

**George W. Bernard, *Anne Boleyn. Fatal Attractions*,
New Haven, London 2011. 237 pages**

G. W. Bernard is professor of early modern history at the University of Southampton and editor of the *English Historical Review*. In recent years his principal interests have focused on the interplay of religion and politics in Tudor England. George Bernard has been producing essays about various aspects of the life of Anne Boleyn for many years. Most of these essays have focused on debunking various myths surrounding Anne. This book serves to bring many of these myths and images together, offering a new and in-depth analysis of the primary sources dealing with the various areas that stand as landmarks to Anne's life.

At the beginning, Bernard explains how he was intrigued by Anne Boleyn and her story. He sets the scene for his book. He writes of the arrests of Mark Smeaton, Henry Norris, George Boleyn, William Brereton, Sir Francis Weston, Sir Thomas Wyatt, Sir Richard Page and Anne Boleyn and asks what they did to deserve such treatment. He searches for the answer in the rest of the book. Bernard looks at Anne Boleyn's background, the Boleyn family's history, her time at Austria's court, her time in France with Queen Claude, her return to England, the proposed marriage between Anne and James Butler, Anne's relationship with Henry Percy and Thomas Wyatt's love for her.

Then Bernard continues by exploring what Anne was like and then he moves on to look at how Henry and Anne became involved and what their relationship was like. He focuses on Henry's love letters to Anne and this is where he poses an interesting question – was it Henry who held back from sexual relations? Bernard puts forward the idea that Henry did not want Anne to become pregnant while he was seeking an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon because it would then be "*obvious that his reason for seeking annulment of his marriage was his passion for Anne, not scruples of conscience over the validity of his marriage to Catherine*" and "*his moral case for that annulment would be undermined.*" He sees Henry as the dominant partner in his relationship with Anne. The king's self-restraint, rather than Anne's determination to surrender for nothing short of wedlock, as the key to the long delay in their sexual relations as the divorce campaign dragged on. He suggests, indeed, that they may have slept together for a while and then ceased as the threat presented by an early pregnancy to the legitimacy of their hoped-for heir became evident. Bernard argues Anne Boleyn had no role in the divorce proceedings at all and that "*Anne's was the conventional role of the woman who waited, and received less attention and a shorter letter than usual, while her husband-to-be pressed on with the hard work that would make their*

marriage possible.” His Anne is in the background and his Henry is the one taking control of things.

Bernard looks at Anne Boleyn’s miscarriage of January 1536, the deformed foetus myth and the idea that Anne was a witch, Henry’s relationship with Jane Seymour and the state of his marriage. He dismisses the deformed foetus theory and the witchcraft idea and concludes that Anne was secure in Henry’s favour as late as the 25th April 1536 and *“right up to the moment of Anne’s arrest, then, there is little to show that Henry was anything but fully committed to his marriage.”* Bernard looks at the “factions” at court, he considers Sir Nicholas Carew and his alleged coaching of Jane Seymour and then presents his arguments against the factional conspiracy theory and the idea that Cromwell conspired to bring Anne down. Bernard then goes on to look at the Countess of Worcester’s role in Anne’s downfall, the poem of Lancelot de Carles that tells of the Countess justifying her own behaviour by saying that the Queen had behaved worse and that she had committed adultery and that *“her brother has carnal knowledge of her in bed.”*

In the last chapter, Bernard writes of how *“there simply is not sufficient evidence to conclude beyond reasonable doubt that Anne, her brother, Norris, Weston, Brereton and Smeaton were guilty”* but that this *“does not mean that they were all innocent.”* Bernard considers Anne’s flirtatious behaviour, her widespread reputation as a “whore”, the climate of *“dancing and pastime”* in her household, her defiance at Henry’s infidelities and her *“foolish and reckless behaviour”*. He concludes that everything can be considered as a *“series of misunderstandings”* due to *“unguarded speech and gossip”* but that *“it remains my own hunch that Anne had indeed committed adultery with Norris, probably with Smeaton, possibly with Weston, and was then the victim of the most appalling bad luck when the countess of Worcester, one of her trusted ladies, contrived in a moment of irritation with her brother to trigger the devastating chain of events that led inexorably to Anne’s downfall.”*

Bernard finishes his book by saying that the Anne Boleyn he has presented is not the Anne who held Henry off for years, who inspired the break with Rome, who had a leading role in the English Reformation and who was the innocent victim of conspiracy. Instead, he explains how he has tried to *“recover the historical Anne Boleyn”* by reviewing all of the evidence. I can recommend this book to come into the hands of those interested in Henry VIII’s “Great Matter” and Tudor England history general.

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