

Reading Guide Questions

Please be aware that this discussion guide will contain spoilers!

1. The novel starts off with a description of hawks soaring in the sky and swooping in to slaughter their prey. In the same manner, the novel closes off with an image of a fox attacking a hen coop. What is the significance of these animals and what do they symbolize?
 1. Anne and her “lovers” are the hens at first, but does it foreshadow the fall of Cromwell later when he becomes the hen? Henry and in small part the nobility are the hawks clearly.
2. How has Cromwell’s upbringing influenced him to become the shrewd and ambitious man that he is? What is the significance of Cromwell refusing to adopt the coat of arms belonging to a noble Cromwell family even as he widens the chasm between his father and himself? How does Cromwell view family and how is it different from his own experience growing up?
 1. Cromwell seems to want to ignore the past and only look to the future, both a strength and a weakness. Refusing the coat of arms is a rejection of the past, his father, nobility of any kind .
3. How is King Henry VIII described in the novel? Is he self-serving, or does he truly believe in the validity of his actions? Does he come over as a sympathetic character?
 1. Like many people who are cosseted from birth, he feels entitled and then being made head of the church and with a direct line to God, anything he thinks, feels or wants to do must be ordained by God IHHO (in his humble opinion) He appears as a spoiled brat, shoving all responsibility off on others and wanting mommy (Cromwell) to fix it.
4. Katherine is accused by Cromwell of causing the split within the church, and of endangering her daughter Mary, by her stubborn resistance to the King's wishes. Do you view Katherine as a relentless and self-indulgent queen or is she noble for staying true to her beliefs?
 1. Probably noble, but sadly naïve. She knows Henry is selfish and feels entitled so she knows how he will react and what he is capable of doing. The writing was on the wall for heaven’s sake! Get out and get on with your life and make him leave you with \$! Times were different and I agree that the upper class women had the least freedom of all the classes of women and fewest choices. Pawns, collateral, etc.
 2. She certainly created the problem that Henry had with the Catholic Church and with his daughter Mary. If she had gone to the nunnery, Mary MIGHT have had a legitimate chance, but where would we be now?
5. Cromwell believes that England "will keep spiraling backwards into the dirty past" unless blunders are forgotten and old quarrels ended. How does this belief influence his actions in trying to build a new England? Does the king help or hinder him in this urge for renewal? How far are Cromwell's actions unselfish, and how far are they self-serving?

1. Cromwell appears to know his time is limited. He doesn't appear to realize he will die at the end of his usefulness. Not looking into the past allows him this fantasy, but the reality is he is predominantly self-serving I think.
6. King Henry had fawned over all three women (Katherine, Anne, Jane) at one point in time. His past actions indicate that he loved his former wives, yet each affair proves temporary. How does Henry view love? Why do the women in the novel endeavor to wear the "poisoned ring?"
 1. Entitled little brats who get what they want all the time are easily bored and always looking for the next great thing, ergo.... Doesn't really explain the Katherine separation though, 20 years is something, but he was younger and I am sure he had mistresses. He wanted to get that heir though and younger women were the way to go, I get it.
7. There is enormous power in a woman's gaze. How do the women in this novel utilize their feminine wiles to their advantage? What effect do they have on men subject to their lure, and what does this tell you about women's power over their male counterparts?
 1. Forbidden fruit is their big draw. Sex was so available it appears in court that the women who did not give it out freely or who were considered off limits were more desirable. Few women at that time could put off the king or high nobility, so I feel the families were using them to try and entrap men into marrying their daughters to raise their status. Sometimes I bet it worked.
8. Birth and is a major conceit throughout the novel. As "nails give birth to nails," are children the product of their parents? Consider the parent-child relationships in the novel. What influence do parents have on their progeny?
9. When the King is thought to be dead after a jousting accident, there is a sudden rush to claim the crown. Are the players idealists, attempting to realize their political and religious ideals for England, or are they simply interested in getting power for themselves?
 1. Duh Power!
10. Anne Boleyn is accused of committing adultery and even incest. Could there be any truth in these accusations, or are they complete fabrications by her enemies? How does she change once she realizes she is in danger?'
11. Cromwell seems very protective of Wyatt and saves him from death, even though he is widely suspected of being one of Anne's lovers. Why does Cromwell feel such a strong need to defend him when he vehemently accuses others of being the Queen's bedfellows? What sets Wyatt apart from the other men portrayed in the novel? What have Wyatt and Cromwell in common?'
12. Does the novel make you reconsider your view of the Tudors?
13. The story concludes with Cromwell's claim that there are no endings, only beginnings. The country now has a new queen and a new leading family. What does this mean for England's future? What do you think Cromwell's role will be in the new order?

14. The execution of Anne Boleyn is one of the most frightening moments in English history. Anne's last words are scripted to appease the King. What do you think would have been Anne's last words had there not been any consequences?