

Threads

The Reincarnation of
Anne Boleyn



Nell Gavin

William Faulkner Competition finalist for Best Novel

Independent Publishers Online: “Wonderful. A great concept, well-written and well-organized - a beautifully woven tapestry.”

Writer’s Digest: “This is a strong, smart, captivating work.”

Curled Up With a Good Book: ** FIVE STARS ** “Threads is not your run-of-the-mill historical novel. Nell Gavin’s imagination shines through, and her research is meticulous.”

Threads: The Reincarnation of Anne Boleyn

By Nell Gavin

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FOREWARD

by Nell Gavin, 2001

One of the more surprising aspects of researching a book about Anne Boleyn is discovering the manner in which each reference disagrees with every other reference on some point or another. There is scant verifiable information on her—there is much more speculation—and various biographies take different views on what the same scant information reveals about her. The perspective on some events switches radically again when you read a third book. So, those who have read one of Anne’s biographies but not the others, and who question some point or another may find the reference in another book.

I preferred some versions of Anne’s story to others. While I read several references and used facts from all of them, I preferred and relied most heavily on the information in “The Six Wives of Henry VIII,” by Alison Weir.

I also rejected a good deal of the information credited to Eustace Chapuys, Spanish ambassador during the reign of Henry VIII. His reports to Spain (their content is quoted or referred to in all of the biographies) were filled with condemning propaganda about Anne that probably contained some truth. However, it was most likely largely distorted or untrue because the things Anne is credited with doing (her extensive charities, her defense of free-thinkers and religious heretics, and her courage in submitting to death in order to defend her daughter’s crown) are not in sync with the she-devil Chapuys described. Later, he made similar remarks about the “ulterior motives” of Anne of Cleves (another of Henry’s wives) that were not supported by statements from other witnesses, or even by logic. Unfortunately for Anne Boleyn, it was ill advised for anyone to speak well of her after her death, so much of her history is comprised of the Chapuys reports with little rebuttal from friendlier factions.

When I massaged viewpoints and conclusions out of frustrated necessity, I felt less as though I were manipulating history than striking a plausible compromise between facts that amount to “good guesses” on the

part of a number of scholars. Nevertheless, there are a few instances when I knowingly adjusted the timing of an event or rearranged the characters. At these times, I gave greater weight to the plot. But for the most part, the facts are as accurate as I know to make them (given the divergence of opinion), except for Anne's childhood and all of her private thoughts, which remain open to conjecture.

In "*Threads*", the Anne I offer to you is the one I kept seeing in each of her biographies, whatever facts they presented or how those facts colored her, the Anne who was always described as an "enigma". I think that term applies to anyone who has a difficult personality, but whose character is essentially good.

Most importantly, "*Threads*" is a fantasy. It is not, nor is it intended to be, an historical reference.

PROLOGUE

London Year of our Lord 1536



I could not see the crowd any longer. Were it not for the sound of an occasional involuntary cough, I might have thought myself alone and dreaming. In the midst of this unnatural stillness, I could sense the thousands of unsympathetic eyes I knew were fixed upon me. I could neither hide from them, nor could I stop myself from visualizing the faces and the stares.

Suddenly, startlingly, a bird flapped its wings and took flight. I imagined all faces were turned toward the sky and all eyes were now fixed upon the bird. For that one moment, all in attendance would have forgotten me and would allow me to quietly slip away before they even noticed I had left them. That fanciful imagery and a final prayer were all the comfort I could give myself.

A voice with a heavy French accent shouted: “Where is my sword?”

Then, in one instant, a hand reached for mine, and a voice gently said “Come,” and I followed. Disoriented yet aware, I looked down and saw the crowd, its taste for blood satisfied by the day’s entertainment. I thought, “Wait,” and saw Henry in my mind and in a flash I was with him for one last moment. He was mounted for the hunt, surrounded by huntsmen and hounds, awaiting the sound of gunshots that would announce my passing. They rang out as I watched and he inwardly flinched, outwardly revealing no emotion at all. He would now race to Jane, would make her his wife in only 10 days’ time, and would never speak my name aloud again.

I looked at him and thought, “*Why?*” like a wail, a keening, and could see he was disturbed, though determined not to be. Denying.

I knew he could sense me. It was in his thoughts, and I could read them as if they were spoken aloud. He was agitated and fearful. “*Damn* you, Henry,” I thought. He heard me in his mind, and thought he was mad.

Then I turned away from him one final time and floated toward the light and toward memory. Like a rustling, I felt him reach toward me then catch himself. Like a whisper, I heard him say to me, “*Damn you*,” but the words were not spoken except in his thoughts, and they carried no conviction in the face of his anxiety.

I sensed there were tears, but his face was stone and tears would not be shed. He would restrain them and hold them within like a cancer, and they would change him and the lives he touched from this day forward. He would never face what he had done. He would do it again and again as if to trivialize the sin. By feeling less next time he could prove it was not sin, for did he not feel righteous? If it were not right, would he not feel shame?

I know this because I know how Henry could twist logic to suit his ends. He could speak for God Himself, he believed, based solely on what he knew to be truth within his heart. He was my husband and I know him to his soul. He was often mistaken.

And so, many more lives would be lost by his decree. It would torment him until the end and he would be guilty, defiant, dictatorial, irrational and dangerous, never realizing that much of it was the denial of grief and conscience. It would be a sad end for a man who, oddly, wanted very much to be a good one.

With concern that was habit more than heartfelt, I absently thought, “He should cry,” then left him.

Good-bye.

PART 1

The Memories

Chapter 1



I still have my immortal soul. I had thought myself shorn of it when I first lay with Henry. My love for him now feels as if it were comprised of greater parts misfortune than sin though, and it seems to me that I will not be dashed into a fiery Hell because of it. It seems, in fact, as though I might find peace.

For a while, I do. Peace: The healing time until being prodded to action—a short stop on my way. I linger there as long as I am allowed, but there is business to attend to, and so I move along.

Elsewhere, beyond that, there is to be no time for peace. There is to be time only for memories, and these soon became all-encompassing. I see each moment of my past existence as a surgeon examines a cadaver organ by organ, and I am horrified, then confused, then satisfied by turns.

Death is not as I had expected from hours, months, and years of religious instruction, nor is it the dark and frightening place of lore. There are neither harps nor terrifying images. I sprout neither wings nor horns. It is not as I had imagined, nor is it as I had feared. Yet it is what I had known it to be, deep within me, like words I had once memorized long ago, but forgot until now when I am awakening from a lifetime of unconsciousness.

The first memories that come to me are of my life, the life just past. From birth to death they pass in a rush, but are unblurred as if time is compressed. I see the entire span of my life without recriminations, but also without rationalizations. There is no escape from the things I had done, no

opportunity to right wrongs or explain things away, or even to look in another direction to avoid seeing. My thoughts and actions lay before me harsh and real.

I then go back again and watch myself from infancy, more slowly and lingeringly. I examine the relationships within my family. I follow the course of my music. I watch my educational and spiritual development and my emotional decline. Like separate threads all crazily woven into the whole, I see my friends and then my enemies, and myself in tangled interaction with them all.

I see my courtship with Henry, a fairy tale. I watch us marry in the cold of January, in joyful secret, then I see the most loving of unions besmirched and defiled and twisted into a nightmare from which I could not awaken. I spend the largest part of my time examining my relationship with Henry, for it was Henry who ultimately defined my life. It was always Henry who brought out the worst of my failings and weaknesses. Ultimately, it was Henry who ordered my death.

He cannot freshly harm me here, and for that I am grateful, but the harm he previously inflicted reverberates and grows. There is nothing to heal it but time. Even here, there is no other cure for heartbreak. I wish that death were a magical cure for all that ailed my spirit in life; it is one more thing I expected and found false. I arrive with the same baggage I carried with me in life. There is nowhere to lay it down here either, no more than a woman with child can lay aside her babe before its birth, for it is within me. I am as I was, just not encumbered with flesh.

I expected the pain to leave and find it has not. It will not go.

I hear words as if they were music on the air. I sense but cannot see the source of them. They float around me like physical beings of vibrant form, and color, and substance. Sometimes they strike me like clamorous blows. Sometimes they whisper comfort and encouragement. Sometimes they weep with me. At times, they even laugh. The intent of the words appears to be to drum some truth into me as I watch myself in a situation where I failed to heed them. They change according to the scene I am examining.

My companion does not identify ... herself? The Voice seems more female than male, although gender does not exist in this realm. She merely calls herself my “mentor”, or “teacher”, seeming almost as a mother would.

She scolds and nurtures like a mother.

The Voice, and the words, describe an ideal toward which I am striving so that I might compare myself to this and view my progress. Jesus Christ is the example with which I am most comfortable, and is therefore referred to most frequently, but is not the only one. There are others for me to measure myself against: Moses, Abraham, Krishna, Buddha, Muhammad, as well as nameless other souls who have reached understanding.

“Compare myself to Jesus Christ?” I wonder. I had done that in life, and had thought myself humble until now, when my Judgment Day (if that is what this is) has come. I am raw with humility.

But still.

I cannot recall anyone in my life who was Christ-like, or Buddha-like, if you will. I have never met a person such as that. Does that not make the assignment unreasonable? Are we not all incapable of success? Is it not merely something to lamely strive for without expectation of reaching the goal because *no one can*? Are the words of Jesus Christ (or Buddha, or Abraham ...) not simply scripture bandied about by the devout, believed in theory but rejected in action?

I would stand at the gates of heaven and argue, Henry once shouted to me in a rage. And so, in a way (are these the gates of Heaven after all? I cannot say for certain.) I do.

Henry knows me very well indeed.

Just as I saw my life in rapid passing, I now see scenes that show a servant who was crippled and in pain, and yet was always kind and high spirited. We ran to her with our little aches and disappointments and sought her comfort, heedless of the pain she was suffering while she soothed ours. She neither preached Scripture, nor was she particularly pious or prayerful, although she wore a small iron cross on a leather strap around her neck and took her place with the other servants in the chapel during Mass.

I see her seated on a three-legged stool in the kitchen by the door, shelling peas into a large wooden bowl. Her walking stick is propped against the wall behind her. I see her wipe her brow, for the fire is lit and hot, and I see her laugh.

She always laughed, and knew how to make everyone around her laugh as well, and knew how to speak to us so that we might feel ashamed of ourselves when we misbehaved without ever thinking she loved us less. We took her for granted until her death, when a lonely gap remained where her bright voice once was. We left the walking stick in its now permanent place against the wall, and never removed it or allowed it to be used again.

I discounted the value and the contributions of the servant because she was not of my class, and therefore not of as much worth as I.

“There is none of more worth than any other,” I hear. The Voice tells me that the servant has far surpassed me, and that I should look to her example for guidance.

I am further reminded of her child, a strange-eyed girl who spoke thick of tongue and could not learn. She was said to look like a Mongol, and had a graceless, slow and heavy gait. The other children ridiculed and teased her, and the adults slapped and scolded her for her clumsiness and stupidity. Her smile was as bright as her mother’s despite this, and she loved her tormentors with a heart-breaking stubbornness. She hugged them, and brought them flowers and little presents, then wordlessly died one night in her sleep, leaving the rest to ponder their cruelty.

I am grateful that I was not among those who were cruel. I am grateful that I returned her hugs. I felt such pity toward her.

“There are many whom we pity who in fact should pity us.”

I had felt deserving of pity in the last years of my life. I even was willing to change places with the likes of Ruth, and be an idiot servant girl in order to let someone else be queen. It seems to me, though, that the Voice is referring to something other than the treatment I received from Henry, and my fall at the very end.

“We are all on the same road, some ahead of us and some behind. We do not always recognize ourselves as being among those who are struggling farther back, and misunderstand, scorn, and even persecute the ones who move ahead of us. History is littered with such as these: eccentrics, geniuses or unwavering idealists being among the most noticeable. These change the world almost by force, though the change most often does not take place during their own time, they are so far ahead of it and therefore so rarely understood.

“The less noticeable shine a light with simple good-natured long-suffering, and they shine that light for us despite our impatience, ingratitude or scorn. There is always a beacon shining if we look for it and open our hearts. We will each be a beacon ourselves, one day. It is just up ahead of us in the very direction we all are traveling. Those who follow behind us need our wisdom, for the ones who shine now will leave at the end of the road, and it will be left to us to be the light.”

One of these “lights” was our gnarled and crippled servant Rose, who shelled our peas, and whom we kept out of charity. She did nothing more than slow and flawed handwork, and often could not leave her bed at all from illness or pain. She created troublesome expenditures and excessive inconvenience in nursing her back to health each time she took to her bed. If she was well enough to work, we were sometimes impatient that she took such tedious trouble to perform her tasks, and that her twisted hands could only deliver sorry results. Yet when she died, even Mother wept and retired to her room. We recalled that she never complained, was always eager to be of service, and when we no longer had her, we all found her contributions to have had great value and missed them. An emptiness remained in place of love we had never noticed, nor realized we needed.

I mourned that I had taken it for granted, and mourned for myself that I should have to continue through life without it. I did nothing to earn it. In fact, with the contempt the upper classes are taught to feel toward the lower, I presumed it was my due and the source of it, Rose, not worth much. I awakened to her worth only upon her death.

There was no pettiness, or criticism, or sarcasm or wickedness in Rose. She had no selfishness or ill-intent. She seemed almost to have lived the life Jesus taught, and I only see this now with being shown. Yet all who should have recognized godliness overlooked her. She was too meek to draw notice, and her position was too lowly.

Her physical limitations, idiot child, and station in life were not a punishment for her, the Voice explains, but were designed by her own heart so that she might be an example for the rest of us. She endured her trials out of generosity and love. Her daughter did the same.

“Only a large soul, far advanced, can give so much just so that others might see more clearly. Such is a means of allowing the rest of us to place our own grievances in their proper perspective, and of showing us how much even the weakest among us is capable of giving. We can see, or not see. The choice is ours.”

I feel suddenly sad for her, that her efforts were not appreciated and rewarded while she lived.

The lecture pauses, and the Voice aims a personal comment toward me.

“Adulation is transitory. Is it not?”

I agree, feeling a wave of pain. Adulation most certainly is transitory.

“Then it hardly matters whether or not Rose received adulation or acknowledgment during her lifetime. It is not those on earth whom we need to impress. They are often misguided in their assessment of worth. Yet there are souls, like Rose, who show them what is worthwhile and through this, some people see and grow.”

I interject: “But if it is not seen, what worth has it? The point of it is lost. Did she waste her effort on us?”

“Do you feel it was wasted? Your mother did not.”

I do not know the “mother” the Voice seems to be referring to. The mother I remember could not be touched by the likes of Rose, or by any other thing. Her heart was ice. Upon hearing of Rose’s death, she did not weep for long. Yet she did weep ...

The Voice continues.

“It is like written music. Its beauty exists whether or not we choose to play it, or choose to listen. If we choose not to see, the choice and the loss are both our own. What we should see is that there is none among us with nothing to give, and that giving is our purpose. At the same time we should respect and show gratitude toward those who are giving themselves so that we might understand this.”

I grow small with understanding. I realize with surprise and then shame that I am one of those who did not recognize herself as struggling farther back.

A far yawning distance stretches before me on the road. I brace myself, not knowing yet if the balance of my life will allow me to move forward, or if I slipped even farther behind.

I cannot demand a better position or order someone to move me closer to the front. I have no power over this except to slowly edge my way forward with painful effort, like everyone else. It is vexing, for I expect crowds to make way for me. I am not accustomed to viewing servants as my betters.

Then I feel shame at my expectation of special treatment. One of my daydreams in life, toward the end of it, had been that I should be like one of the faces in the crowds who knelt and bowed—and sometimes stared and pointed as I passed — any one of them; it mattered not. Remembering, I feel a sense of anticipation for I am now their equal. Relinquishing my expectations is a small price to pay, to finally be one of them. I am pleased.

I am well-pleased, and eager to get to work. I even feel a sense of pride in my position on the road, for there is a swell of souls that surrounds me here, and only a narrow trickle of souls toward the front. I want to be among the masses, unwashed, if need be. I want to be a face in the crowd, unrecognized. I want no special treatment and no special acknowledgment—I have had enough of that, and it grew sour within me.

I am anxious to proceed.

Chapter 2



I now reacquaint myself with The Law, which is only in essence the same as I was taught. It is more stern and forgiving, more fair and unyielding than I had thought in life. I cannot buy it off with rituals and tithings and outward displays of piety. I cannot fool it with secrecy, self-delusion, or excuses. It does not require approval by my peers and church leaders. It has no respect for position, wealth and power; it rather views these as detriments than advantages. It is as Jesus said, but not as my teachers interpreted His words.

The Commandment of The Law says: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

It means this. It means me.

I am here to learn where I failed and where I succeeded. Then I will return to try again, to see if I can overcome my faults and repay my mistakes. It will take many attempts because the human soul must be forced into improving. It is stubborn and self-absorbed, and resistant to disruption of its habits and beliefs both in life, and here, beyond it. It does not go to Heavenly Glory without a fight, and it travels a long hard road to get there. I have yet a long hard road to travel. I will not return to Peace yet, or even soon. I have much to face, and many strengths to develop first.

My purpose, at this stage, is to remember. From this strange and uncomfortable vantage point, I view myself more closely than I care to, my eyes pried open as it were, my face held firm so I am forced to watch. With each memory, the Voice reminds me of The Law and how I measured up to it in that instance. I know I am forgiven. I also know I am not complete. I am forgiven for having had to borrow—we all borrow through our sins; it is

expected and is a step in the process of growth. However there is no escaping payment. I pay for what I take, and am paid for what I give. It is as simple as that. I see where I paid in this last life, what I earned and where I took.

The borrowing brings me incredible sorrow, more than I ever would have thought.

I will be held harshly accountable for seemingly minor things, forgiven for things I had thought unforgivable, rewarded in instances I had thought I would be punished, and shown the error of ways I thought were right and good. I will pay, but not for things I had expected. I also will receive ample reward for small thoughtless, seemingly unimportant acts of kindness and love, and I see there had been many. Each moment counts in the final tally, which will shape my future as it did my past. I am to work toward compiling the tally myself, from the beginning of that life to that last moment when I knelt blindfolded before my executioner and an eager crowd.

One works here at self-assessment until successfully completing the job, then takes the tally and uses it like currency toward the next existence on earth. The tally determines destiny, good or bad, upon one's return there. This destiny, so called, seems frivolously unfair and incomprehensible only in the realm of forgetfulness that we call "life" where the steps leading to seeming injustice are hidden. Here, it is the Word and it is the Wisdom, and I am in the midst of this, understanding and ashamed, attempting to heal from a past and prepare for a future I have created for myself.

The Law is a stern one, but fair to the smallest molecule. I see that it is fair. I see also that I have woven my own tapestry thread by thread from the beginning of time, and have no one to blame but myself for the pattern and the outcome. I would prefer to have woven somewhat differently, in many ways. Regret is easy. It is so much harder to be good when one is flesh, existing in a state of forgetfulness, influenced and seduced by so many things. The most seductive sin, I suppose, is passing judgment on others, and the next must be the acting out of one's anger when one has the power to hurt the ones who wound us. I was guilty of both things.

One is so much better off without power. It is something I will henceforth avoid by choice. It is harder not to pass judgment, or to restrain the temptation toward vindictiveness. One can always find the means to feel superior to someone else no matter what one's circumstances, and can easily feel justified in punishing enemies. So, I am caught again, as I have been caught many times in the past, and I will pay.

For now, I spend this period between lives in reflection and analysis and the setting of goals so that I can begin saving toward the day when the debts come due. In terms of time, I do not know how long the process of analysis takes. There is no time, here in the Memories, or rather, time does not move at the same pace or in the same measurable direction as it does on the physical plane. I believe many years have passed when I first see my life fly past me and find it was a matter of moments. I think mere hours have passed since I arrived only to find it was years. It would be startling were I not absorbed in my task and guided by a presence that reassures me.

I turn back to my life and I watch.

PART 2

Two Pegs Above Mutton 1501—1532

Chapter 1



Like a shadow from the first, there was Henry, spoken of frequently in our household, reverently, as much a fixture in my life in the beginning as in the end. I heard references to him and his father the King and his brother, the heir to the throne, from my earliest days. Names that meant nothing to me were to weave themselves inextricably into my life, first as a backdrop and then as my life's primary focus.

I see my home, the very home in which I first heard Henry's name. How odd it is, the manner in which perceptions change from a distance. There were times when I found this place to be insufferably dull, isolated and provincial. I chafed with boredom and impatience, anxious to be rid of it and on my way to more exciting places and events, rarely missing it, or not missing it at all when I was away. Even thinking of it as "home" seems odd, as I lived in a number of places during my life and spent considerably more time away than I ever spent here. Yet home is what this is, and I now equate the structure and the grounds with the very word "beauty".

This home—my home—was a tiny castle in Kent called Hever, built within two concentric moats, surrounded by rolling grassy fields and thick groves of trees. Ducks glided down the outer moat, which appeared upon first glance to be a stream, and sheep grazed on shallow slopes nearby. I

endured pain and loss, perhaps equal to that which I felt in other places, yet can only envision the sky above Hever as blue, the clouds as white and wispy, the air as sweet, and the flowers blooming in the meadow as if it were springtime.

My father had inherited the little castle which, while outwardly very pretty, was several hundred years old and could not possibly serve us comfortably as a home without significant improvements. So, within the castle walls and attached to the tiny castle, he had built for us a large house with three adjoining wings of three floors each. Within it, the hallways joined one another at right angles forming a square that surrounded a little inner courtyard with the castle at the forefront. On the face of it, you approached a cold, walled-in fortress when you rode up the drive, but as soon as you passed through the gates and entered the courtyard, you were surrounded by charming, vine-covered walls that displayed glinting, diamond-paned windows and architecture in the modern Tudor style. On first sight, you knew you were entering a world that was safe and warm and cheerful. It was within this world that I grew.

The courtyard led to the kitchen, so its walls were lined with barrels of kitchen goods. Within these walls were hunting dogs, servant boys struggling with water buckets or bushels of meal, scullery maids exchanging glances with horse hands, several scratching, soon-to-be-killed-and-roasted chickens, and the head housekeeper scolding all of them for being underfoot, or slow, or inattentive.

The courtyard was a very jolly place. There were whiffs of wood smoke, cooking smells of fish or game, and the heady, delicious aroma of freshly harvested herbs. There were laughs and shouts, grunts from men carrying heavy loads of goods, and the sound of voices singing. I sometimes watched these scenes from the diamond-paned windows in the hallway above, and sometimes wandered down, as a child, to immerse myself in the bustle and the company. I was not supposed to be there, mingling with the underlings, in everybody's way, but if I kept myself very quiet and stayed small in a corner or behind a barrel, I was often unnoticed and forgotten, and thus was