



## The Queen's Bed: An Intimate History of Elizabeth's Court

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Elizabeth I acceded to the throne in 1558, restoring the Protestant faith to England. At the heart of the new queen's court lay Elizabeth's bedchamber, closely guarded by the favoured women who helped her dress, looked after her jewels and shared her bed.

Elizabeth's private life was of public, political concern. Her bedfellows were witnesses to the face and body beneath the make-up and elaborate clothes, as well as to rumoured illicit dalliances with such figures as Robert Dudley. Their presence was for security as well as propriety, as the kingdom was haunted by fears of assassination plots and other Catholic subterfuge. For such was the significance of the queen's body: it represented the very state itself.

This riveting, revealing history of the politics of intimacy uncovers the feminized world of the Elizabethan court. Between the scandal and intrigue the women who attended the queen were the guardians of the truth about her health, chastity and fertility. Their stories offer extraordinary insight into the daily life of the Elizabethans, the fragility of royal favour and the price of disloyalty.

## **The Queen's Bed: An Intimate History of Elizabeth's Court Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Queen's Bed: An Intimate History of Elizabeth's Court for online ebook**

### **Jennifer says**

Superficial; little context to explain what was going on in the world / England at the same time as the events described; very little (as far as I could tell), relatively, in/on the actual words and thoughts of the women who surrounded Elizabeth, compared to the men and their writings; prefunctory notes, with citations but scant explanation. This all feels like an outline to a better book. Plus I read the English edition, so of course the grammar/punctuation threw me fairly often...that's on me, though.

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### **Lisa says**

While there is lots of interesting history in this book, I think the author was really stretching it to relate the history to the queen's bed. I enjoyed the parts that were new info for me about the behind the scenes activities of the Elizabeth and her ladies. The general history parts have been told and retold.

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### **Lewis Smith says**

This book is a solid addition to the library of any Tudor aficionado - lots of nice anecdotes and tidbits scattered throughout, wonderful for supplementing lectures on the reign of Elizabeth. The narrative is a bit scattered, and could be better organized, but overall I enjoyed this a great deal. And no, it's not nearly as titillating as the title might indicate . . .

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### **Roman Clodia says**

This is a popular biography of Elizabeth which eschews high politics for the personal. Focusing on Elizabeth's ladies of the bedchamber and re-telling the stories of her various entanglements and aborted marriage plans, this doesn't reveal anything new but may be an interesting read to anyone only familiar with the queen and her court through fiction.

All the expected episodes are here: the youthful yet disturbing flirtation with Thomas Seymour, then married to Elizabeth's step-mother Katherine Parr; Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester; Christopher Hatton; Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex; as well as the various negotiations for marriage with the royal houses of France and Spain.

The idea that Elizabeth's sexuality, body and fertility is especially under scrutiny because of her gender doesn't really stand up given the intense gossip and political concern over her father's, Henry VIII, own hectic love-life, though he didn't, of course, have to maintain an aura of chastity in the way that Elizabeth did.

So, ultimately, this doesn't do anything different with the expected sources or reveal anything new about

Elizabeth. But if you only know her through popular fiction and the various TV and film treatments that abound, this is an easy and informative read that zips along breezily as it offers the historical picture behind the fiction.

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### **Kate Guinan says**

I bought this book on impulse thinking it would be full of details about Elizabeth I. It is, if you've never read anything about her. Anyone who's read a good biography of her will find some new information but not enough to spend the time rereading well known facts. Plus at times it's a bit of a dry read. Disappointing.

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### **Sallee says**

This was an interesting history showing the intimate court of Elizabeth I. Some of the details were fascinating such as that her favorite bed was six square yards in size, it took several hours to dress her as she had to be pinned into them requiring hundreds of pins, and that her makeup was made from what were later to be found toxic ingredients like lead. She took a bath once a month. "Sweet bags", impregnated with perfume were sewn into dresses and gloves to keep body odors down. It seems that the Elizabethan court was very smelly and not in a good way. The book continued on relaying the plots of the regime and describing the Queen's relationships with her favorite courtiers. On the death of a monarch, it was customary to disembowel the body and fill it with sweet smelling herbs as it was a lengthy time before actual burial. Queen Elizabeth ordered her close ladies to guard her body and not let that happen or to allow anyone to examine it leading again to the age old question of her virginity.

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### **Lisa says**

Did Elizabeth I sleep with Robert Dudley? Did she fall in love with any of her suitors? Was she involved in Amy Robsart's death? Anna Whitelock covers all of these questions in her enjoyable analysis of the scandals surrounding the great Queen. She also discusses Queen Elizabeth's relationship with her 'bedfellows' - her ladies-in-waiting. These included Mary Sydney and Katherine Grey.

Queen Elizabeth was quite tough on many of her ladies-in-waiting. Poor Mary Sydney, for example, nursed the Queen when Elizabeth was ill with smallpox, and caught it herself. She never recovered her former beauty. Instead of being sympathetic, the Queen didn't want to see her, and treated her badly.

The Queen always hated it when her ladies married without her permission - a punishable offence. She would ban them from court, and sometimes send them to the Tower. She became especially vicious when the beautiful Lettice Knowles, her cousin, married her beloved Robert Dudley.

I enjoyed this book, but I felt that Anna Whitelock did rely a lot on the gossip that surrounded the Queen at the time, and there was too little emphasis on Elizabeth I's religion which was deeply felt. She gives the impression of being rather unsympathetic to this Queen.

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## **Lee Battersby says**

An exhaustive and brilliant examination of the political and personal climate surrounding the reign of Elizabeth I, filtering her decisions and the behaviours of those around her through the persons of those ladies most close to her. Whitelock draws these ladies-in-waiting right into the centre of the political intrigues that plagued Elizabeth's court, and shows the parts they had to play-- both positive and negative-- in maintaining the careful balancing act Elizabeth strode between political alliances, religious claims, and the infighting factions as they all jockeyed for control over her person, her power, and the British realm.

Imbued with stunning detail and with a deft and genuine feeling for the age, Whitelock's greatest achievement is in bringing the personalities of her protagonists to life, whether they be the acknowledge greats such as the Cecils and Walsingham, or such minor walk-ons as the procession of Jesuit priests who plotted her assassination. But the book revolves around Elizabeth in the way the court itself did, and it's ultimately the portrayal of this complex, unknowable woman by which the narrative will stand or fall. And Whitelock does an amazing job of bringing her to life, providing a fulcrum around which to build the narrative as well as giving the reader a close insight into the changes in the twinning of the Queen's body with the political fortunes of her realm, and showing the continued price that twinning played, not only on her but on those most intimately associated with her rule, and with her personal routines.

A genuinely stunning work of historical detection and philosophy.

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## **Caroline says**

Of all of England's monarchs none has been subject to such prurient and physical scrutiny as Elizabeth I. History has been obsessed with her body and chastity, from her very earliest days as first a young princess and heir to an illegitimate bastard and back again, right up to today. The gossip and scandal surrounding her physicality and sexuality came in a very real way to define her entire reign and her relations with her nobles, subjects, foreign ambassadors and fellow princes.

Elizabeth very deliberately played upon and enhanced the traditional dual image of the monarch's person, the natural body, and the body politic being one and the same. If Elizabeth's body was pure, legitimate and uncorrupted, so too was her government and right to rule. In the service of this she cast herself in a very specific role - ever-youthful, ever-beautiful, uncorrupted and incorruptible, subject to no man, the Virgin Queen. It is no coincidence that in seeking to undermine and destabilise her country, her enemies took aim not just at her physical body via poisonings and assassination attempts, but also her 'moral body', her reputation, via scurrilous rumours and gossip about lovers, orgies and illegitimate children.

Whitelock takes that dual image as the central theme of this book, exploring Elizabeth's intimate personal life with those who would have known her best - her Gentlewomen of the Privy Chamber and her varied favourites: Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester; Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex; Sir Walter Raleigh; Sir Christopher Hatton - and how those relationships impacted on her rule and government.

It's a lively read and an interesting approach, although with such short chapters it does take on a somewhat episodic feel at times. Whitelock never takes a position as to Elizabeth's sexuality and chastity, something I respect and admire from a woman and an historian. At this remove of history it would be dishonest to pretend that such certainty was remotely possible, and it is surely no coincidence that most of those

throughout history who have claimed such positions were almost all men. A King, after all, would never have had to take such a position to bolster his legitimacy and secure his throne in the first place.

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### **Jodi says**

Elizabeth's bedfellows, her most trusted ladies-in-waiting, were obviously, in a unique position to observe all aspects of the Queen's life. An intimate history of Elizabeth's Court would have been interesting reading. Unfortunately, Whitelock lost sight of her own objective and relayed more information about the principal male players surrounding Elizabeth.

There were a few anecdotes that Whitelock related that were unfamiliar to this reader but generally this was a standard biography. Almost all of the women, from Kat Ashley to Mary Sydney, Blanche Perry, Mary Scudamore and Catherine Howard (Countess of Nottingham), were given very short rift. If the title is about the bedfellows, we needed to hear about their lives—background on their childhood, how they came to be associated with Elizabeth, their children, husbands, their estates, etc. Instead, we learned that John Dee asked such and such to be godmother to his children, we learned about the Irish issue, we learned about Mary, Queen of Scots and we learned about Essex. Do not get me wrong, those are interesting topics to this reviewer, it is just that a book on the ladies-in-waiting should be about the ladies-in-waiting. It became a bit of a distraction (and a bit comical) after pages of political discussion there would be an attempt to finish the paragraph with something about a woman at Court and the word, bedfellow would be worked into it. One began to think that Whitelock intended to have a certain page limit and was determined to reach it. A shorter volume focused on the promised topic would have been more welcome.

All the gossip and scandal that circulated is well known to the general 'watcher' of Elizabethan history. Whitelock seemed to relish this aspect (or felt it was the way to sell more books to the viewing public) without any proof from the 'bedfellows' that any of it had actually taken place. The book's jacket cover itself assures the reader that the women were "the guardians of the truth" which must have been scandal free as there is no evidence from them to point to Elizabeth being sexually active. Repeating all the innuendoes seemed to prove that Whitelock wanted to cash in on sensationalized history. The author found her voice when she focused on the preparation and dressing of the Queen, the royal accommodations and those isolated instances when she expanded on the life of one of Elizabeth's women.

This sounds like a very negative review so the three and a half stars may not seem compatible. It is a well-written book with fewer than normal errors. Modern titles seem to be so quickly produced that there are often editing issues that could be so easily corrected before going to print—some words were missing in sentences and some punctuation needed correction. Use of primary sources is always a plus and Whitelock incorporated many of them (although a large selection derived from the men of the Court).

All in all, an acceptable read for those interested in a basic biography of Elizabeth Regina and who do not have an extensive background in the time period. If the reader would enjoy more information on the Elizabethan Era, check out the book reviews and entries at <https://elizregina.com/>.

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## **Paromita Bardoloi says**

The private life of Elizabeth I has intrigued historians and commoners equally. This interesting biography by Anna Whitelock, tries to peep into the life of the woman who held England's destiny for forty five years.

The word 'Bedfellows' in the title refers to these ladies who was closest to the queen and at times shared her bed too. The whole narrative could have been laced with intrigues, jealousies and power-play but Anna Whitelock never loses the historian in her. Not to forget it is an extremely well researched book.

Whitelock interestingly describes the queen's private chamber, which cannot be really very private with all the ladies in waiting around her all the time. Elizabeth I's body had been a matter of obsession throughout history. During her own days she made extensive use of make-up and heavy costumes. In a very dramatic incident, when Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex rushes into the private bed chamber of the queen, he finds the sixty-six year old balding queen in just a simple night gown. Though the queen received the earl gracefully, the very next day he was confined to his bed chambers by the orders of the queen.

The ladies in the bed chamber very carefully created the public persona of the queen which she presented in the court. But it is difficult to really know how much power they had to influence the queen's decisions. The queen had immense power on their personal lives. Marriage happened with the permission of the queen and the ladies also devoted themselves at her service even till their late pregnancies; and also returning as early on leaving the new born children to wet-nurse. It should be mentioned that the ladies in the chamber so intensely guarded the queen and her persona that they refused the queen's corpse to be opened for embalming according to the last wishes of the queen herself.

In this book Whitelock also presents a very rich culture of the Elizabethan era.

The love life of queen is something that has been a source of curiosity even till date. Her unresolved love with the handsome Robert Dudley is one of the stories that Whitelock talks in the book. The jealousies, tension and stalking that only came to an end on his death are well described. But for the queen love came with manipulation too. In a political exchange Elizabeth also offered Dudley to Queen Mary, which the later declined. Though Dudley's wife died, it should be mentioned that Elizabeth never had him for herself though on hearing of his death she was inconsolable. In this book Whitelock also mentions other lesser known flirtations too.

This book is for everyone, especially if you have a leaning towards the Elizabethan age and times. A very well written and extremely well researched book, that deserves a place in your library. Go ahead with it.

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## **James says**

As interesting as this subject could be, I feel that it was a big let down due to the way it was written. It was quite disjointed and quite often went of on tangents discussing things completely unconnected to what the book is about. It turns in to more of a biography of Elizabeth than discussing the inner sanctuary of her bedchamber and private life.

Occasionally, you get the feeling that certain events are over-exaggerated slightly for dramatic effect. And some events are presented with very little detail and not fleshed out.

I would recommend Tracy Borman's book "Elizabeth's Women", as that delves far more into the inner sanctuary of Elizabeth's private chambers and also her relationships with the women of her bedchamber and her female relations, so the story has a far more natural flow.

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### **Tom says**

Fascinating book. Never dull. The title is more salacious than the well-researched and judicious content.

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### **Orsolya says**

There are countless books on the subject of Queen Elizabeth I and/or her reign. The Gloriana is certainly glorious. However, less of these books focus on Elizabeth's personal life in terms of her feelings, bed, and body. Anna Whitelock explores this underworld in, "The Queen's Bed: An Intimate History of Elizabeth's Court".

Having read and enjoyed Whitelock's biography of Mary Tudor; I was immediately let-down by "The Queen's Bed". The work begins with a prologue which feels out of place as the first chapter *also* feels like an introduction, therefore setting up choppiness and a disjointed text which is (sadly) maintained throughout. Whitelock is applauded for attempting to reveal Elizabeth's inner rooms (literally) and her personal, somewhat gossipy, life; but there is simply not enough information available to create a strong work.

"The Queen's Bed" is not a chronological biography of Queen Elizabeth with each chapter instead focusing more-so on a singular topic/event which results in a repetition of facts and a segmented work. The text is recommended more for those searching for historical indexed facts versus those seeking a historical-narrative flow. Adding a dry writing style to this already weak book creates a piece which fails to be compelling or hold reader attention.

Expanding on this, Whitelock is guilty of simply retelling facts in a bland and rehearsed way without any emotion behind them. Who knew Elizabeth could be boring? Plus, although the text is notated and heavily researched; Whitelock doesn't elaborate on the facts, making the work more of a summary versus anything in-depth.

On the positive end, Whitelock's text is easy-to-understand and is accessible and is thus ideal for those new to the topic. Meanwhile, she also presents some facts and details which are new even for well-versed readers. The biggest highlight is that Whitelock truly represents Elizabeth as 'human' and a woman instead of blowing her up into a goddess-like entity like so many other authors do. The reader will truly grasp Elizabeth's weaknesses and see how these affected her governmental policies.

On the negative front, however; "The Queen's Bed" mostly focuses on the back-and-forth battle between Elizabeth and her Parliament regarding her absentee marriage and lack of heirs. This is the focus of too many pages and is a SNOOZE FEST.

The pace *does* increase approximately halfway through especially with the descriptions of the intrigues of Cecil's and Walsingham's foreign intelligence and spy networks; however, these somewhat lose the connection to Whitelock's thesis (her connection is merely that murder plots were made on Elizabeth's

‘body’). Once again, each chapter is heavily disjointed from the previous. In fact, “The Queen’s Bed” becomes so choppy that it is difficult to read straight through, at times.

Notably, the conclusion of “The Queen’s Bed” is strong and engaging with a focus on Elizabeth’s body pre- and-post death plus showcasing the propaganda surrounding both her physical and sexual selves during the time of her funeral and modern, social times. In this manner, Whitelock wraps up the text well.

“The Queen’s Body” satisfies history lovers with detailed notes, a bibliography, and a section of color plates. However, it should be noted that Whitelock uses some of the same quotes throughout the work to support various arguments. Plus, the copy editor, who is thanked in the acknowledgments, isn’t very meticulous as the book contains grammar and punctuation errors. A **LARGE** error, on page 305, has the first and second paragraphs starting out with the same sentences! It is quite astonishing that this wasn’t caught. Also, although Whitelock lives in England, the overuse of “whilst” was annoying as a US reader.

Even though the concept and thesis of Whitelock’s work, which attempts to show the relations between Elizabeth’s personal and political bodies is a unique one; “The Queen’s Bed” simply doesn’t capture this. The text is choppy, slow, and repetitive with many inconsistencies. With that being said, it isn’t terrible; just not an entirely engrossing or mind-blowing work. Having enjoyed Whitelock’s biography of Mary Tudor; I would read another Whitelock book in order to gauge if this was a fluke due to the topic. “The Queen’s Bed” is not a bad read for Elizabeth and history lovers, but again: not an amazing one, either.

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### **Biblio Files (takingadayoff) says**

The Tudors are an endless source of entertainment and scholarship. I've spent many enjoyable hours reading about them. Anna Whitelock's new book is about the inner court of Elizabeth I, and as the British edition has it, "Elizabeth's Bedfellows." As a new biography of Elizabeth, The Queen's Bed is good, a detailed and readable account. But as a history of the inner court, and in particular, Elizabeth's closest advisors and servants, it falls short.

I am tempted to excuse this failing due to the lack of source material that details the lives and actions of the women closest to Elizabeth. After all, women were often an afterthought in the 16th century, and who would have thought to write about servants, even those of the Queen? But as it happens, someone has already written a book on the topic and found quite a lot of information about the women of Elizabeth's privy chamber. Elizabeth's Women by Tracy Borman came out about four years ago. It tells a story of the upper class, well-educated women who populated Elizabeth's court. They were an influential and politically savvy group, and Elizabeth talked with them about policy and diplomacy. It was quite a revelation to me that these were not just servants who tended to the Queen's makeup and dress. They were intelligent and opinionated advisors who were often targeted by foreign diplomats for inside information.

The Queen's Bed is a fine book about Elizabeth, but if you were hoping for a little more information about the part the women of the Queen's privy chamber played, I'd have to point you toward Borman's book instead.

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