

The Windsor Affair

by Melanie Benjamin



About the Book

A scandalous affair. A power struggle for the throne. A sensational rivalry between an English queen and an American social climber. In this electrifying novel, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *THE SWANS OF FIFTH AVENUE* tells the story of the Abdication of Edward VIII --- and the two women at the center of it all.

Feuding Windsor brothers and their wives --- some things, it seems, never change. *THE WINDSOR AFFAIR* recreates the cataclysmic events that nearly toppled the monarchy and incited the power struggle between Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon and Wallis Simpson. Told from the perspectives of both women, the novel propels readers into the fabulous world of the debonair Prince of Wales, café society of the 1930s, and the glittering private lives of the Windsors. The first novel to be dedicated to this infamous rivalry, *THE WINDSOR AFFAIR* brings us all the gossip and intrigue between the two very different --- yet perhaps more similar than they would admit --- wives of royals.

As Queen, Elizabeth would become the symbol of British pluck and courage during World War II and remain a British institution the rest of her long life. Wallis would be forever forced to enact the World's Greatest Love Story even after it sours, as she goes from being admired to vilified and, ultimately, pitied. Against the backdrop of the Abdication Crisis, World War II, coronations, funerals, births and deaths, these two women maintain a biting, sharp-tongued feud --- until age and the long arm of history bring about a kind of understanding. For the last communication between these bitter rivals was a simple, surprising message: ?In friendship, Elizabeth.?

Discussion Guide

1. The novel alternates between Wallis Simpson and Queen Elizabeth. How did your sympathies shift between them, if at all?
2. The novel suggests that women, though excluded from formal power, wield influence behind the scenes. How do

Wallis and Elizabeth each exercise power differently?

3. In what ways do class and social standing shape the characters? choices and limitations?
4. How does the book portray the tension between personal desire and public duty?
5. Jewelry plays a recurring symbolic role for Wallis. What do her jewels represent --- security, identity, power or something else?
6. The novel questions whether great love stories are real or constructed. How does this idea play out across the narrative?
7. How do public perception and gossip influence the characters? lives and decisions?
8. In what ways do both women actively shape their own narratives versus being defined by others?
9. The novel presents a speculative version of events (especially regarding the jewel theft and political intrigue). How did this blend of fact and fiction affect your reading experience?
10. Did the story change or deepen your understanding of the abdication crisis and its broader impact on the monarchy?
11. What are the similarities between the crisis of 1936 and the modern difficulties facing the royal family?

Author Bio

Melanie Benjamin is the *New York Times* bestselling author of nine works of historical fiction: *ALICE I HAVE BEEN*, *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MRS. TOM THUMB*, *THE AVIATOR'S WIFE*, *THE SWANS OF FIFTH AVENUE*, *THE GIRLS IN THE PICTURE*, *MISTRESS OF THE RITZ*, *THE CHILDREN'S BLIZZARD*, *CALIFORNIA GOLDEN* and *THE WINDSOR AFFAIR*.

Her novels have been translated in over 15 languages, featured in national magazines such as *Good Housekeeping*, *People* and *Entertainment Weekly*, and optioned for film.

Melanie is a native of the Midwest, having grown up in Indianapolis, Indiana, where she pursued her first love, theater. After raising her two sons, Melanie, a lifelong reader (including being the proud winner, two years in a row, of her hometown library's summer reading program!), decided to pursue a writing career. After writing her own parenting column for a local magazine, and winning a short story contest, Melanie published two contemporary novels under her real name, Melanie Hauser, before turning to historical fiction.

Melanie lives in Chicago with her husband. In addition to writing, she puts her theatrical training to good use by being a member of the Authors Unbound speakers bureau. When she isn't writing or speaking, she's reading. And always looking for new stories to tell.

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