

# THE COFFEE POT BOOK CLUB

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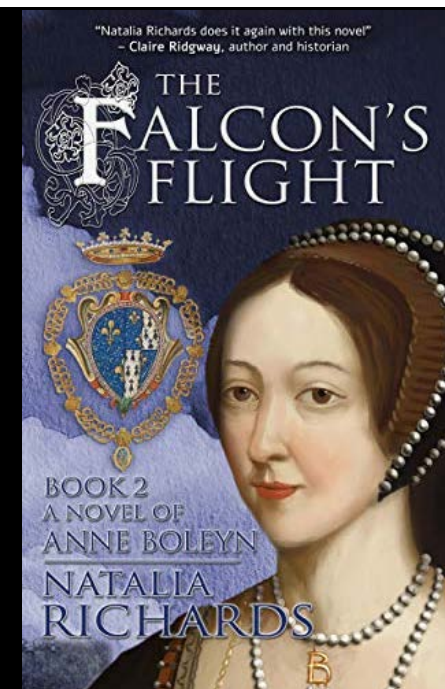


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TUESDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2021

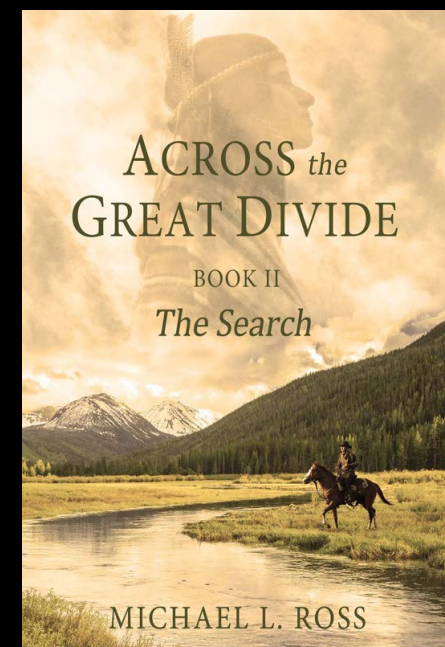
BOOK OF THE WEEK

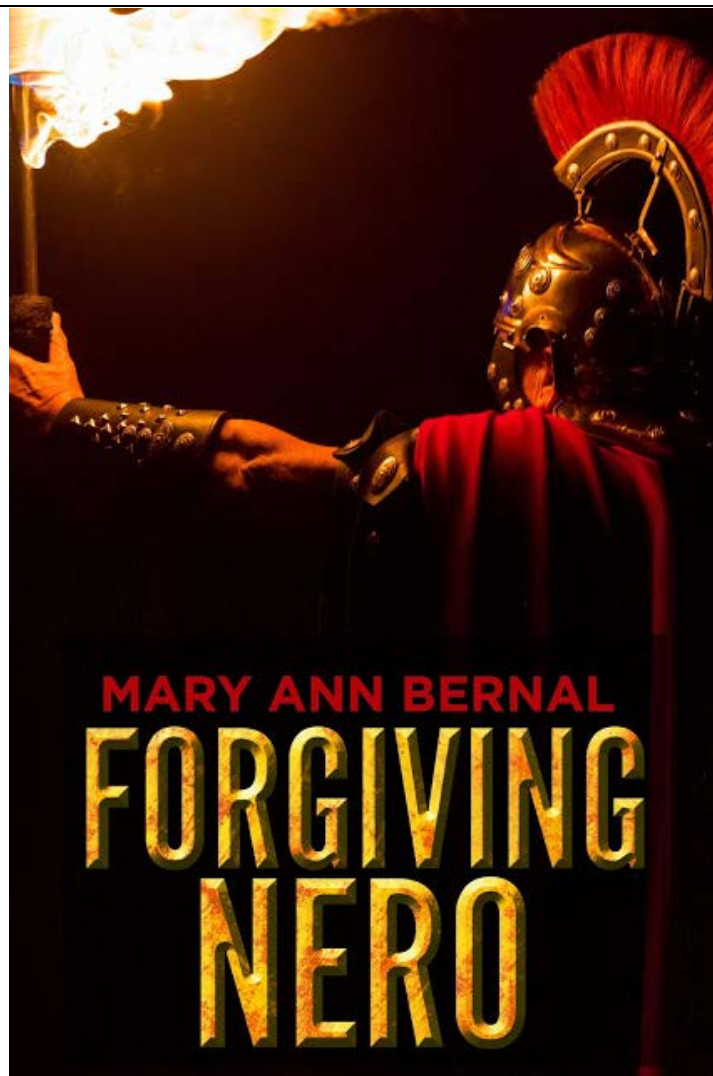
#BookReview — Forgiving Nero by Mary Ann Bernal #HistoricalFiction #AncientRome @BritonandDane



The Falcon's Rise: A novel of Anne Boleyn by Natalia Richards

BOOK OF THE MONTH





Publication Date: 14th February 2021

Publisher: Independently Published

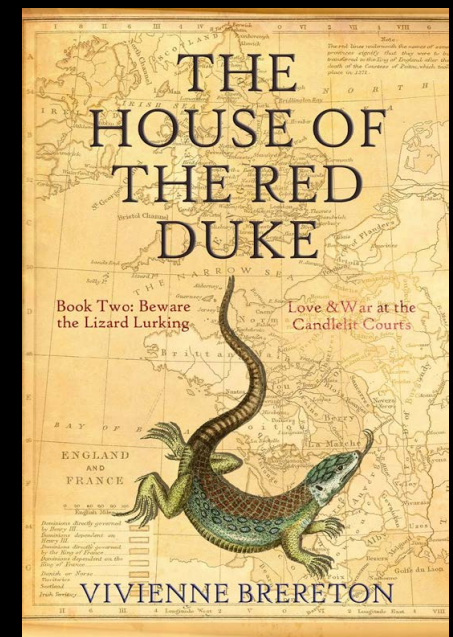
Page Length: 306 Pages

Genre: Historical Fiction

Rome. The jewel of the civilized world is no longer what it was. Strength has failed the Senate. Her legions are in disarray, and the Empire has fallen into Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus Nero's hands. His reign begins under a cloud of

The Search (Across the Great Divide, Book II) By Michael L. Ross

#### BOOK OF THE MONTH



scrutiny, for he is the depraved Emperor Caligula's nephew. Nero is determined to overcome that stigma and carve a name of his own. One worthy of Rome's illustrious history. Politics and treachery threaten to end Nero's reign before it begins, forcing him to turn to unexpected sources for friendship and help. Many of the Praetorian Guard have watched over Nero since he was a small child, and it is in Traian that the young Emperor places his trust, despite the inherent threat of reducing his mother's influence. Traian is the father he never had and the one man who does not judge him. When Traian secretly marries the hostage Vena, it sets in motion a collision of values as Traian comes to odds with his former charge. The whirlwind that follows will shake the very foundations of the greatest Empire the world has ever known, and survival is far from guaranteed.



**I am Nero. And I am your Emperor.**

Ruthless, ambitious, and determined to secure her position, Agrippina saw an opportunity and took it. Her son, Lucius, would become Emperor, and she cared

Beware the Lizard Lurking (The House of the Red Duke, Book 2) by Vivienne Brereton.

BOOK OF THE YEAR, 2020



Songbird: A Novel of the Tudor Court by Karen Heenan

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"WORKING TO EDUCATE, INSPIRE, AND EMPOWER THEIR READERS WITH HIGH-QUALITY INFORMATION..."

not who she had to step over or kill to achieve that aim. Once her son had been named Emperor, Agrippina was determined to use his youth to her advantage, and rule through him. But she failed to see the danger of what she had created.

Traian Aelius Protacius had been assigned to protect Lucius when he had been a young, frightened boy in exile in Calabria. Lucius had been a compassionate child, a little boy desperate for love. But now, as a man, he was unrecognisable. His reign had started with such promise, but there was nothing of the boy in the Emperor who stood before him now. Traian would remain loyal to Nero—as he now liked to be called. He would be the one constant. He could not abandon him, no matter what he did, and yet nor could he save him. Instead, all he could do was watch while Nero rapidly turned away from his trusted advisors and instead listened to those who fed his ego, who bowed to his every whim, and who treated him like a god.

Deep down Nero knew that his hold on the throne would always be precarious. For in truth, the throne, like the laurel upon his head, was never meant to be his...

From a fearful young boy's first night in the Imperial Palace to his descent into madness, *Forgiving Nero* by Mary Ann Bernal is the unforgettable story of one of the Roman Empire's most notorious Emperors.

Nero is one of the infamous emperors whose history has been dictated by those who wanted to see his downfall. History, after all, is not written by the loser. Bernal does not pretend that Nero was a beloved emperor, but nor does she make him quite as monstrous as we have all been led to believe. He is a competent



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administrator; he takes advice from learned men such as Seneca, and although he is also greatly influenced by his mother in this story, Nero is compassionate when compassion allows. History has often accused Nero of causing the Great Fire of Rome so that he could build his 'golden house', but Bernal argues quite rightly that this was not the case at all, and in fact, he helped those who had lost their homes—it just so happened that the fire meant he could build his palace, which in turn meant he needed money and was not afraid to demand it! Bernal has also given us a Nero who is not opposed to murder, nor is he opposed to persecution. Someone had to take the blame for the Great Fire, and the Christians just so happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I thought Bernal's depiction of Nero's mental health, especially his guilt at some of the things he had done, demonstrated her understanding of human fragility and how easy it is to travel down a path of self-destruction. His childlike behaviour in Greece, his instance on winning the laurels at the Olympic Games, caused his sanity and, therefore, his rule to be questioned. He acted like a spoilt child, and he was, consequently, seen as such. But underneath it all, Bernal hints there is still a frightened little boy who just wants to be held by his mother and told that everything would be alright. Bernal has taken the historical sources and picked through the myths and the lies, and has given her readers a more rounded view of Nero and his time as emperor.

The antagonist in this novel is surprisingly not Nero but his mother. Agrippina was a survivor. She had been abused but had somehow managed to turn the tables and come out on top. She used her beauty, intelligence and her ruthless ambition to achieve her aim. I thought Agrippina's depiction was fabulously portrayed. She is this powerful woman, who not only influenced her son but allowed him to be convinced that he was divine. Unfortunately, Agrippina made the terrible mistake of thinking she could control this monstrous man she had

The Search (Across the Great Divide, Book II) By Michael L. Ross

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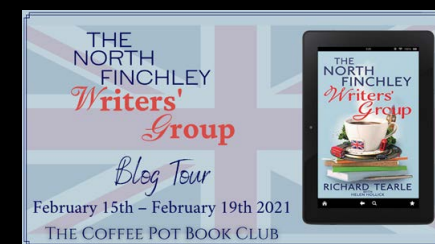
The Bridled Tongue by Catherine Meyrick

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Jude & Bliss By Mal Foster

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Blog Tour: Media Kit: The North Finchley Writers' Group By Richard Tearle, with Helen Hollick

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shaped and created. Agrippina was a character that initially I felt sorry for because of the abuse she had endured, and perhaps, to some extent, that abuse explained some of her behaviour - she wants to be in a position of power so that such a thing can never happen again. However, her lack of empathy, the lies, the manipulation of information, and how she makes her son dependent on her made for some disturbing reading. The abused becomes the abuser, and Bernal asks her readers if Nero ever stood a chance to become the man he wanted to become. And in fact, there are several moments in this novel where Nero realises that the boy he was, Lucius, has been devoured by this monstrous Nero that his mother had fashioned in her image.

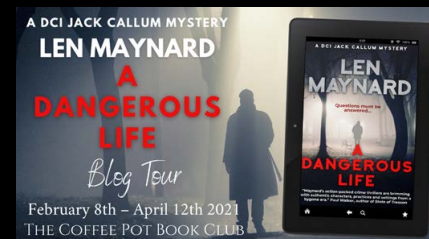
Honour and loyalty is a theme that runs throughout this novel. Nero's benevolent nature and youthful desire to change the world came through on the odd occasion, such as when he helps those in need after the Great Fire. On such occasions, he behaves honourably. But there are moments when his extravagance and debauchery and his belief that he rules by Divine right means he loses track of what is honourable and what is not. He becomes confused, baffled even, as to what he is meant to be doing. He believes that he rules supreme and everyone should bow down to him. He demands loyalty, which history teaches us and Bernal shows us, never ends well.

Unlike Nero, who struggles throughout this book with what is right and what is wrong, Traian does his very best to be an honourable person, and although at times he is disloyal, not to Nero, never to him, but to another that he loves, he takes that act of disloyalty and does his best to learn from it, which I think demonstrated how vastly different Traian was to Nero. Acte, much like Traian, remains loyal to the memory of Lucius the boy and that memory she would never



The Dark Shadows of Kaisersberg  
Book Six in The French Orphan Series  
By Michael Stolle

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A Dangerous Life (DCI Jack Callum  
Mysteries Book 2) by Len Maynard.

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Beware the Lizard Lurking (The House of the Red Duke, Book 2) by Vivienne Brereton.

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betray. Nero is surrounded by good people in this novel, but he is influenced by the wicked because those who wish him well, who want to help guide him to follow the right path, fear that if they upset him or his mother, they could forfeit their lives.

Religion and religious persecution are also explored in this story. Initially, the Christians are tolerated, to an extent. Through characters such as Vena, Bernal examines the dangers of practising a faith that differed so very much from Roman theology. Paul of Tarsus makes several cameo appearances in this novel, and his beliefs put him at odds with the Empire. The slaughter of the Christians after the Great Fire was incredibly harrowing, but masterfully drawn.

This story demanded all of my attention from beginning to end. The narrative was utterly enthralling, and Bernal told Nero's story with a keen understanding of what makes history worth reading. Bernal has brought Nero back to life, and she has explored that life with a profound sweep and brilliance.

Bernal writes with such elegance and authority, not to mention with a keen attention to the historical detail, that a reader can comfortably immerse themselves in this story. Forgiving Nero by Mary Ann Bernal is a must-read for anyone who enjoys quality Historical Fiction.

I Highly Recommend.

Review by Mary Anne Yarde.

The Coffee Pot Book Club



A Matter of Conscience: Henry VIII, The Aragon Years by Judith Arnopp

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The Colour of Evil by Toni Mount

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Songbird (The Tudor Court, Book I) By Karen Heenan

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## Where to Buy

Amazon UK • Amazon US

## About the author



Mary Ann Bernal attended Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, NY, where she received a degree in Business Administration. Her literary aspirations were ultimately realized when the first book of *The Briton and the Dane* novels was published in 2009. In addition to writing historical fiction, Mary Ann has also authored a collection of contemporary short stories in the *Scribbler Tales* series.

Her latest endeavor is a science fiction/fantasy novel entitled *Planetary Wars Rise of an Empire*. Originally hailing from New York, Mary Ann now resides in Elkhorn, Nebraska.

Connect with Mary Ann: [Website](#) • [Whispering Legends Press](#) • [Twitter](#).

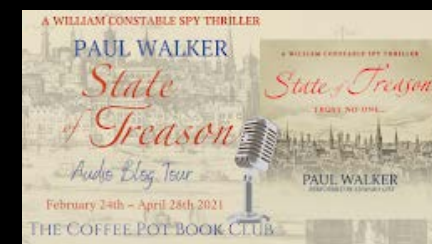
Thunder on the Moor by Andrea Matthews

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A Sword Among Ravens (The Long-Hair Saga) by Cynthia Ripley Miller

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State of Treason (Book 1, William Constable Spy Thrillers) By Paul Walker

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The Year We Lived by Virginia Crow

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Posted by Mary Anne Yarde at 07:00



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*Harvest Moon*  
 Blog Tour  
 March 1st – May 3rd 2021  
 THE COFFEE POT BOOK CLUB



Harvest Moon by Jenny Knipper, March 1st – May 3rd 2021.

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JOSEPHINE GREENLAND  
**EMBERS**  
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 March 4th – May 6th 2021  
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M. LYNES  
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Blood Libel by M Lynes

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Catherine Meyrick  
**Forsaking All Other**  
 Blog Tour  
 16th March – 18th May 2021  
 THE COFFEE POT BOOK CLUB



Forsaking All Other by Catherine