



The Queen's Fool

Philippa Gregory

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A young woman caught in the rivalry between Queen Mary and her half sister, Elizabeth, must find her true destiny amid treason, poisonous rivalries, loss of faith, and unrequited love.

It is winter, 1553. Pursued by the Inquisition, Hannah Green, a fourteen-year-old Jewish girl, is forced to flee Spain with her father. But Hannah is no ordinary refugee. Her gift of "Sight," the ability to foresee the future, is priceless in the troubled times of the Tudor court. Hannah is adopted by the glamorous Robert Dudley, the charismatic son of King Edward's protector, who brings her to court as a "holy fool" for Queen Mary and, ultimately, Queen Elizabeth. Hired as a fool but working as a spy; promised in wedlock but in love with her master; endangered by the laws against heresy, treason, and witchcraft, Hannah must choose between the safe life of a commoner and the dangerous intrigues of the royal family that are inextricably bound up in her own yearnings and desires.

Teeming with vibrant period detail and peopled by characters seamlessly woven into the sweeping tapestry of history, *The Queen's Fool* is another rich and emotionally resonant gem from this wonderful storyteller.

The Queen's Fool Details

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Author : Philippa Gregory

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From Reader Review The Queen's Fool for online ebook

Azar says

An engaging heroine--if somewhat too contemporary in her attitudes for the 16th Century, IMO--narrates this unusual perspective on Tudor England which I enjoyed very much. Not an instant favorite, but definitely a diverting read that I don't regret spending time on. I'll have to read a few more titles by the author before I can say whether or not she's earned her title as queen of Elizabethan fiction.

One thing I found especially intriguing was her unusually sympathetic portrayal of Mary Tudor. Maybe I haven't read/seen enough contemporary accounts of the period, but in my experience books about Tudor England tend to make Elizabeth the heroine and focus on the "Bloody Mary" part of her elder sister's reign. Some of the incidents covered in this novel were events that I either had never learned about, or didn't remember from my history classes, and the book at the least has inspired me to dig deeper and find out just how much of what happened was fiction and how much was history.

Trish at Between My Lines says

2.5 stars

So far my least favourite book in this series.

I think because we get the view of someone outside of the Royal Family circle. Harrah is the Queen's Fool. Most of the time I liked her, and admired her independence. But at the same time, it grinded my gears that she was on everyone's side. Can you say people pleaser. Whoever she was with, that's whose side she was on.

And she wasn't doing it to be cunning, she was just very empathic. But it irked me.

That said it was interesting to see Mary's rise to power, and then Elizabeth's. What I would have loved was this book written from their POV. Then I would have been all over it.

Ashley Marsh says

I'm so, so conflicted with this one. Anyone who knows me knows I CAN'T refuse Philippa Gregory. I go into each of her books with the solid KNOWLEDGE, not expectation, that I'm going to enjoy it. I have so many thoughts about this one. This is probably going to read more as a rant than as an actual review, but I'm still trying to sort out my thoughts.

Unlike the rest of the series, this is told from the point of view, not just of an outsider, but of an entirely fictitious character. Hannah's narrative is decidedly the focus of this story, and, despite her close relationship with both Queen Mary and Princess Elizabeth, I found that the focus on Hannah left me disappointed in what I got from these two daughters. However, Hannah's story, on its own, was rather interesting. I got to experience a different angle of history that I haven't been given by Gregory's other Tudor-era novels. Hannah is a likable character, but guided too completely by emotion. I found that she didn't have a strong enough mind to focus on her safety. She was blind to her role in various plots by different sides until they had

already transpired. I enjoyed the fact that she was educated, that she loved books. But her ideals in terms of a woman's role just don't fit the time period AT ALL. She wanted to never marry, run her own shop, take care of herself, essentially live as a man, with complete freedom? I generally don't mind the historical inaccuracy or filling in that Philippa Gregory adds to all of her stories, but this is just far too modern a view. Her cry for freedom resonates with me, a 21st century woman, but it just doesn't fit and it didn't feel genuine, even when she briefly got what she wanted. She was a character who experienced a lot, but didn't emerge any stronger as a result. Her gift of "Sight" was interesting enough. I would say that it wasn't necessary to the plot, but it was woven in such a way that the story probably wouldn't have transpired in the same way without her abilities. In short, I liked Hannah. She's a reliable narrator, but, as a character on her own, she's a little lacking. She starts off as an independent Jewish girl in hiding, and ends as a married Jewish girl who completely sacrificed her independence to raise her husband's child by another woman, and to live with him as a normal 16th century family for the rest of her days.

As for the Mary/Elizabeth aspect of the story, it was just okay. It was great to have a character, fictional as she is, who managed to be close to everyone, to be a spy for everyone, and to somehow emerge unscathed. Elizabeth was the more interesting character, for sure. Mary I has always seemed to be cold and cruel to me, constantly saddled with her memories of how her father put her mother aside and ruined his legacy, how she went back and forth from being legitimate to illegitimate. She never recovered from this, and her religious convictions meant that she focused solely on the "true faith." This was her downfall. Elizabeth, of course, was not a perfect sister, and she isn't without the many faults of her own. But given the choice between the two, I would much rather have preferred to spend my time in Elizabeth's company. Mary wreaked havoc in England, plain and simple, and she definitely earned her reputation as Bloody Mary. I think Philippa Gregory did a good job in delivering both of these characters in a way that is true to what we know about them, in terms of personality and actual events. Also, what the hell happened to Daniel's mother and sisters? Hannah asks the question to herself near the end of the book, but we're never given an answer. I find it hard to believe that they can live happily ever after if his family is still around. On the other hand, I don't see Daniel living happily without them.

Overall, I really enjoyed this book. Do I wish that the story had been told from the point of view of a real person who actually experienced all of this? Of course. Do I wish that Hannah's story had come in a separate book? Yes. I appreciate the effort it must have taken to weave this story. On one hand, it must have been nice to have a little more liberty with the story as it was told by a character who never existed. However, I think it limited the strength of the novel overall, which is why I can't give it five stars. I LOVE Philippa Gregory, and I'll definitely finish the rest of her books that I haven't yet read, but, so far, this ranks with *The Red Queen* in terms of its weakness on its own. As part of the Tudor Court series, I can appreciate its existence.

Kerrie says

I'm done with Philippa Gregory.

This is the 4th book of hers that I've experienced. I was hoping that, not being constrained by the limits brought by a historical figure, she could create a fuller character than the shallow cardboard cutouts of Anne Boleyn, Catherine Howard, Anne of Cleves, and Katherine of Aragon in her other novels. But no... The character of Hannah Green was by far the most confusing and maddeningly inconsistent character I've read outside of fanfic. This wasn't complexity, but simply a sloppy author who had no idea what kind of character she wanted.

Hannah, we are told constantly, is a free-spirited, strong-willed woman who does not want to have to be subservient to any man. A tall order in 16th century England, and an attitude that would quickly put a bull's

eye on her even if she wasn't a Jew hiding on the downlow from the persecution of both Catholics and Protestants. And yet, Gregory obviously wanted to write a romance, so this strong-willed woman who wants to be self-employed and free from any male rule swoons at even the mention of Robert Dudley. Compelled to be his vassal, even when he releases her from his service, she runs back to him when the going gets tough. This raging Tudor feminist cannot exist without a man. It would be one thing if this irony was addressed, but it is not - Hannah is always treated as a strong, indomitable woman by the author.

I didn't find Hannah a sympathetic character at all. She looks down on the Princess Elizabeth as a whore, tempting other womens' husbands, and yet would have no problem becoming Dudley's mistress but only refrains because she "loves" her husband. One of her positive traits in Gregory's eyes is her loyalty, and she is... loyal to everyone, even those on opposing sides. So, by being loyal to all, she is loyal to none. She speaks in absolutes constantly - Mary Tudor is "the most courageous woman," Elizabeth is "the cleverest," phrases like "that I had ever known" and "greatest" regularly punctuate the narrative. Is this a character trait, or just really godawful writing? I'm suspecting the latter.

Because of the emphasis on romance in this novel, Gregory's usual lackluster prose became glaringly obvious. It doesn't even approach the skill of some romance writers, and Gregory can't even use the excuse that she's a historian with a sideline in writing. Her degree is in English Literature, not History. (It seems that fact needs to be reiterated to correct the prevailing myth out there.) And the writing was droning and repetitive in this novel even more than the others. It could easily have been shortened by a good 50 pages or more if she hadn't repeated information that she had mentioned just a few pages earlier. For example, after introducing the character of Marie and having a scene with her, is it necessary, 2 pages later, to mention her as "my father's nurse?" We already know that. And the most egregious example, more than 3/4 of the way through the book, after the wedding and several scenes of married life, have Hannah say "there stood my husband, Daniel Carpenter?" WE KNOW THAT! Vapid, repetitious filler like this with no letup sorely tried my patience with this novel.

I could go on and on about the shortcomings. The only positive feature of this book was Mary Tudor. It was a different characterization from the typical "Bloody Mary" persona - this was a tortured woman who had finally achieved the throne that she'd been waiting for her entire life, and her reign was marked by disaster. Partly her fault, because of her blind devotion to "The Truth Faith," but her quest for love with King Phillip was a doomed one. In contrast, Gregory's treatment of Elizabeth was cartoonish and disrespectful (I don't think Elizabeth has been referred to as a whore so many times in a book before!) and brought the novel down even further into the depths of unimaginative prose, characterization, and general storytelling.

And lastly, since this is an audiobook... Bianca Amato's narration didn't have the listless suicidal monotone that was so grating in her reading of Anne of Cleves in *The Boleyn Inheritance*. However, it is very difficult for a female speaker to play the part of men, and all her men sounded nearly the same. So, this is my last Gregory novel, and last Bianca Amato reading.

Sara says

Book number twelve in the Tudor saga, *The Queen's Fool* seems to me to be one of Gregory's weaker efforts, or perhaps I am growing tired of her at last. I love historical fiction that contains MORE of the historical and LESS of the fiction. I have loved Gregory at times because I felt her fictional accounts fit so perfectly into the narrative that we know to be true, into the facts that surround the tale. I cannot say that I felt she did a good job here, though, as I walked away thinking that the story was completely ludicrous in view of the known facts and that, rather than offering me a believable interpretation of the people, she had offered an interpretation that I would judge has less than an hair's breadth of being true.

I'm not sure I can buy Bloody Mary Tudor as a sweet girl who was trying to save the souls of one and all by burning them at the stake. Wouldn't it make a bit more sense that this woman, who was treated so poorly by her father and his cronies, while being no doubt influenced by her mother's unwavering adherence to Catholicism, might have had a bit of a vengeful streak in her that would have made burning people and lopping off heads an easier task? I kept asking myself unanswerable questions: Would you continue to love a person and put them above your own safety and that of your father if they signed an order to have you interrogated by the Inquisition? Can a person truly serve two masters faithfully? I know, it makes for a character who can relate first hand what is going on in both camps, but really, wouldn't your true feelings lean one way or the other? And, finally, history tells us Elizabeth I was a strong and independent woman. I just can't buy this slutty, femme fatale version of her. If she had been this woman, could she have survived to have reigned and would these men have respected her judgment as history tells us they did?

So, given these failings, how can I give it a 3-star rating? Well, Gregory knows her craft well enough to spin a tale that you want to see through to fruition. She makes you stay, even at those moments when you are shaking your head and saying, "I don't think so." I'll give her a star for that alone. With another author, I would probably have been out of there less than half way in.

I have two more novels to read in this series of books about the Plantagenets and Tudors. Since I have not read them in complete order, I have already read the next book in line, *The Virgin's Lover*, which is the continuation of this book into the life and reign of Elizabeth I. I thought it also a weaker novel than her norm. Perhaps Gregory is tired, perhaps I am tired, or perhaps she doesn't like Elizabeth and feels moved to malign her? I am hoping that the last two will revert to the quality of some of the earlier ones. The book about Katherine Parr should be more interesting if handled well, since I am not as familiar with her and might not notice the historical inconsistencies quite as much. The last will be *The Last Tudor*, which by its title promises to be the last in this long, long line. I admit I will not be unhappy to have it done.

Sonja Arlow says

I have been SO lazy writing this review, putting it off for days after finishing the audio version. This normally only happens when I am slightly underwhelmed by my reading experience.

As always, the audio narrator Bianca Amato gave a stellar performance and I enjoyed the fact that the book was written from the viewpoint of a non-royal, especially one that has an uncontrollable power of prophecy. I also really enjoyed learning about the lives of Jews during this time of persecution and the danger of the Spanish Inquisition.

To be honest, I have never been a fan of king and queen books but the last 2 audio books by this author was excellent, in fact they were such great experiences it had me believing that maybe my tastes have changed.

But nope, this book just proved to me that my enjoyment of *The Boleyn Inheritance*, and *The Taming of the Queen* was perhaps only because I found the story of mad Henry 8 so fascinating.

So, I am not going to harp on about all the endless cycles of schemes to overthrow the reigning monarch, the endless illnesses or the slightly tepid standing feud between Mary and Elizabeth.

For fans of Phillipa Gregory I think this will go down well but for me..... well perhaps I should give her books a rest for now.

Nicole says

Every time I pick up a Gregory novel, I want more. I love her Tudor series so much I went out and bought almost every Tudor book I could find (at Border's going-out-of-business sale). My obsession began when my best friend said, hey, you know that movie *The Other Boleyn Girl*, I just read the book and I know you are going to think I'm crazy because it's so smutty, but I loved it... you should try it too. Of course, I was hesitant at first, but she's my best friend, if I can't trust her reading recommendations, who can I trust? She was right. It was smutty, but enthralling. I couldn't wait to read the next one and learn more about Henry VIII and his never-ending stream of wives... and so, the obsession began.

This installment is about Queen Mary (Henry's oldest daughter) and her almost tyrannical rule of England. We start before her reign, when her brother King Edward is ill and she lives on the fringes of society. We see her rise to power and watch as the relationship between her and her half-sister Elizabeth (Anne Boleyn's daughter) evolves into something less than sisterly. This book has it all, secret plots, a love story, a divided friendship... everything you want in a novel. My only wish is that Gregory would write more about the Tudors (I mean we hardly got enough of Jane Seymour and Katherine Parr), but I cannot wait to read the next installment.

Mira15 says

Desejava perder-me nos corredores dos castelos, conhecer personalidades fascinantes e cativantes, e, principalmente lançar-me nos meandros da História de uma forma que só Philippa Gregory consegue recriar. Depois de ler 5 livros da autora já sei com o que posso contar e estava ansiosa por ler este - embora soubesse que a personagem principal é fictícia, ao contrário, dos restantes livros.

Oliver e Hannah Verde “Green”, pai e filha naturais de Aragão, Espanha, são honestos e trabalhadores, esforçando-se todos os dias por ganhar o seu ganha-pão. Não obstante o facto de terem sido enveredados nas teias da inquisição e por isso, os dois tiveram de fugir para Inglaterra (após a morte da mãe de Hannah) e lá esperam um recomeço numa terra mais tranquila. Porém, a autora não perdeu tempo e logo nas primeiras páginas dá-se uma mudança – da pequena livraria do pai, Hannah torna-se bobo do rei Eduardo VI. Ela é ambiciosa e não procura esconder o seu desejo de liberdade muito à frente do seu tempo.

“ – *E porque anda vestida à rapaz?* – perguntou.

O meu pai encolheu os ombros.

- Oh, meus senhores, os tempos estão maus. Tive de atravessar a Espanha e a França com ela e, depois, os Países Baixos, sem uma mãe para a guardar. Tenho de mandá-la fazer recados e agir como se fosse meu empregado. Seria melhor para mim se fosse rapaz. Quando se tornar mulher, terei de lhe dar um vestido, mas não sei como hei-de tratá-la. Como uma rapariga, estou perdido. Mas, com um rapaz, lá me amanho. Como rapaz, ela é-me útil.” P.17

Nunca consegui compreender Hannah. Muitos leitores reprovam a personagem de Margarida Beaufort em “A rainha vermelha” (livro nº 2 da série “Guerra entre primos”) pelos seus comportamentos cruéis e pela sua ambição desmedida. No entanto, com ela tenho um pleno espelho da época e á luz dessa mesma sociedade consigo entender o porquê de se ter tornado assim. Hannah, pelo contrário, dá-nos a noção duma mulher completamente livre para tomar decisões e com vários ideais não propriamente comuns na altura. Até a relação entre ela e Daniel Carpenter é fria e distante, devido á sua teimosia e infantilidade. Surpreendentemente, no final muda e o romance renasce repentinamente... Muito confuso.

Como já vem sendo habitual, a escritora utiliza uma pitada de magia e de sobrenatural para intensificar toda a questão da religião, bem como do pesadelo da Inquisição. Curiosamente, alguns episódios desta natureza fizeram-me recordar “A senhora dos rios” (livro nº 3 da série “Guerra entre primos”) pelas semelhanças de certos pormenores. O triângulo amoroso entre conspirações, intrigas políticas e traições perdura durante todo o reinado de Maria e as suas consequências rasgam Inglaterra ao meio vezes sem conta.

“Atualmente, as ruas de Londres estavam muito diferentes. Havia forcas em todas as esquinas com traidores pendurados pelo pescoço e corvos nos beirais dos telhados a engordar à custa deles. A cidade era varrida por um vento pestilento que tresandava a traição.” P. 208

Em “A espia da rainha”, acompanhei Hannah nos meandros da corte e em Calais (antes de se tornar novamente francesa), e pude usufruir de todos os momentos da sua relação íntima com Maria e Isabel, as famosas irmãs rivais Tudor. Apesar de o enredo se concentrar nas personagens de Hannah, Maria e Isabel, o contraste entre estas duas últimas surpreenderam-me, levando-me a querer saber ainda mais!

- + Equilíbrio entre entretenimento (utilizando a ficção com a história paralela de Hannah) com enriquecimento histórico e político de Inglaterra no séc. XVI
- + Bem escrito, prendendo o leitor até ao fim (embora alguns episódios entusiasmem mais que outros.)
- + Em cada capítulo, transparece uma pesquisa impecável e meticulosa por parte da escritora

-
- Modernidade de pensamentos e atitudes de Hannah forçada ao máximo, acabando por se desenquadrar com o resto das personagens totalmente inseridas neste período histórico
 - Relação de Hannah com os círculos mais nobres da corte inglesa, por vezes, demasiado conveniente e incoerente. Não me convenceu...

Para quem como eu acompanha há vários anos a dinastia Tudor é certamente interessante descobrir o que aconteceu durante o reinado da 3ª geração. Descobrir as diferenças e as semelhanças (que não são poucas), reflectir sobre o poder do destino e o quanto os feitos passados ainda conseguem afectar o presente. Quanto maior é o perigo, maior é a recompensa...
Não foi o livro da autora que mais gostei, mas valeu a pena por tudo o que aprendi!

Celise says

"And all they will remember of this queen is that she brought the country floods and famine and fire. She will be remember as England's curse when she was to have been our virgin queen, England's saviour."

That quote is exactly what I knew of Queen Mary Tudor, Elizabeth I's older sister and predecessor. The Queen's Fool is a factual and fictional retelling of Mary's evolution from the miserable child who saw her mother divorced and put aside by Henry VIII, to the woman who would become queen of England and burn thousands of people for their religion in her attempts to return the country to Catholicism, earning the name Bloody Mary. Gregory captures the pain and dejection of a heartbroken woman and while not justifying her madness, she paints a picture of why things might have gone the way they did, starting back in her childhood when Anne Boleyn pushed her mother off the throne, and pushed Catholicism from England with it. (The plot does not go back this far, it is only mentioned, but is covered in The Constant Princess and The Other Boleyn Girl).

This isn't really Mary's story though. The novel is told in first person perspective from the point of view of

Hannah Verde, a fictional Jewish girl who comes to court to serve Queen Mary and Princess Elizabeth. I generally dislike fictional characters set in real history, but she was honestly my favourite part of this. She's a little bit wishy washy with her feelings sometimes, but she's a young girl growing up and learning what she values. This outsider perspective probably makes sense from a narrative perspective as well just because it allows us to see what's going on with both Elizabeth and Mary without two conflicting POVs.

The middle dragged, but these novels tend to do that.

Crystal Starr Light says

Hannah Verde "Green" is a young Jewish girl who poses as a boy to apprentice to her father, a bookkeeper. But when Lord Robert Dudley realizes she has "The Sight", she becomes King Edward's Fool. Hannah The Fool gets to experience the King's death, Queen Mary's rise to the throne, and Princess Elizabeth's eternal scheming to get on the throne all from the front seat of the court. But the real question is: Will Hannah ever find Twoo Lurve?

The last Philippa Gregory book I read, *The Other Boleyn Girl*, I called a guilty pleasure. It wasn't that amazing, the history was iffy, the characters 1-dimensional, but it was amusing and entertaining. I wasn't bored in the slightest.

Oddly enough, I found myself enjoying "The Queen's Fool" even more than I enjoyed TOBG. I don't know much about the historical accuracy, the characters might have been even more annoying, but I was definitely more engaged in the story and more interested.

NOTE: History isn't my forte. I appreciate historical accuracy in a book, but it's going to have to be pretty blatantly WRONG for me to notice it (i.e. Jeans in the Middle Ages type thing). Therefore, if you are reading this review to see how accurate TQF is, I would suggest you move to another review, because I won't be able to answer that question very adequately at all.

Probably the biggest, most obnoxious and annoying aspect of the book for me was Hannah Verde herself. There was quite a bit I didn't like about her.

1. Anachronistic. Yeah, I know, I just noted I "Don't do history" and my first complaint is about historical accuracy. But I put this under "Things that are obvious an idiot would know". I'm sorry but I can't believe a 16th century woman would be saying these things:

"I don't wish to marry...I should like to have my own shop and print my own books."

"It's not you I dislike. It's marriage itself. I wouldn't choose marriage at all. What is it about the servitude of women hoping for safety to men who cannot even keep them safe?"

"I need to be a woman in my own right, and not only a wife...This is the woman I've become."

Women of this day got married and had kids. That was it. There was no big push for women's rights or women to have jobs outside of being a wife and mother. Sorry, if you want to do this plot device, travel to

the 1950's. Even then, though, the women STILL were expected to be wives and mothers FIRST AND ONLY and were SHAMED if they had jobs (just ask my grandmothers!).

2. Mary Sue-ness. Hannah has "The Sight", some weird, undefined phenomenon that takes a historical fiction book into the fantasy realm. Women are jealous of her. She befriends Queen Mary AND Princess Elizabeth and are buddy-buddy with them up until the end. She has several men chasing to get in her skirts. She is shapely and attractive and has desires that are NOT common in her time period. Hannah, come on down, you are the newest Mary Sue!!

3. Miss Passivity. Much like with Mary Boleyn, Hannah barely does ANYTHING of her own volition. Much of her life is being pushed around by everyone else. Now, I know earlier that I said that women were expected to be wives and mothers, and basically didn't have rights. That is true, but I still think it is possible to show a historically accurate woman that isn't a doormat all the time, letting everyone walk all over her.

4. Inconsistent. Hannah spends much of the book fearing that she will be revealed as Jewish. And THAT is why she clings to the VERY Catholic Queen, Mary, who killed several "heretics" during her time. Uh...wait, that doesn't make sense! Now, this COULD have been done well, if Hannah had met and befriended Mary (which she did), but had serious reservations and fears about Mary--something like "Mary is a woman I look up to...but she could kill me at any moment for being Jewish!" But this NEVER HAPPENS.

And yet...she says THIS:

"I couldn't pray to a God who would allow my mother to be burned to death. I couldn't pray to a God who could be invoked by the torchbearers."

But you can serve a Catholic Queen with no problems? Not even some "Oh, I like Queen Mary, but she's burning people, like the Catholic Church burned my Mom, oh no what do I do?" Huh? How does THAT make any sense?

5. Holier Than Thou. Hannah flirts around with the married Lord Robert Dudley. But when Princess Elizabeth does this, WHAT A HORRIBLE SLUT THAT GIRL IS!!! HOW DARE SHE!!!

"The Queen had to watch the man she still passionately loved at another woman's beck and call, and that woman, Elizabeth, the unwanted sister who had stolen Mary's Father, was now seducing her husband."

And yet, when Lord Robert's wife, entrusted with Hannah's care, treats Hannah like dirt, thinking she has fooled around with Lord Robert (and in some ways, Hannah did), GOD FORBID WHAT A HORRIBLE WOMAN!! HOW DARE she not treat Hannah with the utmost respect!

And then, when Princess Elizabeth rebels against the Catholic ways, SHAME ON HER for defying the laws! Oh, Hannah still practices her Jewish ways in secret? Oh, THAT'S OKAY!! Geesh, get it right!

6. Lack of compassion. At one point, Hannah learns Daniel has cheated on her. She is understandably upset (I truly did feel sorry for her and was glad when she reacted appropriately). But when Amy Dudley's husband, Hannah's beloved Lord Robert, does the same thing, does Hannah show ANY compassion or

empathy to Amy? HELL NO!!

7. Mary Boleyn 2.0, New and Improved! There were several times where I found it hard to differentiate between Mary from TOBG and Hannah from TQF. Both were passive, holier-than-thou, women who admired their Pure and Righteous Queen Who Can Do No Wrong, and fall in love with the most boring of men. Even Hannah's supposed Jewishness felt fake; more like painting a white rose red.

8. Forgetfulness. After Hannah learns about Daniel's baby momma, she leaves his house and lives with her father. Understandable. She also doesn't immediately take him back. Good. But then, after the battle of Calais, suddenly, she forgets how he cheated on her and talks about how "patient and longsuffering" Daniel was, how he "waited for her" until she left court and married him. Um, girlfriend, no, he wasn't patient. If he were patient, he wouldn't have a baby momma. You have a VERY short memory, don't you?

For once, I'd like to read a historical novel in which the female main character was correct to her time period, wasn't a pushover, had actual real female friends and LIKED them, wasn't fawned all over by every male within a 30 mile radius, and had simple human emotions such as compassion, mercy, understanding, and kindness.

But enough about Hannah, I think I've worn myself out talking about her.

The other characters are 1-dimensional like in PG's TOBG. Queen Mary is Pure and Holy and All Things Good. While I liked this better than painting her as some devil woman just because she had a lot of people put to death, it got to be over the top on numerous occasions. Princess Elizabeth felt almost EXACTLY like Anne Boleyn from TOBG: scheming, playing around with men, being evil and thinking of herself and her power over her country. Again, while I don't think Princess/Queen Elizabeth was all Perfection, I don't think she was the harlot that PG tried to portray her as.

I got no sense of Hannah's father's character; he felt very much a blank slate. Daniel felt like a selfish, domineering pig. I have no idea WHY he and Hannah Fell In Lurve. Lord Robert was only a self-serving rake; he didn't care about anyone other than himself. Daniel's mother and sisters were terrible people--well, actually, I had more heart for them, realizing that they were scared and didn't want to lose Daniel. But the way Hannah talks about them, you would think they chased her with pitchforks and playfully tied her to the lit BBQ every so often.

In fact, none of the women, other than Queen Mary and Hannah herself are portrayed as being "good". It's sad that Hannah can't have a single female friend--and not someone like the Queen, someone of Hannah's own rank.

I did like William, the court jester. He was pretty amusing at times. Given the 1 dimensional nature of the characters, he was probably the most interesting character to me.

The story is what I think really gripped me. Even though Hannah drove me bonkers, I was curious about what would happen to her. I think also PG writing from the point of view of a fictional character helped her story; she had a lot more flexibility and could show us the little things in court--things that the bigger players, like Queen Mary and Princess Elizabeth wouldn't have seen. Sure, it's awful convenient that Hannah gets in the employ of the Court and sees all that she does, but I'll suspend disbelief for that. What I find ridiculous, honestly, is "The Sight". I have no idea why THAT was included (and I do realize that is what gets her hired, but geesh, there are other ways!).

The writing was serviceable. Nothing glaringly bad. My experience listening on audiobook was good--though I did miss the woman who narrated TOBG. I did wonder whether Hannah, a Jewish girl, would reference Judas Iscariot:

"We ran from her, like a pair of Judas Iscariots, desperate to save our own skins."

(If this would have been likely or not, please comment and tell me!!)

I think if the character of Hannah had been stronger, less annoying, and more unique (less like Mary Boleyn from TOBG), then this book would have been more enjoyable to read. It's a decent read, one that makes you head over to Wiki and check up on some long-forgotten history. Don't go in expecting brilliance, and you are bound to be pleased.

Annie says

Gregory, the reigning Queen of historical fiction, weaves a tale that is as much an insight into the Tudor court as it is into religious history. The protagonist Hannah, is a secret Jew serving a Catholic Queen and befriendng a Protestant Princess. What a catalyst for an electrifying plot!

Being that this story is based in history and immersed in fact, there are twists and turns that you will anticipate. However the addition of a completely fictional heroine adds a layer of intrigue and provides you with plot points you will not see coming. It is such a satisfying narrative arc that you won't want it to finish and you certainly won't want to leave Hannah behind.

Hannah is a character full of contradictions. Like many women of the time, Hannah's age and her sexual innocence leave her at the mercy of men who would use her for social elevation. However her education and life experience make her cunning a formidable player in these war games. She gives her heart freely to Robert Dudley, Queen Mary and Princess Elizabeth all at once and in doing so endears them all to the reader. Yet she finds it hardest of all to give herself over to a love far greater than any of these, one grounded in safety and protection. She is a tangible character and one I am sorry to say goodbye to.

This was one of the most enjoyable history lessons I've ever had and a formidable novel next to 'The Other Boleyn Girl'. I am so grateful for the sympathy and understanding I now have for England's first female ruler and one of history's most notorious tyrants. I saw 'Bloody Mary' through Hannah's eyes and now history is not just black and white, it is all shades of red.

Don't read this if: You don't like reading.

Read this book if: You want to be swept away to another world and another time. If you even have a vague fascination with history than read this book! You may get more out of it if you're interested in Tudor and religious history however the narrative and characterisation is so strong it wouldn't matter.

Selah says

Enjoyed this book tremendously, with the exception of the ending, which felt weak and rushed compared to the rest of the book. Excellent historical fiction. I'm buying all this author's books.

Jen Burke says

I wanted to like this book. It's set during an interesting period of history. It features a Jewish heroine, Hannah, who must hide her faith. The overarching theme is about religious and personal freedom. But the writing is so awful (it reads like a trashy romance novel) I just couldn't like the book. Nor could I like the heroine. Being free isn't equivalent to being unprincipled. And Hannah "loves" everyone she meets; she ends up loyal to no one. Moreover, the characters are all over the place. For instance, we meet Princess Elizabeth in the first few pages of the book, where she is "catting" about with her stepfather. Hannah tells us: "that was the first sight I ever had of Princess Elizabeth: damp with desire, panting with lust, rubbing herself like a cat against another woman's husband" (pg5) and that Elizabeth was "a virgin in name alone... [i:]n reality she was little more than a whore." (pg3). Which would seem to suggest that Elizabeth is a bad actor. Yet later, the heroine tells us she loves Elizabeth because "she is the bravest cleverest woman I have ever known, she is like a quick-witted lion... like a flame of fire, no one could help wanting to be near her..." (pg221). Indeed, Hannah determines that she should look to Elizabeth in order to learn how to "act like a woman." But later, Hannah tells Queen Mary that Elizabeth is a bad woman, who will be a good ruler (pg495). So which is it? Is Elizabeth a bad woman or a good one? This is not some attempt to depict someone as multi-faceted; it's just a confused character study. Also, did anyone else think it weird that Hannah was living in Spain as a girl, but delivering books to Tom Seymour in London? And what precisely was the appeal of Robert Dudley? He was "dashing?" This is enough to convince a girl obsessed with freedom to become infatuated with her "master" instead of rebelling against him? And why did baby Daniel suddenly regain the ability to speak? Anyway, I had higher hopes for this book given all the hype.

Sophia Musgrave says

SO I see some other reviews of this are whining that it is not historically accurate, and all I can say is so what? it is a piece of fiction, although it may be historically based at points, seriously if you want a real history book go read a text book!!! I think this was great book, the story about Hannah Green being claimed as a fool by the court is engaging, at times very troubling and at times very touching. Based upon the reign of Bloody Mary we get to explore several what ifs-- what if one of England's most ill thought of Monarchs was just human? What if she too had normal everyday concerns and issues? What if her reign was deeply affected by these issues? It delves into a world of the author's creation that questions our assumptions about a little known Monarch. I have to admit that the story is a bit hard to get into, and it does seem to go on forever at times, but if you stick with it and open you narrow mind up just a hair, you may be pleasantly surprised! Told from the perspective of a servant girl with a special sight, we get to see the unfolding of Queen Mary's rule from the perspective that not many people would have bothered with, yet it proves to be a fascinating way to present a heart wrenching time in England's history. Because who really was affected by all the bloody deaths? It was more the people, the peasants and servants and those who had very limited power.

Although there is a lot of political intrigue (which I did not really like just because that is not my interest), I really did like play on Hannah being a Jewess in hiding and continually pitted against circumstances of intense religious persecutions. She lived so long in hiding that she became a boy as a child and young woman to the point that when she could feel somewhat safe coming out of being a woman that she had to continue to pretend ignorance to a certain extent that she almost had no idea who she was any longer. It is a beautiful coming of age story that mirrors the turbulent times. I also really liked the comparison of the not so innocent Elizabeth who would become queen. They both grew up in the same time period but that was about where the similarities ended. Suffice it to say, this novel delves into the what ifs and shows the world different perspectives of a very scary time in England's history. But don't go getting ticked off or disappointed if it is not what you expected, because until you read it, you don't really know!!!

K. says

I was pretty excited about reading my first Philippa Gregory book. I mean, she has like a thousand books and they've been turned into movies and miniseries and who knows what else. She clearly knows her shit where historical research is concerned, particularly the Tudor period.

And yet, I only made it to page THREE before I noped my way out of this book. Here's a summary of those three pages:

- 14 year old girl.
- Grown ass married man sexually pursuing 14 year old girl.
- Seriously. He's encouraging her to play chasey with the intention of fucking her when he catches her.
- Grown ass married man pins 14 year old girl against a tree out of sight of supervising adults.
- 14 year old girl is suddenly "no longer a giggling child, she was a young woman in the heat of first desire."
- Grown ass married man shoves his hand down her dress to fondle her boobs.
- 14 year old girl is initially into it but then pulls away.
- Grown ass married man **SHOVES HIS HAND UP HER DRESS.**
- 14 year old girl clenches her legs shut until she feels "the back of his hand on her hidden sex" and then her knees buckle.
- "The girl was a virgin in name alone. In reality, she was little more than a whore."

Nope. I don't care if it's historically accurate. I don't care that times were different. A **FOURTEEN YEAR OLD GIRL** is being sexually assaulted by an adult who's clearly been grooming her, and it's only page three. Nope. Nope nope nopity nope. I'm done. Fuckity bye, book.

Mariel says

Philippa Gregory writes royalty fanfic, pretty much. Sometimes she'll throw in a Mary Sue stand-in based on an actual figure from history (such as Mary Boleyn in *The Other Boleyn Girl*) and ground her story on some small fact she wanted to do a what-if on. That's okay, but it still feels like putting in your own new character into someone else's story (this time a real one) and adding importance to them that they didn't have. Just like fanfics.

The Queen's Fool hones in on fictional Spaniard Jewish girl Hannah Greene. The best parts were about her life in Spain, and trying to be true to their faith in that environment (nobody expects the Spanish inquisition!). Hannah gets married to a boy who is stretched too thin trying to take care of his mama and sister as well as taking a wife. More than sharing his time, Hannah wants to get down and do the nasty. Hannah can't get anything she wants. She has to practice being a good jew in secret from the government, and then hide very real parts of herself from everyone, including those who share her faith (and supposedly) her body.

That was the best part of the book. The standard fanfic historical fiction fare was the "Oh yay Robert Dudley is so sexy!" and "Won't the impossibly cool Queen Elizabeth notice me?" [There's no way that Robert Dudley was the hottie that historical fiction makes him out to be.] Then Elizabeth is a bitch they "have to" (I don't see the need for it. She was who she was. Fascinating, not a saint) rationalize everything because apparently people can't just be complex individuals. 'Boleyn' was the same way about Henry VIII. He didn't need to be a bodice ripper type. He got his, and they were the harem girls waiting around. (The best part of that book was the "new" sexual practices from French court, such as fellatio.) What do I expect from a genre that makes either Elizabeth or Dudley's wife the villain, and Dudley always the poor torn soul.

There had to be interesting things going on back then that did not involve royalty. I know they need a selling hook, but c'mon.

The Elizabeth/Dudley stuff was the weakest part.

I think that it is best to read only one of these types of books at a time. It's confusing for me to read one book with Mary Tudor as the heroine and then switch around and she's the baddie in Elizabeth's story.

Tzippy says

Drinking game! Every time Queen (Princess, here) Elizabeth I is referred to as a whore in *The Queen's Fool*, take a sip of wine. By the time you finish the book, your blood alcohol level will be infinity.

...

Aside from the misogyny party (everyone's invited!), the problem with this book (as opposed to *The Other Boleyn Girl*) is that the main character is an outsider with her own story. She's a secret Jew from Spain, whose mother was killed in the Inquisition. So you have this balance between the intrigue of the Tudor court and the secret life of Marranos in England/Europe, and the main focus of the book is supposed to be the Tudors, but the Marranos aspect is actually more interesting, if only because everyone's not running around calling everyone else a whore all the time.

I felt that the book delved a certain amount into what it was like to be a secret Jew, but it could have done more. I especially would have liked to see a reference to how they would go to the mikvah. In stories about Jews who secretly maintained observance in the Soviet Union, this comes up a lot--secret mikvahs in the basement, or women risking hypothermia to dunk in the sea. I wanted to know what they did in England and France (where presumably using natural bodies of water was less of a big deal), but this wasn't even mentioned.

So, there's that.

There's also the weird way that Mary and Elizabeth are portrayed, like Mary was just this sweet, righteous woman who never *wanted* to burn and behead people, she was just forced into it because of Elizabeth's schemes to secure the throne. I guess that makes it okay, then.

The other thing is, regarding this whole baby subplot, the dates don't add up:

(view spoiler)

Jessica says

The Queen's Fool was stupid. Historically inaccurate and completely out of touch with the tone of the era. Some books - Michael Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* comes to mind, or Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mister Norrell* - can walk and talk like historical fiction, and still prove irresistibly interesting to contemporary audiences. (Postmodernist historical fiction?) This one, however, fails miserably. I thought I was going to like it. I really, really didn't.

Wilja says

Auf Instagram teilen wir unsere Leidenschaft unter #makehistossexyagain. Macht mit!

Eine absolute solide, gut recherchierte Geschichte im tollen spannend verpackten Gregory-Stil. Die Geschichte hat einige Wendungen, die es einem nie langweilig werden lassen. Die Protagonistin ist mal anders als die bisherigen, sehr unroyal und unweiblich und eigensinnig. Ihre Entwicklung gefiel mir fantastisch. Man bekam ebenfalls einen guten Eindruck von der Glaubenskrise, die erneut durch "Bloody Mary" angefacht wird. Ich hätte gerne noch intensiver hinter die Kulissen am Hofe geschaut, wie es sonst bei Mrs. Gregory üblich ist, aber trotzdem eine lesenswerte Geschichte für alle history-Fans.

Sara says

This was the first book I've read (more specifically, listened to) by Philippa Gregory. After seeing the enormous popularity of *The Other Boleyn Girl*, I had kind of wondered what it was that made this author so appealing.

Before reading this, I already knew that most of Gregory's books were historical fiction told from the perspective of women who lived or might have lived during medieval and early modern times. So, I wasn't surprised to find strong female characters who nonetheless live within the constraints of their times. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the author was an absolute expert at portraying multiple, conflicting sides of characters and situations sympathetically.

The main character, Hannah, is drafted into the service of the dying King Edward as a fool, but she soon ends up working for multiple powerful royals and nobles. As a spy, she has close contact with people like Queen Mary, Princess Elizabeth, and the influential Robert Dudley, and she finds qualities to admire in each of them, even when they're working against each other. Her allegiances and loyalties are not so much fluid as complex. She can love someone and hold them in high esteem while seeing their faults clearly. As a reader going along with Hannah's first-person perspective, I found myself seeing both sides of the coin too. A lot of authors create multifaceted, grey-area type characters, but I thought Gregory was especially adept at it. Queen Mary, for example, seems like a really good person whose heart is in the right place--right up until she starts burning heretics. And even then, she seems to truly believe that she's doing the best thing for her country. Yet I still felt some sympathy for her at that point, and so did Hannah, who as a Jew living in secret had every reason to fear the heretic burning.

Hannah's love life was similarly confused. I liked the fact that she wasn't too good. She followed one man with the doggedness and blindness that (hopefully) only comes with youth and inexperience, while resisting another and the very thought of marriage with considerable strength. However, I did think that something that happened towards the end was kind of convenient in terms of making Hannah into a "better person." It just seemed like she came around to a completely different perspective so fully that it was a little strange, and I thought she didn't need to beat herself up so much about having been (somewhat justly) angry and resentful in the past.

A little on pacing: the story starts out in such a way that it immediately draws the reader into the lives and intrigues of people long gone. Historical details are included in a non-intrusive way so that information flows naturally into the grain of the story. For me, the story dragged a little in the middle while Hannah was still at court (the first time). But when she leaves, several unexpected plot twists grabbed my attention and made me really want to know what happened next with all these characters and their dangerous world, where one day something is the law and the next day it's treason or heresy. I got a good flavor for the times, learned some history, and enjoyed the story.
