



## Wideacre

*Philippa Gregory*

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## Wideacre Philippa Gregory

From #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Philippa Gregory comes the stunning first novel of a thrilling trilogy about the Lacey family, and the captivating woman at the heart of a power-hungry estate willing to go to any means to protect her family name.

Beatrice Lacey, as strong-minded as she is beautiful, refuses to conform to the social customs of her time. Destined to lose her heritage and beloved Wideacre estate once she is wed, Beatrice will use any means necessary to protect her ancestral name. Seduction, betrayal, even murder--Beatrice's passion is without apology or conscience. "She is a Lacey of Wideacre," her father warns, "and whatever she does, however she behaves, will always be fitting." Yet even as Beatrice's scheming seems about to yield her dream, she is haunted by the one living person who knows the extent of her plans...and her capacity for evil.

Sumptuously set in Georgian England from the "queen of royal fiction" (*USA TODAY*), *Wideacre* is intensely gripping, rich in texture, and full of color and authenticity. It is a saga as irresistible in its singular magic as its heroine.

## Wideacre Details

Date : Published July 2nd 2003 by Touchstone (first published April 1st 1987)

ISBN : 9780743249294

Author : Philippa Gregory

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## From Reader Review Wideacre for online ebook

### Caroline says

I really wonder what Philippa Gregory was going for in this novel, because she certainly didn't give us a likable heroine in the slightest. Beatrice Lacey is one of the most horrible, nasty protagonists I've read...and honestly I enjoyed her scandalous behavior. I went into this novel knowing that she was a universally disliked character, and I think that really helped my overall enjoyment of this.

I did find myself actually wishing Beatrice would get her way during parts of the novel, which surprised me. While she is such a hateful creature, I felt Gregory did a really good job of making her someone I could root for. The more the story progressed, the less I felt that way, but there were times when I totally could get behind her.

This is definitely not a novel for people that are easily disgusted by very, very scandalous behavior--not only does Beatrice help out in having people murdered, but she has an incestuous relationship that is really foul and disgusting. She will do anything necessary to keep Wideacre under her control....anything.

It's one of those books a reader should go into expecting to be shocked and entertained by outrageous behavior. It seems a lot of readers have gone into it expecting something along the lines of Gregory's newer novels and finding something much more gritty and scandalous. It's a long, sordid tale that is definitely not for the faint-of-heart.

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### Emma says

This book was something else! I LOVED it! Beatrice is the most insane, deranged, evil?, main character I've ever come across in historical fiction. I mean seriously badass! The book was also shocking in many ways all involving the deeds and plans of Beatrice Lacey. She is like a ramped up Scarlett O Hara.

All the while I was reading this my own 'inner reading voice' was making me laugh!: No, she didn't just do that! She can't do that! What is wrong with this woman? What a bitch! Say, what now?  
No one is safe. I mean no one!

This is quite a salacious read in parts so although I am strongly recommending this book, don't read it if you're easily offended!

I nearly shut this review down before mentioning the history. I had never really thought about the consequences of enclosure and what that meant for rural villagers. Commons were where the poor could catch rabbits, gather free firewood and once the commons were enclosed and turned into fields for crops, this was no longer an option. Combine this with rich landowners sending their crops in their entirety to London, keeping prices high, villagers no longer had access to affordable grain. I'm interested to see in the next in the series how this situation improves or worsens.

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### l a i n e y says

Beatrice Lacey. This girl, later woman, was very hurt, very obsessed, brimming with (deservedly) self-

importance and very *very* \*ahem\* lustful.

That is **never** a good combination for *practially ANTHING*.

**Deranged, oppressive and god damn near suffocating.**

It's like watching someone so committed to her road to ruin/success and you have to give props to the woman, disagree with her or not, it takes extraordinary strength and courage (and more than a pinch of delusion) to do it with that sort of ownership. **It is delicious in its depravity.**

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### Danielle says

I'm a pretty big fan of Philippa Gregory, but I found this one to be very disturbing! I almost liked the fact that the main character was so scandalous and cold-hearted because it made the "heroine" of the story be the person you wanted to see lose which made it different from most of the books I've read. But I don't think I've ever been so grossed out by a book before.. the sex scenes in the book wouldn't really have bothered me - except that she was sleeping with her BROTHER! And I don't mean adopted brother either; he was her actual brother. And they were raised together so it's not like you can forgive her for not knowing. I thought about not reading any further but I kept going solely because I don't like to leave things unfinished.

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### Jamie Collins says

I absolutely hated this book. I don't know why I finished it, except that I like the way Phillipa Gregory writes, I just don't like what she writes about. The heroine is despicable in every possible way, yet the author clearly expects you to root for her à la Scarlett O'Hara. She commits multiple acts of murder, participates in very creepy incest, and betrays people who love her. I'm not particularly squeamish, but I do require some redeeming qualities in a protagonist if I'm to forgive them all that, and Gregory didn't provide them.

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### Anna says

Dark, disturbing and downright demented family sagas are my thing, and the Lacey's of Wideacre definitely fit that bill. Our 'heroine' is daughter of the house, Beatrice, for whom incest, murder, scheming and wrecking is a day well spent. Batshit crazy for her is child's play; this sick bitch is the real deal and I loved her for it. Being inside her warped head with all its twisted reasonings had me sympathising with her to a point; I hated what she did, but I understood why she did it, and the further she descended into madness, the more I wanted her to sink to the very murkiest of depths to see which depraved plot she'd come up with next. And as for the finale, oh my, such glorious gothic insanity.

This would have been a 5 star read for me had the pace kept up throughout, but I'm knocking it down to 4 as - finale aside - the crazy peaked before the 70% mark and then the story went right off the boil. I get why this

quieter section was important but it dragged on way too long, completely spoiling the intensity and the fun; I wanted more bonkers Beatrice, not the villagers' woes and her sister-in-law's do-goodings to right her many magnificent wrongs. A disappointing end to a brilliant beginning.

Buddy read with Jemidar and Joanne :-)

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### **Melia says**

Didn't even finish reading this one. The characters are put into neat little boxes: Beatrice is evil, Harry is simpleminded, Celia is demure and kind, etc. The incest was disturbing, but it wasn't the incest that it caused me to stop reading the book. I just reached a point where I realized that I had already read 400+ pages of a book I didn't like and was only 2/3 of the way through. I felt like my time would be better spent doing just about anything other than reading this ridiculous book.

I've enjoyed the other PG books centered around Tudor England, but I have no intention of even attempting to read the other two books in this trilogy.

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### **Rabbit {Paint me like one of your 19th century gothic heroines!} says**

This book was crazy.

It was trashy, entertaining, and scandalous.

Beatrice was an unlikable character but I LOVED her. She was shameless, and it was oddly refreshing to not have her (really) angst about her moral failings.

This was, to date, the most entertaining book Gregory has ever written.

Beatrice reminded me a lot of Scarlett, but like the bad girl version.

Also some V.C. Andrews thrown in with the incest and gothic feels.

Not for the faint of heart tho.

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### **Tiffany says**

Beatrice is one of my favorite characters of all times. She is confident, self-assured, unyielding, and maybe one of the biggest bitches in literature. With all the books out there that negate women's power and authority (uh hm...TWILIGHT), Gregory knows how to create a character that uses her strong feminine prowess and works the system. "The system" being the 18th century society in which women had very few rights and entitlement. What I think redeems Beatrice is her connection with the land and it's through this that ties her and her family together.

It's dark, historical fiction at its best.

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### **Kim says**

The only reason I gave this book a star is because the darn system wouldn't let me give less. Now, I'm not a prude who doesn't like my book to contain a bit of a steamy scene once in a while. In fact, bring it on. JUST NOT WITH YOUR BROTHER. I loved the time period of this book, and initially I was impressed with the strength of the heroine. However...she lost me when she started thinking up ways to seduce her brother. And chucked a darling hubby out the window (Not literally). What was that about? This was one that I seriously threw in the garbage half way through...I didn't want to subject another poor person to a book full of nasty shmasty incest.

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### **Xysea says**

Horrible drive! I had to scrub my brain after reading it. The lengths the heroine goes to for her beloved Wideacre would be semi-interesting if we gave a crap in the first place, but since the author can't even manage to do that well we don't give a crap and so it's a waste of our time and money!

Other books by this author are far, far better. Skip it! Read 'The Other Boleyn Girl' or 'The Boleyn Inheritance'!

Another one that went up on Bookmooch right away, and surprisingly was snapped right up. That poor, poor soul! I gladly paid the postage to mail it away! Out damned spot!

:D

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### **Gary says**

Very strong social message in this book.

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### **Karla says**

I'm a reader who holds grudges. Disappoint me, and it's likely that an author will get cleaned off my shelves and dumped in the donation bin because if I try to read another title by them, the bad experience keeps lingering and trashes the current read. But Philippa Gregory has been the exception.

After two rather blah reads ([A Respectable Trade](#) and [Fallen Skies](#), the latter which I will certainly re-attempt), this hefty saga was recommended to me by the awesome Sarah, whose similarly awesome review told me that I would most likely love the notorious *Wideacre*. Incest, depravity, murder, gloomy Gothic dysfunction, and a totally unlikable protagonist/antagonist? Sign me up!

Three times was the definite charm with Gregory. I'm hooked, and I will probably one day consider myself a fan. **I loved it.** This was the first book in a long, *long* while that I could say had me riveted from first page to the last. I can't think of any dull spots. It was gripping, turgid melodrama with the plot taking twists and turns that had me flipping pages and perched on the edge of my chair.

Sorry for using such lame clichés, but it was true. *Could* Beatrice become any more obsessed and amoral? Who else would fall under her dogged steamroller of psychoses? I had to keep reading and reading, and the ending.... What a grim climax it leaves to the imagination. It's left up to the reader, and their own feelings about Beatrice, as to how that little scene plays out when Beatrice meets her Maker (both the Divine and the Temporal one who started her on her path). It can be as merciful or merciless as one wishes. Do we get more details in the sequel?

I hope not, but at the same time I'm dying to know what Gregory thought up for one of the most memorable characters I've ever read.

Even though Beatrice is a very loathesome character, I found myself able to see things from her point of view, warped and void of morality as it was. She despises the prospect of being kicked out of her home and her land upon marriage, just because she's not male. Her feckless brother, Harry, has no feel for the earth and true traditions of *Wideacre*. All he knows, and cares about, are the perks of the position. But for what *Wideacre is*, Beatrice feels true kinship that becomes a demented fervor.

And, like that village so often quoted about, she has to destroy it in order to save it. The process is an inevitable, continual decline over the years. As Beatrice falls, so does *Wideacre*. Or was that blissful utopia of Nature only beautiful on the surface and *it* was the one rotten to the core? Was Beatrice the fertile soil that made *Wideacre* realize its destructive, soul-sucking potential?

Throughout the book, Beatrice refers to *Wideacre* in terms of a living thing, a thing with a heart, a pulse, and a soul that only she can sense and communicate with. It's a symbiotic, parasitic relationship, evoking the best Beatrice has to offer while at the same time consuming it and leaving nothing but the husk of a mad woman with absolutely no scruples or morals.

One can be squicked by the incest and never venture into the water, but there is plenty going on under the surface.

I loved Gregory's writing. Beatrice's voice is so cold and selfish all the while she insists she's giving up everything, including her soul, for *Wideacre*. She's a total sociopath, and it really took me by surprise how much I still wanted to read about her when I've wanted to tear books in half because of heroes and heroines that did much, much less. Since the story is told from Beatrice's point of view, we watch her mental gears turn and crash as she frantically justifies her actions to herself and the reader, as her entire world is seen through her twisted little mind.

Brilliant and engrossing. Meaty gothic melodrama the way I love it, and I haven't been so absorbed by a dark, demented family since Marilyn Harris' *Eden* series. Like Beatrice, the anti-hero Thomas Eden and his grandson John Murrey Eden were formed by long aristocratic traditions, a remote and self-contained world, and a desire to control absolutely everyone and everything in their lives. *Wideacre* is a natural companion piece to Harris' morbid, melodramatic saga.

## Renee says

I loved the first half of this book. Beatrice Lacey is by far the most horrible, hateful, despicable narrator I've ever read, but I found myself rooting for her throughout all her scandalous deeds- the conspired murder, the attempted murder, the committed murder, the incest, the hidden pregnancies, and on and on the list goes. I even found myself disliking sweet little Celia, as wonderful a woman as she was, simply because she was Beatrice's enemy. That, I think, is the mark of a truly wonderful author. In any other case, I would despise a woman like Beatrice, but while reading this book, I couldn't help but be on her side.

So naturally, when the second part of the book came, and Beatrice's downfall seemed inevitable, I found it hard to get through. Everything was working against her and I lost the initial connection I'd felt with her as a narrator. Her desires didn't make as much sense to me anymore. No longer able to root for the narrator, and watching the world around her fall apart, I found it a difficult book to finish.

Because I loved the beginning and disliked the end, I give "Wideacre" three stars. Not a bad read and I do intend to read the next two books in the series.

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## Jane says

Where I got the book: my local library, because the one that was on my bookshelf disappeared years ago.

Ah, Philippa Gregory. One of the most read, and most reviled, of living historical novelists. Brickbats mostly take the form of stabs at her loose writing and her historical inaccuracies, although I can't say much about the latter as I'm no historian and as long as writers get things more or less in the right era, I'm usually OK.

I tend towards liking PG's books more than hating them, even though I've felt there's a phoned-in quality to some of her more recent Tudor and Cousins' War efforts. I keep reading the dang things, and am known to say "well, she CAN write, you know. *Wideacre*, for example."

So I decided to re-read *Wideacre*, 20 years after the original reading that turned me into a PG fan (if a rather critical one). My task: to judge whether PG really is, in my opinion of course, or ever was a good writer.

The story: Beatrice Lacey is passionately fond of the Wideacre estate where she has grown up and of which her father is Squire. So fond of it that she commits incest, murder and fraud to ensure that she stays on the land rather than let ownership pass to her brother Harry. Fortunately for Beatrice Harry is a blubber-butt bundle of appetites and perverted passions, and therefore easily handled, although Beatrice's husband and sister-in-law prove a bit harder to fool. In attempting to secure Wideacre for her son, Beatrice overreaches herself and effectively ruins the land she loves, bringing starvation to the villagers who once adored her. But they have a champion in Ralph, the gamekeeper's son whom Beatrice has loved and maimed, and who is now known as the Culler and is coming to get his revenge...

Pretty turgid plot, huh? And matched by prose that generally stays within the limits of "vivid" and "compelling," although it does occasionally tip over into "purple." Quite a few sex scenes, although I was less EWWWW about them than usual as I really didn't find them gratuitous. They fit into the themes of

fertility/fecundity, of power and control, and made me think of folklore icons such as the Cerne Abbas Giant. And the whole brother/sister sex thing reaches right back into ancient mythologies.

While Beatrice was in the ascendant I found the book to be a real page-turner. So much wickedness carried out with daring and assurance; I was loving to hate Beatrice throughout. The turning point, I think, comes when she marries John; ironically, it could be argued that her biggest mistake stems from her first genuine good relationship. After this point I found the action dragged somewhat as things started to go against Beatrice and the incredible life-force that seems to sustain her started to erode. The Ralph/Culler plot line never entirely worked for me somehow.

I can't help feeling that this book contains the germs of much of PG's later work, and perhaps that's why more recent books feel increasingly watered-down. But I really appreciated the absence of the white magic elements that PG so often incorporates into her books; using magic to push the plot along seems like cheating. If there is any "magic" in *Wideacre* it is shown as the beliefs of the country people and as a kind of natural force that Beatrice may momentarily embody but can never control.

I noticed a repetitiveness in the writing at times, especially toward the end where I think I read about 300 times that Beatrice's heart had grown cold. Way to belabor a point, PG. And the characters all tended to talk in the same rather melodramatic fashion at times of crisis. But, on the whole, it was a heck of a story and I've read much, much worse in histfic. My feeling is that PG should return to plumbing her imagination for fresh stories in historical settings, instead of handing us fictionalized history where she's constrained by those inconvenient things called facts.

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### **Jenny says**

Even though it is at times grossly sexual (and I mean gross as in disgusting), the Wideacre trilogy is one of my favorite stories of all time. For me, it really captures the essence of the era, and I loved it so much that I read the entire trilogy (easily 1,500 pages) in about two weeks. If you're not uncomfortable with incest, rape and sodomy, it truly is a wonderful, entertaining read, if for no other reason than to show what lengths people will go to get what they think they want. Highly recommended.

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### **Jem says**

I'm going to disagree with the majority of reviews here and say that I loved the book. I couldn't put it down so much that I had read over half of it on the first day of purchase. I really liked the style of writing, the way you felt every emotion, good or bad that Beatrice was going through. The incestuous theme seems to have caused quite a stir here but for me the lead up to it was so intense that I found myself rooting for it to happen! Yes Beatrice is evil, and yes she is certainly vile but overall she is a fantastic character and makes Wideacre a definite must read.

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### **Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says**

PG likes incest a lot more than I do.

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## Kristen says

Oh man. Beatrice Lacy you are one crazy little bitch. It's not often that you get to read a story through the eyes of the villain, but I loved it! I know a lot of people didn't care for the book because they found the protagonist hard to stomach. Oh yeah, and the vomit inducing incest probably didn't help either. She was perhaps one of the shrewdest, most vile characters I have come across. She had no conscience and took down everything and everyone that stood in her way. Half way through the book I started to feel a little uncomfortable because I actually liked her despite all this. I think this was because although she was despicable, she was strong, crafty, and wickedly smart in a time that women were not supposed to be. I also thought it was interesting how they approached the class issue of the rich verses the poor. Overall, I found it to be a fascinating read, a definite page turner, and I am looking forward to the next two.

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## Sarah Mac says

I've never read any of Ms Gregory's Tudor novels. The Tudor era doesn't particularly interest me (though I'm not opposed to the period if a novel has elements I enjoy), so I was intrigued by this trilogy for three reasons: 1) the Georgian setting; 2) her earlier (supposedly less-romantic) work; 3) the negative reviews due to an antagonistic & incestuous heroine.

I agree the incest is gross. It's definitely not the sort that draws a reader's sympathy (like, say, *Flowers in the Attic*). But once Beatrice's initial romanticism has passed, said incest becomes another facet of her anti-heroine status. She is an unreliable narrator -- and, as such, she is the only choice to relay this kind of story. If Celia was the primary POV, Beatrice would be nothing but a villain...which is unfair, even for a character who does such vile things. Nobody can deny Beatrice impacts, warps, & (frequently) ruins everything around her. But the root of her negativity -- her terrors of homelessness, of lacking security, of leaving her childhood home without a ripple of effect on the land she holds dear -- are sympathetic. She craves knowledge that she is loved, & in that she's a tragic character more than anything else. She's a combination of Victoria & Aurora Floyd & Scarlett O'Hara.

So while Beatrice definitely isn't a good person, her villainy has understandable roots. Her defeat is inevitable; in that she's unlike Scarlett O'Hara, who had enough goodness to prevent total downfall. But I'm sad that so many readers don't look past the grotesque plot points & enjoy the heart of the novel -- a sprawling, semi-gothic epic of a twisted family & its relationship with the land. Who is the true parasite -- the family or the land they live upon? It's a romance in the old-fashioned sense -- a tale of warped standards, a la *Zofloya* -- and that sort of romance doesn't need a moral paragon to narrate.

4.5 stars, but this time I rounded up.

...Take that, one-star reviews. ;)

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