



The Virgin's Lover

Philippa Gregory

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From the author of *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Queen's Fool* comes a stunning portrait of the first perilous years of Elizabeth I's reign.

As a new queen, Elizabeth faces two great dangers: the French invasion of Scotland, which threatens to put Mary Queen of Scots on her throne, and her passion for the convicted traitor Robert Dudley.

But Dudley is already married, and his devoted wife Amy will never give him up, least of all to an upstart Protestant Princess. She refuses to set her beloved husband free to marry the queen; but she cannot prevent him from becoming the favorite and the focus of the feverishly plotting, pleasure seeking court.

Others too oppose the marriage, but for very different reasons. William Cecil, the queen's wisest counselor, knows she must marry for policy; her uncle hates Dudley and swears he will be murder him first. Behind the triangle of lovers, the factions take up their places: the Protestants, the priests, the assassins, the diplomats and the moneymakers. The very coin of England is shaved and clipped to nothing as Elizabeth uncertainly leads her bankrupt country into a war that no-one thinks can be won.

Then someone acts in secret, and for Elizabeth, Dudley and the emerging kingdom, nothing will be as planned.

Blending historical fact with contemporary rumor, Philippa Gregory has created a dark and tense novel of Tudor times, which casts Elizabeth I in a light no one has suggested before. Passionate, fearful, emotionally needy, this is a queen who will stop at nothing.

The Virgin's Lover Details

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From Reader Review The Virgin's Lover for online ebook

Robin says

I love Gregory's books and was looking forward to this one because I love to read about Elizabeth I, but I was a bit disappointed in the way she is portrayed in this version. She comes across as a weak woman who is letting herself be bullied by the ambitious man she is in love with. While I don't know that much about Robert Dudley, this book makes him seem very selfish and determined to do anything to be King of England. I also switch between hating his first wife, Amy, and feeling sorry for her, though I think most of the time I feel like she should have seen that Robert was not going to come back to her and gotten on with her life. The book was a good book, well written, interesting to read like all of Gregory's books, but I was disappointed in the way Elizabeth was portrayed.

Aubrey Coletti says

This is one of the worst books I've ever read from one of my favorite authors.

Now, that that is out of my system, let me begin: I am a big Gregory fan: "The Other Boleyn Girl" is one of my favorite novels. However, when a writer abandons filling in what we don't know, for downright changing the facts, they are no longer writing historical fiction, but fantasy: and that is what this book is. The problem? Gregory's attempt at maligning Elizabeth the First's character.

Now, I knew she had a strong love of Queen Mary from "The Queen's Fool", where she attempted to paint Mary as a decisive, loving, and good queen who just fell upon hard times and was a victim of circumstance, instead of the inferior ruler, even if loving woman, that history shows us she is. However, he description of Elizabeth, while it viewed her as conniving and a bit of a whore (also very unlikely considering her mother's death) also acknowledged her strength, as an intelligent, decisive woman with a will to survive and lead, one who would, in the words of her character Hannah Green "fight like a bated cat" rather than give up and weep.

But with Elizabeth front and center, Gregory cannot contain her venom, and changes her OWN portrayal of Elizabeth so roundly that one would think it was written by a different person altogether! No doubt the Virgin Queen had her flaws: history shows us she was vain, ruthless at times, and had a serious temper. However, history, every POSSIBLE historical source, shows us she was also intelligent, wise, strong-willed, and took a full hand in ruling her country. Indeed, a great point is made in how many times she shot her councillors down to do what she had determined was right: and it turned out best for her country. But Gregory attempts to paint her as a weak-willed ninny, who was foolish and lazy caring only for love, and who could barely rule herself, let alone a country. This is, quite simply, not true, and for a historical fiction writer to ignore historical fact, when she had so closely followed it before, suggests a deep seated anger and resentment, the source of which I cannot fathom.

This hatred, or disdain, IS indeed the problem with The Virgin's Lover: Gregory doesn't like ANYONE she is writing about. Lord Dudley is a selfish conniving bastard. His wife Amy is infuriatingly annoying and simpering, and the picture of a stereotypical raving woman: you start off with a wealth of sympathy to give her by virtue of her situation, that of a woman in love with a cheating man she cannot leave, but by God if she doesn't throw it all out the window and try her very best to make you want to strangle her by her bodice laces. And Elizabeth is, of course, to Gregory, the devil in a woman's shape.

If Gregory doesn't like her characters, why should we? Her skill at painting the details of the past and

bringing the reader into the days of Renaissance England are utterly wasted on characters who are completely unlikable, and on a story which reads like a 1500's Catholic smear pamphlet against Elizabeth and not a novel. It is just plain boring, and a waste of your time. Her desperate attempts to do all she can to convince people Queen Elizabeth wasn't a competent ruler against all historical fact simply make for a downright bad book. If you want a good look at Queen Elizabeth the First pick up ANY historical book on her life: her life is interesting enough without fiction. If you want an exciting, engrossing look into Tudor/Elizabethan and now War of the Roses era England try ANY of Gregory's other novels.

Gregory is a fine author when she is writing about characters against whom she does not have a severe vendetta. No one wants to read a book with no one to root for. Ignore this pile of venom, and pick up "The Other Boleyn Girl."

Cleolinda says

Really, really... not good. I think it really suffers from not having a Hannah Green or a Mary Boleyn--a character who's either fictional or relatively unknown to history who can view historical events from the sidelines. As it is, we're left with nothing but ridiculous Elizabeth/Dudley sex scenes. Gregory does have the courage, however, to make Amy Dudley both [sym]pathetic and really, truly annoying.

Debs says

First Instinct Review:

Elizabeth: Waaaaa! I can't rule England without you!

Robert: Come my Sweet! I shall pet you and stroke you and rule you and call you George.

Elizabeth: Ooo, Lord Robert!

Me: Shut the hell up!

With A Little More Thought:

The verdict after reading *The Other Boleyn Girl*, *The Boleyn Inheritance*, *The Queen's Fool* and *The Constant Princess* is that this one is definitely the worst.

I hated the way Elizabeth was portrayed. Yes, from historical records it does seem as though she was indecisive and dependent, but would have been nice to see at least a hint of the strong, older Elizabeth that is more common in other works about her instead of a simpering wench who's too stupid and lovestruck to do anything but whimper at the misguided object of her affections. Amy, who shows some backbone all of once in the entire novel isn't any better, and when the climax happened, I completely didn't care and was kind of glad that she wouldn't be whining anymore. Coupled with the annoyingly suave and power hungry Robert Dudley, I spent most of the time reading this fantasizing about punching all the main characters in the head.

Speaking of Amy's death, it was kind of a downer for someone like me who didn't know the history that they spoiled what happens at the end of the book on the back cover. Furthermore, the back cover was misleading because it says the book is about her death, and the aftermath of that death, but she doesn't die until 20 pages before the book ends, and then the book ends completely abruptly.

At least upon it's completion, I derive some satisfaction in giving it a crappy review.

Theresa Smith Writes says

And so my pilgrimage with Philippa Gregory's Plantagenet and Tudor novels continues, this time with *The Virgin's Lover*, the story of Queen Elizabeth I in her early years of ascending to the throne. Clearly, I am not reading these novels in order, instead approaching the series in hodge-podge manner based on whatever character I'm interested in at the time. Such as these novels are though, they hold up perfectly well as stand-alone reads and I haven't encountered any instances that have given me a reason to regret this approach. Now, I'm going to approach this review as more of a character study and while the novel is about Elizabeth I and her paramour, Robert Dudley, for me, *The Virgin's Lover* became the story of Lady Dudley, the wife Robert Dudley cast aside most brutally upon Elizabeth's ascension to the throne.

I have always had high admiration for Elizabeth I, yet after reading this, I have to question my previous opinion. I'm not a fan of Henry VIII, he might have been a tremendous King but he was a fairly despicable man. Out of his six wives, there were two I really didn't like, Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard. I didn't approve of the way Henry disposed of them, but the manipulations of these two women had me questioning their royal worth. In *The Virgin's Lover*, Elizabeth comes across as the very worst of both of her parents. Ruled by her desires (Henry) and prone to hysteria (Anne), manipulative (Anne) and hot tempered (Henry), disloyal (Henry and Anne) and arrogant to the point of blindness (Henry). She's also what you get when a monarch is so focussed on his male heir that he fails to prepare the much healthier and robust women for the role his son is unlikely to ever fill. Elizabeth, and Mary before her, ascended to the throne with no preparation. The nature of their upbringing had also ensured that they had never experienced court life with any consistency. So they both made a hash of it. And while Elizabeth reigned supreme in the end, she got through those early years by luck and chance and the advice of men who had been there before, and not on her own merits at all. This also made her vulnerable and open to manipulation; enter Robert Dudley, childhood friend and A-one womaniser. The Dudley family was disgraced in the whole Jane Grey saga, father and brother executed as traitors, so when Elizabeth took the throne, Robert was pretty much at the bottom of the barrel in terms of social status, so he worked on his shared history with Elizabeth to butter her up and worm his way into her favour. It worked and he quickly rose as her favourite, much to the disgust of many and the concern of even more.

I don't like Robert Dudley. Not even a little bit. He was married quite young, a love match he defied his parents over, to a woman slightly older than him, Amy Robsart. From the moment Elizabeth ascended to the throne, Robert cast Amy aside, steadily ignoring her until it got to the point that he had openly abandoned her and publicly shamed her. At first, I found Amy naïve and irritating, but I very quickly realised her worth and my heart just burst with sorrow for all this poor woman had to endure. She was not nearly as stupid as Robert, and indeed others around her, supposed her to be. Robert provided her with no home, merely moving her from one house to another with a purse of coins, rarely visiting her and hardly ever writing to her. As news of his affair with Elizabeth spread, Amy's shame grew deeper and such was society back then that friends began to shun her, close their doors to her and refuse to be seen with her for fear of reprisals if Robert ended up marrying the Queen and becoming King consort. As Robert increasingly pressured her and threatened her with divorce – granted by none other than his lover, Elizabeth – Amy's health, both mental and physical, declined steadily. It got to the point that a doctor refused to see her when she was ill for fear of reprisals and being blamed for her death if treatment went wrong. I was so incensed by this stage, at the fickle nature of society back then and the downright cowardice of men, and I say men because the women

were all for helping Amy and were appalled at her treatment but they were of course unable to do much because the men at the head of their households forbade it. Robert Dudley could not have asked for a better wife, but instead of setting her up in the manner she deserved and treating her with the respect she was entitled to as a human being, he harangued her to death with the Queen's encouragement. This line broke my heart, poor Amy, the low she had reached:

"I keep my eyes shut in the morning in the hope that I have died in the night, but every morning I see daylight and know that it is another day I have to get through." – Amy Dudley in conversation to a trusted priest.

She died of a broken neck, but by whose hand remains a mystery to this day. It is almost certain she had breast cancer but had refused to seek treatment as she attributed the pain in her breast to heartache, rather than a medical condition, and bore the pain as evidence of her shame. Historical records show it was suspected she had a 'canker in her breast'.

Robert was entirely self-absorbed in his quest to be a 'Dudley on the throne', so much so, that despite loving him obsessively, Elizabeth threw him over in the end. When faced with a choice between her throne or her beloved, she chose the throne. I was not sorry for Dudley and history shows he recovered from the rejection enough to later marry Elizabeth's lookalike cousin, although the shame of what had happened with Amy apparently tainted him for the rest of his life. GOOD!! He deserved it! I am unconvinced he truly loved Elizabeth. He certainly wouldn't have cast his wife aside and risked all for Elizabeth if she had been a commoner. The throne was what seduced Robert Dudley, even Elizabeth came to see that. The author note at the end says Elizabeth loved Dudley for her entire life and died with a letter he wrote beside her. That she didn't marry speaks volumes because she probably had her pick of men. I really don't feel he was worth such devotion, not even a little bit. He was never truthful, not even to himself.

The Virgin's Lover is a deeply passionate novel, not just in the romantic sense, but in the way people thirst for something, whether it is love, ambition, peace, or spirituality. This was such a volatile time to live in England, where money was worth nothing, worshipping was dangerous and the walls had ears. For Lady Amy Dudley, there was no hope at all, no helping hand, and no settled life. Out of the trio, I don't think any of them were left unscathed, but at least Elizabeth and Robert escaped the scandal with their lives. The Virgin's Lover is top drawer historical fiction, completely absorbing and with richly created characters based on the lives and historical records of notable historical figures. It is a novel though, and must be regarded as such, but as usual, Philippa Gregory has done a remarkable job of recreating events from the past in an accessible and engaging format. I highly recommend this novel with enthusiasm.

Nicole says

AMY ROBSART WAS NOT ILLITERATE. The historical record shows that she was well-educated and there are letters that were preserved written in her own hand. She also was the financial manager of the Robsart estate. It bothers me that, rather than relying on the historical record, Gregory chose to portray Robsart as poorly educated, flaky and with no money of her own in order to make her seem more dependent on those that surrounded her. Gregory also omits Robsart's visit to court in 1559, when she spent a month living in London. I understand this is fiction, but Gregory is playing wildly fast and loose here.

It also bothered me that none of the female protagonists in this book seem remotely capable of standing on their own two feet. Robsart is dependent on everyone who comes along and is an absolute ninny and Elizabeth is always wailing to either Cecil or Dudley.

I kept reading to find out what would happen next, so in that way it was engaging. However, there's not a character in here that you can root for, save perhaps Cecil.

Kendra Kettelhut says

Again, my love for this author grows. I have watched the movie Elizabeth a long time ago, and really remembered none of it....but following the history from each book, and building on all the events in these stories, I have gained such a wealth of knowledge, and appreciation for this period of history.

Since my knowledge of Elizabeth and her reign of power is very limited (pretty much nonexistent) I found her love affair with Dudley very intriguing; especially after following *The Queen's Fool* and learning a bit of background of his early relations to the monarch and Elizabeth herself. I felt this story developed further into the details of his character. In *The Queen's Fool* he is almost a likeable character, and although he still has parts of him that draw you in throughout *The Virgin's Lover*, Phillipa Gregory develops the story and the characters in such a way that you understand the reasoning and logic behind most all of their actions, including the actions he ambitiously takes as well as those painful actions taken against him. Although Dudley's motives are usually self serving, the author does a brilliant job of humanizing each and every character so you can see the whole story as well as how each individual character may see it through their eyes. You are made to feel such an expanse of emotion from ultimate heartbreaking pity for the character Amy Dudley, to such an appreciation for the cunning strength and intellect that William Cecil uses in order to keep the balance of the kingdom in check, and ultimately sustained. Again, I would like to continue to develop my knowledge and research this amazing woman that reigned for so many years, Queen Elizabeth. This book gives such an insight into this woman that held and reigned in an empire solidly for so many years. One fact I have discovered more clear than anything in my exploration of these 5 novels is that the position of King or Queen is not one of comfort or joy for long, in fact I may go as far to say it is not an enviable position at all.

I was sad to close that book, although I hear she has another coming out this fall about Mary Queen of Scots....and a few other books that are definitely on my list of MUST READS....until the next book ends, happy reading!

Jackie says

I've always heard good things about Gregory's books. This was my 1st one and I have to say I was a little underwhelmed. It was not a bad story, per se, but not the great story that I was expecting.

I was disappointed in the way Queen Elizabeth was portrayed. Gregory shows Elizabeth as an almost weak-willed, indecisive woman ruled by her love of a person she knows she can not have. She can not make a firm decision about war with France. She's left scandal about her and Dudley to run amok, let her attention stray from matters of state and her safety, since early in her reign it was anything but secure, all for her love of Dudley.. except when Dudley is ready to be her King and not King-Consort, as Phillip was for Queen Mary. And then she was ready to scheme with Cecil to remove him as a love interest and remove any hope Dudley has of becoming her husband and King of England. The switch was too sudden for my taste. In a

night's time, she is gone from not being able to function without Dudley to being able to put him aside.

Also, from the jacket cover, the story outline leads you to believe this book is about the issue of Amy's death and the impact it had on the Queen and her court, especially Dudley. This is not even really touched on. Amy didn't die until almost at the very end of the book (her death was on page 410 of about 438 pages of actual story material). The scandal of her death and Elizabeth and Cecil's seemingly forehand knowledge is barely mentioned. As a book that takes place during a period of history that I find very fascinating, I have to say it was not nearly as good as I would have hoped and didn't really explore the aftermath of the scandal in the depth I thought it would.

Cherie says

It's 1558, and Elizabeth, daughter to King Henry VIII and 2nd wife Anne Boleyn, has just been crowned Queen of England. After the brief but strict reign of her Catholic half-sister Mary, what is England to expect from the Protestant Princess who wants to abolish the Catholic ways? In a country full of turmoil, Sir Robert Dudley, longtime friend of Elizabeth since their days growing up at court together, seeks to better his position and maneuver himself into a position of power at Elizabeth's side.

But what of his wife: the forgotten Amy Dudley who doesn't come to court but instead remains back home in the country, forever waiting for her husband to put aside his ambitions and return home to her, for the love of a good woman. Unfortunately, the only love Dudley's seeking is the Queen's. But to what lengths will he go to achieve his means?

This was another great read in the Tudor series! Though the work itself is considered fiction, the author bases the stories themselves on fact. Of course, we cannot truly know everything that went through the minds of Elizabeth, Robert, William Cecil, and the others as not as much was recorded in the way of diaries and actual day-to-day events. But despite that, Ms. Gregory is able to take the facts from numerous sources and build a very real feeling story that draws you right in and makes you feel as if you were right there in the Renaissance period, experiencing everything firsthand along with the rest of the court. It's as if she's reconstructed history right before your very eyes!

I was never much for History in school; it was always one of my worst subjects and I could never garner enough interest to retain the facts that were constantly drilled into my head. However, the way these stories are composed by Ms. Gregory, I enjoy them so much that I actually find myself easily retaining all the information I so easily forgot before, even long after I finished the book. My high school history professor would be so proud! LOL

Riley says

I couldn't even finish this book. I didn't care about what happened to any of the characters, because none of them were good or even decent people. She made one the greatest female monarchs a total whore who couldn't decide anything and didn't seem to care as long as she was stealing her precious Robert Dudley away from his wife Amy, who, let's face it, is a dimwit. I couldn't bring myself to finish it, so the ending had better not have been totally impressive, because I am done with this book.

Yvette says

I had high hopes for this novel, after the lovely experience I'd had with Phillipa Gregory's *The Queen's Fool*.

I love just about anything to do with Queen Elizabeth I, and a historical novel of her romance with Robert Dudley was intriguing, to say the least. However...

The novel was weak at best. Oh, the writing is not bad, although the number of typos and grammatical errors really threw me for a loop--how can a work of this calibre fail so miserably in basic grammar and punctuation? Moreover, there seemed to be a few places where either the writer or the editor was in a big hurry, and ideas were either incompletely added or removed, leaving some sentences hanging and ideas not completed. Odd. Just seemed careless or lazy to me.

The story is one we've heard a thousand times: Good Queen Bess and Lord Dudley had the hots for one another, hooked up, then split up because she decided to follow the "Virgin Queen" PR route, for the betterment of the country. The characters are well fleshed out, which Gregory always does well--humanizing historical characters. Doesn't mean you like them, perse, but feel they were human, at least.

Elizabeth is rather a secondary character when all is said and done, so if you're looking for an Elizabeth-centered novel, this isn't quite it. It's more about Dudley, and the two women who loved him concurrently.

Not bad. Not great, but not bad.

Vee says

This book absolutely enraged me. I normally like Phillipa Gregory for a trashy historical read but what she did in this novel made me not want to read her anymore. She takes Elizabeth the Great, arguably the greatest woman in the history of Western civilization, and turns her into a stupid whining weak, vapid character. There is literally a line in the book something where Elizabeth says something like, "Oh shut up. At least you have a man to make your decisions for you!" Boo! Hiss!

Hanley says

This book taught me something about myself: I have to have someone to root for in fiction. I was disgusted by the three main characters: Elizabeth for her selfish, destructive weakness, Robert Dudley for his selfish, destructive ambition, and Lady Amy Dudley for her stupid, pathetic devotion. Even William Cecil, who clearly fought every day for what he thought was best for his country, was ultimately a smarmy man. Why would I want to read about people who revolt me? Especially when it's a fiction, albeit well-researched. I kept going because I wanted to know the story, the tidbits of history and culture, and Gregory *is a good writer*. And I kept hoping that someone would learn something, that something edifying would emerge. But all I learned is that I never want to rule a country, which I was fairly certain of before reading this.

Crystal Navarro says

After a lifetime of hearing what a strong, brave, and effective Queen Elizabeth I was, this book was an extremely difficult read. I did not like her at all. I thought Robert Dudley was a terribly selfish man who made me want to tear my hair out. I felt that Amy was a ridiculously weak willed and dependent woman ... I literally did not have one character to root for. That made this read a long, difficult one for me.

The closest lovable character I could find was Cecil. And even he had traits I did not want to root for.

In that sense, this book is probably a fantastic piece of literature because it frustrated me so fully that I literally despised almost every character for their indisguisable corruptness and misgivings. This was a first for me when reading a book. Books should pull at your emotions and a good book always will. This one just happened to pull on the less pleasurable emotions, haha.

Having read *The Other Boleyn Girl* a few years ago, I found this book lacking in attention grabbing. This could have been due to my feelings of the characters, or the fact that I loved T.O.B.G so much and was comparing this book to the style Gregory used then. I was not absorbed in this read and found the pace of reading to be slow and lacking in eventfulness.

Shaya says

This was on my summer reading list. I read many of the other reviews. I don't understand why this was one of the books for us to read. It sounds like one of the author's other books would have made a much better choice. I thought it was pretty awful. The book should have been 200 pages, not 430.

I don't quite understand how this book is appropriate. There are at least five pretty detailed sex scenes, and two detailed murders. I didn't mind the sex scenes, but for a school that uses the term "co-ed nudity" when referring to the fact that wearing sexual references on clothing is against school policy, I was surprised.

There was one fifty page stretch, perhaps more, when absolutely nothing happened. It could have easily been summarized in five pages.

The overall writing was a bit dreary to get through. Not that many page turning parts. It did feel like it was rushed and not edited well. I would guess a good editor would have cut significant parts to make it shorter and bearable. There were also several grammar and spelling mistakes that I caught, that annoyed me.

I only had sympathy for two characters and only actually liked one of the characters. Amy's story, Dudley's wife, is told with honesty and I felt sympathy for her. Elizabeth and Dudley are horrible, making quick decisions based on emotion with no thought to their greater responsibility. I have always thought fondly of Elizabeth and her political grace in that period, but this book did not portray her in a positive light. I also felt sympathy for Cecil who was just trying to do his duty. He did get snubbed at one point, but came back. He was good at his job even if his morals are questionable.

I did see an underlying current of lines that I liked. Dark understatements, usually in the form of thoughts, that sum up an event well. If her other work has more of that I would be more inclined to try her again with one of the other books people enjoyed more.

I did like the ending. The fact that Amy was dead made it less interesting for me to read but I slogged up to that point. The cleverness of Gregory's writing shows through with Dudley's realization of the huge mistake he made: trading one good woman who loved him and stood with him when he lost his prosperity and honor in the court, for the queen's quick love and the possible position of being a king. In the end he's left a ruined

man, with neither a loving wife nor a crown. At that point he finally realizes the worth of Amy. "A little bit late, I might add."

Katie says

I may be speaking out of turn here, having never published a book,* but I imagine a "best practice" fiction writers may want to follow is to develop characters that readers can't get enough of. Some writers have figured this out on their own, and as such, Atticus Finch isn't a Southern stereotype with nothing to say, Anna Karenina isn't as sparklessly dull as a Siberian winter, and (to throw our reviewed author a bone here) Henry VIII in *The Other Boleyn Girl*** isn't a kind-hearted, just and caring king with zero spunk.

And YET. Here we're punished with Gregory's weasely Dudley and spineless Elizabeth, two characters so off-putting that I could hardly muster the concern to keep reading, though of course I did because I'm for some reason incapable of abandoning a book. These characters weren't the kind you love to hate; they were just the kind you hate. I can forgive the glazed-over, watered-down history and the writing that aspires to Australian soap opera level, but give me *something* to fall for, Phil!

NB, and a personal grievance: Must Gregory use the phrase "Good God!" every two pages? In every moment of shock, awe, exasperation, disbelief, etc. (of which there are many), someone is bound to solemnly gasp "Good God!" on the page. I started to say it aloud each time I read it...in an overly-dramatic, fake English accent, of course. Unfortunately now it's become part of my lexicon (hopefully just temporarily), and anytime someone plots to murder me or steal my crown (or just takes the remote, doesn't put his dish in the dishwasher, etc.), I have to drop a "Good God!" to show my displeasure appropriately.

*Just to clarify, I've also never attempted to publish a book. My pride had to sneak that in.

**Given my loathing of every other Philippa Gregory book I've ever read, I'm starting to wonder if I was on crack when I deemed *TOBG* a stellar historical soap opera. Was Gregory's success a fluke? Or did I just temporarily lower my standards?

Sammy says

Philippa Gregory is still unable to catch up to the success of *The Other Boleyn Girl*. Her past two books have just not been quite up to par with her first one. While I still enjoyed the *The Virgin's Lover* I was far from impressed because I know what Philippa Gregory has the capability of doing.

The writing was still beautiful, as always, but the story line (though taken from history and elaborated upon) was lacking. This time the story was not told from one person's perspective, but several. I think it gave the story less dimension because you found yourself unable to figure out who you wanted to root for. Perhaps that was Gregory's point, but even so, it wasn't kind on the reader.

Also, I'm suspecting she wanted the reader to have read the first two books before this one, and remembered them because there was no family tree or character guide in the front of the book. That would have been tremendously helpful because I had a little trouble trying to follow who was who if they were not in the center of the story. There are a lot of people in the court to try and keep track of after all.

One thing that was kind of fun, was we saw Hannah Green at one point. You may remember her from *The Queen's Fool*. I don't know why but I was amused by that. There's really not much else to say about the book. I admit I was disappointed at the book. I expected a lot more from Gregory. But it was still an interesting read, and I still plan on reading more of her books in the future.

Undomesticgoddess says

I have read quite a few of Gregory's books, and I have noticed one thing:

She likes to turn the tables on the way her characters are portrayed.

Elizabeth I was a strong, smart, independent woman, right? WRONG, at least in this book. Essentially, all of the main characters are unlikeable, for one reason or another, and I do not think they are consistently written, especially when considering *The Queen's Fool*.

Other than that, I think that the plotline she chose simply was not that interesting. There are others that she could have chosen.

Ryan says

I did not enjoy this book at all. Aside from being tedious and at least twice as long as it needed to be, there was not one single character that I liked. The queen's advisors and all of the minor characters were just annoying. Robert Dudley was slimey. Amy Dudley should have been sympathetic, but wasn't. Instead, she was so dopey that by halfway through the story I was anxiously awaiting her death. And of course, there was Elizabeth. It is astounding to me that Philippa Gregory, someone who generally depicts her female characters as strong and complex, would choose to depict England's first great female ruler as a simpering, lovesick, weak-willed girl.

However, by far, the worst thing is the ending. I trudged through this story expecting Elizabeth to grow. What was my reward? Elizabeth fails to become a great and strong ruler, Robert Dudley shows great remorse and even falls in love with his wife once she is dead and in an ending that could have been written by OJ, Amy Dudley's murder is attributed to royal machinations rather than the work of her husband. This book flies in the face of history, reason and human nature. Philippa Gregory ought to be ashamed of herself.

Margie says

I must stop reading Gregory's dreck! This is a bodice ripper thinly disguised as historical fiction. The repeated analogies of Robert Dudley treating Elizabeth I as a horse were repellent, and her characterizations of the three main characters left me disgusted.
