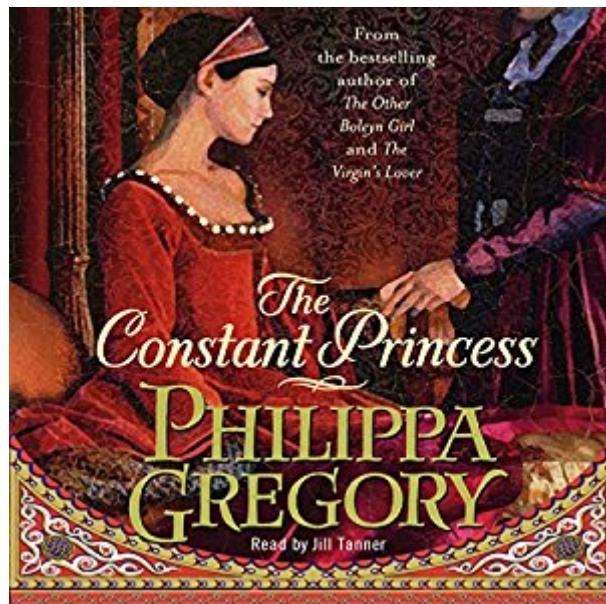


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Constant Princess



Synopsis

"I am Catalina, Princess of Spain, daughter of the two greatest monarchs the world has ever known...and I will be Queen of England." Thus, best-selling author Philippa Gregory introduces one of her most unforgettable heroines: Katherine of Aragon. Daughter of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain, Katherine has been fated her whole life to marry Prince Arthur of England. When they meet and are married, the match becomes as passionate as it is politically expedient. But tragically, Arthur falls ill and extracts from his young bride a deathbed promise to marry his brother Henry, become Queen, and fulfill their dreams and her destiny. Widowed and alone in the avaricious world of the Tudor court, Katherine has to sidestep her father-in-law's desire for her and convince him, and an incredulous Europe, that her marriage to Arthur was never consummated, that there is no obstacle to marriage with Henry. For seven years, she endures the treachery of spies, the humiliation of poverty, and intense loneliness and despair while she waits for the inevitable moment when she will step into the role she has prepared for all her life. In *The Constant Princess*, Philippa Gregory brings to life one of history's most inspiring women and creates one of the most compelling characters in historical fiction.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Oh, how delicious! This is historical FICTION. Emphasis on the word "fiction." While it is a historical account of Catalina, princess of Spain who becomes Katherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife and queen of England, there is liberal artistic license taken. The facts are the bones of the book; the fiction is the flesh. And author Philippa Gregory, who is one of the leading novelists about this time

period, melds the two brilliantly. The book alternates between a third-person story and the first-person thoughts of Catalina/Katherine. This is the first in a series of novels about the Tudors. The story continues in the next book, "The Other Boleyn Girl," when the Boleyn family (first Mary and then her sister, Anne) so devastatingly disrupt the marriage of the King Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon and set in motion the birth of the Church of England. If you enjoy the stories of the Tudors--I find it all quite enthralling--then this is a must-read.

I thoroughly enjoyed this revisioning of the early years of Catalina of Spain who would later be known as Catherine of Aragon, the long-suffering first wife of King Henry VIII. An often silent and very religious presence in many fictive accounts, a woman who stood by Henry for over twenty-seven years before her marriage to him was ended in tumultuous circumstances, resulting in not just the rendering of her only living child to Henry, Mary, a bastard, but the over-turning of the Catholic faith in England, Catherine as a person remains an unknown quantity. She also tends to hover in the margins when it comes to Henry's reign and his other wives and the fate that befell them, especially Anne Boleyn, the women who took Catherine's throne and husband and whose daughter went on to become the "Virgin Queen," Elizabeth 1st. Well, Gregory sets about to change that, presenting readers with a delightful account of Catherine's unconventional childhood, as the much-loved younger daughter of Isabelle and Philip of Spain. Possessed of bellicose parents whose ambitions were to conquer and claim lands and people, Catalina's girlhood was spent in military encampments, always on the move until, finally, her parents settled. Though they tried to destroy the Moors and suborn them to their faith, they end up adopting many of the habits of those they try to oppress. Catalina carries an appreciation for the skills, hygiene, knowledge and artistry of the Moors and Islam her entire life. Revelling in her privilege as a princess the Infanta - Catalina is also raised to understand she is destined to be the Princess of Wales and eventually Queen of England and it is to Arthur, eldest son of Henry Tudor and Elizabeth of England that she is betrothed. But this is no love match for, like many young noble women, Catalina is but a pawn in a long political game. For those of you who don't know the history of Catherine and Arthur and Henry please read no further. For those of you who do, the book remains true to events, but offers readers of the period something more. Arthur tragically dies after only a brief few months of marriage, and Catherine eventually becomes the wife of his younger brother, Henry. What Gregory does, is present the relationship between Catherine and Arthur in an interesting light a very different to other

accounts both historical and fictive (though, as I inferred above, in many ways this period of Catherine's life (let alone the figure of Arthur) is barely addressed by other writers except as a footnote). After Arthur dies, Catherine loses her position at court and, in many ways, her identity as well and in a ruthless way determines to have both restored. From this point on in the novel, it could have been subtitled: "I Wanna Marry Harry" so single of purpose was the young Infanta. The story of Catherine's patience, of the way she deals with hostile forces at court (mainly Henry's grandmother and later, father) and how she eventually triumphs is wonderfully done. Segueing from third person to first person point of view, we get that omniscient narration of events as well as personal and sometimes heart-breaking accounts. There were points at which the first-person parts grew repetitive and a bit tedious, but more often they offered insights into the emotional and psychological energy and passion of this remarkable woman. Henry is also presented in a different light - as the selfish, bombastic and indulged king historians have long known he was. Playing to his strengths and indulging his weaknesses (of which there are so many), pandering to her husband to get her own way, Catherine is presented as a strategist par excellence but one with a heart and a conflicted soul. Capable, shrewd, loving and forgiving, one of the most affecting things about the novel is those of us familiar with her story know how it will end. Gregory does well to finish the book as she does and leave readers with a sense of satisfaction rather than desperation for the woman at its centre. You cannot help but love Catherine and loathe the forces that dealt her such a cruel blow and the people that ensured where and when it would land. A fabulous read for lovers of history and a great story about a woman of substance.

BORING! It's a good thing I read Book 3 and Book 2 (in that order) before reading Book 1 because if I had read this book first I would never ever gotten to any of the other books. It was complete torture reading this book. To think the writer then wrote sequels that were way way more interesting! I am now reading Book 4, I can only hope it's better than Book 1 (I don't think it can be much worse but who knows). Part of the problem is that there's hardly any interaction. There's an ENDLESS amount of time spent of the central character thinking to herself (whole sections wasted on her repeating the same thoughts over and over and over). This is a work of fiction, the writer could have come up with a lot of more interesting options. And the endless mention of Arthur siiiiigh okay, we got it, she adored him and was just doing what he made her promise, why spend sooooo much time going over that.

What I LOVE about this depiction of Katherine (or Catalina) of Aragon is that it's a 100% different take on her as a person, and quite frankly I like it a lot more and almost feel like it's more realistic. Catalina is the daughter of the first monarchs of Spain and one of the greatest Queens of Europe, Isabella of Castile, and I've always had a hard time accepting that Catalina was this simple pious pawn of a Queen married to Henry VIII. She was raised in battle and saw her parents come to power by taking a citadel that hadn't been taken in 700yrs, and then saw them further grow their empire...so she had to be more than that, and there has to be more to her than that...and I think Philippa Gregory has captured that side of her without stretching too far. Catalina is still a Princess (and a woman) in 15th century Catholic Europe with limited power, but Philippa shows us how Catalina has influence over a nation, and over history, despite that. This is the Katherine of Aragon that I want to believe existed. She had strength beyond her piety, she had passion beyond motherly love, and she was an ambitious, intelligent, and strong Queen Regant, not a simple obedient Queen Consort. Philippa shows us that Catalina was a player in her own right- not just a pawn....and I love it!! Next to The Lady of the Rivers, this so far is my 2nd favorite book in this series.

It goes on, and on, and on... with long boring didactic passages, alternating between the third person narrative and the first person by Katherine. I have loved Philippa Gregory's other novels in the Plantagenet and Tudor series, but this one is difficult. I suppose I'll finish it, but am discouraged that I'm only 43% through and struggling with the style. After reading other reviews, I also am tempted to read another historical novel about Katherine, which, being more accurate and interesting according to another review, is what I'd recommend, but for me, having bought this, to switch would be a waste of money. Will probably slough through, but struggling.

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