

[PDF] The White Princess (Cousins' War)

Philippa Gregory - pdf download free book

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Description:

Guest Review of *The White Princess*

By Tracy Chevalier

Tracy Chevalier is the *New York Times* best-selling author of *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. She was born in Washington, DC but has lived in England all her adult life, and now has dual citizenship. A graduate of the English program at Oberlin College, Ohio, with an MA in creative writing from the University of East Anglia, Norwich, England, she was a reference book editor before turning to writing full-time. She lives in London with her husband and

son.

How do you solve a problem like the Princes in the Tower? What does a historical novelist do with Edward and Richard, heirs to the British throne who were purportedly locked in the Tower by their uncle and then disappeared so that he could become Richard III? Conspiracy theories have flourished for centuries, but no strong evidence has emerged to solve the mystery. A novelist has any number of possibilities to pursue.

In *The White Queen*, the novel that chronologically precedes *The White Princess*, Philippa Gregory makes her choice and places their fate in the hands of their feisty mother, Elizabeth Woodville, wife of Edward IV and a key player in the War of the Roses, the dynastic feud among the Plantagenets between the Houses of York and Lancaster. She substitutes a pauper for young Richard, ensuring that the Duke of York gets away. The follow-up to such a dramatic decision inevitably needs to continue this story line. Richard has disappeared. Does he come back?

At first, *The White Princess* seems to tell another story - that of Elizabeth of York, the White Queen's daughter, and one-time mistress of Richard III, who on his death becomes the wife of his slayer, the Tudor Henry VII. (Confused yet? I am still reeling at the thought that she was mistress to her uncle!) Elizabeth is the embodiment of the painful transition between York and Tudor monarchies, her strategic marriage to Henry VII the outward expression of York loyalty as demanded by the Tudors.

Gregory is known for her retakes on British royal history, viewing the scheming, the power struggles, the battles exclusively from women's points of view, exploring how the Queen or Princess finds her own source of power and influence in the interstices left open by the men. Elizabeth of York is no different, using her beauty, her popularity with the people, her instinctive wiliness and political acumen to bear on Henry VII, with varying results. She may pragmatically have to accept that the Tudors are in the ascendance, but she can see that her distant and paranoid husband is not a natural as a king; she must teach him how to win the love and respect of his subjects, who still view the family of York with affection and nostalgia.

Eventually Elizabeth and Henry achieve a kind of marital truce, and grow to love each other, if only for a time. There are plenty of beddings, of ladies-in-waiting with knowing looks, of confinements and wet nurses and babies - including, of course, the future Henry VIII, characterized by Gregory even in his boyhood as a sensualist.

Inevitably, however, *The White Princess* is still the story of men, and specifically of the spectre of the lost princes. Does lost Prince Richard return in the form of pretender to the throne Perkin Warbeck (referred to in the novel most often simply as "the boy")? Gregory places his identity in Elizabeth's hands, demonstrating the impossible position she is in: acknowledge the boy as her true brother and bring down her husband and any possibility that her sons might become King, or deny him and see her possible brother executed for treason. In this impossible situation, Elizabeth must tread carefully, and Gregory does an expert job of maintaining this tricky balancing act to the very end. Relishing the personality clashes and political machinations of an insecure Tudor court, she makes the current British royal family, with its crystal-clear line of succession, seem very dull indeed.

From Gregory charts the vicissitudes of a high-stakes political marriage in her latest diverting epic. It's 1485; the Wars of the Roses have ended, but the victorious Henry VII sits insecurely on his throne. Still mourning her lover, Richard III, Princess Elizabeth of York must wed King Henry to unite their warring houses. Unlike his predecessors, Henry has no personal charm, and the novel

excels at depicting his paranoia as royal pretenders pop up and threaten England's stability. Kept ignorant of the political scheming around her and caught between her York relations and securing her children's inheritance, Elizabeth can't match the dynamism of her mother, Elizabeth Woodville (The White Queen, 2009), or mother-in-law, Margaret Beaufort (The Red Queen, 2010), and they occasionally steal the spotlight. Nonetheless, the younger Elizabeth is an observant narrator, and her difficult position reflects historical reality, as does her growing closeness to her beleaguered husband. The repetitive language will either drive points home for readers or drive them batty, but the novel is as replete with intrigue and heartrending drama as Gregory's fans expect. --Sarah Johnson

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