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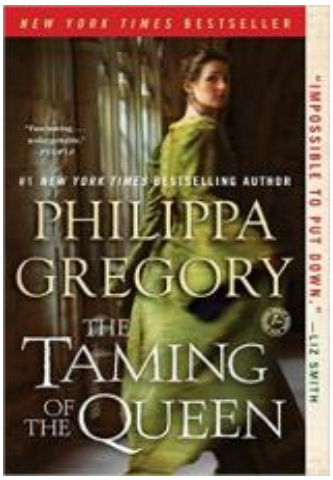
The Taming of the Queen

by Philippa Gregory



About the Book

Why would a woman marry a serial killer? Because she cannot refuse?

Kateryn Parr, a 30-year-old widow with a secret new lover, has no choice when Henry VIII --- a man who has buried four wives --- commands her to marry him.

Kateryn knows the danger she faces: The previous queen lasted 16 months, the one before barely half a year. But Henry adores his new bride, and Kateryn?s trust in him grows as she unites the royal family, creates a radical study circle at the heart of the court, and rules as regent.

But is this enough to keep her safe? Kateryn stands out as an independent woman with a mind of her own. As a leader of religious reform and the first woman to publish under her own name in English, she is an easy target for the traditional churchmen and rivals for power who accuse her of heresy --- the punishment is death by fire and the king?s name is on the warrant.

From an author who has illuminated all of Henry?s queens comes a deeply intimate portrayal of the last: a woman who longed for passion, power, and enlightenment at the court of a medieval killer.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the novel?s title in relation to Kateryn. Several at the Tudor court feel that she is in need of taming, including her husband. Why do they feel this way? Do you think they are right?

2. When Kateryn becomes queen, she must choose a motto. What is the significance of the queen?s mottoes? Do you agree with Kateryn that her motto, ?To be Useful in All that I Do,? is ?not very inspiring?? Why or why not? Do the

mottoes of Henry?s previous queens give you any insight into their personalities and reigns? If so, how?

3. Of her relationship with Henry, Kateryn tells Thomas Cranmer, ??When we first married I feared him, but I have come to trust him.?? Do you think that Kateryn should trust Henry? Why or why not? How does their relationship evolve? Do you think that Kateryn is a good wife? Why or why not?

4. Kateryn thinks, ?Sometimes I shock my sophisticated London-bred sister with my ignorance. I am a country lady --- worse even than that --- a lady from the North of England, far from all the gossip.? Compare and contrast Kateryn and Nan. Do you agree that Nan is more sophisticated? Why or why not? How has life at court affected Nan? How does she use her experiences to help Kateryn navigate her new role as queen?

5. Henry tells Kateryn, ?It is not enough to be a queen, you have to look like one.? What does he mean? Kateryn and her ladies-in-waiting choose her clothing with a great deal of care. Discuss Kateryn?s outfits, giving examples of how they help her accomplish her goals. Why are appearances so important in the Tudor court?

6. Edward Seymour praises Kateryn for being able to manage Henry, calling her ?a formidable diplomat.? How is Kateryn able to cope with Henry?s volatile temperament? What compromises, if any, is she forced to make? Is Kateryn a successful diplomat outside her marriage? Give examples.

7. Henry says, ?This is the way to rule kingdom, Kateryn?. First you appoint one man, then you appoint another, his rival. You give one a task --- you praise him to the skies, then you give an opposite task, a complete contradiction, to his greatest enemy.? Why does Henry think this is an effective method of governing? What problems, if any, does this create?

8. Kateryn has great respect for Anne Askew, thinking her a woman who ?has not been cut down to fit her circumstances.? How does meeting Anne affect Kateryn? Do you agree with Kateryn that Anne deserves admiration? If so, why? How are Anne?s views revolutionary --- and even heretical --- in Tudor England?

9. Although Will Somers says he is ?just a fool,? Kateryn believes him to be wiser than he appears. Do you agree? How has he managed to be ?a long-term survivor of this knife-edge court?? What role does the Fool play?

10. Discuss the Nicholas de Vent portrait that Henry commissions. How does each member of the royal family react when they first see it? Do their reactions give you any insight into their personalities? Explain your answer. Why does the portrait upset Kateryn?

11. Nan tells Kateryn, ?Sometimes, at court, a woman has to do anything to survive. Anything.? Do you agree? Does Kateryn make any desperate choices in order to survive? Did you find any of the choices that others (for example, the Howards) made particularly shocking? Which ones and why?

12. Anne Askew complains that ?the law does not recognize a woman except when she is alone in the world.? Discuss the place of women in the Tudor court. When Lady Elizabeth observes Kateryn as Regent of England, she tells her, ?I didn?t know that a woman could rule.? Why is this so surprising to Elizabeth? In what ways is Kateryn?s reign instructive to Elizabeth?

13. Henry tells Kateryn that he ?guard[s Edward] as my only treasure.? Describe Henry?s relationship with his three children. Why do you think these relationships are so complicated? How is Kateryn able to help Henry appreciate his children? Do you think she is a good stepmother to them?

14. When Thomas Seymour tells Kateryn that her only chance of safety is ?in [Henry?s] love for you,? she replies that she does not know whether ?he has ever loved anyone. I don?t know that he can.? Do you think that Henry is capable of love? Why or why not?

Author Bio

Dr. Philippa Gregory is an internationally renowned historian and novelist. She holds a PhD in 18th-century literature at the University of Edinburgh and is a fellow of the Royal Historical Society and the Universities of Sussex and Cardiff, an honorary research fellow at Birkbeck University of London and she was awarded a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for her services to literature and to charity. Her novels have been adapted for stage and screen, and in 2023 she published her groundbreaking history book, NORMAL WOMEN: 900 Years of Making History, which also was released as a podcast, a teen edition and a series for young children.

Critical Praise

"Gregory puts readers at the scene with visceral details."

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