ACROSS www.across-journal.com
ISSN 2602-1463
Vol. 8 (8) 2024
Literature(s) in English. The Magic of Fiction

From History to *Her*story: Philippa Gregory's *The Constant Princess*

Ana-Maria MOGA
"Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati, Romania

Abstract
In her novels, Philippa Gregory aims to convert history into her*story, the leading characters being presented mostly in relation to the male-dominated circles in which they live, as their moral portrait and personality are largely influenced by their interactions with the opposite gender. Consequently, the present paper brings into focus* The Constant Princess, *a historical novel which offers its readers the fictionalised story of Katherine of Aragon. In order to "restore" the former Queen's life story, Gregory offers a "voice" to this politically marginalised figure, endowing her with masculine features which grant her the power to survive and thrive in a male-dominated world.*

Keywords*:* historical novel, the Tudors, Katherine of Aragon, history, herstory

Jerome de Groot explains that, according to Georg Lukács, the historical novel as a genre "creates a living empathy, a live connection between then and now" (Groot 2010: 27), through "historical faithfulness" (Lukács 1989: 59). Lukács gives the example of Sir Walter Scott's novels, arguing that, to Scott, this "faithfulness" does not lie in the historical accuracy of events and details, but in "the authenticity of the historical psychology of his characters, (…) of their inner motives and behaviour" (1989: 59-60). Hence,

> [w]hat matters therefore in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality. (Lukács 1989: 42)

Throughout time, women have been regarded as "marginalised" characters as they were usually left out of "recorded history, whether as subject, reader or writer," mainly out of fear "that in women's hands the historical novel" could "often become a political tool," therefore transforming the awareness of history into something potentially "subversive" (Wallace 2005: 2). This exclusion has prompted women historians to turn to the historical novel in order to overcome "the barriers to narrating private experience" (Smith 1984: 721). Thus, the "'serious' or 'literary' woman's historical novel" saw a return in the 1980s, when popular historical novels written by men would often leave out "the female, either erasing women altogether or presenting them as the enigmatic 'Other'" (Wallace 2005: 176). In this way, the historical novel provided women writers with the opportunity to "re-imagine," as Linda Anderson (1990: 130) terms it, the stories of the "marginalised," among whom were the women (Wallace 2005: 2).

The Constant Princess, part of *The Tudor Court* series, follows the story of "*Catalina, Princess of Spain, daughter of the two greatest monarchs the world has ever known: Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon*" (Gregory 2017: 6). The novel opens with the conquest of Granada by Isabella and her husband, Ferdinand, where little Catalina is present as well,

witnessing her mother's perseverance, fierceness, and confidence in leading the Spanish army to victory over the Moors (Gregory 2017: 5). Catalina seems to have always looked up to her mother, ever since she was little, being raised to grow up just like her, as her mother believed that "weakness must not be encouraged in a princess" (Gregory 2017: 5). Her strong personality, that matches her own mother's, would later prove useful in such moments as the battle against the Scots, who would end up defeated by the army led by then Queen Katherine herself.

At a young age, Catalina ends up all alone in the bosom of the English court where she is to be married to Prince Arthur, the son of King Henry VII. There, she faces many hardships, starting with the death of her beloved first husband and ending with her being cast away by her second husband, Henry VIII, Arthur's brother, because of her failure to conceive an heir to the throne. Before Arthur dies of illness, she promises to him that she will deny the consummation of their marriage, marry his brother, the future Henry VIII, and rule as Queen of England. She is determined to remain "constant," keeping the promise she made to Arthur and fulfilling his dying wish, just as the title suggests.

The novel is divided into four parts, following the protagonist's metamorphosis from young, innocent Catalina to Katherine, Queen of England. The four parts are: *Princess of Wales*, covering the time Catalina spent with her parents as a child up to the untimely death of Arthur, and Catalina's mourning; *Princess in Waiting*, depicting Catalina as a fierce fighter, doing everything in her power to gain that which she thinks is rightfully hers – the throne of England – going as far as manipulating Henry VII; *Princess Again* presents the marriage of Catalina to Prince Henry, as well as the death of King Henry VII and his mother, Lady Margaret; the last part is entitled *Katherine, Queen of England*, emphasising the last phase of Catalina's transformation – she is Queen at last.

As a historical novel, it can be said that *The Constant Princess* aims to recover the story of a woman, a "marginalised" character (Wallace 2005: 2) who was left out of history, known merely as one of the many wives of Henry VIII. This is Katherine of Aragon's "untold" story, rewritten from the perspective of a woman writer who tries to reconstruct *her*story and glorify the one who was left out of history. If, historically speaking, Henry VIII is usually the centre of attention due to his numerous feats as a king, Gregory places him in the background, bringing Katherine into the spotlight.

In her historical novels, Gregory "idealise[s] a love (…) that transcends the dirty world of the court and of history" (Groot 2009: 221), but she chooses, nevertheless, to often blur the border between genders. *The Constant Princess* deconstructs the pattern of the "old," male-fronted historical novel. Not only does Gregory rewrite the past from the point of view of a woman who was "left outside" by her parents, her husband, and by history itself, but also populates the fictional world with rather polymorphous characters that do not always abide by their traditional roles, most frequently "switching" from one gender to the other as it suits their plans, and who undergo different changes in different stages of their lives. Although her female characters live in a world that upholds strictly defined gender stereotypes, according to which women are mostly weak, sensitive, not fit to rule ("England has to have a king" – Gregory 2017: 163), the novelist endows those very characters with a will of steel that does not bend according to men's rules and makes them stronger and wiser than men themselves. Relevant in this respect are the cases of Catalina/Katherine, who fulfils a double gender role, and Lady Margaret, Henry VII's mother who, although she is not the queen, does act like one – even like a king, in fact – ruling England from the shadows as she is constantly standing behind every decision that is

made at court. It can be said that Lady Margaret is definitely an emasculated character, her only role as a woman being that of bearing children, just like Isabella of Castile, Catalina's mother.

In addition, Gregory's novelistic discourse is characterised by fragmentation: numerous passages that give voice to Catalina/Katherine as a character-bound narrator break the flow of a text otherwise dominated by an external narrator and can be thought of as "diary entries" or, perhaps, even as instances of interior monologue. The text is thus interrupted and fragmented, creating a certain sense of disorder at the level of its structure. This effect of fragmentation is enhanced by the introduction of various symbols on the pages, small pictures that show where a certain (sub-)section starts and ends, and even by the use of italics where Katherine's voice takes over.

As mentioned, one of the main issues that the novel deals with is gender. In this male-dominated world of kings and princes, Catalina, the young Spanish princess, undergoes a series of changes and has to face many challenges in order to become Katherine, Queen of England, all this while never wavering in her faith or in her determination to live up to her belief that she was born to be queen: "*because it is God's will, and it is my mother's order.* (…) *God and my mother are generally of the same mind*" (Gregory 2017: 7). She is depicted as a strong girl, growing up into an equally strong and determined woman who becomes the Queen of England just as she has always dreamt to be, in order to fulfil her late husband's, her mother's and even her own (selfish) wishes.

The young girl manages to keep the appearances and prove her strong personality although things are difficult for her: her husband dies, leaving her even more vulnerable at the English court in her position of a widow – Princess Dowager; she is forcefully sent away to mourn her husband and has to endure, from a tender age, the advances of her father-in-law, King Henry VII; ultimately, she has to cope with the betrayal of her second husband, King Henry VIII. However, she faces all hardships with her chin up and a strong will, trespassing gender boundaries and the social norms of the society.

One of her greatest feats is the successful raid against the Scots, where she acts as Commander of the troops, named by Henry VIII himself, as he is away to fight the French, leaving Katherine in charge of the protection of their home. For that, she has to give up her femininity and leave aside the role assigned to her since birth ("*When that duty is done, I can be a woman again*" – Gregory 2017: 475), putting on the armour and leading the army to victory, thus assuming the role of a man: "*[t]his is a time for a queen who has the heart and stomach of a man.* (…) *I shall ride out with my army*" (Gregory 2017: 468).

The result of her upbringing at Isabella of Castile's court is obvious in the iconic scene of the battle as she quickly assumes the role of a soldier, ready to die for her country. Unlike the Englishmen, and especially the Tudors, who have always sought to keep the peace through strategic alliances, she was raised by two avid soldiers into a life of politics and battles, and she had learnt from them the intricacies of warfare and diplomacy. King Henry VIII himself admits that she knows a great deal about war strategies: "*Did your father teach you* (…) *to plan ahead as if a campaign were a chess board, and you have to move the pieces around?*" (Gregory 2017: 453).

However, the gender roles assumed by the characters of the novel are best depicted through the relationships they engage in, such as: the connection between mother and daughter; the fiery bantering that goes on between Katherine and Henry VII who perceives the girl as a mere object and behaves rather rudely to her; the union of Katherine and Prince Arthur, their pure love being untimely put to an end by his death; and, last but not least, the tumultuous

relationship between Katherine and Henry VIII who casts her away after not being satisfied with her.

One of the most important figures of the novel, as well as the role model for young Catalina, is Queen Isabella of Castile, her mother. She mostly appears at the beginning of the novel, where part of Catalina's childhood is presented, from the victory over the Moors and the conquest of Granada to her departure for England. Isabella is, above all, a queen, a ruler, and a soldier: "The army comes first" (Gregory 2017: 4). She is depicted as leading the Spanish army alongside her husband, King Ferdinand. The king has little to say in matters of war, as he seems to trust his wife's judgment ("The queen is always right." – Gregory 2017: 8) and considers her his equal.

Isabella has inspired her children ever since they were little, taking them on the battlefield to witness the power of the Spanish army under her – and Ferdinand's – leadership and to toughen them against the hardships of the world they live in. What is more, the Spanish princess was also taught by her mother to smile no matter what, so that her true feelings may not be revealed to the outside world: "*if I smile no-one will know that I am homesick or afraid*" (Gregory 2017: 48). Thus, Catalina grows up as a young woman who keeps looking up to her mother even when she is far away from her, at the English court, always thinking in terms of what her mother would say or do. As such, the key-phrase associated with Isabella and with the high esteem in which Catalina holds her is: "*it is God's will, and it is my mother's order*" (Gregory 2017: 7).

Due to this strict upbringing and to the fact that Isabella has always been first a queen and then a mother, Catalina finds herself alone in a foreign country that is strange to her, away from the beauty and traditions of Spain: "*But as a mother to her daughter, I hear from her only rarely*" (Gregory 2017: 132). She constantly wishes to hear and see her mother again, but political issues are more important, thus, she is left on her own, even by her parents who seek beneficial alliances above anything else.

Another important event is the death of Arthur, which leaves Catalina mourning and desperate for advice from her mother. However, the only thing that Isabella does is to write to her daughter in a brief, distant manner, to simply tell her what she is supposed to do as the Princess Dowager. In one of the many first-person entries that fragment the text, Catalina notes: "*It is not a letter from a loving mother to her daughter. It is not a letter from a woman to her favourite child*," as she associates it with a letter of "*business*," one in which a deal between "*merchants*" might be sealed (Gregory 2017: 209).

Catalina is eventually informed of her mother's death, her sorrow being clear in the way she digests the news, thinking of how her mother failed to be there for her more than once: "*She leaves me in death as she left me in life: to silence and a sense of her absence*" (Gregory 2017: 292). Isabella is therefore portrayed as a woman whose feminine duties extend solely to the conceiving of heirs for the Spanish throne, failing to fulfil her role as a mother, as her main concern is represented by the affairs of the state, which, in the patriarchal society, would normally be managed by men. Thus, she assumes a masculine role, contrary to the mentality of the time, which suggests that women are inferior to men and should act as such. In this respect, the binary system of oppositions characterising patriarchy and summarised by Cixous in her "Sorties" (1988: 287) could be applied in reverse here, Isabella standing for the "head," for rational thinking, given that she is the one who plans and commands, while her husband acts mainly as her "support" (but not only). In addition, she is also a woman of "action" who does not hesitate to join a good battle and lead her people to victory over the pagans.

Catalina, as Queen Katherine, seems to resemble Isabella even more than she would have thought, combining feminine traits with the masculinity of a determined ruler. One scene which provides evidence in this respect is the one before the battle against the Scots, when Katherine dons the armour of a soldier in order to join the fight and lead her men: "*I look so like my mother* (…) *that it could be her reflection in the mirror, standing so still and proud*" (Gregory 2017: 468). Moreover, it was Isabella herself who held the family together and took care of business, as Catalina remarks: "*Our family fortunes are cascading down like a house of cards without my mother's steady hand and watchful eye*" (Gregory 2017: 292). Likewise, Katherine takes care of her household and kingdom while married to King Henry VIII – at least until he grows older and "wiser."

The first man that young Catalina encounters at the English court is King Henry VII himself. One of the most iconic scenes in the novel is that of their first meeting, when he forcefully enters the girl's room, not before arguing in front of the door with Catalina's *duenna,* who adamantly refuses to let the king in, though she does not even know who he is at first. However, Henry becomes angrier and angrier, threatening to barge in against the protests of the Spanish woman, who claims that it is against Spanish tradition to see the bride before the wedding (Gregory 2017: 29).

Henry does not take no for an answer, asserting his status as a king, as well as a male dominator: he enters the room, tricking the *duenna* into giving him access to Catalina, and seems immediately smitten by the Spanish Princess whom he ardently desires. Even before meeting her eyes, he takes in the state of her room, feeling aroused at the mere thought of the person that might have rumpled the bedsheets in her haste: "Henry registered the intimacy of being in her bedroom, with her sheets still warm, the scent of her lingering in the enclosed space" (Gregory 2017: 29-30). The king is further enraged when the *duenna* will not lift the veil off the princess's face or allow the princess to do that herself: "Not on my money (…). I'll see what I've bought, thank you" (Gregory 2017: 30). This is one of the instances in which Henry VII simply declares what the princess – and perhaps other women, as well – means to him: a mere object that he has paid for in order to secure an alliance. Nevertheless, Catalina takes matters into her own hands, forced to go against her country's traditions and beliefs by unveiling herself to her future father-in-law before the grand event, much to her *duenna*'s chagrin.

Even though she is determined to stand tall in front of the king – the man who rules the country – deep down she is restless, thinking over and over about the events that she participates in, as indicated by the first-person passages that are scattered throughout the novel: "*I grit my teeth, I smile as my mother commanded me*" (Gregory 2017: 32). She tries to hide her fear of the unknown, and her discontent with the man who seems to stop at nothing to get what he wants, and who has no manners.

As she takes off the veil, Henry's first impression of the girl is revealed by the voice of the external narrator: he sees her as a beautiful and fierce young woman, not as a "shrinking maiden fearing ravishment. This was a fighting princess standing on her dignity even in this most appalling moment of embarrassment" (Gregory 2017: 30). The sight leaves him thinking that this girl would be a challenge to him, because she does not look like the typical damsel in distress. His arousal is further emphasised when he approaches the young girl to perform the ritual of kissing her cheeks: "The perfume of her hair and the warm, female smell of her body came to him, and he felt desire pulse in his groin and at his temples" (Gregory 2017: 30-31). His carnal desires and immediate arousal at the sight of the young girl only highlight the fact

that he treats women as objects, ornaments that have to be pretty and nice, their only use being the achievement of his satisfaction.

Although he looks down on women, Catalina is set to prove to Henry VII that she will not be tamed. She places herself almost on the same level with him, ignoring the differences in rank and gender; she looks him in the eye when speaking and does not simply resort to facial expressions and gestures to prove her stand: she goes as far as using language as a means of insulting the King of England through cold, subtle and witty remarks, and the use of French at the English court. For example, she speaks to Henry in French, as she does not know English, and has not bothered to learn it either. Her refusal to learn and speak English can be seen as a form of resistance to the male-dominated, foreign world that she faces: "Henry fell back a little from the whip of her temper. 'I have a right…'" (Gregory 2017: 31) to which she replies with a shrug, "an absolutely Spanish gesture. 'Of course. You have every right over me.'" (Gregory 2017: 31). Catalina uses sarcasm as a subtle way of attacking the ruler and she interrupts him, showing her lack of interest in whatever he was going to say next. Her "Spanish gesture," the shrug, has the role to further emphasise that she will not be influenced by the lacking manners of the host, keeping herself firmly rooted in her own culture, although she now belongs to the English: "*So be it. He will not find a princess of Spain falling back for fear*" (Gregory 2017: 32).

Furthermore, her "ambiguous, provocative words" (Gregory 2017: 31) make Henry even more aware of his proximity to Catalina. He knows very well that he has invaded her personal space, her intimacy, the proximity of the bed increasing his lust for the young princess. Even so, she stands tall and proud, an odd appearance against the sexualised background in which they find themselves: "It was a scene for ravishment, not for a royal greeting" (Gregory 2017: 31).

Throughout the novel, the relationship between Henry VII and Catalina remains rather constant as he keeps thinking of her in sexual terms. For instance, when he sees her lonely and homesick, instead of talking and risking making her cry, he decides to show her his library in order to take her mind off the things that sadden her. At the same time, he studies her reactions and thinks that "[i]t would be a man of stone who did not want this little flower in his bed" and that he would most certainly delight in attempting to "make her smile" (Gregory 2017: 74). He even presents her with a "gift" (Gregory 2017: 74), which at first seems an innocent act of kindness, but Henry VII's purpose all this time is to make Catalina fall right into his trap; and he knows that his strategy would work and generalises, thinking that "she was a girl as easily bought as any other" (Gregory 2017: 75).

Indeed, Catalina mistakes his behaviour for kindness – exactly what Henry aims for: "*I like it when I am the favourite of the king, I like to feel special*" (Gregory 2017: 77). Here comes into play her feminine side, that part of her that is led by her "heart," instead of her "head" in Cixous's terms (1988: 287). Thus, she eventually becomes a submissive girl: "You are the king (…). I must do whatever you command" (Gregory 2017: 83). Either way, her submissiveness might also be regarded as a strategy of manipulation, making Henry dance to her tunes to ultimately fulfil her wishes and dreams. Even if Catalina has to go through a lot of trouble, she manages to achieve her goal, that of marrying Prince Harry and becoming queen, after Henry VII's death.

One of the most important men to Catalina is Prince Arthur of Wales, the elder son of Henry VII and the heir to the throne, to whom the young princess is initially betrothed. Even after his untimely death and her second marriage, the girl cannot forget her first love, as she constantly prays to him and mentions him in her diary-like entries. Catalina first sees him after

she meets with King Henry VII, shyly waiting to see her and to speak to her. Their first encounter leaves Catalina stunned at the handsomeness of the "*boy on the edge of manhood*" (Gregory 2017: 42), who is so different from his father. In one of the first-person passages, she remarks:

> *He is so fair and slight, he is like a page boy from one of the old romances. I can imagine him waking all night in a vigil or singing up to a castle window. (…) He has a rare smile, one that comes reluctantly and then shines. And he is kind. That is a great thing in a husband.* (Gregory 2017: 42)

Indeed, the boy does show her kindness as opposed to his rude, blunt father, Henry VII. While the king treats the girl as an object, Arthur understands her fear of the unknown and tries to help and reassure her (Gregory 2017: 35).

The next scene shows Henry VII, Arthur and Catalina dining together, the young boy acting merely as an observer at first, witnessing the battle of wits between his father and his betrothed. Catalina, however, shifts her attention to him, thanking him for the letters they exchanged before meeting, which enabled them to become partly acquainted (Gregory 2017: 37). Meanwhile, the boy gets flustered and reveals the truth to Catalina, much to his father's disappointment: "I was ordered to write to you (…). But I liked getting your replies" (Gregory 2017: 37). Although Arthur is initially likeable to the young girl, their next encounters make Catalina think twice and even get to the conclusion that he is not as nice as she thought at first. One of the worst things that Arthur could have done after the consummation of their wedding is to boast to his friends: "Gentlemen, this night I have been in Spain" (Gregory 2017: 62).

While Isabella and Katherine are emasculated characters, in another gender role reversal, Arthur appears as a rather feminine character. For example, one of Catalina's complaints is that Arthur leaves to her the tasks that are traditionally assigned to men: "*He forced me to command in the bedroom, and I am ashamed that I had to be the one to make the first move*" (Gregory 2017: 64). There are moments when the two spouses do not even speak, or they avoid each other, to the extent that Catalina grows tired and becomes cold towards him. Moreover, conceiving a child becomes a chore to both, their relationship being an automatic response to the roles as man and woman assigned to them by the patriarchal order.

Arthur himself despises the way in which their relationship evolves, unaware of his treatment of Catalina. In fact, he believes that Catalina is the one who uses him without loving him, regarding him as "an object of no importance, something she had to endure in order to be Queen of England" (Gregory 2017: 87). This points back to the reversal of roles, as the man (not the woman) feels treated as an object.

The moment Arthur realises that he has feelings for his wife is when they arrive at Ludlow, and he sees Catalina freezing. Then he understands how much he has been neglecting her and how rude he has been. They have a heart-warming conversation in front of their companions, each asking forgiveness from the other as they know they have both made mistakes. Things change that very moment, Catalina deciding to mark their reconciliation with a public announcement directed to Arthur: "Please come to my room for dinner (…). I want to see you, Your Grace" (Gregory 2017: 100). Nevertheless, Arthur dies young, leaving Catalina weeping and grieving for him. On his deathbed, he makes her promise that she will marry Prince Harry, become the Queen of England, and fulfil their dreams (Gregory 2017: 192-193).

Immediately after the loss of her husband, she is confused, not really understanding how ruling a kingdom – more specifically, England – works, and Lady Margaret Pole tries to explain it to her in the simplest words: "you take the position of your husband. It is always thus for all

women. If you have no husband and no son, then you have no position" (Gregory 2017: 201). These words wake Catalina to reality, making her realise that she has always been a "nobody" to the English, in whose view men are superior and women are just an asset. She is no longer the Princess of Wales and future queen, losing everything now that there is no man beside her. Despite this, she is encouraged to become more ambitious and gain what she wants, what she considers rightfully hers. To do so, she has to lie to everyone, saying that the marriage was never consummated. She is determined to remain "constant" to Arthur's wish and to their love, going as far as it is necessary in order to attain her goal:

> *I shall not give myself to heartbreak, I shall give myself to England. I shall keep my promise. I shall be constant to my husband and to my destiny. And I shall plan and plot and consider how I shall conquer this misfortune and be what I was born to be. How I shall be the pretender who becomes the queen.* (Gregory 2017: 213)

She does fool the others for a while, but Henry eventually realises the truth and makes Katherine pay for it.

Henry VIII, the son of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, the brother of Prince Arthur and the second husband of Princess Catalina, is the man through whom the princess hopes to fulfil Arthur's deathbed wish. "[H]e had the look of a boy for whom life came easily" (Gregory 2017: 43), Catalina notices upon her first encounter with Prince Harry, the future king Henry VIII. Being the youngest son, he is pampered and admired by everyone at court, especially by his mother, Queen Elizabeth, and his grandmother, Margaret.

At first, Henry is merely a boy who falls in love with Catalina and who can be easily manipulated by the young girl. His infatuation seems to be noticed from its early stages, in the small gesture that Harry makes when he "reluctantly" (Gregory 2017: 54) lets go of Catalina and hands her over to Arthur.

To achieve her goal, Catalina pushes King Henry VII to agree to her marriage to Harry after Arthur's death but only succeeds in doing so when the king dies, as he grants Harry permission to marry whomever he wants. Being cunning as always, the girl uses the boy's infatuation to her advantage: "A woman could rule a boy like that (…). A woman could be a very great queen if she married such a boy" (Gregory 2017: 238). Despite Margaret's discontent, the two keep exchanging flirtatious looks and eventually get married, Catalina adopting the English version of her name, Katherine. The order of the court is once again emphasised in the placement of the two monarchs' thrones:

> She took a throne just a little lower than King Henry's, and the crowd that cheered for the handsome young king coming to his throne also cheered for her, the Spanish princess, who had been constant against the odds and was crowned Queen Katherine of England at last. (Gregory 2017: 344)

Katherine's position as a marginalised character is asserted once again: firstly, because she is a woman, therefore considered inferior, and, secondly, because she is a foreigner who had small chances of achieving such a feat.

The newly anointed queen's ambitions go further as she keeps manipulating Harry into ignoring his grandmother's advice and planting ideas in his boyish mind: "Slowly, but surely, she drew the management of the entertainments, then of the household, then of the king's business, then of the kingdom, into her hands" (Gregory 2017: 350). However, in time, Henry changes to a certain extent. For instance, when Catalina goes into seclusion to prepare for the

birth of their child, he takes a mistress – the infamous Anne Boleyn – in order to keep himself entertained while the queen is away. Still not mature enough, he allows himself to be influenced by Anne into believing that Katherine lied to him about her virginity. The queen manages to reassure Henry for a while, but, in the end, this will prove to be her downfall. Because of the embarrassing situation that Katherine finds him in, Henry becomes upset, sending Anne and her sister away from court, despite the protests of the queen, who is baffled – the two women are part of her court and she did not approve of their being sent away. When Katherine tries to assert her rights, he snaps back, showing the first sign of his metamorphosis into a "veritable" man: "Whatever your rights! I don't expect to hear talk of rights between us" (Gregory 2017: 396).

Katherine forgives Henry and chooses to forget and never speak again of this unfortunate event. She focuses instead on her duties as a queen and especially on winning the war against the Scots. For this, she has to be cunning and, at the same time, manipulate her husband into going to a different, much easier battle against the French. In this way, she protects him – a role traditionally assumed by men, which is now handled by Katherine – and fulfils her dream of becoming a warrior like her mother and saving England.

Nevertheless, Henry eventually grows tired of Katherine's inability to offer him a son, the only child she could give him being a girl, Mary. Therefore, he seeks to annul his marriage to her in order to be free to marry Anne Boleyn, the woman who has a greater power of influence over the childish king. At that very moment, Katherine is aware that she has known all along that Anne would be her downfall (Gregory 2017: 482).

The keyword of the novel, that describes Katherine best, is "constant," which is systematically repeated throughout the text. Since she was a little girl up to the moment of her banishment, she remains "constant" to her cause and to her first love, achieving great things while enduring the most atrocious hardships a woman could face: separation from her family, from her loved ones, betrayal, being played like a pawn by her own parents and eventually being cast away for her inability to conceive a son. Being a woman and a foreigner, she faces a lot of trouble at the English court. Even other women, such as Margaret, consider that a woman's only role is to bear children: "I'd like a girl with the hips to give us sons (…). A nursery-full of sons" (Gregory 2017: 57). Nevertheless, the young girl, who once made clear the boundaries between the sexes, stating that she was not a "bloodthirsty, monstrous boy" (Gregory 2017: 110), becomes a fierce warrior that leads the army on the battlefield: "*I am a queen who rules as my mother did. When my country is in danger, I am in danger*" (Gregory 2017: 472). At the same time, she is able to shift from femininity to masculinity and back, remaining "constant" and being ready to do her duty to the country on the battlefield and in the nursery as well.

To sum up, in *The Constant Princess*, Gregory chooses to rewrite part of the Tudors' history from the perspective of a woman and a foreigner, a politically marginal(ised) figure, that of Catalina/Katherine of Aragon. Katherine is presented as a warrior queen, while the men in her life, i.e. Henry VII and Henry VIII, try to drive her into submission and view her only as a sexual object (with the notable exception of Arthur, who, unfortunately, dies untimely).

The final scene presents Katherine ready to face her husband, Henry VIII, who seems to be under Anne Boleyn's spell. From this, we learn that Katherine is eventually going to be removed from Henry's life, mostly because she failed to deliver a son for England's throne:

> *'Katherine of Aragon, Queen of England, come into court!'*
> *This is me. This is my moment. This is my battle cry.*
> *I step forwards.* (Gregory 2017: 486)

However, these last lines suggest not so much of an ending but a new beginning for her: she is aware that her position as the Queen of England is in danger, but she summons up all her strength and is ready to fight, whatever the outcome of this final "battle" will be.

Therefore, *The Constant Princess* represents her as a true Queen who does everything that is necessary to live up to the expectations of her loved ones (her mother and her beloved husband Arthur), to fulfil her destiny as a princess and – why not – to satisfy her own political ambitions. She goes to such lengths that she even lies to the King of England, Henry VII, about a very important matter like the validity of her marriage to Arthur, and she also manages to manipulate him into agreeing to her marriage to his son, Harry, the future King Henry VIII. Her power of manipulation is only rivalled by that of another woman, Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's new interest and Katherine's downfall.

References

Anderson, L. (1990) 'The Re-Imagining of History in Contemporary Women's Fiction'. in *Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction*. ed. by Anderson, L. London, Melbourne, Auckland: Edward Arnold, 129-141.

Cixous, H. (1988) 'Sorties'. in *Modern Criticism and Theory. A Reader*. ed. by Lodge, D. London: Longman, 286-293.

Gregory, P. (2017) *The Constant Princess*. London: Harper Collins Publishers.

de Groot, J. (2009) *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

de Groot, J. (2010) *The Historical Novel*. London and New York: Routledge.

Lukács, G. (1989) *The Historical Novel*. trans. by Mitchell, H. and Mitchell, S. London: The Merlin Press Ltd.

Smith, B. G. (1984) 'The Contribution of Women to Modern Historiography in Great Britain, France, and the United States, 1750-1940'. in *The American Historical Review*, 89(3), 709-732. https://doi.org/10.2307/1856122.

Wallace, D. (2005) *The Woman's Historical Novel. British Women Writers, 1900-2000*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.