



## The Confession of Katherine Howard

*Suzannah Dunn*

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## **The Confession of Katherine Howard** Suzannah Dunn

The new novel from the bestselling author of THE SIXTH WIFE. 'England: firelight and fireblush; wine-dark, winking gemstones and a frost of pearls. Wool as soft as silk, in leaf-green and moss; satins glossy like a midsummer night or opalescent like winter sunrise! Little did we know it but that night we were already ghosts in our own lives!' When twelve-year-old Katherine Howard comes to live in the Duchess of Norfolk's household, poor relation Cat Tilney is deeply suspicious of her. The two girls couldn't be more different: Cat, watchful and ambitious; Katherine, interested only in clothes and boys. Their companions are in thrall to Katherine, but it's Cat in whom Katherine confides and, despite herself, Cat is drawn to her. Summoned to court at seventeen, Katherine leaves Cat in the company of her ex-lover, Francis, and the two begin their own, much more serious, love affair. Within months, the king has set aside his Dutch wife Anne for Katherine. The future seems assured for the new queen and her maid-in-waiting, although Cat would feel more confident if Katherine hadn't embarked on an affair with one of the king's favoured attendants, Thomas Culpeper. However, for a blissful year and a half, it seems that Katherine can have everything she wants. But then allegations are made about her girlhood love affairs. Desperately frightened, Katherine recounts a version of events which implicates Francis but which Cat knows to be a lie. With Francis in the Tower, Cat alone knows the whole truth of Queen Katherine Howard - but if she tells, Katherine will die.

## **The Confession of Katherine Howard Details**

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Author : Suzannah Dunn

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## **From Reader Review The Confession of Katherine Howard for online ebook**

### **Brittany B. says**

I think the author just gave up. The book had potential, but the author seems to have lost focus. The stories got muddled up, and the narrative ended abruptly. I don't know what the point of this book was: This book is not the confessions of Katherine Howard, at all. Instead, it is told from her friend Kat's POV. Kat tells us about Howard and Francis Dereham's early relationship. She also describes growing up in the Duchess' household with Katherine. We are told about Katherine and Thomas's liaison, while she is married to the King, and the drama leading up to Howard's arrest.

A mess of a book. Characters enter like they are important, then we never hear if them again. The descriptions of Katherine's personality are strange and lead NOWHERE!

Just a mess. I recently read that this might be meant for a younger audience. If so, maybe I expected too much. But truly, I had low expectations...

Skip this book!

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### **Jane Botten says**

I'm sorry but I loathe this kind of book, shallow minded, unintelligent women and their narrow minded preoccupation with sex. I flatly cannot believe they were as dim witted as they were portrayed.

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### **Janet Wertman says**

I was conflicted about this one. Loved the writing itself, the way the words flowed. Felt cheated that the title implied a different approach (I expected a story written from Catherine Howard's POV), didn't really like the first person narrative (I rarely do), and got annoyed at some of the too-modern dialogue. I also was in two very different minds about the ending. On the one hand, I found it far too sudden - but at the same time, it really stayed with me (to the point where I reread just those last pages a few times) so I have to give the author credit for that kind of power.

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### **Elizabeth says**

This is the story of Katherine Howard told through the eyes of Cat Tilney, one of her ladies in waiting. Cat is attendant upon Katherine before she becomes queen and is a witness to the at first sweet and then sexual affair between Katherine and Francis Dereham. Cat herself falls hard for Dereham, but recognises that he is Katherine's. When Katherine becomes queen, she leaves Dereham behind and Cat takes up with him, first as a comforter, then a lover. Queen Katherine, meanwhile, has moved on to one of the young bloods of the court - Thomas Culpepper and engages in a torrid sexual affair with him. She is found out, and Dereham and

Culpepper are arrested, while Catherine is sent to a nunnery.

The novel mainly explores the intimate world of young aristocratic women in the Tudor period and is very closely focused upon Tilney and Katherine, although the reader never properly gets to know Katherine, her motives and feelings. She remains an enigmatic 'glittering' creature, often perverse and very self-centred. She says very little and although Tilney is supposed to be a close friend, you never get any notion of that closeness. It's not a warm relationship. It is a manipulative one. It's a bit like watching modern teenage girls bitching and bonding in the school playground and at sleepovers, talking about boys and sex, and clothes. That's the feel of the entire novel. Anyone wanting grand politics and a wide screen will not find them here. However, the novel uses language beautifully and portrays the schoolgirl atmosphere to a tee. It's also refreshing to see these young women behaving as they would have done in their time. The mindset feels right. The language is beautiful, both rich and delicate. It's like a gorgeous silk brocade cloth. My only quibble is that some of the contractions and modernisms pulled me straight out of the story - like snags in the cloth. I know that some readers say modernisms are better than 'forsoothery' but I say neither. Anything that drags a reader out of the illusion of being in the room with the characters, should be avoided and 'might've' and 'should've' and 'could've' and all the rest, for me, were the snags in the fabric.

All told I really enjoyed this novel. It was a quick and absorbing read, with some sublime turns of phrase and I would certainly read another Suzannah Dunn novel.

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### **Danielle says**

This was a struggle to read, a book that takes me longer than three days to read is one I'm not too interested in and this was one of them.

I love historical fiction and this wasn't what I would call 'historical'. I didn't feel as though I was in a duchess' household and then the court of Henry VIII, words such 'kidding' 'stuff' and 'yup' were used which, to my knowledge, were not words of Tudor England. It felt more like a chick flick/teen drama than a time in one of the most dangerous years in history, Henry VIII post reformation.

I don't know much about Katherine Howard, she's never held much interest for me in comparison to Anne Boleyn but I decided to have a try at something a little different and boy did I regret it. Aside from the lack of historical culture, the writing was not a style I liked - not to say it was a bad style but just not my cup of tea. I didn't feel any emotion from any of the characters and every time someone said something it needed to be expanded with an explanation from Cat, even though we know what's going on. I like to read between the lines and go with the flow, not being told everything twice and half way through a sentence.

Onto the story. I don't know what to say, it was a weird thing. For me, the story line would be going and then suddenly something has happened and you don't know when. For example, Cat is all about not having sex with Ed? I think that's his name (he disappears from the story almost as soon as he's arrived) and not thinking sex is good and all that and then suddenly she's slept with Francis, at some point, and she's okay with it? Wouldn't have that been a momentous decision? Where was the thought process? There's no declaration of love, all of a sudden they love each other (of course, we are introduced to their romance at the beginning but still?) and they sleep with each other in Culpepper's bed. Talking of Thomas Culpepper, why do Cat and Francis hate him, I get that Francis was her past lover but he was shacking up with Cat by then and isn't too bothered when the King marries her. And Cat? She's a nobody, why is he going to pay attention to you?

Anyway. Characters. I don't know when Cat and Kate become friends, one minute Cat hates her and doesn't

talk to her but all of a sudden they care for each other and Cat's concerned about her? What? I didn't get much of feel for Cat, I still didn't know who she was at the end of the novel, I didn't really know her purpose except to talk about Katherine, because that's all she did. Why have her in it at all when it was Katherine's story? Katherine, herself, was a strange character, I didn't feel her allure or sexuality, she was a controlling and up herself girl. She didn't care about anyone and from a young age was obsessed with sex though she thinks that 'stuff' being on his finger or something will get her pregnant? WHAT? Anyway, I didn't feel sorry for her for marrying Henry VIII, in fact, I didn't feel anything for her. She was a bore, if anything. Francis Dereham, well he got over Katherine fast and got in with her so called best friend faster. I didn't really understand him, he was two different people when lover to Katherine and lover to Cat and I liked none of them.

The remaining characters were there in name and occasionally conversations but they played no real part. I don't even think there was a conversation with Lady Jane Rochford, despite her major role in Katherine's death or really Thomas Culpepper, who was mostly mentioned either in hatred or fact. Cat's parents were a confusing pair and I don't understand their role considering Cat didn't really listen to their 'you're no one's fool' mantra or whatever you want to call it. No one else affected the story that much, Henry VIII wasn't involved properly which was a shame because he was such an interesting character and I like seeing how different authors perceive him.

The ending was random and too soon, so much could have gone on. Cat's pain for her betrayal and the loss of her lover, her future life, Katherine's death. There was so much to develop and could have been the best and most dramatic part of the book. Too soon.

All in all, a poor novel.

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### **Richard Lee says**

I was beguiled by this novel. Some people feel that Suzannah writes with too modern a voice, but that's not a barrier for me. This was an intimate, very normalising portrait of people in an utterly bizarre situation. It's cleverly structured too, so that you could revisit the lightest filigree moments and realise there was weight to them that you had not at first perceived.

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### **Veena says**

Queen Katherine, the fifth Queen of Henry VIII, has always been a character overlooked often. She has often been described as a teenager girl who was made the Queen to satisfy her uncle's ambitious plans for her family and she was equally naive about it. It gets difficult to comprehend the character as such, with a crown on head and a giggle on face, married to a persona like Henry VIII. Curious to find out more about the Queen, I stumbled upon this book in a book store and decided it will help me get another perspective to the story. It erases the 'child whore' character that Author Emily Purdy had described in her book 'The Tudor Wife', but not much.

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## **Teresa Gibson says**

I'm really on the fence about this one. There is much to admire about it, but also much to dislike. First of all, what I didn't like--another first person narrative, although I do understand why it's used--to keep Katherine at a distance and to judge her strictly by her actions, without letting the character's inner motivations justify her deeds. I also dislike the modern dialogue. It's not that difficult to make dialogue read and sound authentic to the time period (see Margaret Irwin's Elizabeth I trilogy for brilliant Tudor dialogue!). But for characters from the 1500s to say things like, "I'm just saying," or "Hello, you," is really jarring. What I do appreciate about this book is that Dunn researched it well, and had all the historical personages in the correct places at the correct times. And her characterization of Katherine Howard, Henry VIII's young 5th wife, as a manipulative flirt, is probably right on the money.

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## **The Book Maven says**

This was such an annoyingly anachronistic read! GAAAAR! Phrases you will encounter: "I bet..." "Yup." "Kidding!" "It'll blow over." And my personal favorite: "What goes up must come down." (Although I don't have proof, I think it's conventional knowledge that Isaac Newton came up with that phrase, and he wasn't around for another 100 years or so.)

If anything, this is like Gossip Girls set in Tudor England. And while I did keep turning the pages, I was underwhelmed most of the time.

Basic premise: A young woman, Cat Tilney, recounts the rise and fall of her friend Katherine Parr, who has become Queen of England but who has an unfortunately voracious sexual appetite and the morals of an alleycat. We all know how the story will end--but what actually defies belief is how Cat ever became friends with Katherine to begin with. Cat begins by being fairly indifferent; at times she is exasperated and almost antagonistic; at no time does she appear to develop a close friendship. And yet there she is, at the end, as close to Katherine as anyone could be. So the author really dropped the ball on developing these character relationships.

All in all, I am quite happy to be done with this book.

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## **Dick Edwards says**

The following review could be thought by some to contain spoilers, so do not read on if you are planning to read the book and want to be surprised. This is an enjoyable book. It exposes once again the shallowness of the second Tudor king and his sycophantic retinue, eager to curry his favor and to advance their own positions. Told in the first person, it puts the reader right in the middle of the 16th century action. I think Ms. Dunn has done a fine job of showing the true (as far as we know it) personality of Katherine Howard, and why everyone around her was attracted to her. The story seems more authentic when Ms. Dunn allows the narrator (Cat Tylney) to show her character to be somewhat less than exemplary by exposing the affair between the Queen and Thomas Culpeper. This was in an attempt (singularly unsuccessful in the long run) to free her own lover, Francis Dereham, from the Tower and an almost certain death sentence. As it was, the exposure resulted in the deaths of Queen Katherine, Thomas Culpeper, and Francis, the latter performed in the grisly manner reserved for those convicted of treason. One wonders how the medieval mind could

possibly convict Francis (who never had sex with Katherine after she was Queen) of treason. Once again we see the immaturity of Henry, who after all took the fortune that his father Henry VII had left in the treasury, and spent it all, very nearly bankrupting the kingdom. Ms. Dunn brings this all to mind in first person intimacy. I give this book a rating of 8 out of 10.

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## **Jennifer Rayment says**

### The Good Stuff

- \* Beautifully descriptive
- \* historically accurate descriptions of the daily lives of the aristocratic young women in Howards life
- \* Unusual way of dealing with the story of K(C)atherine Howard
- \* Some great dry humour
- \* enjoyed the descriptions of Katherine's early life at the duchess' estate

### The Not so Good Stuff

- \* It's uneven in terms of characters motivations and actions
- \* A little dull
- \* I have read many books on Katherine Howard and this one just isn't as compelling, I have read other books by Suannah and she is a good novelist, this just isn't my fav
- \* Just didn't buy the friendship between the two girls

### Favorite Quotes/Passages

"No wonder Katherine did as she did, I realized: this was how she lived her whole life, swanning around like this, garnering people's interest."

"I realized that Kate had never intended any harm. She just hadn't thought; she never did. She was a girl who couldn't help but turn heads, she was a girl of no ambition who'd become queen."

### What I Learned

- \* Really sucked to be in Katherine Howard's retinue
- \* Sucked even worse to be Katherine Howard, the poor thing never had a chance

### Who should/shouldn't read

- \* Those who are looking for a glance into the lives of young women during the reign of Henry VIII
- \* A not bad introduction into Katherine Howard, that will hopefully lead to further reading

I received this from HarperCollins in exchange for an honest review - really wanted to like it more since I have read previous works by Suzannah and enjoyed them

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### **Sandra Fahrlelender says**

Good! I love all things King Henry the VIII, and really anything about England History. I just recently watched The Tudors and felt like Katherine Howard was thrown into the position (fully willing) but not completely "trained" on what a good queen should be. She was only 19 years old when she became Queen and this book details her teen life and then the days before she was beheaded. I enjoyed this book and would recommend to others if you are interested knowing the back history of Katherine Howard and what lead to her death.

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### **Rachael Hewison says**

I always enjoy learning about Tudor history as I find it such a fascinating period that is full of interesting characters. I've read quite a few historical fiction novels delving into the lives of Henry VIII, his wives and Elizabeth I. I'd mainly read books by Philippa Gregory and was keen to try another author of the genre. Step forward Suzannah Dunn. I'd had such hopes for this novel but unfortunately it did not quite live up to my expectations.

I think one of my main issues with the book was its misleading title; it is not the confession of Katherine Howard per se, it is her friend's observations of the life of Katherine. However I do use friend in the loosest term possible since Dunn had built up the story by making Cat (our narrator) dislike Katherine in the beginning, then become indifferent and then suddenly they were best friends. As Dunn chose for us to observe Katherine through another's eyes, I never quite warmed to her and it felt like she was always at a distance. This meant that the reader is made to judge her and her actions without knowing her true thoughts and motivations. It also meant that I much preferred hearing about Cat's life and was more eager to learn about what was going to happen to her.

The layout of the novel was fine and it was quite interesting to dip back and forth from the past to the present. However I did have two major issues. First of all the ending was too abrupt and I was disappointed with it just suddenly finishing with only an afterword to inform the reader as to what happened. I also did not like the contemporary language at all. It made it a lot harder for me to believe in the characters as I couldn't put them into a Tudor context. On a good note though I did like that this version included an interview with Suzannah Dunn whereby she explains her reasons for using modern dialects.

Overall it was fine as an introduction to Tudor historical fiction but not very substantial.

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### **Susan says**

Katherine Howard joins the Duchess of Norfolk's household and instantly becomes the leader of the female pack there, impressing the other girls with her insouciant attitude and her sexual sophistication. Though Kat Tylney tries hard not to be impressed by the newcomer, the arrival and departure of other girls soon brings the two Katherines closer together, and eventually they become best friends of a sort.

When Katherine Howard is called to serve the latest queen, Anne of Cleves, she leaves her latest sexual conquest, Francis Dereham, behind, and quickly loses interest in him when she meets Thomas Culpeper (for

once, not romanticized by a historical novelist). Soon, Katherine finds herself courted by a far more important suitor, while Kat and Francis drift into a romance, which they carry to court when Katherine becomes queen. Inevitably, Katherine's past comes to light, and when the adults begin to ask questions, the young women's friendship is put to the test--and fails it.

As others have noted, this novel has a young-adult feel to it--a Tudor "Mean Girls" if you will, except that in this case the sexual shenanigans and the fights over boys have deadly consequences. I found it highly readable, but I couldn't sympathize much with either Katherine or Kat, as I have in some other novels about Katherine Howard. Maybe that was the author's intention--when the "in crowd" starts fighting amongst themselves, it's amusing for outsiders to watch.

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### **Linnea says**

I enjoyed the first part of the book and how it skipped between the past and the present. What I didn't like was how it ended. I felt there was so much more that could have been written - it ended rather awkwardly. There is so much more the author could have used; she didn't incorporate Katherine's frantic plea for survival - running down the hall of the Tower of London, banging on the door where King Henry was - how juicy of a narrative is that? You could do wonders with that or how she asked for the execution block and practiced how she would lay her head in preparation for her beheading. All this would have really contributed to the story.

I was also rather confused as to how Cat and she became best friends. Cat admits that she had little interaction with Kate - one moment, she dislikes Kate and then, a little later on, the two are best friends, and I'm not quite sure how we got there. I've always felt bad for Katherine Howard - she was accused of being flighty and unfaithful. Poor thing was thrown into the bed of this old fart and expected to enjoy it? Of course she would want attention from someone her own age. But, I'm getting excited. The book was alright; again, I liked the beginning but the ending just seemed really abrupt.

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### **Carolynne says**

I assign this to the YoungAdult shelf even though it is published as an adult book. It is a relatively short novel (307 pages) and most of the book takes place when the protagonists (Katherine Howard, later Queen Katherine, and Cat Tylney, her childhood friend and later lady in waiting) are teenagers. There are, however, some explicit sex scenes. Several other reviewers have remarked on the inaccuracy of the title, since the book is not Katherine Howard's confession at all, but Kat Tylney's. The story is told from her point of view, and the less than flattering portrait of Katherine is Cat's portrayal. That adds to the complexity and interest of the book, particularly since both Katherine and Cat are flawed heroines.

Spoiler Alert: Dunn does a particularly good job of contrasting the flirtatious (her contemporaries might have said "wanton") adolescent Katherine with the bewildered, hapless Queen Katherine after she is accused of adultery, who betrays her former lover Francis (later Kat's lover) in a fruitless attempt to save herself. In turn, her lady in waiting Cat, in an equally hopeless attempt to save Francis, is willing to betray Katherine. Neither young woman aquits herself in an admirable manner. (The central love story of the novel, the relationship between Cat and Francis, is fictitious, although the relationship between Katherine and Francis is based on fact, to the detriment of both of them.)

The author has clearly researched her subject well. Most of what we know of the period is often screened through the prism of Henry VIII himself, but he never actually appears on this stage. He is always distant and for a long time completely uninvolved in the lives of Katherine and Cat. This enables the author to concentrate more fully on the lives and characters of her protagonists and the other girls who are brought up to be ladies in the household of the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, a distant relation of Kat's. This was supposed to prepare for a successful marriage, but in the case of Katherine Howard, it led to her doom.

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### **Thalia says**

The author sabotaged her own work. One cannot read a tudor era novel and not be bothered by modern day phrases/slang and attitudes. I don't understand why Dunn insists on writing Tudor fiction. She should stick to contemporary. She does, I think, have a good handle on human behaviour, particularly the teenage girl. So why not write modern fiction? Also, the title is misleading. It should be called...Katherine Howard as told by Cat. Pass on this one. Pass on this author actually.

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### **Trish says**

I am a big fan of Historial Fiction that takes place during the Tudor period, so perhaps that influenced my opinion of this novel. To put it bluntly: I've read better. Much better. Suzannah Dunn takes perhaps one of the least understood and fictionalized Tudor Queens and somehow fails to deliver a good story about Katherine Howard. Told from the point of view of her friend Cat, the novel is plagued by uneven character development, pages of vague "conversations" between the two main characters that apparently consists of Katherine giving a "look" and Cat failing to understand her point, and colloquial expressions that do not fit with the period. As for Katherine's "confessions," they do not play much, if any, of a role in the book as she barely speaks and her written confessions are not really described or explained. Too bad.

So, why am I giving it two stars? The only thing that saved this novel was that I found the story of Cat's upbringing and experiences in the Duchess's household to be entertaining. Dunn did a good job of developing Cat's character and providing her with an interesting backstory. Too bad she couldn't do the same for Katherine Howard, who did not come to life at all in this novel.

I cannot help but wonder if a change in title, as simple as that seems, would have made this a different experience? The book is clearly more about Cat than the Queen, and it is an entertaining story in itself if you are not expecting something different.

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### **Tee says**

Life in the household of the Dutches of Norfolk was susposed to be a stepping stone to social graces and eduction. Mother's sent their noble daughters to be taught to read Latin, play the virginals and dance. What the girls really learned was very little in the way of prep for a position at court. The improvished noblewoman kept up a front, all the while keeping very little control over the doings in her household. In fact, the girls were allowed to 'run a little wild'.

Written not by Katherine, but by one of her close friends, the reader walks along side the girl destined to be a

queen. Like most very girls Katherine experiments with womanhood and learning the art of flirtation. We also see Katherine pushing the limits a bit too far with young swains she knows will never met with the Howard family approval.

'They never asked me if I was a virgin, before I married the king,' Katherine states. A valid point to make as Cranmer and Cromwell go about investigating her past. Katherine Howard gets to play queen at the cost of her life.

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### **Sheila says**

I was slightly disappointed with this book as the "confession of Katherine Howard" is not actually in Katherine's voice, but rather one of her maids-in-waiting. In a way I don't feel that Katherine plays a big enough role in her own "confession", and am left ambivalent about her character.

I have given the book three stars largely due to the amount of historical research and facts about every-day living in Tudor England, with a pleasing amount of detail being included.

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