

The Virgin's Lover Study Guide

The Virgin's Lover by Philippa Gregory

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Plot Summary

In *The Virgin's Lover* by Philippa Gregory, we are transported to the sixteenth century in Tudor England, at the time of Elizabeth the First. This is a time of deep uncertainty because Elizabeth's and old Queen Mary's father was Henry the Eighth, the English King who broke from the Roman Catholic Church of Rome, dreamed of a United Kingdom of Britain, and himself took many wives (muddling the line of succession). What characterized those years was religious persecution as one monarch swung towards Protestantism and yet another back to the Catholic faith, or civil wars as one child of one of Henry's wives was supported for the throne of England over another.

At the time of the start of the book we see Amy Dudley (previously Amy Robsart) trying to convince her disgraced husband Robert Dudley, to accept his defeat and to build a quiet life in the country with her rather than try to attain place and favor at court. Robert Dudley's whole family was disgraced when his parents tried to rebel against Queen Mary (now known as Bloody Mary), and was trying to earn a name for himself in battle and in charm by attending the courts. As a passionate Protestant, he awaited the day that Queen Mary would die and the natural successor would be Queen Elizabeth, one of Henry's children.

When Queen Elizabeth finally attains the throne, at first Robert becomes her Master of Horse and Master of Revels (a position where he was in charge of all the ceremonies and outings of the young princess). He steadily uses this position to dazzle and delight the young Elizabeth so she starts to fall in love with him, all the while neglecting his wife Amy in the process.

Meanwhile, as rumors start to fly that he is having an affair with the Queen, England is faced with war as France tries to occupy Scotland, and Elizabeth is so shocked that she seems incapable of deciding anything. She turns to Robert to guide her, and he assumes an effective control over her heart and throne, much to the alarm of William Cecil her Secretary of State.

Amidst assassination attempts, a devalued currency, and the increasing scorn of the other European countries as Elizabeth refuses to consider any other hand for marriage, Robert and Elizabeth are secretly engaged, forcing William Cecil to confront the Queen and take action to halt this madness.



Autumn 1558, pages 1-3

Autumn 1558, pages 1-3 Summary

The Virgin's Lover by Philippa Gregory starts in the Autumn of 1558, in Tudor England. It is a time of intense political and religious turmoil as, during these past few years we have seen the swift succession of short-lived monarchs, the dissolution of the Holy Roman Church in England (and the instigation of the Church of England), as well as mounting wars between the English Throne and France, Scotland and Spain. The Virgin's Lover concerns itself with the meteoric rise to power of the infamous Elizabeth the First, one of England's most beloved Queen's who never married during her lifetime, who overturned what a woman was thought (at the time) to be capable of doing, as well as defeating vast enemies and ensuring peace for her kingdom. Elizabeth the First was the last surviving heir of Henry VIII (Eighth) who himself split from the Holy Roman Faith so he could divorce his wife and marry again and again. The entire Tudor period can be seen as resolving the problems that arose as to who was the rightful heir of Henry VIII, and what the state religion of England would be.

In the first season of The Virgin's Lover, one of the main protagonists, Amy Dudley, finds herself woken from her bed in the County of Norfolk by the sound of bells. Amy Dudley, wife to the disgraced traitor Robert Dudley, realizes at once what it means: that Queen Mary (Henry VIII's first daughter) had died. Queen Mary (also known as Bloody Mary) was a Catholic Queen who had reverted the laws and reforms made by her father back in favor of the Holy Roman Church and the Pope, and herself hated the idea that her father had divorced and married again and again - believing it to be heretical. Queen Mary's reign was dominated by her religious persecution of the Protestants, whom she saw as the enemy seeking to steal her throne.

Even though everyone was celebrating the fact that Elizabeth, Henry's next surviving heir would become Queen, and that England would once again become a Protestant country, Amy Dudley herself is saddened by the news of the death. Amy finds herself sad and jealous because, at the very first news of Queen Mary's death she has lost her husband, Robert Dudley. She is jealous of this new monarch, the young Queen Elizabeth, and jealous of the fact that her husband has sped off to Hatfield Palace to welcome Elizabeth to the throne (and thus he hopes to regain some of his family's lost honor and prestige).

Amy Dudley spends the day working in the fields of Norfolk, and thinks she would be happier if her husband Robert was still a traitor to the throne and they lived poor and in exile like they do now, rather than be rich and honored again but never able to see her husband since he will be away at court with the young, beautiful and scandalous Elizabeth.



Autumn 1558, pages 1-3 Analysis

In the very first section of *The Virgin's Lover*, we see the author setting up the themes and the format that will play out through the entire book. We are introduced to one of the protagonists (Lady Amy Dudley) and it is revealed how jealous she is of Queen Elizabeth. Amy is jealous of the time and devotion that her husband will be throwing at the Queen, and knows instantly from the sound of the bells that she will lose her husband for a good long while as he tries to win favor at court.

The format of the first section too, is interesting. Instead of using numbered chapters, the author chooses to use Seasons, and then the date of the year; so this section is simply entitled "Autumn 1558." This style immediately reminds the reader of the style of the times, of old letters of correspondence and journals kept by Kings and Queens of the Tudor Period and the fact that the pace of life was much more dictated by the season and time of year it was then the time of day.

This section also captures the chaos of those times, and the author uses the protagonist to demonstrate them. We learn that once Amy was Lady Dudley, and had lands and title when her husband was favored, but who is now working in the fields (and prefers it) and is penniless. We are forced to recognize how strange those times were when, every few years or decade a new monarch could arrive and the whole country was turned upside down, favors lost or won, or even at civil war. The feelings and circumstances of Amy Dudley here perfectly demonstrate this instability.



Summer 1557, pages 4 - 16

Summer 1557, pages 4 - 16 Summary

In the second section of *The Virgin's Lover* by Philippa Gregory, the narrative begins one year earlier, in the summer of 1557. Robert Dudley is having a dream, a nightmare. As a youth he is standing with his brothers in a gaol (the old term for jail), staring down out of the window to where his father is being dragged to a scaffold. Robert Dudley hears his father renounce their faith (Protestantism) and their principles for Queen Mary. Robert and his brothers watch as his father, who used to be one of the greatest men in the entire kingdom loses his place on the execution scaffold. As he is blindfolded he cannot find the chopping block where he must lower his head and is screaming, scrabbling around feebly. Robert Dudley awakens when he sees the axe thud down, twice, killing his father.

Robert wakes up being comforted by Amy, who understands that he is having "that" dream again. Unwilling to even think about it Robert tries to dismiss it but Amy tells him that it must be a warning, that he must not sail with King Philip as he was about to do later that day.

Amy does not want Robert to go to war. King Philip of Spain is taking a fleet to the Netherlands where he expects to fight, and Robert is arguing that this is his opportunity to be noticed, and to be pardoned. His father and his family were attainted as traitors by Queen Mary, and it is only through his heroic deeds can he be pardoned and he start to clear the accusation from his family name.

Amy argues that he would rather "have Elizabeth's England" and Robert states that he would, with all his heart.

The next day at Dover, Robert meets his younger brother Henry, who is joining him to add to King Philip's fleet. There they are both overjoyed at this opportunity, and Henry confides that King Philip is already aboard his ship, while Elizabeth and Queen Mary are arriving. Robert asks how Elizabeth is, and Henry informs him that she is well, that she has become King Philip's lover but Robert disagrees. Robert understands that Elizabeth must be seen to be enamored of King Philip, because if she were not then Queen Mary would have her thrown in the Tower and the Privy Council would probably have her beheaded. At that very moment, the royal barge arrives.

Elizabeth the princess calls out to Robert Dudley his family's old battle cry and appears to be glad, and mischievous since behind her sits the sour Queen Mary, who barely acknowledges the Dudleys. Robert calls out, asking her whether she is 'all right' meaning whether or not she is safe and being looked after, and she replies in code that yes, she is "constant."



Summer 1557, pages 4 - 16 Analysis

In this section we see a flashback to a year earlier, before Queen Mary died, and to when Robert was desperately trying to earn himself his respect and clear the family name. We discover that his family, the Dudleys, were once one of the greatest families in all of England, and came within a whisker of being the ruling noble house of the realm when they tried to back one of Henry VIII's wife's claim to the throne (Jane Grey). Because of this, their involvement in the struggle for succession and their Protestant beliefs the Dudley's were branded traitors to Queen Mary's throne and stripped of their wealth and position.

Ever since, Robert has been living penniless with his wife Amy at a variety of friends' houses and finally with Amy's stepmother in Norfolk, where they have been working in the fields like common folk. In this section Robert declares that he can take it no more, that the Dudleys were born to greatness and that he must win back his position at court.

Amy, on the other hand, has no desire to see him go at all; she fears that he will be leaving her for a more glamorous world, or that he will be leaving her just for himself to die on a distant battlefield. She reminds him that King Philip of Spain, who married Queen Mary in the hopes that they might have a son who could be the first Emperor of Spain and England, is just using the English to fight his wars in the Netherlands, and this is not even a noble cause. All of this falls on deaf ears.

Amy appears to be almost the complete opposite of Robert Dudley, even though they are married. Amy believes that by owning and managing the land well that she can create a better England, whereas Dudley believes that only by having power and authority can one create a better England.

What is foreshadowed for both of them by the sudden arrival of Elizabeth, is that their lives will be eclipsed by the politics of the new Queen Elizabeth when she ascends to the throne. A hint of danger clangs for the reader when Robert and his brother rush instantly to see the Royal barge as it approaches, Robert apparently forgetting that he has even ever had a wife as his eyes are only on the princess Elizabeth.



Winter 1557, pages 17 - 23

Winter 1557, pages 17 - 23 Summary

Six months later finds Amy accompanied by her friend, Lizzie Oddingsell, at the docks in Gravesend where they are watching the battered and ruined fleet return empty handed. At first she doesn't see him but, after a second, Amy recognizes her husband beside the mast of one of the ships and not seeming in any hurry to jump ashore.

Robert Dudley is a defeated man. As his wife Amy fusses over him and ask him whether he is all right, Robert responds that he has lost Calais (the English city in France), his brother and his horse. Amy is astonished and Robert tells his wife that he received an honorable mention for his bravery in the battle from King Philip and that his brother Henry was killed at St. Quentin. However, afterwards the entire army was defeated at Calais and lost that settlement to the French. Robert has come home defeated and morose, realizing that he himself had lost Calais since he had been promoted by King Philip shortly before. He bids his wife to return to their friends' house and from there he will meet her at her stepmother's house (the Lady Robsart) after he has informed the Queen of what has happened.

Back at the Lady Robsart's in Norfolk, we discover that Amy's stepmother doesn't like Robert Dudley at all. Over dinner the Lady Robsart declares that Robert will have to start earning his keep in the fields with the rest of the tenant farmers and servants, an idea which horrifies Robert.

Lady Robsart reasons that everyone else earns their keep; her sons oversee the farm, Amy does her housework and sewing, and so Robert must do the same and not be kept as a Lord any longer since he is not a Lord at all, but merely a disgraced commoner. She cruelly points out that he has no friends and has no prospects, that he has lost the favor of the monarch (Queen Mary) and is not allowed to profit himself, whether to buy, sell or trade any item.

Infuriated and hurt by so recently losing his brother, Robert leaves the dining room where they are seated for a meal together while Amy tries to reason with her stepmother. In the end, Amy agrees that Robert, instead of general laborer, should be a horse trainer for the farm, because he has a natural knack and skill for them. After securing this compromise Amy runs to tell her husband that he need not toil in the fields like a peasant, but instead can train horses, but she finds his room bare and all of his things have been packed and taken. Robert Dudley has left her.

Winter 1557, pages 17 - 23 Analysis

The short section of Winter 1557 further continues the themes introduced so far as well as the underlying story. Robert Dudley is falling farther and farther from social favor, and



Amy Dudley is getting more and more upset at how he seems to be courting disaster by becoming mixed up with court business once more.

When Amy comes to Gravesend to watch his boat come in, for a second we can wonder if Philippa Gregory is referencing ancient Greek Myth, and this section certainly does have that epic feel of tragedy about it as we watch the great man account how he has lost everything: his horse, his brother, the battle and the entire city of Calais.

At this point in the story these great events — the loss of Calais, the battle in the Netherlands against the French, the mighty fleet of King Philip — all seem quite far away to Amy and to the reader. The author is painting the contrast between the difference in an everyday commoner's life and that of the court. The events that are happening to Robert are happening "off stage" to the narrative of the book, and, effectively, are shutting Amy out of that world.

Amy is instead interested in the business of running a small farm; again this is emphasized as being vastly different from what Robert wants for himself. Even though Lady Robsart is presented as cruel and quite unkind to Robert, we can sympathize a little with what she intends in forcing him to work.



Summer 1558, pages 24 - 28

Summer 1558, pages 24 - 28 Summary

In the next section, entitled Summer 1557, Robert Dudley has fled the Robsart house and has made his way to the newly built Richmond Palace, where he is staying with his brother-in-law during the evenings and, during the day, is a petitioner at court.

Being a petitioner means that he has to wait in the available "public" spaces along with the other common folk until someone higher up than him (a clerk of the palace, or even a noble of the royal household) notices him and asks him what he is doing there. Then he will have the opportunity to explain himself and ask for dispensation. Robert Dudley muses that his fortunes have been completely reversed since he had been a child and had wondered why on earth the common folk had nothing better to do than beg for favors from the noble houses.

He soon finds out that no one will employ him, since his father had been one of the greatest men in all of England just a scant few years before, and Dudley himself is well-remembered by the Catholic Lords for how his family forced through the Protestant Reformation. Also, his entire family had been thrown into the Tower for treason, so even mingling with a Dudley could be seen as misguided or scandalous. During his time at court, Dudley discovers that King Philip of Spain seems to have abandoned Queen Mary after his defeat at Calais. King Philip has gone back to Spain and it is widely believed that he will have nothing more to do with England.

While petitioning, Robert Dudley is in Queen Mary's presence chamber outside of her chapel, waiting for her one morning. To his surprise, the Queen does enter the chamber that morning and recognizes him. Queen Mary herself has grown weary and ill over the long years, and having been unable to bear a child for the throne, she is now heartbroken as well. Robert petitions her and they manage to speak a little about what happened at Calais and the fact that Queen Mary is alone just as Robert is in the world. Queen Mary wearily agrees to grant the lifting of the charge of treason against his name, and decrees that he can have his title and rooms at court back. In short, he can become a part of the royal household once more.

Queen Mary then asks Robert Dudley to come to Mass with her which he does, of course, knowing that you should never refuse a Queen.

Summer 1558, pages 24 - 28 Analysis

During this section Robert Dudley is at the lowest he has ever been. He is facing a complete reversal of the position he once held at court. It is quite easy to feel sympathy for this man, rather than view him as one who is prideful and ambitious, since he is humbled at last and forced to beg for his chances rather than have them granted to him just because he was born a Dudley.



When he finally meets the Catholic Queen Mary, we can see in her not the terrible "Bloody Mary" of folklore but, instead, a weary and tired older woman who has had enough of the Crown, of politics and of men. At this juncture, an equally sympathetic character, Queen Mary seems quite ready to grant Robert Dudley his special dispensation if it will just make her day easier. We have to remember that Queen Mary at this point in time has recently been diagnosed with a cancerous tumor of the womb, and is thus infertile and is probably going to die. She has had a number of miscarriages before this point and her husband, King Philip of Spain appears to have abandoned her. However fierce she had been when she started her reign, the Queen herself has become humbled by the weight of responsibility in a similar fashion to how the Dudleys have lost their favor.

It is perhaps a mark of Robert's mercurial nature, however, that he attends the Mass with the Queen and performs his devotions with such skill. We could say that Robert Dudley had no choice but to follow the queen, but it also serves as a sinister reminder that Robert Dudley can perform and pretend to be all things to all people when he needs to be; and, ultimately, if it will better help him rise in prestige and power.



Autumn 1558, pages 29 - 34

Autumn 1558, pages 29 - 34 Summary

In the Autumn of 1558 we find the princess Elizabeth awakened by the tumult of bells from every church tower in Hertfordshire, replicating how Amy came into the story. Elizabeth is staying at Hatfield palace when she hears the bells, and knows instantly what they mean. Flinging open the shutters, the young princess is joyous, because she knows that she is now next in line for the throne and will be made Queen. The bells signal the death of Old Queen Mary, who has succumbed to her long illness.

Later that morning we find Elizabeth walking in the gardens accompanied by Robert Dudley, who had sped away from his wife Amy, to be one of the first to bear the good news to his new Queen. She asks him what he is thinking, and he replies with a compliment that she looks very good in mourning black and should probably never marry.

They are joined by William Cecil, whom Elizabeth calls 'Spirit', who is a life long co-conspirator, church reformer and friend. Cecil tells the young princess that he has heard that Sir Francis Knollys and his wife Catherine are making their way to England from Protestant Germany. Catherine, we understand, is Elizabeth's cousin and also a childhood friend. The new Queen is upset that they won't be able to arrive until after her coronation, but glad that they will be returning to court and bringing with them their daughter, her niece Laetitia.

Cecil begins to discuss with Elizabeth how they are to conduct the mourning ceremony for the old Queen, and Elizabeth forbids the raising of the Host (the Catholic Sacrament), claiming that it is heretical for the Reformed Church of England.

What follows is a rather tense discussion among Dudley, Queen Elizabeth and Cecil over how they should approach the problem of the Church. All of the Bishops of the Church are avowed Roman Catholics, since the old Queen Mary herself appointed them while she was in office in an attempt to make the country Roman Catholic again. Any one of them would gladly perform the mourning ceremony for the old Queen, but Cecil cannot insure what they will say in the pulpit. The new Queen Elizabeth is impatient and stubborn, warning that Cecil has to find a way to curb their tongues because she will not have her own church making troubles for her before she is even crowned.

In the last section of this season, the lord Cecil is attending the funeral service of the old Queen Mary with his head in his hands, as the Bishop of Winchester, their appointed candidate proceeds to insult the new Queen Elizabeth almost outright by using particular passages from bible scripture, and thus preaches himself into house arrest.



Autumn 1558, pages 29 - 34 Analysis

The first scene of this section begins almost identically to the very first scene in the entire book, with only a few lines changed. Even the actions of the participants are the same from that section to this. In the very first scene, it is Amy Dudley whom we see turning over in her bed and distraught over the sound of the bells over Norfolk that are telling the land that Queen Mary is dead. In this section, it is Elizabeth joyously flinging open the windows to hear the sounds of the bells over Hertfordshire all the much clearer.

We have from this a sense that Amy and Elizabeth are two sides of the same coin, and we can contrast their stories through the narrative similarities. The characters of Amy and Elizabeth stand in contrast to each other; one as a lady who has nothing and no admirers (Amy), and the other who is about to be Queen of England. In a strange similarity however, both Elizabeth and Amy are coming out of dark times in which they had been tainted with treason by the Old Queen and now are able to make their way in the world in a new reign. Or so we might think.

The bulk of Autumn 1558 is concerned with the facts of how Elizabeth should deal with the Reformed Church of England, and the death of Queen Mary. We find Robert and Elizabeth walking through the gardens and are reminded that they are in fact old childhood friends from the times when Henry VIII was alive, and that they have a good, familiar acquaintance. Princess Elizabeth strikes to the heart of the matter - that there will be many Protestants returning to the country now that Queen Mary is dead and that Elizabeth (a supposedly Protestant Princess) is going to be on the Throne. Half of the country is expecting a return to King Henry VIII's style of state religion, while the other half the country will be in violent opposition to it. In this rather comical scene, the author is setting up the story that will be playing itself out in the background throughout the rest of the book - the struggle with the church (and the Roman Catholic Church in particular) for dominance during Queen Elizabeth's reign.



Winter 1558-9, pages 35 - 111

Winter 1558-9, pages 35 - 111 Summary

The Winter of 1558 to 1559 of *The Virgin's Lover* presents the very first part of Princess Elizabeth's transformation into Queen Elizabeth and the trials that immediately beset her as she tries to set up her royal court. The season begins with the Christmas celebration after the funeral of old Queen Mary, and is held at the Tudor stronghold of Whitehall palace. Both Elizabeth and her trusted adviser William Cecil are anxious that the Tudor traditions implemented by her father Henry VIII be followed as quickly as possible (to make it clear that Elizabeth is carrying on that line and has that authority).

Unfortunately, it immediately becomes clear that Elizabeth and William Cecil know next to nothing about the type of celebration that they should be having, the style or the ceremony needed, and indeed know nothing about Whitehall Palace itself. Elizabeth had been a toddler when her father Henry VIII was on the throne, and afterwards had been imprisoned in the Tower by Queen Mary as a pretender to the throne. Elizabeth turns to Robert Dudley, as one of the only people who has been in favor for a short period, to guide her.

The Christmas celebration is marred by her personal priest, Bishop Oglethorpe, refusing to perform the Reformed Protestant service and instead conducting the Roman Catholic Raising of the Host. This leads to the instant dilemma of who amongst the Bishops will perform her coronation, since they are all against Protestantism. Robert Dudley advises William Cecil that he should have it known that Elizabeth is about to marry King Philip of Spain (who had been married to Queen Mary), who is an avowed Catholic. This information manages to secure her coronation, because it placates the Bishops. Robert, now her Master of Horse and Master of Revels (he plans all of her excursions, ceremonies and outings), manages to get closer to the Throne and become an ever trusted adviser.

Meanwhile however, we find his wife Amy painstakingly sewing for Robert three presents — a saddle, gloves and a rich shirt — for his Christmas presents, and later cursing the new Queen Elizabeth in her bed as Amy desperately wishes that her husband will come home for the celebrations.

Sir Francis and Catherine Knollys arrive and are immediately greeted and given positions at court by Elizabeth, who is delighted to be surrounding herself with her childhood friends once again. They bring with them their daughter Laetitia, who is the spitting image of Elizabeth, and makes it obvious to the whole court that Catherine Knollys must be a child of Elizabeth's father. This angers Elizabeth, but she tries not to show it. Word also reaches William Cecil from his contacts across Europe that the Pope is considering a proclamation that will declare that it is not sinful for the common folk to rise up against their king or queen, if that ruler is a heretic. William Cecil understands immediately that this is pointed at Elizabeth's rule, and is openly inspiring revolt in her



country. While he tries to find a way to broach this subject to the Queen, Robert Dudley tells the court that they must change their currency, because the English coin has been so forged, shaved and spoiled that it is now almost worthless.

Meanwhile, Amy Dudley pines for her husband. Her stepmother, the Lady Robsart, sends a letter to the court stating that she wants to be paid the debt that she is owed by Robert Dudley, in that he is neglecting his wife. In return, Amy receives a letter asking her to visit their friends in the neighboring village of Bury St Edmunds. Amy believes that she is about to be reunited with her husband and asked to attend court.

As the season progresses and the challenges against Elizabeth mount up, William Cecil proposes that Elizabeth send Robert Dudley to King Philip of Spain as her ambassador, but the Master of Horse manages to charm Elizabeth out of sending him away. They confide together on a walk in the gardens that he came out of the Tower a changed man, and that he no longer loves his wife, and that he has his sight set on greater things. William Cecil draws up a list of candidates for Elizabeth's hand in marriage, which include King Philip of Spain, the Hapsburg Archdukes, wealthy merchants, and the young Earl of Arran from Scotland. The Earl of Arran looks to be the favorite since he would be able to unite England and Scotland with the two Thrones, and face up against Queen Mary of Scots, who is resident in Scotland and is betrothed to the future King of France.

Winter 1558-9, pages 35 - 111 Analysis

In this season we see the game that Robert Dudley is starting to play at court and his neglect of his wife Amy. Robert immediately makes himself indispensable to the young Queen, helping her by recreating all of the old Tudor traditions and smoothly claiming authority over the whole court itself.

However, Robert Dudley is not simply an ambitious or vain man, but recognizes at several times the key factors that will have to change for his 'Protestant England' to come into existence. He picks out the changing of the currency and the policy of making Elizabeth the 'people's princess' by putting on such a grand coronation and peppering the crowd with actors. Nevertheless, he does do all of this to further his own cause. Robert Dudley sets himself up as a rival to William Cecil for the time and the attentions of the Queen, as he proceeds to whisk her away several times from important policy conversation on the excuse of an amusement. This is why William Cecil advised that Dudley be sent away as an ambassador — to help clear the waters and make his job easier. What emerges is the picture of a young woman (Elizabeth) being manipulated by two older men (Robert and William), although our sympathies lie closer to William Cecil than they do to Robert, since William Cecil seems to be merely doing what he can do for the betterment of the reign, rather than any of his own desires.

When Robert Dudley takes the Queen for a walk in her gardens we can see a comparison between the two: both as Tudor Protestants who were imprisoned in the Tower, were brought low by circumstance and now both rising again to prominence and



power. Robert tells Elizabeth that he cannot love his own wife Amy now, because she seems content with running a small farm in Norfolk and does not understand what it means to have pride in one's family and in one's projects. Here, the character of Robert is being decidedly unkind as he talks about his wife and we can surmise that he is either emphasizing this to pull at Elizabeth's heartstrings or to state how clearly different he is from the Robsarts. What becomes clear by the end of this season is that Robert Dudley has become obsessed with only one person in his life, and that is the young Queen Elizabeth.



Spring 1559, pages 112 - 181

Spring 1559, pages 112 - 181 Summary

During the Spring at court, Robert Dudley still hasn't left to see his wife, but instead is found talking to his sister, Mary Sidney, as they are on a hunting ride with the Queen's procession. Mary reveals that Queen Elizabeth has been writing love letters to King Philip of Spain, detailed enough that the court is starting to get worried that she will scandalize the Throne or will be forced to marry him. Robert Dudley is angry, but realizes that Elizabeth is probably just playing the King of Spain so that he will become an ally of England. He confides that he would want to marry the Queen himself, if he were free. William Cecil drafts a letter to the Queen outlining the many reasons why she cannot marry the King of Spain, including that she will lose the support of the Protestant English.

Robert finally sends for Amy to stay with their friends at Camberwell while he visits. Amy is overjoyed, thinking that her husband has finally sent for her to be with him. When Robert finally arrives, he spends just one night in the house before announcing that he has to leave because he cannot stand listening to the unglamorous concerns of his wife compared to those of court. Trying to stop her from being upset, Robert asks her to find a house for them in the countryside where now, with his new prestige, he will be able to build a proper home.

Back at court, Robert hears about the many different contenders for Elizabeth's hand in marriage and dislikes every one, attempting to distract the Queen and flirt with her at every opportunity to take her mind off of the other suitors.

Amy, on the other hand, is now in Oxfordshire, where she is searching for the appropriate grounds and estate for their home. Accompanying her are the Scotts, a wealthy family who are long time allies of the Dudleys. Amy decides to start looking for a good farm that has fertile land and room for expansion, but the Scotts immediately see that is probably not what Robert meant when he asked her to buy a home; rather a castle or a palace or an old abbey.

At court Robert, as Master of Revels and Master of Horse, is planning the St. George's Day celebration, which he plans to be based on Arthurian Camelot, with jousting competitions and duels. Robert Dudley intends to be the best competitor on the field and impress the Queen again, when, on the actual day she drops a glove from her royal box Robert Dudley rides to pick it up and cheekily carries it as her favor into the contests. The next day, he invites Queen Elizabeth to his newly granted Dairy House at Kew, where he has prepared a breakfast feast for her personal retinue and himself, even including tame lambs.

Amy, while staying in Oxfordshire, hears of this news as rumors and gossip from their friends and, although deeply jealous, she pretends to herself that this is just what the



Queen's Master of Revels and Chief Courtier should be doing, and that there is nothing amiss for their marriage.

At the very end of the season, William Cecil sends another coded message, this time to his contacts in Scotland. He is sending one of his men to investigate the Scottish Lords, and how they stand in relation to Mary Queen of Scots and the French Catholics. If William can support the Protestant Scottish Lords against the French Catholics and Mary Queen of Scots herself, then he would effectively be able to split the enemies that are arrayed against the throne and possibly prevent a French invasion of Scotland.

Spring 1559, pages 112 - 181 Analysis

The Spring of 1559 is all about the promise of Elizabeth's hand in marriage, and securing her claim to the throne by supplying a husband and an heir. It is believed by the Privy Council and by William Cecil that people will look more favorably on her rule if she has a husband, and especially one who could start to solve their many problems. It is for this reason that Elizabeth is considering so many candidates at once. Some bring money with them and so, in some part, can repair some of the damage done by King Philip of Spain when he was Queen Mary's husband, while others bring alliances. If Elizabeth married a Hapsburg Archduke, she would be consolidating power for the Protestants and thus shoring up her own Reformed Church. If Elizabeth instead married the Earl of Arran she would be supporting the Scottish Protestants against Mary Queen of Scots and against the French. Amidst all of this, Robert Dudley is coolly trying to interject himself making small witticisms to entrance Elizabeth's decision away from any one suitor.

Robert Dudley is overjoyed when he finally finds out that Elizabeth has been made the Supreme Governor of the Reformed Church of England, since this separates the Reformed Church from the Pope, Rome and the Vatican, and gives Elizabeth the power to grant divorces and to allow marriages. At this point in the story, we can see that Robert Dudley is considering a plan by which he can get his marriage with his wife Amy annulled by the Queen and then instead marry the Queen himself, becoming the Lord Protector or consort of England.

In Amy, however, we are presented with a character of naïve innocence, a lady who is obviously jealous and fearful of her husband's relationship with the Queen, but is too pious to think anything of it. Instead she thinks that she is being sinful when she is jealous. Amy is overjoyed when Robert decides to see her and when he gives her the task of her finding their home, but her choice of houses shows just how far she is from him in her tastes. We are forced to admit that their marriage is over, and that even Amy is probably right — that a large farm, with the ability to secure their futures through generating money for itself, would be far more useful and sustainable than any castle that Robert sees for them. Dramatic irony can be seen in Robert's choice of celebrations for St. George's Day, (Arthurian), since that would undoubtedly make Elizabeth Guinevere, the adulterous Queen, and himself (Robert), Lancelot; or the most beloved knight in the land.



Summer 1559, pages 182 - 255

Summer 1559, pages 182 - 255 Summary

In the next season of Summer 1559, we find Robert Dudley, now a member of the Order of The Garter and the Queen's favorite at court, in Denchworth with Amy his wife where she has found a home. He accompanies her to where she has found a charming but run down country farmhouse, and he is furious. Robert cannot believe that Amy has chosen anything less than at least an old Abbey or a Castle. He explodes, telling her that she has made a fool of him, and she responds that he should not be so prideful, since he has already lost all of his fortune once and his family inheritance recently. Robert Dudley rides off, and Amy quickly becomes upset. As they travel home she starts to blame herself for not being the proper wife that she should be, for not meeting her husband's needs.

By the time Robert comes back, he finds that one of his informers, William Blount, has arrived at Denchworth and proceeds to tell him that a William Pickering has arrived at court. This William Pickering was an old romance of Elizabeth's when she was a child and her attentions have been completely changed; she is enamored of him. Incensed, Robert decides to leave the next day to travel to London. Amy doesn't see any of this court politics, but thinks that it is merely the argument they had that is sending her husband away, and begs for his forgiveness but he does not give it.

Meanwhile at Court, William Cecil has received word that the French King Francois has been wounded in a joust, and wounded so badly that it looks like he might die. When he does, there will be nothing stopping Mary Queen of Scots from using her French allies and armies to wipe out the Scottish Lords and lead an invasion of England.

As Robert and William play cat and mouse with each other at court, Elizabeth cannot seem to take her mind from the fact that she must marry a man with an army that could defend England.

Later that week, while Robert is organizing another tournament — this one celebrating the peace after the War of The Roses — Elizabeth suddenly arrives at his Dairy House at Kew Gardens, in the evening, looking scared. She says that she was being followed and then, all of a sudden she was being chased while out walking and she ran here. Robert tries to comfort her and, as their passions mount, they are suddenly almost having full sexual intercourse, before the Queen's Guard's arrive and they have to take Elizabeth back to her rooms in the palace.

The next day, as Robert is planning the Roses celebration, Elizabeth and Robert finally seal their affair when she dresses up as a peasant to visit him in his private chambers over the stables. The rumors of this spread like wildfire throughout the court and the kingdom, so much so that Amy herself hears the rumors of it in Oxfordshire and is deeply hurt.



The scandal dominates the court as it becomes obvious that Elizabeth is favoring Robert over every other suitor, so much so that her childhood governess Kat Ashley tells her that she should put him aside, as does William Cecil, for the sake of her reign. William Cecil warns her that the French King is dying and, when he finally does die, there will be an invasion from the north and the French will try to conquer England. Alarmed, Elizabeth begins secret talks with the Earl of Arran, hoping that he can force Mary Queen of Scots out of Scotland and thus save her in return for her hand in marriage.

As the season ends, we find Amy wrestling with her jealousy and racked with anxiety at the rumors of her husband and Elizabeth. She turns to her local church to give her support.

Summer 1559, pages 182 - 255 Analysis

In the Summer of 1559, the budding attraction between Robert and Elizabeth finally blossoms into a full scale affair, sparked by the intensity of the night when Elizabeth is almost assassinated. The whole section is filled with the allegories of romance and of love including the Rose Celebration and Robert's numerous private speeches to the Queen.

At the start of the section, we see that Amy has tried and failed to find an appropriate house for them, or rather has found the perfect house for them, but not one that Dudley thinks he deserves. Really, this argument and Amy's choice of house shows just how far they have grown apart and tells us a lot about their respective characters. Amy seems to be down to earth and filled with practical or "lowly" things, while Robert is filled with ambition, pride, and the needs of court. As the section progresses, we see that Robert has finally turned his back upon his wife and cannot seem to help himself from taking advantage of the Queen. He has a hope that the Queen will annul his marriage and marry him in Amy's stead, and we can see this to be a fanciful notion because there are too many enemies arrayed against England.

Although there is a sudden change in the relationship between Robert and Elizabeth, we are forced to ask ourselves what it must be like for the historical people of this time, knowing that their lives and even their emotions were ruled even from a very early age by their advisers. While Philippa Gregory's depiction of the young Elizabeth is not traditional or in canon with most other depictions of her, it does start to explore another, more human side to the historical Queen Elizabeth of England - one where she is a woman first and foremost, in fact a girl with her own thoughts and desires who is being denied her opportunities and manipulated by the many skillful courtiers at court.



Autumn 1559, pages 256 - 289

Autumn 1559, pages 256 - 289 Summary

It is the Autumn of 1559, and Robert Dudley is planning a grand woodland hunt for his lover, the Queen. While he is at court, he watches William Cecil deliver some private news to Queen Elizabeth and sees her face fall. As soon as he can, Robert approaches his lover to find out just what is wrong, and the Queen tells him that she must give him up as a lover, but begs him to remain her friend. William Cecil has learned that there is a new plot against the Queen, and that it not only includes an assassination attempt on her life but on the life of Robert Dudley as well. It is now common knowledge that Dudley and Elizabeth are lovers and can go nowhere without each other.

Distraught, the Queen admits that she will have to marry either the Archduke of Hapsburg or the Earl of Arran to secure her reputation and to defend her realm against the massing French in Scotland. Robert Dudley is upset and, in private, tells his sister Mary Sydney that he cannot bear it; he returns to visit his wife.

There he finds Amy content and at peace, confident that her prayers have returned her husband to her. They go out riding and spend a happy evening together. The next day, Amy questions Robert about what is troubling him since he is distracted and sombre. This leads to an argument where Robert cannot admit to not being in love with the Queen, and Amy is furious. Robert tells Amy that it is now too late and that the Queen has put him aside, and that he had wished for a divorce - which is the straw that breaks the camel's back. Amy refuses Robert, forever, the possibility of a divorce because it would be a mortal sin for a woman such as her, with a Catholic faith. Robert leaves her, never intending to see her again.

Back at court, Queen Elizabeth is heartbroken without Robert Dudley as the pressure of war mounts around her. The Scottish Protestants had been laying siege to the French forces at Leith castle but they had broken out, defeating the Scottish Lords and now, once more, the French have Edinburgh. It looks as though Elizabeth will lose Scotland forever and war will eventually come to England itself.

Autumn 1559, pages 256 - 289 Analysis

This season describes the first "public" acknowledgement of Robert and Elizabeth's affair and the damage it is causing for other people in their lives and for the country at large.

When we hear of the French plot to assassinate Elizabeth, we see Cecil use it to his whole advantage to scare the Queen into giving up her lover through her love for him making her not want to see him get hurt. The character of Robert Dudley shows, for a brief moment, a spark of nobility as he is talking to his sister, in the fact that he admits that he must give up the Queen to help protect her and her throne — a selfless act that



makes Robert appear more noble than he actually has been throughout most of the book so far. As the author describes the mounting pressure of the Scottish war, feeding the news of the Scottish Protestants in snippets throughout the chapter, we can catch glimpses of the people that Elizabeth, Amy and Robert could become when faced with adversity. Amy, for once, has dignity in her anger and seems ennobled by it as she refuses Robert a divorce, and Elizabeth, when deciding to put Robert aside, looks as though she might mature and take on the business of running her kingdom like a monarch rather than a young girl.



Winter 1559-60, pages 290 - 322

Winter 1559-60, pages 290 - 322 Summary

In the Winter of that year, the worst scenario happens. The French fleet sets sail for England, to reinforce their allies at Edinburgh, and to prepare to invade England and take Elizabeth's throne. Elizabeth is beside herself with worry, wondering whether she should sue for peace or whether she should take her country to a war that everyone is sure England will lose. She changes her mind so much that in the morning she could believe one thing, and then in the afternoon another. William Cecil brings to her a letter from the Scottish Protestants, begging her to intercede and defend Scotland, and saying that only she can save them from the French. Still indecisive without her lover, she cannot take her country to war, even when a secret emissary is sent from the Scottish Lords to offer her the Crown of Scotland if she defends Scotland and defeats the French.

Although Elizabeth likes the idea of finally uniting England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, she is so desperately unhappy that she cannot decide what to do, and her Secretary of State, William Cecil, advises her to find herself a safe refuge, because when the French come they will behead her. He then resigns in disgust.

Meanwhile, Amy Dudley is calming down from her anger and is becoming ever more pious attending church three times a day. She decides that her jealousy of the Queen is a sin, and that for her to find peace she must learn how to forgive her husband and even to forgive Elizabeth.

During the very days as Amy tries to be a better wife, despite what she knows, Laetitia Knollys sends for Robert Dudley to attend to the Queen. Robert Dudley arrives and comforts Elizabeth who is almost falling apart with worry, and his confidence manages to give her the strength to declare war on the French.

The love affair between Robert and the Queen takes on all its former intensity, and the court around the Queen look on with amazement and distrust. Robert's sister announces that she has been played for a fool and nearly disinherits her brother. The whole court thinks that the Queen has shamed the Archduke by pretending to want to marry him, and he refuses to come to England or to aid their realm.

Winter 1559-60, pages 290 - 322 Analysis

Already heartbroken, in this season we see Elizabeth face her greatest trial yet: the threat of war, and we see her crack under the pressure. Instead of rising to the occasion, Elizabeth instead turns to worry and indecisiveness, and in the end turns to Robert to make her decisions for her.



We have to remember that Elizabeth the Queen, Elizabeth the Protestant Princess, is still at this time a very young woman, who is surrounded by people who are either more skilled at manipulation than she, or are actively trying to sway her. Elizabeth seems incapable of plunging the country into a war because she believes that she will fail and, without any firm allies to help her, she does not want to be the cause of any more suffering for her people. It appears ironic that she should decide this, since her actions are already causing the suffering of her realm, with the damage that she is doing to the rule of the throne and the belief that the people have in her. At this point no one expects her to win in a war against France.



Spring 1560, pages 323 - 365

Spring 1560, pages 323 - 365 Summary

In the Spring of 1560 the armies of England are marching north to reinforce the borders and Queen Elizabeth is growing impatient. Robert Dudley again leaves to visit his wife Amy at Stanfield Hall, where he finds her eager to please him once more, thinking that he has finally decided to turn aside from his affections for Elizabeth. Instead, Robert Dudley asks her for a divorce, stating that he could be free to defend the realm with Elizabeth, that the Queen needs him, and that he could become the King of all England if his wife granted a divorce. Amy descends into hysteria, attacking Robert, stating again that she would have to be murdered before he could be free to marry. Robert Dudley leaves her in disgrace, confiding in Lizzie Oddingsell, Amy's companion, that if she does not agree to a divorce then a divorce will be forced upon her and she will be sent out of the country to a convent on some pretext or another.

Meanwhile, back at court word reaches William Cecil that King Philip of Spain has announced that he is going to set sail for England with enough troops to secure Scotland and broker peace between the French and the English. William Cecil sees this immediately for what it is, an attempt by King Philip of Spain to make a move against England, to claim that he is holding Scotland in trust when in actual fact he would become the de facto ruler and able to invade England himself at any time he chose. Hurriedly, William Cecil drafts a letter to Thomas Gresham, a merchant banker in Antwerp, asking that he start speculation that if Spain were to set sail for England, then the English trade in cloth would suddenly disappear from their ports, and this would cause a great loss to the wealth of Spain. This creates a panic as traders begin to speculate on reserves and to hoard their money, and finally protests break out. This halts King Philip's decision, since he thinks it would be better for Spain to keep the trade with England.

Robert Dudley arrives back triumphantly to Windsor Palace, where he is greeted joyfully by Queen Elizabeth. William Cecil sees that Queen Elizabeth is being slowly dominated by the older, more sophisticated man and that she is now unable to make any decision without his assent. Alarmed, William Cecil realizes that he will have to have something done about Robert Dudley, who is fast becoming the power behind the throne, but does not have any time to put anything into action because Queen Elizabeth — at Dudley's request — sends William to Newcastle to broker a peace accord with the French, far away from the court at Windsor where he cannot influence her.

In secret, before he leaves, William Cecil informs her that he is about to have the currency changed, brought in and re-minted but that it must be an absolute secret from everyone, because if it becomes known then the people will start speculating on coins and will ruin the balance of wealth in the country.



Spring 1560, pages 323 - 365 Analysis

In the Spring of 1560 the horror of Robert Dudley as King of England starts to become apparent, as he manages to dominate and manipulate the Queen into making policy decisions before the eyes of everyone at court. In a seeming constant replay of the last season, Robert Dudley again goes back to his wife to try and reconcile a divorce. This time, he is certain that he will have the throne of England and is therefore arrogant and angry at his wife for refusing him. The character of Robert Dudley has finally become a villain in the book, and we can sympathize with Queen Elizabeth who is so head over heels in love that she is unable to stop him.

As we study Elizabeth's character through her apparent inactivity, it is easy to see her as a weak person, unable to have confidence in her own beliefs and far from the fiery, determined youth who we saw in the beginning of the book. We are reminded by William Cecil that Elizabeth has never actually seen a war, or has been at court so long that, in a sense, she truly does not know how to run a country. When all around her have been advisers who have sought to use her for their own ends, we see that the character of Elizabeth is unable to open up and have faith in any of these men and thus has weakened her own confidence. For Elizabeth, Robert Dudley holds such an attraction not merely because of his good looks and her lust for him, but because he appears to be one of the few men who has sought her out for her sake alone, and not because she is the Queen of England.

In the case of Robert, we begin to see his character fall prey to his greatest weakness: that of ambition. Because of his long years being exiled from the court, and from the noble way of life within which he was brought up, Robert has become obsessed with power and cannot help himself abuse it when it is offered to him.



Summer 1560, pages 366 -

Summer 1560, pages 366 - Summary

In the summer of 1560, Cecil is at Newcastle and sends a secret note to Queen Elizabeth talking about the benefits and disadvantages of assassination. Queen Elizabeth understands at once what he means; that an attempt will be made on Mary Guise's life (the French Regent) and she is overjoyed. The negotiations go ahead and then, suddenly, the news of Mary Guise's death arrives and the French forces crumble at Edinburgh. What starts out as a negotiation of France's victory over Scotland suddenly becomes a negotiation over her defeat. William Cecil believes that it is the best piece of political work that he has ever performed.

Hearing wind of this back in Windsor, Robert is outraged that the French have not given up Calais, or paid compensation to the English crown in their defeat. He immediately instructs the queen to write a letter to William, telling him to change the negotiations. Elizabeth, however, is starting to realize that not everything Robert is suggesting might be wise, and so instructs the messenger to get to Newcastle too late to affect the process of the negotiations. When William Cecil eventually arrives home, he is lambasted by the Queen at Robert's behest before the whole Privy Council for not coming back from the negotiations at least with Calais.

William Cecil eventually manages to get Queen Elizabeth on her own, where she tells him that Robert and she are betrothed. Aghast, William Cecil states that she had better start to prepare for her successor, because the Lords and the commoners will rise up against her rather than accept Dudley as their King. He claims that already there are plots to put a certain Katherine Grey on the throne of England, and now the plotters will feel justified for doing so. Alarmed, Elizabeth does not know what to do, and asks for his help in devising a plan to get rid of Robert.

Robert Dudley becomes more confident of his power over the Queen, openly telling her what to do in front of the Privy Council, and gets angry at her when he finds out that she is concealing the fact that she will be minting new coins for the English treasury. He even finally speaks to the Spanish Ambassador on her behalf, pretending to be a king-in-waiting.

William Cecil finally puts his plan into action. One day an unknown man comes to the house of Amy Robsart and kills her by breaking her neck. At the same time, the Queen and Cecil both confide in the Spanish ambassador that they know that Amy, the wife of Robert Dudley, is about to die and then Elizabeth will marry Robert.

As news of Amy's death rocks London, everyone believes that Robert Dudley killed his own wife when in fact he didn't, and Elizabeth commands him to leave the court to save the throne from scandal. A trial is convened and Robert Dudley is found innocent, but he is forever kept at a distance from the throne. At the end of the book, William Cecil



confides in him that he will forever be tarred by this shame, and tries to comfort Robert that at least the throne will continue.

Summer 1560, pages 366 - Analysis

In this, the final chapter of *The Virgin's Lover*, Robert Dudley becomes something of a tyrant in the palace of Windsor, controlling the queen as if they were already married, and taking advantage of her, knowing full well that he can.

The split begins to appear between them when Robert Dudley shows his pride and his anger to the Queen, speaking to the Spanish Ambassador without Elizabeth's consent and effectively usurping her power. Robert Dudley also becomes angry when he finds out that the coinage of the realm is about to be re-minted and that he did not know anything about it. This anger is purely for selfish reasons, since he wants his boxes of underweight coins to be valued at a higher price when the time comes. Queen Elizabeth now realizes the trap that Robert has laid around her, and seeks out Cecil to avert the disaster — especially when she realizes that she will not be able to hold on to the throne, the prize that she has been groomed for and waited for all of her life.

The tragedy of Amy Robsart is that she believed to the end that it was all her fault, that her jealousy was sending her husband away, and that she had to learn to forgive him. In actuality, this quiescent attitude only made it easier for her husband to manipulate her.

It is easy to study the Tudor times through these characters, all as people who are trapped by their society, religion and customs. Amy had no access to allies or friends because of the male view of a wife in the sixteenth century in England, while Elizabeth could not express her own emotions similarly because of what men expected of a Queen at that time.



Characters

Amy Dudley

Amy Dudley, once Amy Robsart, is the long suffering wife of Robert Dudley at the beginning of the book. She was born to a notable Norfolk family, the Robsarts, and is slightly older than her husband. During the course of their courtship, it is revealed that Robert Dudley fell in love with Amy while still a youth and was completely enamored of her, turning away from his family and the wishes of his father to marry her.

What followed was the Dudleys fall from grace and Robert's subsequent imprisonment in the Tower for treason against Queen Mary. Amy stayed with him through all of those dark times, suffering insults and the shame and was forced to return to her stepmother's estate in her poverty. Despite her stepmother, the Lady Robsart, despising her husband, Amy apparently dedicated herself to the farm, learning how to manage it well, and supporting her husband as he sought to regain his position and favor at court.

Amy Dudley is depicted as a simpler soul than her husband, is someone who is uncomplicated by pride or ambition, and instead puts her family, her feelings and her livelihood above all things. She is intensely distrusting of politics and the court - knowing that things can change overnight. Standing in comparison to her husband she seems almost socially inept, since she barely knows how to read or write, and does not understand what is required of a noble from the courts. She herself is intensely aware of her failings, but doesn't seem to understand why a simple life cannot fulfill every need. Instead, she turns towards her faith in her God, following in the Roman Catholic tradition.

Amy Dudley is a tragic figure in *The Virgin's Lover*, because, as she is kept further and further away by her husband's manipulations, she becomes more and more anxious and "needy." She believes every piece of hopeful news — even when others can see how false it is — and ends up suspicious at every other piece of news. By the time it comes to her end, we are waiting for her to turn around and stand up for herself against her husband. In a sense we can see through Amy's situation the same problems that are facing a lot of people in sixteenth century England as they struggle with the changing religion and politics of their times, especially women. Amy is herself a classic symbol of the dis-empowered woman of the late middle ages: women who have no power, no voice, and who can only attain any sense of their own power through their husbands.

Robert Dudley

Robert Dudley, son of the Lord Dudley the Lord Protector of King Edward, was a man who was accustomed to greatness. He grew up beside the kings and queens of England, at a time when the Dudleys were the second family of the realm and, for a



short while, almost became the first. Robert Dudley has seen his father executed as well as most of his brothers, other brothers die in battle and the rest of his family flee England from their persecutors.

As a young man he is imprisoned for his involvement in his father's plot to put one of Henry VIII's wives on the throne (the Lady Jane Grey), and for being a lifelong Protestant during the Catholic Queen Mary's reign. By the time that he comes out of the Tower, Robert Dudley is a changed and humbled man. He has lost everything and his whole family has been disgraced, not believing that the Dudleys will ever rise again. However, still his family and his family name is the most important thing for him. Raised and trained for greatness, it seems that his calm assumption of power and authority is a habit which Robert Dudley can never snap out of. An intensely proud man, Robert Dudley is certainly a man of his times, who is determined and driven to become the premier man in the kingdom either as King, Consort or the most favored at court. We can see that, without his pride and his family name, Robert has nothing to cling to; these are the only things that are keeping Robert afloat in these unsettled times. We can surmise that Robert is actually quite a weak man despite his calm detachment, as shown in his wild and fanciful scheme to become the King of England by marrying Elizabeth.

Through the character of Robert Dudley we can examine all of the failings of Tudor society and sexual politics, and the trap in which the men of his times find themselves. The sense of male greatness and confidence comes from the house and the lands that they might have, the legacy of their family or their friends at court. As a man who starts this story with nothing, Dudley's only way to get some self-respect is to restore his position and family name. However Robert Dudley also exemplifies the worst of male society at that time — the overbearing, the arrogant and the misogynist.

Elizabeth Tudor

Elizabeth Tudor was the second surviving heir to the late Henry VIII, king of England. As a child she was considered one of the favorite's of King Henry, but his successive marriages and unclear line of succession made the choice of his heir difficult. When Queen Mary came to power and restored the Roman Catholic Church, Elizabeth became the enemy of the court, mostly because she represented the return to Protestant rule, so much so that she was known as "The Protestant Princess."

Elizabeth Tudor styles herself on the rule of her father, wanting to be seen as following in the traditions of her father — supporting the Protestant Reformation— and the grand, "gilt and favor" style of reign that Henry Tudor held. She does this partly to remind everyone that she is the rightful heir to the Throne, but also to place herself firmly in the tradition of the golden times represented by the early Tudors. This can be seen not only in her physical looks (the chestnut bronze hair and fair skin), but also in the way she tries to mimic Henry's style of court with grand tournaments, jousts and celebrations.



As a person, Elizabeth Tudor — later the princess Elizabeth and then Queen Elizabeth — is a complicated character in *The Virgin's Lover*. She appears at once as a mischievous and flighty child, eager to be entertained and flirtatious with her male attendants even to the point of falling into a scandalous affair with Robert Dudley, but on the other hand Elizabeth quite shrewdly plays the game of state, playing one suitor off against another to further protect her throne. We must remember that Elizabeth had spent most of her childhood being either groomed to be a princess of the court, or in fear for her life, and so when she finally attains the throne she is threatened once again by her Church revolting against her and threats against her life. Elizabeth, in a sense, never has the opportunity to be a woman and fall in love or care for someone for her own sake. In the story, this opportunity is presented in the form of Robert Dudley, who encourages her to fall in love with him and allows her to feel cared for, loved and attractive.

Although she is portrayed as quite emotionally callous at times (in particular to Jane Dormer, the pregnant ambassador's wife), Elizabeth can be understood as a deeply troubled girl who is unsure of what she should be doing and caught in a web of political machinations. Elizabeth is trying at once to be a good ruler, to further her father's work with the Reformation of England and the Church, as well as wanting to be a free woman. Obviously, not all of these things can be achieved at the same time and some of them have to fail. It is this conflict that characterizes her early life, and the times when she is wantonly scandalous are the times when she is struggling against the expectations of her position.

William Cecil

William Cecil is the Secretary of State for Queen Elizabeth and head of her Privy Council. William had been one of Elizabeth's oldest advisers and friends, and served as a clerk to the Dudley family when the Dudleys were at the height of their power. In short, William Cecil had been at the heart of the Protestant Reformation right from the start and managed to keep clear of accusation and condemnation by his skilful political maneuvering. William Cecil is a mature, married man who, during his time as Secretary of State, builds the magnificent Burghley Hall and manages to keep a good reputation for himself and his family.

William Cecil is a shrewd counselor to Queen Elizabeth, who is surrounded by the problems of the realm from the very first day of her rule. As his skill deepens, he quickly instigates and develops a massive spy network that spreads throughout all of the noble and religious courts of Europe, and uses it to defend the realm and prepare for war. Best seen working behind the scenes, William prefers to head off trouble before it comes rather than face it head on. He, therefore, encourages the Queen to support the Scottish uprising against Mary Guise (Mary Queen of Scots) and to consider a marriage with various suitors to protect her realm. He finds that he has to "manage" Queen Elizabeth as well, presenting her with only partial information at certain times, and often works secretly behind her back (demeaning Robert Dudley for example).



William Cecil, despite his manipulative tactics, is perhaps one of the most likeable characters in *The Virgin's Lover*, since his sole concern is the continuance of the rule of Queen Elizabeth and the defense of the realm. His failings would be considered a lack of understanding Queen Elizabeth's needs as an actual young woman, and his treating her like a token on a chessboard.

Lady Robsart

The Lady Robsart, Amy's stepmother and wife to Lord Robsart, is the matriarch of a lesser known family from Norfolk who has done well through hard work and sacrifice. The Robsarts are presented as a somewhat simple family who believe in hard work and the solid application of good sense: not trusting the appearance, fame and glamor of court but preferring to rise in their own way through labor and production on their farms and estates. The Robsarts had apparently been considered a poor match for the Dudleys by both sides of the marriage of Amy and Robert, but the young couple had been in love. The differences, however, in the respective upbringing and outlook of Amy and Robert begins to show itself through the course of this book and become insurmountable.

Lady Robsart, a widower, is presented as a cruel and strict task mistress. She belittles and scolds her daughter for her poor choice of a husband and her apparent lack of backbone. Instead of supporting her and guiding Amy, the Lady Robsart spends her time berating her daughter and further undermining her confidence. She also absolutely loathes Robert, whom she sees as a fool fit for nothing apart from pretty compliments. When the couple has to live with her after they are disgraced, Lady Robsart actively works to get Robert to leave her house.

King Philip of Spain

King Philip of Spain is encountered first as Queen Mary's husband before Elizabeth comes to the throne. Old Queen Mary chooses King Philip so that her reign will be better accepted by the old families at court, protect England against the French, and further cement their joint Catholic cause. King Philip is depicted as a grand and powerful ruler, and somewhat of an opportunist. As the King of Spain and the Netherlands, he hopes to add England to his collection of realms through a successful marriage with Queen Mary hopefully bearing a child.

Apparently a cunning man, it is known that King Philip had taken a shine to Elizabeth after it became clear that his own wife was having troubles conceiving a child. His favoritism had kept Elizabeth from being executed during her teenage years, and later, directly led to his love letters seeking to be betrothed to Elizabeth. He also appears as quite a self-centered man, since he "drops" Queen Mary as soon as it becomes clear that she will die soon, and only uses England for his troops in a foreign war in the Netherlands. As soon as it becomes clear that Elizabeth is not seriously interested in his hand for marriage, he similarly disappears from the scene.



Queen Mary Tudor

Queen Mary Tudor was King Henry VIII's first daughter, whose succession to the throne was disputed by King Henry because he wanted his later wives to take the throne. Queen Mary, however, was the first child of King Henry's first wife, and thus deemed by the Catholic Church and half of the country as the rightful heir to the throne. Queen Mary Tudor, later known as Bloody Mary, was set aside by King Henry as he married and divorced and remarried several times. This led to a lifelong enmity between Queen Mary and the rest of the Tudor descendants.

Queen Mary Tudor found support in her Catholic faith and tried to roll back the Reformation powered by her father and to halt the spread of Protestantism in her country. This led to the Inquisition in England and many beheadings and burnings of Protestant heretics. Queen Mary managed to fill her church with pro-Vatican Bishops, thus causing a problem for Elizabeth when she finally came to power.

During her life, Queen Mary was expected to produce an heir to King Philip of Spain, thus uniting the realms of Spain, England and the Netherlands. This never occurred, however, as Queen Mary grew older and, after a number of miscarriages, she started to develop a tumor in her womb and was declared barren or infertile.

Queen Mary is presented only a few times in the book, both as a bitter and weary woman, who undoubtedly is in constant pain and has been in conflict for most of her life. When she grants a pardon to Robert Dudley, she has just been left by her husband King Philip and is very weary, knowing that she is probably like to die soon. At this time in her life, Queen Mary seems to be weary of the whole game of thrones and just wants some rest, which is why she has sympathy for Robert's position as one of the few surviving heirs to his family, and who himself has been brought so low by changing fortunes.

Laetitia Knollys

Laetitia Knollys is the daughter of Elizabeth's cousin Catherine and Frances Knollys, who comes to be a hand maiden and courtier in Queen Elizabeth's court when Elizabeth attains the throne. Avowed Protestants, the Knollys had fled to Germany to escape persecution under Bloody Mary's reign, and return to wealth, position and power under the Protestant Princess.

Laetitia Knollys is remarkable in the fact that she looks the spitting image of Elizabeth, but prettier — so much so that it is apparently obvious that Catherine herself must be one of Henry VIII's children but never recognized. This could cause problems, since it would mean that Catherine and Laetitia themselves had a right to the line of succession. This is a fact that is never pressed by the Knollys and never claimed, since they must consider it safer to be a member of Elizabeth's court than a rival.

Laetitia is beautiful, young, and mischievous. She spends her time gossiping in the court, and passing information on to William Cecil. As one of the Queen's confidantes,



she guesses or knows about the affair that Queen Elizabeth is having with Robert Dudley, and revels in the salacious gossip.

William Pickering

William Pickering, a wealthy and handsome young Englishman, is one of Elizabeth's childhood friends from the time when she was a young girl and not in direct danger from Queen Mary Tudor. It is rumored that there was an affair or a romance during their youth, and when he arrives back on the scene William Pickering captures her heart once more. Elizabeth ignores all other men and suitors for her hand and instead spends all of her time with William Pickering, until it becomes obvious that she must choose a husband to defend her realm. During this emotional confusion Robert Dudley makes his move and William Pickering leaves the court, apparently upset and angry. It is learned from the lords of the Privy Council that William Pickering had been encouraged to stay by them as an alternate candidate to Robert Dudley, because they despise Dudley.

Mary Guise, Mary Queen of Scots

Mary Guise appears not as a direct character in the book but more as a constant threat to Queen Elizabeth's reign. Mary Guise is currently betrothed to the Dauphin of France, who is the heir to the French throne, and so is expected to become the next Consort-Queen of France. Mary Guise is a Catholic princess with a claim to the English throne who is being harbored by some of the noble families in Scotland before she can make an attempt at an invasion of England, backed by the French. Mary is talked about as a threat and as a horror for Protestant England, and already apparently bears the English coat of arms as a part of her banner. During the course of the book she is facing an uprising of the Protestant Scottish Lords against her rule, and this uprising is tacitly supported by William Cecil and money sent by Elizabeth's treasury.



Objects/Places

Whitehall Palace

Whitehall Palace is the palace Elizabeth chooses from which to rule, since it was also the home of Henry VIII's court. It is a grand and huge collection of buildings which are very easy to get lost within, and contains grounds, parks, arenas and gardens. Of the characters, Robert Dudley is the only of the early court to remember Whitehall Palace well, since the Dudleys were one of the few families who were in favor. It also has within it secret rooms and secret passageways that Elizabeth uses for her secret assignments with Robert Dudley.

The Dairy Mews at Kew Gardens

The Dairy Mews is a fairly small cottage on the grounds of Kew (next to the palace), which Elizabeth grants to Robert Dudley at the same time that she awards him the Order of the Garter. It is a lovely, quaint house with attendant gardens and servants that Robert Dudley uses as his private getaway. Queen Elizabeth flees to the Dairy Mews when she fears that she is being followed and about to be assassinated.

Calais

Calais is an English city on the French coast and has long been an English territory from when it was first captured many years ago. It is said in the book that the people of Calais paid English taxes, spoke the English language and had English customs. It is lost by King Philip during his campaigns against the French, and lost in particular by Robert Dudley when the French armies overwhelm the sea port.

Stanfield Hall

Stanfield Hall is the home of the Robsarts in Norfolk. It is a fairly small house as far as manor houses go, but with large working farmlands.

The Privy Chambers of Queen Elizabeth

It is deemed to be the highest accolade for a courtier or a visiting diplomat to be allowed access to the Privy Chambers of Queen Elizabeth. It is the domain of Queen Elizabeth and select ladies-in-waiting and hand-maidens, from where she takes breakfast and amuses herself with performances, poetry and music. It is here that Robert Dudley is summoned when Elizabeth finally begins the affair, and also the place where William Pickering spends a lot of his stay at court.



The Love Letters from (and to) Philip of Spain

During the early part of her reign, Queen Elizabeth and King Philip of Spain conduct a long and flirtatious letter correspondence to each other, where the King of Spain constantly tells the Queen of England how much he loves her and respects her. These letters are received with amusement by Elizabeth and her ladies in waiting, who know that it is just a matter of diplomacy.

The Spy Letters from William Cecil

Throughout *The Virgin's Lover*, Secretary of State William Cecil receives and sends many letters to his contacts throughout Europe. They bear with them the news of the proclamations of the Pope, as well as the news from France and the Scottish Uprising.

The Painting of the Archduke

The oil painting of the archduke is sent to Queen Elizabeth for her consideration as a possible betrothal. It is much considered and much laughed at by the ladies in waiting.

First Step

First Step is Robert Dudley's first horse that he wins in a gamble during the time that he is disgraced. A very good horseman, rider and trainer, Robert Dudley sees First Step as his first step back up the ladder of society and return of his natural skill. The death of First Step can be seen as a bad omen for Robert Dudley because on her very first outing (fighting with King Philip of Spain's forces at Calais), First Step is killed by cannon shot.



Themes

Ambition

Ambition is a constant theme throughout the novel, as each character is driven by their own desires into conflict through the course of the events of the plot. The theme of ambition can be studied particularly by looking at Robert Dudley's character and his relationship with his wife Amy. During the period depicted by the book (Tudor England), it is distantly possible for a person to be raised to greatness by being spotted by a wealthy patron or proving indispensable to the throne. It is equally possible, however, for a person to be brought low by losing the favor of the court or by being caught plotting or supporting the wrong candidate for the throne. Robert Dudley, in particular, is hounded by his lack of status when once he was a member of the second greatest family in England, and his ambition arguably blinds him to all of the good things that he already has in his life (his ever loving wife Amy, and his remarkable skill at training horses). Instead of concentrating on developing these things, Robert Dudley's ambition speeds him to Elizabeth's service in the hopes of attaining a high position. When he achieves that it doesn't stop there, however, because Robert wants more more power and authority, rising in his social status to become Queen Elizabeth's trusted confidante, and eventually attaining the Royal Order of the Garter and granted land and title. Still not contented, Robert Dudley seeks to rise to become the first man in all of England as the Queen's husband.

For the other characters, ambition plays a greater and lesser part. In particular Amy, who seems to have no ambition or drive for glory, appears to be completely at odds with her times and her new social position, which is all centered around attaining favor from the Throne. Amy's lack of ambition distracts and annoys Robert, and finally drives them apart. In contrast to this, the ambition of Queen Elizabeth can be understood as a desire to be a normal young woman, able to freely love where and whom she wants. This ambition similarly blinds her as she brings scandal down on her rule through her actions.

A Constant Heart

The theme of "A Constant Heart" means the expression of fidelity, loyalty and faithfulness seen in some of the characters during the course of the narrative. Best expressed by Amy Dudley, "A Constant Heart" shows itself in the ways that she is always faithful and loyal to her husband, even when rumors of his affair are flying across the entire country. Although faithfulness and loyalty are prime virtues and show strength of character, during the Tudor Period this very theme had come under question because of the late King Henry VIII splitting from the traditional marriage laws of the Catholic faith and divorcing many wives, taking many more and changing his affections. The Tudor period is one of the first times in history when it had become socially acceptable to have differences in one's romantic feelings, to change your heart and to



choose a new life for yourself. This conflict is seen the most in the shifting affections of Queen Elizabeth, who first considers William Pickering, and then Robert Dudley, and a host of other suitors.

This does come with scandal and drawbacks however. Elizabeth and Dudley are scandalized by their affair and start to lose the support of their friends and, sadly, their actions directly lead to the death of Amy Dudley at the end of the book.

However, "A Constant Heart" is not always such a virtue. Old Queen Mary had the fairy tale marriage to a powerful King (Philip of Spain) but, even though she was constant throughout her life, was dropped as soon as it became apparent that she could not bear a child. For Amy too, her unquestioning loyalty to her unfaithful husband can be seen as a weakness halfway through the book and, instead of starting to question Robert Dudley's character, she blames herself for her jealous thoughts and her constant loyalty makes her appear spineless.

Religious Freedom

Religious Freedom is another theme that plays a major part in the whole novel. A backdrop to the events of the story is the conflict between the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Church of Rome. The Protestant Reformation didn't first begin in England, but was a whole European-wide movement that was centered around the Bible being able to be read by the common man and not written in Latin, as well as demands that the ultimate religious authority not be the Pope but rather the common elected leaders of men. The Protestant Reformation was partially championed by Henry VIII because he saw it as his chance to free himself from the authority of Rome and to be free to marry whomever he chose, leading to the Reformed Church of England.

During the time of the Tudors, the Reformed Church of England was supported by both Catholics and Protestants, Old Queen Mary staffing it with Catholics and making it swear allegiance to the Pope, with the new Queen Elizabeth drawing it much closer to the Protestant cause.

Paradoxically, during the events of the book both Catholics and the Protestants in England had been seeking religious freedom from the other, the Protestants seeking their savior in Queen Elizabeth and the Catholic characters trying to practice their ceremonies without fear of persecution. The Reformed Church of England that forms the backdrop of the love story in this novel is the vehicle through which both sides are seeking their freedom of expression.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is third person intimate style, always from outside of the character, but with special reference and following one character during a scene. The shifting subjects of these perspectives are Amy, Robert, William Cecil and Elizabeth Tudor, with the most emphasis being placed upon Amy and Robert.

The narrative is set up as a contrast between the life of Amy Dudley, her thoughts and feelings, and those of her husband Robert at court. On one hand we are presented with a rural narrative in the case of Amy, full of simple feelings and natural things such as milking, herding and estate management while the other main narrative, delivered by her husband, is more urban, social, and concerned with the court. These different points of view best show how the social whirl of the court is a world all to itself and is removed from most of the rest of life in England at the time.

Through concentrating on the four main characters — and Robert and Amy in particular — the reader is forced to contrast the characters against each other, their needs, wants and their ambitions. The author uses these different points of view to examine the Tudor dynasty, and in particular the young Elizabeth I, one of England's most beloved Queens of history. Philippa Gregory is using the relationship of Amy and Dudley as a plot device to examine what the queen must have been like, understanding her through the reactions of the people around her as much as from her deeds in person.

Setting

The main setting of *The Virgin's Lover* is Whitehall Palace, where the young Queen Elizabeth is trying to create her noble court. After that we also see the newly built Richmond Palace, the royal parks and some of the lordly houses in London. These courtly settings comprise half of the book and contrast sharply with the rural settings that Amy Dudley finds herself visiting at the behest of her husband. In fact, throughout the entire course of the novel we hardly ever see the "common" or poorer districts, towns and villages. Instead, the point of view gazes squarely upon the richer families and estates of Tudor England.

Even among these wealthier places, there is a stark difference between the sorts of opulence and magnificence in the royal settings and the country manor houses.

Language and Meaning

Throughout the entire novel, the language used is an appropriate approximation for the time of Tudor England. Obviously, Philippa Gregory doesn't use all of the archaic spelling or phraseology that would be almost incomprehensible to the modern reader,



but instead drops a few turns of phrases and words (like "carillon" or "burgher") that indicate the time period. In this way, the novel represents the fact that it is a modern transformation of a historical tale, since there are words, habits, customs and phrases that would almost certainly be used back then that we would find it hard to decipher now (think of some of Shakespeare's allusions).

Instead, the author has settled for a more formal and "courtly" mode of speech for most characters, and particularly those at court or in front of a monarch. This involves the proper use of titles, and a rather stiff sort of communication between the characters, as if the language itself were an art form that should be used and played with.

The only exceptions to this are the intimate conversations between Elizabeth and Robert. During his work as a courtier, Robert is expected to flatter and impress the Queen, but at the times when they are alone Robert drops his tone and speaks with more emotional intimacy, an almost scandalous offense.

Structure

The structure of *The Virgin's Lover* is twelve "Seasons" that all take place between the years of 1557 and 1560, the period of Queen Elizabeth I's succession to the Royal Throne. The use of a season instead of a chapter heading serves to remind the reader that this is set in a time where it was much more difficult to know the exact hour of the day, but easier to tell the month and season by counting a calendar. This seasonal approach also serves to give the appearance that the book is written somewhat in the style of the diaries and letters of the time, giving the reader the "mood" of Tudor England.

Inside these broad seasons a large number of often quite small events happen. These are narrated in scenes with paragraph breaks throughout the whole book, making a chain of occurrences that eventually leads you to the end of the book. This is a highly entertaining way of reading a book, since each scene is important and gives the reader another piece of the plot or point of drama to think about, but can also lead to confusion. There are no big dramatic endings or beginnings to the scenes and seasons. In this way, the book can be difficult to read because the scenes have no natural resolution. However, this could be an attempt on behalf of the author to present a more lifelike portrait of Tudor England, by sharing meaningful moments in the characters' lives, but, understandably, having no cast iron conclusion, much in the same way that our own real lives evolve.



Quotes

"How could it start so well, in such wealth and glory as it did, and end in hardship and loneliness like this?"

Amy, Autumn 1558, page 3

"What I don't know is how to make a solid Roman Catholic Church Crown a Protestant Princess."

William Cecil, Winter 1558-59, page 43

"Elizabeth would never marry against policy, whatever her desires."

Robert, Spring 1559, page 117

"He had thought that she could be a loyal and effective partner in the rise of his family to greatness. He did not realise that she would always be the contented daughter of Sir John Robsart."

Robert, Spring 1559, page 137

"'Grandeur!'...'Are you still running after grandeur? Will you never learn your lesson?'"

Amy, Summer 1559, page 187

"I have failed in my love of my husband, I have set my judgement above his."

Amy, Summer 1559, page 231

"'I am your friend for life, I am your lover forever, I am your husband before the sight of God.'"

Robert speaking to Elizabeth, Autumn 1559, page 265.

"Every time I pluck at it with jealousy it breaks out afresh. I will make myself forgive him, I will make myself forgive her."

Amy, Winter 1559-60, page 291

"'It is a nonsense, husband. You will make yourselves a laughing stock. It is a sin against God, it is a sin against man, and it is an insult to me.'"

Amy, Spring 1560, page 333

"'She is his wife... and she has done nothing wrong. She is not rebelling, she is just refusing to be cast aside.'"

Lizzie Oddingsell to her husband, Summer 1560, page 402

"'Would you leave your throne for him?' 'No!' She exclaimed passionately. 'Not for any man. Not for anything. Never.'"

Elizabeth talking to William Cecil. Summer 1560, page 417

"'Why kill Amy, my wife, if not to set me free?...'"

Robert, Summer 1560, page 481



Topics for Discussion

Discuss Robert Dudley's ambition. Is it blind? Is Robert foolhardy for what he is attempting to do? Is ambition always a bad thing?

Why does Queen Elizabeth feel that she has to take a husband?

Why does Robert Dudley treat his wife, Amy, so badly?

What item does Robert Dudley catch and what does it symbolize at the St. George's Day Celebration?

Why does every Bishop in the land, at first, refuse to anoint and crown the princess Elizabeth to make her Queen?

Should Robert Dudley and Queen Elizabeth have gotten married?

Why was Robert Dudley's horse called First Step in The Virgin's Lover?

Contrast the strengths and weaknesses of Amy Dudley and Queen Elizabeth Tudor.