



The Confessions of Catherine de Medici

C.W. Gortner

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The truth is, not one of us is innocent. We all have sins to confess.

So reveals Catherine de Medici, the last legitimate descendant of her family's illustrious line. Expelled from her native Florence, Catherine is betrothed to Henri, son of François I of France. In an unfamiliar realm, Catherine strives to create a role for herself through her patronage of the famous clairvoyant Nostradamus and her own innate gift as a seer. But in her fortieth year, Catherine is widowed, left alone with six young children in a kingdom torn apart by the ambitions of a treacherous nobility. Relying on her tenacity, wit, and uncanny gift for compromise, Catherine seizes power, intent on securing the throne for her sons, unaware that if she is to save France, she may have to sacrifice her ideals, her reputation, and the secret of her embattled heart.

The Confessions of Catherine de Medici Details

Date : Published May 13th 2010 by Ballantine Books; 1 edition (first published 2010)

ISBN :

Author : C.W. Gortner

Format : Kindle Edition 417 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Cultural, France, Italy

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From Reader Review The Confessions of Catherine de Medici for online ebook

Alice Poon says

After watching in 2014 the first season of the TV historical fantasy romance series “Reign” on CW channel, I was hooked. I didn’t miss the second and third season. It was this TV series that spurred my interest in the historical character Catherine de Medici.

This engaging novel is the third one I’ve read so far by the author C. W. Gortner, and he didn’t disappoint. With his mesmerizing prose I was quickly transported to tumultuous 16th century France, rife with bloody religious wars between Catholics and Protestants and treacherous court machinations in the royal families’ wrangling for power.

As a foreign teenage bride of undistinguished lineage arriving from Italy to marry a sophisticated French prince Henri II, whom she had never met before, Catherine de Medici was doomed to have rough beginnings in her adopted country. Soon she discovered that her new husband’s beloved mistress was the true mistress of Henri’s household and his only true love. When her childless state started to threaten her marital bond, she resorted to using the black arts to help with her fertility.

After becoming the Dauphine, Catherine was able to sire a number of children consecutively, three of whom would become King of France in tandem. During her second son’s reign (Charles IX), she got mired in a noxious scheme to kill several Protestant (or Huguenot) leaders, one of whom had once been her lover and who she believed had betrayed her. The scheme eventually got out of control and led to what is historically known as the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, during which several thousands of Huguenots were murdered in Paris and beyond. The Catholic nobles led by the usurping Guise family put the whole blame on Catherine, who always showed tolerance towards the Huguenots and preferred peace to strife. From then on, she and her reigning sons would be caught up in the never-ending feud between the Catholics and the Huguenots, until the time when she had the Guises killed and subdued.

As much as some of her actions might be deemed ruthless, it would appear they were occasioned by untenable situations brought about by the opposing religious factions’ hostile stances. Were her choices motivated by her thirst for power, or just her zeal to protect her cubs and the royal lineage at all costs?

In the reported words of Henri IV: *“What could a woman do, left by the death of her husband with five little children on her arms, and two families of France who were thinking of grasping the crown – our own (the Bourbons) and the Guises? I’m surprised she didn’t do worse.”*

Gortner has successfully spun a believable yarn of one of history’s most maligned royal women.

Orsolya says

I would love to teach a course on historical female royal figures. One of my lessons would be comprised of females who have a bad reputation and I would have assignments to compare and contrast these women,

their actions, and social perceptions; to that of strong women today. Who would these women in my lesson plan be? Mary Tudor, Mary Stuart (Queen of Scots), Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen Isabella, Juana the Mad, and this woman: Catherine de Medici.

Although I view Gortner's work to be occasionally hit or miss, it is mostly hit and *The Confessions of Catherine de Medici* certainly fits into that category. I have read TONS of historical fiction books including texts on Catherine and this is one of the best works to ever truly bring her alive. I honestly felt like I was sitting right there with Catherine de Medici as she told me her life style. Talk about really feeling the emotions portrayed in the book: I was ready to kick Diane de Poitiers' booty!

An exceptional piece of work not only in the entertainment fictional realm but also in the detailed and informative aspect of historical fiction. This work will inspire you to read more about Catherine and seek out more information.

A must read for history buffs!

Yin Chien ?? says

The opening line of *The Confessions of Catherine de Medici* is simple yet powerful: "The truth is, none of us are innocent. We all have sins to confess."

Well, I have to say that I'm glad I had the chance to read this book, because it's amazing. Before reading this novel, I knew nothing of Catherine de Medici. To make sure that I have a vague idea of what I'm reading, I googled about Catherine de Medici. Turns out, she's a prominent historical figure in France. To be precise, she's the mother of the last three Valois kings of France, a major force in French politics during the 30 years of Roman Catholic-Huguenot wars and the instigator of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Her acts earned her the nicknames of Madame La Serpente and The Black Queen among many others.

At a young age, Catherine de Medici was married off to King Henry II of France. She was optimistic towards her new life in her newly-adopted country, but her optimism did not last for long when she realized that her husband had no interest in her at all and preferred to shower favours on his chief mistress, Diane de Poitiers, who was about twice his age. Even though her husband never neglected their utmost duty - to produce heirs to the throne, she was overwhelmed by loneliness and sadness when she learned that to him, she was merely a breeding mare and nothing else.

After her husband died, Catherine acted as the regent on behalf of her son and held great power. However, she feared that the noble figures in court would trigger an uprising to overthrow the current ruler of France - the royals. She constantly faced complex and daunting problems - the conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants being the main problem. Desperate to keep the Valois monarchy on the throne, she set various policies to ease the tension between the two conflicting parties in religion. However, when things got out of control, she was determined to protect the throne of France at all costs.

To many, she may seem to be the representation of evil itself, but *The Confessions of Catherine de Medici* deems otherwise. Under Gortner's expert pen, we see a hidden facade of the queen herself; we observe the heartaches, the pain, the despair and the sadness of a queen who struggles alone to defend the throne of

France. The Confessions of Catherine de Medici is a powerful appeal for the queen, who, with the burden of the throne of France on her shoulders, is forced to do what is best for the country - even if it means betraying her own heart.

Tea Jovanovi? says

Da li zbog prevoda ili zato što sam ?itala mnogo bolje napisane istorijske romane ova knjiga mi je najve?im delom bila dosadna i bledunjava... Dešava se, kad toliko mnogo ?itam i zbog posla, da mi neke knjige budu dosadne ili loše a ?itaoci se oduševu... :)

Miss says

Women are weak.

Women can't rule.

After reading a biography like this, it is impossible to believe these stereotypes again.

Catherine de Medici is a very extraordinary historical figure.

From an early age, she had to face many challenges and never seemed to have a happy childhood. But she went on, left home and married. Sadly, the marriage brought just pain; Catherine suffered from miscarriages, unloving, disallowance, becoming the Queen - from wars, loved ones' deaths. Over the years she was humiliated, hated, called a witch, issued by friends, even by a daughter. However, a woman never gave up, never left France or her kids. The fight lasted whole her life. She won everything.

I admire Catherine's personality. She was duplex, did some terrible things but also was a caring mother and a wise queen. She loved animals, wrote. It can be difficult for some to believe, but under the mask, there was a sensitive person. With a beautiful soul.

The story, of course, focused on France lifestyle and relations with neighbour countries too. There isn't much to say about that because when you think more, similar problems are in the nowadays world. Different religions, a desire of power, Brother kills brother.

Was this book inspiring? Absolutely. I learned that it doesn't matter if you are a queen or a king, a woman or a man

"we all have sins to confess".

Lucy says

THE CONFESSIONS OF CATHERINE DE MEDICI, by C.W. Gortner is by far the clearest, out-of-the-box-take on this usually overly vilified queen of France. This in depth biography-type novel reveals a Catherine that not many people know- and that in itself is incredibly original as well as refreshing.

The Catherine in Gortner's book has been researched to the max- and although the author took the liberty of slightly altering names and events for creativity and flowing purposes (this merely avoided the encumbrance of an historical index of names appearing just for the sake of accuracy- and I appreciated that!), the history is

impeccably spot-on. Bravo for a novel that stuck to its essence while bringing us so much more! How can this Catherine be so different? Well, for one, *THE CONFESSIONS OF CATHERINE DE MEDICI*, portrays an all-around complete Catherine; woman, mother, queen, lover, friend, ruler, patriot, and ultimate monarch. The emotions alone, that each of these roles entail are enormous and not always easy to convey in a novel; especially when written in the first person. Magically, Gortner achieves this to perfection. Is it possible to love Catherine, when history has done everything possible to morph her into an absolute monster? When you read the how's and why's of Catherine's actions, you begin to understand the person behind the story. It's often easier to hold on to shock images that create an impact effect rather than to delve into the intricacies of the history itself. After reading Gortner's magnificent novel, I understood the history so much better.

The details in Catherine's life, France, her children, the political situation, the religion!- all in flawless account, like layers of a collage with Catherine woven into its web, this story opens up a whole new dimension into France's ruling family of the time. And, if after reading this novel you still can't find it in you to love Catherine- I guarantee you'll begin to sympathize with her in ways you've never imagined. So many facets to this woman: Catherine was headstrong for her nation, yet showed vulnerability in the face of love. She kept strong for her husband and endured the belittlement and embarrassment caused by his mistress and that whole awkward situation. She arranged marriages for her offspring with the nation in mind- yet had immeasurable love for them and an acceptance of their choices which was unparalleled of her time (Her love for her son, Henri, poured unconditionally-beautiful!). Catherine had an uncanny foresight for great things, but sadly never had anyone to completely share her own doubts, needs, fears and- love. The enlightenment that no religion should divide a country and that France was all her people, not only Catholics-this too was grand.

I have to admit that I never truly believed the Jezebel portrayal, so I was especially glad to read this fantastic novel which revealed Catherine as a woman of immense substance. I now see Catherine as a woman and ruler who sacrificed all for the ultimate good of France- a huge responsibility which she took charge of with all her might. Her focus never deviating from her purpose –no matter the cost.

I happen to love this quote from the book;

Catherine while on her deathbed:

"...I've had ample opportunity to reflect on this unseen entity who guides our path and to ponder why he has seen fit to test me so. Have I not struggled as much as any other for my blood? Others live fewer years; accomplish a mere fraction of what I have; and yet they sit enthroned with halos about their brows, while I sink like a villain in my own calumny.

As I wait the inevitable, I see the dead...my sometimes enemies and accomplices, each martyr to their cause. Important as they were in life, through death they have become legend.

And I ask myself, What legend will history inscribe for me?

Read Catherine as you've never read before – It's time history got a dusting-Thank you C.W. Gortner for polishing it to a shine.

EXCELLENT!

Jennifer says

I had a hard time connecting with Catherine. I couldn't hear her voice in my head. Well what I did hear was rather hollow, had little passion. It was just ho hum. I expected more. So much was happening at this time. Elizabeth Tudor was queen of England, there was huge unrest in France. And she met Nostradamus. I expected a grander story, more intrigue and complication. I found it hard to have real sympathy for Catherine. I was surprised at her open mindedness about religion and that she had a loved pet dog. I hope that was all real and true. This was well written and I am sure well researched. It just was off for me.

Christie says

This book has got to be one of the best royal fiction books I have read. Though the book covers many years of Catherine de Medici's life, the pacing is good. I had to force myself to put this book down because it held my attention so well. This was also a refreshing read after reading Mary Queen of Scots by Roderick Graham. Mary spent her life whining about how everyone had done her wrong, Catherine de Medici took charge and made what she wanted happen. I plan to read a biography about her to see how accurate this novel was.

The main problem I had with this novel was that near the end it got harder to tell what year we were in. At one point, 10 years passed over a few pages and there were no transitions to let the reader know this was happening. Some people may not be bothered by this but I am one that needs to have a frame of reference for when a story is taking place. Other than that this book was very good.

I enjoyed the character development in this book. Catherine goes from a young girl to an elderly woman in the novel and her voice matures throughout the novel. It rings very true. I very much enjoyed this book and recommend this to anyone who enjoys royal fiction and biographical novels.

Reading Scavenger Hunt: Three (or more) generations of the same family

Cher says

3.5 stars - It was really good.

I have been called murderess and opportunist, savior and victim. And along the way, become far more than was ever expected of me, even if loneliness was always present, like a faithful hound at my heels. The truth is, not one of us is innocent. We all have sins to confess."

This was an easy to read (and get lost in), informative novel about Catherine de Medici. While I feel like I now know more about her than I did going in, I also want to read more books about her now. This will likely also lead me on a road to other books by involved characters, such as her daughter Margot, Mary Queen of Scots, and Nostradamus. The more you know, the more you realize you don't know....

Favorite Quote: To be a woman alone in this world requires every weapon you possess, every last bit of strength and endurance. You cut away pieces of yourself without realizing it, until you have everything and nothing at the same time.

First Sentence: I am not a sentimental woman.

Allie says

A really good read, I enjoyed this one and it made Catherine appear human as opposed to evil personified that she is often portrayed as. Well written and nicely researched, I'm looking forward to more books by this author.

Amy Bruno says

Catherine de Medici has been called many names throughout history: The Italian Woman, Madame Serpent, Jezebel, the Merchant's Daughter and the Black Queen. Now C.W. Gortner gives us another name to call her - woman.

The Catherine portrayed by Gortner is quite different than in previous novels I've read of her by Jean Plaidy (Catherine de Medici trilogy) and Karen Haper (Courtesan). As with Juana la Loca in The Last Queen, Gortner obliterates what we think we know about these amazing, yet controversial women and brings to life the humanity within them, making them so real that you can't but help feel empathy. Or if not empathy, then at least you can understand the motives behind their actions, even if their actions aren't fathomable.

Having been bred with the knowledge that she was the one hope remaining to the survival of the Medici name, Catherine would forever remain loyal to her family and fight for them to her last breath. She was a woman married off to a man (future King Henry II of France) who loved another, who bore him 10 children and was forced to concede everything to her husband's mistress (Diane de Poitiers), even her children. She was a woman who after the death of her husband fought tooth and nail to keep the throne for her sons, in a country strife with religious war and a starving populace. Catherine could hold her ground with any man, but there was a softer side to her also. A side that just wanted to be loved as a woman and not as a queen. She was also a lover of animals, which is something very dear to this readers' heart!

The Confessions of Catherine de Medici is magnificently written historical fiction. Gortner never fails to amaze me with his understanding of women, research and accuracy and his seemingly-effortless writing talent makes this novel a must-read-again for me!! I am waiting with bated breath for his next novel on Isabella of Castile - another fascinating woman in history.

Jennifer says

4.5 stars

This is one of the best HF's I've ever read. I was hooked from the very beginning, couldn't put it down and didn't want it to end.

The novel starts out with Catherine as a young girl in Italy, leads to her marriage in France to Henri (the second son of King Francis I), her role as the Dauphine, as the Queen of France and then finally as the Queen Mother. She stops at nothing to keep her family and country safe.

I'm so thankful that this was my introduction to Catherine de Medici, her life and the other major players in

France at the time. C.W. Gortner brought Spain and France alive for me and had me constantly looking up the people, the places and the battles, wanting to learn all I could. And how refreshing to read a historical novel in which I actually don't know the outcome. I had no idea what was going to come next and although the Tudors and England will always be my favorites, I have found a new love for the French royals, as well.

This may be my first read on Catherine de Medici and the first book I've read by C.W. Gortner but it won't be my last of either.

B the BookAddict says

My laptop ate my review!

Loved the book. 4★

C.W. says

The truth is, none of us are innocent. We all have sins to confess.

So reveals Catherine de Medici in this brilliantly imagined novel about one of history's most powerful and controversial women. To some she was the ruthless queen who led France into an era of savage violence. To others she was the passionate savior of the French monarchy. Acclaimed author C. W. Gortner brings Catherine to life in her own voice, allowing us to enter into the intimate world of a woman whose determination to protect her family's throne and realm plunged her into a lethal struggle for power.

The last legitimate descendant of the illustrious Medici line, Catherine suffers the expulsion of her family from her native Florence and narrowly escapes death at the hands of an enraged mob. While still a teenager, she is betrothed to Henri, son of François I of France, and sent from Italy to an unfamiliar realm where she is overshadowed and humiliated by her husband's lifelong mistress. Ever resilient, Catherine strives to create a role for herself through her patronage of the famous clairvoyant Nostradamus and her own innate gift as a seer. But in her fortieth year, Catherine is widowed, left alone with six young children as regent of a kingdom torn apart by religious discord and the ambitions of a treacherous nobility.

Relying on her tenacity, wit, and uncanny gift for compromise, Catherine seizes power, intent on securing the throne for her sons. She allies herself with the enigmatic Protestant leader Coligny, with whom she shares an intimate secret, and implacably carves a path toward peace, unaware that her own dark fate looms before her—a fate that, if she is to save France, will demand the sacrifice of her ideals, her reputation, and the passion of her embattled heart.

From the fairy-tale châteaux of the Loire Valley to the battlefields of the wars of religion to the mob-filled streets of Paris, *The Confessions of Catherine de Medici* is the extraordinary untold journey of one of the most maligned and misunderstood women ever to be queen.

Chrissie says

NO SPOILERS!!

I have finished the book and want to say very clearly that this is a wonderful book. For me the the latter half is much better than the first, but you need the first to get acquainted with the characters. I did come to empathize with Catherine. It just took me a while. My sole reservation about this book is that love is poorly portrayed. This is not a romance novel. It is full of action and murder and poisoning and family bruhaha. You think you've got family problems. Forget it. Your problems are a piece of cake compared to the Royal House of France during the 1500s. Nevertheless, you will recognize disfunctions that can occur in any family.

I praise the author for explaining clearly a difficult time period and for his ability to bring this time period to life. If someone should mention the Bartholomew Massacre or the Huguenots or the Guise family or Mary Stuart or Diane de Poitiers or Henri de Navarre and Queen Jeanne d'Albert or Philip II of Spain, François I and II or Nostradamus and many many others, after reading this book, you will understand who they were and what they did and why. Heavens, I forgot Gaspard de Coligny. Don't forget him!!! The Tudors and the Bourbon family, yes they are part of this too. So if it takes a while to know all these people, be a little patient, at least more patient than I was. The author does a magnificent job of teaching you all this. You do not even need a pad of paper and pencil. It does not matter to me that the romance portrayed in the novel did not work for me. I promise you, by reading this book you will learn a lot, and you will enjoy the exciting history that it portrays. Other books will be much more interesting having read this first. So four stars it is.

There is an informative author's note at the end. The author's interpretation of the known facts is convincing, and I appreciate that he takes the time to explain his interpretation to the reader.

Wow, Part Three is action packed! I sure am glad there is a family tree in the front. How many Henris are there?! The kids grow up quickly and are married off, always to promote political ties. That is history. Historical romance is really not my cup of tea, and there is too much of that here. I feel the same when the theme concerns occult beliefs. Some of the episodes are so terribly predictable. The different historical events are presented in a quick and neat manner. Not terribly much depth..... I hope the book improves. On to Part Four.

Through Part Two: Naked as a Babe (page 101)

Having read through part two, I am quite disappointed. I have no complaints with the presentation of the historical facts. My complaint is that I do not believe the emotions expressed by Catherine. I am told she loves France and King François and that she feels physical attraction to her absentee husband Henri, but the author has not made me believe that these emotions could really exist. Below I will give specific reasons for my thoughts.

As a young woman of fourteen when she first arrived in France Catherine emphasizes how she misses home, Italy. In one sentence she says she has these Italian companions to give her comfort in the strange new land. Yes, France is beautiful, and she sees this from the start, but everything is in comparison to the art and beauty she has experienced in Italy. Here, look at this description of Fontainebleau:

I recognized François's passion for everything Italian. He had sought to re-create a vision of my land that I no longer held, one of supreme artistry and extroverted exuberance, and he was so delighted with my interest he even took me on a personal tour of his chateau, pointing out the oleander-dusted grottoes that echoed courtyards of Tuscany and bathing chambers that boasted heated floors and mosaics like those of ancient Rome. (page 46)

(Isn't it grammatically correct to write François' rather than François's?) As the years go by and she never becomes pregnant, rumors abound. They are not complimentary. She is not accepted by the French people. She is ostracized and very much disfavored. Sorry, but where does this love of France come from?

Catherine supposedly feels a strong, immediate friendship with her husband's father, King François. Their love for each other just happened in the twinkling of an eye. Such can occur, but sometimes the prose is just too overblown. The reader is given only one episode, a day of hunting, where the two really interact. Oh yes, there is that tour of Fontainebleau. The reader is told that the two felt great affection and love for each other, but I haven't seen it grow. On his deathbed, Cathrine reflects:

How could I live in a world where he no longer existed? (page 95)

Catherine supposedly feels physical attraction to her husband, a man she never sees and who has humiliated her countless times. Her husband's mistress realizes that Catherine must bear a child. If she doesn't she will be thrown out and replaced by another who will. This could be ever so troublesome for the mistress, Diane de Poitiers! So she gets involved and makes sure that heirs are produced. She taught them **exactly** what to do, down to "providing them with a chart detailing the best positions for conception" (page 90)! Can you imagine anything so horrible? She is standing in the dark corner of the room while they have sex. Do you believe that Cathrine would think the following?

...I stole every bit of pleasure I could in the process, acting the bawd for my husband and his mistress, for she'd told us that only the heat of our ardour would ripen my womb. (page 90)

It is those first words of the quote which I find unbelievable.

I do not feel that at this time the author has shown me, the reader, believable emotions. I am disappointed. Due to these false emotions I feel like I am reading a light novel. I will continue and concentrate on the historical facts. Maybe the characters will turn around too. I hope so.

Through Part One: The Tender Leaf, (page 33)

I have only read part one, but yes I like it. The author has included a family tree and a map, which are helpful. Also the chapters are dated, so you can keep straight in your head when the historical bits really did occur. History is explained clearly. It is interwoven into the story, so it never becomes "a lesson". It is just useful to know so the reader understands why the characters make the choices they do. It is not heavy reading, just fun! And you learn at the same time. :0) What I particularly like is that you see how childhood experiences of Catherine de Medici, who is called Catarina in the book, are shaping her character. She is only thirteen by the end of part one. You know already that she has the ability to speak diplomatically although her emotions push her to scream. She can control her temper. She does not enjoy the "silly curtsies, fluttering hands and coy glances" (page 28) demanded by society and she abhors dancing! Lastly she learns from the past - she will not be duped. So the author has made me empathize with Catarina's childhood difficulties. I like her very much.

Lastly some lines make you think twice, as this one:

Remember, whatever he says, you're more important to him than he is to you. (page 29)

This is said by Lucrezia, Catarina's maid servant, just before Catarina is called into a meeting with Pope Clement VII, her uncle. What does this sentence say? To me it illustrates the close relationship between the two, and it exhibits strength and self-reliance. I am sure this is a forewarning of what is to come.

Before reading: I have to check this out. I am adding it b/c I so loved *The Last Queen* by Gortner.
