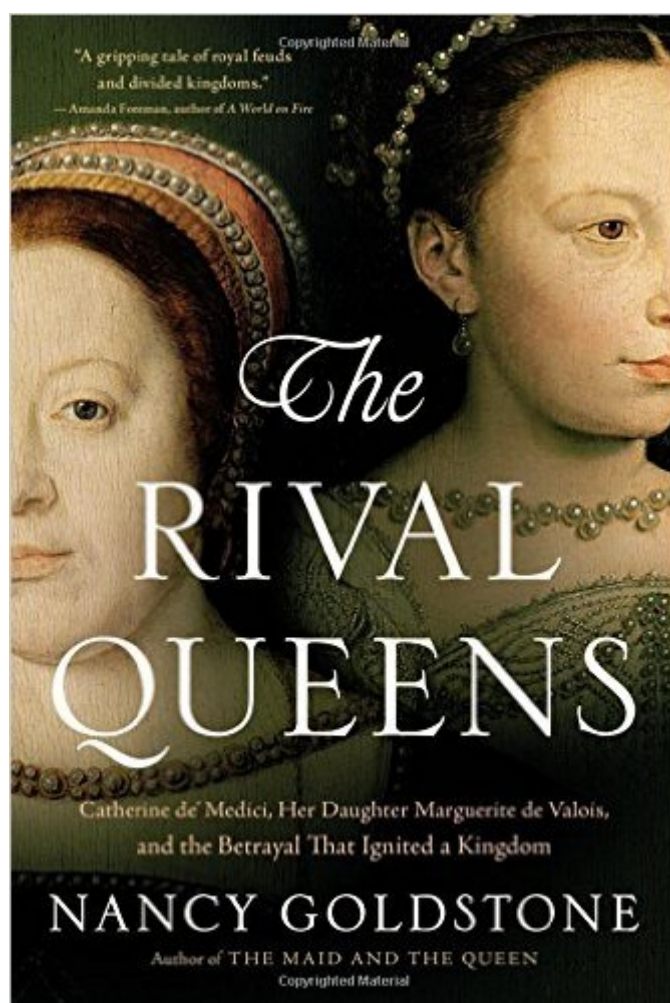


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The Rival Queens: Catherine De' Medici, Her Daughter Marguerite De Valois, And The Betrayal That Ignited A Kingdom



Synopsis

The riveting true story of mother-and-daughter queens Catherine de' Medici and Marguerite de Valois, whose wildly divergent personalities and turbulent relationship changed the shape of their tempestuous and dangerous century. Set in magnificent Renaissance France, this is the story of two remarkable women, a mother and daughter driven into opposition by a terrible betrayal that threatened to destroy the realm. Catherine de' Medici was a ruthless pragmatist and powerbroker who dominated the throne for thirty years. Her youngest daughter Marguerite, the glamorous "Queen Margot," was a passionate free spirit, the only adversary whom her mother could neither intimidate nor control. When Catherine forces the Catholic Marguerite to marry her Protestant cousin Henry of Navarre against her will, and then uses her opulent Parisian wedding as a means of luring his followers to their deaths, she creates not only savage conflict within France but also a potent rival within her own family. Rich in detail and vivid prose, Goldstone's narrative unfolds as a thrilling historical epic. Treacherous court politics, poisonings, inter-national espionage, and adultery form the background to a story that includes such celebrated figures as Elizabeth I, Mary, Queen of Scots, and Nostradamus. *The Rival Queens* is a dangerous tale of love, betrayal, ambition, and the true nature of courage, the echoes of which still resonate.

Book Information

Paperback: 448 pages

Publisher: Back Bay Books; Reprint edition (April 19, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0316409669

ISBN-13: 978-0316409667

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (142 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #138,846 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #115 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > France](#) #259 in [Books > History > Europe > France](#) #280 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Royalty](#)

Customer Reviews

What really sets *THE RIVAL QUEENS* apart, is the readability. Far too many historical biographers write plodding, strictly chronological narratives that leave out nary a discovered fact. Not so with biographer Nancy Goldstone! Her introduction drops the reader immediately into the middle of

16th-Century French politics, by describing the arranged marriage of Marguerite de Valois, a devout Catholic, to Henry de Bourbon, a Huguenot; and by hinting at the assassinations of many members of the wedding party that are only days away. This biography really explains--quite painlessly--how court politics worked in the 16th century. It brings home to the reader just how hard it was, even for those of royal status (e.g., Queen of France Catherine de' Medici; Princess Marguerite de Valois) to maintain any semblance of power, or even to stay alive, amidst the constant espionage and intrigues of the French wars of religion. Even members of the royal family--brothers and sisters, parents and children--spied on and turned against one another on the basis of spies' reports, both true and false. Marguerite, in particular, suffered from a false report of her liaison with a courtier that ruined her reputation shortly after she left the royal nursery to attend the French court. Despite the importance of religion (Catholic or Protestant) to the devout rulers and populace of France, the 16th century French court was quite permissive about morality. Thus this dual biography entertains with accounts of various influential royal mistresses (e.g., Diane de Poitiers). Diane de Poitiers actually coached Catherine de' Medici to help her provide King Henry II with the requisite heirs.

The book opens with the Queen mother inviting her son-in-law-to-be and all of his friends to the royal wedding in Paris. Then has them all murdered. So begins Nancy Goldstone's *The Rival Queens*. This book is a summer treat that should be read with patience and awe--not a book to be gobbled up on a cross-country flight. While many Americans are familiar with Elizabeth I of England (mostly from films), very few know much about Catherine de' Medici or her daughter Marguerite de Valois (Queen Margot) who reigned in France during the 16th Century--part of a period generally known as the Renaissance. The mores of France during this period, and I suspect most royalty if not society at large, were ones steeped in both religious dogma and a happy hypocrisy. The religious dogma was such that adherents of one belief routinely murdered anyone of a different belief. In France, the schism was between the Catholics and French Protestants, known as the "Huguenots." (For those unfamiliar with the term "Huguenot," it was the name given early Calvinists--who were something like the Puritans who sailed on the Mayflower to New England in the following century.) The happy hypocrisy lay in the fact that the kings of that period generally had extra-marital lovers--not just flings, but live-in lovers while the wives had to grimly suffer the humiliation and bear children. (Of course, most queens had lovers as well.) Put in a larger context, the Renaissance occurred about the same time that the Ottoman Empire, fueled by Islamic proselytizing, was reaching its nadir in eastern Europe, western Asia and north Africa.

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