



# Fatal Majesty: A Novel of Mary, Queen of Scots

*Reay Tannahill*

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## **Fatal Majesty: A Novel of Mary, Queen of Scots** Reay Tannahill

Returning from the sophisticated French court to take up her throne in cold and backward Scotland, 18-year-old Mary finds herself trapped in a web of ambitions and intrigues: those of her self-righteous brother, James, who desires to rule in her place; of her brilliant Secretary of State, Lethington, dedicated to placing the Stuarts on the throne of England; and of Elizabeth I, dazzling and unscrupulous, who fears Mary as a threat to her crown and to her life.

Mingling a poet's passion with an historian's insight, Tannahill chronicles an era of easy violence, desperate actions, and the grand, often terrifying, designs of those who would dominate it.

## **Fatal Majesty: A Novel of Mary, Queen of Scots Details**

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## From Reader Review Fatal Majesty: A Novel of Mary, Queen of Scots for online ebook

### Carol says

I think this is the most difficult book to review (since joining goodreads)!

This story is obviously historical and everyone knows the outcome. (Is it a spoiler if its assumed to be common knowledge and you talk about it?!) Mary, Queen of Scots has just returned from France, a 19-year-old widow, to take over the ruling of Scotland from her half-brother. There are plots and intrigues galore as Tannahill follows her life through to its end.

The book is well-researched and, as Tannahill says herself in the Afterward, the basic timeline and history are based on known facts (fascinating), but the rest is all fiction. I was very up and down about this book. There were parts that I adored (the love between Fleming and Lethington) and parts I could have cared less about. I don't think that I'm as sympathetic about Queen Mary as the author is and sometimes I just felt like she didn't quite capture Mary's essence accurately. I think, at times, she comes close, but on the whole it's not there. In other words, Tannahill's description and character of Mary fall short of the historic description, which (however understandable) was disappointing.

I was more wound up in what was happening around Mary than Mary herself. (Which, as I write this, I think is because I felt like I knew Mary all ready, but very little about the other players in her saga.) I don't think she's as innocent at times as Tannahill made her out to be.

The book is made in three parts, which are broken up chronologically and rather nicely. The first part is her return to Scotland after which, she, her brother and her Secretary of State (Lethington) spend an inordinate amount of time trying to get Elizabeth to declare Mary the heir to the throne of England. Elizabeth makes it pretty darn clear she's not going to tell and she's just playing games (albeit highly consequential games) with Scotland. You'd think these intelligent rulers of state could catch on quicker than they did. It was tedious after a while and I found myself saying, *Good grief! You've got your own kingdom. Pay attention to it, rather than worry about Elizabeth's!*

The second part of the book is truly the exciting part as Mary marries Lord Darnley, her secretary is killed, Darnley is killed and she is kidnapped and forced to marry Bothwell (although other sources I've read says there was no forcing about it). At the beginning of the book, Bothwell is a loose cannon and it's hard to take it seriously when Tannahill says he was devoted to the queen; especially as he (in this particular rendition of the story) kidnaps her, rapes her and forces her to marry him.

The third part covers Mary's life as an exiled queen in England until her death. The section has much less to do with Mary than what happened in Scotland after she left. In fact, I felt at times, like Tannahill had completely left the story (and title of the book, by the way) and was simply coasting through a retelling of the history books. There are plots galore (like the Ridolfi plot, which I just read about in **The Siren Queen** and is covered in this book in less than two pages). In fact, there are so many plots involving or revolving around Mary that Tannahill skims them over.

It never ceases to amaze me how easily and often the people surrounding the Kings or Queens (of the 16th century) shifted their alliance just to get something or keep something. The constant shifting of family feuds and loyalty (of which there really isn't any at all) is amazing and fascinating and (here, at least) not always easy to follow. I know about genealogies as well as the peerage and clan systems of Scotland and I was challenged to follow who was who doing what to whom in this story.

The other thing that I'd never quite realized before was the youth involved in all of this. When Tannahill first describes Lethington, I thought he must have been nearing 50 at the very least, and then found out he was in his early 30s and Mary, herself was in her 20s throughout the first two sections of the book. It's quite stunning and yet it makes the drama all the more believable.

As I said before . . . up and down. I loved parts of it, I really didn't like parts of it. I enjoyed some of the characters and found them believable; others missed the mark. The writing at times was quite good; in the third section its less fiction than a simple retelling (without much emotion) of history.

I did go and look up nearly all the characters involved, which is something I love ~ a book that can move me to learn more about the actual history is a good book. I didn't run to the computer (or history book) however, the way I sometimes do. It could have been a thousand times worse; it could have been a little better.

[Sidenote: The Earl of Eglinton and Lord Seton are direct ancestors of Hugh's (Mary Seton would be one of his however many great-aunts). How cool is that? From that standpoint alone I was fascinated!]

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### **Victoria Johnston says**

It took me longer than expected to read this book - not through any fault of the book but because I developed laryngitis halfway through reading it and didn't feel up to reading much.

This is a very good novel. It focuses on the life of Mary Queen of Scots after her return from France to Scotland. Her early life is not covered.

The writer has very clearly well researched her subject. At times the writer's knowledge of history does act as a little bit of a detriment however as it often makes the book a bit dry at times. However, this is generally a well written novel.

On a whole the writer is clearly sympathetic to Mary and less sympathetic to Elizabeth. I do not wholly believe that Mary was quite as innocent in all things as the writer portrays but then we must remember this is a novel not a biography.

Characterisation of characters is mainly good - although Elizabeth I does have a tendency to come across a little one sided. At times however there seem to be almost too many characters and I did start to lose track of who was who a little bit towards the end.

However, this is a well researched, well written novel which I recommend.

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### **Elaine Cougler says**

Fatal Majesty is an intriguing look at Mary Queen of Scots and her fatal positioning in the politics of her day. Tragic yet intriguing, beautiful yet sometimes petty, Mary was thrust into a climate, both geographical and political, for which she was ill-prepared and ill-suited. She was destined to be thwarted at every turn. A most engrossing note of historical fiction. The end-notes on other books are quite interesting, showing the erudition of the author as well as the source of her calculated views.

### **Sarah says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, bringing an entirely different perspective on events so very well known. Despite the ending being a foregone conclusion (it's hardly a spoiler when its part of history so well known) the additional characters she weaves into the storytelling; the Maries, Lethington, James Stewart etc, are compelling and add to the sense of not knowing what comes next for them. Much historical fiction centres around this time period and it is interesting to see Elizabeth I portrayed in a different light, not as national heroine so much as a woman with many faults of her own, but successful in spite of, or perhaps because of them. A really good read i wholeheartedly recommend.

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### **Hannah says**

A prime example of not judging a book by its cover. I picked this up from a charity shop and its a very ratty book with yellow pages but it was totally fabulous. I loved this book and it followed history closely and I couldn't spot any faults. The Scots politics got a little hard to follow at times but thats the only problem I can see with this book. Very good historical read.

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### **Linde says**

You never seem to see Mary Queen of Scots portrayed in good light. She always seems to be plotting to kill Elizabeth. So this was a great change to see things from her perspective and to also see how slightly crazy Elizabeth was. Talk about mental!  
And just like the Gregory books, this one keeps you interested and doesn't ever get boring. Yes, it's big, but it will fly by.

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### **Roshni says**

This was an incredibly well researched novel, so much so, that I felt like the author was just fact/name dropping to an extent that it detracted from the story. I lost track of the characters and I found myself just waiting for Mary to die (however morbid that may sound). The interesting part was actually seeing Elizabeth as a fallible queen who made emotional decisions rather than seeing her in an idealistic, perfect ruler.

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### **Cori says**

So far I like it... it's a little thick with dialogue, but that adds to the feel of the setting. There are tons of characters - representing real people of the time - so it's a little bit of a challenge to keep it all straight, which I love.

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### **Misfit says**

Meh.

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### **Nomanisan says**

I do not normally like historical fiction--I read some of it because I love history and now and then get sucked in; usually, I'm disappointed, either because the scholarship is poor, or the writing is poor, or the author resorts to [gratuitous:] sexually charged scenes (a wise friend of mine enlightened me here: it's done to sell books--and I find I agree with that interpretation), or I get to the point that I JUST WANT THIS FREAKIN' THING TO END!

This is definitively NOT one of those books.

Tannahill has done impeccable research; she's a GOOD writer--by which I mean that her sentences are a joy to read, her paragraphs hang together, her extrapolations upon the history she's used are rational and logical, and despite the size of this book (618 small-print pages, if you include the historical notes at the end--and you should!), I truly enjoyed the entire book.

Told from the Scots viewpoint (not from that of Mary, Queen of Scots, as is usual--or from Elizabeth's--and it does make a difference in how things play out), the story gives a great deal of insight on aspects of events of which I may have been vaguely aware, but was not as well-versed as this author clearly is. I have always rather perceived MQOS as silly, romantic, even a little bumbling; my perception of her has been changed by this book--which is quite a statement for me to make.

This is a book that definitely deserves a read from anyone who loves this era and the specific history of the situation between Scotland and England during the reign of Elizabeth I.

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### **Sara Giacalone says**

A well-written, well-researched and thoroughly enjoyable account of Mary, Queen of Scots. I've read a lot of books about Mary - both fiction and non-fiction - and this one still engaged and educated me. Highly recommended!

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### **Elizabeth Ashworth says**

This was well researched - almost too well researched because I felt that all the facts got in the way of the story and at times it was difficult to follow who was who. The overview narration prevented me coming close to the feelings and emotions of any of the characters and in the end I was glad to finish it.

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### **Denise says**

Mary Stewart...queen of France (for a time) and Scotland. Married, and then widowed, three times. Cousin of the ruthless Queen Elizabeth I. Born into political upheavals and back-door machinations of the 16th century. Betrayal, lies, imprisonment, and health problems haunt her short life. A very interesting read that dwells more on the thoughts and actions of a woman born to be queen and then outdone by the bickering and

backstabbing around her. Beautiful, charming, intelligent...she was accustomed to courtly life. But she never learned the game of being a monarch...to distrust all and to control all. And how to be ruthless when necessary...

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### **Amy Clayton says**

3.75\*

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### **Emily says**

There was too much fact in this book, there was a lot happening but none of it was interesting enough to keep me entertained. None of the characters were likeable & I skimmed through the last 20 pages. I usually love historical fiction but there was too much fact & not enough fiction in this for me.

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