

Did mary queen of
scots understand
what was expected of
her as a scottish
monarch...



To address this question, it is necessary to confront two distinct themes in Marian study. Much of the historiography of Mary Queen of Scots has been sympathetic and concentrated on the tragedy and drama of her reign. This view focusses on issues deemed to be beyond Mary's control such as age; gender and religion, rather than her ability to rule. A contrasting view, first articulated in the 1980s attempted to take an objective assessment of Mary as a political figure and evaluated her entire reign rather than focusing on the turbulent final years. This view concluded that Mary was as an abject failure as a Monarch who failed to appreciate the specific factors needed in order to rule Scotland effectively. In contrast, much of the previous literature on Mary, which was predominantly written from a viewpoint of a Tudor historian. These works would frequently cite one of Mary's greatest disadvantages being her gender. Whereas, the more objective view critiqued Mary as a Scottish Monarch, regardless of her gender. This paper will discuss the contrasting views of Mary and areas for possible further study and debate.

It is important, when considering a question about an individual, to acknowledge that despite having a plethora of sources available, it is impossible to know exactly what was happening inside Mary's head. ' Perhaps because of the impossibility to ever know her fully or to get to the heart of the mysteries surrounding her turbulent life, she still fascinates readers'[1]In fact, as Lewis states ' most of the facts of Mary's life are thus so clouded by contemporary political propaganda and the passions that fired it that it is almost impossible to speak with confidence of the women behind them.'[2]It can be all too easy to slip into the view that Mary was either a

tragic failure or a Catholic heroine as has been written about her. This is why although one may not agree with certain lines of scholarship it is important not to dismiss them. As Lee remarks ' It is virtually impossible to write an entirely satisfactory book about Mary- at least no one ever has.'^[3] Furthermore, Kerr-Peterson notes that there are many Mary Queen of Scotland biographies, but most ' do not do much to add to the debate.'^[4]

It can, and has been argued that Queen Mary did in fact understand her role as Monarch of Scotland. There are many historians who have taken a more sympathetic view of Mary. Notably, John Guy, who assesses that the young Queen fails in her reign because of circumstance, bad luck and others around her. Guy is not alone in this stance, historian

Michael Lynch holds the opinion that the Queen did not neglect the business of Governing Scotland during her personal rule.^[5] Historians who tend to take this angle of thought regarding Mary have, usually a view that it was circumstances out with her control that created issues for Mary, or that decisions she made with the best of intentions backfire upon her. However, Guy receives much adverse academic scrutiny as he is accused of having a direct connection to the inner workings of the Queens brain. ' He must claim continuous and privileged access to Mary's emotions (e. g., ' Mary fought back her tears ').^[6]

It is not unreasonable to state that there are many issues which could be argued to ' go against' Mary Queen of Scots. Although this is not an essay specifically investigating gender, it is important to note that many scholars will regard this as being a major factor when considering her personal reign.

Similarly, much attention is given to her faith, she was a Catholic Queen in an increasingly Protestant Scotland. Both factors were beyond her control and could be argued have separately and combination made her reign more difficult. Notably, she and other female monarchs faced huge criticism from John Knox. For example, he would make statements at church services and write about why a woman should never rule over men. In 'The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women' Knox wrote, 'To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion, or empire above any realm, nation, or city, is repugnant to nature.' [7] However, some historians such as Wormald, who is very critical of Mary, states that she should be assessed as 'not a matter of sex but a matter of personality and political intelligence.' [8] Many historians believe that Mary's reign was a mix of failures on her own part as well as a result 'of the divisions and rivalry endemic among the Scottish nobility of the time.' [9] Some of these nobles who endangered her role actually being her own husbands. As Rowse states 'she made a fair success of it until her disastrous marriage to Darnley engendered her downfall.' [10] It seems that this scenario would not have occurred if Mary had been a male monarch. The ability to usurp power only appears with a female monarch deciding to marry, a factor which the very strong Queen Elizabeth made herself completely immune to by refusing to marry. I believe the role of gender is more important than some historians, such as Wormald, give credit and is worthy of further study.

However, Mary's understanding about her role as a Scottish Monarch is not about external factors such as Knox. For some, Mary understood her role but also made fatal mistakes in her personal rule which ultimately would cause

her downfall. Many of the popular biographies of Mary were written by Tudor historians, meaning that their outlook is from an English perspective[11]and not a Scottish one which have ' little understanding or knowledge of the different forms of Stewart Scotland Government.'[12]. Goodare states that these historians recognise the difficulties that Mary faced as a Catholic ruling an increasingly Protestant Scotland; they are not surprised that she failed in the end, but show her playing her hand with skill.[13]This however, for many, is the precise reason why Mary Queen of Scots is so misunderstood and that general consensus is often difficult, as Lewis states: ' It is indeed impossible to decide how much of Mary's tragedy stemmed from personal guilt, how much from blind sexual passion, how much from religious persecution, how much from weakness of character and how much from simple bad luck.'[14]

Before assessing the argument that Mary Queen of Scots did not understand her role as a Monarch we must understand the two main aspects of this side of the debate. One being that the upbringing Mary had in France led to the incapability to understand Scotland fully enough to rule effectively. The other being, the Wormald argument; that Mary chose not to attempt to understand or act upon the differences.

As we know, in 1548, the young Mary Queen of Scots was sent off to the safety of the French court. The ' Scottish alliance during the minority of Mary, Queen of Scots. The Treaty of Haddington provided for the dynastic Union of the French and Scottish crowns with the betrothal of Mary Stewart and Francois Valois and, more importantly, laid the foundations for a Franco-British empire.'[15]During her ' French childhood Mary had received the <https://assignbuster.com/did-mary-queen-of-scots-understand-what-was-expected-of-her-as-a-scottish-monarch/>

education of a Renaissance princess, studying Latin, Greek, Italian and Spanish as well as drawing, dancing and playing on musical instruments.'[16]She was well educated and by almost all accounts turned into a very charming and intelligent young woman. The evidence of her level of education can be seen from the eloquence of her letter writing.[17]

It can be argued that Mary was prepared for life as a Queen consort. She, from a young age was in preparation to become the French Queen. By her husband's side she would rule, but she would not be the one making the primary decisions and by no means was the Monarch taking on responsibilities of personal rule. ' Queen in her own right, yes; but only of that junior partner, while being feted and ultimately enjoying the pleasures of being queen consort of the senior.'[18]This may have led to the young Mary believing the main roles of a Queen to be a support to her husband and to produce an heir. She was not educated to be the main political voice of her country or taught battle tactics or negotiations which a typical male heir would be educated in. Not only this, Mary was brought up far away from her homeland with very little education regarding what was happening back in Scotland. The question then arises, was Mary failed by her educators? Did she simply receive an education tailored toward a Queen consort rather than a ruling Queen of Scotland? Did she, in France, receive a warped education of her homeland? Listening ' too attentively and unquestioningly to ideas about Scottish barbarity and backwardness and crucial lack of respect for their kings,'[19]Did this result in an inability understand her role and rule effectively? Or did she have the opportunity to do so and refuse?

Jenny Wormald dismisses the influence of Mary's French upbringing impacting her understanding of the role of Scottish Monarch with the comparison of James I. James was taken a prisoner by the English as a young child and was only allowed return to Scotland when he was 18. Despite his captivity and his education being from an English perspective (which was likely to give a skewed impression of the Scots,) he was able to return and rule effectively in his majority.[20]With this in mind Wormald suggest that it is Mary's own attitude rather than the education that was the problem; Mary had the opportunity to learn about her homeland and her specific needs but she refused, instead having her priorities on other goals.

Mary had become accustomed to her life in France, a much more powerful and wealthy country than her own, Scotland. There is evidence that Mary, after the death of her husband, did not automatically want to return to Scotland. But that it was only ' Mary's failure to find a replacement in the royal houses of France and Spain, forced her back to Scotland.'[21]According to Wormald, Mary viewed Scotland as the lesser country. Preferring to ' remain in France and dream of an English throne, rather than return to Scotland'[22]

This cannot have been solely down to the perception she was given, there although the view of barbaric, uncivilised Scotland did exist, it was not a universal perspective. Before leaving France Mary would have contact with Scotsmen who ' could have told her much if she had cared to listen... Had she tried to do so, she would have discovered what her predecessors had known well; that running this unusual little kingdom was not an infinitely inferior business to ruling France or England.'[23]

It is this point that Wormald believes Mary's makes her greatest error. She did not want to rule Scotland. This was ' a unique spectacle of an adult reigning monarch where she did not want to reign.'[24]However, many other historians would contest this point. For example Lewis states " By every account, Mary's longing to be queen was unwavering: she claimed England's arms as a girl and in her mid-twenties led an army to reclaim the Scottish crown that had been wrested from her.'[25]However, desire to be a monarch is not a guarantee of effective monarchy. In wanting to rule a country you shall then learn the way in which is necessary to rule that country. ' Effective rule of any kingdom necessarily depends on an understanding of its particular characteristics.'[26]This would be what would stand Mary apart from her forbearers, according to Wormald, rather than her gender. Whilst there is a belief that although Wormald's view has developed a much fresher line of debate, further study should consider more heavily the issue of Mary's sex and how her actions may have been influenced by the very fact that she was functioning in a hugely male dominated world.

When comparing Mary with the other Stewart monarchs Wormald states that the Stewart Kings, although not always successful in their ventures, they were all able to grasp the ' fundamental aspect of rule; the ability to evoke enthusiasm and affection.'[27]This was possible because they understood the country and the people, successfully fostering ' the self-perception that the Scots were a people who mattered.'[28]' It was all presided over and to a large extent inspired by a line of kings who personified and embodied the aspirations of this impressive little kingdom.'[29]Wormald states that, ' by a combination of political circumstances, luck, strong personalities on the

throne and sheer nerve and stable and remarkably outward looking society, whose kings demanded a great deal of respect and exercised a great deal of power.'[30]The lack of understanding of the Scottish people and not believing in the pride that the Scottish had on their own self-importance would result in the emotive investment the people had in the monarchy begin to collapse. According to Wormald, this would be ' her greatest political error.'[31]Examples of this lack of understanding range from the failure to engage with her privy council, nor fill it with her supporters, through to engaging in factionalism by choosing to have many French advisors surrounding her.

A comparison with her Mother, Mary of Guise, is also informative. Most historians give her great credit. Guy and Marshall would even argue that Mary would go on to follow in the footsteps of her mother.[32]Ritchie even states that ' she continues her Mother's policy of trying to enforce royal authority throughout Scotland.'[33]There is a general consensus that Mary of Guise had a great ability to adapt and understand the way to rule Scotland, even when she was only Regent. This again counters the argument that her daughters upbringing prevented her from understanding her role. '

Regardless of what she left privately it was not in the nature of Marie de Guise, strictly raised by those austere great ladies, her mother Antoinette de Bourbon and Grandmother Philippa of Guelders, to lose control of her emotions.'[34]Guy expresses that Mary of Guise she learned her political skill from her very influential and supportive family and that she ' understood her own role perfectly.'[35]To Guy, it was because of her Mother, Mary had a chance to rule. Even Wormald would complement the Queen Mother; stating

that she made effort, (where her daughter would not) to understand the country that she would control. ' She showed that, even if she was only regent and not queen, let alone king, she was, like the Stewart Kings themselves a formidable personality all too able to impose her politics.' [36] It is even suggested that Mary Queen of Scots damages overall understanding of Stewart Scotland as she does not meet the standards which the dynasty set for her. [37]

The arguments of Wormald are very persuasive. I do not believe that Mary she knew precisely what the role of a Scottish Monarch was. As Wormald states, she did not seem to grasp the understanding of the people, traditions and history needed to rule effectively. However, Wormald's view has limitations, Mary, through her upbringing, knew what to expect as a French Monarch but did not appreciate or realise what was required of her when she was to rule in Scotland. Therefore, upbringing as a contributory factor cannot be discounted. She was educated to be Queen consort of France, with the support of a husband. This role of French Queen would have been very different to the role of a ruling Queen of Scotland. Wormald, in my opinion, significantly develops the debate about Mary Queen of Scot's, allowing an understanding of Mary and her rule to be viewed from a purely political stance. Furthermore, she writes from a Scottish perspective; categorising and comparing Mary's position within the Stewart dynasty. Wormald's scholarship of the 1980's managed to create a new discussion, taking the debate away from romanticism around Mary. However, I do agree with historians such as Groundwater, that further study must include the "grey" issue of gender which Wormald, specifically, does not investigate in her

intentionally black and white approach. Mary will continue to divide opinion but she and early modern Scotland are fertile and rewarding areas for further consideration.

Bibliography


Primary Sources

- Knox, John. 'The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women' extracted from *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1559* (1558)
- Letters of Mary Queen of Scots, published in Strickland, A., *Letters of Mary Queen of Scots: Published from the originals. Vol I'* (London, 1844)

Secondary Sources

- Ágústsdóttir, I. 'Mary Queen of Scots as Feminine and National Icon: Depictions in Film and Fiction' in *Études écossaises* , 15 (2012)
- Clegg, M., *Scourge of Henry VIII: The Life of Mary De Guise*, (Barnsley, 2016)
- Rowse, A. L., Forward in Donaldson, G., *Mary Queen of Scots* , (London, 1974)
- Fraser, A., *Mary Queen of Scots*, (London, 1969)
- Goodare, J., 'Mary Queen of Scots: An Illustrated Life, and: Catholic Queen, Protestant Patriarchy: Mary Queen of Scots and the Politics of Gender and Religion (Review.)' *The Catholic Historical Review* , Vol 94 (3) (2008)

- Goodare, J., ' My Heart Is My Own: The Life of Mary Queen of Scots Mary Queen of Scots (Review)', *The English Historical Review*, Vol 121(493) (2006)
- Groundwater, A., ' Jenny and Mary, a Complicated Relationship' in ' *Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure*' (Edinburgh, 2017)
- Guy, J. *My Heart is My Own: The Life of Mary Queen of Scots*, (London, 2004)

 **Kerr-Peterson, M., ' Jenny Wormald, Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure, with fore and after words by Anna Groundwater (review.)' in *The Innes Review* 69(1), 97-100, (2018)**

- Lee, M., " The Daughter of Debate: Mary Queen of Scots after 400 Years. (Review)" *The Scottish Historical Review* , vol. 68, no. 185. (1989)
- Lee, M. Jr., Review of Lynch, M., ' Mary Stewart: Queen in Three Kingdoms' in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* , Vol. 22, No. 1 (1990)
- Lewis, E. L., *Mary Queen of Scots: Romance and Nation* , (London, 1998)
- Lynch, M. (Ed)., *Mary Stewart: Queen in Three Kingdoms* (Oxford, 1998)
- Marshall, R. K., *Mary Queen of Scots: Truth or Lies*, (Edinburgh, 2010)
- Ritchie, R. E., *Mary of Guise in Scotland, 1548-1560: A political Career* , (2002, Edinburgh)
- Wormald, J., *Mary Queen of Scots: Pride, Passion and a Kingdom Lost*, (London, 1988)

- Wormald, J., *Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure*, (Edinburgh, 2017)
-

[1]Ágústsdóttir, I. ' Mary Queen of Scots as Feminine and National Icon: Depictions in Film and Fiction' in *Études écossaises* , 15 (2012), page 38.

[2]Lewis, E. L., *Mary Queen of Scots: Romance and Nation* , (London, 1998), page 3.

[3]Lee, M., " The Daughter of Debate: Mary Queen of Scots after 400 Years. (Review)" *The Scottish Historical Review* , vol. 68, no. 185. (1989), page 71.

[4]Kerr-Peterson, M., ' Jenny Wormald, Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure, with fore and after words by Anna Groundwater (review.)' in *The Innes Review* 69(1), 97-100, (2018), page 98.

[5]Lynch, M. (Ed)., *Mary Stewart: Queen in Three Kingdoms* (Oxford, 1998)

[6]Goodare, J., ' My Heart Is My Own: The Life of Mary Queen of Scots Mary Queen of Scots (Review)', *The English Historical Review*, Vol 121(493) (2006), page 1121.

[7]Knox, J., ' The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women' extracted from *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1559* (1558) page 13.

[8]Wormald, J., *Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure*, (Edinburgh, 2017), page 36.

[9]Ágústsdóttir, ' *Feminine and National Icon*' , page 2.

[10]Rowse, A. L., ' Foreword' in Donaldson, G., *Mary Queen of Scots* , (London, 1974), page I.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12]Groundwater, A., ' Jenny and Mary, a Complicated Relationship' in ' *Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure*' (Edinburgh, 2017), page V.

[13]Goodare, Heart Is My Own (Review), pages 1120-1121.

[14]Lewis, *Queen of Scot's* , page 3.

[15]Ritchie, R. E., *Mary of Guise in Scotland, 1548-1560: A political Career* , (2002, Edinburgh),

page 4.

[16]Marshall, R. K., *Mary Queen of Scots: Truth or Lies*, (Edinburgh, 2010), page 112.

[17]Letters of Mary Queen of Scots, published in Strickland, A., *Letters of Mary Queen of Scots: Published from the originals. Vol I'* (London, 1844)

[18]Wormald, *Study in Failure* , page 25.

[19]Wormald, Study in Failure, page 23

[20] *Ibid* , page 23.

[21] *Ibid* , page 22.

[22] *Ibid* , page 21.

[23] *Ibid* , page 41.

[24] *Ibid*, page 13

[25] Lewis, *Romance and Nation* , page 5.

[26] Wormald, *Study in Failure* , page 22.

[27] *Ibid*, page 32.

[28] *Ibid*, page 33.

[29] *Ibid*, page 33.

[30] *Ibid* , page 38.

[31] *Ibid*, page 42.

[32] Guy, J. *My Heart is My Own: The Life of Mary Queen of Scots*, (London, 2004), page 18.

[33] Ritchie, R. E., *Mary of Guise in Scotland, 1548-1560: A political Career* , (2002, Edinburgh), page 113.

[34] Clegg, M., *Scourge of Henry VIII: The Life of Mary De Guise*, (Barnsley, 2016), page 11.

[35] Guy, *My Heart is My Own* , page 19.

[36] Wormald, J., *Mary Queen of Scots: Pride, Passion and a Kingdom Lost*, (London, 1988), page 102.

[37]Kerr-Peterson, *Study in a Failure (Review)*, page 99.