

THE BODECIA BOOK CLUB REVIEW

The Other Queen by Philippa Gregory

Harper Publishers London £18.99 ISBN 9780007192144

This is the first historical fiction book that the group has read and what can we say – Wow. What a read! ... and in the process learnt some English history!

This novel covers the first three years of Queen Mary's imprisonment in England. Several plots were hatched and one went so far as to raise an army. But they came to nothing thanks to the lukewarm support of Spain and the extensive spy network set up by Elizabeth's chief advisor, William Cecil.

George Talbot, The Earl of Shrewsbury, and his wife Bess of Hardwick were the unhappy jailers for Queen Mary. They had no choice in the matter and never received any money for her keep. The result was that they spent their entire fortune, over the years, providing the level of luxurious furnishings, food, and lifestyle that a Queen is supposed to have and the burden was too much for George and Bess to bear. Their marriage suffered from the strain. George's infatuation with the Queen right up until her death did not help, either.

Mary, Queen of Scots was in her mid-twenties and had only been on the throne of Scotland for a few years when the rebel lords banded together to force her to their will. She feared a forced marriage, rape or imprisonment and so she fled the country. If she had only gotten on a boat and headed for France, where she had been raised, or Spain, a sympathetic Catholic country, history would have turned out very differently. But she didn't. She fled south, across the border into England. She was under the misguided notion that her cousin, Queen Elizabeth, would take care of her and restore her to the throne of Scotland.

In this story there were several plots hatched, a platonic love affair and some excitement in changing locations. The narrative switches between the points-of-view of Mary, Bess and George and that adds some interest and we felt that it was well written with small chapters detailing parts of each characters life. We all had a very different opinion of Mary and found ourselves disliking her, her constant refrain of "I must be free" made us feel sorry for Queen Elizabeth.

The only downside to the book was that we all knew the ending!!

We gave *The Other Queen* **6 / 10**, which currently stands as 7th on our books reading list.

The book we are now reading is **The Great Lover** by **Gill Dawson**.

Don't forget the first rule of Book Club!