

Reine and romance: Queen mary stuart of scotland

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Abstract:

The objective of this study entitled "Reign and Romance: Queen Mary Stuart of Scotland," is to delve into the reign and romantic experiences of Mary Stuart, a female monarch in the 16th century. It aims to analyze how she navigated the challenging political landscape, the male-dominated society, and the societal expectations of that era. Mary Stuart faced numerous challenges throughout her journey, encompassing her reign and romantic relationships. These challenges were primarily influenced by political, social, religious, and personal factors, which ultimately led to her downfall. Mary Stuart's rule was particularly difficult as she governed over a country divided between Catholicism and Protestantism, with the majority of her subjects being Protestants. Being a Catholic herself, it became increasingly difficult for her to maintain her reign. Additionally, her disastrous marriages had a detrimental impact on her political and personal standing. Furthermore, her gender and the influence of the French played a significant role in turning her Scottish subjects against her. Mary Stuart endured immense hardships and faced enemies both within and outside her court, particularly in her rivalry with Elizabeth I. Despite these challenges, Mary Stuart's resilience and endurance were evident throughout her entire journey, whether in France, Scotland, or even during her execution in England. As a result, she remains one of the most distinguished queens in history.

Keywords: Reign, Romance, Mary Stuart, Queen, Scotland, 16th century, Journey, Monarch.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mary Stuart's journey was undoubtedly one of the most challenging and eventful in history, particularly considering the diverse obstacles that she faced as a woman and queen during the sixteenth century. Her life was filled with experiences where she encountered influential individuals that shaped the course of her journey from the moment she was born until her demise. Her story has captivated numerous historians in which they were encouraged to document her story. Mary Stuart has become an iconic figure among historical queens, thanks to the uniqueness of her journey that has sparked varying perspectives among people. Despite the tragic end she met due to unfair circumstances, her story deserves infinite gratitude and appreciation for the unwavering resilience she demonstrated throughout her life.

This study seeks to unveil the challenges that Mary Stuart faced as a catholic monarch and a woman that navigated through the complex environment of the 16th century, in a form of narrative which follows a chronological order; from her birth to death in an attempt to reintroduce her by exploring social, political, religious, and personal aspects.

2. The Rise of a Queen

At the Linlithgow palace, west Lothian in Scotland, in the winter more specifically on December 8, 1542. This palace held great importance as one of the primary residences of the Scottish monarchs for centuries. During the early hours of the morning and the late at night a queen was born the one and only Mary Stuart in a country torn apart by division, the new born queen was none other than the daughter and sole surviving legitimate child of king James V (1512-1542) and his French wife queen Mary of Guise; Mary de Guise (1515- 1560), however the joyous occasion was short-lived for just six days after her birth, a tragedy occurred as the king passed away. As a result the infant Mary Stuart inherited the throne of Scotland at the age of less than a week. (Antonia Fraser, 1969)

Although it is often said that rulers are chosen by divine intervention, and that it remains a duty and a responsibility that a ruler cannot escape. Nevertheless, the notion of burdening an infant with such a title can be

viewed as somewhat cruel. On December 14 of the same year, Mary Stuart not only inherited the throne and lost her father but also became the target of those who sought to seize power. It must be understood that her life, and her heart, would never truly belong to her alone. Instead, like her predecessors, she was seen as a person bound by duty regardless of her age or wishes. (Antonia Fraser, 1969)

According to Antonia Fraser (1969), Mary of Guise and James V experienced the loss of several infant heirs before the birth of Mary specifically, two princes were gone, instead of attributing these deaths to poison or divine vengeance, many people at the time blamed the harsh nature of the sixteenth century. However, in one hand the death of one infant prince could be considered fate or the result of a natural illness. On the other hand, the death of two infant princes could not be dismissed as a mere coincidence; it could potentially be a case of murder.

There was an ongoing conflict between Scotland and England during that period of time especially after James V's refusal to break away from the Catholic Church, similar to his Uncle Henry VIII's decision, created tension between the two countries, leading to battles at the borders. The situation escalated when Henry demanded a conference at York in September 1541, but James V was unable to attend in person due to the value placed on his life after the loss of his heirs. In the summer of 1542, Henry issued orders to his army to march towards the northern region, as he believed that the Scottish army lacked endurance rather than bravery, this led to a majority of Scottish soldiers fleeing the battlefield upon witnessing the inevitable outcome. Meanwhile, Mary of Guise was in the final stages of her pregnancy with Mary Stuart.(Antonia Fraser, 1969)

Antonia Fraser (1969) claimed that it was suggested that Mary Stuart's actual birth day was on December 7th. However, it was only declared a day after to coincide with the feast of the Virgin Mary, despite the uncertainty, Queen Mary herself believed that she was born on December 8th. On the same day of Mary's birth, a private letter was sent to King Henry, stating that she was a weak infant who could barely survive another day or may already

be dead. The English people believed that Mary was gone for the first days of her life.

There were rumors that surrounded her birth, including one that claimed she was initially named Elizabeth before being called Mary, as stated by Antonia Fraser (1996) if this rumor was true, changing her name to Mary would have been the optimal decision, considering her rivalry with her cousin Elizabeth I for the English and Scottish thrones. It would have caused confusion among the people of that era and even the people of the present time, and it would more likely have turned the competition into one between two Elizabeths instead of Mary and Elizabeth.

The presence of an infant on the Scottish throne during the 16th century monarchy caused all kinds of concerns and fears. To address this, establishing a regency council was necessary to govern the country until the young ruler reached adulthood. However, due to societal expectations that always favored male's leadership, it was never destined for Mary to take over the role of ruler. Therefore, from an early age, the Scottish people expressed their interest about her future husband, as he was the one intended to govern not only Scotland but also potentially unite it with the English throne in the case of a failure in Henry VIII's line of succession. (Guy John Alexander, 2005)

Mary Stuart had attracted the attention of several potential suitors who were interested in marrying her when she was only days and months old. It was crucial to identify a suitable husband for her, even if he happened to be an infant himself. In Scotland, there were two prominent princes who shared her royal bloodline: James Hamilton, the second earl of Arran, and Matthew Stuart, the Earl of Lennox, both of them were descendants of King James II, and a marriage alliance with either of them presented an opportunity for the chosen prince to exert control over Scotland. (Guy John Alexander, 2005)

Based on Guy John Alexander (2005) findings, regarding overseas matters, France and England competed for Mary's hand in marriage, each seeking to exert dominance over Scotland through her. In one hand, Henry VIII's primary objective was to ensure that queen Mary Stuart become the

wife of his son Edward, as this would enable him to unite England and Scotland under his son's reign and eliminate any potential threats to his northern borders. On the other hand, France sought to uphold Catholic influence in Scotland, given the country's religious divide between Protestants and Catholics. They were concerned that if Scotland was to fall under English control, Henry would impose his rebellious inclinations on the Scottish people.

As reported by Guy John Alexander (2004) in the course of the initial five years of Mary's life, she observed her mother, Mary of Guise, who served as a remarkable role model. Her mother possessed intelligence, kindness, and attentiveness, she was engaged in politics to preserve her late husband's legacy and minimize any potential harm. Mary of Guise treated her subjects with generosity and support, earning admiration from the Scottish people. It comes as no surprise that Mary S. began to exhibit similarities with her mother, inheriting both her physical beauty and distinctive personality traits.

The key question that revolves around the individual who assumed the role of governor of Scotland during Mary's formative years, along with his political ambitions and religious beliefs. In a divided nation, the choice of a leader impacts not only the current circumstances but also the forthcoming events, particularly influencing Mary's course of life because Mary could not rule as a child. Regardless of the presence of several lords and nobles who were suitable candidates for a regent position, the majority of them were intimidated by the responsibility. However, in one hand the Earl of Arran, who was next in line to the throne in the case of Mary's death without an heir, stood out, not only was he a Protestant, but he also possessed the courage to take on the role. (Guy John Alexander,2005)

There was the Archbishop of St Andrews Cardinal David Beaton, a religious Catholic, consistently advocated for an alliance with France. Arran's assumption of power in January 1543 was the most significant event, this came after the presentation of a copy of the late King James V's will, appointing him to the position. However, many Scots did not accept this on the basis that the will was forged, as the late king did not write it

himself, considering that his death was unexpected, as he passed away at the age of thirty, and no one writes a will at such a young age, not even a king. (Jenny Wormald, 2017).

3. Mary Stuart's Union with Francis II Valois

Based on Jenny Wormald (2017) Mary Stuart received exceptional treatment during her childhood in France, where King Henry II regarded her as a daughter and ensured she was not separated from his own children. Mary, known for her beauty, kindness, and intelligence was taught various languages such as Italian, French, Spanish, and even her native Scottish language to facilitate communication with foreign dignitaries. These efforts were made in attempt to win her affection towards the French royal family, specifically their son Francis who held a deep admiration for Mary despite their youth. In addition to her linguistic studies, Mary also pursued interests in music, poetry, and horseback riding.

In fact, Mary Stuart was adored by all at the French court, with the exception of Queen Catherine de Medici, who happened to be Henry's wife and Francis's mother. The queen simply could not come to terms with the fact that her daughter in law Mary Stuart outclassed her son, who was famously short and had a stutter. Catherine felt threatened and insecure by Mary's status as the queen of Scotland and the potential future queen of France if Henry II passed away. (Antonia Fraser, 1969)

As stated by Jenny Wormald (2017) Mary Stuart signed three confidential treaties with king Henry II on 4 April 1558, that led to some to argue that she surrendered her native Scotland to France in the case of her death without an heir, as a form of repayment for the financial support provided by France for Scotland and her upbringing . On April 24, 1558, Mary Stuart of Scotland and Francis II of France were united in marriage. Although their union may have been arranged for political purposes, their genuine affection and admiration for each other was evident that they had grown up together. To Francis, Mary was more than just a queen or a means to secure the English and Scottish thrones; she was his beloved wife. This contrasted with the intentions of his father, Henry II who viewed Mary as a tool to further his own selfish ambitions.

Seven months following the union of Mary and Francis, Mary Tudor, the ruler of England from 1553 to 1558 who ruled after the passing of her half-brother Edward VI, died. She was known for undoing her father's accomplishments, King Henry VIII in relation to Protestantism, a faith she strongly opposed. Mary was called Bloody Mary due to her harsh treatment of Protestant followers. This event encouraged King Henry II of France to push forward with his plans, persuading Mary to assert her rightful claim to the thrones of England, Scotland, and Ireland. (Britannica, 2024)

Mary Stuart wore the English armors in France as a symbol of her ambition, with no hidden agenda other than and claimed what was hers and returned to her homeland of Scotland as a powerful queen dedicated to protect her people. Despite Francis, her husband was concerned about the risks involved, Mary Stuart remained resolute in her pursuit of her legitimate rights. At home Scotland, Mary of Guise was the regent at that time even though she perfectly governed and dealt with both the local and foreign political affairs of the Scottish yet, her Hands were tied as far as religious matters were concerned as the religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants did not come to an end, on the contrary Protestantism continued to strengthen and to grow day after day. (Britannica, 2024)

Meanwhile, after she was imprisoned for a long time by her half-sister Mary Tudor, Elizabeth I became the queen of England in 1558, immediately after her sister's death. Like her father, she followed the Protestant religion, but she was more tolerant religiously unlike her half-sister. However, this did not stop the English Catholics from demanding her abdication by replacing her with Mary Stuart, as Elizabeth I was considered illegitimate due to Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon; Mary Tudor's mother and his marriage to Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth's mother which was not considered legitimate. (Britannica, 2024)

According to Guy John Alexander (2004) the Catholic Church in Italy, the Pope who promised to grant Mary Stuart the rule of England for the sake of spreading Catholicism beliefs, had faced pressure from the Spanish King Philip II, who was at war with France and decided to show solidarity and cooperation with Elizabeth, even offering to marry her, it was before

both France and Spain wished to put an end to the war because it was draining them financially. In April 1559, two treaties were signed, one between France and Spain and the other between France and England. As a result, Philip II withdrew his marriage proposal to Elizabeth I of England and instead married the eldest daughter of the French King Henry II.

Mary Stuart and her husband Francis II were both in favor of peace between France and England, yet, Mary always worried from the fact that alliances and treaties are not reliable therefore , they would not last and that France's protection of her and Scotland could shift or disappear. Henry II's passed on July 10, 1559, as a result of injuries and internal bleeding, Mary was no longer only the queen of Scotland, she was crowned queen consort of France as well at the age of 15, and following her husband Francis' own ascension to the throne at the same age. (Guy John Alexander, 2004)

According to Antonia Fraser (1969) Francis II, was the only French king to be crowned on a day of the week that was not Sunday or a day known for a religious event or celebration, as his accession to the throne was postponed due to the illness of The Duke of Savoy; a key figure in the French court. Mary Stuart was by his side, she offered support while her husband showed signs of boredom. It may be questioned why Mary did not ascend to the throne as queen of France on the same day as her husband; the explanation lies in the French tradition of not crowning the queen on the same day as the king. Catherine de Medici was in fact crowned two years after her husband, King Henry II's coronation.

4. Power Struggle during Mary Stuart's Reign in Scotland

Antonia Fraser (1969) stated that Mary Stuart's mourning period for the death of her husband King Francis II, lasted no more than 40 days in France , this was due to the desires of both the Guise family and certain advisors from Scotland. They believed it would be difficult if not impossible for her to rule or even consider returning to Scotland as a widowed Catholic queen especially after the passing of her mother Mary of Guise, Scotland had embraced Protestantism under the influence of John Knox and Mary's half-brother, Lord James Stuart. The Scottish people knew little about Mary Stuart, but they feared her due to her religious beliefs and her French

education. The only way for her safe return to her homeland was by marrying a foreign king who provided her with a strong army for protection.

There have been numerous assumptions regarding the identity of Mary's second husband, she might wed her brother-in-law Charles, the crowned king of France believed that she could choose Don Carlos of Spain, the heir to the Spanish throne, the archduke Charles of Austria, the Earl of Arran, the young lord Darnley, or even the widowed Duke of Ferrera, who expressed his affection for the Scottish Queen. Mary Stuart had no say in choosing her second husband, as everyone eagerly awaited for the announcement of the future King of Scotland and her new spouse. This curiosity extended even to the English ambassador Throckmorton, who expressed his curiosity to the Scottish Privy council:

“Now that death has thus disposed of the late French king, whereby the Scottish queen is left a widow, one of the special things your lordships have to consider, and have an eye to, is the marriage of that queen” (Antonia Fraser, 1969, P: 147)

Antonia Fraser (1969) stated that Mary declared to all present that she possessed the necessary maturity to select her second spouse, and it was essential for everyone to honour her choices without intervening, particularly her maternal relatives; the Guise family. Furthermore, she declared that her return to Scotland would happen on her own terms, free from any external influence, as she had grown weary of living at the mercy of others despite her royal status. With the demise of her husband she no longer enjoyed the protection of the French court, making it all more crucial for her to assume control and assert her authority.

Indeed, after seven months of correspondence and negotiations between Mary Stuart and her Protestant half-brother Lord James Stuart, who was among the leaders of Scotland, they have reached an agreement. The agreement states that Mary can return to rule, but the ruling council must remain Protestant and she must not make any changes to the reforms brought by the parliament. It also allows her to practice her Catholic religion in private, with the promise from James to persuade the English to consider

Mary Stuart as the heir to the English throne in the case that Elizabeth I passes away without any children. (Guy John Alexander, 2005)

As reported by Guy John Alexander (2004) in august 1561, Mary Stuart left France for Scotland with her three ladies. Despite all the challenges she had faced since birth, Mary did not display any signs of weakness or sorrow. However, as the ship began to depart and France started to fade away Mary broke down in tears, leaving behind the country where she had grown up, leaving behind her childhood and memories with her beloved late King Francis, and embarking on a new adventure, she was well aware of its risks, as France was the only country she considered home. Therefore, she offered her farewell in her own unique way, saying (P: 160): “Adieu France. It’s all over now. Adieu France. I think I’ll never see your shores again“.

Mary Stuart arrived in Scotland in less than a week after leaving France, surprising everyone as her entry into Scotland was kept secret for the purpose of protecting her from the English and even her own subjects who were against her rule. Mary was disappointed upon her arrival due to the problems she witnessed among her people, but that did not stop them from celebrating her, despite the fact that she left as a Scottish child and returned as a French woman. She was a light of hope for many Scots and even John Knox acknowledged that she was warmly welcomed by many. (Antonia Fraser, 1969)

Since Mary Stuart returned to Scotland to claim her throne, he did not rest, John Knox, as he was one of her biggest haters because he did not accept the idea of women's rule, especially considering her religion, where he worked hard to overthrow her and the idea of the monarchs. He strongly wanted the rule in Scotland to be for a government and not for a monarchy, although the number of his Protestant followers was increasing, nevertheless this does not mean that Scotland did not contain a large group of Catholics who were marginalized and even violent, as many saw that Mary does not need a husband to impose her power. But only need to forget France and adopt Scotland as the Franco-Scottish alliance no longer exists. Scotland

was no longer protected by France and even Mary following the death of her husband, the protection disappeared. (Jenny Wormald, 2017)

As reported by Jenny Wormald (2017) despite John Knox's efforts to turn James Stuart against his sister Mary, the attempts were unsuccessful as their sibling bond was strong. In 1562, Mary made James the Earl of Moray to strengthen his position at the Scottish court. Additionally, Mary ensured to connect with her Scottish subjects by traveling throughout the country. This was evident when Lord Huntly, a Catholic supporter, rebelled against her in the Highlands. Mary's support of Huntly's destruction by the Earl of Moray sent a clear message to all her subjects, regardless of their religious affiliation, that she was the queen of Scotland and her authority should not be questioned.

““My subjects in Scotland do their duty in nothing ...nor have they performed their part in one thing that belonged to them. I am their Queen and so they call me, but they use me not so ...they must be taught to know their duties ...””Mary Queen of Scotland. (Antonia Fraser, 1969, P: 193)

5. Royal Rivalry between Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I

In late 1563, Queen Elizabeth I declared that she would accept Mary Stuart's proposal and make her the heir to the English throne on the condition that Mary marries an Englishman, despite Mary's aspirations to marry a Spanish, Frenchman, or Austrian due to the power held by these European monarchs. If Mary accepts the offer, Elizabeth I would be pleased, as she expressed: “We will not be behind on our part to satisfy her as far forth as if she were our only natural sister or dear only daughter” (Kate Williams , 2018, P: 247)

Unfortunately, the ambassador and closest advisor to Elizabeth I, William Cecil, decided to remove the section where Elizabeth I referred to Mary Stuart as her dear only daughter. Cecil believed that by doing so, he could protect his queen from any potential threats to her reign because he thought that she would appear in a weak position if she treated her cousin with kindness. Cecil's actions went too far, leading Elizabeth I to believe that her throne was in danger. In an attempt to avoid conflicts, Elizabeth I sent Mary a diamond ring along with the altered document. Although Mary

Stuart was upset, she was pleased with the gift to the extent that she even kissed it. She couldn't risk to offend her powerful cousin especially with John Knox's audacious behavior and threats. (Kate Williams, 2018)

As stated by Antonia Fraser (1969) Mary Stuart knew very well that she would not be able to create the image that Elizabeth I had created as an unmarried queen, because Mary did not grow up in Scotland among her people as Elizabeth I did in England, where no lord dared to insult or even confront Elizabeth as happened daily with Mary Stuart. Therefore, she patiently waited for the man whom Elizabeth would choose for her. Mary rejected the marriage offer that came from the family of her late mother, Guise, because she knew very well that she would be exploited again.

In fact, it did not take long for the English ambassador to pay a visit to Mary Stuart, who told her that Elizabeth had chosen Robert Dudley to be Mary's husband. The Scottish queen was astonished because everyone in Europe knew that Dudley was Elizabeth's lover and that the death of his wife was not natural but a case of murder committed by him. Mary knew that Elizabeth was sending a spy instead of a husband because Dudley would always be loyal to her and her only. Mary refused, declaring that royals marry royals, taking into consideration Dudley's weak position, which would only weaken Mary which is the opposite to what she was seeking. (Antonia Fraser, 1969)

Elizabeth I desired greatly to marry Mary Stuart to Robert Dudley so that the two could live under her mercy in England. In September 1564, Elizabeth I appointed Dudley her lover, the earl of Leicester in an attempt to influence her stubborn cousin Mary. Despite the support of James Stuart, Mary's half-brother, and the queen's Scottish advisors for the English plan, Mary never accepted it. Many believed that James was only encouraging his sister to accept because he knew he would be the regent in her absence if she moved to England to marry Dudley as Elizabeth I proposed. However, the marriage proposal turned out to be a mistake by Elizabeth I, as it caused Mary to turn against her and realize that she should find her own husband without anyone's assistance especially not Elizabeth's. (Kate Williams, 2018)

According to Kate Williams (2018) while Elizabeth I remained determined to arrange a marriage between Mary and Dudley, she decided to introduce some complications for Mary. Elizabeth asked Mary to allow the Earl of Lennox, who had been exiled in England for a long time, to return to Scotland. Elizabeth knew that Mary would not refuse this request in order to avoid any potential conflicts with her cousin. Mary's agreement paved the way for Lennox's ambitious plans for his catholic son, the handsome seventeen-year-old Henry Lord Darnley, to potentially become the next king of Scotland by marrying Mary Stuart. This was due to Darnley's blood rights to the English throne. Elizabeth I, fearing any potential plots against her own throne, imprisoned Darnley and his mother for a fair period of time. Although Elizabeth I regretted her decision in sending them back to Scotland, it was too late to change the situation. Mary Stuart began to see Darnley as the solution to all her problems, as his marriage to her would grant Mary the respect of the lords in her country and allow her to claim the throne of England.

In the winter of 1564, Mary found herself in a state of despair, desperately in need of support and above all, a friend. This was after she uncovered the treacherous actions of her French secretary, who was discovered in possession of English money. In order to fill this void, Mary decided to replace him with one of her beloved musicians, a compassionate and charismatic Italian named David Rizzio. While everyone accepted his role as a musician in Mary's court, there was a significant backlash when she appointed him as her secretary. This was because Mary Stuart had never chosen a Scottish individual for such position, it had always been reserved for the French. The appointment of an Italian felt like a direct insult to the Scottish lords who were already opposed to Mary's rule. Despite the opposition, Mary placed her trust in Rizzio, she believed that those she had raised would remain loyal to her. Little did she know that this would be a mistake she would later discover with Darnley (Kate Williams, 2018)

On February 17, 1565, Darnley arrived in Scotland to meet Mary Stuart. He was the only man taller than her, a handsome and well-spoken gentleman who could easily capture any woman's heart, whether it was a

queen or not. However, behind his charming facade he hid a dark secret agenda that went unnoticed by many, especially Mary. Scholars pondered why Elizabeth I would send such an attractive man with a claim to the throne to her cousin. The truth was that Elizabeth I never anticipated Mary's affection for Darnley; she simply wanted to create distraction and hoped he would cause trouble for Mary. Despite Mary's deep feelings for him, she kept her emotions hidden waiting for Elizabeth I's response. (Jenny Wormald, 2017)

6. The Unfortunate Fate of Mary Stuart

Antonia Fraser (1969) reported that Mary Stuart's pregnancy in the autumn of 1565 came as a shock to Elizabeth and the English people, causing the Scots and even the Lords to view Mary Stuart with respect and see her as the sole ruler of Scotland. The pregnancy instilled fear in John Knox and particularly her husband Darnley, as he did not want Mary to hold any power or authority. He desired to be the sole governor of Scotland and was troubled by the fact that Mary did not submit to him. Darnley misused the kingdom's finances at the taverns of Edinburgh where he was staying and hosting numerous parties by constantly indulging in alcohol.

In fact, he was habituated to only listening to his mother Lady Lennox, but she was held captive in England, leaving him an insufferable individual. As a consequence of his actions, Mary stripped him of the title of King of Scotland, reducing him to merely the husband of the Queen of Scotland. Furthermore, she specified that he would not rule after her death, as she was the only legitimate ruler of Scotland. This news intrigued the English, as it revealed that the marriage was not a successful one, which diverted the couple's attention from claiming the English throne. (Antonia Fraser, 1969)

Mary Stuart no longer met her husband Darnley during her early stages of pregnancy, as she preferred to spend time with her friends, including her secretary David Rizzio. This made Darnley resent the Italian more than he already had for stealing away the influence he believed was his over the Scottish Queen. Meanwhile, Pope Pius IV, who had withdrawn his support for Mary's claim to the English throne, passed away at the end of 1565. He

was succeeded by Pius V, who was enthusiastic about the idea of Mary Stuart, a Catholic Queen ruling England.(Kate Williams, 2018)

Kate Williams (2018) also reported that, Pius V sent a letter to Queen Mary Stuart in order to express his full support in case she is planning and willing to take over her right by birth. In early 1566, Mary invited foreign ambassadors to a banquet and made sure to display a portrait of Elizabeth I in the room. She declared in front of everyone that she was the only Queen of England as Elizabeth I had mistreated her, plotted against her, and insulted her in various ways. Mary believed it was time for her to respond, as she dismissed Randolph; the English ambassador and accused him and his queen Elizabeth I of providing financial support to Moray and his rebels.

Power is a complex force that can easily shift and vanish, as evidenced by the events in Scotland where lords and nobles conspired against Mary Stuart. During a parliament session, pregnant Mary made a decision to strip Moray and his fellow rebels of their titles and lands, which caused distress among both Catholic and Protestant lords, who believed no monarch had the right to take such actions. Darnley, who grew hatred towards his wife found comfort in the idea of regaining the title of King of Scotland along with the authority it carried, through the manipulation of his father Lennox. The plan involved accusing the powerless secretary David Rizzio, whom Darnley was led to believe had poisoned Mary against him and that he was behind everything. Accusations of an affair between Rizzio and Mary further fuelled the conspiracy to the level that many questioned the paternity of the coming royal baby. (Jenny Wormald, 2017)

The plan was to eliminate David Rizzio discreetly. However, Darnley insisted on executing the Italian in front of Mary, in intention of asserting his power and demand her to complete the submission. The lords were concerned about the potential harm to Mary and her unborn child, she feared that the shock might cause a miscarriage. Yet, Darnley showed no regard for her well-being. Poor Mary, overly confident in her ability to handle the lords, had no idea of the true nature of her husband. She knew he was bad, but she never realized he was a monster. Elizabeth I opposed this

scheme, as she never wanted Darnley to become the sole ruler of Scotland, considering him wild and immature. (Kate Williams, 2018)

Tragically, as per Kate Williams findings in (2018) on the night of Saturday, March 9, 1566, after Mary dined with her friends, including Rizzio, a group of lords led by Darnley, attacked and mercilessly killed him in front of her. Despite being five months pregnant, Mary attempted to save him. She later recounted that one of the conspirators even pointed a gun at her womb but failed to shoot. Another conspirator suggested stabbing her to death. They murdered her friend while he cried for her help and she, still pregnant tried her best. The next thing she knew, she was imprisoned in her own room by the homicides.

After the assassination of the Italian secretary, Mary Stuart found herself in a dangerous or rather risky position due to the fragile nature of her reign, with the lords siding with Darnley. Despite facing opposition from all sides, one notable supporter was James Hepburn, the 4th Earl of Both well. Interestingly, he had earned his title in 1556 and was a Protestant who had previously supported the Catholic Mary of Guise as regent in her conflict with Protestant lords.

Following Mary of Guise's passing and Mary Stuart's ascension to the throne, Both well continued to show his allegiance by joining her privy council in 1561. (Britannica, 2024)

Despite being falsely accused of conspiring to abduct the Scottish queen in March 1562, Both well managed to flee and sought refuge in France after a period of exile in England. Upon his return to Scotland, he played a crucial role in assisting Mary in quelling the rebellion of the lords against her. Both well carried deep feelings for Mary, even though she was married, recognizing the danger posed by Darnley, particularly after the murder of David Rizzio. He was willing to take great risks to ensure her safety, despite her refusal to engage in a romantic relationship with him, by prioritizing the preservation of her reign and hoping for Darnley's cooperation. (Britannica, 2024)

Mary was under heavy guard in her imprisonment at Edinburgh Castle, where she learned that the only way to ensure her safety was to

escape. According to Kate Williams (2018) findings Both well and Huntly had planned her escape, but it seemed impossible to flee without Darnley's help. He fortunately realized that the lords were using him to eliminate Mary's authority and that he would never become the king of Scotland as a Catholic, he soon regretted his involvement, especially when the lords framed him for Rizzio's murder by keeping his dagger from that night in attempt to clear their names since the brutal manner in which Rizzio was killed reached the Scottish public.

Regardless of the challenges, Mary managed to escape to Bothwell's sister house, where she gathered an army to confront the lords in Edinburgh. The lords, who had held her captive and killed her friend, were so afraid that they begged for forgiveness. However, Mary had enough of their betrayal and declared all the conspirators outlaws. Some fled to England including John Knox seeking refuge, however Elizabeth I refused to welcome them after receiving a letter from Mary that hinted at the challenges faced by female rulers. Elizabeth I feared she could be next. (Kate Williams, 2018)

Based on Kate Williams (2018) Mary Stuart received a signed document from the lords about her husband Darnley, it revealed his involvement in her friend's death plot. Despite this, she refrained from taking legal action against him as she needed him to validate her son's legitimacy. Consequently, he was forbidden from entering the court, which led to his growing anger and feeling of being manipulated and abandoned.

Mary had to rely on her half-brother, Lord Moray once again, as she believed he did not intend to harm her he only aimed for more power and the spread of Protestantism in his previous rebellion. Meanwhile, Elizabeth I was outraged by the situation that involved her cousin, which further fuelled her disdain for Darnley as she stated: "Had I been in Queen Mary's place, I would have taken my husband's dagger and stabbed him with it! Perhaps Mary would have been better off if she had" (Kate Williams, 2018, P: 288)

It was stated by Antonia Fraser in (1969) that on June 19, 1566, a successor was born, the son of Mary Stuart and Darnley named James VI. This birth seemed to offer a solution to the issues faced by both the

Scottish and English crowns. Despite Mary Stuart's request for Elizabeth I to be the godmother of her son, which was accepted, the new heir posed a threat to both of their reigns. Mary feared that the lords would conspire against her, now that there was a new ruler, and it would be advantageous for them to appoint a Protestant lord as a regent. Elizabeth I also faced concerns about being disposed.

Darnley, as a male ruler with a male heir, became assertive and even threatened to leave Mary and live abroad. There were worries that he would establish a separate royal court elsewhere, this urged the lords to seek assistance from Catherine de Medici. Darnley remained in Scotland and caused ongoing turmoil. Mary was extremely ill after the birth that many of her subjects believed she was pregnant again which made Darnley declare with an irritating manner that if the new born could not survive there will be a replacement this declaration turned many lords against him since it was an insult to both the queen and the heir to the Scottish throne. (Antonia Fraser, 1969)

Mary Stuart's downfall was ultimately sealed by the tragic event of Darnley's death. On the fateful night of February 10, 1567, at Kirk o' Field in Edinburgh, Scotland, Darnley was brutally murdered. The precise circumstances surrounding his demise remain a subject of ongoing debate. However, it is widely believed that he was suffocated and strangled, with his lifeless body discovered in the garden following a devastating explosion that had destroyed the house he was staying in. The planners of this heinous act are commonly thought to have been associated with James Hepburn, the 4th Earl of Bothwell with complicity of Mary Stuart. (Britannica, 2024)

7. CONCLUSION

Upon the exploration of Mary Stuart's eventful or rather complex saga that included social, political, religious, and personal aspects, that was attributed to the deep-seated societal challenges she encountered, ruling a traditionalist or rather sexist nation, Mary had to confront inherent mistrust and opposition to her authority. Her Catholic faith battled with the rising Protestantism in Scotland and England, and complicated her position. Although she encountered countless obstacles, Mary could demonstrate her

capability in ruler ship and made a lasting legacy as a symbol of courage and determination.

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