



*Mary I: The Daughter of Time*

**John Edwards**

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**Review by: Valerie Schutte**



*Mary I: The Daughter of Time*. By John Edwards. London: Allen Lane, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-241-18410-3. xi + 97 pp. \$24.95.

John Edwards's newest biography of Mary I of England presents her as a "pioneer of English female sovereignty," a moniker that has traditionally been applied to her younger half-sister and successor, Elizabeth I (ix). Being a volume in the Penguin Monarchs series, Edwards's biography is concise and condensed, yet still full of information, new sources, and re-interpretations of Mary's historically poor reputation (and where it originated).

The book's concise format makes this study appealing to both amateur historians seeking to know more about Mary, as well as academics for its engagement with the historiography and its reassessment of England's most misunderstood monarch. For example, one new interpretation put forward by Edwards is that it is understandable that the 1530s were incredibly difficult for Mary. Previously, historians have criticized her for being hysterical or unduly harsh to her sister and family, yet Edwards simply notes that these years would have been difficult for her and left an impact on her, without judging Mary for that impact (14). Elsewhere, Edwards directly takes on Geoffrey Elton and his assessment of her inadequacies. Edwards writes, "Any efforts to offer an appreciative and realistic assessment of Mary's education and intellectual skills have still to confront the prevailing account of her half-sister Elizabeth's total superiority in these respects, which was artfully constructed years later by the latter's tutor, Roger Ascham, when the older sister was safely dead" (29). Elton used Ascham's praise as the basis for his own, yet Edwards points out that Ascham's account of Elizabeth was most likely hyperbole, and that Mary received a Catholic humanist education as good as those of her sister and brother, and should not be discounted because she was not a Protestant. It is not known if Mary was a great intellectual because she just did not leave behind as many writings as did Elizabeth.

Vitally useful in Edwards's study is an entire chapter on religion, not only that of Mary's own personal faith, but also of England in the sixteenth century more generally. In this chapter, Edwards unpacks contemporary religious terminology and attempts to understand religion from a sixteenth-century perspective. He addresses the heresy burnings and how they were able to legally take place. Edwards does not place blame on one single individual (typically Mary or Bishop Gardiner), but explains sixteenth-century definitions of heresy, and how trials and punishment operated as part of society. Like *Mary I: England's Catholic Queen* (2011), Edwards's full-length biography of Mary, this study has the benefit of his incorporation of Spanish-language sources. These sources illuminate continental perceptions of the English

queen and her kingdom. With them, Edwards offers a new assessment of what has been considered one of the lowest points of Mary's reign: the loss of Calais. Contemporary Spanish letters reveal that blame was not directly placed on Mary, and show Philip's confusion as to why Elizabeth did not try to recapture it later (73). As for Philip, Edwards points to new work being done on Philip as necessary to understanding Mary's queenship. Edwards constantly points out that Philip was legally King of England and needs to be evaluated as such, for both his impact on English politics and his impact on England's queen.

Finally, Edwards suggests two high points in Mary's reign: her accession in 1553 and her marriage to Philip in 1554. These two monumental events, however, were later undercut by those who preferred Elizabeth and reformed religion, thus damaging Mary's reputation as both a woman and a queen. Edwards suggests that comparison of Mary and Elizabeth "as rulers actual or potential, was already being made even before Mary was in her tomb" (68). Those who rejected Mary's returning England to Catholicism placed their hopes in Elizabeth, and it was well known that they did so. As for Mary's reign largely being judged a failure, Edwards explains that many circumstances were out of her control, from bad weather to influenza, her childlessness, and religious disputes between the papacy, the Hapsburgs, and Cardinal Pole. Mary's historical reputation, therefore, is "complex" and still requires further investigation (79).

At the end of his biography, Edwards provides an annotated bibliography of further reading, which is immensely helpful to show how modern scholarship has treated Mary, and where the most recent work has begun to rehabilitate her reign and reputation. The most cutting-edge revisionist work has been undertaken regarding religion under Mary, and Edwards calls for this to stimulate work on other areas of her reign as well. If there can be one critique of the biography, it is that though this study wrestles with the historiography, and offers some new interpretations of Mary, its infrequent citations make it difficult to know specifically which historians he is referring to, unless he mentions them by name. Edwards's biography of Mary, however, is a readable, concise account of England's first queen regnant, and is an excellent call to action to continue researching Mary's misunderstood and misrepresented life and queenship.

*VALERIE SCHUTTE*  
Beaver Falls, PA