

DAUGHTERS OF THE WINTER QUEEN by Nancy Goldstone

Reading Group Guide

Questions and Topics for Discussion

(1) Elizabeth Stuart's mother, Anne of Denmark, was upset that her only daughter gave up her royal status to marry a man so far beneath her in rank. She wanted Elizabeth to marry the King of Spain instead, even if it meant converting to Catholicism, because then her daughter would hold a position of great wealth and influence in Europe. If you were Elizabeth's mother, what would you have wanted for her? Do you think Elizabeth made the right choice?

(2) On the other hand, Elizabeth's father, James I, was willing to lower her rank by marrying her to Frederick, elector of the Palatinate, because he believed women to be inferior. He would never have agreed to the wedding if she had been a son and not a daughter. But Frederick later accepted the Crown of Bohemia because he believed his marriage indicated that his father-in-law would support him, and the conflict escalated quickly because the rest of Europe also believed that the marriage indicated that England would intervene. Do you think if James had esteemed his daughter as much as he did his sons, the outcome to the Thirty Years' War might have been different? Would there even have been a Thirty Years' War if he had not married her so far below her rank?

(3) Alexandre Dumas's blockbuster novel *The Three Musketeers* portrays Cardinal Richelieu as an evil mastermind intent on destroying the sympathetic Queen of France, who is having an affair with the heroic Duke of Buckingham. Now that you have read *Daughters of the Winter*

*Queen*, what do you think of Dumas's premise? Do you think perhaps Cardinal Richelieu deserves a somewhat less villainous reputation, and the Duke of Buckingham a rather less heroic one? Can historical judgments be subjective?

(4) Princess Elizabeth was obviously a brilliant, courageous woman who was denied the chance to rule, not to mention love and a family, because she held fast to her religion. Part of her strong commitment to Protestantism was undoubtedly due to her having stayed in Germany with her very devout grandmother until she was ten, before joining the rest of the family in Holland. Do you think she would have been happier or more fulfilled if she had been raised in tolerant Leyden with the rest of her siblings, and had agreed to convert to Catholicism in order to marry the King of Poland, as Edward agreed to convert in order to marry Anna de Gonzaga? Or do you believe the intellectual and spiritual companionship she found with Descartes, the most renowned philosopher of the period, sufficiently compensated her for the absence of marriage and motherhood?

(5) If Louise Hollandine had been able to earn her living painting, as women of a lower class were sometimes able to do, do you believe she would have converted to Catholicism and left The Hague? Why do you think people over the centuries were so willing to believe that she had borne fourteen children out of wedlock?

(6) Alone among her sisters, Sophia achieved it all—husband, love (at least for a little while), children, a secure, affluent position in society. To what do you think she owed her success? Was

it simply luck or was it her character, upbringing, and/or ambition? In what respects did she differ from her sisters, and in what ways was she similar?

(7) Sophia clearly negotiated actively for the British Crown, and it is her name on the Act of Settlement. It is her line that has continued unbroken to the present day. Without her, a different family would occupy Buckingham Palace today. But although the lives of Victoria and Elizabeth II, her descendants, are well known, Sophia remains invisible. Even in Great Britain, the vast majority of people believe that her son, George I, was responsible for gaining the throne. Why do you think Sophia has been denied credit all these years?

(8) The author, Nancy Goldstone, has argued that it is not possible to understand what really happened in the 17th century without Elizabeth Stuart and her daughters, and that their collective courage, ambition, and commitment is the true legacy of Mary, queen of Scots. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?