



Elizabeth I

Margaret George

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New York Times bestselling author Margaret George captures history's most enthralling queen-as she confronts rivals to her throne and to her heart.

One of today's premier historical novelists, Margaret George dazzles here as she tackles her most difficult subject yet: the legendary Elizabeth Tudor, queen of enigma-the Virgin Queen who had many suitors, the victor of the Armada who hated war; the gorgeously attired, jewel- bedecked woman who pinched pennies. England's greatest monarch has baffled and intrigued the world for centuries. But what was she really like?

In this novel, her flame-haired, lookalike cousin, Lettice Knollys, thinks she knows all too well. Elizabeth's rival for the love of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and mother to the Earl of Essex, the mercurial nobleman who challenged Elizabeth's throne, Lettice had been intertwined with Elizabeth since childhood. This is a story of two women of fierce intellect and desire, one trying to protect her country, and throne, the other trying to regain power and position for her family and each vying to convince the reader of her own private vision of the truth about Elizabeth's character. Their gripping drama is acted out at the height of the flowering of the Elizabethan age. Shakespeare, Marlowe, Dudley, Raleigh, Drake-all of them swirl through these pages as they swirled through the court and on the high seas.

This is a magnificent, stay-up-all-night page-turner that is George's finest and most compelling novel and one that is sure to please readers of Alison Weir, Philippa Gregory, and Hilary Mantel.

Elizabeth I Details

Date : Published April 5th 2011 by Viking (first published March 1st 2011)

ISBN : 9780670022533

Author : Margaret George

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Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, English History, Tudor Period, European Literature, British Literature

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From Reader Review Elizabeth I for online ebook

Orsolya says

Much has been written about and discussed of Robert Dudley: the great “love” of Queen Elizabeth I’s life. However, there was another Robert, the Earl of Essex and Dudley’s stepson, whom also impacted Elizabeth’s later life. Margaret George focuses on this relationship in her novel, “Elizabeth I”.

“Elizabeth I” is unique in its time period setting by beginning the story with the defeat of the Spanish Armada and emphasizing the Virgin Queen’s late adulthood. George highlights the interaction between Elizabeth and Essex which is standout among other Elizabethan HF novels. George’s prose is accurate with the time period while her descriptions are authentic, rich, and illustrative resulting in a captivating novel that whisks the read away in terms of imagery.

Also valuable is the plethora of historical facts and information that George uses to thicken the plot. Her research is extensive and “Elizabeth I” is therefore a terrific novel to introduce readers to Elizabeth accurately or to refresh the minds of those already familiar with her reign.

On the contrary, though, “Elizabeth I” has some slow, fluffy parts which the novel would have benefited without. George alternates the narrating voices between Elizabeth and Lettice Knollys (Elizabeth’s cousin, one-time wife to Dudley, and mother to Essex) in order to provide a two-person view of the Elizabeth/Essex relationship. Yet, this fails miserably in that Lettice’s chapters are incredibly fictional (not much sound research exists on her) and have no sense or reason to be in the story and are therefore filler. George should have stuck merely to Elizabeth’s view.

“Elizabeth I” also suffers from not being eventful enough on the whole. Oftentimes, it feels like nothing is happening or being built up which won’t satisfy readers seeking a true plot arc; although it is good for those merely interested in an Elizabeth portrait. Overall, this slackens the pace and may encourage skimming. Due to this absence of action, George often resorts to an, “As you know, Bob”- style of writing to describe events as the characters aren’t living them first-hand.

George’s work contains some editing issues which seemingly fell through the filter. For example, p. 502 contains a line starting, “That night at dinner...” and mentions children being in bed. ‘Dinner’ in the Elizabethan times was conducted at around 10am-noon while a light supper was eaten during our modern-day dinner time. George correctly describes this in other parts of the book. These small mistakes do not hinder the plot but are noticeable to experienced eyes.

The major climax of “Elizabeth I” concerning the behavior and downfall of the Earl of Essex is exciting and illustrative, heightening the plot and increasing the pace. Although the build-up was long; it is enjoyable when finally at hand.

After the riveting climax, “Elizabeth I” declines in strength and becomes quite ‘cheesy’ as it revisits and ties up all of the fictional strings which were the weaker parts of the novel to begin with. This leaves the ending feeling like a detached and separate conclusion from the book.

George provides an “Author’s Note” describing the historical liberties taken while also offering some sources/further reading.

“Elizabeth I” is a strong novel despite some minor errors and pacing issues. George does well with presenting Elizabeth in both a positive and negative light (due to the narrative viewpoint of Lettice) and therefore doesn’t simply pen a hagiography. “Elizabeth I” isn’t perfect but is still definitely recommended for all fans of the Tudor era and Queen Elizabeth HF novels.

Siv30 says

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Grace Elliot says

Let me preface this review by saying I'm a huge fan of Margaret George. It was reading her book about Mary Queen of Scots that first kindled my interest in history. Ms George is a towering literary talent and I re-read The Autobiography of Henry VIII every year. So why then did I feel an overwhelming sense of release when I finished 'Elizabeth I'?

This book was a slog to read with little or no of the Ms George magic. It struck me she has lost her way as a writer and become totally absorbed by the research and historical accuracy that she has forgotten the craft of writing an enthralling story. Her earlier books are outstanding in their novel approach to a great historical characters - but Elizabeth is little more than a literary documentary on the life of an elderly queen. I'm guessing the 'hook', if you can call it that, is that we have two viewpoints - one from Queen Elizabeth, and one from Lettice Dudley - the wife of the man linked romantically with Elizabeth - but frankly, this was not enough to hold my interest.

If I'm truthful this book only rates a 2 - but I can't bring myself to give a book by Ms George that, because I owe the author for the multiple hours of pleasure her other books have given me.

Felice says

Historical fiction novelist Margaret George has never shied away from retelling a well known story. Her subjects have included: Henry the VIII, Cleopatra, Mary Queen of Scots, Helen of Troy and now Elizabeth I. It takes a lot of nerve and a passionate love of the subject to tackle the life of a figure we could all know enough about to write a 200 word bio. Add to that the explosion of novels about the Tudors in the last few years and George's audaciousness is multiplied by a thousand.

There are two big, nice surprises in Elizabeth I. The first is that the book does not start with Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth's birth or even her ascension to the throne. The novel begins when Elizabeth is 55 and the Spanish Armada is about to attack. She has already been Queen for almost thirty years and would remain Queen for only another fourteen years. According to most historians by this time the great successes of her reign were past. The second surprise is Lettice Knollys. Lettice was a cousin of Elizabeth's and one of her romantic and political rivals. In 1578 Lettice married for the second time, after having been married to the Earl of Essex, to Elizabeth's great favorite Robert Dudley. In her anger and jealousy Elizabeth banished Lettice from court.

George alternates the novels' chapters between Elizabeth and Lettice. These two women were very much alike. They were both ambitious, brilliant, gravely concerned about the future of their houses and powerful. Despite those traits, shared blood (Lettice was the granddaughter of Anne Boleyn) and agendas because of Lettice's marriage to Elizabeth's supposed lover and her son's efforts to power grab at court they were doomed to be enemies. That's not to say that George has written just a historical frenemy novel. The different narrators bring different perspectives to the detailed political and social events occurring during Elizabeth's reign that George covers.

Despite Margaret George's inspired decision to juxtapose Elizabeth and Lettice and to not tell Elizabeth's life story in a linear fashion, the novel never comes alive. It's quite disappointing. In Elizabeth I, George goes to g-r-e-a-t pains to write a relentlessly fact-filled opus. Unlike George's previous novels covering roughly the same period and family The Autobiography of Henry the VIII With Notes By His Fool Will Somers and Mary Queen of Scotland and the Isles, Elizabeth I is essentially a humorless, play-by-play imagining of the sovereign's daily planner over her lifetime. George didn't leave a drop of her research out of this book and the reader pays the price.

Suzanne says

I'm going to say right at the outset that I loved this book and consider it to be one of Margaret George's finest. That said, I know there are some that were disappointed because the author begins the work of historical fiction when the Queen is 55 years old. It's not a book about the excitement of her early years, but I don't believe it takes anything away from this novel.

Robert Dudley has already died. Elizabeth loved him, and although she had already decided to remain unmarried (she was known as the Virgin Queen), she was terribly jealous and angry when he secretly wed Lettice Knollys. When the novel begins, that event took place long ago, but Elizabeth still harbors a grudge against Lettice.

The author uses dual narratives here. Elizabeth is one narrator and Lettice is the other. A third and very important character is Lettice's son, Robert, Earl of Essex, who becomes a favorite of Elizabeth. I have always been curious (and a little confused) about the relationship between Essex and Elizabeth. Having Margaret George present this novel through the eyes of Elizabeth and Lettice helped me to gain a better understanding of that relationship and its affect on the country and those involved.

Very well done.

Elena says

Elizabeth I was not easy for me. I decided to start it because, after devouring *The Life of Elizabeth I*, I wanted to read a novel about this famous queen, and Margaret George's book had been waiting on my kindle for quite a while. However, I was startled to discover that, far from covering all of Elizabeth's life, it only starts with the defeat of the Armada. I had totally missed it when I bought it! Furthermore, the book is long and the pace is quite slow, and sometimes I was unsure if I was going to finish it. However, I decided to do it, and I am glad I kept going.

George's book is extremely well researched, to the point that sometimes it feels more like a non-fiction than a novel. The setting is very vivid and descriptive, with many parts which describe the court life of the period, as well as some entertaining anecdotes and appearances of famous historical figures. However, while at first this is impressive and truly gives a sense of the time period, after a while it becomes too much and slows down the pace considerably. On the other side, the most gripping parts of the book are really well written and involving; but, unfortunately, they are not so frequent.

The story is mostly told from Elizabeth's point of view, but some chapters are narrated by Lettice Knollys instead. At first I found it weird and a little unnecessary, but as the story went on I started to enjoy Lettice's chapters as well. Elizabeth's characterization, however, is definitely superior. I really liked the fact that she narrates as an adult (and, for the time, even old) woman. Her remembrances of the past and her reflections about the passing of time are powerful and emotional.

Even if overall I enjoyed it, I would not recommend George's book to readers who aren't familiar with *Elizabeth I*. However, if you like descriptive historical novels and don't mind a slower pace, you should give it a try.

Jodi says

Enjoyed this book tremendously! Am not one who likes Queen Elizabeth I messed with so when I received this book as an anniversary present from my husband I was a bit skeptical. No need, so thoroughly steeped in history as to be acceptable to even the most proficient in the Tudor era. George does let you know at the end

what is historiography and what is fiction (which as a former-history teacher I appreciate—can be so hard to dispel the history students pick up in Disney cartoons or Hollywood movies).

This is not for the faint of heart coming in at 641 pages (and surprisingly only deals with Elizabeth's life from 1588.) Remarkably, only saw one noticeable 'error' in printing where an 'a' was left out of a sentence. Commendable considering some books I have read that are so distracting because of errors it is a challenge to complete them.

The narration flips between Elizabeth and Lettice Knollys which works fairly well (except for a fictional meeting at Hever.) Great historical novel of Elizabeth I, would highly recommend it.

Lisa (Lisa and Things) says

This was a bit of a slow read for me, but I'll definitely pick up another Margaret George novel!

It was really interesting to read about Elizabeth I after having read (and watched) fiction about her parents, Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. While it was interesting to read about Elizabeth's later years, I'd love to read/learn more about her earlier years (e.g. her childhood, the early years of her reign, what unfolded with Mary Queen of Scots, etc.)

Like I mentioned, it was a bit slow for me. I wouldn't recommend this book to someone who is new to the genre, but if you're a reader of (adult) historical fiction I would suggest giving it a try!

Linda C says

Overall, this book was a huge disappointment. It was tedious, boring, and way, way, way too long. It took me over 4 weeks to read, which meant that I really did not want to be reading it. If one ever suffers from insomnia, 30 pages with this book and you will be out like a light (probably why it took me so long to read it, I could never stay awake). I should also add that the four weeks of reading time included an 11 hour plane ride, so if I couldn't even stick with it while confined in an airplane, I really didn't like it very much.

This book told the story of Elizabeth I in the latter part of her life, beginning with the Armada. It was told in the first person. Interspersed throughout was the parallel story of her cousin and enemy Lettice, also told in the first person. What I learned about Elizabeth I was that she was petty and mean spirited, generally not a nice person. (Lettice's crime, for which she was banished from court for 30 years, was marrying E I's boyfriend, Robert Dudley. E I wasn't going to marry him, so I guess that meant that one else could either. "If I can't have you, no one can...") What I learned about Lettice is that she seemed like an interesting person, of whom I would like to read more.

What I learned about the author, Margaret George, is that she is in love with her own writing. How else can you explain a 400 page book expanding to 760 pages? There were 400 pages of quite good writing, and 360 of tedium. As an example, at the end of the book, there were several sentences of Catherine Carey, one of E I's ladies, doing needlework, rubbing her forehead, and discussing a headache with E I. Since they were both ladies of a certain age, one expected the headache to be significant, i.e. she is stricken with a seizure later that day. But no, she dies-- four months later of a sweating sickness. There was nothing of value pertaining to the headache or the needlework.

For the last half of the the book, I amused myself (it helped me to stay awake), by mentally eliminating sentences as I read. In most paragraphs, half of the sentences should be cut-- ergo, we have a 400 page book, which might have been a good read.

The author also did not include a Tudor family tree or list of characters, which was a minor annoyance. I have a fairly strong grasp of the major players, but there were so many minor relatives, that it would have been useful in keeping track. Lettice, for example, was not a first cousin, but a second or third cousin (her grandmother, Mary Boleyn was E I's aunt, which made E I and Lettice's mother/father first cousins, or possibly half sibs, since Henry VIII may have been the father of Mary's children. I think.)

Heidi The Hippie Reader says

Margaret George writes about Queen Elizabeth I of England and the last years of her reign.

I think most people are aware that Elizabeth's father was Henry VIII and the tumultuous going's on that preceded and then ushered in her reign. But fewer are aware of what happened during the later years of her life.

The last years were still exciting and dangerous, filled with invading Spanish armadas (more than one) and power hungry lords. That's what this book is all about.

I confess: I am a major fan of both Elizabeth I and Margaret George.

"I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and of a king of England, too- and think it foul scorn that Parma or any prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm." pg 41.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of visiting Westminster Abbey and seeing the tomb of Elizabeth I. The crowds were such that I couldn't linger by the effigy but was forced into constant motion, rushed past.

I burst into tears as I exited the area of the church that contained her tomb and I was completely overcome with emotion. My husband led me through the throng again, just so I could spend a moment more near one of my favorite historical figures.

What do I love about Elizabeth I? Let me count the ways!

First of all, she insisted that she was a ruler in her own right, not because she was married to a royal. Elizabeth used the game of courtship to increase her power. That's hard core.

"Francois had been my last, and in many ways my only, serious marriage possibility. I had been wooed by twenty-five foreign suitors over the years. I never intended to marry any of them, but it was my best tool of diplomacy." pg 72.

Second, she smart with her power rather than greedy. She navigated a world in which she had few allies because of her religion. And she never accepted defeat. *"For my own part, I swear that my heart has never known what fear is. In ambition of glory I never sought to enlarge the territories of my land. If I have used my forces to keep the enemy from you, I have thereby done it for your safety, and to keep dangers at bay."* pg

She was well-learned, charismatic and always knew what to say in public situations.

"It is not possible to see a woman of so fine and vigorous a disposition both in mind and in body. One can say nothing to her on which she will not make an apt comment. She is a great princess who knows everything." pg 363.

And finally, she was honest and true to the end of her life to the responsibility of leading her country. Elizabeth I loved her people.

"There will never queen sit in my seat with more zeal to my country, care to my subjects, and that will sooner with willingness venture her life for your good and safety, than myself. ... And though you have had and may have many princes more mighty and wise sitting in this seat, yet you never had or shall have any that will love you better." pg 608.

My quibble with this book was not with the research or the story, which were both fine in my opinion. It was the fact that George split the narrative- most of the chapters are told from Elizabeth's point of view, but some are from Lettice's point of view, the mother of Robert Devereux.

I understand Lettice's narrative was used to explain Devereux's motivations and unexplained behavior, but I felt as if it slowed the story down. Coming in at 662 pages, this was a book that needed to stay at a fast clip. I didn't feel as if it achieved that.

That being said, George provides an amazing escape from the world and unparalleled historical fiction, with this story.

The weekend I started this book, my mother had an unexpected heart attack and nearly died. She was in good health and relatively young. It was quite a shock.

Some people spend hours worrying, others in conversation or watching TV to wile away stressful hours.

I picked up *Elizabeth I* by Margaret George and transported myself to Elizabethan England. There was worry, danger, intrigue... and when I needed to put down the book and attend to family concerns, I could. By the time the weekend was over, I had completed this book and my mother was discharged from the hospital.

It looks as if she will make a full recovery. And I learned quite a bit more about Elizabeth I.

If you are looking for distraction from every day life, this epic tale could fit the bill. Recommended for historical fiction lovers, of course, but also for anyone who desperately needs a way to pass the time.

Thank you, Margaret George, for providing that for me, just when I needed it most.

Jana says

Not bad, but underwhelming all the same. Readers should be aware, going into this, that the book begins when Queen Elizabeth I is fifty-five years of age and that any prior events will be referred to in clunky or

random exposition. One of the most unfortunate consequences of starting a book so late in Elizabeth I's reign is that two of her most trusted advisors die quite early on, and obviously she's upset, but it's difficult for the reader to have any emotional reaction. If I hadn't known better, I'd say that this is the second volume of a two-book series written by Margaret George about Elizabeth I's life. Were that the case, I would have rated this book more highly, just because of the sheer amount of historical detail and painstaking research which is provided.

I've heard good things from trusted friends about other novels by George--namely *The Memoirs of Cleopatra* and *Helen of Troy*--so I'm not willing to give up on her entirely.

Simon says

I should start by saying that I enjoy Margaret George's work most of the time, and unlike Sharon Kaye Penman (whom I also like), she doesn't make historical figures unnaturally cosy ("Uncle Richard! Sit down and have a cup of malmsey with Ned and Dickon!" Like that) and when George captures the "voice" of her protagonist, things are usually entertaining without straining credulity.

But.

Elizabeth Tudor emerges from this doorstop of a book as *so* smart, *so* kind, *so* wise, *so* statesmanlike, *so* . . . well, you get the idea. George also makes the unfortunate decision to contrast Elizabeth's first person narrative with Lettice Knollys' first-person narrative, and it isn't a good sign that the Lettice chapters are far more interesting than Elizabeth's. Although they're equally annoying. Because if George's reconstruction of Elizabeth's last years are boring, her recreation of Lettice is a bit *too* exciting. It turns out that Lettice has a torrid affair with --- wait for it --- Shakespeare, and may well be the Dark Lady of the Sonnets. Maybe. She also has a torrid affair with Southampton, Christopher Blount, Robert Dudley and some others. Elizabeth Does Not. The scene at the end where the two cousins (Lettice through Mary Boleyn) compare notes about whether it was better to be a slut or a queen was so unrealistic I kept waiting for George to have a talking rabbit late for a tea party dart through the garden in which the two women are sitting.

Meanwhile, George portrays the Earl of Essex as unbearable, which kind of begs the question as to why Elizabeth gave him any favor at all. Even if he was Dudley's legacy, Essex wasn't Dudley's *child*. And he proved incompetent at virtually every task he was given. Nor did the queen sleep with him, although George has a truly hilarious scene where Essex and Elizabeth vibrate away like steam engines in adjoining rooms. Will she or won't she make a noise so Essex will know to come to her in the night? (SPOILER ALERT: She won't.)

However, George does convey the climate of Elizabeth's reign during the last fifteen years. And while the writing on this one as compared to, say, *The Autobiography of Henry VIII*, is pretty pedestrian, she can still make you turn the page. I also laughed out loud every time George has Elizabeth sit through a Shakespeare play and make criticisms. It's okay --- Lettice gets him.

C.W. says

Margaret George has cemented her reputation as a grand dame of historical fiction, creating epic novels

about history's most legendary characters, from Henry VIII to Mary of Scotland to Helen of Troy. In her latest novel, *ELIZABETH I*, she tackles perhaps the most legendary and elusive figure of all - the Virgin Queen herself.

Elizabeth Tudor is famous as much for what she said and did as for what she did not. She remains so fascinating precisely because we know so little about her personally, even as her reign is replete with some of English history's most well-publicized events. She was a study in contrasts, and Ms George uses these contradictions to full advantage in her meticulously researched portrayal of an aging Elizabeth and her world.

Beginning with the first Armada (there were several, as the novel points out) and spanning the last fifteen years of Elizabeth's eventful life, the queen comes across as a steely and astute observer of her own strengths and foibles, as well as those around her, even as she's drawn in the wake of her beloved Leicester's death into the magnetic, ultimately tragic thrall of handsome, unstable Essex. Threaded throughout the narrative - in which, of course, the queen dominates - are those who knew her, such as Leicester's widow and the mother of Essex, the irrepressible Lettice Knollys. Lettice has battled against Elizabeth and lost; despite physical commonalities, there doesn't seem to be anything remotely alike in these two disparate women. Yet as both become pawns of Essex's erratic behavior, parallels begin to emerge, and it is the weaving of these which bring a touching end to the book. For while Elizabeth is the ballast of the story, her keen common sense, majestic prerogative, and deep personal sacrifices permeating the very fabric of her being, Lettice is the sail that draws their shared story onto its shoals— fraught with emotion, captive of her flagrant past, Lettice does not recognize what looms before her until it is too late.

Other memorable characters such as Elizabeth's trusted Lord Burghley and his canny son, Robert; her intimate ladies; and a surprising appearance by the Bard himself, as well as myriad of courtiers who made Elizabeth's palaces glitter, round out this heady look at Gloriana and the flesh-and-blood woman underneath her immortal façade.

Janie Brooks says

Elizabeth I was an iconic figure in English history, although there are very little actual personal papers on her that let us delve into her own thoughts. Margaret George did a fine job of breathing character into her volume of historical fiction. This book switches perspective to Lettice Knollys, who was Elizabeth's cousin and rival. Lettice is also the mother to Robert Devereaux, the Earl of Essex and much of the book centers on his relationship with Elizabeth. Margaret covers the Spanish Armada, the troubled fighting with Ireland, and Elizabeth's own struggle to maintain her power by balancing her rights to govern the people with a steadily stronger Parliament.

We watch as Elizabeth's inner court slowly dies off and she is faced with her own mortality. Margaret gives us a plain view of how it feels to watch Elizabeth's friends and extended family die off due to war casualties and old age. The first 300 pages went by quickly, as we are engaged in court life, and for me, more familiar characters of Elizabeth's reign. The middle of the book seemed to flounder just a tad as we get caught up in historical fact, but Margaret George manages to tidy it up and the last couple of hundred pages are masterfully written. We are introduced to English Theater and the playwright, Shakespeare and how his writings reflected the current trends and events of the time.

I think Margaret did an excellent job of introducing many characters that flowed in and out of Elizabeth's court. I enjoyed the book overall and would highly recommend it to anyone who is a fan of Tudor history!

I received a free copy of this book through goodreads as a first read.

Marinela "SAM" De Leon says

Elizabeth I has always been one of my favorite heroines. She was a CEO who managed an almost bankrupt England, had a deep sense of people's inner motives and never wavered in her promise to stay married to the people of England. This isn't just another big book about a Tudor, this is a book to read if you want to know Elizabeth I as a woman too. Margaret George used two points of view--Elizabeth's and Lettice Knollys, her cousin and the wife of her beloved Robert Dudley. These two strong-willed women provide a brilliant interplay of emotions as they navigate the treacherous waters of the Queen's court. George remained true to historical accounts but used her own vision to show the readers that Elizabeth I was also a flawed human being who was vain, suffered from hot flashes and despised growing old. These flaws made her more real to me.

Francine says

I count myself as one of the people lucky enough to receive an advance copy of Margaret George's new novel Elizabeth I. I can honestly say that having read every one of Ms. George's novels I had every expectation to thoroughly enjoy it and I was not disappointed. The author researches her subjects for months, even years, and writes a very factual novel but in a fascinating way. She writes in a story format so as to entertain while imparting a wonderful piece of historical data that doesn't leave the reader feeling like they have just read a high school text book. I have always been a huge fan of Margaret George and continue to be so after reading this book. I hope she goes on to continue writing about the royalty of centuries ago because she is truly gifted.

She manages to show Elizabeth I in two lights, both believable. One being the conceited queen who struggles to maintain her power over England without the help of a husband by her side. We also see the queen who desperately wants to be loved by both her subjects and by Robert Dudley, a softer side that is rarely written about. The love she holds for her infamous mother, Anne Boleyn, is evident and she flaunts it in a quiet yet almost "in your face" way. I ended up admiring this woman who decided that she would rule England on her own in a time when women were thought to need a man for everything. She may even be one of the world's first feminists. This is a wonderful novel that I shall gladly add to my ever-growing Royal collection.

LeAnn says

As much as I enjoyed the descriptive writing -- boy, can Margaret George make me experience the reality of living as an Elizabethan -- and the deft handling of a middle-aged woman's viewpoint, I struggled to finish this novel. I even struggled as I read it to identify what, exactly, my issues were with it. Was I just not in the mood for a novel that stretched more than 600 pages? Have I gotten so used to reading my guilty-pleasure reads that I can no longer tolerate the slower pace and richer language of less-formulaic fiction? In all honesty, I made it halfway through *Elizabeth I* before whatever magic glue pulls a reader through a book ran

out. Given that I know how it ends, I had little motivation to keep reading. Perhaps for the less-knowledgeable reader, not knowing how Elizabeth's relationship with the Earl of Essex develops is enough to maintain suspense. But, from a purely dramatic standpoint, it is a tepid suspense even so.

In the end, I'm perplexed about what George could have done differently to keep my attention from wandering. After all, the broad strokes of her narrative were already defined for her and likely well known. Even her use of Elizabeth's cousin (and Essex's mother) Lettice, added little drama and seemed designed to mitigate the limitations of a first-person narrator (Elizabeth). Yet Lettice is really only a commentator on the action rather than an actor. Elizabeth herself, although a queen who must have had a very busy life ruling her kingdom, comes across as having little to do or think about save Essex and, occasionally and as an afterthought, the vile Spanish. There is very little about the continued religious fragmentation of English society beyond Elizabeth's mention that she has done her best to hold her beloved country together.

George opens the novel dramatically with the Pope's blessing of papal bulls condemning her, the Spanish Armada setting sail, and Elizabeth anxiously awaiting the fate of England and herself. After that, the action dwindles, and almost all of it is "off stage" because neither Elizabeth or Lettice are able to see or experience most of Essex's adventures and plans. Essex is a cipher, known only through the biased prism of each woman's eyes. Both women come across as highly intelligent and mostly reasonable (if biased toward one another), but I was left frustrated with my inability to decide for myself about Essex's character and motivations.

As with most historical novels that I read, I've developed a strong desire to learn the actual details of Elizabeth's life and reign. Even the small amount that I've uncovered makes me yearn to read a novel of her early years, the ones after her infamous mother, Jane Boleyn, is beheaded and she is shuffled away from court where she is a sad reminder of Henry's desperate and divisive attempt to beget a male heir. I want to read about her romance with Robert Dudley, her terror at being sent to the Tower (her mother's last home) by her eldest half-sister Bloody Mary, who had every reason to dislike and distrust her, and her choices about her advisers, the men who empowered her to rule. I want to read all the drama and conflict inherent in the tumultuous early decades of her reign, including her clever handling of all her suitors and her house arrest of her cousin and rival, Mary Queen of Scots. I think that *that* story would provide a nice counterbalance to George's reflective, almost elegiac, story.

Caroline says

I've never really worshiped at the altar of Margaret George.

"The Memoirs of Cleopatra" is fantastic; that I will never deny. It's probably the best fictional Cleopatra book out there. "Helen of Troy" is frothy and fun and kind of a really long summer beach read? I don't know. "Mary Queen of Scotland & The Isles" was basically a bodice ripper with really disturbing implications... (George apparently dismisses any idea that Mary was kidnapped or raped by her third husband--and believe me, that possibility is quite strong and at least deserves to be acknowledged when you're writing about Mary, Queen of Scots.) "Mary, Called Magdalene" is the red-headed stepchild of George novels, and with good reason. It's interesting, in my opinion, but quite slow. (Still better than "Elizabeth I", but I'll get to that later.) Finally... I will never understand the world's love affair with "The Autobiography Henry VIII" which is basically a sexist if occasionally intriguing adventure through a totally glorified Henry VIII. (But Caroline! you say. It was largely from Henry's perspective! Of course he was glorified and sexist! Yes, reader. Of course he was. Yet I have read books from the perspective of sexist males, and the female characters were

still valid, rounded characters textually. Margaret George simply couldn't hack it.)

So, obviously, I have a love/hate relationship with Margaret George. Still: I cannot believe how boring this thing was. Just, pardon my French, fucking boring. It was this endless list of what Elizbaeth I did here, what she did there, what she did in the privy, how much menopause sucked... (Not that menopause doesn't suck; I know I'm still a youngling, but I do have a bitchy grandma out there.) Here's the thing--there's a reason why so few authors choose to write in detail about Elizabeth's final years. If they do, they focus on the Essex plot... which is what I thought George would do. Especially since a good portion of the book delves into Lettice Knollys's--Essex's mother--perspective.

Nope. Nope. Essex does feature heavily in the novel, but the plot doesn't really happen until the end. Even then, you're kind of stuck wondering why Elizabeth would be fooled by him, since George portrays her more as a god than a human being. She's so magnanimous, and so dull. There are no believable frailties within George's Elizabeth. She's like Glenda Jackson's Liz on crack, with none of the humanity. (Or maybe Cate Blanchett's Elizabeth? I don't know. Either way, she was hitting up the stereotype.)

Lettice is a bit more human, but there are a lot of slut-shaming ambition-is-evil implications going on here. Also, she serves largely as a revolving door for various famous historical figures. "Elizabeth I" serves cameo after cameo. Oh, look! It's Grace O'Malley! Oh, look! It's ambiguously gay/bisexual William Shakespeare! And he's a hunk o' burning love sexing up Lettice!

Honestly, what was this book.

Kathy says

I didn't find this book at all boring as others have but then it might be that much of the information about the Tudor era is new to me. Perhaps some scenes could have been cut but I thought they all added to the story. Plus, I thought Kate Reading gave an excellent performance

This story made me think of an odd kind of organic chemistry where two (and more) compounds come together, share electrons, separate, combine with others and then come together again,,, the two main compounds being Queen Elizabeth I and her cousin Lettice and the story of how their lives orbited about and entwined with each other.

Perhaps the lack of instant explosive reactions made the story too slow for some but I thought it was a good picture of a time without electronics, digital gadgets and other forms of instant communication. It could take weeks to learn of a battle's outcome and waiting for the answer to a letter must have seemed like forever. The fact that religion and superstition were on the same plane as pseudo-science could only muddy the already murky waters of understanding.

One thing that resonated strongly for me was the Crown's concern with money – "There is no money" "We don't have the money" The Queen was constantly concerned with finances and Parliament allowed that having a frugal and non-married monarch was a good deal financially. Still she would have to be very creative to get money approved for projects.

WOW A government that had to live within its means! What a concept! I guess borrowing the country into

oblivion is a recent concept!

Deborah Pickstone says

Margaret George is one of the best historical novelists. Here we find Elizabeth at the point of the invasion of the Spanish Armada and told, largely from her own POV, about the later years of her reign. Quite different from the usual focus on her earlier years and largely less dramatic - but very absorbing! She is one of my favourite characters in English history; this is the equal of *The Autobiography of Henry VIII: With Notes by His Fool, Will Somers* which is an all time favorite of mine.
