



The Queen's Sorrow

By Suzannah Dunn
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Introduction

There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.
—Edith Wharton

From Socrates to the salons of pre-Revolutionary France, the great minds of every age have debated the merits of literary offerings alongside questions of politics, social order and morality. Whether you love a book or loathe it, one of the pleasures of reading is the discussion books regularly inspire. Below are a few suggestions for topics of discussion about *The Queen's Sorrow*.

Questions for Discussion

1. Mary Tudor is portrayed in *The Queen's Sorrow* as a tragic figure as well as, increasingly, a tyrant. How sympathetic did you find her character? How much of her religious extremism can be explained or even excused by her personal unhappiness and difficult upbringing?
2. What insight, if any, do you think the author's portrayal of Mary gives us into other historical figures and the ways in which personal motivations can underwrite the political? Is this a discussion that is relevant to today's leaders?
3. The central characters in *The Queen's Sorrow* are unfaithful to their spouses. How harshly should they be judged for this? What factors drive the various characters to be unfaithful? Can their actions be excused as a side-effect of the nature of marriage in sixteenth-century England and Spain?
4. Overall, is religion a destructive or constructive force throughout the novel? To what extent, if any, is the ideological debate in *The Queen's Sorrow* relevant to the modern day?
5. Rafael spends much of the novel feeling uncomfortably 'foreign'. What does his experience tell us about the sixteenth-century world view, and the ways in which these attitudes have (or haven't) changed?
6. Cecily's position throughout much of the novel is uncertain—she is neither married nor widowed, neither upper nor lower class. Rafael is similarly an outsider. What authority or insight do you think this marginal status gives these two characters? To what extent does this make it easier or more difficult for them to act in their own interests?
7. What would you have done in Cecily's position? What would you have done in Rafael's? Could either of them have acted in a way that might have prevented tragedy?
8. How responsible is Rafael for the events at the novel's end? Are his actions motivated by kindness, naivety or an unwillingness to accept the truth? To what extent does his motivation excuse the results of his attempt to intervene on Cecily's behalf?

About the Author

Suzannah Dunn is the author of ten novels in the United Kingdom, including *The Sixth Wife* and *The Queen of Subtleties*, both published in the United States as well. She lives in Brighton, England.