

Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I. Two strong-willed women, two antagonistic queens, who, within the patriarchal English Renaissance, struggle to balance their humanity and aspirations with the demands of ruling a nation. Who will win? At what cost?

MARY STUART: Queen of Scots

By D. A. Dorwart

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MARY STUART

Queen of Scots



A Verse Tragedy in Two Acts
Translated and Adapted by

D. A. DORWART



Based upon the Tragedy by
FRIEDRICH SCHILLER

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First Edition

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About this Adaptation

Although there are various philosophies of translation, every translation can be said in some way to be an adaptation. No matter how literal one strives to be, different languages in word, in idiom, even in thought, cannot translate with one-hundred percent equivalency.

I have been a director and/or dramaturg on a number of plays translated into English, including several American premieres. Most of these translations were not done by playwrights and had an academic air, even awkwardness, about them. I found these plays telegraphed they were translations and distanced the audience from the experience. Humor most commonly fell victim.

Although I did a “literal” translation of Schiller’s tragedy over the course of a year, when I sat down to write the play, I had one goal in mind – make the piece work for today’s stage. I chose, as I had with my stage adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel *The Scarlet Letter*, what I thought worked first and foremost for the English-speaking stage when it came to historical drama, both in dialogue and length.¹ If I could say what I needed in two lines of iambic pentameter what Schiller said in three or sometimes even four, then by all means I chose the former. With this internal compression as much as any cutting, I was able to reduce the length of the play. In production, a director and dramaturg may propose further edits to tighten the script. And finally, I seldom passed up an English word that better conveyed poetically the spirit of a scene rather than use a word closer in literal translation to Schiller’s.

To some purists this may be heresy, but in the end, I think the question should always be: does the play work in performance as a piece of living theater, paying homage to both the spirit and art of the original, while at the same time being a vital experience in which today’s audience can fully participate? That was my goal at least. That is the goal of every playwright, including Friedrich Schiller.²

¹ The compliment I most cherish regarding my adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter* was that had the reader (a prominent regional theater artistic director) not known of the novel, they would have thought the play an original work.

² See the Appendix, p. 137, for Schiller’s biography.

MARY STUART

Queen of Scots



CAST

(in order of appearance)

HANNAH KENNEDY	Nurse to Mary Stuart, in her 60s
AMIAS PAULET	A nobleman and Mary Stuart's keeper, in his 50s/60s
MARY STUART	Queen of Scotland, in her 30s (see note, p. 9)
EDWARD MORTIMER	Paulet's nephew, in his early 20s
WILLIAM CECIL	The Lord of Burleigh and Treasurer of England, in his 40s/50s
GEORGE TALBOT	Earl of Shrewsbury, Lord Privy Seal, in his 60s/70s
WILLIAM DAVISON	Secretary of State, in his 20s/30s
ELIZABETH TUDOR	Queen of England, in her 40s (see note p. 9)
ROBERT DUDLEY	The Earl of Leicester and Elizabeth's paramour, in his 30s/40s
COUNT AUBESPINE	The French Ambassador, in his 40s/50s (doubles as Melvil)
JOHN KELLY	Mortimer's compatriot, in his 20s (Page, <i>etc.</i>)
MELVIL	Mary's former steward, now a priest, in his 50s/60s
MARGARET CURLE	Mary's former lady, in her 20s/30s
Guards, Attendants, Maids, <i>etc.</i>	

TIME
1587 A.E.D.

PLACE
England

ACT ONE

Scene One	Fotheringhay Castle
Scene Two	Westminster Palace
Scene Three	The Grounds Outside of Fotheringhay

ACT TWO

Scene One	Westminster Palace
Scene Two	Fotheringhay Castle
Scene Three	Westminster Palace

Schiller wrote the director of the Berlin Court Theatre, “In the play, Mary is about 25 and Elizabeth at most 30.” The Queens’ ages are one of several liberties Schiller took with history for at the time of her death, Mary Stuart was 44, and Elizabeth was her senior by ten years.

In the current adaptation, Mary is in the early bloom of middle age, while Elizabeth faces its fading years. This choice is less concerned with historical accuracy than providing a greater depth of experience for both these imperial women and offering a richer juxtaposition to the subplot involving the romantic, young zealot Mortimer. In addition, Elizabeth’s proposed marriage to the Duke of Anjou, her junior historically by 22 years, is predicated on the belief she remains capable of bearing an heir to the throne.

The Duke actually died in 1584, three years before the play’s action. There is also no historical evidence that Queen Elizabeth I and Queen Mary Stuart ever met.³

³ See the Appendix, p. 135, for additional historical notes.

MARY STUART

Queen of Scots

ACT ONE

Scene One

Mary's prison chambers in Fotheringhay Castle. The elderly Sir Amias Paulet enters with attendants pursued by the old nurse Hannah. The attendants rip down the drapery curtaining off the small chamber.

HANNAH

How now, sir? What new outrage is here?

PAULET

Whence came the ring? I'll have this out. I know
That from yon windows it was thrown in hope
To bribe the gardener. Despite all
Precautions, all my vigilance still
(Advancing toward the writing desk.)
More treasures hid. More gems concealed to tempt
Unwitting knaves —

HANNAH

Stop, sir! Here lie my lady's privacies.

PAULET

More secrets I will have.

HANNAH

Mere trifling papers, amusements of an idle
Pen to cheat this prison's dreariness.

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots

PAULET (*taking up papers*).

Idle hands invite the devil's work.
These writings are in French, the tongue
Of England's enemy. And these?

HANNAH

Drafts, Sir. Letters to Elizabeth.

PAULET

Then I shall be their bearer. Ah! What
Is here? (*Discovering a secret compartment.*)
A royal band enriched with stones
And figured with the *fleur-de-lis* of France.

HANNAH

Be merciful. Deprive us not of this
Last jewel which decorates our dismal life.

PAULET

'Twill be restored in time.

HANNAH

Oh, sir.

Who could behold these barren walls and say
That majesty dwells here? Where is the throne?
Where, the canopy of state displaying
A royal house? Instead, the table's laid
With common pewter e'en the lowest dame
Would scorn.

PAULET

Thus, was her husband's table set
As she and paramour lay theirs in gold.

HANNAH

Is this a fate for her, the gentle born,
Who in her very cradle was a queen;
Who, reared in Catherine's court, enjoyed
The opulence of earthly pleasures?

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots

HANNAH (*cont'd.*)

Yet here, my lord, she is denied the simple
Joy reflected in a looking glass.

PAULET

To contemplate her image rouses thought.

HANNAH

Likewise, all books to occupy her mind have
Been removed.

PAULET

The Bible's stays to mend her heart.

HANNAH

Her lute as well, an instrument to cheer
The heart —

PAULET

Because she played her wanton airs.

HANNAH

My God, was it not enough
To rob her of her power? Must you
Envy her its every attribute?

PAULET

These are things that turn the heart
To vanity, which better should collect
Itself in penitence. For wantonness
And treachery demand abasement.

HANNAH

If youthful blood led her to err, she must
Account with her own heart and her own God.

PAULET

Where she's transgressed, she'll find fair judgement.

HANNAH

How, sir,
Transgressed, restrained by such confining bonds?

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots

PAULET

And yet she found the means to stretch her arm
Beyond these iron grates and, with the torch
Of civil war, inflame this realm against our Queen.
From out these very walls, she roused assassin
Bands to regicide and caused the malefactor
Babington to lose his head in sacrifice.
The bloody scaffold sways beneath her victims'
Weight, and we shall not see peace again till she
Herself be offered up upon the block.
A curse upon the day when England clasped
In hospitality this Helen to its breast.

HANNAH

Since first she set her foot upon your shores
And begged her cousin sanctuary,
She's been condemned — despite your nation's law —
To weep away her life behind some prison door.
Fouly accused and summoned 'fore the law,
This hapless Queen must beg for honor and
For life.

PAULET

She came not
As suppliant, but as a murderess,
Chased from throne and land by her own subjects;
Sworn against our realm, our church, our cherished
Queen, she would betray our liberty
To France, and with the tyranny of Rome
Restore the days of Bloody Mary.
Why else would she reserve her claim
To England's crown, when one sole word
Would open wide the gates and set her free?

HANNAH

Your cruelty's edged with bitt' rest scorn. How
Should she devise such schemes, who hath so long
No human face beheld but those of her

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots

HANNAH (*cont'd.*)

Tormentors. With each day fresh bolts and bars
Around her multiply. She is entombed alive.

PAULET

And I each night am roused from sleep to try
The strength of every bolt and test each guard's
Fidelity. I meet the dawn with fear
That it may verify my apprehensions.
Thank god, that all will soon be at an end.

HANNAH

Here comes the Queen.

PAULET

Christ's image upon her hand,
Pride and passion within her heart.

Enter Mary, with mourning veil and crucifix.

HANNAH

O gracious Queen, each day heaps fresh
Indignities upon your royal head.

MARY

Peace, I pray! Now tell me what has happened?

HANNAH

Your bureau's forced, your letters and the bridal
Jewelry removed. Nothing remains.

MARY

Be calm, good Hannah. A coronet makes not a queen.
Basely may they behave toward us, but ne'er
Can they debase us. This much I understand
From my experience in England.

(Turning to Paulet)

Sir, you have extorted that which I
This very day designed to have delivered,
A letter for my royal sister. Pledge

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots

MARY (*cont'd.*)

Me your word of honor that it will be
Conveyed by you directly to Elizabeth
And not into the hands of Lord Burleigh.

PAULET

I shall consider what's best to do.

MARY

Sir, this letter is of much import,
For within, I beg a favor, that she herself,
Whom I have never seen, grant me an audience.
I have been summoned 'fore a court of men,
Whom I shall never recognize as peers. Elizabeth
Is family, of rank and sex the same. To her alone —
Woman, sister, Queen — can I unlock my heart.

PAULET

Yet in the past, my lady, you have entrusted
Fate and honor to men far less the worthy.

MARY

Moreover, I beg of her a second favor.
I have missed the Church's comfort, the blessing
Of the sacraments. I cannot believe,
Although denying me my freedom and
My crown, that she can wish to shut the gates
Of heaven upon my soul.

PAULET

Whene'er you wish,
The parish dean would gladly wait on you.

MARY

Talk not of deans! I seek
The aid of my own church — a Catholic priest.

PAULET

That is against the laws of England.

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots

MARY

I am not England's subject.
Never have I consented to its laws,
Nor will I bow to its despotic ways.
Now, sir, I would request a notary
And scribe. My sorrows and present
Circumstances prey upon my life. I would,
Therefore, indite my will and make disposal
Of what remains to me.

PAULET

This liberty

May be allowed, for England's Queen would not
Enrich herself by robbing you.

Paulet begins to leave.

MARY

And would you leave my presence thus?
Good sir, a month has passed since I
Was brought before the court. In most unseemly
Haste was I surprised and forced, amazed
And unprepared, to face a dread tribunal.
Without an advocate, I stood to answer their
Offensive charges. Like ghosts they came;
Like ghosts they disappeared, and since
That night I am divided from the world.
No voice can reach me through these walls,
And from your look in vain I seek to know
What has prevailed?

PAULET

Close your accounts with heaven.

MARY

From heaven, sir, I hope for mercy;
From earth, I still imagine justice.

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots

PAULET

You may depend on it. Justice will be done.

MARY

Then the suit is ended?

PAULET

I cannot tell.

MARY

Am I condemned?

PAULET

I cannot say, my lady.

MARY

Is dispatch then the fashion? Will
The executioner surprise me in the night?

PAULET

Entertain that thought, and you will be
Prepared to meet your fate. Now I —

MARY

Sir, nothing can surprise me with this court,
Inspired as 'tis with Burleigh's enmity,
But I have yet to learn how far Elizabeth
Will dare in execution of this sentence.

PAULET

What justice has decreed, before the world,
Her brave and noble hand will execute.

Enter Mortimer.

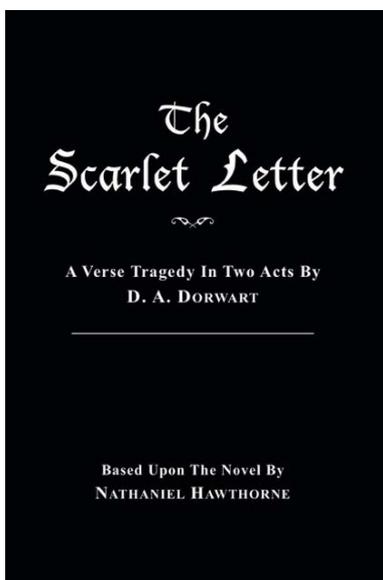
MORTIMER

Uncle, your counsel's urgently demanded.

He exits. Paulet starts to follow.

MARY

Sir, one word before you go, I pray.



“...a tour de force of verse drama. The play feels tremendously authentic and passionate throughout.”

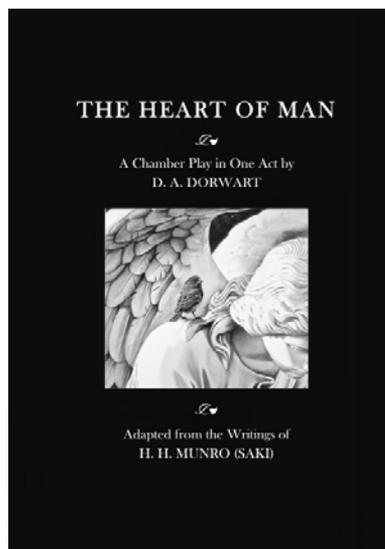
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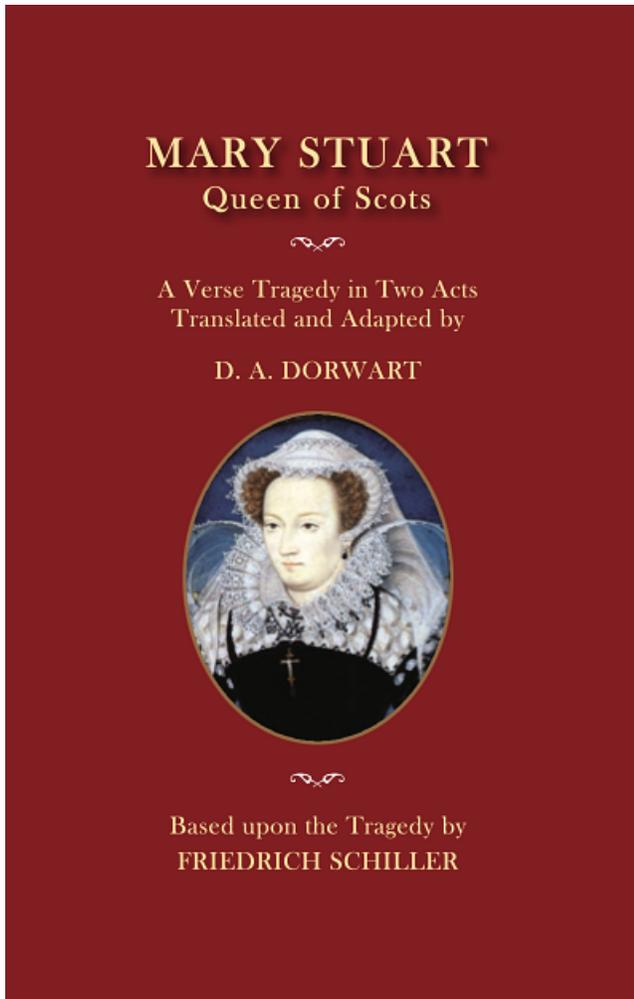
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