

FOLGER BOOK CLUB



Discussion Questions: *The Tower*

Folger Book Club—March 2025

1. What did you think of this novel? If asked, what would you say this book is about?
2. How does each woman react to her circumstances? How would you?
3. Was there a character you were particularly drawn to?
4. How much do you know about Mary, Queen of Scots and her history? If you know her eventual fate, did that affect your reading of the novel?
5. On page 57, Carr writes of Mary, “she, who was once named the Golden Fleece when she was a young dauphiness . . . now, almost a decade on, the people call her Medea: that witch, that jilted murderess. . .” How does this reflect the roles women are perceived to play by the public? What other roles have you observed in how female public figures are discussed?
6. Carr occasionally includes instances of projecting beyond the timeline of the book, such as on page 77 with Margaret. What do you think of these inclusions of known future history?
7. How is royalty defined throughout the novel? Where do you see it as presented as inherent vs. as something manufactured?
8. Carr said in an interview that Mary is often seen through her relationships with men or Queen Elizabeth I, whom she never met, and so wanted to show her in a different kind of relationship: “I wanted to look at this pivotal period of Mary’s life through the lens of female friendship.” Do you consider the relationships shown in the book to be true friendships? Why or why not? How do they change throughout the course of the confinement?
9. This choice was partially inspired by *A Room in the Castle*, which tells the story of Gertrude, Ophelia, and Ophelia’s nursemaid coming together in private spaces to cope with Hamlet’s behavior and actions. Both pieces explore the difference between how women interact amongst themselves in private versus navigating the larger world. Have you experienced this private/public divide? How do you navigate it? Do you find it necessary?
10. With a history as rich as Mary’s, why do you think Carr picked this particular episode from her life? Does it inspire you to learn more about Mary?