



Turn of the Tide

Margaret Skea

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Old rivalries...new friendships...dangerous decisions.

Set in 16th Century Scotland Munro owes allegiance to the Cunninghames and to the Earl of Glencairn.

Trapped in the 150-year-old feud between the Cunninghames and the Montgomeries, he escapes the bloody aftermath of an ambush, but he cannot escape the disdain of the wife he sought to protect, or his own internal conflict. He battles with his conscience and with divided loyalties – to age-old obligations, to his wife and children, and, most dangerous of all, to a growing friendship with the rival Montgomerie clan. Intervening to diffuse a quarrel that flares between a Cunningham cousin and Hugh Montgomerie, he succeeds only in antagonizing William, the arrogant and vicious Cunningham heir. And antagonizing William is a dangerous game to play...

Turn of the Tide Details

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From Reader Review Turn of the Tide for online ebook

Carolyn says

Set in 16th century Scotland during the early days of James VI reign, this is the story of a family caught in the century old feud between two powerful families, the Cunninghames and the Montgomeries. The Earl of Glencairn (Cunninghame) and Earl of Eglington (Montgomerie) are campaigning for political ascendency in James' court and will stop at little to get what they want. Munro, a minor laird and his wife just want a peaceful life with their children on their farm but are tied to the Cunninghames and must be at their beck and call even if they do not agree with their methods or the Earls drunken, malicious son William, Master of Glencairn. That there will be a sequel is clear from the ending and this first book sets up the scene for what promises to be an exciting continuation of the story. Recommended to lovers of Scottish history!

Kate Martyn says

Scots historical fiction is not a genre I seek generally, and I was very agreeably surprised with this book. From the opening lines, with their vividly evocative prose, the elegant writing does not falter. Having Munro with a foot in both camps was a masterly device to give insight into the scheming of both feuding clans, the Montgomeries and the Cunninghames. The switching of sides, the constant jockeying for position, the hatreds and vengeance, the doubt and sorrow, the self-questioning and ultimately the decisions that have to be made on an individual, human level, are brilliantly brought to life in the story, from the initial ambush to the consequences that ripple outward and overtake so many members of both families. This opening episode and subsequent events become an archetype of every blood feud that ever foiled any possibility of peace in Scotland.

Ms Skea has a good ear for easy dialogue and has found an excellent balance between the modern and archaic forms, and by judicious use of minor idiom that in no way detracts from immediate comprehension by the reader, has managed to suggest dialogue in a Scots accent - no mean feat! The characters are three dimensional, believable, and many of them are of considerable charm. To one who can claim no great knowledge of Scots history but with some historical knowledge of the England of that time, the evocation of day to day life is certainly authentic feeling and flows naturally. There is a most appealing warmth and humanity in the affectionate and earthy family scenes, and the romance elements are delicately drawn. The list of characters at the front and the glossary at the end are both useful additions, though I found that contextual understanding was easily gained for any unfamiliar Scots expressions. The characters quickly sorted themselves out in my mind. It could almost be argued that any difficulty in working out who was who and what side they belonged is part and parcel of the real situation, a metaphor for the actual quandary of several of the characters!

The descriptions of the countryside and the vignettes of farm life are just beautiful, economically yet fully drawn and wonderfully integrated, so that everything moves the story along, and I found no wasted words, padding or history for history's sake anywhere. The author is to be congratulated on a tightly plotted, superbly written, highly engaging novel. I will be looking out for more from Ms Skea.

The Just-About-Cocky Ms M says

I rarely stray too far from my historical fiction comfort zone, which is 18th and early 19th century France, although the occasional foray into the Renaissance-era Italian states has been a pleasant surprise, as has a more recent visit to medieval England. I wasn't certain, however, about this book, set in mid-16th century Scotland featuring more warring clans than I thought could possibly coexist on a relatively small bit of rocky real estate shrouded in mist. So I had to look stuff up before setting off on this journey just so I wouldn't flounder midway. Once I had the rather youthful but not particularly regal King James firmly in place, the other lairds more or less sorted—and kudos to Ms. Skea for the detailed and invaluable family trees!—it was off to the feuds, the bloodshed, court wrangling, and barely civilized one-upmanship amongst the lairds, high and low, and all the other wonderfully described aspects of Scots history on a gloomy day in a nearly forgotten century.

Of course, I'm an American, and the classic blood feud we have in our collective memories is that between the Hatfields and the McCoys. But here we have the Cunninghames and Montgomeries, whose feud reaches back so far that it is probable the clan members in *The Turn of the Tide* couldn't tell you with any precision why they were still at each other's throats. A case in point is Munro, the protagonist and a Cunningham adherent at the beginning, to the extent he participates in an ambush and graphic slaughter of rival Montgomerie men. He's no block of wood, and after the initial massacre, finds that he is emerging from the barriers of this rather senseless feud, even as King James orders an end to it, and begins to regard his alleged enemy as something else entirely. His transformation is gradual, and set against the spare, granite backdrop of the time and the locale, with equally sparse dialogue fortunately devoid of the "brogue" some authors can't seem to do without. Instead, Ms. Skea uses the cadence of language, with the occasionally judicious use of a word or three to draw us in, and it works very well indeed. Kate, Munro's wife, is another skillfully drawn character, sometimes difficult to like, or understand, but very human nonetheless.

The plot moves at a good, steady clip for those readers who prefer to be jostled along, but it also pauses from time to time to allow the setting to take a bow, or the weather, or the sometimes haunted—and haunting—ruminations of Munro, his wife, and a number of other characters. The slower parts are well-crafted, the descriptions those of someone who has been there, seen it all, and doubtless has several tee shirts to prove it. When the action escalates, which it often does, take a deep breath because you will feel the rush. Once you sort out who is who, and feel pretty certain you know not only how this story will progress but also how it will end, prepare to be embarrassed. Prepare to be amazed, rather, because you won't see it coming.

I can't address the degree of research Ms. Skea did for this novel because the period is outside my area of expertise. However, I can say with all sorts of fist-bangings and head-nodding that the facts throughout the book feel right, as do the characters, the ones who have a place, albeit it small, in the history books or amongst old parchment rolls, and the ones of imagination. Their words sound right and true, their actions equally so, and there's not a pesky anachronism to mar any of it.

My father was born in Scotland, but alas, not within spitting distance of Ayrshire. Still, I felt the urge to look around for the old family plaid, shake out the mothballs, and figure out how one would wear the darn thing. In the meantime, I recommend you give this excellent debut novel a read, because I hear there will be a sequel.

Linda says

I appreciate Amazon recommending this book to me. The story is set in 16th century Scotland involving a true blood feud between two noble families, the Montgomeries and the Cunninghames. The story is told through a fictitious character named Munro. I likened the story to the Hatfields and the McCoys of the United States fame.

The first hundred pages were difficult to read. Thereafter, the story flowed making for good reading. Each family practiced horrible acts upon the other. The collateral damage to innocent people caused by the feud is the gist of the story. Lesser nobles walked a fine line trying to stay out of the cross hairs of the feud. The line proved too fine for Munro.

I don't give many four stars to a read, but this book had that inexplicable quality that made it more than a good book.

Thank you, Ms. Skea, for an exceptional read.k

Richard says

Margaret Skea's debut novel is the sort of gem that can increasingly be found among the small presses these days.

Choosing an underused period of history (the late 16th century) for the story, she tells a tale of feuding Scottish noble families each eager to gain the favour of the incumbent King, James VI. In amongst all the machinations is Munro, a man with loyalties to one side and friendships on the other.

The story is a good one, with plenty of political manoeuvring, violence, love and tragedy in the mix. The intrigue goes right to the final page and there's plenty of room for another novel to take Munro's story on to the next stage. One thing that stood out for me was the little details, the description of everyday life and the lot of the normal family just trying to survive in that time. That was wonderfully done.

The quality of Margaret's writing is also worth noting. Her research and the language she uses makes you believe that you're there, that you're seeing and hearing the people talking in a realistic way. The chaos and muck of a (for then) big city are illustrated just as effectively as the wide-open expanses of the highlands. Margaret also has a wonderful knack for beautiful similes and uses them effectively.

So, an excellent debut well worth seeking out, and, hopefully, we may get to read more from Margaret in the future.

Margaret Skea says

Munro and his family are fictional, the other main characters are historical and the feud itself was the most notorious in the history of Ayrshire. Beginning in 1488 it wasn't finally resolved until the 1670s, the intervening years punctuated by acts of brutality and reprisal on both sides.

Perhaps it was because I grew up in Northern Ireland through the worst of the Troubles that I was interested in writing about the pressures that living within conflict place on families, on relationships and on personal integrity. Munro is a flawed character whose choices, good and bad, impact on all those closest to him, sometimes with disastrous consequences.

This novel is set in the 16thc but the dilemmas faced by the main characters are mirrored in many parts of our modern-day world.

Tinney says

Turn of the Tide has it all - a rich sense of time and place, characters worth caring about, plot surprises, evocative language, and a pace that never lags. It raises some complex ethical questions that human beings of any time might have to face, and it doesn't insult the reader's intelligence by pretending there are easy answers. Decisions carry a cost (and often a reward as well). The long-running family feud that motivates the plot makes a simple happy ending elusive, but main character Munro's qualities of courage, intelligence, resourcefulness, and resilience shine through. Compassion and steadfast love also have a role. This book engaged me emotionally, and I found it deeply satisfying. Highly recommended.

Sealove says

A refreshing look at a work of historical fiction.

The author uses her words impeccably and brings us into the time and place with ease and grace... even within a time that is so full of horrific battles and shifting allegiances, not to mention the age old family squabble.

This author paints the picture with accurate details by one who has either lived in that the time or has done endless research.

Looking forward to more from this author!

Diana Jackson says

After avidly reading some of Nigel Tranter's novels whilst living up in Scotland last year it was a pleasure to read 'Turn of the Tide.' The long lasting feud between the Cunninghams and the Montgomeries in 16th Century Scotland reaches an uneasy truce due to King James but Kate, a character I felt so much empathy for, and her husband Munro felt the burden of past deeds and divided loyalties, leading to tragic consequences for some. The surprise that even their enemies were human and even quite pleasant resonated

with me. You feel all the emotions in this well written novel, with language evocative of the period, from the joy of family life to fear, devastating loss and a heightened sense of danger. I look forward to Margaret Skea's next novel.

Kathy says

A very realistic, well researched historical novel. Based on a feud between two clans, The Montgomeries and the Cunninghames in Scotland 16th Century is well written and researched. I did enjoy this book that was recommended to me, although I will admit it took me a bit to get into as there were quite a lot of people/characters from the very beginning and I couldn't seem to keep track of it all – hence the 4 stars. But once you get the characters sorted, it reads better. Going to start the sequel straight away and see what happens with them next!

Stephen Gallup says

This is an ambitious, almost sprawling novel based on an historically factual, generations-long dispute between two rival clans in 16th-century Scotland. A massacre occurs in the opening pages, and reprisals follow, until a very young King James (who will later move south to succeed Elizabeth) demands that the Cunninghames and Montgomeries make peace with one another. Suspicion and animosity remain, but the opposing leaders settle thereafter for vying for the king's favor via political maneuvers.

That's the context. *Turn of the Tide* is really about well-intentioned minor nobles and their families (some fictional, some real) who seek only to get on with their lives, raise their children, and meet their obligations. A pair of truly despicable louts make that no easy task. The cast of characters is substantial, and throughout the reading I often referred to the list at the front of the book to keep them straight. The main figure, however, is a laird named Munro--or perhaps it's his wife Kate. They owe allegiance to the Cunningham side, but in the course of the story they realize the Montgomeries are more appealing. Specifically, they find a great deal of common ground with his opposite number, Hugh, Hugh's wife Elizabeth, and his winsome household.

The clans may have agreed to a truce, but such fraternizing is more than frowned upon. It's dangerous.

In reviewing another novel set in this same time period, I commented on the extra challenge of achieving a real understanding of the circumstances of the day. Margaret Skea has apparently made a serious study of the era, and the view into it she provides is likely as accurate as we're going to find. Her liberal use of archaic words (pauchled, forbye, ween, dreich, etc.) and Scottish diction ("The bairn is a fine wee lass and sonsy with it") continually reminded me that, if transported into that setting I would be incapable of understanding anything. (I discovered too late a comprehensive glossary at the end, but had managed to figure things out by context.) On the other hand, human nature is much the same everywhere. Most of us love children, appreciate a good spectacle, object to injustice, and are inclined to benevolence. And on that basis it's easy to enjoy this story. Having finished it, I'm still thinking about the characters, almost as if I knew them.

Susana says

Margaret Skea has made a thrilling, gripping read! I loved this story and can't wait for more of it.

As I see it Munro is more than tangled between his Cunningham loyalty and his Montgomery affinity; he is troubled for the happenings at Annock, as for the part he took in it. Which is making him feel guilty and that guilt is following him for many months, also marring all aspects in his life. Till the point is reached where he is to lose all, his wife and family due to that event. Thankfully that does not come to pass and the relationship with his wife, the feelings they share are only strengthened with time.

Hard times come with hard things happening almost one after the other. The loss of the beloved daughter, also enhances the feeling of powerlessness that seems to follow Munro lately, then his mother is ailing and dying, his brother is becoming an estranger, unknown, there seems to be no clear path to reach him. Then Archie comes around and we find a lovely setting in his development as a close, affectionate brother and uncle and the sweetness of his liaison with Sybilla, whom is a likable lass, strong. In general, the role of the women in this book is strong, both Elizabeth and Kate are powerful women, witty and clear of mind, able to lead their families into safety and to share with their partners joy and risks. They're the safe shore to which turn in the trouble tide that envelopes the plot.

William Cunningham is a loathsome weasel. Weak leader and villain in the mix. He inspires hatred. I'm glad of Hugh and Patrick Montgomerie who are exactly the opposite to William and Glencairn. Munro, as John Cunningham often tells him, just has to pray that no harm comes to Glencairn so William, besides losing the only one able to put a break on his instincts, doesn't rise to the position of laird.

From the start to the end, this book is a page turner. The vast descriptions on each scene are the strokes of an artful painter; through the pen of Margaret, one can picture each detail and actually be in the place of the scene.

Geri says

original post on www.thehistorylady.wordpress.com

“Turn of the Tide” charts shifting currents of clan loyalties

It is hard to know where to begin, there were so many things I liked about “Turn of the Tide,” Margaret Skea’s debut novel about the feud between the Montgomeries and the Cunninghams set in 17th Century Scotland. I have had this one in the queue for a wee while and was grateful for the US Labor Day weekend for uninterrupted hours of reading pleasure.

Set in Ayrshire, the novel opens with main character, Munro setting plans in motion for a massacre of key members of the Montgomery clan. He’s a loyal, albeit reluctant, member of the Cunningham clan who would rather be at home with his wife, bairns and farm. He carries out this mission for the Earl of Glencairn with a seed of misgiving about continuing the 100-year-old feud that grows throughout the novel.

Retribution is swift for many of those involved in the massacre, but Munro has a handy alibi and escapes harm. Still, his wife is horrified and his conscience nags him. A friendly encounter with a Montgomery makes him question further the blind loyalty to the Cunningham clan and its leader, the Earl of Glencairn. Glencairn himself may have some reasonable qualities, but William, his son and heir is a dangerous man. Auch, I’ll no spoil it for ye! I will say that Munro’s conscience is the tide that turns, and the reasons behind it make for a captivating read.

I love that the novel shone a light on this feud, which ran for centuries in Ayrshire. King James VI and his court do feature in the novel, but they are far from the main story. It was a refreshing departure to find a 16th-17th century novel with a gripping tale where royalty is on the fringe and not center stage. That said, one of the issues in the feud was which clan leader took precedence at court.

This is an emotionally gripping story about a man caught between duty and conscience at a time in history when a man's livelihood depended upon his loyalty to family and clan --theoretically those would be aligned. While Skea could have chosen one incident to make Munro's loyalties change, I'm glad she did not. It would have had impact, but missed the nuances, the questioning and the soul-searching Munro went through. And then of course, there was also impact (I willnae spoil it).

Skea clearly knows Ayrshire well, and writes with beautiful detail about the landscape, whether it is describing the miserable rain that can chill you to the bone, or the aconite flowers in a valley. The dialect adds richness to the characters and is judiciously used. Helpfully, there's a glossary in the book so you can look up words like "wabbit" (no, not rabbit).

Margaret says

This is so good, I'm keen to re-read it and I hope that Margaret Skea is busy writing more books!

Emma Wood says

This book is definitely not my usual type of reading, and I was a little apprehensive when starting it. Initially I found the different family allegiances etc. quite difficult to follow, and had to refer frequently to the list at the start of the book. As it went on, though, I began to get better at recognising who was who, allowing my reading (and so my experience of the story) to flow better. There were a couple of unexpected twists which kept me intrigued and the characters were generally engaging and well rounded. I'm hoping to see some of the lesser characters more developed/explored in a sequel...!
