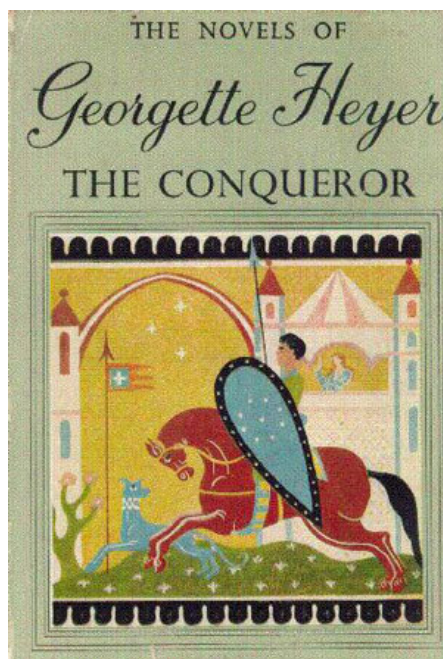




The Conqueror

Georgette Heyer

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The Conqueror

Georgette Heyer

The Conqueror Georgette Heyer

The true story of the bastard son who made himself a king and the woman who melted his heart. The stirring history of William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, who invaded England and became the King. His victory, concluded at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, is known as the Norman Conquest.

Known for her exhaustive research and ability to bring past eras to life, bestselling author Georgette Heyer tells the story of William the Conqueror, who became King of England in 1066, and his queen Matilda, the high-born noblewoman who at first scornfully spurned him. William was an illegitimate child of a nobleman, who won his dukedom through force of will, and went on to bring European feudalism to England, along with a program of building and fortification that included the building of the Tower of London.

The historical novel includes Heyer's brilliant period language and her perfect grasp of the details of the day - clothing, armor, weapons, and food - making for a fascinating and blood-stirring read. Bonus reading group guide available inside. "From the moment when the infant grasped his father's sword with a strength unusual in one so young, William showed himself a leader among men. The Conqueror grew out of an incredible amount of historical research into the way of life, the way of speech, the way of thought, and feeling, and praying in the Eleventh Century.

The Conqueror Details

Date : Published April 4th 1952 by William Heinemann Ltd (first published 1931)

ISBN : 9780434328055

Author : Georgette Heyer

Format : Hardcover 377 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Romance, Fiction, Historical Romance

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From Reader Review The Conqueror for online ebook

Tina says

All through his life men were to fear him and find it hard to meet the direct stare he bent upon them. Thus early the French were made aware of the ruthless strength of his will. The truth was he never swerved from his purpose, and would go to any lengths to achieve it.

History tells us that William of Normandy was born a bastard, held off multiple assassination attempts, became Duke of Normandy, repelled the French and invaded England to become it's King.

This is the same story that Georgette Heyer tells here only it is told very thrillingly indeed.

She begins her story with the birth of William and a prophetic dream of his mother who foresees him as a great tree spreading it's branches over both England and Normandy. As others whisper that he is bastard, she calls him king. The story ends with his coronation in London, Christmas 1066 after the bloody, hard fought battle of Hastings.

In between these two milestones is a wonderful story of a charismatic, often enigmatic, man of towering self confidence and will. It is told mainly through the eyes of one his closest knights, Raoul de Harcourt. Because of his birth William had to pretty much subdue Normandy to accept his rule. Raoul is an idealistic youth who is sure that William will bring peace and prosperity to Normandy. Because of this he runs away to court to swear service to William. While there he manages to help thwart an assassination plot and is at William's side from that point on.

Although I was very familiar with Heyer's writing through her Regency romances and her modern mysteries, this book was a complete revelation. I had always loved her stuff and had always held her as an example of a very elegant and witty writer. But reading this, my respect for her abilities has ratched way up.

First the storytelling was excellent. What could have been a dry or even overly romantic catalog of events of a real person's life, instead was an exciting story that sucked me in and never once let me go. This was more a character study than anything. Sure the events were there, but each assassination attempt, each usurpation attempt, each war was a set piece to draw a picture of a superb war strategist, a merciful and very wise ruler, a shrewd judge of character and a person who inspired men to follow him.

Second was the language. It was simply luxurious. Heyer used french derivations, archaic words and even the archaic meanings of common words to really create a sense of time and place. Her descriptions of places, people, clothing and food were rich and involved. One passage for a banquet reads:

"Gisela began to eat of a Lombardy leach, flourished and served with a sober-sauce, but she did not eat much of it because her quick eye had observed all manner of delicate dishes on the board, and she meant to taste as many as she was able. She glanced around her and wondered aloud whether the Lady Adeline would instruct her in the way to make appulmoy, and whether it were well to put a dash of cubebs in a blank desire. One of the scullions had just brought in a dish of curlews. Gisela finished up what was left on her platter in a hurry. The curlews were served with chaldron, and Gisela was occupied for some time in trying to make up her mind whether this was flavoured with canelle or powder-douce.

Third were the scenes of battles. I admit I am not a keen reader of battle descriptions and probably would have tended to skim or skip them. But each battled was prefaced by a strategy session. Invariably William would think of some new, unorthodox strategy that flew in the face of conventional thinking and his advisors

and vassals would strongly argue against it.

Warfare, as the barons understood it was a matter of chivalry charging to sound of tucket and drum; strategy was of the roughest order: one chose one's ground, one laid ambushes, or made surprise attacks, but while the battle raged there could be nothing to it than hand-to-hand fighting in a tight pack. But the Duke bent over his miniature battlefields, and moved his pawns this way and that, slowly evolving a more intricate way of war than his captains could understand.

William is credited with introducing archers as part of war rather than just for sport. And during his first battle with Henry of France, where he allows the French to advance deep into Norman territory, on unfamiliar ground, to a place of swamp land and uncertain footing so that the poachers and farmers could pick off the unwary, speaks of nascent guerilla warfare. To read these scenes and see his strategy come alive and prove its merit to his naysayers is fun and thrilling stuff.

And finally, it isn't all war and mayhem. History has by all accounts noted that the marriage of Williams and his wife Matilda was a strong, fruitful and loving one. Indeed, their courtship in this book is quite a stormy and passionate one. And in her way, Matilda is just as implacable and fierce as her husband.

Loved this book and am now looking to read more Heyer historicals.

Julie says

The blurb on the book jacket suggests that this is a novel about William the Conqueror and his queen, Matilda. Although a small portion of the book deals with their tumultuous courtship and her role in his court, it is only a small portion. If you are looking for a romance along the lines of Georgette Heyer's Regency books, you may be disappointed. It is really, after all, a book about William, Duke of Normandy, a man of complex character and ruthless ambition, whose magnetism, self-confidence, and powerful leadership compelled the loyalty and service --if not the love-- of virtually everyone around him. The military strategies, political and religious scheming, and battle sequences are really fascinating and thrilling, and if you are interested in military history, especially regarding the Norman conquest of England, then you will probably enjoy this book. It is excellently, thoroughly researched, and written in Georgette Heyer's inimitable style, though without the sardonic humor that is so prevalent in her regency novels. The attention to detail (uniforms, weapons, styles of warfare, food, architecture, geography, etc.) is a bit overwhelming, but so rich and vibrant that I appreciated it. I found the in-depth exploration of the character of William, Duke of Normandy, and the juxtaposition of William and England's King Harold, together with the contrasting but thoroughly humanizing views of the Saxons and the Normans as manifested in an enormous cast of characters, to be especially fascinating. The author's technique of presenting observations of William through the eyes of his loyal knight, Raoul, was especially compelling and ingenious.

Laura says

Just arrived from Australia through BM.

I have no idea what Georgette Heyer had in her mind while writing this book. In my opinion, the plot is totally disconnected, there is a lack of link relating the main charters as well as the corresponding historical facts.

Undoubtedly there are much better books describing the Battle of Hastings.

Certainly this subject deserves better readings and some interesting research at Wikipedia and The Battle of Hastings-1066 which includes facts and full story.

Some interesting book have been recommended at Historical Fiction Online, such as:

The Hollow Crown and Harold the King, by Hellen Hollicks

Peaceweaver by Judith Arnopp

Golden Warrior by Hope Muntz

Firedrake by Cecelia Holland

Fourteenth of October and This January Tale by Bryher

Lord of Sunset by Parke Godwin

William the Conqueror by John Wingate

Jackals in Iron by Merlin Douglas Larsen

The Conquest and The Winter Mantle by Elizabeth Chadwick

Needle in the Blood by Sarah Bower

The Last English King by Julian Rathbone

Housecarl by Laurence Brown

The Gift and the Promise by Sarah Pennell

Another interesting books should be also mentioned:

Gildenford by Valerie Anand

Warriors of the Dragon Gold by Ray Bryant

Jorvik by Sheelagh Kelly

There is a movie coming up about this famous battle: 1066

A TV Series was also made in 2009: 1066 The Battle For Middle Earth.

[image error]

Karen says

Raoul de Harcourt is an idealistic young man who wants to make the world, (or eleventh century Normandy at least), a better place. He joins the household of the young Duke of Normandy, William the Bastard and becomes one of his most trusted men. Ultimately he fights at the Battle of Hastings and watches as his lord is crowned King of England.

I can see why this book would not be a favourite for many Georgette Heyer readers. The setting is medieval as opposed to Georgian, the prose is not her best and the main relationships in the novel are all between men - principally Raoul de Harcourt and William the Conqueror, and Raoul and a Saxon hostage Edgar. While there is romance featured - William and his bride Matilda and Raoul himself and Edgar's sister Elfrida - it is the interactions of the men in the book that forms the novel's focus. However one of Georgette Heyer's strengths is her description of battles and this is definitely shown in "The Conqueror". I recommend "An infamous Army" to anyone who particularly likes this aspect of her novels. Overall the Conqueror is the best of Georgette Heyer's pre-Georgian novels.

Jenn says

I love Georgette Heyer's historical romances, and while I really enjoyed the history portion of this story, there was little compelling "romance" or even character conflict to keep me pushing through to the end (I did get there, though, and did actually enjoy the last few chapters once I got there). I had to force myself through several middle sections that had a lot of names and details, but not a lot of plot movement. I was mostly interested in the story of the - whom I, unfortunately, suspect to be fictional - "Watcher" and William's closest friend, Raoul de Harcourt. I loved him, his relationship with the Saxon, Edgar, and Edgar's younger sister, Elfrida. Since they are all probably fictional, it was disappointing for me that the more historically accurate aspects of the story weren't more engaging. I do feel that I have more of a grasp on where and how William the Conqueror happened, and I'm always very interested in British and European history, but will probably stick to Heyer's more romantic, less history-as-info-dump novels in the future.

Lauren says

Georgette Heyer's *The Conqueror* tells the story of the enigmatic William the Conqueror. Written in the mid-1930s, the Conqueror's language is a bit heavy handed at times. But it is clear that Heyer did a lot of research before writing the novel. A prolific romance novelist, the story was light on romance but heavy on the story of how the conquest of England came to be. Heyer's battle scenes are as well done as Sharon Kay Penman's - culminating in an intensely moving and passionately written account of the Battle of Hastings at the end of the novel.

The novel is told through the eyes of the fictional Raoul de Harcourt, a noble son from Normandy who becomes a loyal and intimate friend and supporter of William from the early days of his Dukedom. Throughout the novel, William never ceases to be an enigma. The only character that seems real to me is the fictional Raoul. I don't think Heyer fully conveys William's motivation to establish himself as King of England. While she does a great job of showing how William's illegitimacy likely motivated him throughout his life, it is unclear why William would undertake his seemingly foolhardy conquest to take the throne from the beloved Saxon Harold Godwinson.

Heyer's approach to this novel reminded me of Sharon Kay Penman's approach in *When Christ and His Saints Slept* (I would say the reverse because Heyer's novel was written earlier, but I read SKP's novel before I read Heyer's novel). Raoul reminded me of SKP's Ranulf both in his role as a storytelling device and in personality. Like Ranulf, Raoul is fiercely loyal but not blind to the faults of the person to whom he binds his loyalty. Raoul also is capable of seeing "both sides" of an issue, like Ranulf. Like Ranulf, he turns down earldoms and gifts, offering his loyalty for the sake of loyalty itself and not for material gain. Finally, both Raoul and Ranulf are separated from their loves due to political divisions. Both SKP and Heyer probably created Raoul/Ranulf because of the gap-filled, spotty history surrounding the main historical figures of the time and the desire to stick with known history while avoiding a history book feel - in this case, William the Conqueror and in SKP's case Empress Matilda and King Stephen.

I felt that Heyer was less successful than SKP in bringing the main historical characters to life. As noted above William remained wooden, as did Harold Godwinson, the Duchess (later Queen) Matilda, and other figures. Also, surprisingly for a romance novelist, Heyer does not create a compelling romance in this novel. The romance between Matilda and William is virtually lifeless (except for William's initial infatuation and Matilda's rebuff of his proposals). Similarly, the romance between Raoul and Alfrida is dull. It is hard to see what attracts Raoul to Alfrida beyond her beauty and I found the reunion between Raoul and Alfrida in the last chapter to be dull. I wish the novel had ended a bit earlier.

That said, *The Conqueror* was "pretty good." I would not hesitate to pick up another Georgette Heyer novel. But I'm still on the lookout for an even better take on William the Conqueror. 3.5 stars.

Becky says

First sentence: There was so much noise in the market-place, such a hubbub of shouting and chaffering, that Herleva dragged herself to the window of her chamber and stood peeping down through the willow-slats that made a lattice over the opening.

Premise/plot: *The Conqueror* is a historical novel about William the Conqueror. It begins with his birth and ends with his coronation in December of 1066. It is not told from his perspective; it is told from the perspective of one of his loyal men--servants, warriors--Raoul.

My thoughts: Would *The Conqueror* conquer me or would I conquer *The Conqueror*? I knew from the start it would be a close call. Indeed it was. If I have biases, I thought they would work in favor of *The Conqueror*. I love history. I love historical fiction. I often enjoy novels about 'the royals.' It was also written by Georgette Heyer. I love and adore her, right?!?! (I can honestly say that if this was the first Heyer novel I picked up, I would never pick up another one.)

I didn't care about the characters for the most part. I don't blame Raoul, not really. One developed character cannot make a good novel. And essentially that's what we get. We may learn enough about Raoul to find him believable as a human being, but, the other characters not so much. Duke William, aka William the Conqueror remains distant, disconnected, unknowable, unlikable. Scenes vary--alternate--from battle scenes to groups of his men sitting around talking about how distant the Duke is. And perhaps that is how it should be. He's the ruler of Normandy. He's an illegitimate son. He's not overly liked or popular in some circles. Every person is a potential threat, a potential enemy, a potential betrayer. Raoul has proved himself loyal where other men had failed him. Raoul is easily part of his inner circle, but Raoul isn't necessarily an equal-equal either.

The one relationship I liked was between Raoul and Edgar.

Duke William has one thing--possibly two--on his mind. He's an ambitious, greedy man who lusts for the throne of England from a relatively early age. I'm not convinced that Heyer wants us to like him. Actually, I'm not sure of what Heyer intended. I doubt her intentions were to put readers to sleep. I doubt her intentions were to make a 470 page novel feel like 2,000 pages. Were we supposed to be cheering William on throughout the novel? Were we supposed to find the battle scenes thrilling? And his quest to be the next king of England noble and admirable?

I felt relief upon finishing the novel.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 2* of five

If this had been my first Heyer, it would also have been my last. This novel was written in 1927, and reissued in 1966 when the 900th anniversary of the Norman Conquest was celebrated.

They shoulda left it on the shelf. It's boring.

I leave all issues of historical accuracy to the anal-compulsive yammerers who think fiction should obey the laws of fact, contenting myself only with the observation that there are a scant number of primary sources from 900-plus years ago, so just unpucker and leave it alone.

The book starts with imagining the life of William's mother, Herleva, in the tannery town of Falaise. This is usually a bad sign that we're going to pretend we were there, but tell our story in third person omniscient PoV. The auguries were correct. Bleeeeargh! Nobosy knows if William's mother was named Herleva for a fact; nobody knows when he was born; nobody knows much about Falaise and its townspeople; so QUIT PRETENDING WE DO! This narrative voice gives the book a spurious air of knowledge imparted instead of speculation and storytelling indulged in; far better to use limited or even first person narration.

And then there are the generational complaints...the silly formality of language (how should we represent the voices of people from the past? It's a good question, but one I think the bygone writers always answered wrong, giving the men and women who came before us the silly faux gravitas of Formal Speech) which makes Every Utterance A Statement, instead of giving a character a voice we can accept and believe in.

Oh well. It was a nice idea to read one of Mrs. Heyer's historicals. I won't do it again. Regencies or nothing at all. NOT recommended.

Freya says

review to come :)

Amy Bruno says

The Conqueror is one of six historical novels written by Georgette Heyer, who is best known for her Regency Romances, and if this is an indication of the other five - then sign me up!

Heyer brings us back to 11th Century Normandy and introduces us to William, Duke of Normandy, (a.k.a. William the Bastard) through the eyes of Raoul de Harcourt - a knight in Duke William's retinue.

Raoul began his service to the Duke as a young knight and he quickly rose to be one of William's most trusted friends. Loyalty is a running theme throughout the novel - loyalty from a knight to his lord. Raoul may not have agreed with a lot of the tactics used by William, but he trusted and respected his lord enough to comply. Don't get me wrong, Raoul was no pushover - he voiced his opinions when it was warranted, but in the end he knew his role and played the part.

Duke William was a very intriguing man - ambitious would be putting it lightly. He valued brain over brawn and cunning over might. Once he saw something he wanted, he got it. Doesn't matter how, but he got it. Which leads me into a great scene with William and his future wife, Mathilda....but I'll leave that for you to read! Let's just say it's not a good idea to call William a bastard!

One aspect of why I love historical fiction is the educational factor. I know I'm a total dork, but it's true - I've learned so much history through all the historical fiction novels I have read. I take some of it with a grain of salt cause it's historical fiction after all, but for the most part I know a lot more than I did a few years ago. While reading The Conqueror I learned a great deal more about the difference between an Englishman (or Saxon) and a Norman and the Battle of Hastings scene was not put-down-able!

I enthusiastically recommend this novel! Heyer's writing is impeccable and her research is without a doubt one of the best. Character development is awesome and dialogue excellent. The Conqueror keeps you enthralled during and wanting more when you're done...which is how every good book should be!

Amy says: 5 / 5

Soundtrack: Conquest by Whitestripes

K Rae says

The Conqueror is a novel depicting the life of William "The Conqueror," Duke of Normandy, from birth until his coronation as King of England in 1066. While I normally love historical fiction (unable to put a book down), this novel had a hard time keeping me interested. There were sections that did have me wanting to shut out the world and keep reading, but there were just as many boring storylines that had me looking at my bookshelf longingly.

Well-researched and portrayed for the time period, I have no complaints in that department. Heyer used great descriptive detail to portray the culture and history. The war-torn battlefields especially were very in-depth.

However, Heyer's writing style thoroughly annoyed me. As an editor, I wanted to go through the book and correct the punctuation with a big, red pen. Written in 1931, perhaps this is just a style of the times, or the style of some genre I've never read before, but I found the break in my reading flow quite distracting.

Another letdown for me was that the book was told from the viewpoint of Raoul, William's right-hand man. Not quite biography, not quite historical fiction, I was disappointed that the novel didn't let me inside William's head. Personally, if I can't be inside the historical character's head, then I'd rather read a biography of the person than fiction.

Lastly, William's relationship with Matilda was so talked up on the book cover and everywhere else, but in

truth, it was just a small piece of the novel and seemed to be missing too much of the real storyline to make sense. In contrast, the relationship between Raoul and his friend, Edgar, had much more romance and love portrayed. I kept wondering when the two of them would become more than friends, but then Raoul fell in love with Edgar's sister, Elfrida, putting that pondering to rest.

In closing, it wasn't an altogether bad book. It just wasn't for me, and I'm doubtful I'll read anymore of Heyer's books.

Simone Z. Endrich says

"The Conqueror" reflects the true genius of this talented historical author. I have read nearly all of Georgette Heyer's books, and was particularly drawn to her Regency era novels, but I believe this historical depiction of William the Conqueror is her greatest masterpiece!

Let me re-phrase ... I was never interested in Medieval historicals, and never particularly drawn to that era in history either. Heyer's novels, however, drew me steadily back in time, century by century, until she involved me and gripped me through all periods of British history. Here was I, a lover of historical fiction, who detested warfare and violence, but who became ever so unexpectedly engaged in love of battle. She brought William, Duke of Normandy, to vivid life. She molded him skilfully into this engaging, though fearsome, character with whom any person across the centuries could identify. She then created the perfect foil in Raoul de Harcourt, the endearing, sensitive contrast to his master, the fighting Duke. Her skilful use of period language is unparalleled. This biographical novel is, all told, a magnificent tapestry woven with immense skill. I could not put the book down and I could not have enough of it!

"Simon the Coldheart" was the first of Heyer's Medieval novels to clinch my interest. Anyone who fell in love with "The Conqueror" would also swoon over "Simon the Coldheart". I do not hesitate to recommend it.

This author deserves the highest accolades that no words of mine can hope to express. I wish she were still alive so I could have conveyed my tribute to her in person. But since I cannot, I hope instead to entice others to appreciate the true genius of this writer. She has the power to teach love of history as no other author I've read. It is a great pity that Georgette Heyer does not receive the same kind of adulation as a period author as, for instance, Jane Austen does. In my view, she is not only in her league, but actually better. Jane Austen wrote from personal knowledge of a life she knew intimately. Georgette Heyer writes with better wit and skill from posterity. And in her writing goes a depth of research that not even Austen would have matched.

Rosemary Morris says

I first read this novel many years ago and enjoyed it this time as much as I did the first time. The language is not dated and the tale of William the Conqueror and Raoul de Harcourt nicknamed The Watcher gripped me from beginning to end. Here is the drama of William's rough wooing of Matilda, of Harold Godwinson breaking his oath to accept William as king after Edward the Confessor's death. Of Raoul's friendship with a Saxon hostage and Raoul's love for the hostage's sister Elfrida. Whether or not that love will survive the Norman conquest adds poignancy to the novel.

Mela says

The Conqueror has conquered me.

Before I explain how the book did it I want to warn some possible readers. You will be disappointed:

1. if you expect from this novel that kind of witty, funny stories like you can find in her Regency romances. There is some humour in a few scenes and characters. You can feel this Heyer sometimes, but it is like a light wind, comes and goes away almost before you notice it.
2. if you believe in some descriptions of the book which suggest that it is mostly a historical romance. Yes, there is a love story. As a matter of fact, there are two love stories, the two kinds that you can find in Heyer's other books: one between two strong characters, which struggle with each other, the second sweet and kind love (and characters) which fight with circumstances. But love stories are a small part.

In these two cases your expectations will not meet.

If you expect a great historical fiction you will not be disappointed.

The history of William the Conqueror is written with a passion of a historian. I don't know too well his history from other sources, but what I know and what I have verified now, shows me that there is a big historical accuracy. I think that Heyer should have written more historical fiction books. *Simon The Coldheart* (my review), *An Infamous Army* (my review), *The Conqueror* are evidence. She mixed perfectly significant historical facts, happenings with descriptions of every day life (such as clothes, food, buildings, concerns, rules of society, law). So you feel as you lived in those times. And you will learn more thanks to reading this book.

An action, a narration is engaging. I was neither bored nor tired.

I love Raoul and Edgar and their history, their friendship. It was so moving. For me it is the book about Raoul and William (in this order).

There is more friendship between men, it is one of the best parts of the book. I envy those men such kind of friendship.

This is also the book about ambitions, choices, beliefs. The last conversation between Raoul and Gilbert about old and new times/ways of life (but also many talks between Raoul and Edgar) is remarkable and memorable. It shows how a writer can speak to a reader through his pages, through his stories.

I am grateful to Heyer for a wonderful time with her book (but I am also a little sad because I have only her one historical fiction to read: *My Lord John*)

Darkpool says

I've taken it into my head to read the historical/romance novels on Georgette Heyer in chronological order - well, the one's I have access to via the library and have not already read in the last 3 or 4 years at least. This is the first, and also the first of her histories I've read (although there was a HEA for the main character, and probably for the Conqueror himself on reflection). I found the going a bit difficult to start with, but as I adjusted to the deliberately archaic language, and as the relationships between the characters developed

things speeded up some.

This particular period of history is not one I've ventured into previously. I'll be looking for more on the subject in future.

Nick Imrie says

Quite possibly Heyer at her worst. The two heroines are so horrid that I could believe they were written by a misogynist. Matilda: a ice-queen bitch who might seem strong-willed but really she just wants the right man to come along and force her submission. Elfrida: spineless moron just waiting for the right man to tell her what she really wants. I wish all the romance had been left out so I could've enjoyed the battle scenes in peace.

Poonam says

I should actually put it on a shelf of half-read book. Could not finish it, since it turned out to be only a maze of conspiracies and wars, presented in very complex language of the era that made the reading weary.

This book is story of William the bastard, the Duke of Normandy (who used to sign as Bastardus' who became King of England after winning the battle of Hastings. Book features Raoul as his favorite and trusted man servant - I believe this was as much Raoul's story as it was William's. For my part, most interesting or rather shocking part of the book was where Matilda, a widow when presented with William's marriage offer refuses him in public court saying, 'she can not marry a base born'. William rides to her father's house in rage and whips her in her own father's house. Second time he proposes (he dares), Matilda marries him! I searched, Matilda and William are said to have a very productive marriage with about 10 kids who dd carry legacy. It is also said Matilda added a reason and reined in his cruelties, as is evident in increased cruelty under William the bastard's rule after death of his wife.

But God, after 10 days too, I had not finished the book. Do not regret it.

Carol ?? says

This was always my favourite of GH's historicals (although GH did slip in a romance between two of the fictional characters - she just can't help herself :D) but this time I enjoyed my read more than ever before.

Being older now the romance isn't so important to me and watching William develop as both a strategist and warrior was fascinating.

As I said above, there is romance a less than PC one between William & Matilda - I worry that some of the violence may have reflected GH's own views- & a more tender one between fictional characters Raoul & Elfrida. But a far more compelling secondary theme is male friendship between both real and fictional characters and this was by far the most interesting part of this tale for me. I found (view spoiler) - unlike the heavy handed symbolism GH uses in wrapping up Raoul & Elfrida's story. But this is an early GH book and she hadn't developed the deft hand she showed in most of her later books.

It is important to remember that this is fiction and that GH may have omitted some facts or they may not

have been available to her. But she certainly captures the gruesome reality of hand to hand contact and I do recommend this account - especially this year, the 950th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings.

Regan Walker says

Good Historical Fiction - Not a Romance

Despite it's subtitle ("A Novel of William the Conqueror The Bastard Son Who Overpowered a Kingdom and the Woman who Melted His Heart"), there is very little in this novel that relates to the relationship between William and his wife Matilda. Though there is a chapter devoted to his determined "conquering" of her (including his beating of her when at first she refused to marry him), it's not a love story nor a romance. The story begins in 1028 with William's birth and continues to his coronation Christmas Day 1066, though most of the book is taken up with the battles for and around Normandy.

William is portrayed as a hard man molded by his dubious beginnings, his relentless determination to have his will carried out and his ambition for the crown of England (ostensibly to secure Normandy's future). He was a brilliant strategist in war, which he was about most of his days, and he could be exceedingly cruel when it served his purposes. He valued courage and loyalty. In this story he says that Harold Godwinson is the only man he (William) respects. But that didn't stop William from using Harold, forcing him to give an oath of fealty (or face a gilded imprisonment in Normandy), the breaking of which he used against Harold to secure the Pope's backing for the planned invasion of England. The author does a good job of showing how William always served his own needs and any good he did for others was motivated by what it could gain him. Perhaps that is what it took to gain a country like England but the author suggests there was something lost in the man for the effort as echoed in the reservations uttered by the men who served him. For that Heyer has done an excellent job of bringing to the picture of the real Conqueror.

The history presented here is interesting and entertaining, though I felt like I needed a dictionary, a map of France in the 1050s and 60s and a notepad for all the names and places thrown at me, particularly when so many men around William had the same first name. Such things also slowed down the reading of the tale in places and made it difficult at times to understand just what was going on or who the men were behind all those names.

In large part (perhaps the best part), this is the story of a friendship between one of William's closest knights, Raoul de Harcourt, and a Saxon, Edgar, who held lands under Harold Godwinson and who was the hostage of the Duke of Normandy. And, if there is a romance here, it's the love story between Raoul and Edgar's sister, Elfrida.

Tanja says

This would be a high 3 stars so I just went with a 4. What a fascinating read of William the Conqueror. I would have to say he was a force. I don't believe, and sure did not believe, that there was anything he could not do. Heyer has a nice style of story telling, although there were parts that read like a history book. But, what are you going to do, it is a historical fiction. I always like reading about English history and it is more fun to see how other countries perceived England. They were drab and even dirty in many opinion. There are many battles in the book, but the grandest battle is against England. If nothing the book made me want to study the history of Normandy and William. I always like to know what is truth and what is a good story created by someone. She is a talented author I would have to say.

