

Princely Education in Early Modern Britain. Aysha Pollnitz.

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In 1642, Parliament requested the right to approve those responsible for educating the brood of royal children. This was an unusual request, but Parliament repeated it in 1673 and again in 1676. Why they thought this matter so important is the subject of Aysha Pollnitz's remarkable new book. In the medieval period, royal princes were trained in piety, courtly skills, some chivalric romances, and, above all, military prowess. All that changed, however, with Henry VII's children, and subsequent generations of royal children had to follow some variant of the humanist agenda involving the intense study of Latin and Greek, as well as French, Italian, and Spanish. Froissart and Arthurian legends suddenly gave way to Cicero and Erasmus.

In tracing this transformation, Pollnitz brings to the task formidable learning and a delightful prose style. In addition to deploying many Latin educational tests, both major and minor, Pollnitz has also made several important manuscript discoveries. From the Bodleian Library she extracted an unknown version of James VI's *Meditatiouns* whose text varies from the 1588 printed text and from Trinity College, Cambridge, Prince Henry's long-forgotten schoolboy essays. Such weighty learning might well have

resulted in a worthy, if somewhat somnolent, volume. But there is little danger of that, given Pollnitz's lively style. George Buchanan, for example, wanted James VI "to cultivate the emotional life of a marble statue" (289), and the Duke of Richmond had become "a northern Lord of the Flies" (101). Likewise, "if Edward was a hothouse plant, he rewarded his schoolmasters' care and attention by flowering spectacularly" (165). Even better still was the gentle correction of Geoffrey Elton; one of his observations about Edward VI was made, she suggests, "without troubling to secure the safety harness of documentary evidence" (159). In Pollnitz's hands, even the most formidable erudition occasionally skips.

Erasmus began this change by imagining how a thorough immersion in the *bonae litterae* would lead rulers to abandon the savagery of war and instead focus on political and religious reform. The engineers of this process were classicists, some famous scholars like John Cheke and George Buchanan, and other more obscure ones like Bernard André, William Thomas, and Thomas Murray. There was no denying the educational results. While Prince Arthur was a bit of a disappointment, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Elizabeth, and James VI and I all earned high marks for their learning, and each was fluent in Latin and relatively adept in Greek. The impact of this education of them, however, was more problematic. Henry VIII prompted Erasmus to revise his education system on learning that it "inadvertently contributed to one of the more audacious power-grabs in early modern European history" (113). Edward VI's lessons led him to try to shift the succession to his cousin, Lady Jane Grey, who was ironically better educated than any of the royal daughters. Mary and Elizabeth both equaled their father's learning, but one wanted to undo his religious changes while the other loathed hearing them challenged. In one of the most impressive chapters, Pollnitz elucidates James VI's revolt against his Calvinist tutor, a revolt that led him to develop controversial ideas emphasizing the monarch's power. Tutors helped the development of James's sons, encouraging Henry to defy him and Charles to obey him, albeit with growing uneasiness. While none of these personality traits are surprising, Pollnitz does much to explain why they developed.

Careful reading of this splendid study will yield rich rewards. It will also raise some questions. Because these generations of royal children experienced roughly the same classical education only to emerge with different temperaments, the question naturally arises: Was the education the determining factor or their inherent personalities? Would, for example, even larger doses of Cicero have made Henry VIII more cautious or Charles I less compliant? More importantly, while Pollnitz touches on this question in brief, how exactly did the adult rulers follow, reject, or modify what they learned in their youth? Admittedly the answer to this question would be another book, but perhaps we can hope for another volume on princely education. Until then, we can only applaud Pollnitz for a wonderful and witty study of a neglected aspect of the Renaissance.

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