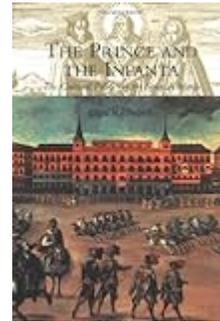


Glyn Redworth. *The Prince and the Infanta: The Cultural Politics of the Spanish Match.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. 232 pp. \$32.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-10198-0.



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Among the diplomatic perennials of the early seventeenth century, none proved harder than the idea of an Anglo-Spanish marriage alliance, and some two decades after it was first proposed in 1604, the Spanish match was still flourishing, having extended its tendrils into most contemporary controversies, everything from the fate of the Palatinate and the Dutch Republic to England's religious orientation.[1] Given the importance of these marriage negotiations, the prospect of a new bilateral study on the 1623 trip to Madrid (the culmination of those talks) is enough to quicken any early modern scholar's pulse. It is hard to find better material. In this episode, the normally reserved Prince of Wales vaulted a wall to glimpse his beloved, the Duke of Buckingham ended a frustrating conference with Spanish divines by stomping on his hat, and James struggled to keep highly sensitive dispatches from the Marquis of Hamilton who kindly offered to help with "any hard words." While the rough outline of this episode is tolerably well known, its precise details are maddeningly vague; this is hardly surprising, since aside from Sir John Elliott's excellent, albeit brief, section in his study of the Count-Duke of Olivares, there is very little aside from S. R. Gardiner's venerable, if predictably unsympathetic, analysis of the Spanish match.[2] Further heightening interest in this new work is the news that it issues from Yale University Press, which has steadily turned out lavishly illustrated and rea-

sonably priced books. *The Prince and the Infanta* runs true to form, boasting twenty-five color plates and nineteen additional illustrations, all for a very reasonable price.

Much of the excitement of this new work derives from the fact that the author is attempting is the scholarly equivalent of a notoriously challenging dive from the high platform, one whose extraordinary degree of difficulty necessarily humbles even the hardest scholar. While bilateral (transnational) studies represent something of the historians' stone, whose sovereign powers all scholars acknowledge, successful examples of the genre are quite rare—and with good reason. They require the author to master two different bodies of primary materials and historiographies, and in the case of this 1623 episode, the challenge is particularly daunting. Various Spanish archives contain a mountain of documentation about the trip to Madrid, while relevant letters are scattered across English repositories, from St. Pancras and Kew to Aberystwyth and Edinburgh. The only serious question is if the author can do justice to such a promising topic and to these rich materials; unfortunately the results are, at best, uneven.

In light of the extensive sources on both sides, this project inevitably seems destined to result in a weighty tome examining diplomatic minutiae in exhaustive, not to say painful, detail. Yet here Glyn Redworth reveals a

surprise; he himself is restive with diplomacy and high politics, confessing that he found the careful analysis of an important later period to “make for unedifying reading” (p. 170, n. 29). Instead he offers a “cultural history” of this event, something “above and beyond the analysis of diplomatic dispatches” (p. 1). Those anxious about their wobbly grasp of critical theory need not be alarmed; this prescription has produced an eminently readable short overview of the entire affair. To this task, he brings a brisk prose style and a sharp eye of telling pieces of evidence. General readers apprehensive of a modern Professor Dryasdust will doubtless applaud the author of lines like “James had caught the whiff of taxation as far away as Newmarket” (p. 34) and “Every inducement was given to lead Charles towards holy water” (p. 90). They will likewise delight in such details as Charles and Buckingham trying out their false beards at a Christmas masque, the favorite walking into the English embassy in Madrid carrying his own bag, and Olivares lending the prince some clothes for his first court appearance. Such lively prose, together with a very tight focus, makes this book easy to read in one sitting, a rare fate indeed for an academic tome.

The Prince and The Infanta will attract professional as well as lay readers. In an earlier article, Redworth presented the text of some remarkable—and remarkably suggestive—letters. In one, the conde de Gondomar announced that it was time for Charles “to mount Spain,” and in another, Charles dubbed the veteran Spanish envoy “my principal Alcahuete [i.e., intermediary/pimp].”[3] In this book, Redworth has the space to present a much fuller analysis of these fascinating documents. Even more startling is his portrait of Olivares. English contemporaries and later historians have long wondered whether the Spaniards, notwithstanding their public protestations to the contrary, would actually have ever allowed the Infanta to marry a Protestant prince. Their anxieties about Spanish sincerity, Redworth reveals, were entirely appropriate. On his deathbed, Philip III privately advised his successor to “seek some means to divert the treaty,” at least as long as Charles refused to convert to Catholicism (p. 67). Likewise Redworth unravels how Olivares quietly intervened to ensure that the terms for a match escalated well beyond what the English could accept, thus effectively scuttling the negotiations. Given the intense controversy at the time and the grim immediate aftermath of the collapsed Anglo-Spanish talks, the profession owes a great debt to Redworth for finally proving that the English were not at fault. Unless Charles eventually decided that the Infanta

was worth a mass, neither Philip III nor Olivares had any intention of sending Dona Maria to London. Yet the greatest mystery about this discovery is Redworth’s puzzling reluctance to deploy this vital information in his subsequent analysis, a decision that might have saved the book from baffling interpretative oddities.

Quite understandably, the intricacies of the trip to Madrid, as it played out across the continent as well as in London and Madrid, are likely to bore the general reader. Rather than possibly anesthetize this important audience, Redworth has presented an exceedingly succinct story in some 80,000 words. Regrettably this prescription for popular success is unlikely to transfix scholars, fond of details, subplots, and exhaustive research. A fuller study of this episode deploying much more evidence would have permitted the author to advance more compelling arguments. As it is, Redworth only has room to offer a few terse remarks about the existing historiography before plunging back into narration. After examining the Anglo-Spanish negotiations in 1623, Sir John Elliott famously concluded that by the end “the dishonours were ultimately even” on both sides (p. 134). Redworth, however, insists on a less balanced assessment, repeatedly castigating the English principals, first for their naiveté and then for their deceit. Thus Charles’s decision to travel to Spain was a “foolish miscalculation”; his decision first to accept, and then to repudiate, a full toleration of English Catholics “is a harbinger of his readiness later in life to make promises he had little intention of keeping”; and the war that Charles began in 1625 was “narcissistic” (pp. 3, 140). Similarly Redworth flatly rejects the notion that “the fate of the Palatinate was uppermost in the minds of Charles and his father.” Instead he maintains that “for all of their undoubted importance, events in the Rhineland played a surprisingly confused as well as secondary role when set against the House of Stuart’s longstanding desire for a union with the Habsburgs of Madrid” (p. 3). Only at the end of the trip to Madrid did the Palatine issue eventually emerge as a convenient excuse, covering Charles and Buckingham’s failure in the marriage talks and ultimately becoming “a twisted excuse for a war of vanity” (p. 5).

Plainly these notions are of paramount historiographical importance—if they were ever proven. Unfortunately, Redworth cannot do so; not only does he lack the space, he is stymied by the way he has framed the project. To be sure, a tight focus on the 1623 episode in Madrid makes for a tight story line. But given the luxuriant growth of Anglo-Spanish negotiations, especially after 1618, the decision to concentrate largely on 1623

is rather like gathering a bouquet of blooms instead of analyzing the flowering plants themselves. The absence of any extensive mention of the Palatinate in the initial stages of the trip to Madrid arguably should not be taken to mean that the Palatine question was not entangled with the marriage talks. Indeed, the profound limitations of trying to separate the marriage from the Palatine crisis can be vividly seen late in 1622 when Gondomar louchely urged Charles to “mount Spain.” The strict focus on the marriage necessarily obscures the fact that Gondomar wrote this note to soothe Charles’s mounting anger over Catholic aggression in the Palatinate; indeed Gondomar’s letter arrived as Charles was busy persuading his father to allow him to lead an English army to relieve the beleaguered garrisons along the Rhine.[4] Hence, any effort to consider the marriage outside of the growing German crisis must inevitably produce strange results. Yet, even within Redworth’s narrow focus on the 1623 trip, interpretative problems bedevil his analysis.

His portrait of the leading Spanish figures is perceptive, depicting Gondomar as the old grandee for whom the Anglo-Spanish marriage was his ticket to prominence and the Council of State, while Olivares desperately sought a subtle means of blocking the marriage itself without incurring English hostility. In sharp contrast, his sketch of the English principals is two dimensional, noting little appreciable difference between James and his son. A closer analysis might well have revealed that for James the Spanish match was as much a state of mind as a rational policy. But even James, for all of his deep emotional dependence on the Anglo-Spanish entente, could still acknowledge, as he did in early March 1623 when pondering the continuing travails of Frederick and Elizabeth, that “if my baby’s credit in Spain mend not these things, I will bid farewell to peace in Christendome.”[5] For his part, Charles himself was indeed devoted to the Infanta, just as he was to his sister (a point that Redworth ignores); and the prince, even more than his father, remained quite concerned that the Spaniards were much more interested in neutralizing England at this critical moment than in producing his bride. Given Redworth’s obliviousness to Charles’s larger concerns, he can only quote, and not elaborate on, the phrase that arguably best describes why Charles and Buckingham went to Madrid; as they told James early in their stay, they hoped soon to “get forth of this labyrinth, wherein we have been entangled these many years” (p. 106).

The uneven analysis highlights another problem that bedevils the entire book. Redworth’s analysis of James, Charles, and Buckingham is based almost exclusively on

a meticulous examination of the printed primary documents, so exhaustive as to summon up not simply G. Akrigg, Philip Earl of Hardwicke, Henry Ellis, and David Bergeron, but also the likes of James Halliwell whose 1848 *Letters of the Kings of England* has been “unjustifiably neglected” (p. 141). Sadly, this research decision placed Redworth entirely at the mercy of the editors and their judgments of notoriously tricky documents. The dangers of this research practice can be vividly seen in the case of James’s agitated response in mid-June on learning of the sudden escalation in Spanish terms. Redworth here relies on Bergeron, who transcribed a version of this letter in BL Add. 6987. Unfortunately, the original, and much fuller, letter survives elsewhere, and this discovery, in turn, would have brought to light other royal letters from the same time, which, along with pointedly denouncing the Spaniards for “thaire deceits,” underscored the father’s most strident advice to his son: “give the fairest wordis you can to gett hoame.” The prince need not worry about any oaths he might have to take, for just as the Pope might eventually intervene to block the marriage, so too “I will warrante you owre church shall free you better here, and then ame I resolved if god spaire me dayes, to become a Maister lacke Kaide my self and the greate governoure of the mutiners in England.” In order to extricate himself from this threatening situation, Charles’s overriding concern should simply be to “gett hoame,” and if ever troubled about how to do so, James reminded him that “I can turne myselve in any shape (but that of a knave) in case of necessitie.”[6] While these documents might well have altered Redworth’s overall judgment, hard-pressed authors can scarcely be expected to look at everything, although this manuscript is in the National Archives at Kew, filed by the correct date in SP 94 [Spain].

A wider focus as well as a more sensitive appreciation of the English personalities—and archives—would have rendered this Madrid episode much more comprehensible, and in the process the author may have been less apt to deliver one-sided moral judgments, with which this short book abounds. “How,” Redworth asked, “could the heir to the throne have been so misguided as to think a Habsburg bride was his for the taking” (p. 122)? Here Redworth inexplicably casts a blind eye on Gondomar’s letter urging Charles to mount Spain; after all, if the prince could not believe the Spanish ambassador, who could he believe? Likewise an unexpected bout of amnesia makes him overlook his own laudable efforts to illuminate Olivares’s repeated attempts to scuttle the match when he delivers another puzzling verdict: “whether or

not Olivares's intrigues with the papacy over the dispensation are to be regarded as deceitful or merely effective diplomacy, the shabbiness of Charles's last ruse plumbed new depths" (p. 133). It is frankly more than a little hard to follow the moral logic that holds it beneath contempt for a hostage to agree, albeit insincerely, to terms for his release while in the same breathe equating secret fiddling about the marriage terms with "effective diplomacy." Even more mind-boggling is the argument that Charles and Buckingham effectively doomed any hope of restoring the Palatinate by abandoning the Spanish match, for "to reject the marriage was to brush aside all hope of Spanish help over the Rhineland, as King Felipe was surely not going to stand idly by while Maria's sister-in-law and her nephews by marriage lived in exile" (p. 137). Yet again a fog mysteriously settles, and Redworth overlooks a fact he had earlier shown that, as far as Philip and Olivares were concerned, Maria was *never* going to have any English relatives, much less any Palatine ones—as least not until Charles converted. Rare indeed are authors so modest as to pass over the implications of their own research.

Therefore, while general readers will doubtless applaud *The Prince and the Infanta* for presenting a lively survey of the Trip to Madrid, scholars are likely to be more ambivalent. To be sure, Redworth deserves high marks for even attempting such challenging goal as a bilateral study, and all in such a brief work. Nevertheless his limited approach to such a complex issue has produced decidedly one-sided conclusions. The greatest achievement of Redworth's latest work, and no small one, is that it has now made the profession abundantly aware of the extraordinarily rich dividends that will flow from a full-on analysis of these extended Anglo-Spanish ne-

gotiations, one that considers popular politics and court maneuvers in both countries as well as the intricate diplomatic *pas de deux*. After *The Prince and the Infanta*, Redworth is the obvious candidate for the job, but whoever finally steps forward, it is now well past time for someone to illuminate "one of the most mysterious episodes in early modern English history."

Notes

[1]. The blurb bearing this reviewer's name on the dustjacket of *The Prince and the Infanta* should not be taken to mean that he read the text prior to publication; rather the quote comes from Cogswell's *The Blessed Revolution*, and appears without his consent.

[2]. Sir John Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 203-214; and S. R. Gardiner, *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War, 1603-1642* (London, 1886), 5: 1-128.

[3]. Glyn Redworth, "Of Pimps and Princes: Three Unpublished Letters from James I and the Prince of Wales," *Historical Journal*, 17 (1994): 401-409.

[4]. I will shortly develop this point at greater length elsewhere.

[5]. *The Letters of James VI and I*, ed. G. Akrigg (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), 394.

[6]. Redworth, 166, n. 1, compared with David Bergeron, *James I and the Letters of Homoerotic Desire* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 166-167; and James to Charles and Buckingham, [mid June 1623], National Archives (TNA), SP 94/27/ 20 and 24.

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