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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

THE FIRST MONARCH
EDWARD VI
JENNIFER LOACH



Jennifer Loach. *Edward VI.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999. xviii + 210 pp. \$27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-07992-0.

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Published on H-Albion (June, 2000)

Jennifer Loach died in 1995 at the age of 49. Prior to her final illness, she had been working on this political biography of Edward VI, the first such projected study of the boy king in several decades. Her unfinished work was left to family members and colleagues to complete for her. As stated in the preface, Alan Loach, Jennifer's husband, passed her research on to George Bernard and Penry Williams, who built on the original work to provide the text we now have from Yale University Press. They credit the work to Loach as edited by Bernard and Williams, but the preface indicates that some parts more clearly reflect Loach's voice than others.

I am honored to review Loach's last work, and wish to thank George Bernard and Penry Williams for their selfless efforts not just to the memory of Jennifer Loach, but for the academic community at large. How nice to have Loach's clear, analytical reflections on the reign of Edward VI. My critical comments on her final work do not lessen my admiration and respect for all who were involved in this project. The profession will be enriched by their efforts.

While offered as a political biography, the emphasis is on the politics. In fact, the book stretches the parameters of the genre of biography tremendously. It is indeed the political world of Edward VI. While the chapter organization unfolds according to a chronological ordering

of the pertinent issues in Edward's life, there are several chapters in which the boy king is almost invisible. His "life" in many instances is lost behind "the times" of the many important issues of his day, especially during the first half of the reign. In fact, when addressing the 1551 meeting between Edward, his council, and the Lady Mary over her continued maintenance of the mass, Loach commented on Edward's "stubbornness" that "fits the general pattern of his behavior." (p. 133) I could only ponder where the book had identified that pattern of personal behavior prior to this statement. The focus on Edward is more personal in the chapters on the prince's education and in the later ones on his court and final illness. The Somerset period (1547-49), however, is dominated by other issues.

For biographies of sixteenth-century figures, such a life and times approach which stresses the times is not out of the ordinary. Among the issues addressed are the debates over Jane Seymour's character and her death, the character and political agenda of Somerset, the character and political agenda of Northumberland, the religious changes, the 1549 rebellions, Edward's illness, and the attempted altering of the succession.

There is throughout the book the sense of a work-in-progress. In fact, one of its great strengths for scholars is the numerous theories sketched out in each and ev-

ery chapter. Yet “sketched out” is the proper term, for little is as fully explored as the final work would surely have done. For example, the reader goes through the first four chapters in 38 pages. We are told that Edward wrote a “competent treatise in his own hand on the pope as Antichrist” (p. 14), but are provided no particulars; we learn that Somerset “probably” wrote a preface to a specific publication, but no explanation follows (p. 44); the whole issue of the *Reformatio legum ecclesiasticarum* gets dealt with in one paragraph without any citations (p. 124). Many paragraphs seem to summarize the recent work of this or that historian. Some transitions are simply spaces between paragraphs. At least one footnote could not be traced.

So the importance of the volume lies in the hypotheses presented within, many of which will hopefully direct other scholars and their research for years to come. Loach differs from W.K. Jordan’s analysis – the last significant work on Edward’s reign – in a number of areas, and is in closer agreement in others. Like Jordan, she sees Edward as the source of the effort to divert the succession from Mary to Lady Jane Grey; unlike Jordan she does not see Edward as increasingly exerting himself in English government during his last few years. Her most intriguing argument stresses the continuity between the policies and government of Somerset and Northumberland.

As far as Edward VI is concerned, the major argument

is directed more at an image than a thesis. Loach targets the ardently “Protestant Edward” as depicted in the famous woodcut of Edward listening to a sermon by Hugh Latimer in Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*. She finds instead that Edward had interests in military affairs, jousts, and other such issues that would likely strike the fancy of a teenage boy of his rank and status in the sixteenth century. This interpretation does not substantially deviate from Jordan’s assessment of Edward’s personality, although Loach makes more of a point of it. I do find it worthy of note that the more “secularized” image of Edward was begun in the same decade as Loades’ biography of Mary I which presents the similar argument that Mary’s religious and charitable life prior to 1553 reveals little evidence to support the overly Catholic image and reputation of that Tudor. Is a secular age simply producing secularized biographies, or are we getting closer to the truth somehow?

In the final analysis this book is about many things, but mostly it stands as a monument to things that might have been. Again, the profession should be very grateful to all involved in the editing and publication of a volume full of many thought-provoking ideas. It is one last chance to hear a voice that was and is so lucid.

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Citation: Gary Gibbs. Review of Loach, Jennifer, *Edward VI*. H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. June, 2000.

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