The Educated Lion
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Assignment Description: Write a paper based on any element of the assigned readings.

From the moment of conception, Queen Elizabeth I of England was thrown into a pit of blood-thirsty animals. Her father Henry VIII had denounced the holy Catholic Church in order to marry her mother, Anne Boleyn, with the sole purpose to produce a male heir. When Anne gave birth to a girl there was little enthusiasm and Henry felt humiliated that God had not blessed him with a son. He already had a daughter and Henry had little use for another. The future of the princess was not very promising after her mother’s execution. It was not customary to educate a bastard child in the formal teachings of the day. It was only by the grace of God and the twist of fate that young Lady Elizabeth was blessed with loving governesses and tutors to see to her education and a love for the arts.

Elizabeth’s first nanny or Lady Governess in the day was Margaret Bryan. She was well known for being the caretaker for King Henry VIII’s children. It is evident that she cared deeply for Elizabeth and was concerned for her welfare. In August 1536, Margaret “found that the young child’s needs were being neglected” (Jackson) and wrote to the chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, complaining of the economic displacement of Lady Elizabeth’s household since the change of her status. She writes:

Now, as my lady Elizabeth is put from that degree she was in, and what degree she is at now I know not but hearsay, I know not how to order her or myself, or her women or groom. I beg you to be [a] good lord to her and hers, and that she may have raiment, for she has neither gown nor kirtls nor petticoat, nor linen for smocks, nor kerchiefs, sleeves, rails, bodystychets, handkerchiefs, mufflers, nor begins” (Rusche).

Margaret “Muggie” only cared for the young girl three short years when Prince Edward became her new charge in 1537. She passed over responsibility to Katherine Champernowne.

Katherine Champernowne, or “Kat” as she was commonly called by Elizabeth, was not only the future Queen’s second governess but her first tutor. Kat herself was highly educated and from the beginning she understood that she played a vital role in young Elizabeth’s future. With the absence of her mother and the lack of attention from the King, it was up to Kat to see to her upbringing. Kat laid a stone foundation starting with an “elaborate code of politeness and subservience to her elders” (Jackson). By the age of five or six, Elizabeth had such a confident grasp of reading and writing of the English language that Kat started her instruction in Latin.

Lady Elizabeth and the future king, her younger brother Edward, lived together at Hatfield House, twenty-one miles from London (Hatfield). Elizabeth never hesitated to draw from the fountain of knowledge that lay in the walls of her estate when Edward started his instruction. It was on many occasions that the young girl called upon Edward’s tutors for assistance. Jean
Belmain, the French tutor, was no exception. He helped Elizabeth perfect her already proficient grasp of the language (Jackson). When clergyman Richard Cox was appointed in 1544, he took Elizabeth under his wing and taught both children the conjugation of verbs, parts of speech in Greek and Latin and challenged the children to conquer the captains of ignorance.

It was not until John Chelle replaced Cox that Elizabeth got the recognition that she deserved. Chelle was a well known scholar and skilled classical linguist; he emphasized the importance of the Holy Scriptures first, followed by the greats like Aristotle, Plato, and Demosthenes, just to name a few (Anthology). By the time she was eleven, Chelle had picked up on the child’s high intelligence and extraordinary memory. Elizabeth had displayed potential in Latin, Greek and French; he wanted to take her education one step further and suggested that Lady Elizabeth be given a private tutor of her own.

A young and ambitious Cambridge student, William Grindal, was appointed to tutor Elizabeth. “Elizabeth benefited from Grindal’s scrupulous, attentive training which was infused with a world view of English Protestant humanism which focused on learning Latin and Greek” (Jackson).

Unfortunately for Elizabeth this arrangement didn’t last long. In 1548, Grindal died of the plague and Roger Ascham was put in his place. He served as her tutor from 1548 to 1550 when Elizabeth agreed to let him go (Anthology).

By the time Elizabeth became Queen in 1558 her education had served her well. Elizabeth had a firm grip of her teachings and a fondness of the arts. One of her pastimes was to translate classic works into English like De Consolatione Philosophiae, write poetry, and attend plays at court.

The Queen loved the theater so much that she formed her own company and on March 10th 1583, Elizabeth signed the order and Queen Elizabeth’s Men was formed. Sir Francis Walsingham was given the job to invade other play houses for the best performers. Three of the leading companies lost their leading and star actors: The Leicester’s Men, The Sussex’s Men, and The Oxford’s troupe (Luminarium).

Entitled The Queen Elizabeth’s Men, the largest company of this time totaled twelve members, and was twice the size of its English predecessors. The group was unique among their peers that they were a “deliberately political company in origin and their repertory appears to have followed the path no doubt pointed out for them by Sir Francis Walsingham” (Luminarium). The company largely performed in the winter months at court and in the warmer seasons they toured the smaller towns of the realm. Between 1592 and 1593, the London theatres were forced to close due to the bubonic plague to which the company never recovered. However, after the closing of her company, the Queen remained a patron of the theater and play writers such as William Shakespeare, who did well under her reign.

In the last ten years of Elizabeth’s service, the play writer performed thirty-two times at court making the economic benefits considerable. After the Global was built in 1599, Shakespeare produced and refined all his works before taking them to the Christmas festivities at Whitehall or Hampton Court. With the help of his sovereign, William Shakespeare took his place among the great patronage playwrights of his time.

Queen Elizabeth was not to have the education of a prince. Nevertheless, because of the insistence from her beloved Kat and the willingness of her brother’s tutors, Elizabeth proved herself more intelligent than the typical Englishman. Her studies provided her with a permanent linguistic self-confidence that served her well
throughout her reign, making her an educated lion feared throughout the world. By the time Elizabeth ascended to the throne, she had gained a love for the theatre and used it to her advantage both politically and on a personal level. Many actors and playwrights benefited from her support and the works became popular with gentry and lower classes alike.

Work Cited


