

Deconstructing Tum Tum: becoming Edward VII

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Jane Ridley, who is preparing a study of the King's relations with women, determined to get beneath the caricature image and 'expanding waistline' of Edward VII. He had a damaging and loveless childhood. Thereafter his personal relations were always an essential part of his political life. Through much of his childhood, the Queen regnant was the Queen pregnant. Victoria abdicated much of her role to her husband. The Prince of Wales during lessons was 'vague' about everything except his right to succeed to the throne. He disliked all his tutors: his father corrected his diaries. At an audience with the pope he was more interested in the uniforms of the Swiss guards than in the conversation of His Holiness. Since his mother demanded to see all his letters, he maintained a secret correspondence with his favourite sisters. The Prince of Wales compensated for the harshness of his upbringing by repeated sexual conquests which gave his father 'the deepest pain I have felt in this life'. After his father's death Queen Victoria refused to share power with her son. She choreographed every detail of his engagement. The Prince of Wales considered 'it's one's duty not to nurse one's sorrow', and 'one must show oneself in public however irksome it may be'. Taking on the public role of the sovereign, he became 'the saviour of the nineteenth century monarchy'. In the subsequent discussion, Kenneth Rose pointed out how much better Edward VII's relations were with his son than with his parents. Every minister whom George V received in 1910 after his father's death found him in tears.