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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEWS

DREAMS OR DESIGNS, CULTS OR CONSTRUCTIONS? THE STUDY OF IMAGES OF MONARCHS

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ABSTRACT. *This historiographical review surveys studies by cultural historians of images of monarchs, including Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, Charles I, and Victoria. These are not biographies, but analyses of the diverse and often contradictory representations of monarchs in their own times and afterwards. The review considers the variety of approaches in the field, from iconographical decoding to political history to the application of psychoanalysis to a national culture. It discusses the extent to which queens tend to be conflated to an enduring model of idealized femininity; how seriously we should take representations of monarchs as sacred; and the incorporation of sexuality in the royal image. It considers resistance as well as assent to the royal image, and how far the royal image as art object can become detached from the ideology which produced it. It concludes by observing our mixed motivations for interest in past 'cults' of monarchs, seeking in them at once the exotic difference of the past and comparisons with public figures of our own time.*

I

Like the coins on whose opposite sides their portraits and insignias appear, monarchs through history attempt to fuse opposing significations into a single whole. On the one hand a monarch is the incumbent of an institution which claims to be timeless and sacred, a symbol of national values; on the other, he or she is a human being with a life story of birth, love, death, mistakes, and triumphs. Poised between the human and divine, the mortal and immortal, elevated on a throne to draw the eyes of all beholders, endlessly presented and re-presented, it is not surprising that monarchs have been an abiding object of fascination not only for their subjects and opponents, but also for cultural historians.

Such cultural historians invariably stress their distance from biographers: their quest is not to identify the real person behind the public facade, but to analyse that highly wrought facade itself, and the processes that went into its construction. Moreover, they quickly find themselves confronted not with a monolith, but with a multiplicity of diverse and even contradictory images. Thomas Dekker's play *Old Fortunatus* (1599), quoted by Roy Strong early in his study *The cult of Elizabeth*, helps to catalogue the numerous guises under which that queen was praised: 'Some call her Pandora: some Gloriana: some Cynthia: some Belphoebe: some Astraea: all by several names to

express several loves.'[1] Adrienne Munich finds that Queen Victoria similarly 'presented herself in many different guises', and 'generated such contradictions that by the time of the Golden Jubilee, representations of the queen had fragmented and multiplied, as if to comprehend uniqueness, multiplicity, and contradiction'.[2] Rather than undertake a potentially endless quest for the real Queen Victoria at the centre of all this, Munich sets herself to explore the abundance of 'cultural fantasies' surrounding her.[3]

David Loewenstein, a contributor to Thomas N. Corns's essay collection *The royal image* on representations of Charles I, likewise finds versions of that monarch 'diverse … conflicting … polemical and frequently retrospective', while at their centre the king himself remains 'often inscrutable'.[4] Alan McNairn's book *Behold the hero* discusses art-works inspired by General Wolfe, the British victor over the French at Quebec in 1759 – not a monarch, obviously, but a national hero undergoing similar iconization – and offers a useful term: not biography, but 'necrography', a narrative of the variations upon a public figure's image after his death, which in turn invites us to contemplate 'the commodification of heroes'.[5] For Jayne Elizabeth Lewis also, her subject, Mary Queen of Scots, is an image or idea as much as an historical woman.[6] Lewis valuably points out how Mary Stuart's provocation of diametrically opposed reputations even as early as the years immediately after her death quickly became the source of her interest and appeal: an intrinsic unknowability on to which all onlookers could project their fears and desires. The real woman is not only irretrievable but arguably irrelevant.

Scholars in this field must deal not only with a multiplicity of images of each monarch, but also with a diversity of media in which such images appear. Monarchs become cult-objects by being turned into artefacts: portraits, statues, a profile on a medal, a decorative figure on the border of a long-case clock (thus Mary Queen of Scots), or an illustration for the letter Q in an alphabet primer (thus Queen Victoria).[7] Of course they featured prominently in courtly or 'high' art, such as the portraits of Charles I by Van Dyck or the literary panegyrics to Elizabeth I, but, as several recent writers remind us, they may have been more present to their subjects in other media which are less available to the modern scholar in a research library, such as coins of the realm, weekly sermons from the pulpit of the national Church over which they presided, and ceremonies or events at which either the symbolic or real presence of the monarch was on display.[8]

Many of these media were specific to a particular historical moment and were inflected by their own novelty: Joad Raymond, for instance, argues that Charles I was the first British monarch to be represented by a popular press beyond his control, and

[1] Roy Strong, *The cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan portraiture and pageantry* (London, 1977; 1999), p. 15.

[2] Adrienne Munich, *Queen Victoria's secrets* (London, 1996; pbk New York, 1998), pp. 12, 194.

[3] Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 2.

[4] David Loewenstein, 'The king among the radicals', in Thomas N. Corns, ed., *The royal image: representations of Charles I* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 96.

[5] Alan McNairn, *Behold the hero: General Wolfe and the arts in the eighteenth century* (Liverpool, 1997), p. xii.

[6] Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots: romance and nation* (London, 1998), p. 2.

[7] Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots*, plate 10; Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 80.

[8] R. Malcolm Smuts, *Culture and power in England, 1585–1685* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 51; Corns, ed., *Royal image*, pp. 14, 49, ch. 9, pp. 291, 302.

that this was a major factor in the desacralizing of his monarchy;[9] while Queen Victoria, unprecedentedly for a monarch, appeared in photographs. These at once appear to give a new directness and truthfulness of representation – we have a much more accurate idea of Victoria's physiognomy than that of, say, Mary Queen of Scots – while also loudly announcing their own artfulness of composition. In a wedding portrait for the Prince and Princess of Wales, a bust of the dead Prince Albert is included as a member of the family group, and the seated queen, in full mourning, gazes fixedly towards him with her back to the bride.[10] An 1893 photograph of the bonneted queen at work at her black boxes under a tasselled canopy on a lawn, attended by her favourite Indian servant, requires as much interpretation and deconstruction as the famous painting of her handing down a Bible to a kneeling African chief.[11] All are visual texts which tell stories and provoke commentary.

How is the scholar to proceed in making sense of all these various forms and images? Clearly the methodologies of art history, literary criticism, and study of popular culture are likely to blend in this field. That said, it is striking how various are the chosen approaches of different scholars. Roy Strong made an important early contribution in *The cult of Elizabeth*, first published in 1977 but including essays written as early as 1959, and building in turn upon the work of E. C. Wilson and of Strong's mentor Frances Yates.[12] The invaluable lesson which Yates and Strong taught their successors is that the past is a different country, and they represented and understood things differently there. Strong's admirable goal, whether considering the *Procession picture* of Elizabeth I, the memorial portrait of Sir Henry Unton, or the Accession Day tilts, is to attempt to recover 'a lost sense of sight, of how the Elizabethans actually *saw* things'.[13] He shows how Elizabethan portraits are totally unaware of modern rules of perspective and have little concern to confine themselves to capturing one moment in time: an engraving of a procession of the Order of the Garter can include foreign knights not present, place Windsor Castle in an imaginary landscape, and superimpose coats of arms on the scene.[14] All such artefacts are seen by Strong as part of a signifying system, interweaving the visual arts, literature, and ceremonial to produce a fabric which others might call richly semiotic, and which Strong approaches as a detective or code-breaker.

It is noticeable, though, that although he elicits a great deal of information about the objects under his scrutiny, he is eager not to decode completely, but always to leave something over to inspire mystery and wonder. His subject is not just the reconstruction of Accession Day pageantry, but its elusive 'magic': 'What incredible spectacles they must have been, and what an impact they must have made at the time!'[15] He describes his findings as merely 'glimpses into this bizarre world', and it is not entirely with regret that he concludes that the tilts 'remain to this day an enigma'.[16] At the centre of all the 'extraordinary mythology' and 'astounding yet comprehensible contradictions' is 'one extraordinary woman – Elizabeth of England'.[17] The rapturousness of the prose makes the book an engrossing read – its subject is glamour, its presentation is sumptuous – but

[9] Joad Raymond, 'Popular representations of Charles I', in Corns, ed., *Royal image*, p. 47.
[10] Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 91. [11] Ibid., pp. 154, 144.
[12] Elkin Calhoun Wilson, *England's Eliza*, Harvard Studies in English vol. 20 (New York, 1966 (1st publ. 1939)); Frances A. Yates, 'Queen Elizabeth I as Astraea', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 10 (1947), pp. 27–82; idem, *Astraea: the imperial theme in the sixteenth century* (London, 1975). [13] Strong, *Cult*, p. 43. [14] Ibid., p. 172.
[15] Ibid., pp. 144, 146. [16] Ibid., pp. 146, 151. [17] Ibid., p. 191.

we might feel that Strong, like Elizabeth's notable biographer J. E. Neale, has become an adherent as much as an analyst of the cult of Elizabeth.[18]

Although Strong sometimes gestures towards court politics in the sense of rival favourites and factions as a context for his material, politics in general is not of great interest to him. A significant difference of emphasis and style may be seen in recent studies of the seventeenth century, such as Thomas N. Corns's *The royal image* on Charles I, or R. Malcolm Smuts's survey of *Culture and power in England, 1585–1685*. Charles's fate leads readily to the question 'where did it all go wrong?' – at least from the monarchy's point of view – and hence to detailed analysis of political currents and counter-currents. There is a seriousness and intellectual rigour about these two volumes, weighing up arguments and charting the course of historical debates. Where Strong presents Accession Day celebrations, say, as spontaneous outpourings of national fervour, these writers tend to foreground the political interest-groups involved in the promulgation of such assertions of monarchical authority, and to recognize forces of criticism and resistance.

In thinking about images of monarchy we clearly need to address both their deliberate construction and promotion by central governmental authority, and their creation by a public projecting their own desires and anxieties on to a prominent figure. This understandably leads Munich and Lewis towards psychoanalytical methodologies. Munich's discussion of the cultural fantasies surrounding Victoria sometimes itself seems a little fantastical: for instance, in a chapter entitled 'Her life as a dog', portraits of the queen with her pets are said to represent Victoria as herself like a dog; and this in turn is said to show her as a domesticated, tamed figure; and this in turn is connected with her warmth towards her colonial domestic servants.[19] The fluid sequence of ideas, a little like someone free-associating on a couch, is at once exhilarating and sometimes faintly implausible. However, it produces a highly entertaining book, partly because of the sense of a lively and open play of thought, partly because Munich has simply amassed a wonderful collection of bizarre, intriguing, and memorable quotations and pictures.

Like Munich, Lewis regards her evidence from art and literature as 'a nation's dream-work'.[20] Her thesis is that Mary Queen of Scots is a sexualized mother-figure who was simultaneously desired and repudiated by the English (and/or the Scottish? and/or the British? – she is a little vague on this). Essentially, then, she applies a schema from individual psychoanalysis to national psychology. Images of monarchs seem to crave some sort of psychoanalytical approach, but some questions remain as to whether the translation from the individual to the mass is so straightforward. Moreover, Lewis's interpretations suffer from being not well grounded in historical knowledge. She wants to resist James Emerson Phillips's division of images of Mary into Catholic and Protestant in his book *Images of a queen*, but to do so is to under-represent the major intellectual framework of Mary's own time and the century or more afterwards.[21] The lack of any discussion of Mary as Whore of Babylon, for instance, feels like a major omission.

In one use of a theological epistemology, though, Lewis claims that as reigning queen, Mary practised 'an impure art of fleshly identification', one which merged sign and

[18] Sir John E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (Harmondsworth, 1960 (1st publ. 1934)).

[19] Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, ch. 6.

[20] Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots*, p. 6.

[21] James Emerson Phillips, *Images of a queen: Mary Stuart in sixteenth-century literature* (Berkeley, CA, 1964).

substance in accordance with the doctrine of transubstantiation, radiating 'a maternal atmosphere of contact and continuity'.[22] This is opposed to Elizabeth's self-representations, which are described as 'self-segregation and sublimation', a separation of the queen's image from her physical body which is explained as both Petrarchan idealism and a Protestant detachment of images from referents.[23] All of this depends upon ignoring large portions of the Elizabethan record, such as the many justifications of the 'civil worship' of the English queen on the grounds that, as Protestant monarch, she was an earthly embodiment of God and in the strongest sense a 'true' image; or the frequent identification of the unconquered English nation with Elizabeth's intact virgin body.[24] Yes, differentiation between signs and the establishment of borders are important in all these images, defining Elizabeth and England in opposition to their enemies, but they are not representations which involve a separation of sign and referent.

Nor does Spenser's allegory: indeed, he is at pains to show how Catholic idolatry and duplicity misapplies signs to referents, whereas Protestant art attempts the pure conveyance of divine truths via true images. Lewis claims that since Duessa in *The faerie queene* has many different referents, only one of which is Mary Queen of Scots, she is radically at odds with the entire system of allegory of the rest of the poem, which 'depends on a stable one-to-one correspondence' between signs and referents; she is therefore on trial in Book V 'partly for the threat she poses to Spenser's allegorical structure'.[25] But just as Duessa represents both Mary Stuart and the Roman Church and the Whore of Babylon and duplicity, so, to take only one example, Una represents both Elizabeth and the Church of England and the Woman Clothed with the Sun and truth, among other things. Lewis also seems unaware of readings of the trial of Duessa by Mercilla which find the subtext of the scene less in Spenser's diversion from celebration of Elizabeth by his subconscious pity for Mary than in his purposeful critique of Elizabeth herself for excessive pity of Mary – her 'more then needfull naturall remorse' which delayed for years and nearly prevented altogether the elimination of her dangerous counter-claimant.[26] Moreover, this is part of an increasing disillusionment with Elizabeth by this stage in the poem; Spenser's position is far more complex than that of 'Elizabeth's very devoted subject' and unquestioning apologist as described by Lewis.[27]

Lewis presents much fascinating primary material from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the Gothic novel by Sophia Lee about Mary's secret daughters, or Swinburne's rampantly decadent account of Mary in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as a vampire goddess reared in 'the alcoves of Sodom'.[28] In the earlier period, though, her intriguing argument feels ungrounded in solid historical research; and even in later periods the important context of Anglo-Scottish relations and the development of Scottish nationalism is under-invoked.

[22] Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots*, pp. 21–2, 43.

[23] Ibid., pp. 21, 19.

[24] Helen Hackett, *Virgin mother, maiden queen: Elizabeth I and the cult of the Virgin Mary* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 86, 115–18, 120–1, 142–3, 145, 153–4, 208–11.

[25] Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots*, pp. 53–4.

[26] Edmund Spenser, *The faerie queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (1977; pbk London and New York, 1980), v.x.4; Thomas H. Cain, *Praise in 'The faerie queene'* (Lincoln, NB, 1978), p. 145; Hackett, *Virgin mother*, pp. 171–4.

[27] Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots*, p. 53; Hackett, *Virgin mother*, pp. 190–7.

[28] Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots*, pp. 136–46, 188–9.

Somewhere between and among psychoanalysis, political history, and aesthetic criticism there must be a language to talk about images of monarchy.[29] Many studies have made important contributions to the vocabulary, yet there still seems to be more thinking to do.

II

One reason why psychoanalysis seems necessary for talking about the representation of monarchs is because so many images recur, coalescing around different figures in different times and circumstances, and thereby implying a response to some kinds of mass needs which endure over centuries. Female monarchs in particular seem to produce a replication of images, as if in the public mind they are all compared back to some primal model of female power. When Margaret Thatcher as prime minister won the Falklands War, newspaper cartoons and interviews with her favourite ministers routinely compared her with Elizabeth I and Boadicea, just as Elizabeth before her in her own time had been compared with Boadicea. Books of the time like Antonia Fraser's *Boadicea's chariot: the warrior queens* or Marina Warner's *Monuments and maidens* could create an impression that all female leaders were simply variations upon a single central model.[30]

In the case of Elizabeth I and Victoria, differences might at first seem more apparent than similarities: one a Virgin Queen, the other a devoted wife and widow and prodigiously prolific mother and grandmother. Indeed Victoria's private secretary, Henry Ponsonby, asserted that she 'was not in the least like the three queens regnant her predecessors', Mary I, Elizabeth I, and Anne.[31] Yet both Elizabeth and Victoria had to deal with an ideology which regarded a female monarch as a 'contradiction in terms',[32] and both were unprecedented to a further degree in lacking a husband for all or much of their reigns. Elizabeth as unmarried queen and Victoria as widowed queen regnant were each obliged 'to write the anomalous role while she played it'.[33] Both partly negotiated the consequent disruption of gender conventions by representing themselves as the dutiful custodians of the memory of dead patriarchs (Henry VIII for Elizabeth, Albert for Victoria). Both also, through their sheer physical tenacity, outlived most of their favourites and advisers and in a sense outlived their own times. They both came to inspire apparent fantasies of immortality in their subjects, who found it simultaneously exhilarating and unthinkable to imagine living without them.

Femininity was clearly a key issue for both queens. While both were sometimes praised for 'masculine' qualities or fleetingly associated with Amazons, such gender-bending imagery was troubling; more often they appear as icons of womanliness. While the basic fact of physical childbearing – done frequently by Victoria, never by Elizabeth – might seem to be a gulf between them, Munich argues persuasively that Victoria became more of a symbolic mother to her subjects *after* her biological

[29] Other important contributions include Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the politics of literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and their contemporaries* (Baltimore, 1983); Helen Smailes and Duncan Thomson, *The queen's image: a celebration of Mary, Queen of Scots* (Edinburgh, 1987); Roy Strong, *Gloriana: the portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London, 1987); Philippa Berry, *Of chastity and power: Elizabethan literature and the unmarried queen* (London, 1989); Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: the competition for representation* (Oxford, 1993).

[30] Antonia Fraser, *Boadicea's chariot: the warrior queens* (London, 1988); Marina Warner, *Monuments and maidens: the allegory of the female form* (London, 1985).

[31] Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 12. [32] Ibid., p. 125. [33] Ibid., p. 99.

motherhood ceased, much as Elizabeth seemed able to claim her people as her metaphorical children all the more forcefully precisely because she had no real children to compete with them.[34] Femininity may have been defined in more domestic and less Petrarchan terms by the time Victoria came to the throne, but there is a common thread running through Elizabethan panegyric of their monarch as 'Queen of Love and Beauty' and Victorian commendation of their sovereign 'who has known how to unite the dignified discharge of public duties with a constant regard for the cares of domestic life': both proclaim that their ruler is no freak, but a personification of womanhood supreme.[35]

The combination in these figures of universal maternal care, chaste propriety, and elevation above the mass of humanity inevitably leads to comparisons with the Virgin Mary. Roy Strong famously implies that the cult of Elizabeth was a deliberate replacement for the cult of the Madonna, and I have written elsewhere about some of the problems and questions which such an argument raises.[36] However, the almost inevitability of Marian and saintly iconography being drawn upon as one of the many sources for fashioning the public image of a queen is illustrated by the case of Victoria. Poems by Elizabeth Barrett on the young queen celebrate her tears as she ascends the throne, presenting her as a martyr to the service of her people whose sacrifice is preparation for a heavenly crown.[37] Later, after Albert's death, Victoria's adherence to mourning dress, withdrawal from public view, and frequent depiction in poses where she gazes adoringly at statues or visions of her departed spouse present her as a nun devoted to his memory.[38] At the same time, in her grandmotherhood, she appears in a Madonna pose, nursing a baby on her lap, in numerous illustrations and photographs. For Munich, her supposed compassion for her people, combined with her physical capaciousness, renders her a 'folk madonna'. In the words of Henry James after her death, she 'held the nation warm under the fold of her big, hideous Scotch-plaid shawl'.[39]

Nearer to Elizabeth's time, Henrietta Maria also was praised in Mariological terms, especially in relation to her childbearing: an epigram by Ben Jonson 'to the Queene, then Lying In', even begins 'Haile *Mary*, full of grace', using the fact that the queen's name was often shortened to Mary.[40] Ann Baynes Coiro sees this poem as 'concerned with its own blasphemy' and 'deliberately challenging'.[41] There was nothing new about celebrating the birth of a royal heir as a messianic incarnation, and a royal mother as a Virgin-Mary-like figure,[42] but she may be right that the Mariological strain is the most overt since the Reformation. It is certainly intriguing, as she points out, in relation to both Henrietta Maria's and Jonson's Catholicism. Does the Catholicism of queen and poet make the language of Mariolatry more or less available, more or less sacred, more or less blasphemous? This is the kind of area where the sensibility of the past is extremely difficult for us to reconstruct.

What did past writers and artists mean when they applied terms of worship to monarchs? To call the ceremonial and imagery surrounding a monarch a 'cult', as

[34] Ibid., ch. 8. [35] Strong, *Cult*, p. 48; Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 217.
[36] Strong, *Cult*, pp. 15–16 and passim; Hackett, *Virgin mother*, Introduction and passim.
[37] Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 20. [38] Ibid., p. 96.
[39] Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 78.
[40] Ann Baynes Coiro, '"A ball of strife": Caroline poetry and royal marriage', in Corns, ed., *Royal image*, p. 32. [41] Ibid., pp. 32–3.
[42] See, for instance, Hackett, *Virgin mother*, pp. 29–37, 141–2.

Strong does, is to imply a combination of religious veneration and the kind of fervour inspired by modern celebrities in their fans (as in the cult of Marilyn Monroe, or the cult of Madonna). In regard to a monarch, this may have seemed like a bizarre attitude of a bygone age at the time when Strong was writing, before Princess Diana. Elizabeth II was the present-day royal with the highest profile, and the royal family seemed pretty far removed from either religious or secular devotion. Times have changed, of course, and in the wake of Diana's public life and death, talk of a cult of a Princess does not seem so far-fetched. If we look back before Elizabeth I, though, we find that the idea of the sacredness of rulers goes back to the ancient world and the Old Testament, and continues through the middle ages in interchanged images of Christ as king and kings as earthly representatives of Christ.[43]

Is it really true, though, that subjects from the sixteenth century and onwards literally deified their monarchs? Strong opines that in representations of Elizabeth from late in her reign she is 'unambiguously presented as an object of worship'.[44] Only two decades later, though, under Charles I, the claim to divine right has become explicitly linked to the fiscal claims of the crown; and by the 1640s terms like 'anointed King' and 'God's viceregent' grate because they have come to connote an oppressive absolutism.[45] Throughout, the royal image still retains an aura of sacredness – after all, the iconoclastic destruction and mutilation of royal statues during the Civil War only serves to prove their enduring spiritual power, just as the post-Reformation destruction of religious images did not deny their symbolic value so much as invest them with an opposite but equally profound symbolic value to that which they possessed before.[46] But Kevin Sharpe poses a pertinent question which remains hard to answer: when Charles's household possessions were sold and distributed after his death, did objects like his monogrammed carpets, chairs, linen, cutlery, and plates, objects which resonated with intimate contact with the royal body, take on the aura of holy relics? Or 'did the dissemination of such quotidian items finally puncture the mystique of divine majesty? Holy mystery or domestic humanity?'[47]

It does seem that, for some at least, such objects were holy relics: Raymond records how 'a teenage girl near Deptford was cured of the King's Evil by a handkerchief dipped in the martyr's blood. The royal blood cured scrofula and blindness, even producing sympathetic stigmata.'[48] Given the long history of exchange of iconography between the sacred and the regal, and since a large part of the role of monarchs has always been to personify certain religious and moral causes, it is not too surprising that monarchs who were incarcerated and executed, like Charles and his grandmother Mary, should have attracted the iconography of martyrdom. Some interesting explorations have been made of specific instances of this. Elizabeth Skerpan Wheeler, for example, shows how *Eikon Basilike*, so crucial in establishing Charles's image as martyr, was produced by cumulative and communal processes, in many ways a product of the people even as it claimed to give an authentic record of the king's inner life.[49] Others have found that Mary Queen of Scots rather than James I tended to be

[43] Ibid., ch. 1.

[44] Strong, *Cult*, p. 52.

[45] Thomas N. Corns, 'Duke, prince and king', in Corns, ed., *Royal image*, p. 13; Raymond, 'Popular representations', p. 54.

[46] Peacock, 'Visual image', p. 220.

[47] Kevin Sharpe, 'The royal image: an afterword', in Corns, ed. *Royal image*, p. 303.

[48] Raymond, 'Popular representations', p. 66.

[49] Elizabeth Skerpan Wheeler, '*Eikon Basilike* and the rhetoric of self-representation', in Corns, ed., *Royal image*, ch. 6.

represented retrospectively as the founder of the Stuart dynasty, inaugurating a family tradition of martyrdom and tragic loss as read back through the fate of Charles I.[50] This produced in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a Jacobite polemic in which, to prove himself a true Stuart hero, each latest claimant had only to 'pray & mourn/Till Heaven our ravish'd Bliss again return' – that is, 'to do essentially nothing at all'.[51]

Even within images of monarchs as saints and martyrs, the style and tone of representation can seem knowingly exaggerated, slightly tongue-in-cheek, slightly camp. The actual humanity and fallibility of the individual behind the glorious image often seems not so far below the surface, the absurdity of inflating him or her like this tacitly signalled by the artificer. Kevin Sharpe pertinently asks whether 'Van Dyck's brilliance in combining a mystification of majesty with a realism in depicting the king's humanity', rather than fusing those properties, might not have raised in onlookers questions about the relation between them.[52] Ann Baynes Coiro accurately observes the self-conscious, self-parodic quality of much Caroline panegyric.[53] Munich's most explicit image of Victoria apotheosized, grafting her familiar jowled head with widow's cap on to an angelic robed figure hovering in mid-air, appeared in a humorous magazine of 1889.[54]

III

Even Roy Strong, even as he revels in the glory of Elizabeth's public image, takes an almost malicious and misogynistic delight in repeatedly imagining 'this withered, vain old lady', 'a rapidly ageing, tired and lonely old lady', 'a lonely, ageing woman' not so very well concealed behind it all.[55] Part of the enduring appeal of monarchs seems to be not only their glittering public facades, but the desire in the beholder to penetrate behind the facade, or even to deface the facade by exposing the scandal of fleshliness and fallibility. The portraits and panegyric co-exist with gossip and rumour, especially around female monarchs, whose sexuality seems to be of intense interest to their subjects and historians alike. Munich's teasing title – *Queen Victoria's secrets* – itself knowingly caters to this voyeuristic desire.

Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, and Victoria all inspired rumours of secret children: to Elizabeth by Leicester, her Master of Horse, or other favourites; to Mary by Bothwell; to Victoria by John Brown, also a horse-keeper, who was satirized as her 'stallion'.[56] In such stories we can detect not only an impulse to reveal the human feelings and human body of a queen, but also, as in the novels on this theme discussed by Lewis wherein the hidden children of Mary Stuart seek their true mother, the fantasy of the common reader to gain access and intimacy to a queen, to partake in regal glamour, to discover that she was herself a princess all along.

Even in official iconography the sexuality of the monarch was often thrust to the fore. Elizabeth's image as Virgin Queen at once asserts a transcendence of sexuality yet foregrounds her body and its intact condition. Her quality of being perpetually and tantalizingly yet-to-be-possessed provokes desire in the onlooker and manages that

[50] Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots*, part II.

[51] Laura Lunger Knoppers, 'Reviving the martyr king: Charles I as Jacobite icon', in Corns, ed., *Royal image*, pp. 275, 270.

[52] Sharpe, 'Royal image', p. 293.

[53] Coiro, 'Ball of strife', passim.

[54] Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 189.

[55] Strong, *Cult*, pp. 15, 54, 128.

[56] Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots*, pp. 136ff, 204; Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 160.

desire as a means of securing political bonds. Married monarchs assert their sexuality and put it to political service in other ways. Both Charles I and Henrietta Maria, and Victoria and Albert, were presented to their subjects as 'paradigmatic wedded lovers'.[57] The containment of their passions in devoted matrimony is at once a model to their subjects of how to conduct themselves in stable social units, and a metaphor for the supposed concord of the state.

Meanwhile, the virility of a royal husband and the fecundity of a royal wife have further symbolic potential. A poem by Jonson celebrates how 'our active *King*/Hath taken twice the Ring/Upon his pointed Lance … Hay! for the flowre of *France*!', asserting Charles's masculine potency in both the marital and the international arenas, and in the process inviting us graphically to imagine the sexual acts of the king and queen.[58] In a painting entitled *Balmoral: bringing home the stag*, Prince Albert thrusts forward his sporran at the centre of the composition as he displays the erect antlers of conquered beasts to his queen.[59] The fertility of his marriage to Victoria lent itself readily to alignment with the prosperity and burgeoning global spread of the British Empire – a painting of *Queen Victoria's family* shows 'the queen in black in the centre with every child, grandchild, son, and daughter-in-law stretching to the bounds of the frames east and west'.[60] Henrietta Maria's maternal success – she bore nine children between 1629 and 1644 – was viewed somewhat more ambivalently; it did secure the succession, but it could also provoke fears of 'overwhelming dynasty … and of a feminized king dominated by a woman'.[61]

Nevertheless, it seems that regal sexuality was often not so much denied or suppressed as incorporated into the iconography of power. In the case of Mary Queen of Scots, more famous as a deposed and executed queen than a queen regnant, her humanity and sexuality seem to be absolutely central to her appeal. As charted in Lewis's book, her popularity ascends in direct proportion to the rise of the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility, of the Gothic genre, of Romanticism, and of the consequent nineteenth-century fascination with Scottishness. Accordingly, the Victorians seem to have preferred Mary to Elizabeth I, configuring them as an opposition between warm feeling, feminine tenderness, and pathos on the one hand, cold-hearted rationality and expediency on the other.[62] Queen Victoria recorded in her journal for 1839 how Lord Melbourne disdained Mary as 'a bad woman' and 'a silly, idle, coquettish French girl', but 'I pitied her'.[63] The story of how Elizabeth bounced back to become the object of such fascination – almost a new cult – in the twentieth century remains to be told elsewhere.

Across centuries, whichever side one takes, it seems impossible to define Mary without reference to Elizabeth, outside that fixed pair of opposites bound together through history. In life, Mary herself repeatedly stressed her sameness to Elizabeth, as queen regnant and kinswoman. Lewis sees this as merely aimed at 'planting the seeds of likeness from which pity and eventually deliverance might grow', and finds in Elizabeth's reluctance to execute Mary simply concern that it would 'cripple the myth of maidenly grace that had long underpinned her own authority'.[64] In fact Elizabeth's awareness of her likeness to Mary was both more painful and more political than this.

[57] Corns, 'Preface', in Corns, ed., *Royal image*, p. xv.
[58] Coiro, 'Ball of strife', pp. 33–4.
[59] Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 43.
[60] Ibid., pp. 94–5.
[61] Coiro, 'Ball of strife', p. 28.
[62] Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 56; Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots*, p. 173; Strong, *Cult*, p. 23.
[63] Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots*, p. 171.
[64] Ibid., pp. 40, 48.

In consenting to the deposition, exile, and imprisonment of a fellow monarch, Elizabeth had set a precedent which had extremely dangerous implications for her own less than secure position; to take Mary's life was in a real sense to increase the jeopardy to her own life. After all, the 1570 papal bull of excommunication against her had explicitly placed her under the sixteenth-century equivalent of a *fatwa*. Deciding Mary's fate was a matter of achieving an acutely delicate balance between competing dangers. Lewis could also expand upon her observation that 'Elizabeth's official illegitimacy harnessed her to her mother's headless, whorish ghost.'[65] In contending with her similitude to Mary, Elizabeth was also contending with Mary's alarming similitude to Ann Boleyn, both of them raised at the French court, charged with depravity and treason, dethroned, tried, and ultimately beheaded.

It is the polarized disparity between the two queens, however, not their likeness, which has dominated their representation through the ages. Ironically, while Elizabeth's cautious negotiation of their resemblance and dynastic proximity kept them apart during their lifetimes – they never met, not even at Mary's trial, where Elizabeth was represented by an empty chair of state – the popular conception of their oppositeness incessantly produces an imagined face-to-face encounter between them. This goes back as early as Spenser's trial of Duessa by Mercilla, and continues on through John Banks's 1684 'she-tragedy' *The island queens*, through Schiller's *Maria Stuart* (1800), into twentieth-century recensions of the fable. The force of such scenes derives from the way in which Mary and Elizabeth are presented as mirror-images in the fullest sense: each the likeness of the other, each the reverse of the other. It may not be history but it makes a great scene, and tells us a lot about how we think about queens, how we struggle at once to merge and to separate majesty and humanity, majesty and femininity.

IV

To date, inquiry into the images of monarchs seems to leave us with as many questions as conclusions. We must continue to ask how far images of monarchs grew out of the psychological needs of their subjects, being projected from below on to the crown, and how far they were deliberate political constructions, emanating from central government. John Peacock finds evidence that devices on medals of Charles I were the result of 'careful deliberation by the King and his advisers', but he also finds evidence of the pleasure of subjects well beyond the court in 'owning and looking at an engraved portrait of the King'.[66] Smuts usefully observes that just as monarchs needed writers and artists to forge their public image, so writers and artists needed monarchs to give them inspirational material and to personify their values and aspirations.[67]

Indeed, going beyond this, when a royal image becomes an art-object it can become up for grabs and for appreciation in ways which set it loose from the ideology which originally shaped it. Thus Van Dyck's portraits of Charles I were collected by wealthy anti-royalists.[68] The Tower Mint, having fallen under parliamentary control, asserted the continuing validity of its coinage by continuing to stamp it with the king's portrait, titles, arms, and personal mottoes; in the process their talented new designer, Thomas Simon, ironically produced an image of Charles better than any on the coinage before,

[65] Ibid., p. 19.
[66] John Peacock, 'The visual image of Charles I', in Corns, ed., *Royal image*, pp. 188, 199.
[67] Smuts, *Culture and power*, p. 60.
[68] Peacock, 'Visual image', p. 228.

classed by Peacock as a 'masterpiece'.[69] McNairn describes how, at the beginning of the twentieth century, nationalistic Canadians began to form collections of memorabilia of General Wolfe, despite his previous significance as a hero of British imperialism. Instead he became 'an affirmation of the existence of a genuine and heroic history which proved the antiquity … of the new Dominion of Canada'; a history was needed, and almost any picturesque or memorable history could be adapted to the purpose.[70] The use of an image need not indicate agreement with the ideology which originally produced it.

Going back to Kevin Sharpe's question about whether Charles I's domestic objects were holy relics or signs of human banality and mundanity: presumably both kinds of value could be accorded to them, in the same historical moment, depending upon each individual into whose hands they passed, and the pre-existent loyalties and ideologies which they brought to bear upon them. The fate of Charles is salutary in reminding us just how far a royal image may be resisted, and the wide diversity of responses which it can provoke. Perhaps it is an error to attempt to psychoanalyse a populace as if they all share the same beliefs and desires.

Even in the reigns of outwardly more successful monarchs, did *all* their subjects participate and assent in the fashioning of their resplendent image? Roy Strong does fleetingly mention the persistent Catholicism of the North of England under Elizabeth, and a few instances of personal dissatisfaction with her such as the 1600 Accession Day costume of the earl of Cumberland, supposedly her champion, as the Discontented Knight.[71] However, he treats these as the merest insignificant whispers of dissent as the Elizabethan monarchy 'held the hearts and minds of all its peoples', and quotes florid texts like Thomas Dekker's *The Wonderful Year* as if they are literally true.[72] He does not consider the idea that, say, Edmund Bunny's published prayers to promote observance of Accession Day in the North were felt necessary precisely because that region was far from having converted to the Elizabeth cult.[73] Smuts directs us to more recent research which has found that Accession Day observances were significantly less widespread and eventful than Strong suggested.[74] Exalted imagery may be evidence not of universal enthusiasm but of a desperation to paper over cracks. Moreover, there may be a complex relation between text and subtext: Kevin Sharpe and Thomas Corns have shown how even Stuart masques, perhaps the art-form which seems most confidently to apotheosize monarchy, could include 'complex and licensed criticism as well as compliment … anxieties about a plurality of voices and visions.'[75]

Much later, Queen Victoria in her extremities of mourning for Albert may look like the personification of her age, enacting a preoccupation with death and grief which was shared by all her people. Yet Munich confirms the findings of previous historians and biographers that Victoria went 'above and well beyond her age's elaborate mourning customs', and 'exhausted her subjects' capacity to enjoy or sympathize with the performance'.[76] Margaret Oliphant, herself a widow with a family to support, wrote vigorously of her difficulty in identifying with the bereaved queen, and queried why she could not like other widowed mothers 'take heart to do her duty whether she likes it .or not. *We* have to do it, with very little solace, and I don't see that there is anybody particularly sorry for us.'[77]

Monarchs evoke polarized responses in their own times, and rise and fall in public

[69] Ibid., p. 186.
[70] McNairn, *Behold the hero*, p. 240.
[71] Strong, *Cult*, pp. 122, 140.
[72] Ibid., pp. 116, 14.
[73] Ibid., p. 122.
[74] Smuts, *Culture and power*, pp. 50–1.
[75] Corns, *Royal image*, pp. 6, 296.
[76] Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 82.
[77] Ibid., p. 99.

favour over the years and centuries which follow. Mary Queen of Scots, vilified by English Protestant writers in the sixteenth century, becomes a heroine in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Lewis traces several plausible reasons for her change in fortunes: partly a rising antiquarian interest in almost anything old, but preferably old things tinged with myth and romance; partly a rehabilitation of her and the rule of heart over head which she was seen as personifying as a way of making the English feel better about themselves; partly a way of asserting the inclusiveness and unity of Great Britain. It was also a way of feminizing history, as women gradually entered further into the worlds of print. The teenage Jane Austen made the 'bewitching princess' Mary Queen of Scots the heroine of her brief, parodic *History of England*,[78] showing her sympathy with Catherine Morland, who complains in *Northanger Abbey* that 'history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in … The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all – it is very tiresome.'[79] Monarchs, especially queens, and especially tragic queens, bring into history personality, emotion, and story.

Are these some of the reasons why we too continue to be interested in past monarchs? We can take one kind of pleasure in contemplating the difference and exoticism of the past: marvelling, as Strong puts it, at 'a way of thinking about a monarch totally foreign to us'.[80] The royal courts of long ago offer us a lost world to boggle at, as in Corns's revelation that the Caroline royal household was as big as a city, or the extravagance and opulence of Victoria and Albert's fancy-dress Plantagenet ball, when Victoria's stomacher alone was festooned with jewels reputedly worth £60,000.[81] But there is another kind of pleasure in making connections to comparable figures in our own time. Lewis finds aspects of Mary Queen of Scots revived in the figure of Princess Diana, while Corns asserts the timeliness of his volume as crises involving the boundaries between the public and private lives of rulers have developed in relation to both the British royal family and the American presidency.[82] Munich in turn detects in the recent history of Elizabeth II replication of the emblematic contrast between the 'dowdiness' of Victoria and 'her beautiful and fashionable daughter-in-law, the Princess of Wales'.[83]

As Smuts wisely reminds us, 'the meanings people give to the past always derive from complex processes of selection, transmission and construction, whether unconscious or deliberate in nature'.[84] As we survey the iconography of monarchs, we seem to see this process wheeling in circles: each monarch's image is built from both the recent past (as when Elizabeth I is seen as the apocalyptic heroine of the ongoing sixteenth-century struggle for religious Reformation) and the more distant past (as when she is seen as the descendant of the Trojan Brut, or when Albert and Victoria dress as Edward III and his queen, Philippa, for the Plantagenet ball). And both these recent and distant pasts are filtered through the prism of each present time which is putting them to use, just as we cannot help using these past figures as templates for thinking about royalty and celebrity today. Contemplation of the purposefully enthralling images of monarchs which parade through the centuries readily deepens into an engagement in the essential dilemma of the historian, caught between a desire to appreciate and understand the difference of the past, and a desire to locate in it precursors of the present.

[78] Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots*, p. 123.
[79] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1818; Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 123.
[80] Strong, *Cult*, p. 16. [81] Corns, 'Duke', p. 16; Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, pp. 27–35.
[82] Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots*, pp. 224-5; Corns, ed., *Royal image*, p. xv.
[83] Munich, *Victoria's secrets*, p. 68. [84] Smuts, *Culture and power*, pp. 154–5.