

# **WOMEN MONARCHS**

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The price paid for any command, empire, or realm – the unrelenting weight of responsibility – is such a nagging thing that it caused Shakespeare’s Henry IV to lament: “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.” Crowns are heavy, and the road to the throne is long; in history, few women have been permitted to bear such a burden or take such a path. To be sure, the journey required a woman of pluck, because unlike a man, she would surely face stout cultural, social, and religious headwinds. Along the way a firm grip on the scepter was essential if she wished to keep what had been won and like her manly counterparts, a willingness to shape, even bend, the public mood to her will. Ambition and some ruthlessness was required for this kind of work, but a shrewd monarch seasoned her reign with an ample dose of self-promotion. After all, getting fired from this job could prove fatal.

Since the time of the Pharaohs, when for twenty years Egypt was governed by a woman, Hatshepsut (r.1479-1458 B.C.), it has been apparent that monarchial skills do not belong to just one sex. Yet, for the most part, the ability of women, not just those of royal birth, to use those talents has remained locked away, atrophying.

For her part, Hatshepsut was often depicted wearing a false beard. (Monter, p. 23). Women monarchs would soon learn that, like their Egyptian sister, image and symbolism are often as important as an army. And for the quasi-divine sovereign the mystical link between God and the masses, images and symbols derived from religious iconography, practice, and ritualism provided a sturdy pillar to the realm.

Perhaps, however, because some distance must exist between a demi-god and her subjects, female monarchs generally had no interest in, or actively opposed, the rights of women.

But even a demi-god is not immune from biological imperatives; balancing the traditional role of wife and mother with managing a realm, familiar tasks yet today, proved a challenge for even the most accomplished female monarch.

Although the incidence of women in positions of leadership crested during medieval and Renaissance Europe, and the phenomenon lasted until the French Revolution, it nevertheless ran counter to deeply held patriarchal ideas of female inferiority, a culture of misogyny so prevalent it often achieved unquestioned legal sanction. (Waller, p. 290; Monter, p. 4). In that era, women were considered subordinate, not fit for ruling a home let alone a kingdom, and to allow them to do so was deemed contrary to nature. It was accepted theology that not only were women created both from and for man, but ever since the unfortunate incident in the Garden of Eden, they were known troublemakers. (Castor, p. 32).

France and its satellites are the prime examples of the legal disqualification of woman through Salic law, a body of legal principles so notoriously convoluted and arcane that Shakespeare easily made it an object of ridicule in the opening scene of *Henry V*. Importantly, however, it worked to preclude women from either taking or transmitting rights to the French crown. (Castor, p. 331; Monter, p. 40).

Even where Salic law applied, however, or where male succession might lead to disintegration-- the far-flung, heterogeneous Holy Roman Empire the prime example -- exceptions were created. For instance, Emperor Charles VI assembled senior officials in 1713 to promulgate a revised law of Habsburg dynastic succession. (Monter, p. 161). The Habsburgs had ruled the Empire since the fifteenth century, but with no likely males to succeed him – or at that point, even females -- Charles provided that in the absence of males, which as he said, “may God

be pleased to avert,” the Empire would go undivided to his eldest legitimate daughter. (Monter, p. 161). This so-called Pragmatic Sanction, an exception to Salic Law designed to assure territorial unity, required approval by the various parts of the Empire, something Charles eventually accomplished eight years later. But even bribery could not secure international acceptance. (Monter, p. 162). Charles’s death in 1740, and the elevation of his eldest daughter, Maria Theresa (r. 1740-1780) to the Habsburg throne set off eight years of conflict known as the War of Austrian Succession. Eventually, Maria Theresa’s husband ended up the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, by then, a largely empty title, and Maria Theresa became the sovereign of Austria, Hungary and Bohemia for the next forty years, the outstanding female monarch of central Europe.

This tradition of monarchical elections, most common in German and Polish states, and the Holy Roman Empire with its all male imperial electoral college worked as a *de facto* bar against female rule. Predictably, no woman would be freely elected to head any European government until Margaret Thatcher in 1979, and after Maria Theresa, no woman of Germanic heritage would “head a major government until 2005.” (Monter, pp. 40, 161-63; Opfell, pp. 151-53).

In Norman England, and elsewhere, however, the concept of primogeniture, meaning the eldest son inherited everything, became the defining principle of royal succession. (Castor, p. 27). Yet, a deceased king with legitimate daughters, and no legitimate sons could leave the oldest daughter the throne over more distantly related males. (Monter, pp. 36, 39). So, with France as the notable exception, the way remained open for women to ascend to the throne through heredity. But for the desperate opportunist, there was also the *coup d’etat*. (Monter, p.

21). The door was sometimes left open for a *coup* because the presumption of male succession often led to weaklings on the throne, a dangerous situation for both the monarch and the realm. This condition and opportunity eventually presented itself to Sophia of Anhalt-Zerbst, the daughter of an obscure German prince.

Sophia was plucked from near-anonymity by Elizabeth, Empress of Russia (and the daughter of Czar Peter the Great), as the intended bride of Grand Duke Peter, the heir to the Russian throne and the orphaned son of her beloved sister. When the teenaged Sophia arrived in St. Petersburg in 1744, she was quickly baptized into the Russian Orthodox faith and renamed Catherine for Elizabeth's mother. (Massie, pp. 52-3, 63; Opfell, p. 163). Peter was also a teenager, and likewise German, but unstable and lazy; he generally preferred to amuse himself with toy soldiers and puppet shows, or by marching his servants back and forth in indoor parades. (Massie, pp. 110, 115; Opfell, pp. 159, 164;). Having entered into the marriage with the best of intentions, the young duchess soon saw that her future lay in shedding her Germanic roots. Soon she was learning Russian and the levers of government. (Massie, pp. 52-3; Opfell, p. 163-64)

Emotionally abused by Peter and often callously used by Elizabeth, Catherine took a series of lovers, gave birth to illegitimate children (although she did have one son apparently with Peter, who was called Paul) and gradually came to see that she was Russia's only hope. (Massie, pp. 161, 163-64; Opfell, p. 164). These matters stood until Elizabeth died in 1762, making Peter (now Peter III) Emperor of Russia while that country was in the Seven Years War with Prussia. Peter, a fanatical admirer of Frederick the Great, Russia's opponent, quickly withdrew Russian forces and concluded a separate peace that returned to Prussia all the lands it

had lost. (Massie, pp. 242-51; Opfell, p. 165). In just six months, Peter, who actually detested nearly everything Russian, had alienated the royal court, unwisely tried to impose Protestantism upon the Russian Orthodox Church, and perhaps most foolishly of all, set out to reorganize the Russian Army on the Prussian model. (Massie, pp. 242-50; Monter, p. 198). Although his dismantling of the secret police was popular, it made him vulnerable, a condition hastened by his expressed desire to divorce Catherine in favor of his mistress. (Massie, pp. 243, 252-54; Opfell, p. 165).

Conspiring with one of her lovers, Catherine arrived at the barracks door of an elite royal regiment during the darkness of a Russian summer night. (Massie, 254-65). It was there in the hazy candlelight of that long room that the soldiers' smoldering resentment ignited into desperate action. Soon, regiment after regiment, 14,000 in all, joined a march led by Catherine astride a magnificent white stallion and resplendent in a colonel's uniform of the royal guard. (Massie, pp. 257-61; Monter, p. 197; Opfell, p. 165). With no alternative, Peter quickly abdicated, inconveniently still alive. (Massie, p. 265). That oversight was apparently corrected eight days later when he died under mysterious circumstances. (Massie, pp. 270-73; Monter, p. 198; Opfell, pp. 165-66).

Catherine's lengthy reign (r. 1762-1796) began in blood, and many view her as a mere usurper, apparently her son, Paul, thought so, because when she died thirty four years later, he promptly restored primogeniture as the basis of succession to the crown. (Massie, p. 482). Never again would Russia be ruled by a woman. (Massie, p. 482).

England, unimpeded by Salic law, has had more experience with women monarchs than any other country, 193 years out of the last 455, and by the time the Victorian era came to a

close, the people of the British Empire enthusiastically accepted the notion of a female head of state. No one, however, would have thought such an embrace possible at the dawn of the sixteenth century; nor could they have foreseen how female rule would begin.

The story opens in 1516 with the birth of a little girl, Mary, to the larger-than-life Henry VIII, and his queen, Catherine of Aragon. Henry, obsessed with a male heir to perpetuate Tudor succession, took the disappointing news in stride, declaring, “If it was a daughter this time, by the grace of God the sons will follow.” (Opfell, p. 73; Waller, p. 17). Briefly, Mary led the life of a cherished only child.

Frustrated with the queen’s apparent inability to provide him with a male heir, Henry soon noticed among her ladies-in-waiting, the nubile and ambitious Anne Boleyn, who encouraged Henry’s obvious interest. (Opfell, p. 73; Waller, p. 17). When the pope refused to cooperate with Henry’s plan for a divorce, however, Henry came to the convenient theological conclusion that papal authority was no longer sanctioned by God, and persuaded Parliament to name him Supreme Head of the Church in England. (Castor, p. 7). Once empowered to make ecclesiastical appointments, Henry had his new Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, declare his marriage to Catherine void. (Opfell, p. 74). The marriage to Anne quickly followed, the second of ultimately six wives; nine months later, in 1533, she too gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth. (Opfell, p. 74).

At Anne’s insistence, Henry stripped Mary of her title as princess, and through Parliament’s Act of Succession, she was declared illegitimate, thus losing the *sine qua non* for royal succession. (Opfell, p. 74; Monter, p. 39). When Mary, a devout Catholic, refused to recognize her father as the Supreme Head of the Church, she was forced to leave her mother to

live with the infant Elizabeth, who now replaced her as heir to the throne. (Opfell, p. 74; Monter, p. 39; Waller, p. 15).

But three circumstances soon changed things: Catherine's death; Anne, unsuccessful in producing a male heir, lost her head for alleged acts of adultery; and Henry's wedding to Jane Seymour. Perhaps sensing an opening, and emotionally adrift after the loss of her mother, Mary acknowledged her father's role as leader of the Church in England and conceded the illegality of her parent's marriage. (Opfell, p. 74; Monter, p. 39; Waller, p. 15). Restored to the court, Mary became the new queen's companion, and when Jane produced the long-awaited male heir, Edward VI, Mary became his godmother.

But Jane died soon after childbirth. After three more barren marriages, Henry, three years before his death, restored both Mary and Elizabeth (each having previously been declared illegitimate) to the royal succession. (Castor, p. 18; Waller, p. 129). The restoration, however, was largely a moot point as long as Henry's son, young Edward VI lived.

In the sixteenth century a long life was uncertain, even for a king, and it was soon apparent that Edward, at fifteen, was dying. Now, for the first time in the kingdom's history, all the potential contenders for the crown, nine in all, were female. (Castor, p. 17). In addition to Mary and Elizabeth, there was also Mary Stuart, the ten year old Queen of Scots, and granddaughter of Henry VIII's sister. At the time, Mary Stuart was living in Paris as the intended wife of the heir to the French throne. (Castor, p. 18).

Surprisingly, the fact that all the leading candidates were female provoked little discussion. (Castor, p. 18). What was now more important than gender was the question of birth and faith. (Castor, p. 18). Henry had made it known, both by statute and in his will that, if



necessary, he wanted his oldest daughter to succeed Edward. The terminally ill Edward, a devoted follower of the Protestant faith, however, did not want the crown to go to his Catholic half sister, Mary, especially since she had defied his religious laws by openly celebrating mass. (Castor, p. 21). Edward and his advisors thought the purported illegitimacy of both Mary and Elizabeth would doom the chances of the two stepsisters. But Mary Stuart was a poor alternative; a Catholic like Mary Tudor, she would probably align England with France and rule from Paris. (Castor, p. 21).

With no good options and with death near, Edward named his cousin, Jane Grey as his successor. Jane was descended from the Tudors too, and the daughter-in-law of Edward's closest advisor, the astute, but hated, Duke of Northumberland. The Duke, of course, could easily see the advantages; Jane, a fifteen year old ingenue and devout Protestant, would be a ready tool for his intrigues. (Castor, p. 22). And much to Jane's surprise, she was proclaimed Queen upon Edward's death. The Duke's gamble was that a *fait accompli*, and a little show of force, would cause the thirty-seven year old Mary to flee, but surprisingly, it had the opposite effect. Although she lacked an army, Mary saw herself, and was seen by many others, as the natural and rightful heir, and soon Catholic forces flocked to her. (Castor, p. 22). At the same time, Northumberland's army melted away.

Joined by her half sister, Elizabeth, Mary soon appeared at the head of a great triumphal procession as it marched into a tumultuously joyous London. (Castor, p. 428; Opfell, p. 76). Mary saw to it that Northumberland quickly met the executioner on Tower Hill, followed eventually by the unfortunate Jane Grey, a queen for just nine days. (Castor, p. 428). It was this near bloodless *coup d'état* that introduced England to its legacy of women monarchs.

Any legal impediments to female rule were quickly removed. Parliament passed the Act Concerning Regal Power, formally and radically, recognizing that female rulers at least were the equal of men. (Waller, p. 4) The Act also endorsed the concept that the monarchy had two bodies: an eternal corporate-like entity and a second, mortal one, meaning that the female monarch was still, naturally, subject to the weaknesses of her sex and subordinate to her husband. (Waller, p. 4).

Although a well-born woman could ascend to the throne, English tradition required the consent of the governed. The image of overwhelming public approval (heavy artillery in any politician's arsenal) can come from sights and sounds that give the appearance of unquestioned legitimacy. Thus, it was no accident that both Mary, and later Elizabeth, would appear before large, wildly cheering crowds to the accompaniment of thundering cannons, beating drums and pealing bells. (Waller, p. 58-59). By contrast, the brief reign of Jane Grey, a bookish teenager with no political skills, was seemingly doomed from the outset by her poorly staged, awkward, and quiet introduction to the people of London.

The coronation ceremony, particularly for a female ruler, is equally important, but tricky. Unlike a male where a soldierly appearance is expected, early female monarchs were forced to pursue a different theme. Mary Tudor (r.1553- 1558), who often later seemed blind to the need for public acceptance, appeared at her coronation borne on a litter, dressed as a bride symbolically betrothed to England, the image of purity and promised fertility. (Castor, p. 434). In this fashion, Mary, and later Elizabeth, silently conveyed their intention to provide England with an heir. (Waller, p. 62).

Because English monarchs possessed ecclesiastical powers, a coronation was also a

religious confirmation. As a quasi-divinity in a patriarchal society, the woman monarch squarely faced God's supposed preference for a man as "his" representative on earth; a presumption that seemingly vanished as the coronation blended the political with the sacred. (Waller, pp. 63, 164, 175).

Thus sanctified, the monarch became infused with mystical powers, such as healing the sick and infirm by touch. (Waller, pp. 173, 316, 491). And Mary Tudor, Elizabeth, and later, Queen Anne, were not shy in displaying these skills at immensely popular public ceremonies. For example, on Maundy Thursday, Mary and Elizabeth would, in imitation of Christ, kneel and wash the feet of the poor; this tradition continues even today, but in a somewhat different form, with the queen presenting small purses of specially minted silver coins to the elderly. (Waller, p. 491)

Yet, the subtle symbolism of a coronation could also reinforce the notion of female subordination. When William and Mary II, for example, jointly ascended to the throne in 1689 after the Glorious Revolution (the first of England's monarchs to rule by the grace of Parliament and not God), it was notable that while the two held hands symbolizing joint rule, William's name was always first, and he answered for both when asked if they would accept the crown. (Waller, p. 272). The symbols of office were also presented in a manner that reflected Mary's subordinate role; the spurs touched only William's heels, and he was the first to receive the ring and crown. (Waller at p. 276).

The true master of stagecraft was Elizabeth I (r. 1558 - 1603). Public events, such as her glittering, wildly extravagant coronation parade, provided her with an opportunity to fully display her political skills. A gifted impromptu stump speaker, during an age when women

were rarely heard, she also had an unerring eye for what modern politicians call a “photo-op.” (Waller, p. 168).

Later, by middle age and beyond child-bearing years, Elizabeth abandoned any pretense of marriage, or at least that she would produce an heir, telling Parliament, “I am already bound unto a husband, which is the Kingdom of England.” (Waller, p. 168). Left unspoken, but clear nevertheless, was the simple message: the people of England were her children. In all, Elizabeth presented the image of an exceptional woman; by turns, a king, queen, virgin, wife, mother to her people, and ultimately, as she described herself, “God’s creature.” (Castor, p. 457; Waller, pp. 175-76).

Elizabeth also exploited the old notion of the king’s two bodies, one mortal and the other immortal, but applied gender to the theory. (Waller, p. 176). Yet she was quick to invoke her earthly lineage, often commenting on how she resembled her father. She did so perhaps most famously when the Spanish Armada threatened, telling the army that there was nothing to fear because although she was a woman, she had the heart and stomach of Henry VIII. (Waller, p. 177; Opfell, p. 91) Eventually, over time, Elizabeth’s well-known virginity grew to symbolize England’s impregnability. (Waller, pp. 215, 220, 230).

Elizabeth’s predecessor, Mary Tudor, did not share her half sister’s air of confidence, perhaps because her intellect was no match for Elizabeth’s original thinking. But another factor might have been education. When younger, Elizabeth was exposed to the teachings of her younger brother’s tutors, and thus as befitted a future male monarch, obtained a fine education. (Waller, pp. 128, 141). Critically, Elizabeth’s education included Latin, “the language of men’s privilege and power”; but she was so linguistically gifted it is said she could carry on

simultaneous conversations in Spanish, French, and Venetian. (Waller, pp. 128, 175) And, unusually, she was taught rhetoric and oratory, which accounted for her polished public speaking. (Waller, pp. 141, 175). Elizabeth's education allowed her not only to function on a masculine level, but also gave her the confidence to rule alone, unburdened by a male consort, with the related pressure of producing an heir. (Waller, pp.141,175).

By contrast, the education of England's other future female monarchs, at least through Victoria, were remarkably upper middle class, befitting women who, while in the line of succession, were never expected to be sovereigns. (Waller, p. 339). Such an education centered on, as was common with the age, teaching virtue, as it was believed that pure thoughts would ensure a pure body. (Waller, pp. 21-22). Although such an education was thought proper for young ladies of that social rank, it entrenched the notion that women were inferior beings, unfit for sovereignty, and the belief that if by happenstance a woman did sit on the throne, talented, educated men would be the true power behind her. (Waller, pp. 21-23). As was commonly said in the sixteenth century and long thereafter: "When women rule, men govern." (Monter, p. 48).

Thus, it came to pass that female monarchs saw an accomplished, well-educated husband as a necessary appendage. Perhaps there is some psychology behind this view; after all, it is said that Mary Tudor, the daughter of Henry VIII, likely saw herself as a poor successor to her towering father. (Waller, p. 83).

Indeed, an unmarried daughter of a king was a pawn on the European chess board; with a few well played moves, the father could use her to forge or strengthen alliances. Certainly Henry saw Mary as a marriageable asset, twice arranging her betrothal to other European royal houses by the time she was six. But now as an unmarried female already on the throne, Mary

was responsible for brokering her own marriage, amidst the stilted formality of diplomacy. (Monter, p. 38).

Mary was certainly attractive politically; but because she ruled England, there were few eligible males her equal. To marry an Englishman of royal blood offended Mary's traditional, but conflicting views of marriage and monarchy. That is, how could she marry one of her subjects, someone who must obey her as queen, while pledging to love, honor and obey him? And because Mary was already thirty seven and responsible for producing an heir, the business had some urgency.

Mary's proposed marriage to the recently widowed, Philip of Spain, however, proved immediately unpopular. Although Mary presumably saw it as the means for uniting two powerful kingdoms, many in England saw it as a risky venture permitting foreign and papal influence. (Opfell, p. 76). Nevertheless, with no time to lose, the marriage between Mary and Philip was promptly negotiated, documented, and signed; occurring just two days after they officially met. Mary and her advisors proved to be hard bargainers, reserving to her all matters of state and leaving Philip with no independent authority in England. (Waller, pp. 85, 87).

Mary's marriage to Philip and his later dabbling in English affairs contributed to her unhappy reign and eventual title as "Bloody Mary." Philip, however, would not be the last such husband. Another occasion arose about a century after the defeat of the Armada, with the English once again debating a woman's capacity to rule. (Waller, p. 274).

The Glorious Revolution and the eventual flight of the Catholic king, James II, led to a vacant throne. James's eldest daughter, Mary II, and most importantly a Protestant, was the wife of that stern Dutch Calvinist, Prince William of Orange. William and Mary had a conventional

marriage, which is to say she was to love, honor and obey. Mary, while born in England, was happy living among the Dutch and comfortable with the traditional view, as she put it, “that women should not meddle in government.” (Monter, p. 152; Waller, p. 274). Eventually, however, the proposal of a dual monarchy, with both William and Mary as sovereigns, brought them to England. But as everyone knew, William, who insisted upon the “sole and full exercise of regal power” was the principal monarch, even though Mary had the stronger hereditary claim. (Waller, p. 276).

Yet William’s frequent military adventures resulted in Parliament passing the Regency Act of May 1690 to allow Mary to exercise regal power during his absences. (Waller, p. 280). During her four regencies, a time of frequent crisis, Mary proved more than equal to the task and received the gratitude of the nation. (Waller, pp. 280-284).

Mary’s death in 1694 at the age of thirty-two ended the unique dual monarchy. At a time when England indulged in notions of female inferiority and questioned the political leadership of women, her management indicated that an intelligent woman of ordinary education was up to the task. Upon William’s death eight years later, however, with Mary’s younger sister, Anne (r. 1702 - 1714), elevated to the throne, that premise would receive another, more severe test.

Anne, shy and supposedly dull-witted, was thirty-seven when her brother-in-law, William, died. (Waller, p. 313). As with her sister, her education had been neglected; while it was recognized that one or both could eventually be queen, it was also assumed they would have accomplished husbands. (Waller, p. 296). Anne’s husband, however, Prince George of Denmark, added little value to the marriage except he was faithful; nevertheless, she adored him. George was a man of few words, neither clever nor witty, leading some to say that it was good

his asthma produced heavy breathing, otherwise people would think he was dead. (Waller, p. 298). As for Anne, by the time of her coronation she was a corpulent, semi-invalid from gout, diminished from seventeen pregnancies in an unsuccessful effort to give England an heir. (Opfell, p. 125).

Yet Anne had common sense, was a good judge of character, and in contrast to her brother-in-law, William, who equated royal ritual and ceremony to Catholicism, Anne was a devout Anglican who revived secular ceremonies and stately provincial trips that inspired great expressions of civic loyalty. (Waller, p. 315-16). Upon the death of her husband, however, she became reclusive, as Queen Victoria would upon the death of Albert a century and a half later. (Waller, p. 325). When Anne died in 1714, she was the last, but most successful Stuart monarch. Now England would be ruled by the House of Hanover – and men – for the next one hundred and twenty-three years. (Opfell, p. 129).

By the time Alexandrina Victoria, daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Kent was born in 1819, the monarchy, run as it had been by men, was in such dangerous disrepute that republicanism was on the rise. (Waller, p. 332). Victoria, as she was called, was at the time of her birth fifth in line to the throne and not considered likely to ever get there. Even her birth merited little mention in the British press. (Arnstein, p. 195). But at eight months of age she quickly moved up the ladder when both her grandfather and father unexpectedly died. (Waller, p. 335). Yet, because her uncles were still likely to produce a male heir, she received scant attention and led an isolated, neglected early life. (Waller, p. 336).

Deprived of a father's attention, Victoria grew up in a feminine world that gave her an exaggerated notion of male strength. As a result, it is said she spent her entire life looking for a



father figure, a man she could lean on, and because she thought men were somehow superior, “she always sought male approbation.” (Waller, p. 336). Consequently, when she ascended to the throne in 1837(r. 1837- 1901), barely eighteen, she immediately became emotionally attached to, and dependent on, her first prime minister, Lord Melbourne. She repeated this pattern with Prince Albert; and after Albert’s death, with a faithful male servant, John Brown; and finally, somewhat bizarrely, with a servant brought from India, Abdul Karim, called the Munshi. (Waller p. 337).

But the unforeseeable future held little importance to young Victoria as she peered upon the distressing present. The monarchy’s power had ebbed, leached away by generations of politicians in Parliament and the monarchy itself was no longer universally accepted, let alone revered. In the earlier Elizabethan era, for instance, any new image of the queen required royal approval, which explains perhaps why Queen Elizabeth never seemed to age. (Waller, p. 218). But the savage press coverage of Victoria’s clumsy coronation gave notice that the royal estate no longer possessed the exclusive patent on its image. This treatment was also likely in the future as the emerging, muscular English press was a dangerous, pulsating electric cord of republicanism directly connected to the people of Great Britain.

Victoria did not abdicate all efforts of public communication, largely at the urging and under the supervision of her husband, Prince Albert. (Waller, p. 371). In the Victorian age, the husband was the master of the home, and Victoria’s new image-maker thought that depicting her as commonly domestic (a reassuring image to Britons) would enhance her popularity as well as her powers of sovereignty. (Waller, p. 371). Although the truth may have been a casualty in this campaign, Victoria did not, for instance, dote on her nine children, the image nevertheless caught

on.

After Albert's death, Benjamin Disraeli, probably Victoria's favorite Prime Minister, urged her to exercise both ceremonial and consultive duties. So, after nearly a decade of despair and mourning, Victoria emerged as a vigorous Constitutional monarch.

By the last decade of her life and reign, having outlived both Albert and Disraeli, Victoria witnessed the return of the monarchy's magical allure. Now seen as majestically above grimy party politics, the queen was respected, powerfully influential, and as with Elizabeth centuries before, a unifying, stable, maternal symbol. (Waller, pp. 351-52, 434, 443). As Albert had thought, gender, in some respects, enhanced Victoria's authority. (Arnstein, p. 203). As her children and grandchildren married among other royal families, Victoria became the virtual grandmother of Europe. (Arnstein, p. 209).

The press too came around, armed with new photographic and printing technology in time for Victoria's jubilees, it learned that extravagant royal ceremonies were popular events that sold newspapers. (Waller, p. 444) Later, television provided a similar function for Elizabeth II; by granting everyone instant and intimate access to national events, it made the royal family a celebrity institution. (Waller, p. 468).

Over time, however, perhaps because of Albert's influence or perhaps because of her early life, Victoria embraced the view that women were inferior and dependent, and should strive to be feminine, amiable, and domestic. (Waller, p. 372). Consistent with Victoria's genuine image of tranquil domesticity that Albert not only created, but imposed, never, for example, wearing a bonnet or gown unless he approved, Victoria was virulently opposed to "Women's Rights" in any form. (Waller, pp. 372, 402).

This attitude was not unusual among female monarchs. Women who are on the throne because they view themselves as exceptional, or divine, who see their achievement as occurring despite their gender, are unlikely champions for other women. Although devoted to the business of monarchy, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth I, for instance, had no interest in the status of other women and did nothing to change their lives. (Waller, pp. 116, 175). Only Catherine the Great, who once described herself as “every inch a gentlemen with a mind much more male than female,” felt secure in opening schools exclusively for young women or in appointing a woman as the head of the Russian academy of sciences. (Monter, p. 207).

In the end, as Simone de Beauvoir once noted, most successful women rulers “were neither male nor female, they were sovereigns.” (Monter, p. 40). Once their femininity was socially abolished, they were no longer seen as inferior. (Monter, p. 40). Stated simply, these women monarchs overcame institutional barriers and achieved success despite their gender, not because of it.

Monarchs both past and present, symbolize national identity, civic unity, and serve as flesh and blood links to a nation’s past and its values. These things do not belong to any one person or gender, they belong to all; walling-off some from contributing to that legacy, in effect, saying to them that they have no meaningful role in the life of a nation, any nation, is to deny their very existence. Women monarchs paid the price, bore the burden, and would not have their existence denied. In so doing, they awakened a sleeping world to a simple, enduring truth.

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