

# How to Write about a Queen Regnant

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## Abstract

This article seeks to analyse how England's first queen regnant was portrayed and how contemporary supporters of Mary reconciled the queen's female body natural with the tradition of male monarchy and role of the monarch as God's representative. It considers representations of Queen Mary I as presented in five ballads and in a letter from Marco Antonio Faitta (secretary to Cardinal Pole) to Ippolito Chizzola, Doctor in Divinity.

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Mary Tudor was England's first queen regnant. Those who sought to portray her in any medium were therefore presented with an unprecedented challenge. Representations of queen consorts and male monarchs abounded. But a queen regnant was a different creature entirely. In England in 1553, there was no equivalence in the titles of king and queen. A king was a leader in the masculine tradition, renowned for his wisdom, his justice and his ability to use his martial power to protect the country.<sup>1</sup> His authority, as an anointed, legitimate heir, was God-given. A queen was the wife of a king, deriving all of her authority from him. It was therefore understandable if the concept of a queen regnant required some careful adaptation and innovation from the queen herself and those who wished to support her. Tension between the female body natural and the sacred body politic of Queen Mary I was inevitable.

This article will consider the co-existence and unavoidable fusion of these two elements, the feminine and the monarchical, within a selection of contemporary ballads<sup>2</sup> and a letter<sup>3</sup> written by Marco Antonio Faitta, the Venetian secretary to Cardinal Pole. The ballads selected were written between 1554 and 1558 by supporters of Mary. The two authors who can be identified with certainty are Catholic priests Leonard Stopes and William Forrest (later one of the queen's chaplains). Mary was well aware of the potential power of ballads, distributed cheaply to the masses, as demonstrated by her proclamation, soon after her accession, banning the printing of 'books, ballads, rhymes and interludes'<sup>4</sup> without special licence. The ballads considered in this article would certainly have met with royal approval, idealising Mary and exemplifying the ideal female monarchy. The language used is full of figurative devices. Alliteration abounds, metaphorical allusions monopolise the content and hyperbole is heaped into each stanza. The content is designed to entertain, to evoke admiration for both author and subject and ultimately to be memorable. The text chosen to complement this selection of ballads is a letter written by Marco Antonio Faitta, secretary to Cardinal Pole (papal envoy to England from 1554 with whom Mary worked closely to undo the royal supremacy of the church established by Henry VIII). In contrast to the ballads, the letter had a single recipient in mind, Ippolito Chizzola, Doctor in Divinity and native of Brescia. Its intention was to inform, the language simple and literal. The letter contains a precise description of the queen's actions and reactions over the course of three days as opposed to the

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<sup>1</sup>Judith M. Richards, "'To Promote a Woman to Beare Rule': Talking of Queens in Mid-Tudor England', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1997), pp. 101-121.

<sup>2</sup>Hyder Edward Rollins, *Old English Ballads 1553-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920): 'A Ninvectyve agaynst Treason'; 'A new ballade of the Marigolde'; 'An Ave Maria in Commendation of our most Vertuous Quene'; 'Now singe, nowe springe, oure care is exil'd, Oure vertuous Quene is quickened with child'; 'The Epitaphe upon the Death of the Most Excellent and our late vertuous Quene, Marie, deceased'.

<sup>3</sup>Rawdon Brown, et al. (eds), *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian* (1864-1898) [hereafter CSPVen], VI, pp. 434-437.

<sup>4</sup>*Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. by Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, 3 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), II: 1553-1587. Richmond, 18th August 1553: 'Offering Freedom of Conscience; Prohibiting Religious Controversy, Unlicensed Plays and Printing', p. 5.

generalised tributes offered by the ballad writers. It was written on 3 May 1556 to inform the reader of Queen Mary's Easter ceremonies, starting with the ceremony of the feet washing on 3 April, Maundy Thursday (known as Royal Maundy), followed the next day, Good Friday, by the blessing of the cramp rings and the blessing of the scrofula victims.<sup>5</sup>

Faitta describes how the queen washed the feet of forty-one women then handed each woman forty one pennies 'giving each with her own hand'.<sup>6</sup> The following day, Mary blessed rings of gold and silver contained in two large covered basins, 'taking them in her two hands she passed them again and again from one hand to the other'.<sup>7</sup> A key part of the subsequent ceremony, the blessing of those suffering with scrofula, involved the queen 'pressing with her hands in the form of a cross on the spot where the sore was'.<sup>8</sup> These ceremonies described by Faitta demonstrated emphatically that Mary as queen regnant was every bit as sacred as a king. By practising the laying of hands on the sick, Mary was continuing the tradition, albeit a sporadic one, of English kings stretching back to Edward the Confessor,<sup>9</sup> despite the fact that no woman had done so before. A monarch's hands were anointed as part of the coronation ceremony. Subsequent direct contact therefore allowed for the divine benediction to be somehow transferred, whether to the precious metal of a cramp ring or directly to a suffering subject. This otherworldly status was conferred specifically as a result of being anointed in sacred oils (chrisms). Well aware of the importance of this, Mary had been concerned before her coronation lest 'the holy chrisms prepared in England may not be such as they ought',<sup>10</sup> as a result of the ecclesiastical censures on the country during Henry's and Edward's reigns. She had therefore sent Renard, the Imperial ambassador, a request that he 'write to the Bishop of Arras to send some of the holy oil from over there'<sup>11</sup> to ensure that the impact of being anointed at coronation could not be called into question. As Starkey asserts, a king with any sense spent a great deal of effort on tricking out his person as a suitably magnificent emblem of royalty.<sup>12</sup> Mary performed the Easter ceremonies dressed in 'the finest purple cloth, lined with marten's fur, sleeves so long and wide they reached the ground'.<sup>13</sup> This display of royal magnificence served to enhance Mary's divine status.

In the ballads too there is evidence of the queen's divine connection. It is claimed that Mary, as legitimate, 'lyege lady and Quene', is therefore under God's protection, the rightful monarch, 'whom the myghty lorde preserve from all hurte and myschaunce'.<sup>14</sup> The extent of the support evident at Mary's accession as described in 'A ninvectyve agaynst Treason', is akin to the 'reverence'<sup>15</sup> and 'idolatry'<sup>16</sup> described by Wingfield and de Guaras respectively.<sup>17</sup> The ballad relates the, 'ioyful godlynes' of Mary's queenship,

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<sup>5</sup> A disease with glandular swellings, possibly a form of tuberculosis. Also known as 'the King's evil' as a result of the reputed ability of French and English monarchs to cure the disease.

<sup>6</sup> CSPVen, VI, pp. 434-437.

<sup>7</sup> CSPVen, VI, pp. 434-437.

<sup>8</sup> CSPVen, VI, pp. 434-437.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Duncan, *Mary I: Gender, Power and Ceremony in the Reign of England's First Queen* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), p. 119. Though this practice was the continuation of a long tradition, it was Mary who first grafted onto Easter celebrations all three ceremonies: the washing of the feet, the blessing of cramp rings and the curing of scrofula sufferers.

<sup>10</sup> CSPA, XI, p. 220.

<sup>11</sup> CSPA, XI, p. 228.

<sup>12</sup> David Starkey, 'Representations through Intimacy', in *Symbols and Sentiments*, ed. by Ioan Lewis (London: Academic Press, 1977), p. 189.

<sup>13</sup> CSPVen, VI, pp. 434-437.

<sup>14</sup> Rollins, 'A ninvectyve agaynst Treason', p.5.

<sup>15</sup> *The Vita Mariae Reginae of Robert Wingfield of Brantham*, ed. and trans. by Diarmaid MacCulloch, Camden Miscellany, 28; Camden Society, 4th series, 29 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1984), p. 251. Wingfield is here describing the response from Mary's soldiers as she reviewed her troops prior to an expected clash with Northumberland during her bid to claim the crown.

<sup>16</sup> Antonio de Guaras, *The Accession of Queen Mary: Being the Contemporary Account of a Spanish Merchant Resident in London*, ed. and trans. by Richard Garnett (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1892), pp. 96-97. De Guaras describes the joy of Londoners at Mary's proclamation as Queen.

<sup>17</sup> Duncan, p. 118.

emphasises the, 'greatest ioy' and, 'much gladnes' of the populace at her accession, 'as the lyke was never seene' because, 'god had shewed on us his grace in gevyng a rightful queene'.<sup>18</sup> As the monarch, 'God loveth her',<sup>19</sup> as evidenced by the fact that he protected her against her enemies. As a legitimate, anointed monarch Mary, whom, 'God of his goodnesse hath lent to this land',<sup>20</sup> had every bit as much of a claim to be God's representative as any of her male predecessors.

Furthermore, her gender allowed for (and her name encouraged) comparisons with the Virgin Mary. As the 'Marigolde' of Forrest's ballad, Mary absorbs as part of her identity the qualities of, 'Christes mother deere that as in heaven shee doth excell'.<sup>21</sup> Hoping for an heir, one ballad requests, 'Fruyte of her body God grant us to see'.<sup>22</sup> With no mention of a father, the image is reminiscent of a virgin birth, miraculous and god-given. Like her namesake, Mary's chastity and piety are above question: she is 'the lampe of vertue's light'; a 'Quene of vertues pure', and 'to praye was her delight'.<sup>23</sup> Faitta likewise emphasises her, 'extreme piety' and, 'love of religion, offering her prayers to God with so great devotion'.<sup>24</sup> A ballad written to celebrate the reported pregnancy of the queen makes reference to, 'Oure Kyng, our Quene, our Prince that shall be, That they three as one, or one as all three'<sup>25</sup> seemingly referencing the Holy Trinity in this description of the royal family. As well as frequently making both direct and indirect reference to the Virgin Mother, authors writing about Mary could just as easily cast her in the role of the Saviour himself. Potentially Messianic qualities are hinted at as the 'Lorde' sent, 'her Grace [...] our maners to mende, our deeds to redresse'.<sup>26</sup> Although the ceremonies described by Faitta ostensibly demonstrated Mary's awe-inspiring powers, a Christ-like humility is evident throughout. The Royal Maundy ceremony required the monarch to wash the feet of the poor. In preparation for the blessing of the cramp rings, she began by, 'kneeling a short distance from the cross before moving towards it on her knees'.<sup>27</sup> Mary remained on her knees whilst giving her benediction to the rings. Likewise, as she pressed her healing hands to the sores of scrofula sufferers, Mary was, 'kneeling the whole time'.<sup>28</sup> Reversing the role of monarch and subject, appearing as a servant, physically humbling herself, the queen is presented once again as God's chosen representative.

As well as being presented as sacred, Mary was praised for her specifically feminine virtues. As the 'Marigolde', Mary's identity is that of earthly woman, 'Golde in earth to have no peere',<sup>29</sup> every bit as much as divine monarch. Portrayed as 'golde', precious and rare, Mary is possessed of all laudable feminine traits. Exhibiting a particular brand of, 'womanly wisdom' all, 'widowes, with maidens and wives, of this blessed woman example may take'.<sup>30</sup> Women who, as widows, maidens and wives, all had their roles defined by men are to take example from the queen regnant, the one woman who defines her own role. Throughout the ballads, Mary is depicted as meek and merciful, the 'Mirror of all womanhood'.<sup>31</sup> This sentiment is reflected in Faitta's letter as he comments on Mary's, 'compassion and devotion' and makes the assertion that, 'there never was a queen in Christendom of greater goodness than this one'.<sup>32</sup> This symbolic representation

<sup>18</sup> Rollins, 'A ninvectyve agaynst Treason', pp. 5-7.

<sup>19</sup> Rollins, 'A new ballade of the Marigolde', by William Forrest, pp. 9-12.

<sup>20</sup> Rollins, 'An Ave Maria in Commendation of our most Vertuous Quene', by Leonard Stopes, pp. 14-18.

<sup>21</sup> Rollins, 'A new ballade of the Marigolde', by William Forrest, pp. 9-12.

<sup>22</sup> Rollins, 'An Ave Maria in Commendation of our most Vertuous Quene', by Leonard Stopes, pp. 14-18.

<sup>23</sup> Rollins, 'The Epitaphe upon the Death of the Most Excellent and our late vertuous Quene, Marie, deceased' pp.24-25.

<sup>24</sup> CSPVen, VI, pp. 434-437.

<sup>25</sup> Rollins, 'Now singe, nowe springe, oure care is exil'd, Oure vertuous Quene is quickened with child', pp. 20-22.

<sup>26</sup> Rollins, 'An Ave Maria in Commendation of our most Vertuous Quene', by Leonard Stopes, pp. 14-18.

<sup>27</sup> CSPVen, VI, pp. 434-437.

<sup>28</sup> CSPVen, VI, pp. 434-437.

<sup>29</sup> Rollins, 'A new ballade of the Marigolde', by William Forrest, pp. 9-12.

<sup>30</sup> Rollins, 'An Ave Maria in Commendation of our most Vertuous Quene', by Leonard Stopes, pp. 14-18.

<sup>31</sup> Rollins, 'The Epitaphe upon the Death of the Most Excellent and our late vertuous Quene, Marie, deceased' pp. 24-25.

<sup>32</sup> CSPVen, VI, pp. 434-437.

as the epitome of feminine perfection is briefly complemented by consideration of Mary as an individual. She had been exceptionally well educated even for a princess, having had courses of study devised for her by renowned humanist scholar Juan Luis Vives under the supervision of her equally well-educated mother, Catherine of Aragon. It is as a unique individual that Mary is praised for her 'education' and 'conversacion'.<sup>33</sup> Faïtta also praises her as an individual who, 'in all her movements and gestures and by her manner, she seemed to act not merely out of ceremony but from great feeling and devotion'.<sup>34</sup> Ceremonial obligations aside, Mary kisses the foot of one of the poor women, 'so fervently that it seemed as if she were embracing something very precious'.<sup>35</sup>

Though meek and mild, Mary is also presented as strong. Her strength is of a feminine nature, characterised by patience and endurance and thus entirely appropriate to a woman. In the literal description of Faïtta, the practicalities of the ceremonies afford opportunity for him to praise her endurance classifying as 'remarkable' the fact that she, 'went the whole length of that long hall [...] ever on her knees'<sup>36</sup> during the Royal Maundy foot washing. After observing her laying hands on the scrofula sufferers, Faïtta comments on Mary, 'enduring for so long a while and so patiently so much fatigue'<sup>37</sup> (there is, of course, no thought for the endurance exhibited by the victims of the disease!). The figurative language of the ballads also praises Mary's strength. Despite being a delicate, 'floure', the Marigold is resilient and, 'sheweth glad cheare in heate and colde', 'enduring patiently' any 'stormes'.<sup>38</sup> Mary is brave as any monarch should be. However, her bravery is not fierce or warlike but the result of piety as '[i]n greatest stormes she feared not for God she made her shielde'.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to praising Mary as a woman, the authors of the ballads and Faïtta offer examples of how traditions of kingship, both imagery and ritual were adapted to accommodate a queen regnant. The ceremony of the Royal Maundy had gradually become personally connected to the monarch who performed the ritual of washing the feet of the poor. From the time of Henry VIII, the number of participants matched the monarch's age as did the number of pennies gifted to each. For the first time, as a concession to Mary's gender, women had their feet washed by the monarch.<sup>40</sup> In '*An Ave Maria...*', Leonard Stopes depicts Mary as a warrior. Yet, just as the queen regnant's bravery is presented in a different way to that of a king, so her role as martial leader is given a twist. In the ballad's imagery, the 'army' that Mary commands and the defence that she constructs are not ones of sword and spear. 'Hope is her helmet, Faith is her shielde and Love is her breastplate'<sup>41</sup> as she faces her foes. The queen will be every bit as effective as a king though her methods may differ.

Confusion over what a queen regnant was can be demonstrated by the contradictory contemporary reports of Mary's pre-coronation outfit. According to one account, 'Her Majesty was marvellously adorned, her mantle of silver and her head-dress of gold' in the manner of a queen consort.<sup>42</sup> However, another account has her, 'sat in a gown of blew velvet, furred with powdered armyen'<sup>43</sup> more usual to male monarchs on that day.

<sup>33</sup> Rollins, 'A new ballade of the Marigolde', by William Forrest, pp. 9-12.

<sup>34</sup> CSPVen, VI, pp. 434-437.

<sup>35</sup> CSPVen, VI, pp. 434-437.

<sup>36</sup> CSPVen, VI, pp. 434-437.

<sup>37</sup> CSPVen, VI, pp. 434-437.

<sup>38</sup> Rollins, 'A new ballade of the Marigolde', by William Forrest, pp. 9-12.

<sup>39</sup> Rollins, 'The Epitaph upon the Death of the Most Excellent and our late vertuous Quene, Marie, deceased', pp. 24-25.

<sup>40</sup> The ritual for appointing new Knights of the Bath provides another example of adaptation as a result of Mary's gender: a proxy (the Earl of Arundel) attended the section of the ceremony which required the men to be naked in the bath whilst taking their oath.

<sup>41</sup> Rollins, 'An Ave Maria in Commendation of our most Vertuous Quene', by Leonard Stopes, pp. 14-18.

<sup>42</sup> de Guaras, pp. 118-119.

<sup>43</sup> '*The Chronicle of Queen Jane and of Two Years of Queen Mary and Especially of the Rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyatt*', ed. by John Gough Nichols, Camden Miscellany, Camden Society, 1<sup>st</sup> series, 48 (London: Camden Society, 1850), p. 28.

As Richards suggests, this confusion of expectations and uncertainty over whether Mary was dressed in the tradition of a queen consort or a king reflected a more general uncertainty over the presentation and nature of a female monarch.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, in direct contrast to the established tradition of the English monarch opening parliament, Renard, the Imperial ambassador, reported to Charles V in August 1553 that, 'certain councillors now opine that it would be better to hold the parliament before the coronation' causing the Queen much 'distress'.<sup>45</sup> This is suggestive not only of the anxiety about the correct procedure for determining female monarchy,<sup>46</sup> but also the opportunity for change provided by the novelty of a queen regnant. Mary and Philip's pre-nuptial marriage treaty serves to highlight how female monarchy was something of an oxymoron in 16th century England. As the monarch, Mary possessed power that, as a woman (or more precisely, a wife), she required help with safeguarding. The treaty agreed that Philip should only, 'aid' Mary in the administration of 'her realms and dominions', 'do nothing whereby anything be innovate in the state...laws and customs of the said realm' and 'leave unto the said lady, his wife Queen Mary, the whole disposition of all the benefits and offices, land revenues and fruits of the said realms and dominions'.<sup>47</sup> In these examples, the queen regnant's sacred monarchical power was apparently threatened by the vulnerability of the woman's body in which it was housed.

However, the artefacts discussed in this essay tell a different story, demonstrating how the queen regnant could be celebrated as a divine monarch, a woman and, where necessary, both simultaneously. The Bishop of Winchester's sermon, preached at Mary's funeral, recognises the traditional female roles played by the queen, asserting that 'she was a king's daughter, she was a king's sister, she was a king's wife'. However, he also recognises Mary's unique position as 'a queen and by the same title a king'.<sup>48</sup> To her supporters a queen regnant could be, as a woman, the best of all that was female and, as a monarch, possessed of sacred power. However, what these two written representations suggest is something more subtle than this, not merely a clumsy mixture of queen consort and king but a genuine fusion of different elements coming together to create a unique, unprecedented entity. It was unnecessary to separate the queen's two bodies. The woman and the monarch could be presented as not merely co-existing but as complementing each other. Thus Mary became the 'lamb-like lion feminine',<sup>49</sup> not merely a princely queen or a feminised king but a new type of monarch, represented as having the capability of being both powerful and unthreatening.

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<sup>44</sup> Judith M. Richards, 'Mary Tudor as 'Sole Quene'?: Gendering Tudor Monarchy', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1997), pp. 895-924.

<sup>45</sup> CSPS, XI, p. 238.

<sup>46</sup> Alice Hunt, 'The Monarchical Republic of Mary I', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (2009), pp. 557-572.

<sup>47</sup> Hughes and Larkin, Westminster 14th January 1554: 'Announcing Articles of Marriage with Philip of Spain', p. 9 (italics added).

<sup>48</sup> *Ecclesiastical Memorials, relating chiefly to religion, and the reformation of it, and the emergencies of the Church of England, under King Henry VIII. King Edward VI. and Queen Mary I.*, Vol. III, pt. 2, ed. by John Strype (1643-1737), pp. 537-550.

<sup>49</sup> *The Proverbs, Epigrams and Miscellanies of John Heywood*, ed. by John Stephen Farmer (London: Gibbings, 1906), pp. 315-318. The line is taken from: 'A Ballad: Specifying Partly the Manner, Partly the Matter, in the Most Excellent Meeting and Like Marriage Between our Sovereign Lord and our Sovereign Lady the King's and Queen's Highness'.

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