

A Killer Queen for the 21st Century?

Between her death and Catholic emancipation in the 19th century, Mary I's image has been dominated by the judgement in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* of hers as a 'horrible and bloody time'. More sympathetic assessments of the queen and her reign informed by a return to primary sources had begun to appear after repeal, such as the conscientious and scholarly Agnes Strickland's influential twelve-volume *Lives of the Queens of England* in 1848, but they were dismissed, in her case as the work of a 'papistical sympathiser'. In the 20th century, Mary was dubbed naïve, lacking political skill, antipathetic to the public mood, bigoted and stupid, as well as tragically abandoned by an uncaring husband following her rejection by a brutish father. Four major biographies following on the heels of the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of her death in 2008 attempted to set the record straight, underlining her preparation for power, intelligence and erudition, the European context, the extraordinary nature of her successful bid for the throne, sensible policies and secure grasp on power up until her untimely end. Our first regnant queen did not rule through favourites. She was not dominated by courtiers, ministers or for that matter a husband whose wishes she ignored when she chose. Writing to Philip about his plan to marry off Elizabeth to the Duke of Savoy in 1557, Mary insisted they 'delay this matter until your return; and then your highness will be the judge of whether I will be blameworthy or not [in getting parliament to agree to it]. Because otherwise I shall find myself resenting your highness, which will be worse to me than death, for I have already begun to feel this too much, to my great sorrow'. There have been numerous false dawns in the recuperation of her historical reputation and these recent scholarly efforts were unceremoniously thrust aside when the London Dungeon held an exhibition in 2010 on the *Killer Queen: Bloody Mary*, complete with the smell of burning flesh, whose digital poster of Mary morphing into a screeching zombie had to be banned by the advertising standards authority as too frightening.

The image of Mary as a dour or dowdy figure is belied by an anecdote recounted by a servant of Philip II, visiting the queen in March 1554, four months before the wedding. Juan Hurtado de Mendoza wrote in a letter to the Bishop of Arras how his witty retort about it being a better time to come to England from Spain (than go the other way) had left queen laughing so hard she spluttered for breath. Apart from making clear the extent to which Mary's fun-loving side, her interest in fashion, love of gambling, hunting, entertainments and chivalric pursuits, has been obscured by the mistaken idea of her as tragic and fanatical. It also reveals how misjudged the idea of Philip as marginal or unwilling to undertake the marriage is. His servants were in close contact with England throughout the lead up to his arrival in July 1554. Few doubt now that the majority of the population in England welcomed Mary's restoration of traditional religion, supported by a highly effective campaign of preaching, public religious ritual and a rapid restocking of the material fabric of churches. Bells and *Te Deums* echoed through the streets of London following her proclamation, as many parishes signalled their solidarity with the queen's traditional beliefs. This was not a reactionary return, however. Her reign straddled the major sessions of the Council of Trent, which formulated Catholic Christendom's official response to the Reformation. The insistence in England's restoration of 'traditional' religion on preaching, residence, clerical education, new catechisms and the real presence in the eucharist, a movement away from pilgrimage and the cult of saints, and a new Christological focus all pointed the way for the reinvigorated Catholicism born of the confessionalisation of Europe.

It is worth remembering that despite ecclesiastical visitations the *Great Bible*, the first complete translation of the bible into English was never officially withdrawn under Mary.

There were many positive achievements in Mary's reign. Her accession itself was a remarkable achievement, as one of her supporter's put it 'of Herculean rather than womanly daring'. The key to overcoming the duke of Northumberland and his well-provisioned army was the small, loyal group of followers who Mary had cultivated after becoming one of the largest landowners in England through her father Henry VIII's will. These men would follow her into government, serving alongside the politically experienced but less trustworthy Henrician and Edwardian privy councillors, who had defected to her cause after being locked in with the new queen Jane in the Tower of London. Loyalists and long-serving servants like Susan Clarencius benefited from Mary's largesse and did act on her behalf as political agents, but her patronage in no sense created a 'petticoat' government. The queen faced down parliament and her Lord Chancellor, Stephen Gardiner, over the issue of her marriage asserting that 'if she were married against her will she would not live three months'. Bargaining hard and exaggerating the weakness of her position in order to extract greater concessions and more favourable terms. When the stirrings of a major rebellion began in November 1553, the government's response was to have the articles of the marriage treaty publicly proclaimed. At a key point in the Wyatt revolt (the only one of four strands that came to anything), Mary's speech at the Guildhall galvanised resistance in London casting herself as mother of the people: 'I cannot tell how naturally the mother loveth the child, for I was never mother of any... if a prince or governor may as naturally and earnestly love her subjects, as the mother doth the child, then assure yourselves, that I, being your lady and mistress, do as earnestly and tenderly love and favour you'. Within a week of a new parliament both houses had approved the marriage treaty. From a young age Mary had demonstrated her conscientiousness, marking the running totals of her privy purse expenses at the top of each page in her own hand from her time as princess of Wales, while presiding over a vice regal court at Ludlow. When she came to power, it was no different. The Venetian ambassador noted early in the reign that she rose at daybreak, prayed, heard Mass and then conducted business incessantly until after midnight. In 1555, one of her closest collaborators, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Reginald Pole noted to Philip that she was spending much of the night dispatching state affairs, despite the costs to her health. Philip's concern is indicated in letters from the Lord Privy Seal, William Paget to Mary early the following year.

Four proclamations addressing the Great Debasement of the coinage were issued in her first year on the throne, while both the Merchant Adventurers and Muscovy Companies, the first joint stock companies in England, received royal charters the following year. It has been argued that the Marian regime failed to understand the importance of print. But seeing the failure to respond to polemical publications as evidence for this is not persuasive. A major reshaping of printing occurred early in the reign and in 1557 the Stationer's Company was incorporated under royal charter, giving the crown oversight of publishing in England. The first printed collection of vernacular poetry in English *Tottell's Miscellany* appeared in 1557, perhaps a year after the first work of prose fiction, the *Image of Idleness*. Work by Thomas Tallis and William Byrd was enriched through their contact with the *capilla flamenca* and the court thronged with illustrious foreign visitors, artists and artisans,

including the duchesses of Lorraine and Parma, Ferrante Gonzaga and his sons, emissaries from Russia and the Americas. Magnificent tournaments, chivalric and civic entertainments were revived, especially when Philip was in England. Titian's paintings were displayed for the first time, along with the Tunis tapestries and the earliest large-scale copperplate maps. Although after his initial arrival in England, there were tensions between king Philip's household and the servants appointed for him (one of his servants commenting 'there are sword fights daily in the palace itself'), the two households were integrated through shared officials, James Bassett acting as principal secretary to both and George Day as Almoner. Following Philip's departure to Brussels in late 1555 to assume the reins of power over his father's global empire regular digests of privy council business were sent for his approval and note. In addition to the state papers signed by both co-monarchs, Philip's notes and comments demonstrate that he continued to be engaged in the affairs of England, intervening in major appointments such as the Lord Deputyship of Ireland, as well as the replacement of Stephen Gardiner as Lord Chancellor. The duke of Alba suggested in 1555 that Philip could easily make himself 'the most absolute [king] that [England] has ever had... because that is what they all want apart from that handful of ill-favoured contradictors of your will'.

One reason for ignoring many of the positive achievements of Mary's reign from finance to culture and politics rests on seeing the Reformation as a movement of national liberation. The re-Catholicisation of England is seen consequently as a temporary reverse on the road to Anglican triumph, a backward-facing and reactionary undermining of hard-won sovereign independence. No legislation under Philip and Mary, however, was permitted to abrogate English statute, owners of ex-monastic property were guaranteed in their possession and the Act for the Queen's Power was a cornerstone of monarchical constitutionalism. According to the standards of the time, Catholic restoration must be counted amongst her greatest achievements, reversing in five short years the wholesale theological changes of a generation. The longevity of England's Catholic, recusant community after her reign is owed in no small part to her religious policies. At one time historians sought to distance Mary from the persecution of Protestants, blaming it on Spanish-influence, embittered conservatives or unscrupulous counsellors. There can be no doubt though that she was directly involved. One of the few autograph documents that survive from her reign is the 1555 instructions to the convocation that sought to create a Marian church settlement. Witnesses at the later trial of Bartolomé Carranza, one of the architects of restoration, attested to the queen's personal involvement in discussions with both him and Cardinal Reginald Pole concerning religious policy and theology. Her savage and intense religious persecution of dissent claimed at least two hundred and eighty-four victims over four years. The horrific burning of evangelicals may have been particularly intense in England, however, the Council of Blood in the Low Countries claimed a thousand in just over seven years and over two hundred Catholics died under Elizabeth after 1570, while Henry VIII executed Lollards, around twenty Dutch Anabaptists, half a dozen Lutherans and at least two hundred for treason under the aegis of the Royal Supremacy, many in the wake of the Pilgrimage of Grace. All rulers were under an obligation of intolerance and burning heretics a ubiquitous practice in early modern Europe. Recent scholarship has argued that the Marian persecution was proving effective, since by the end of the reign high-profile victims were declining markedly and dissidence apparently weakening.

The marriage has frequently been seen along with the return of papal jurisdiction to have meant England's subjection of foreign powers. This misunderstands the nature of dynasticism. Henry Neville wrote that '[A]s long as God shall preserve my master and mistress together, I am and shall be a Spaniard to the uttermost of my power'. Furthermore 'Spanish' monarchy was less centralised than in England and often invested in female rulers, not least Philip's own aunt (Mary of Hungary), grandmother (Juana) and great grandmother (Isabella the Catholic). The evidence is clear that Philip respected not only Mary's superiority over him in England but had no intention of subverting the constitution or law of the land, writing to his father in November 1554 'I am anxious to show the whole world by my actions that I am not trying to acquire other peoples' states, and your Majesty I would convince of this not by my actions alone, but by my very thoughts'. If Philip and Mary had produced an heir, a dynastic inheritance uniting England and the Low Countries would have created a northern European powerhouse to eclipse France and perhaps even Spain itself. Through the marriage England became part of a loose federation of kingdoms that made up what has been dubbed a polycentric monarchy. The sense of England being subjected to Spain is entirely false. After four years of their co-monarchy Mary seemed more secure on the throne and Philip more popular than ever. A global influenza pandemic hit England in 1557 – 8, affecting as much as half the population in some parts of the country. Famine, which had seen two successive harvest failures in preceding years, was suddenly alleviated by the huge drop in population. Despite the high mortality rate, the regime weathered the storm without major social protest, although it may have been what ultimately killed Mary.

How selective our understanding of the past can be is apparent from the citizenship test that those who wish to become British must take. In the original version, it was wrongly claimed Mary's accession was due to Spanish help, while in its most recent iteration she has disappeared, despite the predominance of the Tudors, with Henry VIII alone occupying 15% of Britain's 'long and illustrious' history. Ultimately Mary's greatest achievement may have been to provide a model for her sister, Elizabeth, to follow, setting down the statutory foundations of female rule and offering a prototype of strong, independent, royal government, an assiduous and involved monarch, unswayed by the powerful male courtiers who surrounded her. If our history is described as 'illustrious', the Marian period may be a stronger contender than many other periods dwelt on in qualifying history tests. Analysing the Anthonis Mor wedding portrait of Mary I, one art historian describes her gaze as fanatical, gargoyle-like and frightening in strong contrast to the contemporary Flemish painter, Karel van Mander who saw her in London and described her as beautiful, while the Mantuan ambassador Annibale Litolfi noted 'not at all ugly as in her portraits, and that her lively expression, white skin and air of gratia, even rendered her beautiful'. Of course, early modern portraits construct an 'image' of their subject, nevertheless, these contrasting aesthetic responses are suffused with pre-conceived ideas about the object of contemplation. The volume in the Penguin Monarchs series on Mary I concludes reflecting on her motto *Veritas Temporis Filia* (Truth is the Daughter of Time) and how much her reputation has shifted in the last decade. I can only hope my forthcoming book heralds the coming of that brighter day for Mary and her reign, championing an understanding of her co-monarchy in a broader global frame, seeing its importance precisely in the broader horizons it opened up for England and setting a precedent for her more fortunate and long-lived sister. Confessional differences continue to have a huge influence on views of Mary and her reign, who continues to be considered 'bloody' rather than 'saintly and wise'. There

is no major monument in England to our first regnant queen, while in Spain's capital, Madrid, there is a tube station and street named after her, a telling contrast.

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Far from feeling a mere reasonable regret for his wife's death, Philip in fact wrote to his sister Juana from the monastery of Grunendal in December 1558 that he had felt Mary's loss deeply, as was to be expected, not quite the same thing. While perhaps not a gushing testament to love, it is far from the picture of indifference from history. The widespread image of the marriage as a mismatch seems to have taken its cue from the poisonous polemic penned by exiled radicals who described Mary as an 'old bitch', who 'could not draw the slightest spark of affection from her lord'. Eyewitness evidence, however, suggests that they were happy, dancing and laughing together in public. Although clearly there was for the period a significant age gap of ten years, the couple were both politically experienced and well understood the expectations of dynastic marriages. The importance Philip attached to the crown of England can be gauged from his playfully signing himself 'I the king' before even arriving there and his self-conscious cultivation of his image as king of England. The ship on which he sailed in the summer of 1554, *El Espíritu Santo*, was expensively fitted out with wooden panelling, flags, banners and armour displaying the conjoined arms of England and Spain. Their heraldic impresa featured prominently on the first large-scale copper plate engravings depicting the British Isles and Spain. The *Queen Mary Atlas* almost certainly commissioned by Mary as a gift for Philip depicting Pizarro's revolt against the Crown in Peru reflecting the opening up of the world in England. Following, an Arctic voyage to the court of Ivan the Terrible and the foundation of the Muscovy Company and despite the strict ban on foreigners, Stephen Borough under the auspices of the marriage travelled to the foremost cartographic establishment in the world, the Casa de Contratación or House of Trade in Seville, where he acquired a copy of Martin Cortés' *Art of Navigation*, which was translated on his return and published in five editions in the sixteenth century alone, one of the most influential navigational textbooks of the period (1561, 1572, 1584, 1589, 1596 and 1615) [the dates are probably too much detail].