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Kim Hansen

Brigham Young University, Provo, kk.hansen.7@gmail.com

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Henrietta Maria

Royalist Women's Representations of the French Catholic Queen

Kim Hansen

In 1632, the first work devoted to the discussion of women's rights under English law, known as *The Lawes Resolutions of Women's Rights*, was published. The author provides biblical reasoning (original sin) to justify "that Women have no voyse in Parliament, They make no Lawes, they consent to none, they abrogate none. All of them are understood [as] either married or to be married and their desires [are] subject to their husband" (6). Navigating between this image of English domesticity and the "long-standing cultural expectations regarding the *equality* that should attend marital deliberation and decision-making" was a severe point of conflict during the Caroline era (Butler 178, emphasis added). The conflict became particularly acute upon the royal marriage of King Charles and Queen Henrietta Maria; the tradition that "both husbands and wives were also expected to converse openly and extensively with each other before reaching any major decision" would imply that the king was unable to act without directly involving his wife, and even at times may need to consent to her views (178). As Henrietta Maria was both French and Catholic, Parliamentarians suspected that her counsels were a very real threat to both Protestant religion and English monarchical rule.

These fears and suspicions were confirmed with the capture of intimate and incriminating letters between the king and queen at the battle of Naseby in 1645. Quickly thereafter, Parliament ordered the publishing of an edited

compilation of these letters, printed as *The Kings Cabinet Opened*. The publication included “the most incriminating passages [printed] in italics: ‘*I must again tell thee, That most assuredly France will be the best way for transportation of the D[uke] of Lorraines Army, there being divers fit and safe places of landing for them upon the Western coasts, besides the Ports under my obedience*” (Knoppers 48). With plots for foreign invasions and other atrocities exposed, Parliamentarians argued that the letters revealed the “extent to which the king relied upon [the queen] as an *equal partner* in governing” (Butler 175, emphasis added). The queen’s stalwart Catholic zeal and intimate, persuasive position as the king’s advisor had always been points of concern, but the letters confirmed in Parliamentarian minds her determination to fulfill her papal promise to “do everything in her power to help the Catholics in England” (Stedman 27). Once the letters were in Parliamentarian hands, it took less than three weeks “to decipher, collate, and publicly distribute a great portion of the letters . . . displaying them to great fanfare and speeches at London’s Guildhall and then printing for wider distribution” (Butler 169). The rapid circulation of *The Kings Cabinet Opened* confirmed in the minds of many that the French Catholic queen was severely influencing the king’s decision-making.

In response to the outcry, royalists politicized “the necessary intimacy of a couple’s mutual thoughts as foundational to any healthy marriage, royal or common” (Butler 177). In efforts to assuage the perceived threat Parliament had imputed to Henrietta Maria, royalists emphasized her role as a traditional wife, portraying her as “not dominating her husband, seducing him away from the church, plotting the invasion of foreign armies, or negotiating for papal support,” but living a life that was just as domestic as it was royal—a life that was politically and socially acceptable (Knoppers 95). As part of this effort, the royalists circulated a cookery book, which they falsely attributed to the queen, to emphasize her “private Recreations” and cultivation of “the unimpeachable virtues . . . of collecting and practicing recipes and dispensing medicinal aid and hospitality” (95). In so doing, they emphasized the traditional role of Henrietta Maria as a loyal and submissive wife, attending to her womanly duties, and suppressing associations of her with imperious royal power. The domestication of the queen is further reflected in the artwork commissioned by the king: renowned artist Anthony Van Dyck’s piece, known to Caroline contemporaries as *The Greate Peece*, paints an idyllic royal family scene, combining “the formal demands of official state portraiture with the informalities of family domesticity” (Royal Collection Trust). Royalists hoped that emphasizing the submissive,

domestic role of the queen would be enough to combat the stiffening waves of Parliamentary opposition—though the eventual overthrow of the monarchy and the death of the king attest to their inability to achieve those goals in time.

Given the turbulence and turmoil of cultural exchange leading up to the English Civil War, much scholarly attention has focused on how the royalist cause fought to save the monarchy. The perpetuation of a new, politicized domesticity was taken up by many royalist authors, largely men. However, less scholarly attention has been paid to how royalist *women* responded to or even perpetuated the new, politicized domesticity. Two such royalist women—Hester Pulter and Margaret Cavendish—are presented herein as key figures who not only responded to the new domestic image but perpetuated it in their writings. Hester Pulter’s poems “The Invitation into the Country” and “On the King’s Most Excellent Majesty” engage in the royalist pastoral tradition to depict a somewhat egalitarian and deeply intimate relationship between king and queen—advocating the need for emotional intimacy in marriage, even a royal one. Margaret Cavendish, on the other hand, grants absolute power to the Empress in her utopian piece *The Blazing World*; yet the Empress’s ultimate and total failure functions as a critique of the religious overhaul Henrietta Maria attempted and an admission of the “natural” state of women’s traditional gender roles. Together, the works of both of these royalist women represent the queen in light of the new, politicized domesticity to advocate for the importance of emotional intimacy in marriage and the restoration of the true monarchy to ensure both national and domestic peace.

The works of Hester Pulter present domesticity as a bolster to monarchical power. She champions the new domesticity in the relationship between Queen Henrietta Maria and King Charles as Chloris and Amintas, respectively. In “The Invitation into the Country,” Pulter mourns the loss of king *and* queen:

Then let us still lament and grieve
Till heaven in mercy doth relieve.
'Tis neither sight nor odour's scent
Can my afflicted heart content,
Until I see them *both* restored
Whose absence hath been so deplored.
Just Heaven, hear our prayers and tears,
And place *them* in *their* shining spheres. (182–88, emphasis added)

Pulter makes clear that the royal marriage is incomplete without the pair

functioning as a cohesive unit with different yet complementary roles—one is not without the other. In this domestic image, there is unity in marriage, even a royal marriage. When the royal couple is gone, the disruption of the natural world is acute and severe: “Spring Garden that such pleasures bred / Looks dull and sad since Chloris fled” (27–28); “For since Amintas went away / Shepherds and sheep go all astray” (75–76); “Since lovely Chloris frightened fled, / The *crown imperial hangs* his head, / His princely breast o’erwhelmed with fears, / Weeping at once six crystal tears” (159–63). The crown imperial directly references an English flower (or the mourning of the natural world) but also reflects the pain of the king when separated from the queen—again, emphasizing the emotional intimacy they share. Pulter clearly associates the “disruption of [these royal] relationships with disorder in the state” and the natural world (Butler 176). The poem argues that restoration—a turning back, or return, to the way of life before Parliamentary chaos erupted—is the only way to regain the previously enjoyed peace.

The contrast between “The Invitation into the Country” and one of Pulter’s later works, “On the King’s Most Excellent Majesty,” is fruitful because, though both poems touch on the same subject, the latter was written after the death of the king. In “On the King’s Most Excellent Majesty,” Pulter continues to emphasize emotional intimacy, describing how the royal couple’s love will continue into the eternities:

And let his *lovely, loyal, royal* queen
 To all succeeding ages still be seen
 A most unparalleled pattern of *true love*,
 Begun on earth, ending in heaven above.
 O let them in their shining spheres be fixed . . .
 Let them in endless glory be involved;
 Till when let grace and blessing from above
 Descend on them and all that do them love. (9–13, 18–20, emphasis added)

Yet, Pulter uses more explicitly positive language than in “The Invitation to the Country,” especially in her descriptions of the queen. Whereas in “Invitation” the queen was simply included with the king, “until I see them both restored,” now (after the king’s death and the queen’s exile) she is not just included with the king but also described on her own: the “lovely, loyal, royal queen.” In death and exile, the idea of the royal couple living in celestial domestic bliss is more powerful than the memory of their relationship in life. Evidently, royalist

efforts to domesticate the queen continued after the disruption of the monarchy. In fact, the image of “Charles as father, husband, and family man was more successful [in death] than in life, and, in exile, the controversial and disliked Catholic Queen Henrietta Maria could be fully domesticated as England’s ‘Sovereign Mistress.’ The royal domestic as a kind of political imaginary took fullest form in the absence of monarchy” (Knoppers 5). With the royal couple and their controversial actions distanced from the present, royalists embellished their memory with domestic bliss. This embellishment is further evident in how Pulter describes the intimacy of the royal couple in this later poem; the idea of “true love” between the king and his “lovely, loyal, royal queen” strongly suggests their marriage to be a mutual *match*, not a political ploy or economic convenience. A loving, domestic life was shared between the now lost king and queen, a beautiful mutuality in their relationship, which stands in sharp contrast to how Pulter portrays the Parliamentary relationships that infect London: where “husbands look with jealous eyes, / And wives deceive them and their spies” (“Invitation” 15–16). The death of the king and the exile of the queen created an ideal environment for royalists to depict the domestic happiness of the royal couple, a happiness that reflects the happiness of the country as a whole, as their “grace and blessing from above / Descend on them and all that do them love” (“On the King’s” 126). Again, as in her earlier poem, Pulter emphasizes the fact that only a restoration of the monarchy—the embodiment of domestic and national harmony—is the path to peace.

Not only does Pulter’s poetry suggest the need for intimacy in marriage, but she also suggests the perfectly domestic role that Henrietta Maria plays in said marriage; the queen is lovely and loyal to her husband, not subversive of his rule or religion. The physical body of the queen is extremely important; she is beautiful and delicate as she serves the king, a contrast to the Parliamentary image of “the generative capability of Henrietta Maria’s body [to birth] plots and schemes, producing not just royal heirs but servants and counselors who might drive the rapidly escalating religious and civil conflict . . . subsuming rather than elevating the king” (Butler 176). Further, by presenting Amintas as the strong and gentle shepherd and Chloris as “both wife and maid” (“Invitation” 81), Pulter makes clear that Henrietta Maria is a wife first: lovely, loyal, innocent, and happy. Few would dare admit fear of a woman whose innocence could be no threat to the monarchy and religion of England. Though not true to life, the presentations of Henrietta Maria in this pastoral setting, which emphasizes “a double longing after innocence and happiness,” in both the royalist tradition

and Pulter's work, effectively domesticate the queen (Alper 347). Pulter thus represents Henrietta Maria as a loving wife and mother, whose intimate relationship with the king supports his efforts, but assuredly never usurps his power.

In contrast, Margaret Cavendish's representation of Henrietta Maria—the Empress in her work of prose fiction, *The Blazing World*—seems at first to be completely opposite from Hester Pulter. While Pulter's Chloris is gentle and lovely and kind, Cavendish's Empress is astute, decisive, and tyrannical. She operates within an inverted domestic space, as the Empress takes on, in many ways, a traditionally masculine role. Upon becoming the Emperor's wife, she is granted “an absolute power to rule and govern all that World as she pleased,” as her subjects “tender'd her all the Veneration and Worship due to a Deity,” and adorned her with lavish clothing and jewels only permissible for royalty (Cavendish 13). She immediately inquires as to her subjects' unique way of life, and as they respond, they realize “that her Majesty had such great and able judgment in Natural Philosophy” (49). Hearing about their religion and “finding it very defective, [she] was troubled, that so wise and knowing a people should have no more knowledge of the Divine Truth” (60). The Empress then enacts a good deal of change, particularly “religious reforms [to match her] desire to ‘convert . . . all to her own religion’” (Hair 162). In her determination,

she resolved to build Churches, and make also up a Congregation of Women, whereof she intended to be the head her self, and to instruct them in the several points of her Religion. This she had no sooner begun, but the Women, which generally had quick wits, subtile conceptions, clear understandings, and solid judgments, became, in a short time, very devout and zealous Sisters; for the Empress had an excellent gift of Preaching, and instructing them in the Articles of Faith; and by that means, she converted them not onely soon, but gained an extraordinary love of all her Subjects throughout that World. (Cavendish 60)

It is impossible not to see the parallels between the Empress's sudden and sweeping influence on the Emperor's court and Henrietta Maria's penetrating influence on the English king. For example, Henrietta Maria was just as lavishly adorned as the Empress on her wedding day, her dress “gold- and silver-colored, decorated over and over with the ‘fleurs de Lys d'or,’ and bedecked by diamonds and other precious stones” (Stedman 31). Further, in her marriage contract, “it was set down that she should even be provided with her own chapel in every royal mansion . . . It was further stipulated that she should have her own almoner

and other priests, that her servants should be for the most part French and Catholic, and that her children should remain with her till the age of 13” (27). These stipulations, followed by her decisive action in “helping to free Catholics from jail and supporting the religious conversions of some court members” and other more radical religious reforms, evidence the near symmetry between the Empress and the queen (34). The similarities are enough that the *Blazing World* can be interpreted as a direct criticism of Henrietta Maria—especially since, “in 1643, seeking a life of independence, [Margaret] Lucas applied to be a maid of honor at the court of Queen Henrietta Maria. When the queen was exiled to France in 1644, Lucas accompanied her and shortly thereafter met William Cavendish” (Cunning). As a maid of honor in the queen’s court, Cavendish likely was privy to the queen’s reformatory efforts.

With this in mind, it is interesting that “Paradise in the *Blazing World* is the Eden from which Adam and Eve were expelled, [where] the Emperor stands in for Adam, but initially has no Eve” (Hair 59). The idea of Emperor and Empress as Adam and Eve replicates the age-long justification of absolute rule, as “the king’s power was seen as patriarchal, emanating from Adam . . . the king was seen as head and father, not only of his family but of his subjects” (Knoppers 5). Henrietta Maria’s subversive influence was a threat to this grounding of kingly authority in biblical tradition. She was, therefore, akin to Eve, subject to punishment for subverting the “natural” order. As a result, the Empress is “an Eve-figure like Milton’s Eve, not completely satisfied with her role in Paradise. Cavendish’s fantasy of power (if it is such) may be gratified by a man relinquishing power to her, but, even in her own version of Genesis, where this autonomy is relished, granting absolute power to a female eventually brings dire consequences” (Hair 59). Even though Cavendish critiques the religious reforms of the Empress, she is sure to add that “the Empress, by Art, and her own Ingenuity, did not onely convert the *Blazing-World* to her own Religion, but kept them in a constant belief, without inforcement or blood-shed; for she knew well, that belief was a thing not to be forced or pressed upon the people, but to be instilled into their minds by gentle perswasions” (63). The Empress avoids holy war in her absolute rule, a fate that England did not enjoy. This is clearly a critique of the religious conflicts that took the lives of so many, including Cavendish’s brother. Regardless, the Empress’s ultimate and total failure functions as a critique of the religious overhaul that Henrietta Maria attempted, as well as an admission to the biblical reasoning used to justify the inferiority of women—even, and perhaps especially, that of the queen.

The eventual failure of the Empress is also what makes *The Blazing World* and its representation of Henrietta Maria similar to Pulter's representation of the queen; both women assent to monarchy as the ideal, "natural" state of the world, similar to how the domestic sphere is the ideal, "natural" state for women. The crumbling of the Empress's reforms and radical reign "ratifies the kind of patriarchalism that is articulated in Robert Filmer's defense of kingship . . . which celebrates the divinely appointed power of monarchy and equates obedience to God with submission to the king" (Trubowitz 231). *The Blazing World* idyllically celebrates "Monarchy [as] a divine form of Government . . . for as there is but one God, whom we all unanimously worship and adore with one Faith" and "no more but one Emperor, to whom they all submitted with the greatest duty and obedience, which made them live in a continued Peace and Happiness; not acquainted with Foreign Wars, or Home-bred Insurrections" (Cavendish 16, 10). Pulter, too, champions monarchy as a divine ideal and the only way to heal the disruptions suffered in the natural world by the upsetting of this God-given system of government.

Further, Cavendish, like Pulter, suggests the need for mutuality in marriage: "Then the Empress asked, Whether the number of six was a symbole of Matrimony, as being made up of Male and Femal, for two into three is six. If any number can be a symbole of Matrimony, answered the Spirits, it is not Six, but Two; if two may be allowed to be a Number: for the act of Matrimony is made up of two joined in one" (Cavendish 74). Cavendish's inclusion of these elements is a response to the larger underlying conflicts of religion and political power for which the English Civil War was fought. She presents an "aristocratic nostalgia for what could be called a 'magical' past, for an idealized pre-Civil War England unrooted from actual history, in which the mystical sovereignty of monarchy prevailed over an undivided nation and when custom, tradition, and other rationally irreducible supports for social hierarchy were embraced by all classes" (Trubowitz 231). The nostalgic past Cavendish laments is the same past for which Pulter mourns; both women equate Parliamentary rule with the destruction of the natural way of the world, and both suggest that the restoration of the true monarchy is the only way to regain national, political, and domestic peace.

Though the domestic presentations of Henrietta Maria were not enough to combat the Parliamentary anger against Charles, they would go on to severely influence English life in the centuries of monarchical rule to come. While "politics, especially the high politics of the court and narratives of Whitehall and

Westminster, [had] traditionally been seen as having little in common with the domestic or private sphere, or with women and the middle classes . . . the Victorian portraiture suggests [how] politics and domesticity came together in a powerful if contested mode of monarchical representation in the years of the English Revolution and beyond” (Knoppers 4). Today, the English monarchy and royal family are still somewhat constrained by the images of domesticity created amid the conflict and chaos of the Caroline era. Though their contributions are often less recognized by historians and scholars, royalist women like Hester Pulter and Margaret Cavendish also advanced this new domesticity. Pulter presents a powerful image of domestic bliss—a reformed domesticity, with Henrietta Maria as the doting and docile wife that supports, but does not usurp, the absolute power of her husband the king. Cavendish presents a powerful image of an inverted domestic space as the Empress vies to maintain absolute power. Yet her ultimate failure emphasizes the need to return to the “natural,” God-established way of the world. While framing Henrietta Maria as the quintessential domestic woman failed to save the monarchy from failure, the monarchy’s eventual return and the later fascination with Caroline domesticity evidences the long-lasting influence of royalist women like Hester Pulter and Margaret Cavendish for years to come.

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