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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEWS

THE CROWNED REPUBLIC? MONARCHY AND ANTI-MONARCHY IN BRITAIN, 1760–1901*

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ABSTRACT. *In the last two decades historians have been increasingly interested in the modernization of the monarchy, and the nature of the republican threat. This review evaluates some of this recent literature. The first section argues that while Walter Bagehot's views about ceremony in The English constitution (1867) have influenced historical writing, these approaches do not yield much information about what the monarchy actually meant to people. The second section turns to the political powers of the monarchy, and examines the wide range of views about what the constitutional limits of royal power were. It also shows that even radical writers were often unable to dispel the monarchy from their imaginations. Finally, the review suggests that criticism of the royal family was not necessarily republican, and arose more from concern that particular figures were failing to conform to shared public values. Pure republicans were few, and did not usually focus their energies on the monarchy, but rather on the nature of parliamentary representation and the power of the Lords.*

On the morning of 31 August 1997 Tony Blair spoke to the media outside Trimdon parish church about the tragic events earlier that day. His words on the death of Diana, princess of Wales, are now considered to be a masterpiece of political theatre which captured (or perhaps created) the ‘mood of the nation’. Diana, he intoned, had been loved by ‘the people’ because she was the ‘People’s Princess’. Although coined neither by Blair, nor his press secretary Alistair Campbell,¹ the phrase starkly reveals the paradoxes of monarchy in the modern world. They were dramatically played out in the week leading up to the funeral on 6 September. As oceans of flowers spread across central London, sentiment and reverence were publicly paraded, and even some avowed republicans found themselves caught up in the mood. The irony of this emotional outburst was that Diana was a royal outcast with a loyal following. The initial refusal of the royal family to participate in the commemoration of her death led to public anger, press criticism, and gentle persuasion from the prime minister. Eventually the flag at Buckingham Palace was flown at half-mast, and the queen appeared on television to console her subjects.² In effect the monarch gave in to public demands to acknowledge Diana. Who then was sovereign?

* I wish to thank Joanna Lewis, Andrzej Olechnowicz, Miles Taylor, and Philip Williamson for their helpful comments on this review.

¹ Julie Burchill used the phrase in the *Modern Review* in 1992. See Anthony Barnett, *This time: our constitutional revolution* (London, 1997), p. 118 and ch. 5 generally.

² Andrew Rawnsley, *Servants of the people: the inside story of New Labour* (London, 2000), pp. 59–71. Also, Mandy Merck, ed., *After Diana: irreverent elegies* (London, 1998), esp. Ross McKibbin, ‘Mass observation in the Mall’, pp. 15–24.

The themes so pungently revealed by the 'floral revolution' have a long heritage. Over the last two decades there has been a growth of serious attempts to locate the monarchy in its wider social, cultural, and political contexts, and a move away from narrow biographical approaches. This shift was spurred by wider intellectual developments. Under the impact of Thatcherism, historians on the left began to reassess the reasons for the halted march of labour, and turned their attention to the institutions and ideologies that they thought had impeded the modernization of Britain. In particular, the idea of the 'invention of tradition', popularized by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, criticized the pieties of popular national history, and revealed how the notion of a stable and consensual national tradition was largely mythical.³ The monarchy, it was suggested, was a central contributing factor to the hierarchical, deferential, and nostalgic character of British political and social life. The other area of interest pursued the other side of this question. What would the modernization of Britain look like, and had there been missed opportunities in the past? The 1990s witnessed a rebirth of interest in the constitution, and some consideration of where monarchy fitted in. The 'problems' of the royal family have made the word 'republicanism' more widely known, even if only a minority has thoroughly embraced it. The most avid reformers generally consider that republicanism is an essential feature of any truly modern state.⁴ What they mean by republicanism, however, is rarely explored satisfactorily. In particular, these popular political writings are rarely aligned with work on republicanism in early modern history, which has been of growing significance ever since the publication of J. G. A. Pocock's *Machiavellian moment* in 1975. This review examines some of the recent works on monarchy and anti-monarchy in order to reassess these problems, focusing on the period in which the monarchy supposedly became modern.

I

The spectre of Bagehot haunts the historiography of the monarchy. While recent work has shown that the arguments of the *English constitution* were fairly commonplace when the book was published in 1867, they have nevertheless structured the historical and constitutional approach to the monarchy.⁵ This is ironic, since Bagehot's central interest was the 'efficient' working of government rather than the 'dignified' aspects of the constitution. He intended

³ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, 1983); Tom Nairn, *The enchanted glass: Britain and its monarchy* (London, 1988). These writings may be located within the wider historiography of patriotism. See Hugh Cunningham, 'The language of patriotism, 1750–1914', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), pp. 8–33; Raphael Samuel, ed., *Patriotism: the making and unmaking of British national identity* (3 vols., London, 1989); Miles Taylor, 'Patriotism, history and the left in twentieth-century Britain', *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), pp. 971–87.

⁴ Stephen Haseler, *The end of the house of Windsor: birth of a British republic* (London, 1993); Anthony Barnett, ed., *The power and the throne: the monarchy debate* (London, 1994); Jonathan Freedland, *Bring home the revolution: how Britain can live the American dream* (London, 1998). For a defence of the modern constitutional monarchy see Vernon Bogdanor, *The monarchy and the constitution* (Oxford, 1995), and from a more historical point of view, John Cannon, 'The survival of the British monarchy', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 36 (1986), pp. 143–64.

⁵ Richard Williams, *The contentious crown: public discussion of the British monarchy in the reign of Queen Victoria* (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 120, 244; Miles Taylor, 'Introduction' to Walter Bagehot, *The English constitution* (Oxford, 2001), p. xxi; Paul Smith, 'Introduction' to the same work (Cambridge, 2001), p. xiv. The impact of Bagehot is evident in Peter Hennessy, *The hidden wiring: unearthing the British constitution* (London, 1995); Bogdanor, *The monarchy and the constitution*; Brian Harrison, *The transformation of British politics* (Oxford, 1996), chs. 1, 12.

to banish the old theory of a mixed and balanced constitution by revealing how the state *really* worked, concentrating on how cabinet government was chosen by the House of Commons, which acted as an electoral college. The emergence of this system had rendered most of the monarch's formal prerogatives obsolete. Even the powers to dissolve parliament and to create peers were essentially held by the prime minister. Bagehot did formalize the famous trinity of royal 'rights' to be consulted, to encourage, and to warn, but these are notable for how little actual power they gave the monarch. He therefore concluded that 'a Republic has insinuated itself beneath the folds of a Monarchy'.⁶ Most twentieth-century commentators agree that Bagehot either underestimated the monarch's powers or that he was being prescriptive about them. Victoria's ministers in the 1860s would not have recognized his account as fact, nor did Victoria herself, who regarded him as a radical in any case.

Bagehot's views about ceremony have been most influential, even if again he was recommending rather than describing a state of affairs.⁷ His argument rested on an evolutionary psychology that drew a sharp distinction between the majority who were governed by their passions, and the minority who possessed reason. He thought that the 'masses' of England had remained intellectually stunted for centuries, and that he lived in 'a community in which primitive barbarism lay as a recognised basis to acquired civilisation'.⁸ These 'barbarians' had little understanding of constitutional complexities, but they could be awed by the idea of a single individual wielding power. The purpose of monarchical theatre was to reinforce the idea that the monarch was the source of all political power. This was not, however, a timeless truth, but rather one fitted for England's current level of development. Bagehot believed that even as late as the 1860s the uneducated 'masses' obeyed their queen because they thought her power divinely sanctioned. The 'immense majority', he claimed, would not say she ruled by parliamentary right, but 'will say she rules by "God's grace"; they believe they have a mystic obligation to obey her'.⁹ In other words, ideas of divine right lingered on into the Victorian period, and accounted for deference to 'theatrical show'.¹⁰ The striking point, then, is not that he gave a dignified and ceremonial function to the monarchy, nor that he adhered to an evolutionary psychology which made it necessary to sway the ignorant by their imaginations. These two arguments lacked the necessary connecting tissue. After all, the belief that state ceremony has functional uses can apply to republics just as easily as to monarchies. The central point was that the English masses still held to long-standing views about the awesome political and sacred power of the monarchy, and accordingly they were not yet suited for the knowledge of elective government.

⁶ Bagehot, *English constitution*, ed. Taylor, p. 48.

⁷ The first edition of the *English constitution* was moderate in its defence of 'show'. Ibid., pp. 49–50. Compare 'The income of the prince of Wales', *Economist*, 10 Oct. 1874, in Norman St John Stevas, ed., *The collected works of Walter Bagehot* (15 vols., London, 1965–86), v, p. 418.

⁸ Bagehot, *English constitution*, ed. Taylor, p. 40.

⁹ Ibid., p. 44. Also idem, 'Sir Charles Dilke on the civil list', *Economist*, 10 Jan. 1874; idem, 'The thanksgiving', *Economist*, 25 Feb. 1872, in Stevas, ed., *Collected works*, v, pp. 417, 439. On the mystical powers of the monarchy see Kingsley Martin, *The magic of monarchy* (London, 1937), chs. 1, 4–5; Frank Prochaska, *Royal bounty: the making of a welfare monarchy* (New Haven, 1995), p. 111; Ross McKibbin, *Class and cultures: England, 1918–1951* (Oxford, 1998), p. 14.

¹⁰ Bagehot elaborated on these ideas in 'Sir Charles Dilke'; idem, 'English republicanism', *Economist*, 15 Apr. 1873; idem, 'Mr Bright on republicanism', *Economist*, 17 May 1873, in Stevas, ed., *Collected works*, v, pp. 417, 424–9.

The power of the monarchy was a myth, but it had to be indulged if the real modernity of the constitution were to be preserved.¹¹

While not always acknowledged, it is clear that Bagehot's arguments have lurked in the minds of recent historians. In the 1980s, both David Cannadine and Linda Colley argued that 'theatrical show' was central in explaining the emergence of a popular monarchy, even as its political powers declined. In slightly different ways, they saw the ritual of monarchy shaping a national identity based on tradition, hierarchy, and peculiarity, which in turn applied the brake to social and political modernization.¹² This focus on ceremony owes something to the period in which these historians began working, one which saw Elizabeth II's silver jubilee in 1977 and the marriage of the prince of Wales and Lady Diana Spencer in 1981. Such events seemed to reinforce a common idea, which Cannadine supports, that 'modern societies still need myth and ritual. A monarch and his family supply it.'¹³ More substantively, these histories reveal the emerging influence of cultural anthropology. In *Rituals of royalty*, a collection of essays on monarchical ceremony in traditional societies, Cannadine had the opportunity to develop these links further. While impressed by much of the material on offer, he was critical about whether an overly structural approach to culture could capture the origins of ceremony, and its changing forms and meanings. He argued that historians should contextualize ceremony and be aware of the inevitably contested nature of its meanings.¹⁴ However, these points raise some questions about Cannadine's own work on the monarchy. If the meanings of ceremony are not automatically given, it cannot be assumed that they shape a cultural consensus on the monarchy. It would be necessary to show how the meanings of ceremony were produced, contested, and appropriated.¹⁵ Indeed, the narrow focus on ritual itself needs to be challenged. It was a common view in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that 'show' was the best way of transfixing the imaginations of the 'masses', who were suffering a rationality deficit. Such assumptions are themselves ripe for historical enquiry.

Nevertheless, the work of Cannadine and Colley has had a significant impact on historians writing in the 1990s. Cannadine argued that for most of the nineteenth century monarchical ceremony was shambolic, and considered unimportant by a parliament and a populace fixated on retrenchment. The monarchy continued to wield significant political power,

¹¹ Bagehot, *English constitution*, ed. Taylor, p. 51. See David Spring, 'Walter Bagehot and deference', *American Historical Review*, 81 (1976), pp. 524–31; John Burrow, 'Sense and circumstances: Bagehot and the nature of political understanding', in Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That noble science of politics: a study in nineteenth-century intellectual history* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 171–5; Mark Francis and John Morrow, *A history of political thought in the nineteenth century* (New York, 1994), pp. 241–6; William M. Kuhn, *Democratic royalism: the transformation of the British monarchy, 1861–1914* (Basingstoke, 1996), ch. 1.

¹² David Cannadine, 'The context, performance and meaning of ritual: the British monarchy and the "invention of tradition" c. 1820–1977', in Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The invention of tradition*, pp. 101–64; David Cannadine, *The pleasures of the past* (London, 1989), pp. 9–10; Linda Colley, 'The apotheosis of George III: loyalty, royalty and the British nation, 1760–1820', *Past and Present*, 102 (1984), pp. 94–129; idem, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992), ch. 5.

¹³ Ian Gilmour, cited in Cannadine, 'The context', p. 102.

¹⁴ David Cannadine, 'Introduction: divine rites of kings', in idem and Simon Price, eds., *Rituals of royalty: power and ceremonial in traditional societies* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 11, 15–16.

¹⁵ This argument is made in Elizabeth Hammerton and David Cannadine, 'Conflict and consensus on a ceremonial occasion: the diamond jubilee in Cambridge in 1897', *Historical Journal*, 24 (1981), pp. 113, 145. This article, however, achieves its aims with more success than does Cannadine, 'The context'.

which militated against purely ceremonial functions. However, the aftermath of the 'republican moment' of the 1860s and 70s saw the lavish ritual of Victoria's jubilees in 1887 and 1897, and her funeral in 1901.¹⁶ Politicians began using and refining these occasions to try to mould national sentiment. William Kuhn has recently challenged some elements of this argument. He is opposed to historians who see late nineteenth-century rituals as 'invented traditions', and tries to establish their continuity with earlier periods.¹⁷ Focusing on some of the architects of ceremonial, he reveals the depth of research, and the often tortuous negotiations, involved in organizing jubilees, coronations, and funerals. While these events were not completely invented, however, the effort of research that went into establishing continuity suggests that many of their details had long been forgotten. Also, it is clear that advocates of increased ceremony did not agree about the meanings they should convey. Bagehot and Gladstone were unimpressed by overt imperial celebration, while Lord Esher's approach was less devotional than Gladstone's, and more socially select than Bagehot's.¹⁸ These disagreements about the meanings and functions of ceremony undermine Kuhn's desire to see them as genuine rather than invented traditions. What also comes across strongly is how key figures like Randall Davidson, and the duke of Norfolk, thought that the monarchy should convey tradition and continuity in order to counter-balance an unwelcome cultural and political modernity. There was widespread agreement amongst these 'inventors' of tradition that ceremony encouraged social cohesion among the poorer classes, but that the upper classes were impervious to it. This explains the growing importance attached to Victoria's processions through the southern and eastern districts of London.¹⁹ What remains relatively absent from Kuhn's work, however, is a consideration of how different sectors of the populace understood and reacted to ritual. It is a top-down approach that does not answer whether royal ceremonies actually achieved their desired function.

Colley's writings on George III adopt an approach that is similar to Cannadine's, and they have recently been supplemented by the work of Marilyn Morris. Colley and Morris both suggest that as George III's political (and mental) powers declined in the 1780s, he was increasingly identified as a neutral father figure to the nation. George himself can take some credit for this. Whether promenading at Windsor, or strolling around Weymouth, he consciously projected domestic and familial virtues. He was also impressed by the state festivals of Jacques Louis David, and saw the naval thanksgiving of 1797 in this light. Some politicians and sections of the press thought an increased ceremonial role for the monarchy desirable.²⁰ Colley and Morris also stress the popular contribution to royal celebration: for

¹⁶ Cannadine, 'The context', pp. 120–32. Also, Jeffrey L. Lant, *Insubstantial pageant: ceremony and confusion at Queen Victoria's court* (London, 1979); Freda Harcourt, 'Gladstone, monarchism and the "new imperialism"', 1868–1874', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 14 (1985), pp. 20–51; Thomas Richards, 'The image of Victoria in the year of jubilee', *Victorian Studies*, 31 (1987), pp. 7–32; Walter L. Arnstein, 'Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee', *American Scholar*, 66 (1997), pp. 591–7; Peter Hinchliff, 'Frederick Temple, Randall Davidson and the coronation of Edward VII', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 48 (1997), pp. 71–99; John Woffe, *Great deaths: grieving, religion, and nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Oxford, 2000), chs. 7–8.

¹⁷ Kuhn, *Democratic royalism*, pp. 1–14. Also Walter L. Arnstein, 'Queen Victoria opens parliament: the disinvention of tradition', *Historical Research*, 113 (1990), pp. 178–94.

¹⁸ Kuhn, *Democratic royalism*, pp. 52, 72.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 72, 94, 113; Dorothy Thompson, *Queen Victoria: the woman, the monarchy, and the people* (London, 1990), pp. 132–6.

²⁰ Marilyn Morris, *The British monarchy and the French revolution* (New Haven, 1998), pp. 142–5; Colley, 'The apotheosis of George III', pp. 108–10; *idem*, *Britons*, pp. 215–16.

example, Mrs Biggs's suggestion that a jubilee in 1809 would 'excite a spirit of loyal enthusiasm'.²¹ Urban authorities used such events to demonstrate both their national loyalty and civic pride, but they could not completely control the meanings of these occasions. They might simply be an excuse for a day off work, or a free meal. They could also be used as a form of protest, as in Bristol when many trade groups refused to process in honour of George IV's coronation.²² Nevertheless, both Colley and Morris conclude that George III enabled a transformation of monarchical popularity by serving as a focus of ritual splendour and a model of ordinary domesticity. This conclusion, however, does seem to evade the fact that, despite their best efforts, George IV and William IV did not enjoy the same popularity as their father.²³

The arguments of Cannadine and Colley conflict in their chronologies. Both stress the importance of ceremony in creating a popular monarchy, but the one locates this shift in the late nineteenth century, while the other places it a hundred years earlier. Part of the explanation may be that Cannadine overstates the shift towards ritual in the 1880s, as Richard Williams has recently suggested.²⁴ Certainly Victoria did her best to avoid these duties, which she deemed both politically unnecessary and religiously undesirable.²⁵ She also thought that royal marriages and funerals should be as private as possible. Again, it is true that some critics denounced all ceremony as irrational and barbaric at worse, and expensive at best. Nevertheless, there is significant evidence of the desire for royal celebration from the very beginning of Victoria's reign. The tory *John Bull* complained that the coronation was a chaotic affair, and the radical *Figaro in London* thought that there was a need to put on a proper display for the people. Interestingly, Williams shows that a significant proportion of the London populace celebrated royal events spontaneously. During Victoria's coronation, shops and houses were decorated, and illuminations took place throughout the night. The *Standard* concluded that the 'grandeur of the spectacle is due solely to the people'.²⁶ Williams therefore argues that there were demands for inclusive royal celebrations from at least the 1840s onwards, but that they were only really met from the 1880s. This popular enthusiasm for the monarchy seems therefore to predate the 'invention of tradition' rather than being a product of it. Furthermore, the use of ceremony did not automatically contribute to monarchical popularity. The death of Princess Charlotte in 1817 provoked widespread mourning among many social and political groups, but the elaborate coronation of her father in 1821 generated little public enthusiasm.²⁷ In other words, there is no easy correlation between ceremony and popularity. The evidence points in too many directions. What is lacking is a rich sense of how the populace responded to ceremonies, and the meanings it attributed to them. These could vary considerably. To agree with Bagehot that 'theatrical show' was essential to 'social control' is to make an unwarranted assumption which effaces the complexity of the monarchy.

²¹ Cited in Colley, *Britons*, p. 218.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 227; Morris, *British monarchy*, p. 149.

²³ But see Prochaska, *Royal bounty*, ch. 2.

²⁴ Williams, *Contentious crown*, pp. 230–1 and ch. 8 generally. Also, John Plunkett, 'Queen Victoria: the monarchy and the media, 1837–1867' (PhD thesis, Birkbeck College, University of London, 2000), ch. 1.

²⁵ Kuhn, *Democratic royalism*, pp. 41–2. See also Walter L. Arnstein, 'Queen Victoria and religion', in Gail Malmgreen, ed., *Religion in the lives of English women, 1760–1930* (Bloomington, 1986), pp. 88–128; idem, 'Queen Victoria and the challenge of Roman Catholicism', *Historian*, 58 (1996), pp. 295–314.

²⁶ Williams, *Contentious crown*, pp. 233–5.

²⁷ See Stephen C. Behrendt, *Royal mourning and Regency culture: elegies and memorials of Princess Charlotte* (London, 1997).

In recent years there has been a move away from a narrow focus on ceremony, and a consideration of other factors that may have enabled the modernization of the monarchy. Frank Prochaska's recent work has argued that the royal family's deep involvement in philanthropy was crucial to its transformation into a popular institution, particularly from the 1840s. Victoria may have ignored her ceremonial duties, but she thought her charitable work important (unlike a number of politicians and journalists).²⁸ Similarly both Albert, and then the prince of Wales, toured the country, accepted positions as patrons, and generally made their presence felt in civil society. Undoubtedly this helped to keep a favourable image of the monarchy in the public eye, but it could not monopolize what the institution meant to people. Other recent works have accordingly examined the production, circulation, and transformation of the meanings of monarchy. This has been most notable in writings on Victoria, particularly those by Adrienne Munich, Margaret Homans, and most recently John Plunkett.²⁹ They have examined the ways in which the queen was encoded in various cultural forms from literature, painting, and sculpture to clothing, cartoons, and advertising. Even if the physical person of Victoria was rarely on display, her presence suffused culture in mediated forms. Perhaps the most striking point discussed by both Munich and Homans is whether Victoria was in control of the representations of monarchy, or whether she was subject to them. Homans points to the central paradox that Victoria was both powerful and powerless.³⁰ This is obviously true of her constitutional role, but was also true of the way she could both control and be controlled by cultural conventions. Gender is important here. In relation to Albert she was superior in constitutional terms, but inferior according to gender norms. Together they had to find ways of negotiating this paradox such that Victoria could be both a ruler and a woman, while Albert could be manly but not politically threatening.³¹ Throughout her reign, Victoria was an object of gendered and sexualized anxieties, evident for example in the gossip concerning her relations with John Brown after Albert's death.³² She was even constrained by assumptions about what a monarch should wear, because she often refused to wear regal clothes and jewellery. A shepherd boy who took her for an ordinary woman reportedly asked 'why don't she put on clothes so that folks would know her?', and Lord Roseberry once commented that the uniting symbol of the empire was a bonnet rather than a crown.³³

As a woman and as a queen, Victoria was often subjected to governing conventions that she opposed. She did, however, try to manipulate or resist many of them, and this may even help to account for the widespread support for her. In their years together, Victoria and Albert consciously cultivated a 'bourgeois' style in their public appearances, and also advertised this in photographs and paintings.³⁴ They exploited such media to present

²⁸ Prochaska, *Royal bounty*, pp. 103–5, and chs. 3–4 generally.

²⁹ Adrienne Munich, *Queen Victoria's secrets* (New York, 1996); Margaret Homans, *Royal representations: Queen Victoria and British culture, 1837–1876* (Chicago, 1998); Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich, eds., *Remaking Queen Victoria* (Cambridge, 1997); Plunkett, 'Queen Victoria'. See also Regenia Garnier's review article, 'Locating the Victorians', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 6 (2001), pp. 113–24.

³⁰ Homans, *Royal representations*, pp. xix–xxxvii.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–33; Munich, *Queen Victoria's secrets*, pp. 8–9, 42–4, 62–3; Stanley Weintraub, *Albert: uncrowned king* (London, 1997), pp. 128–9, 144, 165–7, 295–6, 337–9, 356; Plunkett, 'Queen Victoria', ch. 1.

³² Thompson, *Queen Victoria*, ch. 4; Munich, *Queen Victoria's secrets*, pp. 105–9.

³³ Munich, *Queen Victoria's secrets*, pp. 59, 71, and 71–8 more generally.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, chs. 2–3; Homans, *Royal representations*, ch. 1; Plunkett, 'Queen Victoria', chs. 2–3. For a critical approach to Albert see Cannadine, *Pleasures of the past*, pp. 12–21.

themselves as an ordinary loving couple devoted to their children.³⁵ The press offered personalized narratives of the royal family, which were often infused with religious themes. In the 1860s, for example, compassion and sentiment over the queen's loss were widely indulged. It was suggested that her grief brought her closer to the people's hearts, and that personal affection was the most significant reason for popular feeling towards her.³⁶ Victoria's presentation of herself as a perpetual widow also had the advantage of neutralizing sexualized criticisms, and reminding the public that Albert remained a royal presence even in death.³⁷ Similarly, it has been suggested that her adherence to simple and unfashionable clothing aided her appeal to diverse social groups.³⁸ In other words, Munich, Homans, and Plunkett have begun to open up the ways that the meanings of the queen were encoded, and how this may have affected the public understanding of her. It seems likely that the illusion of intimacy created by the mass media, and underscored by knowledge of its philanthropy, did more to generate and sustain interest in the monarchy than did state ceremonials, which by their nature were infrequent and impersonal.

II

In the rush to explore the monarchy's cultural authority, it can be tempting to forget about its political power. Everyone agrees that its power declined, but there is little consensus on when this was accomplished. Peter Hennessey and Vernon Bogdanor, for example, have shown that its formal residual powers, and its informal political influence, were felt in the twentieth century.³⁹ These were obviously stronger in the preceding century, but they are difficult to quantify. In part this is because the inherently contested nature of the unwritten constitution meant that there were always very different opinions about the legitimate powers of the institution. Victoria and Bagehot, for example, offered different visions of the constitution. But it is also because of the whiggish view that the institution's significance dramatically declined over the nineteenth century. Even the recent *Re-reading the constitution* has less to say on the subject than it might.⁴⁰ Eighteenth-century historians, by contrast, have been more interested in monarchical power, but their focus has usually been the mechanics of high politics. Recently, however, work on political ideology and popular constitutionalism in the late eighteenth century has begun to redress the balance, and it has important implications for understanding nineteenth-century patterns.

³⁵ These images may not bear much relation to reality. See David Cannadine, 'The last Hanoverian sovereign? The Victorian monarchy in historical perspective, 1688–1988', in A. L. Beier, D. Cannadine, and J. M. Rosenheim, eds., *The first modern society: essays in English history in honour of Lawrence Stone* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 146–51; Weintraub, *Albert*, pp. 284–6.

³⁶ Williams, *Contentious crown*, pp. 204, 215. See also Wolfe, *Great deaths*, pp. 194–200, 203–8, 222–42; Joanna Lewis, 'The death of David Livingstone: laying to rest a Victorian myth', paper given to *Locating the Victorians* conference, 12–15 July 2001.

³⁷ Munich, *Queen Victoria's secrets*, ch. 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 76–7.

³⁹ Bogdanor, *The monarchy and the constitution*; Hennessey, *The hidden wiring*, ch. 2. Also Frank Hardie, *The political influence of the British monarchy, 1868–1952* (London, 1970); Vernon Bogdanor, '1931 revisited: the constitutional aspects', Philip Williamson, '1931 revisited: the political realities', and Bogdanor, '1931 revisited: reply to Philip Williamson', *Twentieth Century British History*, 2 (1991), pp. 1–25, 328–43; Simon Heffer, *Power and place: the political consequences of King Edward VII* (London, 1998); Robert Rhodes James, *A spirit undaunted: the political role of George VI* (London, 1998).

⁴⁰ James Vernon, ed., *Re-reading the constitution: new narratives in the political history of England's long nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1996).

The power of the crown was perhaps the central concern of late eighteenth-century constitutional politics. J. C. D. Clark has argued that there was a revival of support for a strong monarchy during these revolutionary decades. While those firmly committed to theological politics did advance such views, their wider significance should not be overstated.⁴¹ Recent work on John Reeves, an ultra-loyalist, highlights the limits of constitutional discourse. In *Thoughts on the English government* (London, 1795), he launched a sustained attack on mixed constitutionalism by arguing that even if the Commons and the Lords were 'lopped off' legitimate government could go on. While he might have understood better than many the inherent difficulty of combining absolute sovereignty with mixed constitutionalism, his contemporaries were nevertheless horrified. He found himself prosecuted for sedition, and deserted by his political allies. Even in the 1790s, then, it was widely accepted that Britain possessed a mixed and balanced constitution in which king, Lords, and Commons governed together, and each prevented the corruption of the other.⁴² These pieties, however, could be used to legitimate a wide range of positions. It is now widely accepted that George III, rather than harbouring absolutist ambitions, wanted to restore the crown to its rightful constitutional position after decades of 'whig oligarchy'. James J. Sack has shown that he took little interest in the formal memorialization of Charles I, and persistently claimed to be governing constitutionally. He rightly thought that the ability to choose and dismiss ministers in pursuit of the national good did not contravene either the Bill of Rights or the Act of Settlement.⁴³ The main threat to constitutional balance, as he saw it, was the whig attempt to force both men and measures on him. Once the 1784 election seemed to show that 'public opinion' supported him in this, he more or less settled with ministers who held few ideological axes against monarchy, and continued to think (until he lost even that power) that his prerogatives were intact.

The whigs, of course, laid the blame for constitutional imbalance on the crown. In public they blamed ministers for leading the king astray, but in private they thought the king himself responsible. Although economical reform was their proposed solution, Philip Harling has shown that Pitt and his followers were more successful in implementing this agenda. It is a nice irony that ministers favoured because of their support for the crown did more to reduce its power than did those who attacked it.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the whigs persisted in their

⁴¹ See J. C. D. Clark, *English society, 1688–1832: ideology, social structure and political practice during the ancien régime* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 201–16; James E. Bradley, 'The Anglican pulpit, the social order, and the resurgence of toryism during the American revolution', John A. Phillips, 'The social calculus: deference and defiance in later Georgian England', and J. C. D. Clark, 'England's *ancien régime* as a confessional state', *Albion*, 21 (1989), pp. 361–88, 426–49, 450–74. More recently, Clark, *English society, 1660–1832: religion, ideology and politics during the ancien régime* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 239–56.

⁴² David Eastwood, 'John Reeves and the contested idea of the constitution', *British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 16 (1993), pp. 197–212; A. V. Beedell, 'John Reeves's prosecution for a seditious libel, 1795–1796: a study in political cynicism', *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), pp. 799–824; Morris, *British monarchy*, pp. 64–5, 75–7; John Barrell, *Imagining the king's death: figurative treason, fantasies of regicide, 1793–1796* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 622–42.

⁴³ James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to conservative: reaction and orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760–1832* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 123–4. But see Colley, *Britons*, p. 207. Also David Armitage, 'A patriot for whom? The afterlives of Bolingbroke's patriot king', *Journal of British Studies*, 36 (1997), pp. 397–418.

⁴⁴ Warren M. Elofson, 'The Rockingham whigs and the country tradition', *Parliamentary History*, 8 (1989), pp. 90–115; Philip Harling, *The waning of 'Old Corruption': the politics of economical reform in Britain, 1779–1846* (Oxford, 1996), chs. 3–5; Peter Jupp, *British politics on the eve of reform: the duke of Wellington's administration, 1828–1830* (Basingstoke, 1998), ch. 1.

criticisms: but did they think that the monarch himself remained too powerful, or did they think that it was the government's use of patronage that soured parliamentary independence?⁴⁵ Either way, after the 1832 Reform Act, it slowly became evident that the discourse of the mixed constitution no longer bore much relation to the practice. During the reform debates some writers openly worried about this. One argued that an extension of the franchise would create a 'pure democracy' in which the monarchy and aristocracy would be unable to counter-balance 'the whole power of the state' that resided in the Commons.⁴⁶ These fears misrepresented the purposes of the Act, which was intended to create an independent Commons rather than a 'pure democracy'. Nevertheless, reform changed the political landscape for both monarchs and governments, as William IV soon found out. In 1834 he had no success in creating a 'broad-bottom' coalition, and the Conservative ministry he installed led the king's government to its first electoral defeat in 1835. Interestingly, as G. H. L. Le May notes, Peel held to the traditional view that the king had the right to choose his own ministers, and that even as a minority they should be given a fair trial in parliament.⁴⁷ So while the king continued to believe that his powers remained unaltered in the mixed constitution, and Peel professed the same, it was increasingly apparent that the new mechanics of the constitution subjected government to parliament and ultimately the electorate.

It was this world of post-reform politics that Victoria inherited, and was to shape the approach that she and Albert took to politics. As Cannadine (amongst others) has suggested, they did not try to create a modern constitutional monarchy, but rather to salvage as much as they could for the institution from the reform settlement.⁴⁸ By the early 1840s, they both saw party as self-interested and anti-national, and thought that the best way to preserve the monarchy's powers was to be above party but not outside politics. It has been argued that the major influences on Albert were his uncle Leopold, king of the Belgians, and their mutual adviser Baron Stockmar. They believed that monarchical prerogative and executive rule had been dangerously eroded by the Reform Act, and hoped that Victoria and Albert would be able to turn the sovereign into the 'the permanent President of his Ministerial Council ... a permanent Premier, who takes rank above the temporary head of the Cabinet'.⁴⁹ Albert took this seriously. He believed that the monarch should take a share in all government decisions, recommend and veto appointments, and make dismissals when necessary. When the press caught wind of this project, it was unimpressed. Readers were reminded of Albert's German (and supposedly absolutist) background: the *London Pioneer*, for example, imperiously announced that the job of a monarch was 'to sign our papers when we have drawn them out ourselves'.⁵⁰ Albert's dreams came to nothing, but more work needs to be done on his conception of monarchy, and how it fits into wider constitutional beliefs of the 1840s and 50s. After all, Disraeli's ideas about a 'free monarchy' above faction were not unique. The Russophobe tory David Urquhart argued that the power of the legislative branch had become excessive, and that it allowed the dominant faction to take control of the executive via the cabinet. He recommended reinvigorating the privy council, with a

⁴⁵ For the former position, see Clark, *English society, 1660–1832*, pp. 253–6, and for the latter Jonathan Parry, *The rise and fall of liberal government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, 1993), pp. 73–8.

⁴⁶ Cited in Clark, *English society, 1660–1832*, p. 552.

⁴⁷ G. H. L. Le May, *The Victorian constitution* (London, 1979), pp. 35–40.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 3; Cannadine, 'The last Hanoverian sovereign?', pp. 139–46.

⁴⁹ Cited in Williams, *Contentious crown*, p. 97.

⁵⁰ Cited in *ibid.*

monarchical 'president' in firm control of his ministers. By the 1860s such ideas seemed out-of-touch, although some Conservatives occasionally tried to revive them.⁵¹

After Albert's death, Victoria stuck to traditional views about her prerogatives, but much of this was concealed from the public. As Homans has shown, Victoria's *Leaves from the journal of our life in the highlands* lacked many leaves concerning political affairs.⁵² In terms of the day-to-day business of government, she expected not just to be informed, but to be debated with, to express an opinion, and even to reject advice. She hated being kept in the dark, and disliked Palmerston for just that. She expected some control over cabinet appointments, and often worried about her closet being stormed. In 1880 she desperately tried to persuade Hartington or Granville to become prime minister: anything to keep Gladstone out. She also maintained the prerogative of dissolving parliament, and threatened to disrupt Gladstone's home rule bills by this expedient. Indeed, Michael Bentley has recently argued that from the 1870s Victoria held firm political views, and hoped that ministers like Disraeli and Salisbury would put them into effect.⁵³ There are also suggestions that she hoped the Conservatives would reinvigorate her political role. She preferred Disraeli's 1867 reform proposals to their earlier liberal incarnation because they reached down to a class 'who were infinitely more loyal than those just above them'.⁵⁴ Perhaps a 'tory democracy' might even enable an increase of prerogative? Victoria only seemed politically ineffectual to the public because of the men around her. Advisers like Ponsonby insisted that her interference would damage the monarchy, while politicians like Gladstone concealed her obstructionism for the same reason.⁵⁵ In high politics, the queen may not have seemed as irrelevant as she did to the public, and it would be useful to know more about how the culture of this elite world dealt with her, and even protected her from herself.

To take a broader focus, it remained the case that the inner workings of the constitution were not widely known throughout the 'long' nineteenth century. This fact could be exploited by commentators in a fashion similar to Bagehot. One writer suggested in 1792 that it was important to speak highly of royalty to the lowest classes because 'to talk to them of the constitution is vain: they can only respect the constitution in its true representative and visible emblem, the King's person'.⁵⁶ This again raises the paradox that concerned Bagehot: whom did the public think actually governed? The notion that the monarchy had extensive powers was woven into the mental lives of many ordinary people at the turn of the nineteenth century. Steve Poole and John Barrell have both shown how common was the belief in the power of the monarch, over and above that of the ministry.⁵⁷ Millenarians, for example, advised the prince regent to heed scripture and act for the good of his people, and it seems likely that religious beliefs about the centrality of the monarch remained common. Most strikingly, Poole highlights the importance of petitioning the throne, a constitutional privilege enshrined in the Bill of Rights. As late as 1854 Victoria was dealing with 800 personal petitions and begging letters a year.⁵⁸ In the early nineteenth century, petitioners

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 120, 128–33; Miles Taylor, 'The old radicalism and the new: David Urquhart and the politics of opposition, 1832–1867', in Eugenio F. Biagini and Alistair J. Reid, eds., *Currents of radicalism: popular radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 23–43; Plunkett, 'Queen Victoria', pp. 158–68. ⁵² Homans, *Royal representations*, pp. 131–46.

⁵³ Michael Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's world* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 73–6, 159–64. See also Hardie, *Political influence*, chs. 2–3. ⁵⁴ Cited in Homans, *Royal representations*, p. 128.

⁵⁵ Le May, *Victorian constitution*, pp. 58–60.

⁵⁶ Cited in Morris, *British monarchy*, p. 75.

⁵⁷ Steve Poole, *The politics of regicide, 1760–1850: troublesome subjects* (Manchester, 2000); Barrell, *Imagining the king's death*. ⁵⁸ Poole, *Politics of regicide*, p. 27 and ch. 2 more generally.

expected to hand over their grievances in person, and expected a personal response from the king. Poole argues that would-be regicides such as Margaret Nicholson, John Frith, and Dennis Collins were usually subjects who resorted to desperate measures only because the king had not responded to their petitions.⁵⁹ In other words, petitioners believed that the king himself could and would do something for them.

Petitioning was not restricted to those with private grievances. Reformers used mass petitions from the 1770s to draw attention to political and religious grievances, despite this being explicitly ruled out by the statute permitting petitioning.⁶⁰ They usually did this after unsuccessfully petitioning parliament. As Morris, Poole, and Barrell show, during the 1790s reformers often argued that parliament was dominated by 'evil' ministers who had usurped the powers of the crown. Reform societies saw lively debate about whether the cause of corruption was the crown or the ministry. Although scepticism was often expressed about the utility of petitioning the crown, there remained a feeling that if the king really knew the sufferings of his people he would immediately dismiss his ministers. One handbill suggested that the people would happily accept a patriot king as long as they were not oppressed. And if they were, reformers like Daniel Isaac Eaton and John Gale Jones warned the king that the contract between crown and people could be dissolved.⁶¹ After 1815 there was an increasing belief that petitioning parliament was pointless, and so reformers again turned to the crown. The government did its best to close down this constitutional loophole, telling petitioners that any necessary action would be taken by ministers. This only prompted cries that parliament was removing another right from the people. Only after his rejection of petitions, and his endorsement of the violent suppression of the St Peter's Field meeting ('Peterloo') in 1819, was the prince regent denounced as a 'sham father' and a tyrant.⁶² Victoria's accession was also exploited by reformers, with the London Working Men's Association addressing the queen, urging her to instruct her ministers to prepare a bill for universal suffrage, and to ignore the temptations of pomp and splendour. In 1848 there were calls for the queen to dismiss her ministers and call an election under the terms of the charter.⁶³ Interestingly, the *Northern Star* argued that the whigs and tories had together undermined a virtuous queen by passing unpopular measures which the 'ignorant and indiscriminating' then blamed her for.⁶⁴ Even reformers suggested that, for the 'masses', the queen really governed.

These lines of thought ascribed considerable power to the monarch. No doubt these arguments were often used more for rhetorical effect than from substantial conviction. Nevertheless, they highlight ambivalence about whether governing power lay with the monarch or with parliament. One pamphleteer had commented on this in 1803 while complaining about the extent of petitioning. It was not in the king's limited power, he argued, to relieve large numbers of people, despite the 'ignorant and misguided' who thought that their welfare and happiness 'depend solely on the sovereign'.⁶⁵ Poole argues that despite the attempt of government to assert its indistinguishability from the crown,

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 69, 90–1, 169–70.

⁶⁰ Peter Fraser, 'Public petitioning and parliament before 1832', *History*, 46 (1961), pp. 200–1. Also Colin Leys, 'Petitioning in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', *Political Studies*, 3 (1955), pp. 45–64; James E. Bradley, *Popular politics and the American revolution in England: petitions, the crown and public opinion* (Macon, 1986).

⁶¹ Morris, *British monarchy*, pp. 88–95; Poole, *Politics of regicide*, pp. 100–2; Barrell, *Imagining the king's death*, passim.

⁶² Poole, *Politics of regicide*, ch. 7.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 179, 198–200; Thompson, *Queen Victoria*, pp. 94–6; Frank Prochaska, *The republic of Britain, 1760–2000* (London, 2000), pp. 67–70.

⁶⁴ Cited in Poole, *Politics of regicide*, p. 189.

⁶⁵ Cited in ibid., p. 17.

'popular *mentalités* continued to imagine the Queen in a rarefied, patriotic and separate sphere of contractual beneficence, fouled by ensnarement in the stupefying web of government'.⁶⁶ Reformers certainly exploited this language to assert their loyalty, but many also seemed happy with a monarchy as long as it genuinely acted for 'the people'. Victoria and Albert may have wanted to take a larger role in politics, but the aims of radicals hardly featured on their agenda. The best way they could claim to care for their ordinary subjects was through charitable activity and by promoting a 'welfare monarchy'. But the fact that even radicals had difficulty in expelling the monarchy from their constitutional imaginings suggests how tenacious its grip was.

III

What then of critics of monarchy? Recent works by Antony Taylor and Frank Prochaska – as well as essays on *Republicanism in Victorian society* – have tried to reassess this old chestnut. Taylor, in particular, argues that rather than attending to 'cerebral republicanism', historians should focus on the much wider stream of 'anti-monarchy'.⁶⁷ This approach should be adopted with caution, however, because such sentiments often lambasted particular members of the monarchy for failing to live up to shared public values, and hardly equate with opposition to the institution of monarchy. Nevertheless, there are stock themes that have been used to criticize the royal family for over 200 years. The issue of the 'foreignness' of the royal family was a common complaint, and arose because of fears that national foreign policy was being undermined by the intimate relations between British and European royals.⁶⁸ Aside from this, attacks on the royal family can almost be reduced to two words: morality and money. These sentiments formed a basic tool-kit for anyone wishing to generate popular hostility to the royal family, and even pure republicans found it necessary to draw upon them.

In a period when evangelical values defined public life, the moral failings of the royal family proved too choice a plum to ignore. George III rejected the sexual dalliances of his predecessors in favour of sobriety and domesticity, but the private virtues of the father were contrasted with the public vices of the sons. Even the 'right-wing' press complained that the gambling and adultery of the princes damaged respect for the throne.⁶⁹ Victoria built up moral capital with Albert, but blew some of it with John Brown. Once again, however, it was the prince of Wales who was the real fly in the ointment. Although many conceded that he was a personable chap, his gambling, adultery, and hunting hardly chimed with the bourgeois style of his father, and raised fears that the heir to the throne was another 'filthy

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 201. See also James Vernon, *Politics and the people: a study in English political culture, c. 1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 319–20.

⁶⁷ Antony Taylor, *'Down with the crown': British anti-monarchism and debates about royalty since 1790* (London, 1999), p. 11–19; See also idem, 'Reynold's Newspaper, opposition to monarchy and the radical anti-jubilee: Britain's anti-monarchist tradition reconsidered', *Historical Research*, 68 (1995), pp. 318–37; idem, 'Republicanism reappraised: anti-monarchism and the English radical tradition, 1850–1872', in Vernon, ed., *Re-reading the constitution*, pp. 154–78; Antony Taylor, 'Medium and messages: republicanism's traditions and preoccupations' and '"The nauseating cult of the crown": republicanism, anti-monarchism and post-Chartist politics 1870–5', in David Nash and Antony Taylor, eds., *Republicanism in Victorian society* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 1–11, 51–70.

⁶⁸ Williams, *Contentious crown*, pp. 159–66; Taylor, *'Down with the crown'*, pp. 26, 38, 68–9.

⁶⁹ Sack, *From Jacobite to conservative*, pp. 132–3, 137–8.

fellow' like George IV.⁷⁰ As for the cost of the crown, this was a predictable line of attack from those obsessed with retrenchment. When the president of the United States seemed to require a mere £5,000 a year, the grants given to Victoria, and then Albert, and then their children, seemed excessive.⁷¹ This argument proved particularly fruitful during the queen's seemingly endless retirement from public duties, and prompted fears that she was hoarding wealth. The notorious pamphlet, *What does she do with it?* (1871), asked a puzzling, even worrying, question. In both cases these lines of attack could have been remedied without damage to the institution. All that was required was that the royal family showed a willingness to follow the public values of moral probity and financial prudence. In the former case, Victoria and Albert could not be wholly responsible for the behaviour of their eldest son. As for money, the royal family often complained that their critics deliberately ignored the range of public activities that they were engaged in.⁷² Also, Victoria insisted that her wealth was limited compared to the landed aristocracy who had 'no *status* or court to maintain'.⁷³ This was perhaps an unfortunate comparison. It was the belief that the monarchy was part of the wider problems of aristocratic vice and 'old corruption' that prompted these criticisms in the first place. It is interesting to speculate what would have happened if the monarchy had more explicitly rejected aristocratic culture. No doubt it would have been a popular move, which suggests that these criticisms were directed more at the behaviour of individuals rather than at the failings of the institution. In fact high-minded republicans at the time made exactly this point, arguing that opposition to the monarchy must have sound intellectual foundations.⁷⁴

In a celebrated remark, John Adams once commented that 'There is not a more unintelligible word in the English language than republicanism.' 'It may signify any thing, every thing, or nothing.'⁷⁵ There is more to this claim than meets the eye, because eighteenth-century definitions of the word were rather broader than those of the late twentieth century. The *res publica* or 'commonwealth' could mean little more than governing according to the public interest. It is the narrower definition that has received sustained attention. A republic was defined by the participation of the citizenry in government, which preserved their 'free state' from sliding into tyranny. Interestingly, in a recent discussion of this tradition, Quentin Skinner has preferred to label it a 'neo-Roman' theory of free states, rather than republicanism as such. Adherence to this view could, but need not, entail the rejection of a hereditary prince.⁷⁶ The key element was that laws were enacted with the consent of citizens via a representative body. For some civil war writers, such as Milton, the true republic could only exist once the monarchy and the House of Lords had been destroyed. Others, such as

⁷⁰ Williams, *Contentious crown*, p. 34; Taylor, 'Down with the crown', pp. 113–14. The prince of Wales did cultivate a more accessible and human style than his mother. See Lucy Brown, *Victorian news and newspapers* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 135–7; Prochaska, *Royal bounty*, pp. 119–24; Heffer, *Power and place*, passim.

⁷¹ Williams, *Contentious crown*, pp. 11–13, 19, 33; Taylor, 'Down with the crown', p. 47.

⁷² For examples see Prochaska, *Republic of Britain*, pp. 73–6, 83–4, 99–101. Also Arnstein, 'Queen Victoria opens parliament'; William M. Kuhn, 'Ceremony and politics: the British monarchy, 1871–1872' *Journal of British Studies*, 26 (1987), pp. 133–62, and idem, 'Queen Victoria's civil list: what did she do with it?', *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), pp. 645–65.

⁷³ Cited in Taylor, 'Down with the crown', p. 93.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91; Williams, *Contentious crown*, pp. 43–4.

⁷⁵ Cited in David Wootton, 'The republican tradition: from commonwealth to common sense', in idem, ed., *Republicanism, liberty and commercial society, 1649–1776* (Stanford, 1994), p. 1; Gordon S. Wood, *The creation of the American republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969), p. 48.

⁷⁶ Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 22 n. 67, 54 n. 174, 55 n. 176.

Harrington, thought that a landed aristocracy occupying the senate would add necessary wisdom. A further set of writers argued that hereditary monarchy was tolerable as long as there were safeguards against arbitrary power. So while 'republicanism' designated a self-governing community, it was potentially consistent with a hereditary prince.⁷⁷

This republican compromise with monarchy was central to whig argument in the eighteenth century, as the work of Caroline Robbins and J. G. A. Pocock showed some decades ago.⁷⁸ Maintaining a free state required shoring up the independence of the Commons from the insidious influence of the executive. While it was hoped that the 'virtue' of representatives would be enough, a resort to various mechanisms such as shorter parliaments and rotation of office might be necessary to prevent corruption. Until the final decades of the century, however, few thinkers thought the removal of the monarchy necessary or desirable. As Bridget Hill shows, even the circle of republican admirers surrounding Thomas Hollis and Catherine Macaulay in the 1760s and 70s were speculative rather than practical republicans, at least in the case of large states. They could look back and admire the events of the seventeenth century, but remained committed to the broad shape of the mixed constitution in their own time.⁷⁹ By the 1790s, however, newer forms of republicanism were entering the scene. As Richard Whatmore has recently shown, until this period few people thought real republicanism was possible in large commercial states.⁸⁰ In Britain, Thomas Paine was an exception.⁸¹ In *Common sense* he argued that the ideal of self-government through representation could not be achieved with a monarchy because it would always try to overawe the Commons. In *Rights of man*, the argument developed into an assault on the aristocratic social order which impeded true republicanism. Rather than prefiguring the welfare state, Paine's proposals attacked the mixed constitution and argued that a more equal and unified nation would promote wise government, commerce, and international peace.⁸² Whatmore comments that 'the modern republic was more powerful than a mixed state, because it combined the unified authority of absolute monarchy with the civic commitment of an ancient republic'.⁸³ What is striking, however, is that the monarchy itself was not really the issue. Sieyès also defended the 'modern republic', but he could not understand Paine's opposition to monarchy, because a system of representative government was quite compatible with a monarch as its chief magistrate. In other words the invention of the 'modern republic' in the late eighteenth century was primarily about creating unitary sovereignty and representative government rather than abolition of the monarchy.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–57. Also Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 221–53.

⁷⁸ Caroline Robbins, *The eighteenth-century commonwealthman: studies in the transmission, development, and circumstance of English liberal thought from the restoration of Charles II until the war with the thirteen colonies* (Cambridge, MA, 1959); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian moment: Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition* (Princeton, 1975).

⁷⁹ Bridget Hill, *The republican virago: the life and times of Catharine Macaulay, historian* (Oxford, 1992), ch. 8.

⁸⁰ Richard Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French revolution: an intellectual history of Jean-Baptiste Say's political economy* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 18–31.

⁸¹ Richard Whatmore, "'A gigantic manliness': Paine's republicanism in the 1790s", in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young, eds., *Economy, polity and society: British intellectual history, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 135–57. See also Gregory Claeys, *Thomas Paine: social and political thought* (London, 1989); Mark Philp, *Paine* (Oxford, 1989); D. M. Craig, 'Republicanism becoming conservative: Robert Southey and political argument in Britain, 1789–1817' (PhD thesis, Cambridge, 2000), pp. 8–29.

⁸² Whatmore, 'Paine's republicanism', pp. 140–1, 151.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 152. Also Biancamaria Fontana, ed., *The invention of the modern republic* (Cambridge, 1994).

Few British reformers in the 1790s went as far as Paine did in abandoning the mixed constitution. Most thought that republicanism was only possible in America, because Britain simply lacked the necessary social equality. Even a supporter of universal male suffrage such as John Cartwright was careful to state his support for king, Lords, and Commons, and the need to reform the 'old edifice' rather than destroy it.⁸⁵ These reformers generally thought that a major reform of the 'democratic' part of the constitution would be sufficient, and that a king was tolerable in such circumstances. Indeed, as Prochaska makes clear in *The republic of Britain*, while the language of the republic became more common in the nineteenth century, even the definitions offered by its supporters were hardly cutting edge. For Richard Carlile, a republic was any political system that consulted the public interest, and need not entail the abolition of the monarchy. Similarly for William Sherwin, a republican was anyone who promoted the public welfare, and might include 'kings, emperors, princes, dukes, earls, barons, commoners'.⁸⁶ Henry Hetherington's *Republican* of the early 1830s was more clear-cut. It demanded the 'Establishment of [a] Republic viz. Democracy by Representatives elected by Universal Suffrage'. It also wanted the extinction of all hereditary offices, titles, and distinctions and the abolition of primogeniture.⁸⁷ By making the Commons a democratic assembly it was ultimately thought possible to marginalize the political influence of the aristocracy, and then begin to dismantle their social order. In other words some radicals, at least, pursued the goals of Paine but disguised their arguments in the old language of the mixed constitution. The fact that the land and the Lords often dominated political argument suggests that some radicals and liberals were trying to introduce the essentials of Paine in a constitutionalist idiom. It follows that despite the occasional rhetoric, the monarchy was not a focal issue.

The recent debates about the nature of mid-nineteenth-century radicalism exemplify this. Some historians argue that continental ideas were influential, while others insist that radicalism remained tied to a whiggish framework.⁸⁸ Extreme figures such as George Harding, Ernest Jones, George Julian Harney, and William Linton did take some interest in continental republicanism, nationalism, and socialism, but they cannot be considered wholesale converts. The wider radical movement was relatively unimpressed. The Chartists who proposed 'social republicanism' did not adopt socialist class analysis, and usually remained focused on the question of land. Only a few proposed holding land as common property, and virtually no one advocated state planning of production. It seems that the 'social' elements in such discourse were primarily developments of indigenous intellectual traditions.⁸⁹ The key problem remained the aristocracy. Linton, for example, disliked the pageantry of monarchy but thought that the 'real royalty, is perhaps in the Lords and Commons'. Harney thought England was a republic in the sense of being governed by more than one person, but was a 'sham' because power was not lodged in the people.⁹⁰ In other words a real republic was about popular representation, and discussion usually focused on how this should fit into the inherited constitution. While in principle hereditary monarchy may have been disliked, it rarely took centre-stage in the analysis.

⁸⁵ F. D. Cartwright, ed., *The life and correspondence of Major Cartwright* (2 vols., London, 1826), I, p. 192.

⁸⁶ Prochaska, *Republic of Britain*, pp. 43–4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 57–8.

⁸⁸ Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, retrenchment and reform: popular liberalism in the age of Gladstone, 1860–1880* (Cambridge, 1992), ch. 1; Margot Finn, *After Chartism: class and nation in English radical politics, 1848–1874* (Cambridge, 1993); Miles Taylor, *The decline of British radicalism, 1847–1860* (Oxford, 1995).

⁸⁹ Taylor, *Decline of British radicalism*, pp. 113–14; Malcolm Chase, *The people's farm: English radical agrarianism, 1775–1840* (Oxford, 1988).

⁹⁰ Prochaska, *Republic of Britain*, pp. 87–9.

This context provides the best way to approach the republican 'movement' of the late 1860s and early 1870s. Its identification with republicanism was mainly opportunist, exploiting popular frustration at Victoria's absence, and her heir's immorality, as well as the interest in the new French republic. At its peak the republican clubs were mainly located in the west midlands and the north-east, but their total membership has been estimated at little more than 6,000.⁹¹ From the mid-1870s the movement rapidly declined. The issue of the monarchy was not even the prime concern of these republicans. All those involved, from working men to intellectuals, could agree that the civil list was excessive, and that a royal family was probably inappropriate to a modern society, but their real concern was the creation of a democratic republic in which the sovereign people elected deputies.⁹² A republican conference in Birmingham in 1873 focused on local government, land reform, and religious issues, but barely mentioned the monarchy. It passed a resolution to abolish the House of Lords but not the monarchy. Core members of the movement were usually ex-Chartists, and differences that emerged were usually over the *social* nature of this republic. Bradlaugh, for example, was criticized because, while he opposed the monopoly on land, he did not attack the financial monopoly.⁹³ The monarchy might be emblematic of the problems republicans raised, but it was not easily argued that it was the source.

As Prochaska shows, one common response to the republican movement was to suggest that its arguments were misguided. For the Liberal MP, Henry Labouchere, Britain was a republic with a hereditary president, and for the positivist writer, Frederic Harrison, it was an aristocratic republic with democratic machinery and a hereditary 'grand master of ceremonies'.⁹⁴ Many agreed that a self-governing republic had been achieved without massive changes to the unwritten constitution. For most reforming liberals the pressing challenges were the land and the Lords, rather than the monarchy. It was only extreme democratic republicans who disagreed. The Social Democratic Federation, for example, wanted to place 'supreme political power in the hands of the mass of the people'.⁹⁵ They opposed all aspects of political life which were not based on the elective principle, and they expected representatives to be tied closely to the people. There is evidence of a continuation of such themes in the early Labour party, but there was also the emergence of a Fabian stream that rejected this analysis. Democracy for them was about parliamentary management of the people's affairs rather than popular control over representatives. George Bernard Shaw was notoriously hostile to such a conception of democracy, claiming that government by the

⁹¹ Norbert J. Gossman, 'Republicanism in nineteenth century England', *International Review of Social History*, 7 (1962), p. 59. See also Edward Royle, *Radicals, secularists and republicans: popular freethought in Britain, 1866–1915* (Manchester, 1980), pp. 198–206; Biagini, *Liberty, retrenchment and reform*, pp. 61–83; Finn, *After Chartism*, ch. 7.

⁹² There was also a wider interest in how empire related to traditions of self-government. See Miles Taylor, 'Republics versus empires: Charles Dilke's republicanism reconsidered', and David Nash, 'Charles Bradlaugh, India and the many chameleon destinations of republicanism', in Nash and Taylor, eds., *Republicanism in Victorian society*, pp. 25–34, 106–24. Also Mark Francis, 'Review article: histories of Australian republicanism', *History of Political Thought*, 22 (2001), pp. 351–62.

⁹³ Prochaska, *Republic of Britain*, p. 126; Fergus A. D'Arcy, 'Charles Bradlaugh and the English republican movement, 1868–1878', *Historical Journal*, 25 (1982), pp. 369–70, 381–2.

⁹⁴ Prochaska, *Republic of Britain*, pp. 123–4, 137.

⁹⁵ Cited in Mark Bevir, 'Republicanism, socialism and democracy', in Nash and Taylor, eds., *Republicanism in Victorian society*, p. 81.

masses would lead to social intolerance and royal despotism.⁹⁶ In this sense the Fabians were only one group among many that were more interested in the effective operation of the state than its particular forms. Even labour leaders who disliked the monarchy, such as Keir Hardie, thought social reform the priority. While the Labour party was not as indifferent to constitutional matters as has sometimes been claimed, its prime concerns were the House of Lords and home rule.⁹⁷ The monarchy seemed relatively popular and politically neutral, and there was little to be gained in attacking it. Not everyone agreed that Britain was a ‘crowned republic’, and the secret influence of the monarchy did not vanish, but with the gradual eclipse of an older democratic republicanism there were fewer voices who could muster the intellectual tools to oppose it.

IV

In spite of the golden jubilee of Elizabeth II, the lustre of the monarchy seems to have faded a little. But, if anything, the public appetite for bulky biographies and glossy guides seems to have increased. Part of the appeal is the simple pleasure of a ‘good story’, but it also stems from a desire to peel back the stoical façade, and to see ‘what they are *really* like’.⁹⁸ This is not merely prurience, but rather a fascination with how ordinary humans cope with being ‘royal’, with all the constraints, privileges, and expectations it involves. It is hardly surprising that the public reacts by turns with empathy, *schadenfreude*, and anger. By contrast, academic historians betray a sort of puzzled fascination with this (while being aware of the potentially lucrative nature of the subject). Their questions have often concentrated on how the monarchy has survived into the modern period, and their answers usually revolve around its withdrawal from the political sphere, and its subsequent transformation into a symbolic representative of the nation. In considering the latter, it used to be tempting to use psychological or sociological models, but they now appear rather crude and elitist. A more appealing approach tries to uncover what the monarchy has meant to the public at different times, and what the mechanisms for this were. With varying degrees of success, the royal family has been able to draw upon the mass media to shape public understandings, but at the same time it has been acutely aware that it must appear to represent national values. This is a complex reciprocal process that historians are unlikely to recover fully. Nevertheless, paying attention to the evolution of royal images and narratives, and how they relate to shifting public values, may be the best way to account for both the sense of closeness between subjects and sovereign, but also the moments of defiance and outrage.

But are such histories enough? Many of the works discussed in this review have been written, in part, as contributions to the current debate on the future of the monarchy. This is a more obviously political question. While the monarchy’s political powers did decline in the

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 86; Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock, *Democratic ideas and the British labour movement, 1880–1914* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 176–7 and chs. 1–2 generally. Also Andrew Chadwick, *Augmenting democracy: political movements and constitutional reform during the rise of Labour, 1900–1924* (Aldershot, 1999).

⁹⁷ Ian Christopher Fletcher, “‘Some interesting survivals of a historic past?’: republicanism, monarchism and the militant Edwardian left”, in Nash and Taylor, eds., *Republicanism in Victorian society*, p. 91; Taylor, ‘*Down with the crown*’, pp. 203–4; Prochaska, *Republic of Britain*, p. 151. See also Ross McKibbin, ‘Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain?’, *English Historical Review*, 99 (1984), pp. 311–13. On Labour’s political and constitutional thought see Jose Harris, ‘Labour’s political and social thought’, and Miles Taylor, ‘Labour and the constitution’, in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane, and Nick Tiratsoo, eds., *Labour’s first century* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 8–45, 151–80. ⁹⁸ Nairn, *Enchanted glass*, ch. 1.

nineteenth century, this view can be overstated. Victoria wielded patronage and influence, and it would be useful to know more about how this affected the culture of high politics. Did most politicians think that she was a political irrelevance? More broadly, we need to understand popular views of royal power. Is it true that the public had abandoned any beliefs about the political role of the monarch by the early twentieth century?⁹⁹ Conversely, some historians have argued that Britain's republican tradition needs reclaiming. This review has suggested that while there were traditions of 'anti-monarchical' sentiment, they should be seen as a way of urging individuals to adhere to the public values that they were supposed to represent. As for pure republicans, they never formed a large group. Indeed, on closer inspection, it seems that their vision of a republic was more concerned with the nature of representation, and the power of the aristocracy, rather than with the monarchy. This also suggests an important concluding point. It is evident that the debate about the monarchy in the 1990s was really a debate about the state. This can sometimes be overlooked in works which see the monarchy as increasingly a constituent of national identity. The cultural history of 'the nation' is inevitably wrapped up with the political history of 'the state', even if the relationship between the two concepts has evolved over the last two centuries or so.¹⁰⁰ To focus on the monarchy, then, without considering the state is to miss the real point. Moreover, as the inventors of the 'modern republic' noted long ago, the modernization of the state need not entail the abolition of the monarchy, but it should include the formalization of the powers of all political institutions. Understanding why this has not yet happened is in part a story about the monarchy, but it cannot be detached from wider histories of the state.

⁹⁹ An unpublished survey in 1966 found that a majority thought that the queen would and should prevail in a difference of opinion with the prime minister. Robert Blake, 'The crown and politics in the twentieth century', in J. Murray-Brown, ed., *The monarchy and its future* (London, 1969), pp. 11–12.

¹⁰⁰ Taylor, 'Patriotism, history and the left'; Julia Stapleton, 'Political thought, elites, and the state in modern Britain', *Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), pp. 251–68; idem, 'Political thought and national identity in Britain, 1850–1950', in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young, eds., *History, religion, and culture: British intellectual history, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 245–69; Raymond Geuss, *History and illusion in politics* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 10–12.