

"On the Picture of the King Charles the First... written in Psalms" : devotion, commemoration and the micrographic portrait

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“*On the Picture of the King Charles the First . . . written
in Psalms*”: Devotion, Commemoration
and the Micrographic Portrait

Andrew Morrall

This essay examines a portrait drawing of King Charles I that has been in the Library of St. John’s College, Oxford, since at least 1662. The drawing is unusual in that the lines with which it is composed are made up of minutely written words, reported by early commentators to contain the *Psalms* of King David. The implicit relationship thus created between Charles I and the biblical king is compared to other often “curious” memorials to Charles associated with his posthumous cult, and especially to the popular literary “self portrait” of the martyred king, the *Eikon Basilike*. An analysis of a poem, written as a response to the portrait in 1665, reveals how the image functioned as an object of explicitly Protestant devotion and commemoration and offers insights into a broader mode of micrographic portraiture that was developed to allay concerns about idolatry unleashed by the Reformation. A chain of surviving responses to the portrait under different viewing conditions and altered cultural circumstances between the 1660s and the early eighteenth century further demonstrates an instability and contingency of meaning that attached to the image in the half-century after Charles’s execution. Finally, it is suggested that the interplay between image and script within the portrait – its character as word-picture – is symptomatic of a tendency within an evolving Protestant aesthetic to subject the visual to the written word, one which, over time, was to give rise to a larger form of cultural logocentrism.

What Is an Image in Medieval and Early Modern England? SPELL: Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature 34. Ed. Antoinina Bevan Zlatar and Olga Timofeeva. Tübingen: Narr, 2017. 211-39.



Figure 1: Carstian Luyckx (1623-c.1675), *Allegory of Charles I of England and Henrietta of France in a Vanitas Still Life*, oil on canvas, 57½ x 47¼ in. (146.1 x 120 cm). Birmingham Museum of Art, inv. no. 1988.28. (Photo: Courtesy Birmingham Museum of Art).

The execution of King Charles I of England on 30 January 1649 struck a powerful blow, at home and abroad, against a political establishment predicated upon the divine right of kings. For royalists in England, as for the European ruling classes, it was profoundly shocking – in a way that rocked their whole sense of world order – that a king, anointed by God, could be thus struck down. The profound mark that this event left

in the European consciousness well into the second half of the seventeenth century is registered in a number of European commemorative images most of which date from after the restoration of Charles's son, Charles II in 1660. A still life by the Dutch artist, Carstian Luyckx (1623-c.1675), for example, painted probably after Queen Henrietta Maria's death in 1669 (Figure 1), commemorates both king and queen by situating their printed images amidst stock vanitas symbols: the terrestrial globe suggests Charles's importance as a world leader, while the skull, with the jaw wrenched from the cranium, recalling Charles's own violent death, is crowned by a laurel wreath, symbol of glory and worldly accomplishment.¹ A second monument from this period is a remarkable equestrian statue made from chiselled iron by the Nuremberg ironworker, Gottfried Leygebe, between 1662 and 1667 (Figure 2). It shows Charles II of England as St. George. It was given as a gift by the Archduke of Brandenburg, Friedrich Wilhelm, to Johann Georg II of Saxony, as part of a diplomatic effort to garner support for an international league against France. While not strictly commemorative – it celebrates Charles II's purported military prowess as a potential ally of their league – one of its points of interest is that the dragon that he is slaying is excreting the head of the recently deposed Lord Protector, Richard Cromwell, whose father, Oliver, had made him heir to the Protectorate. The reference not just to the hydra-headed enemy of the European stage but also to the internal politics of England is enough to show how keenly the political events surrounding Charles I's execution and the eventual restoration of his heir were watched with interest and anxiety elsewhere in Europe (Falke 92-98). These technically and conceptually sophisticated examples also point to stark differences in the traditions and character of commemorative image-making between those of Continental Europe and mid-to-later seventeenth-century Britain, where, in the wake of the Reformation, of continuing religious discord, and the circumstances of the Civil War, the conditions for artistic training, production, and consumption were very much more limited.

In England, the celebration of the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 was remembered by “the public communal response, the visible joy” that it inspired (Knoppers 68). As Lois Potter has observed, it was also the first opportunity in ten years for public communal mourning of

¹ A number of other vanitas still-lives that include portraits of Charles I exist, including those by Luyckx's pupil, Simon Renard de Saint-André (ca. 1669-1677), and the Dutch painter, Edwaert Collier (1642-1708), who made something of a speciality of such royal commemorative portraits. See Minna Tuominen.



Figure 2: Gottfried Christian Leygebe, Equestrian Statuette of Charles II of England as St. George, 1660-1670, chiselled iron, 38 cm H., Grünes Gewölbe, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, inv. no. GG IX 2. (Photo: Jürgen Karpinski). Reproduced by kind permission.

Charles I (240-41). Indeed, the public reaction in the immediate aftermath of Charles I's execution in 1649 had been extremely muted. The crowds were dispersed immediately after the execution. The funeral was a modest affair, the funeral procession was conducted in the dark and the service was private and without an oration. The cost was 500 pounds as opposed to the 50,000 pounds expended for James I (Wedgwood 203-05; Potter 241; Gittings 227, 229-31).

The sense of private mourning that took the place of displays of public grief may explain the often "curious" nature of many memorials



Figure 3: William Shephard, Portrait of Thomas Killigrew, 1650, oil on canvas, 49 x 38 in. (1245 x 965 mm), National Portrait Gallery, inv. no. NPG 3795. (Photo: © National Portrait Gallery, London). Reproduced by kind permission.

to Charles I (Potter 241-42). These included images of the king concealed in rings or locketts, portrait miniatures or anamorphic portraits which resolved into a face only when seen reflected in a silver tube: works in other words that seem to have been designed for concealment and secret use. It seems that, even for the communities of royalists in exile, grief for the king was essentially a private experience. A portrait of the playwright and theatre manager, Thomas Killigrew, painted by William Shephard one year after the king's execution when Killigrew was in Venice as the political agent of the exiled Charles II (Figure 3), shows him in the traditional pose of the melancholic, sitting before a portrait of Charles on the wall behind, while on his desk, a copy of the *Eikon Basilike*, the purported collection of the king's own writings and favourite psalms and prayers, supports a pile of his own plays. Of course, this portrait makes a very *public* statement about Killigrew's private devotion

to his late monarch; indeed, in the 1660s, after the Restoration, it was engraved and even pasted as the frontispiece into at least one of his publications (Killigrew). Yet however much a show of private grief could become a public testament of loyalty, it surely reflects the kinds of private devotion that attached to the cult of the martyred king and which stimulated the production of small-scale portraits, miniatures, and other intimate kinds of memorial art.



Figure 4: Anon., Portrait of King Charles I of England, brown ink and metalpoint on parchment (with blue pigment and shell gold). St. John's College, Oxford. (Reproduced by permission of the President and Fellows of St. John's College, Oxford).

It is within this context that we may examine the fortunes of a single image that fell into this category (Figure 4). This is a portrait of King Charles I of England made in brown ink and metalpoint on parchment

(with possibly later additions of blue pigment and shell gold).² It has hung continuously in the Old Library of St John's College, Oxford, at least since 1662, the date of the first surviving reference to it. Within an oval frame is the inscription "Regno Christo Auspice" ("I reign under the auspices of Christ"). Another inscription below reads: "Serenissimus Potentissimusque Princeps Carolus, Dei Gratia, Britanniae Magnae, Franciae & Hiberniae Rex, Fidei Propugnator &." ("Most serene and all powerful ruler Charles, by the Grace of God, King of Great Britain, France and Scotland, Defender of the Faith"). The king is shown full face wearing a rich lace ruff and gorge. What distinguishes an otherwise fairly prosaic depiction is that the lines of the face, of the hair, the lace ruff and details of the costume, as well as the surrounding bands of script and the spandrels of the outer frame are made up of minutely written words, now all but indecipherable (Figure 5). From the earliest commentators onwards these miniscule sentences have been said to contain either the Book of Psalms, or by some, the Penitential Psalms. This form of picture-writing – or "micrography" – is an art form with an ancient pedigree that can be traced back to an ancient Jewish scribal tradition, in which minute script was written sometimes into abstract borders or initials or sometimes formed into shapes of objects. It reached a high level of development in late medieval Spain and by the sixteenth century the skill had emerged in Christian Northern Europe, where it was taken up by writing-masters, *modistes* and "penmen" (Sirat and Avrin; Rottau 158-59). Though today in a very faded condition, over the fifty or so years after its creation the St John's College portrait attracted a considerable number of comments from a variety of viewers. The range of responses allows us to gauge its reception over time and to measure the nature and status of a royal image in the context of changing ideas of theology and governance.

It is not known where or precisely when the portrait of Charles I was made and there are no records of how the college acquired it. The drawing appears to have been modelled on the print by Willem Jacobsz. Delff (1580-1638), printed in Holland before 1638 (the year of the artist's death), after the portrait by Daniel Mytens of 1628 in the Royal Collection. 1628 is therefore the earliest possible date *post quem* for the

² Conservation report by Jane Eagan, 22 June 2004, held in St John's College Library. I would like to acknowledge the generous assistance of Catherine Hilliard, former librarian of St John's College, for sharing her knowledge of the portrait with me, as well as the current librarian, Stewart Tilley and his colleagues for allowing me access to examine the portrait.



Figure 5: Anon., Portrait of King Charles I of England, brown ink and metalpoint on parchment, blue pigment and shell gold. St. John's College, Oxford. Detail of the lines of face and hair. (Photo: © the author).

drawing.³ John Evelyn, who visited the college library in July 1654, mentioned several of the college's curiosities, but not the portrait (Evelyn, *Diary* 3, 108).⁴ The earliest reference to the drawing comes in July 1662, in the journal of the Dutchman William Schellinks, which provides a useful description of its context:

On the 6th July we went to St John's College and delivered a letter of recommendation to a Mr John Tarbuke, a student, whom we found in the library. He and his companion received us courteously, showed us first the bibliotheca and then the new library, this with a very large and extremely interesting quadrangle, where a bronze statue stands about every gate, one of King Charles and the Queen his wife, lately built by the Archbishop of Can-

³ The connection was made by Catherine Hilliard.

⁴ "We went to *St. Johns*, saw the Library & the two *Skeletons*, which are finely clense'd, & put together: observable also are the store of Mathematical Instruments, all of them chiefly given by the late A: Bishop *Lawd*, who built here an handsome Quadrangle." John Evelyn, *Diary*, 12 July 1654.

terbury, William [Laud], beheaded in [1645] in the reign of the Protector. The new library or medical and mathematics school is a very long room, which has, as one enters, a large globe on either side and on the far end two skeletons, and a bust of the founder bishop in a niche. From a locked cabinet he showed us some books, Chinese, Arabic, and others, also a fairly large portrait of King Charles I, the hair, the beard, and the lace of his collar, all the psalms of David and some texts from the Holy scriptures, very subtly written with the pen. (95).

It is thus quite possible that the portrait was acquired at some point between 1654 and 1662. Conversely, a notice by Thomas Baskerville, writing in about 1680, described the portrait as “drawne by a penman as far as the bust, containing in the haire of his head, face, beard, & other clothing, the whole booke of Psalmes. Bishop Laud paid the Penman for this,” (193) which might equally reflect an accurate oral tradition within the college.

On the available evidence, therefore, it is not impossible that the drawing was acquired within Charles I's lifetime; and it leaves unclear how the genesis of the portrait may have related to the cult of King Charles the Martyr that followed his death. Nonetheless, even though the association of contemporary monarchs with King David was a fairly commonplace topos of royal encomium, it is perhaps of significance to the date of its creation and certainly to its later reception that the intimate association between Charles I and the Psalms of King David contained in the drawing was of particular importance to his posthumous cult. This was so in that most popular of all commemorative items, the literary “self portrait” of the martyred king, the *Eikon Basilike*. *The Pourtraicture of His Sacred Maiestie in His Solitudes and Sufferings* (Figure 6). This volume, today widely held to have been written largely by Charles and later shaped by the Presbyterian minister and later bishop of Exeter, John Gauden, contained the king's own apologia for his life and the events of his reign (Lacey 78-81). With its inclusion of his favourite prayers and psalms, it offered a kind of spiritual autobiography. It was being sold on the streets shortly after his execution and according to Francis Falconer Madan, went through 35 English editions in 1649 alone and within ten years had been translated into Latin, French, German, Dutch and Danish (164-66). Both the prayers and the meditations of the *Eikon Basilike* directly echo the Psalms of David, sometimes very closely, as, for instance, the prayer from Chapter 3 which closes with: “Then let the enemy persecute my soule, and tread my life to the ground, and lay mine Honour in the dust,” an almost direct quotation

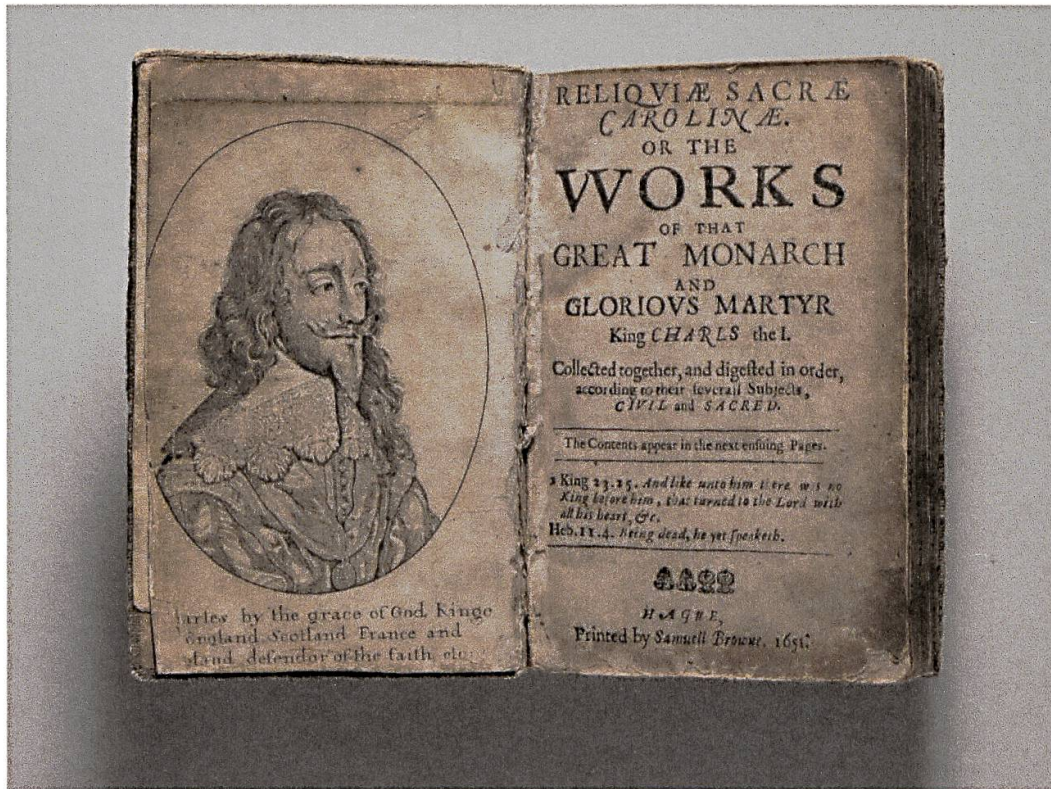


Figure 6: *Eikon Basilike*. The Pourtraiture of his sacred Maiestie in his solitudes and sufferings. London: Richard Royston, February, 1649. Frontispiece, $6\frac{7}{8} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$ in. (17.5 x 11.4 cm.), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 29.23.8. (Photo: © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

from Psalm 7:5.⁵ The author of the *Princely Pelican*, a defence of Charles's authorship of the *Eikon* (which his detractors immediately called into question), explained this choice of inspiration:

But such was Gods goodnesse ever to him [Charles], as his afflicted soul was never so much depressed, but by repairing to those Rivers of Divine Comfort, the *Psalmes of David*, he became infinitely refreshed: So as, the *burthen* of his *griefs* was nothing so heavy, as the *Solace* which that Book afforded him, was delightfully stored with all Spirituall Melody.

This it was which induced His Majesty to end every *Meditation* with a *Psalme*: that as the *former* lay open to the world his distressed Condition: so by acknowledgement of Gods mercy, and resignation of his will to his all-sufficient Mercy, he might returne Comfort to his thirsty Soul in the conclusion. (*Princely Pelican* 12; qtd. in Wheeler 126)

⁵ Compare with the King James Bible verse: "Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it; yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth, and lay mine honour in the dust. Selah."

The larger point, however, is the concinnity of intention and tone between the two. The narration of the *Eikon Basilike* follows David of the *Psalms* in presenting no justification of Charles's royal politics or actions, but asks that God judge him rather on the basis of his piety and sincerity of heart, in the spirit of David in Psalm 7:8: "judge me O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me." The success, indeed the extraordinary character of the *Eikon Basilike* in an age of divine kingship, as Elizabeth Skerpan Wheeler has shown, was that it presented not Charles the king, but Charles the man: pious, humanly limited and perplexed that his rule had gone so seriously wrong (127).

As the structure and tone of the *Eikon Basilike* make clear, Charles's relationship with the Psalms of King David went well beyond mere spiritual reliance or inspiration: it extended to a form of self-identification. As such, and for the light it can throw upon the intentions of the St John's portrait, it is worth considering what kinds of preconditions made possible the *Eikon's* remarkable subjectivity, its unprecedented public baring of a king's soul even to the lowest of his subjects. In part, the quasi-religious mystique that surrounded the contemporary idea of kingship worked effectively to elide, without anachronism, the thoughts and actions of a contemporary monarch with those of a great seer and king of the Old Testament. But another important conditioning factor that made such public self-identification seemingly natural was the position the King David of the Psalms had come to hold within Protestant thought. In an important sense, a strategy was already in play within the Reformation theology of the Psalms that could act as a template for Charles and his supporters – and which formed the basis of the *Eikon Basilike*. As Yvonne Sherwood has demonstrated, the rare instance of a subjective, first person voice within the Bible that the Psalms of David offered, was enthusiastically taken up by the reformers (647-48). Luther proclaimed the book of Psalms the "very hidden treasure of [the] hearts' feelings," that recorded the voice, soul and spirit of David (*Psalms* 7). The Psalms, he continued, "give thee not only the outward David, but, more expressively still, the inner David; and that more descriptively than he could do it himself, if he were to talk with you face to face" (*Psalms* 7; Sherwood 648). The importance of this for Luther lay in the contrast with

other scriptures and histories, [where] the works and bodily exercises only of the saints are described: you have very few histories which give you the words, expressions, and sighs of the saints, which are the indexes of the state of their mind. (6)

And again, “I had much rather hear David or any such eminent saint speak, than merely see the works or exercises of his body; so, much rather would I know [. . .] the faith” (*Psalms* 8; Sherwood 648). By thus framing the biblical references to David within the doctrine of Faith versus Works, Luther seemed implicitly to be offering a contrast between the David of the Psalms and the David of the *Books of Samuel* and *Chronicles*, where the prophet’s actions and deeds, presented in the third person, appear in a much more compromised light, most famously, in 2 Samuel 11, where he commits adultery (with Bathsheba) and murder (Uriah).

From Luther onwards, Reformed interpreters leaned more heavily towards the penitent David of the Psalms – particularly Psalm 51 – as a means literally to justify the flawed, worldly actions of the David of the Book of Samuel. They found in the contrast between spirit and works thus set up, an exemplary explication of the Protestant doctrines of original sin and of justification by Faith not Works, which, by focusing on David’s *spirit* within the Psalms, could relegate David’s *actions* to the external letter.

On this basis, the Psalms became an established model for spiritual autobiography and a resource for many Protestants in which to find connections with their own spiritual lives and consciences. Calvin cast Psalm 51 in this confessional light when he declared that it was a demonstration of how “we may lawfully and freely lay bare before [God] the infirmities which a sense of shame prevents our confessing to men” (*Commentary on the Psalms* i, p.viii). And similar sentiments were echoed in the French reformer Theodore Beza’s popular explanation of Psalm 51, in Anthony Gilby’s 1580 English translation:

What a rare example is this of so great a king and so worthy a Prophet, that laying aside all humane respect, either of his royall Majesty or private reputation, did not onely suffer the story of that his crime to be put in writing, but even he him selfe wrote a perpetuall testimony of his acknowledging of the fact, thereby to satisfie the whole Church. (127; Sherwood 650)

The *Eikon Basilike* in effect performed the same confessional function for the actual King Charles. In so doing it fell into what was, by the mid-seventeenth century, a well-recognized Protestant model of penitential spiritual practice. It allowed the king to appeal to God to judge him not on the basis of his deeds but on his sincerity, on his integrity of heart, a position that exonerated him, like King David, from human laws and judgement.



Figure 7: Portrait Miniature of Charles I, English, ca. 1650-70, satin worked with silk and metal thread, 6¼ x 4½ in. (15.9 x 11.4 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 39.13.7. (Photo: © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

The intimacy offered by the *Eikon*'s textual portrait was replicated in a number of small-scale commemorative portraits that were made after the King's execution and on into the Restoration era. One example, the size of a limned portrait miniature, is actually made of embroidery of an extremely professional quality (Figure 7). A number of surviving versions of this pattern suggest some kind of commercial, serial manufacture. The model for the portrait is the engraved likeness from the *Eikon Basilike* and the link with the cult of the martyr is made further explicit by the embroidered inscription, a quotation from Psalm 18, which thus associates Charles with King David by putting the words of the psalmist into Charles's mouth: "Deus meus est Rypis mea Psa: 18." The reference is to Psalm 18: 2-3, which invokes God's protection against his enemies:

The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and

my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.

While the uncertain dating of the St John's portrait drawing leaves the original intention to elide the figure of King Charles I with King David of the Psalms unclear, there is vivid evidence to show that the portrait became closely associated with the cult of the martyred king in the years following his execution. This comes in a surviving response to it in the form of a poem, written in 1655 by a scholar of the college and future divine, Jeremiah Wells (1646-1679): "*On the Picture of King Charles The First, In St John's Colledge Library, Oxon, Written in the Psalms.*" Such a response is not surprising, emanating from a college closely associated with the royalist cause and whose chief recent benefactor and president had been Archbishop Laud, the discredited first minister of Charles I (Loveman).⁶ The poem exists in two versions, the first in an unpublished manuscript (Bodleian f. 363) and a second, slightly amended, in Wells's anonymously published collection, *Poems upon Divers Occasions*, printed in 1667.

The poem in effect instructs the reader how to approach the image. The first lines of the first, manuscript, version give the gist of the author's ecstatic, highly affective, approach: "Wash thy impure feet, and trembling trace/ With wary steps this more than sacred place (Bodleian f. 363). This was amended in the published version to:

With double reverence we approach, to look,
 On what's at once a Picture and a Book:
 Nor think it Superstition to adore
 A King made Now more sacred then Before.
 [. . .]
 The Object here's Majestick and Divine,
 Divinity does Majesty enshrine,
 Each adds to th' others luster: such a thing
 Befits the Image of a Saint and King.
 Each Lineament o' th' Face contains a Prayer,
 Phylact'ries fill the place of common Hair;
 Which circling their belov'd Defender spread
 Like a True Glory round his Royall Head.

⁶ Jeremiah Wells graduated with a BA in 1669 and became a clergyman with a London living in West Hanningfield. In 1670, he married Deb Willett, the former mistress of Samuel Pepys, whose patronage he later sought in obtaining a position as a navy chaplain and, later, in procuring a lectureship at All Hallows, Barking.

His Mouth with Precepts fill'd bespeaks our Ear,
 Summons That Sence too, bids us See and Hear,
 Both are Divine: Blest *Moses* thus did see
 At once the Tables and the Deity:
 Thus Faith by Seeing comes: Religion thus
 Enamours, when to th' Sences obvious:
 This sight would worke a Miracle on the Rout:
 Make them at once both Loyall and Devout. (1-3)

From the thread of verbal paradoxes, of speaking pictures and texts heard, that runs as an extended conceit throughout the body of the poem and which serves to mirror the word-portrait's intrinsic visual character, there emerges a sustained meditation upon the idea of divinely-inspired kingship. As in an earlier tradition of religious devotional art, the act of contemplating the saintly royal image is revealed as one of full-blown religious reverence: one that can see the radiance of divinity in a thinly-drawn face and the glory of sainthood ("belov'd Defender") in an aureole of words around his head. Remarkably, for an aspiring Protestant divine, Wells explicitly commends the act of seeing as a means to piety and faith. Yet it is the nature of the image as word-picture that, as we shall see, allows him to do so.

The image in fact falls within an established category of micrographic portraiture that became particularly associated with a Protestant commemorative tradition. A number of similar portraits of reformers and heroes of the Reformation, notably of Martin Luther and John Calvin, survive from the sixteenth century onwards.⁷ The best known practitioners of the genre were members of the Austrian-Bavarian calligrapher-family, Püchler (Roth 174-80). Johann Michael Püchler the Younger, working in Augsburg, produced a number of variants of micrographic portraits of Luther and Calvin as well as other Protestant divines (Figures 8 and 9). These images dealt directly with a problem identified by Margaret Aston regarding the status of portrait images of Protestant reformers that they themselves had commissioned. Aston cited the Scottish Jesuit, John Hay in 1580, who put it thus:

Quhy sall the images of our lord Iesus Christ, of his glorious mother, and of the Apostles, be computed unleasome and unclene, contraire the accustomed use of the kirk, and the images of Calvin, Beza, Jupiter and Venus, quhilks some of yow hes in your cabinets, be compted lawful? (187)

⁷ For similar issues around early portraits of Luther, see R. W. Scribner 14-36.



Figure 8: Johann Michael Püchler the Younger, Micrographic Portrait of Martin Luther, engraving, 16.7 x 11.2 cm, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Inv. No. 295-125. (Photo © bpk / Kupferstichkabinett, SMB./ Jörg P. Anders / Art Resource, NY). Reproduced by kind permission.

It was a good point. The Protestant divine, Christopher Hales, who had spent time in Zurich getting to know the leaders of the Swiss reform movement, commissioned six portraits of Zurich reformers from his friend Rudolf Gualter in 1550 after his return home, only to be gently rebuffed because of “the danger that in future a window might be opened to idolatry” as well as the fear of imputations of vainglory in the sitters (Aston 187). Those fears were partly assuaged by adopting older compositional formulae: the portraits of reformers were classically in



Figure 9: Johann Michael Püchler the Younger, Micrographic Portrait of John Calvin, engraving, 14.4 x 10.7 cm, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Inv. No. 293-125. (Photo © bpk / Kupferstichkabinett, SMB / Jörg P. Anders / Art Resource, NY). Reproduced by kind permission.

half length, holding or pointing to a scriptural page or gesturing in the act of preaching. They were portrayed, in other words, not as themselves, but as mouthpieces of the scriptural Word. As Margaret Aston put it, “The glory of their memory was not therefore their own, but God’s” (191). Aston found this bookish tradition continued in the sepulchral effigies of English divines, who continued even in death to stare out of their marble niches, mouths frozen in mid-speech, one hand on book, the other raised in explication. Püchler’s micrographic portraits of Luther and Calvin followed this same tradition, based as they were on conventional portrait models by Cranach and after Beza’s *Icones* (Geneva 1580), respectively. They, too, show the Reformers either holding a book or preaching. But Püchler’s images go further to offset the fear of idolatry, not merely by the obvious conceit that they are literally

fashioned from words; they also explicitly combined commemoration – giving the events of their subject’s life (contained in the area of their hair) – and an exhortatory function, by including quotations from the book of Wisdom and Jesus Sirach (situated in their clothing). These discrete intentions are explicitly stated in the larger, more easily legible scripts of the surround. Well-known proverbs or mottos associated with the reformer, clearly written below the image, invite the spectator-reader to contemplation and devotion.

Püchler produced further micrographic portraits of the Wittenberg theologians Johann Friedrich Mayer and Philip Jacob Spenler, made sometime between 1686 and 1701, as well as a portrait of the Protestant King and General, Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden (Figure 10). The intrepid traveller, Lady Celia Fiennes, who visited St John’s College library in 1694 and recorded seeing the portrait of King Charles I, also mentioned seeing a portrait of Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden “whose portraiture,” she reported, “is represented to the eye in writeing alsoe and contains his whole Life and prowess” (Fiennes 59). Though this particular copy has been lost, it was very probably a version of the same micrographic portrait by Püchler, which also records the events of his life – again in his hair – while his armour contains quotations from the Book of Wisdom, thereby equating him with the wisdom of King Solomon (Roth 176).⁸ At the least, Celia Fiennes’s comments suggest the possibility of a link between the portrait of King Charles and this Protestant European micrographic tradition.

The appeal of this kind of imagery to Protestant divines was the same as that enjoyed by the Jewish scribes who had originally developed the genre: it permitted a form of figuration that resisted the suspicion of idolatry or image worship by the virtue of it also being text. Returning to Jeremiah Wells’s contemplation of the King Charles portrait, he was careful, as a good Protestant, to offset just such an accusation at the very outset of his poem when he wrote:

With double reverence we approach, to look,
On what’s at once a Picture and a Book:

⁸ Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Inv No. 304-125. The larger band inscription reads: “Wahre und Eigentliche Controfactur weylant des Aller...Durchleüchtigsten Fürsten undt Herrn Gustavi Adolphi der Schweeden Göthen und Wenden Königs, Grosfürsten aus finnlandt etc: etc:etc: /Pro Christo. Et Ecclesia /Indisen figures haaren ist der seeligste lebenslauf gustavi geschriben, In den harnisch aber besten Sprüch ex libro Sapient.” See Michael Roth 176.

Nor think it Superstition to adore
 A King made Now more sacred then Before.
 [...]
 The Object here's Majestick and Divine,
 Divinity does Majesty enshrine,
 Each adds to th' others luster: such a thing
 Befits the Image of a Saint and King. (1-2)

Wells's "enshrined luster" suggests another possible meaning intended in the use of the technique. As Leila Avrin has written of Jewish micrographic images, "the scribe was intent on inducing the cerebral condition of alexia, the inability to read the written words . . . the letters seem to melt before one's eyes" (Sirat and Avrin 51). In the Charles I portrait, too, the letters, even in their original, less faded state, would have been barely legible and, as Wells's poem implies, would have functioned more as a vehicle of mystical identification and contemplation. The physical words, in their illegibility, act as a material signifier of an invisible divinity. The various near-contemporary accounts of the portrait of Charles I



Figure 10: Johann Michael Püchler the Younger, Micrographic Portrait of Gustavus Adolfus, King of Sweden, engraving, 20 x 14.7 cm, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Inv. No. 304-125. (Photo © bpk / Kupferstichkabinett, SMB / Volker-H. Schneider/Art Resource, NY). Reproduced by kind permission.

indicate considerable confusion as to what is actually there: Samuel Sorbière asserts that they are in Latin (42-43); Robert Plot, in his *Natural History of Oxfordshire* of 1677 described the image as “the written *Picture* of his Majesty King *Charles* the first . . . taking up the whole Book of *Psalms* in the *English* tongue” (276).⁹ Celia Fiennes thought it was the *Book of Common Prayer* (58). Yet the intention of the text to an ecstatic like Wells seems to have been less legibility than mystical identification between the saintly King and his biblical exemplar. Invisible in plain sight, the Divine Word acts like a genetic code, deeply embedded within the person of the King, its presence clearly palpable, but its substance obscure. The aura of Majesty, as Wells explains, is thereby augmented by the Divine. Indeed, Wells’s ecstatic, almost mystical reactions to the image are striking. An early reader, struck by the lines: “The mad Phanatick, seeing these thy rayes,/ Struck with the light, falls on his face, and prays,” was prompted to write “fulsom” in the margin (6).¹⁰

At another point in his poem, Wells addresses Charles directly, reinforcing and deepening Robert Plot’s understanding of the image as a “written picture.” He analyzes the artist’s use of this word-image duality in claiming that:

The Artist has Design’d, not Drawn thee here,
Nor is’t a Picture, but a Character:
The Embleme of thy Mind; Posteritie
May hence learn what Thou wert, & They should be. (5-6)

This leads Wells to further reaches of hyperbole. Art, he says has covered Charles “with a double veil”: “But well has Art, lest our weak Sight should fail, / Cover’d our *Moses* with a double veil” (3). Having grasped the first, outer veil of gross outward appearance,

Then may’st thou draw the Outer Veil, and pry
Into this image of Divinity . . .
[which is] . . . Lodged in Thee [Charles].
Thy Count’nance does with innate luster shine

⁹ “The written *Picture* of his Majesty King *Charles* the first, in *St. Johns College* Library, taking up the whole Book of *Psalms* in the *English* tongue; and the written *Picture* of King *James*, and the *Arms of England* (as now born) taking up the whole Book of *Psalms* in the *Latin*, in the hands of Mr. *Moorhead* Rector of *Bucknel*, are pretty *curiosities*, and much admired” (Plot 267-77).

¹⁰ Annotated in the margin of the Huntingdon Library Copy, available on *Early English Books Online*, accessed 21 July 2016.

Whose every Feature's, like Thy Selfe, Divine.
 The lines and Thee so like in ev'ry Thing,
 That while we see the Psalms, we read the King.
 Inabled thus Thy self, Thy self to inspire,
 To be at once the Sacrifice and Fire.
 Glorious Without, thy Bodie's ev'ry part
 Is fashion'd, as thy Soul, after God's heart.
 Those Parcels of Religion we adore
 In Others, are Completed Here, and More,
 That Impresse of the Deity in the Mind
 Of Others stamp't, we in Thy Body find.
 Thy frame so like Divine in ev'ry part,
 That thou do not Resemble it, but Art. (4-5)

The sense of the sheer revelatory power of the word inhering within the image is combined with a self-consciousness about the role of "Art," which for Wells lies essentially in its conceit, in its emblem-like role of concealing and revealing, and its ability, as he goes on to say, of "[i]mproving both our Piety and Wit" (7).

In the years following Wells's poem of 1665, the balance between divinity and artful conceit appears to have shifted in favour of the latter as the portrait came to be regarded less as an icon of sacred memory than as a curiosity. This was in part by virtue of its being housed within a famous library, so that it became one of the sights on a well-worn tourist itinerary of Oxford. Changes in the way it was displayed may also have contributed to this. The library, first completed by Archbishop Laud in 1633, was, when Wells was there, only sparsely furnished. Samuel Sorbière, who recorded his visit to St John's library in 1664, described it thus:

I saw a Fine Library. . . and a large Wainscotted Gallery, wherein I found no other Ornament than the Picture of King *Charles* I, which they took out of a Cover, and shewed here for a Rarity, because the Hair of his Head was made up of Scripture Lines, wrought wonderfully small, and more particularly of the Psalms of *David* in *Latin*. . . ." (42-43)

A report of a visit by Cosimo III, the grand Duke of Tuscany, in 1669, states that "His Highness viewed the library, and the gallery, which, except the cieling, possesses no ornament but a portrait, drawn with a pen, of King Charles I [which is shewn as a curiosity]" (Colvin and Thomas 19). It might have been the sparse conditions of the simply wainscoted rooms in the 1660s, where the drawing was shown in severe isolation, that prompted the opening lines of the unpublished manuscript version

of Wells's poem, quoted above ("Wash thy impure feet, and trembling trace/ With wary steps this more than sacred place" [Bodleian f. 363.]) A drawing by Dr John Speed (1595-1640), son of the cartographer and a fellow of the college, shows another feature of this otherwise plain setting: two articulated skeletons or "anatomies," standing on either side of the (north) doorway in pedestal cases (Colvin 74). They had been presented to the college by Speed himself perhaps inspired by similar skeletons, holding moralizing scrolls, which were a feature of the anatomical theatre at Leiden, where they were used for medical demonstrations.

This can be compared to the viewing conditions experienced by Celia Fiennes, thirty years later, in 1694, by which time the Gallery had seemingly accrued more the character of a cabinet of curiosities. She described seeing it thus:

The inner [library] has severall Anatomy's in cases, and some other Curiosity of Shells Stone Bristol Diamonds Skins of fish and beasts; here they have the great Curiosity much spoken off, King Charles the Firsts Picture, the whole lines of face band garment to the shoulders and arms and garter is all written hand and contains the whole Common prayer, itt's very small the caracter but where a straight line is you may read a word or two; there is another of Gustaus Adolphus whose portraiture is represented to the eye in writing alsoe and contains his whole Life and prowess; there is alsoe the Lords prayer and ten Commandments in the compass of a crown piece, there are also severall books all of writeing on vellum leaves, and one book written in the Chinese Caractor on the Indian barks off trees, there is alsoe a Book of the Genealogies of the kings since the Conquest to King Charles the Second with the severall Coates all gilded very fresh till the two or three last . . . ; there was alsoe a fine Prayer book or Mass book off Q. Marias; this was in the new part of the Library which was neatly wanscoated and adorned. (58-59)

By 1694, the portrait seems long since to have lost its commemorative or religious lustre and become a rarity amid other rarities.

It was Joseph Addison who definitively completed the process of emptying the portrait of its religious aura and mystique in an essay on "false wit" in the *Spectator*, no. 58, dated Monday 7 May, 1711, in which he invoked:

. . . that famous Picture of King *Charles* the First, which has the whole book of *Psalms* written in the Lines of the Face and the Hair of the Head. When I was last at *Oxford* I perused one of the Whiskers; and was reading the other, but could not go so far in it as I would have done, by reason of the Impa-

tience of my Friends and Fellow-Travellers, who all of them pressed to see such a Piece of Curiosity. (I 247-8)

For all his apparent insouciant amusement of tone, Addison was concerned that certain kinds of wit, such as he found embodied in this portrait's conceit, were essentially destructive in that they encouraged habits of mind that subordinated rational thought to what he regarded – in this case – as religious enthusiasm and obscurantism. Addison implied that in making words subject and subordinate to the form of the portrait – and he likewise criticized similar kinds of conceit such as verses forming the shape of eggs or altars or wings [aka George Herbert's "Easter Wings"] – their meaning was obscured and made secondary. Such kinds of pattern poetry were the works of "a kind of Painter, or at least a Designer," in which "The Poetry was to contract or dilate itself according to the Mould in which it was cast" (247). As Elizabeth Kraft has pointed out, this kind of "false wit" was inextricably linked in Addison's – the Whig's – mind to politics. She noted how Addison twice connected the Stuart kings to such examples: the portrait of Charles I, which begins his discussion of examples of patterned poetry; and James I, who is cited as a "tolerable" punster (631-32). For Addison, puns, acrostics, and other forms of word play were further forms of false wit to be deplored.

Addison used the vehicle of the *Spectator* to advocate – via "true wit" – values of rationality, good sense and propriety. In his critique he was making a case for clarity of thought and expression, values he deemed essential to the proper workings of a modern society. For this to happen, as Kraft puts it, "[t]he body of language, like the body of the king, has to be demystified through a subordination of image to meaning, sign to significance, word to thought" (634). In the chain of responses to the portrait of Charles I, therefore, from an object of devout contemplation of a martyr-king, to a "Great Curiosity," to finally, the object of an attack in the defence of reason and enlightened government, one sees in the essential instability and contingency of meaning that attached to a royal image a reflection of the cultural turn that England underwent in the half century after Charles's execution.

Conclusion

What general conclusions, if any, about the nature of the image in mid-to-later seventeenth-century England can be drawn from this very singular portrait? On one hand, Wells's reactions to it demonstrate the per-

sistence of habits of contemplation and of mystical identification within a Protestant culture that had belonged to a pre-Reformation tradition of religious devotional art and practice. Such kinds of private viewing certainly continued after the Reformation, migrating from cult images of saints to other genres, such as the portraits of reformers noted above, as well as, in England, to the small and intimate format of the secular portrait miniature (Fumerton). Yet even while it drew upon this tradition, the St John's portrait, in its structural use of words, in its essentially textual character, can be seen as a symptom of a broader characteristic of an emerging Protestant aesthetic that was born of a reformed uneasiness with visual representation: namely, an increasing tendency of visual imagery to be dependent upon text. The portrait of Charles I fits within a reformed understanding of a new relationship between images and texts, which raised the verbal over the visual, and which, crucially, came to *see the one in terms of the other*. Paradoxically, Charles's features exist only by virtue of their being literally formed out of words. Indeed, the work's success as "Art" turns on this fact. This new relationship was ultimately grounded in theological notions about experiencing the Divine and about the nature and limits of representation that had been formulated by the early reformers. It is exemplified in Bullinger's agreement with Calvin in the *Zweite Helvetische Bekenntnis* of 1566, to prohibit all representations of God the Father (as well as Christ) on the grounds that:

as God is invisible, omnipresent and eternal spirit, he cannot be represented by any image or picture [. . .]; neither did Christ assume human form in order to serve as a model for sculptors and painters. Instead, in order to instruct men in faith and about divine things and their salvation, the Lord commanded that the Bible be preached (Mk 16, 15).¹¹

Luther, too, in regarding images as *adiaphora*, as things indifferent to worship or salvation, had declared that "Christendom will not be known by sight, but by faith. And faith has to do with things not seen" (Luther, *Werke* vii 14; cited in Koerner 210). For the reformers, the sacred was

¹¹ "Weil nun Gott unsichtbarer Geist und unendlichen Wesens ist, kann er auch nicht durch irgendeine Kunst oder ein Bild dargestellt werden; [. . .] Denn obschon Christus menschliches Wesen angenommen hat, hat er das nicht deshalb getan, um Bildhauern und Malern als Modell zu dienen. Er hat gesagt, er sei nicht gekommen, Gesetz und Propheten aufzulösen (Matt. 5.7). [. . .] Damit aber die Menschen im Glauben unterweisen und über Göttliche Dinge und ihre Seligkeit belehrt würden, hat der Herr befohlen, das Evangelium zu predigen (Mk 16, 15), aber nicht zu malen oder mit Malerei das Volk zu lehren" Bullinger 1-5.

invisible. Images by their nature could not possess or communicate the inherently ungraspable nature of the divine; at best, they could serve as material pointers to something ineffable beyond themselves or as moral lessons in scriptural history. Words, by contrast, being immaterial, were deemed inherently closer to an invisible God. As Carlos Eire put it, the Word of God was allowed to “stand as an image of the invisible reality of the spiritual dimension” (316). Wells’s grasp of this concept is clear in his evocation of the stream of divine words emanating from within Charles’s persona, filling his face and hair, encircling his head, halo-like, in a blaze of “True Glory” (“Divinity does Majesty enshrine”).

Out of a theological understanding, where the visual, and with it, notions of visuality, bent to the tyranny of the word, there developed a further notion, widely adopted across the larger visual culture, that visual images might be deemed legitimate only in so far as they were reducible to language. This is implicit in the popularity of image-word combinations in prints, broadsheets, and, paradigmatically, in the genre of the emblem, which became so predominant a form of devotional and educational mnemonics in Protestant practice. For the emblem, in its classic tri-partite form of motto, image and epigrammatic explanation, was not strictly a picture so much as a visual sign. Not being properly pictorial, the emblem provided, rather, a kind of matrix of visual-verbal material that proved a highly effective tool in religious teaching as well as in more broadly educational endeavours. It is significant that Wells placed the St John’s College portrait within this category of works, even though it is the palpable, material presence of the words rather than their literal meaning that is at play in the image. In his formulation, the image is “designed, not Drawn”; it is not “a Picture, but a Character,” an “Embleme” of Charles’ mind.” The element of “wit” in evidence – the clever conceit, the self-conscious artfulness in the play of image and text – so admired by Wells and as strongly condemned as “false” by Addison – was also an essential characteristic of the emblem; indeed, by the 1650s, these qualities had become a necessary component of the period idea of Art, aptly mirrored in Wells’s own poetic style.

In its ability to elicit such a range of responses, from Wells’s mystical contemplation before a quasi-religious monument, to the tourists’ wonderment at the micrographer’s “curious” skill, to Addison’s ironical but emphatic censure, it is clear that the word-portrait of King Charles stood at the cusp of two distinct traditions, of the religious and secular, the mystical and rational, the affective and coolly detached. It was a juncture where one could glimpse the increasing ascendancy of a new Protestant cultural paradigm, which instituted in effect a new ontology

of the visual, and which helped engender over time a decisive shift from image to word within western cultural consciousness and led ultimately to a largely logo-centric culture, whose assumptions about the nature of the image live on into the present day.

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