

Chapter 20 : "Monarchists of the Heart"

*Give the audience some good moments,
and don't bore them the rest of the time.*
Howard Hawks, film director

The term "monarchists of the heart" means "everyday royalists" (=that they support the royal house, but lack political agenda). Reasons vary: (1) State utility. (2) Ideology. (3) Culture. (4) The persons. There are also "everyday republicans" who, with the same motives, disassociate themselves from the royal house by ignoring it.

Point 1 covers the involvement of the Royal Family in societal issues, the system of rewards, representation, etc., that is to say the part of the Royal Family's activities not specified in the Torekov-compromise. Point 2 covers the role of the royals as citizens and role models. Point 3 covers the Royal House's "museum" activities with emphasis on buildings and public art; academies with an emphasis on the Swedish Academy & the Nobel Prize; the court culture with emphasis on clothes, jewellery & rituals. Point 4 covers the "royal brand", press policy and personal contacts.

Research in the field has focused on that easiest study: (1) The effect of well defined events, mainly scandals & rituals. (2) The impact of continuous information is more difficult to get a grip on, but there are a lot of content analyses of postcards, picture magazines, "at-home features", intimate biographies & the like. There seems to be a consensus that the popularity of the monarchy is due to it satisfying a demand, rather than it being created (=propaganda). This is also King Carl Gustaf's interpretation. He assumes that the popularity of the monarchy depends on how well it adapts to the people's somewhat unclear expectations. "For Sweden - In Our time", as he puts it.

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A. MONARCHISM : PERSONALITY CULT

From the research in chapter 19, it can be concluded that there are groups with very strong feelings for the British Royal Family. The sociologist Ann Rowbottom has conducted a series of studies on how it expresses itself.¹ The conclusion is that the manifestations could best be described as a secular religion or a personality cult. In particular, the reactions at the death of Diana Spencer fit well with the description.²

The closest thing to a corresponding Swedish personality cult is the intense interest in the Haga princesses, Gustaf VI's wife the Crown Princess Margareta & Prince Carl's daughter Queen Astrid of Belgium.

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Margaret of Connaught (1882-1920)

During her pregnancy in 1919/20, Margaret contracted multiple infections. The last infection ended in general blood poisoning & cardiac arrest. Death was completely

¹ Rowbottom 1989, 1994, 1998 & 2002.

² Bennet & Rowbottom 2009.

unexpected & her husband shocked. It was in the morning. He spent the whole day walking like an automaton from one church to another. A number of people, including Gustaf V & politician, cried openly. Although Margaret was not very well known as a person, she was also mourned by the population, and a fundraising in her memory gathered more than one million. The memorial words of the Linnaeus Society are congenial: "As the frost night mercilessly and without ulterior meaning ravages the most beautiful flowers, so in a few hours the disease broke down Princess Margaret. But she lives in the hearts of her people, and for the generations to come she shall live in her books of the flowers of Sofiero.

In 1981 the journalist Staffan Tjerneld declared her popularity a fantasy in the spirit of the time - immature, more child than adult & possible to interpret at your discretion: "She was the new woman. Not a suffragette though. But a woman who at one and the same time was a young girl, a good mother, a happy wife and who despite her love for home had her eyes open to other values in life, to art and nature." Or as the journalist Jaya experienced her in an interview in 1912: "She is a real mother for her children, a playful, happy, sensible mother, but during the hours, you are her guest, you time and time again think: So young she is. It is both looks and conduct. Nothing girly, but a soft and female charm, deflecting the mischief in her eyes."

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Astrid of Sweden (1905-1935)

August 29, 1935, Astrid died in a car accident. Since it was a single accident, there speculation about the cause. Astrid seems to have somehow distracted her husband King Leopold of Belgium who drove off the road and collided with a tree. The car was seriously damaged. The driver who was temporarily in the back seat injured his leg. Leopold was knocked unconscious. Astrid was thrown head first into tree and died of her injury. A chapel was later built at the place.

Her legacy was mixed. It was about her immaturity & intellectual flaws, about her beauty, noble background, goodwill & heart, about her image of perfect daughter, mother, wife, daughter-in-law & queen and finally about that something strange that had briefly visited the country. She seems to have fulfilled a collective fantasy about two incompatible qualities in the same person: both frail & perfect, both bourgeois & royal, of the earth & of the myth. The religious parallels were quite obvious and there were candles in front of her photographs as if she were the Madonna. From a political point of view, she appears to have been simultaneously so known (in appearance) and at the same time so uncontroversial that she fitted a national symbol. Belgium was a marriage of reason between two peoples and something was needed to unite them. Already upon her arrival in the country she was considered exotic - that is to say, belong to a fairy tale rather than Sweden - and that trend was exploited after her death so that through images, memorials, historical parallels & hagiographies she was transformed into a purely Belgian icon. She is best known for her photographs by Robert Marchand. He left behind 87 heavily retouched portraits of the family & of her alone which all seem to have been arranged by Astrid herself. Her best angle was en face. The profile pictures were a little stiff. The official portraits of her in formal dress were even stiffer. It was no longer Astrid, but someone from the John Bauer forest, barely discernible in the clair-obscur.

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B. MONARCHISM : EVERYDAY ROJALISM

There are three British studies that try to get to the bottom of what people in general - by which is meant workers & lower middle class - really thought of their royals (Hoggart 1957; Blumler 1971; Billig 1992). The studies have in common a popular interest in the royals' life situation, a desire that they set a good example & that they do not make themselves too important. The old-fashioned rituals are claimed to be an asset, but in reality seem to conflict with more recent demand for social utility & democratic popularity: "It is as if in matters royal [the English] want to 'have their cake and eat it too'. They would like the Queen to be at one and the same time grand and common, extraordinary and ordinary, grave and informal, mysterious and accessible, royal and democratic."³ In the literature it is often described as a conflict between the religious roots of the monarchy, a later-day bourgeois ideal and a modern celebrity culture. Blumler reports a factor analysis as proof.

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C. MONARCHISM : INDOCTRINATION

In 1953, the professor of psychology Percy Black published a book "The Mystique of Modern Monarchy", in which he attempts to give the English monarchy a social psychological explanation - the charisma of the regents, the utility of the form of government, the power of tradition, the people's need for spectacle, fantasy & submission, the national pride of the people, patriotism & loyalty - and ends with the acceptance of the British monarchy being learned rather than innate and that its possible utility over time has devolved into spectacle & fantasy. It was a kind of cult behaviour. "The only mystery about it, is its thriving survival right into the midst of our modern age."

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In 1974, Fred I Greenstein et al. published a study on how the education system affected children's perception of the monarchy "The Child's Conception of the Queen and the Prime Minister." The answer to that was that they were not taught the subject. The level of knowledge was therefore low & dependent on what they intercepted:

"There is no consensus in Britain that the schools should be involved in the teaching of civics and contemporary history, at least before the later secondary-school years. The vacuum is filled by casual absorption of impressions from family, peers and the mass media, by untutored juvenile reasoning about how things 'must' work, and undoubtedly by the conduct of government, such as the Queen's reference to 'my government', her opening of Parliament, and royal assent to bills."⁴

The attitude towards the Queen was positive, but her importance was exaggerated. The knowledge became better with age, but working-class children always had the most unrealistic picture. The Swedish monarchy debate bears witness: Full of outdated facts, urban legends & fixed ideas.

³ Blumler m fl. 1971: s. 158.

⁴ Greenstein et al. 1974: s. 272.

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D. MONARCHISM : PSYCHOLOGY

In 1936, journalist Kingsley Martin published an essay called "The Evolution of Popular Monarchy", which was expanded to a book called "The Magic of Monarchy" (updated in 1962). The royal family, through their unique upbringing, were unusually poor politicians. They could only command. One effect of their staying out of politics was that they devoted themselves to what they were best at, which was to represent.

The representation had unexpected effects. The increased exposure made them popular, but also piqued curiosity their their person. In order to avoid criticism – there was always someone irritated at something - all royals with a sense of self-preservation learned that silence & conventions were golden. They were known in appearance and for their virtues, but not as persons. Martin illustrates their situation with the public's vehement reaction to Edward VIII's relationship with the divorced American Mrs. Wallis Simpson. Martin's conclusion was that, unlike Victoria, Edward VII & George V he had been unable to adapt to the "system": To keep his private self & his policy secret, so that the propaganda, the media and the popular imagination could interpret him according to their own discretion.

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The reason for the royals' popularity was discussed in both the popular press and in research. It was not the case that the royals & the people lived in the same circumstances. Why did the people even care. One approach was the essay by psychoanalyst Ernest Jones "The Psychology of the Constitutional Monarchy" (1936), which assumed that their private life was sufficient to explain it. It was not that the royals lived in their own crystal sphere, but they had the same love & family concerns and so on as the rest of the population, even though these took place on a larger stage:

“When the sophisticated pass cynical comments on the remarkable interest the majority of people take in the minute doings of royalty, and still more of the cardinal events of their births, loves and deaths, they are often denying and repudiating a hidden part of their nature rather than giving evidence of having understood and transcended it. With the others there is no trace of envy, since the illustrious personages are in their imagination their actual selves, their brother or sister, father or mother. In the august stateliness and ceremonial pomp their secret day-dreams are at last gratified, and for a moment they are released from the inevitable sordidness and harassing exigencies of mundane existence. When to this is added the innumerable "homely touches" of royalty, the proof that they are of the same flesh as their subjects, together with signs of personal interest and sympathy with their lot, loyalty is infused with affection. And a constitutional monarch, so guarded from adverse criticism, has to have a pretty bad character before a arouses any, An autocratic monarch may be selfish and cruel, but kindness and friendliness are the natural appurtenances of a constitutional monarch.

...

The important point of this consideration is that the institution of limited monarchy, so far from being simply a method of dealing simply with potentially troublesome monarchs, is really an index of highly civilised relation subsisting between rulers and

ruled, It could not survive, or even exist, except in a state that has attained the highest level of civilisation, where reasoned persuasion and amicable consent have displaced force as a method of argument.”⁵

Jones' argument about constitutional monarchy as a family package has been adopted in Sweden by the monarchist professor emeritus Stig Strömholm.

”If you measure a man's influence on his environment in terms of total influence, not through the weight of individual decisions, it can well be argued, that King Gustaf VI Adolf ”meant more” to his contemporaries than more powerful predecessors. ... [We have a] need for *permanence* - of a bit of duration, a bit of connection between then and now, and between now and a foreseeable future. The monarchy and its symbols are [as opposed to politics] *societal factors*. ... It is in the rhythm of births, weddings and deaths that most people still measure their lives. Our symbols of security must have the quality of us and them sharing destiny. The monarchy provides, disrespectfully put, a whole 'family package', inviting us to share and identify with events in their private lives that resemble our own. Politicians cannot fulfil this role, and we should be grateful to them for not trying. [They are anonymous & ephemeral and should remain so.]”⁶

When people upon Gustaf VI's death expressed loss was it according to Strömholm not an irrational feeling but a necessary part of modern society. You could of course object to the way of the weeklies to foster this feeling but not to their goal. The monarchy was by its very nature conservative and in Sweden filled an essential role where creating something new meant destroying something old. I quote a British source:

It is the first step in sociological wisdom, to recognize that the major advances in civilisation are processes which all but wreck the societies in which they occur: like unto an arrow in the hand of a child. The art of free society consists first in the maintenance of the symbolic code; and secondly in fearlessness of revision, to secure that the code serves those purposes which satisfy an enlightened reason. Those societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision, must ultimately decay either from anarchy, or from the slow atrophy of a life stifled by useless shadows.⁷

Not surprisingly, there is a republican counter-literature that those who appreciate such depictions must be mentally handicapped. Not even the royal house's sympathizers seem all that kosher with the monarchy as a symbol for God knows what. Carl Gustaf's mentor Stig Ramel expressed it as “Our need for royalty resembles our need for Christmas trees.”

⁵ Jones 1936.

⁶ Strömholm 1973: ss. 443,445,449

⁷ Whitehead 1927: s. 88.

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