



*Monarchy, Print Culture, and
Reverence in Early Modern
England: Picturing Royal Subjects*

Stephanie E. Koscak

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Stephanie E. Koscak's debut monograph explores how the growing marketplace of print in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England impacted contemporary cultures of loyalism and ideas about monarchy (8). Instead of arguing that commercialised print culture led to the decay of sacred kingship, *Monarchy, Print Culture, and Reverence* proposes that commercialised representations of rulers became central to the experience and performance of loyalty and enhanced the cohesion between sovereign and subject (11–12). Koscak develops her argument by focusing upon how “ordinary subjects incorporated representations of rulers into quotidian activities and domestic spaces, where they carried a dynamic range of meanings and often-progressive associations” (13). Koscak embraces a wide range of visual and material sources, primarily cheaply available items including portrait prints, engraved playing cards, coronation ceramics, and contemporary satire, which she navigates with adept methodological diversity. In so doing, Koscak aspires to displace traditional narratives on early modern loyalism by approaching the subject from the perspective of the general populace, which opposes the elitist perspective taken by Hannah Smith in her 2006 study, *Georgian Monarchy: Politics and Culture, 1714-1760*.

The introductory chapter comprehensively details Koscak's central argument, primary research questions, and the existent scholarship within which this text is situated. This is succeeded by six elaborately-detailed chapters and a succinct conclusion. Chapter One examines how the *Eikon Basilike* (1649) appropriated graphic and discursive elements from contemporary emblem books, which enabled readers to correctly interpret and contemplate the meaning behind the text (48). In contrast, Chapter Two examines representations of Charles I and Charles II in anamorphic prints, a complex medium that, according to Koscak, disciplined the act of looking at the monarch by subjecting the spectator to their gaze and reiterated the awe and mystery of the monarch in question (114– 115). Meanwhile, Chapter Three, which was partially published in *Restoration* in 2018, explores how cheap print was a significant political tool that strengthened early modern conspiratorial thinking by contributing to the public's awareness of partisan scheming, an elaboration of the argument put forth by Noah Millstone in his 2016 study, *Manuscript Circulation and the Invention of Politics in Early Stuart England* (136).

The subsequent three chapters focus on the period following the end of prepublication censorship in 1695. Koscak discusses how early modern print espoused loyalism through the illusion of access and intimacy with the royal family in Chapter Four, which provides captivating insight into the origins of modern-day notions of celebrity and royalism (191). Meanwhile, Chapter Five focuses upon the intersection between royalism and what Koscak terms urban signage (i.e. shop signs) in eighteenth-century London, a medium that she argues is routinely overlooked despite its significance in regal visual culture (244). Koscak then focuses on how the expansion of the graphic print trade stimulated, influenced, and

responded to a public desire to possess and collect royal pictures in Chapter Six (286); this chapter is important to the overall argument, yet it is the weakest in terms of its conviction. Meanwhile, the concluding chapter is rather unremarkable, although it succinctly reflects upon the timeframe covered within the text to bring the narrative to a close.

A prominent strength of *Monarchy, Print Culture, and Reverence* is the clarity of argument and the facility with which Koscak constructs her narrative, which is further augmented by the text's methodological diversity. For example, the author effortlessly dissects the intricate mathematical components of anamorphic print in Chapter Two, in addition to engaging with psychological theorems on cognition and memory to enhance her analysis of *Eikon Basilike* in Chapter One. Koscak also engages with a plethora of fascinating ephemeral and textual sources. For instance, she offers the compelling argument that urban signage was a source of metropolitan knowledge, enabling the streets of London to become a "museum to the lower sorts of people" (272–273). Furthermore, Koscak's deduction extends the remit of Nicola Smith's argument in *The Royal Image and the English People* (2006) that monuments were the most immediate form of loyalism in the public arena. Meanwhile, Koscak's examination of playing card packs provides intimate insight into how the general populace engaged with high politics, where players were encouraged to imagine themselves at the centre of the conspiracies narrated by the cards (169). Due to the extensive use of visual sources within this study, she circumnavigates the risks posed by early modern literacy barriers.

However, the coverage of secondary literature is a distinct weakness of the text: the majority of scholarly texts discussed derive from the late-twentieth-century or early-2000s. This limitation is pertinent in Chapter One when Koscak engages with analyses from Roy Strong's *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals, 1450-1650* (1984) and Jerzy Limon's *The Masque of Stuart Culture* (1990) to discuss how Caroline-era masques extolled Charles I's reign as a triumph of virtue, an ideology that was re-articulated in *Eikon Basilike* (69). However, one would have preferred some interaction with Bonnie Lander-Johnson's recent seminal study, *Chastity in Early Stuart Literature and Culture* (2015), which offered refreshing insight into the promotion of the Caroline court's chastity.

Nonetheless, Koscak's study is an extension of Jason McElligott's argument in *Royalism, Print and Censorship in Revolutionary England* (2007) that print was an agent of social stability and cohesion rather than a mere medium for radicalism. However, McElligott added that, because pamphlet authors appealed to the hearts rather than the heads of the readers, scholars should avoid approaching early modern print from an intellectual framework. Despite this, Koscak utilises the contemporary ideologies of Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes to support her analysis of *Eikon Basilike* in Chapter One, despite their limited, elitist readership. Meanwhile, Koscak's text pairs nicely with Tim Somers's recent monograph, *Ephemeral Print Culture in Early Modern England: Sociability, Politics, and Collecting* (2021). Somers primarily focused on the social, intellectual, and political factors involved in the collection of early modern print, which amends the weaknesses associated with Chapter Six of Koscak's text. Somers also incorporated balladry into his study, an insightful medium that Koscak overlooks in her work.

Despite this, Koscak's monograph is a fairly accessible read: she opts for endnotes rather than footnotes; avoids lengthy discussions of scholarly debates; and condenses complex topics into comprehensive explanations. However, the narrative is sometimes tangential and verbose. For instance, the discussion of liturgical emotion concerning the reception of *Eikon Basilike* in Chapter One could have been articulated in one paragraph rather than across several. Similarly, the discussion of print collection in Chapter Six is dominated by a lengthy description of the practices of japanning and glass prints, which overshadows the argument that these practices were significant to women's self-fashioning and political belonging.

Nevertheless, *Monarchy, Print Culture, and Reverence* is an elaborate, thorough, and thought-provoking text on early modern print and cultures of loyalism. Koscak has successfully distinguished herself by reiterating the benefits of methodological diversity and in the promotion of cheap, mass print to illustrate the complexity of regal visual culture, for academic and lay audiences alike.

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