

Pierce, Helen. "Text and Image: William Marshall's Frontispiece to the *Eikon Basilike* (1649)." *Censorship Moments: Reading Texts in the History of Censorship and Freedom of Expression*. Ed. Geoff Kemp. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 79–86. Textual Moments in the History of Political Thought. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 6 May 2019. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472593078.ch-011>>.

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Text and Image: William Marshall's Frontispiece to the *Eikon Basilike* (1649)

Helen Pierce



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On the morning of 30 January 1649, King Charles I of England stepped out of the Banqueting House on London's Whitehall and onto a hastily assembled scaffold dominated by the executioner's block. One onlooker reported that as the king's head was separated from his body, 'there was such a grone by the thousands then present as I never heard before and desire I may never hear

again'; subsequent images of the scene produced in print and paint show members of the crowd weeping and fainting, as others reach forwards to salvage drops of the king's blood as precious relics.¹

The shaping of Charles's posthumous reputation as royal martyr may appear to have originated with the relic-hunters at the scaffold, but both its catalyst and its fuel was the publication of a book. Copies of *Eikon Basilike: The Pourtraicture of His Sacred Majesty in His Solitudes and Sufferings* were circulating in the capital within days of the regicide.² A collection of prayers, reflections and meditations attributed to the king, the *Eikon Basilike* assumed an immediate and essential role in the development of a distinct royalist hagiography. It was a work the regicide regime would have liked not to exist but also one that was difficult to suppress, for practical and also political reasons. This chapter considers the artist William Marshall's (literally) iconic visual frontispiece as a crucial part of the process of royal myth-making and suggestive of the problem of censoring 'sacred majesty'.³

The book was first published in octavo format by Richard Royston, a prolific bookseller and long-standing freeman of the Stationers Company. Royston was also a staunch supporter of the crown who had spent time in the Fleet Prison in 1645 for the publication of an anti-Parliamentarian satire. Attempts were initially made by the Commonwealth's Council of State to curb Royston's printing and distribution of the *Eikon Basilike*: according to Dr William Denton, Charles's former physician and a later advocate of liberty of the press, 'the King's booke ... hath beene much suppressed, the first printer and impression plundered and presses broken'.⁴ The Council's actions, however, were ineffective. They merely led Royston to publish the *Eikon Basilike* on a press beyond the city boundaries, from which 2,000 copies were swiftly distributed within days of the regicide, followed by two further reprints of Royston's edition. By the middle of March 1649, three new editions in the smaller, duodecimo size had been printed from the private press of William Dugard, headmaster of the Merchant Taylors School in London. Dugard was arrested and questioned by the Committee for Scandalous Pamphlets, but he was not dissuaded from issuing a further edition upon his release. Later editions published in the second half of 1649 for John Williams were smaller still, with the introduction of miniature versions of the king's book developing a relationship between text and reader that was increasingly personal, private and portable.⁵

The interventions by the Council of State did little to curb the enthusiasm of royalist publicists. A total of thirty-five English editions of the *Eikon Basilike*

were published in 1649, with their number supplemented by English and foreign-language versions printed at Cork, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Paris, Rouen and Copenhagen, serving the interests of both supportive residents and royalist exiles. Further foreign imprints were issued during the 1650s, together with four editions printed in England with a false imprint of The Hague. In 1649, it was not until 20 September that earlier parliamentary printing orders were strengthened by an 'Act Against Unlicensed and Scandalous Books and Pamphlets, and for Better Regulating of Printing', too late to prevent the multiplying editions of the king's book. It is significant that this Act, albeit belatedly, makes reference to 'any scandalous or libellous Books, Pamphlets, Papers or Pictures whatsoever' and to the seizing of both unlicensed printing presses and rolling presses, which were used for the publishing of letterpress and engraved images respectively; the *Eikon Basilike's* own scandalous content encompassed both text and image.⁶

The role and status of the *Eikon Basilike* has its own historiography within broader debates over politics, print and propaganda. Less attention, however, has been paid to how the pictorial elements of this book, particularly its frontispiece, contributed to the novel fashioning of Charles I as an English martyr-king, whose image invited continuing reverence by both his supporters and, uneasily, by his critics.

The title *Eikon Basilike* translates from the Greek as 'the royal portrait', highlighting the importance of the visual in promoting a particular posthumous identity for the king. The book's frontispiece was a vital tool in this public relations campaign. An illustrated frontispiece will usually look to draw the reader in and then provide that reader with an initial means of engaging with the accompanying text by encapsulating its broader narrative or messages within an image. That of the *Eikon Basilike* is no exception.

The illustration promotes Charles as a martyr-king through a combination of emblematic, mnemonic devices. The king is placed at the centre of its composition, set within a barrel-vaulted chamber; he kneels in prayer and contemplation of the heavenly crown above him as his hand reaches firmly for a circle of thorns, which contrasts with the earthly crown at his feet. Charles's identity is indisputable to a broad audience: the profile format recalls the more familiar forms of royal representation on coins and medals, while ermine-lined robes and the discarded crown confirm his status and authority. Behind the king, an open landscape sees a rock steadfast in the middle of a stormy ocean, and in the foreground, the weights attached to the fronds of a verdant palm tree are ineffective, with the fronds springing upwards as rolling

banners proclaim the unmoved and triumphal nature of the rock (*‘Immota, triumphans’*) and the virtue that cannot be outweighed (*‘Crescit sub pondere virtus’*). Further Latin inscriptions clarify the meaning of individual elements, in the recognizable manner of an emblem book. William Dugard’s editions of the *Eikon Basilike* saw an explanatory text in Latin and English inserted beneath the image, signed G. D. (Gulielmus Dugard), of which a number of subsequent versions and variants exist.

The artist William Marshall (fl.1617–1649) was tasked with the production of this original image. Marshall was a prolific engraver who worked primarily for the London book trade. Although it is difficult to assign particular political sympathies to Marshall on the basis of his output, it is likely that the *Eikon Basilike* commission had its origins in earlier works that he produced for royalist patrons, such as illustrations to Francis Quarles’s *Emblemes* (1635) and *The Shepherds Oracles* (1645). The former, one of the earliest emblem books published in England, may well have provided inspiration to both the engraver and his employers in their development of the frontispiece content of the king’s book. The *Eikon Basilike*’s design was carved by Marshall onto a copper plate using a cutting tool called a burin. The plate could then be inked and passed through a rolling press multiple times to reproduce multiple copies of that image. Marshall’s design is known in seven slightly different states – an indication that the image was in great demand, with a plate being worn down by the continual printing process and re-engraving many times over. Multiple English and overseas editions of the *Eikon Basilike* resulted in five additional frontispieces based on the original design, signed by contemporary engravers and etchers including Wenceslaus Hollar, Thomas Rawlins and Robert Vaughan, together with numerous unsigned versions by unknown artists, after Marshall.

The power and influence of this image of Charles as martyr-king can be seen not only in the ubiquity of the frontispiece in manifold editions of the king’s book but also in its existence beyond the material object of the *Eikon Basilike* itself. William Somner’s 1650 pamphlet *The Frontispice [sic] of the King’s Book Opened* accompanies Marshall’s design with a lengthy verse explanation and panegyric of the picture and book (*‘By Heav’n ’tis Licenc’d, and may not goe downe, Though, as a Booke it wants men’s Imprimatur.’*) The image was subsequently bound into *Reliquiae Sacrae Carolinae*, a collection of Charles’s writings printed in 1651 by William Dugard and for Richard Royston in 1657. As well as forming an integral part of the *Eikon Basilike*, the frontispiece is also easily detached from the book. Its striking and persuasive emblematic content

ensured that it was able to exist independently as a distinct piece of royalist visual polemic in a single sheet, particularly in those impressions from Dugard's press onwards, which were accompanied by a written 'explanation of the Emblem'. Excerpts from the *Eikon Basilike's* text were copied down in manuscript form by loyal royalists; so too Marshall's engraving was disseminated beyond print, through copies in paint and needlework.⁷

Further illustrations sporadically joined the frontispiece in various editions of the *Eikon Basilike*: these were primarily engraved portraits of the king and of the prince of Wales taken from existing plates rather than newly commissioned compositions. Engraved plates are printed using a rolling press rather than a common or hand press; text and image are transferred to the page using two distinct printing processes, and it is likely that the *Eikon Basilike* would have passed through the workshops of several printers. The inclusion of Marshall's illustration and its later derivatives, together with supplementary images, would have added both time and cost to the production of the book; the retention of this illustration across multiple editions therefore underlines its value and importance to the broader project of royal martyr-making.

Marshall's design was not the only persuasive image of Charles in circulation in the wake of the regicide. A continued and positive presence of the king in visual form across the Interregnum can be understood as representing a challenge to government and initially provoked forms of censorship in response. A spate of iconoclastic attacks was carried out on public statues of Charles in London during the early 1650s, under the orders of the Council of State; sculptures were removed from public display, and the king's likeness at the Royal Exchange was decapitated. However, such actions ran counter to a more general, unspoken unwillingness among his critics to visually denigrate Charles or censure his visual image. English prints purporting specifically to show, let alone celebrate, the regicide, were unknown during the Interregnum. Although the bibliophile George Thomason was able to acquire an engraving of the execution scene, represented in eyewitness form, this was produced by the German engraver and publisher Sebastian Furck.

John Milton was the most notable of a number of authors to comment disparagingly on Marshall's frontispiece, observing how 'the Picture sett in Front would martyr him [Charles] and Saint him to befool the people...' and seeing the bewitching nature of the image highlighted as troublesome, belying its portrayal of the personal qualities of the individual pictured.⁸ Milton's *Eikonoklastes* ('image-breaker'), first published in October 1649, presented a government-endorsed, written response to the *Eikon Basilike* which sought to

justify the king's trial and its ramifications, as well as to justify its own appearance in opposition to the royal bestseller.

In Milton's view, the frontispiece purported to present a simple picture of harmless piety but its very nature as an accessible and iconic image drew the 'Image-doting rabble' into a 'civil kinde of Idolatry' which could then be used to revive royalist ambitions. In effect, it was a political message that worked by not involving political thought. He contended that those who could 'read' the image included many too illiterate to read rightly the book's Latin sign-off, 'prayers may give what war denies' ('*Vota dabunt qua Bella negarunt*'). As a key to the image, Joseph Jane's royalist defence *Eikon Aklastos* insisted that the Latin conveyed the pacifist message that the king would receive his reward in heaven; to Milton, it implied that Marshall's imagery of prayer and *Eikon Basilike* generally were intended to succeed where the royalist war effort had failed: the image of the pious king could help bring final victory.⁹ Later claims for the importance of *Eikon Basilike* to the restoration of monarchy in 1660 – when *Eikonoklastes* was among the first books banned – did little to prove him wrong.

At the Restoration, the *Eikon Basilike* was subject to further, approved publication by the new regime; it was also included in the *Basilika*, a collection of writings attributed to Charles, first published in 1662 by Richard Royston. In this form, the work encountered criticism from a quite different confessional perspective to that of Milton and his contemporaries. A copy of the *Basilika* was seized by the Portuguese from an English ship en route to Lisbon in 1670 and subjected to some severe annotations on the orders of the Inquisition.¹⁰ Any written references to Charles as a Christian martyr, or defender of the Protestant faith, were expurgated, with the text of the *Eikon Basilike* suffering particular damage. Its frontispiece image, a version of Marshall's design by the Dutch engraver Abraham Hertocks, saw only the heavenly crown, which the king gazes up at, struck through in ink. But with the single stroke of a pen, the meaning of the image was changed: the king's body remains unsullied and the authority of monarchy unchallenged, yet his martyr-status has been comprehensively removed – a rare example of literal 'image-breaking' within the king's book which does not seem to have been repeated by English readers, at home or abroad, during the Interregnum.

Already by the time of these criticisms, however, an anonymous work, *Eikon Alethine* ('the truthful image'), had questioned the authorship, and thus the authority, of the king's book. The attribution of the *Eikon Basilike* continues to generate debate today, with scholars generally conflating the king's contributions with those of John Gauden, Dean of Bocking in Essex and later Bishop of

Worcester.¹¹ The *Eikon Alethine* points immediately to the involvement of a mysterious clergyman. Its own frontispiece illustration shows a hand pulling back a curtain theatrically, to reveal what the accompanying verses describe as a 'Presumptuous Preist' who plots to 'make his King his Bastard Issue owne'. Charles himself does not feature within the composition, with the viewer encouraged to direct their censure at this generic, clerical figure who has dared to assume the voice of the king. A royalist riposte soon appeared, in the form of *Eikon e Piste*, which took the frontispiece to the *Eikon Alethine* and inverted its imagery: a similar curtain is lifted away, this time to reveal the king seated at a table, surveying his 'own' book. A critical figure, presumably the author of the *Eikon Alethine*, attempts to replace the king's crown with a cleric's cap; his efforts are thwarted, however, by a dynamic cavalier who instead places a jester's hat on the intruder's head. Amidst this action, Charles is again a model of thoughtful contemplation and authority.

This respectful treatment of the king's body in illustrated form was continuing a pattern of restraint established during the 1640s. Controversial individuals closely linked to Charles, such as Thomas Wentworth, the Earl of Strafford and Archbishop William Laud, found themselves ridiculed in both cheap printed images and more refined engravings and etchings in the wake of the abolition of Star Chamber in the summer of 1641. Printing restrictions and controls collapsed as the monopoly and authority of the Stationers' Company faltered, and critics of the king's autocratic rule across the 1630s were granted a novel voice in print, though often couched as criticism of royal counsellors rather than the king himself. The iconography of kingship itself remained unimpeachable: reports emerged in 1642 of an illustrated broadside picturing Charles standing outside the closed city gates at Hull, observed by its governor, Sir John Hotham, on horseback upon the city walls. Hotham had indeed refused the king admission into Hull, on the orders of the House of Commons; yet when the sheet was brought before the Commons, it was uniformly condemned and orders were issued that all known copies of the image were to be publicly burned.¹² In contrast, Laud's visual image was treated with notable hostility and a generous measure of irreverent, slapstick humour by critics of his ecclesiastical regime; he is shown variously in the act of vomiting, having his nose held to a grindstone, and with a noose around his neck, in pamphlet and broadside illustrations.

The continuing availability of conventional printed portraits of Charles I during the 1650s suggests that the royal image remained a popular and marketable genre. In 1654, the prolific London printseller Peter Stent published

an advertisement of stock available from his premises at the White Horse in Guiltspur Street; here, interested parties could acquire a portrait of the king ‘in a Laurel’ etched by Wenceslaus Hollar after an original painting by Anthony Van Dyck; further prints of ‘The King, Queen & children’; and the ‘King & Queen standing’; together with a ‘great sheet’ of Charles on horseback – all alongside portraits of Oliver Cromwell and Thomas Fairfax.¹³

Although attacking the royal image appears to have been off limits to supporters of the Republic, as I have discussed further elsewhere, royalist polemicists demonstrated no such charity to their counterparts.¹⁴ A stream of acerbic illustrated broadsides criticizing the regicide and Cromwell’s subsequent Protectorate also emerged from continental and, in particular, Dutch presses, during the 1650s. Such imagery sought to damage reputations through bodily exaggeration. Cromwell was pictured variously with a monstrous tail, a false beard and moustache, or with a pipe-smoking, bespectacled owl at his shoulder. Following Cromwell’s death, his son Richard was reportedly ‘confined to his chamber’ following the publication of a mocking woodcut printed in London showing ‘His Highnesse’ as half man and half owl.¹⁵

At the Restoration, copies of Milton’s *Eikonoklastes* were burned by the public hangman; in contrast, paintings based on Marshall’s frontispiece were distributed around the country to be placed on public display.¹⁶ The frontispiece to the *Eikon Basilike* was a powerful tool in shaping an image of the late king as Christian martyr, which helped preserve the continued pictorial treatment of the royal body with respect during the 1650s.