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Stacking the cards of ideology: the history of the *Sun Souvenir Royal Album*

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ABSTRACT. This paper examines the ideological construction of popular narratives of history. It is suggested that contemporary ideology, because it contains contrary themes, can give rise to contrary histories, produced by the same source. The analysis concentrates upon the *Sun*, Britain's largest-selling newspaper and a key element in Rupert Murdoch's News International empire. The *Sun Souvenir Royal Album* is analysed in detail for its depiction of royal history as a narrative of individual, moral progress. This is compared to an older popular history which expresses an ideology of liberal political progress, as opposed to moral individualism. However, the *Sun* also articulates a different history, which is critical of monarchy, and this is articulated under different rhetorical and political conditions. In this way the narratives of history serve ideological and political functions.

KEY WORDS: ideology, discourse, tabloid, media, newspaper, press, the *Sun*, monarchy, royalty, history, biography, United Kingdom

Autumn 1988 saw the publication of a history which failed utterly to attract the attention of professional historians. The *Sun*, the best-selling newspaper in Britain, marked the birth of Princess Beatrice, daughter of the Duke and Duchess of York, by issuing a special publication: the *Sun Souvenir Royal Album*. Heralded in television advertisements, this glossy album could be purchased from 'a newsagent near you' for 40 pence. There were also 160 different cards to be bought, so long as the purchaser possessed the special 'Royal Tokens' contained only in the pages of the *Sun*. These cards were to be stuck into the *Album* alongside appropriate commentaries. The completed album would be a historical record of a special occasion. As the cover announced, the album represented 'from William the Conqueror to the Duchess of York's new baby—the complete story of our illustrious Royal Family, told in living detail'. This history was reviewed neither in the serious newspapers, nor in the weekly literary magazines. No distinguished professor felt impelled to rescue the honour of Clio by refuting the history in an academic journal. In short, the publication was at a level so low that it did not even merit professional scorn.

Nevertheless, there are reasons for taking seriously a publication such as the *Sun's Royal Album*, not as a work of history which tells the reader about the past, but as a piece of ideology which discloses the present. Two

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justifications can be given for studying this particular piece of history-writing. In the first place, close analysis may help to clarify theoretical questions about the relations between a published text and the wider ideological currents which have produced the text. In particular, it is possible to ask a basic structuralist question about text analysis: whether the structure of a text—in this case, the structure of the *Sun's* narrative of the past—mirrors the wider ideological structure. In the second place, such an analysis raises issues about the nature of that wider ideology and the ways that the present ideologically recreates the past. Therefore, instead of quickly dismissing the *Sun's* history as absurd nonsense, one can pause to watch the transmission and reproduction of contemporary ideology being enacted by a widely publicized text.

IDEOLOGY IN THEORY

The present analysis arises from an approach which stresses the dilemmatic aspects of ideology (Billig et al., 1988). According to this conception, ideologies, as lived practices and commonsensical beliefs, contain contrary themes. One implication of this position is that ideological subjects do not typically possess the sort of internally consistent 'belief-system' which is assumed in many conventional social psychological theories and, indeed, in a number of critical theories of ideology. Instead, a discursive variability is to be expected, for ideological subjects possess contrary interpretative repertoires for talking about the world (Billig, 1988a; Frazer, 1988; Wetherell and Potter, 1988). Thus, what people say, think and argue will vary across time; the recourse to one repertoire, rather than another, may depend upon the functions of the discourse and the context in which it occurs (Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984; McKinlay et al., in press; Potter and Reicher, 1987; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1988). Most crucially, this is not a matter of merely accommodating to the views of others, but also of arguing against other things which are said (Billig, 1987; Billig, 1989). In this respect, ideologies are intrinsically rhetorical, for they provide the resources and topics for argumentation, and, thereby, for thinking about the world; and these are arguments which occur within the ideology (Billig et al., 1988).

If ideologies are seen to be intrinsically contradictory, or dilemmatic, then questions must be asked about the relation between the structure of the individual text and that of the ideology as a whole. In particular, there is the problem that individual texts might possess internally consistent structures, whilst the ideology from which they are derived is dilemmatic. Certainly, texts such as newspapers, advertisements and royal albums can all be seen as being components of wider ideologies. Each individual text may have a clearly discoverable structure. Roland Barthes has shown how it is possible to deconstruct ideological products, in order to reconstruct their inner ideological structures. However, there are good theoretical reasons for suggesting that the structure of the individual text is not a microcosm of the wider ideological structure, especially if the former has an undilemmatic,

internally consistent, structure. In this case it might be wrong to 'read off' a consistent wider ideology from the particular text.

A brief example can be given to show how this problem has sometimes been overlooked, even by highly sensitive decoders of ideological texts. Kress (1983) focuses his attention upon the representation of news in particular newspapers, and, in uncovering the linguistic structures involved in the newspaper reports, he tends to assume that the relation between the newspaper text and wider ideology is somewhat unproblematic. He suggests that 'the insights of linguistic theory may be an aid in uncovering the ideological layerings of meaning in a given text' and that 'the ideology used in constructing the text is expressed in the text in the homology of ideological and linguistic structure' (p.122). Kress himself has shown how ideology affects the linguistics of the individual text. However, this does not mean that there is necessarily a homology between the structure of the individual text and that of the wider ideology. If the text is produced in a particular rhetorical context, and if it enters into a specific ideological argument, then its own internal homology may be only a partial representation of the ideology from which it is constructed. Other themes, absent from the text in question, might be used on other occasions to create texts of very different structures. These themes will be drawn from an overall ideological repertoire which is both more contradictory and unstructured than its particular textual productions.

In this way, the smooth structure of a particular discourse can be seen to be an accomplishment of the ideology, rather than a direct representation of the ideology itself. The structuralist project for analysing texts can be used to illustrate this. This can be done by subjecting a text such as the *Sun's Royal Album* to the type of structuralist analysis which seeks to reveal the internal structure, and possibly to show a homology between linguistic devices and ideological message. The analysis of the *Album*, outlined below, attempts this. In fact, the analysis can be seen as a tribute to Barthes, both for the powerful theoretical tools of his semiotic theory and, most crucially, for the literary style of his project. This structuralist tribute takes the text *qua* text: the *Royal Album*, and its 'complete story' of the Royal Family, is decoded in an effort to reveal what Barthes (1983) called the 'narrative structure' of historical discourse. Yet the question of ideological structure still remains: is the individual textual structure a representation of ideological structure, or is it a particular rhetorical accomplishment which has drawn upon a certain set of ideological resources but not others? In short, it is insufficient merely to uncover a narrative structure within the *Sun's* venture into historiography. Over and above this, it is necessary to situate that structure in the rhetorical context of the ideology.

IDEOLOGY IN PRACTICE

Of all the possible texts to study for ideological structure, the choice of the *Sun's Royal Album* might seem bizarre. A text of historical insignificance

has been selected, and, in consequence, this selection might appear to indicate a flippant view of serious ideological matters. Yet, there are two general reasons why one might expect important ideological themes to flow through such a text and why the choice has its serious side. First, the *Sun* occupies a key position within British journalism and the current British political climate. Second, the monarchy is by no means a trivial topic if one seeks to come to terms with contemporary British ideology.

The *Sun* is the best-selling British daily newspaper with a circulation above four million, and Britain itself is the nation with the second-highest newspaper readership per head of population in the world (Baistow, 1985: 7). The British Social Attitudes Survey of 1987 asked a random selection of the British public whether they normally read a daily morning newspaper at least three times a week: just over 17 percent answered that they read the *Sun*. This was over double the response for the next most widely read newspaper (Jowell et al., 1987: 201). The *Sun* is part of Rupert Murdoch's News International group (or News Corp. as it is known in the United States). In 1968 the *News of the World* became the first major newspaper owned by Murdoch outside Australia. He followed this up a year later with the capture of the *Sun*. At the time of the takeover, the *Sun* was an ailing, left-of-centre paper with a circulation of around a million. Within four years it had become a right-wing, populist tabloid, whose circulation had overtaken that of its nearest rival, the *Daily Mirror* (Tunstall, 1983). The success of the *Sun* enabled Murdoch to expand his newspaper ownership at the opposite end of the market: in 1983 he bought the most historically prestigious of all British newspapers, *The Times*. The acquisition of one-third of the British national newspaper market (as calculated in terms of the sales of national dailies and Sundays) was not sufficient for the global ambitions of Murdoch. Today, his media interests stretch across the world, and currently News International is expanding into television, with its attempt to create a fourth network in the United States and a satellite channel in Britain. In these enterprises Murdoch is cutting across traditional divisions of ownership in a systematic way, whilst personally retaining tight control on the expanding business. In the words of one financial analyst, he is 'building a synergistic world-wide media empire', whose profits for the year ending December 1986 reached above 172 million dollars (Moore, 1987: 71; see also Gomery, 1986).

The success of the *Sun*, a key component in the construction of this empire, was built upon a particular formula. To put it simply, Murdoch took the paper downmarket: there was a daily diet of crime, sex and sport, with page three regularly showing the bare nipples of a posed model. In addition, there was the political message. Murdoch, despite outward protestations about 'editorial freedom', has used his newspapers to support uncritically the Conservative party, and especially the most right-wing elements of the present Conservative government. It has been claimed that he sacked a *Times* editor for insufficient devotion to the political cause (Koss, 1984: 672), and there are stories about a close friendship with Margaret Thatcher (Tunstall, 1983: 266). Whether or not there is a personal friendship, the

government has ensured that Murdoch's progress has not been impeded by an application of the monopoly regulations, and Murdoch's papers have not been bashful in their admiration for the British premier. The *Sun*, with its anti-union stance, its crude nationalism and its strident right-wing politics, has provided a populist and regularly read version of the Thatcherite message. If, as some have claimed, the British political culture has shifted towards 'authoritarian populism' since Thatcher assumed power in 1979, then the *Sun* has played a considerable role in the packaging and transmission of this ideology (Hall, 1988; Hall and Jacques, 1983; but see Jessop et al., 1988, for a criticism of the concept of 'authoritarian populism').

Not only does the *Sun's Royal Album* have ideological significance on account of the nature of its publisher, but also its specific content is highly ideological. Although British social scientists have tended to ignore the issue of monarchy, it is hard to see how the continual interest of the British public in the activities of the richest family in the land—and a family which explicitly symbolizes the nation itself—can be anything but ideological. As Nairn (1988) has argued, it is necessary to take the Royal Family seriously in order to understand the construction of contemporary British ideology. The *Sun*, in common with other British tabloids, keeps up a steady stream of 'royal stories'. Whereas the paper might not have regular foreign correspondents in the major political capitals of the world, it does employ specialist reporters exclusively to cover the activities of the Royal Family.

There is a general need to examine the ideological meanings in this coverage of royalty, not to mention the way that such coverage is received by the public. A number of investigations have looked at semiotic and rhetorical features of monarchy (Billig, 1988a, 1988b, and 1990; Brunt, 1988; Coward, 1983; Dayan and Katz, 1985; Williamson, 1987). Amongst other things, these studies have drawn attention to the historical themes contained within contemporary royal symbolism, as tradition, or national history, is represented as being continued by the present. In this respect, the *Sun* saw it as appropriate to celebrate a royal birth by publishing a 'complete' history of 'our' Royal Family. The paper, by offering no explanation for this style of celebration, indicated the naturalness of marking the royal present with a history. According to Cannadine (1983), the basic historical message transmitted by the symbols of contemporary royalty is not a particular history of the past; the message is simply that there is a past, or a national history, which is being continued by the present. Thus, the royal ceremonies can comprise a jumble of anachronisms, with traditions being specifically invented so that the whole arrangement appears historical (see also Chaney, 1983). However 'historical' the monarchy might appear, this evocation of tradition cannot be entirely devoid of historical content. The publication of royal souvenirs, such as the *Sun's Album*, provides the opportunity for taking the step beyond recording that the royal present is represented as being 'historical'; it permits an analysis of the particular representations of the past, which are being produced presently.

History is always created by the present and, therefore, its representations of the past will express present assumptions and even contain

arguments directed against present targets (Mead, 1932, 1938; see also Schwartz et al., 1986, for a specific example). Some analysts have suggested that contemporary culture is unique, in that the postmodernist consciousness has been cut adrift from any historical consciousness (Jameson, 1985). However, the ease with which the *Sun* celebrates the present with an account of the past indicates that historical consciousness at a popular level is not completely devoid of content or form. The structure of this representation of the past can be investigated, for works of history can be read not just for the accounts they may give of specific past events, but also for the way that past time in general is represented. The rhetoric of historical accounts can reveal how historians reconstruct the general historical process or the tempo of historical time (Hexter, 1972; Megill and McCloskey, 1987; Merquior, 1988). It can be assumed that even histories such as the *Sun's* will contain assumptions about the nature of historical time, and, thus, will express, implicitly or explicitly, underlying arguments about the process of history. In this way, the ideological structure of such texts can be sought not in the particulars of the historical mythologies, but in the more general way that they impose a structure upon past time.

FOREGROUNDED COMPARISONS

The task of ideological reconstruction needs to take into account both the themes which are outwardly expressed in the specific text and, just as importantly, the themes which are significantly omitted. In order to throw light on the absences, a strategy of comparative analysis can be useful, for the contents of a second or third text might suggest what is absent in the first text. Usually, in a comparative study, equal weight is placed upon the texts, or sets of texts, to be compared. However, the present intention is not to compare two texts equally, but to use comparisons in order to reconstruct the representation of history in the *Sun's Royal Album*. One might call this analytic strategy not a simple comparison but a 'foregrounded comparison', because one particular text is being kept in the foreground of the analysis.

If the structure of the text is to be examined in terms of its wider aspects, then it is important not to abstract a text from its discursive or rhetorical context (Billig, 1987, 1988a; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1988). A piece of popular history is itself a communication, and any accomplished structure must be examined in terms of the text's communicative functions. At the minimum this means that any comparison of texts should bear in mind the sorts of communication that are being compared. In this respect, it is useful to distinguish two sorts of comparison: those which compare similar sorts of communications from different time periods, and those which compare different sorts of communication produced by the same ideological source within the same period. The analyst, engaged in foregrounded comparison, can glance 'backwards' and 'sideways'. If the glance is directed backwards, then it is important to compare similar types of

communication so that like is compared across time with like. On the other hand, the sideways glance can benefit from variety, so that the same communicative source can be caught in different communicative acts.

The foregrounded comparisons of the *Royal Album* will involve both backwards and sideways glances. It is hoped to show that the construction of historical time in the *Sun's Royal Album* possesses a particular ideological structure. The achievement of this structure is shaped by present ideological concerns, as can be seen by a backwards glance to a similar narrative formulated over 50 years ago. Moreover, a sideways glance at further texts of Britain's best-selling newspaper will suggest that the *Sun's* ideology is not bound to the construction of a single structuring of historical time. Instead, the structure of historical time can be altered to match the immediate political moment. Thus the wider ideology possesses the possibilities for different, and contrary structurings.

GLANCING BACKWARDS

The *Sun's Royal Album* was more than a history, or 'complete story', for it was also an explicit celebration of the present. The early sections of the album were devoted to the historical narrative, whilst the later sections, concentrated upon the lives of modern royalty. In the historical first section, there were card portraits of individual kings and queens to be stuck on pages, which were, roughly speaking, devoted to particular dynasties. Alongside each card was a brief biography of the relevant king or queen. Each page, or double-page spread, also had its own narrative text which linked the individual reigns. Broadly, this arrangement was chronological, in that each dynastic age was presented in temporal order, and the monarchs within each dynasty were presented chronologically. Thus readers could start with Edward the Confessor (not William the Conqueror, as advertised on the cover) and work their way to the present dynasty, whose double-page spread was headlined 'The Wonderful Windsors'. After this, the orderly reader would then advance to the tales of present royal life, with especial attention paid to the happy parents, the Duke and Duchess of York.

The basic genre of collecting cards and affixing them in albums was commonly associated in Britain with cigarettes. For the first half of the century cigarette packets, particularly those brands sold to a working-class market, contained a card which was part of a series. Albums could be purchased separately for the collections. The series covered a wide range of topics: sporting personalities, fauna and household tips were popular themes. Royal occasions tended to be marked by issues of monarchical themes. Just as the *Sun* marked the birth of the Queen's latest grandchild with a royal card series, so in 1935 John Player's, a branch of the Imperial Tobacco Company, marked George V's Silver Jubilee with a series of 50 cards entitled 'the Kings and Queens of England, 1066–1935'. Each card featured either a king or queen from William the Conqueror to the reigning

monarch; a coloured portrait was on each obverse, whilst a biography was on the reverse. There was an accompanying album, in which the biographies were reproduced.

The similarities between this series and the *Sun's Royal Album* provide the possibility for a foregrounded comparison. Both series are similar sorts of communication, for in each case sets of cards were to be collected and affixed in albums. Both were issued by manufacturers of other products as an appropriate celebration of royal events. There is a difference: the issue of cards was a special departure for the *Sun*, whereas it was normal practice for packets of cigarettes during the 1930s to contain collecting cards. There are two other differences, which must be noted. The John Player series did not include any extra pictures of modern royalty in various informal poses. That sort of material typically formed the basis of separate series (i.e. the Wills 1937 series of 'Our King and Queen'). Nor did the John Player Album contain narrative links over and above the individual biographies. As is demonstrated later, this particular difference is not theoretically damaging to the foregrounded comparison, because, despite the lack of narrative format in the John Player series, its history contains a more explicit historical narration than does the *Sun's*.

Lastly, there is one major similarity between the two series which makes foregrounded comparison all the more compelling. A large number of the pictures of historic kings and queens are the same—or rather, they are reproductions from the same pictorial source. A detailed analysis of the albums' respective iconographies might reveal meaningful differences in the way that these identical pictures are reproduced. For example, there are differences in colour tone. The John Player series is more sombre and its tones deeper, with the background composed of a single, deeply textured shade. If in the later series Richard I wears armour rather than a blue cloak, Anne Boleyn has lost her sickly pallor, and the image of James I is mirror reversed, nevertheless the poses are unmistakably the same, as they are for the majority of monarchs from William the Conqueror to the 19th century (the pictures of more modern monarchs differ in the two series).

Therefore, the two series provide popular histories in similar forms of communication at a distance of over 50 years apart. In addition, many of the historical narratives of the albums are attached to the same iconographic representations of monarchs. Not often does history spontaneously create the sort of controlled conditions favoured by experimental investigators. In this case, the analyst has been accidentally dealt two lucky hands of cards with each containing the same royal flush.

OUT OF TIME

The two series might follow similar broad chronological principles, yet there is a difference. The John Player series follows a strict chronology, without even the divisions of dynasty. Each reign is given the same allotted space, as

the kings and queens are arranged with three portraits neatly aligned per page. The only chronological gap is for the period of the Commonwealth, with Oliver Cromwell absent from this royal parade. The *Sun*'s format is not so orderly, as the number and position of the cards varies from page to page. Moreover, there is not a strict adherence to the chronology of individual reigns. There are two sorts of chronological deviation, neither of which was to be found in the earlier album: unexplained gaps and the removal of figures from chronological sequencing.

Although the *Sun* claimed to present 'the complete story', some monarchs failed to get a mention in the text, let alone a celebratory colour card. By and large, these seem to be monarchs who fell between the pages, marked by epochal headlines. Page 3 is headlined 'Doomsday Arrives', whilst the next two pages are 'Plantagenets: Flower Power'. Between this division the reigns of Henry I and Stephen are lost entirely. Nor is there room for Henry IV at the bottom of the first Plantagenet page or at the top of the second. William III, Mary II and Anne would have fitted neither into page 10 ('King Loses Head') nor into page 11 ('The House of Hanover'); so they disappear. Nor is there room for William IV in the House of Hanover, for George IV occupies the last space in the bottom right corner. None of these gaps is even mentioned, let alone explained.

The *Sun's Royal Album* deviates from chronology in another way. In the 'modern' section there are two further historical sections: 'Royal Heroes' and 'Royal Rascals'. Appropriate royal figures, not always monarchs, have been plucked from the continuity of history to appear in these special categories. In no case is the absence of a monarch marked in the historical sequence, not even by a forward reference. In fact, the chronological gap between pages 3 and 4 is longer than the reigns of Henry I and Stephen, for Henry II and John are to be found among the rascals and Richard I amidst the heroes. Thus there is an unmarked gap of 116 years between these two pages. Considerations of layout and typography may have contributed to the generation of these absences, but the fact that such considerations can overrule the order of time should not be considered as philosophically fortuitous. Even more illustrative of the *Sun's* freedom from the strict, but somewhat uneven, tempo of regnal time are the categories of 'heroes' and 'rascals'. Within the context of the album these categories are not temporal, for figures are taken out of time. In these instances, chronology takes second place to a very different segmentation of history. This is a moral ordering, whose categories impose an order which is literally timeless.

CHARACTERS OF HISTORY

The moral themes can be seen in the biographies attached to the pictures in the *Sun Album*. Two complete examples of such biographies are given below. Neither is taken from the sections reserved for special heroes or rascals.

(1) Charles I

(1600–1649) was a sickly child who had difficulty walking. He became a short, shy, lonely man with a stammer and high voice. He was a good husband and father and loved beautiful things, but he had no sense of humour and was very pig-headed. He was not afraid to die, and when his head was cut off the assembled crowd gave a groan of despair.

(2) George III

(1738–1828) was the son of Frederick. He was very popular because he was a good King and felt himself to be entirely English, unlike the Georges before him. He was known as ‘Farmer George’. He had 15 children, who he spoiled badly. Towards the latter part of his reign he suffered attacks of porphyria, a disease diagnosed by the doctors as madness, but in reality a form of poisoning that affects the brain.

Several features common to both examples, and typical of the other biographies in the *Sun Album*, can be mentioned. Both biographies are narratives in the sense that they contain a temporal sequencing: the story starts with the child and ends with death or enfeebled age. These personal narratives are told in a factual voice. ‘In reality’ is a semantic device to signify the factual mode, as readers are presented with the unarguable truth about George III’s illness. Similarly, readers are told that Anne Boleyn ‘WASN’T unfaithful’ (emphasis in original), but Catherine Howard ‘really was unfaithful’ to Henry VIII, contrary to the beliefs of the monarch himself. In no case are rival interpretations of the past presented, with readers being invited to make a choice, for history is not presented as a matter of interpretation or opinion: it is represented as being incontestably beyond argument.

In the biographies, the bulk of the factual constructions do not concern the circumstances of birth, death or possible adultery. The majority are about personality. From childhood emerges a definite person, composed of physical and psychological traits. Charles I possesses pig-headedness and a lack of humour, as surely as he possessed a stammer; as for William II, ‘he stuttered and was a nasty man’. George III is the good, family man, although inclined to overindulge his children. Every monarch is ascribed a personality as a matter of fact: Henry III, ‘a coward and stupid’; George I, ‘shy, lonely man’, etc.

These personalities are presented as being morally lucid. Judgements are made as the personalities are ascribed. A few monarchs like John are such liars, murderers and cowards that they can be placed amongst the rascals, whereas Henry V was so clearly brave and wise that he is a timeless hero. The personalities are to be judged ‘good’ or ‘bad’, although sometimes it is a part of the persona, rather than its whole, which is held up for moral blame or praise: James I ‘was shabby, never washed—and his table manners were disgusting’. In some cases, the characters have both their good and bad points: George III, despite being good and English, spoils his children; Charles I, though humourless, was a ‘good’ husband and a brave individual.

In these cases, the good and bad points are clearly separated; readers are in little doubt which aspects should be applauded and which criticized. Moreover, the overall judgement is clear: George III, when all is said and done, was good; and Charles I, despite his personal and physical weaknesses, deserves sympathy—the crowd today should repeat the sympathy shown by the 17th-century crowd.

In outline these character portraits do not differ from those offered by John Player, which showed a similar tendency to present a summary of the individual's personality. The same heroes and villains are to be found. John was as unpleasant 50 years ago—'cruel and completely selfish'—and George III was 'homely, domesticated and devout'. Charles I was still a tragic figure who, for all his weaknesses, was nevertheless 'one of the foremost connoisseurs in Europe'. Great heroes like Henry V and the bold queen Elizabeth I have maintained their mythic status, as the *Sun* represents similar representations to those presented 50 years ago. However, the *Sun Album*, in keeping with the daily style of its parent newspaper, shows a greater relish for salacious matters. The John Player series, more formal and decorous in its language and choice of detail, did not mention that George II 'died of a heart attack while sitting on the lavatory'.

The similarities indicate that both series are drawing upon a common historical culture in which the monarchical heroes and villains of England are clearly defined (see Schwartz, 1990, for a discussion of the constraints upon changing popular historical myths). However, the same mythic figures can be inserted into different representations of historical time. In order to examine the representation of the historical process itself, one needs to look beyond the individual biographies, and to reconstruct what Barthes (1983) calls the underlying narrative logic.

As a first step, the centrality of personality in the *Sun's* representation of history must be recognized. If the importance of moral personality in this historical narrative is conceded, then it is possible to take seriously the *Sun's* claim that it is providing a 'complete' story. The sketchiness of its history is obvious: the biographies, as short paragraphs, cannot possibly give the complete record of all known facts about the individual. Few regal actions are described, but the gaps are filled by statements of persona. William I is a 'genius', but no action of genius is given; William II is 'nasty', and likewise this must be accepted on its own terms; similarly too for the portraits of Charles I and George III. Barthes (1983: 264) suggested that 'the "character" of a narrative agent may well never be explicitly named while being constantly indexed'. The *Sun*, by contrast, reverses this by naming the character while indexing the action.

The claim of completeness rests upon a particular representation of history. The complete story is to be found not in a long tedious list of actions, but in the completed judgement to be passed upon individual personalities. It is also to be found in events, such as the Battle of Hastings and the Armada, which have attained mythic status. Details of actions may be omitted, but the personality must be presented. The whole story would be incomplete without its heroes and villains. In this respect, this history is

more than a series of narrative biographies: it expresses an assumption about the essential role of personality in the diachronic movement of history.

HISTORICAL ACTION

The biographies in the *Sun Album* are intended to be read in conjunction with the linking narrative text. Charles I's biography refers to his execution, but it is the summary text, under the heading of 'King Loses Head', which tells briefly the story of the Civil War and the trial of the king. In theory, the linking narratives could provide a wider historical context in which the biographies could be set. Yet, the wider historical narrative is also a narrative about personalities. The way that the biographies combine with the linking narratives to construct and explain historical events can be illustrated by the example of Charles I. The background to the Civil War is given in the opening paragraph of 'King Loses Head':

(3) Charles I was better liked than his father, James I, at the start of his reign. But he believed that he ruled by 'Divine Right', which meant god-like powers to do whatever he wanted. Within a few years Charles decided to rule without Parliament, and there was a rising against him.

It is the king, who is the grammatical subject of each sentence, and who, thereby, is syntactically revealed as the mover of the action (Fowler et al., 1979; Kress, 1985). The cause of the trouble is the king's belief in Divine Right. There is no explanation why the king should have held this particular belief, but the biographical piece provides an 'interpretative repertoire' of a psychological nature. Charles is pig-headed, humourless and rather isolated—just the sort of person who might compensate for personal defects by believing in his right to do 'whatever he wanted'. The psychologically small man struts like a god, if not a king. After a while, he 'decides' to rule without a Parliament. And that really stirs up the trouble.

The causal links are not spelled out, but their themes make the narrative meaningful. The war follows from a decision by the king and this decision follows from the sort of person that the king is. No specific historical context is needed to understand this account. The reference to the 'Divine Right' loses its historical and theological specificity: God Himself has been transformed into a psychological disposition, as Divine Right is constructed as the belief that one possesses 'god-like' powers. It is the sort of belief, or perhaps psychological syndrome, which might be found in any age. Whoever believes that they are god-like, regardless of when they live, is going to have difficulty in dealing with others. No wonder then that the Roundheads were up in arms: 'Feelings ran so high that civil war began'.

A glance to the background of the earlier card series will emphasize the lack of specific historical context in the *Sun's* account. The John Player text stated that 'inheriting a belief in the divinity of Kingship, he [Charles I] tried to carry out theories of government unacceptable in that age'. Here the king

acquires a specific belief in kingship's divinity (not divine-like qualities to do what one wants). This belief, inherited from the previous king, is out of tune with the age. There is a sense of historical movement; the king's psychology—his 'weaknesses' and 'unshakeable beliefs'—tragically rub up against a wider movement of time. Not all actions are caused by the king, for the movement, which makes his ideas old-fashioned, is not caused by the king. The resulting war is not solely the action of the king, although he figures largely: 'His father's weaknesses, his unshakeable beliefs and the angry temper of Parliament led to Civil War'. If there is a psychological moral in this account, it is that one should not get left behind the movement of history.

The *Sun's* lack of a specific historical framing makes its comparative unconcern with chronological sequencing more comprehensible. The headline 'King Loses Head' does not have to belong to the 17th century. The present tense, its tabloid style and even its pun indicate the timelessness of the message. The events could have occurred before or after they did, had a similar personality ascended the throne and been motivated to behave like the unfortunate Charles. This story, in common with those of the heroes and rascals, could have been taken out of temporal sequence, for there is no mention of specific inheritances or singular historical movements.

This representation of past time suggests that historical movement constantly restarts with each new reign. Just as a villain like John can follow a hero like Richard I, so each new monarch can create their own narrative afresh. Perhaps the reign will be glorious or perhaps it will end in execution. Much will depend upon the singular personality of the monarch. The 'complete story', therefore, must indicate this personality and pass judgement upon it. Aristotle in *Poetics*, a work which greatly influenced Barthes's analysis of narrative structure, commented upon the difference between history and epic poetry. According to Aristotle, epic poetry describes probabilities, or 'the kind of thing that might happen', as opposed to the necessities of 'what has happened'. The epic poem provides a kind of 'universal statement which declares what such and such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do' (p.17). According to Aristotle's idea, the *Sun Album*, for all its narrative brevity and crudity of language, possesses the mark of epic poetry, rather than history. The claim of completeness is not to be interpreted literally, for money will not be refunded to customers who point to the unexplained gaps in chronology. The claim is an epic one, which transcends mere chronological exactitude. All human life is contained in the brief emblematic stories of monarchs: their heroics, villainies and lavatorial behaviour.

NARRATIVES OF PROGRESS

The *Sun Album*, despite its moral ordering of history, does nevertheless tell a tale of overall progress. Strictly speaking this is not a tale of historical progress, but of felicitous moral advance. The difference between this moral

tale and the narration of historical progress can be illustrated by glancing backwards to the earlier card series. Although the John Player series did not possess linking narratives, its individual biographies conveyed a classic Whig account of historical progress. Its features are historical rather than epic, with English history presented as a progressive movement of liberalism and constitutional reform, culminating in the democracy of the present.

In this Whig interpretation of history, the monarchs are not necessarily the prime movers of progress: sometimes, like Charles I, they are obstacles to be swept aside by the inevitable movement towards the present. This is a history which marks the development of constitutional monarchy and which shows its allegiance to the Whig party. Of George I it is written: 'His reign was occupied by the establishment of a new and more limited monarchy, Whig ascendancy and cabinet government'. The *Sun* mentions none of this, but concentrates upon the monarch's 'popping eyes' and 'very boring' character. As for George III, the John Player series includes a critical political commentary: 'His views of kingship conflicted with the constitution'. And it tells that the monarch finally submitted to his ministers, who are identified as Whigs. The biography of William IV makes clear the popularity of reform by its claim that the king 'became popular, for he was known to favour reform'. In this narration monarchs are to be criticized if they oppose constitutional progress and attach themselves to the enemies of the Whigs. This criticism is separate from the praise which might be due to them on account of the rectitude of their personal lives.

The *Sun* might not tell this Whig history of progress, but its epic story contains a narrative of progress, as history moves haphazardly from dynasty to dynasty until it reaches 'Our Wonderful Windsors'. The present dynasty could have had its share of rotters and disgustingly mannered bullies, but history has dealt the nation a hand of trumps with the Windsors. In this history, monarchs act and the nation judges; these judgements are then reproduced as facts in history. By framing the judgements as matters of fact, the nation becomes both invisible and indivisible; it is an audience in a darkened auditorium watching the splendid show of history and always ready to applaud and boo. The *Sun* itself, and its own narration of history, is to be located in this darkened audience. The factual framing implies that the judgements and the judges are unchanging. Therefore, what changes in the narration of progress is neither the 'nation' nor its morality, but the monarchs, who perform upon the illuminated stage.

These aspects can be seen in the way that the *Album* constructs 'popularity' and 'goodness' in its epic tale. The 'good' kings and queens are those who succeed in attracting the applause, and it is the 'bad' kings who are the unpopular ones. Cause and effect may be entangled, but the interpretative repertoire closely links goodness and popularity: George III was 'very popular because he was a good King', whilst Harold II, killed prematurely, 'was very popular and probably would have made a good king'. Arch-villains, such as John, are seen as massively unpopular. There is not a single instance of a good but unpopular monarch, nor of a popular but bad one. Significantly, the only exception was not a genuine monarch: Oliver

Cromwell 'ruled well, but with a rod of iron . . . and banned all fun things'. No proper sovereign, by contrast, is construed as ruling well without popular support or affection.

Popularity is described as if it were an attribute of the person, rather than a relationship between monarch and people. The adjectival form renders the 'people'—the audience—invisible: George III's popularity was a characteristic like his domesticity. There is no mark to suggest who made him popular. By making the audience syntactically invisible, the *Sun* also constructs it as indivisible. At moments of conflict between the monarch and nation only the former is grammatically revealed. The *Sun Album* manages to tell of John and Magna Carta without mentioning the barons—'he was forced to sign'—with the agents doing the forcing remaining unmentioned. The barons are clearly visible in John Player's account. When James II, an 'unpopular' monarch, was 'determined to make England Catholic', William of Orange 'was invited over to be king instead': the issuers of the invitation are invisible. The connection between invisibility and indivisibility can be seen by comparing the *Sun*'s description of George III as 'very popular' to the corresponding comment in the John Player series: 'He was popular with the middle-classes'. Not only is a particular audience indicated, but so is yet another audience: the class which did not find the monarch popular. The Whig history of John Player indicates that the nation might be divided in its estimation. The goodness or badness of a monarch is not assumed to be universally transparent, but a mixture of cheers and boos might come from different parts of the darkened auditorium.

The nation is thereby construed in the *Sun* history as an unchanging and unified moral community. There is no rise and fall of classes in this account, no rebellious barons nor particular middle-class perspectives. Instead the community watches and judges. Sometimes the performance has been so bad that an invitation is issued to another actor to take over the leading role. Moreover, this history justifies its own historiography, for the whole account is contained in a communication which is cheering the 'Wonderful Windsors' of the present.

The tale of modern royalty's fortunate, but not inevitable, moral progress is even clearer in the sections for 'Heroes' and 'Rascals'. Apparently, English history has produced but five heroes, only two of which were monarchs (Richard I and Henry V). A third medieval figure, the Black Prince, takes his place in the heroic gallery. There are two 20th-century heroes, each of whose heroism merits more than double the text accorded to the medieval heroes. There is Lord Mountbatten, Prince Philip's uncle, and lastly there is Prince Andrew, who during the Falklands War risked his life 'for Queen and country', and who 'narrowly escaped death many times while trying to lure Exocet missiles from their targets'.

By contrast, there is not a single Windsor amongst the 'Royal Rascals'. The choice of 'Rascal', rather than 'Villain', is instructive; it suggests delightful roguery, rather than outright evil. There are three medieval rascals—John, Henry II, Richard III—all branded as murderers. At the foot of the page is the 20th-century monarch, Edward VII—a rascal who in

his younger years 'loved women, drinking and gambling'. He invented a cocktail, was involved in scandals and generally was a bit of a lad. But such is progress, that the modern rascal is not involved in real villainy. Moreover, when it matters, the modern rascal is capable of reversing character in a wonderfully epic, and historically unprecedented, manner: 'Surprisingly, when he finally became King, he reformed completely'.

GLANCING SIDEWAYS

The *Sun's* claim to tell the whole story is inexact, not only because of the omissions, but also because the writers of the *Album* could have mentioned other stories. To show this, it is necessary to look sideways at the *Sun* in a very different rhetorical context. The basic rhetorical context of the *Album* was one of celebration. The paper, acting in the historically constructed role of national judge, was observing the royal actors and seeing fit to lead the applause. The resulting production was incomplete in that critical themes were out of place, as they generally are in the panegyrics of celebration. The *Album* can be likened to a family photograph album, as its modern photographs show weddings, births and general familial togetherness. Beloff (1986) and Musello (1979) have pointed out that ordinary family albums tell partial stories, showing the family in its acceptably united face, with all tensions, let alone the scandals, well hidden. The *Royal Album* was not the place to mention those unseemly happenings of which regular *Sun* readers would be aware. For example, the *Album* managed to give a brief biography of the Duchess of York without mentioning her parents. Earlier that year her father had figured prominently in the *Sun's* 'Fergie Dad Vice Shock: Blonde Barbara Was "Favourite"' story (11 May 1988). Both he and Barbara were tastefully absent from the *Album*.

The *Sun*, as a tabloid newspaper ever ready for royal scandal, has other ways of talking about royal members apart from those displayed in the celebratory 'complete' story. Significantly, when the cheers turn to boos, a very different reconstruction of past time and of monarchy's place in British history becomes visible. While the *Album* was still being offered for sale at the newsagents 'near you', the *Sun* newspaper ran a series of front-page stories whose rhetorical message and construction of history were of a different order. Initially the story continued the same celebratory mode of the *Album*. The paper featured a 'scoop' photograph showing the Duchess of York holding her baby and seated between the Queen and Queen Mother ('Exclusive! Fergie baby with her two grannies': 13 October 1988). It was the sort of photograph which could have featured in the family album. And that was the problem. It was a private snapshot, to be stuck into a personal royal album, not into the public album of the *Sun*. The following day, the newspaper announced that the Palace had complained. The Queen had called in lawyers and the newspaper had promised not to reproduce 'the magical photo [which] touched the nation with its natural warmth and charm' (14 October 1988).

On Monday, 17 October, the *Sun* hit back with its 'Page One Opinion'. The cheers had been replaced by anger: 'Queen clicks her fingers and the cops come running' announced the headline. There was direct criticism of the Queen for calling in the Head of the Serious Crime Squad, whilst serious crimes—violence, burglary and sex offences—went undetected: 'Do they not warrant the full attention of the forces of law and order? Or do you have to be a Royal before the Yard will jump?' No longer are the Windsors quite so wonderful, as the *Sun*, speaking for the whole nation (which had been touched by the magical photo), stands as the stern-faced national judge. Significantly, in the moment of criticism a past history was reconstructed to fit the rhetorical purpose, and, just as significantly, it was a very different tale than that in the moment of royal celebration. A different historical structure was created: the story is not one of moral progress; the audience is neither invisible nor indivisible; and Whig themes are drawn upon but with crucial modifications:

(4) We have today a society in which the Government is dedicated in bringing greater democratic power to the people. You can SHARE in the wealth of the nation, you can CONTROL your life as never before.

But one thing has not changed in 300 years: The power of the richest families.

The dominance of those born with a whole canteen of silver spoons in their mouths.

(*Sun*, 17 October 1988, emphases in original)

In this passage royalty is no longer wonderfully royal, but it is reconstructed critically as merely being a rich family. Society has ceased to be indivisible and now it is split between the 'people' and the rich whose inherited privileges stand in the way of democracy. In addition, the present is understood in historical terms. The privileges of the rich are of long standing, and should have been swept away by the historical movement of the past 300 years. The choice of historical time is significant: 300 years leads back exactly to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, when one monarch was deposed and another invited to take his place. Today's potential issuers of invitations—'the people', 'the Government'—are no longer anonymous. Thus, the Whig themes of people against monarchy make their appearance. However, this Whig history does not claim, as it does in the John Player album, that the best possible monarchy has been established. Instead, history has a further move to make: the past revolution has not been sufficiently successful, and may have to be repeated if the necessary changes are to take place. From out of the darkened auditorium, the people might need to march into the light of battle, led by the government and illuminated by its *Sun*.

PAST AND PRESENT

The sideways glance reveals that differing historical narrations might be produced at roughly the same time by the same source but in different

rhetorical contexts. For this to occur, the ideological repertoires of the *Sun* must contain contrary historical accounts. Each individual history may have a particular narrative structure telling a particular tale, but the overall ideology tells more than one sort of history. In other words, a narrative structure can be accomplished by means of the ideology, but this structure is not the structure of the overall ideology. The *Sun*, in its mood of respectful national celebration, can tell a tale that praises the traditional authorities for their moral progress. The rhetorical mood can quickly change from respect to anger; a populist history can be constructed which complains that the rich have shown insufficient moral progress and which hints darkly of revolutionary deeds. Both histories, the authoritarian and the populist, are constructed from the same ideological source, but neither, in telling their structured tale, calls upon the full range of thematic resources of the ideology. Each represents an accomplished consistency, and the inconsistent juxtaposition of the populist and authoritarian themes could be said to represent better the whole than either individually. This whole—the authoritarian populism of the *Sun*—has provided the resources for these historical tales and for others which have been or might well be constructed in their turns.

Because the wider ideology might possess contrary themes and might not be marked by the structured tightness of particular accomplished texts, this does not mean that there is a randomness in the themes providing the resources for the ideology. There are ideological constraints in the ways that the narrations of history can be employed rhetorically, for the business of the present does not give free licence to the construction of the past. The *Sun* might draw upon Whig themes, when the populist mood takes over from the authoritarian, and when the celebrant of monarchy becomes the critic. Nevertheless, it cannot reproduce the Whig text of the John Player series with the same exactitude as it can reproduce the pictorial portraits of old monarchs. There are semantic and political aspects of the Whig account which would fit uncomfortably into the present political business of the *Sun* and its proprietor.

One example can be given. The John Player series, in describing George III, stated that ‘though finally submitting to his ministers, he remained an extreme Tory’. In the context of the battle against the monarch’s unconstitutional behaviour, this description is critical. By contrast, the *Sun* does not, and semantically could not, criticize George III for being an ‘extreme Tory’. The Tories are the upholders, if not creators, of the democracy threatened by the Queen and her lawyers. The ‘Page One Opinion’ even cited in its support the views of an unnamed ‘Tory MP’. The very concept of ‘extreme Tory’ is not one that makes sense in the paper’s ideology, for it is almost a contradiction of terms. ‘Extreme’ is applied as a term of rhetorical criticism against the left-wing enemies of the Tories, and/or more generally to the enemies of the ‘nation’. To be too Tory is only comprehensible in the way that ‘having too much of a good thing’ might be. Significantly, in the *Album* there is no criticism, or indeed mention, of George III’s politics; he is recreated as an entirely popular and good king. In this way, the sideways

glance reveals a semantic homology across texts, across rhetorical contexts and across narrative structures. Different pasts may be summoned up, but both have to match the same demands of the political present.

The narrative structures of the differing histories can be revealed by textual analysis with the help of foregrounded comparisons. All such analyses are conducted at the level of text *qua* text, but they lead out from the specific text to a consideration of the wider rhetorical context. Nevertheless, even if the texts are considered in theory as pieces of communication, this analysis has stopped short of considering their communicative effects. This neglect of the reception of texts has been a general weakness in the structuralist project (see, for instance, the criticisms of Morley, 1983, and Corner, 1983). In the present analysis nothing has been said about the possible reception of the *Sun*'s royal history. However, a brief theoretical word can be said about the hypothetical reader of the *Album*, or at least the person who collects the stickers.

Walter Benjamin described the pleasures of collecting in his essay 'Unpacking My Library'. He claimed that the genuine collector liberates an object by taking possession of it. Yet, it is very different for the collectors of the *Sun*'s royal cards. They are collecting objects that have been mass-produced for no other purpose than to be assembled into collections whose features have been planned by the producers. The act of collecting may result in the representations of history becoming the personal property of the collector, as the cards are duly affixed to their allotted positions in the album. However, these narrations of history have not been liberated in the way that Benjamin's collected objects were. Collecting the *Sun* stickers in no way disturbs the flow of the present, but is an act which joins the individual to a particular rhetorical moment of contemporary ideology. Thus, in possessing these histories, dutiful collectors are themselves collected together and possessed by the present.

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