

HONOURING HER MAJESTY

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We have a new heir to the throne. I wish an able Canadian writer would mythologize him in fiction or in song so that when the time comes, Canadians will take him to their hearts. Unfortunately, hounding paparazzi will do the mythologizing, rendering him undignified, comical, if not tragic like his grandmother Diana.

Not having gone to school here, it's been difficult for me to grasp the part that our monarch plays in my life. I've taken my cue from Alden Nowlan, who knew history and respected the Royal Family. He wrote about the monarchy in his usual sensible way, not knee-jerk liberal or conservative, but embracing the uncertainties.

If only there was a way to make our head of state seem to be a part of our lives. We change her representatives – governor general and lieutenant-governors – every few years, even though the important thing about monarchs is that they are constant and impartial. We don't elect our monarchs, so they don't serve at our whim. We've learned how to box them in so they can't shout "Cut off his head," but they also ensure that our government is stable.

I wonder how much New Brunswick schoolchildren learn about our constitutional monarchy. When Prince Charles becomes king, will Canadians think of him as the husband of Diana and paramour of Camilla, or will they be able to create an image of a monarch who guards our freedoms, protects the minorities, resists the fads of the day?

It's too bad that our Queen and those surrounding her are celebrities: like Paris Hilton, famous for being famous. They are not seen doing much except living luxuriously and attending events, thus disguising their real purpose.

A few immigrants recently decided they don't want to swear allegiance to the Queen when they become citizens. Charles Moore wrote an informative opinion column in the Telegraph-Journal about our constitutional monarchy, demonstrating why we must have a monarch and why anyone wanting to become a Canadian must swear allegiance to her. To change our system of government would be difficult and divisive; besides it works pretty well.

I've heard native-born Canadians complain that the Queen is a foreign monarch. It's true that the pomp connected to her seems alien – the fancy carriages, the many palaces and the vast cathedrals. But that's true only about the human being who embodies the queen or king at the moment, not the historic monarch who heads the Commonwealth. In a column on the divine right of kings Nowlan writes, "It is important to remember that it is the principle not the person of the king that mattered." A great empire was able to morph into a Commonwealth of 16 equal nations with the aid of this principle.

In another column, Nowlan wrote that if England had sent a younger son to be our monarch, we could have had one of our own. Maybe it isn't too late. We could still have Prince Edward with his Canadian wife. His children growing up in Canada would sound Canadian, play hockey instead of polo.

The foreignness must be why Canadian literature doesn't make much of our monarch. In the U.S., people write novels about fictional contemporary presidents; movies and TV series are made about them. School children read stories about the real presidents.

Our composers don't create music in honour of our Queen. I don't remember reading any contemporary Canadian fiction or poetry in which she or a fictional monarch plays a part. Our artists and writers don't give us much assistance for imagining how our monarch impacts our lives. Not much is made in our art, or in our media, of the fact that our present monarch is a woman, or that two great monarchs – Victoria and Elizabeth 1 – were women. It's unlikely that a woman will be elected president of the U.S. or prime minister of Canada in my lifetime.

We don't approve of hereditary classes, dukes and earls. Rich and famous people in Canada usually come from humble beginnings, progeny of immigrants who scratched out a living. In one of his columns, Nowlan gives Prince Charles's entire name: His Royal Highness Charles Philip Arthur George, Baron Renfrew, Earl of Chester, Duke of Cornwall and Rothesay, Prince and Lord High Steward of Scotland, Lord of the Isles and Prince of Wales. Nowlan is not belittling the name, but his spelling it out this way does make it seem foreign and slightly comic.

Where is a Canadian Shakespeare when I need her? A comic genius would do.