

EUGENE BARILO VON REISBERG

Garters and Petticoats: Franz Xaver Winterhalter's 1843 Portraits of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert

ABSTRACT

What does official royal iconography tell us? What messages does it communicate about the sitters – and from the sitters? This paper deconstructs two official portraits of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert painted by Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805-1873) in 1843. It outlines the complex semantic layering within this pair of British royal portraits, and explores in particular the emphasis on Prince Albert's newly-acquired 'Englishness' and the notion of an iconographic 'gender reversal' within the context of traditional marital pendants.

The Honourable Eleanor Stanley wrote in a letter that a 'regular dull evening' at Windsor Castle on 24 March 1845 was enlivened by the youthful Queen Victoria's impassioned speech about the state of British portraiture, 'a terrible broadside at English artists, both as regards their works and ... their prices, and their charging her particularly outrageously high.'¹ The twenty-six-year-old queen spoke from experience. As the heir apparent to the British throne, she had been painted from infancy by a succession of artists, vying for the patronage of the future sovereign. From her accession in 1837, the queen sat to numerous painters who failed to satisfy the requirements of official portraiture in the eyes of the monarch, her courtiers, and the critics.

David Wilkie's (1785-1841) portrait of the queen was condemned by the critics as being 'execrable'.² The queen considered her portrait by Martin Archer Shee (1769-1850) as 'monstrous';³ while the *Figaro* compared her countenance in the portrait by George Hayter (1792-1871) as that of an 'ill-tempered and obstinate little miss.'⁴ Portraits of Prince Albert, whom the queen married in February 1840, did not fair much better. His portrait by George Patten (1801-65) was considered to be lacking in regal dignity,⁵ the portrait by John Partridge (1790-1872) was dismissed as an 'inferior production',⁶ and the awkward portrait composition by John Lucas (1807-74) was widely lampooned by *Punch*.⁷

The frustrating search for a royal iconographer continued, and in 1841 it extended beyond the Channel. The attention was focused upon Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805-73), and careful enquires had been made by the Palace about his prices and his availability.⁸ From 1838 Winterhalter was successfully employed by Louis-Philippe,

This paper is partly based on my thesis, 'Tradition and Innovation: Official Representations of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert by Franz Xaver Winterhalter', M.A. diss., The University of Melbourne, 2009.

¹ Hon. Eleanor Stanley, to her father, Edward Stanley, Windsor Castle, 24 March, 1845; quoted in Stanley, 1916, p. 286.

² The Examiner, 1840.

³ Millar, 1992, vol. 1, p. xvii.

⁴ Figaro in London, 1839.

⁵ Millar, 1992, vol. 1, pp. 200-201.

⁶ The Art Union, 1841, p. 76.

⁷ Punch, 1845, p. 211.

⁸ Millar, 1992, vol. 1, p. 284.

King of the French, and his portraits of the French royal family became a regular staple of the annual Salon exhibitions. While British critics continued to condemn artistic aberrations featuring their sovereign and her husband, Winterhalter's portraits of French royal princesses inspired romantic poetry and violent declarations of love; and his romanticised, swashbuckling depictions of Louis-Philippe's sons and sons-in-law were considered worthy of the late Sir Thomas Lawrence.⁹

The artist arrived in London in June 1842, and rapidly proceeded to produce a modestly-sized three-quarter-length portrait of the queen in a white ball-gown and a pendant of Prince Albert in the Field-Marshal's uniform ([Fig. 1](#) and [Fig. 2](#)).¹⁰ Upon completion, the two portraits were universally judged an immediate success.¹¹ One of the queen's attendants, Georgiana Lady Bloomfield (1822-1905), thought Winterhalter caught 'the expression of the Queen's mouth' better than any of his predecessors,¹² and even Victoria's officially-appointed portraitist, Sir George Hayter, had to concede that the portraits were 'exceedingly like.'¹³ The critical response to them was likewise predominantly positive. The press found the resemblance of the queen 'the most successful which we have yet seen,'¹⁴ and foresaw the pervading popularity of Winterhalter's images. The public reception of Prince Albert's portrait was not as enthusiastic as that of the queen, but the critical consensus was that the present painting was the best portrait produced of the Prince to date.¹⁵ The portraits became the official representations of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert for years to come, and, judging from the proliferation of copies in public collections and on the art market, they were also among the most popular depictions of the young queen and prince.¹⁶

Garters and Petticoats: Official Portraits of 1843

The generally positive reception of Winterhalter's portraits of 1842 served as an impetus for Queen Victoria to invite Winterhalter to return to England in 1843. The artist was commissioned to execute a pair of far more ambitious and imposing paintings: official full-length portraits of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

Work on the portraits commenced immediately upon Winterhalter's arrival in England in July, and sittings were recorded in the queen's journal between 14 July and 25 August 1843; both Victoria and Albert were frequently present at each other's sittings.¹⁷ On 14 July, she commented on a 'beautiful sketch' Winterhalter had made of Albert in crayon and oil directly onto canvas; on 26 July she recorded Albert's

⁹ See, for example, Charles Lenormant's 'Salon de 1846', 1846 (Lenormant, 1846, p. 379) and Ormond and Blackett-Ord, 1988, p. 34.

¹⁰ Winterhalter, *Queen Victoria*, 1842, oil on canvas, 133.4 x 97.8 cm, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle; Winterhalter, *Prince Albert*, 1842, oil on canvas, 132.7 x 97.2 cm, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle.

¹¹ Millar, 1992, vol. 1, p. 286.

¹² Bloomfield, 1883, p. 40.

¹³ Queen Victoria's Journal, 21 June 1842; quoted in Millar, 1992, vol. 1, p. 286.

¹⁴ *The Age*, 1843, p. 3.

¹⁵ *The Age*, 1843, p. 3.

¹⁶ Ormond, 1977, pp. 35-36. Winterhalter also completed a portrait of Victoria and Albert's eldest daughter Victoria and of Albert's sister-in-law Alexandrine Fürstin von Sachsen-Coburg und Gotha (both 1842, oil on canvas, HM Queen Elizabeth II).

¹⁷ Ormond, 1977, pp. 35-36.



Fig. 3. Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *Queen Victoria*, 1843, oil on canvas, 273.1 x 161.6 cm, Windsor Castle, Royal Collection (by gracious permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II).



Fig. 4. Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *Prince Albert*, 1843, oil on canvas, 274.3 x 162.6 cm, Windsor Castle, Royal Collection (by gracious permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II).

delight with her portrait; and on 25 August she remarked that her own portrait was 'wonderfully like', and Albert's 'finished and beautiful.'¹⁸ Once completed, the portraits were placed in the Throne Room at Windsor Castle, where they have remained ever since.¹⁹

Winterhalter succeeded with his usual ease and panache in creating a monumental portrait of Queen Victoria (Fig. 3).²⁰ She stands on the elevated dais away from the foreground of the picture plane and dominates the psychological space of the painting. She confronts the viewers—her subjects—with a direct and imperious gaze. The fashionable evening gown and personal trinkets of the 1842 portrait have been replaced by heavy ceremonial garments, a magnificent suite of sumptuous Turkish diamonds, and the State Diadem with stylised roses, shamrocks, and thistles, symbolic of the queen's rule over her British dominions. Victoria proudly displays the Garter above the left elbow, and regally wears the voluminous robes of its Order. The crown and sceptre on her right, and the throne on her left are the traditional symbols of royal power. A heavy curtain in the background is lifted to reveal a glimpse of Buckingham Palace, the London seat of her power. The artist dwells on Victoria's femininity by outlining the delicate silhouette of her neck and effectively contrasting the dazzling *décolleté* of her shoulders (of which the queen was very proud) against the rich dark crimson of the background curtain. However, the portrait represents a break away from Winterhalter's characteristic portrayal of women. Such allegorical devices of femininity as serpentine arrangements of cascading flowers, which can be observed in his earlier portraits of French princesses, are absent from this painting. Instead, Winterhalter endowed Victoria with the masculine symbolism of monarchical power. The erect outlines of the queen, the sceptre, the throne, and the palatial colonnade in the background bring an overall sense of balance and stability to the portrait. She is the embodiment of sovereignty, the institution of majesty, the continuation of the dynasty, and of the monarchic tradition.

Winterhalter's pendant portrait of Prince Albert shows him similarly swathed in the Robes of the Garter, standing full-length, and facing the viewer (Fig. 4).²¹ The ultimate goal was likewise to construct the official, semiotic concept of the prince that conveyed his status and position to the widest cross-section of the British population. However, as will be demonstrated below, the portrait would have presented Winterhalter with numerous symbolic and compositional challenges, most of them without precedent in existing royal iconography.

While royal portraiture in Britain—as well as on the Continent—abounded with representations of queens *consort*, portraits of princes *consort* were rare. This was due chiefly to the Salic law, which codified the agnatic succession in continental Europe and essentially barred females from inheriting the throne.²² The few European princesses who succeeded under exceptional circumstances as reigning sovereigns, traditionally chose their husbands from the pool of other reigning monarchs, or

¹⁸ All references from queen's diaries are from Millar, 1992, vol. 1, pp. 287-88.

¹⁹ As sighted by the author, August 2005.

²⁰ Winterhalter, *Queen Victoria*, 1843, oil on canvas, 273.1 x 161.6 cm, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle.

²¹ Winterhalter, *Prince Albert*, 1843, oil on canvas, 274.3 x 162.6 cm, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle.

²² Williamson, 1988, p. 75.

promoted their spouses to an equal status of king—or a nearly equal status of king *consort*. The latter, thus elevated, were portrayed alongside their reigning wives in the full panoply of royal majesty. The British Royal Family, on the other hand, adhered to the law of succession in order of male primogeniture, which allowed for the inheritance of the throne by females. Nevertheless, of the five queens *regnant* prior to Queen Victoria, Elizabeth I (1533-1603) never married; Mary I Tudor (1516-1558) and Mary II Stuart (1662-1694) were each married to a king; while the brief reign of Lady Jane Grey (1536-1554) was not long enough to consider the official status or develop sufficiently the iconography of her husband, Lord Guilford Dudley (1536-1554).²³ The only other male consort of a reigning sovereign (who was not a king in his own right) was Prince George of Denmark (1653-1708), the husband of Queen Anne (1665-1714). His official iconography was scant at best.

The chronicles of Queen Anne's reign, who was the last female monarch prior to Victoria, were indeed consulted to ensure correct procedures during the Coronation, and corresponding gendered alterations to Parliamentary addresses, liturgical texts, and the royal precedence.²⁴ Queen Victoria's portraitists would have been advised accordingly on the particulars of the court dress and ceremonial regalia of a female monarch: thus we see Queen Victoria wearing the Order of the Garter on the left hand above the elbow, in the same manner in which it was worn by Queen Anne, as opposed to below the left knee as it is usually worn by male knights of the Order.²⁵ However, the position of Prince George differed greatly from that of Prince Albert. Upon his marriage to Anne, George had a royal dukedom bestowed upon him, which afforded him a seat in the Parliament and on the Privy Council.²⁶ When Anne succeeded to the British throne, she made her husband Lord High Admiral, effectively putting George in charge of the royal fleet.²⁷ The few portraits of George in the Royal Collection reflect his status accordingly. In a double portrait miniature with Queen Anne by Charles Boit (1663-1727), George is shown wearing his crimson ducal robes (Fig. 5).²⁸ In the monumental full-length equestrian portrait by Michael Dahl (1659-1743), George is shown in his full military splendour complete with a chased cuirass and naval flotilla in full sail in the background (Fig. 6).²⁹ However, Prince George's iconographic precedents were not applicable to Winterhalter's portrait of Prince Albert, as the latter had neither a peerage nor an actual military command.

In fact, Prince Albert initially had no official status within the complex hierarchy of British society, which could have inspired the artist's choice of allegorical or symbolical allusions within the portrait. Every aspect and facet of Albert's existence in his newly adopted country was subject to incessant political wrangling between the queen and her Parliament.³⁰ The suggestion that Albert's official title should be *King Consort* was flatly turned down (the alternative title of *Prince Consort* was not officially granted by the Parliament until 1857). He was to have no military rank lest he should seek political influence; he was refused a British peerage lest it entitle him

²³ Piper, 1984, *passim*.

²⁴ Weintraub, 1987, pp. 101-102.

²⁵ The Court Magazine, 1837, p. 89.

²⁶ Green, 1970, p. 54.

²⁷ Green, 1970, p. 56 and p. 94.

²⁸ Charles Boit, *Queen Anne and Prince George of Denmark*, 1706, enamel, 25.4 x 18.4 cm, Royal Collection.

²⁹ Michael Dahl, *Prince George of Denmark*, 1704, oil on canvas, 312 x 274.7 cm, Royal Collection.

³⁰ Greville, 1885, vol. 1, pp. 396-406; Weintraub, 1997, pp. 8-11.

to a seat in Parliament.³¹ His Naturalisation Bill was hotly contested, having been passed only after its third reading.³² Despite Albert's Lutheran faith and the fact that his ancestors sheltered Martin Luther from papal persecutions in 1540, dissenting voices even accused him of being a secret Roman Catholic.³³ His only legal position in England was to be that of a 'minor foreign princeling who happened to be the Queen's husband.'³⁴ It would be fair to say that early representations of Prince Albert reflected these ongoing debates and the uncertainty surrounding his official status. As a result, they uniformly failed to progress beyond a mere likeness of the prince.

When it came to state portraiture of monarchs and their spouses, Winterhalter was no novice. He had successfully resolved official representations of male sovereigns before, as can be seen in his portraits of Louis-Philippe, King of the French (Fig. 7),³⁵ and Leopold I, King of the Belgians (Fig. 8).³⁶ Louis-Philippe d'Orléans, who succeeded to the French throne after the Revolution of 1830, is shown in Winterhalter's portrait in a military uniform. Egalitarian tricolours and the Legion d'Honneur replace traditional royal decorations. His hand is prominently placed on the Charter of 1830, which illustrates the constitutional agreement between the king and his people. The crown and sceptre are still present in the portrait, but they are placed behind the Charter, and recede almost beyond the limits of the picture plane.³⁷

Leopold I of the Belgians likewise did not succeed to his sovereign position by inheritance. Born Prinz von Sachsen-Coburg-Saalfeld, he was elected by the Belgians as their constitutional leader after their country gained its independence from the Netherlands in 1831. In his portrait by Winterhalter, Leopold is shown in a Belgian military uniform, and his most prominent decoration is likewise a Belgian honour, the Grand Cross of the Order of Leopold I, which is further accentuated in the painting by the corresponding crimson sash. In both portraits Winterhalter eschewed the traditional representation of kingship, such as heavy flowing robes and sumptuous ceremonial regalia, arguably in order to illustrate the non-hereditary status of each monarch. The portraits are imbued with realism and modernity, emphasising the kings' rule not by the grace of God but by the will of their people. Their representations, however, could not have served as direct inspirations for Winterhalter's official portrait of Prince Albert, whose military status was honorary rather than factual, and who owed his position to peace-time dynastic considerations rather than politically-motivated military upheavals.

³¹ Greville, 1885, vol. 1, p. 402.

³² The Bill was passed on 4 February 1840, while the prince was already *en route* from Gotha to London, and only six days before his wedding: Greville, 1885, vol. 1, pp. 396-406; Weintraub, 1997, p. 17.

³³ To quell the rumours about the prince's covert "Papism", Gotha's protestant church was prominently featured in the background of George Patten's portrait. The medieval fortress, which towers over the horizon, is the place where an ancestor of Prince Albert allegedly hid Martin Luther from papal persecution. Bell's Life, 1840, p. 5; Weintraub, 1997, p. 2 and p. 8.

³⁴ Weintraub, 1997, p. 89.

³⁵ Winterhalter, *Louis-Philippe, King of the French*, 1839, oil on canvas, 260 x 190 cm, Musée National du Château de Versailles.

³⁶ Winterhalter, *Leopold I, King of the Belgians*, 1840, oil on canvas, 278 x 181 cm, Musée National du Château de Versailles.

³⁷ See Marrinan, 1988, pp. 14-16 for a penetrating analysis of this painting.

Winterhalter's *oeuvre* also contains official portraits of female consorts, depicted either by themselves or with their children, as can be seen in the full-length portrait of Duchesse d'Orléans with her eldest son, Comte de Paris (Fig. 9).³⁸ Hélène Prinzessin von Mecklenburg-Schwerin (1814-1858) came to Paris as the bride of the Duc d'Orléans in 1837.³⁹ She was Prince Albert's maternal cousin, and in a similar fashion to Prince Albert, her Lutheranism and Germanic origins were the source of frequent negative comments in French society.⁴⁰ It was perhaps to combat such attitudes through the medium of official portraiture that the Duchesse d'Orléans is depicted in her portrait surrounded by the markers of her adopted country. She is dressed in a fashionable Parisian gown with *Sévigné* folds and rich valances of French lace, and placed in an interior next to an imposing gilded piece of Boulle furniture, a well-known French palatial heirloom.⁴¹ Most importantly, she is holding the infant Comte de Paris, the heir to the King of the French. Hélène therefore embodies her position as the royal wife and mother, furthering and perpetuating the dynastic concerns of the ruling family of France. If I have mentioned before the dearth of iconographic precedents for the portrayal of male consorts of a reigning female monarch, to date I have not come across an official portrait of a male consort with a child semantically equivalent to the portrait of the Duchesse d'Orléans. Winterhalter did paint portraits of fathers with their children, such as the delightful portrait of Prince de Wagram with his daughter.⁴² However, the latter painting conveys a feeling of informality and paternal affection rather than a certain sense of psychological and emotional disassociation between the mother and child, arguably necessitated by the dynastically-charged depiction of the Duchesse d'Orléans.

So why did the portrait of Prince Albert, standing by himself and enveloped in the robes of the Garter, offer a suitable representational solution to the unique iconographic challenge of portraying a male consort? The Most Noble Order of the Garter is one of the oldest and most exclusive British orders of knighthood. It was instituted by King Edward III (1312-1377) around 1348, and is unique to the British monarchy. It is awarded at the sovereign's personal discretion to some of the most senior peers of the realm in recognition of their service to the country, and to foreign heads of state as the marker of close diplomatic ties.⁴³ Its exclusivity is one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the Order: at any one time, the number of Knights of the Order, including the British sovereign and the Prince of Wales, cannot exceed twenty six. The Garter is bestowed for life, and membership of the Order only becomes vacant upon the death of a Knight of the Order, at which time a new award can be issued. Its strict numerical limitation had remained inviolate for more than four hundred and fifty years until 1805, when George III introduced a purely honorary

³⁸ Winterhalter, *Hélène, Duchesse d'Orléans, née Prinzessin von Mecklenburg-Schwerin, with her son Louis-Philippe d'Orléans, Comte de Paris*, 1839, oil on canvas, 215 x 140 cm, Musée National du Château de Versailles.

³⁹ For the biography of Duchesse d'Orléans, see d'Orléans, 1859, and Schubert, 1859.

⁴⁰ Ormond and Blackett-Ord, 1988, p. 184.

⁴¹ *The Court Magazine*, 1842, p. 153. I am grateful to Valérie Bajou for pointing out that some of the furniture pieces, depicted in Winterhalter's portraits of Louis-Philippe's family, are still in the collection of the Musée du Château de Versailles (in conversation with author, April 2007).

⁴² Winterhalter, *Napoléon-Alexandre Berthier, 2nd Prince et Duc de Wagram, with his daughter, Mlle Malcy Berthier de Wagram, later Princesse Murat*, 1837, oil on canvas, 186 x 138 cm, Grosbois, Société d'Encouragement à l'Élevage du Cheval Français. See Ormond and Blackett-Ord, 1988, p. 80.

⁴³ The general information about the Order of the Garter has been compiled from Beltz, 1841.

companionship to include members of the Royal Family, which did not affect the strict twenty-six member limit.⁴⁴

Victoria, in turn, used her royal prerogative to issue a special statute and confer the Order of the Garter upon Prince Albert on 16 December 1839.⁴⁵ When all other distinctions were refused by the Parliament to her future husband, this was the only sovereign right the queen was able to exercise amidst the increasingly limited powers of a constitutional monarch. Queen Victoria thus became the first British sovereign, irrespective of gender, to confer the Order of the Garter on her spouse. By portraying Prince Albert, a young man no older than twenty-three, wearing the highly recognisable robes and insignia of the Garter, as well as other important military decorations, such as the collars of the Orders of the Golden Fleece and the Bath, which under normal circumstances would have been symbolic of a lifetime of achievements, Winterhalter succeeded in realising a portrait which visually signified a person of power and consequence, who also enjoyed the proximity and highest regard of the reigning monarch.

If we were to draw a semantic parallel between this portrait of Prince Albert and the portrait of the Duchesse d'Orléans discussed above, we can likewise examine this painting as a calculated depiction of a foreign-born prince representing his adopted country. In other words, if the Mecklenburg-born Duchesse d'Orléans is painted in valances of French lace to represent her *comme une française*, the formal vestments of the Order of the Garter emphasise the newly-acquired Englishness of the Coburg-born consort. Winterhalter's portrait thus forms a powerful visual antithesis to Albert's first portrait by George Patten, which showed the prince wearing a Prussian uniform.⁴⁶ The portraits of the Duchesse d'Orléans and Prince Albert, despite their apparent differences, thus converge in their emphasis on the sitters' loyalty to their adopted country through the use of clothes, accessories, and furnishings. This allegiance is further stressed in the prince's portrait by the British coat of arms, woven into the carpet design, and placed at Albert's feet.

Garter portraits of kings and nobles have had a long and distinguished history in British portraiture. Examples abound in the Royal Collection, including Lawrence's Garter portraits of George III (Fig. 10)⁴⁷ and Leopold I (Fig. 11).⁴⁸ Both kings are swathed in the Order's distinctive robes of royal blue with crisp white lining; both proudly display the Garter with its gilded motto below the left knee; while the extravagantly feathered headdress of the Order is equally prominent. An observation can be made that Garter portraits are compositionally indebted to official representations of kingship: the full-length stance of the sitters and cascading folds of their voluminous robes represent the most prominent points of iconographic similarities. As I will demonstrate below, the point of resemblance was not lost on royal portraitists, who frequently varied the versions of a 'Patron Portrait' to depict the sitter wearing vestments of state or the Garter as dictated by the occasion or the

⁴⁴ Beltz, 1841, p. cxxxv.

⁴⁵ Beltz, 1841, p. cxlvii; Weintraub, 1997, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Bell's Life, 1840, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), *George III*, c. 1792, oil on canvas, 269.2 x 117.8 cm, Royal Collection.

⁴⁸ Thomas Lawrence, *Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, later Leopold I, King of the Belgians*, 1821, oil on canvas, 269.9 x 182.2 cm, Royal Collection.

sitter's choice. In 1818, Lawrence painted the Prince Regent resplendent in the robes of the Garter.⁴⁹ A few years later, when the Regent succeeded as George IV in 1820, Lawrence reworked the same composition and represented the new monarch in the ermine-lined robes of state (Fig. 12).⁵⁰ The same can be observed with Queen Victoria's portraits by Hayter, though in reverse. A version of his portrait of the queen in dalmatic robes of 1838 was modified by the artist in 1843 to represent Victoria in the robes of the Garter.

It can be argued, therefore, that the very interchangeability of state and Garter robes around a compositional archetype served as an impetus for constructing an official representation of Prince Albert as a Garter knight. In other words, if his ill-defined status prevented the prince from being portrayed in the regal ermine-lined robes, his Garter vestments evoked the full panoply of the royal tradition. The installation of Winterhalter's portrait of Prince Albert in the Throne Room at Windsor Castle placed the painting thematically as well as physically within the context of other royal representations.⁵¹ It is thus possible that Winterhalter echoed state and Garter portraits of the Georgian era in his 1843 representation of the Prince Consort. Furthermore, Richard Ormond points to the compositional similarities between Winterhalter's portrait and Van Dyck's representation of Charles I in the Robes of State, which was also in the Royal Collection at the time (Fig. 13).⁵² There is indeed a strong correlation between the two with respect to the turn of the body, the right hand on the hip, and a high balustrade with a prominent central column in the background.

It can also be argued that Winterhalter may have been inspired by the paintings of his contemporaries, as can be seen when one examines the compositional and semantic parallels between Winterhalter's portrait of Prince Albert and Landseer's double portrait of the queen and prince of 1842 (Fig. 14).⁵³ Queen Victoria commissioned from Landseer a portrait of herself and the prince depicting them in the costumes they wore to the Plantagenet *Bal Costumé* on 12 May 1842.⁵⁴ While Landseer's painting has been widely discussed for its historical and genealogical implications,⁵⁵ its relationship to Winterhalter's portrait of Prince Albert has been hitherto overlooked. Landseer depicted the royal couple as their ancient predecessors, Queen Philippa and King Edward III of England. It is important to remember that the latter was the founder of the Order of the Garter, the insignia of which is visible on a wall hanging in the background of the Landseer's painting. While Victoria/Philippa is shown standing firmly on the top of the dais, Albert/Edward is shown ascending the dais and

⁴⁹ Thomas Lawrence, *The Prince Regent, later George IV*, 1818, oil on canvas, 295 x 204 cm, Dublin City Council, Civic Portrait Collection.

⁵⁰ Thomas Lawrence, *George IV*, 1821, oil on canvas, 289.6 x 200.7 cm, Royal Collection.

⁵¹ The placement of the portrait in the Throne Room of Windsor Castle is mentioned in Millar, 1992, vol. 1, p. 288. The portrait still remains *in situ*, with the pendant of the queen, as sighted by the author, August 2005.

⁵² Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641), *Charles I*, 1636, oil on canvas, 248.3 x 153.6 cm, Royal Collection. Ormond and Blackett-Ord, 1988, p. 38.

⁵³ Edwin Landseer (1803-73), *Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at the Bal Costumé*, 1842-46, oil on canvas, 143 x 111.6 cm, Royal Collection.

⁵⁴ See Millar, 1992, vol. 1, pp. 141-42, for further descriptions, details, and reviews of the 1842 *Bal Costumé*. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert gave several fancy-dress balls, and their appearance at the Restoration Ball on 13 July 1851 (dressed as Charles II and Catherine of Braganza) was commemorated by Winterhalter in a small oil sketch (1851, oil on canvas, HM Queen Elizabeth II).

⁵⁵ See, for example, Munich, 1998, pp. 28-32. See also Stevenson and Bennett, 1978 for the tradition of fancy dress balls in Britain.

offering his hand to the queen in a gesture which can be read simultaneously as one of both support and subordination. Landseer continued labouring on the portrait until 1847, and it is possible that Winterhalter may have been aware of the work in progress while he was engaged on his portrait of Prince Albert. If we were to reverse the figure of Prince Albert in Landseer's portrait, the resulting silhouette of the prince would closely resemble his depiction in Winterhalter's portrait, including the three-quarter turn of the body, raised left hand, right hand on the hip, and, most importantly, the left foot placed on a raised step of the dais. An examination of the respective stances of the queen and prince in Winterhalter's pendant portraits also reveals that Winterhalter painted the queen (just like Landseer) standing firmly on the podium, the elevation of which can be seen in the lower left hand corner of the painting. Prince Albert, on the other hand, mirroring his silhouette on Landseer's canvas, is shown standing at the foot of the dais, with only the toe of his shoe placed on the carpeted elevation. It can be argued that such a representation shows Winterhalter's inability to escape, whether intentionally or not, from intimating Prince Albert's subordination to the queen. He appears in Winterhalter's portrait physically and hierarchically on the step below his august wife. Albert owed his status and position to Victoria, and even his investiture with the Order of the Garter projected the queen's largesse.⁵⁶

The anomaly of Queen Victoria's position as the reigning sovereign and Albert's ancillary role as her spouse against the background of the predominantly patriarchal society of nineteenth-century Britain has been broadly discussed in a number of important recent feminist studies.⁵⁷ There is a general consensus that Prince Albert's subordinate position would have been considered as emasculation within the strict gendered hierarchies of Victorian Britain. If we were to return, albeit briefly, to Winterhalter's portrait of the Duchesse d'Orléans, we can observe that the artist constructed the identity of a *female* consort by emphasising Hélène's fecundity and femininity with such symbols as a full-bellied ovoid vase and the garlands of spilling flowers. The prince on the other hand firmly grips the ceremonial Field-Marshal's baton that prominently rises from his loins; the background of his portrait is a sturdy cylindrical column; and the prince's right foot is emphatically placed near the vulvic outline of his queen's coat of arms. It can be argued that the feminine / subordinate qualities of a *female* consort have been counterbalanced in Albert's portrait as a *male* consort with the symbols of phallic dominance.

By employing Winterhalter as her official iconographer, Queen Victoria followed in the footsteps of her royal predecessors, who invited elite portrait specialists from abroad whenever the pool of native talent periodically ran dry. The artist was able to create monumental portraits of Queen Victoria, portraying her as the personification of British Empire, its wealth, stability, and largesse. He was also able successfully—and respectfully—to reverse the gendered traditions of the royal iconography, and, by relying on the tradition of royal portraiture and his own intuitive innovations within the genre, create an iconographic construct of the Prince Consort. Prince Albert's Robes of the Garter visually manifest a person of power and consequence, and the close proximity and friendly regard of the monarch. The baton and insignias unmistakably point to the elevated status of the sitter, while the voluminous folds cascading onto the carpet form a visual link to official representations of kingship.

⁵⁶ Weintraub, 1997, p. 4.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Casteras, 1987; Homans, 1988, pp. 1-32; Homans and Munich, 1997; Munich, 1998.

That these iconographic devices were still current in the nineteenth century can be seen from portraits of George IV by Lawrence and of William IV by Shee. The Garter's motto, *Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense*—'Shame on him who thinks ill of it'—can be read as an illustrative reference to the Garter portrait, and as an indirect and symbolic reference to Prince Albert's unique and uneasy position within the societal and gendered hierarchies of Victorian Britain.⁵⁸

Despite Queen Victoria's satisfaction with the portraits and their significance as the first important pair of official, pendant representations of the queen and Prince Albert, she still appeared to have been cautious at this time about publicly acknowledging her increasing patronage of a foreign artist. The palace-controlled Court Circular remained silent about Winterhalter's activities at court until the middle of the 1840s. While Hayter's progress on the queen's portrait in Garter Robes for the King of Prussia was minutely recorded between January and March of 1843, no mention was made of the Garter portraits of the queen and prince by Winterhalter, which were being painted between July and August of the same year.⁵⁹ The queen's "gracious approvals" of lithographs and engravings after her portraits by British artists were also continually recorded, while those after Winterhalter's works went unmentioned in the Court Circular, perhaps deliberately censored by the Royal agency until at least the middle of the 1840s. While copies of Winterhalter's 1843 Garter portraits were commissioned for close family members and selected foreign heads of state, the wider distribution of these images, as well as the production of engravings after them, did not commence until 1847.⁶⁰ The Court Circular continued to report that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert sat to British artists, like Sir Francis Grant (1803-78), Frederick Newenham (1807-59), and John Partridge at least until 1845. The entries in the queen's journal and the reminiscences of her entourage at the time reflect the queen's increasing frustration with the length and number of the sittings, which were further compounded by indifferent or negative responses from the press when these portraits were shown at the Royal Academy.⁶¹ The study of the queen's iconography reflects this frustration and shows that from approximately 1845 onwards all requests for portraits of the royal couple were responded to with the presentations of copies after Winterhalter's portraits, the only official depictions of herself and the prince of which Queen Victoria wholeheartedly approved.⁶²

In fact, Queen Victoria was extremely active in the dissemination of her own images. Once Winterhalter began producing successful likenesses of the monarch and her family, they were multiplied *ad infinitum* to be placed throughout her residences, given to relatives and friends in Britain and abroad, and set into pieces of wearable jewellery. They were exchanged as diplomatic gifts with other heads of state, and sent to British embassies and legations abroad. Reproductions of these portraits through the relatively affordable medium of lithography also meant that the images of the British sovereign and her family were now within the reach of the widest cross-

⁵⁸ The motto of the Order of the Garter, which is visible on all insignias of the order, approximately translates as 'Shame on him who thinks ill of it'.

⁵⁹ The Times, 1843, p. 4.

⁶⁰ For the list of known copies (to date) see Barilo von Reisberg, 2009, Appendix II, nos. 3 and 4. Portraits were engraved by Atkinson, and published by Moon in 1847 (The Times, 1847, p. 6).

⁶¹ See, for example, the letter by Hon. Eleanor Stanley, to her father, Mr Edward Stanley, Windsor Castle, 24 March 1845: quoted in Stanley, 1916, p. 286.

⁶² See, for example, the examination of the portraits in the collection of HM Queen Elizabeth II in Millar, 1992.

section of the population within Britain and its farthest imperial outposts. For example, *St James's Medley*, reviewing lithographs of Winterhalter's later royal portraits in 1856, mentioned their affordability: 'Winterhalter originally produced [these] most striking portraits, which now adorn the Royal residence; whilst Mr. Lane has enabled the public generally to become possessed of copies at a trifling cost.'⁶³ Therefore, the production and distribution of her images for personal, political, diplomatic, and propagandist purposes played an important part in Queen Victoria's performance of her royal duties and in the visibility of the British Monarchy.

The official state portraits of Queen Victoria represented her *in absentia* throughout the offices of her power; symbolised her august presence in public buildings, private residences of the upper echelons of society, and humble homes of the working classes. Placed in British legations and agencies of the British Empire abroad, the portraits embodied the sovereign, under whose munificence and in whose name official business was to be transacted. They also represented the monarch to the millions of her subjects across the vast outreaches of the British Empire, who may never have seen their sovereign in person. They inspired awe and loyalty, reaffirmed the primacy of the monarchy, and became one of the cornerstones of the national identity to the multitude of the culturally and religiously diverse subjects of Queen Victoria's Empire.

The decision to entrust her official iconography to Franz Xaver Winterhalter, a portrait painter who was a foreigner and a German, was not taken lightly by Queen Victoria. In all other genres of painting, the queen remained a staunch supporter of British artists. However, to paraphrase Christopher Lloyd,⁶⁴ the nature of the royal iconography is propagandist, and Queen Victoria made the choice of Europe's leading exponent in the field to carry out the work.

Eugene Barilo von Reisberg commenced his professional career in the arts at the Museum of Russian Art in Kiev, Ukraine, and at the State Hermitage in St Petersburg, Russia. He pursued his passion for arts in Australia, and worked at Sotheby's, Fabergé, and the National Gallery of Victoria. From 1998 to 2008 he managed the respected Charles Nodrum Gallery in Richmond, and in 2000 he established his own art consultancy, BvR Arts Management. Eugene has produced a catalogue raisonné of Franz Xaver Winterhalter ([available online](#)) and in 2009 he completed his MA thesis on the artist at the University of Melbourne.

⁶³ 'Lithographic portraits of the Queen, Prince Albert, and the Princess Royal' (The St James's Medley, 1856, pp. 549-60).

⁶⁴ Lloyd, 1998, p. 9.

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