Marek Smoluk

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Marek Smoluk
University of Zielona Góra
Poland

A deadly combination: obsession and/or infatuation

Mary Tudor's way to the throne was fraught with pitfalls and ever-present dangers. If she ever believed in becoming queen, she could perhaps have anticipated that her reign would be beset by perplexing and complex issues. Long before she ascended the throne, her succession had been questioned on a number of occasions and had even been repealed by Henry VIII. During the rule of both her father and later her half-brother, the future Queen had been made to feel of little consequence. By the time she was crowned in 1553, Mary was able to conceal her fears; it was her coronation that opened up "Pandora's box" with her old obsessions, which were then complemented with some new ones.

The principal aim of this paper is to present Mary's reign not so much as a set of chronological events but as a period during which the maelstrom of her seething thoughts led to her self-destruction. Ever since Mary became the English queen, her thoughts were focused on three crucial issues: Elizabeth whom the Queen was always suspecting of plotting against her with a view to her dethronement, her infatuation with Philip of Spain and last but not least an important part

of the Queen's life was her mission of converting her subjects back to Catholicism. This would effect revenge on the Protestants by burning them at the stake.

The analysis of these aspects may bring the reader closer to the answer of the question whether the Queen was obsessed and/or already paranoid. To researchers of British civilization, the difference between these two states of mind may be subtle, therefore it is useful to contrast paranoia with obsession by citing first their definitions: Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English defines obsession as "a fixed and often unreasonable idea with which the mind is continually concerned"[1]. The Oxford English Dictionary augments this definition regarding obsession as "the action of any influence, notion, or 'fixed idea', which persistently assails or vexes, especially so as to discompose the mind"[2]. Being paranoid, according to the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology, means having "suspicious ideas and beliefs [...] that one is being harassed, persecuted, or treated unfairly"[3].

It was John Dudley's monumental folly in not placing Mary in custody after her half-brother's death, thinking that she would silently approve of Jane Grey on the throne and allow the Duke of Northumberland to rule the realm with Jane Grey as his virtual puppet. Mary was determined to win over the throne; not only was she the rightful heir, but also had a mission to fulfill i.e. to revive the faith in which she had been brought up and professed all her life[4]. As Northumberland's army dispersed, in September 1553 Mary Tudor entered London, where she was greeted with all the respects due to monarch. Now her principal aim was to restore Catholicism in

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[1] *Longman Dictonary of Contemporary English*, Longman Group UK Limited 1987, p. 714.
[2] *The Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition, Vol. X*, Oxford 1989, p. 664.
[3] A. M. Colman, *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology*, Oxford 2001, p. 531.
[4] More on Mary Tudor's childhood and religious education see: M. Smoluk, Royal education in the Tudor age, [in:] *Lubelskie Materiały Neofilologiczne*, No. 31/2007, Lublin 2007, pp. 193-209.

England and tie it to Rome as it had been prior to 1527[5]. Thus, Mary set about her task with great determination, first giving an order to cancel the legislation according to which the marriage of her parents had been made illegal. As this decision could be viewed as caution on her part to assure her position, her next decision was aimed directly at the Church; all the reforms that had been introduced during the reign of her predecessor – Edward VI – were to be repealed. Namely, Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer introduced according to the Act of Uniformity was declared invalid and the mass and other religious practices were now to be based on the times of her father when Catholicism had been the only acceptable religion. This meant that the Latin mass was reintroduced as well as penalties for those not going to church on Sundays and Holy days. Furthermore, those church officials, who during the reign of her half-brother had been dismissed and often imprisoned, now were released from captivity and awarded the highest ranks in the Church. Amongst those who became effective tools with which Catholic restoration was being made were Stephen Gardiner, Edmund Bonner and Reginald Pole. Their faithful obedience to Mary Tudor and Rome led to further repercussions; about two thousand married priests were dismissed on the grounds of failing to practise celibacy; others in fear of sharing their fate recanted their marriages[6].

Prior to Mary's coronation, Elizabeth had never had close relations with her half-sister. Not only was Elizabeth viewed as her possible rival for the English throne, but also the two women differed drastically in their religious beliefs. Both arguments could be fatal to the Princess. The much younger and intelligent Elizabeth seeing how much and how quickly religion was undergoing change began to understand that for her own safety better she should convert to Catholicism. Much as she disliked long and tedious services at

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[5] W. P. M. Kennedy, Difficulties of Queen Mary [in:] *Studies in Tudor History*, London 1916, pp. 124-125.

[6] J. Choińska-Mika, Polityka wyznaniowa ostatnich Tudorów, [in:] *Mówią Wieki*, No. 4-5, Warszawa 1996, p. 89.

church[7], Elizabeth decided to keep up the appearance of being a devoted member of the Catholic Church. For the time being, Mary took her mind off Elizabeth who could unwittingly feel safe – at least temporarily.

The more urgent matter to which the Queen needed to attend was the issue of succession. Mary Tudor was already 37 years old, which by 16th century standards was the optimum time for giving birth to a child. Despite the fact that she was aware of her biological clock ticking fast, she rejected Henry Courtenay's proposal[8]. Even though Courtenay was a great-grandson of Edward IV and was regarded as a suitable match for the aging Queen, she would rather find Philip of Spain, the son of the Emperor Charles a perfect candidate for her husband and father for her children. In addition, Mary thought that nobody else would be able to guarantee a firmer bond between England and Rome as well as keep her kingdom in faithful devotion to Catholicism. The combination of these two factors with Philip's physical attractiveness resulted in the Queen's infatuation with the Spanish king[9]. Mary proceeded now to evidence her love and marry Philip, irrespective of the fact that the Parliament considered her choice to have been appalling.

The marriage contract can be assessed in different ways, depending on the angle from which one looks at it. From the Queen's viewpoint, the marriage was a blessing and the merits of it are best summarised by Simon Schama, who says:

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[7] M. Smoluk, *op.cit.*, p. 207.

[8] N. Cawthorne, *Życie prywatne angielskich władców*, Warszawa 2000, p. 35.

[9] *Ibidem*, p.36: The irony is that Philip of Spain did not reciprocate his opinion and found Mary Tudor unattractive, to put it mildly. The further explanation one finds in P. Williams' *The Later Tudors England* where quoting after an anonymous Spaniard in the retinue of Philip of Spain the author writes: 'The Queen [...] is not at all beautiful: small and rather flabby than fat, she is of white complexion and fair and has no eyebrows. She is a perfect saint and dresses badly'. See: P. Williams, *The Later Tudors England 1547-1603*, Oxford 1995, p. 86.

> The best was done to protect England. Philip was to be made king in title only and was to be sworn to protect and preserve English institutions. If the queen died before him, he was still to be excluded from the line of succession[10].

However, not everyone shared Mary Tudor's opinion in favour of Phillip. Undoubtedly, the French court did not like the prospect of England and Spain being united by this marriage; therefore they offered to sponsor a rebellion in England. Thomas Wyatt in collaboration with Courtenay[11] now agreed to lead an uprising in protest against the Queen's marriage with Philip. This they thought of as detrimental to English interests. The revolt was initiated in Kent, but it had no chance of success. No sooner had the rebels begun their pillage in London than they were defeated in Kingston and the uprising was crushed totally before it could spread. The putting down of the rebellion ushered in the period of persecutions. Not only the leaders of the revolt but also one hundred participants were executed in order to set an example for future.

The Queen decided to extend her private scourge not only to those who had actively participated in the uprising, but also to those who might have sympathised with this act of disloyalty viz. Lady Jane Grey, her husband, father and brother were sentenced to death as they may be the possible source of future evil.

Also Elizabeth, who until Wyatt's rebellion had been on good terms with the Queen and had even been granted permission to leave the royal court to reside in the countryside, now was summoned to London. This protracted and detailed hearing was to prove that the aim of the rebellion had been to overthrow Queen Mary; the coup d'état of which Elizabeth was now being suspected of as the initiator[12]. The examination of Elizabeth evinced no evidence, yet she was sentenced to imprisonment in the Tower. Clearly, Mary Tudor could not afford to have her half-sister at large as she no longer trusted her. Certainly, in addition to this mutual lack of trust was the changing

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[10] S. Schama, *A History of Britain*, Vol. 1, London 2000, p. 271.
[11] As already mentioned, his advances the Queen had previously turned down.
[12] A. Fraser, *The Lives of the Kings and Queens of England*, London 1975, p. 201.

climate of terror and Elizabeth's inability to play the theatrical role of an ardent Catholic. The Queen's suspicions were increasing.

In her search for the offenders of the rebellion and their sympathisers, Mary grew in conviction that the revolt was unsuccessful because more than 25,000 Londoners had volunteered to defend their Queen[13] and it was God's will to punish the unfaithful. She went further; in her belief she began to interpret the victory as "a sign that God approved her marriage"[14]. Confident in the outcome of her cogitations, Mary Tudor married Philip of Spain at Westminster Abbey in July 1554. Shortly after the marriage it occurred to her that for the first time in her life she had someone she could trust and rely on. The Queen deliberated and finally convinced herself that "with the help of God and Philip, she could set about cleansing the realm of the pollution of heresy"[15].

The royal marriage appears to have confirmed the restoration of Catholicism in England and cemented the ties between Canterbury and Rome. The re-union of the Church of England with the Pope was feasible subject to certain conditions: English nobles were permitted to keep the land and such other chattels that came into their possession as the result of the Dissolution of the Monasteries of the late thirties. Though this compromise between the Crown and Parliament failed to realise Mary's wishes[16], it enabled the monarch to obtain a legal sanction to persecute heretics and burn them at the stake of her own accord[17]. The anti-Protestant laws applied not only to those who were not Catholics thus - by implication - heretics, but also anyone who dared to question the royal marriage of Mary and Philip, could be convicted and executed.

At the time Parliament was granting permission for prosecutions of heretics, MPs were aware that their jurisdiction over the English

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[13] Ch. S. Fearenside, *A History of England, 1485-1580*: with a chapter on the literature of the period, London 1891, p. 90.
[14] S. Schama, *ibidem*.
[15] *Ibidem*, p. 272.
[16] G. M. Trevelyan, *Historia Anglii*, Warszawa 1963, p. 390.
[17] *Ibidem*.

ceased and it was automatically passed on to the Privy Council and powerful Church officials under Mary's control. Clearly, they must have assumed that the Protestants' conflicts would resemble the persecution of heretics as in the reign of Henry VIII[18]. Little did they expect that in this way they smoothed the path for the years of terror to come.

The first target of attack was the clergy, who under reign of Mary's predecessor had been allowed to get married. Now, if they did not want to be dismissed from their parishes, they had to confirm their practising of celibacy. Over two thousand did not lie and thus lost their posts[19]. It is noteworthy that the lower echelons of the clergy were not the only group to be victimised by the Queen. The scourge was also aimed at ordinary people such as "cloth-workers, chandlers, cutlers – and many of them were young, members of the generation who had felt the excitement of finding truth through their own reading of the English Bible"[20].

The first of the Marian martyrs to be burned at the stake was John Rogers, an English translator of the Bible. His death initiated a series of burnings. Examples abound, but only a few of the most outstanding have been selected here to illustrate the point; John Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester suffered a lingering death as the gunpowder thrown on the bonfire failed to ignite, thus prolonging his agonising torment[21]. Similarly, two bishops: one of London -Nicholas Ridley and the other of Worcester – Hugh Latimer were not broken during their interrogations carried out at Oxford. They remained faithful to their beliefs to the end. Before they died in defence of their faith Hugh Latimer is believed to have uttered the following words to Nicholas Ridley: "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as I trust shall never be put out"[22].

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[18] *Ibidem*, p. 391.
[19] J. Choińska-Mika, *op.cit.*, p. 89.
[20] A. Fraser, *Sześć Żon Henryka VIII*, Pruszków 1994, p. 88.
[21] S. Schama, *op.cit.*, p. 272.
[22] Quoted after: Ch. S. Fearenside, *op.cit.*, p. 93.

Another outstanding martyr of the time was the eminent archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer. The head of the English Church in matters of religion had already made a name for himself during the reign of Henry VIII. With unimaginable courage he had defended Thomas More, John Fisher, Mary Tudor, Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cromwell. Besides being the author of his well-known Prayer Book, Thomas Cranmer was a man of great influence having maintained contact with all the European reformers. A man such as Cranmer, with both an impeccable reputation and superlative achievements could be an extremely useful tool in the Queen's endeavours to cleanse the kingdom of heresy. Mary, being supported by bishops Bonner and Thirlby, managed to deceive the old man by making it bluntly obvious that she was ready to repeal his death warrant on condition that he recanted his Protestant faith. The archbishop indeed proceeded to act as expected, but when four months later the Queen demanded that he should make a public recantation and admit his errors from the pulpit, the archbishop realised what Mary's intentions had been viz. he had already been sentenced to death but the execution was suspended as long as he remained useful in backing up Catholicism and justifying the Queen's religious policy[23]. No sooner had this realisation hit him than the archbishop revoked his previous statements and chose to die as a courageous man. As he was brought from the church to the stake, archbishop Cranmer "thrust his hand that had signed the false recantation into the flames, punishing it for its insincerity"[24].

As already mentioned above, the majority of the Marian victims were ordinary people and these three spectacular executions of notable figures were only an indication of what the nation was soon to witness. After Thomas Cranmer's death, the seat of the Canterbury see was taken over by cardinal Pole who decided to accelerate the speed and scope of the persecutions. The devotion with which the Protestants were now prosecuted became notorious. Witch-hunting of

[23] A. Fraser, *op.cit.*, p. 90.
[24] S. Schama, *op.cit.*, p. 272.

the dissidents under Pole's guidelines meant that neither the living nor the dead could feel safe. For instance, the new cardinal ordered that in the cemetery at Cambridge the bodies of Buncer and Fagius should be dug up in order to punish the dead men in public at the stake[25]. Similarly, John Tolley's body was exhumed in order to be burned because rumour had it that the dead man had spoken unfavourably of the Pope as he stood on the scaffold. These are only several examples of many, which are described in detail in John Foxe's book known as the "Book of Martyrs"

At the time the persecution of the Protestants was in full swing, Elizabeth was already incarcerated in the Tower of London. The future Queen was totally aware of the mortal danger she was in. Her only hope was that she would not be made a life prisoner without first preferring charges against her. Much to Mary's bitter disappointment, it appeared impossible to find any substantive evidence on the basis of which the Queen could send her half-sister into the dock. The failure to convict Elizabeth of plotting against the Crown did not lessen Mary's fears; consequently she was put under home arrest in one of the royal residences. Despite her assiduous efforts, the Queen was able neither to quieten Elizabeth down nor to execute her. All Mary could do was to humiliate her half-sister on every possible occasion and make her life under house arrest ever more miserable.

Mary Tudor was unable to deliver a crushing defeat not only on Elizabeth, but also the majority of English Protestants. The Queen's bonfires, though lit often and throughout the kingdom, could not eradicate all heresy[26]. This was so because the Protestants lived and worked as a kind of underground movement, gathering in secret spots under the leadership of ever changing ministers. Such communities of the Protestants existed in London, Kent and eastern England. Not all Protestants, however, were to live in fear of arrest and inevitable

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[25] A. Fraser, *ibidem.*

[26] Further deliberation on why the religious policies of Mary I Tudor failed refer to: M. Rathbone, Was Mary I's Persecutions of Protestants Counter-Productive? [in:] *History Review*, Dec 2001, Issue 41, pp. 20-25.

death. Some eight hundred of the intelligentsia, including lawyers, the clergy and students left for Zurich, Geneva, Frankfurt and Strasburg[27]. The consequences of permitting these groups to emigrate were negative in the extreme and are best summarised by Kenneth Morgan:

> Yet Mary made two mistakes. The first was to allow some 800 English Protestants to emigrate [...]. For not only did these exiles launch a relentless crusade of anti-Catholic propaganda and subversive literature against England, which the government was obliged to suppress or refute as best it could; they also flocked home again upon the accession, in 1558, of Elizabeth, the Protestant Deborah, as they believed her to be [...][28].

The second mistake, which the author mentions, refers to the Queen's marriage with Philip of Spain. Before this aspect is taken into account, mention must be made that Mary did not confine herself only to harassing Elizabeth and cleansing her realm of heretical communities, which were fated either to death at home or refuge abroad. The Queen - from her own experience - knew that Oxford and Cambridge had been the centres of heresy in the past and may well spread this pestilence in the future. Appropriate measures were taken in advance and the greatest Protestant scholars were dismissed from their posts and replaced by their Spanish Catholic counterparts. Both in Oxford and Cambridge the old colleges were reformed in the Catholic spirit. In addition, new colleges were founded such as St John's and Trinity; their role was to popularise Catholicism in scholarly circles. Similarly, in the countryside the process of restoring Catholicism ended in tremendous success. For example, four fifths of the parishes in Kent converted to the newly imposed religion within four years[29].

The successes of her home policy were to be torpedoed by Mary's blunders and failures in her personal life, thus the second mistake to which Kenneth Morgan referred. The marriage of Mary and Philip seems to have been approved solely by the Queen since others, including her Privy Council opposed it and attempted to persuade

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[27] J. Choińska-Mika, *op.cit.*, pp. 89-90.
[28] K. O. Morgan, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*, Oxford 1984, p. 263.
[29] J. Choińska-Mika, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

Mary to give up the plan. Eventually, Mary proved adamant and married Philip. The marriage proved to be disastrous as the only party involved in it emotionally was the Queen. The Spanish king, now Mary's husband, did not make too much effort to conceal his interest in other ladies at the royal court[30]. The Queen seemed either not to take notice of it, or knew everything and in her desperation decided to announce that she had become pregnant. In May 1555 the official statement from the court informed that due to miscalculation of the conception, the Queen would be giving birth to a child at a later date. In August the Queen was compelled to admit that she had suffered a false pregnancy. On hearing the news Philip of Spain decided to leave England for Spain. The Queen saw him off at Greenwich, and having returned to her royal residence, she broke down[31]. She began to realise that in her marriage there would be no room for happiness, which she had hoped to find. Philip of Spain, instead of being Mary's bulwark turned out to be a source of loneliness and deep depression. In her desperation she wrote letters begging him to come back. When, the following year, Philip of Spain returned, his mission was not to be reunited with his wife, but to endeavour to persuade the infatuated woman to join him in war against France. Her agreement to participate in the war was Mary Tudor's most damning decision of her foreign policy since ultimately it cost England the loss of Calais – the last English possession in France. This failure in the war must have been a heavy blow to the Queen's image and self-esteem. The last straw came, however, upon Philip's departure in January 1558 when Mary began to imagine that she had become pregnant again. In fact, it was a tumour or dropsy, which gave rise to hallucinations and in the end led to her death[32].

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[30] N. Cawthorne, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

[31] *Ibidem*, p. 37.

[32] See a detailed account of the Queen's last days: J. M. Stone, *The History of Mary I, Queen of England as found in the public records, dispatches of ambassadors in original private letters, and other contemporary documents*. London 1901, pp. 459-475.

The death of Mary Tudor did not leave the nation in mourning. In fact, her subjects felt a sense of relief and they rejoiced in the streets. Similarly, Elizabeth, who as soon as she learnt of her half-sister's death, fell on her knees and uttered in Latin: "this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"[33]. The cruelties committed by Mary Tudor are legendary and undisputed. The fact that her father had acted with the heretics in an identical manner or that dissidents were being executed in greater numbers on the continental mainland does not redeem her in this overall assessment. Irrespective of the hatred that the Queen aroused in the Protestants and Elizabeth and the pity coupled with contempt in Philip of Spain, Mary seems to have been a tragic figure. All her life she had craved love, yet this yearning remained elusively beyond grasp to the very end. Not surprisingly, her infatuation with Philip of Spain, as the months passed, began to take the form of an obsession. Similarly, she was conscious of her sacred obligation to produce an heir who would continue to rule her Catholic England. Her advanced age for conception made her bitter in the obsession that she would be unable to fulfil her monarchical duty. Consequently, she turned these two obsessions against Elizabeth and English Protestants about whom she became almost paranoid. In fairness, Mary was fully conscious of the fact that Elizabeth was waiting to succeed her and the Protestants were ready to do away with Catholicism. Therefore, she rejected all diplomacy and proved to be a monarch who offered no compromise. Whatever objectives she had set for herself, she stubbornly looked forward to their realisation, paying no attention to the side effects and showing no regard for the possible damaging consequences.

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