Refractory: a Journal of Entertainment Media, Vol.3, 2003.

The Most Charismatic King: Nascent Celebrity in the French Renaissance

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Few escaped his spell, and even the most astute observers were quite taken with him. By all outward appearances Francis [I] was the very picture of royalty, one of the few Renaissance kings who actually looked and acted the part. (Hansen 1980, p. 98)

Although the zenith of western, celebrity culture is located in the modern era, an incipient, anthropocentric manifestation is found in sixteenth-century France during the early modern period. Specifically, this celebrity culture finds its articulation in the glittering, socially insular court of Francis I, who reigned as King of France from 1515 to 1547 - a period that reflects the cultural climax of the French Renaissance. The eloquent arbiter of Renaissance deportment and decorum, Baldassare Castiglione rhetorically expressed the magnificence and magnanimity for which Francis I, the exemplary courtier, ideal prince, chivalrous warrior, and eminent patron of arts and letters was renowned for: "When I was at the court not so long ago, I saw this prince; and, besides the disposition of his body and the beauty of his countenance, he appeared to me to have in his aspect such greatness that the realm of France must always seem petty to him". (Castiglione 1959, p. 68)

As a result of Francis I's aesthetic precocity, the sixteenth-century French court was distinguished by the prominence that was attributed to the art of portraiture, which significantly, and unprecedentedly, amplified the saliency of the visual re-presentation of the King. [1] Functioning as self-promoting publicity, the portraits of Francis I were not only characteristically glamorous, but emphasised his distinctive facial feature of an extremely long nose, which has made his image and identity effortlessly identifiable for viewers in different temporal and cultural contexts. [2]

However, the King's impressive visual imag(in)ing was offset by a large assemblage of contemporary, formal and anecdotal textual depictions, or literary portraits, which highlighted his reputation as an inveterate libertine. The gossipy tone and apocryphal nature of some of these sixteenth-century courtly

observations are a precursor of modern tabloid journalism, [3] and Francis I's repute as a legendary *roué*, is his most ambivalent and controversial attribute, which continues to ignite the imaginations of many modern biographers: 'Francis I, l*e roi grand nez* - a long nose was thought to signify virility, and he had both - seemed bent on outperforming Don Juan. [Aside from his] most memorable royal concubines...he always had other irons, so to speak'. [4]

From within this mutually influential interface of literary and artistic portraiture, Francis I emerges as a 'larger-than-life' personage, who appears to have had the 'it' factor in abundance. It was, however, through the King's sophisticated representation in his many and varied portraits that his extraordinary sense of charisma was most effectively constructed and disseminated. In comparison to the portraits of his medieval, royal predecessors, the portraits of Francis I are strikingly unique. They almost imperceptibly melded his desirable, physical distinction, which as will be discussed shortly, far surpassed the length of his nose, with sixteenth-century, sociocultural ideology. These mindfully fabricated, individualised, yet idealised, royal re-presentations, vaunted the King's physical singularity, which was lauded by his contemporaries. This corpus of (naturalistic and allegorical) portraits also illustrates the seductive, yet flexible capacity of the King's image and identity, which was not only 'built-up' over time, but consciously aimed at the garnering of an admiring, even adoring, and often envious, national (French) and international (European) audience.

In this way, from a different historical perspective, Francis I can be generally posited as a kind of 'fledgling celebrity', a rudimentary model of the modern 'celebratised' statesman and/or media personality or, more explicitly, an archetypal, (self)-styled, 'playboy prince.'[5] The representation of figures of (masculine) authority and power constitutes a relatively continuous, though richly varied, referent of European art and western visual media. Whereas in the present historical context, the judgement of authoritative figures of power focuses on their relative strength of leadership and charisma, among other vaguely defined factors concerning personal morality and sexuality, during the Renaissance this was equivocated to an assessment of a ruler's reputed 'honour' and 'virtue.' (Murray and Eisenbichler 1996, 101)

The concepts of honour and virtue not only hold great significance for a discussion of the representation of Francis I, but for all sixteenth-century monarchs. While the specific definitions of these terms were derived from the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and were revised during the Renaissance period (Wiley 1954, 15-23, 177-178), they continue to be of resounding relevance in the equivalent visual culture of the early twenty-first century.

Likewise, the utilisation of art - or visual imagery - and artifice remains an integral component of the successful achievement of celebrity status and, in this way, the portraits of Francis I signify an important juncture in western, visual culture, especially in terms of images of rule. French Renaissance, royal portraiture evinces a changing cultural canon of the portrayal of power and authority, from a predominantly masculine, monarchical framework, to a democratised and secular social model. (Rojek 2001, 13-14 & Guardini 1996) Francis I's contemporary status as a fledgling celebrity via an efficacious, largely visual construction of his charisma, and its relation to and affect on his local and

foreign male and female companions has, nevertheless, not been explored.

Although celebrity is closely related to the concept of 'fame', which is further interrelated with the notion of honour, and has a history extending back to ancient Greece and Rome (Braudy 1986), there are subtle connotative differences between the two terms. Whereas both denote the state of being widely known or recognised as a famous person, fame, unlike celebrity, implies a reputation that has transcended its immediate cultural context and boundaries into a remote, future time and place, thus it is intimately linked with posterity. Conversely, there is a distinct temporal and cultural limitation of celebrity that binds it more tightly, though elusively, to a specific period and culture, thus it is more likely to be superficial, artificial and capricious (Rojek, 2001, 9). Based on this understanding, it is accurate to state that Francis I, unlike many of his preceding and successive French monarchs, with the conspicuous exception of his Bourbon scion, the 'Sun King' Louis XIV (reign 1643-1715), has undoubtedly achieved a relative level of fame. This is partly due to Francis I's outstanding artistic, architectural and educational patronage, which earned him the epithet of 'Père des arts et lettres',[6] and also because he 'is probably, with Louis XIV, the most easily recognized king in the whole of the French monarchy'. (Richardson 2002, 191) But, there are also fundamental criteria in the making, presentation and dissemination of the contemporary portraits of Francis I that clearly resonate with the modern idea of celebrity.

As King of France, Francis I was initially the beneficiary of an early form of ascribed celebrity. But through his behaviour and visualisation, visible to the modern viewer via his portraits, he also achieved an element of contemporary, celebrity status (Rojek 2001, 17-18). His rank as King of France was, moreover, literally *predetermined* because Francis I was actually from a cadet branch of the royal House of Valois - the Angoulême - and became a monarch through sheer luck of circumstance (Knecht 1994, 1). In the highly superstitious culture of Renaissance France, he was, however, unusually marked to be of royal stock before he was born by prophecy, as opposed to his assumed accession of the throne through the direct, royal lineage.[7] Traditionally, French kings were marked by their especial royal blood, which was deemed 'to be continuous, stretching through time from one king to the next. Royal blood was clear, transparent, luminous, and, in contrast to normal blood, a sombre red' (Knecht 1994, 88-89) The conspicuous symbolism of royal blood was followed and supported by a sequence of established rites and ceremonials, from the sacre at Rheims, entrées royales, to the final obsequy and burial in the royal necropolis at Saint Denis, among other performative forms of highly charged pageantry.[8] Prior to the reign of Francis I, the foremost ceremony of medieval and Renaissance French kingship, the sacre or coronation, was a major way in which

the charisma of the monarch was constructed and perpetuated. Royal incumbents were not only crowned, but anointed with sacred holy oil that had been used for the baptism of Clovis, the first Christian King of France (reign 481-511), which invested them with the official title of 'Most Christian King'. [9]

This highly symbolic and performative rite ascribed French kings with a special 'magical power' or thaumaturgical ability to 'cure' the disfiguring disease identified as scrofula (glandular tuberculosis) by merely touching them.[10] It was a sacred attribute and quasi-priestly function that was implicitly associated with the royal anointment, yet was shared by the kings of Germany and England.[11] The fundamentally religious foundation of the theory and exercise of French kingship was the most static and pervasive tenet of the institution, as it enhanced the elementary legitimacy of the monarch through a simultaneous allusion to and illusion of their seemingly innate, 'supernatural' charisma.[12] Along with the *sacre*, the *entrée royale* or royal entry and funerary ceremony, were also extremely consequential rituals that established and maintained this 'given' or 'institutionalised' charisma of French sovereigns, especially the inaugural entry into Paris (See Bryant, 1966). Operating not that differently to the contemporary 'red carpet' entrance of the Hollywood star, the visual and aural spectacle created an interactive stage in which 'Both the king and city were on view', and, through which, 'the king moved through throngs [13] who issued joyous acclamations and offered, in pageantry at set places, an image of themselves and of the prince' (Bryant 1966, 99). The king himself was also positioned as both observer and participant (Giesey 1985, 53; Bryant 1985, 99), and was introduced to his broader subject base through an offering of an exclusive, corporeal first impression; an anticipated, grandiloquent display of majesty that was reciprocated with an array of public, lavish entertainments.

The royal funeral was the ceremony in which the central, cogent idea of royal continuity or 'seamless kingship' was most patently founded. By the mid-to-late sixteenth-century, that is upon the death of Francis I, it had gradually formed into an extravagantly styled and drawn-out vigil, complete with a realistic, regally-dressed wax effigy of the expired monarch (Giesey 1985, 46-50). According to primary sources, Francis I's hyper-realistic, sumptuously clad effigy created from his death mask,[14] spent a week reclining in wait in a salle d'honneur being regularly and ceremoniously served wine and meals before it was finally replaced with the coffin enshrouded in black (Giesey 1985, 48). In terms of decorum, this elaborate practice must have exercised a subtle, restraining influence, or at least, established useful visual and symbolic parameters on the incipient representation of the successive sovereign. [15] Yet, this grandiose funerary ceremony may actually reveal more about the aspirations and objectives of the ensuing Valois monarch, Henri II (reign 1547-1559), and the political motivations and visual capital of his artists and advisers (Anderson 1979, 379-399). Notwithstanding this accurate observation, it is also clearly indicative of a concerted effort of a bid for fame during Francis I's own lifetime, evidencing the remarkable magnitude - or fledgling celebrity status - of his charismatic image and identity within his immediate social milieu of the French court.

The idea of celebrity encompasses relative, positive and negative aspects, since a person can achieve celebrity status through behaviours that transgress

sociocultural norms, thus bringing them 'notoriety' or 'infamy' (Rojek 2001, 10) While a celebrity culture is largely socially constructed, it is also necessarily unregulated, because image-makers of celebrities - and celebrities themselves - often endeavour to manipulate representations according to personal and cultural (ideological) biases, just as viewers can misinterpret the intended meanings of the resultant visual images. While 'the fame of celebrity is ubiquitous', it is clear that 'Renown...depends on reciprocal personal or direct para-social contact. These individuals have a sort of localized fame within the particular social assemblage of which they are a part' (Rojek 2001, 12) In approaching the portraits of Francis I as a primordial indication of a burgeoning celebrity culture, a tension exists between his contemporary, ascribed and achieved renown, which is juxtaposed against his future fame. But, along with his posthumous fame, Francis I has also achieved a level of notoriety, which can denote a negative form of celebrity, and it is this aspect of the King's historical legacy that has been particularly emphasised, or more accurately, criticised, in the modern historical context (Hansen 1980,80-81, 83-84, 98-100, 103-105).

Despite the broad cultural links between the imagery of leaders in the past and the present historical contexts, there are still extremely important and obvious differences that problematise my central argument. For example, in the Renaissance period portraiture was prestigious because of its elementary status as 'high art and culture,' which is starkly contrasted against the analogous, deluge of visual forms produced via photographic media and digital technologies, which have enabled portraits to progress from static to moving images. While the sitters in sixteenth-century French portraits were predominantly royal or noble, the subjects portrayed in artistic portraits in the modern historical context are taken from the general populace, ranging from formal images of well-known identities for display in public spaces, to ordinary, frequently unknown, private citizens.

Furthermore, within the saturated tele-visual 'portrait sites' of commercial intent - such as those offered by *E!* and *Entertainment Tonight* - or paparazzi images that litter gossip magazines, politicians are granted equal or, most often less, space than entertainers, including male and female actors, musicians, models, and sportsmen and women. The function and motivations of Renaissance court artists - not to mention architects, couturiers, poets, panegyrists and historians - were solely directed at fabricating a persuasive royal image and identity. This starkly contrasts the elevated status of many of the creators and directors of the corporeal spectacle of modern celebrities, otherwise known as 'cultural intermediaries' (Rojek 2001, 10-11), who may strive to achieve a level of self-promotion that can at times overshadow the eminence of the celebrity.

The popular demand for portraits of both Francis I and his most exalted and

favoured members of French Renaissance courtly society, were supplied by the major, father-and-son portraitists of Flemish origin, Jean and François Clouet, in the form of chalk drawings. [16] The original Clouet 'templates' of Francis I were also the basis of numerous copies and variations of varying, sometimes very poor, quality, which were then assembled into gallery collections, series and albums - in which Francis I was invariably placed at the anterior (Jollet 1997, 137) - that circulated throughout France (Popham 1921, 140; Risatti 1976, 24; Mellen 1971, 19; Jollet 1997, 9 & 37). The drawings of the King were not only used as preparatory studies similar to modelli, but also gradually achieved a contemporary status as 'collectibles' among French courtiers and nobles as alternatively highly valued, finished works of art or modes of aristocratic play (Jollet 1997, 81-138). The practice of basing the predominant representations of Francis I's distinctly recognisable visage on an array of endorsed Clouet templates enabled the production of a sanctioned and stable royal image and identity (Dimier 1910, 283-303). In this way, there are essential artistic and social qualities particular to the Clouet drawings and their derivatives that were rare and unique in the history of French art. More importantly, these sixteenth-century drawings, which duplicated Francis I's carefully fabricated appearance, functioned as a relative, scaled-down prototype of the mass-repetition of the multifaceted, media imagery of celebrities, which are believed to enhance and amplify the universal allure of their public image and identity (Burke 2001, 34). Likewise, as has been argued by star and celebrtity theorists and historians such as Richard Dyer, such strategic control over a media image not only aids in the (controlled) creation of a star or celebrity persona, but the image construction is imbued with ideological connotations that semiotically present the 'viewer' with "true meaning" of the stars status or power.

For modern celebrities it is a truism that the significance of appearance is paramount to their ability to attract and communicate with their audience. This begins with their very physicality, from the articulation of the face and body and presentation of expression, pose and gesture, to the style of their grooming and dress, which are 'made' and preferably hallmarked for maximum viewing impact. The scrupulously fashioned appearance also usually adheres to the dominant or preferred convictions and conventions of gender, in the presentation of heightened or exaggerated femininity, masculinity, or ambivalence, such as androgyny. The representations of the celebrity are then distributed through a matrix of audio-visual technologies, including officially endorsed, mass-produced, often digitally altered or 'air-brushed' photographs in print media and the Internet, and offset with managed television and film, performances and interviews, alongside informal, candid, and unendorsed 'sightings' by fans and paparazzi.

Significantly, the nucleus of these key characteristics of celebrity, from the constructed representation of culturally subjective, gendered allure in physicality and attire, to the magnitude of the visual disclosure, are all demonstratively inscribed in the portraits of Francis I. From a political perspective, the move towards the centralisation of the Renaissance court and elementary absolutism of Francis I's style of kingship, clearly increased the concentration of the conflation of royal art and politics, and culture and power. This then resulted in a much greater focus on the veritable embodiment of the monarchy, that is, in the physical presentation and re-presentation of the King himself. In addition to the

secularised and democratic characteristics of the modern conception of celebrity is the inherent feature of charisma. [17] Undoubtedly, the emanation of this exaggerated, public allure, which operates via a seductive appeal to an audience desirous to imitate or emulate the style of the 'star', is largely created through visual means. [18] But the uncertainty of the meaning of charisma is lucidly articulated by Clifford Geertz:

> ...the concept of charisma suffers from an uncertainty of referent: does it denote a cultural phenomenon or a psychological one? At once "a certain quality" that marks an individual as standing in a privileged relationship to the sources of being and a hypnotic power "certain personalities" have to engage passions and dominate minds, it is not clear whether charisma is the status, the excitement, or some ambiguous fusion of the two.' (Geertz 1983, 121)

Seemingly, it is the very enigma of charisma that constitutes a source of its power. It does, however, also appear to be a fusion of constructed physical, psychological and behavioural traits, which enable an individual to be received and categorised as charismatic. It is equally likely that what made a Renaissance ruler charismatic is somewhat different to what is agreed to make a modern politician, or other type of celebrity, appealing, thus charisma is subject to particular historical contexts. It then follows that these respective cultural variables would also apply to the expectations and judgements of the Renaissance versus modern spectatorships, which has obvious implications for the changing reception of historical portraits of rulers.

Francis I's heightened physical demeanour and sumptuous presentation is clearly illustrated when his portraits are compared and contrasted against the banal renditions of his (late-medieval) royal predecessors. The late-medieval to early Renaissance style of French Renaissance royal portraiture was characterised by detailed, linear clarity that created a simplicity of conception and informality of presentation, which largely resulted from the 'unsophisticated', in terms of lack of artifice and idealism, artistic sensibility particular to fifteenth-century Flemish realism (Murray 1955, 585; Chatelet 1963, 79) For example, with its brutally detailed rendering, an anonymous profile-portrait of King Louis XI (reign 1461-1483), also known as the 'Universal Spider' (Baumgartner 1995, 2) appears to be less that of a magnificent monarch than one of his unattractive nobles. The plainness of his attire and dourness of his puffy, aged visage does, however, resonate with the dissonant tone found in his contemporary literary portraits (Tyrell 1980, 57) and subsequent modern appraisals (Murray Kendall 1971, 29)
of his appearance and character:

> His personal appearance was not attractive. He had a long nose, sunken but piercing eyes, thin legs, a pale face, but a rather strong chin. He dressed simply. He went bald early, and usually wore an old hat, decorated with a lead medal of saint, and with a broad brim that protected his head from the cold, sun or rain. Louis hated formality and was not interested in ceremonies, banquets, balls and

tournaments. (Tyrrell 1980, 54-55)

As harsh as the literary and visual representations of Louis XI may seem, his immediate successor, Charles VIII (reign 1483-1498), is similarly scarcely delineated with any attention to undue compliments regarding his exterior or interior appearance, again, by both contemporary commentators (Scheller 1980-82, 16 n. 42) and modern historians. [19] For example, according to the unflattering testimony of a French physiognomist, Barthélemy Coclès:

> He had a great head and an exceedingly large aquiline nose, rather flat lips, a rounded and slightly cleft chin, large, prominent eyes, a short and flabby neck, a broad chest and back, rather full, quite wide hips, a fleshy stomach and an ample seat, but his thighs and legs were slender and long... Finally he was short. This is why the nickname 'little King' stayed with him through subsequent reigns. The Italians, who had reason to detest him for stirring up a war which left them under foreign domination, called him scornfully Cabezzucco, that is to say, pigheaded, in allusion to his big head, and they reproached him with stubbornness, as though he had embarked on this journey against all sorts of advice and good sense. But those who wished to praise him gave him this motto: 'Major in exiguo regnabat corpore virtus'. [20]

In his portrait of Charles VIII, the court artist Jean Perréal adopted an established pictorial format of a three-quarter, head-and-shoulder pose, in which the King's gaze was directed away from the viewer outside of the picture-plane, as he clasps his hands together. Charles VIII's generously proportioned facial features, the large, round eyes, protruding nose and fleshy - as opposed to 'rather flat' - lips, framed by a thick, dark mop of bluntly cut hair, creates the effect of a caricature rather than majestic dignity. To modern eyes this portrait does not appear to have captured the desired, theoretical balance between naturalism and comeliness, as it presumably avoids down-playing the King's physical shortcomings (Jollet 1997, 27). It is difficult, at least for the modern viewer, to reconcile with the fact that Charles VIII was, like Francis I, known, albeit not renowned, in his own time for his insatiable lust for women, though evidently not for his charisma.

A portrait of Charles VIII's successor, Louis XII (reign 1498-1515), painted after Jean Perréal, is also in keeping with the French royal portrait tradition, as it shows a typical lack of outward seductiveness and a static sense of lifelessness and reserve (Chatelet and Thuillier 1963, 90). According to

a modern biographer of Louis XII, otherwise known by his epithet of 'le Père du peuple', [21] the artistic visualisation again fitted the literary description of this ordinarily presented monarch:

> His portraits and busts reveal that he had a rather small head with large eyes, a long thin nose, thick lips, and straight reddish hair cut in a page-boy style. None of the contemporary portraits present him as regal in appearance, even when mounted in full armor on a charger. Louis' character and virtues were seen as rather common, which helps to explain the insult roi roturier (commoner king) that some nobles used for him. (Baumgartner 1995, 55, 56, 85)

In the famous, Clouet portrait of Francis I in the Louvre, amid the dazzling spectacle of the King's ornately textured costume, the eye of the viewer is drawn to a pair of small, but comely, almond-shaped eyes, and a gaze that is direct and unwavering. Indeed, it is the first time that a representation of a French monarch locks eye-contact with and magnetically captivates the viewer. The royal nose is also a particularly prominent feature, of such length that the delicately squared tip appears to almost touch the small, fleshy pink, moustached mouth. Robust physicality and masculine strength, signified in the King's enormous and improbable chest cavity (in addition to his phallic nose), along with his wiry, black facial hair, are tempered by elements of refinement, through the linear rendering of the elegant facial countenance, long, smooth, tapered hands, and intricately embellished, aggrandised and concealing costume. Atop Francis I's head is his trademark of a jauntily angled, black cap with jewelled ensign and dramatic white plume. The subtle suggestion of the King's shadow, directly above his right shoulder, conveys a sense of volume and immediacy, simulating the royal attendance against the complementary colours of the rich red, brocade background and dark green, velvet parapet. As a state portrait, the Clouet painting is a grand image of rule, illustrating a thoughtfully contrived balance between simplicity and regality, gracefulness and authority. But, through the sophisticated construction of Francis I's individualised, yet idealised, physiognomy, which is bedecked in extraordinary sartorial splendour, it also reflects the requisite distinction and beautification of mien that is requisite to the fabrication of the public presentation of the ameliorated, modern celebrity. [22]

Moreover, the sumptuous, formal presentation of Francis I was a personal idiosyncrasy, as can be seen in the numerous copies and variations of the Clouet state portrait. For example, it is also featured in the closely related state portrait of Francis I by Joos van Cleve, now held in the Museum of Fine Art in Philadelphia, of which there are also several different versions after the Flemish artist. In Joos van Cleve's portrait of Francis I, the King is attired in a highly decorative costume. He wears a coat with a fur collar, which is embroidered with pearls and worn over a knotted doublet, that conceals the prestigious accessory of a rather delicate necklace, presumably of the Order of Saint Michael. Underneath the outer finery, on the areas of the decolletage and wrists, peaks a finely pleated, white undershirt with delicate black trim. The dark green background and parapet covered with red fabric also inverts the order of the setting in the Clouet state portrait, while the King's illusory shadow behind his

left shoulder is also included. With his slightly more bloated and rubicund visage, and gaze outside of the picture plane, the resplendence, or more accurately, veritable 'glow' that emanates from Francis I's presentation exhibited in the Clouet state portrait, is in this example, slightly diminished.

It is also a cliché that celebrities are nothing without an audience, who functions as a kind of psychological mirror. The audience not only reflects and validates the self-concept - even esteem - of individual celebrities, but that of their fans, with conscious or unconscious reference to particular ideological trends within a specific, cultural space. Francis I had, advantageously, been the beneficiary of a type of informal, though enduring, visual publicity and 'portrait-administration' since his childhood (Potter 1995, 51). Instigated by his mother, Louise of Savoy, his earliest portraits were as attentive to the effects of his personalised, presentation and representation, as they were to the potential affects on the relevant, sometimes targeted, contemporary viewers. The conscious marking of a potential, future audience is demonstrated, for example, in the form and content of a group of medals dated to 1504, long before Francis I's accession of the French throne. Reminiscent of the later franchising typical of the entertainment industry of the late twentieth century, the medals, commissioned by Louise of Savoy, are the earliest likenesses of Francis I, and were struck to commemorate the Count of Angoulême's tenth birthday. A sub-textual reading of these early medals rather stresses the social aspirations of the noble, mother and son and the hope of the fulfilment of 'their' royal destiny.

The obverse of the medals depicts Francis in a static, profile-pose that was representative of the simplistic style of French, medieval and Renaissance coins and medals in general. Yet, it also closely echoes the pose, coiffure and toque depicted on a bronze medal, dated to 1500, of the much older King of France, Louis XII. [23] In this way, the portrait is an audacious grafting of image and identity, because early in 1504 Louis XII had been critically ill, and was still precariously without his desperately hoped for dauphin, making for an unfortunate situation upon which the attainment of Francis I's royal destiny ultimately depended (Hansen 1980, 95-96; Scher 1994, 307 & 309). The political implications of the language of medallic inscriptions and whether they are in French, Latin or Italian is also relevant in the determining of particular viewers. The French inscription FRANÇOYS DVC DE VALOIS COMTE DANGOULESME AV X AN D[E] S[ON] EA[GE], [24] on the 1504 medal, signifies the engagement of an intimate audience of French courtiers, or latent, future allies of Francis I. In reality, these early medallic representations and inscriptions are just as strongly indicative of the pretensions and ambitions of Francis I's politically astute mother, Louise of Savoy, who can be interpreted as having coveted a vicarious form of fame, but also celebrity through her precious son.

Unendorsed, discordant images of modern celebrities often drive them to take legal action against their publication. Similarly, the portraits of Francis I were not always made within the controlled artistic and cultural locus of the French court. Or even with the knowledge, input or permission of the King or his advisers. For example, a satirical double-portrait of Francis I and his second wife, Eleanor of Portugal, by an anonymous sixteenth-century English artist, was commissioned by the Tudor King of England, Henry VIII. It presents a scathing

visual reference to Francis I's conspicuous licentiousness, for which he was alternatively admired, reviled, or with reference to Henry VIII, envied. The portrait presents Francis I with his contentious, politically 'arranged' second wife, Eleanor of Austria, the plain, widowed sister of his Habsburg archenemy Charles V. [25] The royal couple are depicted in a close embrace, clasping hands, and wearing hat badges with each other's initials on them. Francis I's head is positioned on an uncharacteristically coy angle, while his sly gaze appears to collude with the viewer as he protectively holds his oblivious consort. Eleanor is further marked by her fatuous expression, unattractively jutting 'Habsburg jaw', and pseudo royal orb of a pomegranate (a common symbol of marital union), while a jester or fool points tauntingly at the odd couple. [26]

Nevertheless, Francis I was just one of the most frequently depicted rulers of sixteenth-century western Europe (Cox-Rearick 1996, 2-25, 430 n.1). Competition, like charisma, is also symptomatic of the successful construction and maintenance of celebrity. As well as receiving validation from an admiring audience, celebrities also overtly or covertly, gaze at and compete with each other, which often results in the formation of images and identities that are paradoxically analogous, yet diverse, particularly for celebrities of the same gender. The patriarchal ideology dominant in European, Renaissance society and culture was extremely consequential to the 'visuality' of Renaissance rule, but was especially pronounced through its authorisation within the institution of French monarchy. Unlike the other nation-states of sixteenth-century Europe, France had maintained the institution of the Salic Law since the fourteenth century, which excluded females from the throne for a male heir of the royal blood line, constituting a fixed link between French kingship and masculinity (Knecht 1994, 3, 41, 522, 555).

The vivid portrait traditions particular to the three political protagonists of the era were in no small way, generated by the stimulus of their exaggerated visualistions of masculine beauty and power. For example, contrary to the endless political dialogue between Francis I and Henry VIII, which largely took place through their respective ambassadors or other diplomatic representatives, the French and English rulers only ever 'met' each other twice during the sixteenth century (Burke 1999, 408). Yet a third, posthumous, symbolic meeting was arranged in 1989 at the Eurotunnel breakthrough in Calais, where six-metre-high polystyrene statues of the respective Kings were placed either side of the completed shaft at the Coquelles terminal, indicating the longevity and veracity of their 'physio-political', now nationalist, opposition (Anglo 1992 1). In this way, 'the work of professional artists that circulated from court to court...[which revealed] the physical appearance of the great and mighty...' (Jollet 1997, 102), also evidences the

efficacious, political communication intrinsic to sixteenth-century royal portraiture, which constituted an ongoing 'visual dialogue' between these powerful monarchs.

Functioning as conveyors and creators of a celebrity status that audiences must aspire to (through worship/ adulatation/ adoration of their star), the portraits of Francis I also clearly delineated the dominant ideology of Renaissance masculinity through a hyper-idealistic, fabrication and flaunting of the preferred sixteenth-century model of male physicality and attire. The King was also portrayed as perpetually youthful, robust, energetic, handsome, virile, cultivated, and 'in vogue.' Francis I's cogently, stylish mode of masculinity is not only visible in his naturalistic portraits, in which the allure of his face, body and costume are readily elucidated, but also in his quixotic, allegorical representations that pertained to the traditional religious, mythological and imperial themes of French Renaissance royal portraiture. While Francis I achieved his greatest contemporary renown and future fame as a warrior and patron, the relation between his allegedly, highly attractive physical appearance and womanising reputation, is a subject that also invites exploration. The possible positive or negative connotations and sub-textual signification attached to his image and identity necessitates a mindful analysis that is sensitive to the infinite chasm that exists between attitudes towards love, sexuality, masculinity and the body between the past and present.

For instance, it is arguable that the visual representations of the various women in Francis I's life enhanced, as opposed to damaged, his contemporary image and identity through inference to his heightened masculine attractiveness and sexual potency - a fact highlighted, to state the obvious, by the penis-like associations afforded his iconic nose. This was accomplished through feminine representations that were, on the one hand, characterised by restraint, as can be seen in the simplicity and piety expressed in Louise of Savoy's austere portraits. And on the other, in terms of female beauty and elegance, which are illustrated by the resplendent portraits of Francis I's highly esteemed sister, Marguerite of Navarre, [27] and of his 'official' mistresses. These female portraits were not only individual representations, but performed as proxy 'representatives' of the King, which both complemented and complimented the visual splendour that was requisite for Renaissance rulers like Francis I.

However, it is also important to differentiate within the concept of Renaissance masculinity, between virility, that is sexual potency, and fertility, which is the biological capacity to produce healthy offspring as, technically, the former is not necessary for the achievement of the latter (Reber & Reber 2001, 272, 552, 791). Both the spectacular development of the previously functional and unassuming item of clothing known as the codpiece, and almost institutionalised role and representation of royal mistress (See Plogsterth 1991), clearly signifies the importance of the appearance of virility in the Renaissance conception of masculinity. Evidently, Francis I was both attracted by, as well as attractive to, his French, female courtiers and other favourites of lesser social status, such as his 'privy' or 'fair band of ladies' (Knecht 1994, 249, 483, 549). Parallel to the powerfully beguiling coquetry of the increasingly formidable, though precariously bejewelled royal mistresses, was the stark reality of the reproductive role and seemingly insignificant representation of the Queen, whose physical capacity for the bearing of live, robust progeny cannot be underestimated:

> Royal marriages...were the very essence of high politics in medieval and early modern Europe, as the fortunes of states depended upon the fertility of monarchs and their consorts, and upon the accidents of infant mortality (Loades 1994, 1; Hansen 1980, 227-246).

The majority of the primary and secondary sources on the history of French kingship customarily present the King partnered by a plain, sometimes ugly or deformed, preferably devout, and expectantly fecund, 'suitable' wife, juxtaposed against the imaginatively voluptuous, if not genuinely or conventionally beautiful, sexually desirable and available courtesans (Hansen 1980, 80-128). This tendency was certainly supported by Francis I's parochial marriage to his first wife, King Louis XII's 'sweet and pious, though strangely corpulent' daughter, Claude of France (Hale 1979, 107; Knecht 1994, 17). Her insipid physical representation and indirect attendance, resulting from her debilitating, but fortuitous delivery of seven healthy children, including an all-important Dauphin - and two replacement Dauphins - formed an extremely persuasive margin in Francis I's royal image and identity. This was because the 'complete package' of a King's fertility and progeny was a strong repellent against the threat of factional usurpation. [28] The Queen's own persona was symbolic of the propogation capacity of the King, and of her ability to produce further progeny like the king.

The need for the re-establishment of a linear royal lineage, was, in actuality, an ongoing 'cultural crisis' in sixteenth-century France. Indeed, it was a sensitive issue for all European monarchies during this period. While not relying on media technologies and forms of dissemination familiar to the celebrity machine during our own times, the portrait was a powerful disseminatory of meaning during this earlier period. The portraits of Francis I were integral in addressing this particular cultural crisis through the visual construction of his physical iconography, the source of the King's charisma (See Dyer 1991, 59). On the one hand, his portraits visibly invoked his royal legitimacy with his forefathers through his particularly large nose. As testified by the French royal portrait tradition, large noses appear to have been a Valois physiognomic and genealogical peculiarity: "If the king possessed a long, prominent nose, as did Jean le Bon, who died in 1364, then the painter of the earliest effigy of a King of France made the most, as well as the best, of that distinguishing feature" (Murray 1955, 582). But, on the other hand, his portraits also focused on his distinctively masculine, physiognomic qualities, which effectively mollified this crisis for the audience who counted most, the national and international courtiers and nobility. [29]

 The closely interrelated concepts of charisma and celebrity are also intimately interwoven with narcissism. It could be argued, albeit simplistically, that this is illustrated by the fact that Francis I quantitatively invested more in the construction of his image and identity through the art of court portraiture than any of his royal ancestors. In light of the rapid development of French Renaissance portraiture resulting from the pervasive artistic influence of the Italian Renaissance masters and their techniques, along with the competitive, sixteenth-century historical context, this investment was generally more politically astute than it was personally vain. Yet, theoretically, from a particularised, modern perspective, the intrinsic structure of the Renaissance monarchy and its representation, visibly sanctioned the development of a monumentally egotistical state of 'self-admiration' in the figurehead of the King. In regards to the overall successive judgements of Francis I's style of kingship, significant sub-textual inferences in his image and identity are almost unanimously agreed upon. Notably, Francis I is notorious for his prodigious self-indulgence, and he is judged by modern commentators as having consistently prioritised his self-interest over the public-interest. From this viewpoint, while lacking global and mass scale impact, the peculiar refinement and grandiloquence of the portraits of Francis I corresponds to the modern 'celebratised' (a la Clintonesque) politician's close relationship with media 'spin'.

The very presence of Francis I was integral to the crystallisation of the portrait in France during the Renaissance period, as was observed by John Pope-Hennessey in 1966 who succinctly stated that 'When Francis I came to the throne in 1515, there was no tradition of French court portraiture' (Pope-Hennessey 1966, 187). Indeed, there is probably 'no other country in Europe during the Renaissance (or perhaps even presently) where the personal taste of the supreme chief (king or president) was given such importance' (Chastel 1981, 85). Thus, the portraits of Francis I signify a profound cultural movement, from the Middle Ages in which French sovereigns were the beneficiary of 'supernatural' charisma, to the Renaissance, when the 'personalised' and 'celebratised' Kingly semblance captivated and invigorated a watchful and cosmopolitan spectatorship as a primordial 'superstar.'

By virtue of his public position, personal qualities, political decisions, and private actions, Francis I, with input from his 'advisers', clearly cultivated and achieved a fledgling status of the modern conception of celebrity in his own historical context. It is equally clear, however, that in different temporal and cultural contexts Francis I maintains a precarious balance between posterior fame and notoriety. Before Francis I ascended the throne of France, he received his initial publicity 'build-up' as a beautiful youth, a Renaissance Apollo wreathed with laurel, who by iconographic implication, was not only destined to be King of

France, but Holy Roman Emperor. Although his latter political aspiration was not successfully accomplished, he continued to be crowned with laurel as a triumphant King of France. Throughout his thirty-year-long reign, Francis I evolved a highly influential representation of early modern, royal charisma. It is an antecedent of the stereotype of the 'playboy prince', which resounds, for better or worse, in the political image and identity of more than one example of the modern, western 'celebratised' statesman.

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Endnotes

[1] The portraits of Francis I were made by a range of European artists in a variety of media, including drawings, paintings, miniatures, medals, sculpture, tapestry, stained glass, wax, and enamel *objets d'art*. They are visually distinguished from his numerous, generic and schematic representations, normally summarised by a large nose, helmet of hair, royal costume, or floating capital 'F', which are mostly delineated in miniatures in illuminated manuscripts and on the King's coinage.

[2] S. Nodelman, 'How to Read a Roman Portrait', *Art in America*, January/February, (1975), pp. 27-28. Importantly, this is different from, though related to, the concept of physical distinction found in veristic portraiture of statesman as practiced in the first century B.C. in ancient Rome. The ancient etymology of the term 'celebrity' is outlined in C. Rojek, *Celebrity*, London, 2001, p. 9.

[3] For an excellent example see the following primary source, P. de Bourdeille, abbé de, Brantôme, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. L. Lalanne, 11 vols., Paris, 1864-1882.

[4] W. Manchester, *A World Lit Only By Fire: The Medieval Mind and the Renaissance: Portrait of an Age*, Boston, Toronto and London, 1992, p. 71. Also see J. R. Hale (ed.), *The Travel Journal of Antonio de Beatis: Germany, Switzerland, the Low Countries, France and Italy, 1517-1518*, London, 1979, p. 107. Many sixteenth-century primary sources also refer to Francis I's philandering, such as this observation made by Antonio de Beatis, who visited France in 1517 in the train of Cardinal Louis d'Aragona. He recorded that 'The king...is a great womanizer and readily breaks into others' gardens and drinks at many sources'.

[5] D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago and London, 1987, pp. 327-328, 347; R. B. Waddington, 'The Bisexual portrait of Francis I: Fontainebleau, Castiglione, and the tone of courtly mythology', in *Playing with Gender: A Renaissance Pursuit*, eds. J. R. Brink, M. Horowitz and A. P. Coudert, Urbana and Chicago, 1991, pp. 107-108; R. J. Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior and Patron: The Reign of Francis I*, Cambridge,

1994, p. 443; K. Wilson Chevalier, 'Women on Top at Fontainebleau', *Oxford Art Journal,* 16, (1993), pp. 34-48; Janet Cox-Rearick, *The Collection of Francis I: Royal Treasures,* New York, 1996, pp. 262-264. The fact that the King also openly indulged a voyeuristic taste for erotic works of art further supports this idea. He appreciated the nude female form, especially when diffused by amorous, mythological scenes or episodes, typical of the School of Fontainebleau, but also enjoyed more secular, sexual imagery, from the topos of the emasculating 'woman on top' to fantasy-scapes of lesbian frolics.

[6] ('Father of arts and letters').

[7] Knecht, 1994, p. In 1492, two years before the birth of Francis I, his mother, Louise of Savoy, obtained an auspicious prediction of her unborn son's royal destiny as the future King of France and namesake of the Italian hermit (and future saint) Francis of Paola. [17] In a culture dominated by credulous belief-systems, this made the young Duchess of Savoy - and soon to be widow - an obsessively devoted, fiercely protective, and highly ambitious matriarch. In 1494 the newborn Francis, as Count of Angoulême, was merely the first cousin of King Charles VIII, and in line to the throne behind the mature and worldly - by virtue of age and repute if not physical appearance - Louis d'Orléans, the future Louis XII. In the meantime before the latter scion's succession, King Charles VIII and Queen Anne of Brittany anxiously awaited the (non)-arrival of a live, male heir and dauphin.

[8] This is reflected to a certain degree in the widely publicised, pomp and ceremony of the modern comparative example of the House of Windsor, or British Royal family.

[9] Ralph E. Giesey, 'Models of Rulership in French Royal Ceremonial', in *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual and Politics since the Middle Ages,* ed. Sean Wilentz, Philadelphia, 1985, p. 43. An account of Francis I's *couronnement* is included in the following manuscript in the British Museum, B.L. Harley Ms. 3462, fols. 202b-214b.

[10] See the classic study on the consecration of French kings by Marc Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges,* Strasbourg, 1924; repr. 1961; English trans. by V.E. Anderson, *The Royal Touch,* London, 1973; Giesey, 1985, pp. 44-45.

[11] Sergio Bertelli, *The King's Body: Sacred Rituals of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe,* trans. R. Burr Litchfield, University Park, 2001, p. 26. English kings also specialised in the healing of epilepsy by distributing coins with the royal image, which were later reduced to 'cramp rings'.

[12] Mostafa, Rejai and Kay, Phillips, *Concepts of Leadership in Western Political Thought,* Westport, Connecticut and London, 2002, p. 76. A church historian named Rudolf Sohm originally coined the term 'charisma' in relation to divinely inspired leaders and biblical prophets and their heavenly bestowed gifts of grace. This previous, religious connotation has expanded to a broader, secularised meaning that refers to the quality of power of an individual to attract, influence or inspire people.

[13] Rojek, 2001, p. 9: Interestingly, 'The Latin root of the term *celebrem*...has connotations with both "fame" and "being thronged."'

[14] See Giesey 1987; Bourreau 1988; Jollet 1997. Deathmasks had been made of deceased French kings since the thirteenth century.

[15] See the classic study by Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies,* Princeton, 1957.

[16] The drawings are held in collections in Europe and North America: Chantilly,

Musée Condé; Paris, Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque nationale de France; Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre; Saint-Petersburg, The Hermitage Museum; London, Department of Prints and Drawings, The British Museum; Vienna, Albertina; Florence, Gabinetto dei Disegni, Uffizi; Harvard College Library.

[17] The foundation study on the highly contended concept of charisma is by the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920), *Economy and Society*, eds. G. Roth and C. Wittich, 3 vols. New York, 1968, I, p. 241: 'The term "charisma" will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as not to be accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a 'leader'.

[18] Alan Bryman, *Charisma and Leadership in Organisations*, London, Newbury and New Delhi, 1992, p. 47. Although, in certain instances the importance of a charismatic leader's voice and oratory skills are also relevant.

[19] Murray Kendall, 1971, p. 353: 'Charles was a sickly lad, slightly misshapen in the shoulders, not very intelligent, given to bouts of illness that kept his father in a state of alarm'; Baumgartner, 1995, p. 17: 'Charles was not regarded as being a very bright lad, and his education both formal and political had been limited by fears that his fragile body could not take rigorous effort. While not as misshapen as his sister, Jeanne, he had much the same slight frame, spindly arms and legs, and long, narrow face, but unlike her was plagued with frequent fevers and nagging colds'; R. J. Major, *From Renaissance Monarchy to Absolute Monarchy*, Baltimore and London, 1994, p. 23.

[20] ('Greater courage resided in a small body'). An account of the physiognomist, Barthélemy Coclès, in *Archives curieuses de l'histoire de France depuis Louis XI jusqu'à Louis XVIII*. B.N. Ms. fonds Saint-Germain No. 209, Paris, 1834-1841, vol. I, p. 163, cited in A. Denieul-Cormier, *A Time of Glory: The Renaissance in France 1488-1559*, New York, p. 25.

[21] ('Father of the people').

[22] Conversely, this is especially applicable to modern, female celebrities, such as Marilyn Monroe.

[23] C. Scailliérez, *François Ier et ses artistes dans les collections du Louvre*, Paris, 1992, p. 58. This author notes the resemblance between the medals in terms of artistic attribution, as the work of a medallist from Lyon.

[24] ('Francis, Duke of Valois, Count of Angoulême, in his tenth year').

[25] Hansen, 1980, pp. 157-158; Knecht, 1994, pp. 287, 289.

[26] See A. Stewart, *Unequal Lovers: A Study of Unequal Couples in Northern Art*, New York, 1977. The incongruity of the couple in this satirical double-portrait can be placed in the thematic tradition of the unequal lovers.

[27] Colloquially known as the 'Pearl of the Valois'.

[28] The rise of a royal challenger or upstart was a constant, potential threat for all monarchs, but specially for those like Francis I, who were not a direct descendant of the previously established royal lineage; which for the Valois had abruptly halted on the death of Charles VIII in 1498. In this way, Francis I's biological and genealogical credentials, as a masculine - virile and fertile - monarch were physically and visually authenticated, expressing a powerful

political message both within and outside of the French kingdom. A modern remnant of this practice is indicated by the flight arrangements of the Windsor Princes, William and Harry, who customarily travel separately to avoid a possible risk to the continuity of the royal lineage.

[29] According to the sixteenth-century comprehension of sexuality and reproduction, Francis I's portraits signified that he was virile, and therefore, fertile, if not monogamous, but certainly charismatic. The representation of the King's pronounced virile masculinity was further supported, firstly, by his reportedly large, physical stature. Francis I, like his English adversary Henry VIII, was estimated to have been approximately six feet tall (Morgan 1965, 199), which must have been visually impressive, let alone psychologically imposing, given that 'the average [Renaissance] man stood a few inches over five feet and weighed about 135 pounds' (Manchester 1992, 54-55). Secondly, his youthful cultivation and lifelong maintenance of a moustache and beard, has cross-culturally defined and symbolised the idea of vigorous manhood since antiquity (Warner 1995, 242). His hirsutism was particularly conspicuous because all of the previously mentioned French kings from Charles VII to Louis XII had consistently shaved off their facial hair, as is evidenced by their comparatively homogenous portrait record. In the provincial confines of the French court, it was purported that in 1521 '...Francis I grew a beard to cover a scar, at which point every man at court stopped shaving' (Jollet 1997, 107; Wiley 1954, 81), but by this time both Henry VIII and Charles V had also grown beards (Burke 1999, 408).

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