A Pair of Queens

by Reg Green

Noël Coward, who perfectly fitted the title 'man of letters,' was so much an Englishman that besides loving all the obvious things — the literature, country lanes, the dreary but gentle climate — he once said he also loved standing to attention when the national anthem was played (in those days "God Save the King" not "the Queen.") As an English youth I felt the same affection for the royal family.

Now I am an American citizen and so no longer directly involved but, seeing what a collection of narcissistic boobies they have degenerated into, I am sufficiently concerned that I feel they should be allowed nowhere near any semblance of power.

Beyond the current personalities I have a more enduring objection: that their very presence stratifies British society in a way that is incompatible with democracy. If a prince is better in some way than a duke, every Sir Somebody is better than any Mr. or Ms. And so in every corner of society some people are inherently better than others.

That said, the queen who just died brought out everything in the British people that Noel Coward felt. It was true of her predecessor too, as a vivid personal memory confirms. One day at Heathrow airport I was fuming my way through the loud chaos of the security line, tempers on edge all around, everyone fearful of missing a flight, when an announcement was made. "Ladies and gentlemen, we regret to inform you that the Queen Mother has just died. We will observe a two-minute silence." Instantly that vast space fell into a deep silence.

What people thought of during those two minutes, there is no way of knowing. What I thought about was World War II and the way the whole country was as one. The two minutes passed and the grumbling resumed but for a while at least without quite the rancor.

Whatever we think of the monarchical principle, Queen Elizabeth II merits the same response as her mother, truly a pair of exemplary queens.