

STATUE OF OLIVER CROMWELL AS HERCULES



STUDENT WORKSHEET

PORTRAITS OF CROMWELL

I. Key Concepts for Portrait Analysis (Context and Intent)

When analysing historical portraits, especially those produced during or after a civil conflict, consider the following questions:

- **Patronage:** Who commissioned and paid for the portrait? (The sitter, a political group, a family member). This often dictates the intended message.
- **Audience:** Who was meant to see this portrait? (The public, Parliament, foreign courts, only the family). The intended audience shapes the symbolism.
- **Iconography:** What symbols are included, and what do they represent? (E.g., armour = military power; column = stability; classical arch = imperial triumph).
- **Propaganda:** How does the portrait function as a piece of political advertising? What message about legitimacy, power, or character is the artist trying to convey on behalf of the sitter?
- **Historiography:** How does the portrait reflect the **changing interpretation** of the sitter's power or role?

II. Context: Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658)

| Date of portrait | Event/Context | Significance for Presentation |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| 1653 (Cooper Miniature) | Cromwell had forcibly dissolved the Rump Parliament and the Nominated Assembly, becoming Lord Protector —the sole head of state, effectively a monarch in all but name. | He needed to assert his new, unprecedented legitimacy and authority while maintaining his image as a <i>servant</i> of God and Parliament. This tension often dictated his presentation choices. |
| 1658 (Wyck Portrait) | Cromwell was ruling as Lord Protector. England was militarily successful abroad, having defeated the Spanish and captured Jamaica (1655) and gained power in the Anglo-Spanish War. | He needed to project international power , military strength, and the expansion of the English Protestant state (often called Cromwell's 'Western Design'). |
| 1657 (Title of King refused) | Cromwell rejected the offer of the crown but accepted the Humble Petition and Advice , formalising his semi-monarchical status. | The political reality was that his power was absolute, leading to the use of visual language (in later portraits) that was remarkably similar to the monarchy he had helped abolish. |

III: The "Warts and All" Request (*Samuel Cooper Miniature, 1653*)



Cromwell's command to Samuel Cooper—to paint him as he was, "plain in character and clothing," without flattery—was a deliberate political act. The following [article](#) from Spartacus Educational gives some context to Samuel Cooper, who was commissioned to produce this portrait in 1653 when Cromwell had just become Lord Protector following the expulsion of the Rump Parliament and the dissolution of the Nominated Assembly. It was four years since Charles I had been executed.

- How might this context might have influenced how Cromwell wanted to be presented? (Consider how this portrait differed from images of Charles I)
- Why did Cromwell want to be presented 'warts and all'?
- What religious and political message did Cromwell want this portrait to send?
- Can you find out where this portrait would have been displayed/who would have seen it? How does this affect our reading of it?

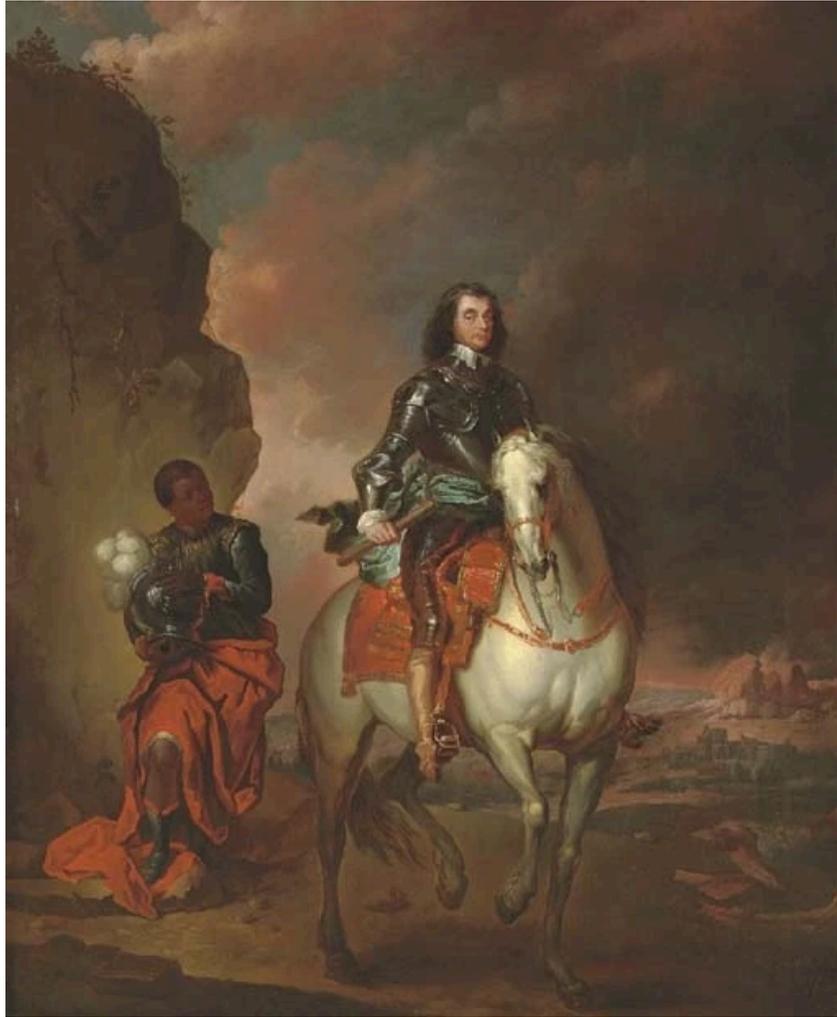
IV. Context: *Charles I with M. de St. Antoine (Van Dyck, 1633)*



This portrait was created during Charles I's **Personal Rule (1629-1640)**, a period when he ruled without Parliament. The central political problem was asserting his **Divine Right** to rule without challenge.

| Iconography | Symbolism and Intent |
|--|---|
| Classical Arch | Represents triumph, permanence, and imperial power , associating Charles with Roman Emperors. |
| Armour and Baton | Signifies his role as military commander and head of the armed forces (a key aspect of Royal Authority). |
| Blue Sash/Order of the Garter | Emphasises his position as the head of the aristocratic and chivalric order of the kingdom. |
| Royal Coat of Arms | A direct visual assertion of his sovereignty over the three kingdoms: England, Scotland, and Ireland. |
| Pierre Antoine Bourdin (Riding Master) | His respectful gaze and inclusion highlight the King's status, dignity, and authority (even over foreign dignitaries). |

V. Visual Analysis: *Cromwell's Mounted Portrait (Jan Wyck, 1658)*



The Black Page (and Imperial Ambition)

The inclusion of the page, often depicted as a **Black slave or servant**, is common in 17th-century European portraiture of military and aristocratic figures.

- **Symbolism of Domination:** The page serves as a visual marker of **wealth, global reach, and domination**. In the context of 1658, after the capture of Jamaica (1655), the page represents Cromwell's **imperial ambitions**—the growing scope of the English state to control distant territories and peoples (a continuation of the Royal policy of expansion).
- **Military Status:** The page, holding the bridle or a helmet, emphasises the commander's high rank, as he requires an attendant.

Task: Comparing Wyck's Cromwell to Van Dyck's Charles I

Complete the final column below, explaining what you think the similarities or differences in purpose/interpretation are between the two pictures and why.

When you compare them, look for how Cromwell subtly or directly appropriates the visual language of monarchy (the grand horse, the military stance, the page) while maintaining the visual cues of a committed, non-monarchical Puritan. This dual message is key to understanding his late protectorate.

| Feature | Charles I (Van Dyck) | Cromwell (Wyck) | Purpose/Interpretation |
|--------------------------|---|---|------------------------|
| Pose & Stance | Majestic, static, looking down slightly; a pose of inherited authority. | Military, dynamic, perhaps leading a charge or surveying a field; a pose of achieved merit. | |
| Setting | Classical architecture (triumphal arch) and formality. | Open landscape, military camp, or battlefield; emphasis on active service. | |
| Clothing | Silk, blue sash, expensive armour; emphasis on inherited status and chivalry. | Military uniform/armour; often simpler, but still powerful, asserting effective military command. | |
| Key Symbolism | Divine Right, lineage, the three kingdoms. Military Prowess, Godly cause | Military Prowess, Godly cause, imperial reach (Jamaica). | |

Comparison Question: How and why does Cooper's 1653 miniature differ from Wyck's 1658 portrait?

Extension Task: Compare other portraits from Cromwell during his reign - how and why do they change over time? See the following article for support with this: [Primary sources with questions and answers on Oliver Cromwell.](#)