And what a queen she is. A regal Samuel Johnson, no Danton. For history the way other nations do. We bouts of bragging followed by sulky Australians. As a nation, we’re unfortunately, we do have a queen. have no Thomas Jefferson, no Elizabeth the First or even Victoria, would be quite inappropriate. It would be an affront to our treasured democratic heritage. But it wouldn’t be much of a life would it?”

But Elizabeth the Second would never exhibit a whim like that. Her secret is to reveal nothing of her internal life. In fact, at 65, our queen is notable for never having voiced an opinion on anything of import. She is like the stolidest of suburban Australians: more concerned with dog breeding and horseriding than matters cultural or political. She is the Ford Laser of monarchs.

Look at her dress sense: polyester to the end. I remember once, in Scotland, finding myself at the side of the road along which the royal motorcade was about to travel. The cars came rushing toward me, too fast to distinguish who was riding where. But, just when it seemed my brush with the house of Windsor would be irrevocably blurred, I suddenly noticed a bright orange glow. It was the Queen clad in one of her more electric outfits. She would have been visible from 20 kilometres or more, casting off light like the aftermath of a nuclear accident.

And what a queen she is. A regal person, an autocrat in the style of Elizabeth the First or even Victoria, would be quite inappropriate. It would be an affront to our treasured egalitarianism to have someone in the top job who had strong opinions about things or, heaven preserve us, whims.

Imagine, for example, if the queen got it into her head that no sensible person needed to travel. Imagine that she had decided her mind was quite sufficiently broadened and that, henceforth she could park herself at Balmoral and travel no further than would be necessary to slaughter examples of local wildlife.

For a while, we could take it as harmless eccentricity, a piece of lovable Englishness and a symbol of her aristocratic heritage. But it wouldn’t be long before the rumbles would begin. She’s the queen, after all. Our queen. And as such she is required to fulfil her side of the bargain that runs: she waves—we cheer. There would be lobby groups calling for the installation of Charles before you could say "inherited wealth".

But, of course she isn’t. We know nothing of her world view, if indeed she has one, and less of her character and personality. It’s all rumour and conjecture the stories of how she clashed with Margaret Thatcher and how fond she was of Ronald Reagan. She is a blank space, a void, into which we project what we will. She can be a battler, or a stateswoman: it makes no difference to her.

And perhaps therein lies the key to her popularity in Australia. We look at her and we are transported back to the 50s. We see her scarf and we think of bumper wool prices and the first cars built in Australia. As long as she keeps her mouth shut we’re happy.

We’ve never liked thinking people, after all. Our prototype intellectuals were hard-drinking, self-consciously prole boys of the 1890s the Lawsons and the Patersons, the ones popularly perceived to speak in our own language. We don’t like it when someone tells how we should be thinking. We prefer to worship at the feet of our own image.

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WANDA JAMROZIK writes the 'Today’s People' column for the Sydney Morning Herald.