Court masques were multi-media entertainments, with song, dance, theatre, and changeable scenery, staged annually at the English court to celebrate the Stuart dynasty. They have typically been regarded as frivolous and expensive events. This book dispels this notion, emphasizing instead that they were embedded in the politics of the moment, and spoke in complex ways to the different audiences who viewed them. Covering the whole period from Queen Anne’s first masque at Winchester in 1603 to *Salmacida Spolia* in 1640, Butler looks in depth at the political functions of state festivity. The book contextualizes masque performances in intricate detail, and analyzes how they shaped, managed, and influenced the public face of the Stuart kingship. Butler presents the masques as a vehicle through which we can read the early Stuart court’s political aspirations and the changing functions of royal culture in a period of often radical instability.

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For James and Emily
Mendoza

And, Celso, prithee, let it be thy care tonight
To have some pretty show to solemnize
Our high instalment; some music, some masquery.
We’ll give fair entertain unto Maria,
The duchess to the banished Altofront.
Thou shalt conduct her from the citadel
Unto the palace. Think on some masquery.

Celso

Of what shape, sweet lord?

Mendoza

What shape? Why, any quick-done fiction –
As some brave spirits of the Genoan dukes
To come out of Elysium, forsooth,
Led in by Mercury, to gratulate
Our happy fortune; some such anything,
Some far-fet trick, good for ladies, some stale toy or other,
No matter, so’t be of our devising.
Do thou prepare’t. ’Tis but for fashion sake;
Fear not, it shall be graced, man, it shall take.

John Marston, The Malcontent

Have I not seen the pomp of a whole kingdom, and what a foreign king could bring hither also to make himself gazed and wondered at, laid forth as it were to the show, and vanish all away in a day? And shall that which could not fill the expectation of a few hours entertain and take up our whole lives, when even it appeared as superfluous to the possessors as to me that was a spectator? The bravery was shown, it was not possessed; while it boasted itself, it perished. It is vile and a poor thing to place our happiness on these desires. Say we wanted them all: famine ends famine.

Ben Jonson, Discoveries

Earl of Essex

Tedious orations, dotards on their knees;
I for one would yawn myself to death.

Benjamin Britten and William Plomer, Gloriana

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A note on procedures

In the early seventeenth century, the English calendar was ten days behind the calendar on the continent, hence dispatches sent home by European diplomats carry dates ahead of those being used in England. English dating was further complicated by two modes of calculus, which marked the new year alternately on 1 January or on Lady Day, 25 March (with dates falling in January – early March expressed in the form 13 January 1603/4). These circumstances impact radically onto the material synthesized in the appendix, so, for the sake of clarity, I have standardized dates, anglicized continental dating, and taken the new year to begin on 1 January.

In this book I refer to Anne of Denmark as Queen Anne. In his biography of Anne, Leeds Barroll points out that she signed herself Anna, and in Scotland was known as Anna, Queen of Scots. However, Anne was the form by which her English subjects generally knew her – for example, she is named on the quarto title page of The Masque of Queens as ‘the most absolute in all state and titles, Anne, Queen of Great Britain’ – and so I have continued to use this name. In this I follow The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, which also refers to her as Anne.

All quotations, from literary and non-literary texts, have been modernized and (where necessary) repunctuated. Since many texts are cited from modern-spelling editions, it seems inconsistent not to apply the principle of modernization to all quotations alike. If some are left unmodernized, a misleading impression is conveyed of their historical difference from quotations in modern spelling. The only exceptions are a few instances of citations from account books and the like, which are difficult to translate into modern forms, and where exactness of wording is crucial.

Line and page references for frequently cited texts use the following editions:


A note on procedures

The Poems of Thomas Carew, with his Masque 'Coelum Britannicum', ed. R. Dunlap (Oxford, 1949)
The Poems and Masques of Aurelian Townshend, ed. C. C. Brown (Reading, 1983)

At the time of writing there are as yet no satisfactory modern editions of Daniel, Middleton, Shirley, or Davenant, but The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses, The Inner Temple Masque, The Triumph of Peace, and Salmacida Spolia are cited from A Book of Masques in Honour of Allardyce Nicoll, gen. eds. T. J. B. Spencer and S. W. Wells (Cambridge, 1967); the editors are, respectively, Joan Rees, R. C. Bald, Clifford Leech, and Terence Spencer. Tethys’ Festival and The Coleorton Masque are cited from Court Masques: Jacobean and Caroline Entertainments 1605–1640, ed. D. Lindley (Oxford, 1995). Other masques I cite from the original printed texts, silently modernized. Place of publication is London, unless otherwise stated.

Where possible I have referred to aristocrats and monarchs by the titles that they bore during the periods under discussion, but I have occasionally telescoped chronology for the sake of clarity. I have preferred the spelling ‘marquis’ to ‘marquess’, on the authority of Fowler’s Modern English Usage (and given the absence of ‘marquess’ as a headword in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) – despite what OED says under ‘Marquis’, n. 1, 2).