

I

Duke, prince and king

Thomas N. Corns

I

The representation of the future Charles I long preceded his accession in 1625. His princely persona, as Duke of York and later as Prince of Wales, was carefully figured in court masque and commemorated in court portraits, and, as we shall see, in those roles, he fitted perfectly within a mature royal ideology, in ways which permitted an accomplished negotiation of the death of Prince Henry, his elder brother. However, in the 1620s the developing crises in Stuart foreign policy and in the relationship between the crown and parliaments radically destabilized the image of James I and rendered Charles's own intentions and values quite enigmatic to large sections of the political nation. His marriage and accession were overshadowed by anti-Catholic sentiment and anxiety. Though the almost immediate reformation of those aspects of the conduct of the king's court which fell within his control certainly addressed some aspects of public perception, uncertainties about his objectives and values were exacerbated in the late 1620s, the years of the Forced Loan and of sometimes bewildering foreign policy decisions, and control of the most formal aspects of the royal image remained insecure probably until 1630, while alternative, negative constructions lurked beneath the public surface of the political consciousness throughout the period of the Personal Rule, returning like the repressed in the late 1630s.

II

But it had begun well. As part of the elaborate celebration of Prince Henry's investiture as Prince of Wales, Charles had taken a leading role in

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the court masque *Tethys' Festival*, performed on 5 June 1610, probably in the second Banqueting House in Whitehall (the immediate precursor to Inigo Jones's extant masterpiece).¹ His mother, Anne of Denmark, took the principal role, and his sister, Princess Elizabeth, the future wife of the Elector Palatine, masked too. Surprisingly perhaps, the masque, written by Samuel Daniel, a protégé of the queen, and designed by Inigo Jones, deflected some attention away from Henry and James, and towards Anne and her other children. It depicted a process by which Tethys, through the agency of Zephyrus, presented to Oceanus-James a triton, symbolic of his rule over the ocean (and perhaps also an allusion to his rule over the three kingdoms) and to Henry a sword, reputedly worth £500.² As David Lindley has observed, Tethys, as mother of 3,000 rivers, represented a species of fertility, and as such offered an appropriate role in which Anne could mask with two of her children before her eldest child and their father.³ The primary message of the masque confirmed the argument of Ben Jonson's text for *Prince Henry's Barriers*, performed five months earlier to commemorate Henry's 'first bearing of arms': indeed, the age of Elizabethan chivalric militarism *could* be revived in Henry, but it has to be restrained by the wiser policy of his irenic father. The description of the sword carried the thesis in *Tethys' Festival*:

[Tethys-Anne] wills [Zephyrus-Charles] greet the lord
 And Prince of th'isles, the hope and the delight
 Of all the northern nations, with this sword,
 Which she unto Astraea sacred found,
 And not to be unsheathed but on just ground.
 . . .
 For there will be within the large extent
 Of these my waves and wat'ry government,
 More treasure and more certain riches got
 Then all the Indies to Iberus brought:
 For Nereus will by industry unfold
 A chemic secret, and turn fish to gold.⁴

Astraea, goddess of justice but frequently a mythological attribute of Elizabeth I, is a pleasingly complimentary inclusion. Old Protestant activists from the age of Elizabeth looked to Henry to reanimate the confessional dimension in English politics.⁵ The sword he takes up is one associated with Astraea's rule, which fits nicely with another concern of the masque, the establishment of continuities between the Tudor and Stuart dynasties: the setting is Milford Haven, 'The happy port of union, which gave way / To that great hero Henry [VII] and his fleet', when he

returned to displace Richard III.⁶ But the text explicitly warns against a western design, to match Spanish and Portuguese imperialism with an English one. In place of such adventurism, it seems to suggest, Prince Henry should look to the British fishing industry to generate wealth, thus turning ‘fish to gold’.

The issue of Jacobean foreign policy and the framework it set for James’s sons is one to which we shall return. But we should note, too, the vividly realized image of the young Charles. At a purely technical level, the part he played indicates a considerable assurance and competence for a child less than ten years old. Moreover, he is represented as a glittering embodiment of power, fertility and affection, in ways that curiously anticipate the court celebrations of the 1630s. He appears,

in a short robe of green satin embroidered with golden flowers, and a round wing made of lawns on wires, and hung down in labels. Behind his shoulders two silver wings. On his head a garland of flowers consisting of all colours, and on one arm, which was out bare, he wore a bracelet of gold set with rich stones. Eight little ladies near of his stature represented the naiads, and were attired in light robes adorned with flowers, their hair hanging down and waving, with garlands of water ornaments on their heads.⁷

The first song celebrates Zephyrus-Charles as a figure of fertility, a bringer of a new spring:

Youth of the spring . . . mild Zephyrus blow fair,
 And breathe the joyful air
 . . .
 Breathe out new flowers which yet were never known
 Unto the spring, nor blown
 Before this time, to beautify the earth,
 And as this day gives birth
 Unto new types of state,
 So let it bliss create.⁸

Part of the appeal of the succession of James I to the English political nation had rested in his proven fertility – he already had two sons, and the dynastic uncertainties that had characterized the later years of Elizabeth I’s reign were unlikely to arise at the close of his.⁹ In the context of a period in which life-threatening epidemics could touch even the wealthiest and in which political assassination attempts were not infrequent, there were advantages in having a reserve for the dangerously ebullient Prince Henry.

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As Ann Coiro vividly demonstrates in chapter 2 below, a near-obsession with the fertility of the royal couple characterizes royal panegyric of the 1630s. But we should recognize that this component of the royal image was already well established in the earlier representation of Charles. The young Zephyrus of *Tethys' Festival* is father to the man whom Ben Jonson, in a fragment of an entertainment of uncertain date, greets thus:

Fresh as the Day, and new as are the Howers,
Our first of fruits, that is the prime of flowers
Bred by your breath, on this low bancke of ours;
Now, in a garland by the graces knit:
Upon this obeliske, advanc'd for it,
We offer as a Circle the most fit
To Crowne the years, which you begin, great king,
And you, with them, as Father of our spring.¹⁰

The same myth underlies Jonson's figuring of Henrietta Maria as Chloris, the nymph pursued and 'breathed on' by Zephyrus to become Flora, the goddess of flowers, in the masque *Chloridia: Rites to Chloris and Her Nymphs* (1631), though in a genteel variation Zephyrus is played, not by Charles, but by 'a plump boy' in 'a bright cloud'.¹¹

Of course, the cultural and political Primavera associated with Prince Henry was curtailed by his death in 1612. His legacy to Charles remains somewhat uncertain. He had established himself as patron of a formidable literary circle, and writers plainly looked to him for protection and advancement. In contrast, probably only in his final and most unhappy years did the literary text (as opposed to the performance of play, masque or song) assume a central role in Charles's cultural life.¹² At no time was his library extensive, and most of it would seem to have been inherited from Henry.¹³ In contrast, though, his enthusiasm for music was reflected in the considerable ensemble he retained in his princely court.¹⁴ It is unsurprising that his court as king found its most abiding cultural expression in musical forms, in the song of Henry Lawes, the instrumental music of William, and in that consummate synthesis of words, design and music, the masques of the 1630s, as Jonathan Wainwright explores in chapter 8 below.

Charles was created Prince of Wales in 1616, and in 1618 he presented to his father a masque, *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, which neatly differentiated his priorities from those of his late brother; the title could serve as epigraph to the cultural agenda of the Caroline court. Formally, the masque resembles quite closely *Oberon, the Fairy Prince*, Prince Henry's

Christmas masque of 1611. In that, however, a chivalric – indeed, Arthurian – aesthetic obtains, as the martially accoutred masquers proceed from a cleft in a rock to pay homage to James.¹⁵ A similar epiphany occurs in *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, though here, as the rock gives forth the masquers, led by Charles, the disappearing antimasque depicts, not innocent satyrs, but ‘the voluptuous Comus, god of cheer’, whose transient regime as lord of misrule gives way to a new era in which ‘Pleasure [is] the servant, Virtue looking on’. Ben Jonson’s text stresses the role of discipline and education as well as innate goodness, nurture as well as nature, in founding this new golden age. As Mount Atlas opens to disclose the masquers, a song declares,

Ope agèd Atlas, open then thy lap,
 And from thy beamy bosom strike a light,
 That men may read in thy mysterious map
 All lines
 And signs
 Of Royal education and the right.
 See how they come and show,
 That are but born to know.
 Descend,
 Descend,
 Though pleasure lead,
 Fear not to follow:
 They who are bred
 Within the hill
 Of skill
 May safely tread
 What path they will,
 No ground of good is hollow.¹⁶

The Arthurianism of *Oberon* gives way to a decidedly Horatian aesthetic, which relegates martial nature to civilizing nurture.

Unusually, the masque was restaged six weeks later, with a new antimasque of stage Welshmen, as *For the Honour of Wales*, a celebration of the prince’s relationship to the principality. The refashioned version suggested something of the facility with which the early Stuarts represented their sovereignty over all the nations of the British Isles. But the Welsh context supported a flirtation with Arthurianism, as when Evan notes that James I’s full name is an anagram:

Jenkin. Aye, that is *Claims Arthur’s Seat*, which is as much as to say your madesty sould be the first king of Great Pritain, and sit in *cadair Arthur*,

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which is Arthur's chair, as by God's blessing you do. And then your son Master Charles his, how do you call him? is Charles Stuart, *Calls True Hearts*, that is us, the Welse nation, to be ever at your service . . .¹⁷

But here the Arthurian gestures are confined to the antimasque, and find expression in the (presumably amusing) broken English and fragmentary Welsh of characters whose inarticulate expression offers a view of the monarch and his son, as if from the margins of his realm. They are displaced by the same manifestation of cultured virtue that dismissed the bellygod.

III

Court masque was among the most controllable of cultural forms. It was collaborative, and so its contents were open to pre-performance scrutiny. It was expensive to produce, and so intricately tied into the most elevated levels of the patronage system. It actively involved participants of the highest rank, usually including members of the royal family, so the unmanaged and unsanctioned introduction of critical material was improbable. Its audience came by invitation, and was narrowly circumscribed to include a section of the court and appropriate ambassadorial representatives, and so counter-cultural audience response was scarcely possible. That is not to say that masque necessarily reflected a simple image of the royal family as all-powerful and all-virtuous. Kevin Sharpe, in a study that gave a new depth to the critique of the cultural ideology in the Caroline court, has demonstrated that the masques of the 1630s echo alternative voices in ruling circles and reflect concerns and anxieties that run counter to the remote and over-confident perspective sometimes attributed to them.¹⁸ But latterly closer consideration of the inner governmental circles of early Stuart England has disclosed a much more fissured system in which both the objectives of policy and its implementation were debated and disputed. The apparent monolith of royal rule admitted – and perhaps required – internal debates of considerable intensity, sometimes reflective of radically different political, religious and cultural ideologies, while the clash of interests in the pursuit of office and patronage generated savage political infighting.¹⁹

The literary culture of the court was more permissive than it superficially seems, but the alternative voices it entertained were required at last to accept the finality of the official position. Prince Henry may indeed have offered a vision of a restored Elizabethan militancy, but it had

to submit to the irenic wisdom of James, just as the Jonsonian antimasque, representing satyrs, witches, bumpkins and citizens, was controlled and expelled by the mere disclosure of the masquers. Expelled, but not finally beaten, for the struggle of sovereignty is an unending one.

The early masques of Charles, Prince of Wales, while celebrating monarchy agonistes as well as triumphans, nevertheless defined his image with clarity and precision. At the same time, the martial aspect of royalty was being established and developed, though in a different context. Charles had been a sickly child, and at sixteen in the tilt to commemorate his creation as Prince of Wales he 'was not strong enough to put on an impressive display, so his opponents had to hold back lest they outshone' him.²⁰ At barriers, at the same age, Henry had performed 'with wonderous skill, and courage, to the great joy and admiration of all the beholders'.²¹ But princes could be assiduously fashioned. Quite simply, Charles trained hard, and by 1620 he appeared to acclaim in great tilts. Whereas masques offered a wholly closed and narrowly select audience, tilts functioned instead as a significant interface between the court and the city. The tilting yard roughly ran along what is now Whitehall. While within the precincts of the palace of Whitehall and overlooked from royal buildings, it afforded spectacle to both the court and invited ambassadors and to a wider section of the populations of London and Westminster. Thus, on the most memorable occasion, Charles 'mounted on a powerful white horse, decked in splendid plumes, and wearing a suit of the finest armour inlaid with gold and silver', tilted with sundry aristocrats, and, according to a contemporary account, 'distinguished himself to the great joy of the people'.²²

No doubt some of the success in image building in the late 1610s and early 1620s depended on James's favourite, the future Duke of Buckingham. Charles and he had masked together in *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*. In a frequently cited passage, the chaplain to the Venetian Embassy, who was present, described how Buckingham 'danced a number of high and very tiny capers . . . that made everyone admire him' (especially the king), whereas Charles's style was marked by the quality of his bows, 'being very formal', and the precision of his footwork ('nor was he seen to dance once out of step').²³ In the masques that followed, Charles danced with 'several lords', and Buckingham more often than not is named among them. It was the public and formal recognition of a new political configuration within the ruling circle, and in the 1620s James, Buckingham and Charles formed a sort of troika, though one which, at critical periods,

evidently did not pull together. But the higher political profile of the prince and his association with Buckingham, a figure of labile public standing, fractured the elegant simplicity of representation which had been arrived at by 1620; we have the beginnings of that diversifying of perception and representation which most of the chapters in this volume engage with.

IV

Foreign policy and its intersection with fiscal concerns and domestic attitudes to Catholicism strained the royal image of James as well as Charles to breaking point and, it is often remarked, rendered Buckingham the most hated man in England. Frederick, the Elector Palatine, had married Charles's sister Elizabeth in 1613, amid elaborate and extended public celebration. *The Lords' Masque*, scripted and orchestrated by Thomas Campion, had anticipated their fertility and happiness:

Live you long to see your joys
In fair nymphs and princely boys,
Breeding like the garden flowers,
Which kind heav'n draws with her warm showers.²⁴

Perhaps more significantly in terms of its abiding significance for the political nation, the Middle Temple and Lincoln's Inn, in one of those occasional demonstrations of wealth and latent power which characterized the Inns of Court's relationship with the crown, processed to Whitehall to masque, with 'such a glittering shew that all the King and all the companie were exceedingly pleased', as a contemporary observed.²⁵ In a script by George Chapman, amid similar anticipations of 'fruitage' and much talk of Honour, Love, Virtue, and Beauty, a religious theme is intermittently heard, as pagan sun worshippers, 'Virginian princes', recognize the power of James and celebrate him as a monarch spreading Protestant light:

Virginian princes, you must now renounce
Your superstitious worship of these suns,
Subject to cloudy dark'nings and descents;
And of your fit devotions turn the events
To this our Briton Phoebus, whose bright sky
(Enlightened with a Christian piety)
Is never subject to black Error's night . . .²⁶

James brings the true light of Christian piety, dismissing 'superstitious worship', which in the lexicon of contemporary politics and religion most

Protestant Englishmen would have decoded as allusion to Catholic practices. The Inns gave the hymeneal celebration a distinctly denominational feel, in ways curiously prophetic of Frederick's emergence, in the 1620s, as Protestant icon.

In November 1619 Frederick accepted the crown of Bohemia, thus involving the Palatinate in a major way in the developing continental conflict which was to be known as the Thirty Years' War. In its earliest phase, it had the characteristics of a war of religion, between the Protestant states of northern Germany and the Catholic states of Austria and southern Germany. Such a conflict would in any case have excited and interested the partisanship of the English political nation, which was traditionally fiercely anti-Catholic, but Frederick's actions, which amounted to assuming the leadership of the emerging Protestant alliance, established his status as Protestant hero (and, quite soon afterwards, Protestant martyr), aroused an abiding sympathy for the Palatinate and its people, and stimulated an unprecedented interest in news. Appropriately, Joseph Frank begins his standard history of early English newspapers at 1620. As Frank observes, the earliest newspapers in English were conspicuous in their avoidance of 'any news having to do with England', reflecting at once a concern to negotiate a *modus vivendi* with the English authorities and an awareness of their readers' appetites for continental news.²⁷ Control and monitoring of the circulation of news were recurrent concerns of government in the 1620s and 1630s.

But early corantos were just one of several mechanisms for the distribution of news, and the factors of news, characteristically London-based, kept provincial England informed through the dispatch of manuscript newsletters. *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon*, scripted by Jonson and presented by Charles and Buckingham as the prince's Twelfth Night masque of 1620, reflected something of the official edginess about popular interest in the *arcana imperii*. The masque begins with discussion among two heralds (as we are later told, 'the muses' heralds'²⁸), a factor, a printer and a chronicler. The exchange anatomizes the problem for government: a plurality of voices produces a plurality of versions of events, and the authoritative statements of heralds, proclaiming the official version, are no longer privileged. Jonson satirically suggests the simultaneously mercenary and tendentious nature of unofficial versions. His factor confesses, 'I do write my thousand letters a week ordinary, sometimes twelve hundred, and maintain the business at some charge . . . I have friends of all ranks and of all religions, for which I keep an answering

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catalogue of dispatch wherein I have my Puritan news, my Protestant news and my Pontifical news.²⁹ The masque acts out a royal fantasy in which a unity of perspective replaces such a divisive and intrusive plurality, as an antimasque of flying creatures is dismissed and the masquers descend. The second song, separating the opening dance from the main dance and revels, explains that the masquers reflect the values of the monarch, that there is complete concord between them, and that the living discourse of monarchy is uniquely privileged once more:

Now look and see in yonder throne
How all those beams are cast from one.
This is that orb so bright
Has kept your wonder so awake,
Whence you as from a mirror take
The sun's reflected light.
Read him as you would do the book
Of all perfection, and but look
What his proportions be;
No measure that is thence contrived,
Or any motion thence derived,
But is pure harmony.³⁰

The masque ends with the figure of Fame, celebrating James as 'The knowing king', and with the two heralds who began the masque acknowledging that Fame, which is truth-telling, has displaced alternative constructs:

1ST HERALD See, what is that this music brings,
And is so carried in the air about?
2ND HERALD Fame, that doth nourish the renown of kings,
And keeps that fair which envy would blot out.³¹

In this agreeable fantasy, Charles and Buckingham danced discourse back into unity; James saw clear advantages in a legislative framework of control.³² But the problem could not be thus negotiated. From the early 1620s onwards, two tendencies developed in step. As Joad Raymond demonstrates in chapter 3 below, populist versions of the royal image had wide currency in media that, by their nature, escaped from the management of the government. Again, the English obsession with contemporary continental conflict set a framework for the interpretation and evaluation of government policy which profoundly influenced English politics through the 1620s and 1630s and into the Civil War and Interregnum. In chapter 7 Sharon Achinstein explores the role of English anxieties about interna-