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Karen Britland

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## *Introduction*

No ambassador ever seemed to grasp the fact that Henrietta, who saw everything in terms of personalities, was simply not interested in affairs of state unless, of course, one of her friends happened to be involved.

(Alison Plowden, *Henrietta Maria*, 2001)

The common perception of Henrietta Maria is one of an ignorant, political meddler, whose love of Catholic spectacle helped to provoke England to rise against its king. In Samuel R. Gardiner's massive *History of England*, for example, she is described as a woman who 'had nothing of statesmanship in her', and who wanted only 'to live the life of a gay butterfly passing lightly from flower to flower'.<sup>1</sup> Gardiner denigrates her political actions through his use of the loaded terms 'intrigues', 'contrivance' and 'feminine allurements', and remarks that the outbreak of the civil wars was 'so incomprehensible to her, that she was roused to mischievous activity by the extremity of her annoyance'.<sup>2</sup> His representation of Henrietta Maria effectively excludes her from serious politics because of her gender, and marks her as a frivolous woman whose nationality, religion and love of pleasure contributed to the downfall of the English king.

This view is not simply to be found in works from the nineteenth century. Alison Plowden's recent biography promotes a similar image of the queen consort, describing her as 'governed principally by her emotions' and 'heedless of the great political issues of the day'.<sup>3</sup> Citing selectively from the Venetian state papers, she builds up a picture of Henrietta Maria as politically ineffectual, manipulated by male advisers and controlled by her affections. Her book takes little notice of the notion of courtly faction, nor does it recognise the important role that noblewomen played in patronage and preferment at the early modern courts. Finally, her comment that 'no ambassador ever seemed to grasp the fact that Henrietta . . . was simply not interested in affairs of state' exposes a

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problem intrinsic to her interpretation – if ambassadors continuously expected the queen to involve herself in political affairs, is it then not possible that, to some extent, she did?<sup>4</sup>

By investigating the environment within which Henrietta Maria was raised and by detailing the cultural and political activities of her friends and family, most notably those of Marie de Médicis, her Florentine mother, I seek to counteract this image of the queen. In her world, ostentatious display was intricately bound up with political expression and she promoted a social fashion that drew on her French heritage and religion, maintaining throughout her life a lively interest in the affairs of her native country. Far from being a frivolous social butterfly, she corresponded with many of the major European statesmen of her age and was later to take up a position of adviser and financier to her husband in his efforts during the English civil wars.

This book takes a roughly chronological look at the entertainments associated with Henrietta Maria at the French, English and exiled royalist courts in order to plot the changes and development of her political activity and allegiances. I am particularly concerned to investigate how her productions reflected events on the continent, introducing a European dimension into discussions of the politics of court masque. Martin Butler has noted that Charles I's masques of the 1630s 'had very little to say about continental affairs'.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, I argue not only that the queen consort's personal iconography was strongly influenced by her earlier experiences at the Bourbon court, but that her English entertainments actively engaged with events in Europe. This work does not seek to offer a comprehensive historical analysis of Henrietta Maria's life as England's queen. Instead, it considers her court productions, suggesting that they should, at least in part, be read in the light of her national and familial concerns.

#### HENRIETTA MARIA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

Born in 1609, Henrietta Maria was the youngest of the five surviving, legitimate children of Henri IV of France. She was sister to the future Louis XIII, who succeeded to the throne in 1610; to Elizabeth, who married the future Philip IV of Spain; to Christine, later duchess of Savoy; and to Gaston, duc d'Orléans. Her mother, Marie, was the daughter of Francesco de Médicis, late Grand Duke of Tuscany, and had married Henri IV after the 1599 annulment of his marriage to the childless Marguerite de Valois. Henrietta Maria maintained strong ties

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with her mother and Christine throughout her life, and was also closely associated with her brother Gaston.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, during her exile in France in the 1640s and 50s, she hoped to marry his daughter to her eldest son. Her links with her sister Elizabeth were less close, yet they wrote to each other occasionally, and, on at least one occasion, Henrietta Maria recommended a lady-in-waiting to her sister's court.<sup>7</sup>

The proliferation of common cultural images among the European courts was therefore not just the result of the mining of classical texts, nor of the foreign journeys undertaken by craftsmen such as Inigo Jones; it was aided by the marital exchange of royal women and by those women's continued patronage of the men and motifs familiar to them. For example, Marie de Médicis promoted ballets and plays at her court, calling a succession of Italian actors and artists to Paris, and, in 1609, collaborating in *Les Félicités de l'Age doré*, an entertainment to inaugurate the *salle de la fête* at the palais de l'Arsenal.<sup>8</sup> She also encouraged cultural interests in her offspring – all the royal children took part in French *ballet de cour*, and, in 1611, Princess Elizabeth was encouraged to stage a production of Robert Garnier's play, *Bradamante*. This interest in theatre was not deemed to be improper, nor was it inimical to devout feminine behaviour. Indeed, as Wendy Gibson has noted, the queen mother's 'enthusiasm for ballets was such that in 1612 she commanded the lords of her court to provide her with one every Sunday'.<sup>9</sup> As I will discuss, Marie's personal iconography, which specifically promoted women as peaceweavers as they moved between courts, made a virtue out of the itinerancy that was the royal woman's lot, situating the queen mother as central to a peaceful Europe and stressing her overwhelming importance as a mediator between monarchs who were also her relations.

Quite understandably, notable connections can be established between the artists employed by Marie de Médicis and those commissioned by Henrietta Maria. For example, in 1626, Orazio Gentileschi, the Tuscan painter, arrived in England with Marie's blessing.<sup>10</sup> Although he was in King Charles's pay, he was at first closely associated with the duke of Buckingham, and then, after Buckingham's death, was predominantly active for Henrietta Maria.<sup>11</sup> In the 1630s, the queen consort made a concerted effort to collect his paintings, particularly those with Biblical associations. She also gave him his largest commission in England when she engaged him to paint the ceiling of the Great Hall at her house in Greenwich.

Gentileschi's canvases for Greenwich House were completed by the time of his death in 1639 and figured an *Allegory of Peace and the Arts*.

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Gabriele Finaldi has observed that all of the twenty-six figures represented on the ceiling were female, and remarks:

This assemblage of iconographies suggests (I put it no more strongly) that the Great Hall may have been intended by the Queen as a sort of realm of womanly virtue at the heart of her 'House of Delight'.<sup>12</sup>

By creating a palace full of female-centred imagery, Henrietta Maria followed a tradition evoked by her mother at the palais de Luxembourg whose decorative themes also glorified women. For example, a series of eight sculptures of women were commissioned to adorn the Luxembourg's dome, while the walls and ceiling of Marie's bedchamber were decorated with a profusion of female allegorical figures that celebrated her success as a monarch.<sup>13</sup> In the case of both mother and daughter, the promotion of such imagery installed women as central to the nation's peace and prosperity, advocating feminine virtue as essential to the balanced governance of the realm.

Just as Marie de Médicis used designs that brought to mind her Florentine heritage, so Henrietta Maria surrounded herself with familiar motifs. Unlike James I's queen, Anna, whose upbringing in the cosmopolitan Danish court had exposed her to a variety of influences, Henrietta Maria actively sponsored art which emphasised her French background. This was not just an exercise in nostalgia, but a deliberate act of appropriation that distinguished her identity from that of her English husband. Henrietta Maria's evocations of her native land emphasised her status as the daughter of an important and civilised nation, demonstrating that England had much to gain from an appreciation of French design and behaviour.<sup>14</sup> In addition, her cultural patronage enabled her to maintain close links with her family, who supplied her with commodities from petticoats to fruit trees.

The exchange of artists and craftsmen between France and England was, of course, not a new phenomenon. At least seven French musicians were maintained in Anna of Denmark's household, playing at the late queen's funeral in 1619 before being granted passes to return to France. French dancing masters were also in demand at the Jacobean court: Jacques Cordier (known as Bocan), a celebrated dancer and violinist, was a member of Prince Henry's household in 1608 and appears to have remained in England until 1614 when his name disappears from exemption lists.<sup>15</sup> Peter Walls has noted that he was living in Paris between 1622 and 1625 when three of his children were baptised.<sup>16</sup> What Walls does not mention is that, at precisely this time, Bocan was listed as 'maistre de

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dance' in the household lists of Henrietta Maria.<sup>17</sup> In 1625, he returned to England, probably as a member of the queen consort's wedding party, and received a gift of £500, procured for him by the duke of Buckingham. He seems to have been in England periodically throughout the 1630s, receiving a payment of £60 from Henrietta Maria in 1630 and two from Charles in 1633 and 1634 respectively.<sup>18</sup> While his activity at the Caroline court cannot be attributed especially to the influence of the queen consort, it demonstrates a receptivity to French fashion that her presence helped to facilitate and which she was concerned to promote. It also indicates that, on the level of dancing at least, Charles and Henrietta Maria shared a common training and a common repertoire.

Sebastian La Pierre, another French dancing master, was also employed in England, starting his career in 1611 as the instructor of Charles, Prince of Wales, before, in 1625, transferring to the household of Henrietta Maria. A Guillaume La Pierre, possibly his son, was later employed as dancing instructor to the royal children, Charles and Mary, demonstrating the court's continued preference for French fashions in dancing.<sup>19</sup> The Frenchmen Bartholomew Montagu and Nicolas Picard were also members of Henrietta Maria's early entourage and were named in her household lists as dancers. Montagu danced in an anti-masque entry in *Luminalia*, the queen's masque of 1638, while Picard seems to have had the specific charge of training Henrietta Maria's maids of honour.<sup>20</sup> These French influences had a palpable effect upon the Caroline masque form which, under Henrietta Maria's patronage, saw a marked movement towards the style of French *ballet de cour*.<sup>21</sup>

Henrietta Maria's preference for French cultural forms also extended to her taste in music. She arrived in England accompanied by about a dozen French musicians, many of whom had previously served Anna of Denmark. These men's expertise, like that of the dancing masters, was inevitably employed in the service of Caroline court masques. Louis Richard, her master of music and one of Anna's former servants, composed the music for *Britannia Triumphans* (1638) and *Salmacida Spolia* (1640), while the talents of her harpist, La Felle, were used in *The Temple of Love* (1635).<sup>22</sup> In addition, 'the more to please her M[ajesty]', four of the queen consort's French musicians were invited to play in the Inns of Court masque, *The Triumph of Peace* (1634).<sup>23</sup> Indeed, nowhere is the queen consort's preference for French music more apparent than in an anecdote recounted by Bulstrode Whitelock, one of *The Triumph of Peace's* organisers. After showing Henrietta Maria a coranto he had composed, Whitelock reported that she expressed surprise that it had

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been written by an Englishman 'because she said it was fuller of life and spirit than the English aiers use to be'.<sup>24</sup> Her patronage of French musicians can, therefore, be attributed to conscious choice and aesthetic preference, rather than to a bland mimicry of French fashion.

Interestingly, Henrietta Maria did not only patronise male musicians. Payments were made from 1637 onwards to a Margaret Prevost, the widow of Camille Prevost, one of the French musicians inherited by Henrietta Maria from Anna of Denmark. It is possible that this amounted to nothing more than a widow's pension, yet, during the interregnum, a specific payment of £10 was made from the queen consort's coffers to 'Margaret Provoe, servant to the late Queen in the Musick', indicating that she probably had a musical function in her own right.<sup>25</sup> However, Henrietta Maria's most notable contribution to musical patronage must be her promotion of female singers in the court masque. As I will discuss in chapter 5, it was in her production of *Tempe Restored* that Madame Coniack and Mistress Shepherd became the first named women to sing upon the English court stage. Even more notably, Henrietta Maria, herself, became the first recorded English queen to take a speaking and singing role in a dramatic production.

#### CATHOLICISM, NEO-PLATONISM AND PRÉCIOSITÉ

The preferred form of Catholicism practised at Marie de Médicis's court was pioneered by prelates such as St François de Sales, Pierre de Bérulle and Jacques-Davy du Perron. Marie patronised the Carmelite order of nuns introduced into France by Bérulle in 1602, and also supported the congregation of the Oratory that he founded in 1611. Significantly, when Henrietta Maria left for England in 1625, she was accompanied not only by a complement of Oratorian priests who were intended to serve in her chapel, but by Bérulle himself, who had been involved in the marriage negotiations and was to serve as her confessor. She was also presented with a farewell letter written by her mother and expanded by Bérulle which set out the behaviour expected of her as the Catholic wife of an apostate king. The message of this letter, together with the imagery deployed during her Parisian wedding, foreground the issues that would preoccupy her married life and consequently deserve investigation.

The letter exists in two versions, the shorter of which might well have been entirely written by Marie de Médicis and which is preserved in a manuscript draft under the title 'Instruction de la Reine Marie de medicis – a la Reine dangleterre sa fille marie-anriette de France 15 juin 1625'.<sup>26</sup>

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The longer version, entitled, 'Instructions données par Marie de Médicis à sa fille Henriette de France, Reyne d'Angleterre', was transcribed in 1694 by Charles Cotolendi with the significant observation that the original was held in Henrietta Maria's convent at Chaillot (founded in 1651).<sup>27</sup> That the letter remained in the queen consort's care for more than twenty-five years emphasises the importance she placed upon it and perhaps supports the contention that it was strongly associated with her mother.

The shorter version is affectionate and declares itself to be written by Marie de Médicis in her own hand 'affin qu'il vous soit plus cher' [so that it will be dearer to you].<sup>28</sup> It reminds the new queen to be grateful for the privileges given to her by God and tells her to remember that she has been placed on earth for the sake of heaven. While exhorting Henrietta Maria to be diligent in her faith and not to shirk her religious observances, it does not overtly encourage her to proselytise. However, the longer version, which opens in an exact duplication of the former, continues in a more didactic strain. Henrietta Maria is urged to remain faithful to her religion and is exhorted to protect the English Catholics. Indeed, she is named their Esther 'qui eut cette grace de Dieu d'estre la déffense et la délivrance de son peuple' [who had this grace from God to be the defender and deliverer of her people].<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, although she is enjoined to be obedient to her husband, she is also encouraged to pray for him to be drawn to the true faith, and is exhorted to be charitable towards Protestants so that, by her example, she may lead them to convert.<sup>30</sup> In other words, while it is an overtly religious document, the letter also functions as a conduct manual, emphasising the behaviour appropriate for a Catholic queen. It gives Henrietta Maria a socio-religious role at the English court, encouraging her to lead by her good example in order to draw her subjects back to the old faith.

The expectation that she would take an active role at court was therefore incumbent upon the new English queen consort from the start. It is not enough, then, to mine her dramatic productions for signs of some sort of emergent female agency, or for a proto-feminist engagement with the issue of female voice. As Alison Shell has noted, the imagery of 'feminised religious love' found in the queen consort's entertainments 'is consistent with St Paul's injunction that wives professing the true faith and married to unbelieving husbands should use indirect means to convert them'.<sup>31</sup> 'To call this feminist is misleading', she says, although it does count 'among the incentives that prompted early modern women towards finding a voice'.<sup>32</sup> If Henrietta Maria's iconography was femino-centric, it

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was less because she was fighting the good fight for her sisters than because she was actively promoting her role as an exemplary Catholic princess in an apostate land.

Henrietta Maria was, furthermore, descended from a number of former queens consort and queens regent, numbering among her ancestors not only the powerful women of the Médicis family, but also her father's famous relatives, Jeanne d'Albret and Marguerite de Navarre. Although the example she set at the English court might well have inspired other less privileged women towards cultural creativity, she can hardly be deemed to have been struggling for role models herself. Indeed, her French wedding entertainments made a point of drawing analogies with other French princesses who had become queens of England, providing her with examples of active, effective and pious women and thus situating expectations about her own activities within a framework of previous female action.<sup>33</sup>

For example, in Amiens, on her way to the coast, Henrietta Maria was presented with a series of pageants, composed, as the French newsbook, the *Mercure François*, reported, in seven pieces like the seven wonders of the world.<sup>34</sup> The seventh and last pageant depicted five French princesses who had become queens of England, and who were each supposed to be the incarnation of a particular virtue. The first – Adilberge, who had converted her husband, King Ethelbert of Kent – represented Faith and Religion. She carried a sun in her hand, and declared to Henrietta Maria:

J'estois fille de France espouse d'un grand Roy  
A qui j'ay fait cognoistre un seul Dieu qu'on adore:  
Je n'ay que commencé faisant comme l'Aurore  
Qui vous ay attiré vray Soleil de la Foy.<sup>35</sup>

[I was a daughter of France and the wife of a great king  
To whom I made known a single God who is adored:  
I only began, acting like the Dawn,  
Which has drawn you, true Sun of the Faith.]

It is significant that the first queen to speak expressed a proselytising agenda. Her verses drew together a series of solar references from the previous six pageants, making the whole entertainment redolent of a conversionary programme that would see England returned to the true faith through the ministrations of its new queen. The imagery of light, so prevalent in English and French encomia to Henrietta Maria and so compatible with the tenets of neo-Platonism, was given a specifically Catholic gloss that was subsequently compounded by the virtues of Clemency, Humility, Prudence and Constancy incarnated in the other

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four queens.<sup>36</sup> These commendable Christian virtues were thus offered to Henrietta Maria as examples of the conduct that would draw the English nation back to Rome.

The letters and entertainments impressed upon her on her way to England therefore emphasised the importance of her conversionary mission, informing her that her marriage had been ordained by God to bring relief to suffering English Catholics and to save Protestant heretics by showing them the way to the true faith. They are significant for they are early manifestations of a vocabulary that can be identified throughout the queen consort's entertainments of the 1630s and beyond. Henrietta Maria arrived in England already associated with beauty, love and light, attributes that would be exploited in the development of her so-called neo-Platonic love cult. Most importantly, the image of light was glossed in the Amiens entries as the light of faith, locating Henrietta Maria as the purveyor of religious illumination in Britain. Erica Vevers does not make this connection in her work until she discusses the queen consort's 1638 production of *Luminalia*, yet the idea of Henrietta Maria as the divinely ordained saviour of Catholicism is explicit in French texts from the mid 1620s, and, as I will discuss, can even be perceived in *Artenice*, her first dramatic production on the English court stage.<sup>37</sup>

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Veevers's study of Henrietta Maria's neo-Platonism and its resonances with Catholicism is superb. She argues that the queen consort's masques may have been an opportunity to show 'that she was active in the interests of Catholicism, and that her sponsorship of Platonic love was a means by which her religion was made acceptable at court', and, through readings of *The Temple of Love* (1635) and *Luminalia* (1638), makes a convincing case for the 'Catholic slant' of the queen's masques.<sup>38</sup> What arises from her study is the suggestion that these masques could be used to promote an agenda that differed, at least on the subject of religion, from that of the king. She also successfully renovates the older idea that Henrietta Maria's masques and their neo-Platonism were frivolous and facile.

To contextualise this neo-Platonic fashion, Vevers discusses the social trends and religious enthusiasms of the France of Henrietta Maria's youth, and summarises modern critical attitudes towards her drama. 'Most critics', she says, 'have distinguished different degrees of seriousness with which the fashion for Platonic love was taken at the English court, but they have not agreed about the seriousness with which it was taken by the

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Queen.<sup>39</sup> These differences of opinion, she notes, ‘have arisen partly through the failure to distinguish between different phases of *préciosité* in France, and to determine exactly which phase was adopted by the Queen at the time when she came to have a decisive influence at court’.<sup>40</sup> Henrietta Maria’s neo-Platonism, she suggests, was influenced by *honnêteté*, a standard of virtuous yet civilised behaviour advocated in France for both men and women.<sup>41</sup> Such *honnêteté* was in turn derived from the ‘Devout Humanism’ taught by St François de Sales and promoted in texts such as Honoré d’Urfé’s *L’Astrée* which ‘drew on the attractions of the romance to help popularise the ideals of religion’.<sup>42</sup>

Her analysis of St François de Sales’s theology and of the development of *honnêteté* is subtle and thorough, and provides a firm basis for her discussion of the queen consort’s theatrical productions. Nonetheless, it introduces a false distinction into her portrayal of Caroline neo-Platonism because of its use of problematic descriptive categories. The queen, Veevers asserts, was not ‘a typically sophisticated *précieuse* of the Parisian *salons*’ and favoured ‘a side of the fashion that had more in common with the concept of *honnêteté* than with the exaggerated woman-worship of the romances’.<sup>43</sup> However, she suggests (paraphrasing J. B. Fletcher) that Lady Carlisle, one of Henrietta Maria’s early English companions, was ‘the typical “salon” *précieuse*: the beauty who dispenses her beneficent influence to a *coterie* of admirers, who in turn immortalize her in verse’.<sup>44</sup>

Veevers is correct to note that Caroline neo-Platonism was not a static phenomenon and her analysis of the queen consort’s fashion is well developed. However, the distinction she makes between this and Lady Carlisle’s activities is open to reinterpretation. Firstly, although she acknowledges that ‘the term *préciosité* and its derivatives did not come into use . . . until about the middle of the seventeenth century’, she projects it unproblematically on to the 1620s and 30s, asserting that ‘the word will be used without the value judgments (of affectation, over-refinement of manners and language, or even of “advanced” views on morals) which have been imposed on it by its development later in the century’.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Domna Stanton has shown that the concept of *préciosité* was conceived initially as a derogatory term for women by men. ‘The only reality that can be claimed for the *précieuse*,’ Stanton says, ‘is her representation in a body of mid-seventeenth century texts which are designed to chastize her pervasive faults.’<sup>46</sup> Stanton characterises the *précieuse* as the negative pole of the *honnête* woman who, instead of helping society by promoting politeness and chaste conversation, transgresses social norms through her ambition and pride.<sup>47</sup> Veevers’s portrait of Lady Carlisle