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Introduction: the court masque

Most of Inigo Jones's surviving stage designs (there are over 470) were made for the court entertainments known as masques. Although the masque has a history stretching back to the early Tudor period, and a prehistory even lengthier,[1] in its fully developed form it belongs to the reigns of James I and Charles I. The Stuart court masque emerged with its recognisable character in 1605 and flourished until 1640. That character was shaped in collaboration by Jones and the poet Ben Jonson; and although other poets and designers were sometimes employed, and other artists (composers and choreographers) added their indispensable contributions, it was Jonson and Jones who made the masque into a highly sophisticated aesthetic and cultural form. Their partnership, based on common intellectual ground, was also charged with conflict. When it broke down after twenty-five years, Jonson was discarded and Jones left in control of the productions; so his commanding involvement with the Stuart masque, either as co-equal or 'sole Monarch' (a tactless but revealing phrase of his own), lasted from start to finish.

The term 'masque' is difficult to define, and contemporaries never seem to have attempted this, although practitioners were quite prepared to generalise prescriptively about the masque,[2] and spectators to make critical judgments on performances, as if the nature of the form was clear to them. The alternative spelling 'maske' suggests that the salient feature was a concealment or change of identity. Jonson drops a helpful piece of folk-memory into *The Masque of Augurs* (1622) by having one character say 'Disguise was the old English word for a Masque.'[3] This derives the masque from the older 'disguising', and highlights the adoption of roles. That older format, as recorded in the time of Henry VIII, involved the entry of a group of disguised courtiers, often in a movable scenic machine (a 'pageant'), who performed a series of dances, and then retired.[4] But there are parallel records of a new kind of entertainment imported from Italy, the 'maske': here a

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group of courtiers, similarly disguised but designated 'maskers', would arrive attended by torchbearers; they would take partners from the assembled company and dance with them; and finally make a formal departure.[5] It seems that the masque as Jonson knew it had a more complex ancestry than his character suggested, combining the theatrical representation of the 'disguising' with the social ritual of the Tudor 'maske', the common factor being the masquers' assumption of some symbolic role.

In the Stuart masque the theatrical dimension is much elaborated. The hall where the entertainment takes place is set up as a theatre, and a quasi-dramatic fiction explains the appearance of the masquers in their appointed roles, and envelops the entire action, including the social dancing (known as the 'revels'). A preliminary episode called the 'antimasque' (there might be more than one of these) leads into the masque proper or 'main masque', and serves both as an exposition and a contrast.[6] At its fullest extent the structure comprises an introductory poetic dialogue (perhaps including song), one or more antimasques, the main masque, the revels (sometimes punctuated by song), and an epilogue as the masquers withdraw to the stage, from which they have descended to dance their set pieces and join in the revels.[7]

The word 'masque' could still be applied to the central part alone of the elaborate structure which bore the same name – the part where the masquers appeared in their splendid costumes, performed their rehearsed dances, and then danced with the spectators. So on a design for *The Temple of Love* (1635) Jones has written 'for the Quenes Masque of Indianes',[8] referring to the roles taken by Queen Henrietta Maria and her ladies, who were to appear at the climax of the whole piece. This interchange of name between the whole and a part indicates a persistent sense of where the central emphasis lay in a now complex structure: on a revelation of, and communion with, symbolically transfigured persons.

These quasi-religious terms are appropriate, as masques were not just luxurious recreations. William Davenant, introducing the published text of *Britannia Triumphans* (1638), wrote:

> Princes of sweet and humane natures have ever, both amongst the ancients and moderns in the best times, presented spectacles and personal representations, to recreate their spirits wasted in grave affairs of state, and for the entertainment of their nobility, ladies and courts.[9]

The issue is not pleasure as such, but the 'nature' of the 'Prince', whose generosity bestows such pleasure on his subjects. Jonson called masques 'the donatiues, of great Princes, to their people':[10] their very gratuitousness proves the magnanimity and 'magnificence' of the monarch. They also represent those virtues. In *Britannia Triumphans* Charles I appears as

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'Britanocles, the glory of the western world'; and the action concludes with an ingenious scenic tableau of his 'great fleet', financed by ship-money.[11] The pleasures of the masque were a function of politics. Jonson did insist from the start that the masque should strive to transcend its immediate political concerns and 'lay hold on more remou'd *mysteries*',[12] on arcane moral and philosophical truths. But since masques always focussed on the King, and the King (whether James or Charles) was not only head of the Church but sponsor of his very own political metaphysic, the '*mysteries*' were usually those of divine right monarchy.

It is difficult for us, over three and a half centuries later, to imagine what a masque was like. Masques were made for performance; there was little systematic effort to give them an after-life by publishing full records of those performances, as was done with court festivals in Italy. Any publication was usually undertaken by the poet who had written the text; but this, even if he tried to give some account of the whole occasion, still placed undue emphasis on only one constituent. The masque was a combination of different arts: poetry (and sometimes prose), music, dance, and visual spectacle (both costume and scenery). As we have seen, the collaboration that was required could generate conflict, so that the relationship between the constituent arts could be volatile and unsettled. The present study, in emphasising the art of the designer, is necessarily partial.

Since our easiest access to the masque is as readers of the texts which survive, especially the outstanding corpus by Ben Jonson, we may tend to overstress the literariness of the form. It is tempting to see it as an effete version of the drama performed in the public theatres of 'the age of Shakespeare'. To avoid such misconceptions we must take account of the specific social conditions which made it what it was.

The masque was a courtly form. There are instances of courtiers putting on masques in their own houses: *Lovers Made Men* (1617) was offered by Lord Hay to the French ambassador, and *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* (1623) by Buckingham to King James.[13] But most masques took place at court, 'presented' by members of the royal family and nobility to their fellows, an élite community. Fierce efforts to obtain admission were made by those outside this élite. They might range from foreign ambassadors (an invitation conferred diplomatic prestige) to mere citizens or adventurous nobodies, as documented in Jonson's comic antimasque for *Love Restored* (1612). The principal masquers were always courtiers,[14] usually grouped around a royal personage: Anne of Denmark, Prince Henry, Charles I and Henrietta Maria were all keen masquers. King James alone never took part, but as chief spectator he would always be complimented, and drawn into the symbolic action. This action was governed by the decorum of the court. The masquers never impersonated characters as if they were actors on the

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dramatic stage; they never spoke or sang. They simply appeared in costume, their real identities enhanced by symbolic roles, and danced – dancing being a proper courtly accomplishment. Dialogue and song, and the histrionic dancing seen in the antimasque, were delegated to professional actors and musicians.[15]

Masques were occasional, that is, linked to specific occasions. These were of two kinds. There were the regular seasonal festivities, such as Christmas: it was customary to present a masque on Twelfth Night (as on Shrove Tuesday). There were also special celebrations, such as a royal coming-of-age or wedding: *Tethys' Festival* marked the investiture of Henry as Prince of Wales in the summer of 1610; and three masques were presented (two by the Inns of Court) at the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to the Elector Palatine in February, 1613. Since the action of a masque was related to its occasion (the seasonal productions often had a topical sub-text), masques could only receive a unique performance. In fact some masques were repeated: Queen Anne had missed *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1618) because of illness, so it was restaged for her benefit; and an exceptionally successful piece, like *The Temple of Love* (1635), might be repeated more than once.[16] But in principle masques could not be revived like plays.

Unlike plays moreover, masques were theatrical without being intrinsically dramatic. They professed to represent higher realities beyond the ordinary world of appearances and natural vicissitudes. The action achieved its climax by transcending drama: the 'discovery' of the masquers was always a moment of triumph or apotheosis, when negative forces released in the antimasque would be confounded with glory. Any elements of drama were confined to the antimasque. Not an original part of the overall structure, this was developed by Jonson in *The Haddington Masque* (1608) and *The Masque of Queens* (1609). It might be an episode of 'antic' dance inserted in the poetic prologue (as in the former), or a semi-dramatic scene with demotic or fantastic characters filling the entire space before the main masque (as in the latter). Jonson gave his talent for comedy generous scope in the antimasque, while the poets who succeeded him allowed it to become more and more demonstratively balletic. Again, like the sometimes uncertain consensus of the contributory arts, the shifting relation between symbolic and dramatic action showed the economy of the masque to be more volatile than was theoretically allowed.

The generic affinities of the masque were European rather than domestic, less with contemporary English drama than with courtly continental forms like the Italian *intermedio* or the French *ballet de cour*. Other kinds of court entertainment also belong in this international context: tilts (chivalric tournaments with a theatrical setting), barriers (tilts on foot), and the

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pastoral plays favoured by Queen Henrietta Maria. Jones's work as a designer covers the whole spectrum; but it was the masque designs which made the strongest impression, taking the culture of the English court into the mainstream of European art.

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The theory and practice of imitation

L'artiste sera ou plagiaire ou révolutionnaire
Gauguin

Delight and profit

We think of Inigo Jones as the first classical architect in England, who showed his compatriots a version of what had been going on in Italian architecture over the previous 150 years. But well before he was in a position to do this, becoming Surveyor of the King's Works in 1615, he was introducing the Stuart courtiers to the traditions of Renaissance art, with which they were still largely unfamiliar, on a broader front. He did this through the court masques; and he did it with some deliberation.

It may seem strange to see the masques as vehicles of a didactic programme. Bacon called them 'toys', trivial diversions. But the rulers who commissioned these extravagant spectacles, and the artists who produced them, both took them very seriously.[1] When the Dowager Grand Duchesses of Tuscany granted a *privilegio* to Giulio Parigi in 1626, it included among his works the famous *intermedi* staged in 1608.[2] Ben Jonson, who wrote many of the masques which Jones designed, was fond of stressing the significance of their content: 'though their *voyce* be taught to sound to present occasions, their *sense* . . . should alwayes lay hold on more remou'd *mysteries*'.[3] In his preface to *The Masque of Queens* (1609) he described himself as 'obseruing that rule of the best *Artist*, to suffer no object of delight to passe without his mixture of profit, & example.'[4] Here, in specifically invoking the Horatian principle of delightful teaching, he is speaking for himself as a poet, but – being perfectly aware on Horace's authority that '*Poetry*, and *Picture*, are Arts of a like nature' – he might just as well be speaking for Jones as designer;[5] and the Cockpit-in-Court theatre which Jones built later incorporates a Horatian motto about instruction and delight above the proscenium.[6] In fact Jones's contribution to the masques is doubly didactic: his teaching is aesthetic as well as moral. Not only is he

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using 'picture', in collaboration with Jonson's poetry to communicate philosophical, ethical and political ideas; he is inducing his audience to revise radically their ideas about what 'picture' is, to adopt a wholly new concept of visual art.

Rubens described Jones's friend and patron the Earl of Arundel as an evangelist of art.[7] The term could have been even more aptly applied to Jones. As the first English artist to acquire a deep and inward knowledge of the whole Renaissance tradition, he was able to grasp just how marginal to that tradition was the visual culture of his own country: in spite of the impact of Holbein and numerous lesser continental artists, English art was still in outer darkness. It was to this situation that he addressed himself. At the outset of his career, his friend the antiquarian Edmund Bolton identified him as a person of peculiar promise, 'through whom there is hope that . . . all that is praiseworthy in the elegant arts of the ancients, may one day find their way across the Alps into our England'.[8] These words were written in a copy of Gianfrancesco Bordino's *De Rebus Praeclare Gestis a Sixto V*,[9] a book of poems celebrating the energetic pope who had combined ecclesiastical reforms with a sweeping architectural transformation of the city of Rome. Bolton was setting out a programme for Jones, and Jones responded to the challenge. By the end of his career he had realised Bolton's hopes.

The programme

Bolton's inscription is couched in formal, public terms, but it has an irreverent undercurrent which makes it partly private. Since it hovers between public and private, we have to consider what it leaves half-said or unsaid, as well as what it manifestly states.

> Tertio Calendas Januar. MDCVI Styl. Angl. Arrham, tesseramque amicitiae, futurae cum Ignatio Jonesio sempiternae, Edmundus Bolton do libellum hunc. Ignatio Jonesio suo per quem spes est, Statuariam, Plasticen, Architecturam, Picturam, Mimisim, omnemque veterum elegantiarum laudem trans Alpes, in Angliam nostram aliquando irrepturas. MERCURIUS IOVIS FILIUS.

> 30 December 1606. As an earnest and a token of a friendship which is to endure forever with Inigo Jones, I, Edmund Bolton give this little book. To his own Inigo Jones through whom the hope is that sculpture, modelling, architecture, picture, theatrical representation, and all that is praiseworthy in the elegant arts of the ancients, may some day insinuate themselves across the Alps into our England. MERCURY SON OF JOVE.[10]

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The final reference to Mercury, messenger of the gods, is appropriate, since Jones is given the role of mediator or go-between. And the formula 'Mercurius Iovis filius' is explained by the British mythographer Alexander Ross: 'They called him the son of *Jupiter*; to shew, that eloquence, sciences, and ingenuous arts are the gift of God.'[11] According to Cartari, quoting a string of classical authors, Mercury was the discoverer and patron of 'tutte le buone arte'; and the characteristic Greek statues of him, called herms, were placed in schools and academies.[12] Now we know that the great project of Bolton's life was to found a national academy under royal patronage, for which he petitioned James I ten years later, and that Jones was to be one of the members.[13] Whether he is alluding at this earlier stage to his vision of an academy, and to Jones as a future academician, we cannot be certain. But clearly in a sense he is already acting as a cultural entrepreneur: he invokes Mercury as the god who teaches humans 'all the good arts', and salutes Jones as the potential messenger to England of those best known to him – what we would call the fine arts, and he knew as the arts of design.[14]

Bolton's words could almost be read as a joint statement. Even if the idea of an academy is far from fully formed, Bolton sees his relationship with Jones like those between the scholars and artists who joined together in the Italian academies, where the artists were absorbed into the humanist tradition, and seen not as craftsmen with manual tasks to discharge but intellectuals with knowledge to impart. One function of the *letterati* in these relationships was to encourage and assist the artists to articulate their ideas, not only in the visual discourses of art but in speech and writing. In this perspective Bolton's inscription can be seen not just as a one-sided demand, imposing a programme on Jones, so much as a collaborative statement recording Jones's aspirations as they have emerged in the intercourse between artist and writer.

Putting this statement in Latin – which offers the artist a voice he could otherwise not have used – adds to its meaning.[15] The Latin language stresses the scope of Jones's project, which crosses national and temporal boundaries, extending in space across Europe and in time back to antiquity. It also allows Bolton to use a conventional form of words which gives that project a specific historical character. His listing of the arts follows a humanist formula from the fifteenth century. The concept of the 'veterum elegantiae' derives from the preface to Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantiae linguae latinae*, produced around 1440, the influential anthology of the arts of language as practised by the best Roman writers. Valla identifies in his own age an artistic 'revival' – what came to be seen by Vasari in the next century as a 'rinascità' and by writers of the nineteenth century as 'the Renaissance':

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> I do not know why the arts most clearly approaching the liberal arts – painting, sculpture in stone and bronze, and architecture – had been in so long and so deep a decline and almost died out together with literature itself; nor why they have come to be aroused and come to life again (ac reviviscant) in this age; nor why there is now such a rich harvest both of good artists and good writers.[16]

The list of arts in Valla's Latin runs: 'illae artes quae proximae ad liberales accedunt, Pingendi, Scalpendi, Fingendi, Architectandi . . . ' This was followed by Erasmus, about fifty years later, comparing the revival of eloquence and the visual arts, whose products he listed as 'caelaturas, picturas, sculpturas, aedificia, fabricas et omnium denique officiorum monimenta . . . '[17] Others used the same list in the same context;[18] and, more than a century and a half after Valla, Bolton, with his 'Statuariam, Plasticen, Architecturam, Picturam', is still using essentially the same formula, together with Valla's idea of recovering the 'veterum elegantiae', the choicest aesthetic effects of the ancients.

Bolton's use of a conventional structure of words and ideas first fashioned by Valla enables him to make a vital point without spelling it out, and so preserve the elliptical terseness proper to a Latin inscription, which is also a somewhat private communication. The coming of the arts to England will be a journey not only across Europe but across time or history, a revival or rebirth. For Bolton to take up the stance of a literary humanist welcoming an artistic revival, a stance over a century and a half old, may seem anachronistic. But by speaking of 'hope' rather than achievement he suggests that England is still only on the verge of that revival. The passage of the arts across the Alps will produce a rehearsal of that rebirth of antiquity which brought the arts in Italy to their modern fulfilment. By reusing a rhetorical formula from the context of Quattrocento humanism, designed to greet self-consciously the dawn of Italian Renaissance art, Bolton more resonantly acknowledges the backwardness of his native culture and asks Jones to transform it, by initiating the Renaissance in England.

His appeal takes a radical view of English culture, since it sweeps out of account whatever responses to the revival of the arts England had already made in the course of the sixteenth century. The idea of a whole new programme of work to be inaugurated springs from the poetic text he is inscribing to Jones, which is itself a part of what he has to communicate. It celebrates Sixtus V as a protagonist of the counter-Reformation, a figure who revives the energy of the High Renaissance papacy but in a radically reforming spirit, who makes a fresh start, and hopes to win back lost ground. The text includes illustrative prints, showing the powerful feats of architecture and urban planning which gave concrete cultural expression to the

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Pope's new plans for the Church. The Sixtine *renovatio Romae* resumed the earlier building campaigns of Renaissance popes like Julius II, but carried them out more thoroughly, as if for a second Renaissance charged with the dynamic of reform. These are the points of reference, Renaissance compounded by reform, which make Bolton's words so resolute. Whatever has been gained or lost in the past, a radical new beginning is to be made.

How is this to be done? The answer lies in the word which Bolton adds to the conventional list of the arts, 'Mimisim'. This is a quasi-Latinised form of the Greek 'mimesis', and is best glossed from its original context. Unlike Valla or Erasmus, who speak of the arts as practices or products, Bolton refers to them in conceptual terms, using abstract nouns; he is not expecting Jones to practise all the arts which figure in his neo-classical conspectus. All his terms come from impeccable ancient authorities: 'Statuaria', 'Plastice' and 'Pictura' are used by Pliny in his account of the arts; 'Architectura' is obviously sanctioned by Vitruvius. And 'Mimesis', as part of the vocabulary of the arts, is given its definitive meaning for the Renaissance in the *Poetics* of Aristotle. There it has a broader and a narrower meaning. In general it denotes the universal human instinct for imitation[19] which Aristotle sees as one of the root causes of poetry, and of representation in all art. More specifically it describes the imitative function of poetry, or rather – since Aristotle's discussion of tragedy does not focus exclusively on poetry as a verbal medium – of poetic drama performed with all the resources of the theatre. Although he wrote occasional verses, Jones was no poet; but up to the time of Bolton's dedication nearly all his work had been in the theatre. If we insert this fact into the context provided by Aristotle, we can define the term 'Mimesis' used by Bolton to Jones as 'theatrical representation' or 'the imitative arts of the theatre as detailed in Aristotle's *Poetics*'.

Jones had already revived the theatre of antiquity in the plays he designed and produced before the King at Oxford in 1605, which included a tragedy, a comedy and a satyr play all in Latin, and used the scenic *periaktoi* (rotating prisms) described by Vitruvius, together with costumes of 'Antique fashions'.[20] But a royal visit to the university was a rare occasion: he did not work again in Oxford for thirty years; and Bolton cannot be looking for that kind of archaeological revival on a regular basis. The crucial point about 'Mimesis', the art of theatrical representation as described by Aristotle and practised anew by Jones, was that in its fullest form it was a composite of various other arts: poetry, music, dance and spectacle.[21] And it was not the university but the court at Whitehall that offered the resources and opportunities for realising a modern idea of the aesthetic complexity of the ancient theatre, in the annual productions of the masques. When Bolton wrote his dedication, Jones's theatre work at Oxford was receding into the past, but the court offered a future. He had already staged *The Masque of*

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