

THE WRITING OF
ROYALISM
1628–1660

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CHAPTER I

The halcyon days: 1628–1637

When supporters of the royal cause looked back across the conflicts and defeats of the 1640s, they remembered the years of Charles I's personal rule as a golden age of peace and prosperity. Writing shortly after the death of Oliver Cromwell, Abraham Cowley gave poetic expression to a common nostalgia:

Ah, happy Isle, how art thou chang'd and curst,
Since I was born, and knew thee first! . . .
When upon Earth no Kingdom could have shown
A happier Monarch to us than our own.¹

A similar testimony in prose was given by Sir Philip Warwick, who declared that 'from the year 1628, unto the year 1638, I believe England was never Master of a profounder peace, nor enjoy'd more wealth, or had the power and form of godlines more visibly in it'.² Edward Hyde, writing as an exile in the Scillies in 1646, laid particular emphasis on the contrast between continental Europe, ravaged by the Thirty Years War, and the realms of Scotland, Ireland and England over which Charles had reigned in peace:

The happiness of the times . . . was enviously set off by this, that every other kingdom, every other province, were engaged, some entangled, and some almost destroyed, by the rage and fury of arms . . . whilst alone the kingdoms we now lament were looked upon as the garden of the world.³

This nostalgia for the decade of rule without Parliament had a cultural as well as a political dimension. As Thomas Corns has pointed out, the posthumously published works of Sir John Suckling and Thomas Carew were presented in 1646 and 1651 as witnesses to a lost world in which the arts had flourished.⁴ And when Andrew Marvell cast his mind back from 1648 to the period of his first acquaintance with Richard Lovelace as a young man at Cambridge, he defined the innocence of 'that candid Age' in terms of its literary contrast with a present infested with 'Word-peckers, Paper-rats, Book-scorpions'.⁵

From the perspective of a nation embroiled in Civil War or experimenting with new forms of government in the wake of a military coup, such an idealization of the past was natural enough – particularly among the gentry class which, it has been argued, enjoyed a period of ‘unparalleled prosperity’ during the 1630s.⁶ But the myth of a Caroline golden age was not the invention of disconsolate Cavaliers and royalist historians exploiting nostalgia for political purposes.⁷ It was created during the period of Charles I’s personal rule by writers and painters commissioned by the King or Queen, by poets seeking patronage, and by courtiers simply celebrating their own delight in an environment which favoured the cultivation of the arts.⁸ The various components that were to contribute to the making of the myth of the ‘halcyon days’ were ready to hand when the event which decisively changed the direction of Charles’s reign took place.⁹

On 23 August 1628, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, was assassinated by a discontented naval officer as he was making preparations for an expedition to relieve the besieged French Protestants at La Rochelle. The strong dependence of Charles upon the friendship and political advice of his father’s last favourite had been forged during their abortive escapade to Madrid in 1623 to woo the Spanish Infanta. Buckingham had used his power over both the declining James I and the young prince to secure the subsequent war with Spain and the match with the fifteen-year-old French princess, Henrietta Maria, whom Charles married by proxy on 1 May 1625, a few weeks after succeeding to the throne; and he had continued to be the dominant influence in the new king’s political and personal life during the early years of his reign. In the opinion of L. J. Reeve, this relationship was a major factor in undermining the foundations upon which the system of Stuart government had hitherto rested:

The traditional notion of evil counsel had never been further than the shortest of steps from a reflection upon the monarch. In a situation such as that prevailing in 1628 this distinction could not be sustained. The basis for alarm was that, as events had shown, Charles was *susceptible* to such counsel. . . . The removal of Buckingham was to bring those who doubted the king a step closer to recognizing him as the cause of their grievances.¹⁰

Charles never forgave the House of Commons for impeaching his chief counsellor and closest friend in 1626 and when his own attempt to adjourn his third Parliament on 2 March 1629 was resisted, he retaliated by dissolving it and arresting the leading opponents of his policies. In a series of proclamations, he made it clear that he had no plans to

summon another parliament in the immediate future. The death of the major architect of his foreign policy, however, had freed Charles to pursue a different course after the failure of the expedition to La Rochelle and he was ready to face the fact that he simply could not finance any more military adventures abroad. With the support of Richard Weston, who rapidly became the most powerful figure in the government as Lord Treasurer, peace treaties were signed with France in April 1629 and with Spain in November 1630.

The first years of Charles's marriage to Henrietta Maria had not been a success. Mentally and physically immature when she arrived in England in June 1625, the French princess was a Catholic in a Protestant country and initially encountered animosity on all sides. Fearing the loss of his own influence over the King, Buckingham had encouraged distrust of the Queen's French household, and Henrietta Maria herself caused dissension by refusing to attend the Protestant ceremony of her husband's coronation in 1626. By August 1628, however, she was ready to fill the void left in Charles's emotional life by the Duke's death and the royal marriage was soon re-established on a basis of mutual love. Her first pregnancy in January 1629 was said to have made the King 'very forward to have a peace' with France;¹¹ and the loss of their first-born helped to draw the couple closer together. When the future Charles II was born in 1630, Ben Jonson hailed the young mother as 'Spring / Of so much safety to the realm, and king'.¹² Thereafter there was a minor industry of poems greeting the result of each new confinement.¹³ The University of Oxford alone produced no less than five volumes to commemorate royal births between 1630 and 1640 and Henry King struck a representative note when he welcomed Charles back from a visit to Scotland in 1633 with the thought that the offspring of his 'fruitfull Love' for Henrietta Maria were 'Seales of your Joy, and of the Kingdome's Peace'.¹⁴

The arrival of Peter Paul Rubens in London in 1629 to conduct the peace negotiations on behalf of Spain gave Charles an opportunity to signal the change of foreign policy in cultural terms and to incorporate his improved relationship with his wife into the royal myth that was to be cultivated by court artists and writers throughout the 1630s. His major commission for the painter-diplomat was the decoration of the Banqueting House which Inigo Jones had designed for James I. In addition to the depiction of James as Solomon summoning the allegorical figures of Peace and Plenty, the central oval of the ceiling was to be

occupied by the apotheosis of James and the side panels filled with images of the Golden Age. All this was a continuation or revival of the cultural traditions of the previous reign, and it fed into the 'halcyon myth' that came to dominate the imagination of many Caroline courtiers and later royalists.¹⁵ Another of the works started by Rubens during his year in England anticipates a motif that was to run through many of the royal entertainments and much of the panegyric output of academic and court poets in the 1630s. In *A Landscape with Saint George and the Dragon*, Charles is the model for St George and Henrietta Maria is the princess who has inspired his courageous victory over the dragon. Malcolm Smuts decodes the political message embodied in the details of a picture in which 'the landscape represents the kingdom itself', released from the 'devouring monster' of war, and 'the royal couple have already become guardians of peace, in an extended sense which encompasses their personal victories over passion, the defense of the church, and their patronage of the civilizing arts.'¹⁶

In the field of literature, it is appropriate to find at the threshold of the new age a liminal poem in the form of 'A New-yeares gift. To the King' by the man who has been described as 'the Caroline *arbiter elegantiae*', the number and variety of whose commendatory verses and literary epistles 'testify to the central position he commanded in the artistic life of the court'.¹⁷ Thomas Carew had been personally singled out by Charles for service as a gentleman of the Privy Chamber and evidently enjoyed an intimate relationship with his royal master. The poem he presented to him on 1 January 1631 brings together the themes and motifs of both the commissions that had recently been given to Rubens and sets the cultural agenda for the decade that it ushers in so gracefully. After calling upon the classical god who stands at the gateway between the old year and the new to twine 'auspicious dayes' into a wreath for the monarch, Carew utters a benediction over Charles in his two family roles as husband and father. The joys of the marriage bed and fidelity to his beautiful consort have a direct bearing upon the performance of his kingly duties 'by day', seasoning the 'cares' of public responsibility with private consolation; and the fruits of that happy and stable union will be a blessing to both parents and kingdom, as they grow into the royal inheritance symbolized by their status as 'Suns' in the social and political firmament.¹⁸ Carew then turns to the strategies of international and domestic policy which it will be his task as an artist to endow with cultural values:

Circle with peacefull Olive bowes,
And conquering Bayes, his Regall browes.
Let his strong vertues overcome,
And bring him bloodlesse Trophies home:
Strew all the pavements, where he treads
With loyall hearts, or Rebels heads;
But *Byfront*, open thou no more,
In his blest raigne the Temple dore.

The strength of the self-disciplined monarch will make itself felt on the European stage through the exemplary exercise of virtue rather than military force; and at home these same personal qualities will win the trust of the people, and if necessary put down resistance. The allusion in the final couplet invokes the powerful cultural icon of Augustus Caesar, who ruled over that golden age of Roman civilization during which the arts flourished and the doors of the temple of Janus (*'Byfront'*) were closed to signify that there was peace throughout the empire. In this, the poet was very much in tune with the instincts of his royal patron, who placed the impressive portrait of himself in imperial guise by Van Dyck at the end of a gallery lined with Titian's portraits of the Caesars and Guido Romano's smaller series of them on horseback.¹⁹

But if painting and music were the arts for which Charles I had the deepest regard, the aesthetic medium most characteristic of his court and most instrumental in purveying its ideology of kingly rule was the masque.²⁰ The two earliest of the Caroline texts to survive are from 1631, the year heralded by Carew as the first in which the reign was blessed by peace. Both were by Ben Jonson and they established a pattern which reflected the other blessing of harmonious love between King and Queen: Charles presented an entertainment to Henrietta Maria at the end of the Christmas celebrations early in January and she reciprocated by presenting one to Charles at Shrovetide. It is made apparent in Jonson's introduction to the printed version of the first of the 1631 masques, *Love's Triumph Through Callipolis*, that the King was quite consciously intent on elevating his new-found feeling towards his wife to mythological status. The poet and his collaborator, Inigo Jones, had been commanded 'to thinke on some thing worthy of his Majesties putting in act, with a selected company of his Lords, and Gentlemen, called to the assistance: For the honor of his Court, and the dignity of that heroique love, and regall respect borne by him to his unmatched Lady, and Spouse, the Queenes Majestie'.²¹ This passage also indicates a major change in the nature of the masque in the Caroline period. The

King had been the chief spectator at the productions of the Jacobean court, but his son would himself be the chief masquer, 'putting in act' the artistic conceptions of his writer and designer, as would the Queen in the works that she commissioned. As the recipient of the masque, Henrietta Maria occupied the central seat on the dais from which she had the most privileged view. In a final piece of stage spectacle, the roses of England and lilies of France united in a '*Crowne imperiall*' at the top of a palm tree; and in a final song, Venus and the Chorus celebrated the propitious effects of mutual love between the principal masquer and the principal spectator. The participation of the monarch himself as a performer meant that he could be fully incorporated into the mythological fiction as the power which brought about the transformation from disorder to harmony at the climax of the action, when the twelve antimasquers who represented 'deprav'd Lovers' were put to flight by the entry of the fifteen '*perfect Lovers*' led by Charles. And when he and the Queen danced together in the revels, they made manifest in their own ordered movements the effects of a shared and disciplined love and became living symbols of the benefits their marriage bestowed upon the country.

The masques by Jonson and his successors in the early 1630s, performed in the majestic setting of the Banqueting House where important ceremonies of state also took place, were thus deliberate attempts to bring the resources of pagan mythology, religious ritual and theatrical art together in a cultural statement about the ideology and the political priorities of the Caroline regime. It has been argued that the Banqueting House itself 'functioned as a temple of royal divinity, expressing the sanctity of the king through an elaborate architectural language'; and that the masques exploited a comparable symbolism, which used the rules of single-point perspective in order to emphasize the central position occupied by the royal spectators in the visual arrangement as well as the dramatic impact of the performance: 'the closer one sat to the monarch, the clearer the masque images became, a way of asserting that the whole masquing world revolves around the king.'²²

The golden age of peace and love which the new foreign policy and the mutual devotion of King and Queen had supposedly ushered in was also celebrated in poetry of various kinds. Sir Richard Fanshawe's famous ode in response to a royal proclamation requiring gentlemen with no urgent business in London to return to their estates looks forward hopefully to the flowering of literature under the imperial patronage of

Charles, the ‘*Augustus* of our world’, who will be praised by a new Virgil as ‘author of peace / And *Halcyon* dayes’.²³ Even a poet like Francis Quarles, who was best known for his biblical paraphrases and moral emblems, celebrated the religious benefits of peace in an eclogue which depicted Charles’s kingdom as a haven for the persecuted Huguenots of France: ‘How happy! O how more then all the rest, / In the wide world, are *Britaine* Shepherds blest.’²⁴

Of all the poetic genres encouraged by the Caroline court, however, the most representative of its ethos was the panegyric. As with the related form of the masque, developments begun during the reign of James I came to full fruition under his son. Not that there had been any shortage of poetic praise for their predecessor, as Ruth Nevo points out, but it had reflected in both form and quality a different kind of relationship between monarch and subject:

The very tendency of Elizabeth to become *Gloriana* – that is to say, her significance to her people as a supreme symbol in a total system of values, religious, national, ethical, and sociological – militated against the formal separation of royal panegyric from other kinds of literature. She is pervasively present in prose, verse and drama. And it is not until the break in the dynasty . . . that the need is felt for a formal and specific expression of the subject’s allegiance and of the values which command it.²⁵

This need was created by James’s avoidance of any spontaneity in his relationship with his people on public occasions, which was taken further by his son, who introduced into the conduct of the royal household the gravity and ceremonial formality that had appealed to him in the etiquette of the Spanish court.²⁶

It is hardly surprising that the Caroline court proved fertile ground for the cultivation of a literary genre which has been described as ‘highly conventionalized, embedded in social contexts and hierarchies’, and designed to validate power ‘by reflecting and disseminating the image power would like to project’.²⁷ The art of panegyric, as practised by the courtiers and academic poets of the 1630s, was often more than empty flattery by those in search of patronage. The writer who praised a person of influence or celebrated a royal occasion was also affirming his ideological allegiances and laying claim to a place within the privileged circle of the culture that his own talent was helping to create and sustain. In this way, panegyrics served ‘a virtually liturgical function, for their authors and the community for which they were written’,²⁸ and like the court masques, they contributed to the separation of that community from the larger society beyond Whitehall and the colleges of Oxford and

Cambridge. The poetry occasioned by Charles's visit to Edinburgh in the summer of 1633 may be taken to typify the methods of the panegyrists who directed encomiums at members of the royal family on almost any pretext – a birth, a miscarriage, an anniversary, the return from a journey or recovery from an illness. The young Cambridge poet, Abraham Cowley, invoked the god-like combination of qualities in England's monarch:

Yet while our CHARLES with equal Balance reigns
 'Twixt *Mercy* and *Astraea*; and maintains
 A noble Peace, 'tis he, 'tis only he
 Who is most near, most like the Deity.²⁹

For Henry King, the winter created by the King's sojourn in his northern kingdom was ended by his sun-like return; and William Cartwright rejoiced on behalf of his countrymen that 'We are a people now againe, and may / Style our selves Subjects', and went on to imagine how the benighted Scots would boast to their posterity 'that they were scene by Thee'.³⁰

Even during these early years of the personal rule, when the death of Buckingham had removed a major grievance and the end of hostilities with France and Spain had eased the pressure on the government to raise money from an unwilling populace, the myth of a harmonious nation ruled by the royal embodiments of virtue, beauty and love was belied by signs of discontent not far beneath the surface. At the very time that negotiations for a peace treaty between England and Spain were nearing completion, renewed impetus was given to the anti-Catholic cause in Europe by the rise of a young military hero, Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, whose exploits in Germany raised the spirits of Protestants generally and of English supporters of the exiled Elector Palatine in particular. Hopes that the marriage of Charles's sister, Elizabeth, to the Elector Frederick V in 1613 was the signal for England to play a more active role in the Protestant Union had come to nothing, and English public opinion was inflamed when Frederick and Elizabeth, who had been offered the throne of Bohemia, were driven from Prague in 1620 by the forces of the Catholic League. Unable to return to the Palatinate, which had been occupied by the armies of Spain and the League, they became a focus for those in England who distrusted the foreign policy of the Stuart kings. In the context of the recent treaties with the Catholic powers of France and Spain, the victories of Gustavus Adolphus against the forces that had dispossessed James I's daughter were felt as a

national reproach by a significant number of Charles's subjects. The shock of the Swedish King's death at the battle of Lutzen on 6 November 1632 resulted in a remarkable outburst of literary activity, some of which speaks with more than formal grief of a loss that seemed to thwart apocalyptic expectations of the final triumph of Protestantism.³¹

In a poem which has been called 'the best known tribute' to the Caroline peace,³² Carew replies to the suggestion that he should join his fellow poets in honouring 'the dead conquering King'. Aurelian Townshend's 'Elegy on the death of the King of Sweden: sent to Thomas Carew' contains the implication – similar to that in another elegy by Henry King – that the Swedish warrior's achievements have become the measure of true kingship, which is now in short supply.³³ In declining Townshend's challenge, Carew acknowledges Gustavus's great reputation, but rejects the world of victories and defeats as a subject for his own poetry, which, in the reading of Kevin Sharpe, 'has a more sublime purpose and engagement than with the flux of European power politics', being concerned with 'the restoration of a golden age of innocence beside the calm of which the battles of Germany seem but a noise in time'.³⁴ But the creation of an image of that golden age through art does not preclude an awareness of the facts of the real world. Indeed, it is by confronting those facts with a realism not found in other elegies on Gustavus Adolphus that the value of the poet's task is established.³⁵ There is the grim fact of a continent laid waste and the certainty that there can be no final victors in a religious war of this kind. Against such a background, the poet's advice to his fellow countrymen has considerable force:

But let us that in myrtle bowers sit
Under secure shades, use the benefit
Of peace and plenty, which the blessed hand
Of our good King gives this obdurate Land.³⁶

Even here, in the juxtaposition of 'good King' and 'obdurate Land', there is a realistic acknowledgement of the difficulties that Charles was experiencing in getting his foreign policy accepted in some quarters. Carew's argument, however, was directed more narrowly at the court poets of England, like Townshend, who had a particular role to play in inculcating the values of a peaceful society in which the civilized arts were encouraged:

Let us of Revels sing, and let thy breath
(Which fill'd Fames trumpet with *Gustavus* death,
Blowing his name to heaven) gently inspire

Thy past'rall pipe, till all our swaines admire
 Thy song and subject, whilst they both comprise
 The beauties of the *SHEPHERD'S PARADISE*.

In endorsing the genre of pastoral, Carew had in mind the values promoted at court in plays like Walter Montagu's *The Shepherd's Paradise*, which Henrietta Maria acted in during January 1633, and masques like Townshend's own *Tempe Restored*, which had been performed in February 1632; and in reminding his fellow poet that 'Tourneyes, Masques, Theaters, better become / Our *Halcyon* dayes' than 'the German Drum' and 'the thunder of their Carabins', his object was to counter an unthinking enthusiasm for the *idea* of war by writers who owed the very privilege of practising their art in 'calme securitie' to the the foreign policy of 'our good king'.

As the 1630s wore on, voices of criticism began to be raised more insistently against the economic, social, and religious effects of the King's rule without Parliament. Ship Money writs were issued annually from 1634 and for some time proved to be a remarkably successful expedient in the absence of an elected body to vote subsidies.³⁷ By 1637, however, opposition to what many regarded as an illegal tax was mounting and on 2 February Charles wrote to the judiciary to ask for a ruling on a king's right to compel his subjects to contribute financially to the defence of the realm. All twelve judges confirmed that he had such a right. Armed with this opinion, he allowed a test case to be brought against John Hampden, who had refused to pay his Ship Money assessment. After listening to the arguments from both sides, the judges began to deliver their individual judgements early in 1638, and by June the Attorney-General was able to announce that the legality of the tax had been established by the far from convincing majority of seven to five. Charles had not heard the last of this verdict or of Hampden.

The decision in 1633 to reissue James I's Declaration of Sports, which aimed at promoting the rural festivals and pastimes that were regarded as survivals of paganism and occasions of immorality by the puritan clergy, has been described by a historian of popular culture as part of 'a conservative ideological campaign to repair the vertical ties which bound the social structure together'.³⁸ David Loewenstein highlights the religious ramifications of this policy, which resulted in 'maypoles themselves' becoming 'symbols of release from godly reformation of the church encouraged by Puritanism'.³⁹

A much more audacious puritan assault on the culture of the court

itself was launched by William Prynne in *Histriomastix*, which branded women who appeared on the stage as 'notorious whores' and pronounced it 'infamous' for kings 'to act or frequent Playes, or favour Players'. Published in November 1632, only two months before the Queen took part in *The Shepherd's Paradise*, the book was suppressed and its author eventually tried and sentenced to have his ears cropped. Prynne was in trouble again in 1637, when he and two other puritans, John Bastwick and Henry Burton, were brought before Star Chamber for publishing treatises that attacked the ceremonies and government of the national church. Condemned to be whipped, pilloried and mutilated, the three men bore their punishment with such fortitude that they won themselves a reputation as martyrs and fuelled the growing hostility towards the church authorities. There has been a great deal of debate about the extent to which William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury since 1633, was to blame for the resentment that boiled over in 1640. Certainly his name was associated with policies that antagonized the puritan element in the Church of England: the placing of the communion table at the east end of the chancel, the railing of altars, the practices of bowing to the altar and kneeling to receive communion. Kevin Sharpe has demonstrated, however, that although Laud was in favour of a renewed stress on the ceremonial aspects of worship, he did not seek to impose his will with such authoritarian strictness as many of his contemporaries believed and later historians have asserted.⁴⁰ In some cases, Charles I may have been more insistent on enforcing compliance with controversial measures than Laud himself, but one concern on which they worked closely together was that of the poor condition of many church buildings.⁴¹ In London, the King took the lead in an ambitious project for repairing St Paul's Cathedral and engaged Inigo Jones to design a new west portal.⁴² The scheme took on symbolic significance for one poet, who saw in it a summation of Charles I's exemplary conduct as man, king, and churchman.

Edmund Waller's panegyric, 'Upon His Majesty's Repairing of Paul's', recalled that this 'work of cost and piety' had been mooted by James I, but was only now being accomplished 'by his glorious son'.⁴³ Comparing him with Amphion, whose music raised the walls of Thebes, the poet invoked the image of Charles that had been elaborated in the masques: 'For in his art of regiment is found / A power like that of harmony in sound'. Treated as an emblem of the relationship between the English monarch and the institution that has been entrusted to his care, the act of refurbishment is seen as 'an earnest of his grand design, /

To frame no new church, but the old refine'. And in emphasizing the essentially conservative programme of restoration undertaken by Charles and Laud, Waller sets in stark relief the threat to the ancient fabric of worship by those who were clamouring to frame a 'new church' under the banner of reformation.

The day after the first sentence of mutilation was imposed on Prynne in February 1634, the King had led out the masquers in the performance of a work which has been described as 'the greatest theatrical expression of the Caroline autocracy' and said to mark 'the summer solstice of royal confidence'.⁴⁴ It has also been read as 'one of the best examples we have of an ironic and sardonic treatment of the values of the court and of the masques which represented them'.⁴⁵ Such contradictory judgements indicate something of the complexity of what is slowly being recognized as a central text for understanding the court culture of the 1630s and the tensions that inhabit the art of its best and most representative poet.⁴⁶ Thomas Carew's *Coelum Britannicum* begins with an orthodox presentation of the conceit upon which the masque's action will be constructed. Mercury explains that the 'exemplar life' of Charles and Henrietta Maria has made its influence felt amongst the Olympian gods, who have determined to lay aside their 'wild lusts' and cleanse the firmament, replacing 'infamous lights' with new stars recruited from the present courtiers and past heroes of Britain, who will 'alone dispence / To'th'world a pure refined influence'.⁴⁷ Mercury is soon joined by the subversive figure of Momus, however, whose prose has a very different tone from the verse spoken by the messenger of the gods and who scornfully ignores the command to bridle his 'licentious tongue'. Together, from their contrasting perspectives of idealization and satire, Mercury and Momus proceed to purge the heavens and to conduct a series of comic interviews with candidates for the places vacated by the immoral constellations. Eventually, Momus declares that he has grown 'weary of these tedious pleadings' and leaves Mercury to oversee the climactic spectacle in which Charles, his Queen and his courtiers are stellified. A final song celebrates the justice and gentleness with which the 'Royall Turtles' reign over 'their Subjects hearts', and looks to the continuation of the Stuart line far into the future under their heavenly influence: '*Propitious Starres shall crowne each birth, / Whilst you rule them, and they the Earth*'.

There is no doubt that the contending voices and visions of Mercury and Momus reflect the two sides of Carew's own artistic activity as

panegyrist and satirist, both promoting and debunking the extreme idealization of female virtue, sexual relations and royal power in the court culture of the 1630s. A question mark remains over the extent to which the sceptical realism of Momus was expected to colour the audience's reception of the undiluted Platonism that takes over once he has withdrawn from the scene. Jennifer Chibnall regards him as a device for exorcising through laughter 'those aspects of social reality which could be brought against the harmonious vision the masque is to present'.⁴⁸ Joanne Altieri makes Momus much more central to the experience of the whole masque as Carew's instrument for bringing 'contingent life into contact with the perfected constructions of an idealistically imagined world' and so forcing the audience 'to judge the constructs in terms both of reality and of their self-enclosed consistency'. This is not to say that the voice of Momus is intended to invalidate the voice of Mercury; rather, the realist 'comes on stage to present the realities which both challenge and necessitate idealization'.⁴⁹ Whatever judgement is reached about the balance between political scepticism and aesthetic illusion in *Coelum Britannicum*, it no longer seems adequate to dismiss it as a thoughtless reflection of 'the easy Court view' that the King's subjects 'were cheerful, loyal and reverent'.⁵⁰ On the contrary, in seriousness of purpose and in the skilful adaptation of an ephemeral form into a vehicle for genuine intellectual debate, it can claim pride of place among the literary artifacts generated from within the culture of the Caroline court.

There had always been antagonism between Henrietta Maria and Richard Weston, now Earl of Portland, who favoured a maritime treaty with Spain, wariness of the French and non-involvement in the European wars. When he fell ill towards the end of 1634, the Queen's court became the focus for increased activity by the anti-Spanish faction led by the earls of Holland and Northumberland.⁵¹ Her closeness to Charles and the lack of any favourite in succession to Buckingham gave her considerable political importance as Portland's deteriorating health made a change of personnel in the higher reaches of the administration imminent. When he died, the two leading contenders for the empty post were Sir Thomas Wentworth, Lord Deputy of Ireland, who was supported by Laud, and Sir Francis Cottington, who was backed by the faction gathered around Henrietta Maria. After a lengthy delay, the Treasurership eventually went to Laud's alternative candidate, William Juxon.

The death of Portland also emboldened those at the English court who had long been advocating more active assistance for the exiled (and now widowed) Elizabeth of Bohemia and her son, Charles Louis, the displaced Elector Palatine, and the outbreak of war between France and Spain in 1635 gave them a new opportunity to press their case. Under mounting pressure from his sister, his wife, and leading courtiers like Hamilton and Holland to make a positive move over the Palatinate, Charles kept diplomatic channels open with both Spain and France. On 21 November 1635, while various negotiations were in progress, Charles Louis arrived in England, only a few weeks short of his majority, and was soon joined by his younger brother, Prince Rupert. The young Elector was widely feted and over the next two years theatrical productions of various kinds played no small part in the demonstrations of political support for his cause.⁵² Sharpe considers that this propaganda offensive brought the King closer to 'engaging himself in the spring of 1637 than at any point since the wars of the 1620s'.⁵³ Events conspired against such an end to the Caroline peace, however, and before the year was over his nephews had been recalled to resume the struggle in Europe without his help and Charles I had become increasingly preoccupied with problems nearer home.