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978-1-107-49245-5 - The Court Masque: A Study in the Relationship

Between Poetry & the Revels

Enid Welsford

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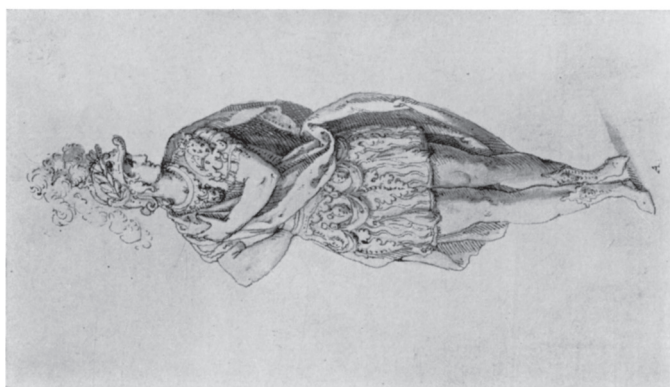
PLATE I



2 IRIS

Design of an allegorical figure for an Italian
 entertainment, attributed to Vasari

Foto Garberini



1 A KNIGHT MASQUER

Designed by Inigo Jones
 for Jonson's *Oberon*

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THE COURT MASQUE

A STUDY IN
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
POETRY & THE REVELS

BY
ENID WELSFORD

SOMETIME FELLOW OF NEWNHAM
COLLEGE



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To

MY BROTHER

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PREFACE

THE English Court Masque is not an unexplored subject, and anyone venturing to follow in the wake of Professor Brotanek, M. Reyher, Sir E. K. Chambers, Mr W. J. Lawrence, and the learned editors of *Designs by Inigo Jones* is almost bound to offer a preliminary word of excuse and explanation. This book, however, is not intended as an exhaustive treatise on the masque. My chief aim has been to interpret and to coordinate rather than to accumulate facts, and consequently it has not been my primary object to add to the great wealth of detailed information collected in *Les Masques anglais* and *The Elizabethan Stage*, although I have tried to trace the foreign sources of our Court entertainments in order to retell the story in the light of this new evidence, and to set the English revels against their proper background of European folk-custom and Court pageantry.

My central theme is the English Court masque of the seventeenth century—that elaborate form of entertainment in which all the skill of all the best artists, poets, and musicians of the day was required for the purpose of introducing a band of masked noblemen to an expectant assembly. This is the central theme, but not the whole scope of the book.

My attention was first drawn to the masque when, in preparing some lectures on Shakespeare, I had to consider the relationship between *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Elizabethan revels. First of all it was necessary to find an answer to the question what is a masque; and the answer proved of an unexpected interest and complexity. The masque, I began to realise, had no modern parallel; and yet for several centuries it had been inseparably bound up with social life, and had had an incalculable influence on art and literature. I wondered why it had disappeared so completely, and whether its loss was to be regretted. My curiosity moreover was whetted by something

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paradoxical in the very essence of the masque. It was exclusive and aristocratic, yet popular; it was artificial and sophisticated, yet primitive—so primitive indeed that it was strangely like those pantomimic ritual dances of which we hear so much from the students of comparative religion. All this I could see would carry me far beyond the scope of an hour's lecture; and moreover, before I could begin to answer my original question about *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I had to satisfy my mind upon a further point. Was it part of my business to put labels upon Shakespeare's plays? Yet I soon discovered that it was not a matter of attaching a label, or even of tracing an influence: it was a matter of understanding a creative process and the nature of the individual poet's debt to his environment. It was in a word a question not of classification but of interpretation.

I have therefore been chiefly pre-occupied with the significance of the masque, and this has determined the arrangement of the book. In the first part I have dealt with its origin and history; in the second part I have tried to show its influence upon art and poetry; in the third part I have discussed certain aspects of the masque, which do, I believe, throw some light upon the nature of art, and particularly upon its social value.

My obligations are many. In the first place, I have to thank Newnham College for the generous gift of a Fellowship. His Grace the Duke of Devonshire very kindly allowed me to study his collection of the designs of Inigo Jones at Chatsworth, and also gave me permission to reproduce some of them in this book. I have pleasant recollections of courtesy shown to me in libraries in Paris and Florence, and I am grateful for permission to reproduce designs from collections in the Uffizi Gallery, the Louvre, and the Bibliothèque Nationale.

This book would hardly have been written had it not been for the unfailing interest and encouragement of both Professor and Mrs Chadwick, and to Professor Chadwick I am also deeply indebted for a long and delightful initiation into research. Mr E. J. Thomas of the Cambridge University Library I thank for the unremitting patience with which he has read my proofs discussed my problems, made valuable suggestions, and in par

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ticular I thank him for indispensable help given to me in certain philological difficulties. To Miss Jane Harrison I owe gratitude not only for the stimulus of her writings, but also for most welcome personal encouragement.

The Index is the work of Miss M. H. James, to whom my thanks are due for the expert care which she has bestowed upon the somewhat intractable subject-matter.

Finally it is a pleasure to record my indebtedness to the authorities and officials of the Cambridge University Press.

E. W.

March 1927

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