

Chapter 16

LITERATURE AND THE COURT

LEAH S. MARCUS

In his dedication of the 1616 folio version of *Cynthia's Revels*, Ben Jonson addressed the early Stuart court as 'A bountiful and brave spring' that

waterest all the noble plants of this island. In thee, the whole kingdom dresseth itself, and is ambitious to use thee as her glass. Beware, then, thou render men's figures truly, and teach them no less to hate their deformities than to love their forms; for, to grace there should come reverence, and no man can call that lovely which is not also venerable.

Thus described, the court is inseparable from the nation at large: not only does it 'water', or offer economic and other sustenance, to the 'noble plants', the aristocracy and gentry, but it also 'mirrors', or provides through its own collective outward 'grace' and loveliness, and its inward sagacity and probity, a set of patterns against which other elements of the kingdom define themselves and each other and determine their relative worth.

It is doubtful whether the Stuart court was as central to all areas of the emerging nation as Jonson claimed it was: in defining it as he did, Jonson, whom James I appointed Poet Laureate and granted an annual pension in that very year of 1616, sought in part to establish the value and significance of his new position. But his definition also points towards an important historical truth: under James, significant elements of court culture were more visible to the nation at large than they had been at any previous time in British history if only because so much of the literature associated with the court was routinely brought into print. Elizabeth I had not published any of her own writings in her own name, and literature produced by (rather than for) the Elizabethan court usually circulated only in manuscript, if at all. James I was the first British monarch who fully understood and exploited the power of print to publicise his own treatises, royal entertainments, proclamations and other materials closely associated with the court.

If the print medium allowed the monarch and his court to receive an unprecedented level of visibility in an emerging 'public sphere', it also created

an unprecedented potential for tension between the idealised images of royal policy and of court life typically promulgated by the court itself and other more negative images – hence Jonson’s warning that courtiers must offer the nation a ‘glass’ worthy of emulation. Even more than the theatre, the medium of print had the power to ‘make greatness familiar’ in both the positive and negative connotations of the phrase, and to make conflicts newly visible to a public at large. Neither the Jacobean nor the Caroline court was by any means an ideological monolith. As recent historians have emphasised, both courts are better understood as heterogeneous groupings of contrasting interests and affiliations. To mention only one salient area where this heterogeneity was visible to contemporaries, both Queen Anne and Queen Henrietta Maria had their own households that functioned in considerable independence from – and sometimes in gleeful opposition to – the policies of their respective husbands. Yet the literature closely associated with the court often portrays it as a monolith, effacing, or at least rendering less visible, the perception of heterogeneity that we receive from other sources. If there was such a thing as early Stuart ‘absolutism’, that ideology of the power and centrality of the monarch was much more an artifact of literary portrayals than it was an accurate depiction of the ruler, court and nation in interaction. One aim of the present chapter will be to trace some of the ingenious strategies by which literature closely associated with the early Stuart court sought to erase its own highly specific affiliations and present itself as offering broadly accepted truths that belonged to the nation as a whole.

As amply indicated in Catherine Bates’s and Patrick Collinson’s chapters in this volume (see Chapters 11 and 12), James I was a published author well before he assumed the English throne. His writings as James VI were recognised in England as well as Scotland. By 1601, Gabriel Harvey had referred to the ‘King of Scotland’ as ‘sovereign of the divine art’; before 1603 Harvey owned James’s *Essays of a Prentice in the Divine Art of Poesie* (Edinburgh, 1585), which, Harvey claimed, offered ‘the excellentest rules and finest art that a king could learn or teach in his kingdom’, and *His Majesty’s Poetical Exercises at Vacant Hours* (Edinburgh, [1591]), in which Harvey’s marginalia particularly commend James’s epic ‘Lepanto’ as ‘a gallant and notable poem, both for matter and form’.¹ Although Harvey was an unusually prolific reader and book collector, his interest in the writings of the Scottish monarch was not unusual for the period. During the final decades of the sixteenth century, James sought

1 Virginia F. Stern, *Gabriel Harvey: His Life, Marginalia, and Library* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 79n., 126 and 223.

through print to become known abroad for his ‘Castalian band’ of poets, in imitation of the French *Pléiade*, and for the broad humanist erudition displayed through such literary pursuits.

When James became King of England in 1603, he was deluged with printed tributes, and many of his major works appeared in London editions: *Daemonologie* (which argued for the reality and danger of witchcraft), *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (which expounded and defended the theory of the divine right of kings) and especially his *Basilikon Doron* (James’s advice-book on rule for the heir-apparent Prince Henry), which was widely praised as a ‘true image’ of the mind of the king.² *Basilikon Doron* went through eight English editions during 1603 alone. The royal writings offered panegyrists a gold mine of material to admire and imitate, and inspired in English writers the hope that James I would prove more receptive to their offerings than Elizabeth had been. Thomas Greene’s 1603 tribute *A Poet’s Vision and a Prince’s Glory* celebrated James for the ‘triple crown’ of rule over England, Scotland and Ireland, but also for a ‘triple crown’ of laurel earned through his accomplishments as a poet. When a poet is also a king, ‘He then is equal with a deity.’³ The most enduringly famous of volumes celebrating James I’s accession is surely Ben Jonson’s, which combined *His Part of the King’s Entertainment in Passing to His Coronation* in 1604 with Jonson’s *Althorpe Entertainment*, performed before Queen Anne and Prince Henry in 1603 on their way to England from Scotland, and Jonson’s ‘Panegyre on the Happy Entrance of James . . . to His First High Session of Parliament’ (1604). This volume echoed James’s writings at several turns and revived the classical Roman tradition of address to Roman emperors on important state occasions; in its published form, it included numerous erudite notes that gave it the appearance of a Renaissance edition of a classical author.⁴ In the immediate aftermath of James’s arrival in England, the English printing scene was further internationalised by the publication of works by James’s Scottish courtiers: preeminently William Alexander, later Earl of Stirling, whose volume of verses, *Aurora, Containing the First Fancies of the Author’s Youth*, and his *Monarchic Tragedies*, treating Croesus and Darius, appeared in London in 1604; and Sir Robert Aynton, whose Latin verses entitled *Basia* appeared in 1605. William Drummond of Hawthornden was perhaps the most prolific of Scots poets who received a new, English audience for his work as a result of James’s

2 See James Doelman, ‘“A King of Thine Own Heart”: The English Reception of King James VI and I’s *Basilikon Doron*’, *Seventeenth Century* (1994), 1–8; the cited phrase is from James’s 1603 preface to the work.

3 Thomas Greene, *A Poet’s Vision and a Prince’s Glory* (London, 1603), sigs. B4v–C1r.

4 David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 109–12.

accession. Though Drummond continued to publish primarily in Edinburgh rather than London, he wrote in English rather than Scots as an acknowledgment of his newly expanded readership.

The advent of a writer-king gave new meaning to the inexpressibility topos: numerous poets communicated their sense of futility in writing panegyric for a monarch who was his own best poet. But James's enormous largesse towards his new English subjects, combined with his well-publicised interest in literary pursuits, gave poets hope that they would enjoy new prominence and esteem. John Chamberlain cynically observed, 'the very poets, with their idle pamphlets, promise themselves great part in his favour'.⁵ In the first years after his accession, there were from three to seven times as many books dedicated to James each year as there had been books dedicated to Elizabeth on average in each of the final years of her reign.⁶ The players certainly benefited from the King's show of interest. James I made the drama a royal monopoly by issuing new patents to all of the major London dramatic companies that removed them from the patronage of chief nobles of the realm and attached them instead to members of the royal family, thereby bringing them at least nominally under the wide umbrella of early Stuart court culture. James called for plays at court far more frequently than Queen Elizabeth had, although he appears not to have savoured them as much as she did: for him, they were less important as entertainment than as a display of royal magnificence.

One salient effect of James's published self-presentation as an author was to efface any clear distinction between literary production that belonged to the court and that which only aspired to it. As John Donne was to put the matter in the preface to his *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), the King had descended 'to a conversation with your subjects by way of your books', encouraging men of letters to ascend to his presence by the same means. This printed 'conversation' constituted what we might call a 'virtual court' much broader than the actual numbers of subjects who had personal access to the monarch. How can we assess the impact of James's writings on this 'virtual court' that existed in the public sphere? Certainly, after James's accession, we find that many of his keynote political and moral themes are echoed repeatedly by other writers. His famed love for a *via media* and 'moderation in all things' as articulated in *Basilikon Doron* was a frequently echoed topos, as was his articulation of the divinity

⁵ *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. Norman Egbert McClure, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1939), 1:192 (letter of 12 April, 1603). See also Curtis Perry's discussion in *The Making of Jacobean Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 15–49.

⁶ Perry, *Jacobean Culture*, p. 24.

of kings in a prefatory sonnet to the same work: 'God gives not kings the style of Gods in vain'. It is often impossible, however, to determine the extent to which a given work was meant to be read as part of the royal 'conversation'.

As an illustration of this point, we might consider James's well-known interest in Roman imperial themes, as applied in particular to his project for the creation of Great Britain through the union of England and Scotland. Already in 1603, poets were beginning to praise the Stuart monarch for the creation, through his own person, of an empire of Britain. Jonson's court masque *Hymenaei*, performed in 1606 for the marriage of the Earl of Essex and Frances Howard, daughter of the Earl of Suffolk, used the occasion of the marriage of two very different families – Essex, a scion of the Puritan nobility and ally of anti-Spanish interests at court, and Howard, daughter of a strongly pro-Spanish and pro-Catholic faction – to celebrate James's project for the Union of the Kingdoms, figured in the masque through a giant 'microcosm or globe' reportedly turned by Ben Jonson himself. Although not ratified until a century later, the project for union was weighed by Parliament, defended in a number of published treatises, and strongly identified with James I in a wide variety of literary forms during the period, including Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, which is saturated with symbols and prophecies of the 'union' and repeats *Hymenaei*'s allegorical device of a marriage of highly disparate partners to figure James's projected marriage of the kingdoms. How, then, are we to read literature from a similar milieu that appears to rework the same subject, but renders it more equivocally?

A much discussed case in point would be Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which was first performed at court in the same year as *Hymenaei*: 1606. Shakespeare's play begins with a united Britain, a subject dear to James's heart, and displays the disastrous effects of Lear's plan to divide it into three kingdoms corresponding roughly to England, Scotland and Wales (or Cornwall). But depending on the degree to which one wished to press the play's potential analogy between the riven family of Lear and the larger body politic, the play could easily be read as obliterating the possibility for the kind of beneficent, fruitful unity of kingdoms that the King himself was campaigning so hard to achieve. The emptied, exhausted nation at the end of *King Lear* is at the farthest possible remove from the luminous globe that emblematises political union at the end of Jonson's *Hymenaei*, or the re-energised imperial Britain at the end of *Cymbeline*. Moreover, the personality of the British King in *King Lear* – his outbursts of rage, his carelessness about the daily business of running the government, his propensity for endless gallops about the countryside – reflects widely noted defects of James I. The play's obvious participation in James's public 'conversation' about

Britain does not render the dramatic work more legible in terms of the Jacobean policy initiative; rather, that participation makes more troubling and powerful the play's association of divinely ordained kingship with fallibility and disorder. Similarly, *Macbeth* is a play that explores the Scottish underpinnings of James's English rule and forecasts a glorious future for the monarch and his offspring, the line of Banquo; but at the same time, in the person of Macbeth, the play explores darker, destructive elements of the monarch's 'imperial theme'. Macbeth's ruination comes about in part because he takes to heart Jacobean myths about the unassailability of royal prerogative powers.

Alvin Kernan has recently emphasised the undeniable fact that Shakespeare the player, as a member of the King's Men, was a paid, liveried servant of James I. Kernan contends that such a close courtly affiliation precludes readings of plays like *King Lear* or *Macbeth* that interpret them as fundamental assaults on James's high-flown theories of monarchy, at least in terms of their performance and reception at court.⁷ Most other critics, however, would resist Kernan's argument as oversimplification of a knotty set of interpretive problems. Indeed, our present critical debate about topical meaning in early modern plays in many ways recapitulates the liveliness and uncertainty expressed about topical meaning during early decades of the seventeenth century. James's 'conversation' with his subjects about some of the most vital principles of his belief and rule may at first have dazzled them with its learning and rhetorical power, as Donne compares the influence of 'your majesty's books' to that of 'the sun which penetrates all corners' (dedication to *Pseudo-Martyr*, 1610). But the very pervasiveness of the royal rhetoric – penetrating, at least, all the literate corners of the kingdom – made it difficult to control in terms of imputed interpretations, and therefore difficult to restrain within the idealising perspective that had so entranced James's subjects on his first arrival in England. Donne himself freely appropriated the sun imagery so closely associated with the monarchy to his own role as poet-lover in poems like 'The Sun Rising', which dismisses James I as otherwise occupied ('tell court huntsmen that the King will ride') and adopts the language of royal absolutism to conjure up a world emptied of all but the poet's own prerogative and his obedient subject(s): 'She is all states, and all princes, I, / Nothing else is.'⁸

Perhaps the best illustration of the pitfalls of literary production under James I derives from the career of Ben Jonson. As noted above, Jonson seemingly

7 Alvin Kernan, *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright: Theatre in the Stuart Court 1603–1613* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 89–105.

8 *John Donne*, ed. John Carey (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 93.

pulled out all the stops in celebrating James's accession, and continued to praise the King in masques at court and in his *Epigrams*, mostly written by 1612 and first published as a collection in his *Works* of 1616. The *Epigrams* honoured the Stuart monarch as 'best of kings' and 'best of poets' (no. 4) and immortalised the King's project for the union of England and Scotland by depicting it as the marriage of two kingdoms with James as officiating priest and the encircling seas as the ring (no. 5). At the same time, however, Jonson had little but scorn for courtiers considered collectively: the court in the *Epigrams* is comically reduced to a 'Something that Walks Somewhere', a Lord who is only nominally alive, buried in his own 'flesh and blood' (no. 11), a 'Court-Worm' whose garments encircle just such a larva as spun them (no. 15), spiteful 'Courtlings' who ignorantly aspire to be public arbiters despite their utter lack of taste (nos. 52 and 72), or a 'Fine Lady Would-Be' who has aborted her offspring so as not to miss the holiday revelry at court (no. 62). When he praises courtiers by name in the *Epigrams*, Jonson as a rule praises them for personal attributes and fails to note their courtly affiliations. In order to maintain an idealising perspective on the King and principal ministers like Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, Thomas Egerton, Lord Ellesmere, and Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk, Jonson separates the monarch and chief ministers from the lesser courtiers and projects many of James's known weaknesses onto the latter group. Anonymous 'courtlings' are excoriated for their officiousness, voluptuousness, arbitrariness of judgement, and intoxication with the latest fashion, while the chief ministers, often in poems provocatively juxtaposed with the more overtly satiric epigrams, are praised by name for truth and virtue.

During the same years, however, Jonson wrote a series of plays that got him into considerable trouble at court. His frequent adoption of Roman imperial themes in his plays from 1603 onward is surely to be interpreted as part of the developing Jacobean 'conversation' about empire, divine right and good rule. But if Jonson hoped for royal approbation through his use of such materials, he was more than once disappointed. After his *Sejanus* was performed at court in the 1603–4 holiday season, Jonson was called before the Privy Council for it and accused of popery and treason by Lord Henry Howard (shortly to become Earl of Northampton).⁹ *Sejanus* demonstrates the decline of the Roman Emperor Tiberius after he lapsed into tyranny as a result of overdependence on evil counsellors like Sejanus. It is easy to imagine how such a subject could arouse the paranoia of Privy Councillors who were similarly attempting to influence James I. In taking on such a topic, Jonson may well have placed too much trust

in James I's power over his courtiers, and in his humanist love of learning and debate. But it is equally likely that Jonson was venting hostility against some of the very leitmotifs of Jacobean rule that elsewhere he praised.

In 1605 he got in worse trouble for his part in *Eastward Ho*, co-authored with Chapman and Marston, a play that had a seemingly innocent plot but ventured several incidental jabs against James I, his insolent Scottish courtiers and his notorious sale of titles to gain additional revenue. One of the characters, in a marked Scots accent, acknowledges another as 'one of my thirty pound knights'. The play even makes fun of James's project for union by wishing that the Scots who have invaded England could be banished to the New World instead. For his part in *Eastward Ho* Jonson was precipitously thrown into jail. By what schizophrenic logic could he have collaborated in such a production at a time when he was seeking court patronage? The answer lies in a recognition of the fractured allegiances that marked the Jacobean court beneath the public paeans to union and unity. Many English nobles felt enormous resentment at the power and influence wielded by James's Scottish favourites, who had a virtual monopoly on close access to the King. Jonson's patroness for the production of *Eastward Ho* was Queen Anne, who also smarted under exclusion from access to her husband as a result of the dominance of his favourites. The Children of the Chapel Royal, who performed the play at court, were attached to Queen Anne's household. The French ambassador reported at this period that the Queen attended plays for the express purpose of laughing at satiric portrayals of her husband. This was one of the many cases in which Queen Anne's interests as a patron of poets diverged markedly from the King's.¹⁰ Indeed, we can speculate that it may have been in part Queen Anne's influence that got Jonson released from prison and saved him from the threatened punishment of the loss of his ears and nose.

Clearly what Jonson needed in order to bring his savage satiric impulses into line with his equally strong need to idealise the monarch was a literary form that could successfully accommodate both passions. Jonson's greatest triumphs as court poet came from his masques, elaborate entertainments using music, dancing and sudden, spectacular shifts of scenery; these productions typically modulated from strenuous critiques of court vices in the early scenes into wondrous visions of moral transformation and transcendence. In our study of the development of the masque, as in many areas of the study of literature

10 For Queen Anne's court see Leeds Barroll, 'The Court of the First Stuart Queen' in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 191–208; and Barbara Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 15–43.

and the Jacobean court, we have placed too little emphasis on the innovative activities of women. One of Jonson's most important early patrons was Lucy, Countess of Bedford, one of Anne's ladies-in-waiting, and it is perhaps she who recruited him to write *The Masque of Blackness*, performed by the Queen and her ladies on Twelfth Night, 1605, and its sequel *The Masque of Beauty*, performed on Twelfth Night, 1608. The Queen and her inner circle of women devised the subjects of both masques, and may have been at least partially responsible for their engagement with the Jacobean leitmotif of empire. If *Eastward Ho* envisions the beggarly Scots as swarming like a species of vermin over the whole earth, *Blackness* and *Beauty* offer a more positive vision of imperial expansion: the sunlike rays of the King pierce even as far as Africa to 'heal' the blackness of the Queen and her courtiers, imagined as women of Niger. These early masques inaugurate an 'imperial theme' that was to become increasingly prominent in Jonson's later masques and other works such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), which both invokes and critiques the masque form as part of a broader set of colonial encounters. Jonson's language of colonial transformation in the Jacobean masque helped courtiers and poets imagine the sweep and power (along with potential dangers) of imperial rule at a time when the British Empire was only embryonic.

Jonson specifically credits Queen Anne with the invention of the antimasque, 'some dance or show that might precede hers and have the place of a foil or false masque' which appeared first in the *Masque of Queens*, performed at court in February 1609.¹¹ This sumptuous entertainment moved from an antimasque of evil witches to the main masque's idealised procession of queens enacted by Queen Anne and her ladies. Of course the King was free, if he desired, to see Queen Anne and her ladies in the witches rather than in the idealised matriarchs of the main masque: *The Masque of Queens* takes on particular bite if we imagine it as dealing with the 'problem' of women's power and independence at court. Kathryn Schwarz has recently analysed the masque as a systematic dismemberment of the King's 'body politic'.¹² Perhaps not coincidentally, this was the last masque designed by Jonson explicitly at the prompting of Queen Anne and her circle, although they continued to take major roles in the planning and performance of later court entertainments.

From 1616 – the year of Jonson's laureateship – onward, his court masques typically have a bipolar structure in which the antimasques boldly satirise

11 Cited from Inigo Jones, *The Theatre of the Stuart Court*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 1:132.

12 See Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 160–97.

national and courtly vices and the main masques celebrate James's proposed solutions. The increased satiric thrust of his masques from this period may stem in part from the fact that his patron the Earl of Pembroke had been appointed Lord Chamberlain in 1615. Pembroke was as well known for his 'ultra-Protestant' leanings as for his great 'friendship' towards poets, and may have encouraged Jonson's reforming tendencies in the court masque. As part of his 'conversation' with his subjects, James I was prone to issue lengthy, published proclamations that not only announced a policy decision, but explored it in terms of the pragmatic and conceptual problems it was designed to correct. Jonson's and other court masques belonged to the same conversation; they were usually also published within a short interval after their performance, so that both they and the royal policies they celebrated could be aired and debated not just by the courtiers and visiting ambassadors who attended the actual performance, but by the nation at large.

As an example of the daring Jonson was willing to venture in praise and correction of the 'glass' the court offered to the nation, we might consider *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, performed in early 1618 to celebrate James I's landmark visit to Scotland during the previous summer, his efforts there to break the power of the Kirk and impose the governance and liturgy of the Church of England, and his promulgation of an important document that became known as the *Book of Sports* after its publication in 1618. *The Book of Sports* was one of several policy initiatives of the King's designed to reduce the size and dominance of London and to revitalise the countryside, in this case by encouraging traditional communal sports and pastimes – such as church ales, dancing about maypoles, and lavish holiday hospitality on the part of local gentry and aristocrats – all of which customs had 'decayed' in rural parts or been actively suppressed by ecclesiastical reformers and local magistrates concerned with the pastimes' potential for fomenting 'disorders'.

In *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, Jonson brilliantly unites the King's recent ecclesiastical and rural policy initiatives by displaying them as instances of James I's self-characterisation as a mediator, a creator of a fruitful 'middle way' in all things. The masque demonstrates royal power in action through the person of Hercules, who successfully vanquishes excess at both the extremes of Catholic superfluity and Puritan spareness in order to revitalise the countryside and the nation as a re-equilibrated vision of unity. The dances of the main masque show the courtiers' successful assimilation of Hercules' lessons in moderation – a 'mirror' to the nation, of grace and reverence brought into a single whole. The dances end with Prince Charles and the other masquers poised to inherit the role of Hercules for themselves. But the antimasques of *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* demonstrate how closely the extremes which James moderates are

associated with the court itself. Comus the belly-god and his drunken retinue are introduced by an erotically charged cupbearer to Hercules who bears a strong resemblance to the royal favourite George Villiers, later Duke of Buckingham, and who admits that it is Hercules' own cup that is being dishonoured through the drunken orgies of Comus and his courtiers. The antimasque points at James's own excess along with that of his courtiers – his excessive fondness for Buckingham, upon whom he lavished titles, wealth and sexual favours; his frequent inebriation; and his squandering of court revenues on over-lavish banqueting and drink.¹³ In its original form, *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* was not successful at court; Jonson scrapped the original antimasques for a less controversial display of loyal Welshmen when it was newly performed six weeks later in honour of Prince Charles under the title *For the Honour of Wales*.

Despite the palliative revisions, however, the strong medicine of this entertainment demonstrates just how intellectually and morally challenging court entertainments could be under the early Stuarts. Despite their brave shows and huge expense, much resented by many contemporaries, they were not mere empty spectacles but strenuously dialogic mediations between the ideals of the court and fallible human behaviour. In 1618, Jonson himself travelled to Scotland in imitation of James I's celebrated visit of the year before. Jonson's three weeks' stay with William Drummond of Hawthornden at Drummond's estate south of Edinburgh resulted in the remarkable *Conversations* collected by his host. Jonson's table talk reveals much of his ambivalence about his career as court poet, including his wish that he had been a churchman so that, finding favour with the King, he might preach before James and not flatter the monarch even if Jonson were staring death in the face. Whatever else it may have signified, his statement was surely a rueful comment on the adulatory stance towards the monarch that was an unavoidable part of being chief masque writer at court.

After the 1618 onset of the Thirty Years' War in Europe, the Stuart court masque increasingly took on international subjects and offered a vaster vision of the transforming power of the King. One of James's mottos was 'blessed are the peacemakers'. To the despair of English ultra-Protestants, James steadily refused military involvement in the European conflict, even after his own daughter Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia, was ousted by Catholic forces from the throne she held along with her husband the Elector Palatine. Prince Henry, in marked independence from the pacifism of his father, had been strongly

13 Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 106–39.

associated with the ultra-Protestant, interventionist faction in England and with the revival of chivalry at court, but after his death in 1612 that faction lost its chief support within the royal family. After the outbreak of war in 1618, English militants stood by helplessly, fearing that international Protestantism was about to be engulfed and destroyed. Jonson's masque for 1620, *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon*, attempts to bridge the widening gap between the pacifism of the King and the war hunger of many of his subjects by associating royal power with the universal operation of planetary magic.

The antimasques of *News from the New World Discovered* acknowledge the division of the nation over British intervention in the European war by satirising various commercial agents by whom the new war was reported in England, and whom James had attempted to suppress through another of his public proclamations – an ominous instance in which the royal penchant for print was used to silence public debate rather than furthering literary 'conversation' between James and his subjects. Once the antimasques' erratic, illicit 'news' has been silenced, the main masque ascends to a new world that does not change – the mind and ethos of the King, depicted as a universal *primum mobile* constant in 'perfection' and 'pure harmony' and securely controlling the movement of all the planets (that is, the courtiers, the nation at large and even the international community as a whole) despite the huge cataclysm even then being enacted in Europe and the seriously divided opinion it had kindled at home. In the new world of the main masque, what many subjects saw as James's narrow, dangerous isolationism is recast as breadth of vision: Jonson celebrates the monarch as a divinity who controls a universe rather than a mere island kingdom.

Scholars have tended to see masques like *News from the New World*, which link royal power with Neoplatonic planetary magic, as simply communicating James's own grandiose notions of royal absolutism. But we need to recognise how far Jonson's vision of the operation of royal power goes beyond James I's usual assertions of it. It is Jonson, not James, who dramatises through sweeping, cosmic imagery the absolute, universal operation of royal power. Jonson and other masque writers in the 1620s and thereafter were enormously aided by Inigo Jones's innovative uses of perspective in his staging designs for the masque, which increased the audience's visual perception of distance, broadened the imaginable range of royal authority, and thereby extended the dream of empire almost infinitely. Jones's scenic designs also introduced a newly Romanised architecture anchored in the principles of the ancient Roman Vitruvius, and serving visually to imprint a connection between Roman and Jacobean 'empire' upon the minds of viewers and readers of the published version of the masque. The court masque helped James and Charles I and other courtiers to expand their own understanding of the meaning and potential scope of royal

power, and that was surely a large part of the fascination this art form held for three decades at court.

One of the most central critical debates of recent decades concerns the degree to which the very pervasiveness and insistence of James's own rhetoric may have created an 'opposition' literature, or at least individual dissenting voices, in writings of the period. The most direct form of 'anti-court' literature was prose and verse libels, sometimes hilariously scurrilous and almost always circulated only anonymously in manuscript. These clandestine but very popular tidbits tended to cluster with particular frequency around lurid episodes in the life of the court, such as the Essex-Howard divorce case (only a few years after the marriage had been celebrated with such pomp in *Hymenaei*). During the widely publicised divorce proceedings, James I sided with the dissolute but putatively virgin Lady Howard against the advice of his own archbishop, since he wanted to free her to marry one of his Scottish favourites, Robert Carr, Lord Rochester. Worse yet, in the ensuing Overbury scandal it was revealed that Frances Howard had gone so far as to murder the courtier Sir Thomas Overbury in order to obliterate evidence that might have blocked her divorce. Elements of the Essex-Howard divorce and Overbury scandal are satirised in plays like Jonson's *The Devil Is an Ass*, but unprinted libels went considerably further in their contempt for the sorry assortment of sorcerers and fashion mavens surrounding Frances Howard. Before his death, Thomas Overbury and his circle, centred on the courtier Cecily Bulstrode, a kinswoman of the Countess of Bedford, had played a manuscript game called 'news' in which they had circulated parodies of prominent courtiers. In the aftermath of the Overbury scandal bits of this 'news' slipped into print as tantalising appendixes of 'Conceited News' provocatively attached to posthumous editions of Overbury's *The Wife*.¹⁴

The so-called 'Robert Herrick's Commonplace Book'¹⁵ is but one interesting example of a collectively compiled manuscript book that crackles with squibs against the main contenders in the Overbury scandal; against Robert Cecil, Lord Salisbury; and against the Duke of Buckingham, particularly during his and Prince Charles's ill-fated clandestine voyage to Spain to secure the hand of the Spanish Infanta for Charles. The proposed Spanish match was enormously unpopular, satirised as early as Thomas Scott's virulently anti-Spanish *Vox Populi* (printed four times in 1620 alone and eventually suppressed, but

14 See *The 'Conceited News' of Sir Thomas Overbury and His Friends*, ed. James E. Savage (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968); and the discussion of manuscript libels in Ann Baynes Coiro, 'Milton and Class Identity: The Publication of *Areopagitica* and the 1645 *Poems*', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22 (1992), 261-89.

15 Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, Pre-1700 MS 79. Most scholars now agree that Herrick's hand is not represented in this manuscript, though it may have been closely tied to his circle at Cambridge.

continuing to circulate widely in manuscript), and as late as Thomas Middleton's hilariously scurrilous play *A Game at Chess* (which enjoyed wild popularity on stage in 1624 until the King acceded to pressure from the Spanish ambassador and suppressed it). Not content with his proclamations that had attempted to curb inflammatory debate and news from abroad, James I himself issued a verse reply to 'railing rhymes and vaunting verse' lampooning the Spanish match.¹⁶

The royal favourite George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, was another perennial butt of libels. He had originally been introduced at court by Pembroke and the anti-Spanish faction, but his precipitous rise to a dukedom, and his enormous and carelessly wielded power as a close intimate of the King's, earned him many enemies. He accompanied Prince Charles on his ill-fated trip to woo the Spanish Infanta, and had little better luck in his later anti-Spanish phase, when he shamed the nation with the disastrously ill-managed Île of Rhé expedition to relieve continental Protestants. By the time of Buckingham's assassination in 1628, he was called the most hated man in England, and one of the many libels celebrating his death was written in a style so similar to that of Ben Jonson that the laureate was for a time accused of its authorship.¹⁷

Writers willing to acknowledge their own literary offspring had to be more circumspect. Sir Francis Bacon was very much of the court during most of the years in which he was writing and expanding his brilliantly terse *Essays* (published in 1597, 1612 and 1625, with frequent reprints in between); yet he was insistent on the subject of favourites and evil counsellors: let the King not divulge his own 'inclination', lest his councillors do nothing but 'sing him a song of *placebo*'; let kings not purchase friendship 'at the hazard of their own safety and greatness'; let the King not align himself with a single faction or party, for when those are 'carried too high and too violently, it is a sign of weakness in princes'. Bacon's *Essays* circumspectly revise the masque's idealised depiction of James I: 'Princes are like to heavenly bodies, which cause good or evil times; and which have much veneration, but no rest.' The King is to remember that he is a man, and to remember that he is a god, or 'God's lieutenant' – 'the one bridlenth their power, and the other their will'.¹⁸

16 Kevin Sharpe, 'The King's Writ: Royal Authors and Royal Authority in Early Modern England', in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Sharpe and Peter Lake, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 117–38.

17 See Alastair Bellany, "'Raylinge Rymes and Vaunting Verse": Libellous Politics in Early Stuart England, 1603–1628', in *Culture and Politics*, ed. Sharpe and Lake, pp. 285–310.

18 Citations are to *Francis Bacon*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996): 'Of Counsel', p. 382; 'Of Friendship', p. 391; 'Of Faction', p. 441; and 'Of Empire', p. 379.

There were other indirect ways of indicating distrust of unbridled ‘power’. As David Norbrook has argued, there was a loose coterie of poets sometimes called the ‘Spenserians’ who harked back to the style, Protestant poetics and apocalypticism of Edmund Spenser and other Elizabethans as a way of communicating their dissatisfaction with the monarch and dominant elements of the Jacobean court. To some degree, these poets were disgruntled by their failure to receive preferment under James. Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, was one such poet: his *Life of Sidney*, which was not published until 1652, idealised Sidney as ‘the last representative of a heroic age of austere Protestant militancy which had now given way to luxury and cowardice’.¹⁹ Samuel Daniel, another poet associated with the ‘Spenserian’ label, started out with a verse ‘Panegyric’ to the newly crowned James I and a commission to devise a masque for the first season at court, but was increasingly edged out by Jonson as the poet of choice at court. Daniel’s services as poet and masque writer were nevertheless called for by the ultra-Protestant faction. He, not Jonson, created the entertainment for Prince Henry’s installation as Prince of Wales: *Tethys’ Festival* (1610), danced by Queen Anne, her daughter Elizabeth, and her ladies. Other ‘Spenserians’ include Michael Drayton, Giles and Phineas Fletcher, William Browne and George Wither, but these figures varied widely in their degree of opposition to the court, their willingness to take on specific issues and their readiness to allow their work to be printed.

The simplest, yet subtlest, way ‘Spenserians’ indicated their dissatisfaction with the Jacobean court was their refusal to participate in its dominant cultural norms. James prided himself on his ‘plain style’ as part of his quest (at least in theory) for ‘moderation in all things’; the Spenserians tended to prefer the ornate, highly coloured and complex style of Edmund Spenser. Instead of praising James, they harked back to the glory days of Elizabeth. If James I modelled himself upon Augustus Caesar, the ‘Spenserians’ and their fellow-travellers chose instead to emphasise the virtues of the Roman republic. While James sought to link himself with the epic glories of urban Rome, the ‘Spenserians’ preferred pastoral, a genre associated from ancient times with the critique of courts. In works like William Browne’s *Britannia’s Pastorals* (the first part of which was published in 1613) the court is conspicuously absent and the countryside is instead offered as a model for national virtue. Similarly, Michael Drayton’s mammoth *Poly-Olbion* (the first part of which was published in 1612) was dedicated to Prince Henry, not James I, and maps the entire nation

19 David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 195–214; quotation from p. 196.

county by county, placing particular emphasis upon the local notables in each area to the neglect of, and in implicit criticism of, the court.

Lady Mary (Sidney) Wroth's long pastoral romance *Urania* (of which the first part was published in 1621) can be interpreted as belonging to the same anti-Jacobean literary strain, even though its author was very much a fixture at court, unlike most of the 'Spenserians'. At the height of England's 'war fever' and James's pacifism, Wroth's romance constructs an alternative candidate for imperial ruler of the west – the young Amphilanthus, whose internationalism reflects the political stance of Wroth herself, Wroth's lover the Earl of Pembroke, and others who favoured intervention on the continent against the Catholic powers. Wroth's titillating romance aroused outrage on the part of many courtiers who saw themselves personally satirised in its pages; the second half of the manuscript, presently at the Newberry Library in Chicago, never saw print in its own era, although it may well have circulated in manuscript to the special delectation of court ladies who despised both James's political quietism and his well-known contempt for women.²⁰

The tendency of early Stuart court literature, however, was to attempt to absorb the opposition. If the Spenserians used pastoral eclogue and romance to suggest simpler, purer alternatives to the values that prevailed at court, the court developed its own forms of pastoral that sought to move a purified court out into the countryside. From 1614 through the 1620s, James I issued a series of proclamations ordering the gentry and aristocracy who swelled the urban population of London, leaving the countryside neglected, to return to their proper spheres of influence and 'keep hospitality' on their rural estates, for the better health of the countryside and of the nation as a whole. Immediately, the masques presented at court began to reflect the policy initiative through their use of pastoral motifs. In *The Golden Age Restored* (1615), for example, Pallas reveals a seductive landscape of the countryside as its culminating vision and admonishes its aristocratic onlookers, 'Behold you here / What Jove hath built to be your sphere; / You hither must retire.'²¹ The King even wrote his own Horatian elegy to support the policy initiative, though, uncharacteristically, no printed copy is extant and the poem may have remained in manuscript.

20 Both volumes of the *Urania* are now, for the first time, in print. See *The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995); and *The Second Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts, Suzanne Gossett and Janel Mueller (Tempe AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1999).

21 Quotation is from *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, ed. Stephen Orgel (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 231. See also Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, pp. 64–105; and, for a more complex reading of the political statement of the masque, Martin Butler, 'Ben Jonson and the Limits of Courtly Panegyric', in *Culture and Politics*, ed. Sharpe and Lake, pp. 91–115.

In one copy, the poem is entitled 'An Elegy Written by the King concerning His Counsel for Ladies and Gentlemen to Depart the City of London according to His Majesty's Proclamation'. Like many Jacobean masques, the poem disparages Whitehall's baubles, plays and 'debauched' manners, and offers more wholesome country arts and increased prosperity as part of his incentive to get the upper classes back to rural life: 'The country is your orb and proper sphere. / There your revenues rise; bestow them there.'²² James's poem was widely imitated; it may well be that the early Stuart subgenre of the country-house poem arose out of the same policy initiative.

In all likelihood, the first country-house poem was written by a woman, Aemilia Lanyer, wife of the court musician Alfonso Lanyer. Her *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, published in 1611, was dedicated to Queen Anne, Princess Elizabeth and a number of other prominent women. Lanyer's is rare among published volumes in that it gives us a sense of the interests and values a woman author, herself marginally attached to the court, thought likely to appeal to Queen Anne's circle of courtly women. It includes 'The Description of Cooke-ham' honouring the Dowager Countess of Cumberland and her estate, and incorporating many of the themes that were to become staples of the country-house poem: praise of its varied landscape, stately oaks, crystal streams and welcoming flora and fauna. Ben Jonson's 'To Penshurst' is the most famous poem of the subgenre, written about the same time as Lanyer's. It celebrates a seigneurial way of life in which a great family, that of Sir Robert Sidney, Viscount Lisle, lives in symbiotic interaction with the people and products of the surrounding countryside – very much the image of rural retreat celebrated in Stuart court pastoral. But the Stuart country-house poem, unlike Spenserian pastoral, does not elide the monarchy. In 'To Penshurst' one demonstration of the wholesomeness of the estate is the fact that it was able to offer appropriate hospitality to 'our James', even in the absence of its lord and lady.

In the work of Jonson's followers the 'Sons of Ben', however, more and more elements of court life are incorporated into the rural retreat: the subgenre, over time, was 'colonized' by the court, and the owner of the estate increasingly imagined as a surrogate of the monarch. In Thomas Carew's 'To Saxham', for example, which probably dates from the late 1620s, the country estate is cut off from its surrounding fields and villages by winter weather, but, within, the house enjoys a 'spring' of bounty and delicacies that appears to be miraculously supplied from the heavens, much as they might appear in the culminating vision of a masque. Carew's 'To My Friend G. N. from Wrest', probably written

22 *The Poems of James VI of Scotland*, ed. James Craigie, 2 vols., Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1955–8), 2:179.

in 1639, severs the estate even more literally from its surroundings: it offers its courtier visitors a magical self-enclosed space of peace and plenty while the First Bishops' War rages around it. In later examples of the subgenre written during the 'Cavalier winter' of the Civil War and its aftermath, the rural estate becomes not a mere reflection of the court but its only remaining image.²³ Early Stuart pastoral castigates the vices of the court and repudiates it in favour of rural simplicity, as one would expect in a pastoral, but the countryside is infused with purified and rarified simulacra of the values promulgated at court.

If anything, Stuart court pastoral increased in popularity after the death of James I, for his son Charles continued many of his father's major policy initiatives. These included renewal of the earlier proclamations ordering gentry and aristocrats with no specific business in London to return to their country estates; a ceremonial visit to Scotland in 1633 to attempt, yet again, to impose Anglican church government upon the Scottish Kirk; and, as part of the same effort, reissuance of the *Book of Sports* the same year, amidst a new round of controversy over the propriety and lawfulness of traditional customs like church ales and dancing about maypoles. Queen Henrietta Maria made a regular practice of acting in pastorals at court, and even received drama coaching from a member of the King's Men.²⁴ But a key difference between Charles and his father was that, while James had styled himself a 'bard' unto his people and had kept up a steady, often garrulously intrusive 'conversation' with them via the printed page, Charles prided himself instead upon his silence, informing his first Parliament that it did not 'stand with my nature to spend much time in words' – a statement he often repeated.²⁵

Charles did not share his father's relative tolerance for the messy rough and tumble of public debate: his early speeches before Parliament repeatedly if reluctantly broke his preferred silence to interpret differing political opinion as a form of abuse of his authority. After 1629, he silenced Parliament altogether in favour of his own eleven years' 'personal rule' (1629–40), during which he showed little inclination to communicate with his subjects in print. Charles's court, in marked contrast with James's, was generally well run, with much emphasis on order and decorum and (especially after Buckingham's assassination in 1628, which removed the chief impediment to intimacy between Charles and his Queen Henrietta Maria) little tolerance for open displays of drunkenness and sexual depravity. Charles's interests were more visual than literary:

23 Leah S. Marcus, 'Politics and Pastoral: Writing the Court on the Countryside', in *Culture and Politics*, ed. Sharpe and Lake, pp. 139–59.

24 Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632–1642* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 101.

25 Sharpe, 'King's Writ', pp. 131–4.

under his rule, particularly given the relative public silence in which he conducted the business of state, the Stuart court masque achieved even greater sumptuousness and prominence as a vehicle for the communication of royal policy initiatives. Charles also developed his own roster of favoured poets and his own set of royal themes and motifs distinct from his father's – most notably, after the death of Buckingham, the cult of chaste 'Platonic' love he celebrated with Queen Henrietta Maria.

Much has been made of Charles I's 'neglect' of Ben Jonson, who at least nominally retained the title of Laureate until his death in 1637, but was called upon relatively seldom to provide masques and entertainments at the Caroline court. He composed *Love's Triumph through Callipolis*, the King's Twelfth Night masque for 1631, and *Chloridia*, Queen Henrietta Maria's Shrovetide masque performed in February of the same year. Both of these lavish works complemented the ethos of the new court by exquisitely celebrating the pair's highly publicised cult of married chastity and Platonic love. Jonson also composed a handful of congratulatory verses for Charles and two rural entertainments for the King on progress, the *Entertainment at Welbeck* (1631) and *Love's Welcome at Bolsover* (1634), both commissioned by the Earl of Newcastle, Jonson's most significant patron at court after the death of the Earl of Pembroke in 1630. Jonson himself felt slighted by Charles's evident preference for younger poets like Thomas Carew, Aurelian Townshend and William Davenant. In an epilogue added to the printed version of his play *The New Inn* (1628–9; published 1631), which had been intended for court performance but was never staged there because of its utter failure at Blackfriars, Jonson went so far as to suggest that any waning in his own artistry could be attributed to royal neglect: 'And had he lived the care of king and queen, / His art in something more yet had been seen'.²⁶ But Jonson arguably brought this neglect on himself through his own strategic silence. At the time of Charles I's coronation, the new King had been greeted by the customary verse encomia from many corners of the kingdom, but not one word, so far as we know, from Jonson. His *Underwood*, published only posthumously in 1640, includes several poems addressed to Charles or his consort (numbers 62–7, 72); but these poems, unlike the bulk of the collection, are explicitly dated by Jonson either through their occasion or in their titles, the earliest belonging to 1629. It would appear that only when Buckingham was safely dead was the Poet Laureate actually willing to address panegyric verses to the monarch. At the end of his life, we find Jonson frantically attempting

26 Cited from *Ben Jonson: The New Inn*, ed. Michael Hattaway, The Revels Plays (Manchester and Dover, NH: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 203 (Epilogue, lines 21–2).

to make amends: he wrote *The Tale of a Tub* (1633) in part to commemorate Charles's reissue of James's *Book of Sports* the same year, and when he died he left unfinished *The Sad Shepherd*, an exquisite piece designed to meet the seemingly inexhaustible demand for pastoral drama at court. But these efforts were too little, too late. Charles never forgave Jonson for his impolitic silence during the first years of the reign.

As Jonson's popularity waned at court, his arch-rival, the engineer and architect Inigo Jones, assumed increasing dominance as a deviser of masques. Jones's first production after he definitively broke with Jonson was *Albion's Triumph* (1632), for which the verses and elements of the 'invention' were supplied by Aurelian Townshend. Through its depiction of the divinely ordained union of the Emperor Albanactus (performed by the Scottish-born Charles I himself) and Alba, goddess of Albion (performed by Queen Henrietta Maria), *Albion's Triumph* combines the imperial themes and celebration of Anglo-Scottish Union familiar from the Jacobean masque with the motif of Platonic love that was a special hallmark of courtly entertainments during the 1630s. In case Charles's performance fails to live up to the masque's high visions of perfection, there is an antimasque character named Platonicus who instructs sceptical viewers that the monarch should be viewed not with mere sight, but through the eyes of intellect as an emperor over all base passions: 'For a supplement to thy lame story, know I have seen this brave Albanactus Caesar, seen him with the eyes of understanding, viewed all his actions, looked into his mind, which I find armed with so many moral virtues that he daily conquers a world of vices.'²⁷

It is enormously significant that, unlike his father, Charles I performed as chief masquer in his own masques; indeed, he had been brought up on the art form in the Jacobean court. As a monarch who witnessed his own courtly entertainments, James I had preserved at least a semblance of distance from their assertions of royal divinity and omnipotence, but Charles instead made himself part of the vehicle by which the masque communicated the 'removed mysteries' behind its glorious shows. Indeed, *Albion's Triumph* and other Caroline masques announced themselves, in all their grandiosity and sumptuousness, as revelations of the mind of the King. Did Charles I make the mistake of confusing life and art – actually believe in the highly ritualised 'magic' of his masques to transform the guiding myths of his reign into reality? Many of his sceptical subjects feared that he did, and in the Caroline masque, the issue of the entertainment's credibility, its power to win over its audience, becomes newly prominent.

²⁷ Inigo Jones, *The Theatre of the Stuart Court*, 2:455.

Given the pervasiveness of the Platonic imagery of chaste love in the culture of the Caroline court, a cynical backlash against that particular set of idealisations was perhaps inevitable. Some of the most beautiful love lyrics in the language date from the Caroline era – such as Thomas Carew’s ‘Song’: ‘Ask me no more where Jove bestows / When June is past the fading rose’. But the same poet, who as a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber was very much a court insider, also wrote ‘A Rapture’, with its clever invitation to unchastity: ‘Then tell me why / This goblin Honor, which the world adores, / Should make men atheists, and not women whores.’ Sir John Suckling, who was later to demonstrate his passionate devotion to the Cavalier cause, was nevertheless a steady debunker of royal platonising, as in his ‘Loving and Beloved’, which likens lovers to kings on the grounds that both rule through the art of dissembling, or in his ‘Against Fruition,’ which begins, with wittily scathing reference to the royal dyad as depicted in the masque, ‘Fie upon hearts that burn with mutual fire! / I hate two minds that breathe but one desire.’ The frequent misogyny of Caroline love lyrics has caused them to lose popularity during recent decades; and, indeed, to read these graceful expressions of male nonchalance alongside women’s diaries of the period – which typically record the pain of constant child-bearing and the anguished loss of offspring – is to receive a salutary correction of the Cavaliers’ strangely limited, hothouse perspective on women.

To what extent might the fashionable undercurrent of Cavalier literary misogyny reflect an uneasy awareness of the independence of Queen Henrietta Maria? Like Queen Anne before her, Henrietta Maria had her own circle of intimates at court. During the early and mid 1630s, she served as a focal point for the militant anti-Spanish faction: ambassadorial reports record, ‘the queen allies herself to the puritans’, and she showed special favour for plays and verses that cast Spain in a negative light, such as the revival of *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*, an old Elizabethan play about Spain’s cruelty towards the Protestants in Germany, which she attended at Blackfriars along with the German Prince Rupert in 1636.²⁸ During the final years of the decade, by contrast, Henrietta Maria became the centre of a strong Catholic revival, particularly among English noblewomen, many of whom converted to Catholicism. Counter-Reformation devotional literature flowed relatively freely into England under her sponsorship; its effects can be seen, for example, in the highly florid baroque style of Richard Crashaw’s book of Latin epigrams (1634), and later poems like his ‘Flaming Heart’ and hymn to St Theresa. During the 1640s, if not earlier, Crashaw himself converted to Catholicism

²⁸ Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 33.

under the patronage of the Countess of Denbigh, one of Henrietta Maria's ladies-in-waiting.

The popularity of Catholicism at court was worrisome to many strong Protestants, particularly since, in their view, Charles I's own love for ritual and liturgical forms seemed to be moving the nation dangerously close to 'popery', quite apart from the activities of the Queen. During the mid and late 1630s, a long-brewing controversy over the proper place of liturgical forms became increasingly visible in published writings, in part because of the unprecedented thoroughness with which King Charles and Archbishop Laud sought to impose conformity. What later became known as the 'Laudian' party favoured the retention of ancient pre-Reformation rituals like making the sign of the cross, giving a ring in marriage, and placing the altar against the east wall, at a hieratic distance from communicants in parish churches. What was sometimes disparagingly termed a 'Puritan' current of counter-opinion branded all such practices as unacceptably 'popish' and profane. Increasingly, battles over liturgical forms and the pastimes traditionally bound to religious holidays were fought out in the courts, with the common law venues pitted against the so-called royal prerogative courts, particularly the dreaded High Commission and Star Chamber, where Charles could enforce obedience to royal proclamations over the objections of the lower courts. Particularly after Charles's reissue of the *Book of Sports* in 1633, any literary defence of ritual and ceremony came to be politically coded as pro-Caroline and pro-Laudian. So we find the 'Son of Ben' Robert Herrick, who had court connections and had served earlier as chaplain to the Duke of Buckingham, commending 'May-poles, Hock-carts, Wassails, Wakes', and other forms of holiday mirth as part of a broader agenda to support ritualism per se against its many contemporary enemies. In Herrick, however, as in most of the Cavalier poets, ceremony and seduction are never entirely separable: in 'Corinna's Going a-Maying', for example, he urges Corinna to 'obey' Charles's 'Proclamation made for May' in the *Book of Sports* as part of an effort to seduce her into rural dalliance.

In the masque, Charles sought to legitimise ecclesiastical ritual practices and purge them of such licentious admixtures by tying them to solemn, ancient British usages that predated even the importation of Catholicism from Rome. If religious ritualism was purely British, a mystical intimation of Christian truth *avant la lettre*, then it could scarcely be repudiated as some dangerous foreign import. In *Albion's Triumph* the Emperor Albanactus is also a proto-Christian high priest whose quasi-liturgical rites are innocent precursors of Anglican worship. Perhaps the most sumptuous Caroline masque was Sir Thomas Carew's *Coelum*

Britannicum (performed at court during Shrovetide, 1634), in the thick of the controversy surrounding the *Book of Sports* and Laudian ‘innovations’ more generally. *Coelum Britannicum* is in many ways a rewriting of Jonson’s *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* in that it sets a love for traditional communal pastimes within a larger set of ritual structures that redeem it from its excesses. The masque begins with an intriguing vision of the ‘ruins of some great city of the ancient Romans or civilized Britons’ which Jove vows to restore. The scene changes to a depiction of the night sky, which is gradually darkened through a series of antimasques that one by one extinguish its stars. Several of the antimasques represent grotesque perversions of Charles’s actual policies, such as the cultivation of art and connoisseurship, the alleviation of harmful monopolies, the restoration of the countryside, and the reformation of morals at court. Then the scene changes again, revealing a mount holding the ‘three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland’ that comprise modern Britain. The divine dyad Carlo-Maria, imagined as a sun or noonday star in the night sky, gradually re-illuminates the ‘darkened sphere’ of the British heavens through a series of highly elaborate ritualised dances.²⁹ With each dance, some of the stars re-emerge until all are once more visible. The newly furbished, star-studded heavens are depicted as a restoration of ancient pattern, not a novelty, but they also pointedly echo the star-painted ceiling of the court of Star Chamber, which Charles I used during the period of personal rule as a quasi-legal instrument to enforce his visions of political and liturgical order. In Carew’s amazing tour de force, ritual is naturalised and linked, through the pointed allusion to Star Chamber, with royal prerogative powers. The dance of ritual, in effect, is identified as the performance of Charles’s divinity on earth.

To what extent was the extreme hieraticism of the Caroline masque reflected or reworked in other literary forms of the period? The striking allegorical tableaux of the masque – a Mercury or Peace or Platonic Passion seemingly frozen into an eternal present during their time on centre stage – may well stand behind hyper-real, strongly visualised and highly equivocal images in Caroline lyrics like Andrew Marvell’s ‘The Unfortunate Lover’, possibly written before 1640, his later Mower Poems and ‘Upon Appleton House’, as well as numerous other poems that post-date the period covered in this chapter. As Martin Butler discusses at greater length below in his chapter on ‘Literature and the Theatre to 1660’, Caroline drama, both the so-called ‘court’ drama and the newly genteel public theatres, took up many of the same troubling subjects that were investigated in the masque: the extent and efficacy of royal prerogative

29 Cited from Inigo Jones, *The Theatre of the Stuart Court*, 2:570–80.

powers, the importance of good counsel and the (sometimes unbridgeable) gap between appearance and reality in matters of rule.

In considering the theatrical production of the 1630s, we must take care not to rely on hindsight: the ultimate isolation and shipwreck of the Caroline monarchy should not be read back into cultural productions of a decade earlier; indeed our perception of the artistic integrity and independence of the Caroline drama has suffered greatly from an inability to separate it from the 'decline' of the monarch. Plays written by courtiers for performance before the King are often narrower and more insular than plays written for the public theatre, yet even the court plays echo earlier work by Shakespeare, Jonson and others, in that they explore controversial subjects with considerable freedom. Robert Davenport's *King John and Matilda* (c. 1634), which was acted 'often before their majesties', demonstrates through the case of King John how absolutism allied with personal vices can defile church and state; Sir William Davenant's *The Unfortunate Lovers* (1638) shows how a monarch's authority can be perverted through the 'intricate / Though powerful influence of love' and reflects upon Charles I's lack of accountability for his decisions during the period of personal rule; Davenant's *Fair Favourite* from the same year depicts a king who is 'outwardly absolute' but 'inwardly unfree'.³⁰

Even John Milton's *Maske at Ludlow* (1634) is of the court in the sense that it was created for an important royal servant, John Egerton, Earl of Bridgewater, on the occasion of his formal installation as President of the Council in the Marches of Wales, one of the courts by which Charles I was attempting to secure and extend his royal prerogative powers. The *Maske* was performed by court musician Henry Lawes and the Earl's own children, who had danced in masques at court, most recently in Carew's *Coelum Britannicum* the same year. But Milton's masque takes place in a wilderness that is far removed from the civilised ethos of the court. Its tempter figure Comus recalls the sinister Comus of Jonson's *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, and attempts to seduce Milton's Lady with deliberate echoes of the very language of Carew's 'rewrite' of Jonson in *Coelum Britannicum*. Through Comus's appeal to the Lady, Milton also echoes and critiques the standard Cavalier invitation to sexual incontinence under the guise of 'harmless mirth'.³¹ On the occasion of the performance of Milton's *Maske at Ludlow*, courtiers danced in an entertainment that disassociated the authority of the Earl of Bridgewater from many standard elements of court ideology. During the same decade the public theatres dared to take on issues

³⁰ Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, pp. 73, 58.

³¹ Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, pp. 169–212. Also see Chapter 20, p. 627, below.

like Laudian ritualism, monopolies, the lawfulness of the King's efforts to forbid gentry to reside in London, and un-Parliamentary taxation.

Though some of these productions were suppressed either by the Privy Council or by ecclesiastical officials, the freedom with which the drama treated such sensitive subjects suggests that it, at least, preserved some of the dynamic richness and diversity of the Jacobean 'virtual court', where considerable freedom of debate was frequently tolerated. The plays of James Shirley and Richard Brome, in particular, display and resist the court's tendency to colonise and monopolise the national culture. Brome's *Queen and Concubine* (which Butler suggests may have been acted at court in 1636) offers a scathing portrait of a royal pair – the King of Sicily and his concubine – addicted to the 'top of sovereignty'. The King calls Parliament only to dominate it, despite the objections of his subjects, and ignores the advice of honest courtiers in favour of the toadying Horatio, who consistently holds that 'the king's power warrants his acts'. Similarly, Shirley's *The Lady of Pleasure* (1635) and *The Example* (1634) show how the insistent encroachments of court culture can tyrannise over the lives of those who wish to live separate from it.³²

By the late 1630s, in the eyes of at least some loyal subjects, the court's profound influence over the rest of the country was identified with the unlawful assertion of prerogative powers by Charles I and his ministers: Jonson's enticing earlier model of the court as a 'spring' or 'glass' to nurture the nation as a whole was reinterpreted as an imposition of cultural tyranny. William Davenant and Inigo Jones's *Salmacida Spolia* (1640), the last masque presented by Charles I and Henrietta Maria at court, offers a final depiction of Charles's idealised nation, a pastoral landscape 'with all such things as might express a country in peace, rich and fruitful'. But the masque also newly acknowledges the frailty and evanescence of the royal vision, showing antimasques of Furies that plunder the rural abundance through political and economic discord, and even acknowledging a stubborn people who fail to value the 'easy blessing' they have received through the King's care. *Salmacida Spolia* ends on an elegiac note: looking upon the royal 'blessings that descend so fast', the Chorus of Beloved People, who have belatedly learned to prize Charles I's blessings upon the nation, grieve that they are 'too great to last'.³³

³² Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, pp. 35–42 and 166–74.

³³ Inigo Jones, *The Theatre of the Stuart Court*, 2:729–34.