

2

'A ball of strife': Caroline poetry and royal marriage

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I

Charles's royal image was profoundly collaborative. It was his loving and remarkably prolific marriage with Henrietta Maria that was the public projection by which Charles defined himself as king and by which he meant to be understood and obeyed by his subjects. As Roy Strong and Dolores Palomo have argued, imagery of war joined to peace and of a halcyon moment of national calm was crucial to the Caroline vocabulary, but this imagery was created out of the potent, overarching symbolism of royal marriage.¹ Charles was Mars and Henrietta Maria was Venus; the halcyon brooding quietly on the still waters evoked the queen endlessly pregnant and maternal. The importance of the cult of neoplatonic love which Henrietta Maria imported from France and imposed as a style on the English court has been a single note played, perhaps, too loudly in our understanding of the Caroline reign.² For at the same time that Henrietta Maria was ruling over and play-acting in this chaste and stringent love regime, she was almost constantly gravid or recovering from childbirth. The dissonance is palpable and recorded in Caroline poetry.

II

It was literally only a generation before Charles took the throne that England lived through an extremely worrying and edgily prolonged shift in power from the Tudor to the Stuart dynasty. A new, multinational identity, British, began its long, violent birth. In the sixteenth century, Englishmen had spent several decades speculating about and trying to

control the sexual life of their queen, but by the end of the century the Tudor line was over. In *The Faerie Queene*, for example, we can read the propaganda value *and* the barely hidden criticism of the idea of the Tudor virgin queen, the poem's chief reader and ostensible subject. The one social formation that is insistently promulgated in the poem is marriage. It is the fulfilment, the great destiny, the national duty of the major characters. Indeed, throughout his career as England's Protestant poet, Spenser presents marriage as the ideal human bond.

Yet we can also see in Spenser's poem an argument for a strong masculine force as the ultimately proper form of government: the divine-right patriarch certainly informs, prophetically, the nationalist epic. James I fulfilled that role, after a fashion. His position as father was multiple. He brought with him to England an heir, a back-up heir and a marriageable princess. He wrote and published a letter of fatherly and kingly advice to a son, *Basiliike Doran*. He styled himself publicly and explicitly as the father and husband of his people. He also introduced a disturbingly erotic valence to the notion of fatherhood. He and his wife, Anne of Denmark, maintained, very expensively, separate households. His succession of favourites were sons and lovers. He fussed over them, married them off. Buckingham, his last and dearest favourite, was urged upon the king by his wife. James called Buckingham his son, his sweetheart, his wife, and Buckingham called the king dad. By the time Elizabeth and James had finished playing with the categories of virgin, queen/king, and father, the sexual vocabulary of the English court had been heavily deployed and imaginatively expanded.

Nevertheless, in a country that had not seen a functional royal marriage for generations and that had lived through the dire consequences, the idea of a fertile marriage and the stable dynasty it could produce must have seemed enormously desirable. In Charles I and Henrietta Maria, the British finally got, quite splendidly and successfully, that wish fulfilled. In the cultural praise celebrating them, however, there is also unease. The poetry produced during the Caroline years is largely concerned with the relationships of men and women. Even the war poetry of Lovelace and Suckling (and the anti-war poetry of Carew) frame masculine concerns and relations in tension with the lures and demands of women. This chapter will concern itself with the ways in which the paradigm at the centre of Caroline culture – highly sexual, prolific marriage – pervades and worries its poetry.³ I will focus on a range of poets, some usually considered cavalier (such as Lovelace, Carew, Davenant and Herrick) and

some who are rarely thought of as Caroline artists (such as Milton, Marvell, Jonson and Crashaw).

The year 1629 is remarkable in the reign of Charles I as the year he dissolved Parliament and began eleven years of personal rule. Arguably, it is equally remarkable that in 1629 Henrietta Maria began producing children. A son, Charles, died at birth in May of 1629. Another Charles was born a year later, in May of 1630. Year after year, more children would appear – over the course of fifteen years, four sons and five daughters (born in 1629, 1630, 1631, 1633, 1636, 1637, 1639, 1640, and 1644). The unusual four-year hiatus between children, in the 1640s, was due, presumably, only to the separations necessitated by the war; the last child was dramatically delivered on the southern shores of England and left behind as Henrietta Maria fled from pursuing parliamentary forces. The burgeoning royal family is especially striking since, by the mid-seventeenth century, the birth of any child to a reigning English monarch was remarkable. Anne of Denmark had borne a daughter, Mary, in 1605, who died a toddler, and Sophia in 1606, who lived only a few hours, but before that the last royal birth was that of Edward to Henry VIII and Jane Seymour in 1537.

The implications of a king's children, of a royal childbed, for the cultural imagination were at once joyous and threatening, an analogical fulfilment of a wished-for dream that had overtones of sexual-political nightmare. On an immediate, literal level, until Charles produced heirs, the next in line for succession to the throne was his sister, the Protestant heroine Elizabeth of Bohemia, so that the birth of a child to Charles's French Catholic queen meant the end of a genealogical hope for militant Protestant English.⁴ But the fecund rule of Charles I was a dream and a nightmare in ways less concrete than simply the spectacle of cosy domestic bliss while the king ruled alone, patriarch without parliament, or the loss of a firm Protestant line. Since kingship was a political and social analogy, Charles's reign introduced the analogical possibilities of overwhelming dynasty, on the one hand, and of a feminized king dominated by a woman, notably a papist woman, on the other.

The idea of genealogy, of momentous family history, lies at the centre of the seventeenth-century imagination. Family connections were, of course, terribly important politically, as they had been for many generations, since wealth and power rested largely in the hands of the nobility. As Michael McKeon has demonstrated, however, by the seventeenth century England was experiencing a crisis in the hegemony of aristocratic ideology.⁵ The assumptions that in high birth resided intrinsic honour and that power and wealth were locked in a system of genealogical transference

were being eroded by rational questioning and by such pragmatic facts as the sale of titles and the growing power of capital.⁶ It is not surprising then that propagation and lineage are the subjects of intense interest to the late Renaissance, since, as McKeon articulates it, 'in those moments when the delicate workings of intellectual and institutional convention, strained to their limits, seem all at once to proclaim what they would enjoin, we see the mechanisms of historical change laid bare'.⁷ The symptom of that attention in seventeenth-century poetry and drama is striking and raw. The nationalist focus on genealogy gives way increasingly and disturbingly to a focus on the sexual act itself.

Political and social relationships were understood by organic correspondence in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The state was conceived of as a human body, for example, the king, the body's head. Or the state was understood as a family, the king, its father and its husband. Such biological, physical analogies were enormously powerful, embracing and reciprocal. If the state was a family, then the family was a state. If the state was a body, then each body was a state. There were always potential instabilities inherent in such thinking, for the separate body and the individual family could be vastly graced by these analogies, empowered rather than disempowered by being set in analogical play with monarchy.

There were also innumerable inconsistencies generated by analogical political thought and in order for it to work it needed to absorb contradiction, even direct contradiction, into itself; so that Elizabeth, for example, could be a husband to the state even though she had a woman's body. In exploring the ways in which the crown was gendered as both male and female during the Renaissance, Stephen Orgel reminds us that the Renaissance 'interpretive technique in which anything can also be its opposite (as well as any number of other things) is so common as to constitute a critical topos in the age'.⁸ But ages end, and as they do their topoi become inexplicable rather than explanatory, evidence of power's lack rather than power's pervasive sway. And in the seventeenth century there was an increasing unease with the capacity of images to mean almost anything. Francis Bacon wanted a stable language, stripped of confusing play. Jonson argued that his words should have controlling power over Jones's images. Donne examined with meticulous logic the literal implications of images, pushing the play in the image out into the open. So also, long-accepted images of society were open to logical conclusions, to literal extrapolation. The results of such attention would prove disastrous for British kingship.

England had just had a strong queen, Elizabeth, and a strong king, James. Charles's mother, Anne, had been a visible queen, fond of

progresses and masques and head of an important household, but it was clear that the influential role of consort belonged truly to James's favourites. The importance of Henrietta Maria as queen consort was, therefore, a surprise and not a pleasant one. It is true that Henrietta Maria was a welcome substitute for the hated possibility of the Infanta, but her attractiveness was, to the English people, relative and limited. She had begun her marriage scorned by her husband and inept at negotiating the political and religious shoals of the English court. She quickly became the absolute imaginary centre of the Caroline reign, the romantic heroine to Charles's hero, the mythological embodiment of the peace Charles came to espouse (for reasons both psychologically needful and economically practical). At this moment when the theoretical role of kingship had been pushed into strained visibility, when notions of divine-right kingship or of organic correspondence throughout nature – the great chain of being – had begun to seem artistic rather than natural, to be insisted upon rather than formulated without a thought, the analogical meanings of this foreign, Catholic queen were only alarming.

On 1 April 1627, for example, John Donne preached a sermon before Charles on the text: 'Take heed what you hear.' Donne was apparently trying to defend the Church and the king against criticism, and yet the sermon caused the king serious displeasure. Donne had stumbled over analogical rupture; he had pushed a long-standing metaphor too far into reality:

The Church is the spouse of Christ; Noble husbands do not easily admit defamations of their wives. Very religious Kings may have had wives, that may have retained some tincture, some impressions of errour, which they may have sucked in their infancy, from another Church, and yet would be loth, those wives should be publicly traduced to be Heretiques, or passionately proclaimed to be Idolaters for all that. A Church may lacke something of exact perfection and yet that church should not be said to be a supporter of Antichrist, or a limme of the beast, or a thirster after the cup of *Babylon*, for all that. From extreame to extreame, from east to west, the *Angels* themselves cannot come, but by passing the middle way between; from that extreame impurity, in which Antichrist had damped the Church of God, to that intemperate purity, in which Christ had constituted his Church, the most Angelicall Reformers cannot come, but by touching, yea, and stepping upon some things, in the way.⁹

Rather than feeling vindicated by this ameliorative argument for the middle way, Charles felt criticized and threatened. Implying a comparison

between his actual wife and his analogical wife, Henrietta Maria and the Anglican Church, exposed both relationships to danger. When analogy is taken too literally, its ideological magic is lost, and its machinery is dangerously, even ridiculously, visible. A king with a sexy, flirtatious, foreign and prolific queen was vulnerable to unfriendly readings that troped precisely upon his own state vocabulary. Applied too closely, allegory becomes an obvious script, or game, and in England in the seventeenth century the allegory of kingship, the idea that the king is the nation's head (or husband, soul, or father) began to seem a metaphysical conceit that could be appreciated, perhaps, for its wit but not for its truth.

We can see in poems that take Charles and Henrietta Maria as their direct or indirect subject the workings and the dysfunctions of the heavily iconographic and allegorical Caroline court culture. Certainly in the masques performed before and by the king and queen, the centrality of marriage symbolism is striking and, while Caroline masques have recently received strong critical attention, the gendered politics of these masques would generously repay more attention still. But the conventional-bordering-on-parodic language of the poetry written in the second quarter of the seventeenth century is inestimably important to an understanding of Caroline England. Its littleness, formal perfection and conventionality have, however, been barriers to cultural analysis. It is its very formality which makes it a resistant discourse, one which resists its rulers and rules even as it parodies neatly itself, the artful objects that we think of as cavalier, or royalist poetry.

In the poetic effusions prompted by the birth of the royal children to Charles and Henrietta Maria, for example, we can see characteristics of and fault lines in Caroline monarchical imagery. Although birthday poems and poems on royal recoveries from sickness can seem like greetings card verse, such occasional poetry and the complex advice, criticism and reservations that can be decoded from it are integral and meaningful in a patronage society.¹⁰

Probably in his role as poet laureate, Jonson wrote several poems to the king and queen in 1629 and 1630. They seem strange gifts to give at the time, and in 1640, published by Sir Kenelm Digby as a sequence in *Underwood*, they signal at once a harsh warning and a bizarre familiarity. The first poem is an 'Epigram Consolatorie' to the king and queen for the loss of their first-born son. It lectures sternly, 'Who dares denie, that all first-fruits are due / To God, denies the God-head to be true', making a harshly self-referential gesture to his poem on the loss of his own first son

and namesake.¹¹ If Charles and Henrietta Maria do not ‘grutch’, God will repay this investment of a dead child with ‘large int’rest’ (a usurious metaphor which appears repeatedly in the university volumes on this sad occasion but also in later years as the infant interest rate increased impressively).

Placed between the epigram consolatory and a congratulatory epigram on the birth of the second son, Charles, is an anniversary epigram for Charles’s 1629 ascension day. As Thomas Corns notes in chapter 1 above, its topic is the nation’s uneasiness with the king. Great Britain is a woman who is ‘barren growne of love’ (line 15) and cannot be filled with gratitude. It is a frank and surprising choice for a purported compliment on an ascension anniversary, for the king’s failures are seen in the light of abortive sexual failure on the part of Charles as husband of his people.

Jonson’s next epigram on the birth of an heir plays with the unusual appearance of the heavens at his birth, as most poems written to celebrate the birth of Prince Charles did, a sign that poets tried hard to read as propitious but that could easily be seen as ominous to an early modern observer. But instead of troping, as did most other poets celebrating that day, on the fact that the evening star appeared at noon on the day of Prince Charles’s birth, Jonson ends his poem by poetic reference to a much more sinister astronomic omen. Two days after the prince’s birth there was an eclipse of the sun. The poet invokes the ‘envious’ moon to haste ‘and interpose thy selfe, (“care not how soone.) / And threat” the great Eclipse. Two houres but runne, / Sol will re-shine. If not, CHARLES hath a Sonne’ (lines 9–12). Again, an ostensible compliment is jagged edged. To conjure a world of darkness at the birth of this child is to conjure the deepest human fears. In this brief poem, Jonson includes as well another unsurprising cliché, given the child’s natal month. He styles newborn Charles as the ‘Prince of flowers’, who has sprung from ‘The bed of the chast *Lilly*, and the *Rose*’. The conceit of a flower-bed barely conceals the sexual, marital bed.

The sexual bed of the king is made completely explicit and then dangerously complicated in the following epigram ‘to the Queene, then Lying In’, which begins ‘Haile *Mary*, full of grace’. Most of the poem is concerned with its own blasphemy. After all, the angel-poet says boldly,

When was there seene
(Except the joy that the first *Mary* brought,
Whereby the safetie of Man-kind was wrought)
So generall a gladnesse to an Isle,
To make the hearts of a whole Nation smile,
As in this Prince? (lines 6–11)

The idea of Mary (it was common practice to anglicize Henrietta Maria’s name) as the Virgin Mother is dangerous and seems to be deliberately challenging. It suggests, for one thing, her Catholicism (and Jonson’s). While it ostensibly suggests that Charles is God’s representative on earth (‘Let it be lawfull, so / To compare small with great’ (lines 11–12)), it also suggests that Henrietta Maria lies in this bed still a virgin. The poem’s transgression is capped by its ending, where the queen becomes mediatrix, ‘Then, Haile to *Mary*! spring / Of so much safetie to the Realme, and King’ (lines 13–14). While the anniversary poem marked the king’s unhappy position in March of 1630, now in May his saviour has arrived in the form of a child and his mother Mary. Charles’s implied position as impotent and as weak, fallen man requiring rescue, is not enviable.

The next poem in the sequence celebrates an event of a few months later, Henrietta Maria’s twenty-second birthday in November of 1630. Instead of an epigram, Jonson writes an ode with stanzas sung by each of the muses. Again, this birthday compliment is freighted with anxiety, warning, and a weird intimacy. Jonson’s choice of message from each muse is carefully tailored. Clio, the muse of history, begins by exhorting some kind of ‘publike joy’ even – ominously – ‘though the Parish-steeple / Be silent’ (lines 1, 4–5). Melpomene, the muse of tragedy, harps again on the silence of the Tower’s bells and guns, guessing them

As fearfull to awake
This Citie, or to shake
Their guarded gates asunder? (lines 10–12)

But the muses of comedy and lyric poetry, Thalia and Euterpe, gaily call on court trumpets, strings and song in lieu of public rejoicing. Terpsichore imagines the queen invested with the pomp and glory of France, ‘the royall *Mary*, / The Daughter of great *Harry*! / And Sister to just *Lewis*!’ (lines 25–7) and Erato, love poetry, sees her reigning as Venus in England.

By the end of the poem, however, the ominous quality of these fairy-godmothers returns to haunt the feast. Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, summons an astonishingly graphic jousting pun:

See, see our active *King*
Hath taken twice the Ring
Upon his pointed Lance:
Whilst all the ravish’d rout
Doe mingle in a shout,
Hay! for the flowre of *France*! (lines 37–42)

We are asked to look at the king and queen's sexual acts in our mind's eye. And even as we do so, we hear the shouts of 'the ravish'd rout'. Calliope is the mother of Orpheus, and the presence at this marriage of a dionysian crowd, willing to rip a man to shreds for sexual failures, is extremely troubling. Polyhymnia, sacred music, concludes

Sweet! happy *Mary!* All
The People her doe call.
And this the wombe divine,
So fruitfull, and so faire,
Hath brought the Land an Heire!
And CHARLES a *Caroline!* (lines 49–54)

The rhyme divine/Caroline is at once easy and distasteful. Elizabeth had deftly mantled herself with the old charm of the Virgin, but a Catholic queen dressed poetically as the Mother Mary is a clumsy appropriation, dangerously Duessa-like, dangerously provocative. After all, though, Jonson was old, sick and disgruntled. (The next poem in *Underwood* blames Charles's household for denying Jonson his entitlement to a vat of wine. The hostile joke with which the poem ends, however, "'T were better spare a Butt, then spill his *Muse*' (line 12), is aimed as much at Charles as it is his servants.) The lavish, almost sacrilegious praise barbed with unease evident in the laureate's poems may simply be attributable to his unhappy place in Caroline society. Other poems on the princes' births can serve as controls.

III

In 1630 Robert Herrick was about to assume the vicarage of Dean Prior, patronage that was also a kind of exile. Before he left the court he wrote a 'Pastorall upon the birth of Prince Charles', which was set to music by Nicholas Lanier and performed before the king. A shepherdess, Amarillis, and two shepherds lie happily talking of the birth of a babe to 'The Court'.¹² Here the omen of the evening star's appearance is given a spin so heavy-handedly positive as to roll on into the desecratory:

And that his birth sho'd be more singular,
At Noone of Day, was seene a silver Star,
Bright as the Wise-mens Torch, which guided them
To Gods sweet Babe, when borne at *Bethlehem*;
While Golden Angels (some have told to me)
Sung out his Birth with Heav'nly Minstralsie. (lines 19–24)

And so the three shepherds decide to go visit the child, bearing country gifts, 'To have his little King-ship know, / As he is Prince, he's Shepherd too' (lines 43–4). The poem's jolly blasphemy is knotted up jauntily by its ending couplet: 'And when before him we have laid our treasures, / We'll blesse the Babe, Then back to Countrie pleasures' (lines 47–8). Again, as in Jonson's poems, we see an abrading degree of sacrilege which takes the form of evoking the Virgin Mary and Christ.

Herrick's pretty Amarillis and his linking of Christ-king-shepherd strike a tiny, tinkling note before the sonorous beauty of Milton's 'Lycidas', written seven years later. It seems blasphemy even to whisper a common vocabulary.¹³ But Milton did himself write a natal poem at precisely the moment when court and university poets were mourning and rejoicing the death and birth of heirs. In 1629 Milton was a student at Cambridge and (like Henrietta Maria) twenty-one years old. Oxford University would produce *Britanniae natalis* in 1630, celebrating the birth of one Charles and noting the loss of another, but Cambridge University was markedly remiss on the occasion of this truly noteworthy court event. It was not until 1631 that Cambridge would produce a volume of natal verse, *Genethliacum Illustrissimorum Principium Caroli & Mariae*, and by then there was already a princess to celebrate as well. In Milton's Christmas poem, it can be argued, however, Cambridge paid its required tax on time.

In significant ways Milton's 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' is concerned with Caroline state imagery. Written on the Christmas day that fell between the birth of the first two sons to England's king and the queen called Mary, the poem is at once a repudiation and a celebration of the sexual vocabulary of queenship and kingship. That Milton's first great poem would be inspired by Christmas is in itself significant, for Christmas was a holiday objectionable to puritans, who saw it as pagan and superstitious and who were particularly uneasy with the drunken sexual roistering that accompanied its celebration.¹⁴ Christmas was ceremonial, papist and decadent, associated with the Stuart court, which had long upheld the practice of festival, and associated, inevitably, with the Virgin Mother and thus with Catholicism.¹⁵

Milton was working in a long tradition of nativity poems, ranging from popular vernacular ballads and carols to late classical and neo-Latin poetry, a tradition which flourished in the seventeenth century.¹⁶ But writing a Christmas poem was not simply a traditional exercise for Milton in 1629; it was a political act, and one thickly embedded in the tensions of Caroline culture.

In the Nativity Ode itself, as many critics have noted, there is a conspicuous absence of the bodily. There is a great deal of music and starlight, of silence and ancient mythologies, but a jarring absence of the mother and baby in the manger surrounded by animals. The sexual sweetness and taboo of Christmas is present, however, in the poem's frame. The poem begins:

This is the month, and this the happy morn
Wherein the Son of heav'n's eternal King,
Of wedded maid, and virgin mother born,
Our great redemption from above did bring;
For so the holy sages once did sing,
That he our deadly forfeit should release,
And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.¹⁷

The paradox of 'wedded maid' and 'virgin mother' and the incestuous suggestion of the unnamed maid as the consort of her own Father and the mother of her Father's Son is touched on immediately, but then the poem seems to recoil from the crèche and the act of childbirth that is going on in the suspended moment of the poem's time. Throughout the body of the poem, however, the act of birth is present in its deliberate absence. The 'Hymn' begins by telling the story of its first stanza again, but in a conflicted past tense:

It was the winter wild,
While the heaven-born child,
All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies;
Nature in awe to him
Had doffed her gaudy trim,
With her great master so to sympathize:
It was no season then for her
To wanton with the sun her lusty paramour. (lines 29–36)

Personified Nature, the ur-mother to the virgin mother, consort to the Heavenly Father, cloaks herself in snow to cover her 'naked shame', 'Confounded, that her maker's eyes / Should look so near upon her foul deformities' (lines 43–4). This rather shocking reference to female genitalia brings the poem back to the crèche and the divine birth, asking us to look at the sexual woman even as she hides from the gaze of 'her maker's eyes', and daring us, even taunting us, not to hear the old pun on the homonym sun and son which, heard, opens the madonna and child to the sexual speculation that the poem seems to be trying to hold at bay with the light.

The third stanza of Milton's poem is markedly Caroline. To comfort

Nature in her sexual shame, God sends a powerful personification, one who can suspend sound and time, war and unrest:

But he her fears to cease,
Sent down the meek-eyed Peace,
She crown'd with olive green, came softly sliding
Down through the turning sphere
His ready harbinger,
With turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing,
And waving wide her myrtle wand,
She strikes a universal peace through sea and land. (lines 45–52)

Sweet amorous peace is the state imagery used for Henrietta Maria for years after this, in the paintings of Van Dyck, for example, and in the court masques.¹⁸ When this personification descends, 'No war, or battle's sound / Was heard the world around . . . The Trumpet spake not to the armed throng' (lines 53–8). With eerie precision, Milton's poem evokes what is to become the quintessential Caroline imagery, the halcyon moment. The night is peaceful 'Wherein the Prince of Light / His reign of peace upon the earth began', the ocean still 'While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave' (lines 62–8). The central conceit of the poem, the halting of time and light, the poem's power to dwell in the split second of the baby's world-changing arrival, is literally enacted by the stars, which do not yield their place to Lucifer, the harbinger of morning.

Milton is writing this poem five years into Charles's reign, as the potent imagery of kingship begins to mantle him after the death of Buckingham and the *rapprochement* with his wife. The poem's vocabulary is clearly evocative of imagery we bracket off as cavalier (and sycophantic). Just as Herrick's poem 'Rex Tragicus' describes uncannily the crucifixion of Christ in terms that seem to be a description of Charles's execution, but months before it happened, so Milton's 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' seems to conjure the ideograms that become the constantly reiterated symbolism of Caroline culture after the birth of Prince Charles, an event which happened months after Milton wrote his poem. Indeed, Christ's nativity was to be the reigning metaphor used by court poets for the birth of an heir to Charles and Henrietta Maria. Even the aberrant behaviour of the morning star and the suspended moment of darkness at a prince's birth are going to be repeated at Charles's birth and then repeatedly troped upon by Caroline poets. A perverse argument can be made that the pre-eminent poet of Charles I is not poor old Ben in his grumpy time-serving, nor Herbert in his cloistered parish, nor Carew, fanciful and brilliantly sarcastic, nor Lovelace and his dashing bravado, nor Donne preaching his last sermons, nor

Herrick far away miniaturizing the court in charming talismans, but that the pre-eminent poet of Charles I is John Milton.¹⁹ No one else took him quite so seriously; no one else paid tributes – albeit elliptically – quite so touching in their vision of what might have been.

But Milton understood the treacherous as well as the beguiling nature of images. ‘On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’ is also a warning of the dangers inherent in the mythology of Christmas, dangers that curse those who attempt to assume the nativity aura as their own. The vivified world of ancient religion is drained of its tutelary presences – the oracles banished, the geniuses and nymphs, ancestral spirits and spirits of the dead sent weeping away, and

In urns, and altars round,
A drear and dying sound
 Affrights the flamens at their service quaint;
And the chill marble seems to sweat,
While each peculiar power forgoes his wonted seat. (lines 192–6)

Milton’s contemporary implications are clear – a true celebration of the birth of Christ will banish the false worship of contaminated church ceremonialism. As Milton strips myth after myth of its power to charm, he comes right up flush with the Mother Mary when he scorns ‘mooned Astaroth, / Heaven’s Queen and mother both’ who ‘Now sits not girt with tapers’ holy shine’ (lines 200–2). The danger and much of the power of the poem’s subject has been, all along, the mother at its heart, heaven’s queen. And yet, in the final stanza, when Milton rounds again to the manger he asks us to look once more at the centre of the universal spectacle he has been summoning and ignoring: ‘But see the virgin blest, / Hath laid her babe to rest.’ Marked in the poem is a demonic Christmas, a pagan mother whom Milton desperately needs to put aside so that we can ‘see’ the ‘virgin blest’ uncontaminated by sexual and idolatrous myths and their appropriation. ‘Upon the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’ is very much a poem of its historical moment and part of its haunting effect is the overlay of negative and positive images of an embodied and bodiless Christ and Mary during the breathless moment of this brilliant early Caroline poem.

IV

If we look to the other end of the central Caroline decade and to young poets who came of age artistically during the symbolic reign of royal marriage, we see the divine, sexual bodies of the queen and king troped upon

still, but with increased self-consciousness and unease. Marvell, who rivals Carew as the most perceptive literary critic of the seventeenth century, wrote, early in his career, a kind of companion poem to his great 1674 commentary ‘On Mr Milton’s *Paradise Lost*’. In addressing Richard Lovelace on the occasion of his 1648 *Lucasta*, Marvell laments the loss of ‘That candid Age’ of a few years before which ‘no other way could tell / To be ingenious, but by speaking well. / Who best could prayse, had then the greatest prayse’.²⁰ In fact, Lovelace’s body of praise extends prettily to women, the only public poem a rather tortured celebration/elegy for the Oxford volume commemorating the one-day life of Princess Catherine. Marvell’s poem to Lovelace is thus slyly funny; it ends, for example, with the spectacle of women in dishabille sallying forth to do battle with Parliament in defence of their valiant poet. Marvell does mean to praise Lovelace, but in such a way that simultaneously enacts the very critical tendency Marvell professes to abhor: ‘He highest builds, who with most Art destroys’. The object of Marvell’s ostensible regret is ‘the Civicke crowne’ of unbounded praise, but the mocking praise of this poem identifies that crown with a feminized kingdom.

And yet, Marvell’s first published poem was an Horatian ode on the birth of Princess Anne in the Cambridge volume on that occasion, *Συνωδία sive Musarum Cantabrigiensium Concertus et Congratulatio* (1637), written when Marvell was fifteen.²¹ Marvell entitles his poem a parody, that is a formal imitation, in this case of an ode by Horace which describes the horrors of civil war and begs Caesar to save the state.²² The poem offers critical difficulties. It could be argued, for example, that it is simply a schoolboy exercise, an excellent imitation of a poem chosen as a model compliment. Almost all such university poems are marked as academic exercises, which does not obviate, and perhaps underscores, their political valence. What Marvell intends in imitating this poem, written on the eve of the end of the Republic and indeed inviting its end and the rise to total power of Caesar Augustus, is impossible to say.²³ Within the context of its volume, however, the poem is richly revealing of Caroline culture. The horror that Marvell’s poem summons (on what would seem to be a happy occasion) is present to varying degrees in all four university volumes on the princesses, and is even more strongly marked in the two volumes commemorating the birth of Henry, Duke of Gloucester in 1640.

Marvell repeats exactly Horace’s question: ‘Quem vocet divum populus ruentis / Imperi rebus?’ (What god shall the people invoke when the state collapses?). For Roman images of civil war, Marvell substitutes the plague

and structures his poem much more strongly than Horace around the recurring notion of father. It is the father who has sent this punishment on his people. But, at the same time, it is parents who are its cause:

Audiit mortes vitio parentum
Rara juvenus.
Quem vocet divum populus ruentis
Imperi rebus? (lines 23–6)

They have heard of the deaths caused by their fathers' vices.
What god shall the people invoke when the state collapses?²⁴

The speaker pleads with the national parents, Charles and Mary, who can expiate for the past sins of the fathers, 'neglectum genus et nepotes / Auxeris' (aid your forgotten people). Marvell wrote this poem during Henrietta Maria's pregnancy, so the sense of dread and wished-for salvation is tied to the unknown outcome. A child, boy or girl, born alive will repair the damage the plague has visited upon the nation:

Hic ames dici pater atque princeps,
Et nova mortes reparare prole
Te patre, Caesar. (lines 50–2)

Here may you delight to be called prince and father,
and with new birth make good our losses, Caesar.

The poem's closing word underscores its intense ambiguity. Charles's clear association here with Caesar Augustus will be repeated with equal opacity of political valuation in Marvell's later Horatian ode when 'restless Cromwell could not cease / In the inglorious arts of peace' (lines 9–10) but

Caesar's head at last
Did through his laurels blast.
'Tis madness to resist or blame
The force of angry heaven's flame. (lines 23–6)

The Latin ode's title, 'Ad Regem Carolum Parodia', does, however, offer a teasing clue. All through these middle years of the seventeenth century the slippage between Latin and English is electric and culturally central. Most poets wrote in both languages and were able to play elegant games with words caught between the ossified and evolving languages. *Parodia* is a neutral, descriptive word meaning a close imitation, but *parody* had already mutated in its transition to English into mockery and burlesque. Marvell's *parodia* is astonishingly exact *except* in the three verses on

Henrietta Maria, Charles, and their children. Where Horace talks of a terrible war-weariness, Marvell talks of the queen's fecundity as the antidote to death, the birth of a royal baby balancing the subjects' death, and where Horace addresses 'te duce, Caesar', Marvell salutes 'Te patre, Caesar'. Marvell's Horatian ode seems, at least retrospectively, to balance somewhere between a counter-turn and a parody – written on the eve of civil war rather than its ending, and addressing a king who is already the volatile father that Horace wishes to propitiate.

Richard Crashaw has been regarded as an aberration from English seventeenth-century poetry because of his extravagant, grossly bodily, flamboyantly sexual poetics. Rather, he is a master of the central early modern discourse we have been considering. Crashaw, who contributed steadily to university volumes, including the one in which Marvell's ode appeared, does what scores of other poets of this period attempt to do: he moves with brilliant bilingual fluidity from Latin to English and back again; he pushes cliché into the range of explicitness and discomfort so that it becomes metaphor charged with a stunning strength; he creates an intimate closeness with the Virgin Mother and the body of Christ that challenges gender and hierarchy.

It is not surprising, then, that Crashaw is the most truly passionate Caroline poet – and the object of his fascination is, significantly, not Charles, but the queen. (And Henrietta Maria would remain central to his life. He joined her in exile in Paris, and she wrote to the Pope to recommend Crashaw's services to the Catholic Church.) After matriculating at Cambridge in 1632, he wrote eight poems for six royal commemorative volumes, three of these poems appearing in Cambridge's rather desperate outpouring of 1640, *Voces votivae*.²⁵ It is perhaps fitting to end a consideration of Charles's eleven years of personal rule with Crashaw's 1640 poem on the occasion of the birth of another son, a poem which was enlarged and retitled in the 1648 *Delights of the Muses*, 'To the Queen, Upon her numerous Progenie.'²⁶ The poem repeats the Christic nativity imagery and incorporated pagan mythology characteristic of Caroline poetry, but here the birth of children is explicitly marked as an enormous, even perhaps unbearable stress on Britain. 'Thou art opprest / With thine owne Gloryes' (lines 3–4)

for lo! the Gods, the Gods
Come fast upon thee, and those glorious ods,
Swell thy full gloryes to a pitch so high,
As sits above thy best capacitye. (lines 5–8)

The marriage of Charles and Henrietta Maria was richly symbolic, trapped with divinity. But the erotic and the sacred were a volatile mix in a country increasingly sensitive to Catholic influences, to anything that could be regarded as superstition. More than that, the very nature of symbolism was being effected by the shift from ceremonial and analogical thinking to a much more literal form of understanding.

During the central Caroline years the notion that the body of Christ was still present in the world – the notion celebrated most fully in the ceremony of the Eucharist – was still being embodied by artists in the idea of the king (and even more so in the idea of his children and their mother Mary). Oxford's 1641 volume celebrating the return of Charles from Scotland is entitled, for example, *Eucharistica*.²⁷ But the capacity for kingship to carry divinity had been radically diminished in a linguistically rich, densely developed Protestant humanist culture, which had reached a crescendo and was now at a loss. Mikhail Bakhtin posits a critical moment when 'linguistic consciousness – parodying the direct word, direct style, exploring its limits, its absurd sides, the face specific to an era – constituted itself *outside* this direct word and outside all graphic and expressive means of representation . . . the creating artist began to look at language from the outside, with another's eyes, from the point of view of a potentially different language and style', and I am proposing that the Caroline period is exactly such a moment of dawning parodic consciousness.²⁸ The vocabulary of queen as Mother Mary and of an uxorious king is clearly a provocation to puritans, but it is linguistically provocative as well: highly stylized and elegant, decorative and self-involved, it loses its potency in its refinement. Instead, its potent energy moves into self-consciousness. The Caroline period is the cusp of the great age of translation and mockery.

The king's body had for centuries a numinous power which extended to – even rested in – his personal, bodily intimacies.²⁹ And yet, at the same time that Charles rested his sense of rule on divine right, an emerging sense that the divine rested in the individual – a sense intrinsic to Protestantism – was inexorably reshaping power and gender relations.³⁰ Charles himself had a fastidious sense of privacy, insisting on elaborate procedural rules to hedge his body and his private chambers from unwanted contact.³¹ And he and Henrietta Maria enjoyed an unusually close relationship, which entailed a retreat into privacy which was remarkable given their rank. Court poetry had come, therefore, to inhabit a space that was suddenly liable to embarrassment and even furtive amusement.

Jonson's jousting Charles thrusting his spear through Henrietta Maria's ring is in many ways more disturbing than the detailed eroticism of Carew's 'Rapture'.

We began by thinking about the ways in which the Elizabethan poet Spenser had promulgated marriage as a political act. But, at the same time, *The Faerie Queen* is livid with fear of women. No female allegorical figure is more dangerous than Duessa, who in the poem bears an extraordinary range of meanings, from the abstract to the historical (when she means Mary, Queen of Scots, Charles's Catholic grandmother). The tension of Book 1 is in the ever-present fear that the Red Cross Knight will succumb to this monstrous, papist shape-changer. Finally, he does take off his armour, lies down under a tree, and falls into her power; epic victory cannot be achieved until he casts off Duessa and her minions. Charles I prized and fostered the symbolism of the Order of the Garter; on the reverse of his cross of St George, which he wore constantly, was a picture of his wife.³² He took it, in part, as an emblem of his romantic marriage. But clearly the lady in the icon could be read as Duessa, seducing the king into a pastoral shade and holding him and the English people in thrall to a lurking papist giant. Charles wore on his person a nuanced and sophisticated cultural reference that was liable to collapse into a strong (and damning) statement.

V

In *Eikonoklastes*, Milton's legalistic dismemberment of *Eikon Basilike*, he dismisses out of hand Charles's horror at the way his 'Protestant subjects'³³ have treated his wife: 'what concerns it us to hear a Husband divulge his Household privacies, extolling to others the virtues of his Wife; an infirmity not seldom incident to those who have least cause'.³⁴ In order to demystify the aura of kingship, Milton argues that the family is a private affair. In the moment, he did not succeed, and in some ways *Eikon Basilike* controls the king's imagery to this day. But in Milton's epic, *Paradise Lost*, he succeeds. Eve brings down Adam, as the queen brings down the king, because of the irresistibly sexual nature of their relationship. Milton understood royal symbolism as a metaphoric system that was already shifting to the individual. Even a generation earlier Donne had played teasing games (of serious import in an analogical world) with monarchical roles and sexual privacy:

She's all States, and all Princes, 1,
Nothing else is.
Princes doe but play us, compar'd to this,
All honor's mimique.³⁵

Charles I delighted in the idea of such an analogical marriage as well. He thought, however, that his private world should be the only public world. It was his downfall.

Notes

- 1 See Roy Strong, *Van Dyck: Charles I on Horseback* (London: Allen Lane, 1972) and Dolores Palomo, 'The Halcyon Moment of Stillness in Royalist Poetry', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 44 (1981): 205–21.
- 2 See Erica Veevers's fine study, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainments* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- 3 Very oddly, Heather Dubrow's excellent study of the Stuart epithalamium, *A Happier Eden: The Politics of Marriage in the Stuart Epithalamium* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990) makes no mention of the marriage at the centre of Caroline culture.
- 4 As Malcolm Smuts points out, reports were made that 'Puritans' refused to join in the celebration for the birth of the Prince of Wales, 'saying God had already provided for the succession in the family of the Elector Palatine, the German Calvinist married to Charles's sister'. See 'The Political Failure of Stuart Cultural Patronage', in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton University Press, 1981), 182.
- 5 See Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 150–9.
- 6 Mark Kishlansky has pointed out that
in 1603 . . . James I created more knights in four months than Elizabeth I had in forty-four years . . . The precision of these distinctions was significant, for it created the impression of stability which was otherwise constantly belied . . . The Stuarts continued the pattern with a vengeance, nearly tripling the size of the titular aristocracy both by selling titles in the second quarter of the seventeenth century and by rewarding office-holders in the later decades.
See *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain, 1603–1714* (London: Allen Lane, 1996), 24.
- 7 McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 151.
- 8 Stephen Orgel, 'Gendering the Crown', in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 136.
- 9 John Donne, *The Sermons*, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter, 10 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), vii, 409.
- 10 See Thomas N. Corns, *Uncloistered Virtue: English Political Literature, 1640–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); M. L. Donnelly, 'Caroline Royalist Panegyric: The Disintegration of a Symbolic Mode', in *The Muses Common-weale': Poetry and Politics in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), 163–76; Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison:

- University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); and Kevin Sharpe, *Criticism and Compliment: The Politics of Literature in the England of Charles I* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).
- 11 Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–63), viii, 235–6, lines 1–2. All further references to Jonson will be to this edition; line references will be given within the main text.
 - 12 Robert Herrick, *The Poetical Works*, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 86. All subsequent references to Herrick will be to this edition and will be given within the main text.
 - 13 On Milton's early poetry in its contemporary context see Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 185–282.
 - 14 See Chris Durston, 'Lords of Misrule: The Puritan War on Christmas, 1642–60', *History Today*, 35 (December 1985): 7–14. See also David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989); Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 256–70.
 - 15 See Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (University of Chicago Press, 1986).
 - 16 See J. B. Broadbent, 'The Nativity Ode', in *The Living Milton*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), 12–31; and Rosemond Tuve, *Images and Themes in Five Poems by Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 37–72.
 - 17 *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London and Harlow: Longman, 1968), 101, lines 1–7. All subsequent references to Milton will be to this edition and will be given within the main text.
 - 18 Helgerson points out how masque-like this description is in *Self-Crowned Laureates*, 265.
 - 19 See Malcolm McKenzie Ross, *Milton's Royalism: A Study of the Conflict of Symbol and Idea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1943).
 - 20 *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, rev. Pierre Legouis with E. E. Duncan-Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 1, 3.
 - 21 Marvell also wrote a Greek poem for the occasion, which plays upon the number five, since Anne was the fifth surviving child of Charles and Henrietta Maria. Much more attention should be paid to the body of academic verse produced for occasions deemed significant by Oxford and Cambridge, and this is especially true for the Caroline years, when the practice reached its apex of activity. During the reigns of James I and Charles I, Oxford University produced twenty-four volumes of commemorative poetry (STC 19019–19039; Wing O883, O941, and O903). Cambridge produced fifteen (STC 4475, 4477, 4479, 4480, 4481, 4483, 4484, 4486, 4487, 4489, 4491, 4492, 4493, 4495, and Wing C340). See Raymond Anselment, 'The Oxford University Poets and Caroline Panegyric', *John Donne Journal*, 3 (1984): 181–201 and J. C. T. Oates, 'Cambridge Books of Congratulatory Verse, 1603–1640', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 1 (1953): 395–421.
 - 22 Book 1 Ode 2. References to Horace's text will be to *The Odes and Epodes*, trans. C. E. Bennett, rev. edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1927), 6–11.
 - 23 As Malcolm Smuts argues, much of court culture was a recall of Augustan Rome and its age of peace. There is deep tension, however, between the ideological use of

- Augustan Rome and the ideological use of the birth of Christ in Stuart culture, since they represent historically concurrent but potentially competing world views. See 'Political Failure of Stuart Cultural Patronage'.
- 24 The translation is from Andrew Marvell, *Complete Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).
- 25 This volume commemorated the birth of Henry, Prince of Gloucester.
- 26 In 1640 the poem was entitled 'Upon the Duke of Yorke his Birth'. Crashaw got his dukes confused, of course. James, Duke of York had been born in 1633. It was Henry, Duke of Gloucester who was born in 1640. The text cited is from Richard Crashaw, *The Poems English, Latin and Greek*, ed. L. C. Martin, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 176.
- 27 The polyglossia of this moment is largely lost to us, but the play and danger possible as words crossed the boundary line from one language to another is one of the most teasing aspects of Caroline poetry. In Latin *eucharistica* simply means thanksgiving, but there was nothing simple about its use in 1641 as the title of this volume.
- 28 Mikhail Bakhtin, 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 60. Bakhtin is referring to classical Roman literature.
- 29 See David Starkey, 'Representation Through Intimacy: A Study in the Symbolism of Monarchy and Court Office in Early-Modern England', in *Symbols and Sentiments: Cross-Cultural Studies in Symbolism*, ed. Joan Lewis (London: Academic Press, 1977), 187–224.
- 30 See Michael McKeon, 'Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660–1760', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28 (1995): 295–322.
- 31 See Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), especially 209–22.
- 32 On the Order of the Garter, see *ibid.*, 219–22. For an important argument about the importance of chivalry and romance outside the king's circle, see William Hunt, 'Civic Chivalry and the English Civil War', in *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Grafton and Ann Blair (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 204–37.
- 33 *Eikon Basilike*, ed. Philip Knachel, 30.
- 34 *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–82), III, 419.
- 35 John Donne, 'The Sunne Rising', *The Complete English Poems*, ed. C. A. Patrides (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 5, lines 21–4.

3

Popular representations of
Charles I

Joad Raymond

I have in my time seen certain *Pictures* with two *faces*. Beheld one way, they have presented the *shape* and *figure* of a *Man*. Beheld another, they have presented the *shape* and *figure* of a *Serpent*. Me thinks, Sir, for some years, whatever *Letters* the *King* wrote either to the *Queene*, or his *friends*, or what ever *Declarations* he publisht in the defence of his *Rights* and *Cause*, had the ill fortune to undergoe the fate of such a *Picture*. To us who read them impartially, by their own true, genuine *light*, they appeared so many cleare, transparent *Copies* of a sincere and Gallant *Mind*. Look't on by the *People*, (of whom you know who said, *populus iste vult decipi, decipiatur*) through the *Answers* and *Observations*, and venomous *Comments*, which some men made upon them, a *fallacy* in *judgement* followed very like the *fallacy* of the *sight*; where an *Object* beheld through a false deceitfull *medium*, partakes of the *cosenage* of the *conveyance*, and *way*, and puts on a false *Resemblance*. As *square*, *bright*, *angular* things through a mist show *darke* and *round*; and *straight* things seen through water show *broken* and *distorted*.¹

I

Jasper Mayne's simile is a key to the king's celebrity. Charles I was the first ruler of England, Wales, Scotland or Ireland to be represented by a popular press beyond his control. Competing images, both verbal and visual, endure to this day, leaving their residue in conflicting interpretations of Charles's reign.² The growth in popular representations stemmed from several related factors: the expansion of interest in politics in the early seventeenth century; the rapid development of journalism in the popular press; the political divisions nurtured by Charles's rule. The resulting *exposure* of the king's person, a theme which countless writers harped upon, was one of the great ideological tremors of the 1640s.