"BUT WHY DO I DESCRIBE WHAT ALL MUST SEE?": VERBAL EXPLICATION IN THE STUART MASQUE

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ABSTRACT

Composed of signs taken from various art disciplines, the seventeenth-century masque involved a considerable amount of interaction between its constituents. Among these, word and image seem to have been particularly interdependent. One of the key aspects of the relationship between the two media in question was that the masque's frequently obscure visual element conditioned the explicative character of the verbal component. This paper attempts to classify the elucidative passages to be found in masques: it shows that these referred both to the signalled fiction and to the material structure of the scenic arrangement. Moreover, the study proves that these comments, essentially devised to clarify pictorial signs, fulfilled a variety of other functions: for instance, they served as ostensive markers, invested the scenic composition with temporal qualities, and emphasised the close connection between the stage set and the figure.

It was a common practice in Renaissance portraiture to supply sitters with symbols of the arts as their attributes. In some sense, the performative genre referred to as the Stuart masque functioned as such a tribute, expressed by means of all the creative disciplines that were at its makers' disposal. This type of seventeenth-century entertainment served to illustrate the glory of the monarch, who was to be perceived, as stated in Ben Jonson's *Oberon, the fairy prince* (1611), as "the wonder … of tongues, of ears, of eyes" (Spencer – Wells 1967: 59).[1] A multimedia structure meant to express that overwhelming praise, the masque soon became an arena for the complex dialogue between a variety of artistic structures. This is to say that disciplines as diverse as architecture, painting, music, dance or poetry began to influence and complement one another, gener-

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[1] The quotations from masques are taken from the following collections: Spencer – Wells (1967), Orgel (1969), Orgel – Strong (1973) and Lindley (1995).

ating a variety of new messages, which would not be transmitted if any of these constituents were removed from the entertainment.

Long recognised as one of the constitutive aspects of the genre, this hybrid quality has nonetheless received surprisingly little in-depth analysis; consequently, the scope of its impact on the shape and informative potential of individual signs used in the masque remains largely unexplored. One of the possible reasons behind this omission is that, for all the comments likening the Stuart entertainment to an ideal *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the most common way to approach it has always been to disentangle its multimedia structure and then to deal with just one of its numerous components at a time, removing language, stage design, music or dance from their poly-systemic context. What is thus overlooked is the extent to which each of the elements listed above was actually shaped by and adjusted to the remaining ones. The present study, in its turn, will focus on one of such interdependencies, which, although it surely does not exhaust the subject of cross-disciplinary combinations used in the masque, is nevertheless highly representative of the genre discussed, emerging as it did between its two most intricately connected components, namely word and image. A crucial aspect of this complex interaction was that the linguistic medium supplemented and, not infrequently, also counterbalanced visual splendour, an inherent feature of the masque. This was effected by means of certain highly conventionalised linguistic structures, which this analysis will attempt to classify.

In his speech on the splendid scenic construction of the Throne of Beauty, Vulturnus, in Jonson's *The masque of beauty* (1608), asks: "But why do I describe what all must see?" (Orgel 1969: 66). Rhetorical as it is, this question deserves to be answered, for it could be posed with regard to almost every masque staged for the court of James and Charles I. Even a brief survey of the masques' printed accounts, customarily composed after the actual performance, will indicate that the Stuart productions abounded in speeches and songs explicating the visual element. This peculiar feature of the genre's linguistic material was conditioned by the nature of the images that were specially devised for this type of entertainment. The maximum aesthetic appeal of its visual portion, which manifested itself in all kinds of pictorial opulence, including a profusion of colours, textures and types of lighting, had to be accompanied by a comparable intellectual input in order to obtain the high degree of sophistication appropriate for the occasion. That is why each court production contained a large number of references to a variety of representative codes. Drawn from classical sources, contemporary emblem books, various iconographic manuals, native artistic traditions and those of Italy and France, the masque's visual element must have been the quintessence of eclecticism. Unsurprisingly, the surviving costume and setting designs may strike the modern reader as mysterious and undecipherable; one has to study the accounts included in the printed versions

to understand their content. In fact there exists considerable evidence suggesting that their actual scenic realisations proved equally unclear for the contemporary audience.[2]

The requirement of intellectual sophistication could have destroyed the form, as any performance exclusively based on such intricate visual symbolism would cease to convey meaning. It would hence fail to become a work of art, for each artistic structure should, at least to some extent, be self-explanatory. The solution adopted by the masque to avoid this obscurity was rather simple: its erudite images could be comprehended in the presence of other systems, which would clarify their meanings. As language is the basic clarifying agent of human communication, it was a natural choice for the genre. Consequently, numerous verbally elucidated meanings were introduced into the actual performance. One method of doing this was to include such information in the figures' conversations that the spectators could simply "overhear"; another was to enlighten the audience directly by having gods and personified abstractions address them. Such condescension towards those members of the audience whose knowledge of the contemporary cultural codes was insufficient formed something of a theatrical counterpart to the learned glosses that Jonson placed in his printed masques, where he laboriously annotated his sources and explained the allegories used.

Its presence imposed by the masque's visual content, verbal explication became an essential element of each court performance. Obviously, this requirement had a bearing on the style of speech used in the entertainment: the linguistic portion of the masque proper[3] had to be so modelled as to fulfil its clarifying function most effectively. This type of speech was not a system focused on dynamism, irregularity or true dialogue; rather, it was one centred on stasis, harmony and monologue, or at most on a dialogue with an already preordained ending. Consequently, the verbal portion of the genre was mostly declarative in character, composed of long and detailed descriptions of images, usually narrative and essentially neutral in relation to the action. This type of language was

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[2] For instance, in his detailed account of Jonson's *Pleasure reconciled to virtue* (1618), the Venetian Busino describes the figures that were to represent Pygmies as "twelve masqued boys in the guise of frogs. … [who] danced together, assuming sundry grotesque attitudes" (quoted in Welsford 1927: 206). An account by a foreigner, most probably unable to follow the *libretto*, is particularly interesting, because it shows what the perception of the show would have been without the coherent linguistic element. Such a deficiency could have led, as it actually did in the case of the Italian spectator, to a confusion over the meaning of the entire spectacle.

[3] That is, the main portion of the entertainment with the exclusion of the so-called "antimasque". The antimasque was the part of the performance that depicted unruly elements, which were then conquered by the forces of harmony at the outset of the masque proper. A considerable number of antimasques, especially those from the Jacobean phase in the history of the genre, were almost exclusively based on vibrant and witty language.

used not to create fiction but to reflect whatever fiction had already been sig-
nalled visually. The verbal component of the Stuart masque, at least within the
masque proper, was hence essentially dominated by *ekphrasis*.[4]

By now we should be able to answer Vulturnus's question: he describes
what all must see because the entertainment itself requires this of him. The re-
dundancy involved in rephrasing verbally what has already been suggested pic-
torially, which worries him so, is fully justifiable if one regards the introduction
of such repetitive, not to say tautological, linguistic passages into the perform-
ance as a means of clarifying its message and intensifying its aesthetic appeal.
Moreover, the phenomenon discussed has a solid historical grounding, for it
was as much the inner requirements of the form as the general taste of the epoch
that made verbal explanation essential. As a huge portion of its "libretto" was
devised to explain numerous clusters of images, the Stuart masque took the
Renaissance drive towards explication to extremes (see Orgel 1975: 24-26).
Appropriately enough, the explicatory utterances inserted into the spectacle
represented a whole spectrum of informative potential. Most of these dealt with
the invented fiction of the setting or the figures' allegorical and mythological
dress; yet sometimes the thing commented on was not the fictitious location or
character but the material substance of the scenic composition. Whatever the
case, when it thus stressed its constituent parts, the entertainment drew attention
to its own structure. In other words, when employed like this, language func-
tioned as a powerful ostensive marker: it served to accentuate those elements of
the performance which were to be remembered by the audience, enabling them
to discover a network of relationships built up among these prominent clusters
of signs. That intertwined structure of reference, in turn, was used to convey
meaning in an elsewhere unmet way. At the same time, certain masques were
also capable of moving out of their own temporal boundaries, and verbal expli-
cation mirrored this tendency as it referred to notions such as history or previ-
ous court productions, extending the network of relationships beyond the scope
of a single entertainment.

The general classification presented above conditions the three main areas of
interest of the present discussion: the verbal accounts of the masque's signalled
setting, the linguistic recognition of the material substance of signs denoting
that setting, and the spoken descriptions of individual figures. Each of these
stood in a different relationship to its referent; each imported different types of
meaning into the spectacle; each made the audience perceive and interpret the

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[4]   It is surprising how little critical attention has been given to this prominent quality of the
masque's language, a notable exception being John Peacock's article on *Prince Henry's barriers*,
where he observes that "[b]y making *ekphrasis* his seminal rhetorical device, Jonson meets Jones
on his own ground, and facilitates their united efforts" (Peacock 1987: 175-176).

performance in a slightly different way. This virtuosity is one of the features that make the Stuart masque an elaborate cognitive game, some working mechanisms of which I shall attempt to investigate.

1. Explication of the setting

Most of the scenographic arrangements used in masques, often referred to as "the stage pictures" because of their strongly pictorial character,[5] were identifiable at some basic level. For instance, it was clear for the audience that the initial *tableau* of Samuel Daniel's *Tethys' festival* (1610) represented a seascape. However, like any other depiction of space in the stylised form of the Stuart show, this seascape was not just to signal a neutral setting. Its connection with the action, and in the masque "action" meant the visual and intellectual enlightenment of spectators, manifested itself on a deeper plane of ideas. The pictorial representation was to serve as a concept incorporated into the chain of concepts created by the show. That is why it had to be precisely identified, which could only be accomplished verbally. In the course of *Tethys' festival* Triton defined the scene as "the goodly spacious bay / Of manifold inharbouring Milford ... / The happy port of union, which gave way / To that great hero Henry and his fleet" (Lindley 1995: 59). In his analysis of the entertainment, Pitcher (1984: 36) writes that it "sets the investiture of Wales's own Stuart Prince in the perspective of the Tudor dynasty – the dynasty, with king James as its successor, which began at Milford, both a Welsh harbour and the port at which Henry VII (the Earl of Richmond) landed in 1485". In the light of this interpretation, the presence of the identifying linguistic label attached to the scenic construction seems justifiable enough.

To take another masque connected with Prince Henry, this is how the much discussed eclectic architectural construction of St. George's Portico from Jonson's *Prince Henry's barriers* (1610) was introduced by one of the figures:

> What place is this so bright that doth remain
> Yet undemolished? or but late built? O,
> I read it now. Saint George's portico!
> The supreme head of all the world, where now
> Knighthood lives honored with a crowned brow.
> A noble Scene, and fit to show him in,
> That must of all world's fame the garland win   (Orgel 1969: 147).

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[5]   The masque took over the Italianate model of the stage, whose main characteristics were, as Ratajczak (1985: 30-46) points out, symmetry, perspective and the proscenium arch. All of these are also the organising rules of the art of painting, the proscenium arch corresponding to the frame of a painterly work.

Notice the emphasis put on the newness of the building, and the amount of attention paid to its connections with knighthood. Both notions were of crucial importance for the ideological message of the show, which presented Prince Henry as the knight Meliadus, destined to resurrect the ancient chivalric ideals. The inclusion of those ideas in the passage quoted above indicates that the scope of such explication was not limited to elucidating the more puzzling fragments of separate stage pictures: it was the major ideas that were stressed in the descriptions analysed. Consequently, this section of the masque's linguistic material should be treated as an inherent portion of the performance, and not as some external addition to the show.

As explicatory utterances were contained within a highly-structured work of art, where each detail was suffused with signification, everything about them could be used to increase the scope of their informative potential. One of the aspects which frequently mattered was the identity of the figure commenting on the setting. Not only did the choice of such speaker have to be decorous – and hence the initial seascape of *Tethys' festival* was described by a marine creature – but it would also frequently carry some additional meaning, which strengthened the overall message of the show. This was the case with one of the scenes in Jonson's *Haddington masque* (1608) when

> the cliff parted in the midst and discovered an illustrious concave filled with an ample and glistering light, in which an artificial sphere was made of silver, eighteen foot in the diameter, that turned perpetually: the *coluri* were heightened with gold; so were the arctic and antarctic circles, the tropics, the equinoctial, the meridian and horizon; only the zodiac was of pure gold, in which the masquers, under the characters of the twelve signs, were placed, answering them in number...
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> (Orgel 1969: 115-116).

The printed version tells us that the sphere's "offices, with the whole frame as it turned, Vulcan went forward *to describe*" (Orgel 1969: 116, emphasis added). These words seem to imply that the major reason for the introduction of this particular figure was not dramatic, and indeed any dramatic potential there was in the masque was limited to the search for Cupid, in which Vulcan did not participate, but explicatory.

The god's speech following his entry was precisely of this character:

> It is a sphere I've formed, round and even,
> In due proportion to the sphere of heaven,
> With all his lines and circles, that compose
> The perfect'st form and aptly do disclose
> The heaven of marriage, which I title it;
> Within whose zodiac I have made to sit,

> In order of the signs, twelve sacred powers
> That are presiding at all nuptial hours   (Orgel 1969: 116).

This utterance was succeeded by a series of comments on the Zodiac signs adorning the sphere, among these, for instance: "The first, in *Aries'* place, respecteth pride / Of youth and beauty, graces in the bride. / In *Taurus*, he loves strength and manliness, / The virtues which the bridegroom should profess. / In *Gemini* that noble power is shown / That twins their hearts, and doth of two make one" (Orgel 1969: 116). Interestingly enough, in his study of the masque's iconography, Gordon (1975: 189) notes that the interpretation of the Zodiac as the powers governing marriage seems to be Jonson's own invention. This hints at the amount of pressure that was put on all the elements so that they would match the vision of an ideal marriage to be promoted by the performance.

Not only did the content of the speech quoted above follow that direction, but the presenter of that utterance was also to fit into the truly cosmic scheme of an ideal union advocated in the masque: a fruitful harmony between the newlyweds, the countries combined under James's reign, and the forces governing the universe. Seen in this context, the choice of Vulcan, whose married life can scarcely be termed successful, might seem ironic if not entirely paradoxical. Nevertheless, as it was the task of all masques, and especially those that celebrated weddings, to combine opposites, the figures of Venus and Vulcan could be brought together. One should not forget that within the fictitious world the magnificent artefact prepared by Vulcan was meant as a gift for his divine consort. At this point let us once again turn to Gordon, who interprets Vulcan as "the heat without which procreation cannot take place; and, adopting the same mode of interpretation, Venus is nothing else than the hidden desire for copulation grafted in human nature in order that procreation may ensure. For procreation, then, the conjunction of Vulcan and Venus is necessary" (Gordon 1975: 190). Although the figure in question was treated as a mouthpiece, it was not to remain a purely transparent one. This mouthpiece had to be ideally suited to the show, hence the introduction of Vulcan, a character complementary to his consort.

Another quality of Vulcan that made him a perfect presenter of the scenic marvels was his status as an archetypal artisan. The choice of an artist, and not just any artist but the epitome of the profession, as the speaker commenting on his own work imposes a self-referential reading on his speech. Accordingly, this utterance should be treated as a message on the nature of the Stuart genre, as well as an account of all creative work as such. Notably enough, the triumph of Cupid to be celebrated by the show was the newlyweds' union, and Vulcan's gift was devised to fulfil the same aim, that is, as he himself stated, to "grace the chaster triumph of her [i.e. Venus's] son" (Orgel 1969: 117). It follows that the divine figure denoted the creator of that, or indeed, any, masquing spectacle. In

more general terms, the production was to depict the typically Renaissance phenomenon of an artist acknowledging his authorship, and proudly parading his creation. Vulcan's speech, within which the acts of naming, describing and creating were shown to merge, attested to the semi-divine potential in this type of art.

Numerous cross-disciplinary references enclosed in the descriptions of stage pictures set these scenic representations in a much wider context than their own content would ever suggest. However, this was not the only way of increasing the scope of reference of the image. Some explicatory utterances could also function as veritable vehicles for moving in time, supplying their pictorial objects with the story of the past or that of the anticipated future. The declarative nature of the masque's verbal element accorded well with this kind of narrative focus. The essentially timeless structure of the stage picture was thus invested with temporal qualities. An interesting example of such temporally-oriented explication can be found in Chapman's *The memorable masque* (1613). The initial *tableau* of the production was accompanied by a clarifying speech presented by the figure of Plutus. Having given a short explanation concerning the symbolic significance of the work, the deity used it as a point of departure for the story of his first encounter with the goddess of Honour:

> In that rich temple, where Fortune fixed those her golden wings thou seest, and that rolling stone she used to tread upon, for sign she would never forsake this kingdom. There is adorned the worthy goddess Honour, the sweetness of whose voice, when I first heard her persuasions both to myself and the Virginian princes arrived here to do honour and homage to these heavenly nuptials, so most powerfully enamoured me that the fire of my love flew up to the sight of mine eyes, that have lighted within me the whole firmament of bounty, which may securely assure thee thy reward is certain   (Lindley 1995: 84).

A reference to that encounter, a past event not to have been presented in the actual entertainment, was needed to justify the god's intentions and to provide the hinge for the entire masque. This means that the explicating passages of the type analysed above could also apply to the general concept of the performance.

Apart from supplying information on a hypothetical past, some comments on the setting were also used to anticipate certain events which would actually be signalled at a later point in the production. In Townshend's *Albion's triumph* (1632), for instance, the view of "the forum of the city of Albipolis, and Albanactus triumphing, attended like a Roman emperor ... afar off [passing] in pomp" (Orgel – Strong 1973, 2: 455) was foretold by Mercury. Although his speech was explicitly directed at the goddess Alba, the whole audience was its implicit addressee:

From fair Albipolis shall soon proceed
A triumph: mighty as the man designed
To wear those bays, heroic as his mind,
Just as his actions, glorious as his reign,
And like his virtues, infinite in train.
Th'immortal swans, contending for his name,
Shall bear it singing to the House of Fame.
And though at distance, yet high Jove is pleased
Your labouring eyes shall with this sight be ceased

(Orgel – Strong 1973, 2: 454).

By describing what was not yet there, the messenger of Jove prepared the audience for the display of splendour and might that they were soon to see.

The example quoted above points to yet another significant feature of the masque's explicatory speeches: what these utterances often stressed was the close connection between the stage set and the figure. The spatial model built up by the Stuart masque functioned as a complex attribute of the figure, and this quality could sometimes find its reflection in language. It is not coincidental that most elements of the elaborate scenic constructions were assigned to gods or personified abstractions: what the audience saw on stage was identified as the bower of Flora, Jove's altar, the house of Night, Oberon's place, etc. Such attribution was possible only in the presence of the linguistic medium, which classified visual elements and specified their owners. Mercury's speech was precisely of that nature: it prepared the audience to interpret the manifestly pictorial scene of the triumph, which was actually modelled on the famous *Triumph of Julius Cesar* by Andrea Mantegna (Peacock 1995: 303), as an allegory of Albanactus's glorious reign and his heroic features. The explication served to ensure that the spectacular stage picture would not be taken as a mere procession of miraculous figures.[6] This kind of interpretation of the visual was not limited to the pictorially-oriented Caroline productions, for the Jacobean entertainments contained some analogous utterances making the audience perceive the setting as the figure's attribute. For instance, in *Prince Henry's barriers*, the Lady of the Lake dispelled any doubts concerning her identity as she told the audience that if "any yet should doubt, or might mistake / What nymph I am, behold the ample lake / Of which I am styled…" (Orgel 1969: 142). No other message on the relationship between figure and space could be more precise.

Not only were the masque's characters connected with the presented location

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[6] An account of such literal, and therefore false, perception was given by Publius, who raved at the memory of "Ceasar march[ing] captive kings, with their hands bound, and ladies with their arms a-cross, furious wild beasts, great giants, and little dwarfs, with lictors, and pictors, and a number of priests" (Orgel – Strong 1973, 2: 455).

on the ideological or allegorical level, but they also merged with it on the material plane. Just as figures posing in front of the perspective picture were to be treated as inherent parts of that painterly composition, so did language further glue them into the scenic *tableau*. For example, the masquers of Jonson's *Pan's anniversary* (1620), who appeared in the guise of Arcadians, fused with the wondrous view presented on stage. The merging of these two domains was reflected in the verbal description of the magnificently lit scene given by a Shepherd, who did not fail to mention "the best and bravest spirits of Arcadia, called together by the excellent Arcas ... yonder sitting about the fountain of light in consultation of what honors they may do the great Pan by increase of anniversary rites fitted to the music of his peace" (Orgel 1969: 308-309). An analogous quality was noticeable in Francis Beaumont's *The masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn* (1613), which contained an elaborate stage picture representing a camp placed on a hill, with Jupiter's altar standing between some pavilions richly decorated with armour. The scenery was accompanied by the following comment made by the figure of Iris:

> ... the Olympian games
> Which long have slept, at these wish'd nuptials
> He pleas'd to have renew'd, and all his knights
> Are gather'd hither, who within their tents
> Rest on this hill, upon whose rising head
> Behold Jove's altar, and his blessed priests
> Moving about it...
>
> (Spencer – Wells 1967: 139).

What this portion of the linguistic element confirmed was the material connection between the figures, both the knights and the priests, and the setting. Reading it, one gets the impression that the performers were actually significant building-blocks of the *tableau*. This impression must have been infinitely stronger for the audience assembled in the masquing hall, who could simultaneously see the scene and listen to the accompanying speech.

2. Comments on the signalling material

In most cases, the masque's explicatory speeches were contained in the world of fiction. Not only did they refer to fictitious space, but they were uttered by figures belonging to the realm of representation. In other words, what the audience saw on stage was just a set of signs invoking fiction and whatever explication they heard was given by some personages embedded in the fictional domain. However, in accordance with the self-referential inclination of the entire form,

some entertainments played with this convention, which tendency could also imprint itself on the descriptive verbal passages. For instance, the transition from the antimasque to the proper section of Jonson's *Neptune's triumph for the return of Albion* (1624) was marked by an exclamation of the Poet at the discovery of the first scenic *tableau*: "Well, now, expect the scene itself; it opens!" (Lindley 1995: 142). This short sentence is of particular interest, because it concerns the material substance of the stage set, from now on to be referred to as the signalling material, instead of the fictitious setting. To put it another way, the Poet commented on the material substance of the cluster of signs placed on the stage, and not on the fiction it denoted. By doing so, he abandoned the theatrical illusion and briefly entered the temporal dimension of the audience, taking on the part of a spectator. There was no other way to signal this broadened perception than to inscribe it into the linguistic element.

One of the reasons for the introduction of such remarks into the masque must have been the requirement of variety inherent in the form. The genre needed different modes of speech to interest the audience, in the same way that it needed some spectacular scene changes to amaze them. However, as with the shifts of scenes, which were something more than mere instruments of wonder, variation was never the exclusive aim of the comments on the material structure of the stage set. These utterances had a more significant function to perform: they were often used to convey some self-referential messages on the nature of the entire genre. For example, the quotation taken from *Neptune's triumph* points to one of the crucial organising principles of the Stuart masque, that is the abrupt discovery of its *tableaux*. A different manner of scenic revelation, in turn, was alluded to in Thomas Campion's *The Lord Hay's masque* (1607) when the figure of Night entered the stage with the following words: "Vanish, dark veils, let Night in glory shine / As she doth burn in rage" (Lindley 1995: 25). That paradoxical utterance, which called for the removal of darkness in order to enable the incarnation of darkness to display her shining splendour, might be interpreted as a direct reference to the signalling material used in the spectacle. The screening devices referred to were of course the curtains, whose removal intensified the glamorous quality of the following scene. Another essential element of the masque's stage set was mentioned in *The Haddington masque* when Venus asked the Graces to "[s]py ... his [i.e. Cupid's] footsteps on this green; / For here ... he late hath been / With divers of his brethren, lending light / From their best flames to gild a glorious night" (Orgel 1969: 109). The expression "on this green" relates to the green carpet customarily covering the dancing floor (Nicoll 1938: 35); and light adorning the celebration was a commonplace for all such entertainments.

At this point it might be worthwhile to concentrate on the status of the figures that were allowed to notice the material structure of signs. With this aim in

mind, let us analyse a complex self-referential utterance presented in *The memorable masque*, where Plutus reacted to the initial stage composition in the following way:

> Rocks? Nothing but rocks in these masquing devices? Is Invention so poor she must needs ever dwell amongst rocks? But it may worthily have chanced, being so often presented, that their vain custom is now become the necessary hand of heaven, transforming into rocks some stony-hearted ladies courted in former masques, for whose loves some of their repulsed servants have perished. Or perhaps some of my flinty-hearted usurers have been here metamorphosed, betwixt whom and ladies there is resemblance enough: ladies using to take interest, besides their principal, as much as usurers. See, it is also; and now is the time of restoring them to their natural shapes. It moves, opens. Excellent! This metamorphosis I intend to overhear   (Lindley 1995: 81).

There is a gently mocking twist to these words: parting rocks were indeed among the most popular devices used for scene transformation, so the deity had a "right" to be impatient. The ironic impact intensified when the rocks cleaved to show fickle Capriccio instead of some splendid view marking the beginning of the masque proper, which would normally have followed the device. Such reversal of the masquing practice frustrated Plutus, who complained of "no transformation, but an intrusion into [his] golden mines" (Lindley 1995: 81). These comments indicate that the god of riches, himself a part of the scenic artifice, was nevertheless aware of some major principles governing the masque, such as scene change or character transformation.

Even more strikingly, Plutus mentioned the "stony-hearted ladies courted in *former masques*" (Lindley 1995: 81, emphasis added). According to Lindley (1995: 239), this motif was an allusion to the last night's production of *The Lords' masque*. In this way the verbal element of the performance transcended the boundaries of a single entertainment, thus confirming the essentially cyclic nature of the Stuart shows.[7] The complex scheme of perception displayed by the deity was further accentuated by contrasting it with Capriccio's limited point of view. For this personified abstraction, the rocks were just an element of a purely fictitious surrounding, and he signalled no recognition whatsoever of the rules governing the show. The realms of fiction and reality thus confronted one another and intermingled on stage; all of which was verbally marked.

Regardless of whether it referred to the created world or concerned the material substance of the production, verbal explication seriously extended the context in which separate stage pictures functioned. At the same time, placed within the multimedia spectacle, the linguistic system provided additional space

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[7] For the discussion on the cyclic nature of courtly entertainments, see Limon (1990: 107-197).

for yet another reflection of the main theme. That is why the concepts invoked by figures or choruses commenting on space appear to have been situated at the very heart of the performance. However, all this richness of reference notwithstanding, there was yet another domain that such clarifying passages could focus on: it was the figure itself that frequently became the subject of linguistic explanation.

3. Explication of the figure

The figure, built up of a complex set of visual signs, has so far occupied a secondary place in this discussion. However, apart from being an integral, though mobile, constituent of the scenic *tableau*, the masque's figure was also a self-contained composition in its own right. It is enough to look at any figural design by Jones to see that its actual realisation would be by no means lacking in aesthetic impact. Still, as was the case with the entire stage picture, the visual opulence of such signs had to convey intellectual meaning. In order to achieve this aim, the performers were given allegorical dress, which was frequently a veritable compilation of ideas taken from various iconographic sources. The provenance of such designs is laboriously elucidated in Jonson's printed accounts of his masques; while the iconographic analysis of costume is a significant area of study in masque criticism.

Although such costumes were undoubtedly supposed to parade their inventors' erudition and intellectual sophistication, the sections of the linguistic material describing them appear to encompass fewer elements than the speeches concerning the signalled setting. They neither tackle issues such as time nor strive to underline the principles governing the genre. They are basically lists of attributes that were presented in the form of props or elements of dress, and, to use an observation by Meagher (1969: 47-48), "[c]onventional attributes do not necessarily suggest anything about the nature of the gods, though they serve to identify them." And indeed, the main function of those explicatory utterances was to facilitate the identification of characters. In *The masque of beauty* Januarius recognised Boreas by his "rude voice, that doth so hoarsely blow, / [his] hair, [his] beard, [his] wings o'er-hilled with snow, / [His] serpent feet..." (Orgel 1969: 62). In Jonson's *Love freed from ignorance and folly* (1611) Sphynx described Love as a deity "that awe[s] the gods above, / As their creatures here below, / With the sceptre call'd [his] bow; / And do all their forces bear / In the quiver that [he] wear[s]" (Spencer – Wells 1967: 79). In Shirley's *The triumph of peace* (1634), the figure of Eunomia was heralded as a deity "[i]n her celestial gaiety, / Crown'd with a wreath of stars to show / The evening glory in her brow" (Spencer – Wells 1967: 296).

A relatively early instance of this practice, and at the same time its unques-

tionable culmination, came with Jonson's *The masque of queens* (1609), which contained an entire catalogue of vices that were both presented visually and identified verbally during the show. The vices were incarnated in a group of hags, enumerated by their Dame as they entered the stage. Each personification was given a single attribute or feature that functioned as a name-card summarising its character. In a chain of negative concepts, there came Ignorance, "[k]nown by [her] scaly vesture", Suspicion, "[w]hose eyes do never sleep", Credulity, "[w]ho hath but one ear, and that always ope", "[t]wo-faced" Falsehood, Bitterness, "whose pores sweat gal", "flame-eyed" Rage, and many others (Lindley 1995: 38). The resultant structure, whose perception approximated the action of turning the pages of Cesare Ripa's *Iconology*, could be seen as a scenic adaptation of an iconographic manual.

At this stage it would be practically impossible to sever the two media. Although one of them, that is the word, had a subsidiary function, it nevertheless took over certain features of its visual object. This is to say that the linguistic element materialised on stage when confronted with its pictorial point of reference. In the concluding *tableau* of Jonson's *Chloridia* (1631), for instance, there appeared a figure holding a trumpet, who was placed on a sphere crowning a hill. The discovery of this allegorical personage was accompanied by her own words: "Rise, golden Fame, and give thy name a birth", followed by a line from the chorus: "From great and generous actions done on earth" (Lindley 1995: 153). What the audience could thus see, and hear, was literally the act of giving birth to a name on stage. Other names were also "born" at the same moment: Fame was accompanied by four other figures seated on the hill. These introduced themselves as "learned Poesy", "severe History", "Architecture, who will raise thee high", and "Sculpture, that can keep thee from to die" (Lindley 1995: 154). Notice the balance between the domains using the word as their medium (history, poetry) and those employing the image (architecture and sculpture). It was the ultimate aim of each Stuart entertainment to combine those elements harmoniously; and that aim was clearly achieved in *Chloridia*.

Despite the fact that its scope of reference was usually narrower than that of the explication concerning the setting, the figure's description was nevertheless a self-contained linguistic unit. Moreover, at times it did cease to be just a passive reflection of the visual. Meagher (1969: 47-48) observes that "[t]he understanding of Jonson's symbolic figures ... depends not upon their identification through conventional attributes but upon the way in which they are employed in the masques". The verbal explication, which was inseparably connected to those attributes, proved more operative when put in the context of the events shaping the entire masque. One of these was the situation of contention, where figures tried to verify their true identity in the presence of an impostor. For instance, the stage in Jonson's *A challenge at tilt* (1613-14) was taken by two Cupids, taking

the sides of the bride and the groom respectively, who engaged in a verbal struggle, both announcing themselves as the true Love. The Second Cupid, furious at his double, whom he treated as a mere fraud, appealed to the ladies in the auditorium:

> He tells my tale, he tells my tale, and pretends to my act. It was I that did this for the bride; I am the true Love, and both this figure and those arms are usurped by most unlawful power. Can you not perceive it? Do I not look liker a Cupid than he? Am I not more a child? Ladies, have none of you a picture of me in your bosom? Is the resemblance of love banished your breasts? Sure, they are these garments that estrange me to you! If I were naked, you would know me better
>
> (Orgel 1969: 199).

What we have here is a figure shaped in accordance with contemporary visual codes who actually refers to the audience's knowledge of these codes. He knows Cupid should be a child, and tries to appear more childlike than his opponent; he knows Cupid should be naked, and regrets being clothed. It is worth mentioning that at another point of the production one of the Cupids displayed an awareness of the whole set of visually-oriented metaphors connected with love, that is with himself, functioning in poetic diction. He used those rhetorical devices as he challenged his enemy, underlining his own influence on the bride: "Had I not lighted my torches in her eyes? Planted my mother's roses in her cheeks? Were not her eyebrows bent to the fashion of my bow? And her looks ready to be loosed thence, like my shafts? Had I not ripened kisses on her lips, fit for a Mercury to gather?" (Orgel 1969: 199). The strongly self-referential message phrased in this way might serve as a perfect example of the elaborate play with representative codes that the Stuart masque engaged in. Needless to say, at this point word and image were virtually inseparable. One translated into another, but it is impossible to say which was the object and which the outcome of this translation.

A verbal contention of unique intensity was included in Jonson's *Barriers at a marriage* (1606), a miniature entertainment functioning as a supplement to *Hymenaei*. Although devised to justify a spectacular mock tournament, this portion of the production was nevertheless based on a self-contained debate, which revolved around the notions of vision and allegory, and interweaved a complex explication into its resolution. The initial scenic discovery was analogous to the opening of *A challenge at tilt*: the spectacle commenced with the entry of two figures "so like attired as they could by no note be distinguished. The colour of their garments were blue, their socks white; they were crowned with wreaths of palm, and in their hands each of them sustained a palm bough" (Lindley 1995: 11). These figures, "after the mist was vanished, began to examine each other curiously with their eyes" (Lindley 1995: 11). The very behav-

iour of the two personifications, their looking at each other, seems to have been introduced into the scene to stress the importance of visual perception for this particular masque.[8] Indeed, the audience's initial reaction must have mirrored that of the figures; it is highly probable that they also "examined curiously with their eyes" the identical figures emerging from the sight-impeding mist enshrouding the stage. The characters went on to introduce themselves, but this time the linguistic signs proved useless for identifying the image, because both personifications claimed to be Truth. It was impossible to distinguish between the two, even though the audience had already been informed that one of these should be Opinion, who "[l]ike Truth her habit shows to sensual eyes" (Lindley 1995: 11).

What followed was a debate full of exempla strongly appealing to the sense of sight, in the course of which Truth advocated marriage, while Opinion urged virginity.[9] After these verbal oppositions came the martial ones when a mock fight was staged between two groups of masquers championing each figure. The carefully planned structure of that double battle ended in a visually-oriented resolution: the retransformed eternal Truth descended from the sky, ushered into the room by an angel. His introductory speech is worth quoting at length, as it is the most extensive figural explication to be met with in the Stuart masque. This seems to have well matched the figure whom Gordon (1975: 182) regards as "little more than an agglomeration of attributes":

> Upon her head she wears a crown of stars
> Through which her orient hair waves to her waist,
> By which believing mortals hold her fast,
> And in those golden cords are carried even,
> Till with her breath she blows them up to heaven.
> She wears a robe enchased with eagles' eyes
> To signify her sight in mysteries;
> Upon each shoulder sits a milk-white dove,
> And at her feet do witty serpents move;
> Her spacious arms do reach from east to west,
> And you may see her heart shine through her breast.
> Her right hand holds a sun with burning rays,
> Her left a curious bunch of golden keys,
> With which heaven gates she locketh and displays.
> A crystal mirror hangeth at her breast,
> By which men's consciences are searched and dressed;

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[8]   This was a masque in which "the theme of double representation [came] into the foreground ... implying the interchangeability of the mirror and the mirrored" (Grzegorzewska 1993: 225).

[9]   The printed text, where each utterance is preceded with the speaker's name, makes it clear which notion was championed by Truth, and which by Opinion. However, the audience of the actual performance lacked that kind of certainty: it was not until the final resolution that they learnt which stage figure was the real Truth.

> On her coach wheels Hypocrisy lies racked;
> And squint-eyed Slander, with Vainglory backed,
> Her bright eyes burn to dust, in which shines fate.
> An angel ushers her triumphal gait,
> Whilst with her finger fans of stars she twists
> And with them beats back Error, clad in mists.
> Eternal Unity behind her shines,
> That fire and water, earth and air combines.
> Her voice is like a trumpet, loud and shrill,
> Which bids all sounds in earth and heaven be still.
> And see! descended from her chariot now,
> In this *related* pomp she visits you
>
>   (Lindley 1995: 15-16, emphasis added).

If read in isolation, that might seem just an empty passage, with its aesthetic appeal seriously reduced by the sheer number of elements. However, such an explication proved particularly pertinent to the entertainment, whose main theme was representation. Uttered in the physical presence of its object, this self-reflexive section literally announced that it was a description, something to have just been *related* to the listeners. The divinely inspired clarity it brought about made it possible to expose Opinion. The negative personification suddenly found herself deprived of her costume, as foretold at some earlier point when Truth announced that she "shall strip thee [i.e. Opinion] to the heart, / And show how mere fantastical [she is]" (Lindley 1995: 11). The defeated impostor was defined by the angelic herald as "mere Opinion, / That in Truth's forced robe for Truth hath gone! / Her gaudy colours, pierced with many folds, / Show what uncertainties she ever holds" (Lindley 1995: 16). It should be stressed that even the sheer length of the two explanatory passages was calculated to indicate the winner: already in the printed version the huge mass of Truth's attributes literally crushes the short definition of Opinion, and this impression must have been infinitely stronger during the actual performance, whose audience could actually *hear* those speeches voiced on stage.

Forced to include a wide spectrum of explanatory passages in order to remain intelligible, the masque used this constraint to its own advantage, becoming an arena for the dialogue between the visual and the verbal system. That dialogue could be realised in a variety of ways, one of which was that to engage in an elaborate self-referential play with representative codes, which only strengthened the aesthetic and intellectual appeal of the form. Inevitably, this type of organisation entailed repetition: parallel messages were visually and linguistically transmitted within the boundaries of a single entertainment. Still, suffused as it was with those repetitive elements, the Stuart genre managed to avoid tiresome tautology. Having attempted to group all the miscellaneous types of explication used by the masque, this analysis has focused on individual ex-

amples taken from a number of productions. Within a single performance, how-ever, all these types of linguistic description were superimposed on one another to create an intricate structure of interconnected passages, where variety mani-fested itself most effectively to contribute to the overall kaleidoscopic nature of the genre.

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