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'Hail, reverend Structure!' Questioning Patriarchal Parenthood in the Aquatic Imagery of Grottoes in Court Masques

Abstract I: I masque *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* (Jonson, 1624), *Tethy's Festival* (Daniel, 1610), e *Love's Triumph through Callipolis* (Jonson, 1631) mettono in scena, in modi diversi, la rappresentazione del potere patriarcale nelle corti Stuart di Giacomo I e Carlo I, sia sul piano privato che su quello politico. A partire dall'analisi della rappresentazione di genere e genitorialità, questo saggio si propone di confrontare le immagini acquatiche di grotte manieriste che compaiono in questi tre spettacoli al fine di ricostruire la complessa ricezione, alla luce dei ruoli materni e paterni di Anna di Danimarca e Giacomo I, da parte di Carlo I, e di come essa ne abbia influenzato l'iconografia nei successivi spettacoli di corte.

Abstract II: Jonson's *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* (1624), Daniel's *Tethy's Festival* (1610), and Jonson's *Love's Triumph through Callipolis* (1631) explore the representation of royal private and political patriarchy within the Stuart courts of James I and Charles I. By questioning the representation of gender and parenthood, this paper aims at conjecturing the conflictual variety of audience-responses to the aquatic imagery of Mannerist garden grottoes at work in these shows in order to investigate whether the motherly agency of Queen Anna is really erased by James I's imagery of aquatic patriarchy or if it survives in Charles's mnemonic reception during his later performances on the masquing stage.

In 1603, James I Stuart was saluted by the English people not only as king, but also as the father of a royal dynasty. The new monarch applied a patriarchal model to both his reign and his family: by opposing his iconography to that of the previous 'virgin queen', in several speeches to Parliament James presented himself as the husband to "the whole Isle" and compared the king of a nation to a *parens patriae*, "the politique father of his people" (McIlwain 1918: 271; 307). However, James I confronted conflicting interests in matter of both parenthood with his wife, Anna of Denmark¹, and of foreign politics with his two sons: Henry, who prematurely died in 1613, and Charles, who would succeed his father in 1626².

Among Renaissance festivals, Stuart masques were a private form of court theatre

¹ Following C. McManus (2002: 1) and other scholars, the queen will be referred to as Anna, as she used to do herself, rather than by the English version of her name, Anne.

² For a biographical insight on the personal relationships at work within the royal family of James I, see Bergeron (1991).

organized for the king and a select audience and were characterised by rich stage settings, light, music, and dances. The Banqueting House in Whitehall was explicitly designed by architect Inigo Jones in order to introduce the perspective stage, an architectonic device that conveyed both symbolic and narrative functions because the king, sitting at the centre of the scene, was both the main spectator and the main spectacle of the show. The masque was usually structured into three main sections: an anti-masque, acted by professional actors; the proper masque, set in a more allegorical dimension and impersonated by masquers, that is to say, non professional dancers (usually members of the court or of the royal family itself); and the final revels. As a dramatic form, thus, the masque exploited the conflict between nature and art, a contrast that was resolved by the direct or fictionally evoked intervention of the king and was dissolved in the achievement of harmony in the final revels, during which audience and masquers mingled, coalescing reality and fiction. As a matter of fact, by actively taking part to the performance of masques, the monarch and the court engaged themselves in complex dynamics of negotiation and dialogue, that would have been otherwise unacceptable off the stage (Butler 2008: 4-5)³.

Water is a constant element in the representation of British national identity in Renaissance literature and, not surprisingly, English monarchs were often associated to or represented by means of aquatic allegories and mythologies⁴. Water symbolism and settings abound in court masques and, in particular, aquatic grottoes – important architectonic features of Renaissance gardens linked with the symbolism of water – appear in three shows hinged upon the representation of parenthood and power: Tethys's underwater cave in Samuel Daniel's *Tethys's Festival* (1610), the Palace of Oceanus in Ben Jonson's *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* (1624), and the fountain of Neptune and the Muses in Ben Jonson's *Love's Triumph through Callipolis* (1631)⁵. By questioning the representation of gender and parenthood, this essay aims at conjecturing the conflictual variety of audience-responses to the aquatic iconography of Mannerist garden grottoes at work in these shows in order to investigate whether the motherly agency of Queen Anna, as outlined in *Tethys Festival* and curiously resumed and reversed in *Neptune's Triumph for the return of Albion*, is really erased by James I's imagery of aquatic patriarchy or if it survives in Charles's mnemonic reception during his later performance of *Love's Triumph through Callipolis*.

In 1624, Ben Jonson's *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* was commissioned by James I in order to celebrate the intended betrothal of Prince Charles to the Spanish Infanta Maria Anna, the daughter of Philip III of Spain. This political match was pursued by James

³ On Stuart court masques, see, among others, Gordon (1975); Orgel (1975); Strong (1984); Lindley (1984); Ravelhofer (2006); Butler (2008); Knowles (2015).

⁴ On general concepts of national identity in early modern Britain, see, among others: Helgeson (2002); Mceachern (1996); Willi (1997); Gordon & Klein (2001); Backer & Maley (2002); Brocklehurst & Philips (2004); Baratta & Equestri (2016). Kevin Curran offers a useful overview on further bibliography on James I's policy of union of England and Scotland (2009: 7); for a more detailed investigation on aquatic themes linked with national identity in early modern English literature, see, among others: Herendeen (1990); Schama (1995); Klein (2002); Ackroyd (2007).

⁵ Jonson (1969); Daniel (1995). Henceforth, quotes from the masques will be referred to by a short title of the show and number of the page of the edition included in the final bibliography.

I by means of long and prudent negotiations that Charles tried to cut short by embarking on a seven-months mission to Spain, in order to accelerate the negotiation. Despite the failure of the expedition, the masque was supposed to be danced by the prince himself and was adjusted to the circumstances and rehearsed until the very last moment. However, it was eventually cancelled, officially due to diplomatic issues: in this way, the tensions between father and son were resolved by withholding the ambiguous plurality of voices that would have potentially emerged from the show (Lindely 1995: 255-256; Butler 2008: 266). The masque survived, circulated as a pamphlet, and in 1625 was re-elaborated into *The Fortunate Isles and their Union*: although resuming the stage settings and the same verses of its earlier version, the whole fable of the masque was updated to the evolved political situation. The aquatic iconology of both versions illustrates Neptune's pride on and responsibility over Albion's safe homecoming and promulgates a hierarchical and patriarchal representation of the court of James I.

The opening proscenium arch, described in the written record of the masque, celebrates Neptune as homeward guide (*Neptuno reduci*) and as a second Jupiter (*secundo Iove*): "All that is discovered of a scene are two erected pillars dedicated to Neptune, with this inscription upon the one, NEP. RED.; on the other, SEC. IOV" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 409). The association between the king and Neptune, defined as "mighty" over a "large command of waters and of isles" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 412), recalls an Elizabethan iconography of maritime power (Orgel 1971: 75)⁶. However, in Jonson's attempt to negotiate with the representation of James's pacifism, Neptune is depicted "Not as the lord and sovereign of the seas / But chief in the art of riding" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 412-413). For this masque, Jonson chooses a Platonic myth, according to which Neptune is the inventor and tamer of the horse, a variant certainly closer to James's scholarly and Solomonic persona rather than to Elizabeth I's imagery of nautical power (Orgel 1971: 67-77). Jonson's retroactive presentation of history pictures Neptune and Albion as cooperative sharers of the intentions and aims behind the enterprise: "The mighty Neptune [...] / late did please / To send his Albion forth, [...] / Upon discovery" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 412-413). However, their purposes are acutely skirted by being defined as "best known to themselves" (Butler 2008: 267) and the official theme of the masque shifts from the actual perils of Albion's homeward journey to his rescue, "His great commands being done / And he desirous to review his son / He doth dispatch a floating isle from hence", and to the celebration of his safe return by focusing on "What the triumphs are, the feast, the sport / And proud solemnities of Neptune's courts" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 413) – a meta-literary description of the Banqueting House itself, later allegorised as the 'Palace of Oceanus'. After the revels, the masque ends with a representation of the fleet, celebrated as Neptune's compact instrument of peace and richness: "ready to go or come

⁶ In his personal marginal notes, Jonson points at money dating from the empires of Vespasian and Hadrian, along with Statius, as his sources for these attributes of Neptune: "In the money of Vespasian and Hadrian we find this put for *Neptuno Reduci* [to Neptune the guide home], under *Games in Honor of Neptune, Six Holidays Consacrated to Neptune*. SEC. IOV. That is, *Secundo Iovi* for so Neptune is called by Statius in *Achilleis* I. [48-9], 'the second Jupiter': 'and as for the rest, clinging to the right hand of the second Jupiter [...], as Pluto is called the third Jupiter" Orgel (1969: 554).

/ Or fetch the riches of the ocean home / So to secure him both in peace and wars" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 423). By asserting that Albion "knows the compass and the card" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 423), the text hints at Charles's ability and pleasure in navigation, but it simultaneously tames his policy of naval intervention against Spain, since the fiction of the masque compares his rescue to mythical and quasi-divine antecedents (Leucothea, Arion, Castor and Pollux), more linked with Neptune's will and command over the oceans rather than with Albion's actual maritime abilities (Lindley 1995: 258).

Neptune's Triumphs for the Return of Albion is generally praised for Jonson's ability to overlook the negative contingency of the mission's failure by finding a way to develop a commendation of the court and of James's will (Orgel 1975: 71; 77; Butler, 2008: 265). In the present analysis, however, I would like to focus on the ideal underwater environment of the 'Palace of Oceanus' and on its architecture, an elaborate "unitary perspective set" designed by Inigo Jones (Peacock 2006: 86), described as a "reverend structure", whose splendour, mirror of Neptune's magnificence, is boasted to the eyes of the audience and praised for "being able all the gods to feast" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 422)⁷. In 1623, James had ordered architect Isaac de Caus to redecorate his Privy Cellar, which lay below the Banqueting House, with maritime features according to the fashion of Mannerist grottoes: according to Roy Strong, the new appearance of the king's rooms would have provided the source for Jones' stage design. A surviving example of what the grotto in the Privy Cellar must have looked like can be observed today in the basement cellar built by Isaac de Caus at Woburn for Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford, sometimes before 1627 (Strong 1979: 139-140)⁸. Usually placed at the centre of Renaissance gardens, grottoes could take the shape of both fountains and proper rooms, and were aquatic symbols of fertility which reunited opposites, since, by imitating nature, they were decorated with real and fabricated minerals and shellfish in order to reproduce an aquatic environment on land. As a matter of fact, the cave was opposed to the masculine architectonic and natural element of the mountain and, in classical mythology, it was considered as the dwelling of river and sea nymphs, mythological figures that performed educational roles during important stages of transformation of human life: birth, youth, marriage, motherhood, and death. In the Renaissance, the symbolism of grottoes also overlapped with the classical and Christian tradition of the *fons sapientiae*, further strengthening its meanings linked with both fertility and knowledge. Thus, by entering a cave in the middle of an initiation journey, the traveller symbolically died and was re-born to a new life, ready to complete the second half of the circular pattern through the garden⁹.

In 1610, Queen Anna had appeared as Tethys in an aquatic grotto in Samuel Daniel's *Tethys Festival*, a masque she had commissioned and performed at Whitehall to celebrate the

⁷ A reproduction of Jones's drawing for the House of Oceanus can be found in Orgel & Strong (1972: 378).

⁸ Pictures of the grotto at Woburn Abbey can be seen here: <http://thespasdirectory.com/images/bruce/248pic10.jpg>; <https://media-cdn.tripadvisor.com/media/photo-s/0f/46/fb/fd/the-grotto-at-woburn.jpg>.

⁹ On hydraulic engineering in Renaissance mannerist gardens, and grottoes in particular, see, among others: Bachelard (1942); Guénon, (1962); Fagiolo (1981); Cosgrove & Petts (1990); Medri & Ballerini (1998); Fagiolo & Giusti (2001); Cazzato *et al.* (2001); Morgan (2007); Calzona & Lamberini (2010). On the same tradition in early modern England and English literature, see in particular: Macdougall & Miller (1977); Strong (1979); Romero Allué (2006); Lees- Jeffries (2007).

Creation of Prince Henry Stuart as Prince of Wales. In the masque, Tethys appeared with her nymphs – including her daughter, Princess Elizabeth Stuart, as the nymph of the Thames – in an underwater cave, “made of modern architecture in regard of room” (*Tethys Festival*: 60), divided into five niches decorated with precious stones, minerals, and seaweeds, whose colours were refracted by artificial lights and characterised by the visual and aural dimension of real and fabricated water running through the many fountains within the cave:

On the top of this was a round globe of gold, full of holes, *out of which issued abundance of water, some falling into the receipt below, some into the ovall vase borne up by the Dolphins; and indeed there was no place in this great aquatick throne that was not filled with the sprinkling of these two naturall-seeming waters.* The neeces wherein the Ladies sate were foure, with pillasters of gold mingled with rustick stones, shewing like a minerall to make it more rocke, and cavern- like, varying from that of Tethys throne. [...] On the rustick frontispice lay two great figures in rileve, which seemed to beare up a garland of seaweeds, to which from two antick candlesticks which stood over the pillasters, were hanging labells of gold [...]. Aboue this were three great Cherubines heads *spouting water into the bowle* [...]. The rest of the ornaments consisted of maske-heads *spouting water into the bow* (*Tethy's Festival*: 60-61. My italics).

Furthermore, Tethys's scene is introduced by Zephyrus, impersonated by Prince Charles, then aged nine, as the wind of spring and husband to Flora, a symbol of youth and air: an element which, along with water, usually ran musical automata. Although no draft of this particular scenery survives, Roy Strong connects the underwater cave richly described in *Tethys' Festival* to the octagonal fountain – the typical architectural shape of every baptismal font – that represents Mount Parnassus designed by Isaac de Caus's brother, Salomon, at Somerset House for Queen Anna (Strong 1979: 89)¹⁰. Both contexts allude to the queen's patronage of the arts, a further form of motherhood, and transpose the queen's identity into the physical space of the king, celebrated in the masque. The cave resonates with the symbolism of the maternal womb, where Tethys, mother of the rivers, and Anna, whose presence was denied during Henry's baptism in Scotland in 1597, symbolically deliver Henry's new life as heir to the throne (Trevisan 2011:158-174). The role of Tethys further associated Anna with Queen Elizabeth as an aquatic goddess (Berry and J. E. Archer 2001: 120-121), but, compared to the virgin queen, Anna's role of mother endowed her with a real educational force to create an heir to the throne (Leeds Barroll 2001: 1269; Butler 2008: 134; Guardini 2016: 96)¹¹. At this point, it is worth recalling that one of the bathrooms in the Privy Gallery at Whitehall was given the aspect of a grotto during the reign of Elizabeth I (Thurley 1999: 65; 88): the evidence of such an architectonic continuity testifies to the legacy of the memory of a recognisable iconography, linked first with Queen Elizabeth; and then with Queen Anna, but also with James's newly decorated Privy Cellar and the masque's stage design of the 'House of Oceanus'. Tethys/

¹⁰ A reproduction of Caus' engraving can be seen at the following link: <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/ef/ce/73/efce735a81cb96b3253694d3caa1c493.gif>.

¹¹ On women and water in Renaissance theatre see also Kern Paster (1995: 23-63).

Anna's grotto and Neptune/James' House of Oceanus resume the imagery linked with Elizabeth I/Cynthia, queen of the Ocean, from two different but simultaneously ambivalent points of view. Elizabeth I's female imagery of motherhood and of alchemical and artistic delivery, implicit in her private grotto and predominant in the womb-like and baptismal dimension of *Tethys Festival*, is transformed into a celebration of patriarchy in *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion*. In the light of this iconographic correspondence, it can be suggested that, since he could not allow himself to erase the imagery linked with Elizabeth I from the memory and the language of his court, James I wanted to legitimise his place on the throne of England by undertaking a metamorphosis from Cynthia to Neptune. At the same time, as a parental and educational figure to his son and heir to the throne, the king also needed to resume Anna's maternal dimension, derived from an Elizabethan iconographic tradition, in order to take on the double roles of father and mother. The same aquatic grotto re-created in the real palace of Whitehall and in the fictional world of masques delivers an ambiguous and complex multitude of symbolisms and readings that cannot be put into a unique and unalterable perspective, but rather changes according to the point of view from which it is observed.

Until 1625 James was never explicitly associated in masques with aquatic divinities, but rather to the Sun of a separate world, while Anna, on the contrary, was more often linked with different aquatic goddesses¹². Since Anna, when still alive, had opposed the idea of Charles marrying so young, but saw with favour a Catholic match (Bergeron 1991: 139; Leeds Barroll 2001: 168), it can be further suggested that in *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* her memory is not just erased or ignored, but symbolically absorbed into James's self-fashioning. Contrary to Anna, James never danced in masques, and *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* can be considered as the first and last show that most insistently addressed James I by means of such a defined aquatic iconography, as if he were one of the masquers on the stage. The water symbolism present in Stuart early masques is generally read in terms of James's appropriation of Elizabethan imagery, but I think that it is possible to assert that in this particular scene the House of Oceanus works as a fictional underwater picture of Whitehall, associated with a garden-grotto, where Neptune replaces Tethys as much as James replaced Anna in the aesthetic process of parental, and in particular maternal, self-affirmation on the masquing stage. Although not estranged from hermetic and natural philosophy, why would James adopt an iconography that in 1625, when Anna was already dead, could resonate with such ambiguously motherly and female dimensions to the eyes of Charles, in a masque that was supposed to overshadow the conflict between father and son? Did James need or wanted to resume a mother-like iconography in order to seek alliance with Charles rather than just impose his patriarchal model? And what could have been Charles's mnemonic response to his previous role as a child on the masquing

¹² Queen Anna was a river nymph in Ben Jonson's *Masque of Backness* (1605) and *Masque of Beauty* (1608): a coloured picture of a costume designed by Inigo Jones for this role can be found in Orgel & Strong (1972: xv). Queen Anna impersonated Bel-Anna, the Queen of the Ocean, a character created by Ben Jonson for her in *The Masque of Queens* (1609). A drawing by Jones of a headdress for this character is reproduced in Orgel & Strong (1972: 151). No sketches for costumes of Tethys survive for Samuel Daniel's *Tethys Festival* (1610), although Orgel and Strong identify a drawing that possibly reproduces a headdress (1972: 198).

stage with his mother? These questions challenge Grahams's reading of Jacobean masques as lacking "the language of paternal love" (2001: 394), and, albeit destined to remain unanswered from a historical point of view, the only fact of asking them uncovers alternative, and somewhat cooperative narratives that would otherwise be silenced.

Interestingly, in Ben Jonson's *Love's Triumph through Callipolis*, the first masque of the Caroline reign performed in 1631, the parade of Heroic Love through the streets of Callipolis – a fictional rendition of Charles's programme of aesthetic and moral renovation of London – culminates in a sea-triumph, "upon the sight of a work of Neptune's, being a hollow rock filling part of the sea-prospect, whereon the muses sit" (*Love's Triumph*: 459). The description alludes to the traditional iconography of Mount Parnassus, and the fact that the rock is explicitly described as "hollow" seemingly identifies it with a fabricated mannerist grotto, once again transposed to a maritime setting. Since, according to myth, Neptune is the father of Pegasus, from whose hoof Mount Parnassus's main spring originates, the association between the maritime god and the Muses is not uncommon in Renaissance gardens and fountains, where he often substitutes Apollo and represents "the source from which the muses emerge at the feet of the ruler" (Metzger 2013: 588-589). A fountain representing the same subject is present in the *Hortus Palatinus*, the garden designed by Salomon de Caus at Heidelberg, where in 1613 he followed Princess Elizabeth Stuart, James I's daughter and Charles's sister, after her marriage to the Elector Palatine, Friederich of the Rhine. In particular, Metzger analyses the fountain of Neptune and Mount Parnassus, in the light of the association between the (absent) statue of Apollo and Friederich V, where, as the scholar suggests, the maritime god does not properly substitute Apollo in such an architectonic *ensemble*, since he is in his turn replaced by the real presence of the Elector Palatine (Metzger 2013: 589). Likewise, in *Love's Triumph through Callipolis*, the Muses, presented by Neptune, emerge at the feet of Heroic Love/Charles, who, like Friederich V in his *Hortus Palatinus*, can be further identified with the otherwise absent Apollo. In 1631, Neptune as a benevolent and protecting figure could also remind Charles of his father James, who was last addressed as the maritime god linked with Pegasus only five years earlier in a masque danced by the very prince. However, as already said, the iconography of Neptune linked with the muses first appeared, although obliquely reversed, in *Tethys' Festival*. In Daniel's masque Tethys emerges from her octagonal fountain, whose architecture is based on Salomon de Caus's fountain of Mount Parnassus for the garden in Somerset House. Thus, in this Caroline masque, although Tethys is not explicitly resumed, it seems to be Queen Anna's iconography, rather than James's, to be re-elaborated upon the imagery of Neptune as a tribute to Charles's patronage of the arts. Or it can be possibly further argued that the iconographies of both James and Anna are combined in the same imagery.

Mannerist grottoes staged in court masques somewhat testify to the amphibious co-existence, typical of the Seventeenth century, of modern science and natural philosophy, respectively based on the cooperative communication of knowledge and secrecy, as exemplified by Francis Bacon's fable *The New Atlantis* (Romero Allué 2003: 97-120)¹³. As a matter

¹³ "Contemporary critics, still rooted in a post-Romantic perspective, have regarded Bacon, the founder of modern science in England, as a sort of second Cain, as the responsible for the moral decline of European

of fact, as reproductions of artificial landscapes, grottoes testify to the holistic and cooperative attitude of modern science, since the Jacobean Mannerist garden was “a walled enclosure within which nature tamed by art is made to fulfil the wildest of Mannerist fantasies, above all by means of the new hydraulics” (Strong 1979: 134; 136). Likewise, masques not only transposed the court onto an allegorical level, but actually moulded it and re-created it anew, and the exclusiveness and privacy of their performances somewhat mirrored the secrecy of Hermeticism. In the fictional dimension of court festivals, man gains all the power and control over nature in an ideal and idealised world:

The world of the court fête is an ideal one in which nature, ordered and controlled, has all dangerous potentialities removed. In the court festival, the Renaissance belief in man’s ability to control his own destiny and harness the natural resource of the universe find their most extreme assertion. In their astounding transformations, which defeat magic, defy time and gravity, evoke and dispel the seasons, banish darkness and summon light, draw down even the very influences of the stars from the heavens, they celebrate man’s total comprehension of the laws of nature. The Renaissance court fête in its fullness of artistic creation was a ritual in which society affirmed its wisdom and asserted its control over the world and its destiny (Strong 1984: 40-41).

Neptune’s Triumph for the Return of Albion, and, even more so, its later alternative re-elaboration as *The Fortunate Isles and their Union*, represented a one-way father-son relationship, transposing the Stuart court – and, by extension, the whole reign – onto a mythological aquatic landscape where water’s symbolism is forced to allude to the masculine features of fatherhood and patriarchy. Notwithstanding, the setting of the “Palace of Oceanus” also ambiguously evoked the feminine, womb-like, motherly, and esoteric iconography of Tethy’s underwater cave, outbound to birth, knowledge, and discovery, as a tool of empowerment for Charles rather than for James. Moreover, the iconographic memory of Queen Anna’s aquatic symbolism of motherhood and patronage of the arts survived in Charles’ later performances on the masquing stage. In particular, the aquatic grotto appearing in *Love’s Triumph through Callipolis* seems to reunite opposites and, by coalescing the masculine and feminine dimensions of James and Anna, king and queen, father and mother, power and art, nature and culture, it seems to overcome, rather than stress these polarities.

It has been observed that masques generated, rather than pictured, contents, and that by including the audience in the revels, masques belonged to ritual rather than to theatre (Limon 1990: 64; 89)¹⁴. In these terms, the coexistence of both dramatic and ritual dimen-

society and as the killer of spiritualism. [...] But Cain, besides being the first killer and the first *homo faber* – the first technological man – was also a farmer and gardener. Closely connected with Cain, Bacon’s works display an interesting combination of science and nature, chemistry and agriculture, new experimental method and hermetic tradition, modern technology and traditional philosophy, science and religion, secrecy and divulgement, individualism and partnership: the New Atlantis, an organized scientific community placed in an ideal island, solves and reunites the whole series of contraries.” (Romero Allué 2003: 197). For a comparison between Renaissance gardens and Stuart masques, see also Guardini (2017 – forthcoming).

¹⁴ “Ritual, unlike theatre, does not distinguish between audience and performers. Instead, there is a congregation whose leaders may be priests, party officials, or other religious or secular ritual specialists, but

sions in masques relied almost exclusively on the active agency of the audience, as Butler highlights by stressing the role that spectators had in both detecting and interpreting the meaning of the performance, as well as the ritual dimension of court behaviour (Butler 2008: 4). In a study on the original readership of masques, Lauren Shohet explicitly advocates for the necessity of looking at these shows also from the point of view of the audience, and, by quoting Roger Chartier's ideas on the composite mechanism of conventions and perceptions in the process of the readership's apprehension of contents¹⁵, she invites us to "move beyond what masque producers may have intended of their masques to also include what receivers can make of them" (Shohet 2011: 8). According to Orgel, it was the power of the audience that fully gave meaning to court shows: "whether the pageant constituted celebration or satire lay ultimately not in the power of the actor or the intention of the inventor, but in the eye and mind of the beholder" (1985: 120). In the light of the determining role of the audience, it can be further asserted that, like the religious emblematic tradition of the seventeenth-century, masques performed a strong mnemonic and didactic, or better to say, persuasive function by means of visual images¹⁶.

When introducing her theories and ideas on a "partnership model" as opposed to a "dominant model" as a tool to re-imagine and re-shape society, the social scientist Riane Eisler observes that "no society orients completely to one or the other of these models", but that hierarchies can be defined in terms of a dominator's "power over" subjects as oppose to a community's reciprocal "empowerment", depending on how much one model prevails on the other (Eisler 2003: 22; 29). In these terms, Charles' reception and personal synthesis of the imagery and symbolisms of grottoes during all his life on the masquing stage can be read as an example of his unconscious and somewhat pioneering proto-advocating the practice of a partnership model, according to which "the recognition of autonomy and difference, together with the equal status amongst sexes, is the premise for their interwoven evolution: a polarity is transformed and nourished by the connections and communications occurring with the other polarity" (Riem Natale & Albarea 2003: 10)¹⁷.

Susan Bennett insists on the primary role of audience and readership in theatre, both in performance and print, by arguing that "in the theatre every reader is involved in the making of the play" and that "no two theatrical performances can ever be the same precisely because of this audience involvement" (Bennett 2002: 21). The same ideas can be applied to masques, especially because of the occasional and unique nature of their performance, even though it is almost impossible to retrieve the whole of their multimedia dimension today, since only little textual evidence (some manuscripts, printed editions, music sheets,

all share formally and substantially the same set of beliefs and accept the same system of practices, the same set of rituals or liturgical actions. A congregation is there to affirm the theological or cosmological order, explicit or implicit, which all hold in common, to actualize it periodically for themselves and inculcate the basic tenets of that order into their younger members, often in graded series of life-crisis rituals" (Turner 1982: 112).

¹⁵ See Chartier (1995).

¹⁶ On memory and persuasion in emblematic tradition, see: Innocenti (1983); for an explicit investigation on the relationship between the masque as a dramatic form and emblems, see also: Limon (1990: 52-91).

¹⁷ See Eisler (1987; 1996; 2000).

and stage designs) survives. Lauren Shohet suggests that the study of how these texts were received in their historical contemporary context, both by audiences in performance and by readers in print, “reveals masques working in a diffuse and complex nexus of elite and quasi-public culture” (Shohet 2011: 10). By uncovering the complexity of political and cultural categories that underlie court masques, we – Shohet insists – “can draw together the scrupulous contextual research we already are practising with a perhaps less verifiable, but in the end equally important, notion of reception as a locus – a place situated in history, but not completely or reductively determined by history – where meanings are made” (Shohet 2011: 10). Therefore, whereas the response of the original audience of masques (i.e. Charles) can only be conjectured by retrieving the complexity of the aquatic imagery performed in the performances analysed above, we, as the contemporary audience of these texts, can also apply a partnership model, meant as “the intention [...] to contribute to the building of new cohesive contexts in which diversity is fundamental to the creation of another history” (Riem Natale & Albarea 2003: 9).

It can be observed that the qualities of adapting, moulding, and filling shapes that are peculiar of water work on both physical and allegorical levels: as much as a patriarchal system will always try to impose its model of power to any iconography, contemporary audience – and readers – of masques should always adopt the plurality of points of view of their original performers and receivers in order to retrieve their fully aesthetic and cultural value as works of art (both verbal and visual), and, at the same time, enable masques to keep generating multiple, dialectic, often conflicting, and possibly new, narratives that would otherwise be silenced.

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