

## IX

### The Hermaphrodite King:

#### Polysemy and the failure of unity in William Davenant and Inigo Jones' *Salmacida*

#### *Spolia.*

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*This article interrogates the presentation of monarchy in Salmacida Spolia, a court masque staged during the escalating political turmoil that culminated in the execution of Charles I. By approaching the work through both William Davenant's script and accompanying commentary and through Inigo Jones' scenic and costume designs, the relationship between textual and visual signification will be examined, establishing that semiotic instability discursively challenged and undermined aspects of the Caroline regime, rather than bolstering monolithic royalism. The resultant complexity in signification allowed contemporary spectators to renew their hermeneutical approach - an emancipatory process at odds with the putative pro-monocracy perspective of the work.*

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A king is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions  
and gestures, all the people gazingly doe behold.<sup>1</sup>

**D**espite the extravagances lavished upon Caroline court masques, and the remarkably select number of people permitted to participate in them, the opening night of *Salmacida Spolia* was not sufficiently tempting to lure Robert Reade to court. 'The mask was performed last Tuesday night', he wrote to his cousin Thomas Windebank three days after the event, 'myself being so wise as not to see it. They say it was very good, but I believe the disorder was never so great at any'.<sup>2</sup> Freshly

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<sup>1</sup> James I, *Basilikon Doron*, *Stoics.com* (Vancouver: 2015) <[www.stoics.com/basilikon\\_doron.html](http://www.stoics.com/basilikon_doron.html)> [accessed 20 Jan 2018].

<sup>2</sup> Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage Plays and Playwrights* Vol. 3. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.213.

devised by the talents of poet laureate, William Davenant, and the eminent polymath, Inigo Jones, the masque had premiered on the 21<sup>st</sup> January 1640 in the Palace of Whitehall's Masquing House, a purpose-built *salles des fêtes*, hastily erected in a courtyard in 1637 as a temporary alternative to the Banqueting House,<sup>3</sup> where the recently painted Rubens ceiling was in danger of irreparable damage from the smoke and condensing perspiration of the assembled court.<sup>4</sup> Reade's reluctance to attend, and his confided suspicions of turbulence in his absence, signals the political turmoil at the highest level of British government. Charles I's continued insistence on personal rule without recourse to Parliament was proving an increasingly contentious policy – especially in the face of the rising financial and diplomatic crisis, resulting from his defeat in the first Bishop's War. As the threat of dissent mounted, Charles needed to validate his authority as divinely anointed ruler. With Henrietta Maria by his side, he assumed the starring role in Davenant and Jones' latest enterprise, reasserting himself as sovereign redeemer and benevolent king whose love and virtues could unite and pacify his people. Parties known to harbour anti-royalist ideologies were deliberately cast as masquers in an active demonstration of the king's peace.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the attempt to position the king as a munificent source of harmony, symbolically bolstering royal authority, failed. Performed only twice, *Salmacida Spolia* was to be the last court masque. Nine years later almost to the day, Charles I was publicly executed on a scaffold erected metres away from where his Masquing House had stood – a violent end to seven years of bloody Civil War.

All court masques existed 'at the point of intersection between politics and the arts'.<sup>6</sup> Ostensibly spectacular entertainments with a specific political message, they formed part of the ritual of government itself, encompassing both the physical and conceptual dimensions of the court. In performance, they were enacted within the space of government – Whitehall – by and for powerful members of the ruling class. Of all the court masques, none was staged at such a time of political volatility as *Salmacida Spolia*, and the piece has received significant scholastic attention from those seeking to understand the events that led up to Charles I's execution. Martin Butler has contributed extensively to this body of research, admirably deposing the popular conception of the court masque as nonsense entertainment to demonstrate that the genre was a thriving political discourse. He concludes, however, that 'Davenant [...] use[d] *Salmacida Spolia* to articulate the need for a loving accord between king and people and to situate the king in postures of humility and patience', claiming

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong, *Inigo Jones: the theatre of the Stuart court, including the complete designs for productions at court for the most part in the collection of the Duke of Devonshire*, 2 vols (London: Sotheby Par Bernet, 1973), I, p.80.

<sup>4</sup> John Orrell, *The theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.149; Inigo Jones designed and oversaw the building of the Masquing House himself.

<sup>5</sup> David Lindley, "Explanatory Notes to *Salmacida Spolia*" in *Court Masques: Jacobean and Caroline Entertainments 1605-1640*, ed. by idem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.269-271 (p.269).

<sup>6</sup> Martin Butler, "Reform or reverence? The politics of the Caroline masque" in *Theatre and Government Under the Early Stuarts*, ed. by J.R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.118-153 (p.118).

that ‘masque-poets’ failed to realise the full political power of the masque by allowing themselves to be ‘constrained by the governing imperative [...] to dispel criticism’ of the king.<sup>7</sup> He is remiss in confining analysis to Davenant’s contribution. *Salmacida Spolia*, as all court masques, cannot be understood by the text in isolation.

This paper will interrogate both the visual and textual presentation of the king in *Salmacida Spolia*, establishing that, rather than being a stable locus encoded with conventional qualities of sovereignty, he exists as a contradictory and complex cipher, signalled here as the ‘king-character’. As this cipher attempts to straddle the intersecting binaries of the classical and the contemporary and the conceptual and the actual, semiotic instability begins to mount, creating a rupture that, although allowing a regenerative hermeneutical approach, is fundamentally incongruous to the putative ideological purpose of the court masque as a vehicle to ‘validate the symbolic authority of the monarch’.<sup>8</sup> The artefacts evaluated are those posterity bequeaths: the pen and brown ink sketches of Inigo Jones,<sup>9</sup> and the printed copy of the script with accompanying explanatory notes and description by Davenant, circulated in conjunction with the performance in 1640.

It is acknowledged that this triumvirate of sources – Jones’ surviving designs, Davenant’s lyrics and words, as performed, and Davenant’s accompanying description – still omit crucial factors that would effect signification in performance: intonation of speech; the idiosyncrasies of the individual masquer in voice or shape; the instrumentation and orchestration of the music, and the acoustics within the Masquing House itself. While a precise comprehension of such semiotic complexities can no longer be understood, a patchwork of signifiers – and how those signifiers might interact with one another – can still be discerned, and usefully analysed.

Fundamental to the court masque is the conceptual and physical participation of the court including, in the case of *Salmacida Spolia*, the king, the ‘fulcrum upon which the action of the masque is turned.’<sup>10</sup> The piece sees Charles adopt the name and guise of the formidable Philogenes, who is first ‘discovered sitting in the Throne of Honour, his Majesty highest in a seat of gold [...] adorned with palm trees, between which stood statues of the ancient heroes’.<sup>11</sup> Philogenes has secured his throne through ‘strength of virtues’,<sup>12</sup> his prowess for overcoming adversity represented both topologically by

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<sup>7</sup> Butler, pp.121, 151.

<sup>8</sup> David Lindley, ‘The Politics of Music in the Masque’ in *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*, ed. by David Bevington and Peter Holbrook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.273-296 (p.292).

<sup>9</sup> Inherited by his assistant, John Webb, and now in the custody of the Duke of Devonshire’s collection.

<sup>10</sup> David Lindley, ‘Introduction’ in *Court Masques: Jacobean and Caroline Entertainments 1605-1640* ed. by idem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.ix-xvii (p.x).

<sup>11</sup> William Davenant, *Salmacida Spolia*, in *Court Masques, Jacobean and Caroline Entertainments 1605-1640* ed. by David Lindley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.200-213 (p.209, ll.307-310).

<sup>12</sup> Davenant, p.209, ll.337.

the ‘craggy rocks and inaccessible mountains’ of the mountain pass scene,<sup>13</sup> ‘the difficult way which heroes are to pass’,<sup>14</sup> and materially by the treasures that form his golden throne: ‘under parts on each side lay captives bound in several postures, lying on trophies of armours, shields, and antique weapons’.<sup>15</sup> His worthiness to occupy a position within a symbolic order of classical heroes and kings is asserted through the apparent ease with which he accesses and occupies the space of divinely anointed victor, and the chorus lavish admiration upon him, beseeching him to ‘Accept our wonder and enjoy our praise!’<sup>16</sup> The conflation of the masquer-king Charles and the fictional-king Philogenes is deliberately threadbare, with the name, traits and costume of the fictitious Philogenes simply being layered atop of the body of the king himself, offering symbolic validation and – in theory – amplifying the kingly qualities already presumed inherent in the figure of Charles. Jones’ *Finished design for a masquer* is probably the final design for Charles’ Philogenes costume, indicated by both the exceptional flamboyance of the garments and the presence of additional flaps of paper, where alternative collar styles could be compared against the rest of the clothing.<sup>17</sup> Jones etches out the pattern woven into the fabrics and, by reducing or increasing the amount of detail, a sense of texture as fabric changes between doublet and hose, and in the segments of the sleeve. Davenant’s description helps flesh out the colour palette; ‘the habit of his Majesty and the masquers was of watchet, richly embroidered with silver; long stockings set up of white; their caps silver with scrolls of gold and plumes of white feathers’.<sup>18</sup> While the precise formation and organisation of these colours, and their relationship to texture – and how that texture might appear to change in the lighting conditions of the Masquing House – must be left to the individual imagination, the opulence and luxury of the outfit can hardly be in doubt. Similarly, evident is how conspicuous the figure of Charles himself would have seemed beneath the costume. All the recognisable components of his countenance are openly displayed, with no item from forehead to chest disguising or altering his appearance, and the top half of Jones’ design reflects contemporary Caroline fashions. Only the choice to use hose over breeches hints that Philogenes belongs to an earlier time. Aside from the elaborate headdress, the design of the head and torso almost echoes one of Charles’ Rubens or Van Dyck portraits.

Lindley argues that the court masque genre was Caroline aristocracy displaying ‘itself [...] to itself’, but this perspective is reductive in omitting the narcissistic narrative creation inherent in both the textual and visual construction of characters like Philogenes.<sup>19</sup> This is the court displaying an *idea*

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<sup>13</sup> Davenant, p.207, l.257.

<sup>14</sup> Davenant, p.207, l.263.

<sup>15</sup> Davenant, p.209, ll.310-311.

<sup>16</sup> Davenant, p.209, l.338.

<sup>17</sup> Such creative control over attire was, no doubt, reserved for the monarch.

<sup>18</sup> Davenant, p.209, ll.313-315.

<sup>19</sup> Lindley, *Introduction*, p.ix.

of itself to itself; a glorified, idyllic vision of quality and purity that lends itself more to the arena of the performance than the realm of the everyday. ‘Philogenes’ does not signify a character performed by Charles, but rather denotes a representational shell, an entity of greater, amplified virtues into which Charles can expand. The process is a conspicuous realisation of Searle’s assertion that live performance is ‘not a pretended representation of a state of affairs but the pretended state of affairs itself’.<sup>20</sup> Charles does not *become* Philogenes, as a twenty-first century actor would *become* a character, but, rather, he inhabits the site of Philogenes, and both are simultaneously present on the stage. The formation of this king-character is signalled, in the printed work, by near-constant reference to ‘his Majesty’ rather than by the character’s name and, in the costume designs, by scribbled lines ‘for y<sup>e</sup> king’. Paradoxically, the attempt to assert the king-character as a stable locus of unquestionable sovereignty and virtue creates tension. As direct comparison is made, the ‘gap between real and ideal must have been only too obvious to spectators’, especially when the king-character is decreed ‘fit to govern [...] and rule alone’.<sup>21</sup> In establishing Charles as at once contemporary leader and classical hero, a figure uniting the time-honoured qualities of the honourable ruler, Davenant and Jones present a cipher of kingship that is flawed, volatile, and full of hubristic humanity.

Notably absent from the surviving scenic designs of *Salmacida Spolia* are any traces of the fountain of Salmacis itself. Davenant references the Greek legend in the introduction to the published iteration of the masque, setting the scene with the ‘ancient adage’ that ‘*Salmacida spolia sine sanguine sine sudore*’ [‘Salmacian spoils, got without bloodshed, without sweat’] before describing the ‘famous fountain of most clear water and exquisite taste’ that, once imbibed, quelled the barbarian horde, their ‘fierce and cruel natures [...] reduced of their own accord to the sweetness of Grecian customs’.<sup>22</sup> Davenant spells out the imagery he is invoking: ‘the allusion is, that his Majesty, out of his mercy and clemency [...] seeks by all means to reduce tempestuous and turbulent natures into a sweet calm’.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the king-character cipher, the symbolic site occupied by Charles in Philogenes’ clothing, also signifies and exudes the mysterious powers of the fountain. The symbiosis is problematic, as Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* – which deals with the origin and legend of the fountain in detail – reveals:

I will explain the way in which the fountain  
Of Salmacis, whose enervating waters  
effeminate the limbs of any man<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.69.

<sup>21</sup> Lindley, *Introduction*, p.xiv; Davenant, p.209, l.339.

<sup>22</sup> Davenant, p. 201, l.59; p.202, ll.70-71; p.202, ll.75-77.

<sup>23</sup> Davenant, p.202, ll.90-92.

<sup>24</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Charles Martin (London: W.W. Norton, 2005), p.135, ll.396-398.

Crucially, the harmonisation that subdues the barbarian horde is conceptualised as a process of effeminisation. Figured as a sort of purification through emasculation, ferocious masculinity is washed away, leaving the feminine signaled by absence. The rhetoric of *Salmacida Spolia* replicates this sense of absence – absence of war, of violence – instead epitomising the effect of the king-character’s presence as tranquility and tolerance. His patience is referenced twice within the same stanza,<sup>25</sup> and he is revered for his ‘mercy’,<sup>26</sup> for refusing to ‘invert imperial arts to question a thought | Nor punish vulgar sickness as a sin’.<sup>27</sup> Directly contradicting the textual suggestion of concord, however, is the visual signifier of violent, exploitative human cost, as Philogenes’ throne is formed of the bodies of conquered rivals. Orgel and Strong have identified a small sketch as part of Jones’ visual design for the masque. The presence of these naked, contorted figures facing away from the spectator as if to signal shame, and to highlight the anonymity of Philogenes’ vanquished foes, creates a sinister counterpoint to the reiterated munificence of the king-character. Tension between visual and textual signifier mounts. If Philogenes inherently possesses and can exhibit the ‘feminising’ characteristics of mercy and harmony, he is also capable of brutal exploitation and violence. A more complex hermeneutic approach is required as the king-character is presented simultaneously as both redeemer and monster, female and male. Semiotic space begins to form in the schism between these binary points, and the powers and motivations of the king-character become flexible and significantly less benign.

The concept of harmony, achieved through the union of male and female, is also evidenced in *Salmacida Spolia* by the participation of Henrietta Maria, who appears as Philogenes’ gift from the heavens and ‘represent[s] the chief heroine’ of the piece.<sup>28</sup> It is notable that the royal pair appear on-stage together for the first time at a critical moment of political volatility, and Davenant’s closing song emphasises their personal alliance as vital for the establishment of peace among their subjects: ‘All that are harsh, all that are rude, | Are by your harmony subdued’.<sup>29</sup> Yet, the union of male and female is not a reconciliation between two representatives of two opposite and disparate categories, as archetypal gender characteristics are demonstrated by both parties. Jones’ designs for the king’s and male masquers’ costumes depict an androgynous creature stood in an open, easy stance, left hand proffered upward while the right – the hand normally aligned with action – is obscured behind. The short-waisted doublet is structured, segregated from the sleeves, as if to suggest a breastplate - but there any military connotation ends. Meanwhile, the queen’s and female masquers’ costumes are Amazonian in theme, and feature decorative swords.<sup>30</sup> For Henrietta Maria, who would have been visibly pregnant at the

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<sup>25</sup> Davenant, p.209, ll.321-324.

<sup>26</sup> Davenant, p.209, l.329.

<sup>27</sup> Davenant, p.209, ll.331-332.

<sup>28</sup> Davenant, p.210, l.346.

<sup>29</sup> Davenant, p.212, ll.425-426.

<sup>30</sup> Davenant, p.210, l.353.

time of the performance, the juxtaposition of phallic weapon and her growing womb would have been evident. Seen together, similarities abound between the male and female masquers costumes: the tendril-like patterns; the doubled nature of the skirt and hose; the breastplate-like upper garment; and the three sections of the sleeve. The headdresses and hair, too, were seemingly worn alike. The decision to favour hose over breeches in the male costume also creates lines of parity with the female counterpart. Despite the textual revelation that king-character and heroine create a consummate and harmonious whole, the visual signification layers a more complex symbolism onto their individual roles, and, in arming the heroine, she becomes implicated in the king-character's more violent tendencies. So, *Salmacida Spolia* undercuts its own vision of unity once more, 'unconsciously suggest[ing] that Charles and Henrietta Maria's marriage contributed to the nation's disorder' – an inversion of the apparent portrayal of consolidation and solidarity.<sup>31</sup>

Critical to appreciating visual signification in the Caroline court masque is an understanding of contemporary ocularcentrism and its importance to the transmission of knowledge.<sup>32</sup> John Peacock has identified a central theme of Jones's stage work as 'true knowledge [...] gained through the medium of visual beauty', while the concept of an enlightened truth, comprehended instantaneously upon its perception by the eye, bypassing interpretive processing, is similarly invoked by Davenant.<sup>33</sup> The chorus call upon the king-character to behold the presence of the queen, that 'by his eyes advance his heart | And through his optic learn to love!'.<sup>34</sup> The unnamed heroine is granted the 'most complex and elaborate' entrance of any court masque as she is lowered from above the stage on a purpose-built cloud machine while carefully crafted lighting effects make her appear to glow as she descends from the heavens.<sup>35</sup> Her relationship to divinity challenges the authority of the earthly king-character, surrounded as he is by the flesh of man. She is positioned as a frontier vessel through which some transcendent quality can be comprehended: 'through the casements of her eyes | Her soul is ever looking out'.<sup>36</sup> Alongside the Neoplatonic assertion of outward beauty, mimicking internal beauty, is a suggestion that within her, or through her, the king-character can discover something greater than himself – a concept at odds with the ostensible presentation of the king-character as almost deified in his perfection, beyond improvement by humanity.

The Caroline court masque was an established method of reasserting the monarchy's ascendancy, both in the allegorical and conceptual content of the dramatisation and in the tangible

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<sup>31</sup> Karen Britland, *Drama at the Courts of Queen Henrietta Maria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.188.

<sup>32</sup> The centrality of the visual to Jones' work was famously the cause of the rift between himself and playwright, Ben Jonson, who believed that the visual elements of the masque could not be interpreted without the text.

<sup>33</sup> John Peacock, *The Stage Designs of Inigo Jones: The European Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.326.

<sup>34</sup> Davenant, p.210, ll.370-371.

<sup>35</sup> Orgel and Strong, I, p.25.

<sup>36</sup> Davenant, p.210, ll.377-378.

display of wealth and power. As such, it created a relationship between classical character and contemporary performer that was deliberately transparent. Accordingly, *Salmacida Spolia*'s Philogenes serves as a vehicle for Charles to amplify and perpetuate traits, supposedly inherent to him by virtue of his divinely anointed status. Yet rather than creating semiotic unity between the fictional Philogenes and Charles I, the juxtaposition invites comparison and ultimately signals difference, intensifying cause for enquiry into Charles' methods and motivations. In an added level of complexity, the king-character simultaneously signifies the apparently harmonising qualities of the legendary fountain of Salmacis. The suggestion that he had the power to unite his peoples without bloodshed is rhetorically and visually expressed as an ability to adopt qualities, deemed to belong to a particular gender role. Yet, the unification of the male and female fails. In the place of balance and stability is chaos and contradiction, as the figure that supposedly exudes peace is propped up by violence. Caroline ocularcentrism exacerbates this sense of semiotic collapse as co-dependent and transient lines of meaning are created between ocular and aural/textual signs, developed by masque-poet and masque-designer in tandem. In performance, this semiotic complexity manifests itself, being at once 'artificial and hermeneutic [...] full of contradictions of attitude, moving constantly between irrational and rational'.<sup>37</sup> Thus *Salmacida Spolia* was not the sole creation of Davenant, but rather an ever-flexing series of signifiers born of Davenant's words and Jones' artistry, whose complex and fluctuating interchanges would have necessitated individual interpretation from spectators and participating masquers alike. At its heart the message of *Salmacida Spolia* is not one of straightforward propaganda, bolstering monolithic royalism, but rather a series of discursive contradictions, absences and challenges, that allow for individual regenerative hermeneutical approaches. No wonder Robert Reade was so convinced of the audience's 'disorder'.

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<sup>37</sup> Orgel and Strong, I, p.47.

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————— *Scene III: The way to the throne of honour*, pen and black ink splashed with scene-painters' distemper, 7 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 11 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches, Chatsworth.

————— *The queen or a masquer in Amazonian habit*, fine pen and brown ink splashed with grey, 10 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 6 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches, Chatsworth.

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