

## VII

CHRISTIAN VERDÚ

**‘Me thinks I see the love that shall be made’: two Restoration views of St James Park**

The Restoration saw a strong dependence of the visual arts and verbal arts upon each other. This paper analyses one painting and one poem about a public space closely connected to the monarchy: St James Park, to illustrate how different artistic media could express contrasting views on Charles II’s self-fashioning as an approachable yet regal figure, and how sexual slander was used by both court wits and parliamentarian poets to debunk the painterly idioms of court portraiture and landscaping.

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Charles II was the first English king to pursue popularity by means of an image of ordinariness. It was an image he fashioned with an astute political sense, being aware that an English society transformed by civil war, regicide and republic would not endorse the Personal Rule attempted by his father. “A subject and a sovereign are clear different things”, declared Charles I on the scaffold: determined to avoid his father’s political miscalculations and to restore the monarchy durably, Charles II would endeavour to fashion himself as a bonhomous monarch. He was also determined to reconnect with the Elizabethan and early Stuart tradition of public processions and pageants, which had done so much to consolidate Elizabeth I and James I’s public image, and which his father had forsaken at his own risk, preferring, as he did, to perform in the grand masques designed by Inigo Jones and Ben Jonson for the court’s eyes only.

As part of Charles II’s self-fashioning project, programmes of architectural work and royal display played an important role right from the beginning of the Restoration. As early as 1664, John Evelyn would write: ‘It would be no Paradox, but a Truth, to affirme, that Your Majesty has already Built and Repair’d more in three or four Years (...) than all Your Enemies have destroy’d in Twenty.’<sup>1</sup> One of the places in London that underwent a major transformation was St James Park; here, Charles II spent £400 on a lodge, £1,700 on bringing water from Hyde Park to create a canal, where he then would float gondolas given him by the Doge of Venice, and he bought plants and flowers for the gardens at an exorbitant price. A wall was built to protect these

<sup>1</sup> John Evelyn, ‘To the Most Serene Majesty of Charles the Second’, in *A parallel of the antient architecture with the modern in a collection of ten principal authors who have written upon the five orders* by Fréart, Roland, sieur de Chambray. <<http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A31653.0001.001>> [Accessed: 4 March 2017]

treasures, which cost £2,400, funded from prize money in the Dutch wars.<sup>2</sup> When in London, the king would often enjoy a walk in this public space, sometimes with no attendants, making his body public and approachable by his subjects.

Sycophants were quick to commend the new park: prominent among them was Edmund Waller, who in his poem *On Saint James Park, As Lately Improved by His Majesty*, praised it in heroic couplets, stressing its connection to Whitehall Palace and to dynastic display ('In such green Palaces the first Kings reign'd (...) Here Charles contrives the ordering of his States'<sup>3</sup>) and depicting it as a new garden of Eden: 'Me thinks I see the love that shall be made / lovers walking in that amorous shade; / the gallants dancing by the river's side; / they bathe in summer, and in winter slide'.<sup>4</sup>

But by the 1670s any public space connected to the monarchy would have been tainted by Charles II's scandalous sex life, as the king was increasingly criticised by both parliamentary poets such as Marvell and court poets like Rochester, and his public image came increasing closer to the 'Prince who is his Pleasures Slave' in Rochester's *Lucina's Rape*.<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 1: Hendrick Danckerts. (c. 1674-5) *Whitehall from St James's Park*. Oil on canvas. Government Art Collection. <<http://www.gac.culture.gov.uk/work.aspx?obj=17632>> [Accessed 2 February 2017]

This paper analyses two artefacts from the early 1670s which reflect the tensions in this policy of public display; *Whitehall from St James Park*, a painting by Hendrick Danckerts from c. 1674-5 (fig. 1); and *A Ramble in St James Park*, a poem by John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, from c. 1672-3. While neither of these were

<sup>2</sup> Liz Picard, *Restoration London. Everyday Life in London 1660-1670* (London: Orion Books, 2004) p. 61

<sup>3</sup> Waller, *A Poem on St. James's Park As lately improved by his Maiesty* <<http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A31653.0001.001>> [Accessed: 4 March 2017]

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 21-4

<sup>5</sup> John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, 'Lucina's Rape Or The Tragedy of Vallentinian', in *The Works of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, E. Harold Love <[http://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/OXVU1:LSCOP\\_OX:oxfaleph019644041](http://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/OXVU1:LSCOP_OX:oxfaleph019644041)> [Accessed: 27 February 2017] 26-7

conceived as a propaganda piece, and neither are primarily concerned with St James Park, the contrasting views they produce of a public space closely connected to the king illustrate how Charles II's scandalous private life had started to impinge on the intended public image devised by the monarch.

### The painting

While allegorical and actual landscapes formed an important background to Van Dyck's royal portraits, there were few landscapes commissioned by Charles I. By contrast his son, following his return to England, appointed Hendrick Danckerts, another Dutch artist, as a painter of 'prospect pictures and landskips'. Danckerts was a Catholic who would have to flee England during the Popish plot, but by 1688 there were twenty-nine works by him in the Royal Collection; fifteen of which remain today. One of these is *Whitehall from St James Park*; a landscape depicting Whitehall Palace in the background, with the king and his retinue in the foreground as they enjoy a walk in St James Park. English landscapes of the period are often permeated with a sense of prosperity and wellbeing (precisely the impression which Charles II would wish to convey) and this is no exception: king, courtiers, soldiers, town people, deer and fowl cohabit peacefully in the shadow of Whitehall Palace.



Fig. 2: Hendrick Danckerts. (c. 1674-5) *Whitehall from St James's Park* (detail). Oil on canvas. Government Art Collection. <<http://www.gac.culture.gov.uk/work.aspx?obj=17632>> [Accessed 2 February 2017]

But the implicit geography of the palace, which would be obvious to contemporary viewers of the painting, would kindle less pastoral feelings. Contemporaries would be well aware that the Banqueting Hall (the only component of the Palace that remains today) was not only the former setting of the Stuart kings' court masques but also the place of Charles I's execution. Furthermore, the window frame through which he stepped out onto the scaffold can be explicitly seen in the painting (fig. 2).

The labyrinthine complex of the Palace of Whitehall was also host to Charles II's mistresses: Louise de K rouaille, the unpopular French mistress whom many said was an agent of Louis XIV and was directly blamed for the dissolution of Parliament, had moved in in 1671. Evelyn described its magnificent apartments:

Following his Majesty this morning through the gallery, I went, with the few who attended him, into the Duchess of Portsmouth's dressing room within her bed-chamber, (...) that which engaged my curiosity was the rich and splendid furniture of this woman's apartment, now twice or thrice pulled down and rebuilt to satisfy her prodigal and expensive pleasures, whilst her Majesty's does not exceed some gentlemen's ladies in furniture and accommodation. Here I saw the new fabric of French tapestry, for design, tenderness of work, and incomparable imitation of the best paintings, beyond anything I had ever beheld. Some pieces had Versailles, St. Germain, and other palaces of the French King, with huntings, figures, and landscapes, exotic fowls, and all to the life rarely done.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 3: Hendrick Danckerts. (c. 1674-5) Whitehall from St James's Park (detail). Oil on canvas. Government Art Collection. <<http://www.gac.culture.gov.uk/work.aspx?obj=17632>> [Accessed 2 February 2017]

Although the Duchess's lodgings are not visible in the painting (they were on the river side), the presence of the royal mistress at Whitehall and the lavish lifestyle that the king allowed her and other mistresses, would have been very much in the mind of contemporary viewers, as by this time many court lampoons and parliamentary poems denouncing the court's salaciousness had achieved wide circulation. In Bishop Burnet's words, the court was 'full of pimps and bards, and all matters in which one desires to succeed, must be put in their hands.'<sup>7</sup> Evelyn's stress on 'French tapestries'

<sup>6</sup> John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 4th October, 1683 <[http://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/OXVU1:LSCOP\\_OX:oxfaleph014092375](http://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/OXVU1:LSCOP_OX:oxfaleph014092375)> [Accessed: 4 March 2017]

<sup>7</sup> Gilbert Burnet, in Ranke, *History of England principally in the Seventeenth Century* <[http://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/OXVU1:LSCOP\\_OX:oxfaleph013351543](http://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/OXVU1:LSCOP_OX:oxfaleph013351543)> [Accessed: 4 March 2017]

and on pieces which ‘had Versailles, St. Germain, and other palaces of the French King’ is hardly fortuitous: since about 1673 the court had undergone a shift toward a more French-oriented stance. This French connection is obvious in the painting once we stop considering the mazy, messy Tudor palace and follow the procession of the king and his retinue as they walk down the Old Staircase (fig. 3) in the middle of the painting to stroll down the alleys of St James Park, which form a trident in the French formal manner.

The French architect Le Nôtre, consulted by the king’s mother about the park’s redesign, had actually recommended that the rural atmosphere of the formal deer park be preserved, but Henrietta Maria, who had been allotted St James’s Palace on her return to England, longed for the *jardins à la Française* of her exile in Fontainebleau, and resorted to Le Nôtre’s rival André Mollet to impose a formal layout of *patte d’oie*. It is not surprising therefore, that Danckerts’s view of the English court’s walk in the radial alleys of St James Park strongly echoes Allegrain’s painting celebrating Versailles and the *promenade* of Louis XIV in its famous gardens (fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Étienne Allegrain. (c. 1688) *Promenade de Louis XIV en vue du parterre du Nord vers 1688* (detail). Oil on canvas. Château de Versailles. <<http://ressources.chateauversailles.fr/La-promenade-du-roi>> [Accessed 2 February 2017]

Another signature feature of the French formal garden is the canal, seen to the right of the picture: built at great expense by bringing water from Hyde Park, this straight, ornamental sheet of water was 2,800 feet long and 100 feet wide and ran along the long axis of the Park. The king was probably proud of this achievement since Waller did not fail to state in his sycophantic poem that ‘its of more renown / to make a River then to build a Town’.<sup>8</sup> Danckerts himself cleverly highlights the importance of this formal feature: contrary to many of his landscapes, where he liked to place bird formations in the skies, all the birds in the painting are basking in the canal created by the bountiful monarch.

<sup>8</sup> Edmund Waller, *On St. James’s Park* 11-12

French influence was perhaps unavoidable since Charles had spent nearly two years in the orbit of the French Court. It ranged from landscape gardens and mistresses to sartorial matters: even after his restoration he preferred the Parisian style in tailoring. But he knew it to be unpopular and eventually relinquished it. Thus, in the painting he can be seen wearing the so-called ‘Persian vest’ which he had put into fashion some six or seven years before as a reaction to the former French combination of doublet, petticoat and breeches (fig. 5), as John Evelyn recalls in his diary.<sup>9</sup> The contrast between anti-French fashion and the very Versailles-like view of the king and his courtiers in the French formal park is illustrative of the constant negotiation between contrasting interests and influences in Charles II’s self-fashioning project.



Fig. 5: Norah Waugh, *The Cut of Men’s Clothes: 1600 -1900* (London, Faber and Faber, 1985) Plate 6

At any rate, the St James Park of Danckerts’ painting is suffused with the pastoral overtones that permute also Waller’s poem. Rochester’s poem, as will now be seen, produces a much more cynical view of the same London public space, where, in the dead of night, order and harmony are replaced with ‘rambling’ and the orderly alleys of the park regress to a primeval forest.

### The poem

The Earl of Rochester was part of the inner-circle of court wits. As a Fellow of the Bedchamber, whose task it was to sleep in an alcove in the Royal bedchamber, he would have had first-hand knowledge of many of the salacious scenes that informed the court’s scandalous reputation and that he himself would exploit in many court lampoons. His poem *A Ramble in St James Park*, though, is not a court lampoon: it belongs to the satirical sub-genre of the ramble poem which narrates an expedition by a disreputable male into the city by night in search of drink and prostitutes. In it, the author wanders in the park at night in search of his beloved Corinna and finds her involved in the sexual orgies that take place among the bushes. As Love points

<sup>9</sup> John Evelyn, *Diary*, 18th October, 1666

out, the sub-theme of an upper-class male's infatuation with a whore was echoed in real life by Prince Rupert's for Peg Hughes; Thomas, Lord Colepeper's for Sue Willis; and Edward Mountagu, Earl of Sandwich's for Becky Becke; it would also resonate with the King's infatuation with Nell Gwynn, the former orange-seller and probable prostitute who had had recently borne him two children.<sup>10</sup>

Rochester's *St James Park* has little to do with the pastoral setting of Danckerts's painting: to this notorious *débauché*, 'park-time' is, like in Wycherley's *Love in a Wood*, a code-word for sexual cruising.<sup>11</sup> In this he is not alone, as the park at night, was a well-known centre for street prostitution. The pickup area, in the southwest corner near Rosamond's pond (close to what is now Buckingham Palace), became so well known that the theatres acquired stock flats depicting it for use in comedies. It was actually so popular that in 1678 the King had to instruct Sir Christopher Wren to repair the wall and to take action against trespassers, because:

several persons have without leave put up doors in the wall of St. James' Park and others have broken through the park wall about the Old Spring Gardens and put up doors there, which gives occasion to many inconveniences by affording passage and retreat to lewd and disorderly persons.<sup>12</sup>

These 'lewd and disorderly persons' are the protagonists of Rochester's poem, when night has fallen and the orderly crowd of Danckerts's painting has given way to a rabble of ramblers ('to ramble' meaning, here, 'to rove loosely in lust'):

Unto this All-sin-sheltring Grove,  
Whores of the Bulk, and the Alcove,  
Great Ladies, ChamberMaids, and Drudges,  
The Ragpicker, and Heiress trudges:  
Carr-men, Divines, great Lords, and Taylors,  
Prentices, Poets, Pimps and Gaolers  
Foot-Men, fine Fops, do here arrive,  
And here promiscuously they swive.

Interestingly, this inventory stresses the fact that this nocturnal crowd is more diverse than the fashionable Town people and courtiers that wander through the alleys of the park during the day: the park may have been officially opened to the public by royal decree, but it is sex, the great leveller, which manages to bring together Town, City and Court and turn the park into a truly democratic space.

<sup>10</sup> John Wilmot, second earl of Rochester, 'Poems probably by Rochester: Flytings and Invectives: A Ramble in St James's Park', in Harold Love (ed.), *The Works of John Wilmot Earl of Rochester*, note 0.1

<sup>11</sup> William Wycherley, *Love in a Wood*, Act I, scene 1 <<https://archive.org/details/dramaticworkswy00huntgoog>> [Accessed: 2 March 2017]

<sup>12</sup> Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the reign of Charles II, 1680-1681, preserved in the State Paper Department of Her Majesty's Public Record Office. Vol. 22. : Sept 1680-Dec 1681. Reign: Charles II Entry Number: 1681., [894] Document Ref.: SP 44/51 f.397 Page Number: 209 Date: March 11 1681

Furthermore, the colourful sartorial particularities that, in the painting, identify the social standing of their wearers (such as the scarlet uniforms and the ensign of the soldiers identifying them as Coldstream Guards) no longer apply: in the park, at night, when all cats are grey, vision has been replaced by a more primitive sense: flair. And flair boils down this heterogeneous mix of lords, ladies, coachmen and prostitutes to their common condition of mammals in heat. Hence Rochester's brutal description of the ramblers as dogs following the scent of a bitch:

a proud Bitch does lead about,  
Of humble Currs, the Amorous rout'  
Who most obsequiously do hunt,  
The sav'ry scent of Saltswolne Cunt

Not only animal nature has regressed: the vegetal world has also regressed to its primeval state, and the galleries of trees of the French formal garden that Waller praised have reverted here to their pre-Tudor state of wilderness. This victory of nature upon nurture is Rochester's way to mock the king's public project, and he makes it clear by parodying some verses of Waller's poem: 'Next this my Muse / (what most delights her) sees / A living Gallery of aged Trees, / Bold Sons of Earth, that thrust their arms so high / As if once more they would invade the sky.'<sup>13</sup> Rochester's outré vision of the trees becomes:

Rowes of Mandrakes tall did rise,  
Whose lewd Tops Fuck'd the very Skies.  
Each imitative Branch does twine,  
In some lov'd fold of Aretine.

The 'lov'd fold of Aretine' that each lascivious tree branch imitates refers to a set of engravings by Marcantonio Raimondi of pornographic illustrations by Giulio Romano, first issued in 1524, which were later supplied with sonnets by Pietro Aretino. They were a favourite with Rochester, who is said to have had a set of paintings based on Romano's illustrations at the ranger's lodge at Woodstock, and with many libertines, so that the aforementioned verse would have immediately summoned up, in most of the poem's readers, very specific images of intercourse (fig. 6 and fig. 7).

Waller's verses 'Me thinks I see the love that shall be made, / The gallants dancing in the Amorous shade'<sup>14</sup> are also crudely parodied as 'And Nightly now beneath their shade, / Are Bugg'ries, Rapes, and Incests made'. Indeed, there is nothing left, in the poem, of the pastoral vision of Danckerts's painting and Waller's verses. Trees are gone wild; respectable citizens have become dogs in heat; the canal has disappeared, and the water motif is reduced to unsavoury allusions to body fluids, as in

<sup>13</sup> Waller, *On St James Park* 65-8

<sup>14</sup> Waller, *Ibid.* 21-2



Fig. 6: Giulio Romano (c. 1524). Engraving. In Pietro Aretino, *Sonetti supra i "XIV modi"* (Rome, Salerno Editrice, 2006) p. 22



Fig. 7: Giulio Romano (c. 1524). Engraving. In Pietro Aretino, *Sonetti supra i "XIV modi"* (Rome, Salerno Editrice, 2006) p. 44

'My Dram of Sperm, was supt up after, / For the digestive Surfeit Water'. The whole park becomes an actor in an extravagant orgy of cosmic proportions that can be read as an extended metaphor for the scandalous reputation of Charles II's court.

In conclusion, by eroticising the public space, Rochester brings into question the public persona of a monarch who, in his pursuit of popularity, had shrewdly reconnected with the Elizabethan tradition of public display (preserved in commissions like Danckerts's *Whitehall from St. James Park*) and strived to command reverence without relinquishing an image of ordinariness, but eventually allowed his scandalous sexual lifestyle to compromise this project.

The relation of *A ramble in St James's Park* to *Whitehall from St. James Park* can be read retroactively as an avatar of the mock-heroic *Last Instructions to a Painter*, by Andrew Marvell, where the established idioms of court portraiture are brought into question by describing an imaginary painting where Charles II falls short of raping Britannia herself:

Paint last the King, and a dead shade of Night,  
 Only dispers'd by a weak Tapers light;  
 (...) Naked as born, and her round Arms behind,  
 With her own Tresses interwove and twin'd:  
 Her mouth lockt up, a blind before her Eyes,  
 Yet from beneath the Veil her blushes rise;  
 He wonder'd first, then pity'd, then he lov'd:  
 And with kind hand does the coy Vision press,  
 Whose Beauty greater seem'd by her distress;  
 But soon shrunk back, chill'd with her touch so cold,  
 And th' airy Picture vanisht from his hold.  
 In his deep thoughts the wonder did increase,  
 And he Divin'd 'twas England or the Peace.<sup>15</sup>

In Rochester, as in Marvell, sexual slander has become the lingua franca to describe the court as well as the private and public spaces associated with it, the ultimate point being that England itself has become, under Charles II's rule, yet another object of the monarch's basest appetites.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Marvell, *The Last Instructions to a Painter*, in H. M. Margoliouth and Pierre Legouis (eds), *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, Vol. 1: *Poems (Third Edition)* <<http://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions.com/view/10.1093/actrade/9780199670321.book.1/actrade-9780199670321-div2-65>> [Accessed: 4 March 2017] 885-906

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