

Moreover, Shakespeare censures Falstaff rather more sternly than McAlindon admits. Falstaff's corrupt recruiting practices in *Part 2* show the character at his most reprehensible. If there is something amiss in this otherwise scrupulous study, it may be that its focus is too top-heavy in its readings of the texts. There is not quite enough here about Mouldy, Feeble, Wart, and Bullcalf. For Falstaff these men are just cannon fodder. As he cheerfully notes, 'Go to, peace, Mouldy. You shall go, Mouldy; it is time you were spent'. By structuring his argument around the political and historical theories of the time McAlindon is almost inevitably pushed towards the court and clergy. And yet Shakespeare does give a voice to the yeomen and yokels here as much as in *Henry V*. When the king is challenged by Williams the night before Agincourt, we know that Shakespeare means us to take note. For him the Henry plays are 'condition of England' works as surely as the novels of a later century.

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Timothy Raylor. *The Essex House Masque of 1621: Viscount Doncaster and the Jacobean Masque*. Medieval and Renaissance Literary Studies. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2000. Pp xv, 204.

The Jacobean court masque presents a special challenge even to a serious reader. The texts are so sparse and allusive, so dependent on visual and musical contexts, that an unmediated reading is almost a waste of time. Mere footnotes, however, do little to convey the complex interplay of political, aesthetic, social, and economic forces at work behind the scenes of any important court entertainment. Most of these masques were commissioned and sponsored by James I's courtiers as subtly coded communications of loyalty and flattery, involving topical references framed within a system of animated emblems drawn from classical mythology. To do the job of interpretation properly, even for a minor masque, requires an entire volume.

In *The Essex House Masque of 1621: Viscount Doncaster and the Jacobean Masque*, Timothy Raylor has presented a compelling argument for identifying a manuscript found among the Portland Papers at the University of Nottingham as the missing text of the masque in question. Although the libretto is still unattributed, Raylor makes a good case for including it among the masques (which include Jonson's *Lovers Made Men*) that were performed to the order of James Hay, Viscount Doncaster.

In an introduction, Raylor briefly recaps the logic behind his identification of the manuscript with the masque performed at Essex House on 8 January 1621. (This part of his research was previously published as ‘The “Lost” *Essex House Masque* [1621]: A Manuscript Text Discovered’, *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700* 7 [1998]:86–130.) His chief argument lies in the fact that the masque in question featured nine performers (an unusual number, but one often utilized in Doncaster’s masques), one of whom was “a Son of Lord Hollis”. Raylor identifies ‘Lord Hollis’ as John Holles, Lord Haughton, and notes that the manuscript was found in the papers of a contemporaneous Holles family historian (4–5).

The text of the masque itself is quite brief (under 250 lines) and lightly edited; the bulk of Raylor’s volume includes a detailed analysis of the social, political, and aesthetic forces at play in James’ court at the time of its performance. Specifically, James was involved in playing the French against the Spanish – negotiating with both for a marriage for Prince Charles, and also trying to find a non-military way to return the Palatinate to his son-in-law, the Emperor Frederick (appeasing the puritan factions in his own court), while not alienating the Spanish ambassador, Gondomar.

Other ongoing monarchical concerns seem to have been addressed in the masque, as well. In the context of James’ annoyance over increasing resistance to his royal prerogative by the populace and Parliament, Raylor cites Buckingham’s attempts to create an ‘Academy of Honor’ in which to indoctrinate James’ ‘new’ nobles in the traditions of nobility, and notes that Doncaster was part of the committee formed in 1621 to organize such a project (65).

Raylor then discusses the masque’s place among other entertainments known to have been presented by Doncaster: specifically, Jonson’s *Lovers Made Men* and Campion’s *Lord Hay’s Masque* and *The Lord’s Masque*. All these masques, like *The Essex House Masque*, featured a costumed transformation of the masquers that took precedence over scenic transformations. He traces Doncaster’s unique taste in masques to his time in France and his early preference for the French *ballet de cour* – a source for the arrangement of nine masquers he favoured.

Noting that the spectators present on 8 January were James and Charles, Buckingham and his wife, as well as the French ambassador, Cadenet, Raylor suggests that the masque was forced to communicate several things simultaneously: the usual acknowledgment of James as a royal – even divine – source of transformation; an implication to the ambassador that James was still committed to the French marriage and the return of the Palatinate to James’ son-in-law; and the continuing refinement of Buckingham’s aesthetic taste.

Raylor speculates that the performers in the masque were, unusually, not established courtiers, but nine young men who had never danced in a masque before – probably gentleman in service to Doncaster. Raylor speculates that Doncaster may have even been hoping to place a future favourite (Buckingham's replacement) in James' eye, to be his 'creature' near the king (75). He notes that courtiers seldom appeared in antimasques or took speaking roles in court entertainments, but that such a practice was common in private entertainments; however, the fact that the performers here played rebellious figures (nine Giants rebelling against the Greek pantheon) is unusual, made acceptable only by their probable youth and lack of court status.

Turning to the masque's allegorical elements, he analyzes the climactic action of Minerva petrifying the Giants with the Gorgon's head in the context of its importance to both James and Buckingham: citing other masques as well as court paintings, he suggests this image may have been a coded reference to James' pacifistic approach to the Palatine problem. Moreover, he notes that Prometheus' attempt to get divine blessing for his project is part of the era's desire to read Prometheus as 'a figure of wisdom rather than rebellion', and that Prometheus was actually included among the Nine Worthies in *The Lord's Masque*. However, this masque leaves Prometheus unpunished: a radical departure. Raylor claims that the masque creates 'a new fable' in which 'we witness [in the first antimasque] the rampant disorderliness of mere nature, liberated from divine control'. This is followed by images of 'outright rebellion,' answered at last by a restoration (in the creation of humans) of 'an apt balance between the terrestrial and the divine' (90–1).

The masque is concluded by the transformation of the petrified Giants, who become courtiers through the power of both the monarch's divine presence and the ardent gaze of the female spectators. Addressing the well-established issue of the monarchial gaze in court entertainments, Raylor argues that, in this private entertainment whose message was intended for the French ambassador, James is represented obliquely rather than directly by Pallas and Prometheus as the agents of transformation. Focus, he notes, is instead shifted to the female spectators, both as threatened victims of the Giants' lust and as partners for the newly-created men. They share with James the power to animate the petrified masquers, but Raylor misses an opportunity here to examine any irony in the implication that both James and the ladies are encouraged to gaze with desire at the beautiful young men.

Raylor insists that this masque's successful integration of so many poetic and spectacular elements and its careful structuring places it 'high in the annals of achievement.... It can stand alongside the unperformed *Neptune's Triumph*

as a model for the genre' (105). He is exhaustive in his analysis of all elements of the evening's entertainment, even noting that the banquet following the masque 'made lavish use of the aphrodisiac ambergris, from which Venus was reputedly born' (98).

Raylor's enthusiasm for the aesthetic achievements of this masque doesn't cloud his perception of its (far more interesting) overtly political implications. The most significant complication is the fact that the masque was presented both to the king and to his French guests. Raylor suggests that the overt symbolism of Athena and Prometheus locates the masque 'firmly within the iconographic program of James' court', but that the design and casting of the Nine Worthies more subtly asserts Doncaster's militant protestantism while the message that love creates order transmits his support of a French marriage for Charles. Such a 'double reading' of the court masque – attempting to have the masque both overtly flatter and subtly correct/instruct the monarch – is currently fashionable but always essentially speculative.¹ Whether James himself conceived of using masques to string along possible suitors for his son (in the same way Elizabeth in her own time used her own marriage-marketability) is a tantalizing possibility that Raylor does not pursue. He notes sensibly that the masque was French in form and style as a compliment to its guest-spectators, but then becomes a little fanciful in his suggestion that its complexity and lavishness may actually have been designed to 'overwhelm the critical faculties' of the French guests and 'overawe their senses' (108). Raylor even entertains the possibility that the animated stones stand for a 'moribund' Parliament, in which one of the young masquers was trying to win a seat (110).

Not only James but Buckingham, Raylor argues, was the target of coded messages. Doncaster may have been promoting his participation in Buckingham's proposed 'academy of honor'. Again, the coded messages are double-edged – while Raylor finds elements that flatter Buckingham's ambitions and even his marriage, he also sees 'courtly one-upmanship' in the fact a masque of Giants that Buckingham had planned the year before had been cancelled because the Duke's banquet room was too small for the production. Raylor also places the Essex House masque politically between two other masques that commented on the Palatine crisis – Middleton/Rowley's (pro-war) *Courtly Masque* and Jonson's (pacifistic) *Pan's Anniversary*. He sees this masque, of course, as a sober 'negotiation' between the two polemic extremes.

Raylor notes wryly that Doncaster's efforts at subtly prodding the king toward a French marriage were unsuccessful, earning him a royal reprimand, and that both the newly-convened Parliament and Buckingham's 'academy' soon fizzled out. However, in its 'extravagance', the entertainment 'became,

for a time, the standard by which such receptions were judged' (117). Still, Raylor notes, 'Perhaps the most appropriate judgment on the success of the masque is... that Doncaster never seems to have sponsored another one' (118).

After a discussion of the staging and design of the masque that is well-informed but almost entirely speculative, offering little besides analogous details from unassigned Inigo Jones sketches, Raylor considers the possibility that Jones designed this masque. He cites similar features in other Jones masques and Jonson's bitter comment about Jones' "twice conceyvd, thrice payd for Imagery" to suggest that Jones recycled scenic and costume designs into and out of this masque (136).

Having artfully delayed the point as long as possible, Raylor turns to the ultimate question of authorship. Citing Jonson's 'Expostulation Against Inigo Jones', an apparent lampoon of *The Essex House Masque* in Jonson's *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*, and snide asides towards Jonson's *Pan's Anniversary* in *The Essex House Masque*, Raylor hints at another Poet's Quarrel, this time played out in the court halls rather than the private professional stage. He identifies the text as Jonsonian but probably, due to orthographic and stylistic differences (as well as its possibly antagonistic internal commentary on other Jonson masques), not Jonson's.

Remaining suspects suggested as unlikely are Thomas Carew, Thomas Middleton, and John Fletcher, leaving George Chapman as the one poet with the requisite credentials to have composed so important a masque. Raylor turns to complex but plausible patterns of imagery, style, diction, and orthography to link *The Essex House Masque* with Chapman's *The Memorable Masque*. (Of special interest is Raylor's discussion of a correlation between poetic enjambment and theatrical verse). And, while admitting that similarly persuasive external evidence is lacking, he suggests that circumstantial evidence linking Chapman to Doncaster's patronage circle allows the possibility of his authorship, while there is no overt evidence against it. He wisely closes with an admission that the connections between Chapman, Inigo Jones, Doncaster, and the masque are strongly suggestive but by no means proof. Given that (as he notes) authorship of any court masque is of relatively less concern than its sponsorship and design, his suggestions are enough to provide a satisfying conclusion to his analysis.

Raylor has constructed an admirable study, with a wealth of contextual detail carefully arranged to support his identification. What emerges in the process is perhaps one of the most complete descriptions possible not only of an elaborately conceived and executed performance piece, but also a moment

of sophisticated and intricate communication between a powerful courtier and his monarch.

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Notes

- 1 Another recent example is Clare McManus' insistence in *Women on the Renaissance Stage: Anna of Denmark and Female Masquing in the Stuart Court (1590–1619)* (Manchester, 2002), that Queen Anne's masques allowed her to be simultaneously submissive and rebellious.