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LITERATURE

THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF THOMAS CAREW'S *COELUM BRITANNICUM*

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Carew is indebted for the general conception of his masque to Giordano Bruno's philosophical dialogue, the *Spaccio de La Bestia Trionfante*. Consiting of three dialogues, the *Spaccio's* main theme is the virtuous reformation of an old Jove. Consequently, the constellations which stand as records of the misdeeds of Jove and other gods are swept clean. Carew takes Jove's reformation as a general framework. Old constellations, testifying to Jove's former life, are replaced by new ones representing virtuous deeds. Virtue is to replace vice, creating a pattern or order centering on Charles I and his queen; it is Charles' "exemplar" life, Carew makes clear, which has brought such a change in heaven. Structurally, *Coelum Britannicum* consists of three basic movements, all of which contribute to the theme of order and virtue.

The first movement presents Mercury's message from Jove and contains the speeches of Mercury and Momus. Mercury descends to announce before Charles' court a revolutionary change in heaven; the Olympian deities have decided to discard their wild lust and follow instead the path of virtue:

> From the high Senate of the gods, to You
> Bright glorious Twins of Love and Majesty,
> Before whose Throne three warlike Nations bend
> Their willing kness ....
> Come I Cyllenius, Ioves Ambassadour:
> Not, as of old, to whisper amorous tales
> Of wanton love, into the glowing eare
> Of some choyce beauty in this numerous traine;
> Those dayes are fled, the rebell flame is quench'd
> In heavenly brests, the gods have sworne by Styx
> Never to tempt yeelding mortality
> To loose embraces. (47—62)

Jove's reformation is derived from the virtuous example Charles has established in himself. Charles' "exemplar life" has been emulated by the deities above:

> Your exemplar life
> Hath not alone transfus'd a zealous heat
> Of imitation through Your virtuous Court,
> By whose bright blaze your Pallace is become
> The envy'd patterne of this underworld,
> But the aspiring flame hath kindled heaven;
> Th' immortall bosomes burne with emulous fires,
> Jove rivalls your great virtues, Royal Sir. (62—69)

The British people, under the virtuous rule of the Stuart dynasty, dispense a "pure refined influence" throughout the world.

> So to the Brittish Stars this lower Globe
> Shall owe its light, and they alone dispence
> To'th' world a pure refined influence. (101—103)

Carew thus injects a patriotic element into his praise of his king. This may sound like hyperbolical flattery. Nevertheless, we might well recall the Jonsonian emphasis on the role the king and aristocracy play in the unity and cohesiveness of society. There is an element of instruction subtly conveyed through praise. The king is presented with a very noble image of himself to live up to. He is praised for the virtues he should possess. Moreover, as Jonas Barish (1960: 244) has noted,

> The compliments to the king, so often dismissed as ignoble flattery, are one expression of ... self — congratulation on the part of the community. To eulogize the king is to congratulate the society, of which the king is figurehead, for the communal virtues symbolized in him.

The idea of the king as the center of ordered society is a commonplace of Renaissance political theory. This idea is highlighted by the imagery Mercury uses. Charles is the "Pole-starre" diffusing light to the heavens and to the lower globe of British "heroes". The royal pair are addressed as "bright glorious Twins" whose "bright blaze" and "aspiring flame" have kindled heaven itself. However, a clear-cut contrast is drawn between two kinds of light, the virtuous light of the British Stars and the profane light of the stars that Jove has made records of his sexual exploits:

> He Jove acted incests, rapes, adulteries
> On earthly beauties, which his raing Queene,
> Swolne with revengefull fury, turn'd to beasts,
> And in despight he transform'd to Stars,
> Till he had fill'd the crowded Firmament
> With his loose Strumpets, and their spurious race,
> Where the eternall records of his shame
> Shine to the world in flaming Characters. (76—83)

As Mercury finishes his eulogistic speech on Charles' "shining" virtues,

Momus enters dressed in a "black" robe. Momus' costume indicates a different kind of character from Mercury, whose speech has been stuffed with light imagery. Skeptical and sharp-tongued, Momus starts by questioning the behavior of Mercury as contrary to the new order of heavenly change:

> I cannot reach the policy why our Master breeds so few Statesmen, it suits not with his dignity that in the whole Empyraeum there should not be a god fit to send on these honourable errands but your selfe, who are not yet so carefull of his honour or your owne, as might become your quality, when you are itinerant: the Hosts upon the highway cry out with open mouth upon you for supporting pilfery in your traine; which, though as you are the god of petty Larcinry, you might protect, yet you know it is directly against the new orders, and opposes the Reformation in Diameter. (113—123)

Momus is fault-finding character. He tells us that Peter Aretine and Frank Rablais "suck'd much" of his "milk". Momus may represent the satirist who expose vice to ridicule and infamy:

> But that you may arrive at the perfect knowledge of me by the familiar illustration of a Bird of mine own feather, old Peter Aretine, who reduc'd all the Scepters and Myters of that Age tributary to his wit, was my Parallell; and Frank Rablais suck'd much of my milke too. (161—165)

Carew seems to emphasize the role of the satirist in the reformation of manners. Momus launches an attack on libertine poets who

> to perpetuate the memory and example of their triumphs over chastity, to all future imitation, have in their immortall songs celebrated the martyrdome of those Strumpets under the persecution of the wives, and devolved to Posterity the Pedigrees of their whores, bawds, and bastards. (208—212)

Momus' attack on libertine poets has been taken by Elbert Thompson to symbolize the Puritan's objections to poetry and dramatic production as immoral endeavors. Carew, Thompson (1966: 222)observes, "describes the privileges of his Momus in a way applicable to Prynne". William Prynne's *Historio-Mastix, the Players Scourge*, 1633, is a landmark in the history of the Puritans' attack on the stage. If so, Momus represents a spirit of discord alien to the masque's atmosphere of revels and praise. In fact, Inigo Jones' sketch for the character of Momus shows his hair "party-coloured" (104—107).

Whatever Momus symbolizes, one thing is clear; Momus serves as a contrast to Mercury. Mercury delivers formal declamations in blank verse. Momus, on the other hand, uses prose. Momus plunges abruptly into his speech and, unlike Mercury, does not address the king and his court. In fact, he throws doubt on the idea that Jove's reformation is owing to the king's exemplary life.

> You shall understand, that Jupiter upon the inspection of I know not what vertuous Presidents extant (as they say) here in this Court, but as I more probably ghesse out of the consideration of the decay of his natural abilities, hath ... disclaimed, and utterly renounced all the lascivious extravagancies, and riotous enormities of his forepast licentious life. (195—202)

One of Momus' techniques is to let his sentences run for lines without interruption. This technique promotes an emphasis on oddness and undermines any expectation of conformity or restraint. His style is a means for a revelation of his own character. However, his use of prose is also justified on the ground of comic effect. Prose has always been the medium of comedy. Prose enhances Momus' comic wit and colloquial language. Thus a comic element is injected into the masque, giving *Coelum Britannicum* more variety and realism. It also lightens the weight of the ethical emphasis on order. A point worth stressing here is that Momus' prose provides a contrast to Mercury's, whose blank verse gives him a more dignified status. Both characters, however, engage in a debate on the recent change in heaven. Debate necessitates the use of dialogue. Though their dialogue lacks the depth of dramatic conflict, it gives *Coelum Britannicum* at least a dramatic semblance and highlights the significance of the heavenly change.

The second movement is the process of purgation and replacemet. Vice figures are banished from their "stations in the Firmament" and replaced by figures representing goodness and righteousness. The purged vices are expressed through a series of seven antimasques. The antimasque is presented by the scenery. It is a kind of "false-masque" which could be used as a foil to set off the principal masque with more emphasis. Carew's use of the antimasque is certainly indebted to Johnson's perfection of it. It provides an effective contrasting ground against which the grace and beauty of the masque proper show more splendidly. Carew stresses the power of the virtuous main-masque by avoiding a direct conflict: the mere advent of the main-masque and its agents suffices to scatter the impotent forces of the antimasque. This technique lessens the element of drama in the masque. However, Carew is showing the helplessness of the forces of disorder, and at the same time, is keeping the antimasque from interfering with the nobility of his masque. Jonson and Carew use antimasque as a direct foil to the dignity of the main-masque, exemplifying the principle that virtue is more adored when vice stands by it.

After the licentious constellations have been purged and the heavens are darkened, a free election is announced to select their replacements,

> Such Persons onely as shall be qualified with exemplar
> Vertue and eminent Desert, there to shine in indelible
> Characters of glory to all Posterity. (448—450)

Consequently, we have four figures pressing their claims for ascendancy: Plutus, Poenia, Fortune, and Pleasure.

Plutus obviously represents richness. He pleads his case on the ground that virtue is the "slave" of money:

> If Vertue must inherit, shee's my slave;
> I lead her captive in a golden Chaine,

> About the world: She takes her Forme and Being
> From my creation; and those barren seeds
> That drop from Heaven, if I not cherish them
> With my distilling dewes, and fotive heat,
> They know no vegetation; but expos'd
> To blasting winds of freezing Poverty,
> Or not shoot forth at all, or budding, wither. (489—497)

After expressing his power in terms of birth and life imagery, however, Plutus gradually moves toward an account of the destructive force of richness:

> Turne but your eyes and marke the basic world,
> Climbing steepe Mountaines for the sparkling stone,
> Piercing the Center for the shining Ore,
> And th' Oceans bosome to rake pearly sands,
> Crossing the torried and the frozen Zones,
> 'Midst Rocks and swallowing Gulfes, for gainfull trade,
> And through opposing swords, fire, murdering Canon,
> Shaling the walled Towne for precious spoyles. (503—510)

By a stroke of wit, Carew makes Plutus defeat his own earlier claim as a force of life. Evil is self-contradictory and illogical. What he pictures as life turns out to be destruction. Mercury pointedly denies Plutus' claim to preferment on the ground of his destructive power:

> Thou art brought hither, where thou didst breathe
> The thirst of Empire, into Regall brests,
> And frightedst quiet Peace from her meeke throne,
> Filling the World with tumult, blood, and warre,
> Follow the Camps of the contentious earth,
> And he the conqu'rers slave, but he that can
> Or conquer thee, of give thee Vertues stampe,
> Shall shine in heaven a pure immortall Lampe. (555—562)

The symbolism of Plutus as a force of death is implied in the fact that Plutus is the god of the underworld in classical mythology.

Poenia, poverty, follows. Her argument is that poverty is the best preserver of virtue:

> Shee Virtue is my Darling, I, in my soft lap,
> Free from disturbing cares, bargaines, accounts,
> Leases, Rents, Stewards, and the feare of theeves,
> That vex the rich, nurse her in calme repose,
> And with her, all the Vertues speculative,
> Which, but with me, find no secure retreat. (611—616)

Mercury's answer stresses the futility of passive fortitude:

> We not require dull society
> Of your necessitated Temperance,
> Or that unnatural stupidity

That knows nor joy nor sorrow; nor your forc'd
Falsely exalted passive Fortitude
Above the active. (652—657)

Untested virtue is opposed. Mercury's statement foreshadows Milton's famous rejection of "cloistered virtue" in *Areopagitica*. Obviously enough, Carew introduces Poenia after Plutus for the sake of contrast. The claims of either extreme are rejected. Momus makes the point that heaven is no place for either of them:

No, I give you to know, I am better vers'd in cavils with the gods, then to swallow such a fallacie, for though you two cannot bee together in one place, yet there are many places that may be without you both, and such is heaven, where neither of you are likely to arrive. (634—638)

The idea Momus stresses is that heaven's essence is harmony and cohesiveness; opposites and extremes are alien to the very nature of heaven. Moreover, opposites and extremes do not fit the world of the masque whose focus is order. In this respect, the world of the masque, presided over by the character of the king, bears a resemblance to heaven. Order and harmony govern both. The pleas of Plutus and Poenia for a place in heaven are in fact attempts to destroy that harmony. They are denied heaven and, consequently, are purged from the world of the masque proper. They are, that is, part of the antimasque world.

Fortune advances next, claiming to be Astraea's "deputy on Earth", She is the prime mover behind everything. Richness, poverty, greatness, etc., all proceed from her. However, she is denied supremacy on the basis of her unjust acts. She exalts the vicious and depresses the virtuous. The discrepancy between what she claims and what she really is establishes a context of irony. The world of disorder is not only purged, but is also rendered ridiculous. Moreover, Fortune embodies a deadly sin, the sin of sloth. She is therefore helpless when confronted by "industrious labor" and dedication:

Industrious labour drags thee by the lockes,
Bound to his toyling Car, and not attending
Till thou dispence, reaches his own reward.
Onely the lazy sluggard yawning lyes
Before thy threshold, gaping for thy dole,
And lickes the easie hand that feeds his sloth. (744—749)

Pleasure comes last. Her introduction after Plutus, Poenia, and Fortune is appropriate since pleasure is the ultimate end claimed by each of these three allergorical figures. Pleasure clearly represents the Epicurean doctrine:

Beyond me nothing is, I am the Gole,
The journeyes end, to which the sweating world,
And wearied Nature travels. For this, the best
And wisest sect of all Philosophers,
Made me the seat of supreme happiness. (772—776)

Her train consists of the five senses that perform the final antimasque. She is dismissed with the charge that she is "the Author of the first excesse/ That drew this reformation on the gods" (830 - 831).

With the rout of Plutus, Poenia, Fortune and Pleasure, the sphere, which commands the second structural movement, vanishes. The disappearance of the sphere symbolizes the defeat of those figures. Immediately, "a new scene appears of mountains, whose eminent height exceed the clouds which past beneath them" (877—878).

The change in scenery marks the climax of the second movement. Vices are purged, and the sphere which bears the records of Jove's former misdeeds vanishes as the "antient Worthies" of the three kingdoms of Great Britain appear from within a rising mountain. These worthies are to occupy the vacant places in the firmament, clustering around their pole-star, Charles I.

Those antient Worthies of these famous Isles,
That long have slept, in fresh and lively shapes
Shall straight appeare, where you shall see your selfe
Circled with moderne Heroes, who shall be
In Act, what-ever elder times can boast,
Noble, or Great: as they in Prophesie
Were all but what you are. Then shall you see
The sacred hand of bright Eternitie
Mould you to Stars, and fix you in the Spheare. (856—864)

British history becomes the main focus of Carew's masque. Charles I figures as the sum total of the unity of the three parts of Britain. However, Carew emphasizes that Charles' fame and importance as a national hero are derived from his "moral acts".

The third movement carries the celebration of British history further. Through a series of four songs, Charles' place as the focal point of this history is established. The harmony implies in the act of singing heightens the impression of the unity of the British past which these songs celebrate. The songs are sung by the "Genius" of the three kingdoms, by the kingdoms themselves, and by chorus of Druids and rivers. The Genius calls for the ancient worthies to arise from "these rockie cliffs"

and see where Glory spreads
Her glittering wings, where majesty
Crown'd with sweet smiles, shoots from her eye
Diffuse joy, where Good and Faire,
United sit in Honours chayre. (897—901)

The "Good and Faire" are Charles I and his queen. The reference to "Honours chayre" indicates that Charles and his queen were probably enthroned opposite the stage, providing a focus for the masque's theme and underyling symbolism.

The virtuous deeds of British worthies are highlighted by specific comparisons to Hercules, Prince Arthur, and St. George. One of the masquers is addressed as a "British Hercules".

> Pace forth thou mightly British Hercules
> With thy choyce band, for onely thou, and these,
> May revell here, in Loves Hesperides. (944—946)

The identification of the masquer with Hercules has ethical, specifically religious, implications. Hercules, as an infant, strangled two snakes to death. In Christian allergorical interpretation, Hercules stands as a prefiguration of Christ who destroyed sin in the disguise of a snake. Milton, for example, makes use of this allegory in his "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity". The deeds of the British worthies have transformed Britain into a "Hesperian" bower "where faire trees beare/Rich golden fruit, and yet no Dragon neare" (933—934).

Among the worthies of the British past Prince Arthur and St. George are singled out:

> We bring Prince Arthur, or the brave
> St. George himself (great Queene) to you,
> You'll soone discerne him. (1030—1032)

St. George, the Patron of England, is known as the slayer of the dragon of sin. In the first book of *The Fairie Queene*, Edmund Spenser identifies the Redcross knight with St. George. Arthur is usually considered the perfect pattern of chivalric values. The patriotic and religious undertones seem to merge. Excessive patriotism is also tempered by moral weight. The morality and patriotism of the British past reach their point of culmination in Charles I and his queen. After the third song has been sung and the revels have been danced for "a great part of the night", a great cloud appears and

> Arriving at the middle of the heaves, stayeth; this was of severall colours, and so great, that it covered the whole Scene But of the further part of the heaven beginnes to break forth two other Clouds, differing in colour and shape; and being fully discovered there appeared sitting in one of them, Religion, Truth, and Wisdome ... In the other Cloud sate Concord, Government, and Reputation ... the great Cloud began ne to breake open, out of which stroke beames of light; in the midst suspended in the Ayre, sate Eterminty on a Globe ... in the firmament about him, was a troope of fifteene starres, expressing the stellifying or our British Heroes; but one more great and eminent than the rest, which was over his head, figured his Majesty. And in the lower part was seene a farre off the prospect of Windsor Castell, the famous seat of the most honourable order of the Garter. (1054—1085)

Spectacle thus blends beautifully with the poet's description and theme. The greatest cloud, figuring "his Majesty", is surrounded by "a troope of fifteene starres, expressing the stellifying of our British Heroes". Windsor castle, the seat of the Garter, poinpoints the emphasis on the English Chivalric past by

visual means. Finally, Eternity joins the other six allegorical figures in a song praising Charles and his queen for the pattern of virtue and order they have established. This pattern will be eternized through "endless succession" of Stuart kings:

> Then from your fruitfull race shall flow
> Endlesse Succession,
> Scepters shall bud, and Lawrels blow
> 'Bout their Immortall Throne. (1133—1136)

Perpetual morality will be preserved by natural birth. The vision that emerges is of an illustrious England under a stable monarchy adhering to the values of the British past. The triumph of the world of order is enhanced by the involvement of the spectators in the final dance and by the concluding scenery. The clouds disappear "leaving behind nothing but a sirene sky", symbolizing the restoration of virtue.

Coelum Britannicum moves from a world of disorder to one of cohesiveness. The world of disorder is conceived of in terms of the Dragon constellations and in terms of antimasque figures. The world of the masque proper is the world of British worthies and heroes. The emphasis on order bears a close similarity to the Jonsonian masque. Order is also symbolized by means of dance, song, and scenery. The various elements of *Coelum Britannicum* form, in the manner of the Jonsonian type, a harmonious entity. The emphasis on the role of the king and the general ethical bearing also recall Jonson's. Carew, however, injects humor and with into his masque, thus lessening the ethical burden embedded in the overall theme.

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