

Africa, England, Elysium: On *The Masques of Blackness and of Beauty*

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The aim of this paper is to investigate into the Jacobean images of England and Africa through a reading of Ben Jonson's masques. I take masques to be especially convenient for the present purpose because the Jacobean masques, unlike the contemporary plays, were always performed at court or houses of nobles, catering both for the tastes and the ideology of the ruling of the period. Masques provided occasions for the demonstration of the king's political stance as well as for recreation and entertainment.¹⁾ As the performance of court masques took for granted the presence of foreign ambassadors, they could not be considered without some political message or other. Before we discuss particular masques, some accounts should help to clarify the extent to which the masque in general was of, by, and for the court.

(I)

The performance of the masque, since it was still in its prototypal form called 'the disguising' in the early fifteenth century, usually took place on special days (or nights) of the year such as the New Year's Day, the Twelfth Night and Christmas, or on special social occasions such as wedding in the royal or an aristocratic family. This explains why a masque was usually performed once and for all, and never again.²⁾ The gorgeous costumes and other stage properties which weighed heavily upon the court budget were not only never used for another masque, but were usually given out for the audience and performers to plunder and take home as a sort of souvenir. This does not happen to plays performed in theatre, whether private or public, supposedly

repetitively. When Prospero towards the end of *The Tempest* compares the evanescence of life to that of the spectacle of his own devising, he is not merely referring to the temporary nature of dramatic performance, but referring specifically to the convention of the masque. This convention necessitated the publication of pamphlets which described the masques after their performance. In the foreword to one of those pamphlets, Ben Jonson vindicates his task of recording the performance:

The honor, and splendor of these *spectacles* was such in the performance, as could those houres haue lasted, this of mine, now, had been a most vnprofitable worke. But...little had beene done to the studie of *magnificence* in these, if presently with the rage of the people, who (as a part of greatnesse) are priuiledged by custome, to deface their *carkasses*, the *spirits* had also perished...I adde this later hand, to redeeme them as well from Ignorance, as Enuie, two common euills, the one of *censure*, the other of *oblution*.³⁾

It seems, eventually, thanks to the pamphlets of this kind that the masque could be known to the public and that the dramatists outside the court could make use of the form within their dramatic works.

The masque, above all, was of festival nature, which easily led to the extravagant presentation of the world outside the reality. The mythical and the exotic are predominant factors. *Hymenaei* (1606), *Oberon* (1611), *The Golden Age Restored* (1615), *Pan's Anniversary* (1620) by Ben Jonson who was the central figure in the Jacobean court entertainment, are all based on classical and domestic myths. Jonson's other titles like *The Masques of Blackness and of Beauty* (1605 and 1608), *The Irish Masque at Court* (performed twice in 1613 and 1614), *The Masque for the Honour of Wales* (1618), *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon* (1620), *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* (performed three times in 1621) will sufficiently speak for their exoticism.

Another point which has to be held in mind when dealing with the masque is that it was written for amateur courtiers-masquers to perform whereas the play was written for the professional actors. This is remarkable because the masquers included both male and female courtiers when it was just out of the

question for an actress to appear on the stage. Of course the masquers, being amateurs, had no speaking roles in the masque and professional actors and singers were called on to speak and sing, but the main point of the masque lay in the revelling—dancing of the masquers alone or dancing of the masquers and the partners chosen from the audience. This essential amateurism, which takes for granted the audience capable of participating extempore in the performance as well as watching it, makes it hard to reproduce the masque today.

(II)

The Masque of Blackness can be called the first in several ways. It is the first masque Ben Jonson had wrote, and the first instance of the cooperation between Ben Jonson the poet and Inigo Jones the architect which ended up in the famous bitter quarrel between the two. It is also the first of the eight masques for which Alfonso Ferrabosco II composed music. The more important in the history of the masque is that it is also the first masque to have a plot, if at all, which gives consistency to the work. The plot distinguishes *The Masque of Blackness* from the earlier masques, which were hardly anything more than pageants of disguised persons based on some allegorical theme or other. What is more, the plot of *The Masque of Blackness* was to be continued in *The Masque of Beauty*, although the two masques were performed separately, the former on the Twelfth Night of 1605 and the latter on the Twelfth Night three years later.⁴⁾ They were published together in the form of a quarto in 1608 with the title 'The Characters of / Two royall Masques. / The one of BLACKNESSE, / The other of BEAUTIE, / personated / By the most magnificent of Queens / ANNE / Queene of Great Britain, &c. / With her honorable Ladyes, / 1605. and 1608. / at White Hall; / and / Inuented by BEN: IONSON.'⁵⁾ The combined publication occurred probably because the two masques constituted one plot or story, and it is this plot that makes it imperative to discuss the two together. The two masques, however, needs separate chapters, because they make use of different series of images—the one, those of Africa, and the other, of England.

The plot of *Blackness* is rather simple: the river Niger, with his twelve daughters (masquers), meets Oceanus on their quest for a land where the daughters' black hue should be bleached, according to the prophesy of the moon goddess. Oceanus tells him that the land is Albion or Britannia. There appears the moon goddess who reassures Niger about the fulfilment of the prophesy, for which she tells the daughters of Niger to wait one year. The story, thus summarized, sounds so bizzare that one is likely to wonder where the initial idea came from. There are several factors which needs consideration as to the creative process of the masque.

Queen Anne, who commissioned Jonson to write a masque for the Christmas season 1604–1605, originally gave the idea of having something to do with blackness. In the Q-pamphlet Jonson states that 'it was her Maesties will, to haue them *Black-mores* at first'. Here Jonson sounds rather apologetic about the extraordinary concept of blackness, for the statement is not found in the MS submitted to the court beforehand but only added excusingly in parentheses on the publication of the Q-pamphlet.

As to where Queen Anne got the idea from, one can only conjecture. The court had a masque of Indian and Chinese knights on 1 January the previous year,⁶⁾ and the queen might well have looked for something that would surpass the previous one in unusualness. Here an incident draws our attention. On All Saint's Day (1 November), 1604, at the old banqueting house at Whitehall, the King's Men performed Shakespeare's *Othello*, which might have been a direct stimulus to her fancy. *The Masque of Blackness* was performed on 6 January, 1605, and we cannot be sure if the period of just over two months was enough for composition and preparation, and the queen's commission on the masque might have been given to Jonson before the performance of *Othello*. However, if *Othello* had anything to do with the *donnée* of the masque, the play and the masque have very little in common. The masque is a masque of *blackness* instead of a masque of *blackamoor*. It is a story of blackness changed to fairness, and all Jonson needed was to create figures of some sort or other for the courtiers to enact the story.

But then, we might ask, why blackness changed to fairness instead of otherwise? The idea seems to derive itself from the proverb of impossibility of changing black skin white, quite often found in the contemporary writings in various forms such as, 'The bath of a Blackmore hath sworn not to whiten', 'Black will take no other hue', or even in a very similar form 'go about to make an Ethiop white'.⁷⁾ Amongst the writings which use this proverb, one especially stands out as relevant to the moral framework of the masque: *A Choice of Emblemes, and Other Devises*, a contemporary emblem book by Geoffrey Whitney. Along with other emblem books which served as compendia of emblems and mythology for Jonson and his contemporary writers, Whitney's book enjoyed great popularity. Written in English rather than in Latin or Italian and collecting, illustrating and moralizing familiar proverbs, sometimes appearing rather like a jest book,⁸⁾ this book of Whitney seems to be intended for less esoteric a circle of readers compared with other 'learned' compendia towards which Jonson turned for classical knowledge.⁹⁾ Among the proverbs in *A Choice* is *Aethiopem lauare*. (Fig. 1) The illustration shows a blackamoor sitting in the centre being washed by two white men by a fountain. The moralizing verse reads:

Leave of with paine, the blackamore to skowre,
 With washinge ofte, and wiping more then due;
 For thou shalt finde, that Nature is of powre,
 Doe what thou canste, to keepe his former hue:
¹⁰⁾

The verse emphasizes the power of Nature 'to keepe his former hue', and it is to this idea that *The Masque of Blackness* was to be an antithesis. The moon goddess foretells that the changing of the colour should take place in Albion (white land!),

Rul'd by a SVNNE, that to this height doth grace it:
 Whose beames shine day, and night, and are of force
 To blanch an AETHIOPE, and reuiue a Cor's.

Æthiopem lauare.

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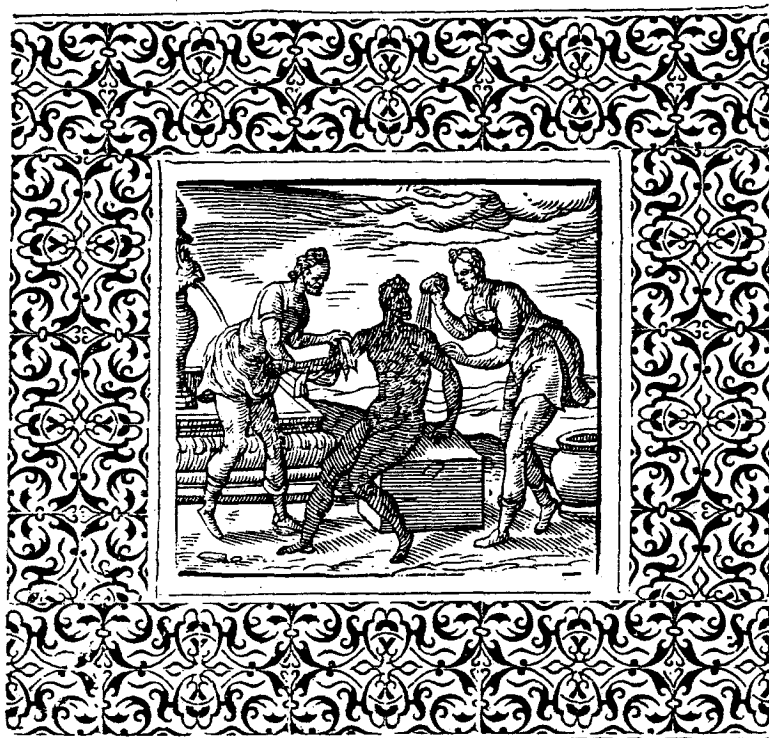


Fig. 1

His light scientiall is, and (past mere nature)
Can salue the rude defects of euery creature.

(*Blackness*, ll. 253–257)

The 'SVNNE' signifies King James I, whose power is shown to be able, paradoxically, to whiten an Ethiop, the name given to African native for their scorched ($\alpha\tilde{\iota}\theta\text{-}\epsilon\epsilon\nu$) face ($\delta\psi$) by the strong sun of Africa. The treatment of

James as having magical ('scientiall') or supernatural ('past mere nature') healing power follows the medieval tradition of *rois thaumaturges* (wonder-working king). Here blackness superbly serves as a 'rude defect' through the healing of which the masques can sing the king's praises.¹¹⁾

(III)

The opening scene is one of 'an artificiall sea'. The sea is 'seene to shoot forth, as if it flowed to the land, rayseed with waues, which seemed to moue, and in some places the billow to breake' (*Blackness*, ll. 26–28). In order to get these extravagantly illusionistic effects, the architect Inigo Jones's genius was indispensable. The tritons (musicians), the sea-maids (singers), and sea-horses that accompany Oceanus on the sea are probably copied from Catherine de'Medici's water festival among those called the Bayonne *magnificences* in 1565. Jones could have known the festivals through the official '*Recueil des choses notables qui on esté faites à Bayonne*.' As Roy Strong maintains, the festivals were planned to celebrate the Hispano-French *entente*, projecting the French monarchy internationally as rich and splendid not only in financial but also in cultural terms.¹²⁾ In copying the sea festival, the masque aspires to be something of the same political scale. Yet the sea in the masque does more than that in the Bayonne festival—it is an extension of the power of the English monarch presented here as a magical healer, as Aethiopia's advice to Niger's daughters suggests: since they have found Albion to be the land of their quest, they must stay on its shore and

...with reuerence, steepe
Your bodies in that purer brine,
And wholesome dew, call'd *Ros-marine*:
Then with that soft, and gentler fume,
Of which, the *Ocean* yet yeelds some,
Whereof bright VENVS, BEAUTIES Queene,
Is said to haue begotten beene,
You shall your gentler limmes ore-laue,
And for your paines, perfection haue.

(*Blackness*, ll. 338–346)

The Protean or metamorphic power of the sea, and probably the baptizing effect of the water as well, are here called upon to emphasize the power of the English monarch. Actually the English monarch is called 'Neptune's son' in the ending song, and the epithet defines him to be the ruler of the sea, Neptune's domain. This association of the sea and the king can hardly be overestimated, for the sea-scene was so devised that 'the termination, or horizon' of the sea was 'the leuell of the *State* [=the king's chair], which was placed in the vpper end of the hall'. From the horizon 'was drawne, by the lines of *Prospectiue*, the whole worke shooting downwards, from the eye' (*Blackness*, ll. 83–87). It is obvious that the king was to give sense to the whole thing by surveying it from the focal point of the scene. The sea was one of the most important factors of foreign expedition. The sea had to be explored and conquered by the English nation. It was hardly a casual choice that Jonson and Inigo Jones, as they wrote their first masque for the English court, made use of a sea scene, which so successfully expressed the desired state of foreign affairs around the English monarchy.

Along with, and in connection with the image of the sea, the image of the African river is no less significant in this masque. The queen's request of having blackamoors unequivocally meant that the blackamoors should be played by the masquers chosen out of her courtiers. Perversely enough, and to the great shock of the audience, it even turned out that the masquers should be played by court ladies including the queen herself.¹³⁾ By casting the masquers for the nymphaean daughters of an African river Niger, Jonson succeeded in answering her request without the embarrassment of making the masquers look too much like the blackamoors in the proverb mentioned above. The Niger, far less grasped by the English than the Nile was in Jonson's days, should have added to the exotic nature of the masque. Yet at the same time it was so novel to the English ears that Jonson seems to think it appropriate to explain its whereabouts, invoking several historians and geographers ancient and modern both in the MS submitted to the court and in the Q-pamphlet for the public:

PLINY, SOLINVS, PTOLOMEY, and of late LEO the *African*, remember vnto vs a riuer in *AEthiopia*, famous by the name of *Niger*; of which the people were called *Nigritae*, now *Negro*'s: and are the balckest nation of the world. This riuer taketh spring out of a certain *lake*, east-ward; and after a long race, falleth into the westerne *Ocean*.

(*Blackness*, ll. 15–21)

Not satisfied with simply mentioning the river's course, Jonson adds a marginal note in Q-pamphlet:

Some take it to be the same with is *Nilus*, which is by Lucan called *Melas*, signifying *Niger*. Howsoeuer, *Plinie*. .hath this: *Nigri fluuio eadem natura, quae Nilo, calamum, papyrum, & easdem gignit animantes*. [The river Niger has the same nature as the Nile: it produces reeds and papyrus, and the same animals.]¹⁴

If Jonson needed Niger simply as an allegorical figure with a name meaning 'black', this explanation at length would be unnecessary. A good deal of his concern seems to be in the geography of Africa, though his knowledge is far from accurate. Jonson's notion of the Niger flowing westward into the ocean is perfectly in accordance with the contemporary misguided identification of the Niger with what we now know as the Senegal (Fig. 2). It was three centuries before the English people out of imperialistic urge identified the accurate course of the river Niger, springing in the western part of Africa, flowing eastward and then southward into the Gulf of Guinea. Yet the English people's interest in Africa as a whole was very strong, partly because of the feeling among them that they were much delayed in African affairs compared with the Spanish and the Portugese who had established active commerce with, especially, the west African natives. Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1600; earlier editions 1582 and 1589), known as *Hakluyt's Voyages*, abounds in English expeditions to that part of Africa only to find the Portugese or the Spanish having settled well before them.

But *Hakluyt's Voyage* was only one of the many books dealing with Africa, available mainly in the form of English translation to the Jacobean readers.

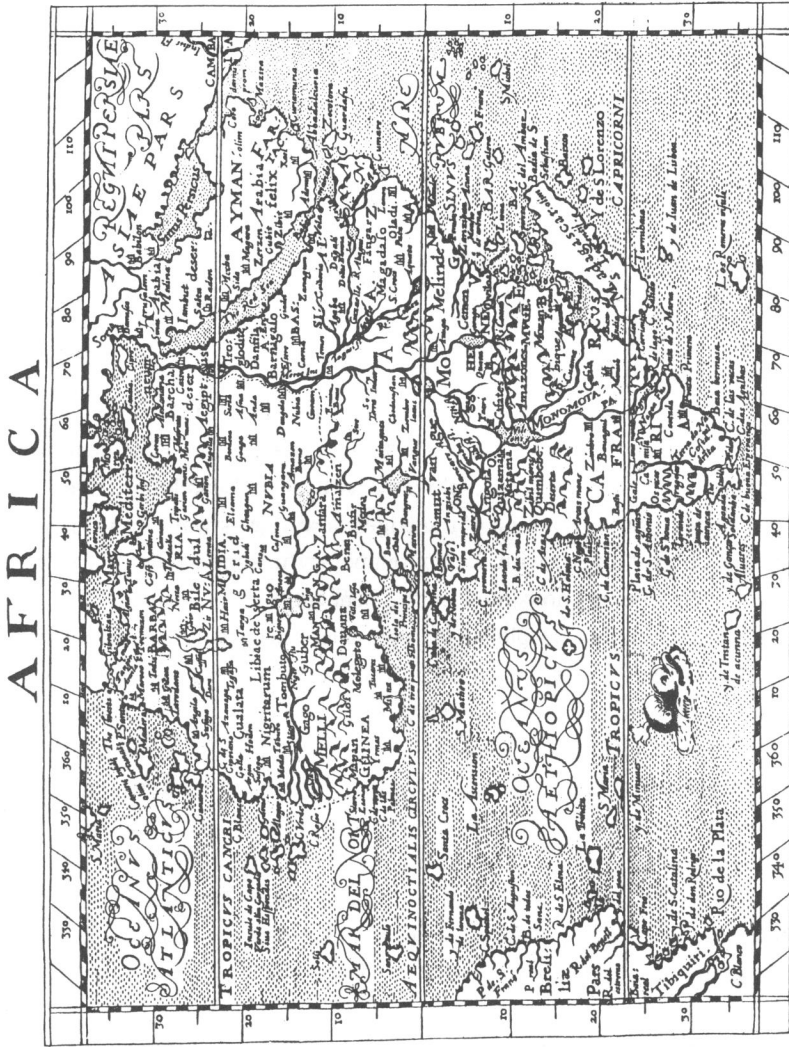


Fig. 2 Pory's Map in *A Geographical Historie of Africa* (1600). Robert Brown, ed. *The History and Description of Africa . . . written by . . . Leo Africanus. Donne into English in the year 1600, by John Pory*, 3 vols. (1896; rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, n.d.), Vol. I, Map VIII.

To name a few, in 1555, William Waterman translated Boemus's *Omnium gentium mores* (1520) into English and titled it *The Fardle of Fashions*; Herodotus's 'History' (5th century B.C.), translated by one B. R. as *The Famous Hystory of Herodotus* (1584); Solinus's *Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium* (3rd century B.C.), by Arthur Golding as *The Excellent and pleasant work, of Julius Solinus Polyhistor* (1587); Duarte Lopez's report on Congo (1591) by someone as *A Report of the Kingdome of Congo* (1597); Leo Africanus's *Descrizione dell' Africa* (original in Arabic; Italian MS in 1526, printed vesion in 1550, 1554, 1563, 1588; Latin version in 1556, 1558) translated by John Pory as *A Geographical Historie of Africa* (1600), and Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* (1st century A.D.) was translated into English by Philip Holland and entitled *The Historie of the World* (1601). As to which of these above Jonson had in mind in writing his masques we do not know anything apart from his mention of Pliny, Solinus, Ptolemy and Leo the African. But Jonson was well aware that an African masque responds to the age's demand. Considering that the expeditions usually took the form of going upstream of rivers, the employment of the Niger was at least quite timely. That Niger with his daughters comes to England for help probably answered, if only in symbolic terms, the collective wish of the English ruling class to take hold of west Africa as England's subject.

Likewise, the costumes designed by Inigo Jones, iconologically read, will clarify the political significance of the masque. Niger is produced 'in forme and colour of an *Aethiope*; his haire, and rare beard curled, shaddowed with a blue, and bright mantle: his front, neck, and wrists adorned with pearle, and crowned, with artificiaall wreathe of cane, and paper-rush' (*Blackness*, ll. 50–54). In representing Niger in an Ethiopian form Jones follows Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, a compendium of emblems and iconology the most used by writers around 1600.¹⁵ Jones's debt to Ripa in both *Blackness* and *Beauty* is evident, but pearls, cane and papyrus here are Jones's innovations.

The cane and papyrus connect Niger with the Nile. Images of Egypt are noticeable in other parts of *Blackness*, too. At the point when Niger finishes telling Oceanus what brought them out of their home land, there appears the

moon goddess, to whom Niger calls: '...our siluer *Starre!* / . . . / Great *AEthiopia*, Goddess of our shore' (*Blackness*, ll. 222–224). As 'Aethiopia' as a place name then meant a far wider area than what we now grasp by the name Ethiopia—Aethiopia Inferior roughly covering the whole southern half of the continent including the west coast, and Aethiopia Superior the Kingdom of Ethiopia whose size was grossly exaggerated¹⁶—it may not be so absurd an idea to present its deified figure as a goddess of Niger's shore. At the same time, the moon goddess Aethiopia, sat in a silver throne of pyramidic shape, can be associated to Isis=Diana whom Egyptians especially worshipped, or the Europeans thought they did.¹⁷ The contemporary geographical theory deriving from Ptolemy's 'Geography' that the Nile springs from among the 'Mountains of the Moon' may have helped form the Isis=Diana worship. The combination of the Nigerian goddess Aethiopia with Egyptian Isis=Diana is especially appropriate because Aethiopia prophesies the whitening of Niger's daughters in an enigma, for which manner Egypt, land of myths and hieroglyphs, stood out as authentic among ancient countries.

Pearls which adorn Niger are iconologically associated with Asia as one of the four continents. In Ripa's *Iconologia* pearls adorn the woman signifying Asia, not Africa.¹⁸ The masquers disguised as Niger's daughters are similarly in the form of 'Negro's' (l. 56), and 'for the front, eare, neck, and wrists, the ornament was of the most choise and orient pearle; best setting off from the black' (*Blackness* ll. 76–78). (Fig. 3) Apart from being painted black, they are almost an exact copy of Ripa's Asia. The confusion in Niger's and his daughters' costumes, whether deliberate or not, serves to present Niger as signifying, beyond the locality of the river Niger, exotic places in general which the English nation explored by the sea. Jones' design corresponds exactly to the opening verse of *Blackness* on Jonson's part in which a Triton and sea-maids sing:

Sound, sound aloud
The welcome of the *Orient* froud,
Into the *West*;



Fig. 3 Inigo Jones's design of a masquer's costume: Niger's daughter.
Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong, *Inigo Jones: The Theatre of the Stuart Court*, 2 vols,
(London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1973), Vol. I, p. 88.

Fayre NIGER, sonne to great OCEANVS,

....

(*Blackness*, ll. 96–99)

And Oceanus calls to Niger:

...thou, the AETHIOPEs riuer, so farre *East*,

Art seene to fall into th'extremest *West*

Of me, the king of fouds, OCEANVS,

....

(*Blackness*, ll. 111–113)

Therefore, for the audience who were more or less acquainted with foreign affairs, meeting of Oceanus and Niger on the shore of England should have enacted the subjection of the west and the east to the English dominion.

(IV)

If the image of Africa reflects the politics of the masques, then the images of England and its monarch cannot be left unexamined. In *Blackness* the reference to England occurs in Niger's speech, who recalls the enigmatic prophecy about the place where the whitening of his daughters would take place. The daughters saw a face in the lake in which they read these words:

That they a Land must forthwith seeke,

Whose termination (of the Greeke)

Sounds TANIA....

(*Blackness*, ll. 188–190)

Political allusion is hidden in this prophecy which would otherwise sound like a childish guess-what game. Oceanus instantly gives the answer 'Albion', and Aethiopia answers 'Britannia'. The emphasis on the ancient name of the kingdom 'Britannia' is not accidental. For, in 1604, the year before *Blackness*, the name 'Great Britain' was coined when James VI of Scotland became king also of England and Wales. For the new king's entry into London in the same year, Jonson, with Dekker, had prepared the speeches. James came as the

first Stuart monarch after the last great Tudor Queen, and Jonson's job was to present the entry so that this transition of dynasty might go down as legitimate. Similarly, the masque had to be a celebration of the renaming of England, and not a mere fanciful story of bleaching blackamoors. Jonson goes so far as to identify the monarch with the kingdom:

This *Land*. . .
 . . . is *Albion* the faire;
 So call'd of Neptunes son, who ruleth here:

(*Blackness*, ll. 205–207)

He even makes the point of justifying this identification in his marginal note: 'Alluding to the *rite* of stiling princes, after the name of their princedomes'. In this new Britannia James reigns as an alternative sun:

For were the world, with all his wealth, a ring,
 BRITANIA (whose new name makes all tongues sing)
 Might be a Diamant worthy to inchase it,
 Rul'd by a SVNNE, that to this height doth grace it:

(*Blackness*, ll. 250–253)

This is an image of a monarch which was to repeat itself in Louis XIV half a century later in France—an image that naturally accompanied the advent of the age of absolutism. Jonson elaborates the image in *Blackness* by furnishing it with supernatural power of healing, as pointed out in the last chapter.

The sun-image of the monarch is slightly modified in *Beauty*, which celebrates the fulfilment of Aethiopia's prophecy, and sings neo-Platonic praise of love and beauty. The opening dialogue between Januarius and Boreas, the North Wind, recapitulates the story of *Blackness*, and Boreas thus explains the reason for two years' delay in Niger's daughters' returning to England for gratitude: four more daughters, seeing the twelve sisters washed white, wished to be given the same benefit, when Night, power of darkness attempted to hinder them by disturbing the ocean. There appears Vulturinus, the East Wind, who reports that Aethiopia has broken the charm of Night and that the

daughters take rest on a floating island. In the meantime the island arrives on the shore of England and the sixteen daughters (masquers), now bleached, are received by the river Thames.

The introduction of Night as the hindrance to the bleaching is possible only on the basis that England is the world of 'day' under the sun, the monarch. The notion that the sun exists in the centre of the universe and reigns everything else permeates the whole masque.

The item on which both the poet and the architect bend their energies lies in the sumptuous floating island. Jonson seems to have got the idea of a floating island from the contemporary report of one in a Scottish lake, and thought it appropriate for a panegyric for James I, formerly James VI of Scotland.¹⁹ But what is produced in the masque is quite very different from the natural one. Before the island appears with the sixteen daughters of Niger on it, Vulturnus describes the island at some length to Boreas and Januarius, thus explicating the basic ideas about the island. That the island symbolizes the combination of beauty and love, that it is a 'new *Elysium*' where 'The spirits of the antique *Greekes* are come, / *Poets* and *Singe<r>s*', and that it reproduces a *locus amoenus* with 'arbors made of myrtle, and gold', 'flowry mazes', 'two fountains' called '*lasting Youth*' and '*chast Delight*'. (*Beauty*, ll. 136-48) Here, Vulturnus turns towards the king in the audience and addresses him:

Which now expect to see, great *Neptunes* sonne,
And loue the miracle, which thy selfe hast done.

(*Beauty*, ll. 159-160)

The epithet 'Neptune's son' is continued from *Blackness*. There appears before the king the island itself, and the fact that Jonson goes into minute detail in describing it in Q-pamphlet shows how pleased he was with Inigo Jones's job. He begins with the throne in which the sixteen masquers sit, the ornament of the throne composed of eight figures representing the elements of beauty, the costumes of the masquers and torch-bearers in the form of Cupids, the garden in *locus amoenus* style, and then Jonson comes to the point:

This *Throne*, (as the whole *Iland* mou'd forward, on the water,) had a circular motion of it owne, imitating that which wee call *Motum mundi*, from the *East* to the *West*, or the right to the left side. . . . The steps, whereon the *Cupids* sate, had a motion contrary, with *Analogy*, *ad motum Planetarum*, from the *West* to the *East*:

(*Beauty*, ll. 256–262)

With the two kinds of circular motion—the one imitating the movement of the world, and the other that of the planets,²⁰—the throne symbolically imitates the whole universe. From here on, the masque, so far enacted with neo-Platonic grandiosity, swiftly moves towards its ending, which has to be no other than dancing among the masquers and the audience. In order to bring the Elysian island in connection with the English court audience, the local river Thames is introduced into the scene.

In *Blackness* it was the meeting of Oceanus and Niger on the English shore that enacted the political ideal. In *Beauty* it is the Thames receiving Niger's daughters to the English land. As the daughters arrive in an island as a pseudo-universe, we may even understand it, without being too sweeping, to mean that England at last took hold of the whole universe. Towards the end of the masque, Januarius maintains that the floating island now rightly belongs to England:

. . . that seate which was, before,
Thought stray'ing, vncertayne, floting to each shore,
And to whose hauing euery *clime* laid clayme,
Each *land*, and *nation* vrged as the ayme
Of their ambition, *beauties* perfect *throne*,
Now made peculiar, to this place, alone;

(*Beauty*., ll. 382–387)

The last song begins by addressing the island itself, telling it to 'turn, and imitate the heauen / In motion swift and euen' and ends by imploring it to stay:

But let your state, the while,
Be fixed as the Isle.
CHO. { So all that see your *beauties* sphaere,
May know the '*Elysian* fields are here.

Ecch. Th 'Elysian fields are here.

Ecch. Elysian fields are here.

(*Beauty*, ll. 406–409)

Now that the blackness is washed and the Elysian floating island with Niger's now beautiful daughters and ancient poets in the *locus amoenus* on it has arrived at England, England itself has become the Elysium both in political and cultural terms. The epithet 'Elysian' is obviously developed from the image of England in *Blackness* as something out of the ordinary world, as Aethiopia termed it 'A world diuinded from the world' (*Blackness*, l. 248). When the masque approaches towards the end, the audience dance with the masquers. The dancing, called 'unmasking', is a deliberate and the correct procedure for blending the fictional world of the masque with the real one. At this very moment, the grand illusion that 'the Elysian fields are here' comes true, no matter how expensive, and how short.

Notes

- 1) For this idea I am much indebted to Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals 1450–1650* (1973; rev. ed. Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of Calif. Pr., 1984), especially its first 74 pages.
- 2) There are, however, some exceptions. In the case of Jonson's masques, *The Irish Masque at Court*, *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court*, *The Golden Age Restored*, *The Vision of Delight*, *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon*, *The Masque of Augurs* were performed twice each, and *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* was performed three times.
- 3) Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Blackness in Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy & Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. (London: O.U.P., 1925–1952), Vol. VII, p. 169. All citations from *The Masques of Blackness and of Beauty* are from this edition.
- 4) Originally the two masques were intended to be performed in successive years, but *Beauty* was postponed on account of the two weddings which required 'wedding masques' for the two intervening Christmas seasons.
- 5) A word on the texts: for *The Masque of Blackness*, a manuscript (though not a holograph) with Ben Jonson's own signature remains in the British Museum, and is reproduced in type in the Oxford Edition. It consists of verses to be spoken or sung and prose directions concerning the action, scenery and properties (including costumes). The verses and stage direction can be attributed to Jonson, scenery and properties to Inigo Jones. It is supposed to have been submitted to the court

beforehand—six weeks, as Marchette Chute in her biography *Ben Jonson of Westminster* (1953; London: Souvenir Pr., 1978) surmises—for preparation. The 'MS' in this paper refers to this manuscript. That, or a copy of that, Jonson seems to have had at close hand when he was compiling the above-mentioned quarto pamphlet entitled *The Masque of Blackness and of Beauty* (entered on the Stationer's Register 21 April 1608). Jonson greatly elaborates on the description of the two masques, adding marginal notes on the sources, classical and contemporary, to give authority to the speeches and appearances of his allegorical figures. The prose directions as to the scenery and properties are more detailed than in MS, and is changed from present tense to past tense as if Jonson had written that part from memory. The 'Q-pamphlet' in this paper refers to this one. Manuscripts of *The Masque of Beauty* has not been discovered yet. Only one music survives of *The Masque of Blackness*, and all five of *The Masque of Beauty*, all composed by Alfonso Ferrabosco II, and reprinted in his *Ayres* (1609).

- 6) Herford and Simpson, *Masque Commentary in Ben Jonson*, Vol. X, p. 451.
- 7) Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of The Proverbs in England In the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Pr., 1950), B105, B436, E186.
- 8) Rosemary Freeman, *English Emblem Books* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 59.
- 9) As to the other books Jonson depends on for emblematic knowledge in *The Masques of Blackness and Beauty*, see D. J. Gordon, 'The Imagery of Ben Jonson's *Masques of Blacknesse and Beautie*' in *The Renaissance Imagination* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of Calif. Pr., 1975), pp. 134–156.
- 10) Geoffrey Whitney, *A CHOICE OF EMBLEMES, AND OTHER DEVICES, For the moste parte gathered out of sundrie writers, Englished and Moralized* (Leyden, 1586; reprinted in facsimile in The English Experience Series, Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1969), p. 57.
- 11) For a full discussion of the treatment of blackness, see Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State Univ. Pr., 1987).
- 12) Roy Strong, *Art and Power*, pp. 105–109.
- 13) *Blackness* is the earliest English court masque in which royal masquers appeared as Moors, for which there is an existing text. (Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race*, p. 20). An instance of contemporary reaction can be seen in the letter of Dudley Carleton, courtier, written to Sir Ralph Winwood, saying that the painting 'became them nothing so well as their red and white, and you cannot imagine a more ugly Sight, then a Troop of lean-cheed'd Moors.' Herford & Simpson, *Masque Commentary in Ben Jonson*, Vol. X, p. 448.
- 14) *Ben Jonson*, Vol. VII, p. 169. The English translation in the brackets is from Pliny, *Natural History*, ed. and tr. H. Rackham, Loeb Cassical Library (London: Heinemann, 1942), Vol. II, p. 251.
- 15) 'Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* was first published at Rome in 1593 without illustrations. The first illustrated edition appeared in 1603, again at Rome with woodcuts', writes Stephen Orgel in Preface to his edition of Ripa's *Iconologia* (Padua, 1611; reprinted in

- facsimile, New York: Garland, 1976).
- 16) Robin Hallett, *The Penetration of Africa: European Enterprise and Exploration Principally in Northern and Western Africa up to 1830*, 2 vols. (London: RKP, 1965), Vol. I, p. 37n.
 - 17) Jonson mentions Stephanus for a source of this belief. Yet, Vincenzo Cartari's *Le imagini de i dei degli antichi* (Venice, 1571; rpt. New York: Garland, 1976), compendium of images and statues of the pagan gods, was responsible for the identification of Isis and Diana. See pp. 117–118 of the book. Within the sixteenth century, this book was translated into Latin, French, German, and into English by Richard Linche as *The Fountaine of Ancient Fiction* (London: 1599; rpt. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1973) and enjoyed great popularity among the English writers.
 - 18) Ripa shows a picture of a woman signifying Asia with '*lucido Oriente*' in *Iconologia*, p. 357, 'Asia'.
 - 19) Herford and Simpson, *Masque Commentary in Ben Jonson*, Vol. X, p. 460.
 - 20) According to Ptolemaic theory of the universe, *motum mundi* is the motion of the sphere containing the fixed stars, and *motum planetarum* is the motion of the sphere of the planets, in the opposite direction from *motum mundi*. Stephen Orgel, ed., *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Pr., 1969), p. 70n.

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