



Politics and Political Culture in the Court Masque (Early Modern Literature in History)

James Knowles

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Politics and Political Culture in the Court Masque treats the Jacobean masque as engaged with a broad range of ideas, issues and texts from other political arenas rather than as an exclusive tool of monarchy and court culture. Building on James I's own sense of the monarchical stage as a site of scrutiny not adulation, this book traces the masque's involvement in political events, such as the crises and scandals that provoke political debate, to argue for a form that is more experimental and more intensively concerned with how to articulate political criticism. Exploring a series of Jonson's Jacobean masques staged at political pressure points (Love Restored, The Irish Masque at Court, News for the New World in the Moon, and Gypsies Metamorphosed), this book suggests that these texts contribute to a wider public political culture. It links the masques to politics and political forms, such as libelous verse, from beyond courtly ceremoniousness and tact, and argues that the masque can represent more critical and controversial political ideas. The book closes with consideration of Shirley's Triumph of Peace as a response to the reinstitution of the Jonsonian masque in the 1630s, itself part of a cultural 're-launch' of the Caroline regime. In highlighting moments of strain in the interactions between the masque and political culture the pressures on the form and the debates around its purpose are seen as urgent and explicit, exposing questions of how to speak politics and how to engage in a political culture. Politics and Political Culture in the Court Masque proposes a more critical and stringent role for masques in a more contested and diverse politics.

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