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CHAPTER 3 FESTIVALS

Tracey Hill

Defining the Genre

Early modern festivals foreground issues central to the study of popular culture. They raise the important questions to do with audience, participation and agency which in themselves define what constitutes popular culture in this period. The distinction between popular and elite culture is not a simple matter to resolve; as Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield have argued, ‘popular culture is a complex phenomenon ... What might seem popular may really be elite and what appears to be elite may really be popular.’¹ I discuss below a couple of ‘case studies’ which bear out their view and which demonstrate the characteristic interplay between what one might call ‘top–down’ and ‘bottom–up’ elements of festive culture. Indeed, these instances bring into question the very nature of the genre: what was an early modern festival? Who produced it and who consumed it? Whose interests did it serve? As we will see in more detail below, crucial questions about participation and spectatorship as well as issues to do with passivity versus active involvement are involved in the analysis of popular festive culture. It is worth pointing out from the outset that the focus here is not on festivity as a *mode* within, for example, drama (à la C. L. Barber) but on actual instances of early modern festive culture.² This chapter therefore draws on tangible and material as well as textual evidence. In the two examples I have chosen to illustrate this topic, we will see how popular engagement with forms of festivity played out in practice.

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries festivals of various kinds were still numerous, and they punctuated the lives of early modern people in ways that are now largely

¹ Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield, ‘Introduction’, in Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield eds, *Literature and Popular Culture in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), p. 7.

² C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

lost to us. Games, plays, feasts and other kinds of entertainment dominated popular festivity. This chapter does not attempt a comprehensive genealogy of early modern festivals. It is worth noting, though, that like so much of early modern culture, festivals can be traced back to the medieval period; indeed, as Lawrence Clopper and Anne Lancashire have shown, ostensibly ‘medieval’ festive culture continued well into the sixteenth century.³ In the earlier periods, by and large, festivals (or at least the organised ones, an important distinction to which I will return) were associated with the religious calendar. In London and the larger provincial towns the year was regularly punctuated by quasi-theatrical events based on biblical stories and allegories, which were used to mark notable religious dates such as Corpus Christi and Whitsun as well as various saints’ days. A particular continuity with the medieval period is the use of allegory, which retained an important presence into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In urban settings such festivities were often organised by guilds and other civic bodies, as we will see further below.

London was the venue for some of the most important ceremonial and celebratory occasions, but festivals in early modern England took place in a range of civic, courtly and regional locations. As befits forms of celebration with their roots in feast days, they were primarily date-specific (my examples are 29 October 1617 and 5 October 1623) as well as space-specific. The majority were instances of cyclical ritual culture, taking place on a set date every year.⁴ At the same time, Clifford Davidson reminds us that ‘the ritual year was not celebrated in the same way by towns and parishes as by university, the court, or aristocratic households’.⁵ Diversity was a perennial feature of festive culture and by the early modern period, as David Cressy argues in his seminal account of English festivity, *Bonfires and Bells*,

³ Lawrence Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Anne Lancashire, *London Civic Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴ A useful calendar of early modern festive events can be found here:
www.chsbs.cmich.edu/Kristen_McDermott/ENG235/EM_calendar.htm.

⁵ Clifford Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 4.

‘several calendrical schemes operated together ... combining economic, ecclesiastical, dynastic and patriotic seasons and dates’.⁶ Tradition, continuity and innovation, as is so often the case in this period, operated simultaneously. Although the religious calendar was not entirely expunged by the Reformation, the sixteenth century saw the development of what Cressy calls ‘a new national, secular and dynastic calendar’, fit for newly Protestant England.⁷ Accession Day, celebrated on 17 November to mark the anniversary of the start of Elizabeth’s reign is an example of a post-Reformation feast day. Nevertheless, Shrovetide and Maytide and other such longstanding calendrical events were still occasions for popular festive celebration which drew on antique roots and often exceeded the bounds of behaviour deemed acceptable by the authorities. Drunkenness was a constant feature of popular festivity, as were impromptu bonfires; even the ubiquitous bell-ringing stood as an implicit rejection of the workaday responsibilities of ‘normal’ time.

The celebration of London’s mayoral inauguration is a good example of an ‘organised’ festival that combined ecclesiastical and civic traditions. One of the chief predecessors of the Lord Mayor’s Show was the Midsummer Watch (which itself probably dated back to the mid-thirteenth century), held overnight on the eve of St John the Baptist’s Day, 23–24 June, and St Peter and St Paul’s Day, 28–29 June.⁸ Pageantry, from which emerged the mayoral Show of the early modern period, became part of the Watch in the course of the fifteenth century, and from an early date the Watch included secular elements such as wildmen, giants and the like that were inherited by the Shows. Lord Mayor’s Day itself traditionally took place on 29 October (unless that date happened to be a Sunday), the day after the feast of St Simon and St Jude, an approved feast day under Protestantism; a smaller-scale event to mark the election of

⁶ David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1990), p. xi.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

⁸ For more on the connections between the Watch and mayoral Shows, see my *Pageantry and Power: A Cultural History of the Early Modern Lord Mayor’s Show, 1585–1639* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 28–30 and Davidson, *Festivals and Plays*, pp. 38–42.

the new mayor preceded this on Michaelmas Day.⁹ Mayoral installations were also celebrated in the larger regional towns such as Coventry and Norwich. Other moments of festive celebration, such as my second example below, served as sometimes quite spontaneous responses to ad hoc events or series of events. The increasingly secularised festivals of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – particularly those in the latter category, as I will show – at times engaged directly with contemporary politics.

Although festivals are by their very nature ephemeral in part (how easily can a permanent record exist of shouts on the street or inebriated celebrations?), from the sixteenth century onwards aspects of many were captured in print.¹⁰ There was an increasingly busy industry in England producing texts to commemorate or disseminate the festive moment. Printed books of the Lord Mayor's Show, as I have discussed in more detail elsewhere, began to appear from the 1580s, and celebratory occasions involving domestic or visiting royalty were written up to perform a quasi-news function for the public.¹¹ Partly because they were more closely connected to elite celebrations, festival books produced on the Continent were more likely to attempt to reproduce the visual spectacle than English books (Stephen Harrison's drawings of James's royal entry in 1604, published in a handsome folio, is an exception).¹² English festival books, by and large, took the forms of pamphlet, ballad or

⁹ The Lord Mayor's Show also dates back to the thirteenth century. It has even more historically remote links with the triumphal entries and processions of classical Roman times.

¹⁰ The study of festival books as a genre has been facilitated by various online resources, many with searchable images. These include the British Library's site www.bl.uk/treasures/festivalbooks/homepage.html; a similar initiative, based on Watanabe-O'Kelly and Simon's book: <http://festivals.mml.ox.ac.uk/index.php?page=home>; books from the Folger Shakespeare Library: www.folger.edu/html/exhibitions/festive_renaissance/; the Warburg Institute (mostly Italian books): <http://warburg.sas.ac.uk/library/links/action/festivals/>; and a site dedicated to German festival books: www.hab.de/bibliothek/wdb/festkultur/index-e.htm.

¹¹ For the print history of the Lord Mayor's Show, see my *Pageantry and Power*, esp. ch. 4.

¹² Stephen Harrison, *The arch's [sic] of triumph* (London: printed by John Windet, 1604). The lavishly illustrated two-volume *Europa Triumphans* is an excellent resource for the visual dimensions of European festivals. J. R.

broadside (with no illustrations beyond the occasional woodcut), genres that have been categorised as cheap or popular print; some accounts of festivity like verse libels did not even get the authority of print.¹³ There are important consequences to this distinction that I explore in more depth below.

In addition to urban celebrations, early modern festive culture has been defined in such a way as to include royal entries, progresses and one-off events such as weddings and royal visits, as well as the court masque.¹⁴ Royal entries were predominantly processional, with gates and triumphal arches being set up for the occasion. Like the mayoral Shows, they tended to feature sporadic tableaux set up at ceremonially significant locations, which formed an opportunity for speeches and music. Examples of ad hoc events would include the marriage of Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine in 1613, the investiture of Prince Henry in 1610 and the visit of King James's brother-in-law, Christian of Denmark, in 1606.¹⁵ Fireworks and entertainments on the Thames were consistent features of the civic celebrations of such events, as was music, in the form of instrumental play and songs.¹⁶ As mentioned above, celebrity occasions such as these, especially the royal wedding in 1613, prompted

Mulryne, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly and Margaret Shewring, *Europa Triumphans: Court and Civic Festivals in Early Modern Europe* (2 vols, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

¹³ See Joad Raymond ed., *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture* (vol. 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁴ For royal progresses, see Mary Hill Cole, *The Portable Queen: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Ceremony* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999) and William Leahy, *Elizabethan Triumphal Processions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

¹⁵ For discussions of specific royal events on the Continent, see, for example, Stijn Bussels, *Spectacle, Rhetoric and Power: The Triumphal Entry of Prince Philip of Spain into Antwerp* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012) and Mara R. Wade, *Triumphus Nuptialis Danicus: German Court Culture and Denmark: The 'Great Wedding' of 1634* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996).

¹⁶ Two of the printed Lord Mayors' Show include musical notation of some of the songs performed on the day: John Squire's 1620 *The Tryumphs of Peace* and Middleton's 1613 *The Triumphs of Truth*. In the 1620 Show the song appears to have been composed specially for the occasion.

many writers to try to cash in on public interest by producing (allegedly) documentary accounts of the entertainments.¹⁷ However, in general terms royal entertainments were less public and more exclusive in terms of audience once the Stuarts took power; festivities at the London Inns of Court and in noble households also took place in a more restricted environment. In keeping with their ideological function, royal entries and progresses in particular offered little opportunity for popular engagement beyond spectatorship; on such occasions ideals of monarchical power were imposed on the urban landscape.¹⁸ Neither of my case studies derives from court culture, for there is, of course, an argument about whether masques and the like belong in the category of festive culture at all, which foregrounds once again the point about the role of the audience and their degree of participation in the event. Furthermore, it is not coincidental that both of my examples are taken from the late Jacobean period, when the monarchy had distanced itself from festivity to a greater extent than during Elizabeth's reign.¹⁹

Critical Approaches to Festival Culture: A Brief Overview

Scholarly work on early modern festival culture has deep roots. It dates back to the pioneering archival research undertaken by figures such as Robert Withington and John Nichols from the

¹⁷ Examples of works produced on such occasions include *The most royall and honourable entertainment, of the famous and renowned king, Christiern the fourth, King of Denmarke* (1606), Anthony Munday's *Londons loue, to the Royal Prince Henrie ... With a breife [sic] reporte of the water fight, and fire workes* (1610) and Taylor's *Heauens blessing, and earths ioy. Or a true relation, of the supposed sea-fights & fire-workes, as were accomplished, before the royall celebration, of the al-beloved mariage, of the two peerlesse paragons of Christendome, Fredericke & Elizabeth* (1613).

¹⁸ This is not to claim that active engagement invariably came from the protagonist: Archer and Knight emphasise Elizabeth's 'strategic' silence whilst on progress. Contemporary witnesses, they write, 'place great emphasis on being able to see, follow, and describe the body of the Queen'. Jayne Elisabeth Archer and Sarah Knight, 'Elizabetha Triumphans', in Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring and Sarah Knight eds, *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 11.

¹⁹ In 1625, there was neither a mayoral Show in London nor the traditional accession entry for King Charles: this was partly due to plague but it set a marker for Charles's attitude towards popular festivity thereafter.

late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries.²⁰ However, it has in the past been inclined to reproduce the polarity between ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ forms of entertainment outlined above. As recently as Sydney Anglo and Roy Strong’s day, for example, royal entertainments were unthinkingly prioritised: Strong’s statement in *Art and Power* that ‘Renaissance festivals focussed on the prince’ exemplifies his approach.²¹ As a consequence, popular forms of festivity tended to be relegated to studies in ‘folklore’ and the popular tradition.²² Many opportunities were lost for comparative and comprehensive analyses of early modern festivals as a result. Popular festive culture was marginalised in other ways, too. It was from its earliest days fundamentally dramatic in form, and by the middle of the sixteenth century, street pageantry was the main festive mode in early modern England when it came to organised events. It is therefore unfortunate that scholars have too often treated pageantry as quite separate to theatre despite the fact that these two cultural forms share many characteristics. Indeed, the history of scholarship in the area of festivals until quite recently is largely one of fragmentation, both in terms of genre and also of nationality.

²⁰ Robert Withington, *English Pageantry: An Historical Outline* (2 vols, New York: Arno Press, 1980, first published in 1918); John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*; among which are interspersed other solemnities, public expenditures, and remarkable events during the reign of that ... Princess: ... with historical notes (3 vols and vol. 4. pt 1, London: J. Nichols, 1788–1821). For more on Nichols’ work, see Julian Pooley, ‘A Pioneer of Renaissance Scholarship: John Nichols and *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*’, in Archer et al. eds, *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, pp. 268–86.

²¹ Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1984), p. 21.

²² An important quasi-anthropological study of festival culture is offered by Clifford Geertz, ‘Centers, Kings and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power’, in Joseph Ben-David and Terry Nichols Clark eds, *Culture and Its Creators* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977), pp. 150–71.

Non-British European festival research is perhaps the better-established.²³ One attempt to broach the continental and generic divide is Pierre Béhar and Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly’s *Spectaculum Europaeum*, which presents brief summaries of civic and royal festivals, masques, ballets and related theatrical entertainments from across early modern and early eighteenth-century Europe.²⁴ Some instances of festival (such as the Lord Mayor’s Show) are given very perfunctory treatment, however, and since the book’s coverage is not exhaustive in any of these contexts, its value lies primarily in the pan-European juxtapositions it throws up, enabling scholars to form comparisons between, for instance, the English court masque and Polish ballet. In contrast, the voluminous *Europa Triumphans* presents more extended treatments of festival culture from France, Italy, Poland, Scandinavia, the Protestant Union and the Netherlands to early colonial Mexico and Peru.²⁵ Here too, though, even where the location under scrutiny is an urban one, the focus is almost exclusively on elite entertainments.

Scholars of popular culture such as Peter Burke, followed by the important contributions of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White in the 1980s, changed the picture in Britain. Equally, the revival of interest in the seminal work of Mikhail Bakhtin, together with the impact of cultural materialist approaches to early modern culture, led to a renewed attention to the carnivalesque aspects of festivity and highlighted the crucial questions of control, spontaneity, audience and participation that I engage with in this essay. Critics such as David Bergeron, R. Malcolm Smuts, Gordon Kipling, J. R. Mulryne, Jane Archer, Margaret Shewring and Elizabeth Goldring have offered more granulated and local approaches to festive culture. In general terms, scholars are now more likely to explore

²³ A major organisation in this field is the Society for European Festivals Research:

www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/theatre_s/research/festivals_research. It is perhaps telling that no UK organisations are listed as contributing to the European PALATIUM project. See www.courtresidences.eu/index.php/home/.

²⁴ Pierre Béhar and Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly eds, *Spectaculum Europaeum: Theatre and Spectacle in Europe (1580–1750)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999).

²⁵ Mulryne et al., *Europa Triumphans*.

materiality and the lived experience of early modern culture.²⁶ The study of early modern festivity has also benefited from a groundswell of interest in the history and culture of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London. In addition, festivals serve as a reminder to modern scholars of how *visual* early modern culture could be, and how central spectacle and theatre were to people's lives, especially in urban environments. Modern critical approaches to festivity are in general terms more comfortable with hybrid forms of culture than in the past. Such interdisciplinarity suits the study of early modern festivals very well, for they were inherently heterogeneous events, possessing dramatic, literary, historical and artistic elements. Scholars have accordingly explored festivals' use of music and dance and special effects such as fireworks, their architectural qualities, and their appearance in print. Ronnie Mulryne has rightly argued, then, that 'festival is pre-eminently a composite topic of study ... Music, choreography, visual design and script are as crucial to the presentation and interpretation of festival as political intent and economic supply.'²⁷ The two examples I explore in more depth below demonstrate that interplay between genres and modes.

Early Modern Festival in Action

Early modern festivity was by its very nature a transient business. All the same, it is possible to reconstruct many aspects of the lived experience of those who participated in and watched festive events through the exploration of the printed books and various eyewitness accounts of festive events. The two moments given prolonged attention here are connected, not just by their shared festive qualities, but by date – both took place in October of their respective years – and, indirectly, by the figure of Thomas Middleton. Middleton co-produced the 1617 Lord Mayor's Show and he also exploited the moment of my second example at least twice: in the

²⁶ A fascinating insight into the lived experience of festival is provided by the International Network for the Study of Early Modern Festival's online reconstruction of a royal entry:

http://www.recreatingearlymodernfestivals.com/exhibition_laura.htm.

²⁷ 'Introduction', in J. R. Mulryne and Elizabeth Goldring eds, *Court Festivals of the European Renaissance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 2.

1623 mayoral Show, printed as *The triumphs of integrity*, as well as, most famously, in *A game at chesse*, performed the following year and printed in 1625.²⁸ In both of these case studies we can perceive what Dimmock and Hadfield have called a ‘potent intermingling of elite and popular culture’ since both reveal a combination of authorised and unauthorised forms of celebration, demonstrating the extent to which these two modes were intertwined in the period.²⁹

‘These Great Uproars’: Watching the Lord Mayor’s Show

The 1617 mayoral Show was produced by the Grocers’ Company to celebrate the inauguration of one of their members, George Bolles. The resultant book, entitled *The tryumphs of honor and industry*, was written by Middleton, who in association with his collaborators Rowland Bucket, Henry Wilde and Jacob Challoner had designed the pageantry and devised the speeches. The Show itself was composed of the by-now conventional series of emblematic tableaux commenting on some aspect of the Grocers’ Company and on the requisite moral qualities for the chief governor of the City, accompanied by various sideshows, pyrotechnics, music and cannon-fire. The Show was a major event in the civic calendar and, as we will see, it attracted a very large and diverse audience. In principle, these triumphs (the preferred term in the period) presented a coherent and unified version of civic power; in practice, however, they were as prone to reveal signs of conflict and tension as any other form of mass popular culture.

The formal, admonitory aspect of the Shows, however, was always at the forefront of Middleton’s mind. In this particular instance he was at pains to stress that the festivities were not simply ‘an idle Relish’ produced for empty, extravagant display, but that they had a

²⁸ I discuss the treatment of the Spanish match in the 1623 Lord Mayor’s Show in more detail in my *Pageantry and Power*, pp. 298–300.

²⁹ Dimmock and Hadfield, *Literature and Popular Culture*, p. 1.

serious purpose, which was to put on an ‘imitation of Vertue and Noblenesse’.³⁰ ‘A Company of Indians’ formed the centre-piece of the first pageant, enabling references to the Grocers’ trade in exotic spices such as pepper and nutmeg. The personage of India, ‘the Seate of Merchandise’, as Middleton puts it, was accompanied by emblematic figures representing the qualities of trade, ‘Traffique or Merchandize’ and ‘Industry’ (sig. A4v). To reinforce the message about the global reach of traffic and industry, the second device centred on ‘the Pageant of seuerall Nations’. Here the audience were presented with speeches delivered by a Frenchman and a Spaniard, who were included, Middleton claims, because they had ‘a thirst to utter their gladnesse’ at the installation of the new Lord Mayor (sigs B1v–B2r). As we will see from an eyewitness account shortly, however, the onlookers’ reaction to the appearance of these strangers demonstrated rather less decorum. Finally, the day concluded with ‘the Castle of Fame or Honor’, where notable past dignitaries of the Company were paraded.

One does not, however, have to rely exclusively on the printed book with its own specific agenda for a sense of how the event transpired. Fortuitously, a very detailed account of the 1617 Show was drawn up for an official report back to Venice by Orazio Busino, the Venetian ambassador’s chaplain.³¹ Our eyewitness appears to have had a particular interest in entertainments, for he recorded his impressions of a court masque and a play at the Fortune theatre as well as the 1617 Show. Eyewitness accounts such as these are especially valuable in capturing the most ephemeral, impromptu aspects of popular festive celebrations. They offer a space for contingency and interaction with audience and participants that the printed books could not accommodate. Busino’s first-hand account of the latter event also provides an outsider’s perspective, and since he is unlikely to have been able to understand the songs and speeches (he confesses to having been ‘bewildered’ by what he was seeing), his

³⁰ *The triumphs of honor and industry* (London: printed by Nicholas Okes, 1617), A3r-v. George Bolles was a man of quite stringent Protestant views: during his term of office he is said to have rebuked the King for progressing through the City during divine services on a Sunday.

³¹ Ambassadors often attended the Lord Mayor’s Show. All quotations from Busino are taken from *CSP Venetian*, vol. XV, pp. 62–3: www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=88665.

recollections focus on the spectacle and, importantly, the behaviour of the audience. The title of his report states that the Show was a ‘Public Solemnity performed for the satisfaction of the populace’, and accordingly he describes the vast audience as ‘a fine medley’ of young and old, rich and poor, male and female, English and ‘alien’. The official part of the day was not neglected. Busino witnessed the water show as well as the show on land and he provides a colourful description of the lavish formal festivities:

The ships were beautifully decorated with balustrades and various paintings. They carried immense banners and countless pennons [pennants]. Salutes were fired, and a number of persons bravely attired played on trumpets, fifes and other instruments ... We also saw highly ornamented stages with various devices which subsequently served for the land pageant.

This description bears out the ‘no expense spared’ approach one gleans from the records of the Grocers’ Company, whose members funded the Show. Busino also notes accompanying music – the City Waits with their trumpets, flutes and fifes were usually employed to play on the barges and on Cheapside – and the use of cannon-fire to punctuate the proceedings. Indeed, the musical instruments – trumpets, drums and fifes – were those conventionally used for processions; they were chosen to produce the loudest and most robust sound possible.³²

At the same time, Busino’s attention was often drawn to incidents that had little to do with the actual Show but which evidently provided an enjoyable spectacle on the sidelines. Those who watched the Lord Mayor’s Show, it appears, were willing to participate as well as spectate. *The triumphs of honor and industry* includes a speech in Spanish to accompany ‘the Pageant of the Nations’. In performance on the day, the man playing the Spaniard – who, Busino writes, ‘imitated the gestures of that nation perfectly’ – took advantage of the

³² See also Jane Palmer, ‘Music in the Barges at the Lord Mayor’s Triumphs in the Seventeenth Century’, in Kenneth Nicholls Palmer, *Ceremonial Barges on the River Thames* (London: Unicorn Press, 1997), pp. 171–4. Less noisy musical interludes were provided by the child singers often employed on these occasions (indeed, Anthony Munday was chastised in 1609 by the Ironmongers’ Company because ‘the Musick and singinge weare wanting’ (GH MS 16,967/2, fol. 66b)).

presence of recognisable overseas spectators (the Spanish wore distinctive costume) to extemporise.³³ Busino writes that the actor ‘kept kissing his hands, right and left, but especially to the Spanish ambassador, who was a short distance from us, in such wise as to elicit roars of laughter from the multitude’.³⁴ Clearly, regardless of the probable intention of the pageant to present unity within the various nations, the actor was appealing to the longstanding popular animus against Spain which was such a central feature of my second example below.³⁵ Busino, who admits to anti-Spanish ‘prejudice’, never passes up an opportunity to record the indignities suffered by Spaniards. He goes on to describe how

some of our party saw a wicked woman in a rage with an individual supposed to belong to the Spanish embassy. She urged the crowd to mob him, setting the example by belabouring him herself with a cabbage stalk and calling him a Spanish rogue, and although in very brave array his garments were foully smeared with a sort of soft and very stinking mud ... Had not the don saved himself in a shop they would assuredly have torn his eyes out.

The degree of coverage given in the report to the treatment of Spaniards, real and pretended, indicates that Busino was struck by the unruly behaviour of the crowd at least as much as he was by the formal celebrations. He remarked less sympathetically that ‘the insolence of the mob is extreme’; certain individuals, he wrote, ‘cling behind the coaches and should the coachman use his whip, they jump down and pelt him with mud. In this way we saw them bedaub the smart livery of one coachman, who was obliged to put up with it.’ ‘In these great uproars’, he concludes, ‘everything ends in kicks, fisty cuffs and muddy faces’.

³³ To make a convincing Spaniard, ‘he wore small black moustachios and a hat and cape in the Spanish fashion with a ruff round his neck and others about his wrists, nine inches deep’.

³⁴ Busino also mentions ‘two ugly Spanish women ... ill dressed, lean and vivid with deep set eye balls [who were] perfect hobgoblins’.

³⁵ Cressy argues that in this period ‘popular opinion, in as far as it can be reconstructed, was vehemently, almost pathologically, anti-Spanish’. Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. 96.

Although Middleton's printed text strives to confer decorum and formality upon the proceedings, as befitting the nature of a day of 'solemnity', it is clear that the assembled crowd had ideas of their own about how the festivities should be enjoyed. For many present on the day, the boundary between onlooker and participant was there to be transgressed. 'An incessant shower of squibs and crackers' were thrown down into the streets from the windows above, Busino records, and although (as was the usual practice) 'a number of lusty youths and men armed with long fencing swords', as well as 'men masked as wild giants who by means of fireballs and wheels hurled sparks in the faces of the mob' attempted to clear the way and control the crowds, the impression is one of barely controlled chaos. Documentary records bear out what Busino says, with drunkenness and misbehaviour being a regular aspect to the civic festivities. In November 1629, for example, Benjamin Norton, a Clothworker, appeared before the Court of Aldermen after having been 'arrested for throwing squibbs into the streete upon the Lord Maiors Day past' in precisely the way outlined by Busino above.³⁶

Bonfires, Bells and Booze: Celebrating the Return of Prince Charles

The crowd were given even greater freedom to produce their own version of festival on another October day just six years later. Prince Charles, the Duke of Buckingham and their entourage arrived back in England from the failed marriage negotiations in Madrid on 5 October 1623, three weeks before that year's mayoral Show. Celebrations of their safe arrival at Portsmouth – or rather, celebrations of the perceived failure of the Spanish match thinly disguised as joy at their safe arrival – were widespread, and they extended, reports claimed, to Scotland and Ireland.³⁷ Indeed, as with 5 November, 5 October 1623 became a date to commemorate for years to come.³⁸ The festivities had every appearance of spontaneity, too.

³⁶ Court of Alderman Repertories, vol. 44, fol. 2r.

³⁷ A highly ideological version of the reaction to events in the English plantations in Ireland is presented in Stephen Jerome, *Irelands iubilee, or ioyes Io-paeen, for Prince Charles his welcome home* (Dublin: printed by the Society of Stationers, 1624).

³⁸ Thomas Cogswell writes that 'for the rest of the decade the return of the prince remained popular material for literary treatment ... [A]t St Margaret's, Westminster, church bells continued to toll on [5 October] until the

Various contemporary witnesses testify that the delight expressed ‘by all sorts of people’ was unprecedented in the Jacobean period; powerful figures including Archbishop Laud expressed their astonishment at the popular response to the prince’s return from Spain.³⁹ Although there undoubtedly were on this occasion aspects of what Cressy calls ‘stage-management’, as he remarks, ‘authenticity and manipulation are not ... necessarily exclusive [and] a truly popular celebration can be fuelled or fostered by official prompts’.⁴⁰

There are accordingly many and diverse sources of evidence for the popular celebrations of Charles’s salvation from the twin perils of a perilous sea voyage and a Catholic bride. Letters flew back and forth across the country to spread the news, and the event prompted the publication of a number of broadsides, ballads and pamphlets and the circulation of illicit verse ‘libels’. All these printed books and manuscript texts focused on the numerous outbreaks of apparently spontaneous street festivities, and the fact that these were testified to in very similar terms in both public and private media confers a degree of accuracy upon the varying accounts. Interestingly, a more straightforwardly ‘elite’ treatment of the return of the prince, Jonson’s masque *Neptune’s triumph for the returne of Albion*, designed to be performed during the Christmas festivities at court, never actually took place although it was printed.⁴¹ The field was left, then, to other voices to convey their feelings about the events.

A lively sense of popular celebration is conveyed by one of the anonymous broadsides produced to exploit the joyous occasion, *The High and Mighty Prince Charles ... his happy*

outbreak of the Civil War’. Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution: English Politics and the Coming of War, 1621–1624* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 10–11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

⁴⁰ Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. 101.

⁴¹ Ben Jonson, *Neptune’s triumph for the returne of Albion* ([London: *s.n.*], 1624). The title page nevertheless claims that it was ‘celebrated ... at the Court on the Twelfth night’. In fact, the masque was first postponed to Shrovetide and then cancelled entirely due to irreconcilable political pressures from the Spanish and French ambassadors. See Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 393–4.

returne, and hearty welcome ... the fifth of October, 1623. ‘No tongue can halfe expresse / The rausht Countries wondrous ioyfulness’, the writer begins, although he or she then proceeds to try. The whole country was given over to raucous celebration, it would appear:

The Peoples clamour, Trumpets clangor, sound
Of Drums, Fifes, Violls, Lutes, these did abound;
Loud Cannons thundring from the Castels, Towers,
And Ships, shooke Ayre and Earth ...

To accompany the racket, the traditional devices of popular festivity were employed: ‘all to their powers’, we are told, ‘Pourde healths of wine for welcome; Bels were rung, / Bonfires [*sic*] were kindled, fire-workes each-where flung’.⁴² Indeed, Cressy argues that the usual elements of festivity, ‘fire, noise, alcohol, and crowds’, achieved an unparalleled ‘intensity’ on this occasion.⁴³

John Taylor, who managed to be on the spot at both Portsmouth and London, produced a longer and more detailed work on the subject.⁴⁴ His equally hyperbolic account, *Prince Charles his welcome from Spaine*, claims that on hearing that the Prince had merely arrived at port to *depart* from Spain, the celebrations commenced immediately: ‘the great Ordnance

⁴² Anon., *The High and mighty Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, &c. the manner of his arriuell at the Spanish Court, the magnificence of his royall entertainement there: his happy returne, and hearty welcome both to the king and kingdome of England, the fifth of October, 1623* ([London: s.n.], 1623). To underscore its authenticity as a documentary record, the text includes footnotes ‘for the better explaining some of the Verses, and Story’.

⁴³ Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. 104.

⁴⁴ ‘At Portsmouth [Taylor and some friends] were welcomed aboard the flagship of the fleet waiting to fetch Prince Charles home from Spain’ (Bernard Capp, *ODNB*). Taylor’s pamphlet about Charles’s return was rushed to the press, being registered with the Stationers’ Company only a day after the London celebrations. By this date Taylor, who held both strong Protestant and royalist sympathies, had established a productive sideline in pamphlets about events concerning the royal family: he published verses on the death of Prince Henry in 1612 and a celebratory work about the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to the Elector Palatine in 1613. For more on Taylor’s involvement in the 1623 moment, see Clare Wikeley, ‘Honour Conceal’d; Strangely Reveal’d: The Fool and the Water-Poet’, in Alexander Samson ed., *The Spanish Match: Prince Charles’s Journey to Madrid, 1623* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 189–208.

thundered and filled the earth and skies with loud reioycings, the trumpets clangor pierced the welkin, the beaten drummes ratled [*sic*] triumphantly [and] all manner of Instruments sounded melodiously'.⁴⁵ Again, the celebrations must have been very noisy, with trumpets, drums and 'all manner of Instruments' (probably not played as 'melodiously' as Taylor claims) adding to the din. As one might expect, this was just a taster of what was to come. Taylor, as a de facto Londoner of some 30 years' standing, singles out the City of London as the location of the most extensive celebrations of the Prince's return. He concedes that 'the whole Kingdome' experienced 'excessive ioy'; however, as with mayoral inaugurations, the City 'spared for no cost' and showed the rest of the country how to party.⁴⁶ Taylor summarises the festivities in London thus:

The Bels proclaim'd aloud in euery steeple,
The ioyfull acclamations of the people.
The Ordnance thundred with so high a straine,
As if great Mars they meant to entertaene.
The Bonfires blazing, infinit almost,
Gauē such a heat as if the world did roast.
True mirth and gladnesse was in euery face,
And healths ran brauely round in euery place. (B1r)

From his urban vantage point Taylor was able to provide an apparently first-person description of the forms of celebration in London with equivalent detail to that of Busino's treatment of the 1617 Show.⁴⁷ He provides anecdotes replete with local colour: 'I heard it credibly reported', he states, 'that there was one Bonefire made at the Guildhall ... which cost one hundred pounds (belike it was some Logwood which was prohibited or unlawful to be

⁴⁵ John Taylor, *Prince Charles his welcome from Spaine* (London: printed by G[eorge] E[lld] for John Wright, 1623), A4r. Further references to this work are given in the body of the essay.

⁴⁶ Cogswell described the reception Charles received in the capital as 'pandemonium'. Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution*, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Other printed works, such as William Hockham's broadsheet *Prince Charles his welcome to the Court* (London: printed by Edward Allde for John Wright, 1623), are much vaguer than Taylor about the festivities, suggesting the use of second-hand sources.

used by Dyers, and being forfeited it was ordained to be burnt in triumph)' (B1v). Alastair Bellany and Andrew McRae write that 'the festivities for the return of Prince Charles – church bells, bonfires in the streets, drums and cannon salutes – were part of the early modern English "vocabulary of celebration" ... and were thus similar to those used at the installation of Lord Mayors of London'.⁴⁸ The correspondences with the Lord Mayor's Show are indeed numerous. For one thing, Taylor (who was to write a mayoral Show himself a decade later) calls the celebrations of Charles's return 'triumphs', the usual term for mayoral Shows in this period, and like Busino he focuses on the behaviour of 'all estates' of the people. Further echoing Busino, he invokes a 'most merry and ioyfull confusion' of celebration involving 'people of all degrees, from the highest to the lowest, both rich and poore' (B1v, B2v). As in Busino's account of the 'incessant shower of squibs and crackers' being thrown around during the 1617 Show, Taylor recounts that there were 'Cressit lights, and most excellent fireworkes, with squibs, crackers [and] racketts, which most delightfully flew euery way' (B2v–B3r).⁴⁹ The sheer din of the celebrations also resembles that of the Lord Mayor's Show, featuring what Taylor calls 'the reioycing noyses of Instruments, Ordnance, Muskets, Bels, Drums, & Trumpets' (B1v).

One of the major differences between the festivities in October 1623 and those of the mayoral Show, however, was that the person who was being celebrated, Prince Charles, was virtually absent on the former occasion. In the context of that absence, what comes across particularly vividly from Taylor's pamphlet as well as from other contemporary witnesses is the degree of unfettered agency on show. As with popular festival since time immemorial, the City's population treated the occasion as a holiday. 'No shops were opened', Taylor writes,

⁴⁸ 'Early Stuart Libels: An Edition of Poetry from Manuscript Sources', ed. Alastair Bellany and Andrew McRae, *Early Modern Literary Studies Text Series I* (2005):

<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/texts/libels/>, Nv18, note 10 (further references to this collection are abbreviated to 'Early Stuart Libels').

⁴⁹ Cressets were metal holders or baskets for torches. They were purchased in large numbers for mayoral Shows since part of the day's entertainment would have taken place in autumnal darkness.

and ‘no manner of worke was done from morning till night’ apart from building the ubiquitous bonfires and, of course, the ‘filling and emptying of pots’ (B1v). Although, Cogswell writes, ‘the Lord Mayor had ordered the constables to prepare the customary demonstrations of joy ... [t]he citizens ... had already anticipated the command and were in the midst of celebration’.⁵⁰ Indeed, according to Simonds D’Ewes, a student in London at the time, ‘’Twas pretty to observe the difference between the bonfires made by command ... [and those] that were made upon the matter voluntarily, the first being thin and poor, [the latter] many and great.’⁵¹ On this day of revelry Londoners were *en fête* – free to drink vast quantities, to feast from communal tables, to set off muskets and cannons and set fire to anything that came to hand, from logs and baskets to hogsheads and barrels (the latter no doubt emptied specially). One contemporary observer, John Woolley, wrote to William Trumbull (an overseas diplomat) that ‘the people for joy and gladness ran up and down like madde men and none of what condition soever would work upon that day’.⁵²

Unlike the Lord Mayor’s Show or the royal entry, as Cressy suggests, ‘there was no centrepiece to the celebration, no contrived court ceremony [and] no triumphant procession’.⁵³ There was instead a literally intoxicating and doubtless quite perilous juxtaposition of booze and bonfires. As Cressy notes, ‘Taylor was inspired by the vast and varied drinking of the day.’⁵⁴ The latter indeed evokes a bacchanalian picture: ‘Whole pintes, quarts, pottles, and gallons, were made into Bonefires of Sacke and Claret’, he writes, and in turn ‘good fellows like louing Salamanders swallowed those liquid fires most sweetly and affectionately’ (B2r). Danger was present throughout the day: George Calvert, the Secretary of State, observed that the bonfires ‘might have hazarded the burning of the streets, had they not been allayed with

⁵⁰ Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution*, p. 6.

⁵¹ Cited in Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. 94. D’Ewes is referring to when Londoners responded ‘grudgingly’ to orders to light bonfires on Charles’s arrival at Madrid some seven months earlier. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁵² Trumbull MSS, XLVIII/104; cited in Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution*, p. 8.

⁵³ Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. 101.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

London liquor'.⁵⁵ The sheer number of impromptu conflagrations did cause some problems, ironically enough, for the man whose return was being celebrated. The coach bearing Prince Charles himself was prevented from travelling through the City due to the vast numbers of bonfires blocking the thoroughfares.⁵⁶

One therefore gains a sense of the *materiality* of popular festive culture in the period. According to Taylor, households were ransacked for items to burn, with items including 'mouse-traps' and 'old graters and stooles' being added to the various conflagrations. Local knowledge is also brought into play. As we have already seen, place names add to the authority of the text. Taylor notes that 'the very Vintners burnt their bushes in Fleetstreet and other places' (B2r) and as a high-profile member of the Watermen's Company he could not resist the addendum, 'it is to be remembered, that two Watermen at the Tower Wharfe burnt both their Boats in a Bonefire most merrily' (C3r). Similarly to the Shows, which were pre-eminently street entertainments, Taylor's text reveals the extensive use of outside locations as the venues for festivity. 'Streets, lanes, courts, and corners' all had their bonfires; indeed, according to Taylor, 'betwixt Paules Church yard & London-bridge ... there were at least 108 Bonefires', not including those set up in 'the Strand, Westminster, and Holborn' as well as 'hundreds of places which [Taylor] saw not' (B3r).⁵⁷ Paul's Churchyard, the traditional location of one of the mayoral pageants, was the site for 'two mighty bonfires', along with 'a crosse of wood ... extended into foure branches'; Paul's Cross itself was adorned with 'as many burning Linkes as the Prince his Highnesse was years old' (B2v).

Corroboration of these various accounts is provided by a series of contemporary anonymous 'libels'. These illicit texts arguably offer an even more 'popular' and certainly more irreverent voice than the two printed works discussed above. Expressions of joy remain indisputable; what remains at issue, as Cressy reminds us, are 'the ambiguous issues of

⁵⁵ *CSPD*, 1623–5, p. 89; cited in Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. 96.

⁵⁶ See Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Simonds D'Ewes's diary records '335 [bonfires] between Whitehall and Temple Bar'. Cited in Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. 94.

spontaneity and control, and the haunting question of who was saying what to whom'.⁵⁸ At some levels, the libels reiterate the messages put across in printed works. Thus 5 October will remain 'for eternitie / A day of rest and sport', states the libel entitled 'Oh for an Ovid or a Homer now'.⁵⁹ Another, 'Of Prince Charles his voyage into Spayne' (otherwise known as 'The fift of August, and the fift') notes the common ground with the mayoral Show. On hearing bells and cannon-fire one might presume that celebrations of a mayoral installation were underway; however, on this occasion, 'It is not for a Mayor, or such a toy; / The melancholy drums do beate'. The same festive features highlighted in the printed sources re-occur: 'the bonefires all are in a sweate', 'the belles ring' and 'gunnes sing'; moreover, it 'shalbee treason to bee sober / On the fift day of October'.⁶⁰

One significant difference between these libels and printed texts, however, is the overt treatment of religious politics. Lighting so many fires on a day of constant rain and in the context of a wood shortage stood not just for 'community and joy', Cressy argues, but also 'defiance'. The ceaseless bell-ringing, too, can be seen to have acted as what Cressy calls 'a communal exorcism of the Spanish threat'.⁶¹ England is celebrating, the second libel asserts, not solely because the Prince is safely returned, but because there is no longer the prospect that 'the pope / Could make here a Romish plantation'. Another libel, 'The Prince is now come out of Spayne' (which features a scurrilous reference to 'the Cunninge of old Gundamore'),⁶² puts forward the same point in even more explicit terms:

They tolde us twenty thousand lyes,
To feede the peoples fantasies;
And put them in great feare.
But when the Prince to England came,

⁵⁸ Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. 93.

⁵⁹ 'Early Stuart Libels', Nv16, lines 80–1.

⁶⁰ 'Early Stuart Libels', Nv18, lines 31–5, 4–5.

⁶¹ Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, pp. 104–5.

⁶² 'Gundamore' is Count Gondomar, the notorious Spanish ambassador, who played a central role in the marriage negotiations and who was extensively mocked in *A game at chesse* the following year.

And brought not home the Spanish Dame,
The Papists hung their eares.⁶³

This work also presents a more sceptical take on popular festivity than is evident in the other texts under discussion.⁶⁴ Here the celebrations are evidence of political naivety rather than righteous elation. A man rejoicing at the Prince's deliverance is for this writer just 'some Maudlinn drunke' (line 34), and in place of Taylor's scene of spontaneous comradeship a sourer note is struck: 'So to the taverne all they went, / And every foole his verdict spent, / And then the bells did ring' (lines 40–2). This anonymous writer offers a dispassionate contemporary view on Cressy's observation that 'princes were supposed to be greeted with enthusiasm, and a genre had developed to describe it'.⁶⁵ More troublingly for James's 'pacific' rule, the searing religious politics of the period are foregrounded here. The bonfires so widely cited simply as evidence of unmitigated joy in the other accounts of the 1623 festivities serve in this instance as what Bellany and McRae call a 'mordant' reminder of the fires that consumed Protestant 'martyrs' in the mid-sixteenth century: 'It's thought that since Queene Maries days / There was no such a fyre', observes the poet.⁶⁶

The 'great excess and drunkenness' that D'Ewes lamented in 1623 resulted in a virtually carnivalesque scene that day: as Cressy argues, 'conventional respect for property and commodities was inverted, private possessions became public property, wood carts [normally protected by law] were commandeered, and valuable items were consigned to the

⁶³ 'Early Stuart Libels', Nv17, lines 7–12.

⁶⁴ A different perspective is presented by a work by Andrés Almansa y Mendoza, *The Ioyfull Returne, of the Most Illustrious Prince* (London: printed by Edward Allde for Nathaniell Butter and Henry Seile, 1623). As one might expect of a text apparently 'translated out of the Spanish Copie', Charles's safe arrival back at Portsmouth is here described as a cause for the 'unspeakable Ioy of *both* Nations' (A1r, my emphasis). The text resembles the English versions, however, by referring to bells, bonfires and ordnance being set off on Charles's arrival. See also Henry Ettinghausen, 'The Greatest News Story since the Resurrection? Andrés de Almansa y Mendoza's Coverage of Prince Charles's Spanish Trip', in Samson, *The Spanish Match*, pp. 75–89.

⁶⁵ Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. 100.

⁶⁶ 'Early Stuart Libels', Nv17, lines 29–30.

flames'.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the events that took place in October 1623 reveal the potentially dangerous interconnections between popular festivity and domestic and foreign affairs in early Stuart England. The popular celebrations of Charles's return, with their double-edged reference to the failed marriage negotiations, had the potential to highlight, even to challenge, the precarious balance being struck by Jacobean state policy. King James would have been left in no doubt about the weight of popular feeling against closer links with Spain. In this respect the October festivities form a link with more trenchant commentators like Thomas Scott, whose fervently anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish tracts such as *Vox populi* were the chief sources for Middleton's final word on the events of 1623, *A game at chesse*, which itself received unprecedented popular acclaim.

Early modern festive culture was therefore embedded in what Cressy calls 'a cycle of cultural and political collisions' and it manifested both elite and popular traditions and concerns.⁶⁸ As historians of popular culture and disorder such as Steve Hindle, Paul Griffiths and Keith Wrightson have shown, festive culture could at times spill over from exuberance into genuine disorder.⁶⁹ Festivals reveal the impact of social, political and (especially) religious change on the mass of the population. They acted as a means by which ancient traditions and rituals could be both memorialised and adapted, and they serve as a reminder to future generations that elite, canonical cultural practices cannot tell the full story of the lived experience of early modern popular culture.

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⁶⁷ Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. 105.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Steve Hindle, 'Custom, Festival and Protest in Early Modern England: The Little Budworth Wakes, St Peter's Day, 1596', *Rural History* 6:2 (1995), 155–78.

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