



*Charles II: The Star King*, Clare Jackson (London: Penguin, 2016).

*Scandalous Liaisons: Charles II and His Court*, R. E. Pritchard (Stroud: Amberley, 2015).

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*Charles II: The Star King*. By Clare Jackson. London: Penguin, 2016. ISBN 978-0-141-97976-2. ix + 130 pp. £12.99.

*Scandalous Liaisons: Charles II and His Court*. By R. E. Pritchard. Stroud: Amberley, 2015. ISBN 978-1-4456-4878-1. 288 pp. £20.

No British monarch has come to embody so fully the age in which they reigned quite like Charles II (1630-85). With his flowing black ringlets and extravagant attire, his witty repartee and (in)famous penchant for beautiful women, Charles possesses all of the attributes of the Restoration rake. However, as scholars over the last thirty years have come to appreciate, the king was not simply a ribald caricature like those found in the countless comedies presented on stage during the 1660s and 1670s. Instead, we now recognise that Charles consistently demonstrated an aptitude for the complex machinations of late seventeenth-century domestic and foreign politics, using the spectacle of majesty to legitimize, and even create, his authority. The two books under review here point out the paradoxes and tensions in Restoration England. Clare Jackson's biography of the king demonstrates how he understood his role as a complex public performance, while R. E. Pritchard gives us an entertaining account of the hedonistic court, its sexual mores, and the personality politics that were played out in the apartments and galleries of Whitehall Palace.

The Penguin Monarchs Series is quickly establishing itself as an indispensable resource for general readers and undergraduate students alike. Jackson's contribution to the series opens with an acknowledgement that Charles II is one of the more challenging subjects for biography because he "repeatedly evaded attempts to capture his personality" (3). Charles's very allusiveness is precisely a result of his upbringing under the tutelage of the then Earl of Newcastle, William Cavendish, who encouraged the young prince to understand kingship as something publicly *performed*, rather than as something intrinsic to his natural self (as his father, Charles I, had believed). In a letter to Charles, Newcastle advised that "a king must know at what time to play the king, when to qualify it" (5). Jackson takes this appeal to conceive of monarchical majesty as a form of theatre seriously and it informs the structure as well as the content of her biography. *Charles II: The Star King* analyses the visual and literary representations of the king as well as the ceremonies through which he signified his status as monarch. The opening chapter sets out Jackson's methodology. Rather than providing a cradle to grave account of his life, she instead approaches her subject thematically, looking in turn at how Charles's image was fashioned by him and his court in

official portraits and royal ceremonies as well as represented and received by the wider public in forms as diverse as verse lampoons, plays and, in subsequent centuries, historical novels and films. Chapter two then gives a succinct narrative of Charles's life which is used to anchor the thematic discussions that come later.

The next three chapters form the centre of the book and discuss the paradoxes inherent in images of the king. In chapter three Jackson examines the visual images that were produced during Charles's exile and throughout his reign. She notes how in 1660 portraits of the new king were extremely outdated: years of civil war and exile meant that accurate likenesses were not commissioned. Despite this, after the restoration Charles's face quickly became one of the most disseminated of any British monarch. Subjects announced their loyalty to the king by displaying his portrait in houses and public buildings, as well as on everyday objects such as china bowls and dishes. Chapter four discusses Charles's use of royal ceremonial as a means of legitimating his rule. As Jackson makes clear, though, these rituals only serve to highlight the contradictions inherent in the Restoration itself. For example, while touching for the king's evil (which Charles did more than any other monarch), he also wandered through parks and chatted with subjects. The penultimate chapter looks at literary representations of Charles and his court, and how these media – from plays to newspapers to sermons – promoted and challenged government policies and court behaviours. The final chapter forms an overview of the reception of Charles II's image across the centuries in both academic and popular depictions ranging from Whig historiography of the 1680s to J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904).

This account of Charles II is both lively and rewarding. As an introductory biography it is necessarily economic, but the author does a good job of sketching out the key elements of Charles's eventful and intriguing life. The notes and brief bibliographical essay provide an accurate state of the field as it currently stands, pointing readers to further sources of information. This is, I think, a good introduction to Charles and his time for students and general readers who are new to the subject, but Jackson acknowledges her debt to previous scholarship on Charles II. Those familiar with John Miller's *Charles II* (1991) or, especially, Ronald Hutton's *Charles II: King of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1989) will find little new here, though the emphasis on Charles's "multiple masks" (106) offers an alternative way of reading the personality of this most elusive of kings.

R. E. Pritchard's *Scandalous Liaisons: Charles II and His Court* is an account of the hedonistic milieu and sexual liaisons of Charles's court from the accession to his death in 1685. The introduction sets out the remit and parameters of the book: using a wide range of literary material, from verse

lampoons to memoirs to pen portraits, the author reconstructs the intimate social and literary contexts of the lives of Charles's courtiers, their lovers and hangers-on. Extensive quotation from diarists and gossip-seekers such as Samuel Pepys add local colour to the events being discussed.

The opening chapters cover Charles's early years during the civil wars and his exile on the continent during the 1640s and 1650s and his first romantic relationships. Of particular importance in this period was Charles's encounter with Lucy Walter, who gave birth to James Fitzroy, the future Duke of Monmouth, in 1649. Rumours that the two had in fact married before Charles's Restoration periodically caused the king problems throughout his reign, especially during the Exclusion Crisis, but he always insisted there was no truth to them. The chapter closes by describing Charles's initial acquaintance with the strong-willed Barbara Villiers, who quickly became his principal mistress after 1660.

In chapter two Pritchard describes the complex set up at court as Charles divided his energies, as well as his palace, between his new queen, Catherine of Braganza, and Barbara, now promoted to Lady Castlemaine. Many people witnessed the workings of this unhappy *ménage à trois* from the wings and wrote about it in verse and in memoirs. Pritchard makes much of this material to reconstruct the tense and morally ambiguous atmosphere of the Carolean court.

The following three chapters move away from Charles himself to focus on other key figures with equally complicated love lives. Chapter three looks at the king's younger brother James, Duke of York (1633-1701), and his clandestine marriage to Anne Hyde, the daughter of Charles's senior minister the Earl of Clarendon, his numerous mistresses, and finally, after Anne's death in 1671, his second marriage to Mary of Modena. In chapter four Pritchard widens his lens in order to sketch a picture of the broader sexual libertinism of the court as seen from observers both inside and outside Whitehall's gates. In works such as the anonymous manuscript poem *On the Ladies of the Court* (1663) or the verse lampoons of Rochester, we see disenchanted wits accusing (or celebrating) court ladies as sexual teases and perverse celebrity idols (117). The post-Restoration court was not a model of chaste virtue but instead a place of morbid fascination for ordinary citizens as a lude and corrupt institution. The mistresses ranged from French noblewomen to actresses. Chapter five charts the life and loves of George Villiers, the second Duke of Buckingham (Barbara's cousin).

The second half of the book returns to Charles and his later mistresses, with chapters on Barbara and her children, Francis Stewart, Nell Gwyn and Louise de Keroualle, and (briefly) Hortense Mancini, Countess Mazarin. Pritchard does a good job narrating the shifts in fortune of these politically

astute and powerful women both as a group (revealing the influence Charles's mistresses had on all aspects of court life, from its *décor* to issues of government policy) while ensuring that each individual relationship remains distinct for the reader.

Overall, this is an entertaining but flawed account of Charles II and his court. Its liberal use of contemporary accounts means that readers get a good sense of the Restoration "moment", though the book lacks sufficient analysis of its sources. The author tends to take what the texts have to say at face value, without addressing questions of literary form that bare directly on interpretation. How does the manuscript context of *On the Ladies of the Court*, for example, which circulated among a specific cadre of readers, change the way we read that libellous poem? Added to this is a lack of critical and historical discussion. Pritchard leans far too heavily on one or two historical studies, without fully interrogating their conclusions. The reader unfamiliar with the complexities of the period and its distortion by later Whig historians, all beautifully laid out by Jackson, risks leaving *Scandalous Liaisons* with a sense of Charles and his court as no more than sexually debauched, drunken pleasure-seekers rather than as complex characters at the centre of high politics during a crucial moment of English (and British) history.

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