



*Anna of Denmark and Henrietta
Maria: Virgins, Witches, and
Catholic Queens*

Susan Dunn-Hensley

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In 1604, Anna of Denmark performed as the virgin goddess Pallas Athena in the *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, her first royal English masque. She did so wearing a plumed helmet and a costume fashioned from an old gown from the wardrobe of the late Queen Elizabeth, hemmed to show her legs. Years later, in 1638, the daughter-in-law she would never meet, Henrietta Maria, impersonated an Amazon in the final royal masque of the Caroline period, *Salmacida Spolia*. Both women had a fondness for masquing, and would utilize the performance genre as a means of establishing a dynastic mythology—with themselves at the forefront as powerful figures within that dynasty. Building upon the previous queens' imagery as Anna did upon Elizabeth's and Henrietta Maria did upon Anna's, they each created a mythology by the characters they chose to portray in the masques, as well as deciding which artists to collaborate with and to patronize.

With *Anna of Denmark and Henrietta Maria: Virgins, Witches, and Catholic Queens*, Susan Dunn-Hensley takes on the parallel tasks of not only filling gaps in the historiography, but also propelling forward a vigorous image-rehabilitation campaign of both early Stuart queens. Her book is right at home in the *Queenship and Power* series from Palgrave Macmillan, and is interestingly conceived, well researched, engages extensively with secondary literature, and is accessibly written. Dunn-Hensley opens her book with a discussion of the roles of English queens consort from the high medieval period until the early modern. This is well done, but a bit brief as she spends more of the introduction connecting Anna and Henrietta Maria with the late Elizabeth I than to other (consort) queens. Her main argument is twofold: that both Anna and Henrietta Maria, like the late queen Elizabeth, exerted political control and used their patronage to represent themselves as autonomous queens; but because they were consorts and not regnant queens, their power was derived from their fertility, so their constructions of authoritative feminine power were seen as disruptive and dangerous. Dunn-Hensley builds this argument over the course of the book through thematic chapters that deal variously with either Anna or Henrietta Maria. While there is little overlap between them, Dunn-Hensley deftly moves through issues of religion and themes to transgression in royal masques at a good pace. Each chapter provides a sufficient overview, but there are ample avenues for further research, especially in the chapter on Anna and the witches.

One key piece of Dunn-Hensley's argument is that Anna of Denmark was a Catholic (as were all the rest of the female Stuart consorts). While she

acknowledges that there is still much scholarly debate on the matter, Dunn-Hensley argues that Anna had converted to Catholicism while she was a young Queen of Scotland, following arguments proposed by scholars including Maureen M. Meikle and Helen M. Payne. Dunn-Hensley's approach is one that is respectful both to Anna and the available source material. Taking Anna seriously as an individual, Dunn-Hensley's narrative of Anna's conversion is one of an intelligent young woman who connected with Catholicism's teachings in a meaningful way, and was probably introduced to the faith through new friends in Scotland. Dunn-Hensley also addresses what could be seen as inconsistencies in how Anna practiced her faith by countering with examples of the young queen's shrewd manipulation of noble factions in Scotland, and the simple fact that Anna kept her personal faith private.

The book's first half deals with Anna, and while two of the chapters focus on Anna after she became queen of England, the first engages with Anna's life before 1603. The chapter on Anna and the Berwick Witch Trials of 1592 is absolutely necessary and very well done. The parallels between Anna and Geillis Duncan (a young woman accused of witchcraft) are skilfully used to illustrate how both "are subject to the constructions of patriarchal society—one defined and constructed as a witch, the other as a young princess and consort of a king—neither having complete control of her image, her body or her destiny" (47). Throughout the course of the following chapters, Dunn-Hensley shows how as Anna grew into her role as queen, so did her abilities to self-fashion her public identity.

The book's second half naturally deals with Henrietta Maria, and her growth from French princess into English queen. Henrietta Maria too, as she matured from princess to queen, utilized masquing and other artistic forms as a means of fashioning her public identity. While more could have been made of Henrietta Maria's acting in *L'Artenice*, Dunn-Hensley's use of *Chloridia*, *The Temple of Love*, *Luminalia*, and *Salmacida Spolia* as examples of the queen's agency in the creation of her public image work well.

Through masquing and patronage, each queen strove to create an image of herself as a powerful woman whose virtues could strengthen a dynasty or lead her people to her true faith. Both Anna and Henrietta Maria's posthumous images are in need of rehabilitation, and Susan Dunn-Hensley's book is a compelling and impressive addition to the historiography.

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