On 24 March 1603, after having ruled England for nearly half a century, Queen Elizabeth I died without leaving an heir; a situation her subjects had long anticipated with a considerable amount of anxiety. Many people feared that the Virgin Queen’s death might lead to a contested succession and subsequently a civil war, with the possible outcome of a Catholic foreigner ruling England. The strongest claim to the throne, however, was held by King James VI of Scotland, the great-grandson of Henry VIII’s eldest sister, Margaret Tudor. As soon as possible, the King of Scots was proclaimed King James I of England, to the great relief of most of his new subjects. James was a Protestant and a family man with two sons, a daughter and a wife who was likely to bear more children. With his accession, the future of a Protestant English monarchy seemed secure. In the words of the playwright Thomas Dekker, to whom we shall return in due course, “all men’s eyes were presently turn’d to the north, standing even stone-still in their circles, like the points of so many geometrical needles”, anticipating the arrival of “this treasure of a kingdom (a man-ruler)” (Dutton, 28).

James, in turn, was more than happy to have come into his rightful inheritance. In the eyes of the impoverished Scottish
King, the English crown seemed extremely wealthy and its subjects appeared more civilised in their treatment of their monarchs than the unruly Scots. As he put it at the Hampton Court Conference of 1604, England seemed to James like “a promised land, ... where he sat among graue, learned and reuerend men; not, as before, elsewhere, a King without State, without honour, without order; where beardless boyes would braue him to his face” (Barlow, 4). As soon as it could be arranged, James and his court travelled south, crossing the river Tweed and leaving Scotland behind on their way towards London.

This paper will consider the welcome James received in the form of poetry and pageantry during his journey and upon his arrival in his new capital. As we shall see, the greetings that different groups of people extended to the King reflected their own needs, expectations, hopes and fears at the start of the Stuart reign in England.

1. Peacemaker

As James slowly made his way south, his subjects did their best to give him a royal welcome, providing entertainments which were designed to please the King with well-chosen flattery and to declare England’s loyalty to its sovereign. A representative example of the kind of flattery presented to James can be found in Samuel Daniel’s *A Panegyric Congratulatory*, delivered to the royal party at Burley in Rutlandshire (Nichols, pp. 121-34). It combines personal praise for James with an insistence on the
legitimacy of his claim to the throne, and places great emphasis in particular on James’s role as a peacemaker between the ancient enemies England and Scotland, thus reflecting the relief of the English at the peaceful accession and their hopes for a stable reign.

As do most of the early poetic reactions to James’s accession, Daniel begins by expressing mixed feelings of joy at the arrival of a new king and sorrow at the death of Queen Elizabeth, “Her whom yet we do deplore / Amidst our joy” (122). To apologise to James for this inability to show nothing but happiness, however, he describes England’s mourning over Elizabeth as a good sign for a new monarch:

Which likewise makes for thee, that yet we hold
True after death; and bring not this respect
To a new Prince, for hating of the old;
Or from desire of change, or from neglect:
Whereby, O mighty Sovereign, thou art told,
What thou and thine are likely to expect
From such a faith, that doe not haste to run
Before their time to an arising Sun. (122)

Elizabeth had in fact felt that towards the end of her life her subjects were growing tired of her; she had expressed on several occasions that one reason for her refusal to name her successor was people’s tendency to turn from the setting to the rising sun. As it turned out, nostalgia for the Elizabethan age would soon begin to sanctify the Virgin Queen in people’s minds, whereas
James rapidly lost popularity. In the spring of 1603, however, it was the rising sun who had England’s full attention. In Daniel’s poem, too, joy soon triumphs over mourning, especially since the new King is such a paragon of virtue that his reign will more than compensate for the loss of Elizabeth. Much of the text is devoted to praising the various excellent qualities of the “Prototype of Kings” (125) who was on his way south. Especially James’s reputation for temperance receives a great deal of attention: his court will doubtless be characterised by virtue and plain dealing, and flattery will be banished since the King – in contrast to most monarchs – is particularly averse to it. Daniel therefore devotes some of his seventy-two stanzas of flowery panegyric to the observation that poets had better speak plain truth because flattery will never work on James.

The most important theme of Daniel’s *Panegyric*, however, and that of the great majority of welcoming poems and pageants presented to the new King, is the image of James as a peacemaker. In the course of his English reign, James became known as *Rex Pacificus*, much to the annoyance of some of his subjects who would have preferred him to be rather more militant and who disliked, for instance, his policy of peace with Spain and his decision not to involve England in the Thirty Years’ War. The image of James as a king who avoided war at all costs still characterises most modern discussions of his reign, and the foundations of this aspect of his reputation were laid in the panegyrics of 1603.

At the time of his accession, however, the King was mainly celebrated as a peacemaker *within the realm*; foreign policy was
not then the subject under discussion. James was hailed as *Pacificus* in two senses. First of all, his arrival would save England from the violence of a contested succession. Secondly, by uniting the crowns of England and Scotland in his own person, the ancient enmity between these two neighbours would automatically be resolved. As Samuel Daniel put it, England had never been “entire in her full orb” until James effected its union with Scotland:

> And now she is, and now in peace; therefore  
> Shake hands with Union, O thou mighty State!  
> Now thou art all Great Britain and no more;  
> No Scot, no English now, nor no debate:  
> No borders, but the Ocean and the Shore;  
> No Wall of Adrian serves to separate  
> Our mutual love, nor our obedience;  
> Being subjects all to one Imperial Prince.

James’s accession had thus accomplished by peaceful means “What heretofore could never yet be wrought / By all the swords of power, by blood, by fire, / By ruin and destruction” (121). Truly great kings, according to Daniel, are peaceful by nature: like wide and powerful rivers they glide calmly along, whereas “Small torrents roar more loud, and work much less” (127).

In joining together two former enemies, James reminded many poets of the first Tudor king, Henry VII, who had united the houses of Lancaster and York and ended the Wars of the Roses. This period of destructive civil war brought about by a disputed
succession was still very much alive in public memory, not least because it frequently featured on stage in Shakespeare’s histories, and the conflict between Lancaster and York was often cited as an example from the past of what to avoid in the future. Parallels between Henry VII and James were easily drawn: the former had saved England from the reality of civil war and the latter had prevented a repetition of past bloodshed. The comparison between the two kings served another purpose as well: it drew attention to James’s rightful place in the English succession as a descendant of Henry VII’s eldest daughter, Margaret Tudor. James was well aware that his had not been the only claim to the throne, and at this early stage of his English reign, when he was not yet securely established, it could certainly do no harm to emphasise the superiority of his claim over all others. Samuel Daniel took the reference to Henry VII slightly further than most in using it to emphasise James’s English roots and downplaying his foreignness:

Thus hath the hundred years brought back again
The sacred blood lent to adorn the North,
And here return’d it with a greater gain,
And greater glory than we sent it forth. (129)

Margaret Tudor’s royal English blood, in short, was only lent to the Stuarts and had now returned in the person of her great-grandson to continue, in a sense, the Tudor line. Moreover, James’s virtues would purge England of acquired foreign vices
And bring us back unto ourselves again,
Unto our ancient native modesty,
From out these foreign sins we entertain (131).

In other words, the King of Scots was in fact a thoroughly English monarch who would bring the nation back to its traditional virtue; not an irrelevant argument to make when the main objection to James’s claim was Henry VIII’s attempt in his will to exclude Margaret from the succession on the grounds that she had married a foreigner, whereas their younger sister Mary’s descendants were English.

2. Lion

The new union between England and Scotland and the unexpectedly smooth transition of power were the main ingredients of nearly all the poetry and pageantry presented to James in the course of his journey south. This depiction of him as a peacemaker, however, was not entirely to everyone’s taste. Nor did it necessarily agree with James’s image in Scotland, where he had worked hard to establish a reputation as a strong ruler and – for a time at least – as a staunch and almost militant Protestant. The King himself mused in the last years of his reign how surprising it was that “the diction of PACIFICVS was added to my title, at my comming in England; that of the Lyon, expressing true fortitude, hauing beene my diction before” (James VI and I, 590). Although the English in 1603 naturally wanted peace in their own
country and were universally delighted to find they were likely to have it, in terms of foreign policy there were many who wished James to be a man of action rather than a *Rex Pacificus*. This desire, too, is reflected in some of the poetry written to welcome the King to England.

One example of a more militant image of James can be found in the work of the poet and clergyman Joseph Hall. Although Hall’s poem of welcome, *The Kings Prophecie: or Weeping Joy*, includes many of the features of a typical 1603 panegyric, its author appears to have been more interested in the fact that James was a Protestant than in his effecting a peace between Scotland and England. In keeping with the genre, *The Kings Prophecie* begins by expressing at length the poet’s mixed feelings of grief at Elizabeth’s death and joy at James’s accession; a “ciuil strife of Passions strong” (A3v) which he describes in terms of a civil war within himself. Like many of the “throngs of Poesies” (A8r) with which James was received, Hall’s panegyric further contains references to the Wars of the Roses, when “millions of our Sires to death were stung / With those sharp thornes” (A5r), and remarks on England’s extreme good fortune at finding that Elizabeth’s death was not the end of “the race of Brittish Kings”, but that on the contrary for the first time “we see / Faire Britaine formed to a Monarchie” (A6v). Hall also dwells rather unsubtly on the prospect of finally having a royal family with a plentiful supply of heirs. It is, he argues, a terrible misfortune when “Princes loines all barren bin & dry” (B8r), and a country cannot be happier
... then when the bed
Of Princes chast abounds with large increase
Of rightfull progeny; vpon whose head
May stand their fathers crown (B8v).

In many respects, then, Hall’s welcoming poem for James resembles the mainstream of the genre.

However, Hall pays rather more attention than usual to the religio-political aspects of James’s accession. He dwells in some detail on those who were, in his opinion, hoping to turn the death of Elizabeth into an opportunity to engineer England’s downfall: those who were planning to place a Spanish, Catholic monarch on the throne and “Of a sworne foe to make a Soueraigne” (A5v). Under Catholic rule, England’s future would have been grim:

Waiting for flames of cruell Martyrdome,
Alreadie might I see the stakes addrest,
And that stale strumpet of imperious Rome,
Hie mounted on her seuen-headed beast (A5v).

Hall’s personal praise for James consequently focuses on his religion in addition to more generally celebrated virtues such as wisdome and temperance:

Deepe wisedome doth adorne his princely head,
Iustice his hand, his lips graue Eloquence,
And that which seld in Princes brest is bred,
(Tho Princes greatest praise, and best defence)
Purest religion hath his heart possest.
O Iland more then fortunate and blest.  (B1v)

James may have united Great Britain peacefully, but to Hall he is primarily a Scottish warrior who will ensure peace not out of an essentially pacific nature but from a position of strength, and who will not be slow to act in case

... some hostile might
(If any hostile might dares him withstand)
Shall break those bars; and boldly shall excite
Our sleeping Lyon; ...

Wise and not wrongfull Stratagems shall speed
His iustest warre, and straighter discipline
Shal guide the warlike troupes himself shall lead
To doubtfull field  (B6v).

The image of the lion, in short, is at least as important in Hall’s poem as that of the olive branch.

One such just war in the eyes of many Englishmen was the Protestant struggle against Catholic rule that was taking place across Continental Europe. A substantial number of Protestant refugees resided in England, most of them French Huguenots and Dutchmen from the southern (Spanish) Netherlands, and their cause was considered by many to be worthy of English support. Hall, for one, saw an important role for James as a protector of
such refugees, as they were, after all, England’s allies against Spain:

Vnder the safer shadow of his wing
Shall exilde Aliens shroud their restlesse head;
And here alone shall forced exile bring
Better contentment to the banished
Then home-smelt smoke; O Iland kind & free
In fauouring those that once befriended thee. (B5r)

Various groups of Continental Protestants were keen for James to take on an even more active role in support of their cause. The Dutch, whose treaties with Elizabeth dated back to 1585, pressed hard for a continuation of this alliance under the new regime, and were even hoping that James would prove more forthcoming than his notoriously tight-fisted predecessor in supplying concrete financial support and troops. The States General were quite alarmed at early rumours that James might be considering a peace treaty with Spain, and James’s rapidly growing reputation as a peacemaker cannot have done much to reassure them. The delegation they sent to congratulate the new King of England in late April was instructed, among other things, to impress upon him the importance of defeating the Spaniards for good:

It is true that a good, assured peace in Christendom is to be wished for: but they firmly believed, that his Majesty himself would not think that this could be hoped for until the Spaniards and their followers were removed from the
government of and domination over the Netherlands. (Van Meteren, fol. 498v; my translation).

Of course, the States General would not declare publicly that they objected to peace, but they did want James to understand that peace should not be the result of negotiation and compromise, but of military victory.

The Dutch and French refugee communities in England were themselves not slow to approach James with a similar message. On 23 May, their representatives were granted an audience at Greenwich. Their spokesperson, Mr de la Fontayne, offered his congratulations to the King on behalf of all those who had “fled to his protection”, describing James as the sun who had driven away the black clouds “of fear in the good and of hope in the wicked” that the death of Elizabeth might have resulted in civil war or a Catholic successor. Their good wishes for the King, he added, might include the wisdom of Solomon, the victories of Joshua, or a string of good qualities belonging to biblical kings and heroes, but deep down the Protestant immigrants had only one wish:

that the Spirit of God, who has dictated and engraved in your soul, and guided your pen to express in your little book, so many perfections, and beautiful virtues worthy of a great King ... may help you express them in all your actions ... If you, my Lord King, show yourself so in deed, as your book promises before the eyes of all the world, all the communities of Christ will fix on your Majesty ...
hearts and eyes. You will send back into Hell the apple of discord, which has troubled them for so long. (Oratie, A3v-A4r; my translation)

In other words, if James would only live up to his reputation as a perfect Protestant King, he would unite European Protestantism and achieve a lasting peace by securing a permanent victory over the forces of Rome. He would be a peacemaker, but by means of action rather than compromise.

3. Self-portrait

As the refugees’ address indicates, their impression of James was based on more than his general reputation alone. The King had written – and published – both poetry and prose works since his youth, so that many of his ideas and attitudes were available in print. His latest effort, a manual on kingship entitled Basilikon Doron, had just been reprinted in an expanded edition which appeared in London within days of Elizabeth’s death and had immediately become a bestseller. Curious as people were about what to expect from their new sovereign, Basilikon Doron was scrutinised and used as a guide to the workings of James’s mind, especially to his likes and dislikes. The book was generally admired; according to Francis Bacon, it filled “the whole realm as with a good perfume or incense before the King’s coming in” (Bacon, 278-79). Many of the characteristics his flatterers attributed to James in 1603 may well have been based on his own
description of a perfect king: virtues such as modesty, temperance, godliness and a distaste for flattery feature prominently in *Basilikon Doron* and the panegyrics alike.

James’s writings were, however, also used to other ends than mere flattery. They were not infrequently quoted back to him as a reminder of his responsibility to live up to his words. The Dutch and French immigrants were not the only ones to refer to James’s “little book” for this purpose. Joseph Hall referred specifically to *Basilikon Doron* in a marginal note, indicating that he had “drawne [the sum of the book] in forme of prophecy into verse” as part of his poem (B3r). Samuel Daniel used the King’s writings both to flatter their author and to point out that he could hardly do otherwise than prove himself as good as his word:

They fear the humours of a future Prince,  
Who either lost a good, or felt a bad:  
But thou hast cheer’d us of this fear long since;  
We know thee more than by report we had.  
We have an everlasting evidence  
Under thy hand; that now we need not dread  
Thou wilt be otherwise in thy designs,  
Than there thou art in those judicial lines. (124)

After elaborating for some time on *Basilikon Doron*, Daniel once again argues more emphatically that James has committed himself: his book

.... doth even tie
Thy Sceptre to thy word, and binds thy Crown
(That else no band can bind) to ratify
What thy religious hand hath there set down;
Wherein thy all-commanding Sovereignty
Stands subject to thy pen and thy renown. (p. 125)

Considering James’s belief in the Divine Right of kings and his resistance to the idea that kings can be bound by anything other than God’s law, it was probably a wise decision on Daniel’s part to include the remark that James’s own pen had bound a crown “That else no band can bind”. Nevertheless, the terminology the poet used in his claim that James’s sceptre was now tied to his word, his crown bound and his sovereignty made a subject is remarkably strong, and it indicates how seriously at least some of James’s subjects took the printed words of their King. Both his description of a virtuous court and his self-declared position as a Protestant monarch were taken by some of his readers as a guide to James’s future behaviour, on the assumption that the King would practice what he preached.

4. London Greetings

When James finally made his official entry into the City of London on 15 March 1604, the festivities having been postponed because of the plague the previous year, the imagery surrounding him was still much the same: most saw the King as a peacemaker while some preferred him as a lion. According to the account of the
proceedings in Thomas Dekker’s *The Magnificent Entertainment*, the royal procession was met by the patron saints of England and Scotland, St George and St Andrew, who rode towards each other in full armour and were then “to ride hand in hand, till they met his Majesty” (Dutton, 29). This image of union was an appropriate beginning to a day on which every hand held “olive-boughs and palm” and each pen was “dipp’d in nectar” (Dutton, 31). Each of the seven triumphal arches under which the royal family passed as they made their way through the city offered its own version of the by now traditional flattery: again, references were made to Henry VII and James’s undoubted right to the English throne, Queen Anna was portrayed as a fruitful vine who would provide many more heirs, and as a symbol of the peace James had brought to the realm there were olive branches everywhere.

The pageant presented by the Dutch merchant community, however, sounded a slightly different note. Their triumphal arch referred not to Henry VII but to the ultra-Protestant King Edward VI, whose faith they pointed out was shared by James, and in their prayers for “all things auspicious and fruitful to [James’s] eternal reign” they included a reference to “the ancient treaty of alliance” between the English and the Dutch (Dutton, 59). In the Latin oration addressed to the King, the Dutchmen declared themselves to be “a nation banish’d from our own cradles”, and asked for the same protection they had enjoyed “in the tender bosom of Princely Mother, Eliza”, in addition to stressing the importance of Religion and Fortitude (Dutton, 65).

Unfortunately, the procession kept moving and part of the speech was delivered to the King’s back: “whilst the tongues of
the strangers were employed in extolling the gracious aspect of the King, and his princely behaviour towards them, His Majesty... was gotten so far as to Saint Mildred’s Church in the Poultry”, where some Danish music was played for the delectation of Queen Anna. As the music in question was a “very sprightly ... Danish March” performed by nine trumpets and a kettle drum (Dutton, 66), it is doubtful whether James actually heard much of the Dutch appeal to his sense of responsibility for his fellow-Protestants across the North Sea. Unbeknown to the Dutch merchants, English negotiations with representatives of the Spanish Netherlands had in fact already been taking place for some time, and in August 1604 a peace treaty between England and Spain was concluded. The treaty did not only put an end to Dutch hopes for James’s support, but it also proved unpopular with many of the King’s Protestant subjects; their great expectations upon James’s arrival in England were soon disappointed.

5. Conclusion

We have seen that the imagery used in reaction to James’s English accession, although largely similar across the board, differed in focus according to the poets’ own priorities. In addition to general praise of James’s virtues, relief at the arrival of a male king with heirs, and frequent references to his undoubted right to be King of England, the most important theme in the majority of panegyrics is peace: the new King had not only prevented civil
war in England, but had also resolved the ancient conflict between England and Scotland by uniting them into one country, Great Britain. The image of James as *Rex Pacificus* became a permanent fixture in the rhetoric of praise for him, and steadily gained in prominence as his reign progressed. However, there were also those (both in England and abroad) who wished to see a rather more militant side to the new King of England. They were hoping for a Scottish lion who would not hesitate to enforce peace by supporting just wars, more specifically by backing the European Protestant cause against the Catholic powers of France and Spain. English Protestants such as Joseph Hall joined the French and Dutch refugee communities in appealing to James’s sense of solidarity with his European co-religionists, and pointing out to him that a lasting peace in Europe could only be achieved by a military victory over Spain.

People’s expectations of James were to a large extent based on his own writings; in most of his published texts, James had portrayed himself emphatically as a Protestant monarch, and in his popular book *Basilikon Doron* his ideas about kingship centred around virtue, honesty, temperance and Protestant godliness. James himself acknowledged the importance of the role his writings played – and were intended to play – in his public image. He expressed this in his reply to the French and Dutch immigrants at Greenwich:

> Although you have not seen me before now, yet I am not strange or unknown to you: you know with respect to my religion what I am like, not only by the reports you have
been able to hear of me, but also through my writings, in which I have truly expressed the affections of my soul; therefore I have no need to use many words to show my good will to you who have fled here for the sake of religion. (Oratie, A4r-v; my translation)

However, the high hopes of 1603 soon turned to disappointment. James’s peace treaty with Spain in 1604 caused a great deal of consternation in the Netherlands, although in the end its consequences proved not to be as catastrophic as the Dutch had initially feared. In England, James’s pro-Spanish policies met with great disapproval, and the “Prototype of Kings” lost much of his appeal. Scotland, in the meantime, had lost its court and its court culture, as those looking for patronage were forced to follow the King to London. Despite his own advice in Basilikon Doron that a king should visit all his kingdoms at least once every three years, James returned to Scotland only once. His English court soon turned out to be anything but virtuous and even acquired a reputation for corruption and debauchery. King James VI and I, in short, was no different from most people in his inability to follow his own advice consistently. His written words proved no great help in predicting his actions, and his reputation – as reputations usually are – was mainly constructed in the minds of others.
Works cited


