Abstract
When King William III and Queen Mary II ascended to the English throne in 1689 they were relatively well received. However, by 1692 their relationship with the public was strained. This created a need for image rehabilitation that could be partially satisfied by a public work, such as semi-opera. *The Fairy Queen*, Henry Purcell’s 1692 semi-opera, can be interpreted as a vehicle for this rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is achieved in this work through literary and historical allusions as well as an allegorical relationship between *The Fairy Queen*’s Queen Titania and England’s Queen Mary. Purcell subtly reinforces these references and this relationship through instrumental, harmonic, and dramatic choices.
Project

Allegory for Political Rehabilitation: William and Mary, 1692, and Henry Purcell’s
The Fairy Queen

When William and Mary ascended to the English thrown in 1689 they were greeted by an elated, cheering public.¹ By 1692, however, their positive public image was strained by issues spanning all facets of life. William’s subjects disdained his preference for foreign generals and were further dissatisfied by his war with France that had stemmed from his feud with King Louis XIV.² The formerly peaceful society now harbored dangerous political dissenters. Conflict threatening the monarchs occurred intellectually and physically. Conspiracies endangered William and Mary, while the continued circulation of Jacobite (the supporters of former King James II who was disposed of in 1688) propaganda disparaged their government.³ Relatedly, the public’s view of the royal family was strained by familial issues including Anne’s (Mary’s sister and future Queen of England) departure from the court after feuding with Mary.⁴ This culmination of wide ranging issues left the royals’ image in dire need of rehabilitation, rehabilitation that could only be satisfied by an accessible, public work. Public theater was an ideal medium for the royals’ image recovery. Works such as plays, operas, and semi-operas reached the paying public eye and were performed in relatively new London theaters such as Dorset Gardens, the Queen’s Theater Company.⁵ In London during May of 1692 this theater

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² Craig Rose, England in the 1690s: Revolution, Religion and War, (Malden: Blackwell 1999), 39 and 122.
³ Ibid., 48.
⁴ Ibid., 59.
⁵ Mark A. Radice, "Sites for Music in Purcell’s Dorset Garden Theatre," The Musical Quarterly 81, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 430.
company produced *The Fairy Queen*, a new semi-opera by Henry Purcell. This semi-opera displayed a sense of image rehabilitation and can be shown as an element of restoration for William and Mary’s public image through allusions and allegory.

*The Fairy Queen’s* most prevalent allusion can possibly be drawn to Queen Elizabeth I. Purcell’s compositional and theatrical choices associate Queen Elizabeth with Queen Mary. Establishing this connection rehabilitates the royals’ image because Queen Elizabeth, a revered, successful monarch who “delighted” her subjects, was associated with respect, nationalism, tradition, and loyalty. Allusions to this admired former monarch foresee that Mary will become as well-respected and successful. They also coincide with Mary’s supporters’ opinion that she was the most well-loved queen since Queen Elizabeth. Purcell achieves this by creating subtle instrumental allusions to Queen Elizabeth’s time. For instance, hautboys were commonly integrated in Elizabethan theater and are used in five of *The Fairy Queen*’s songs (figure 1).

Music’s use in the production also references Elizabethan court life. Court life is reflected by Queen Titania’s and King Oberon’s initiation of music to entertain guests and display power. For instance, when Titania calls for “all variety of music, [a]ll that should welcome up the rising sun”

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7 The music to *The Fairy Queen* was composed by Henry Purcell to an anonymous libretto. Purcell is believed to have had some influence over the text of this libretto. Robert Etheridge Moore, *Henry Purcell and the Restoration Theatre* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1961), 103.
9 Craig Rose, *England in the 1690s*, 42.
her request is fulfilled by unique orchestration.\textsuperscript{11} This unique orchestration includes the earliest kettledrum solo in orchestral history.\textsuperscript{12} The fulfillment of a monarch’s encouragement of and request for novel music accentuates Mary’s social similarities to Elizabeth. Mary briefly revived Elizabethan court life through her artistic patronage.\textsuperscript{13}

Allusions to Queen Elizabeth are also seen through the semi-opera’s title and the works on which it is based. Purcell’s \textit{The Fairy Queen} was very loosely adapted from Shakespeare’s \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}. This work, in turn, was believed to have been influenced by Edmund Spenser’s epic poem \textit{Faerie Queene}.\textsuperscript{14} In \textit{Faerie Queene} Spenser glorifies Queen Elizabeth through the character of Gloriana.\textsuperscript{15} Similarly, Purcell glorifies Queen Mary through the character of Queen Titania. Dramaturgically, connections to the Elizabethan era masque accentuate this allusion. These masques often contained similar “Canny, often playful \textit{scripting} of authority through conventional flattery.”\textsuperscript{16}

Flattery of Queen Mary is achieved by her foil Queen Titania. This connection is first established by the similarities of both monarchs. Both are powerful queens separated from their public by their regality and isolation. Titania was literally separated from mortal society by her residence in the forest and her fairy powers. Mary was internally separated by her

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[15]\textit{Ibid.}
\item[16]\textit{Lauren Shohet, Reading Masques: The English Masque and Public Culture in the Seventeenth Century} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 57.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
homesickness and self-doubt.\textsuperscript{17} Similarities between the monarchs also arise through Purcell’s orchestration. For instance, Purcell accentuates the trumpet in his birthday odes for Queen Mary, such as “Come, ye sons of art away.”\textsuperscript{18} Later, in 1695, the trumpet is prevalent in the two canzonas for slide trumpet and trombone in his funeral music for Queen Mary. Correspondingly, much of Purcell’s orchestration in \textit{The Fairy Queen} includes trumpet (figure 1). Emphasizing the trumpet for Queen Mary and the fairy monarchs shows Purcell’s rhetorical reinforcement of instruments denoting royalty.

Given the monarch’s similarities and Purcell’s similar musical treatment of these monarchs it is possible for audience members to relate the characters to each other. Once Titania’s function as a foil is established her positive traits are transferable to Mary. Titania is a popular, respected monarch. For instance, she commands a willing fairy public to conceal her changeling child.\textsuperscript{19} This positive, congenial reception of Titania is analogous to the popular image created by Mary’s admirers. For instance, one of her admirers, preacher John Tillotson, illustrates this respected image by stating that Mary had “a most serious and steady attention without wandering, without diversions, and without \textit{drowsiness}.”\textsuperscript{20} Displaying the female monarch in a positive light promotes the association of female monarchs with positivity. This can be generalized to presenting a positive image of Queen Mary.

\textsuperscript{20} Elizabeth Hamilton, \textit{William’s Mary}, 257.
The Fairy Queen’s plot changes from A Midsummer Night’s Dream continue the presentation of Titania (and thus Mary) as a regal, admirable character. This positive view of Mary was protected because precautions were taken to avoid negative parallels with the royals.\(^{21}\) For instance, Titania’s and Oberon’s adultery (originally present in A Midsummer Night’s Dream) was eliminated. Possible assumptions regarding infidelity are also reduced by Titania’s function as an ‘impressionistic’\(^{22}\) allegorical figure. This eliminates the connection between Mary and Titania’s infatuation with Bottom. These changes present William and Mary as a cohesive unit. Thus, William and Mary’s solidarity overshadows other royal relationships including Mary’s feuds with her sister Anne.

Notable dialogue reduction and changes contribute to The Fairy Queen’s accentuation of royal characters. Clarity and allegorical intent were enhanced by colloquial changes to Shakespeare’s original poetry. Other changes, such as role elimination in the case of Hippolyta and Philostrate, primarily pertain to mortal characters.\(^{23}\) These are changes of economy. Time allotted to the mortal characters (in A Midsummer Night’s Dream) is given to Titania, Oberon, and their fairy public (in The Fairy Queen). While giving more stage time to Titania clarifies and emphasizes the importance of her allegory, giving more time to her fairy public accentuates their approval of Titania. Increasing the role of her fairy public also emphasizes their importance to their monarchs. The increased role of a monarch’s public heightens the applicability to Mary’s public. This allusion evokes the idea that the public is important to


\(^{22}\) Andrew R. Walking proposes this type of Restoration period allegory. ‘Impressionistic’ allegory occurs when there is not a continual allegorical commentary throughout a work, but when one can assume allegory because of a sum of reflective elements or references. These allegories are usually directed towards a more general audience. Andrew R. Walking, “Performance and Political Allegory,” in Studies in Seventeenth-Century Opera, ed. Beth Glixon (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 428.

\(^{23}\) Ulrike Küpper, William Shakespeare’s, 28.
William and Mary. Mary’s public is able to relate to and envision themselves in a similar relationship with her as Titania has with her constituency. Clarity of themes and allegorical messages increased the work’s effectiveness as an ‘impressionistic’ allegory. It allowed all audience members to grasp the message of rehabilitating the royal’s image.

While plot changes to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* clarify the allegory, the addition of music illustrates Mary’s power. Fairies, such as Titania and Oberon, are the only characters who are directly involved with music. In *The Fairy Queen*’s 1692 version, music is primarily contained in four masques (figure 2). Masques of the Restoration Era contained musical interludes, dance, and spectacle.\(^{24}\) In *The Fairy Queen*, the ability to initiate these masques is exclusively reserved for the fairy monarchs (Oberon and Titania). Titania’s authority is established because she initiates three of the four masques (figure 2).

The masques that she initiates accentuate different positive qualities of her relationship with her public. For instance, the first masque, the *Masque of Sleep*, validates Titania’s power. Titania trusts her public to help her fall asleep and then to keep watch while she is sleeping. During this masque Titania requests and receives choruses and airs to entertain her and move her to sleep. The public is able to relate to her because her power is contrasted with vulnerability (sleep). By conceding some power to her public Titania shows that she is cooperative and that her power is to be trusted. This develops the public’s relationship with Titania because it decreases Titania’s separation from her society. Titania’s conciliatory and trustworthy public has a sense of duty to their queen. Her people’s willingness to help her is

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musically highlighted through Purcell’s unique harmonic language. Purcell has the fairies create unusual harmonies such as augmented dominant triads in order to lull Titania to sleep (during the Masque of Sleep’s “Hush, no more”) (figure 3). These harmonies are calming and effective because they help Titania achieve her desire of falling asleep. This appeals to Mary’s constituency, since the monarch is willing to trust her public, the public should do the same for the monarch. Mary, like Titania, should be trusted with her power. Titania’s relationship with her constituency accentuates Mary’s “friendly, human” connection with some members of her constituency.\(^{26}\)

Like the use of the augmented dominant, Titania inspires her public to develop other new ways of lulling her to sleep. Titania cares about her public; she is unable to fall asleep until they are calm and supportive. This is evident in the first use of muted violins in England (during the Masque of Sleep’s “See, even Night herself is here”) reflecting Titania’s inspirational connection with her constituency (figure 1).\(^{27}\) This raises the idea that it is advantageous for the public to help and respect their monarch(s). The public is able to gain ingenuity from helping the monarchs. Muted violins also illustrate Mary’s soothing personality. Similar to the muted violins, Mary possessed a calming power to ameliorate situations. She “remained calm in the face of all dangers” and was able to set people at ease “with [fulfilled] promises.”\(^ {28}\) Purcell’s orchestration brings this positive characteristic to the forefront of the audience member’s mind. This orchestration also references France. France is suggested because Jean-Baptiste

\(^{26}\) Elizabeth Hamilton, *William’s Mary*, 301.
\(^{28}\) Elizabeth Hamilton, *William’s Mary*, 301.
Lully (court composer to King Louis XIV) was known for including muted violins in his music. This coupled with the loyal and serene image of Mary can be interpreted as presenting a more congenial image of England, one that embraces and recognizes innovative aspects of other societies (including their enemy France).

Plot additions as well as these positive instances of instrumentation contribute to the semi-opera’s allegory. One main addition to the plot in *The Fairy Queen* that was not present in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is a celebration for Oberon’s birthday. Coincidentally, Mary’s birthday (April 30th) was just three days before *The Fairy Queen* premiered on May 2nd. Purcell utilizes this connection between the addition of Oberon’s birthday celebration and Mary’s birthday. He composes an ode for Oberon that is similar to one of his later birthday odes for Mary. Purcell’s 1693 birthday ode for Mary (“Celebrate this Festival”) features textual, rhythmic, and melodic similarities to his ode for Oberon (“Now the night is chas’d away”). Whereas “Now the night is chas’d away” repeats “tis that happy, happy day” melismatically to a dotted sixteenth note followed by a thirty-second note rhythm, “Celebrate this festival” repeats “celebrate this festival” melismatically to a similar dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note rhythm (figures 3 and 4). Oberon’s birthday celebration, in act IV of *The Fairy Queen*, thus can be allegorically interpreted as celebrating Mary’s birthday. Purcell’s original glorification of Mary thus progresses to a celebration of her. He achieves this through the introduction of this birthday allegorical element. These similarities evoke praise and celebration for the monarch; Purcell’s rehabilitation of the monarchs concludes by inspiring the public to join in celebrating them. Celebrating Mary as a way to rehabilitate the image of both monarchs was a successful
tactic because Mary was generally more popular than her husband.\textsuperscript{29} Thus, it was most effective to focus on rehabilitating Mary’s image and then to allow her positive reception to be generalized to include William.

Purcell inspires this positive generalization by supplementing his celebration of Mary with a few positive allusions to William. This balances the Queen Titania and Oberon’s birthday allegorical goals of a positive reception of Mary with a similar goal of reception in relation to William. The magical, otherworldly subject matter of \textit{The Fairy Queen} coincides with the views of William’s supporters. William’s more devoted followers glorified him as a modern-day Moses figure.\textsuperscript{30} Others thought him divinely ordained because of his multiple evasions of death.\textsuperscript{31} These connections are similar to the otherworldly, non-human characteristics of fairies.

William’s connection with the fairies is, like in Mary’s case, accentuated by music. For instance, hautboys, a favored instrument in Purcell’s orchestration (figure 2), subtly reference France. This is because in the 1670s, King Louis XIV established military bands including hautboys.\textsuperscript{32} Audience members who were familiar with this connection could interpret this as another congenial incorporation of French ideas. This shows the universality of musical instruments, how the same instruments are used in different societies for different purposes. This commonality again presents England in a congenial, collaborative light.

By combating William’s and Mary’s militaristic, familial, and political issues through art, the possibility for rehabilitation was effectively achieved. As a public work \textit{The Fairy Queen} gained positive reception by critics such as Peter Motteux of \textit{The Gentleman’s Journal, or The

\textsuperscript{29} Elizabeth Hamilton, \textit{William’s Mary}, 331.
\textsuperscript{30} Craig Rose, \textit{England in the 1690s}, 22.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{32} J.S. Manifold, \textit{The Music in English Drama}, 121-122.
Key to the rehabilitation’s success was the audience’s ability to see and understand allegory in *The Fairy Queen*. Allegorical readings allow a work to function within a greater perspective. This can extend the modern audience member’s sense of the piece’s context. They provide an alternative interpretation, aid in performance practice, and can bring the modern listener closer to the work’s intended societal function. Allegory was common at the time; therefore a public audience was familiar with allegorical material. For instance, some popular staged works such as *Psyche* and *Albion and Albanius* were allegorical. Since Purcell’s other works, such as *King Arthur*, are interpreted by some as allegorical, it is reasonable that Purcell’s *The Fairy Queen* is similarly allegorical. An allegorical reading of *The Fairy Queen* shows the work’s veneration of William and Mary, entertainment of the public, and status as a musical masterpiece. Purcell’s innovative techniques illustrated and alluded to the presence of allegory and the establishment of a wide variety of emotive tonal colors.

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35 Purcell’s semi-opera that premiered just a year before *The Fairy Queen*  
Appendix

Figure 1
Allegorically interpreted instrumentation in *The Fairy Queen*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Piece</th>
<th>Instrumentation with possible allegorical consequences</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overture</td>
<td>Trumpets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act II symphony</td>
<td>Trumpets, hautboys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo-‘See, even Night herself is here’</td>
<td>Muted violins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act IV symphony-prelude</td>
<td>Trumpets, kettledrums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act IV symphony-canzona</td>
<td>Trumpets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act IV symphony-allegro</td>
<td>Trumpets, kettledrums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act IV symphony (immediately following ‘Let the fifes, and the clarions’)</td>
<td>Trumpets, kettledrums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus- ‘Hail! Great parent of us all’</td>
<td>Hautboys, trumpets, kettledrums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prelude immediately preceding solo-‘Here’s the summer, sprightly, gay’</td>
<td>Hautboys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance during <em>Masque of the Seasons</em></td>
<td>Hautboys, trumpets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symphony immediately preceding solo-‘Thus the gloomy world’</td>
<td>Hautboys, trumpets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo-‘Thus, the gloomy world’</td>
<td>Trumpet solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo and chorus- ‘Hark! The echoing air’</td>
<td>Trumpet solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus and dance-‘They shall be as happy’</td>
<td>Trumpets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 2
**The masques of *The Fairy Queen* (1692 Version)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masque</th>
<th>Main songs/pieces included in masque</th>
<th>Plot purpose of masque</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Masque of Sleep**    | Solo-‘See, even Night herself is here’  
Solo-‘I am come to lock all fast’  
Solo-‘One charming night’  
Solo-‘Hush, no more, be silent all’  
Chorus-‘Hush, no more, be silent all’  
Dance                                                                               | Initiated by Titania to lull her to sleep.                                               |
| The act III scene ii masque | Prelude  
Solo-‘If love’s a sweet passion’  
Chorus- ‘I press her hand gently’  
Symphony  
Dance  
Prelude  
Solo-‘When I have often heard’  
Solo-‘A thousand, thousand ways’  
Chorus-‘A thousand, thousand ways’                                                                 | Initiated by Titania to entertain Bottom.                                                |
| **Masque of the Seasons** | (Symphony-prelude, canzona, largo, allegro)  
(Solo and chorus-‘Now the night is chas’d away’)  
(Duet-‘Let the fifes, and the clarions’)  
(Symphony)  
(Prelude)  
[Phoebus’s solo-‘When a cruel long winter’]  
Chorus-‘Hail! Great parent of us all’  
Prelude  
Solo-‘Thus, the ever grateful Spring’  
Prelude  
Solo-‘Here’s the Summer, sprightly gay’  
Prelude  
Solo-‘See, my many colour’d fields’                                                                 | Initiated by Titania’s call for music  
(pieces in parentheses indicate music associated with Oberon’s birthday celebration. They mainly preclude the *Masque of the Seasons*).  
Follows Oberon’s birthday celebration.  
Considered by Price to be Purcell’s replacement for Titania’s foul-weather speech. |
| The act V scene ii masque | Symphony  
Prelude  
Solo-‘Thrice happy lovers’  
Solo-‘O let me weep’  
Dance  
Symphony  
Solo-‘Thus the gloomy world’  
Prelude  
Solo-‘Thus happy and free’  
Chorus-‘Thus wildly we live’  
Solo-‘Yes, Daphne, in your face I find’  
Dance  
Prelude  
Solo-‘Hark! How all things’  
Solo and chorus- ‘Hark! The echoing air’  
Duet and chorus-‘Sure the dull god’                                                                 | Initiated by Oberon to entertain and demonstrate fairies’ power and existence to the mortals. |
Prelude
Solo-‘See, I obey’
Duet, ‘Turn then thine eyes’
Solo-‘My torch indeed’
Dance
Trio-‘They shall be as happy’
Dance
Chorus and dance- ‘They shall be happy’

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