



A Gambling Man: Charles II's Restoration Game

Jenny Uglow

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The Restoration was a decade of experimentation: from the founding of the Royal Society for investigating the sciences to the startling role of credit and risk; from the shocking licentiousness of the court to failed attempts at religious tolerance. Negotiating all these, Charles II, the "slippery sovereign," laid odds and took chances, dissembling and manipulating his followers. The theaters may have been restored, but the king himself was the supreme actor. Yet while his grandeur, his court, and his colorful sex life were on display, his true intentions lay hidden.

Charles II was thirty when he crossed the English Channel in fine May weather in 1660. His Restoration was greeted with maypoles and bonfires, as spring after the long years of Cromwell's rule. But there was no way to turn back, no way he could "restore" the old dispensation. Certainty had vanished. The divinity of kingship had ended with his father's beheading. "Honor" was now a word tossed around in duels. "Providence" could no longer be trusted. As the country was rocked by plague, fire, and war, people searched for new ideas by which to live. And exactly ten years after he arrived, Charles would again stand on the shore at Dover, this time placing the greatest bet of his life in a secret deal with his cousin, Louis XIV of France.

Jenny Uglow's previous biographies have won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and International PEN's Hessel-Tiltman Prize for History. *A Gambling Man* is Uglow at her best: both a vivid portrait of Charles II that explores his elusive nature and a spirited evocation of a vibrant, violent, pulsing world on the brink of modernity.

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