

EDITED BY
GRACE E. COOLIDGE


ASHGATE

The Formation of the Child in Early Modern Spain



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Chapter 8
Growing Up Carlos II:
Political Childhood in the Court
of the Spanish Habsburgs

Silvia Z. Mitchell

On the afternoon of September 18, 1665 “we went up to kiss the hand of our new king, who has not yet reached his fourth birthday,” the president of the Council of Aragon, Christobal Crespi de Valdaura, recalled in his diary. “When we reached the royal chamber,” he noted, “we could not enter because the king began to cry; the [attendants] took him inside to console him, but he did not come out until much later. After that, the ministers entered the chamber quickly without waiting for the previous person to leave.”¹ This event, which took place at the commencement of the reign of Carlos II (1661–1700), presented the first of many practical difficulties the Spanish Habsburg court faced when the ceremonies associated with kingship rested on a young child’s shoulders, or, more accurately in this case, depended on his stomach. The traditional hand-kissing ritual had been interrupted because the three-year-old king was hungry. Although courtiers were inconvenienced for only one hour and the young king resumed his duties after he was fed, this charming anecdote suggests the unease the court felt as it confronted the daunting task of adapting its rituals and customary functions to the whims and needs of childhood.

Unlike his predecessors, Carlos II spent most of his childhood as king of Spain. His case, therefore, offers a unique opportunity to study the experiences of a child-king and, simultaneously, deepens our understanding of the Spanish Habsburg court. Most importantly, a study of Carlos II’s childhood helps dismantle some myths that have shrouded his image. The king’s demise in 1700 without descendants marked, without a doubt, a major historical event. It brought a new ruling dynasty to Spain and triggered the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714), giving way to a new order in the European and global arenas. As a result, Carlos II’s death became the central event of his life. Even though he lived for close to 40 years,

¹ “A la tarde nos juntamos en la pieza del cons[ejo] en Palacio como solemos en las Pasquas de donde subimos a besar la m[ano] al nuevo Rey n[uest]ro S[eñor] que aun no ha cumplido quatro años ... y luego llegamos a la puerta donde nos detubimos p[or] que comenco a llorar y le entraron a callarle y tardo harto poco en bolver a salir ... Vinieron de uno en uno los ministros sin esperar a q[ue] volviese el primero p[a]ra salir el segundo aunque me dijo la de los Velez que ya havia merendado y que con eso ya se le havian pasado las lagrimas ...” BNE mss 5742 fol. 363v.

biographical studies present death as his looming and inevitable destiny, the result of the Habsburg dynasty's well-known preference for endogamy, a practice that led to generations of interbreeding.² Add to this the fact that his reign coincided with Spain's loss of hegemony in the European stage and it is easy to understand how Carlos II became the ideal metaphor to represent an empire and a dynasty in the very last stages of decay and degeneration. Based on what is written about the king, one could argue that Carlos II is the very embodiment of Spanish decline. "Wretched," "a dying pathological entity," "enfeebled," "deformed," "retarded," "impotent" are some of the adjectives that have been used to describe him.³ Although superseding concepts, such as recovery and resilience, now form part of the overall picture of his reign,⁴ and the figure of the king, too, is undergoing revision,⁵ misunderstandings about Carlos II persist.

Recent studies on royal childhood that have focused on the court as the context in which Habsburg children were "apprenticed" and "raised to rule,"⁶ suggest that Carlos II's own childhood would also benefit from such a structural analysis. Childhood deeply transformed the practice of kingship and, conversely, kingship shaped Carlos II's experiences as a child. It is imperative, therefore, to take these basic premises into account when investigating the figure of the king. Although Carlos II adapted to his kingly role at a remarkably young age, his youth continued to present great difficulties for the court. This can be observed particularly well at the beginning of his rule, but even more so when he reached his majority and attempted, unsuccessfully, to assert political independence from his mother,

² Jaime Contreras, *Carlos II el Hechizado: poder y melancolía en la corte del último Austria* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2003); John Langdon-Davies, *Carlos, The King Who Would Not Die* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963); Ludwig Pfandl, *Karl II; das ende der spanischen machtstellung in Europa* (Munich: G.D.W. Callwey, 1940).

³ See, for an example, the review of Langdon-Davies's book in *Hispania* 47 (May 1964): 427–8; John Lynch, *Spain under the Habsburgs. Volume Two: Spain and America, 1598–1700*, 2nd edn (New York and London: New York University, 1981), 258; John H. Elliott in his classic *Imperial Spain, 1469–1716* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 361, to name just a few.

⁴ The most recent works include Luis Ribot, "Carlos II: El centenario olvidado," *Studia histórica. Historia moderna* 20 (1999): 19–44; Luis Ribot, *El arte de gobernar: Estudios sobre la España de los Austrias* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2006); and Christopher Storrs, *The Resilience of the Spanish Monarchy, 1665–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006). For an earlier revisionist view of the period see Henry Kamen, *Spain in the Later Seventeenth-Century, 1665–1700* (London and New York: Longman, 1980).

⁵ See Luis Ribot, "El rey ante el espejo. Historia y memoria de Carlos II," in Luis Ribot, ed. *Carlos II: El rey y su entorno cortesano* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2009), 13–52.

⁶ Martha Hoffman, *Raised to Rule: Educating Royalty and the Court of the Spanish Habsburgs, 1601–1634* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2011); Joseph F. Patrouch, *Queen's Apprentice: Archduchess Elizabeth, Empress Maria, the Habsburgs, and the Holy Roman Empire, 1554–1569* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

Queen Mariana of Austria (1634–1696), who had served as regent during his minority. Carlos II's inability to make a decisive shift into maturity provoked a political watershed that almost resulted in civil war. An examination of Carlos II's trajectory at this critical stage sheds significant light on the court's predicament as it adjusted to a child-king and as that child-king made his transition to political adulthood. Once the king's actions and the court's reactions are placed in their proper analytic framework—one that takes into account structural issues as well as the personalities of the people involved—a new picture of Carlos II and his court emerges.

The Politics of Carlos II's Childhood

Carlos II's life became inextricably linked to European and even global concerns from the very moment he inherited the throne. The Venetian ambassador reported on the death of Philip IV and the succession of his minor heir which had, he opined, thrown Europe into a "state of emergency."⁷ The situation was especially grave because of the scope of the Spanish empire and the existing international configuration. Philip IV exacerbated the situation by decisively favoring the succession of his Austrian Habsburg relatives to the Spanish throne over the French if his son died prematurely. He named the descendants of his younger sister, Empress Maria of Austria, after his own children in his testament.⁸ He cemented his objective with the marriage of his younger daughter, the Infanta Margarita of Austria (1651–1673), who was second in line of succession, to Emperor Leopold I, who was third.⁹ To protect Habsburg interests further, Philip IV denied Louis XIV claims to the Spanish crown by excluding the Infanta Maria Teresa of Austria (1638–1683), Philip IV's oldest daughter and Louis XIV's wife.¹⁰ Queen Mariana continued a strong pro-Habsburg policy and, in one of the earliest acts

⁷ "Trascorso politico sopra l'emergence di Stato che può suscitare in Europa la morte del Ré Catolico Filippo Quarto." BNE mss. 2392, fol. 248. The clauses that established the lines of succession were of enormous interest in Europe. There is abundant documentation that copies were printed (many are housed in the Biblioteca Nacional de España), distributed in Madrid, and sent to foreign courts. For the reception of the testament in the Viennese court, see Alfred Francis Pribram and Moriz Landwehr von Pragenau, eds. *Privatebriefe Kaiser Leopold I an den Grafen F. E. Pötting, 1662–1673*, 2 vols. (Wien, 1903), I: 166–7. The wife of the English ambassador, Lady Anne Fanshawe, discusses the testament in her diary with great familiarity. John Clyde Loftis, ed., *The Memoirs of Anne, Lady Halkett and Ann, Lady Fanshawe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 176.

⁸ *Testamento de Felipe IV. Edición facsimil*, Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, ed. (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1982), Clauses 12, 13, and 21–37. The Spanish Infanta Maria was Philip IV's younger sister. She married Emperor Ferdinand III and gave birth to Leopold I and Mariana of Austria (Carlos II's own mother).

⁹ Leopold I was the son of Empress Maria and thus had a place in the succession through his own blood.

¹⁰ *Testamento de Felipe IV*, Clause 15, 23–37.

of her regency, confirmed the marriage of her daughter Margarita to Leopold I thus causing tensions to escalate significantly.¹¹ Louis XIV viewed the alliance as directly threatening his own interests in Europe. Leopold I also faced a dilemma even though the succession had been tilted decisively in his favor: it remained to be seen if the emperor would be able to enforce his wife's (and his own) rights to the Spanish crown while simultaneously dealing with threats from the Ottoman Turks in the east.¹² Once Margarita left Spain to marry the emperor just six months into Carlos II's reign, the politics of the Spanish succession acquired an international dimension. Carlos II's childhood, therefore, became extremely politicized. His death now had the potential to completely alter the European status quo.¹³

Not surprisingly, Carlos II's health became a major diplomatic concern and any illness, no matter how slight, caused international turmoil. In this unstable environment, exaggerations, rumors, and even outright false reports were used for political gain. The Spanish ambassador to the French court, the Marquis de la Fuente, often expressed his frustration about the many reports of Carlos II's death that were disseminated in France and then sent to foreign courts.¹⁴ The Imperial ambassador to Spain, the Count of Pötting, noted in his diary that the queen regent occasionally sent extraordinary couriers to Vienna so that the "*fabricated voices* about Carlos II's most recent illness would not give the Imperial Majesties a disturbing fright" (my italics).¹⁵ Nonetheless, false reports continued to circulate and ultimately shaped diplomatic outcomes. In 1668, Louis XIV used rumors about Carlos II's declining health to lure Leopold I into signing a partition treaty whereby they agreed to split the Spanish monarchy in case of the king's death.¹⁶

¹¹ The Regency Council confirmed the marriage during their first meeting on September 18, 1665. BNE mss. 5742 fol. 364r-v.

¹² For Leopold I's attitude over the succession in Spain see Linda Frey and Marsha Frey, *A Question of Empire: Leopold I and the War of Spanish Succession, 1701–1705* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1983).

¹³ Ambassadors in Madrid received detailed and lengthy instructions on how to proceed in the case of the child-king's death. See Miguel Nieto Nuño, ed., *Diario del Conde de Pötting, embajador del Sacro Imperio en Madrid (1664–1674)*, 2 vols (Madrid: Biblioteca Diplomática Española, 1993), II: 142, fn. 180.

¹⁴ AHN Estado Libros 129, 130, and 139. Gabriel Maura, *Carlos II y su corte: ensayo de reconstrucción biográfica*, 2 vols (Madrid: Revista de archivos, bibliotecas y museos, 1911 and 1915), I: 210 and I: 237.

¹⁵ "Hable a la Reyna ... proponiendo a Su Magestad [que] conbendria despachar un extraordinario a Alemania para librar a sus Magestades Cesareas de qualquier siniestro susto, que les prodria ocasional la voz adulterada de esta enfermedad de Su Magestad, lo qual la Reyna aprovó, y que lo dispondria quanto antes." May 24, 1670. Nieto Nuño, *Diario del Conde de Pötting*, II: 117. The same situation was repeated on other occasions.

¹⁶ See Laura Oliván Santaliestra, "Mariana de Austria en la encrucijada política del siglo XVII" (PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2006), 177. Leopold did not ratify the treaty, but its existence was made public in 1668. See John P. Spielman, *Leopold I of Austria* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1977), 56.

This and other events suggest that French diplomats had a clear political strategy in presenting a sovereign at the verge of dying.¹⁷ Pötting commented in his diary with an obvious hint of sarcasm that the French envoy's demonstrations of happiness over Carlos II's convalescence after a short illness were "utterly contrary to the man's true inner sentiments."¹⁸ Although Carlos II experienced illnesses that could have terminated his life, as was the case with other children in the early modern period, the anxiety caused by insecurities about the Spanish succession contributed to an overly negative image of the little king.

If, however, we turn to other sources, such as the household records, letters, and diaries of people who were part of the day-to-day activities of the court, it is possible to construct an alternative, more nuanced, and more persuasive picture of Carlos II. These sources reveal that the king and the court went through a difficult period of adjustment, but eventually adapted to the new political reality with a significant measure of success. The ceremonies during the first Christmas season of Carlos II's reign, for example, were re-arranged to take place over the course of several days in "consideration of [the king's] age."¹⁹ The president of the Council of Aragon recalled that when it was time for him and ministers to go upstairs to honor the king, they were informed separately by the two women in charge of the queen's household that Carlos II was taking a nap.²⁰ When the court gathered on April 25, 1666 to celebrate the marriage by proxy of the Infanta Margarita to Leopold I, the little king "did not allow his hand to be kissed," thus preventing one of the traditional political rituals of the Spanish court from taking place.²¹ The king's stubbornness is a clear reminder of the uncooperative, individualistic, and spirited nature most four-year-olds share. Spaniards in general, and the Habsburgs

¹⁷ Indeed, these strategies coincided with the planning stages of Louis XIV's attacks on the Spanish Low Countries and continued through the War of Devolution (1667–1668) and the partition treaty of 1668. I draw my conclusions from my own examination of the diplomatic correspondence and council of state deliberations from 1665 to 1668. For a lucid discussion of Louis XIV's foreign policy, much of it focusing on the conquest of the Spanish Low Countries, see Paul Sonino, *Louis XIV and the Origins of the Dutch War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁸ "[E]l Marques de Couuré, Embiado de França, tubo audiencia de Sus Magestades, el qual vino a congratularse de la reconbalecencia del Rey, demontraçion bien contraria al sentimiento interior." Nieto Nuño, *Diario del Conde de Pötting*, II: 139.

¹⁹ "el Rey n[ues]tro S[eñor] fuese dividido en dias por no cansar sus pocos años en función que durase tanto t[iem]po ..." BNE mss. 5742 fol. 371v.

²⁰ "... y aunque la resolucion fue tambien que fuese primero al Rey sino dormia y uno y otro me embiaron a decir la camarera y la Haia pero p[or] estar durmiendo entramos a la pieza de la Reyna primero ..." BNE mss 5742 fol. 371v.

²¹ "Acabado que fue [el desposorio] se açerco la Magestad Cesarea [Margarita] a la Reyna y en rodillas le beso la mano, la qual la levanto con mejor graçia y ternura que â todos pudo causar. Lo mismo hiço con el Rey, el qual no se deço besar la mano." Nieto Nuño, ed., *Diario del Conde de Pötting*, I: 197–8.

in particular, appear to have been quite sensitive to the needs of children.²² Carlos II was allowed to adapt to his role at his own pace and, consequently, political rituals suffered.²³

Concerns about the negative impact a child king could have on the very office of king became evident on several occasions. During a council of state deliberation on an etiquette conflict provoked by a dispute over the proper place Carlos II's personal attendants should occupy in court ceremonies, the VI Duke of Alba protested loudly that the "dignity of kingship" was at risk.²⁴ The ceremonies associated with the prestigious military order of the Golden Fleece gave way to a number of awkward situations. The first one took place when Carlos II became the ninth master of the order in late 1665. Barely four years old, he was naturally unable to preside over the ritual; the task fell on one of his subjects, the Duke of Cardona. "It was especially strange," commented Pötting in his diary, "to see a gentleman invest his own king into the order."²⁵ This was an extraordinary situation, indeed, because in theory no one could knight a king of Spain and no one, other than the king, could bear the royal arms.²⁶ In the induction ceremony of the Count of Harrach several months later, a similar situation occurred. This time, Carlos II's *aya* or governess, the Marquise of los Vélez, performed the ceremony with the king sitting on her lap. Again, the solution was considered "indecent;" a lady, noted Pötting, should not "intermingle in an affair as gentlemanly as this one."²⁷ In these ceremonies, Carlos II was no more inadequate than any other child of four would have been, no matter how gifted. Nonetheless, when substitutes were needed to perform royal duties, the office of kingship suffered.

²² My findings here conform to those of Martha Hoffman, who has studied the childhood of Philip III and Margarita of Austria's children. See Hoffman, *Raised to Rule*, chapters 2 and 3.

²³ Words such as *impedimentos* or *embarazos* that convey the idea of difficulty appear often in the records.

²⁴ The comment originated as a result of a conflict of etiquette that debated the place that Carlos II was given in the rituals and ceremonies of the court during his minority. AHN Estado leg. 674 exp. 18.

²⁵ "Lo mas raro de esta acion era de haverse visto que un uasallo armaua â cavallero â su Rey, acion de eterna memoria para la Casa de Cardona." The ceremony took place on November 8, 1665, two days after Carlos II's fourth birthday. Nieto Nuño, ed. *Diario del Conde de Pötting*, 1: 149.

²⁶ Teófilo Ruiz, "Unsacred Monarchy: The Kings of Castile in the Late Middle Ages," in *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics since the Middle Ages*, Sean Wilentz, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985), 124.

²⁷ "Diciembre 3, 1665. ... Armole cavallero en nombre del Rey el Duque de Cardona, pero la Marquesa de los Veles teniendo â su Su Majestad en las faldas le puso con el dicho Duque de Cardona el collar sobre el cuello, lo que a mi no me parecia muy decente, que una dama actualmente se entremeta en funcion de una Orden tan caballerosa como esta." Nieto Nuño, ed., *Diario del Conde de Pötting*, 1: 156.

“By His Own Royal Hand”

Difficulties gradually subsided as Carlos II grew older and became capable of withstanding the rigors of court rituals and could adequately carry out his role in them. Indeed, the court did not have to wait very long for this to happen. Records indicate that by six and seven years of age, two to three years into his reign, Carlos II started to receive diplomats, learned to order grandees to cover their heads, and uttered commands, all of which marked important political milestones.²⁸ Pötting carefully recorded in his diary the first time that Carlos II inducted a gentleman into the order of the Golden Fleece “by his own royal hand.”²⁹ At seven years old, Carlos II performed a knighting ceremony, mastering one of the most traditional and prestigious tasks associated with kings.³⁰

Like other royal children, Carlos II grew up in the court environment, which provided hands-on training for the young sovereign. The Spanish Habsburgs allocated a number of officers to care for their offspring in the queen’s household, where children spent their formative years until they were given an independent entourage according to the political demands of the moment, their status within the larger family structure, their age, and their gender.³¹ Thus, from the moment of their birth, royal children were incorporated in the overall court structure and occupied a conspicuous position in it, even before they took on their permanent political roles. The presence of royal children had concrete political consequences for noble families, who could obtain coveted appointments each time a Habsburg child was born. These arrangements also had implications for queens, who saw their royal households (and consequently their sphere of influence) increase with each birth. This system also seems to have worked very well for the children themselves; the royal household provided stability and a training ground for the younger generation of royals, who, unlike their French counterparts, continued to be close to their parents during their formative years. Growing up in this manner, Habsburg children also became accustomed to being the center of a large staff and to engage in the rituals and ceremonials of the court.³²

Although Carlos II differed from other Habsburg children in that he became king at a very young age, the system did not change when he inherited the throne. Carlos II remained under his mother’s supervision and was served by members

²⁸ Some of these occasions are documented in the diary of the Imperial ambassador (Nieto Nuño, ed., *Diario del Conde de Pötting*) and the President of the Council of Aragon (BNE mss. 5742). Maura also gathered these details. Maura, *Carlos II y su corte*, vol. 1.

²⁹ “El Rey dio por su real mano el Tuson al Marques de Camaraça.” Nieto Nuño, ed., *Diario del Conde de Pötting*, II: 46.

³⁰ See Nieto Nuño, ed., *Diario del Conde de Pötting*, I: 46 and 156.

³¹ For a more detailed explanation of all of these issues, see Hoffman, *Raised to Rule*.

³² Hoffman, *Raised to Rule*, chapter 2.

of her household for most of his minority.³³ This practice held deep political significance, not the least because it reversed the traditional political hierarchy of the court, in which members of the king's household took center stage. It simultaneously provoked, among other things, a number of etiquette conflicts that pitted members of the court against each other. It was precisely within this context that Alba expressed his concerns about the "dignity" of the office of king. As queen regent, Mariana held fast to the arrangement, but adopted a series of measures that provided the necessary tools for Carlos II to learn his job. For instance, she appointed a large number of *meninos*, male courtiers under 15 years of age, as Carlos II's own personal entourage.³⁴ These youngsters, who formed a sort of mini-household within the larger queen's household, became the king's constant companions.³⁵ With this male-gendered and age-appropriate following, Carlos II participated in the first public procession of the reign in 1668. It offered a "beautiful sight," an eye-witness remarked, because 12 of these boys "especially chosen from the highest nobility" were part of the spectacle.³⁶ These lavishly dressed attendants followed the royal carriage, bearing lighted torches and parading on exquisitely caparisoned horses. Later that year, Carlos II, accompanied by six of his *meninos*, performed a dance on the occasion of his mother's birthday.³⁷ His actions fulfilled the cultural traditions of the Spanish Habsburg court, in which members, including the royal children, participated in all kinds of theatrical activities.³⁸ Surrounded by his young and masculine troop, Carlos II gradually began to command the court's center stage.³⁹

³³ *Testamento de Felipe IV*, Clause 36. He obtained his own household on April 14, 1675. AGP Reinados, caja 92.

³⁴ *Meninos* should not be confused with pages, who had gradually been segregated to the stable section of the royal household. An office title of Portuguese origin, *Meninos* (and *meninas*) lived inside the palace; these appointments were usually given to children of higher ranking court officials or to members of the titled nobility. Hoffman, *Raised to Rule*, 50.

³⁵ "*Meninos* incorporated into the household of the queen from the moment that Carlos inherited. (Listed as *Gentiles hombres de la cámara y meninos de la reina*)." AGP Adm. leg. 5648 and AGP, Reinados, caja 92, exp. 3. (Other than that they were younger than 15, there is no way of knowing from these records the youngsters' age.) Carlos II had close to 40 *meninos* appointed during his childhood.

³⁶ Nieto Nuño, *Diario del Conde de Pötting*, I: 393-4.

³⁷ ADM Histórica, leg. 69; Nieto Nuño, *Diario del Conde de Pötting*, II: 164.

³⁸ Mariana hired additional musicians for Carlos II's dance lessons. ADM Histórica, leg. 69.

³⁹ The number of *meninos* grew exponentially during Carlos II's minority. AGP Adm. leg. 5648; José Rufino Novo, "La Casa real durante la regencia de una reina: Mariana de Austria," in *Las relaciones discretas entre las Monarquías Hispana y Portuguesa: las casas de las reinas*, 3 vols, José Martínez Millán and Paula Marçal Lourenço, editors, I: 483-548, I: 510.

Positive descriptions of Carlos II increased as he adapted to his kingly role and took on more difficult tasks. While the French were busy deploying alarming news about the young king, Venetian diplomats produced very different reports about Carlos II. Marino Zorzi, for example, reported that the six-year old child was growing up in "prosperity and [good] health" and "encouraging signs of vigor."⁴⁰ Zorzi's successor, Catterino Bellegno, testified that at nine years of age, Carlos II possessed such "vigor," "beauty," and "talent" that "it defies human understanding."⁴¹ The next ambassador, Carlo Contarini, described the 12-year old king in similar terms.⁴² The three men unanimously lavished praise on the king: they emphasized his "angelic nature"—a term that is repeated often in other documents—"his majestic appearance," and "mature countenance."⁴³ It is clear that Carlos II's active role in courtly activities gave way to enthusiastic descriptions about the king. Interestingly, as the minority came to a close, political expectations created a situation similar to that at the very beginning of his reign. This time, however, the politics of childhood played out not on the international stage, but in the domestic sphere of the court. While the anxiety over the succession waned, questions about the composition of the new regime loomed. Everyone's future now depended on a 14-year-old boy.

Transition to Adulthood

Although Carlos II showed auspicious signs that he was growing up in the manner expected of a young king, his transition to adulthood became extremely difficult. Part of the problem was that legal, physical, cultural, and political expectations of adulthood in early modern Spain were defined differently. Because these variations complicated the task of cleanly demarcating childhood from maturity, they are crucial to any historical understanding of Carlos II's predicament.⁴⁴ Male youths typically came of age at 25 or when they married; if their fathers died, however,

⁴⁰ "Corre nell'anno sesto con prosperità e salute, si rinfranca nel vigore del corpo ogni giorno avanzando ... si decantano meravigliosis progressi di talento sublime, e di altissima capacità il presagio si forma. L'indole è angelica, l'apparenza maestosa, il tratto maturo ..." Marino Zorzi, in Nicolò Barozzi and Guglielmo Berchet, eds, *Relazioni degli Stati Europei lette al Senato dagli Ambasciatori Veneti nel secolo decimosettimo. Raccolte ed annotate*. Serie I; Spain, vol. II. (Venice: Pietro Naratovich, 1860), 339.

⁴¹ "lo ha costituito in vigore e bellezza e dotato di lumi e di spirito grande nel nono anno della età sua, che trapassa l'uman concetto." Barozzi and Berchet, eds, *Relazioni*, 377.

⁴² Barozzi and Berchet, eds, *Relazioni*, 397–8.

⁴³ "L'indole è angelica, l'apparenza maestosa, il tratto maturo ..." Marino Zorzi. This idea was repeated by Bellegno and Contarini; Barozzi and Berchet, eds, *Relazioni*, 339, 377, and 397.

⁴⁴ For an important study of the men's life cycle in early modern Italy see Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex, Crime, and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

they could be emancipated at 14.⁴⁵ These several milestones allowed for a wide range of difference in the attainment of adult status. The two types of guardians the Spanish legal system specified neatly illustrate this ambivalence. Guardians for male children 14 and younger (for female children, 12) were called *tutores* (tutors) and those of youths from 14 to 25 were called *curadores* (curators). In her study of guardianship among the Spanish nobility, Grace E. Coolidge points out that young people under the surveillance of a curator had a measure of independence, but not necessarily total autonomy. Young men (and women) past the age of tutorship had a say in a curator's appointment by rejecting one altogether or nominating their own candidate.⁴⁶ Curatorship implied a transitional period and illustrated the ambivalent position of a male-heir, who could inherit titles and even choose his own guardian, yet still be under the partial surveillance of another adult. Carlos II's status was also uncertain under the terms of his father's testament. Although he was eligible for legal emancipation at the age of 14, he was to remain under the curatorship of his mother.⁴⁷

Ambivalence extended to all aspects of the king's process of coming of age, including physical maturity. Observations about Carlos II by people close to him, for instance, reveal their awareness that the king was still a young man who had much growing up to do even as his political emancipation neared. "The king's height is in proportion to his age, his body slim, and his constitution robust and agile" reported a contemporary.⁴⁸ "The king is enjoying himself [hunting] very much; *soon we should see him very grown up*, since the countryside suits him wholly, just like his father" reported one court officer to another in a private note (my italics).⁴⁹ At the time of these comments, Carlos was 13 and a half, six months before he was scheduled to take over the government of his extensive realm. The nuns at the Madrid Royal Convent, known as the Descalzas Reales, reported that Carlos was becoming a man and that he looked just like his father (he was 15 and a half at the time).⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Grace E. Coolidge, *Guardianship, Gender, and the Nobility in Early Modern Spain* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 22.

⁴⁶ Coolidge, *Guardianship, Gender, and the Nobility*, 22.

⁴⁷ *Testamento de Felipe IV*, Clause 35, 51–3.

⁴⁸ "El Rey aunque en estatura de proporción con la edad, flaquito en bulto, robusto y aguil en salud." BNE mss. 9399, fol. 48v.

⁴⁹ "Nuestros Amos estan buenos (a Dios gracias) y el Rey n[uest]ro S[eñor] tan gustoso que pienso le hemos de bolber ya Muy crecido porque el Campo le ace estar tan divertido, q[ue] sigue el aliento de su Padre que goce de Dios, ayer tubieron Comedia de los de la legua, salieron luego al Campo, y mato S[u]m[agestad] Jabali. No hay nobedad alguna de que avisar a v[uestra] m[erced] mas que bolber a repetir me tiene asu obediencia. Cuya vida g[uar]de Dios mi S[eñor]. Aranjuez 27 de Abril de 1674. ... su m[ayo]r ser[vido]r, don Pedro de VillaReal." AGP Administracion General, leg. 780.

⁵⁰ The comments were intended for Carlos's sister and Queen of France, María Teresa of Austria, who responded "I am happy that my brother is enjoying good health and that he is such a man as you tell me he is, and nothing would be better for him than to be and

Perceptions about Carlos II's physical growth had deep political ramifications at this point in his life as much, or perhaps more so, than at any other. The council of state deliberated on the question of his marriage from November, 1673 until January, 1679 (between his thirteenth and seventeenth birthdays) and considered his physical maturity at length.⁵¹ Here again we can observe how aspects of childhood intimately intertwined with high politics. Carlos II's initial engagement to Archduchess María Antonia of Austria (1669–1692), who was seven years his junior, was generally acceptable before he reached puberty as a diplomatic and a dynastic strategy.⁵² It became intolerable, however, once Carlos II started to show signs that he reached sexual maturity. The reason behind this strong opposition was clear: a marriage to a much younger bride would postpone the birth of a successor longer than necessary. In the summer of 1676, the council of state hesitated to confirm the marriage to the little archduchess precisely for that reason.⁵³ The following year, the council reconsidered the marriage options on the basis of the doctors' opinion that Carlos II was capable of assuming married life.⁵⁴ Councilors urged the king to not delay his marriage to an adult bride any longer. The issue of Carlos II's marriage became a point of great contention for everyone involved, and naturally so. Marriage was yet another benchmark of adulthood, as important for men as it was for women, and in this case had far reaching consequences for the succession.

Indeed, the events that took place at the end of Carlos II's minority indicate that the unclear boundaries between childhood and adulthood played a decisive role in the political watershed that followed. The crisis began on the day of Carlos II's fourteenth birthday (November 6, 1675), when the young king made his first attempt to assert political authority. He summoned to court his older, illegitimate half-brother, don Juan of Austria (1629–1679), to become his advisor in lieu of his mother, Queen Mariana.⁵⁵ Under pressure from his mother who demanded don Juan's immediate dismissal when she discovered her son's scheme, Carlos II quickly lost his nerve and reversed the orders that he had publicized on that same

look like his father." [... me guelgo infinito que mi hermano este bueno y tan hombre como me dizes que esta, nada le estara mejor que parezese a su padre ...]. Maria Teresa to the Descalzas Reales, August 3, 1677. AGP Descalzas Reales, c. 7, exp. 1.

⁵¹ They commenced in 1673 with discussions on his marriage to Archduchess Maria Antonia (AHN E. leg. 2799) and concluded in 1679, when it was decided that Carlos II would marry the French Princess, Maria Louise of Orleans (AHN E. leg. 2796).

⁵² Spain and the Empire were military allies in the war against France and Maria Antonia had rights to the succession. AHN E. leg. 2799.

⁵³ Council of state deliberation on June 4, 1676. AHN E. leg. 2799.

⁵⁴ See deliberation on July 8, 1677. AHN E. 2799.

⁵⁵ Mariana and don Juan had been involved in power struggles for most of the minority. In making his decision, Carlos II had been influenced by his teacher and his confessor, two authority figures. They had the opportunity to act with more freedom after the king obtained his own household (April 15, 1675) and was thus no longer under Mariana's constant surveillance (AGP Reinados, c. 92 exp. 3).

day.⁵⁶ The episode was much more than a political struggle between the queen mother and her enemy, don Juan, who had challenged the regency government on more than one occasion in the past. Although she won the battle, the event became a deep source of embarrassment for Carlos II and sealed her downfall. Conspiracies against Mariana's regime grew exponentially. Carlos II's independence became the reason for the *coup d'état* that materialized one year later.

On December of 1676, a sizeable group of nobles took the extraordinary step to "liberate" the king. Forming a "Confederation" (*Confederación*), they demanded a change of regime,⁵⁷ and, most significantly, that Carlos II separate himself from his mother permanently.⁵⁸ Mariana's influence over Carlos II had become a political issue of significant proportions. The conflict resided not simply in that she continued to dominate court politics, but more importantly, that her power compromised the king's rule.⁵⁹ The ruling elite required that the king demonstrate a measure of autonomy and independence. Precisely because the process of maturation was not clear cut for men in early modern Spain, even for sovereigns, the ruling elite understood it would be extremely difficult for a boy of Carlos II's age to hold his own with his mother, who enjoyed multiple layers of authority as mother of a king, the widow of another, a Habsburg matriarch, and a former ruler. In order to avoid precipitating full-fledged civil war, Carlos II acquiesced to his subjects' demands.⁶⁰ He moved into the Palace of the Buen Retiro in the outskirts of the city under the utmost secrecy on February 14, 1677, leaving his mother behind.⁶¹ A gazetteer wrote that when the king abandoned his mother "all

⁵⁶ BNE mss. 10129.

⁵⁷ The nobles of the confederation called for the elimination of Fernando Valenzuela from the government, who had risen to the office of prime minister thanks to Mariana's patronage, and the installation of don Juan at the helm of the government.

⁵⁸ "Por causa de las malas influencias y asistencias al lado de S[u] M[agestad] dela Reyna su Madre, dela qual como primera raiz se han producido, y producen quantos males, perdidas, ruinas, y desordenes experimentamos, y la mayor parte de todas, la execrable elevación [de Fernando Valenzuela] ... evidencia que el mayor serbicio que se puede hacer a S[u] M[agestad] es separar totalmente, y para siempre, cercanía de S[u] M[agestad] a la Reyna su Madre ..." *Confederación del S[ñor]r Don Juan de Austria, y los grandes de España*, BNE mss. 18211 fol. 19r. Twenty-four members of the upper aristocracy signed this important document, including don Juan.

⁵⁹ See Silvia Z. Mitchell, "Habsburg Motherhood: The Power of Queen Mariana of Austria, Mother and Regent for Carlos II of Spain," in *Early Modern Habsburg Women: Transnational Contexts, Cultural Conflicts, Dynastic Continuities*, ed. Anne J. Cruz and Maria Galli Stampino. (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 175–94.

⁶⁰ The Duke of Medinaceli (who became Carlos II's Prime Minister in 1680) and Count of Villahumbrosa, who wrote a memorandum to the king assessing the situation, convinced Carlos II that the best way to avoid civil war was to separate from his mother. Villahumbrosa's text is housed in ADM hist. leg. 159.

⁶¹ BNE mss. 10129.

the lords gathered, as well as much of the population, full of joy and to proclaim such prudent action, *so rare at that age*" (my italics).⁶²

Widespread approval greeted Carlos II's seemingly decisive actions. A few days after the separation, the king visited the Virgin of Atocha escorted by the bulk of the nobility.⁶³ Scions of the most powerful lineages of the realm lavished exquisite gifts and attentions on the young sovereign to celebrate his newly found independence. Pedro of Aragon presented to Carlos II splendid tapestries and jewels valued at 300,000 ducats; the duchess of Béjar a sumptuous outfit, adorned with diamond buttons, and embroidered with emeralds and rubies; the duke of Osuna 25 horses with exquisite hangings, and so on.⁶⁴ The demonstrations of joy continued unabated, in public ceremonies and inside the palace. The visible and public separation from his mother made a strong political statement. In taking such a step, Carlos II acted more like an adult male than a timid youth, indicating to his subjects that he was finally ready to assume his political role as king. He then issued a royal decree ordering his mother to retire, a request tantamount to exile; the queen had no choice but to obey her son's command and left the court on March 2, 1677.⁶⁵ Mariana's retirement, or rather exile, was a milestone in the king's own life: the process culminated in an elaborate procession on his return to the royal palace.⁶⁶

In spite of these important initial steps, Carlos II had clearly acted under pressure from his subjects and had evidently been motivated by political expediency. Carlos II's correspondence with his mother after she left the court suggests that the moment of her retirement *qua* exile did not fully mark his maturity; rather he continued to grow and mature in stages over the next two years.⁶⁷ Gaining independence from his mother's influence, in fact, formed another crucial marker of maturity and carried significant political ramifications. Gradually, the young king asserted his authority, for example, over patronage, one of the most visible symbols of royal prerogative. On one occasion, Mariana dispatched a decree in favor of one of her ladies through her *mayordomo mayor*, the Marquis of Mancera. Carlos II rebuked Mancera for obeying Mariana. Mancera's mistake led to his

⁶² "... concurrieron todos los señores, y mucho pueblo ... llenos de alborozo y aclamaciones por acción tan llena de prudencia y tan estraña en aquella edad ..." BNE mss. 9399 fol. 62v.

⁶³ "el Rey n[uest]ro S[eñor] duia R[ea]l persona salio el día siguiente Sabado 16 a caballo a n[uest]ra S[eñor]a la R[ea]l de Atocha, con gran comitiva de Señores q[ue] lo han continuado asistiendo ..." BNE mss. 10129, fol. 8v.

⁶⁴ Maura, *Carlos II y su corte*, II: 334–5.

⁶⁵ Mariana lived in the city of Toledo from April 2, 1677 (she had spent a month previously in Aranjuez) and returned to Madrid on September 27, 1679.

⁶⁶ There are various *relaciones* describing the event, celebrated not only in Madrid but in other cities as well. See for example, RAH 9-3656 n. 18 and *Menor edad de Carlos II*, Colección de Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de España, vol. 67, 3–68, 27.

⁶⁷ AHN E. leg. 2729.

exile and precipitated a brief showdown between mother and son.⁶⁸ Mariana's relentless demands for her clients caused considerable friction with her son and soon became a test of strength over who held ultimate authority.⁶⁹ Although she could no longer issue orders directly, she nevertheless expected that Carlos II would follow her commands. The king sometimes acquiesced, but he just as often refused his mother's wishes. On one occasion, for example, he explained to his mother that the requests she made on behalf of Mancera "are major ones and thus have to be closely regulated," justifying his denial in terms that were not offensive to his mother, but that nonetheless forcefully signaled his authority.⁷⁰ Carlos II made strong political and personal statements when he limited Mariana's influence over him and delineated her subsequent political role.

As he gained confidence, the king became more assertive, and did not hesitate to be quite blunt with his mother when necessary. Some of his extant letters show a side of his personality that has been seldom acknowledged by historians: his assertiveness. One particularly poignant incident during Mariana's exile illustrates how far the king could go. Encouraged by what she perceived as a positive turn in their relationship, Mariana tried to force her son to agree to a personal meeting. Carlos II responded to his mother's appeals in no uncertain terms:

Your additional comments, that it is no longer time to pretend (*disimular*) and that you will search for me to the ends of the earth, I must confess have hurt and astonished me greatly, as much because I have heard these expressions from you as because you force me to respond to you now with the utmost clarity. I have never given you any reason to pretend [*disimular*], a term very inappropriate for you to use. And under no circumstance and in no case must you even think of leaving [crossed out] to search for me without my express will.⁷¹

⁶⁸ The Marquis of Mancera to Jerónimo de Eguía, February 2, 1679. BNE mss. 2409, fol. 557.

⁶⁹ Doña Francisca Manrique is listed as one of Mariana's ladies in her household in Toledo. AGP Reinados Carlos II, c. 117, exp. 2.

⁷⁰ "A Mancera esto en hacer m[er]c[e]d proporcionada a sus meritos y del que esta haciendo en serbirte pero (no escuso decirte q[ue] la q[ue] te a insinuado de la grandeza y la q[ue] aca represento del consejo de estado tienen reparo por aora debiendo regularse estas dignidades q[ue] son las mayores y se hacen a los vasallos con una continuacion larga y singular de grandes y relebantes meritos. Las que pretende la Manrique tienen grabe reparo por q[ue] consisten en cargar mi acienda quando esta tan destituida y aniquilada (crossed out) ..." Carlos to Mariana, August 19, 1678. AHN E. leg. 2729.

⁷¹ "Lo demas q[ue] me dices de q[ue] ya no es tiempo de disimular, y q[ue] saldrias a buscarme al cabo del mundo es preciso confesarte me a causado suma extrañeza y sentimiento asi por aber oido de ti cosas semejantes, como porq[ue] me ayas obligado a responderte con la claridad q[ue] debo, q[ue] no abiendote dado nunca motibo justo para q[ue] tengas q[ue] disimular es mui impropio de tu atencion este termino, y q[ue] en ningun tiempo caso, ni accidente puedes pensar en moberte de donde estas sin expresa volun[tad] (crossed out) en busca mia sin tan expresa voluntad." Carlos to Mariana May 11, 1679. AHN E. leg. 2729.

In thus proclaiming his royal authority, Carlos II left no doubt where he stood. He was forthright in telling his mother that he would not compromise it for her sake since God had placed him in his position. He affirmed that he would never fail to fulfill his kingly obligations; they always came first. The king informed his mother that he would consent to see her “only when I judge it convenient” and explained that she should not consider this refusal an indication that his filial love had diminished.⁷²

The personal and political autonomy that Carlos II demonstrated regarding his mother also extended to the issue of his marriage. The king had been engaged to his niece, Archduchess María Antonia, when he was 13 years old. The marriage plans, however, stalled during the convoluted events of late 1676.⁷³ Deliberations on this crucial political, dynastic, and diplomatic issue resumed in the council of state shortly after the queen mother was sent into exile. For numerous reasons, not least her age, the French princess, Marie Louise of Orleans (1662–1689), became the preferred candidate by August, 1677.⁷⁴ By then, Carlos II had assumed full control of the marriage arrangements, answering the council of state’s deliberations personally, without even the assistance of a secretary.⁷⁵ He decided to marry the French princess, after having received encouraging reports of her beauty and personality,⁷⁶ and took the lead in negotiating the delicate situation with his mother and uncle (Leopold I), both of whom had no choice but to accept Carlos II’s choice.⁷⁷ Carlos II met his bride in late 1679 in the city of Burgos and joined her on the last leg of her progress to the capital. The journey was deeply symbolic for the king and his subjects. It marked the culmination of a process that began under such inauspicious circumstances the day of his legal emancipation. By the time that he returned to Madrid with his beautiful French bride, the 18-year-old sovereign had left his childhood definitely behind.

⁷² “pues no pudiendo yo faltar a cumplir en las obligaciones de la dignidad de Rey en q[ue] Dios me a puesto, y deven ser las Primeras, seria preciso resultaren de lo contrario muchos inconvenientes contra tu propio respeto y consuelo, y aré que quando yo lo juzgaze comb[enien]te no te lo negare y q[ue] no por esta declar[aci]on animo debes imaginar ser menor mi cariño del q[ue] como buen hijo debo tenerte pues esto no tiene q[ue] ver con lo q[ue] toca a mi soberanía y bien d[e] mis Reynos.” Carlos to Mariana May 11, 1679. AHN E. leg. 2729.

⁷³ The proxy ceremony had been scheduled for December 9, 1676 in the city of Passau.

⁷⁴ Consultation of 2 August 1677 in AHN E. leg. 2799.

⁷⁵ Carlos II’s answers to the council of state consultations are indisputable holographs.

⁷⁶ Marie Louise’s potential fertility, physical constitution, and her beauty were seen as the ticket to the resolution of the succession crisis. All of these issues were abundantly discussed in the council of state. AHN E. leg. 2796.

⁷⁷ For example, see the letters Carlos wrote to Mariana dated January 23, April 2, April 17, and May 4, 1679. AHN E. leg. 2796.

Kingship versus Childhood

The incompatible nature of kingship with childhood can be observed particularly well at two moments in Carlos II's trajectory as a child-king: at the beginning of his rule and when he exited his minority. Carlos II became sovereign of the western world's largest empire when scarcely four years of age. Because the political system under which he ruled depended largely on dynastic succession, fears about his early death, exacerbated by the absence of siblings that could succeed without involving the other major contemporary political powers, helped create the black legend that has for so long surrounded Carlos II. We cannot assume from the surviving documents, however, that the king suffered from any serious physical or mental disabilities even if his illnesses repeatedly put Europe on high alert. In addition, the sophisticated and elaborate Spanish court apparatus demanded that the king, as little as he was, fully participate in its rituals and ceremonies. His initial difficulties in fulfilling a role designed for an adult negatively affected the perception of Carlos II. Nonetheless, the king's participation in complex court activities at a still relatively tender age reveal a child with a remarkable capacity for adaptation and one that was growing up as expected. From these first hesitant steps as a child-king, Carlos II's own story emerges as he confidently adapted to his birth-given position.

As Carlos II approached the age of emancipation, his subjects expected their king to bring stability to the land by assuming his political responsibilities, getting married, and providing a successor. Although the boundaries between childhood and adulthood were ambivalent for all early modern Spanish males of the same age, Carlos II, as king, had little room to maneuver. The court factionalisms that led the monarchy to the brink of civil war at the time of his legal emancipation were to a large extent caused by the king's inability to assert his independence from his mother. It took Carlos II almost four years to make a full transition into adulthood (from late 1675 until late 1679). In spite of the difficulties, however, he showed strength of character and a clear awareness of his obligations, eventually asserting his will over the strong figure of his mother and taking the lead in resolving the crucial issue of his marriage. An examination of Carlos II's childhood, one that sets it within the cultural expectations of Spanish male adulthood and the traditions of Habsburg kingship, offers an alternative to the histories of his reign that project the events of the end of his life to the beginning. Most importantly, perhaps, it provides a solid point of departure to rethink and thus rewrite his life story.

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