Libeling Painting: Exploring the Gap between Text and Image in the Critical Discourse on George Villiers, the First Duke of Buckingham

THESIS

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Abstract

This paper investigates the imagery of George Villiers, the first Duke of Buckingham, by reinserting it into the visual and material culture of the Stuart court and by considering the role that medium and style played in its interpretation. Recent scholarship on Buckingham’s imagery has highlighted the oppositional figures in both Rubens’ and Honthorst’s allegorical paintings of the Duke, and, picking up on the existence of “Felton Commended,” a libel which references these allegories in relation to illusion, argued dually that Buckingham’s imagery is generally defensive, a result of his unstable position as royal favorite, and that these paintings consciously presented images of the Duke which explicitly and topically responded to verse libels criticizing him. However, in so doing, this scholarship ignores the gap between written libels and pictorial images and creates a direct dialogue between two media that did not speak directly to each other.

In this thesis I strive to rectify these errors by examining a range of pictorial images of Buckingham, considering the different audiences of painting and verse libel and addressing the seventeenth-century understanding of the medium of painting, which defended painterly illusionism and positioned painting as a ritualized language. I argue that the only existing satirical print depicting Buckingham, *The Kingly Cocke*, utilized a traditional composition and objective engraved line that prevented it from visually lampooning Buckingham and distanced it from the satirical intensity of written libels.

ii
Similarly, printed and painted portraits, which were produced by Buckingham’s own patronage and proclaimed his social position, gentility and wealth through his cultivated dress, manicured appearance and controlled bearing, were not defensive and had no connection to libels. Even when Buckingham’s imagery contained oppositional figures, as can be seen in Rubens’ and Honthorst’s overt allegories, those images did not respond to libelous criticism. Rather, like works produced for monarchs and other royal favorites, these paintings employed the conventional theme of Virtue triumphing over Envy and Discord, to activate the ritual language of painting and elevate their images above the quotidian. This allowed them to successfully function as glorifying images of the Duke’s position and authority.

Additionally, I argue that in order to understand how these paintings operated, they need to be re-embedded into the visual and material culture of the court, where their audience and display would have supported their elevated imagery. In this vein, we can understand the pictorial illusionism of these allegories as a positive part of their power and not as pejoratively deceitful. Not only was illusionism defended by the seventeenth-century discourse on painting, as well as the Neo-Platonic understanding of court masques, which positioned masques as illusions designed to embody higher truths, but it became a means of visually proclaiming the continental aspirations of the Stuart court. With this discourse in hand, I argue that “Felton Commended” paradoxically reveals the power of the images it critiques and that it demonstrates the extent to which painting came to stand for the entire performative culture of the court.
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Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ ii

Acknowledgments....................................................................................................................... iv

Vita................................................................................................................................................ v

List of Figures ............................................................................................................................... viii

Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 1

George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham—Royal Favourite....................................................... 5

News and the Culture of Complaint.............................................................................................. 12

Buckingham’s Responses to Criticism ......................................................................................... 17

The Theme of Envy in Buckingham’s Pictorial Representations................................................ 25

Printed Representations of Buckingham....................................................................................... 38

Buckingham’s Collecting and Commissioning of Painting......................................................... 47

Painting, Allegory and Illusion – The Power of Painting............................................................. 54

Criticism, Painting and Libels: Issues of Medium.................................................................. 60

Rubens’ and Honthorst’s Paintings.............................................................................................. 64

A Rereading of “Felton Commended”......................................................................................... 73
Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 75
Bibliography .................................................................................................................................. 78
Figures ........................................................................................................................................ 86
Appendix A: “Felton Commended” .............................................................................................. 98
List of Figures

Figure 1: Photographic reproduction, Peter Paul Rubens, *Equestrian Portrait of Buckingham*, ca. 1627. Formerly Osterley Park, destroyed in 1949 .........................86
Figure 2: Photographic reproduction, Peter Paul Rubens, *The Glorification of the Duke of Buckingham*, ca. 1627. Formerly Osterley Park, destroyed in 1949 .................87
Figure 3: Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Buckingham*, ca. 1625. Galleria Palatina (Palazzo Pitti), Florence, Italy .................................................................88
Figure 4: Peter Paul Rubens, *Mercury conducting Psyche to Olympus*, ca. 1625 ...............88
Figure 5: Peter Paul Rubens, *Oil Sketch*, ca. 1625. Whereabouts unknown, photographic reproduction ................................................................................89
Figure 6: Peter Paul Rubens, *Modello*, ca. 1625. National Gallery, London .....................89
Figure 7: Gerrit van Honthorst, *Apollo and Diana*, 1628. Hampton Court, Royal Collection ..........................................................90
Figure 8: Peter Paul Rubens, *Modello*, ca. 1625. Kimbell Art Museum ......................90
Figure 9: Juan Bautista Maino, *Recapture of Bahia*, 1635. Museo del Prado ...............91
Figure 10: Nicolas Poussin, *Time Rescuing Truth*, ca. 1640. Musée du Louvre ............91
Figure 11: Woodcut, *Charles II with his Nose to the Grindstone*, July 1651 ...............92
Figure 12: Broadside, Engraving, *The Kingly Cocke*, 1636. The British Museum ..........92
Figure 13: Willem van de Passe, Engraving, *Buckingham on Horseback*, ca. 1625 ......93
Figure 14: Simon van de Passe, Engraving, *Queen Anne*, ca. 1616 ..................................................93

Figure 15: Willem Jacobsz. Delff, Engraving after Michiel van Mierevelt, *Duke of Buckingham*, 1626. The British Museum ........................................................................................................94

Figure 16: Michiel van Mierevelt, *Duke of Buckingham*, 1625. Art Gallery of South Australia .................................................................................................................................94

Figure 17: Engraving after Michiel van Mierevelt, *Duke of Buckingham*, 1625. National Portrait Gallery, London ..........................................................................................................................95

Figure 18: William Larkin, *George Villiers*, ca. 1616. National Portrait Gallery, London .................................................................................................................................95

Figure 19: Anthony Van Dyck, *George Villiers and Katherine Manners as Venus and Adonis*, ca. 1620-21 .........................................................................................................................96

Figure 20: Anthony Van Dyck, *Le Rio à la Chasse*, 1635. Musée du Louvre ...............96

Figure 21: Gerrit van Honthorst, *Buckingham Family Portrait*, 1628. National Portrait Gallery, London .................................................................................................................................97
Introduction

The allegorical imagery of George Villiers, also known as the Duke of Buckingham, which includes two paintings by Rubens and a painting by Honthorst, utilizes universal, allegorical themes to glorify the Duke. Despite their inclusion of oppositional figures and the existence of “Felton Commended,” a libel which specifically mentions two of the works, these paintings neither directly referenced nor responded to libels. Instead, they employed an aggrandizing visual rhetoric which elevated their imagery above the polemical fray of libels. To understand how these paintings operated, we need to examine not only the iconographies of the images but also the cultural implications of the works. By embedding them into the visual and material culture of the court and considering their audience and display as well as the theoretical understanding of painting in the early seventeenth century, we can tease out their multivalent function and understand how their pictorial illusionism visually connected Buckingham to the political goals of the Stuart court and indeed came to stand for the entire performative culture of the court.

Recent historical scholarship on the Duke of Buckingham, who was the English royal favourite between 1614 and 1628, has been fruitfully driven by an interest in recovering the contemporary opinion of the favourite through the study of early modern news pamphlets, broadsides, and libels, some of which presented political figures in a very different light from those figures’ own propagandistic public images. Building on
research which examines these contentious written materials, English historians have begun to question the role that libels played in influencing public opinion and affecting early seventeenth-century English politics.\(^1\) This research has in turn been expanded to address the pictorial imagery of the Duke. For instance, in a 2008 article entitled ‘Naught But Illusion’? Buckingham’s Painted SELves, Alastair Bellany addresses two allegorical paintings of Buckingham by Rubens, an equestrian portrait (Fig. 1) and a ceiling painting (Fig. 2), in an attempt to discover the role that Rubens’ paintings played in light of criticism of the Duke.\(^2\) Considering the paintings in relation to court masques written for Buckingham and libels written against him, Bellany argues that portraits of the Duke specifically countered images of Buckingham circulated through verse libels and illicit poems.\(^3\)

Focusing on the allegorical representation of Envy, and following many aspects of Thomas Cogswell’s analysis of Buckingham’s cultivation of popularity and a positive public image, Bellany argues that Rubens consciously presented a fashioned image of the Duke which “responded to” the image of Buckingham presented in libels. Aligning Rubens’ representations with the depiction of Envy in a 1627 masque, Bellany claims that Rubens’ paintings were explicit, topical responses to criticism. Yet in his analysis,

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\(^3\) Bellany, 2008.
Bellany fails to account for medium-specific issues within the images that he addresses. Although he specifically discusses pictorial display and thoughtfully explores the allegorical role of horsemanship, his failure to consider issues of audience and the ritual language of painting prevents him from fully exploring the tension between the topical political events which he discusses and the universal allegories that Rubens creates. In doing so, Bellany fails to recognize the gap between the written libels and the pictorial allegories that he addresses, instead creating a direct dialogue between two media that did not speak directly to each other. This failure is clearly visible in the conclusion of Bellany’s argument, in which he addresses a libel, known as “Felton Commended,” that references Rubens’ *The Glorification of the Duke of Buckingham* (Fig. 2) and connects it with illusion, rhyming, “In an heroick painting, when before / Antwerpian Rubens’ best skill made him soare... In a bright blissful palace, fayrie ile, / Naught but illusion were we, ‘till this guile / Was by thy hand cut off, stout Machabee.” Bellany maintains that this libel not only undermines the success of Rubens’ painting but reinterprets court art in general, claiming that the libel divested Rubens’ paintings of their persuasive power by connecting them to the false illusory enchantment of witchcraft, and that the libel devastatingly reinterpreted the idealization of all court art by positioning that art as a negative mirage specifically designed to deceive the viewer. However, this position does not acknowledge the celebrated and positive role of illusion in painting, failing to

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4 Quoted in Bellany, 2008, 159. As I will argue bellow, Bellany specifically focuses on the phrase ‘Naught but illusion,’ failing to address who is being referenced in the claim ‘were we.’

5 Bellany, 2008, 159-160.
acknowledge that the illusion created by the painting, a celebrated feature in the discourse on painting, was a key element of its persuasive power.

Following the thrust of such scholarship, this paper will consider the role played by both printed and painted pictorial representations of the Duke in light of other much more volatile representations of the Duke in written form. In doing so, I will incorporate into my argument issues of ritual language and medium that Bellany’s discussion lacks, exploring the overlap between the Duke’s pictorial imagery and criticism against him during the tempestuous period between 1625, when Charles I came to power, and 1628, when John Felton murdered Buckingham. Through a specific analysis of both the function and audience of printed and painted images of Buckingham and of the Duke’s collecting, commissioning, and display of visual art, I will argue that Buckingham’s patronage specifically coincides with the ideals established by earlier favourites and that by attempting to follow established patterns of patronage in his commissioning and collecting of art, Buckingham worked to present himself as a learned, wealthy courtier similar to other European favourites. Inserting a specific discussion of medium into an analysis of Buckingham’s imagery, I will question the role of painting and printed images in relation to libels and the budding idea of public opinion, considering the role played by visual medium in the seventeenth century and addressing issues of self-fashioning and illusion. Finally, I will conclude with an analysis of “Felton Commended,” which addresses Buckingham’s imagery, reconsidering its critical claims in terms of the power of court art.
George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham—Royal Favourite

George Villiers, who was named the Duke of Buckingham in 1623, first came to power as a court favourite at the end of 1614, having caught the attention of James I when his previous favourite, Robert Carr, was embroiled in a scandal surrounding the poisoning of Thomas Overbury. Villiers, whose family came from minor gentry stock, was by all accounts incredibly handsome and charming, allowing him to rise rapidly in court rank despite his lower-class birth. Villiers’ rapid accumulation of favour was supported both by James’ personal affection, which was probably coupled with a homosexual relationship, and a group of courtiers with diverse political objectives who were unhappy with Carr’s monopolization of royal favour and who intended to reestablish some parity between court factions. However, having achieved recognition and the favour of the King, Buckingham quickly supplanted Carr as singular royal favourite, ruining the chances of balancing power between court factions through multiple favourites. During these early years, Villiers’ political power came specifically from his personal relationship with James and the positions he held within the privy chamber, which included roles as cup bearer and gentleman of the bedchamber.

However, as his career progressed, James continued to grant Buckingham favours, giving

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6 See Bellany, 2002, for an account of the Overbury scandal and Buckingham’s rise to power.
him numerous titles and roles that expanded his power beyond the confines of the King’s household.9

At the same time, Buckingham developed a close friendship with the future Charles I, a relationship which was probably cemented on their secretive trip to Spain in 1623 during the Spanish Match Crisis, when James was attempting to establish an alliance with Spain through the marriage of Charles and the Infanta María. This trip, which undoubtedly helped Buckingham maintain his position at court after James’ death in 1625, also marked the beginning of the Duke’s active role in continental politics. Although the exact nature of Buckingham’s position at court from 1623-25 is hotly debated, most scholars agree that by 1625, Buckingham’s political role had switched from that of a royal favourite, whose power derived from the affection of the King, to that of a valido or political minister, whose role was to advise Charles I.10 This view is supported by the fact that Buckingham never held a position within Charles’ privy chamber,11 receiving instead more public and politically based appointments, including that of Lord High Admiral of the English Fleet. Following this appointment, Buckingham embraced a more active and martial political role, supporting a militaristic foreign policy that led to war with Spain and France. He also commanded a series of failed military

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9 Villiers received the title of the Viscount Villiers in 1616, the Earl of Buckingham in 1617, and the Marquess of Buckingham in 1618.
11 See Sharpe, 1987, 226. This fact also led Sharpe to conclude that while Buckingham and Charles’ relationship was founded on royal affection, it was not based on any type of sexual relationship.
campaigns in 1627 and 1628, leading to his assassination by John Felton, a disgruntled soldier, in August 1628.

During this time, as Buckingham’s role changed from court favourite to political advisor, criticism against him intensified. Beginning with accusations that he had attempted to draw James into an unfavourable alliance with Spain through the Spanish Match, which was highly unpopular in England because of a pervading anti-Catholic sentiment,\(^\text{12}\) this criticism carried over into Charles’ new reign, when the Duke was associated with several dubious and highly controversial political machinations, including issues of taxation to raise money for the crown and the continental wars with France and Spain.\(^\text{13}\) To make matters worse, attempts to impeach Buckingham led to the disbanding of several sessions of Parliament, exacerbating recurrent disagreements between the crown and Parliament, which would eventually lead to Charles’ Personal Rule from 1629-1640.\(^\text{14}\)

As this short history attests, Buckingham’s transition from royal favourite to court minister coincides with a tempestuous political time for England. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the blame for England’s political troubles was often fixed on Villiers. However, it is also important to keep in mind that criticism of the Duke frequently correlated with issues within the English court and Charles’ reign, as much as it did with


\(^{14}\) For more information concerning failed attempts to impeach Buckingham and the disbanding of several parliamentary sessions see Christopher Thompson, “Court Politics and Parliamentary Conflict in 1625,” in *Conflict in Early Stuart England*, edited by Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (New York: Longman Inc., 1998), 107-134.
Buckingham’s own behavior. I point this out not to argue against Buckingham’s political ineptitude, or as Cogswell phrased it, “his talent for the maladroit”\textsuperscript{15} but to open up a space to consider the criticism against Buckingham in relation to the negative discourse on English favourites and the burgeoning culture of complaint that marked early seventeenth-century English politics.

In the early seventeenth century Buckingham’s position in the English court was by no means unique. By 1614, when Buckingham was first introduced at court, royal favourites were in many ways an accepted part of monarchical rule across Europe. Although court favourites were frequently criticized, favourites were a common part of the European courts during the sixteenth century, and the seventeenth century saw the rise of numerous powerful singular favourites who monopolized much of their kings’ favour. However, despite the prevalence of court favourites, they were often condemned as the product of weak monarchs with neither the interest nor skill to rule themselves. Echoing much of the contemporary criticism leveled against favourites, early historians positioned favourites as evil counselors and promoters of tyranny who had managed through grace and cunning flattery to hoodwink their way into positions of power.\textsuperscript{16} This belief was in a large part founded on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century understanding of royal power and the sacredness of sovereignty. According to monarchical theory, the king, as the unique holder of divine sovereignty, could not share his power with a subject for the same reason that God does not create another God; doing


\textsuperscript{16}Roger Lockyer argues that English historians were especially prone to this belief because they believed that England’s development into a parliamentary monarchy was both inevitable and morally right and saw court favourites as an obstruction to parliamentary power. See Lockyer, 1986, 45.
so would undermine the very quality that gave him power and made him who he was. Yet favourites, by their very nature, suggested a friendship and an equality that conflicted with the ideal of absolute power. Tied to this difficulty, was the belief that the king, as an agent of God, could do no wrong. If, as Roger Lockyer notes, he seemed to do so, it was logically blamed upon the poor counsel of his favourite.  

This disjunction between monarchical theory and the existence of validos and favourites, which threatened to transform the king into a figurehead, was especially visible in England, where favourites never gained as much positive support as they did in Spain or France. While historians have, for the most part, embraced the singular royal favourites of France and Spain, especially Olivares and Richelieu, who, like Buckingham, served as important political ministers, this acceptance never extended to the powerful English favourites Robert Carr and Buckingham. In part, this omission was predicated by Carr’s and Buckingham’s perceived intimate sexual relationships with James, which caused many historians to overlook their political roles and condemned them as products of a weak, sexually deviant monarch. Nonetheless, recent scholarship has begun to recover the complexity of the seventeenth-century discourse on English favourites by reconsidering favourites’ actual political roles and by examining the critical commentary on favourites in terms of a general historical phenomenon.

For example, Antonio Feros, Linda Levy Peck, and A. Lloyd Moote all argue that the development of singular royal favourites was caused by shifting governmental

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17 Lockyer, 1986, 58.
18 For instance, Christopher White wrote of Buckingham, “In the course of two years Buckingham had reached a position of absolute power over the king’s mind. He was totally unfit for this role, and both as a statesman and a general proved himself completely corrupt and incompetent.” See Christopher White, *Rubens and His World* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 70.
circumstances including a succession of European wars and a sharp increase in population, which led to an increased number of officials and institutions, as well as an increased demand for state favour. Although all three of these authors’ research focuses on different favourites in different European countries, and only Levy Peck specifically discusses Buckingham, as a whole their work resurrects the multivalent discourses on royal favourites and problematizes the purely negative consideration of English favourites.

For instance, Antonio Feros explores the ways that the language of ideal friendship was often used to defend the role of royal advisors, who, as ideal friends, could be trusted absolutely to defend the interests of the king. Moreover, Feros argues that even though favourites were often accused of undermining monarchical power, books on courtly behavior encouraged courtiers to attract the love and attention of the monarch so as to become a favourite. Quoting Castiglione, Feros claims, “to win a monarch’s favor was not considered illegitimate or corrupt, but a legitimate goal of all courtiers.”

Additionally, Levy Peck specifically claims, “While favourites were frequently criticized, they played an important role in the early modern court in two ways: they became the focus of petitions for favour thereby insulating the monarch from incessant demand, and


21 Feros, 1999, 206.
they substituted for a nobility whose institutional power made it a greater threat to the monarch than the favourite who was his ‘creature’.”

Transferring this general statement specifically to Buckingham, Levy Peck, quoting Francis Bacon’s warning to Buckingham that he might one day “be offered as a sacrifice to appease the multitude,” also argues that part of a favourite’s job was to shield the monarch from public criticism. This claim, which effectively transformed the favourite into a proverbial whipping boy, was also echoed in an anonymous English verse which rhymed,

“Which wise kings know, and what it is to have
A favourite, whose office is to save
Their government from blame, as what’s amiss,
The fault be not their own, but counted his.”

Given the negative discourse surrounding European favourites, Buckingham’s late transition to the more respectable role of political minister, and Bacon’s clear positioning of favourites as expendable tools it is perhaps unsurprising that Buckingham, the only English favourite to achieve the power of the continental favourites, was heavily maligned during his controversial tenure and accused of being a Spanish sympathizer, sexually deviant, generally corrupt, and popish. Yet as Moote points out in his analysis of Cardinal Richelieu’s role in France, “the techniques of favouritism reflected the political culture and social drives of the age more than they did the peculiarities of an individual favourite’s social status, career path, or personality.” This same sentiment lies at the heart of Levy Peck’s observation that, “[Buckingham’s] reputation was closely linked to

22 Peck, 1990, 49.
24 Quoted in Lockyer, 1986, 58: Bodleian Library, MS Malone 23, 123.
25 Moote, 24.
other crucial issues of foreign policy, religion and taxation.\(^{26}\) In this vein, instead of assuming that Buckingham’s own political ability lay at the heart of his negative public image, one needs to consider the attacks on Buckingham not only in light of the type of criticism traditionally directed at favourites, but of the political milieu during the 1620s and the budding culture of complaint, which, accompanied by the developing print culture in England, expanded the discussion of political issues beyond the confines of the court and parliamentary advisors.

**News and the Culture of Complaint**

The early seventeenth century marked the birth of the modern news culture in England, which, bolstered by the rapid rise in printing shops around London, allowed for the easy production and dissemination of printed newsbooks, separates, and broadsides,\(^{27}\) extending political discussion beyond the confines of the court and parliament.\(^{28}\) However, the importance of ‘news’ within elite and middle class circles during Buckingham’s reign has been one of the most hotly contested elements of recent scholarship on early modern England primarily because it is unclear what political effect public opinion had in the years before the English Civil War. Although little scholarly agreement has been reached regarding the true impact of news or its chronological

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\(^{26}\) Levy Peck, 1990, 190.

\(^{27}\) Separates are off-prints, or short, individually printed texts that are often proclamations, public addresses, or chapters of larger texts designed for individual sale, whereas broadsides, sometimes called broadsheets, were designed more explicitly for distribution and display.

development, as Richard Cust observes, the increase of surviving news after the 1620s attests to the large increase in news production. Tied to this burgeoning news culture in both France and England was an equally potent culture of complaint. This complaint culture was particularly active in England in the 1620s, and consisted primarily of satirical criticism heaped upon public figures in popular plays and in libelous poems and songs, which as Bellany observes, were often “crammed with allegations of sexual transgression, violations of gender and social order, witchcraft, poisoning and the betrayal of true martial honor, all with clear political implications.”

This complaint culture is especially visible in the frequent and violent mocking of public figures in verse libels. Libels, derogatory poems and ballads, were disseminated mostly through oral reproduction or quickly jotted notes and tended to revel in bad puns and obscene jokes. Libelous criticism, which had been a frequent part of the English political discourse in the Elizabethan era, became an increasingly potent means of conveying political opinion in the beginning of the seventeenth century. While some libels were exchanged by “small coteries of poetically-inclined friends for their own, essentially private, use and amusement,” others were performed and sung on the street by balladeers or collected and traded in St. Paul’s Cathedral, a common meeting place for the exchange of news and gossip. Some libels were even posted at or cast around the court, making it increasingly likely that many people would read them, and allowing

29 Cust, 1995. This increase consisted of both official news, disseminated in printed separates and newsbooks, and unofficial news including published pamphlets, newsletters, hand-written personal correspondences and news diaries, and libelous poems and songs.
them to circulate on a much broader scale. In this way, libels created a bridge of political commentary that connected gossip at the court to the parliament and the larger public. By the early century these derogatory poems, part of a larger vibrant news culture, were acknowledged as the price of power, and although libels carried little true political weight, in part because of their often lewd graffitiesque nature, recent scholarship has sought to recover the insight they provide into early modern political attitudes and to discern the effect they might have had on shaping popular opinion. This is especially true for libels concerning Buckingham, as the sheer quantity of such ballads and poems confirms how loudly, contentiously and bitterly Buckingham was condemned throughout his life for a myriad of transgressions. Also noteworthy is the extent to which the libels seem to have bothered Buckingham, leading him once to offer a thousand-pound reward in an attempt to catch the author of a libelous song.

Libels targeted Buckingham from the very beginning of his political career, when the scandalous gossip that was produced by the poisoning of Thomas Overbury and the downfall of Robert Carr spilled over to include the new favourite. As the Duke’s influence at the court grew, the negative political commentary contained in libelous

\[32\] For instance, one anti-Buckingham verse was said to have been pinned to the court gates. See Bellany, 2002.

\[33\] See Bellany, 2001, 99. Bellany specifically cites Thomas Wentworth’s advice to William Laud, the recent recipient of a series of libels, that “all great ministers are commonly made the objects of [libels],” leaving one little choice but to ignore them until their humor was spent.

\[34\] The diversity and quantity of these libels led to their compilation in the mid-nineteenth century by Frederick W. Fairholt in Poems and Songs related to George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham; and his assassination by John Felton, August 23, 1628 (London: Percy Society, 1850). Although it is hard to judge how pervasive these libels were, Alastair Bellany argues that a ballad entitled the ‘Clean Contrary Way’ was popular enough to be considered by some “Buckingham’s signature song,” allowing it to reach a large, diverse audience. See Bellany, “Raylinge Rymes and Vaunting Verse,” in Culture and Politics in Stuart England, edited by Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1993), 289.

poems and songs became more prevalent and abusive, focusing on Buckingham and accusing him of drawing James and Charles into the Spanish Match. As Thomas Cogswell notes, this accusation carried with it both political and religious connotations that not only allied Buckingham with continental tastes and pro-Spanish sentiment but charged him with being a Catholic sympathizer, a belief that was fueled by the Duke’s mother’s conversion to Catholicism in the early 1620s.36

Coupled with these allegations were accusations of sexual transgressions. For instance, as Bellany observes, one poem associates Buckingham with illicit sexual behavior by positioning Buckingham as Ganymede and James as Jove, who, captured by Buckingham’s Ganymedean charm, ignores his duties. The poem rhymes,

“Still Jove with Ganymede lies playing,
    Hears no triton’s sound,
Nor yet horses neighing:
    His ears are bound.
The fiddling God doth lull him,
    Bacchus quaffs
And Momus laughs
    To think how they can gull him.”37

This same rhetoric is reiterated in the “King’s Five Senses,” which accuses Buckingham of seducing the King and calls on God to save him, imploring,

“Oh let my sovereign never smell!
    Such damn’d perfumes are fit for hell,
Let no such scent his nostrils stain;
    From smells that poison can the brain
Heaven still preserve him; next I crave

36 Cogswell, 1989. Buckingham was not the only courtier blamed for the Spanish Match Crisis and accused of pro-Spanish sentiment. One poem blames these ‘times of sin’ on a wide group claiming, “I homeward came unto our country peace / And find a Spanish faction to increase. / For great king James, would not have us complain / That he intends to match the prince with Spain / Thus Buckingham, and Arundel combine / And many other to the sort incline.” Quoted in Bellany, 1993, 299.
37 Quoted Bellany, 1993, 298.
Thou wilt be pleased, great God to save
My sovereign from a Ganymede,
Whose whorish breath hath power to lead
His excellence which way it list.\textsuperscript{38}

The scandalous allegations of both of these poems utilize moral subversion to religio-political ends, connecting sinful sexual behavior to religious and political corruption. As Bellany concludes, “Sexual and other apparently apolitical allegations contained in verse libels could carry powerful political meanings, constructing a representation of the court that meshed with the worst fears of popish corruption theorists.”\textsuperscript{39} In other words, through an accusation of sodomy, which was inherently entangled in metaphors of sin and evil and was in turn associated with witchcraft and popery, these libels presented a degrading image of courtly behavior and corruption.

The same conclusion can be made for much of the criticism that continued to be directed at Buckingham for the rest of his career, especially from 1625 to 1628 when he was actively involved in foreign affairs and commanding the English fleet. For instance, one verse, recounting Buckingham’s failed military outing on the Ile de Ré in 1627, accused him of being a weak, overfed, oversexed commander, whose main goal was to stifle a much needed Parliament, claiming:

“And art return’d againe with all thy faults,
Thou great commander of the al-goe-naughts;
And left the isle behind too; what’s the matter?
Did winter make thy teeth begin to chatter?
Could not the surging and distemper’d seas
Thy quesie stomache gorg’d with sweetmeats pleas?
Or distd thou suddenly remove thy station
For jealous feare of Holland’s supplantation?

\textsuperscript{38} Bellany, 1993, 298-299. This poem was a parody of a Ben Jonson song.
\textsuperscript{39} Bellany, 1993, 296.
Or wast for want of wenches? Or didst feare
The king, thou absent, durst wrong’d Bristoll heare?
Or didst thou hasten headlong to prevent
A fruitlesse hope for needful parliament?”

However, Buckingham was also the target of much more violent intentions, including several libels which called for Buckingham’s death. For example, one song implored, “London, prepare thy faggots / Against the duke’s returne; / And see thou hast them readie / Layd for the duke to burne.” Another, equally brutal verse called for the public lynching of the Duke, by connecting him with John Lambe, the Duke’s astrologer who was slain by a mob early in 1628, maintaining, “Let Charles and George do what they can / Yet George shall die like Doctor Lambe.”

Buckingham’s Responses to Criticism

These libels, which Bellany believes might actually have led to Buckingham’s assassination by encouraging a violent response to the Duke, in many ways support the critical position of historians, who believe Buckingham was, as Maurice Lee Jr. articulates, “monumentally wrong-headed about politics,” and that “his career was a disaster for the monarchy.” However, it is also important to note that the existence of this complaint literature does not necessarily attest to a coherently negative public image of Buckingham. As tantalizing as it is to view libels as capturing the uncensored truth of

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40 Fairholt, 19-20. “Holland’s supplantation” refers to Henry Rich, the first Earl of Holland, who fell out of favour at court after James’ death. Additionally, as Fairholt notes, Bristoll refers to John Digby, who had been rather unjustly made the scapegoat for the failed Spanish Match to quiet public criticism against Buckingham.
41 Fairholt, 18.
42 Quoted in Bellany, 1993, 287, and Fairholt, xv.
43 See Bellany, 2002.
popular opinion, libels did not maintain a strict political opinion and were often countered by yet more libels, which, in combination with rhymed responses penned by the very figures that the libels attacked, news pamphlets, and officially published addresses, provided a diverse flow of political comment.

For instance, during the Spanish Match Crisis one author expressly countered libelous allegations of a sexual transgressive relationship between James and Buckingham by firmly claiming that their relationship was “an unobjectionable expression of princely love and favour” and, after castigating the libel writers as ‘adders and serpents whose envenom’d stings,’ concluded that James was better off relying on his own judgment of Buckingham’s character. Moreover many court figures took it upon themselves to write and publish verses that must have competed, through their rhyming meter, with the claims presented by libels, while at the same time avoiding the negative anonymity of libels. For example, James himself replied to the increased vigor of public complaint in 1623 in a striking response written in doggerel verse and entitled, “The wiper of the peoples teares, the dryer upp of doubts and feares.” The poem chided,

“God and kings do pace together,  
But vulgars wander light as feather...  
Be corrected for your pride  
that king’s designs dare thus deride  
By raylinge rhymes and vaunting verse  
Which your king’s breast should never pierce...  
Hold your prattling, spare your pen  
Be honest and obedient men.”

45 This libel is discussed by Bellany, 2002, 261.  
46 This poem includes 170 lines, sections of which are quoted by both Bellany, 1993, 294, and Cogswell, 1998, 117.
This type of response is particularly important when considering criticism of Buckingham because the Duke specifically countered public criticism against him in many of his own public presentations, including parliamentary speeches and newsbooks. Different aspects of these public presentations have been interestingly discussed by both Cogswell and Bellany, and it is worth looking specifically at their examples and analyses, in order to consider how Buckingham sought to defend his own actions in a variety of written and performed genres during the last five years of his life.

Thomas Cogswell has explored Buckingham’s addresses to Parliament from 1624 to 1626 and the published newsbooks from Buckingham’s military campaigns in terms of popular opinion, arguing that securing a positive popular opinion was an important aspect of Buckingham’s political decisions. Although popularity does not seem to have been a factor in how other favourites maneuvered at court and the Duke did not issue many public explanations for his actions, claiming that he “saw no fruit of Apologies but the multiplying of discourse,” upon returning from the failed Spanish Match, Buckingham participated in a series of addresses to Parliament which effectively reversed his negative public image. For Cogswell, these speeches, marked a turning point in Buckingham’s career, because they established Buckingham’s increased role in continental politics and prompted a series of public addresses specifically designed to harness public favor.

During these addresses, Buckingham positioned himself as a Protestant champion by

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47 Cogswell, 2002. Cogswell’s account of this period, in an attempt to argue for the importance of public opinion at this early date, is somewhat more narrativized and emphatic than necessary. However, he interestingly utilizes the image of the Duke in coeval libels to capture the shifting public opinion on Buckingham during the tempestuous early years of Charles’ reign.

48 Quoted by Cogswell, 2002, 211.

49 These parliamentary addresses were recorded and printed, quickly becoming a “de rigueur” item for collections of separates. For a discussion of the printing of these speeches see Cogswell, 2002, 218.
presenting Parliament with letters and documents proving that he was not the Habsburg stooge many had accused him of being, gaining, in the process, a large amount of public support.\(^5\) However, this support was short-lived, and by 1625, he was again facing public censure which included accusations that he had poisoned James, who died of an unexpected illness in March 1625. During this time, Cogswell argues that Buckingham, realizing that his multiple addresses to Parliament were not winning him the sustained support he hoped for, attempted to defend himself through printed manuscripts. Cogswell expands upon this argument in a later study, investigating a series of newsbooks published during Buckingham’s 1627 expedition to the Ile de Ré.\(^6\) He argues that initially these newsbooks, which consisted of published accounts of Buckingham’s military campaign in France, were quite successful at bolstering Buckingham’s public standing, allowing him “to establish his bona fides as a warlord, to ally himself with English nationalistic spirit, and to prove his devotion to the Reformed religion.”\(^7\) As Cogswell points out, the newsbooks’ Protestant imagery was also supported by Buckingham’s own wardrobe, which, as one contemporary account records, included the Duke wearing the Plume and Buffe coat of a Protestant soldier. However, Buckingham’s eventual failure to capture the citadel at the Ile de Ré, which forced him to retreat, losing dozens of regimental flags and almost a thousand men in the process, served only to reinforce libelous accusations of his inability to command. For instance, one humorous

\(^5\) Cogswell also discusses a Middleton dramatization of Buckingham’s address, which was presented at the Globe. See Cogswell, 2002, 219.  
\(^7\) Ibid., 17.
ballad which epitomized the negative public commentary that continued even after Buckingham’s assassination in 1628, warned,

“Venus pavillions do befit thee best,  
Perriwigs with helmets are not to be prest.  
To o’rerunne Spaine, win Cales, and conquer France,  
Requires a soldiers march, not courtiers daunce.”

Bellany, who presents a similar analysis of the Duke’s attempts “to reassociate himself with militaristic Protestantism through sympathetic news journals and the patronage of patriotic works,” adds to Cogswell’s research by specifically discussing two masques and a 1628 parliamentary address, arguing that all three consciously present a critical perspective designed to counter public criticism of the Duke by positioning criticism as the product of Envy.

Bellany argues that the first of these masques, *Neptune’s Triumph for the Return of Albion*, a never-performed work written in 1624 by Ben Jonson, was designed to humorously allude to Buckingham’s trip to Spain and comically control the public criticism caused by the Spanish Match by making fun of it. In the masque, Buckingham was to play two roles, Hippius, the loyal Manager of Horse, and Haliclyon, the famed Lord Admiral in charge of protecting the prince. Alluding to the popular criticism against Buckingham through criticism directed at Hippius and Haliclyon, Jonson shows it

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53 Quoted in Fairholt, 23-24 and Bellany, 1993, 302. Buckingham was well known for his skill as a dancer, including an anecdotal incident at the *Twelfth Night* masque when Buckingham reinvigorated a party by performing a series of elaborate and graceful dance steps. See Bellany, 2008.
54 Bellany, 1993, 301.
56 James I cancelled the masque to resolve an intense dispute between the Spanish and French ambassadors regarding the seating arrangement at the performance. Seats close to the King were highly coveted and often fought over by courtiers and dignitaries.
to be the product of Envy. At the end of the masque, Hippius-Haliclyon-Buckingham was to triumphantly overcome this Envy through his virtuous and loyal service to the King.

A similar theme of Envy was repeated in Jonson’s 1627 masque, which was presented to King Charles and Queen Henrietta Maria at York House, Buckingham’s residence on the Strand, shortly before the Duke’s military campaign to the Ile de Ré. Joseph Mead recounts this performance in a contemporaneous letter describing the masque, in which “first comes forth the duke, after him Envy, with divers open-mouthed dogs’ heads, representing the people’s barking; next came Fame; then Truth.” As Mead’s account reveals, like the earlier masque, this performance figures criticism against the Duke as Envy, specifically as barking dogs, and shows Buckingham triumphantly overcoming this criticism.

This same gesture was also at the heart of a 1628 written response to the lower house of Parliament, which Fairholt describes as “remarkable for its enumeration of all the crimes popularly imputed to the duke.” The lengthy response, which begins, “AVAUNT, you giddie-headed multitude, / And doe your worst of spight: I never sued / To gaine your votes, though well I know your ends / To ruine mee, my fortunes, and my friends;” specifically addresses criticism against the Duke, including his loss at the Ile de Ré, the claim that he was embezzling money for Spain and the allegation that he had poisoned James, as well as general accusations of magic and sexual perversion.

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58 Quoted in Gregory Martin, “Rubens and Buckingham’s ‘fayrie ile’,” *The Burlington Magazine* 108 (1966): 617. This account has strong ties to Lucian’s description of Apelles’ painting of Calumny. Although the painting itself is lost, it has a long painterly history including two versions made by Mantegna and Botticelli from Lucian’s ekphrasis. However, while this masque was no doubt designed with knowledge of this famous classical example of calumny, it is not an explicit recreation of Lucian’s account, which included figures of Envy and Truth, but not Fame.

59 Fairholt, 28.
Defending these accusations, Buckingham emphatically points out that his power is bound by his service to the king. The address concludes,

“My power shall bee unbounded in each thing,
If once I use these words I and the king.
Seem wise, and cease then to perturb the realme,
Or strive with him that sitts and guides the helme:
I know your reading will inform you soone
What creatures ’twere that bark’t against the moone.
I’ll give you better counsell, as a friend,
Coblers their latchetts ought not to transcend.
Meddle with common matters, common wrongs,
To the House of Commons common things belongs.
Th’ are extra spharam that you treat of now,
And ruine to your selves will bring, I vowe,
Except you do desist, and learne to beare
What wisedome ought to teach you, or your feare.
Leave him the care that best knowes how to Rowe,
And state to him that best the state doth knowe.
If I, by Industrie, deepe reache, or grace,
Am now arriv’d at this or that great place,
Must I, to please your inconsiderate rage,
Throw downe my honours? will nought else assuage
Your furious wisedomes? true shall the verse bee yet,
Though Lambe be dead, I’le stand, and you shall see
I’le smile at them that can but barke at me.”

As this excerpt illustrates, Buckingham himself mobilized the imagery of barking that had been used in the masques to counter the criticism against him. In the first reference, he specifically acknowledges the presence of written libels, by rhyming, “your reading will inform you soone / What creatures ’twere that bark’t against the moone.”

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60 Fairholt, 28-31, dated June 21, 1628, and signed, “yours as you use him.” Buckingham’s reference to cobblers is notable because it connects his own rhyming response to criticism with Pliny’s classical tale of Apelles’ reply to public criticism. According to Pliny, Apelles overheard a cobbler criticizing the way he had painted a sandal and, taking the cobbler’s advice, proceeded to fix his painting. However, when the cobbler proceeded to criticize his painting of the figure’s legs, he became irate, advising the cobbler, “Nesutor ultra crepidam,” or “Cobbler, stick to thy last,” meaning that the cobbler should not address matters beyond his own expertise.
Yet what sets Buckingham’s address apart from the conventional, general allegorical theme of triumphing over Envy utilized in the masque is the last two lines, which reference Lambe’s death and specifically contrast with the previously quoted two-line libel which prophesies Buckingham’s death. In his response, “Though Lambe be dead, I’le stand, and you shall see / I’le smile at them that can but barke at me,” Buckingham seems to specifically reply to the essence of the libelous claim, positioning himself beyond the reach of his noisy critics.

As these examples attest, Buckingham, like many early modern political figures, was aware of the popular criticism against him. However, unique to Buckingham’s history is the specificity and consistency of his own parliamentary address which explicitly responded to the criticism of libels, positioned him as a Protestant champion and cast criticism against him as irrational barking. This specificity has problematically led to the grouping of the general, allegorical iconography of the masques with the specific and topical response of the Parliamentary address. This confusion has in turn been extended to discussions of the pictorial representations of the Duke, most notably two overtly allegorical paintings of the Duke by Rubens which prominently include elaborate representations of oppositional figures often identified as Envy. These figures, which have been a focal point of the scholarship on Rubens’ paintings since Gregory Martin’s seminal article, thematically link the Duke’s pictorial imagery with the aforementioned masques and Parliamentary speech, making the paintings an excellent place to begin examining pictorial representations of the Duke in relation to criticism.

61 The libel claimed, “Let Charles and George do what they can / Yet George shall die like Doctor Lambe.”
against him.\textsuperscript{62} Despite the repetition of imagery one cannot understand these oppositional figures, which reference the general theme of Discord within the realm, as being the same as the parliamentary address’ topical response to libels.

The Theme of Envy in Buckingham’s Pictorial Representations

Rubens’ paintings, an equestrian portrait (Fig. 1) and a ceiling painting of Buckingham being led to the Temple of Virtue and Honor by Minerva and Mercury (Fig. 2), often entitled \textit{The Glorification of the Duke of Buckingham}, which were made sometime between the end of 1625 and 1628, both clearly include allegorical representations of Envy being overthrown by the Duke and the winged genii who protect him. Painted by the greatest living artist at the time, and commissioned shortly after the Duke had cemented his position in the new court of Charles I and been made High Admiral of the English Fleet, Rubens’ paintings of Buckingham overtly glorify the Duke and his political position, and as Gregory Martin observes, seem to be representative of Buckingham’s taste and aspirations, both in terms of the work he collected and commissioned and the public image he cultivated of himself.

The current understanding of the iconographical elements of Rubens’ ceiling painting has been highly influenced by Gregory Martin’s 1966 article, in which he convincingly develops a new time frame for the commissioning and execution of the ceiling painting by connecting it to the commissioning of the equestrian portrait, refutes the ceiling painting’s original identification as the apotheosis of the Duke by arguing that it represents his glorification and not his death, and establishes the finished painting’s

\textsuperscript{62} See Martin.
relationship to several oil sketches. Martin argues that although there is some question of
the exact dates of Buckingham’s commission, one can be fairly certain that both the
ceiling and equestrian portraits were conceived some time during 1625 and finished by
September 1627. 63 Buckingham first met Rubens at the French court in May of 1625
when the Duke was there to collect Henrietta Maria, who had been married to Charles by
proxy, and the artist was at the court installing his allegorical cycle for Marie de’ Medici,
which Buckingham no doubt would have seen on his trip. During this time Buckingham
probably commissioned a half-length official portrait (Fig. 3), and, perhaps inspired by
the propagandistic potential of Rubens’ Medici cycle, the allegorical equestrian portrait
and ceiling painting. However, there is some possibility that Buckingham did not
commission the works until November of that year when he passed through Antwerp and
purchased Rubens’ antique collection and almost all of the paintings in his studio. 64 In
either case, it is clear that the equestrian portrait was commissioned by the end of 1625,
because a letter from Rubens, to Balthazar Gerbier, the Duke’s art dealer, expresses
Rubens’ regret that a political trip “had caused a delay in painting Buckingham’s portrait
on horseback.” 65 A second letter from August 1627 establishes the works’ completion
stating, “the paintings of my Lord Duke are all ready.” 66 Although Rubens’ ceiling
painting is never specifically mentioned in either of these letters, we know that The

63 See Martin.
64 There is little scholarly agreement or concrete evidence regarding when Buckingham actually
commissioned his paintings. Anne-Marie Logan claims that the official portrait and equestrian portrait were
commissioned initially and the ceiling painting was added later. See Anne-Marie Logan and Micheil C.
Belkin argues that the two initial commissions were the equestrian and ceiling paintings and does not
548.
66 Martin, 614.
Glorification of the Duke was at some point included in the commission because a libel, which references the painting, definitively dates it before 1629 and an inventory conducted in 1635 lists both the equestrian portrait and the ceiling painting in the Great Chamber at York House. As Martin convincingly argues, all of this evidence points to the conclusion that Rubens’ paintings were delivered shortly before the Duke’s assassination in 1628. This chronology also contradicts the idea that the ceiling painting depicted Buckingham’s apotheosis since it was completed before the Duke’s death. Instead, Martin argues that the painting represents the glorification of the Duke and that its apotheosis-like composition was the product of Rubens’ attempts to secure the prestigious commission for the Whitehall banquet house ceiling, which commemorated James’ rule and death and included an apotheosis scene.

In his article, Martin also establishes the artistic development of the conception of the ceiling painting by comparing several sketches to the final composition. In addition, he explores the iconography of both allegorical works establishing the emphasis that Rubens eventually placed on oppositional figures in his paintings. Martin argues that Rubens developed an oil sketch, representing Minerva helping the Duke climb the steps of a temple (Fig. 5), from a sketch that was possibly meant to represent either the Spanish

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67 The inventory catalogues three hundred thirty paintings at York House in 1635. See Randall Davies, “An Inventory of the Duke of Buckingham’s Pictures, etc., at York House in 1635,” The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs 10 (1907): 376-382, for a list of the paintings and where they were hung in York House.
68 Martin also suggests that the ceiling painting’s position in the Great Chamber, instead of “the ceiling of my Lords Closett” where it was intended, makes it likely “that the paintings were delivered not long before the duke’s assassination.” See Martin, 614.
69 See Martin, 613. Held also argues that the ceiling painting’s composition was designed to secure Rubens the Whitehall commission. See Held, 1976, 547.
Match or Charles’ marriage to Henrietta (Fig. 4). This sketch does not yet use the apotheosis-like, free-floating figures of the later compositions, relying instead on the conventional theme of the hero climbing to the temple of virtue. However, Rubens has already envisioned several of the main elements of the final painting in this work, including the three Graces to the bottom-left of the sketch, the heavy columns of the temple in the upper-left, the figure of Minerva assisting Buckingham, and the oppositional figure in the bottom right corner who grasps the Duke’s leg to hold him back. This sketch evolved into a modello (Fig. 6), in which Rubens developed the *di sotto in sù* viewpoint for the central figures. In this modello, Rubens replaces the central trumpet blowing figure of Fame with Mercury, adds two allegorical figures to the temple steps, and visually clarifies the oppositional figure of Envy who has been shifted to the center of the work. In the final painting (Fig. 2), Rubens emphasizes the glorifying iconographical elements of the painting even more by enlarging the temple, making the two figures standing on the temple steps clearly recognizable as Honor and Virtue. Additionally, Rubens emphasizes the Duke’s triumph over opposition by adding a harpy.

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70 The whereabouts of the second sketch (Fig. 5) are currently unknown, but this work is known through a reproduction in the British National Gallery Archives. Additionally, as Martin points out, the original commission and meaning of the initial sketch (Fig. 4) remain unclear, although it might have been an allegory of either the Spanish or French Match. See Julius S. Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens: A Critical Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 190-192.

71 Martin specifically highlights the conventionality of this early sketch, labeling it pedestrian. See Martin, 617.

72 Martin argues that this work was the modello because x-rays reveal that the figure of Fame, present in the earlier oil sketch (Fig. 5) was removed from this work.

73 The importance of Rubens’ addition of Mercury to his final painting, which Martin overlooks, will be discussed later.

74 Martin’s attribution of these two figures comes from a sketch by Rubens at the Musée Plantin with identical figures, a man with staff and cornucopia and a woman with helmet staff and sword, which are labeled ‘Honos’ and ‘Virtus.’ See Martin, 617. This addition of allegorical figures and elements is typical of Rubens’ working practice.
and dragon, common companions of Discord, to the group of evil forces who attempt to restrain Buckingham.

The importance of the iconographic development in these paintings is that Rubens clarified and emphasized the Duke’s virtuous, heroic triumph over oppositional figures as the composition developed. However, the true significance of the allegorical opposition in the paintings, both to Martin’s argument and to later research on these works, is that the commission and execution of Rubens’ work chronologically coincides with a difficult political time for Buckingham, during which he was heavily criticized for the disastrous military campaign on the Ile de Ré, and that Rubens’ depiction creates a repeated theme of opposition as Envy, connecting Rubens’ paintings with the envious opposition present in Buckingham’s court masques. Martin picks up on both of these themes in his argument, citing the 1627 masque that Buckingham gave, and concluding that Rubens’ ceiling painting was “therefore relevant to the situation from 1625 to 1628…for it expressed the Duke’s confidence that as military commander he would overcome opposition at home and achieve victory and honor.” Yet in so doing, Martin seeks to read the paintings against the masques, initiating an interpretation of the paintings that suggests that the works intentionally referenced the masques, establishing a topical dialogue when one did not exist. In their more recent scholarship on Buckingham, Jonathan Brown and Bellany have in turn problematically embraced this mode of interpretation, explicitly connecting Rubens’ allegories to topical, libelous criticism of Buckingham.

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75 Martin, 617-618.
Like Martin, Brown picks up on the overtly allegorical themes of Envy and calumny, specifically addressing both the equestrian and ceiling paintings, as well as Honthorst’s allegorical painting of the Duke (Fig. 7), which hung in the Whitehall banquet house and which also includes oppositional figures. In his argument, Brown attempts to define the imagery of favourites as a subcategory of court art by comparing allegorical paintings of Buckingham, Olivares, and Richelieu. In doing so, Brown argues that images of favourites, unlike their kingly counterparts, employ a somewhat apologetic and defensive character. Focusing on the negative figures of Discord and Anger that appear in the imagery of Buckingham, Olivares, and Richelieu, Brown concludes that favourites, who were granted power at the whim of the monarch, “hung by a golden thread and this insecurity is woven into their imagery.” However, Brown’s research cannot be productively extended as neither opposition nor a lack of confidence seems to have been an important factor in the imagery of favourites beyond his limited examples.

Beginning with an analysis of Buckingham’s allegorical imagery, Brown highlights Martin’s discussion of the progressively emphasized oppositional figures in Rubens’ ceiling painting, and establishes a similar, if less complex, progression for the conception of Buckingham’s equestrian portrait, arguing that as Rubens developed the allegory he progressively emphasized the theme of opposition. In his modello for the equestrian portrait (Fig. 8), Rubens includes only the allegorical figures of Neptune and a naiad in the lower-left and a wind god in the upper-right. However, as Brown stresses, in

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the final painting (Fig. 1), Buckingham is surrounded with allegorical figures, including Victory, who flies in front of his horse carrying a wreath and cornucopia, and Charity, who flies behind the duke holding a flaming heart. At the same time, Rubens has again incorporated an oppositional figure, this time inserting the demonic figure of Discord into the margin of the painting. Yet opposition is once again expelled, as Charity forcefully pushes the figure away from the Duke and almost out of the painting with her heel. Brown also specifically connects these figures with Honthorst’s inclusion of Envy and Hate in his painting, in which Buckingham, personified as Mercury, presents the seven liberal arts to Charles and Henrietta Maria, who, dressed as Apollo and Diana, sit in the clouds above the Duke. In his discussion of this work, Brown emphasizes the figures of Virtue and Love in the lower-left corner of this masque-like composition who overthrow the figures of Envy and Hate.

These prominent oppositional figures, Brown argues, represent a tacit acknowledgment of political opposition within the familiar trope of the courtly promotion of the arts, and allow us to “see an embattled favourite [Buckingham] mounting a defense against a determined and growing opposition in parliament and at court.” However, Brown does not see this imagery as particularly unique to Buckingham. As he points out, images of Olivares and Richelieu also include oppositional figures, which, while not as prominent as the figures in Rubens’ and Honthorst’s paintings, acknowledge the critical

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77 Brown, 1999, 225.
78 Brown iconographically interprets Rubens’ oppositional figure as Discord rather than Envy, as Martin identifies her, yet he refers to the oppositional figure in Honthorst’s painting as Envy. This discrepancy in language is notable because Bellany highlights the theme of Envy in Buckingham’s written and performed responses to criticism, and attempts to explicitly group Rubens’ paintings with these responses by emphasizing that Envy again opposes the Duke.
discourse against these figures. As examples, Brown cites the inclusion of Discord, which he terms the “bête noire of favourites,” in two works, Juan Bautista Maino’s *Recapture of Bahía* (Fig. 9) and Poussin’s *Time Rescuing Truth* (Fig. 10).

Maino’s painting, part of a series of battle scenes executed for the Hall of the Realms at Buen Retiro, boldly depicts Fadrique de Toledo, the victorious Spanish commander, addressing a group of defeated Dutch soldiers. Displayed on the tapestry behind the commander is a depiction of Philip IV, trampling personifications of Heresy and Treachery, while Minerva and Olivares crown the King with a laurel wreath. However, the figure that Brown focuses on is the figure of Discord, who Olivares holds firmly to the ground with his right foot. Brown argues that this figure, incorporated into a painted series which constituted a defense of Olivares’ foreign policy by depicting the victories of the reign, attests, as Buckingham’s imagery does, to the fury and calumny of Olivares’ detractors, while at the same time, comprising one side of the count-duke’s “visual war of self-defense.”

Brown similarly argues that even Cardinal Richelieu’s imagery, which was much more deliberate and systematic than that of Buckingham or Olivares, and which potently utilized the thriving print culture in Paris to disseminate a positive public image outside the court’s confines, admits in the end that “the voices of dissent were not drowned out in the din of glory.” For Brown, this dissent is manifest in Poussin’s *Time Rescuing Truth*,

80 Brown, 1999, 229.
81 Ibid., 230. Brown interestingly discusses several allegorical prints depicting Richelieu protecting French interests and defeating his enemies and detractors.
a ceiling painting intended for the Cardinal’s private residence.\textsuperscript{82} Glossing over the uniqueness of this abstract and much more philosophical painting, he focuses again on the figure of Discord who is seated on an illusionistic ledge next to the snake-entwined figure of Envy. Connecting these figures to the figures of Discord in Olivares’ and Buckingham’s imagery, Brown argues that once again a favourite must overcome Discord and Envy; a feat Poussin’s painting allegorically demonstrates Richelieu will accomplish, as Time, revealing the truthfulness of Richelieu’s intentions, lifts a naked figure of Truth out of the destructive reach of both Envy and Discord.\textsuperscript{83}

In each of Brown’s three short case studies, we are shown glorified images of the respective favourites, or, in the case of Richelieu, images that glorified him, but we are also shown personifications of the criticism that the favourites faced. Positioning these elements as two sides of the same coin, Brown concludes that favourites’ precarious political position was woven into their imagery, leaving it ultimately lacking the confidence of monarchical works that employed comparable symbolism and rhetoric. However, as I will argue, this conclusion does not hold up once one begins to consider images of favourites as a whole. Even Buckingham’s imagery, for which Brown’s discussion of opposition is strongest, does not include oppositional figures beyond the examples that Brown cites nor can his imagery be described as lacking confidence.

\textsuperscript{82} Brown also discusses a second work by Poussin entitled Moses and the Burning Bush. He argues that two passages from Exodus are innovatively combined in this painting: God appearing in the burning bush and ordering Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, and Aaron’s staff turning into a serpent, a sign that he should persist despite the incredulity of his people. Brown argues that this allegorical combination was designed to position Richelieu as a French Moses in charge of leading his incredulous and unbelieving subjects to the Promised Land.

\textsuperscript{83} In his discussion, Brown glosses over the uniqueness of Poussin’s painting, which neither depicts Richelieu nor references his political position, in order to group his work with the representations of Discord in the imagery of Buckingham and Olivares.
Moreover, both the Medici Cycle and the Whitehall ceiling, paintings which clearly promote monarchical power, include allegories of the destruction of Discord, making Brown’s division between monarchical representations and images of favourites unsustainable.\textsuperscript{84}

Despite these issues, Alastair Bellany’s recent discussion of Buckingham’s allegorical imagery, while much more condensed in scope than Brown’s argument, also picks up on the same themes of calumny that Martin and Brown address.\textsuperscript{85} Focusing on Rubens’ paintings of the Duke, Bellany specifically considers the works in terms of self-fashioning and public presentation, incorporating a limited discussion of the paintings’ display and their relationship to Buckingham’s commissioning and collecting of art. Additionally, concentrating on Rubens’ equestrian painting, Bellany explores the ties between horsemanship, self-control, and the ability to govern, concluding that the work attempted to connect courtliness and military power. However, his main argument is that there was a direct, causative link between criticism of the Duke and his visual imagery, arguing, “Portraits of the Duke constituted one side of an implicit and explicit dialogue with proliferating ‘public’ counter-images of Buckingham circulating in the literary underground of illicit tracks and verse libels.”\textsuperscript{86}

Specifically citing the image of Envy present in the two masques that were discussed earlier, as well as the images of Envy in Rubens’ paintings, Bellany argues that

\textsuperscript{84} For instance, in the Whitehall program, both Minerva and Mercury are depicted in The Peaceful Reign of King James I forcefully ejecting an oppositional figure, while discordant figures are overthrown by both Minerva and Hercules in separate roundels.

\textsuperscript{85} See Bellany, 2008. Bellany interestingly does not discuss Brown’s analysis of these paintings and might have been unaware of his scholarship.

\textsuperscript{86} Bellany, 2008, 130.
the Duke sought to undermine the legitimacy of the many grievances against him by positioning them as the product of jealous Envy rather than legitimate complaints against the Duke. Pushing on this interpretation, Bellany specifically considers Rubens’ paintings of Buckingham in terms of two libels. The first libel, entitled ‘And art return’d again with all thy faults,’ from which I quoted a small section earlier, is, Bellany argues, “a perfect inversion of Rubens’s image, savagely critiquing the Duke’s handling of the 1627 expedition to [the Ile de] Ré, and dismantling the links the painting forges among courtliness, self-control, authority, and chivalric heroism.”

In a similar vein, Bellany also considers a rather striking libel, “Felton Commended,” written shortly after Buckingham’s death, which praises Felton for murdering Buckingham. It reads,

“Immortall man of glorie, whose brave hand
    Hath once begun to disinchautn our land
From magique thraldome. One proud Man did mate
    The nobles, gentles, commons of our state;
That to his idoll greatnes would not fall.
    With groveling adoration; sacred rent
Of Brittaine, Saxon, Norman princes; spent
    Hee on his panders, minions, pimpes, and whores,
Whilst their great royall offspring wanted dores
    To shutt out hunger, had not the kinde whelpe
Of good Elizas lyon gave them helpe;
    The seats of Justice forc’d say, they lye,
Unto our auntient English libertie.
    The staine of honour, which to deeds of praize
And high atchievements should brave spiritts raise,
    The shipps, the men, the money cast away,
Under his onely all-confounding sway.
    Illiads of greife, on toppe of which hee bore
Himselfe triumphant, neither trayned in lore

87 See page 16-17.
88 Bellany, 2008, 55.
Of arts nor armes: yet in a hautie vast
Debordment of ambition, now in haste,
The cunning Houndhurst must transported bee
To make him the restorer Mercurie
    In an heroick painting, when before
Antwerpian Rubens’ best skill made him soare,
    Ravish’t by heavenly powers, unto the skie,
Opening, and ready him to deifie
    In a bright blissfull pallace, fayrie ile,
Naught but illusion were we, ‘till this guile
    Was by thy hand cut off, stout Machabee;
Nor they, nor Rome, nor did Greece ever see
    A greater glorie. To the neighbour Flood.
Then sinke all fables of old Brute and Ludd,
    And give thy statues place; in spight of charme
Of witch or wizard, thy most mightie arme,
    With zeale and Justice arm’d, hath in truth wonne
The prize of patriott to a Brittish Sonne.”

Focusing on the libel’s clear reference to Honthorst’s Apollo and Diana and
Rubens’ Glorification of Buckingham, Bellany argues that by connecting these paintings
with negative illusion the poem clearly undermines the power of the allegories. Picking
up on the libel’s interesting reference to illusion, he argues that it effectively strips not
only Rubens’ and Honthorst’s paintings of their power, but court art in general, claiming:

“In this poem then, lies not only a profound critique of an individual
embodiment of court corruption, but also a devastating reinterpretation of
the meaning of court art: vehicles of power, agents of authority and
symbols of sophistication are here rewritten as vehicles of illusion, agents
of political and social transgression, symbols of idolatry. The
‘idealization’ that Renaissance and courtly theorists of portraiture argued
was essential to the socio-political and moral success of such paintings, is
here glossed as dangerous deceit, as ‘naught but illusion’.”

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89 Quoted in full in Fairholt, 69-70. This libel, which I will return to later, is also brought up in Martin’s
work, but it is only used as a means of dating the paintings.
80 Bellany, 2008, 159-160.
However, in this conclusion and in his attempt to bring paintings and libels into specific dialogue with each other, Bellany fails to address the complex political and cultural elements of the paintings, not in their pictorial imagery, but in their very existence as paintings. Bellany does not distinguish between the ‘images’ of Buckingham that he is bringing together, treating text and painting, parliamentary address and libelous poem as comparable media that can easily enter into dialogue with each other. In doing so, Bellany disregards the different audiences that paintings and libels addressed and the effect that each medium would have had on its viewers, specifically failing to acknowledge both the commonplace nature of Buckingham’s allegorical imagery and the universal and explicitly non-topical language that it employs. Additionally, Bellany emphasizes the libel’s reference to illusion, problematically attempting to discuss the allegorical images of Buckingham in terms of truthfulness, ignoring the complex Renaissance understanding of deceitful illusion as a positive, persuasive visual strategy of painting. Interestingly, this failure is also an underlying element of Brown’s commentary. For instance, Brown claims “Buckingham’s enemies, of course, were not to be rebutted by a mere equestrian portrait,” and slightly later posits, “In any case, actions, as usual, spoke louder than images.” Although in Brown’s case these claims seem to be authorial flourishes, they reveal, in relation to Bellany’s argument, a much deeper problem in the scholarly analysis of Buckingham’s imagery.

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91 This problem extends to Bellany’s identification of the oppositional figures in Rubens’ paintings as Envy rather than Discord. While this attribution is not outside the realm of possible iconographic attributions given Rubens’ often unspecified allegorical figures, it illustrates Bellany’s wish to interpret Rubens’ works as specific responses to criticism rather than understanding them as generally referencing the ubiquitous allegory of Discord within the realm.

Printed Representations of Buckingham

The remainder of this paper will specifically address visual representations of the Duke considering the pictorial images of Buckingham in light of the volatile representations of the Duke in written form. In doing so, I will consider printed images of the Duke in relation to criticism against Buckingham, arguing dually that the vast majority of the images of the Duke do not highlight the calumny nor the defensive characteristics that Brown and Bellany focused on and that printed images of the Duke in general were invested with a courtly interest in the fine art. I will also examine the role of collection and display in relationship to Buckingham’s imagery, focusing not on the iconography of images of Buckingham, as others do, but on their existence as objects. In doing so, I will concentrate on issues of allegory and illusion, specifically exploring the understanding of illusion as part of the discourse on painting and the function of art within court culture to highlight the tension inherent in the seventeenth-century understanding of art, thereby creating a much richer and more complex reading of Rubens’ and Honthorst’s paintings.

Given the expansive category of complaint literature against Buckingham, one might assume that pictorial representations of Buckingham, especially printed images which existed more specifically within a public realm, would coincide with their written counterparts if not in number, then at least in satirical form. However, satirical prints of Buckingham are rare and considerably more circumspect in their critical commentary than libels. Instead of the explicit and often crude satire of written criticism, pictorial
images, even when accompanied by satirical text, were neither crude nor overtly satirical and therefore, were not a significant part of the complaint culture of the early century.

Print culture in early seventeenth century England was significantly behind its continental counterparts. As Alexander Globe, whose research focuses on the production of Peter Stent, a London print seller active between 1642-1665, bluntly articulates, “Viewed in the context of continental developments, engraving in seventeenth-century England remained primitive.” In fact, there is little evidence that overtly political prints were produced in England before the 1640s and it was not until the 1670s that politically satirical prints were openly listed in print catalogues. As Helen Pierce notes, in her recently published book, *Unseemly Pictures: Graphic Satire and Politics in Early Modern England*, although it is clear from written correspondences that satirical prints were made in continental Europe, these accounts, “while stressing foreign inclination towards visual lampoons, give no indication as to the possibility of a comparable culture of English pictorial satire.” In other words, satirical prints, like the woodcut of Charles II with his Nose to the Grindstone (Fig. 11), published in 1651, did not appear in England until the mid-century.

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95 Pierce, 2. Pierce specifically discusses several written accounts of images involving English politics which were circulated on the continent, including a 1617 print of James with his pockets hanging out and a 1623 lampooning of the failed Spanish Match. Yet as she articulates, these accounts do not extend to England, making it unlikely that satirical broadsides existed in England and merely failed to survive.
This scarcity of satirical prints in turn extended to the controversies surrounding Buckingham. As Pierce observes, “official and courtly portraiture aside…few visual representations of Buckingham are known. Rarer still are pictorial critiques of his character and actions.”

In fact, there appears to be only one surviving satirical print of the Duke that was both explicitly connected with Buckingham and designed to be printed and disseminated in some quantity. This print, a broadside entitled *The Kingly Cocke* (Fig. 12), which was published in 1636 both in the Netherlands and in England, not only specifically depicts the Duke but also uses his image to initiate a political commentary on the state of the English crown. The main figures in the print, which can be identified by their individualized portraits and by the accompanying text, are Charles, seated on the throne, Buckingham, slightly behind him, Louis XIII, standing on the left, the Spanish Ambassador Count Gondomar, standing on the right near the chest, and the Earl of

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97 Pierce, 81.
98 This print, which is catalogued by Mary Dorothy George in the *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Publications Limited, 1978), #133, was the only print of Buckingham that I found that criticizes the Duke through an explicit depiction of him. George also discusses a political print which depicts Buckingham in a more positive light. In the print, which draws on Middleton’s *A Game at Chess*, Buckingham is shown as the White Knight, discovering Count Gondomar and the Bishop of Spalatro’s support of Catholic interests and exclaiming, “Checkmate by discovery.” See George, #94. Additionally, Pierce discusses several political prints which could have been indirectly linked to Buckingham, including *The Description of Giles Mompesson Late Knight Censured by Parliament*, which commented on the monopoly scandal of 1621 and was one of the earliest British satirical prints concerned with a parliamentary issue.
99 Given the high quality of this print, it was probably engraved by a continental printmaker in the Netherlands.
100 Interestingly, as Levy Peck points out, only the second state of the print, which was presumably designed for its publication in England, specifically labels the favourite as Buckingham, while the Dutch version merely states “the Hispanolized English favourite,” leading Mary Dorothy George to claim that it referred to Lord Cottington and not Buckingham. See Linda Levy Peck, “Monopolizing Favour: Structures of Power in the Early Seventeenth-Century English Court,” in *The World of the Favourite*, edited by Elliot, J.H. and L.W.B. Brockliss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 54-70, and George, #133.
Arundel, entering through the rear doorway carrying news with him. In the print, the characters’ actions and the accompanying inscription lay out the narrative scene. In the center, Charles slumbers in his throne, lulled by the Spanish Ambassador who plays soft music on a pipe, his attempt to bribe the King clearly represented by the open chest of jewels which he gestures toward. Meanwhile, Louis attempts to wake Charles, calling out “awake, awake, sleep has too long possessed you,” while reaching forward to shake the king from his enchanted slumber. However, Buckingham admonishes Louis for his attempt to wake Charles, pushing him away from the King and inquiring, “Who taught you [to] be so rude? / So neare our King who sleepest thus to intrude.”

As this narrativized reading of the print reveals, the negative rhetoric that associated favourites with weak and slovenly monarchs was an active part of the attributes ascribed to Buckingham in the broadside. As Linda Levy Peck articulates, this print, which was published eight years after the Duke’s death, highlights both the type of criticism that was leveled against Buckingham during his lifetime – explicitly his “intimacy with the king, consumption, display, corruption and leanings towards Spain” – and the extent to which Buckingham became a symbolic representative of the weakness of the English crown.

However, while *The Kingly Cocke* specifically depicts the Duke, it is as much a general commentary on the state of the monarchy as it is a direct criticism of

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101 In the English version of the print, the Spanish Ambassador addresses the sleeping King as James, although he is quite clearly supposed to be Charles in the representation. However, it is unclear if this is a printer’s mistake or a specific editorial comment and neither George nor Levy Peck pursues this discrepancy.
102 Quotes from the inscription accompanying *The Kingly Cocke*, 1636.
103 Quotes from the inscription accompanying *The Kingly Cocke*, 1636.
104 Levy Peck, 1999, 55.
Buckingham. Not only was it published eight years after Buckingham’s death, but central
to the whole print is the sleeping figure of Charles whose inattentive slumber is the main
focus of the print. Additionally, if one considers the engraving of *The Kingly Cocke*
without the textual narrative, what is most striking is that while the image itself quite
clearly articulates the narrative, much of the explicitly satirical qualities that the text
lends the image do not exist. Compared with the rough woodcut of Charles II, this fine
engraved print, with its carefully drawn figures and tightly modulated line, seems
controlled and cultivated, and as such, gives the impression of focusing more on
conveying a political warning than lampooning any of the figures. In other words, the
engraved line, which conveys forceful control, denies the more subjective, crude and
quickly dashed off quality that one usually connects to satire, exuding instead an
objective strength that gives the image authority. The same can be said of the print’s
carefully laid out composition, which echoes the controlled and cultivated effect of the
engraved line in its conventional links to family portraiture, thoughtfully placed figures,
and unifying use of rhetorical gesture.

The engraved line, as William Gilpin articulated in his early essay on prints, was
associated with strength and firmness because, “From such a line also, as it is a deliberate
one, correctness must be expected; but no great freedom: for it is a laboured line,
ploughed through the metal.”105 Gilpin continues, arguing that if one wanted to express a
satirical, subjective opinion, etching, which was closer to sketching, used a more fluid
line, and could be produced easily by one person, or woodcuts, which were cheaper and

105 Quoted by Rauser, 98. This essay was not published until 1768, but I quote it here to articulate the
importance that early printers gave to the medium-specific quality of lines.
lasted longer, were the best media to use. Consequently, although the engraved image in *The Kingly Cocke* clearly aligns Buckingham with Spanish deception and bribery, it avoids the crudeness of popular libels and later English satirical prints because its deliberate and clearly cut, labor-intensive line gives the print an objective authority that created a disconnect with the subjectivity of its witty written commentary.

Yet the engraving of *The Kingly Cocke* does not operate separately from the text, rather it works with the text. In order to understand this relationship, it is helpful to use the same strategy that Michael Gaudio uses in his book *Engraving the Savage: The New World and Techniques of Civilization*, in which he examines prints as not merely illustrative of the text that accompanies them, but as “the thing against which the text generates itself.”

Focusing on the materiality of the print and the engraved medium itself, Gaudio argues that Thomas de Bry’s engraved images of Native Americans, which accompanied Thomas Harriot’s *Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, permitted a reseeing of the Native American peoples that served to support the images of native life created by the text, through the physical presence of the engraved images themselves. Similarly, by utilizing Gaudio’s emphasis on the material effect of the engraved line within *The Kingly Cocke*, we can develop a richer understanding of the tension between the broadside’s text and its image. As an engraving, the print could serve as a visible reality through which the text could be verified. Utilizing the objectivity of the image to compensate for the subjectivity of the text, the engraving effectively

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manipulates the viewer by offering itself as visual proof of the corruption and complicit folly outlined in the text.

It is therefore not surprising that few satirical printed engravings of Buckingham exist despite a rich collection of written criticisms against him. Not only was the dissemination of visual imagery slow to integrate into England, but as my analysis of the *Kingly Cocke* reveals, engravings, unlike libels, carried with them a medium-specific authority that did not easily conflate with the licentious liberality of satirical texts nor the negative whimsy of public opinion. Thus it is not surprising that when satirical prints like *Charles II with his Nose to the Grindstone* began to be produced en masse in the 1660s they were made using woodblocks and etching. These media were both cheaper and faster to make than engravings, allowing them to comment on topical political issues in a much more explicit way than the generalized political warning of *The Kingly Cocke*, and they were perceived as more subjective and therefore more appropriate for satirical commentary than the objective line of engraving.

Given this discussion of medium-based authority, it is unsurprising that Buckingham’s official portraits form the majority of surviving prints of the Duke. Utilizing the authority of their traditional compositions and their engraved line, these prints were the product of Buckingham’s own patronage, creating images of the Duke designed to proclaim his position among the aristocracy, both through the images that they produce of the Duke and through their connection to the fine arts and painting.

One such example is the equestrian print of Buckingham engraved by Willem van de Passe, ca. 1625 (Fig. 13). This print, whose quality speaks to its cost and the skill of its
engraver, explicitly depicts Buckingham as a member of the courtly elite, including an inscription that lists the Duke’s many titles and dedicates the image to him. Using a conventional equestrian composition, which connects the image of the Duke to other court portraits, the print proclaims the Duke’s position through his stature, fine dress, carriage and ability to control his mount. Additionally, the print connects Buckingham to established circles of artistic patronage at the court. It does so through the skill of the engraving itself, whose refined detail and masterful use of line to create both shadow and texture demonstrate van de Passe’s considerable skill, and through the artist’s connection to the English court, as Simon van de Passe, Willem’s brother, had executed a similar equestrian engraving of Queen Anne in 1616 (Fig. 14). Equally notable is the fact that the print itself does not have the name of a publisher associated with it, but is specifically ‘graven and dedicated’ to Buckingham. This fact has led Antony Griffiths to conclude that “Passe must have reckoned on a sufficient reward from Buckingham to cover his costs in engraving the plate, and thus be able to retain it in his own possession rather than sell it to a publisher.”

108 That is to say, this print was not purchased by a printer who intended pay for his investment by printing and circulating the image on a large scale.

108 For more information regarding this print see Antony Griffiths, The Print in Stuart Britain, 1603-1689 (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 70 and Arthur Hind, Engraving in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Descriptive Catalogue with Introductions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952-64). Griffiths’ conclusion that this plate was not paid for by a printer is supported by the fact that the work does not include the name of a printer, which was often engraved onto plates that were purchased or commissioned by printers.
Instead, de Passe engraved the plate with the specific goal of garnering a large amount of money for a limited number of impressions through Buckingham’s personal patronage.\(^{109}\) This issue of the patronage is equally important in Willem Jacobsz. Delff’s 1626 engraving of Buckingham (Fig. 15), which also includes a written dedication to the Duke and is not associated with a specific printer. The print, which is explicitly based on Michiel Van Mierevelt’s 1625 portrait of Buckingham (Fig. 16), reproduces the Duke’s sumptuous high lace collar, elaborately pearled coat, and impeccably styled beard and mustache.\(^{110}\) Yet what sets this print, which was presumably commissioned when Buckingham was on a diplomatic trip to The Hague, apart from Mierevelt’s painting is not its image but its size. Measuring 417mm by 294mm, Buckingham’s portrait was the first printed portrait of its size of any English sitter. Given its large size, coupled with the fact that the plate was also not associated with a printer, one can assume that Delff’s engraving was, like van de Passe’s, not intended for the general portrait market. That is not to say that the prints of Buckingham as a whole were never mass-produced. In fact, a large number of printed portraits based on Mierevelt’s painting survive, including one small print, measuring 141 mm x 83 mm, which predates Delff’s engraving (Fig. 17), and a large number of later prints that were printed en masse throughout the century. Yet these prints were designed to become part of printed portrait collections of famous men,
and as such were much smaller and proportionally cheaper than Delff’s engraving. By contrast, Delff’s engraving was, much like a fine-painting, designed to produce a stir at the court because of its size and quality. As Antony Griffiths anecdotally relates, upon seeing the work, Charles attempted to obtain a similar sized portrait of himself from Delff. This reaction firmly roots the reception of this print into the type of competitive behavior that surrounded the collecting of painting at the Stuart court. Thus, the commissioning and production of this engraving was firmly set within the sphere of the fine arts and painting. Not only was the print based on a painting, but it was founded on the same impetus to collect artwork that drove elite patronage of the fine arts during Charles’ reign, positioning Buckingham’s printed portraits within an established pattern of artistic patronage. This patronage fit, in turn, within established patterns of courtly behavior, both in terms of the collecting of portraits as a means of showing political affiliation and of collecting memorable and unique artwork.

Buckingham’s Collecting and Commissioning of Painting

As this analysis demonstrates, printed images of Buckingham were not associated with calumny or opposition. Consisting mostly of commissioned works, these prints instead fit into the courtly ideal of artistic patronage: a patronage which corresponded to established ideals of courtly behavior and which is also present in Buckingham’s commissioning of paintings and collecting of painting and sculpture which embraced the

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111 To view several such prints dating from just after the portrait was painted in 1625 through the 1660s, as well as a similar series of portrait prints based on a work by Cornelius Johnson that date into the eighteenth century, see the collection at the British National Portrait Gallery.

112 Griffiths, 74. Griffiths also quotes a 1690 written account of the print that also emphasizes its size, describes it as “that mighty favourite almost as big as life.”
burgeoning English interest in continental art during the early seventeenth century. This patronage was designed to procure works that would proclaim their sitter’s wealth and status, but it was also a potent means of visually connecting the sitter with the court and as such is an integral part of understanding Buckingham’s imagery.

In the early seventeenth century art collecting was highly politically motivated. As David Howarth observes, English painting at the end of the sixteenth century meant portraiture, and was “as much a filing cabinet of family relations as a pleasing display for the eye.” However, this began to change as the English court, seeking to integrate itself into the arena of continental politics, quickly embraced the continental interest in collecting art, as well as the continental artistic style. Led by Prince Henry’s and Queen Anne’s interest in painting, the English court quickly sprouted a crop of connoisseurs among a select group of courtiers who, picking up on the tastes and artistic trends of continental Europe, began to appreciate different artistic styles and to make distinctions between a master’s hand and those of his assistants. This increased interest in painting, in turn initiated a twofold phenomenon in the collecting of art. Primarily, it made owning paintings an important part of the courtly cultivation of prestige and splendor, kicking off a competitive market focused on outdoing one’s neighbor by securing particularly celebrated works. Additionally, it made paintings an important commodity for courtly exchange.

In the seventeenth century, splendor and elegance were inherently linked to high office, and, as the century progressed, magnificence became an aspiration to be met through the purchase and display of continental art.\footnote{See Linda Levy Peck’s works, “Building, Buying, and Collecting in London, 1600-1625,” in Material London, ca. 1600, edited by Lena Cowen Orlin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000) and Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth-Century England (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), for a larger discussion of splendor in seventeenth-century English society.} This observation held true for both courtly noblemen and the European monarchs, who spent lavishly on magnificent buildings and splendid furnishings, including the purchase of paintings, which progressively came to be seen as important markers of wealth and cultural enlightenment.\footnote{See Jonathan Brown, Kings and Connoisseurs: Collecting Art in Seventeenth-Century Europe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 229.} As art collecting became fashionable it became an emblem of status and identity among a small but prominent group of wealthy elite who competed fiercely for paintings. For instance, several letters survive of Sir George Chaworth, begging William Trumbull for a portrait of the Archduchess Isabella of Austria, which he wanted to have in time for James I’s visit, hoping to impress the King with his portrait collection.\footnote{See David Howarth, “William Trumbull and Art Collecting in Jacobean England,” British Library Journal 20 (1994).} As Linda Levy Peck argues in her study of the material splendor of early modern England, as the art market developed, collecting became an integral part of aristocratic identity and even came to be seen, alongside military accomplishments, as an element of fame and national duty.\footnote{Levy Peck, 2005.} For example, Thomas Howard, the Earl of Arundel, specifically saw his collecting and display of foreign art and antiques as part of his virtuous duty as an English nobleman, a duty which he tried to impress on his heirs in an
attempt to ensure that his collection remain intact after his death.\textsuperscript{119} This correlation between art collecting and artistic prestige also initiated a progressively competitive art market in England, which was in turn fed by the newly established English embassy in Venice and the increasingly cosmopolitan interest in European travel that opened the European art markets to English collectors.\textsuperscript{120}

As the interest in paintings rose, Englishmen living in Italy, like Henry Wotton, the ambassador to Venice, began looking for Italian works to ship back to England. At the same time, art dealers like William Trumbull and Balthazar Gerbier, the latter of whom specifically handled Buckingham’s collecting and commissioning of art, began making trips to continental Europe searching for good works to send to their clients. However, these collecting activities were not necessarily to secure works for their own collection. With the progressively frenetic interest in collecting paintings, securing a particularly good work could, in a society where gift-giving was considered an integral part of public relations, allow one to curry favour or promote one’s career through strategic gift-giving. For instance, Sir Dudley Carleton specifically cultivated a relationship with Buckingham, which was initiated in part by the exchange and sale of art and which eventually secured him a position as Secretary of State.\textsuperscript{121} This phenomenon, was even more important during Charles I’s reign because of Charles’ particular interest in collecting and his love of art, leading Charles to surround himself with companions

\textsuperscript{119} While there is no evidence that the vast majority of art collectors shared this interest in posterity, it does illustrate the extent to which English courtiers began to see art collecting as part of their aristocratic identity.

\textsuperscript{120} See R. Malcolm Smuts, \textit{Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987) and Levy Peck, 2005. For example, Arundel made a trip with Indigo Jones to Italy in 1613-14 to see and collect Italian art and antiques.

\textsuperscript{121} For more on Carleton’s and Wotton’s use of art to gain political favor see Howarth, 1997.
who could satisfy his passion for art to such an extent that, “all the great aristocratic collectors sooner or later won his favor.”\textsuperscript{122} The exchange of art also became an important aspect of international relationships as art collecting became a shared interest among the European courts, making the exchange of pictures a convenient guise under which donor and recipient could meet, allowing the exchange of paintings not merely to maintain relations between and within the European courts, but to initiate important political discussions.\textsuperscript{123}

Buckingham’s collecting of art in turn was built upon these same interests. Rising to power in 1614 after the collecting fad was already underway in England, and surrounded by a group of established collectors, including Hamilton, Arundel, Prince Charles, the Earls of Pembroke, and the previous favourite Robert Carr, it is not surprising that Buckingham became interested in collecting paintings as a means of proclaiming his position. Yet what is unique to Buckingham’s collection is the speed at which it was acquired, becoming in less than fifteen years one of the great English art collections.\textsuperscript{124} Consisting primarily of paintings and sculpture, the Duke’s collection, documented at York House in a 1635 inventory, consisted of more than four hundred works, including three hundred thirty paintings, among them numerous Italian

\textsuperscript{122} Smuts, 1987, 122. Charles’ love of art is captured in numerous anecdotes of his animated discussions about art. Smuts specifically elaborates on one such anecdote regarding Charles’ excitement when a new shipment of paintings arrived in London, emphasizing how Charles’ cool manner gave way to warm enthusiasm as he examined the new acquisitions.

\textsuperscript{123} See Howarth, 1997.

masterpieces and large number of works by Rubens.\textsuperscript{125} However, despite the impressive size and quality of Buckingham’s collection, its rapid accumulation has led to a generally negative impression of his taste and artistic discernment amongst modern scholars. For instance, Smuts rather derogatorily attributes Buckingham’s collecting merely to the wish not to be outdone, while Graham Parry argues that Buckingham’s collection represented the tastes of Balthazar Gerbier, who acquired works for the Duke, more than his own, claiming, “Buckingham seems to have regarded his collection as a brilliant possession rather than an extension of his own values and character.”\textsuperscript{126}

My difficulty with these comments lies in the extent to which they attempt to divide an interest in painting from its cultural implications and the extent to which they assume that Buckingham knew nothing about pictures. Collecting, as Linda Levy Peck points out, “was not only a private passion but also a public performance,”\textsuperscript{127} and this is true of all the great courtly collections, including Buckingham’s. Although the Duke’s artistic understanding might have been relatively limited in his early years, his courtly lifestyle would have quickly given him experience with paintings, which would have been augmented by his travels. As Howarth points out, English collectors were, “not only given privileged access to the finest collections of France, Italy and Spain, but choice examples too. That was an education itself.”\textsuperscript{128} This is particularly true for Buckingham, who traveled to several continental courts and would have been expressly shown the most impressive works. For instance, both the Duke and Charles had direct access to the Duke

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\textsuperscript{125} See Davies.
\textsuperscript{127} Levy Peck, 2005, 186.
\textsuperscript{128} Howarth, 1997, 248.
of Lerma’s and Philip IV’s extensive collection in 1623 when they traveled to Spain, a trip which seems to have ignited Charles’ own interest in art. Additionally, Buckingham traveled to France in 1625 and would most certainly have seen the collections there, as well as the Medici cycle that was being installed and, as mentioned above, must have had a significant influence on Buckingham’s own commission from Rubens. Buckingham also visited Rubens’ studio in 1625, when he purchased the artist’s collection of antiques along with a large number of paintings. In all of these ventures, the Duke would have been able to see and discuss numerous finely crafted works, allowing him to expand his understanding of painting and his ability to discuss them knowledgeably, while at the same time instilling in him recognition of paintings’ power to glorify.

Buckingham’s own commissioning of painted portraits also gave him an opportunity to become acquainted with artistic practices, while at the same time adding to his collection and providing works which proclaimed his status and rank. Highlighting his natural beauty and physique, these paintings were used, from the very beginning of Buckingham’s political career, to assert his position within the upper echelon of the court. For example, an early full-length painting (Fig. 18), attributed to William Larkin, ca. 1616, depicts the young favourite as a Knight of the Garter. Presenting him in a canonical pose and highlighting his dress and the sumptuous drapery that surrounds him, Larkin’s painting proclaims Buckingham’s elevated position, establishing the elegant figure as an English icon. Similarly, both Rubens’ and Mierevelt’s half-length portraits

portraits, while exemplifying the more naturalistic style of the late 1620s, proclaim the Duke’s nobility. Painted against dark backgrounds that emphasize his face, his manicured appearance, the sumptuousness of his dress, and the elegance of his carriage, both of these portraits present their viewers with images of Buckingham’s courtly grace and ease. This idealized courtly ease can also be seen in Anthony van Dyck’s portrait historié of Buckingham and his wife, Katherine Manners, as Venus and Adonis (Fig. 19). Although this portrait is different from Larkin’s and Mierevelt’s portraits both because of its allegorical emphasis and presumable private display, the figural beauty of the Duke, the marital tenderness of his gesture towards his new wife, and the painting’s visual ties to court masques all still situate the couple within an elite courtly tradition.130 These pictorial themes are in turn reinforced by van Dyck’s masterful illusionistic style, which captures the courtly elegance of the Duke’s pose and his mannered hand gestures with conviction.

Painting, Allegory and Illusion – The Power of Painting

Clearly Buckingham’s collecting and patronage of art can be seen as part of a larger courtly trend. For the early seventeenth-century courtier, conspicuous display was part of everyday life and paintings came to be seen as attributes of greatness. However, the particular style of the works was also of the utmost significance, and as some have argued, directly related to the image that Buckingham and other courtiers sought to project. This style is a particularly important aspect of allegorical paintings such as

130 For the commissioning and display of this work see Arthur K. Wheelock and Susan Barnes, Anthony van Dyck (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1990). Wheelock believes that this portrait was specifically painted for the couple’s private chambers because of its theme, the symbolism of the entwining trees along the right side of the painting, and its overt nudity.
Rubens’ and Honthorst’s paintings of the Duke, and must be taken into account when exploring the role that these paintings played as well as the relationship between illusion and painting that the libel “Felton Commended” raises.

As Bellany rightly points out in his analysis of “Felton Commended,” the libel clearly disparages both Rubens’ ceiling painting of Buckingham and Honthorst’s Apollo and Diana as ‘naught but illusion,’ thereby stigmatizing Buckingham’s power as false. Emphasizing this reference, Bellany fully embraces the libel’s negative reference to illusion, arguing that it devastatingly undermines the idealization of Renaissance portraiture. However, in doing so, he ignores the complex seventeenth-century discourse surrounding painting and illusion, thereby failing to capture the inherent tension between reality and the positive, persuasive illusion that both Rubens’ and Honthorst’s paintings utilize. Picking up on this discourse, which would have been well known to Buckingham and Charles, and understood, at least in part, by the majority of the English courtly elite, one can begin to see how these paintings mobilize their overt allegorical language to elevate their imagery into a realm of universal truth, creating potent and effective visual images which prevent the radical rewriting and ultimate ineffectuality for which Bellany argues.

131 As I will develop below, Bellany problematically pinpoints the libel’s criticism of illusion as a criticism against the idealization of court portraiture. He specifically claims that this idealization, which extended to the aggrandizement of patrons as long as they were not shown outside their political and social positions and which was defended by art theorists as a means of creating moral and social exempla for others, is glossed by the libel as dangerous deceit. Yet in doing so, he falsely assumes that the libel is referencing the paintings as a means of attacking portraiture. Instead, I argue that the libel positions painting as synonymous with the entire performative culture of the Stuart court, using it as a synecdoche to criticize the court itself.
The seventeenth-century understanding of painting’s relation to illusion, and its connection to Stuart politics, has been thoughtfully explored by John Peacock in his 1993 article “The Politics of Portraiture.” In his argument, Peacock considers a number of written commentaries on art, specifically exploring the discourse on idealization, illusion, and style. Yet what makes his argument so pivotal to Buckingham’s imagery is Peacock’s emphasis on how art theory was used to defend the new continental cultural policies of the Stuart court. As Peacock argues, “for a late Renaissance courtier, especially one aiming to exercise political power, the representation of his status and power in portraits was a necessity. Idealist philosophies of art could not be allowed to change this practice, but had to be enlisted to support it. And so they were.”

In other words, as continental taste, and with it figurative art and portraiture, began to saturate the English court, art theory was quickly employed to defend it.

As Peacock argues, early English painting texts were highly defensive, feeling the need to respond to the anti-figurative bias of the Reformation. This is especially true of Nicholas Hilliard’s painting treatise, which consciously attempts to justify portraiture in the context of Protestantism. Emphasizing the importance of his own linear form of limning, and the theoretical distinction between disegno and colorito, Hilliard explicitly contrasts his painting style, which he claims “consisteth in the truth of the line,” with the more plastic continental style, whose use of light and shadow, he argues, serves only to obscure and darken. Tied to these distinctions were also religious divisions. For

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132 Peacock, 199-228. Peacock considers both Classical and Renaissance texts on painting.
133 Ibid., 209.
134 Ibid., 203-205. Hilliard’s text was never published, but it did circulate in manuscript form and was pirated by later theorists.
135 Quoted in Peacock, 205.
instance, Hilliard explicitly connects his artistic style with Protestant doctrine, by emphasizing the truth of his painted line, and uses Calvin’s theory of divine election to defend his artistic talent and painting style. By contrast, Hilliard aligns the continental use of light and color, which many other artists were beginning to use, with Catholicism, arguing that the Italian style served merely to obscure visual truth, creating illusionary images which defiled the truth of God through mediation just as Catholicism did. However, this explicit negative connection between the Italianate style and illusion slowly eased as early Stuart patrons came to terms with continental art and began to embrace Italianate art theory. This theory, which included Classical texts such as Pliny’s *Natural Histories*, Horace’s *Ars Poetica* and discussions of visual representations by Plato, Aristotle, and Xenophon, as well as Italian Renaissance art theoretical writing including Alberti’s *De Pictura*, Vasari’s *Lives*, and Lomazzo’s *Trattato dell’arte*, quickly made painting an intellectualized and consciously theorized subject. In doing so, this art theory positioned painting, specifically portraiture, as proper for only the educated, leisured elite, and it defended the persuasive, illusory power of the continental style.

Both of these characteristics are important aspects of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, one of the most influential texts on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century understanding of art theory. Central to Aristotle’s theory was the idea of *mimesis*, which is often translated as ‘imitation’ or ‘representation.’ This concept, which he saw as the originating drive of all art, focused on man’s ‘inbred delight’ in the imitation of nature. Harnessing the idea of

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136 See Peacock, 205.
137 Peacock argues that this transition can explicitly be seen between Henry Peacham’s 1606 edition of *Art of Drawing* and his 1612 edition, which maintained a strict position on idolatrous images while adding a more nuanced view of religious art.
mimesis, Aristotle emphasized that both recognizable likeness and aesthetic skill were necessary components of all great art. However, as Peacock enunciates, what made Aristotle’s writing so applicable to the visual arts was that while he specifically addresses poetry and drama, he supports his argument through constant analogy to portraiture, effectively positioning “[painting as] the paradigm of representation and portraiture as the paradigm of painting.”¹³⁸ For instance, Aristotle claims, “[Good portrait-painters], while reproducing the distinctive form of the original, make a likeness which is true to life and yet more beautiful.”¹³⁹ The uniqueness of this claim, is that it positions mimesis not as mere replication of appearance, but as “a representation which, while paying due regard to nature, aims at the ideal, the universal.”¹⁴⁰

This emphasis on idealization and portraiture was in turn taken up by both Italianate art theorists and artists. For instance, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, emphasizing that the aim of painting was to make representations of rulers that would encourage posterity to emulate them, argued that sitters must be depicted majestically, “whether they are so in fact or not.”¹⁴¹ Seen in a similar light, Michelangelo’s refusal to take into account his sitters’ actual appearance, and his claim that in a thousand years no one would know the difference, might be seen as merely an extreme extension of the Aristotelian idea that the elite should be represented in the most beautiful way possible.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Peacock, 207.
¹³⁹ Quoted in Peacock, 208.
¹⁴⁰ Peacock, 208.
¹⁴¹ Ibid., 210. Lomazzo’s chapter on portraiture was not translated by Haydocke, but it was known to court artists and courtiers who were knowledgeable of Italianate theory.
¹⁴² See Peacock, 208-209.
Embracing this theory, just as seventeenth-century courtiers did, Peacock’s argument concludes with an analysis of how the art of the Stuart court enlisted the aesthetic and cultural power of the Renaissance art tradition to represent the social and political power of the court itself. As Peacock argues, patrons accepted the illusionistic Italianate style that Hilliard had eschewed, and began utilizing Italianate artists’ skill and ability to illusionistically portray objects and space as an analogy for the power that the patrons themselves exercised in the world. For Peacock, this idea is epitomized in Anthony Van Dyck’s _Le Roi à la Chasse_ (Fig. 20). As he effectively argues, the painting’s persuasive illusion, which believably captured “material substance, bodily presence and real space,” became a metaphor for Charles’ authority and his territorial command. In other words, painted with absolute illusionistic ease, Van Dyck’s ability to capture space became, for the viewer, an extension of Charles’ ability to rule that space.

At the same time, paintings began to acquire meaning by their grouping and display. As collecting was becoming an increasingly important aspect of artistic culture, and courtiers became more adept at understanding art, how a work was displayed and the context in which it was hung became pivotal to its pictorial message. Building on this idea, Peacock specifically addresses the display of Van Dyck’s _Charles I and M. de St. Antoine_, which was hung in the gallery in St. James’s palace. Standing in this gallery, which was lined with a collection of sixteenth-century Venetian works, among them Titian’s portrait of the twelve Caesars and Guilio Romano’s portrait of the Caesars on

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143 Peacock, 225.
horseback, a viewer would have been “impelled to see Charles as the imperial heir of the Caesars and Van Dyck as the heir of the great Italian masters.”

Criticism, Painting and Libels: Issues of Medium

Given the English court’s acceptance of the illusory Italianate style, one might wonder why “Felton Commended” attempts to position Rubens’ and Honthorst’s paintings as illusory at all. However, it is important to note that the libeler is hostile not only to painting but to the lavish excesses of the court itself, and that he references the paintings as examples of that extravagance. While continental painting had gained popularity within the Stuart court, it was still unpopular among a large section of the English populace who often criticized its illusionistic style. This criticism was largely founded, just as Hilliard’s criticism was, on Protestant religious objections against figurative art, which led some to view the English court’s acceptance of the Italianate style’s plastic use of color and light as an example of popish religious corruption. For instance, William Laud dismissed paintings on religious grounds, advising Strafford in a letter to read his Bible instead of looking at pictures, specifically admonishing, “read over the short Book of Ecclesiastes… you will see better the Disposition of these Things, and the Vanity of all their Shadows, than is to be found in any anagram of [John Donne] or any design of vandike.” However, criticism against paintings and collectors extended beyond religious lines. For example, Thomas Roe’s writing, which supported the collecting of painting, reveals his anxiety about the allegation that collecting was

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144 Peacock, 226.
145 Quoted by Howarth, 1997, 209. The claim specifically highlights the common criticisms that painting’s illusionistic use of light and shadow created false images, while referencing the transient nature of earthly processions that is highlighted in Ecclesiastes with the saying, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”
effeminate primarily through his need to deny the general critique that collecting softened the spirit of the nation by arguing that it “reflected civility and refinement not luxury.”

Additionally, one of the most common complaints against paintings, and one which, as Smuts observes, has unfairly been picked up by historians, is that they greatly increased crown expenditure, leading to the financial straits of the monarchy and eventually the Civil War. For instance, one parliamentary writer specifically complained about the money that the crown had wasted on “old rotten pictures and broken nosed marbles.”

This complaint is itself misleading; as Smuts notes, “A masterpiece by Titian or Leonardo might bring a few hundred pounds. These sums were not small, but they appear almost insignificant compared with the thousands of pounds great courtiers spent annually on jewels, clothing, gambling, and lavish banquets.” Similarly, Charles only spent about eight thousand pounds on the purchase of art between 1625-40.

Nonetheless, it clearly demonstrates how criticizing pictures was mobilized as a means of condemning the lavish lifestyles of the English court. As highly visible objects, paintings appeared more extravagant than they actually were, and could therefore symbolize the other less tangible extravagancies of the English Court.

These complaints, while perhaps ill-founded, attest to the negative discourse that surrounded paintings in the 1620s, a discourse into which “Felton Commended” fits.

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147 Quoted in Smuts, 1987, 131.
148 Smuts, 1987, 60. Even if one is to assume that some paintings cost the seven thousand pounds that Arundel was said to have offered Buckingham for Titian’s *Ecce Homo*, they could not compare with the sumptuous dress or banquets of the English court. For example, one white diamond-studded suit that Buckingham wore during his 1625 trip to Paris was said to have cost eighty thousand pounds. See Parry, 140.
However, as Peacock’s argument proves, among the majority of the cultured elite, especially prominent members of Charles’ court who employed paintings to make visible their political power and display their cultivated refined tastes, these critical opinions carried little weight. As the seventeenth century progressed, the anxiety about paintings that had plagued early art theory disappeared, leaving in its wake an understanding of art that embraced illusion by emphasizing beauty and insisting that paintings were designed to represent the innate authority of the elite and create an aristocratic ideal for others to emulate. However, Peacock’s argument also presents an important distinction, specifically that the understanding of Italianate painting’s unobjectionable expression of prestige and power, unlike the libelous criticism which I quoted at the beginning of this paper, existed within a narrow courtly milieu, thereby positioning the ritualized language deployed by painting in an entirely different genre than libels. That is not to say that paintings were not criticized, but rather that paintings, acquiring prestige from their displays, patrons, and painters, operated in a different discourse than the criticism that was directed at them, divorcing the works from libelous criticism and preventing the radical rewriting for which Bellany argues. As Richard Bauman articulates, “All genres are not created equal—or, more accurately, equally empowered—in terms of their ability to structure discourse. While ‘ordinary conversation’ affords much greater room for disorder, heterogeneity, and open-endedness, some genres of ritual discourse provide almost no room for these characteristics or for structural flexibility in general.”

As I discussed above, libels, which tended to revel in obscene puns and jokes and were disseminated mostly by word of mouth or handwritten notes, served as an important means of bridging the gaps between the court, parliament, and public gossip. However, although it is tempting to look at libels as extremely effective resistance to the political policies of the age or as unmediated reactions to political leaders, their actual effectiveness and scope is much harder to gauge. As Bellany points out, while it is important not to underestimate the power that libels held and the ways that “libeling someone – impugning his honour – threatened to rend the fabric of respect that stabilized social and political relations in an orderly hierarchical society,”\textsuperscript{151} it is also important not to view libels as accurate reflections of the true nature of the political figures they describe or even of public opinion.\textsuperscript{152} On the one hand, some libels were catchy and easy to remember and disseminate, while on the other, libels were ephemeral, had no inherent authority, and their credibility was undermined by their “underground” nature, as well as by libel singers themselves, whose lifestyles and social positions often led to their rather scruffy personal appearances.\textsuperscript{153}

By contrast, court paintings, situated in a ritual discourse that relied on the power and prestige of their public commissioning and display, acquired authority and credibility from their patrons and artists, and also from their display and style. Paintings, operating

\textsuperscript{151} Bellany, 1993, 293. Bellany also interestingly discusses readership in this article, allowing that the degree to which readers or listeners would have been able to decode the more allusion-heavy libels is unknown.
\textsuperscript{152} Older literature on libels often falls into this trap. For instance, Fairholt specifically argues in his introduction that libels are worth studying because “the ballads and satires of the day bring us personally acquainted with the men.” See Fairholt, i.
on an entirely different level than libels, did not suffer from the ‘underground’ stigmatism of libels because they were not mass-distributed, marginal, or subversive. Additionally, and more importantly when addressing Bellany’s argument, court paintings were not held to the same standards as other media, allowing them to produce allegorical images that harnessed the positive, persuasive role of illusion without negative issues of illusion affecting their position amongst the courtly elite who studied, understood, and purchased them. Accepted as idealized images, court paintings embraced the universalizing rhetoric and overtly aggrandizing style of allegorical representations to establish their sitters’ status and create images for posterity to emulate.

Rubens’ and Honthorst’s Paintings

Specifically applying this discussion to both Rubens’ and Honthorst’s paintings, we can see how each of these paintings harnesses the overt allegorical content and style of its artist, and with it, the positive, persuasive power of illusion, to convey Buckingham’s own political power and social prestige. Painted in the same allegorical, propagandistic style used for Marie de’ Medici’s painting cycle, both Rubens’ ceiling painting and equestrian portrait clearly operate within an established pictorial language of courtly aggrandizement. For instance, the equestrian portrait (Fig. 1) explicitly honors Buckingham through its clear pictorial references to some of his many royal titles, including his position as Master of the Horse and his newly acquired title, Lord High Admiral of the English Fleet, which he received slightly before commissioning Rubens’ portrait. Flanked by the figure of Victory, the subservient Neptune, and the English fleet itself, Rubens’ portrait proclaims the Duke’s military prowess. Yet, the true power of
Rubens’ painting lies not in its allegorical figure of Victory but in its pictorial style. Painted with the same deft aristocratic ease with which the Duke controls his rearing mount, Rubens’ artistic skill becomes a visual metaphor for the Duke’s military command. Offset by his billowing cloak and the rearing action of his horse, Buckingham’s oversized figure presides over the scene, looking out at the spectator with a calm command that stabilizes the action around him, creating an image that supports both his ability and his right to command the fleet. Equally important, is the way that Rubens’ painting combines the Duke’s courtly and military roles, connecting militaristic and chivalric imagery.\(^{154}\) Clad in elaborate armor and wearing the blue sash and cross-shaped jewel of the Lesser George, the badge of the Knights of the Order of the Garter, Rubens presents the Duke as the embodiment of courtly virtue, creating a glorious, iconic image of Buckingham.\(^{155}\)

Similarly, Rubens’ ceiling painting (Fig. 2), also utilized Rubens’ illusionistic pictorial control to support its aggrandizing image. Captured in Rubens’ striking *di sotto in sù* viewpoint, to which ‘Faryie Ile’ specifically refers when it rhymes, “In an heroick painting, when before / Antwerpian Rubens’ best skill made him soare,” the Duke is lifted towards the Temple of Virtue and Honor. Surrounding him is an extensive group of allegorical figures, each of which Rubens has artfully positioned around the Duke, proclaiming his ability to persuasively manipulate illusionistic space and aggrandizing allegorical motifs to create elaborate, panegyrical images.

\(^{154}\) Bellany discusses this connection at length in his analysis of Rubens’ equestrian portrait. See Bellany, 2008.

\(^{155}\) For a more in-depth discussion of the Order of the Garter’s link to chivalry see Bellany, 2008.
Yet equally important is the fact that Rubens’ has chosen Minerva and Mercury to
guide the Duke to the temple, a choice that explicitly emphasizes painting’s ability to
glorify. As Jeffrey Muller has argued in his analysis of Rubens’ tromp l’oeil decoration
of his house and studio, Minerva and Mercury, as the patron deities of painting, were
linked to the illusionistic power of painting.\footnote{156} Having armed Perseus with the shield,
sword, and winged sandals with which he slew Medusa and later rescued Andromeda,
Minerva and Mercury were connected with sight’s ability to transfix. Just as Medusa’s
head had the horrifying power to transfix viewers to stone, and Andromeda’s statuesque
beauty captivated Perseus, painting had the ability to mesmerize its viewers. As Rubens
claimed, “those things which are perceived by the senses produce a sharper and more
durable impression… than those which present themselves to us only in the imagination,
like dreams, or so obscured by words that we try in vain to grasp them.”\footnote{157} This claim is
especially important when considering Rubens’ ceiling painting. As Rubens developed
his composition he incorporated the figure of Mercury, emphasizing the role of the visual
arts in the glorification of the Duke. Flanked by the trumpeting figure of Fame and the
laurel wreath of victory that the three Graces are presenting, the patron deities of painting
lift Buckingham to his elevated position, crowning him victorious. In so doing, they

\footnote{156} See Jeffrey M. Muller, “The ‘Perseus and Andromeda’ on Rubens’s House,” Simiolus 12 (1981-82): 131-146. Muller specifically discusses the artistic program for the courtyard of Rubens’ house, connecting the statues of Minerva and Mercury on Rubens’ gate with a painting of Perseus and Andromeda on the side of the house. Buckingham would have seen this program when he visited in 1625.

\footnote{157} Quoted by Muller, 139-40. Rubens wrote this in a personal letter to Franciscus Junius, Arundel’s librarian, thanking him for the copy of his 1637 book, De Pictura Veterum, which commented on a large number of classical and Italianate art theoretical texts. See Peacock for the publishing of this text and its importance to the art theoretical instruction of English gentry.
embody the very function of painting itself, to elevate their sitter, creating glorious images which would encourage others to emulate them.

The visually glorifying nature of both paintings’ iconographies would also have been supported by the paintings’ conspicuous display in the sumptuous setting of the great chamber at York House. Positioned against the extravagant backdrop of the mansion, which Buckingham used for elaborate celebrations and which visually asserted his power through its proximity to the royal palace, each of Rubens’ pictures of Buckingham would have been viewed amidst the splendor that proclaimed the Duke’s social and political authority, his wealth, and his close relationship with the King. At the same time, Rubens’ paintings of the Duke would have proclaimed Buckingham’s role as a cultured collector. Hung alongside eight other paintings by Rubens, the portraits would have connected Buckingham with the elite group of court favourites whose portraits Rubens had painted, acquiring power from Rubens’ own fame and his prestigious patrons throughout the European courts.\(^{158}\)

As this analysis reveals, by harnessing their pictorial style, the prestige of their painters, the wealth and status of their patrons, and their setting, Rubens’ paintings presented Buckingham as the ideal embodiment of courtly and aristocratic virtue. These same elements are also pivotal to Honthorst’s *Apollo and Diana* (Fig. 7), which is, as Parry rightly observes, “a scene conceived entirely in terms of the masque, and one which

\(^{158}\) Bellany interestingly begins his discussion of Rubens’ paintings of Buckingham by noting the effect that both pictorial display and style would have had on anyone viewing these works, claiming that the paintings would have operated as dazzling objects which “were clearly displayed not primarily as part of the pageant of Villiers family connections and history, but as two Rubenses among Rubenses, objects who derived their prestige from the immense fame, continental connections and bravura baroque style of the Flemish artist who produced them.” However, these observations are not carried out in his conclusions. See Bellany, 2008, 134-35.
celebrates Buckingham’s intimate relationship with the King.”

Composed as an elaborate portrait historié, this massive group portrait depicts Charles and Henrietta Maria seated in a bank of clouds on the far left, while Buckingham, as Mercury, presents the seven liberal arts to the royal couple. In the painting, Buckingham strides toward the King, his torso brightly illuminated by the light that surrounds the royal couple and falls over the group of courtiers below, while Charles reaches toward the Duke, as if to receive the personified figures, completing a gesture of subordinated friendship that emphasizes both Charles’ and Buckingham’s glorification of the arts.

Painted in Honthorst’s distinctive pictorial style, which utilized his commanding use of bold color, bright light and heavy shadow, the work would also have connected Buckingham to the royal family through its commissioning. While little is known for sure about this painting’s patronage and early history, making it uncertain if this glorifying image was specifically produced at the Duke’s request or if Charles had the painting produced to honor his friend and political ally, the painting clearly celebrates both Charles’ and Buckingham’s roles as patrons of the arts. As the largest and most elaborate work done by Honthorst during his short stay at the English court, Apollo and Diana would have emphasized Buckingham’s personal ties to the monarchical family,

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159 Parry, 226. This painting, which is believed to have initially been hung in Whitehall, was sold in 1650 and recovered during the Restoration. At some point it was hung in Hampton Court and misidentified as a portrait of the King and Queen of Bohemia. See Oliver Millar, “Charles I, Honthorst, and Van Dyck,” The Burlington Magazine 96 (1954): 36-42, and Richard J. Judson and R.E.O. Ekkart, Gerrit van Honthorst, 1592-1656 (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1999) for a short history and analysis of the painting.

160 Grammatica, the first of the personified figures, appears to be a portrait of Katherine Manners, the Duchess of Buckingham. See Judson and Ekkart, 108.

161 A written account by Joachim von Sandrart, Honthorst’s assistant, suggests that Charles had requested the work, see Millar, 1954. However, James Younge described Honthorst’s painting in 1681 as, “an excellent piece of paint, very large, given to K. Charles the first by the Duke of Buckingham.” Quoted by Judson and Ekkart, 107. This discrepancy led Judson and Ekkart to suggest that Buckingham commissioned the work originally and that Charles had it finished after the Duke’s death.

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including Charles’ sister Elizabeth, the Queen of Bohemia, who had introduced the artist to the court. For some viewers, this connection might have been accented by Honthorst’s painting of Buckingham’s family (Fig. 21), which Charles had hung in his personal bedchamber. At the same time, as with Rubens’ paintings, the display of Honthorst’s work would have also been an important part of the painting’s pictorial message. Initially hung at Whitehall, the image’s affect would have been supported by the sumptuous dress of the courtiers who attended the masques performed in the banquet hall, as well as the magnificent building, whose cost far outweighed the price of whole painting collections, and the power and prestige of the King himself.

However, unique to Honthorst’s painting are its visual ties to court masques and performance. When first considering Honthorst’s clearly performative painting, it might seem logical to connect it with the false illusion that one usually connects with staged performances. However, as Vaughan Hart points out, court masques were “viewed not as a theatre of illusion but as a glimpse of reality.”162 Performed by the court, masques were seen as presenting higher truths and were ultimately about their courtly participants.163 Staged to contrast the court, as a paradigm of order, with its supernatural, disharmonious opposite, masques activated Neo-Platonic ideas about divine reality.164 In so doing, these ritual performances were seen as a means of facilitating the mind’s ascent to the higher world of Platonic ideas, and as such were not dramas but models of the universe. This distinction has been thoughtfully developed by Jerzy Limon, and it is worth addressing

163 Hart specifically claims that masques were an art form intended only for the elect of the Court. See Hart, 20.
164 Hart discusses the supernatural and magical nature of opposition within masques, which frequently used witches and magicians to personify opposition. See Hart, 17.
his argument specifically.\(^{165}\) Limon argues that masques, operating within Neo-Platonic thought, were treated as heavily allegorized codes that, once decoded, revealed divine truth. Staged by the court, for the court, in one sense courtly performers seemed to be nothing but themselves, creating an illusion of a ‘real’ world within the masque, yet at the same time, in the ‘created’ world, all the people in the court were given miraculous insight into the metaphysical sphere through the allegorical language of the masque. In other words, the masque effectively overlapped the real and created worlds joining them both temporally and spatially. This overlap was stressed through the illusionistic stage sets which used perspective to dissolve the boundary between the stage and auditorium. Designed so that the King designated the perspective of the set, the entire hall, the King, who sometime performed in the masques himself, and the spectators of the court, were incorporated into the created world of the masque.\(^{166}\) In so doing, the staging of the masques, in contrast to the separation between actors and audience in public theater, extended the hierarchy of the court onto the stage. This same device also denied the past/present dichotomy of drama, temporally joining the audience to the performance. Because of these characteristics, Limon concludes that while the masque used speeches and narratives, it was not a minor form of drama, but rather, “[a] courtly ritual, constantly rewritten, but invariably dealing with the infinite depth of the king’s divine wisdom.”\(^{167}\)


\(^{166}\) Limon does not discuss specifically how these perspectival sets were tailored for the King nor what effect these sets would have had when the king himself was performing, leaving some unanswered questions as to how this connection was worked out in specific instances. Nonetheless, his discussion of the overall integration of the court into the performance of the masque is integral to an understanding of the masque’s function within court society.

\(^{167}\) Limon, 221.
This argument is, in turn, essential to any reading of Honthorst’s painting because the work itself mobilizes the imagery of the masque. In his painting, Honthorst has duplicated the magical setting of the masque; putti fly with flowers, wreaths, and trumpets, around the main figures, while in the far left, three angels push a goat and two oppositional figures, Envy and Hate, out of the path of the Duke. Additionally, the personified figures carry instruments of their arts including globes, compasses and musical instruments, tools through which nature might be perfected and platonic ideals achieved. Yet most importantly, the personified figures in the painting are the royal court. By including these court figures, Honthorst employs the programmatic language of the masque, granting it the same ritual function by overlapping a created image and the real world of the court. Hung within a space frequently peopled by courtiers and where court masques were performed for and by the King, Honthorst’s painting positions itself within the rhetoric of the masque, inserting its theatrical language into a discourse that emphasized Neo-Platonic order and truth. That is not to say that people who viewed Honthorst’s painting were unaware of its theatricality and idealized aggrandizement, but rather that the painting positioned itself within an understood and accepted courtly discourse that valorized Honthorst’s skill at allegorically depicting the idealized, Platonic order of the court.

This argument is also applicable to Rubens’ paintings of Buckingham, which like the masques employ a universalized ritual language to support their images. In this vein, I argue that while Rubens’ and Honthorst’s paintings employ the theme of envious

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168 Sandrart describes this allegorical group as Envy and Hate hurled down by Virtue and Love. The goat probably was meant to symbolize base passion. See Judson’s and Ekkart’s discussion of Sandrart, 108.
criticism, theirs is a universalized depiction of discord against the realm, as opposed to the topical response of Buckingham’s parliamentary speech, in which he specifically enumerated and responded to the claims of libels. Harnessing the ritual language of painting, these works activate a different authority than that of libels – an authority which positions their images outside of the polemical fray. As Smuts observes in his examination of the articles of impeachment brought against Buckingham by the English Parliament, both the criticism against Buckingham and his defense “were well rooted in established cultural typologies and cannot be understood purely as responses to short-term events.”

Key to this claim is Smuts’ understanding of the universality of the established languages of criticism and response within which Buckingham and his advisers operated. Correspondingly, Rubens’ and Honthorst’s paintings of Buckingham cannot be seen as specific, topical response to libelous criticism nor can their images be rewritten by libels, because their visual language activates universal, allegorical themes. The question of whether or not Buckingham was truly fit to enter the Temple of Virtue and Honor was irrelevant because the very function of the paintings was to visually assert the Duke’s right to do so. As Parry similarly points out, “whether Buckingham was a fit person to introduce the Liberal Arts to his sovereign is beside the question, for part of the function of this painting was to assert Buckingham’s position as patron and master of the arts and sciences.”

Activating the ritual language of painting and utilizing Rubens’ and Honthorst’s performative visual vocabularies, both paintings created highly rhetorical

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169 R. Malcolm Smuts, *Culture and Power in England, 1585-1685* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 78. Smuts specifically claims that what is most notable about the impeachment proceedings is “the degree to which it reproduces the imagery of court parties that long antedated Buckingham’s rise to power.”

170 See Parry, 226.
visual images that transcended the quotidian and hence the realm of libelous discourse. In other words, both paintings used an allegorical visual vocabulary, relying on the ritual language of court painting to create an image of the Duke which did not allow for discursive rewriting.

A Rereading of “Felton Commended”

Cognizant of the positive discourse of painterly illusion, one can return to an analysis of “Felton Commended” and instead of embracing its counter-narrative, as Bellany so emphatically does, we can begin to see the struggle that the poem embodies and in so doing, tease out both its resistance and submission. As Bellany’s argument reveals, this libel clearly identifies Rubens’ and Honthorst’s paintings as illusory and criticizes Rubens’ image of the Temple of Virtue and Honor as a ‘fayrie ile’. However, the libel is not nearly as devastating a reinterpretation as Bellany makes it out to be, nor is it as explicitly directed at court painting as he would have us believe. Although the libel clearly attempts to undermine the credibility of the paintings, revealing a calculated attempt to resist the glorified images of the Duke, the libeler is not merely addressing court art but the entire performative culture of the Stuart court. In the libel, painting, which was bound inextricably to the material and visual culture of the court, becomes a synecdoche of that culture, revealing, in the process, both the power and visibility of painting through the libeler’s very need to deny the painted messages.

171 This reference is interesting because it picks up on a literary tradition which connected England with the mythological Fortunate Isles, the other worldly abode of the souls of heroes. See Josephine Waters Bennett, “Britain Among the Fortunate Isles,” Studies in Philology 53 (1956), 114-140.
When considered in a more critical light, one of the most striking characteristics of “Felton Commended” is the degree to which the libeler himself seems to have been seduced by the paintings he disparages. Not only does the libeler create a keen visual reading of both paintings that it mentions, he personalizes his account, claiming, “Naught but illusion were we.” Highlighting Buckingham’s role as Mercury in Honthorst’s painting and the glorifying palace in the background of Rubens’ painting, the libel situates its narrator as a viewer who had seen the paintings and been taken in by both their allegorical language and overall aggrandizement. Moreover, positioning himself as being held under Buckingham’s ‘all-confounding sway,’ the libeler indicates that he and his audience were cultivated individuals who would have seen and participated in court society. In these two lines, the libeler casts himself as a disgruntled courtier who, while cognizant of the ritual language of court art, has become disillusioned with Stuart policies.

Yet, even though the libel attempts to criticize Honthorst’s and Rubens’ paintings, arguing that only the skill and cunning of Honthorst and Rubens could produce such glorified images of a man ‘neither trained in lore of arts nor armes,’ it also reveals the authority that the libeler placed in the works. Especially striking is the specificity of the libel’s discussion of Rubens’ and Honthorst’s paintings. Although a reader would not necessarily had to have known or seen both of the paintings to understand the libel, on hearing it, a courtier might have mentally recalled the two works, a process that would

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172 As Bellany notes, there is little evidence about this poem’s author. Although Sir James Balfour suggests that Richard James, Robert Cotton’s librarian, wrote the libel, no evidence supports this claim. See Bellany, 2008, 157 and Bellany, “The Brightness of the Noble Lieutenants Actions”: An Intellectual Ponders Buckingham’s Assassination,” *The English Historical Review* 118 (2003): 1243-1263.

173 Italics my emphasis. “Felton Commended,” Fairholt, 69-70
have reproduced their aggrandizing imagery. That is not to say that the libel would not have found a receptive audience. For those who already saw Stuart court culture or figurative art in general, as negative illusion, the libel would have supported their views positioning the paintings as false representations. But for the courtly elite versed in the language of continental painting, Rubens’ and Honthorst’s paintings would have remained visual ideals to aspire towards – visual ideals that, through the libeler’s need to address the paintings’ and their powerful images of the Duke, we see at least one viewer fully grasped.

Conclusion

The Duke of Buckingham’s political career was fraught with public scandal and accusations of misconduct. From his rise to power until his assassination in 1628 Buckingham was known ironically both for garnering the “most widespread and fervent popularity of anyone outside the royal family in the early seventeenth century”174 and for being “the most unpopular man in England,”175 and thus was certainly aware of the fickleness of public opinion. In the face of rising public complaint and a veritable flood of derogatory songs and verse libels, which became much more viciously directed at the Duke as his role in court politics increased in 1623, Buckingham’s imagery utilized the theme of Envy to contain the rising public criticism against him, depicting the critics as envious, yapping creatures in allegorical paintings, two masques, and a public speech. Yet, even though these different theatrical presentations all worked to fashion the Duke’s public image, it is important to keep in mind that each of these examples also had a

175 Bellany, 1993, 297.
unique form of presentation and thus different audiences and different means of asserting their authority. For instance, Buckingham’s poetic response to the House of Commons in 1628 specifically replied to libels impugning his honour, questioning his morality, and accusing him of treasonous political activity by utilizing the rhyming meter of the libel to respond to the accusations against him. However, this same topical response is not apparent in Buckingham’s pictorial imagery in general or in Rubens’ and Honthorst’s allegorical paintings.

Images of Buckingham, unlike their textual counterparts, were not as critically vehement as libels, nor did they repeat the themes of calumny that the scholarship on Buckingham’s imagery has highlighted. While there were printed images of Buckingham that were produced to negatively comment on the state of English politics, the only such known image, *The Kingly Cocke*, did not visually lampoon Buckingham. With its traditional composition, and the objective, controlled line of its engraving, this work relies solely on its accompanying text to provide a satirical gloss, distancing it from the satirical intensity of written libels. Because of this paucity of satirical images, the majority of printed images of the Duke were portraits, many of which, produced through Buckingham’s own patronage, existed within the realm of painted portraits and the fine arts, and presented him as a cultivated, wealthy courtier. Similarly, painted portraits of the Duke also exemplified Buckingham’s patronage of the arts and his social position, creating iconic, aristocratic images that proclaimed the Duke’s gentility and wealth through his cultivated dress, manicured appearance and controlled bearing. Even when Buckingham utilized oppositional figures in his pictorial imagery by depicting
oppositional figures in Rubens’ and Honthorst’s overt allegories, those images did not respond to libelous criticism. Rather, like works produced for monarchs and royal favourites in France and Spain, they employed the conventional, pictorial theme of Virtue triumphing over Envy and Discord, while activating the ritual language of painting to elevate their images above the quotidian. This allowed them to successfully function as glorifying images of the Duke’s position and authority. Utilizing the persuasive power of painting, which relied on its display and style as much as its overt pictorial message, Honthorst’s and Rubens’ paintings used their connections with ritual performance to empower their imagery. Although they employed allegorically aggrandizing visual strategies, these works were not seen as negatively deceitful by the courtly elite for whom the paintings were made. Instead, they were viewed as presenting idealized images for others to emulate and aspire toward. Paradoxically, the same tool that Bellany claims creates a “devastating reinterpretation of the meaning of court art”\textsuperscript{176} is the best tool for gauging the success of the work because the libel demonstrates the existence of an audience that was aware of the paintings and their meaning, and, given that the libeler felt the need to specifically degrade the paintings, their power.

\textsuperscript{176} Bellany, 2008, 159.
Bibliography


Fairholt, Frederick W. Poems and Songs Related to George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham; and his assassination by John Felton, August 23, 1628. London: Percy Society, 1850.


Figures

Figure 3: Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Buckingham*, ca. 1625. Galleria Palatina (Palazzo Pitti), Florence, Italy

Figure 4: Peter Paul Rubens, *Mercury conducting Psyche to Olympus*, ca. 1625. Published in *The Burlington Magazine* 108 (1966).

Figure 6: Peter Paul Rubens, *Modello*, ca. 1625. National Gallery, London
Figure 7: Gerrit van Honthorst, *Apollo and Diana*, 1628. Hampton Court, Royal Collection

Figure 8: Peter Paul Rubens, *Modello*, ca. 1625. Kimbell Art Museum
Figure 9: Juan Bautista Maino, *Recapture of Bahia*, 1635. Museo del Prado

Figure 10: Nicholas Poussin, *Time Rescuing Truth*, ca. 1640. Musée du Louvre

Figure 13: Willem van de Passe, Engraving, *Buckingham on Horseback*, ca. 1625

Figure 14: Simon van de Passe, Engraving, *Queen Anne*, ca. 1616
Figure 15: Willem Jacobsz. Delff, Engraving after Michiel van Mienevelt, *Duke of Buckingham*, 1626. The British Museum

Figure 16: Michiel van Mienevelt, *Duke of Buckingham*, 1625. Art Gallery of South Australia
Figure 17: Engraving after Michiel van Mierevelt, Duke of Buckingham, 1625. National Portrait Gallery, London

Figure 18: William Larkin, George Villiers, ca. 1616. National Portrait Gallery, London
Figure 19: Anthony Van Dyck, *George Villiers and Katherine Manners as Venus and Adonis*, ca. 1620-21

Figure 20: Anthony Van Dyck, *Le Rio à la Chasse*, 1635. Musée du Louvre
Appendix A: “Felton Commended”

“Immortall man of glorie, whose brave hand
Hath once begun to disinchaunt our land
From magique thraldome. One proud Man did mate
The nobles, gentles, commons of our state;
That to his idoll greatnes would not fall.
With groveling adoration; sacred rent
Of Brittaine, Saxon, Norman princes; spent
Hee on his panders, minions, pimpes, and whores,
Whilst their great royall offspring wanted dores
To shutt out hunger, had not the kinde whelpe
Of good Elizas lyon gave them helpe;
The seats of Justice forc’d say, they lye,
Unto our auntient English libertie.
The staine of honour, which to deeds of praise
And high atchievements should brave spiritts raise,
The shipps, the men, the money cast away,
Under his onely all-confounding sway.
Illiads of greife, on toppe of which hee bore
Himselfe triumphant, neither trayned in lore
Of arts nor armes: yet in a hautie vast
Debordment of ambition, now in haste,
The cunning Houndhurst must transported bee
To make him the restorer Mercurie
In an heroick painting, when before
Antwerpian Rubens’ best skill made him soare,
Ravish’t by heavenly powers, unto the skie,
Opening, and ready him to deifie
In a bright blissfull pallace, fayrie ile,
Naught but illusion were we, ‘till this guile
Was by thy hand cut off, stout Machabee;
Nor they, nor Rome, nor did Greece ever see
A greater glorie. To the neighbour Flood.
Then sinke all fables of old Brute and Ludd,
And give thy statues place; in spight of charme
Of witch or wizard, thy most mightie arme,
With zeale and Justice arm’d, hath in truth wonne
The prize of patriott to a Brittish Sonne.""\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{177} Quoted in full in Fairholt, 69-70.