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Unto One Man's Hand: The Power of Portraiture of The Favorites of James I

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the study and analysis of portraiture of the favorites of King James I: Esmé Stuart, Robert Carr, and George Villiers. Although famous female mistresses (such as Anne Boleyn before her queenship or Madame de Pompadour) often did wield immense political power, there is better historical documentation for the power of male favorites in politics, the military, economics, and other areas of national affairs. Studying visual primary source material allows a new perspective on contemporary thought and propaganda of the time. Certain aspects of character are better communicated through the intricate symbology of the time, and portraiture allows a perfect avenue to bringing those observations to light. The art forms discussed—official depictions as well as engraved prints, which were more easily disseminated to a wider public—had very different audiences and therefore carried different messages. By analyzing these works, we can draw new conclusions about the ways in which the contemporaries of the favorites, regardless of social status, perceived these men. "Reading" visual and written sources through a queer lens will also provide a depth of understanding missed by earlier sources, which have historically lacked that lens.

The subject of royal favorites has been of historical interest for quite some time, but these studies or fictionalized interpretations usually involve the female favorites of kings (or, rarer still, the male favorites of queens).² This latter category provides an interesting angle from which to approach the biographic studies of male figures in the favorite's role. The study of male royal favorites can therefore oppose the historical neglect of same-sex relationships in royal courts through the colliding lenses of court history and queer history. This interdisciplinary combination illuminates subjects that are seriously understudied in both fields when evaluated independently. Although female favorites often wielded immense political power, there is better historical documentation for the power of men in politics, the military, and the economy. Visual art provides extensive historical documentation of the importance of male figures, specifically in portraits (both life-size and miniature) and in engraved prints.

Rather than focusing exclusively on written sources, which have served as the major point of reference in extant studies of the favorites of James I, art historical analysis provides a new perspective on Jacobean-era English thought and propaganda. Certain aspects of character are

better communicated through the intricate symbology of the time, and portraiture provides a perfect avenue to bring those observations to light. This paper examines two forms of art meant for different audiences (those at court versus those outside of that noble inner circle); thus, these works of art had to carry different messages. Studying them individually and comparing them suggests new conclusions about the ways in which contemporaries of the favorites perceived these men. My working hypothesis is twofold. On a more tangible, pragmatic level, I believe that the painted portraits will be a more revealing, authentic representation of self-image than written descriptions of these men. Rather than an independent printer controlling the messaging, the artist, patron, and subject did so for official pieces. Also, these portraits did not serve as far-reaching propaganda in the same way that prints, which were more easily disseminated, would have; the improvement of the public persona within the court, however, was possible and was often accomplished by commissioned portraits. Larger-scale portraits allow for the greater use of object symbolism, and the full-color paintings, whether miniature or life-size, invoke the color symbolism of the time. Engraved prints, which lack color, will be analyzed for object symbolism,

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² Examples of the first situation include Philippa Gregory's 2001 novel *The Other Boleyn Girl* and its corresponding film, or Colin Jones' 2002 biography *Madame de Pompadour: Images of a Mistress*. As for the latter situation, a more contemporary example is that of the 2018 film *Mary Queen of Scots*, which features Joe Alwyn as Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. In this movie, the favorite of Queen Elizabeth engages in a romantic relationship with the queen.

poses, and any accompanying captions. Investigation of the differences between these two forms of visual art will help demonstrate differences in messaging and the audience addressed, and further, will isolate explicit instances of symbolism in these portraits.

From the perspective of a historiographical study—that is to say, a “literary” review in the subject of art-historical analysis—there is much information to be gleaned from the resources provided by art museums, namely the National Portrait Galleries of England and Scotland. While there were quite a few surviving portraits of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, James’ last favorite, there are not nearly as many specific existing analyses of visual representations of the earlier two favorites featured in this paper, Esmé Stuart and Robert Carr (the Duke of Lennox and the Earl of Somerset, respectively). I hypothesize that this lack of extant information stems from the erasure of James I’s sexuality; within the context of their own times, Stuart and Carr were both major players in their respective royal courts and thus would have been recognizable figures through their portraits. Though it is difficult to study omission or total lack of evidence, by examining that “negative space” (to use a more artistic term), I believe we can draw important conclusions about how a lack of preservation, if not an outright destruction, of certain records make it seem to a more modern audience as if homosocial, homoerotic, and homosexual spaces, relationships, and figures did not exist before the turn of the twentieth century.

The other part of my hypothesis operates on a much broader scale, expanding the study of the omissions of queer figures from mainstream historical study. I hope also to begin to illuminate ways in which the sexualities of these men did or did not influence recorded public opinion of them. My working hypothesis is that the fact that these men were in homosexual relationships with the king of England would have caused much less public unrest than modern audiences would likely assume. Many sources—from textbooks to the didactic texts of museums—refer to the favorites simply as colleagues, companions, or friends of the king. An example of the latter source is in the Royal Museum at Edinburgh Castle in Scotland, where even the authors of a certain wall text cannot seem to agree on the exact nature of the relationship between James I and the Duke of Buckingham. The full text reads, with italics for emphasis:

James’s close friend George Villiers visited the castle with him in 1617. The queen did not. The top floor of the palace was remodeled for Anne in 1617. But ill health prevented her from joining her husband. Instead, the suite of rooms was given to the king’s favourite George Villiers, Earl (later Duke) of Buckingham, who some scholars believe to have been James’s *lover*.

³ Wall text, “The King’s Favourite,” The Royal Museum, Edinburgh Castle, Edinburgh.

⁴ Letter, James I to George Villiers, December 1623 (n.d.), in *Letters of King James VI & I*, ed. G. P. V. Akrigg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 431. Akrigg notes that the original publication of this

The caption of the accompanying picture (the William Larkin portrait analyzed later in this paper) reads: “James made his *beloved* George one of the most powerful men in England” (italics for emphasis).³ Contemporaries of James and George could certainly have put two and two together to see that the relationship between these men went beyond the normal boundaries of male homosocial friendship of the time. Without putting too fine of a point on it, Villiers taking over the rooms meant for the Queen of England is quite representative of the power that royal favorites could hold, both over the king himself and over the country’s politics. Additionally, it is obvious from reading letters between the king and his favorites that there was a romantic, if not outright sexual, relationship between these men. Though not technically public information, these letters were sent under the assumption that they could be opened and read by prying eyes. Rather than try to conceal their relationship, these men wrote freely about their feelings for each other, sometimes going into erotic or romantic detail. James I even proposed a version of marriage to Villiers when he wrote,

I cannot content myself without sending you this present, praying God that I may have a joyful and comfortable meeting with you and that we may make at this Christmas *a new marriage ever to be kept hereafter*; for, God so love me, as I desire only to live in this world for your sake, and that I had rather live banished in any part of the earth with you than live *a sorrowful widow’s life without you*. And so God bless you, my sweet child and wife...⁴

The seventeenth-century contemporaries of James I would have been aware, not ignorant, of same-sex relationships, particularly one in which those involved used heteronormative ideas and words to describe a version of marriage. By investigating these relationships from multiple perspectives—not only from that of the men involved in them, but also from the perspective of onlooking courtiers—historians can humanize these figures in ways in which the academy has failed to do so in the centuries since their deaths and can acknowledge their existence as their contemporaries would have done.

To fully reconsider the nature of these relationships, I will invoke a more modern, interdisciplinary analysis of these queer figures than existing historiographical studies have used, while still contextualizing them within their own time through the use of contemporary primary sources. Instead of continuing to accept the propaganda left behind by the Victorian era about the sexuality of those who came before us, we can refocus gay and lesbian studies in their own times and perspectives. Just because people in early modern Europe did not have the same vocabulary as we currently do to express more modern perceptions of concepts like gender, sexual orientation, and

letter in 1839 marked the date as December 1625, though analysis involving the year of James’ death and the timing of Buckingham’s return from an extended trip to Spain result in December 1623 as our current best guess.

overall identity does not mean they did not feel and very clearly express those things through their art and literature. Beyond that, they often *did* have certain turns of phrase and cultural shorthand in use to acknowledge the existence of non-heteronormativity, whether that was represented in differing sexual attraction, gender presentation, or any other diversion from the heterosexual-cisgender norm. It does a huge disservice to both our current queer community and those of the past to ignore clear evidence of same-sex relationships from centuries ago.

The lens of gay and lesbian history and theory, especially applied by an own-voices writer, is not one often deployed in extant histories of these men's lives. Many of the (already limited!) extant studies date from the mid- to late-twentieth century and thus do not explore this topic. The lack of specific biographical research on these men, as with so many other queer figures of the past, contributes to a lack of understanding and empathy from a more mainstream, largely heterosexual audience. Unfortunately, this leads to an over-reliance on certain sources for new studies of queer figures, if only because there are still so few from which to choose. Yet this is an issue which can be solved by historians committed to studying those outside of traditional mainstream history. By humanizing these figures and discussing them as fully rounded people apart from their sexualities (which, of course, must take a large part of our study), the idea of homosexuality as a newfangled invention may finally be put to rest. A study of these figures in 2020 is better able to accomplish this goal because of interpretive advances in gay and lesbian studies. The ability to "read" visual and written sources through this lens provides a depth of understanding missing in earlier sources and will further inform my studies. Biography and art historical analysis will serve as two equally important prongs in this paper's research, which will attempt to elevate these figures as worthy of historical attention both from a more academic community and for the more casual consumer of Early Modern English and Scottish history.

Although Esmé Stuart entered the young king's life when James was only thirteen, the favorite's influence over the politics, manners, and religious associations of the Jacobean court lasted long after Stuart's death.⁵ The first cousin of James' father, Stuart returned to Scotland in September 1579 after a stint in the French court of Henri III. By the next year, the former Lord of Aubigny had been named Duke of Lennox, a fact notable both for the speed of Stuart's elevation as well as for his singular status as the only

duke in Scotland.⁶ Exactly what means this thirty-seven-year-old, married father of five used to enchant the young king of Scotland are made quite clear in disparaging tirades from the Scottish pulpit; the Presbyterian Kirk of Scotland accused Stuart of going "about to draw the King to carnal lust."⁷ Even though Stuart quite publicly converted to Presbyterianism, his unpopularity in Scotland prompted him to flee back to his French homeland after James was captured by rebel Scottish lords in 1582.

Though the two kept in frequent correspondence as James waited for his older lover to rescue him, they would never see each other again. The Duke of Lennox died in 1583 and left instructions that his heart should be removed from his body, embalmed, and sent to the newly escaped young king.⁸ Though his time with the king had been short, Esmé Stuart left a lasting impact on James' ruling style, especially when it involved his favorites. For one thing, unlike later favorites—who tended to be much younger than James—Stuart often maintained the upper hand in a power imbalance between them, even though, of course, James far outranked him. While other, younger favorites have been described (though likely incorrectly, as I intend to prove later in this paper) as "apolitical playthings," Stuart "was virtually the power behind the Scottish throne," S.J. Houston asserts.⁹

Here begins our art-historical analysis of one of the better-known portraits of Esmé Stuart—a posthumous lithograph after the French artist François Quesnel. Much like Stuart himself, Quesnel had a unique relationship to the kingdoms of Scotland and France. His father, Pierre, had been court painter of James V of Scotland, James I's maternal grandfather. François himself eventually became a favorite portraitist of the French king Henri III and later painted in the court of Henri IV as well. Under Henri III's rule, Quesnel also became accustomed to depicting male royal favorites through his portraits of Henri's *mignons*, the French term for favorite. Quesnel also drew portraits of royal mistresses, such as Charles IX's mistress, Marie Touchet.¹⁰

In this specific portrait, Quesnel invokes the standards of fashion found in Henri III's court, implicitly including Stuart among those who followed Henri's more flamboyant, overtly queer style. Although not truly depicting Stuart as a *mignon*, such artistic choices as broad as depicting Stuart in a hat were enough to align him with Henri's homoerotic faction. I draw on this example in particular as it is a very obvious aspect of the drawing which would have been clear to any viewer. Additionally, it was a fashion choice shared by the French king himself, who often

⁵ When discussing the Frenchman Esmé Stuart, I have chosen to spell the royal surname in the French manner popularized by Mary, Queen of Scots as dauphine and Queen of France. For James and other members of the Scottish/English extended family, I will use the traditional Scottish spelling of Stewart, unless discussing direct quotes.

⁶ David M. Bergeron, *Royal Family, Royal Lovers: King James of England and Scotland* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 26, 27, 29; Neil Cuddy, "The revival of the entourage: the Bedchamber of James I, 1603-1625," in *The English Court from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War*, ed. David Starkey (London: Addison-Wesley Longman Ltd., 1987), 180.

⁷ Bergeron, 29.

⁸ James B. Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 13, from S.J. Houston, *James I* (Harlow, England: Longman, 1995), 135.

¹⁰ "Quesnel, François, the Elder," *Benezit Dictionary of Artists*, Oxford University Press, October 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1093/benz/9780199773787.article.B00147544>; "Attribué à François QUESNEL," *Louvre Atlas Database of Exhibits*, accessed November 22, 2020, http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=1067.

wore elaborate hats such as Stuart's jewel-encrusted cap. Another example of the impact of French fashion on this portrait and Stuart's self-presentation is the possibility of jewelry. Due in part to the lessened quality of the engraving as opposed to the original chalk drawing, it is difficult to discern whether or not Stuart wore an earring, another sign of indulgent luxury. Because of the portrait's pose, it is entirely impossible to see if he wore *two* earrings, a real sign of effeminacy often worn by Henri and his mignons and disparaged by their enemies. While Quesnel also painted in oils and was a skilled tapestry artist, he is perhaps best known for his work with chalky pastel crayons. It is this type of portrait that has been copied as a lithographic engraving here by an unknown artist.¹¹

Finally, the lithograph print's caption also adds to our ability not only to analyze but to further contextualize this piece within a longer dynastic history: "This duke was father to Lodowick, Duke of Richmond [sic]."¹² Esmé's son, Ludovic Stuart, would inherit multiple positions of power from his father. Shortly following Esmé's death and James' reinstatement on the Scottish throne, Ludovic was summoned to the Scottish royal court by the king to claim his hereditary right to the dukedom of Lennox. He eventually also became both the Lord Great Chamberlain and First Gentleman of the Bedchamber in Scotland, and First Nobleman of the Chamber in England after James' coronation there in 1603. Though this portrait only invokes the name of Stuart's direct successor in his son, we see here an example of the immense benefits gained by the families and descendants of royal favorites. Regardless of whether these families felt it proper to discuss exactly how their forebears had reached these peaks of privilege, it is important to acknowledge the long-lasting effects of this social elevation due to homoerotic romantic and sexual relationships.¹³

Stuart set the standard for other favorites, particularly when it came to manners of the court; Stuart's French refinement clearly piqued James' interest. The two other favorites studied in this paper were educated in France, and like Stuart, likely exemplified French court manners popular at the time. Additionally, Stuart solidified James' reliance on the Bedchamber as both a social and political machine. Through his establishment of James' first adult household in 1580, Stuart effortlessly blended Scottish and French customs to further develop the court in ways that shocked the English after James' coronation in 1603.

¹¹ Katherine B. Crawford, "Love, Sodomy, and Scandal: Controlling the Sexual Reputation of Henry III," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 4 (2003): 513+, accessed November 22, 2020, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A116672774/AONE?u=txshracd2548&sid=AONE&xid=c7c70ab4>; "Quesnel, François, the Elder;" "Esme Stewart, 1st Duke of Lennox, c 1542 - 1583. Favourite of James VI and I," *National Portrait Gallery*, accessed November 23, 2020, <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/33678/esme-stewart-1st-duke-lennox-c-1542-1583-favourite-james-vi-and-i>; P. Roberts (printer), after François Quesnel, *Esmé Stewart, 1st Duke of Lennox, 1542 - 1583. Favourite of James VI and I*, n.d., lithograph on paper, 5.08 cm high (2 in high), Scottish National Portrait Gallery accession number UP L 19, Edinburgh, <https://www.national>

galleries.org/art-and-artists/44781/esme-stuart-1st-duke-lennox-c-1542-1583-favourite-james-vi-and-i.

Finally, the violent reaction against Stuart's Catholicism was yet another reminder to James to stay far away from his ancestral religion. He went as far as barring the wedding of a favorite until the favorite's Catholic fiancée had converted. As James' first favorite, Stuart imprinted a memorable image of the ideal partner for the king and those he later favored.¹⁴

Newly crowned king of England, James did not wait long before his next famous—or perhaps infamous—favorite appeared. Robert Carr was a young man who enraptured the king and his court, only to be convicted of murder just eight years later. Though he was James' first favorite in England, he did represent James' homeland: Carr would eventually become the first Scotsman to sit in the English House of Lords as James elevated his favorite through the ranks of peerage. As of 1603, Carr served as a Groom in the royal household, but after he was dismissed, he pursued other employment in France. By 1607, however, he was back in England. During a joust, Carr fell from his horse and broke his leg in front of the king, who visited him often throughout his recuperation, using the time to try to teach Carr Latin. Although that endeavor proved futile, James had successfully found himself a new lover. Through the years their relationship lasted, James publicly showered Carr with gifts, including jewels, land, and titles. 1611 was a particularly excellent year for Carr. In addition to being named Viscount Rochester, Carr was installed as a Knight of the Garter in April of that year.¹⁵

To commemorate this event, celebrated portraitist Nicholas Hilliard painted a miniature of Carr. In researching the provenance of this portrait, I could not find the commissioner of the piece; I assume either James I or Carr himself commissioned it, with my assumption being that the king commissioned court portraitist Hilliard to commemorate his gift to Carr of a higher court position. The tiny portrait—it measures just 1.75 inches by 1.375 inches—shows Carr in flamboyant dress that effectively communicated his newfound wealth and status.¹⁶ Prominent during the Tudor era, Hilliard was accustomed to emphasizing "sobriety of clothes and bearing, and a certain calm magnificence of spirit" in his portraits.¹⁷ In some ways he succeeded: his typical Elizabethan style shows through this portrait of Carr, with his plump cheeks and shortened face evoking the pinnacle of feminized beauty found in Hilliard's portraits of Elizabeth. In addition to the face

¹² P. Roberts, after François Quesnel. Esmé's son's name is most often spelled Ludovic, which is how I will refer to him throughout this paper.

¹³ Bergeron, 33; Cuddy, 185.

¹⁴ Bergeron, 33; Cuddy, 185.

¹⁵ Young, 29, 30; Bergeron, 86, 87, 105.

¹⁶ Nicholas Hilliard, *Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset*, circa 1611, watercolor on vellum, 4.4 cm x 3.5 cm (1.75 in x 1.375 in), National Portrait Gallery, London, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw05898/Robert-Carr-Earl-of-Somerset#.X8hoigRAXys.link>.

¹⁷ David Piper, *The English Face* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1978), 44.

shape, Hilliard continued to use the color scheme of the Elizabethan era to denote youth and beauty, with Carr's skin being the preferred colors of red and white. Hilliard painted Carr's hair as the idealized gold, and he was drawn with very thin brows and nearly translucent lashes.¹⁸

Yet many aspects of the staid, heavily regulated Elizabethan court, which had taken many cues from *The Book of the Courtier*, were quickly undermined by the more elaborate and flamboyant Jacobean court. That is not to say there were not rules under James I. Those rules just happened to be a bit more glamorous—or ostentatious, depending on one's point of view—than the ones which Hilliard was accustomed under Elizabeth's rule. For example, in this portrait, Carr wears an elaborate ruff, for which Hilliard was well-known. Hilliard also skillfully applied white highlight beneath the jeweled buttons on Carr's doublet (which match the jewel in his earring), creating a three-dimensional effect and calling extra attention to these expensive accessories. The fact that such fashionable trappings bedecked a royal favorite stoked resentment at court. Particularly, Carr's blue ribbon—marking him out as a member of the elite Order of the Garter—was a symbol of his prominence in court that would not have gone unmissed by his fellow courtiers. In the Elizabethan court, clothes in portraits had been heavily regulated, with portrait sitters forced to dress in ways that accurately represented their rank, either inherited or earned through service to the crown. From further up the social ladder at James I's Whitehall, however, there was discontent with the obvious favoritism shown to Carr as he accrued wealth and status his fellow courtiers deemed as undeserved. His clothing suggested his background was truly noble, that he came from the established lineage of the upper echelon. Yet in truth, Carr was only a gentleman's overly elevated son, and a Scot, no less.¹⁹

Some of the loudest criticisms of Carr came from one of the most powerful members of court: the Prince of Wales, Henry Frederick. Prince Henry was only seven years younger than Carr, likely making the public knowledge of a potentially sexual relationship between his peer and his father uncomfortable. Further, Henry "resented the attention and affection given to Carr... James bestowed on Carr the love and attention that might have been given to his family."²⁰ One such example is this elaborate miniature,

intricately set into a gold pendant. It is unclear if that was its original format or if the portrait was added to the pendant after its initial creation. It is not beyond the realm of possibility, however, that the portrait began its life as a pendant; Hilliard, like most miniaturists of the time, was a jack-of-all-arts and had been trained as a goldsmith. He is still recognized by art historians as the "master of the oval miniature in locket-shape."²¹ James I could have worn this miniature over or under his doublet, stressing the intimacy of his relationship with Carr. Yet the size of the portrait is important, as well. Its minuscule size reduced the number of potential viewers. It also emphasized individual ownership, suggesting that the relationship between James and Carr was transactional at best and extended to the commodification of their sexual relationship, which would eventually flounder and lead, at least in part, to Carr's downfall at court.

Soon after the miniature was completed, Carr celebrated another triumph: he married famed beauty and heiress Frances Howard in December 1613. To celebrate the event, engraver Renold Elstracke created a portrait of the happy couple together. Elstracke himself was one of the most important engravers of the Jacobean period and thus was given such subjects to depict as those within the royal household. For example, Elstracke engraved a portrait of James' daughter Elizabeth with her new husband Frederick, Elector Palatine, likely based on a Hilliard portrait. Therefore, it is not surprising that through his connections at court, Elstracke began a series of studies on prominent courtiers at Whitehall.²² This group of engraved portraits included Thomas Overbury, Carr's longtime friend and benefactor.²³ The double portrait of the newly wedded Carr and Howard, in fact, was most likely a companion piece to the portrait of Overbury. Rather than form a scene of friendly collaboration or gratitude—Overbury had been at least partially responsible for securing and maintaining Carr's role in James' household, and therefore, as royal favorite—Elstracke intentionally placed these two portraits together in order to draw attention to a great scandal of the time.

Though Overbury had helped Carr write the initial letters of courtship, he had been against the marriage for any number of reasons. For one thing, Frances Howard was already married to the Earl of Essex; she would manage to have that marriage annulled. Even with the Essex faction removed from the picture, Overbury was the enemy of

¹⁸ Ibid, 51, 52, specifically references Hilliard's 1600 portrait miniature of the Queen; Hilliard.

¹⁹ Piper, 44, 45; James Hall, "Diamonds and a Ruff: The Masterpieces in Miniature of Nicholas Hilliard," *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 6052 (2019): 20+, accessed November 23, 2020, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A632137138/AONE?u=txshracd2548&sid=AONE&xid=f915f7a9>.

²⁰ Bergeron, 105.

²¹ Piper, 55.

²² Young, 30; Alastair Bellany, "Howard [married names Devereux, Carr], Frances, countess of Somerset," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, January 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/53028>; Renold Elstracke, *Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset and Frances, Countess of Somerset*, circa 1615, line engraving on paper, 19.2 cm x 15.2 cm (7.5 in x 6 in), National Portrait

Gallery, London, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw128576/Robert-Carr-Earl-of-Somerset-and-Frances-Countess-of-Somerset#.X8hpGbc8CrA.link>; Michael G. Brennan, "The Sidney Family and Jacobean Portrait Engravings," *Sidney Journal* 27, no. 1 (2009): 9-30; Roy Strong, *The English Renaissance Miniature* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983), 128-9.

²³ John Considine, "Overbury, Sir Thomas," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, January 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20966>. Considine also notes – interestingly enough regarding the topic of this paper – that Overbury was not only responsible for day-to-day clerical and managerial duties for Carr, he also took on the role of art collector for the Somerset collection.

several members of Howard's own family, and he was loathe to expose the easily swayed Carr to their influence. Overbury also feared that his own power over Carr would diminish if Carr fell in love with Frances and became subject to her influence instead.²⁴ Finally, there is the potential that Overbury, too, had romantic notions about the royal favorite. Referred to as "the favourite's favourite" in several modern secondary sources, the friendship between Overbury and Carr often publicly crossed those lines deemed "normal" for homosocial friendships at this time.²⁵ Regardless of Overbury's motivations, his opposition to the marriage (and therefore, for once, to Robert Carr himself) was strong enough that James I decided to take action. The king pressured Overbury to accept a foreign ambassadorship in order to remove him from Carr's circle and influence, which Overbury declined on grounds of ill health. As a final move against Overbury, James I imprisoned him in the Tower of London in April 1613. By September of 1613—just a week before Howard's first marriage was officially annulled—Overbury was dead of apparent natural causes, therefore removing the last roadblock to Carr and Howard's marriage.²⁶

It was not for another two years that Overbury's suspicious death was investigated in full, and Carr's possible role in a larger conspiracy brought to light: in 1615, King James wrote to Carr that if the accusation of Carr's involvement in Overbury's death were to "prove false, God so deal with my soul as no man among you shall rejoice at it as I."²⁷ Yet the panel of investigators appointed by the king (which included Ludovic Stuart, Duke of Lennox) found enough evidence and witness testimony to press charges. Jurist Edward Coke even implied that Overbury was not the first to fall to this web of poisoners—rather that Prince Henry, who had died in 1612, had also been a victim of this widespread conspiracy. As for the Overbury trial, four accomplices were tried and promptly hanged for murder. Frances Howard, for her part, confessed and pled guilty to the murder, whereas Carr pled innocence: both husband and wife were found guilty of conspiring to, and succeeding in, poisoning Overbury. Howard was the only member of the accused to plead guilty, a tactic which both incriminated and saved her: whereas James I spared the lives of Carr and his wife at least partially due to Howard's apparent penitence, public opinion of her continued to spiral downward.²⁸ Since the annulment of Howard's first marriage, the rumor mill had been hard at work. There had been plenty of rumors of Frances using witchcraft in order to leave her first husband and entrap her second. Now, she was seen as "sexually

promiscuous, murderous, syphilitic sorceress who had used...cruel poisons to kill the virtuous Overbury."²⁹

This opinion is clearly reflected in Elstracke's engraving through his depiction of the couple's contrasting sightlines and Frances' clothing. While Carr looks directly ahead, meeting the viewer's eyes with a calm expression to show he has nothing to hide, Howard looks shiftily to the side of the frame. Additionally, evidence of societal distrust and hatred of sexually empowered women is found in several of Howard's portraits, including this one: Elstracke has sketched, crudely but visibly, far more visible cleavage than was appropriate at the time. King James must have believed in Carr's innocence to some extent—he commuted the couple's death sentence and instead kept them imprisoned in the Tower for seven years with their infant daughter before allowing them to retire to the countryside in obscurity. On the other hand, Elstracke and the consumers of his engraved prints likely did not share the same opinion. Rather, Elstracke's arrangement of the Somersets right next to Overbury was a constant reminder of the scandal and would have been commercially successful for Elstracke and his printers as a society ravenous for royal drama snatched up the series. Elstracke's portrait of Overbury truly emphasized the seriousness of this scandal: in the portrait, Overbury is depicted writing his own epitaph. The dramatic, highly publicized murder trial gave James the perfect reason to cut ties with Carr, with whom he had been fighting for the better part of a year. It was essential that he distance himself entirely from the murderous Somersets, which he did, in part, by finding and elevating a new favorite.³⁰

Amidst Carr's dramatic fall from grace, this competitor entered the scene: George Villiers. The fourth son of a minor country gentleman, Villiers' relationship with the king eventually provoked the dictum that "a King should have many Councillours, and that he should never commit the helme of affaires, unto one mans [*sic*] hand."³¹ Born in Leicestershire in August 1592, Villiers and his elder brother attended a gentlemen's finishing school in France before returning to London in 1611.³² He eventually rose to staggering heights; he became, as David M. Bergeron writes, "the only duke in England without a trace of royal blood."³³ Initially, Villiers did not have much hope of upward mobility. Yet all that changed when he first met James I at a hunt at Apethorpe in the latter half of 1614, just as Carr was reaching the ephemeral peak of social and political power.

Later that year, Villiers became a Cupbearer at James' royal table—against the wishes of Carr, who rightfully suspected the young interloper of attempting to

²⁴ Bellany; Considine; Young, 30.

²⁵ Considine; Cuddy, 184, and G.P.V. Akrigg, ed., *Letters of King James VI & I* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 342, describe Overbury as "the favourite's favourite."

²⁶ Considine; Bellany.

²⁷ Letter, James I to Robert Carr, October 1615, in *Letters of King James VI & I*, 344.

²⁸ Akrigg, 343, 345; Considine; James M. Sutton, "Henry Frederick, prince of Wales," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, January 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12961>; Young, 30; Bellany.

²⁹ Bellany.

³⁰ Elstracke; Young, 31; Brennan.

³¹ Andrew Thrush, "Villiers, Sir Edward," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, May 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28288>; Young, 65, from Alexander Leighton, *Speculum belli sacri; or the looking-glasse of the holy war* (n.p., 1624), 24 – italics added for emphasis.

³² Bergeron, 162; Roger Lockyer, "Villiers, George, first duke of Buckingham," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, May 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28293>.

³³ Bergeron, 176-7.

steal his position. Carr had only just managed to block Villiers' immediate appointment to the Bedchamber, which would then occur in early 1615.³⁴ Villiers' promotion from his original position as Cupbearer to the Bedchamber presented a marked positive change in his fortunes, as well as the inverse in Carr's. James conducted debates, which he referred to as "trials of wits," between the men who served him at table.³⁵ Villiers demonstrated his personality and intelligence, as well as the good looks that had initially caught the king's eye. On April 23, 1615 (St. George's Day), Queen Anne officially asked James to knight Villiers and make him Gentleman of the Bedchamber. He performed the private ceremony with the sword of Prince Charles, who would also become a close associate of this new favorite.³⁶

Thus began Villiers' career as a courtier in the court of King James, as well as the official beginning of his relationship with the king. Like Carr before him, Villiers rose rapidly throughout the ranks of the English peerage. In January 1616, he became Master of the Horse. Three months later, he was named to the Order of the Garter and created Viscount of Buckingham. To commemorate his induction to the Order of the Garter, Buckingham commissioned William Larkin, the most formal portraitist of the early Jacobean court, to paint him a full-length portrait.³⁷ Although Ronald Thomas Harvie noted in his 1998 doctoral thesis on Buckingham's relationship with the art and aesthetics of his era that "There are no extant documents which detail a single commission by Buckingham to any specific artist," he also refers to this portrait as "[Buckingham's] first formal artistic commission."³⁸ As seen throughout his life, Villiers was a master of self-promotion, so it is a fair assumption that the young nobleman did immediately commission a portrait in order to begin rebranding himself as a better fit at court. Additionally, Villiers' older sister Susan was depicted in the same background and by the same hand—it is extremely likely that Larkin painted her portrait at the same time. Villiers' in-laws' family treasury also noted the commission of Larkin for "a portrait of Lady Katherine," suggesting that the Manners family (the Countess of Buckingham's maiden name) had existing connections with Larkin. This portrait of Villiers was potentially just the first of many Larkin commissions requested by the young courtier and his family.³⁹

Regarding this portrait, even a highly formal painter like William Larkin struggled to contain Villiers' personality to the flat, emotionless mask found so commonly

throughout his earlier portraits. Rather, the delicately arched eyebrow and slightly smirking moue declare the young Viscount of Buckingham a force with which to contend.⁴⁰ By the next year, Villiers was an earl with a position at the Privy Council. In 1618, he became the Marquis of Buckingham, before finally advancing to dukedom in May 1623.⁴¹ It was true indeed, Arthur Wilson wrote in *The History of Great Britain*, that "To speak of [Villiers'] Advancement by *Degrees*, were to lessen the Kings Love; for [when] *Titles* were heaped upon him, they came rather like *showers* than *drops*."⁴²

Villiers continued to establish his family members in secure posts around court and went to work arranging politically advantageous marriages for them. His brother Christopher, for example, was appointed as a Groom of the Bedchamber in March 1617, though his unremarkable personality and supposed alcoholism made securing an heiress as a bride for him impossible. For his part, Villiers made an advantageous marriage when he wedded Katherine Manners, the extremely wealthy only daughter of the Earl of Rutland. Though initially opposed to the marriage—supposedly because of Katherine's staunch Roman Catholicism—James eventually supported it, and had a public, almost familial relationship with Katherine and the Villiers children. Apart from the obvious benefits that a friendship with the king could gain for Katherine and her children, the king benefitted as well, engaging in this more casual familial dynamic. With his own children, James had always had to focus on securing prudent dynastic marriages and often had to play the diplomat, schoolteacher, or distant ruler rather than the doting father. Even the paintings of the Villiers family betray the fact that his children lived in a very different world from James' own.⁴³ Apart from our knowledge that "the responsibilities [the Villiers children would] assume are bound to be less burdensome and less intrusive," the children are posed in more unplanned, less stiff poses than their royal counterparts.⁴⁴ Rather than being portrayed as tiny adults, as the princes and princess had been, the Villiers children were allowed to be just that—children. Thus, they were depicted as living happier and less stressful lives than those led by the royal children.

To cement Villiers' reputation as a loyal family man (despite the public continuation of his romantic and sexual relationship with the king), Gerrit van Honthorst painted a family portrait of the Villiers clan in 1628. The version I analyze, which the London National Portrait

³⁴ Cuddy, 214.

³⁵ Ibid, 184.

³⁶ Young, 32; Cuddy, 214.

³⁷ Piper, 72.

³⁸ Ronald Thomas Harvie, "The Spectre of Buckingham: Art Patronage and Collecting in Early Stuart England" (Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1998), 98, 106.

³⁹ Ibid, 108.

⁴⁰ William Larkin, *George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham*, circa 1616, oil on canvas, 205.7 cm x 119.4 cm (81 in x 47 in), National Portrait Gallery accession number 3840, London, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw00881/George-Villiers-1st-Duke-of-Buckingham#.X800n7gXoQQ.link>.

⁴¹ Bergeron, 166, 168.

⁴² Ibid, 166, from Arthur Wilson, *The History of Great Britain, Being the Life and Reign of King James the First* (London: Printed for Richard Lownds, 1653).

⁴³ Cuddy, 222; A.F. Pollard and Sean Kelsey, "Villiers, Christopher, first earl of Anglesey," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, September 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28287>; Jane Ohlmeyer, "MacDonnell [*née* Manners, *other married name* Villiers], Katherine, duchess of Buckingham and marchioness of Antrim," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, January 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/69581>; Bergeron, 170, 179.

⁴⁴ Christopher Lloyd, *The Paintings in The Royal Collection: A Thematic Exploration* (London: Royal Collection Enterprises Limited, 1999), 234.

Gallery cites as a “good, early copy,” was completed by a follower or student of the original artist.⁴⁵ Van Honthorst was a Dutch follower of Caravaggio who had been commissioned several times by James’ daughter, Queen Elizabeth of Bohemia. Rather than the overly formal family portrait characteristic of English portraiture at the time, van Honthorst used a Dutch style to create a warmer, friendlier version of this little family. The trio of Katherine, toddler Mary, and baby George makes for a loving group, with the children leaning toward each other. Their pose evokes contemporary images of the infants Jesus and John the Baptist.⁴⁶

Villiers, however, seems somewhat removed from the others. He is dressed more formally, with his blue riband signifying his place as a Knight of the Garter. Unlike his first portrait, which focused on the actual garter as his badge of honor, this portrait focuses on the upper, rather than lower, body, which removes the homosocial aspect of the Order.⁴⁷ In addition, whereas Katherine and the children are posed in front of a blossoming rosebush, Villiers is placed against a notably stark background. As this portrait was completed the year of Villiers’ death, this difference in background could allude to the family’s loss.

A final intriguing aspect of the painting is the paper which Villiers holds in his hand. Although the paper is in the hand closest to Katherine, which would possibly suggest a sharing of information between the spouses, the sheet is folded away from her, effectively closing her off from the information within. Whether the writing on that paper was full of state secrets from Villiers’ newfound political positions at court or intimate details about his relationship with the king is unclear; no writing is apparent on the page. Villiers was in close communication with both James I and Charles I after him, so it is certainly possible that the page he holds in his hand is a piece of truly classified correspondence. Either line of analysis reemphasizes Villiers’ eminence at court and his intimate relationships with those in charge (i.e., his romantic and sexual

relationship with James and his close friendship with Charles) at the expense of his closeness with his own family—yet another heteronormative disguise applied onto Villiers throughout these years.

In addition to the king, Villiers had other powerful friends at court—namely the crown prince, Charles. Just as his older brother Henry resented Carr’s influence on James, so too Charles was initially unhappy that Villiers received so much of the king’s attention, especially in contrast to the paltry amount that the royal family often had. By 1623, however, the newly named duke accompanied the prince to the Continent to pursue the Spanish Match, the much-discussed marriage of Charles to the infanta, Princess Maria Anna of Spain. After being named as Lord Admiral in 1619—his highest formal office—Villiers must have thought himself well-prepared to advise the crown prince in political matters. Unfortunately, his bravado coupled with Charles’ overly romantic notions about the infanta led to disappointment, which turned to disaster when the two young men returned home and pressured James into declaring war against the Spanish. Villiers supported war not only because the country had spurned the prince. He also saw it as an opportunity to rebrand himself once more, tired of the derision from fellow courtiers who mocked his lack of manliness, even going so far as to compare him to a capon. Although Villiers’ pro-war sentiment initially endeared him to the English people, who saw this as proof of his masculinity and strength, resentment toward him grew as the war effort floundered.⁴⁸

This resentment was expressed through engraved caricatures, such as Hendrik Goltzius’ 1628 print of Villiers as a standard-bearer in war, which showcased public scorn for Villiers as a military figurehead. Another Dutch artist, Goltzius’ work had been favored by Prince Henry’s court and had even laid the groundwork for fellow Dutch artists, such as van Honthorst.⁴⁹ While Goltzius was often particularly interested in depicting poses through a “Michelangelesque exaggeration of muscles,” his other

⁴⁵ Unknown artist (after Gerrit van Honthorst), *The Duke of Buckingham and his Family*, original and copy circa 1628, oil on canvas, 145.4 cm x 198.1 cm (57.25 in x 78 in), National Portrait Gallery accession number 711, London, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw00882/The-Duke-of-Buckingham-and-his-Family#.X8hrMfh4hjM.link>; “The Duke of Buckingham and his Family,” *National Portrait Gallery*, accessed November 23, 2020, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw00882/The-Duke-of-Buckingham-and-his-Family#.X8hrMfh4hjM.link>. Unknown artist (after Gerrit van Honthorst), *The Duke of Buckingham and his Family*, original and copy circa 1628, oil on canvas, 145.4 cm x 198.1 cm (57.25 in x 78 in), National Portrait Gallery accession number 711, London, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw00882/The-Duke-of-Buckingham-and-his-Family#.X8hrMfh4hjM.link>; “The Duke of Buckingham and his Family,” *National Portrait Gallery*, accessed November 23, 2020, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw00882/The-Duke-of-Buckingham-and-his-Family#.X8hrMfh4hjM.link>.

⁴⁶ Harvie, 145; “Apollo and Diana,” Royal Collection Trust, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/405746/apollo-and-diana>;

“George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham (1592-1628) with his Family,” *Royal Collection Trust*, accessed November 9, 2020, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/406553/george-villiers-1st-duke-of-buckingham-1592-1628-with-his-family>.

⁴⁷ Stephanie Trigg, *Shame and Honor: A Vulgar History of the Order of the Garter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 199.

⁴⁸ Bergeron, 104, 155, 156, 169; Young, 103, 104; David Coast, “Rumor and ‘Common Fame’: The Impeachment of the Duke of Buckingham and Public Opinion in Early Stuart England,” *Journal of British Studies* 55 (2016): 241-267, accessed November 23, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2016.2>.

⁴⁹ Benjamin Cole (printer, after Hendrik Goltzius), *George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham*, circa 1628, line engraving, National Portrait Gallery accession number D5812, London, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw4022/George-Villiers-1st-Duke-of-Buckingham#.X8hrthhu1mE.link>; Michele Lynn Frederick, “Shaping the Royal Image: Gerrit van Honthorst and the Stuart Courts in London and The Hague, 1620 – 1649” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Delaware, 1998), 77, 273.

fascination—the study of sumptuous, draping fabric—is on display in his *Standard Bearers* series.⁵⁰ In the engraved portrait, he certainly succeeds in depicting that: Villiers wears an elaborate set of clothes, with matching embroidered doublet and breeches, a fanciful hat with a feather, and delicate little shoes with bows. The great flag he carries behind him is another example of Goltzius' skill in depicting fabric. Yet unlike a real standard, which would have the sign or sigil of the warring party painted across it, the banner held by Villiers is blank. Apart from symbolizing quite plainly that Villiers fought for no particular cause but his own glory, the way in which Goltzius depicted the fabric is reminiscent of the luxurious curtains in court portraits, such as Larkin's. This suggests that Villiers was much more comfortable in the extravagance of court than with the realities of war. Special attention was also paid to Villiers' legs; he famously had very beautiful calves and was well aware of that fact in his excessive vanity. It makes sense, therefore, that Goltzius would mock his subject with wide ankles and stockings somewhat baggy around the knee.⁵¹

Goltzius used every bit of his print to discredit Villiers, moving from his subject's head to his feet in a dazzling array of symbolism. Though the phrase "head in the clouds" did not reach common vernacular until the mid-1600s, the cloudy background behind Villiers' face still plays into Goltzius' symbolism. The phrase "under a cloud" is first documented in use circa 1605, and certainly Villiers qualified for the definition of "in trouble or difficulties; out of favour; with a slur on one's character."⁵² Immediately below the clouds, Villiers' face, with nose pointed slightly up, shows the viewer that the Villiers of this print thinks he is much better than those beneath him. Finally, Villiers' petite shoe points toward the lower-left corner of the print, where he is about to tread on a group of plants – the flowers do not appear to be English roses, but Scottish thistles. Apart from the disservice Villiers did to the kingdom, Goltzius here points to Villiers' destruction of James' reign by thrusting the country into war. Yet it was not only his relationship with James and his sexuality criticized in this piece; because Villiers is depicted alone in the foreground, the blame fully falls on him.⁵³ With this piece, Goltzius effectively argues that Villiers was a poor military leader because of his superior attitude and his glory-seeking ways.

Others clearly agreed with Goltzius' assessment; by 1626, Parliament moved to impeach Villiers. This was successful in no small part due to that public resentment stoked by representations of Villiers through art—written evidence or specific eyewitness support was not used in the impeachment trial. Rather, "common fame," or public opinion, was the real drive behind the jury's accusations when they accused Villiers of corruption, religious sedition, and overall military failure.⁵⁴ Yet this disaster did not deter

Villiers—nor, indeed, the newly crowned Charles—from resuming a pursuit of high culture in London. In particular, they continued to bond over their shared love of art. Charles had a good eye and genuine appreciation for fine art: art historian Christopher Lloyd even begins his survey of extant art in the Royal Collection by introducing Charles I as one of the main collectors among English royalty, one of whom contributed to the "taste and energy that [led to] the paintings in the collection [being] so heterogeneous."⁵⁵ Certainly Charles added great scores of paintings to the Royal Collections, both from trips abroad (such as the failed proposal voyage to Spain) and from commissions by foreign artists who came to London. Villiers, on the other hand, purchased whatever was most expensive or popular at the time. During James' rule, Villiers recommended renowned Northern Renaissance painters such as Mytens, Rubens, and Van Dyck to the king. By the time Charles had come to the throne, Villiers had hired Italian painter as Orazio Gentileschi, for his own household and promptly advocated for his elevation to court painter to Charles.⁵⁶ This shared network of artistic patronage fully cemented the friendship between Charles and Buckingham, as well as their shared social and political importance in the sophisticated Caroline court.

Nowhere is the intellectual power of this duo, consolidated in their isolated royal haven, more apparent than in *Apollo and Diana*, van Honthorst's massive allegorical oil painting of Charles, Villiers, and their wives as enlightened Greek mythological figures. While the painting was likely initially requested and commissioned by Buckingham, Charles I finished payment for this masterpiece.⁵⁷ The huge portrait was done "in the manner of a masque"—that is to say, the subjects, in elaborate costumes, blurred the line between classical allegory and the costumed balls the Stewarts so often threw.⁵⁸ In this portrait, van Honthorst engages in typical classical allegories and symbols of the time through his portrayal of Charles I and his wife, Henrietta Maria, as godly twins Apollo and Diana. Clearly, the choice to depict the couple as siblings shows that van Honthorst focused less on the real-life relationship at hand and more on showing the artistically minded, intellectual king as the god of art and learning. The couple sits enthroned in the upper left-hand corner as Mercury approaches. Villiers appears here in the guise of the messenger god, leading a line of personified Liberal Arts to the king and queen. Mercury also represented Villiers' role as Charles' right-hand man, responsible for any and all royal communications. Katherine, directly behind her husband, takes the form of Grammar holding a book. She leads the other Liberal Arts, and the key she holds represents her position as "door-keeper of all learning."⁵⁹

⁵⁰ Harold J.L. Wright, "Some Masters of Engraving: Lecture II: German and Netherlands Engravers (Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century)," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 87, no. 4529 (1939): 1079-1095, accessed November 23, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41359422>, 1095.

⁵¹ Cole; Young, 75, 76.

⁵² "Cloud, n.," *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed November 23, 2020, online edition.

⁵³ Cole (after Goltzius).

⁵⁴ Coast, 241, 242.

⁵⁵ Lloyd, 11.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 82; Strong, 127.

⁵⁷ Frederick, 325.

⁵⁸ Lloyd, 39, 280, 281.

⁵⁹ Gerrit van Honthorst, *Apollo and Diana*, 1628, oil on canvas, 357 cm x 640 cm (140.551 in x 251.969 in), Royal Collection Trust accession number 405746, London,

Yet the happy, fantastical scene hid the real-life doom that quickly approached its subjects. While the action of the painting centers on the triumph of learning over the personified sins of Ignorance, Envy, and Lust, life did not imitate art in this instance.⁶⁰ On the heels of the failed Spanish mission, public discontent mounted, as well as the Crown's debts. Rather than address the issues, Charles retreated further into his lifestyle of academic luxury and a court culture determined to compete with the sophistication of continental courts. Beyond this, Charles also continued to enjoy his royal status until he no longer could (of course, his 1649 execution was an unimaginable tragedy far on the horizon at that point). Villiers, however, never saw the Civil War nor its catastrophic consequences for his friend or the royal prerogative. By 1628, Villiers had been assassinated by a disgruntled military officer, who "was encouraged by popular opinion to kill Buckingham, and frankly the populace had good reason to rejoice in his murder."⁶¹ With such strong anti-Villiers sentiment coming from all corners—artistic and political included—it is no surprise that the court of public opinion also tried the former favorite and found him guilty of corruption in every way.

Official portraiture depicts Buckingham as a young, beautiful courtier who effortlessly seduced James I (and really did seem by all accounts of letters exchanged between the two men, as well as eyewitness testimony, to have loved the king). These were the portraits that Buckingham himself and his supporters commissioned and displayed in York House, carefully curated to show the parts of his personality most useful at any one time. For example, Villiers' public persona was the young, effeminate favorite in the Larkin portrait while he was still trying to win over James I, whereas he could socially reinforce his masculinity by transforming into a doting husband and father in the van Honthorst portrait. Critics consider Villiers the first true example of the *nouveau riche* man who further ingrains himself into the establishment by investing in art. As Lloyd notes, "[Villiers] probably introduced into *Britain* the concept—perhaps one that can only be fully appreciated retrospectively—by which an outstanding art collection gained for its patron prestige, influence, and wealth."⁶² Former Director of the National Portrait Gallery Sir David Piper agreed, writing that Buckingham "was certainly an accumulator for prestige purposes, in the early American millionaire tradition, rather than a connoisseur

with...learning and discrimination."⁶³ For his stately homes—York House and Chelsea House—Buckingham acquired nearly four hundred pictures and about a hundred statues over the period of less than six years.⁶⁴ In several letters of 1629, Rubens remarked upon the size of the art collection of the subject of his towering *Equestrian Portrait*: "I must admit that when it comes to the pictures by the hands of first-class masters, I have never seen such a large number in one place as in the royal palace in England *and in the gallery of the late Duke of Buckingham*."⁶⁵ Yet such a collection's impressive size was not its only strength. Rather, Villiers took a cue from his friend Charles and exercised absolute control over depictions of his own persona through portraiture, much like the young king did to successfully manipulate his own royal image.⁶⁶

The more widely disseminated engravings, however, showed another side: the struggling soldier failing in foreign affairs. During his impeachment trial, the jury accused Villiers of several specific military failures, including losing control of the Narrow Seas and failing to take the port city of Cadiz in order to disrupt Spanish shipping and colonial commerce.⁶⁷ In another example of glory-seeking through war, it also seemed that Villiers was trying to match the naval exploits conducted in the Elizabethan era to better present himself as a successful military leader. During his impeachment, however, Villiers continued his self-promotion through the use of print propaganda, which depicted him "as a heroic, virtuous leader of the Protestant cause."⁶⁸ Despite these attempts, his detractors clearly won out. Their use of the "common fame" argument in order to successfully remove Villiers from certain positions of power proves that by his trial in 1626, his fame had turned to infamy. Yet a key aspect of this is that, while his jurors did point to Villiers' sexuality as a reason to mistrust him, it was not the only reason.

Rather, the jurors, the nobility, and even those with no direct contact with Villiers saw him representing far more frightening things than just the sin of sodomy. To be clear, Villiers' so-called sexual deviancy was certainly mentioned in the trials. For example, Sir John Eliot, a leader of anti-Buckingham members of the House of Commons, did "glancingly refer to the 'veneries' of Sejanus," using a phrase and allusion to a classical figure that would make sense to an Early Modern audience.⁶⁹ Effectively, by reminding the rest of the jurors that Villiers held romantic

<https://www.rct.uk/collection/405746/apollo-and-diana>; "Apollo and Diana."

⁶⁰ Lloyd, 280.

⁶¹ Young, 97, 103, from James Holstun, "'God Bless Thee, Little David!': John Felton and his Allies," *ELH*, 59 (1992), 513-52.

⁶² Lloyd, 30. Italics added for emphasis; elaborate systems of artistic patronage to boost social standing had long existed in the royal courts of Italy and France.

⁶³ Piper, 72.

⁶⁴ Frederick, 298.

⁶⁵ Lloyd, 38, from *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Ruth Saunders Magum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 320, 322. The letters in question were from 8 and 9 August 1629, to Pierre Dupuy and

Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, respectively; italics added for emphasis.

⁶⁶ Strong, 82.

⁶⁷ Coast, 241.

⁶⁸ Siobhan Keenan, "Representing the Duke of Buckingham: Libel, Counter-Libel and the Example of *The Emperor's Favourite*," *Literature Compass* 9, no. 4 (2012): 292-305, accessed November 24, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2012.00880.x>.

⁶⁹ Coast, 247; Young, 104, in describing this trial and Eliot's statement, notes "veneries" and "solecisms" as period-typical euphemisms for sexual deviance. He also discusses the Tiberius-Sejanus discourse, an allusion to the relationship between a Roman emperor and his overly influential favorite; Charles willingly placed himself into

and sexual sway over James—and insinuating as well that this power extended to Villiers' relationship with Charles—Eliot reemphasized the strength of the influence Villiers held. This brief reference to Villiers' sexuality, however, is dwarfed by the jurors' discussion of his other faults and the ways in which he threatened the court and the country. On the whole, Parliament focused on other, more pressing issues in their attacks on Buckingham. His possible pro-Catholic sentiment, rumors of his corruption, as well as evidence of his failure as a military leader, were the real matters at hand.⁷⁰

Other sources, however, specifically attacked Villiers' sexuality—yet these also paired those critiques with further vilification of other parts of Villiers' personality and background. In an interesting mirror to Villiers' own attempts to use art to further bolster his public persona, certain satirical poems, masques, and plays negatively depicted royal favorites clearly meant to represent Villiers himself. These favorites were “ambitious, treacherous, [and] tyrannous,” but also “effeminate and lecherous.”⁷¹ In addition, these favorites were often low-born, another aspect of public mistrust of Villiers. It was one thing for a high-ranking member of the nobility to accrue power and influence over royal affairs, but the low status with which Villiers had been born had not been forgotten by the public. In addition, this was just another cliché used to describe overly controlling favorites in plays and poems at this time. These stereotypical qualities, including those related to sexuality, show a wider public condemnation not only of Villiers' power, but also of the way in which he had acquired it.⁷²

Over Villiers' long period of influence over the kings, the nobility acknowledged Villiers' prominence and accepted his social success. They were, however, suspicious of the ways in which he had achieved it—less so because of his use of sexuality, and more because of his original lower social standing and rapid rise to financial prosperity. Yet through his commissions and artistic patronage, Villiers could more effectively integrate himself into the social and political networks at court and use his powers of charisma to increase his political sway over James (and then Charles). For example, the full-length court portraits showing the duke astride a great horse or pictured in the guise of academic virtue only elevated his best qualities. By conveying attributes desired by the court, these works of art served to further promote their subjects among the courtiers. Yet the power of a favorite was a double-edged sword. Royal favorites tended to act as “lightning rods for popular discontent,” drawing fire away from the ruler as long as the favorite was far away from legislative and military machinations of the state.⁷³ When one was as politically involved as Villiers became, however, it was altogether too easy for the failures of a favorite to drag down the reputation of the king—to say nothing of his own fate. Thus, those outside of court did not see Villiers' carefully cultivated image, honed through years of meticulous self-promotion

and networking. They saw only the caricature of the effeminate fop playing at war. They might have believed that that made up his whole personality, and their distrust and dislike of him is nowhere better represented than the myriad of sardonic poems and plays featuring caricatures of Villiers, and then of course by his violent assassination in 1628.

It is no great wonder that over centuries of analysis, male royal favorites seem like such complicated, contradictory figures. The significant number of artworks featuring the duke of Buckingham, for example, tell very different stories. In some cases, the stories they tell are intentionally suppressed by the academy in order to discredit overtly queer rulers such as James I. Great institutions have omitted the stories of the other two favorites in this paper, as well: the Scottish church in the case of Stuart, and the English judicial system in the case of Carr. It is those very contradictory natures of Villiers, Carr, and Stuart that make them such fascinating subjects for gay and lesbian studies scholars today. Rather than either outright villainizing them in the way of many past writers or blindly glorifying them, we can instead analyze these figures as part of a gray area of history that must be further explored. The discipline of gay and lesbian studies continues to rapidly evolve (especially with concurrent developments in the field of queer studies); instead of only looking toward the future, which of course offers academics as well as a more popular audience new information and paradigms, the field must also more deeply address its past. Through an interdisciplinary study of both the history and historiography surrounding famous queer figures, today's queer scholars can better solidify the memory and legacy of the bedrock of our community. Rather than continue to engage in what groundbreaking lesbian novelist Radclyffe Hall called a “conspiracy of silence” against work discussing her sexuality, modern audiences must further investigate past representations of queer figures and their influences on our perceptions of those figures, their communities, and ourselves today.⁷⁴

that allusion in order to defend both Villiers and Charles' own relationship with him.

⁷⁰ Coast, 247.

⁷¹ Keenan.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Coast, 246.

⁷⁴ Sarah A. Smith, “Breaking the Code,” *Index on Censorship* 27, no. 5 (1998): 122-126, accessed November 24, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080%2F03064229808536428>.

APPENDIX



Figure 1: Roberts, P., after François Quesnel. *Esmé Stewart, 1st Duke of Lennox, 1542–1583. Favourite of James VI and I.* N.d. Lithograph on paper, 5.08 cm high (2 in high). Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh.



Figure 1. Hilliard, Nicholas. *Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset.* Circa 1611. Watercolor on vellum, 4.4 cm x 3.5 cm (1.75 in x 1.375 in). National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 2. Elstracke, Renold. *Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset and Frances, Countess of Somerset.* Circa 1615. Line engraving on paper, 19.2 cm x 15.2 cm (7.5 in x 6 in). National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 3. Larkin, William. *George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham.* Circa 1616. Oil on canvas, 205.7 cm x 119.4 cm (81 in x 47 in). National Portrait Gallery accession number 3840, London.



Figure 4. Unknown artist, after Gerrit van Honthorst. *The Duke of Buckingham and his Family*. Original and copy circa 1628. Oil on canvas, 145.4 cm x 198.1 cm (57.25 in x 78 in). National Portrait Gallery accession number 711, London.



Figure 6. Cole, Benjamin (printer), after Hendrik Goltzius. *George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham*. Circa 1628. Line engraving. National Portrait Gallery accession number D5812, London.



Figure 5. Van Honthorst, Gerrit. *Apollo and Diana*. 1628. Oil on canvas, 357 cm x 640 cm (140.551 in x 251.969 in). Royal Collection Trust accession number 405746, London.

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