

### O. Buckingham at War (c. 1624-1628)

The poems in this section span the period 1624 to 1628, and revolve around three main topics of political interest: firstly, England's entry into wars with Spain (in 1625) and with France (in 1627); secondly, the escalating crisis in parliamentary politics that was in part a result of these failed military adventures; and thirdly, connected to both the military and parliamentary crises, the growing problem posed by the immense power of the royal favourite, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham.

The Parliament of 1624 witnessed a major shift in English foreign policy as Prince Charles, with Buckingham at his side, worked with a "patriot" coalition at court and in Parliament to undermine James I's policies, break negotiations with Spain, and drive England into a war against the Spanish that would supposedly result in the restoration of the Palatinate. England's commitment to foreign war, reasserted at the accession of Charles as king following James's death in March 1625, placed immense financial demands on the nation, necessitating the calling of frequent meetings of parliament. The parliamentary sessions of 1625, 1626 and 1628-29 proved increasingly fractious. Part of the reason for this was that the war had brought little success. The two major expeditions—to Cadiz in 1625, and to the Ile de Ré in 1627—both ended in humiliating failure. In the light of these disasters—and to the great frustration of the King—MPs proved reluctant to grant sufficient taxation revenue to the Crown. When, in 1626-27, Charles attempted to bypass parliament and raise money through a forced loan of questionable legality, he triggered a constitutional crisis that preoccupied much of the 1628 Parliament. Parliament also clashed with the King in both 1626 and 1628 over the increasing power of the favourite Buckingham. Buckingham had achieved the impossible: he had become the favourite of two successive kings, and his power seemed only to be growing. He had been instrumental in bringing England into the continental wars in 1624-25, and had assumed many of the responsibilities of military command—overseeing the Cadiz expedition in absentia as Lord Admiral, and leading the expedition to Ré in person. Many MPs blamed Buckingham for the failures of English military intervention and for an ever-growing array of other ills plaguing the kingdom, ranging from the decay of trade to the rise of anti-Calvinist Arminians in the Church. During the parliamentary session of 1626, the House of Commons attempted to

impeach Buckingham in the face of Charles's repeated and explicit declarations of support for his favourite. In the 1628 session, despite securing Charles's concession to a Petition of Right settling their constitutional grievances, the Commons drew up a Remonstrance of the nation's ills that named Buckingham as their prime cause and asked the King to remove the favourite from power.

We have divided the poems in this section into three groups. The first focuses on the period from 1624 to the spring and early summer of 1627, and includes verses on several events and topics. The group begins with poems on the breach with Spain and the fall of the anti-war Lord Treasurer, Lionel Cranfield, Earl of Middlesex during the 1624 Parliament. It then continues with verses on the failure of the Cadiz expedition of 1625, the build-up to and aftermath of the 1626 Parliament, and on the 1627 promotion of Nicholas Hyde to Lord Chief Justice. The group concludes with a series of vitriolic libels on the Buckingham problem, as it was perceived in the early months of 1627.

The second group of poems primarily focuses on the expedition to the Ile de Ré in the summer and autumn of 1627. Designed to assist the beleaguered Huguenots of La Rochelle, the Ré campaign ended in an ignominious English retreat that resulted in heavy casualties and an escalating number of vicious attacks on Buckingham's military leadership.

The final group of poems belongs to the first seven or eight months of 1628. One set centres on the first session (17 March to 26 June) of the 1628 Parliament—focusing not on the great constitutional debates surrounding the Petition of Right, but on the Commons' interventions in religious politics and the crafting of the Remonstrance against Buckingham. A second selection of poems celebrates the 13 June street lynching of Buckingham's astrologer-physician, the notorious John Lambe, while a third selection explicitly fantasizes about Buckingham's own violent demise.

Although the poems collected here focus on a wide range of contemporary political issues and anxieties, it is Buckingham who dominates. In 1624 he became, briefly, the libellers' hero. No longer the corrupt, crypto-Catholic court Ganymede of the 1620-23 libels, Buckingham was reimagined as a militant champion of the Protestant cause. By 1626, however, the favourite's

“patriot” reputation was in tatters. Despite an aggressive printed media campaign to burnish his image before and during the Ré expedition, Buckingham became once again the libellers’ cynosure of corruption. In the libellous discourse of 1626-28, the Duke was represented as a lowborn, womanizing, effeminate coward; an incompetent and a traitor; a poisoner and patron of witchcraft; and an agent of popery, who wielded immense transgressive power over king and country. By the summer of 1628, with parliament having failed for a second time to curtail Buckingham’s power, the poems registered and reinforced deep-grained popular fantasies of the Duke’s violent death. The assassination that was to come in August 1628 had already happened in the imaginations of libellers and their readers.

Most of the scholarly work on the libels of the mid- and late-1620s has focused on Buckingham. The 1624 poems are discussed and contextualized in Cogswell’s *Blessed Revolution*; the shifting image of Buckingham in the libels is sketched out in Bellany’s “Raylinge Rymes”; the function of satire in the interpretation of confusing circumstances in the 1620s is examined by McRae (*Literature* 114-152); while many of the anti-Buckingham poems are given intriguing close readings by Holstun. A forthcoming book by Bellany and Cogswell will present a full-scale study of the favourite’s libellous reputation.