

### Pi18 Heere lies a gracious graceles Peere

*Notes. Like “Fortunes darling, Kings Content”, this epitaph economically weaves together a wide array of charges against the late Duke. The poem also uses Buckingham’s scandalous reputation as a poisoner—his “trade” was “Murther”—to legitimate the assassin Felton’s morally and legally troubling decision to take the law into his own hands.*

#### “Epitaph”

Heere lies a gracious graceles Peere,  
Of King belov’d, to ’s countrie deere,<sup>1</sup>  
That did both Foot and horse commaund,  
And beare the sway by Sea and Land;<sup>2</sup>  
To death which many thousand sent<sup>3</sup> 5  
Ere hee receiv’d the death hee lent.  
Nor Law nor Justice had to doe  
With what his Will consented to,  
Nor was there any question made  
With him of Murther:<sup>4</sup> ’twas his trade: 10  
And will his Ghost bee angrie trowe<sup>5</sup>  
If any other<sup>6</sup> should doe soe?  
Can any thinke his scholler naught  
For doeing that himself hath taught?  
But he that killd this killer thus, 15  
Did it to save himself and us:  
Thus farr then with him wee’l dispence,  
Hee did it in his owne defence,<sup>7</sup>  
Besides, his Act redeem’d agen  
Great multitudes of honest Men. 20  
Then all the Fault, and all the Wrong  
Was, that hee let him live soe long.

**Source.** BL MS Sloane 826, fol. 183r-v

**Other known sources.** Bodleian MS Malone 23, p. 144; BL MS Egerton 2725, fol. 82r; St. John's MS K.56, no. 22

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<sup>1</sup> *deere*: pun on the double meaning of “dear”, as cherished and as costly, with the implication that although Buckingham was cherished by his king, he was costly to his country.

<sup>2</sup> *That did both Foot...and Land*: Buckingham was Lord Admiral and commander of the English army during the war with France in 1627-28.

<sup>3</sup> *To death which many thousand sent*: news reports estimated the English casualties suffered during the 1627 expedition to the Ile de Ré in the thousands.

<sup>4</sup> *Murther*: the murders in question were the alleged poisonings of James I and a handful of rival courtiers. The charges were first levelled in George Eglisam's 1626 pamphlet, *The Forerunner of Revenge*, and later repeated in many libels.

<sup>5</sup> *trowe*: true.

<sup>6</sup> *any other*: i.e. Felton.

<sup>7</sup> *Hee did it in his owne defence*: i.e. if Buckingham was a mortal threat to the whole nation (including the assassin), Felton acted in self-defence and was thus no murderer.

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