

Pi27 Great Duke, which art commaunder of the Seas

Notes. This is the longer of two poems written as dialogues between the murdered Buckingham and Charon who, in classical mythology, was the ferryman of the dead across the rivers of the underworld (cf. “At Portsmouth Duke I will no longer staye”). This libel is milder than most, opening with Charon intending to take Buckingham to “Elysium” (though that hope is later seemingly contradicted), and concluding with a theologically problematic—essentially Roman Catholic—suggestion that the Duke might eventually rise to heaven after a period of punishment in purgatory.

“A Dialogue Betweene Charon and the D.”¹

Great Duke, which art commaunder of the Seas,²
Make haste to Portsmouth,³ if thy highnesse please;
For there my boate is ready to convey
Thy soule to the Elizeum:⁴ come away.

Duke.

Whose is that voice that soundeth in myne eare? 5
Meethinks 'tis Carons: See, hee doth appeare.
Who sent thee, Caron, that thou makst such haste
For to remove my blisse, to have mee plac't
Among the Furies,⁵ that ne're see bright day?
But I must goe: Caron calls, Come away. 10
Come Felton then, and execute thy will,
Who are prepar'd great Georges blood to spill.
Yet, give mee leave, before I see my end,
One poore Petition through the skies to send,
For to sollicite him that rules the heaven, 15
And that my spotted soule may bee forgiven.

Charon.

Thou art too tedious, and dost stay too long:
Noe time is lent thee. Come: you must among

Those that on earth could finde noe time to pray
 Till I come for them: Therefore come away. 20
 For if thy conscience doth not thee accuse,
 In that thy God and King thou didst abuse;
 Then make noe question of thy doing well,
 Thy soule shall onely passe with mee through hell,
 Where thou content must bee to stay a while, 25
 To clense thy conscience, which thou didst defile:
 And if from thence to blisse thou finde a way,
 Thou leave shalt have: But now I will not stay.
 Duke.
 Then farewell Joyes: Ile bee content to dwell
 A thousand yeares in Purgatorie⁶ or hell, 30
 Soe that I may at last but purchase heaven,
 And rest with him whose blood for mee was given.⁷

Source. BL MS Sloane 826, fols. 187v-188r

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¹ *the D.*: the Duke.

² *commaunder of the Seas*: Buckingham was Lord Admiral of England.

³ *Portsmouth*: Buckingham was assassinated in the naval town of Portsmouth, on the south coast of England.

⁴ *the Elizeum*: the Elysian fields, the dwelling place of the blessed souls in the classical underworld.

⁵ *Among the Furies*: the three avenging goddesses known as the furies were usually described as dwelling beneath the underworld and being responsible for inflicting torments on the damned. This destination seems to contradict Charon's opening suggestion that he was to take Buckingham to "the Elizeum".

⁶ *Purgatorie*: the middle place between hell and heaven in which, according to Catholic belief, the souls of the dead could suffer for a period of time to pay off the debts of their accumulated sins.

Protestants believed that purgatory was a “popish” fiction.

⁷ *him whose blood...given:* i.e. Christ.

