N. The Spanish Match Crisis (c.1618-1623)

On 24 December 1620, James I issued a stongly-worded proclamation:

> forasmuch as it comes to Our eares, by common report, That there is at this time a more licentious passage of lavish discourse, and bold Censure in matters of State, then hath been heretofore, or is fit to be suffered, Wee have thought it necessary, by the advice of Our Privie Councell, to give forewarning unto Our loving Subjects, of this excesse and presumption; And straitly to command them and evry of them, from the highest to the lowest, to take heede, how they intemeddle by Penne, or Speech, with causes of State, and secrets of Empire, either at home, or abroad, but containe themselves within that modest and reverent regard, of matters, above their reach and calling, that to good and dutifull Subjects appertaineth.

Seven months later, James was forced to reissue the command (*Stuart Royal Proclamations* 1. 495-96, 519-20). Neither proclamation made any difference—the volume of "lavish and licentious speech" on matters political, both domestic and foreign, continued to escalate. And, howling as loud (and as licentiously) as any other element in this chorus of dangerous political speech, were the "railing rymes and vaunting verse"of the libellers ("O stay your teares yow who complaine").

The escalation both in the quantity and in the political daring of the verse libels written during the period 1618-1623 was both a direct result of, and a powerful contribution to, the intensity of debate about the course of James I's foreign policy, in particular his attempts to seek a Spanish bride for his son and heir Prince Charles. Although the ecumenically-minded James had mulled over the benefits of a marriage alliance with Catholic Spain since making peace with the Spanish in 1604, and had actually begun serious negotiations as early as 1614-15, the Match became a real source of public controversy only in the aftermath of the outbreak of confessional warfare on the Continent, triggered by the Bohemian revolt of 1618. The Protestant Bohemians' deposition of their Catholic Habsburg king, the future Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand of Styria, was of more than passing concern to James and his subjects. For the Bohemian rebels chose in Ferdinand's stead, James I's son-in-law Frederick V, Elector Palatine, who had married James's daughter Elizabeth in 1613. Much to James's dismay, Frederick accepted the rebels' offer of the crown. The consequences were disastrous. Frederick and Elizabeth were driven from their new kingdom after a major defeat at the Battle of White Mountain in November 1620. Meanwhile, Frederick's lands in the Lower Palatinate had been occupied by Spanish armies under Spinola, who saw these crucial Rhineland territories as strategically indispensable in the war with the United Provinces that would almost inevitably ensue upon the expiration of the Spanish-Dutch twelve-year truce in 1621. Driven from Bohemia, from the Lower Palatinate and, by October 1621, also from the lands of the Upper Palatinate seized by the Catholic Duke of Bavaria, Frederick and Elizabeth became exiles, sheltered by the Dutch government at The Hague.

The Bohemian-Palatinate crisis opened up dangerous divisions of opinion in England. Many called for war—whether a war of religion or a war of dynastic and national honour—to protect the Palatinate, Protestant and Stuart interests against their Catholic foes. James, however, remained embarrassed at his son-in-law's actions, and committed himself to a diplomatic solution, the cornerstone of which was the long-mooted marriage alliance with Spain. For James, a marriage alliance with Spain offered solutions to many of his problems: in diplomatic terms, an alliance between England and Spain might help collapse the rigid divisions between the confessional camps that were squaring off across the battlefields of Europe; an alliance might also allow James to secure Spanish assistance in returning the Palatinate to Frederick V, or in negotiating some kind of settlement between Frederick and the King of Spain's understandably irate cousin, the Emperor Ferdinand. A match with Spain also brought both symbolic and material benefits: marrying into the most powerful royal house in Europe would impress upon the world the dynastic status of the House of Stuart; and, in material terms, the marriage offered James the tempting prospect of a massive dowry to replenish his chronically strapped coffers. For many of James's subjects, however, the pursuit of the Spanish Match threatened to sanction the permanent abandonment of the suffering Palatinate and Protestant cause to the forces of the Habsburg Antichrist. Spain, many believed, was England's natural enemy, and the marriage alliance but a cunning plan to engineer England's capitulation to Spanish aspirations for a "universal monarchy" under the political sway of Madrid and the spiritual sway of Rome. Opposition to, and anxiety about, James's foreign policy, took many forms—from parliamentary agitation during the turbulent 1621 sessions, to the rowdy jeers of London apprentices hurled at the Spanish ambassador, Don Diego de Sarmiento, Count Gondomar. Opposition was also expressed in a variety of polemical writing. Pamphlets attacking the Match and warning of Spain's sinister ambitions were printed abroad and smuggled into England to be consumed by a voracious public. Newsletters and printed serial newspapers (corantos) reported in detail the shifting military fortunes of the Protestant cause. Parliamentary speeches, leaked letters of advice, and other critical tracts circulated as manuscript separates. And alongside the pamphlets, copied down next to separates, enclosed in newsletters, were verse libels.

We have chosen to organize our collection of the extant verse libels on the Spanish Match into six interlinked subsections. The first assembles a small group of poems that couched their anxieties and hopes in the form of prophecy, alongside which we have also chosen to include James I's verses explicitly mocking his contemporaries' tendency to interpret signs and prodigies as portents of imminent doom. The second subsection collects those poems that deal explicitly or implicitly with the diplomatic and military issues surrounding the Bohemia-Palatinate crisis. The third subsection collects a small group of verses attacking the Spanish ambassador Gondomar, whose second posting to England from 1620 to 1622 coincided with the heightening of anxieties about the Spanish Match. Subsection four publishes two of the most remarkable libels of the age, one framed as the petition of the English common people to the late Queen Elizabeth, and the other purporting to be the Queen's reply. The paired poems generate a truly radical energy, merging prophetic urgency, providentialism, and scriptural warrant with a markedly anti-Stuart nostalgia for a heavily idealized Elizabethan golden age. The fifth subsection collects the significant mass of politicized manuscript verse triggered by the reckless 1623 journey to Madrid by Prince Charles and the royal favourite Buckingham. The Prince and favourite seem to have imagined the voyage as a romantic attempt to finally secure the marriage alliance through a kind of chivalric *coup de théatre*. Among their shocked contemporaries, however, the voyage inspired bewildered fear and widespread criticism only partially countered by some impassioned defences. For many, 1623 appeared to promise nothing but catastrophe for both the nation and the True Religion. For several months, the heir to the throne was in Madrid, under Spanish control and surveillance, and prey both to the pressure to convert to Rome, and to the machinations of Spanish diplomats eager to extract religious toleration for English Catholics as the price of a marriage treaty. Back in England, the easing of persecution of Catholics as part of the negotiations with Spain had allowed several openly Catholic peers to achieve prominence and office, and had triggered a wave of highprofile conversions at court, including the sensational conversion of Buckingham's mother, Mary Compton, Countess of Buckingham. And in Germany, the Palatinate cause seemed more hopeless then ever—in February 1623, the Duke of Bavaria had been appointed the new Elector Palatine, and by May the whole of Frederick's inheritance was under Habsburg control. Many of the anxieties and debates generated by these events are documented in the libels and counter-libels written during the Prince's absence from February to October 1623. The libels also document the sheer joy to which these anxieties turned upon the arrival home of the unmarried—and increasingly Hispanophobic—Prince in October 1623.

While the poems in this section form a relatively coherent body of work, they also connect in many ways with poems in other sections. Notably, our final subsection includes two powerful verse commentaries on the frenetic libelling of the early 1620s—one probably written by James I himself, the other by a poet known only as "Wm T.". Both poems direct their fire at particular charges levelled in the libels of the age, and at the broader political implications of the whole culture of libelling. Wm T.'s anti-libel, for instance, alludes openly to verses (published in Section L) that branded James I's favourite Buckingham as the king's homosexual "Ganymede". Similarly, a number of other verses in Section N allude to grievances connected to the debate on monopolies and corruption that preoccupied the 1621 Parliament (see Section M). Anti-popish and anti-Spanish anxieties that appear throughout Section N can also be found in the major poem in Section K ("Some would complaine of Fortune & blinde chance"), in some of the poems on the execution of Ralegh (Section I), and in some of those on the Roos-Lake scandal (Section J). These overlaps should make clear that our decision to thematically organize the poetry written between 1616 and 1623 into Sections I through N should not preclude attention to the numerous interconnections between the libels composed during this period.

While we note below some of the more interesting scholarly commentary on individual libels, the most important general reconstruction of the politics of the pamphlet, poetic and parliamentary debates on the Spanish Match can be found in the opening chapter of Cogswell's *Blessed Revolution*.