Author/s:
Cordner, Anna Schneider

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EMBODYING OPPOSITION: EARLY MODERN LIBEL AND THE POLITICS OF PERSONALITY

Anna Schneider Cordner

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Abstract

Embodying Opposition: Early Modern Libel and the Politics of Personality presents a study of libelling in England during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that situates this practice within the literary and political cultures of the period. Literary and historical debates that have positioned libels on the margins of discussions about the relationship between literature and politics in this period are revaluated. Instead, it is argued that libels can be read as a central vehicle for articulating political discontent. As the thesis demonstrates, libels' *ad hominem* mode of address challenged an early modern system of spiritual and secular governance in which authority was insistently embodied and personalised. Accordingly, this thesis focuses in particular on those libels that sought to inflict reputational damage on the most prominent individuals associated with the church and court. The explanatory context for reading these libels is provided by the contested literary, legal, cultural and material constructions of 'libel' as a textual form, and of 'libelling' as a seditious activity, which is traced from the middle of the 1580s to the end of the 1620s. This period encompasses the death of Queen Elizabeth I and the succession of King James I and provides the historical basis for an examination of the transformation of libelling in response to two distinct styles of monarchical government. This study is developed through an investigation of the linguistic and rhetorical strategies of libellous texts that focus on, in turn: Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester; Queen Elizabeth I; Richard Bancroft and John Whitgift, successive Archbishops of Canterbury; King James I; and, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. How these libellous critiques were received and perceived is further explored through close analyses of a range of other texts that comment on the phenomenon, including diaries, letters, royal proclamations, essays, and so-called counter-libels.

Declaration

I certify that:

1. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD
2. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used
3. the thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of bibliographies and appendices, as approved by the Research Higher Degrees Committee

Anna Schneider Cordner, 2020

A Note on Texts

In passages quoted from early modern texts, I have silently modernized i/j and u/v, and expanded abbreviations and contractions.

List of Abbreviations

Add. MS	Additional Manuscript
BL	British Library, London
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CELM	*Catalogue of Early Literary Manuscript 1450-1700*
EEBO	*Early English Books Online*
Eg. MS	Egerton Manuscript
ESL	*Early Stuart Libels*
Harl. MS	Harleian Manuscript
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*

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INTRODUCTION

Situating Early Modern English Libel

> Good name in man and woman, dear my lord
> Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
> Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
> 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
> But he that filches from me my good name
> Robs me of that which not enriches him
> And makes me poor indeed
>
> William Shakespeare, *Othello*, III.iii.155-161

This thesis is a study of the changing practice and perception of libelling in England during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. In particular, it focuses on libellous writing that draws attention to the prominence of powerful individuals in the church and at court.

Over the last twenty years there has been a growing scholarly interest in the apparent intensification of libellous writing during the late-Elizabethan and early-Stuart periods. Seemingly both ubiquitous and curiously fugitive, in the language of the day libels are found 'scattered,' 'cast about' 'running up and down.' They are 'scandalous libels,' 'foolishe and dangerous rimes' and 'vauntinge verses.' Libellers themselves are characterised as 'heralds of the devil', at times by the same people who took an avid interest in collecting them. The Suffolk minister and diarist John Rous writes: 'I hate these following railing rimes, yet keep them for president [precedent] of the times.'[1] A later miscellany compiled by the Reverend William Cole (1714-82) echoes Rous's sentiment. Alongside his transcription of verses on the death of John Felton (who was responsible for the killing of James I's and Charles I's great favourite George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham), Cole writes: 'I put not these verses down here for any merit that is in them: but only to show the wicked spirit of the Puritan and Republican faction of that time.'[2] The Elizabethan lawyer, John Hawarde (c.1571-1631) reporting on the Attorney General, Edward Coke,

1 John Rous, *Diary of John Rous, Incumbent of Santon Downham, Suffolk, from 1625-1642*, ed. Mary Anne Everett Green (London: Camden Society, 1856), 109.
2 William Cole, BL Add MS 5832, 197v.

bemoaned the 'growing vice' of libels in 1602. There 'are more infamous libels [now] within a few days than ever there were in the ages last past.'[3] For Hawarde, as for Cole and Rous, libels were both scourge and symptom; ephemeral yet acknowledged as centrally significant to the period.

What early moderns perceived as the malign and extraordinary escalation of the transmission and circulation of libellous writing has led literary historians to suggest that writing of this kind grew to 'near-epidemic proportions in Elizabethan and Jacobean England.'[4] Unsurprisingly, there are tensions about how to interpret the significance of these texts, and indeed, how and where they might fit in with traditional literary, political and historical narratives of the period. These debates in turn are complicated by insufficient attention to what might be considered fundamental categorical or generic questions about the nature of libel. These more intrinsic questions are always to some extent at stake in scholarly studies; however, they seldom constitute the primary focus and are frequently subsumed into the concerns of broader enquiries. This practice tends to conceal how mobile 'libel' was as a term in this period. Used as a kind of catchall, or umbrella term, that did not securely designate a coherent conceptual category, or genre of writing, the semantic scope of the term was one of its most distinctive features.

Writing in his 'Treatise of the Court of the Star Chamber,' William Hudson notes that:

> Libels are of several kinds; either by scoffing at the person or another in rhyme or prose, or by personating him, thereby to make him ridiculous; or by setting up horns at his gate, or picturing or describing him; or by writing of some base or defamatory letter, and publishing the same to others, or some scurvy love-letter to himself, whereby it is not likely but he should be provoked to break the peace.[5]

In discussing the great variety and hybridity of libel in the last decade of Elizabeth I's reign, the eminent early modern politician and philosopher, Francis Bacon points to precisely these problems of classification:

> It is strange what a number of libellous and defamatory books and writings, and in what variety, with what art and cunning handled, have been allowed to pass through the world in all languages against her majesty and her government:

3 Hawarde, *Les Reportes Del Cases in Camera Stellata (1593-1609) from the Original MS. Of John Hawarde*, ed. William Paley Balidon (London, 1894), 143.
4 David Cressy, *Dangerous Talk: Scandalous, Seditious and Treasonable Speech in Pre-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35.
5 William Hudson, "Treatise of the Court of Star Chamber," in *Collectanea Juridica: Consisting of Tracts Relative to the Law and Constitution of England,* 2 vols. (London, 1791), 2: 100.

> sometimes pretending the gravity and authority of church stories to move belief; sometimes formed into remonstrances and advertisements of estate to move regard; sometimes presented as it were in tragedies of the persecutions of Catholics to move pity; sometimes contrived into pleasant pasquils and satires to move sport: so there is no shape whereinto these fellows have not transformed themselves…[6]

Libels were antagonistic of the social hierarchies, codes and conventions of a patronage culture reliant upon social deference but still, according to Bacon, it was difficult to point to a coherent political vision, unifying literary theme, or single material form. In modern day terms they did not, for instance, constitute what could be considered to be a political movement, insofar as they did not clearly coalesce around a shared set of issues or values. And yet, as Bacon's observations suggest, in an era in which there was no standing army or independent bureaucracy to enforce the monarch's will, libellous and defamatory writing threatened the stability of state; insofar as 'both the co-operation of the political nation and the obedience of the lower orders rested more on a culture and ideology of order than on any physical coercion.'[7] Although these 'books and writings' were written in this case against the 'Queen and her government', Bacon implies that libels were able to 'pass through the world' unchecked, because they took on the form of traditional literary, ecclesiastical and political genres: 'church stories', 'remonstrances and advertisements', 'tragedies', and 'pasquils and satires'.

Formal inventiveness and imitation accelerated in the libellous writing of the early Stuart period, where anagrams, acrostics, chronograms, ballads, rhymes, epigrams and epitaphal manuscript libels superseded the famous printed prose libels of Elizabeth's reign. This thesis takes up the particular problem of early modern libel's categorical identification as a constitutive and meaningful feature of the form itself. I suggest that what appeared to Bacon to be libel's troubling interpretive instability was a consequence of its evolving status as a mode of popular criticism and enquiry into the activities of royal, government and church powers, as well as a consequence of a series of acute historical and political contingencies to which libellous writing was reactive.

In addition, and perhaps more fundamentally, these categorical identifications were all the more complex because the term 'libel' both indicated and activated a relationship to a set

6 Francis Bacon, "Certain Observations Upon A Libel" (1592) in *The Oxford Francis Bacon I: Early Writings 1584-1598*, ed. Alan Stewart with Harriet Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
7 Kevin Sharpe, "The King's Writ: Royal Authors and Royal Authority in Early Modern England," in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (London: Macmillan, 1994), 117.

of legal expectations, as distinct from the literary and rhetorical contexts of their composition. Discussions of authorial intention are now often regarded as a kind of category error; however, an intrinsic notion of authorial intentionality is hard to escape from in the case of libels, which generally sprang from the savage critical, social or political judgements of their authors. Moreover, although libels appropriated a range of literary forms, familiarity with specific social and political affairs were as crucial for their understanding as any set of aesthetic or formal criteria. Situated between artefact and artifice, early modern libels (as Bacon's text also suggests) seemed to be designed to appeal to the emotions of their readers, either to 'move pity…or sport,' and in this sense arguably functioned as varieties of rhetorical construction. A verse libel warning King James about the corrupt behaviour of Buckingham, for example, might have been written in an epideictic mode, a particular rhetorical form of praise or blame for offering advice to a monarch, but interpreted by the object of its advice as a seditious libel.

Libelling was embedded in the politics of the state as a criminal, as well as civil wrong, remedied according to the laws governing seditious libel or the medieval statute *Scandalum Magnatum*. As James Loxley has argued: 'to call a text a libel was to 'frame an accusation, with the implication that its status [was] not self-evident, that the accusation must be justified or refuted, and that grounds must therefore be adduced, authorities and schemata appealed to.'[8] Loxley's understanding of the legalistic framing of libel gives a sense of the broad reach of these texts in the distinct but regularly conflated discursive cultures of the period. Through analysis and discussion of libellous texts from the middle of the 1580s, this thesis aims to demonstrate that by the end of the 1620s, the *ad hominem* style favoured by libel had become an especially relevant mode for commenting on what the culture itself was ever-more critical of: the corrupt and scandalous effects of a personalised political culture.

Given the many and varied senses in which the term 'politics' is currently used, it is worth explaining, at the outset, the ways in which I use it in this thesis. Early modern libels commented on a range of everyday political affairs: decisions to go to war, to raise taxes, unscrupulous public officials, suppression of religious groups, and so on. Political life encompassed not just members of the court or of parliament but also members of the

[8] James Loxley, "On Exegetical Duty: Historical Pragmatics and the Grammar of the Libel," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2006): 83–104.

clergy, who were in this period involved directly in the day-to-day business of social governance. Anchored by the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose realm, his religion), the early modern English state was deeply invested in a political field broadly conceived. Early modern theologians, politicians, poets and playwrights all acknowledged the essential role of religion in state affairs and religious controversy or dissent was understood to be disabling of state security. Because this thesis is primarily interested in tracking a changing political culture and the significance of libel in that culture, 'politics' here is also used to refer as broadly as possible to the myriad forms in which power relations are expressed and/or challenged in a culture. In this I am working with a primarily Foucauldian and new historicist model of sovereign power and its 'juridico-political coding'.[9] This convention of politics often draws attention to those particular manifestations of power which 'radiate out from political sovereignty: censorship, punishment, surveillance, and above all spectacle.'[10] These included: royal public progresses and entertainments; the baptisms, marriages and funeral services, the opening of parliament; public execution and so on, as well as the textual and often more nuanced articulation of power: in official speeches; in the strategic paraphrasing of Biblical text in sermons.

As many scholars have shown us, early modern writers developed ways to subtly but decisively intervene in and challenge the vision of political consensus that the sovereign was at pains to enforce. Poetic strategies included for example, the analogues of epic poetry and dramatic form and the Petrarchan constructions of courtly love poetry. Like these traditional literary forms, libels regularly offered a competing interpretation of current events. In particular, libels specialised in what might be regarded as a rather heavy-handed demystification of institutional power, figured through the personalised dissection of key office-holders. It is often argued that references to substantive political issues were either 'missing' or relegated to the periphery. However, the strategies employed by these *ad hominem* attacks, which were typically focused on personal failing and moral weakness represented through alleged acts of sexual transgression or grotesque descriptions of the human body and its functions, registered a fundamental concern with the condition of political influence and authority, namely that it was perforce subject to the personal inclinations of whomever occupied the office.

9 Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 3.
10 Halpern, 3.

The extensive reach of libellous expression was significantly indebted to the diverse publication and media strategies employed by writers, readers and copyists. The same libel might be written down in a diary, sent in a letter, printed and circulated in manuscript, sung aloud or pinned up in public. These last two approaches in particular cast libel into a public arena where there was a particular fear that the denigration of official figures might foment more serious forms of community opposition. Libels of public officials rarely took the radical positions of the literature of the mid-century. No libel in the period covered by this thesis properly entertained the notion that the monarch her or himself had or could commit a criminal act. In their focus on spiritual and moral failings, however, it is argued that they opened the way for more revolutionary ideas.

To speak about the emergence of libel as a particular kind of early modern criticism or opposition is to suggest that despite their myriad motivations and forms, their *ad hominem* style of critique did represent a shared, albeit loose vision of the failure of political or spiritual power as the result of the subordination of both to self-interest. Libels represented the condition of early modern English political culture insofar as their personalised attacks were arguably invested in modes associated particularly with hierarchical societies: reputation, honour, shaming rituals and so on, but as this thesis argues, libels also radically modified the conditions and terms under which this hierarchy was able to be publicly discussed and perceived.

To try and explore in more detail how libel developed and took hold as a form of dissent, this thesis covers a period beginning in the late Elizabethan era and ending with the death of James I. With some important exceptions, scholarly studies regularly emphasise the early Stuart period as the historical moment in which libel achieved a visible cultural significance.[11] While many of these studies glance back to the late-Elizabethan period, most are interested in exploring libel, and verse libel in particular, as an early Stuart form *par excellence.* In an evaluation of critical accounts of early Stuart libels Alastair Bellany has commented on the value of taking a longer view on this inquiry:

> Our understanding of the verse libel's genealogy is still hazier than it should be. Early Stuart historians clearly need to look back and undertake a more intensive

11 See especially, Steven May and Alan Bryson, *Verse Libel in Renaissance England and Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

> search for earlier Elizabethan and early Tudor songs, libels, and political satires, and for their medieval predecessors as well.'[12]

In keeping with literary historical scholarship that considers the continuities and breaks between Elizabethanism and Jacobeanism, I seek to develop a comparative account of early modern libel by considering the relationship between late Elizabethan iterations of the form and their arguably more famous early-Stuart counterparts. This involves asking what features of the text—its themes, its material form, intrinsic or extrinsic factors readers and writers were responding to when they called something a libel, and the reasons this changed over time. The significance of libel's changing textual forms, which moved between prose, poetry, and even drama, is discussed, as is the significance of shifts in political circumstance, including changing legal regulations and the transfer of monarchical power from an English female to a Scottish male.

In order to bring to light how libelling came to have a political purchase, I also explore the changing interpretation of what constituted 'libel' as well as how early moderns read and repurposed these texts. What such a comparative study brings to light, I suggest, is how libel's discursive emergence at this time relied upon a series of cultural processes involving symbolic and linguistic accretion and recurrence, profoundly conditioned by developments in late Elizabethan satire and libel. This case is further developed through an investigation of the linguistic and rhetorical strategies of libellous texts that focus on, in turn: Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester; Queen Elizabeth I; Richard Bancroft and John Whitgift, successive Archbishops of Canterbury; King James I; and, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. In addition, I explore how these libellous critiques were received and perceived through close analyses of a range of other texts that comment on the phenomenon, including diaries, letters, royal proclamation, essays, and so-called counter-libels. I aim to show how libelling intervened in a political culture still heavily striated by the force of powerful personalities and structured by orthodox beliefs regarding social hierarchy and interpretive authority. In a political culture so structured, libels posed a series of unique rhetorical challenges and emerged as an exemplary mode of political critique, albeit one that initially, at least, sought more to clarify rather than seriously challenge social and political orthodoxies.

[12] Alastair Bellany, "'Railing Rhymes Revisited: Libels, Scandals, and Early Stuart Politics,'" *History Compass* 5, no. 4 (2007): 1165.

After a review of the literary and historical scholarship on libelling in this period, the argument of the thesis is structured through six further chapters. Each investigates in detail a selection of libellous texts and analyses their cultural and political significance. These readings are loosely organized through the discussion and analysis of phenomena closely associated with the practice of libelling and are comprised of: the relative and unstable status of anonymous and pseudonymous writing versus authored texts; the difficulty of discerning, or grounding, the difference between truth and fiction; and the consequences of the corrupting influence of private interest on political life. Because the appearance of libel as a kind of cultural discourse is complex and uneven in its development, these phenomena receive greater or lesser weight across the six chapters according to their relevance to the particular texts under scrutiny.

As I have been suggesting, and as I explore in greater detail in Chapter 1, scholarly studies of early modern libel are the inheritors of a series of interpretive and definitional challenges. The criminal and civil statutes against libel, in addition to pre-publication censorship, meant that it was barely conceivable that the writer or printer of a text would ever claim to be publishing a libel. In the scribal communities where verse libel in particular flourished, copyists do often identify, albeit after-the-fact, this or that verse as a 'libel.' However, it was just as common for verse, including a verse that had on another occasion been identified as a libel, to appear without a title or simply for the scribe to adopt its first line as a convenient stand-in. 'Libel' unlike, for instance, its close generic relative 'satire,' never simply announced itself. Rather, libel was a hermeneutic invention, a designation that already implied an act of interpretation, whether in the form of a juridical pronouncement or the more casual verdict of the everyday reader.

The problem of categorisation is complicated further by the range of uses to which the term could be applied in this period. Etymologically, the term 'libel' derived from the word *libellus* meaning 'a small book.' It could be used to refer to any written matter that broadly fitted this description, without necessarily implying any defamatory intent or effect. To put this in context, in the same period the meanings of slander or defamation cluster around their still current sense of spoken scandal and damage to reputation.[13] The legibility of libel, on the other hand, involved a closer attention to the context of the utterance, in order to recognize the distinction that is being made between the use of the term as it describes an

[13] *OED*, s.v. "libel (n.)."

illicit mode of discourse, or as it signals the material condition of a text. Such distinctions or discriminations involve a particular kind of historically attuned reading and spring from a genuine need, as Bellany has noted, to test 'our current sense of the distinctiveness of the early Stuart phenomena.'[14] Quentin Skinner's interpretation and application of the language philosophers John Searle and J.L Austin's work on the illocutionary force of speech acts is helpful here. Skinner's proposition for a hermeneutic practice, a rhetorical pragmatics, which can read a kind of authorial intention through the reconstruction of both the 'prevailing conventions' governing the discourse as well as construing the possible frame of reference or mental world of the writer, have generated new possibilities for historically informed readings of these texts.[15] Annabel Patterson's influential theorisation of the 'hermeneutics of censorship' has also provided an essential model for reading back from the rhetorical strategies of a text to 'a cultural bargain between writers and political leaders.'[16] Patterson's focus on often dramatic texts in which ambiguity is the characteristic poetic strategy or manoeuvre is in contrast to writers of libels, for whom there was no commercial impetus to negotiate with state authorities and for whom anonymous modes of publication could provide a reasonable shield from prosecution.

While the following six chapters share the same fundamental theoretical concerns, each chapter turns to a closer examination of a different libellous text or texts. Similarly, while aiming to draw out the many overlapping and persistent ideas and themes, each chapter broadly focuses on a different but key historical moment in the early modern construction of libellous discourse. For the sake of narrative continuity, at the beginning of parts two and three I briefly recapitulate each of their main concerns and summarise the major concerns they raise. In the first chapter, 'Classifying Early Modern Libel' (which also comprises Part One of the thesis), I consider the current critical frameworks informing discussions of early modern libel and historically situate libel as an emerging mode of early modern political discourse. Some of the advantages and limitations of current critical approaches to early modern libel are discussed as well as some of the theoretical

14 Bellany, "'Railing Rhymes Revisited: Libels, Scandals, and Early Stuart Politics,'" 1165.
15 Quentin Skinner, "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretations of Texts," *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972): 406. See also: Quentin Skinner, "Hermeneutics and the Role of History," *New Literary History* 7, no. 1 (1975): 209-232; Alastair Fowler, "The Selection of Literary Constructs," *New Literary History* 7, no. 1 (1975): 39-55, Frank Lentricchia, "E.D. Hirsch: The Hermeneutics of Innocence," in *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 257–80, Sandy Petrey, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
16 Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*: *The Conditions of Reading and Writing in Early Modern England* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 8.

complexities associated with this study. In addition, I trace the development of the category of 'libel' from the early sixteenth century as a legal term predominantly used to refer to a bill of divorcement, to its emergence by the turn of the century as an apparently widespread cultural phenomenon, signifying written defamation. In particular, I focus on a key piece of legislation, the 1605 change in statute covered by Edward Coke's report *de Libellis Famosis*, possibly the most significant article of legal regulation in terms of expanding the influence of libel into popular culture. Coke's report reiterated the hostile approach to satirico-libellous writing but paradoxically strengthened the idea of libel as a form of political discourse.

Chapters 2 and 3 in Part Two ('Contesting Consensus: Elizabethan Libel and Satire'), examine two late-Elizabethan libellous texts: *The Copie of a Leter wryten by a Master of Arts of Cambridge,* (1584) a text which is now more commonly known as *Leicester's Commonwealth*; and the infamous Martin Marprelate tracts (1588-89). I explore how readings of these texts' libellous assaults on a royal favourite and senior clergy shed new light on the operation of libellous discourse in the Elizabethan period and beyond. The popularity and influence of both these texts grants them a certain representative status in the satirico-libellous writing of the period.

Many libels in the early seventeenth century appear to have been grounded in Puritan dissatisfaction. The *Commonwealth* and Marprelate tracts, however, emanated from opposite sides of the confessional divide and underscore that the practice of libelling was not the exclusive province of one or other religio-political side. Both texts also provide important rhetorical antecedents for the Jacobean libels on royal favourites and church figures. Providing key examples of the perceived connection between libelling royal appointees and undermining the monarch, these texts also anticipate forms of libelling of royal appointees which impacted a hegemonic ideal of monarchy. The writers of the *Commonwealth* and the Marprelate tracts both insist on their fundamental loyalty to the Queen who, they claim, is not the focus of their censure. However, while the Queen appears to be strategically marginalised in these texts, she resurfaces as the silent term in the writers' strong critiques of royal appointees. Elizabeth's relative absence from these libellous assaults on her court and church provide a striking point of contrast to the dominant mode of Jacobean verse libels. Although many Jacobean libels still insist on their fundamental loyalty to monarchy, this principle is regularly undercut by an insistent focus

on not just the figure of the favourite but James I himself. I argue that the *Commonwealth* and Marprelate tracts mark an under-examined but crucial episode in the developing practice of early modern libelling which continued to shape the early modern interpretation of libels into the early Stuart period. In particular, I suggest that thinking about the influence of these printed prose critiques on the verse libel of the early seventeenth century sheds light on several material and formal modifications in libellous discourse. Such an approach underlines the endurance of particular forms of libellous figures, themes and expression which gained currency independently of their textual form.

Chapter 4, 'Libel, Late Elizabethan Satire and the Bishops' Ban,' moves into the very final years of Elizabeth's reign and focuses on the historical and literary conditions which initiated an important transition from the prose forms of the *Commonwealth* and Marprelate tracts to the verse forms with which libellous writing became most strongly associated. This chapter discusses the revival of neo-classical satiric forms in the final decade of Elizabeth's reign and their endorsement of *ad hominem* forms of literary composition. I consider how renewed interest in these forms intersected with the intensification of factional struggle at court thereby launching libellous forms of writing into the cultural mainstream. This chapter also discusses the significance of the bishops' ban of 1599, which after nearly a decade of unprecedented literary experimentation with satire, recalled several of these texts and outlawed the printing of further satires. I examine the list of texts prohibited by the ban and explore the relationship it cements between satire and unlicensed and libellous forms of writing, in particular.

Historical toleration of satires had meant that many so-called libellers could appeal against this allegation by claiming that their work was satirical and corrective rather than defamatory and seditious. However, the bishops' ban effectively eliminated this useful slippage, recasting satire as entirely illegitimate and therefore unavailable to accused libellers as an alibi against such accusations. In other words, the ban resulted in the loss of any cognate and legitimizing genre. This chapter offers a provisional account of the contemporary legal and social context for libelling practices in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and prepares the ground for the more focused readings of Jacobean libels presented in the remaining chapters.

The final part of the thesis, 'Interpreting Authority: Jacobean Authority and the Poet-King', explores the escalation of verse libel as an increasingly overt form of political opposition from the very beginning of James I's reign. Chapter 5 considers the significance of the transition in styles of royal authority from Elizabeth I to James I. Poets writing panegyrics to mark the occasion of James's succession faced a number of conceptual impasses as they tried to praise, through poetry, a king himself considered to be a proficient poet. As discussed, the obstacles these poets encountered anticipated James's personalised style of governance. These included his willingness to grant preference and even offices of power to those in his favour, a point of great contention both at court and beyond. Close readings of two verses written at this transitional moment, are used to illustrate how changing political circumstance can be seen to have actively shaped interpretations of libelling.

Chapter 6 focuses on some of the most famous libels of James's reign and in particular, those inspired by his intimacy with his favourite, George Villiers. The ascendancy of Buckingham coincided with a series of political conflicts between the king and his parliament concerning revenue-raising, as well as James's pursuit of a marriage match between his son Charles, and the Spanish Infanta Maria. Seeking a vehicle for complaint, James's 'lavish' relationship with his favourite came under particularly close scrutiny.

As well as publishing poetry that followed in a vatic tradition of poetic composition, including lyric, pastoral and epic poetry, James also wrote verse that addressed topical matters, and unlike Elizabeth, this included verse that responded directly to the libellers and their libellous allegations. I argue that James I's vision of himself as a poet-king and his interventions into this 'ephemeral' and more personal or subjective mode of verse, inadvertently exposed him and the principle of monarchy he embodied to the damaging effects of libellous writing.

In order to make this case, I consider several poems written by James that register and respond to the proliferation of libels. In particular, I examine James's most extensive treatment of libels in 'The wiper of the Peoples teares' (1622), his poetic rejoinder to a now lost libel entitled 'The Common Teares' (1621). Exchanging the distinctly royal preserve of the proclamation for rhyming couplets, a medium he had previously denigrated for its associations with the 'rash Imaginations' of his subjects, James's poem registers the

injunctive force of libellous verse. A refusal of the capacity of libels to inflict real damage, this poem epitomizes a disavowal which its own composition inherently undermines. Just as the anti-Martinists' appropriation of Martinist style, inadvertently worked to sanction the very libellous style it rejected, James's response to the verse libel also worked to indirectly endorse this kind of writing as an appropriate vehicle for serious debate. Elizabeth, whose motto *Video et Taceo* ('I see and keep silent') summed up her attitude to libellous incursions, had chosen to respond to transgressive writing via the official channels of royal proclamation and legal statute. The queen herself never responded directly to the allegations made by libellous writing. James, perhaps encouraged by his sense of himself as a poet, seems to have felt driven to answer the libellers on their own terms. His intervention, however, both elevated the profile of libelling and arguably sanctioned a notion of the medium as a legitimate vehicle for debating political matters.

My concluding chapter provides a summary of my key findings and suggests further avenues of research. I briefly refer to the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham as the apotheosis of the libellous culture I have been investigating, insofar as it provides an example of the potential for libellous discourse to bring about material fissures in the political scene.

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1

CLASSIFYING EARLY MODERN LIBEL

In this chapter I explore some of the key critical and historical contexts for understanding the significance of the early modern practice of libelling powerful individuals. The first part provides a review of the scholarly work most relevant to my own discussion of early modern libelling, in order to situate it in relation to the current critical field. While this thesis calls upon a number of critical categories, there are a cluster of recurring and frequently paired principal terms. They are 'libel' and 'satire;' 'authorship' and 'anonymity;' 'personal' and 'political.' I present detailed and historicised explanations of the conceptual territory covered by these terms. Then as now, these categories were themselves subject to continuing interrogation, revision and debate. What was almost never in question, however, was the fundamental and conditioning relationship of each category to the other. These ideas, despite often overlapping, are frequently invoked and developed as sets of antitheses. Divisions of this kind performed dubious, if arguably essential ideological work: making it possible, for instance, for satire to be assimilated as a legitimate form of critique, while libel was regarded, quite literally, as the inscription of sedition. My interest in considering the changing contemporary and critical construction and interplay of these categories is to show how contingent the early modern construction of libel was on a range of intersecting, and always partial acts of interpretation.

Far from emerging *sui generis* in the early Stuart period, the practice of libelling developed from and was conditioned by a range of earlier literary, political and historical pressures, not least the many official and unofficial attempts to regulate transgressive language. This thesis, however, is primarily concerned with libel as an exemplary kind of text within a political culture increasingly troubled by the executive prerogatives of powerful personalities. Accordingly, the narrative I trace focuses mostly on the ways in which libel developed in response to heavily personalized modes of royal and ecclesiastical power and representation.

Whether explicitly or implicitly, libel routinely pits the limits of royal prerogative against the legal protections provided for by the ancient rights of Magna Carta (1215). Libels also participate in early modern debates regarding the possibility of a literary or moral truth as distinguishable from factual truth. Current approaches emphasise, for instance, how verse libels thrived in an early Stuart culture that itself appeared steeped in the stuff of popular fiction: 'court scandal and notorious favourites.'[17] Literary, political and philosophical debates about the nature of truth, authority, and interpretation, form the wider interpretive contexts that both shape and were shaped by the development of early modern understandings of libel. The final part of this chapter traces the etymology of the term and offers an account of some of the key lexical transformations in early modern understandings of libel in the period leading up to the final decades of Elizabeth I's reign and the succession of James I.

The approach I have taken has been influenced by Raymond Williams's method in his inquiry into a selection of twentieth century 'keywords.' Williams argues that modulations in the meaning of some of the most familiar cultural terms are the necessary distillates of larger social and cultural transformations. Discussing the different conditions under which a unit of vocabulary might be modified, Williams notes those instances when a word appears to be split between two seemingly distinct arenas or discourses. In particular, those words which 'beginning in specialized contexts, have become quite common in descriptions of wider areas of thought and experience.'[18] Like Williams, I aim to point to those moments where the meaning of 'libel' appears to undergo an extension, modification or reduction. Similarly, my approach is informed by a genealogical understanding of value and ideology that aims to tie the developments of term and concept together.[19] This method puts stress on the historical movement of 'libel' from a statement of sheer fact to a statement of value.[20] Early moderns themselves appreciated the tension in the semantic work done by the word 'libel'. Although the legal sense of 'libel' was stabilising to mean

17 Andrew McRae, *Literature,* 8.
18 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Flamingo, 1983), 14.
19 This genealogical approach to historical analysis is based on Michel Foucault's development of Frederich Nietzsche's work in *The Genealogy of Morals*. For instance, see Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D.F Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139-64; Foucault's analysis of the emergence of the modern coercive institution is exemplary of this approach, see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977). For instances of genealogical approaches to early modern culture, see Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation*, and Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (New York: Methuen, 1986).
20 Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 13.

the defamation of an individual, in common parlance a libel was often perceived to be any 'anti-government writing, regardless of whether it defamed an individual.'[21] In clarifying these two strains – in order, it may be assumed, to defend the court against accusations of misconduct – Hudson registers the prevailing semantic tension:

> But it must not be understood [that these prosecutions were] of libels which touch the alteration of government;…but libels against the king's person and nobles have here been examined.[22]

The identification of tensions or divergences in linguistic and semantic construction can be used, as Terry Eagleton has suggested, to expose underpinning ideological structures. This entails paying close attention to standard usage, for 'in order to be able to decipher an ideological system of discourse, we must already be in possession of the normative, undistorted use of terms.' Specifically, the purpose of this approach is to demonstrate the change 'libel' undergoes, from the specialized institutional meaning of the term, as a kind of legal document, to a term with widespread cultural and moral valency. This was able to occur, in large part I suggest, because the individuals these texts scrutinised were central to the structure of that political culture. It is libel in this secondary sense that this thesis is concerned with exploring.

Tracing changing conceptions of the term and its use is also designed to extend critical accounts that prioritise an early Stuart conception of verse libel. This method 'mak[es] visible a singularity at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant, an immediate anthropological trait or an obviousness that imposes itself uniformly on all.'[23] Once again, although 'libel' was a term of legal language, deriving from civil and ecclesiastical statute, it did not always signify that a legal process had taken place; many texts that never came before a court were referred to and regarded as 'libels.' Exploring this critical assumption as it applies to cases for slander, M. Lindsay Kaplan has argued that this critical practice neglects the significance of 'the body of law [that] developed around defamation… for shaping larger cultural expectations about what can or cannot be

21 Philip Hamburger, "The Development of the Law of Seditious Libel and the Control of the Press," *Stanford Law Review* 37, no. 3 (1985): 696.
22 Hudson, "Treatise of the Court of Star Chamber," 100.
23 He calls this "making visible," "eventialisation," which also involves: 'rediscovering the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies and so on, that at a given moment establish what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal and necessary. In this sense, one is indeed effecting a sort of multiplication or pluralisation of causes.' Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method: An Interview with Michel Foucault," *Ideology and Consciousness* 8 (1981): 6.

said or written.'[24] I suggest that by the end of the period covered in this thesis, libel carried both the precise legal sense of a written defamation with seditious effects, as well as being used more informally to identify any topical and/or scandalising item of writing. In other words, by the end of this period, 'libel' and 'libelling' had become loosened from their identification with either the sheer 'document,' or normative sense of legal defamation. In their place, I suggest, this term was used as cultural shorthand to signal what were regarded as popular expressions of opposition or dissent. Following from this, it can be suggested that the texts which we read as 'libels' can be thought of as the tangible index of modes of subversive interrogation of political life. Such indices are otherwise more difficult to uncover as they were predominantly the product of oral culture. Writing at the very end of the period in question, Francis Bacon conveys this shift towards libel as a sign of public discord:

> And as there are certain hollow blasts of wind, and secret swellings of seas before a tempest, so there are in states…Libels and licentious discourses against the state, when they are frequent and open; and in like sort, false news often running up and down to the disadvantage of the state, and hastily embraced; are amongst the signs of the troubles.[25]

The mobile use and interpretation of the term that culminates in Bacon's estimation of libel supports this reading, and I suggest that it demonstrates how libelling was construed to have a socio-political signification, in addition to and distinct from its legal status. Reading different early lexicons alongside and against each other, I consider the genealogy of the term as it was conceived from the early sixteenth century up to its decisive legal reimagining by Edward Coke in the early seventeenth century.

Libel: Work or Document?

In recent years, investigations into early modern libels have become a prominent sub-field within literary and historical studies. This emergence can be seen as a tangible realization of the central insights of practitioners of both New Historicism in literary studies and revisionism and post-revisionism in historical studies. While the hermeneutic practice of this study follows closely in the footsteps of these critical practices, particularly in their

[24] M. Lindsay Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6.
[25] Francis Bacon, "Of Seditions and Troubles" in *The Essays, or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 43.

theorization of the dynamic exchanges of literary and political culture, I also seek to move beyond some of their methodological preoccupations. For instance, because libels regularly lack the organising principle of an author or readily available and stable ur-texts or critical editions, they have only relatively recently started to receive attention from scholars of early modern political culture. The relative neglect of libels seems to reflect a continuing reliance on modes of biographical or author-centred interpretation. The acceptance of an idea of the fixed or stable-text can lead, however, to an unnecessarily narrow application of the concepts of political culture and textual authority.

Libels would seem to present as ideal objects of study for such historically informed work, as they bear on the issue of what Margreta de Grazia has called 'the collapse of [the distinction] between work and document that sets New Historicist readings into motion.'[26] Since libels display a high degree of historical specificity, they arguably work to clarify the dynamic interdependency of text and context, power and discourse that these critical practices are putatively invested in bringing to light. In spite of this, studies that take their cue from New Historicism are still predominantly focused on a small number of canonical authors and printed texts.

Two of the most significant recent studies of the effects of early modern libel have been written by historians: Peter Lake's *Bad Queen Bess* and Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell's *The Murder of James I*.[27] Historical studies have provided detailed analyses from both within and about a particular period, from which we might extrapolate. However, they are not necessarily concerned with the exposition of general trends. As a consequence, readings of libel are likely to become sequestered within a specific period and categorised as 'Elizabethan' or 'Early Stuart' libel.[28] For studies including my own, that focus on those libels that address the machinations and manoeuvrings of key figures at court, this can be

26 Margreta De Grazia, "What Is Work? What Is a Document?," in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985-1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton: Renaissance English Text Society, 1993), 202.
27 Peter Lake, *Bad Queen Bess? Libels, Secret Histories, and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell, *The Murder of James I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).
28 For studies that focus on Elizabethan libel see: Alan Bryson and Steven W. May, *Verse Libel in Renaissance England and Scotland*; Julia M. Walker Ed. *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana* (London: Duke University Press, 1998); Steven W. May, *The Elizabethan Courtier Poets: The Poems and their Contexts* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991). Studies that focus on early Stuart libels: Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: News, Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Andrew McRae, *Literature, Satire and the Early Stuart State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

an appropriate and useful framework. However, as intensely topical as libels had become by the 1620s, they also drew on an extensive generic tradition with roots in late-Elizabethan libellous texts which were themselves profoundly influenced by the satiric postures of this period. While I draw heavily on studies that favour discrete periodization, this thesis also seeks to draw greater attention to the modulations libels underwent, as well as their accretive significance, by offering a contrasting analysis of the late-Elizabethan and Jacobean moments. The purpose of this approach is to shed new light on libelling as a practice, the status and significance of which can be seen to rest on several factors that were mediated by this transitional moment. These include the perception of court politics in the last decades of Elizabeth's reign, Jacobean nostalgia for the Elizabethan period, and the perception of James's failings as monarch, and lastly, the slow accumulation of symbolic currency, which ultimately resulted in a recognizable libellous aesthetic.[29] As I discuss in greater detail, this aesthetic involved a kind of blunt literalization of the abstract types associated with formal verse satire.

The idea that a 'post-truth' politics of 'alternative facts' is a distinctive characteristic of modern political life would surely have amused the eminent early modern jurist Edward Coke. As this thesis discusses in greater detail, the phenomenon of libelling led Coke to rule against upholding any functional distinction between truth and falsehood. Libel's mobilization of satiric tropes, combined with an insistence on the real person and event, was considered a combustible political mix. As Andrew McRae has noted, although 'libel was encoded as satire's other,' in practice this distinction was also somewhat murkier than this implied. In many instances libel 'could never satisfactorily be separated from [the] neoclassical genre.'[30] Many of the avid readers and collectors, not to mention the legislators and subjects of libels in the early Stuart period, would have been familiar with the most famous Elizabethan libels and conscious of the representational store on which they were drawing. In other words, I suggest that the apparent popularity of libel in the early-Stuart period needs to be more fully understood as grounded in certain Elizabethan developments in the forms of literary and political expression.

[29] For important studies that focus on the transition between Elizabethan and Jacobean and its effect on literary culture see: Malcolm Smuts, *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1987); Curtis Perry, *The Making of Jacobean Culture: James I and the Renegotiation of Elizabethan Literary Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); John Watkins, *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England: Literature, History, Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[30] McRae, *Literature*, 27-28.

This thesis is concerned with tracing the political and social consequences of libels directed at key figures of church and court, the Archbishop of Canterbury, royal favourites and the monarch. I delimit my enquiry quite narrowly to focus on those libels that take these individual office-holders as a motivating theme. As a result although this thesis has greatly benefited from work that focuses on provincial English libels as well as the practice of libelling in Scotland and abroad, it is beyond the scope of this study to consider these in detail here.[31] Nor is it possible to explore the many instances of the libel of ordinary subjects and of women in particular, which promises to provide another rich point of comparison.[32]

In a connected way, this study is necessarily interested in considering how the attacks on powerful individuals who held office affected the perception of the office itself. Following work by scholars such as Linda Levy Peck and Curtis Perry on royal favourites, I read the libellous scrutiny of these figures as crucial to an understanding of rising anti-court sentiment in the period.[33] The relationship between a monarch and her or his favourite, for instance, drew attention to the contiguity of personal and political interests. This meant, as Perry has suggested, that 'thinking about royal favourites inevitably meant thinking about the uneasy intersection of the personal and the public in a political system traditionally organized around patronage and intimacy.'[34]

31 Foremost amongst historical scholarship on the practice of libelling in the provinces, see J. A Sharpe, *Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: The Church Courts at* York, Borthwick Papers, no.58 (York, 1980); for discussion of the practice of libelling at the French court see Una McIlvenna, *Scandal and Reputation at the Court of Catherine de Medici* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016); and for an account of the culture of libelling in Scotland see Amy Blakeway, "A Scottish Anti-Catholic Satire Crossing the Border: 'Ane Bull of Our Haly Fader the Paip, Quhairby It Is Leesum to Everie Man to Haif Tua Wyffis' and the Redeswyre Raid of 1575," *English Historical Review* 129, no. 541 (2014): 1346–70.

32 Women were prohibited from pursuing claims in the secular courts; however, they were able to go to the ecclesiastical courts and in this setting they constituted the majority of plaintiffs in cases for slander. For detailed discussion of the role of women and representations of gender in early modern cases of slander and libel see especially Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) and Ina Habermann, *Staging Slander and Gender in Early Modern England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003).

33 Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); and Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For the role of the early modern favourite in other European states, see J.H. Elliot and L.W.B. Brockliss eds., *The World of the Favourite* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). For further discussion regarding tensions between the idea of the office and the persona of the office holder see especially Conal Condren, *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England: The Presupposition of Oaths and Offices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

34 Perry, *Literature*, 1.

The scandalous intersection between the personal and political was regularly articulated via an excessive focus on unflattering, degrading or obscene descriptions of the person's body or bodily functions that signified their compromised ability effectively to inhabit office. Douglas Bruster has called this a form of 'embodied writing' which he understands as 'a kind of text, or textual practice' which 'put resonant identities and physical forms on the printed page.'[35] Through their lingering attention to the essential worldliness of these powerful individuals, libels thus worked to lift the veil on the deliberately mystified representations of the court and church. This thesis also considers the relationship between forms of textual authority and royal or sacred authority. As I discuss in much greater detail throughout the thesis, both libels and commentary on libels reveal that these texts were perceived to have a corrosive effect on the temporal power of the court. The instinct of their writers was anti-panegyric and, in so far as these texts performed this function, they also worked to demystify the panegyric vision, which was for monarchy, in particular, a central vehicle of representational power. Most likely because of their connection to folk and oral traditions, especially *charivari* or rough music, libels were often classified as debased literary forms, and often employed a demotic mode of address.

Although this study also considers printed prose libels, vast swathes of libellous material was originally written in verse and circulated in manuscript. These verses are found copied into the letters, manuscript miscellanies, commonplace books and diaries, compiled by individuals or a small number of interested parties. Studies of manuscript culture have been very well placed to respond to contemporary shifts in literary criticism and theory. For instance, questions of materiality, the relative status of manuscript and print, the cost of paper and ink, and the class status of manuscript compilers have been on the agenda for scholars working with manuscripts for a long time. Whereas studies of printed, literary texts quite often suppress the material aspects of print culture, studies of the period's manuscripts are naturally more attentive to the material components of textuality. There has been little need to deconstruct the 'mastertext' as there has been in Shakespeare studies, for example. In part, this is because it is accepted practice amongst scholars of early modern manuscript culture to treat as commonplace the idea that a number of different variants of a text can coincide without believing that one needs to be singled out as originary. Similarly, there has been less need to contend with notions of the singular,

[35] Douglas Bruster, "The Structural Transformation of Print in Late Elizabethan England," in *Print, Manuscript, and Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti and Michael D. Bristol (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 50.

individualised and originating force of the author, as the majority of manuscript texts circulated anonymously and many remain unattributed. Perhaps initially viewed as an impediment to their full incorporation into traditional literary and historical studies, the interest in anonymous libels has both been driven by, and has helped to drive a movement in some areas away from the privileging of single-author studies, towards methodologies that emphasise the concept of both authorship and anonymity as culturally mediated and historically constructed. As a number of scholars have noted, libels were inherently social texts.[36] That is, they circulated, were copied and were also amended and updated by groups of interested parties and, in addition, were often posted in public places for all to see. Libels were also 'social' in the sense that the text of a libel gave shape to the formlessness of rumours, gossip and other unofficial discourses, which, in turn, gave libel both its impetus and theme.

In discussing libels in these terms, I have also been influenced by now classic studies from Mary Hobbs, Arthur Marotti and H.R. Woudhuysen that seek to situate fugitive or fleeting modes of expression in specific political and historical contexts.[37] In particular, this thesis draws on and seeks to contribute to scholarship that considers the rhetorical function of anonymity and pseudonymity in this period. It makes use of well-known theoretical work on the concept of authorship and specifically seeks to problematise the Foucauldian notion of the organising effect of the 'author function' in terms of early modern models of authorship.[38] It follows scholars who conceive of anonymity as a model of authorship that indicates an authorial decision or strategy and hence signifies positively. Anonymity is not read as the mere absence of an author, or as an obstacle to the full interpretation of these texts. Instead, the operation of anonymity is viewed as a strategy of publication and as

[36] For discussions of early modern models of book authorship that also have an application for libels and other unlicensed and unofficial literary practices, see for example Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors and Libraries in Britain Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); and Jerome McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).
[37] Mary Hobbs, "Early Seventeenth-Century Verse Miscellanies and Their Value for Textual Editors," *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700* 1 (1989): 182–210; Hobbs, *Early Seventeenth-Century Verse Miscellany Manuscripts* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992); Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995); and H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
[38] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Critical Theory since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 1986), 138-48; for differing theories of the function of the author; cf. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"[1967] in *Image, Music Text*, ed. and trans., Stephen Heath (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 142-8; Gary Taylor, "What Is an Author [Not]?," *Critical Survey* 7, no. 3 (1995): 241–54.

fundamental to the successful proliferation and renewal of the libellous text across a longer period of time.

This thesis draws heavily on these developments in manuscript studies and has benefitted from ongoing projects to make this material available to a wider audience through online databases and archives. Bellany and McRae's online database, *Early Stuart Libels Online*, as well as Peter Beal's *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts*, in particular, have generated invaluable indices for researchers on early modern libel. However, they do not aim to, nor could they, capture the range of variant texts or the material contexts of their original inscription. Digital projects investigating the history of the book and the history of reading, such as the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters' *The Archaeology of Reading in Modern Europe,* promise to make online platforms replicate not just the archival experience of consulting rare books, but also provide a reading experience akin to that of the early modern reader. In manuscript studies, however, there is still no adequate substitute for consulting texts in the archives in which they are now housed.

In the course of my research I have consulted many variants for each of the manuscript texts that I consider. However, unlike the student of libel committed to systematic analyses, or writing the material history of libel, I have confined myself to samples rather than complete sets, so to speak, of libels. For reasons of scope, scholarly work that comprehensively considers every instance of a particular libellous work is more particularly suited to a narrow historical period. In contrast, the aim of this thesis is to explore how it became possible by the end of the Jacobean period to speak about libel as a particular kind of politicised expression, built on certain recognisable rhetorical strategies and representational patterns across a longer period of time. Although a sense of the range of variants is crucial to this kind of study, for the purposes of illuminating general trends, a certain selectivity is also needed.

As any reader familiar with these texts will know, the student of early modern libel has an abundance of potential material to draw on. Early modern libels circulated in both prose and verse, in print and in manuscript. They were disseminated and collected in and around the royal court, the universities and the inns-of-court and they were posted at public gathering places such as St. Paul's Cross. Libels were written in both Latin and English; they were composed by both Catholics and Protestants; while some were the subject of

seditious libel proceedings in the Star Chamber, others were determined by the ecclesiastical or assize courts and the majority remained beyond the reach of the law; some referred to local concerns involving 'private' individuals, while others implicated 'magistrates' and figures of public importance. In addition to the libels themselves, many other late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century texts, including plays, poems, royal proclamations, diaries, letters, essays, and so on, comment on the phenomenon. As this suggests, libels were culturally diffuse, generically hybrid texts. Similarly, they could not be safely tied to a particular ideological or religio-political position. Indeed, the very hybridity of these texts and their resemblances to other discursive forms presented early modern readers with a complex set of interpretive problems. Depending on the context, an early modern discussion of libel might signify that the text in question was evidence in a legal proceeding. However, the term could also be more casually invoked in a popular setting, to refer for instance, to a reader's perception that a text carried a scandalous or obscene message.

Anonymity, Pseudonymity and Authorship

All the libels that are the focus of this thesis were first circulated anonymously or pseudonymously and many of them remain unattributed. Studies of anonymous libels provide an important counter-narrative to accounts of the period that diminish the prevalence of anonymous texts in favour of the rise of the individual author and the commercial print trade.[39] Although I raise more particular functions of anonymity as they occur in relation to the libels considered in this thesis, it is useful at this point to outline some of the key approaches that inform analyses of early modern anonymity.

As John Mullan has noted in his history of the various uses of literary anonymity, 'anonymous' as it was used to describe a literary text, dates from the sixteenth century, 'as if it took print to make the absence of an author's name an important fact.'[40] While these accounts often pitch anonymity in opposition to authorship, in this thesis anonymity is conceived of as a mode of authorship, albeit with a distinct set of organising features. Paul

[39] For further discussion of the breadth of anonymity's function in this period, see especially Mary North, *The Anonymous Renaissance: Cultures of Discretion in Tudor-Stuart England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and Margaret Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999).
[40] John Mullan, *Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), 296.

Hammond has argued that readers were 'well used to interpreting poems within canons which were based not around authors, but on topics, as when reading scriptorium manuscripts which anthologized political or erotic verse.'[41] Collections of verse libels which coalesce around specific public figures or political episodes support this claim. The grouping of verses according to specific themes illustrates a strong tendency in early modern reading practices, which was focused on the 'matter' of the text and did not seem to assume that author attribution was a 'necessary context for understanding a work.'[42]

As Joad Raymond has shown, anonymity could indicate that an author's name had been 'lost' but it also denoted a range of intentional functions that included 'shamefaced' anonymity, when associated with pornographic texts; the wilful obscuring of authorship in cases where the author's name threatened to prejudice the reception of the text; an effort to avoid stigma, for reasons of gender or social status; as a performance of humility and as a way of singularly embodying collaborative authorship.[43] Pseudonymity, as Catherine Gallagher has discussed, can be understood as a cognate form of anonymity but is distinguished from it insofar as it gives to the abstract practice of anonymity a 'positive form: the form of the fictional Nobody, a proper name explicitly without physical referent in the real world.'[44] Pseudonymity was an especially useful device in satirical works, which heavily relied on inflated *personae* to guide their polemic. As the case of the Marprelate Tracts came to epitomise, the imitation of a real speaker was considered rhetorically effective and socially destabilising in equal measure.

Aside from its literary effects, anonymous or pseudonymous publication or circulation was, as we know, a response to and refuge from legal constraints governing speech and writing. Within the pressures of this regime, writers were able to find ways of making a virtue out of necessity. It was not until Parliament's order of 1642 that it became a legal requirement to attach an author's name to a work.[45] Hence in a period prior to the foundation of copyright and the legal categorisation of authorship as a form of textual property, the treatment of 'authored' and 'anonymous' texts was more fluid than fixed. As

41 Paul Hammond, *The Making of Restoration Poetry*, p.50.
42 North, *Anonymous Renaissance:* 23.
43 Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 64-5.
44 Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace 1620-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xv.
45 Joseph Loewenstein, *The Author's Due: Printing and the Prehistory of Copyright* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002).

a consequence of a lack of strict authorial standards, readers did not necessarily or always discriminate on this basis. Acculturated to authored, anonymous and pseudonymous forms of writing, the early modern reception of texts in these formats implicitly challenges Foucault's suggestion that there are 'transhistorical constants in the rules that govern the construction of an author.'[46]

Many of the most well-known poets of the period, including John Skelton, Edmund Spenser and John Donne, published their work anonymously.[47] Anonymous writing, as Mary North reminds us, was an approved and institutionalised practice:

> The church fathers, the early Protestants, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Elizabethan government had all utilized anonymity at one time or another, and they continued to recognize its value. Likewise, Elizabethan readers viewed anonymity as a relatively common condition of a text and as an authorial stance available to a wide variety of writers in a myriad of circumstances.[48]

Halkett and Laing's *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous Publications in the English Language: 1475-1640* lists over four thousand English publications that were anonymous, pseudonymous, or attributed with initials. Texts that remain unaccounted for in this dictionary include the many individual unattributed items in anthologies and the hundreds of poems and verse libels that circulated anonymously in manuscript.[49] Modern estrangement from the various uses of anonymous publication risks underestimating the significance of its earlier function, a period in which authors used it as 'an alternative source of authority, privilege, control, text presentation, and even identity.'[50]

Libel, Satire and the Question of Genre

One of the most important questions for critical discussion of early modern libels is how to define their relationship to traditional literary genre. The genres that they are most often studied in relation to are the formal verse satires of the late Elizabethan period and the seventeenth century trend for writing epigrams. Again, these questions are revisited as they

46 Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 143. For a representative critique of the ahistoricising implications of Foucault's formulation, see Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
47 Janet Wright Starner and Barbara Howard Traister eds., *Anonymity in Early Modern England: "What's in a Name?"* (London: Routledge, 2011).
48 North, *Anonymous Renaissance*, 120.
49 Marcy North, "Early Modern Anonymity", *Oxford Handbooks Online* (Oxford University Press, November 12, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.013.12.
50 North, *Anonymous Renaissance*, 33.

relate to particular examples throughout this thesis, however there are a number of preliminary critical claims that can be made about the relationship between libel and satire and which motivate these more detailed discussions.

In his *A discourse of English poetrie* (1586), William Webbe suggests an ancient genealogical connection between satire and libel, in which for reasons of decorum, satiric writing came to supersede libellous forms. Considering how 'some arts do increase' and 'some do decay by natural course, Webbe tells us:

> The olde manner of Commedies decayde by reason of slandering which therein they used against many, for which there was a penaltie appointed, least their bitternes should proceede to farre: In place of which among the Latines, came the *Satyres*.[51]

In addition to its legal meaning, literary-historical accounts of early modern libel almost always acknowledge its formal correspondence to satire, often regarded in terms akin to M.H. Abrams's definition as: 'the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation.'[52] Together with criticism that argues for the cohesiveness of satire as a literary genre however, is a distinct but equally emphatic critical insistence on the fundamental difficulty of defining satire in generic terms.[53] In his study of satiric forms, Edward Rosenheim has argued for precisely the resistance of satire to definition:

> No mode of writing is more frequently identified with terms applied to other literary species; the achievements of satire are, more often than not, assessed by standards appropriate to rhetoric, comedy, or even moral philosophy. And in its particularity, its "topicality," satire seems to resist our attempts to establish principles by which, over the ages, the art of the satirist can be regularly recognized and described.[54]

[51] William Webbe, "In his Epistle ad Pisones de arte Poetica," in *A discourse of English poetrie* (London, 1586), *EEBO*.
[52] M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 9th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 320.
[53] This problem orients a great deal of critical work on satire, see especially: Conal Condren, "Satire and Definition," *Humour: International Journal of Humour Research*, 25, no. 4 (2012): 375-599. Eminent studies on the literary history of satiric forms include: Alvin Kernan, *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959); Fredric Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962); John Peter, *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956); Raman Selden, *English Verse Satire: 1590-1765* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978); Harold Love, *Clandestine Satire, 1660-1702* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London: Routledge 1980); and Gary A. Schmidt, *Renaissance Hybrids: Culture and Genre in Early Modern England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013).
[54] Edward W. Rosenheim Jr., *Swift and the Satirist's Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 3.

Rosenheim suggests that satire rarely conforms to any fixed rules, rather it inflects other genres with a recognisable satiric attitude to topical particulars; and hence its intelligibility relies on an appreciation of the local and specific context of its original composition. There is a general agreement, as Robert Phiddian has remarked, that formal criteria alone cannot meaningfully account for satiric work:

> As satire is a mode or attitude rather than a genre or identifiable set of textual practices, the removal of recourse to arguments about a deliberate intent to persuade an audience (of the beastliness of Domitian's Rome, of Walpole's duplicity, of Thatcherism's brutality etc.) makes it close to untheorizable. [55]

Historical and biographical approaches to satire, however, arguably diminish satire's aesthetic commitments and effects. Maynard Mack suggests a triangulation of formal and historical criteria through the introduction of a 'third kind of inquiry,' that treats the work, as he puts it:

> With some strictness as a rhetorical construction: as a "thing made," which, though it reaches backward to an author and forward to an audience, has its artistic integrity in between—in the realm of artifice and artifact.[56]

Thinking about satire in these terms, as a form of rhetorical construction, underlines its unusual and especially 'active' aesthetic. Characterising the practical function of his own work in the middle of the sixteenth century, the poet Thomas Drant remarked that satire was 'an instrument to pinch the pranks of men.'[57]

For early moderns, the perception of satire's reformative capacity to modify behaviour for the public good was regularly considered to be the inversion of libellous writing, which it was argued, sought to arouse public discord. Strongly didactic in intent, this distinction was designed to point out the moral and generic distinctions, between, for instance, degenerative versus reformative and neoclassical versus rough verse, in order to reaffirm the status of legitimate satire. This pairing however, inevitably brought into focus an intermediate space and drew attention to the difficulty of enforcing such a distinction. The difficulty in entirely sanitising satire or limiting a notion of its offensiveness is perhaps best

55 Robert Phiddian, "Satire and the Limits of Literary Theories," *Critical Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2013): 51.
56 Maynard Mack, "The Muse of Satire," *Yale Review* 41 (1951): 82.
57 Thomas Drant, quoted in William Jones, *Satire in the Elizabethan Era: An Activistic Art* (London: Routledge, 2017), 14.

summarised later in the seventeenth century in John Milton's attack on Joseph Hall's distinction between 'toothless' and 'biting' satire. Milton excoriates Hall for the apparent absurdity of his claim that satire could be 'toothless'. He writes:

> But that such a Poem should be toothless I still affirm it to be a bull, taking away the essence of that which it calls itself. For if it bite neither the persons nor the vices, how is it a Satyr, and if it bite either, how is it toothless, so that toothless Satyres are as much as if he had said toothless teeth.[58]

This was principally because it was very difficult to reach a stable consensus about what if any, formal characteristics might be a prerequisite or *sine qua non* for satire. If libel is considered a perversion of the legitimate literary form of satire, or as McRae has suggested, 'encoded as satire's other,' then the intelligibility of satire as a genre naturally has essential consequences for our understanding of libel's procedures.[59]

Although the distinction between satire and libel was available in theory, it is more difficult to identify in practice. The range of poetic content in early modern commonplace books and miscellanies calls into question the extent to which literary genre was the dominant organising principle of early modern reading practices. These volumes show early moderns copying down verse from the most established poets of the day, including Walter Ralegh, John Donne and Ben Jonson, alongside anonymous libellous verse. Arguing along these lines, Joshua Eckhardt has suggested that 'collectors preserved far more copies of libels in verse miscellanies than in manuscript books of exclusively topical or political documents; in other words, they deemed libels worthy of sharing space with the most exemplary lyric poetry of the English Renaissance.'[60] Bodleian MS. Rawl. Poet. 26 provides one such example of a composite volume of manuscript verse that includes poems by well-known poets of the period alongside libellous verse. This is a large volume, containing 186 leaves often with multiple verses on each side of the folio leaf. In various hands we find poems such as 'Even Such is Time,' Ralegh's poem on his own death, Ben Jonson's epigram 'To Fine Lady Would-Be', Henry Wotton's, "The Character of a Happy Life" and an extract from Nicholas Udall's comedy *Roister Doister*. Interspersed there is a large quantity of bawdy or occasional verse on topics as diverse as the benefits of smoking tobacco, on the fate of

58 John Milton, *An Apology Against a Pamphlet Called A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions upon the Remonstrant against Smectymnuus*, sec. 6 (London, 1642) *EEBO*, 33.
59 McRae, *Literature,* 22-23.
60 Joshua Eckhardt, *Manuscript Verse Collectors and the Politics of Anti-Courtly Love Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 29.

beautiful but idle women, and complaint against Scottish immigration to England. However, by far the most significant proportion of the folio is dedicated to libels addressing the relationship between King James and the Duke of Buckingham.

Many scholars of satire have noted that the debate and disagreement about satire is ironically embodied by an etymological confusion inherited and perpetuated by the Elizabethans. This misapprehension becomes a regularly obscured but nonetheless crucial component of satire's flexibility of form. The Latin root *satura*, is originally found as part of the phrase *lanx satura* or 'a full plate.' This phrase eventually acquired an independent status, meaning repleteness, or miscellaneous richness. The other common construction of the term worked via a tempting homonymic association with the 'Satyr,' the hybrid beast of Greek myth. As Alvin Kernan notes:

> Later Elizabethan critics derived an expanded theory of satire from the discussion of the genre included in the history of comedy and tragedy written by Aelius Donatus, a fourth-century grammarian, and prefixed regularly to the editions of Terence read in all Elizabethan grammar schools. Donatus says that satire descended from the *vetus comoedia* which was repressed because of its scandalous attacks on personalities. The dramatic type that succeeded was, according to Donatus, the satyr play, in which actors assumed the character of satyrs and under this mask attacked individuals in the rough, savage fashion befitting such woodland creatures. Because of its excesses the satyr play in turn gave way to the New Comedy in which identifiable individuals were no longer attacked. The idea that poetic satire had its origin in dramatic form distinguished for its viciousness of attack and spoken by rough satyrs was the basis for nearly all Elizabethan theories of satire.[61]

It was this association that seems to have become dominant by the end of the sixteenth century, illustrated by the convention of couching satires in the form of pastoral. George Puttenham replicates the common misrecognition in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589). He remarks that the 'satyrs or sylvan,' who 'should appear and recite those verses of rebuke…whereupon the poets, inventors of the device, were called satirists.'[62] As K.W. Grandsen has noted:

> They [the Elizabethans] usually spelt it 'satyre,' and connected it by a false etymology with the Greek 'satyros,' a 'satyr.' These grotesque creatures, half man, half beast, originated as the chorus of the ancient Greek burlesque drama. Horace describes them in his *Ars Poetica*, the most influential work of classical literary

[61] Kernan, *The Cankered Muse*, 54-55.
[62] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London, 1589), *EEBO*, Book I, Ch. XIII, 25.

> theory at this time…They were imagined as being brought on to the stage from the woods; they were 'ex lex,' exempt from the laws of urban civilisation; they were licensed to speak in an outrageous manner.[63]

In his *Virgidemiarum* (1597), Joseph Hall echoes this view of satire as a savage form connected to its supposed origins in the satyr plays: 'The ruder *Satyre* should goe rag'd and bare:/And show his rougher and his hairy hide.'[64] In seeking to describe the libel as it emerged in the early Stuart period, McRae and Bellany characterise libel's relationship to satire in terms of influence:

> While the libel was indebted at once to popular traditions of invective and elite literary traditions of satire, it emerged in the early seventeenth century as a distinct textual mode.[65]

Other scholars of Elizabethan satire and early Stuart manuscript verse libels have traced the emergence of libel as a kind of 'satirical journalism'[66] or 'a scribal news genre,'[67] that fed a growing hunger for rumour and reportage, or as a category that should be capacious enough to include 'all types of underground verse, not solely those containing direct personal remarks.'[68]

Despite ostensible claims for the emergence and singularity of this textual form in the seventeenth century, McRae and Bellany explain that their database of early Stuart libels presents a collection of libels and other political poetry, in order to capture the character of early Stuart manuscript culture:

> Here, therefore, are straightforward libellous assaults on men and women of state, more abstract representations of political processes, and even some eminently conservative poems written in response to libels.[69]

McRae makes a convincing argument for the continuing critical influence of John Dryden's Restoration definition of satire and the imposition of very clear distinctions between, 'the native and the neoclassical, the scurrilous and the moral, the libellous and the properly

63 K.W. Gransden, *Tudor Verse Satire* (London: The Athlone Press, 1970), 19.
64 Joseph Hall, *Virgidemiarum* (London, 1597), n.p.n.,
http://search.proquest.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/docview/2240904255?accountid=12372
65 Bellany and McRae, "Introduction," *ESL*, i.
66 Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London: Routledge, 1980), 3.
67 Bellany, *Politics*, 97.
68 Bellany, 98.
69 Bellany and McRae, i.

satiric.'[70] One argument for retrieving a more extensive canon of texts is grounded in the need for historicising these later critical divisions between satire and libel.

Like McRae and Bellany, Harold Love has argued that libel is best understood as an 'umbrella term' in early modern discourse.[71] To consider 'libel' in its broadest possible terms, however, does not always generate the appropriate framework for interrogating specific examples. Umbrella terms can suggest a cohesiveness that is not reflected in either experience or specific usage. For instance, such an appraisal imposes no distinction between libels in the strict sense that this category was enforced via a legal process and those texts that might have been broadly considered defamatory but for which no legal context actually grounds this distinction. Although the term certainly had a wide semantic reach, sweeping classifications can be less effective as analytical tools insofar as they risk diminishing meaningful distinctions between the term's use as it could be invoked, for example, in a social context and its arguably more specific function in the legal setting. In this second setting, the allegation of 'libel' presents us with a striking point of contact between so-called libels and the apparatus of state; an occasion where it is possible to witness, as Annabel Patterson has shown, those 'certain moments in history when the law was forced to take particular cognizance of problems of interpretation.'[72]

However, because libels so often acquire definitional clarity in relation to other modes of written expression, they demand more open modes of analysis that are sensitive to the literary genres and cultural forms from which they draw meaning. Of all the literary forms that libels make use of, none has had a more fundamentally determining role than satire. In their recent introduction to *Verse Libel in Renaissance England and Scotland,* Steve May and Alan Bryson argue that libel can be understood as a special variety of satire:

> Whereas satire can denigrate anything, including institutions, doctrines, social types and classes, libel is a specialized *ad hominem* satire. For the purposes of this study, we define libels as attacks that single out one or more individuals who would have been identifiable to contemporary readers.[73]

[70] McRae, *Literature,* 8.
[71] Harold Love, *English Clandestine Satire: 1660-1702* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7.
[72] Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*, 10-11.
[73] May and Bryson, *Verse Libel*, v.

For May and Bryson, libel is best classified as a sub-genre of satire. My own approach to libellous literature in this thesis is closest to May and Bryson's definition of it as an *ad hominem* form of satire. However, this definition also requires qualification as we know that many texts that did not explicitly reference specific individuals were also gathered under this heading. Critical efforts at defining libel paradoxically point to the term's resistance to abstraction. In this period, what was considered libellous was almost always contested, and requires intense historical re-contextualisation to be comprehensible. Like satire, libel was much more than the sum of its formal, constituent parts. Deeply embedded in the circumstances of their composition and reception, to identify a text as a libel was also always an articulation of a particular attitude, or a normative argument regarding legitimate speech and writing. This was connected not only to changing attitudes to its generic relative, satire, but also (as I discuss in the final part of this chapter) to popular attitudes and legislative shifts regarding the decorous use of language. Indeed, it comes as no surprise that early modern satirists were often at pains to deny that their works contained any libellous elements, arguing instead that construal indicated the presence of hostile readers. Jonson provides a striking example of the strong desire to strictly enforce the boundary between satire and libel and protect a notion of satire from 'invading interpreters.' In the dedicatory Epistle to *Volpone* he invites readers to closely scrutinise his work and to ask themselves 'what broad reproofs have I used? Where have I been particular? Where personal? Except to a mimic, cheater, bawd, or buffoon – creatures for their insolencies, worthy to be taxed?'[74] However, in suggesting that he can only be accused of criticising those 'worthy to be taxed,' or those who thoroughly deserve reproach, Jonson calls upon a notion of truthfulness as an absolute defence against libel that as I discuss later in this chapter was, by the time of *Volpone*'s first publication in 1607, legally (if not culturally) moribund. Jonson's epistle also then registers the ongoing tussle by poets to define 'libel' as 'untruth' against a notion of satiric 'truth,' even as we know that this definition had been officially revoked in the legal setting.

A suppleness of approach is clearly needed to grasp the uneven yet overlapping definitions of libel across literary, legal and political cultures, as well as an alertness to the way in which the libellous controversies that often dogged satirists might also be seen to encode a renewed sense of unease about the function and effects of literature itself. In so far as I move away from May and Bryson's descriptive definition of libel then, it is in order to

[74] Ben Jonson, 'The Epistle,' *Volpone*, ed. Robert N. Watson (London: A & C Black, 1968), 167.

draw attention to what I am suggesting is the discursive quality of libel, as both an index of early modern disputes regarding the appropriate rhetorical application of language to religious and political affairs, and the *medium* in which this interrogation was taking place.

Ad Hominem Attack and the Body Politic

The most substantial scholarly treatment of libels addresses what might be considered their contribution to public or political forms of discourse. This work has been especially interested in addressing libels' status and the variety of their configuration in the early Stuart period, a time in which, as I discuss in the final part of this chapter, the term was undergoing significant redefinition.[75] For these scholars, the prevailing significance of libels is evidentiary; that is, libels allow a reconstruction of the socio-political climate beyond the court and, in particular, can be used to substantiate the strength of popular voices of dissent.[76] This kind of work foregrounds the opposition between libel and legitimised forms of discourse and situates the practice of libelling in a broader culture of popular literary discourse that included pasquils, ballads, epigrams and other satiric forms, framed by a culture of gossip and rumour-mongering. This scholarship also looks to the proliferation of libel and other unauthorized modes of speech and writing as proof of the emergence of an early modern public sphere and as an instance of popular opposition that anticipates the polemical exchanges characteristic of the English Revolution.[77]

In wide ranging surveys of the causes of the English Civil War such as those by Thomas Cogswell, Conrad Russell and James Holstun, verse libels are invoked to suggest a contested political climate or are seen as symptomatic of a coherent ideological opposition to monarchical power.[78] Prominent political figures that were scrutinized in prose and verse libels over the course of the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I included the Earl of Essex; Sir Walter Ralegh; Robert Cecil; Robert Carr and Frances Howard; Sir Francis Bacon; George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham; Thomas Wentworth; and the Earl of

75 Richard Burt, *Licensed by Authority: Ben Jonson and the Discourses of Censorship* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 7.
76 Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander*, 2.
77 See especially, Thomas Cogswell, "Underground Verse and the Transformation of Early Stuart Political Culture," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (1997): 303-326; Peter Lake and Steven Pincus eds., *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) and Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
78 Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution: English Politics and the Coming of War, 1621-24* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) and James Holstun, *Ehud's Dagger: Class Struggle in the English Revolution* (London: Verso, 2000).

Castlehaven.[79] Levy Peck, Perry and Pauline Croft all offer strong readings linking attacks on public figures to a corrosion of royal authority.[80] At different moments many of the figures above were the particular favourites of Elizabeth or James, a position that carried a significantly freighted ideological function. The highly personalised attacks on these public figures brought into focus the 'uneasy intersection of the personal and the public in a political system traditionally organised around patronage and intimacy.'[81] This 'uneasy intersection' is regularly thematized in libels through an excessive focus on the body.

In the prose and poetry discussed, this is a body often figured as under threat. As Mary Douglas has described it, a body in which 'all margins are dangerous.'[82] Libellous assaults on powerful individuals often fall back on the language of the grotesque in which the body's orifices signify its inherent corruptibility. In this hermeneutic system, the body's sensuousness (Queen Elizabeth, King James) or mis-shapeness (Robert Cecil), or buffoonery (John Whitgift, Richard Bancroft) become analogues for political or spiritual corruption or in the case of the monarch, a way to draw attention to the limits of sovereignty. In thinking along these lines, I have been influenced by Curtis Perry's argument that 'the discourse of corrupt favouritism' was the early Stuart period's 'most important unofficial vehicle for exploring constitutional unease concerning the nature and limits of personal monarchy within the balanced English constitution.'[83] In other words, an attention to the language used in the libellous attacks on key agents of the state promises to deepen our understanding of the contested cultural and political investments at the heart of early modern social and political life.

Reflecting upon the broader political significance of attacks on public figures, Peter Lake, Steve Pincus and Rebecca Lemon identify the proliferation of verse libels in the early seventeenth century as evidence of the existence of an early modern public sphere or spheres.[84] In moving back in time from Habermas's eighteenth-century bourgeois

[79] Marotti, *Manuscript*, 94.
[80] Pauline Croft, "Libels, Popular Literacy and Public Opinion in Early Modern England," *Historical Research* 68, no. 167 (1995): 266-85; Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); and Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[81] Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, 1.
[82] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, in vol. 2 of *Mary Douglas: Collected Works* (London: Routledge, 2003), 121.
[83] Perry, 38.
[84] Lake and Pincus, *Politics of the Public Sphere*; and Rebecca Lemon, *Treason by Words: Literature, Law, and Rebellion in Shakespeare's England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

formulation, Lake and Pincus acknowledge that their discussion is not a doctrinaire application of this work but constitutes a significant modification of his narrative. In their own words, the notion of a post-Reformation public sphere is best seen as a 'variation' on some 'basic themes and categories from Habermas and as an enabling critical tool that permits a certain kind of productive analysis that could not otherwise take place.'[85] The difference between a post-Reformation and post-Revolutionary public sphere is characterised by a transformation of public discussion from 'episodic' to 'regular' and finally to the normative character ascribed to it by Habermas. A study by Dermot Cavanagh and Tim Kirk, setting aside grand narratives, has sought to use verse libels to develop more localised accounts of the cultural history of dissent.[86] These investigations all share in an idea of the production of libellous verse as a politically motivated activity, and, for the most part, this is a debate that turns on an attempt to define the precise bearing of their political operation. David Colclough has suggested that the circulation of libels in this period reveals not so much a contested political culture, as one in which subjects sought to find new channels to express their views, in the interests of offering loyal advice. He argues that much scholarly work:

> Fail[s] to take account of the justifications for libelling, and the place of the libel in the possibilities for political comment and analysis open to the population of early Stuart England.[87]

However, it is arguably misleading to think about the political valency of libels as antithetical yet similarly analytical to officially authorized political discourse. Verse libels were not strictly speaking analytical. Conceiving of libels and 'official discourse,' as two sides of the same coin, conceptualises their operation as predominantly structured by their participation in the language of political culture. In search of the broader political themes at stake, Colclough inevitably downplays the significance of the slippage between aestheticization and politicisation that occurs in the construction of the verse libel. Verse libels were by nature rhetorically excessive and dependent on 'pattern[s] of associations' that were 'linked to the truth but not reliant on it.'[88] In this sense the operation of the libel

85 Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, "Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 273.
86 Dermot Cavanagh and Tim Kirk eds., *Subversion and Scurrility: Popular Discourse in Europe from 1500 to the Present* (London: Ashgate, 2000).
87 David Colclough, *Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 205.
88 James McElligott, "The Politics of Sexual Libel: Royalist Propaganda in the 1640s," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2004): 87.

is activated as much by an engagement in the conventions of literary discourse as by the injunction of an overarching politico-legal program.

This scholarly emphasis on historicization, particularly in relation to the period of the English Civil War has meant that attention to libels' formal, literary character has been mostly overlooked. I argue that a study of the formal characteristics of the libel provides a crucial perspective for understanding why they were considered so damaging to the stability of monarchical authority. In addition to the predominantly historical contextualisation provided by the scholars above, a closer study of the symbolically accretive, literary register of libels promises to elicit new ways of considering the libel's operation as a cipher for a range of larger social and ideological anxieties.

Lexical Change and the Invention of English Libel

The scholarly study of early modern libel remains largely focused on the early seventeenth century, the period widely considered to be the moment of the form's greatest cultural significance. However, attention to the genealogy of libel as a term that variously describes an idea, an object and an activity opens up a further crucial line of enquiry. Such an enquiry not only allows a deeper understanding of how libel emerged as a politically effective textual form, but also sheds light on some of the interpretive problems built into the term itself and with which early moderns struggled. One of the major methodological problems encountered in tracing the history of libel is the range of uses to which the term was put.

Throughout the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth century, libel was used polysemically and, as I discuss, not always, or even predominantly, to refer to defamatory texts. Present linguistic practice allows for the relatively effortless slip between 'libel' in its two main parts of speech, as both a verb and as a noun. However, the earliest English usages of the term suggest that 'libel' was originally conceived of only in the secondary sense, as a description of a kind of thing, signifying a material condition, but not yet as a kind of 'activity.' The OED records that the earliest usage of libel in 1297 referred, rather broadly, to 'a formal document, a written declaration or statement.'[89]

[89] *OED*, s.v. "libel (n.)."

Over approximately the next three hundred years, libel continued to accrue other related nounal uses; a libel could be 'a written paper' (1603), something akin to a label; 'a leaflet, bill, or pamphlet posted up or publicly circulated' (1521); it was even used as a humorous term to indicate the collective body of lawyers (1550-1520).[90] The term did not become definitively attached to calumny until the early part of the sixteenth century and it was another fifty years before it seems to have acquired a parallel verbal usage. It is not until 1570 that the first recorded use of libel to mean 'to make libellous accusations of statements; to spread defamation' is found. And yet, in their suggestion of ephemerality and public forms of writing, a number of these earlier definitions seem to foreshadow the later defamatory sense of the term. Etymologically grounded in the words *Liber* (a book) and *Libellio* (a writer of books), for early moderns in the early-to mid-sixteenth century, the most common usage of libel was probably as it meant 'a little book; a short treatise, or writing' (1382).[91]

Running in parallel to its definition as a 'little book,' 'libel' also carried a specialist meaning in civil and ecclesiastical law to describe the document containing a plaintiff's allegations. As with other senses of libel as a kind of material object, this was (in theory at least) a descriptive expression, in this instance tied to a bureaucratic process, rather than used to imply that the material was defamatory.[92] Most strikingly, in this arena, libel was a term intimately tied up with the practice and procedures available for acquiring a divorce. One of the most commonly found usages of 'libel' in the first half of the sixteenth century are descriptions of 'libels of divorcement,' or documents outlining the justification, often an accusation of adultery, for the procurement of a divorce.

In the late 1520s and early 1530s, books and pamphlets discussing the scriptural interpretations of divorce became relatively common. There was intense public interest in the legitimacy of dissolving a marriage as Henry VIII scrutinised the terms of his own marriage to Catherine of Aragon and attempted to negotiate first an annulment and then a divorce. A libel in this case was a type of official claim, made by a husband against his wife, with legal and spiritual ramifications. While it often contained within it a charge of

90 *OED*, "libel, (n.)."
91 *OED*, "libel, (n.);" see also, Ian Lancashire ed. *Lexicons of Early Modern English*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Library and University of Toronto Press, 2017), leme.library.utoronto.ca.
92 *OED*, "libel, (n.)."

moral transgression, an accusation of infidelity for example, it did not yet connote scurrility and sedition, characteristics with which it would later become synonymous.

Sixteenth-century writers interested in the theological legitimacy of divorce regularly adapted and paraphrased the relevant passages of the New Testament, especially the Gospels of Matthew and Mark and the provocation of Jesus by the Pharisees, as well as arranging new translations of the works of Saint Augustine. In this context, a libel of divorcement was the legal document that expressed the theological criteria by which a man might 'turn out' his wife. For this reason, a libel of divorcement was a matter for the ecclesiastical authorities rather than for parliamentary, juridical or royal powers. The use of the term in this setting draws attention to the regular conflation of moral, spiritual and legal matters in this period. In one sense, libels of divorce were simply any official kind of claim, however the term became inextricably and, in the legal context, almost exclusively associated with an allegation of improper sexual behaviour. The connection between libels of divorce and defamatory libels has persisted; the term 'libellant,' for instance, can be used to refer to both the petitioner in divorce proceedings, the plaintiff, as well as the writer of libels.

The transitional sense of 'libel' or 'libellus' in the mid-sixteenth century is signalled by the availability and interchangeability of these two terms, both of which carried a number of parallel and overlapping meanings. A heterogeneous expression, it was available for use in both everyday as well as formal, legal discourses, although even here it had not yet consolidated in its modern sense as written defamation. The developing meanings of the term seem to have been taken up unevenly. For instance, although by 1521 the term had begun to acquire its defamatory sense, Sir Thomas Elyot's dictionary of 1538 gives a definition that appears unaware of the defamatory connotations of the term. A 'Libellus' he writes is 'a lytell boke: also sometime an epistell, a supplication, a lybell or declaration in the law, of dette, trespasse, couenant, and other lyke.'[93] Elyot concurs that the most common understanding of libel, is of a 'lyttel boke,' again, a formal description rather than a moral or legal evaluation of the status of the material itself. However, over the course of the sixteenth century, 'lytel bokes,' were frequently associated with controversy and

[93] Thomas Elyot, *The Dictionary of Sir Thomas Elyot Knight* (London, 1538), *EEBO*, n.p.n.

debate.[94] An ideal vehicle for the dissemination of topical but controverted matters, little books or pamphlets were relatively cheap to print and easy to distribute surreptitiously.

It has been suggested that as the century wore on, while libel continued to be used as 'a cognate term for pamphlet,' by the 1580s it also 'already carried connotations of defamation, stronger than those associated with the pamphlet.'[95] This argument can be supported by reference to Richard Huloet's dictionary of 1572 which gives only one definition of libel, explicitly joining it to a defamatory intent or effect:

> Libell of defamation. Libellus famosus, qui maledictis sauceat ac suggliat alicuius famam. Brocard, parole ignominieuse, libel fameus. H. Et Famosum epigramma, Programma famosum. Libelle diffamatire. S.[96] (*A little famous book*, *to wound/which wounds and* suggliat *the reputation of someone/anyone with reproaches*. Brocard, parole ignominieuse, *a reputation making book*. H. *also famous with its inscription, famous with its proclamation. O little book to* diff. (*cause a bad reputation*).

The diverse treatment of libel can be at least partly explained by the early modern jurisprudence covering writing and speech that were considered offensive. In the first half of the sixteenth century what would later be termed seditious libels were frequently dealt with via alternative legal channels. As many scholars have discussed, the Tudors had dozens of legal statutes to draw on when they wanted to target transgressive language: laws governing treason, the laws governing the reporting of false news, known as *Scandulum Magnatum,* those dealing with heresy, felony statutes and licensing laws.[97] Debora Shuger has argued that during the period from the late fifteenth century into the Stuart era, 'virtually all substantive law dealing with the regulation of language concerned defamation.'[98]

However, the notion that libel's relation to the law could be characterised by steadily evolving and ever more oppressive attitudes to speech and writing also needs to be

94 Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering*, 20.
95 Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering*, 20.
96 Richard Huloet, *Huloets dictionarie newelye corrected, amended, set in order and enlarged, vvith many names of men, tovvnes, beastes, foules, fishes, trees, shrubbes, herbes, fruites, places, instrumentes &c. And in eche place fit phrases, gathered out of the best Latin authors. Also the Frenche therevnto annexed, by vvhich you may finde the Latin or Frenche, of anye English woorde you will. By Iohn Higgins late student in Oxeforde* (London, 1572), *EEBO*, Cc1v.

97 See Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 337; and Lemon, *Treason by Words*.
98 Debora Shuger, *Censorship and Cultural Sensibility: The Regulation of Language in Tudor-Stuart England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 69.

qualified. In her study on language that was considered actionable as treason, Rebecca Lemon draws attention to Henry VIII's renovation of the law in 1534, its repeal by Edward VI in 1547, and its augmentation by Elizabeth I in 1571. Her study suggests that this period did not simply see a progressive definition and clarification of the laws governing transgressive language. Instead, what comes to light is the continuous rehearsal and reworking of statute, suggesting in turn that the very notion of transgressive language or libel was itself a construction of acute political contingency.[99]

Towards the century's end, public grievance at social and political flux and pervasive xenophobia were likely to have been significant factors in the growing number of libels expressing protestations against foreign residents in London. The most famous of these was probably the Dutch Church Libel (1593) which was found pinned to the wall of the Dutch Churchyard in Broadsheet Ward. This libel, in rhymed verse, was one of many directed at "Flemings and Strangers" resident in London and was viciously xenophobic and anti-Semitic. Its author threatened to 'cutt your throtes,' while 'in your temple praying' and made a range of accusations against foreigners, suggesting for example that financial interest rather than religious persecution has motivated foreign migration ('counterfeiting religion for your flight/ When 't'is well knowne, you are loth, for to be thrall/ your coyne, and you as countries cause to flight).'[100] The Dutch libel is a very clear example of a general tendency of libellous verse towards intolerance and conservatism, although it is perhaps rarely as explicit as it is in this example. It is also a striking early example of a libel against a group, which in the modern era would fall into the category of hate speech. Perhaps because it contained direct threats of violence, the Dutch libel was seen to 'excead the rest in lewness.' It may have been fears of vigilantism that lead the Privy Council to authorise the use of torture for the purposes of discovering the libel's authors.[101]

In terms of registering the emergence of libel as a newly acknowledged social threat which needed specially designed legal treatment, the most significant piece of early modern legislation is given in Edward Coke's report *de Libellis Famosis* (1605). This case is worth exploring in some detail as it radically transformed the terms under which libel was constructed. Coke's report developed out of the proceedings of the prosecution for libel

99 Lemon, *Treason by Words*.
100 Bodl. MS. Don. D.152., 4v.
101 Arthur Freeman, "Marlowe, Kyd, and the Dutch Church Libel," *English Literary Renaissance* 3, no. 1 (1973): 50-51.

of a leading Puritan, Lewis Pickering. Pickering was accused of writing and publishing a verse libel attacking the recently deceased Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift and his successor, Richard Bancroft. As they stood, the existing libel laws were not sufficient to prosecute Pickering. It was the provocation of this occasion that led Coke to establish this case as the precedent through which to frame a new definition of libel.

The historical significance of this case has been discussed at length by Alastair Bellany. Bellany explores how the pinning of the verse 'The Lamentation of Dickie for the Death of Jockie' to Whitgift's hearse, set off a chain of events that led to the instantiation of 'a legal precedent that was to be employed in discussion[s] of libel and sedition for the next two centuries.'[102] In order to draw out the significance of this case for the transformation of the meaning of libel, it is worth exploring in some detail the text of *de Libellis Famosis* and the circumstances that provoked it.

Whitgift's death in 1604 had coincided with a period of heightened tension between the Puritans and James I. The king faced increasing pressure from reformers to reconsider ecclesiastical policy which demanded universal subscription to the three articles and required Puritans to affirm the authority of royal supremacy, the spiritual authority of the Book of Common Prayer, and, in particular, that the thirty-nine articles, 'contained nothing contrary to the word of God.'[103] As Bellany has suggested:

> It was as part of this evolving ecclesiastical policy that Lewis Pickering's case acquired importance. The timing of Pickering's arrest and his ensuing prosecution for libel coincided with a broader royal and conciliar counteroffensive against the pressure tactics of disgruntled provincial and parliamentary Puritans.[104]

The conditions under which the Pickering prosecution occurred gesture strongly towards the political contingencies underlying early modern constructions of libel in its defamatory sense. As Bellany reads it, the influence of the particular configurations of religio-political circumstance was the trigger for the aggressive prosecution of Pickering and, by extension, Coke's renovation of common-law. Coinciding with James's struggle to enforce the issue of subscription, the publicity produced by the prosecution of a leading Puritan on a libel charge could only be advantageous in discrediting the movement more generally. In his

[102] Alastair Bellany, "A Poem on the Archbishop's Hearse: Puritanism, Libel, and Sedition after the Hampton Court Conference," *Journal of British Studies* 35, no. 2 (1995): 151.
[103] Bellany, "A Poem on the Archbishop's Hearse," 144-146.
[104] Bellany, 144.

defence, Pickering presented a number of sophisticated arguments that challenged the grounds of his prosecution.

In the past, the accused libeller had always had recourse to a 'truth' defence under the medieval statute *de scandalis magnatum*.[105] If the accused could show that their claims were based in fact, prosecution for libel could be avoided. In accusing Whitgift of being 'non resid[e]ns,' the 'Reformers hinderer,' and 'the ceremonyes proctor,' Pickering could at least make a case that his verse was rooted in 'questions of religion and conscience, not obedience or disloyalty.'[106] In addition, existing laws considered the libel to expire with the death of the individual libelled. As Pickering's verse was only aired after Whitgift's death, Pickering could and did attempt to argue that his verse should not be treated as a libel. In order to address the particular formulation of Pickering's libel and eliminate the ambivalence of language that could be imported in his defence, Coke radically reconstructed the legal terms constituting 'libel.' Significantly, this involved an emphasis on the effects of the libel rather than its contents. The rationale for this change is given by Coke through the distinction between libelling a private individual and libelling a 'Magistrate or publick person':

> If it be made against a private man it deserves a severe punishment, for although the libel be made against one, yet it incites all those of the same family, kindred, or society to revenge, and so may be the cause *per consequens* to quarrels and breach of the peace, and may be the cause of shedding of blood, and of great inconvenience: if it be against a Magistrate, or other public person, it is a greater offence; for it concerns not only the breach of the peace, but also the scandal of government; for what greater scandal of government can there be than to have corrupt or wicked Magistrates to be appointed and constituted by the King to govern his Subjects under him?[107]

By this construction, libel was understood as much more than an *ad hominem* offence, damaging the reputation of the libelled individual. In Coke's configuration, it was the excessive effects of the libel, its capacity to '*per consequens*' bring about 'a breach of the peace,' or 'scandal of government,' that could constitute grounds for the prosecution of libel. He shifts the emphasis away from the textual form of the libel and insists on it as an object constituted by the sum of its potential effects.

105 Shuger, *Censorship and Cultural Sensibility*, 72.
106 Bellany, "A Poem on the Archbishop's Hearse," 147.
107 Edward Coke, "Case de Libellis Famosis, or the Scandalous Libels," in *Reports of Sir Edward Coke, Knt. In Thirteen Parts* (London: J. Butterworth and Son., 1826; New Jersey: Lawbook Exchange, 2002), part V, 255. Citations refer to the Lawbook Exchange edition.

The re-production of libel as a kind of procedure allowed Coke to make perhaps the most important intervention into the early modern conceptualisation of libel in which the truth or falsity of its claims were no longer pertinent to its status as such. By this account: 'It is not material whether the Libel be true, or whether the party against whom the libel is made, be of ill or good fame.'[108] Coke's collapsing of the significance of the distinction between truth and falsehood had the effect, as Bellany notes, of thoroughly incorporating libel as a type of political discourse:

> Pickering's hesitant truth defence was thus refuted not by the assertion of alternative facts but rather by the assertion that the facts did not matter. The poem on the archbishop's hearse was wrenched from the purely ecclesiastical context in which Pickering had tried to place it and inserted instead into a political context in which criticism was to be judged by its effect on royal honour and no other standard.[109]

The effacement of the difference between truth and falsehood was crucial to Coke's attempt to close down the possibility of writers to escape the designation of their work as libels by making a claim on moral equivocality. *De Libellis Famosis* thus worked to figure these texts as interested only in 'undermining authority rather than purging evil in the interests of authority.'[110] Furthermore, the report shifted the common-law emphasis of libel from an articulation of it as a purely textual phenomenon to a notion of it as an index of social unrest. Reframing libel as a product of its seditious effects that could induce 'others of the same family, blood, or society to revenge,' made it possible, as Bellany has suggested, 'to depict any criticism as inherently libellous and seditious.'[111] Gary Schneider has shown, for instance, that by this rationale, libel law could encroach on the domain of unpublished, private correspondence as 'the reception of a letter deemed libellous led to a desire for revenge that in turn led to a breach of peace.'[112] In trying to capture so absolutely all manner of texts under the pretext of their seditious effects, *de Libellis Famosis* inadvertently registered the contingent semantic status of libel. As Kaplan has suggested, the unintended consequences of this were that:

[108] Coke, "de Libellis Famosis," 255.
[109] Bellany, "A Poem on the Archbishop's Hearse, 157.
[110] Andrew McRae, "The Literary Culture of Early Stuart Libelling," *Modern Philology* 97, no. 3 (2000): 364-92.
[111] Coke**,** "de Libellis Famosis,"255; Bellany, 163.
[112] Gary Schneider, "Libellous Letters in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England," *Modern Philology* 105, no. 3 (2008): 506.

> In moving from the ideal to the real, common law defamation began to lose its definitional clarity. When slander is determined by its outcome, the words function in relative rather than absolute terms, since the same speech can have different effects once the context is changed. Thus, emphasising the effect of defamation allows for the contradiction in its definition.[113]

Unlike contemporary references to accusations of slander and defamation, references to libel involved differentiating between accounts that described an allegedly defamatory mode of discourse; a material classification; or possibly both. Considering what a seventeenth-century judge would have encompassed by the term, the legal historian, Philip Hamburger, notes:

> He may have meant that he was applying the common law to punish a written defamation that, because it defamed an official had a seditious effect. Alternatively, he may have meant that he was dealing with an anti-government pamphlet, without specifying the law being used against it.[114]

As Kaplan has shown, the increasing concern for the effects of libellous words, 'serves to ground defamation in the realm of the material or temporal, moving it out of the ecclesiastical category of the spiritual.'[115] From thence we see the development of two separate strands of law dealing with libel: the common law definition that focused on financial loss and the awarding of damages and, simultaneously, the development in the Star Chamber of a 'category of criminal defamation—libel—which measured the crime in terms of its disruption of public order.' [116] Between 1603 and 1625 there were approximately 577 prosecutions for defamation in the Star Chamber of a total of 8228 cases overall.[117] The escalation of all kinds of litigation meant, as Christopher Brooks has argued, that this was a period in which 'law-mindedness came imperceptibly to colour social relationships and ideals.'[118]

Early examples of libel of this second kind, as they were perceived to disrupt public order, are considered in the following chapters.

113 M. Lindsay Kaplan, *Culture of Slander*, 17.
114 Hamburger, "The Development of the Law of Seditious Libel and the Control of the Press," 663.
115 Kaplan, *Culture of Slander*, 17.
116 Kaplan, 17.
117 May and Bryson, *Verse Libel,* 26.
118 Christopher Brooks, "A Law-Abiding and Litigious Society," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Tudor and Stuart Britain*, ed. John Morrill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 143.

PART TWO

Contesting Consensus: Elizabethan Libel and Satire

The previous chapter outlined the principal social, literary and legal frameworks informing Elizabethan and Jacobean understandings of libel. As I have been suggesting, libels were considered most damaging when they attacked a public office-holder and the monarch in particular. In the following two chapters I turn to a close examination of two Elizabethan libels that take key public office-holders as the object of their attack and which in quite distinct but significant ways were perceived to encroach on the stability of government and crown.

The figure of Elizabeth I has maintained a mythic, idealised quality in even the most avowedly scholarly accounts of the period. There is certainly an argument that it has been the on-going investment in this romantic narrative that has led, at least in part, so many accounts of early modern libel to identify the notorious scandals of the early Stuart period as the point of origin for the culture of reading, writing and collecting libels. It is increasingly acknowledged, however, that traditional accounts of Elizabeth's reign as a period of stable government and political consensus need to be qualified by the revaluation and interpretation of texts that represent a much greater range of critical and dissenting voices than was previously thought. Deeply held beliefs in a golden age of Elizabethanism have also adversely affected the evaluation of the political culture of her successor James I's reign, resulting in the perpetuation of what John Watkins identifies as a series of 'stark binary oppositions' dividing the two periods.[119] Indebted to larger theoretical shifts in critical discourse, revisionist projects have sought to question the 'catastrophic narrative of the Tudor-Stuart transition;' however, the wholesale rejection of this narrative needs also to be resisted.

There is ample evidence that early-Stuart subjects reflected on contemporary events through a nostalgic and binary rhetoric of the recent past. Within this melancholic framework Elizabeth I emerged as a heavily idealized figure, and in this retrojected form Elizabeth and chivalric forms of Elizabethanism became a touchstone for a great deal of libellous literature critical of the Jacobean state. This is discussed further in Chapter VI.

[119] John Watkins, *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England: Literature, History, Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5.

Read in this light, this simplified vision remains significant insofar as it marks a major contemporary mode of critical engagement with political affairs. With a focus on key libellous texts of the period, the narrative that I pursue in the following chapters tries to balance the competing strands of this debate. Both the major continuities between Elizabethan and Jacobean modes of opposition that Watkins alludes to as well as the key discontinuities and differences are described. I suggest (for instance) that readings of Jacobean libels that focus on nostalgia for Elizabeth have tended to obfuscate not just the very significant elements of opposition evident in the Elizabethan state, but also the formal influence of Elizabethan texts on libellous challenges to the early Stuarts. I propose finally, that what emerges from this narrative is a much clearer sense of a pattern of influence and representation, that might reasonably be regarded as the genealogical connection between particular modes of Elizabethan critique and Jacobean libels.

Within literary criticism some of the strongest challenges to the orthodoxy of the 'catastrophic narrative' have emerged from the scholarship initiated by New Historicism. In collapsing the distinction between 'work' and 'document' and re-theorising the place of literature within culture, New Historicists have sought to demonstrate how literary texts implicitly contested some of the most abiding myths of Elizabethanism. In large part because it provided the setting for the most public of literary forms, it has been studies of the period's drama and the social conditions of the public stage that have received most attention from scholars exploring the circulation of oppositional energies and ideas generated by literary texts in a censorious political environment.[120] For instance, as tantalising evidence of the state's concern about the articulation of social critique in public performance, critics cite an account of Elizabeth's comments to William Lambarde, archivist at The Tower of London.[121] In response to reports that the Earl of Essex had

120 For scholarship that investigates the dynamic exchanges between early modern dramatists and various forms of censorship, see especially Richard Burt, *Licensed by Authority: Ben Jonson and the Discourses of* Censorship (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993); Janet Clare, *'Art Made Tongue-tied by Authority:' Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Censorship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Richard Dutton, *Licensing, Censorship and Authorship in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Louis Montrose, "Shaping Fantasies:" Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture, *Representations* 1, no. 2 (1983): 61-94.

121 While the provenance of this account has long been disputed, a recent article by Jason Scott-Warren provides persuasive evidence for its veracity: Jason Scott-Warren, "Was Elizabeth I Richard II? The Authenticity of Lambarde's 'Conversation,' *Review of English Studies* 64, no. 264 (2013): 208-230. For examples of earlier New Historical approaches to this episode see Stephen Greenblatt ed., *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1982); Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); and

hired players to stage a version of *Richard II* with a view to inspiring an insurrection against her, Elizabeth is said to have turned to her archivist and remarked: "I am Richard II. Know ye not that?"[122]

Mobilizing historical anecdotage of this kind alongside close textual analysis, critics have turned to drama to show not just that literary texts and political culture were mutually constitutive but that this dynamic had an effect at the level of practical politics or the realpolitik. Lambarde's anecdote points to the significant value that was placed on literary texts in this period, and the kinds of discursive functions within which they were embroiled. Most importantly perhaps, the story foregrounds a fundamental assumption and anxiety of the period: the belief that literary texts were actively able to influence their readers toward seditious or treasonous ends.

Despite an avowed interest in the interchanges between political and literary discourses, it is striking that perhaps the chief legacy of New Historicism has been the critical prioritisation of those texts that most heavily code this relationship. As a consequence, satirico-libellous texts, which tend to accentuate rather than obfuscate their involvement in the topical or political, have received relatively slight attention. However, as scholars such as Bruster have shown, the intensely familiar approach these texts took to matters of individual identity and the 'private' life of the powerful were thought to have serious implications for the stability of the Elizabethan polity.[123] With this in mind, this chapter and the one that follows explore two major works of nondramatic, satirico-libellous writing at the end of Elizabeth's reign: *The Copy of a Letter Written by a Master of Art of Cambridge*, commonly known as *Leicester's Commonwealth*, and The Martin Marprelate tracts. Both are exemplary of the Elizabethan vogue for this style of comment. They take the form of scandalous accounts of the effects of persons and personalities on the structure of political life, broadly conceived here to encompass the institutions of court, church and parliament and those over whom they had a regulatory control. Popular with readers for decades after their original publication, these pamphlets exploited satirico-libellous techniques to generate defamatory accounts of prominent members of the Elizabethan establishment, in particular: Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (c.1532-1588); Richard Bancroft, Bishop of

Leeds Barroll, "A New History for Shakespeare and His Time," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1988): 441-464.

122 John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth,* 2nd ed., vol. 3 (London: John Nichols and Son, 1823), 552.

123 Bruster, "The Structural Transformation of Print," 49-89.

London (1544-1610); and John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury (1530/31-1604). An analysis of these libellous texts provides, I suggest, an under-examined but crucial site for analysing and conceiving of the representation and circulation of critical voices in the period.

In order to bring into focus how these texts functioned as part of a broader libellous culture, the discussion is organised around three loosely recurring and related features of libellous writing. First, I examine the reliance of both texts on anonymous and pseudonymous publication and draw out some of the social and political effects of this activity. Both texts avoided the strict regulations of Elizabethan printing practices by arranging for printing to take place either overseas (*Leicester's Commonwealth*) or on clandestine presses (Marprelate Tracts), and both had central roles in shaping the so-called 'pamphlet-wars' of the late Elizabethan period.

The 1580s has been called a 'watershed' moment for the pamphlet, and it is clear that this period witnessed a massive acceleration in the production and consumption of printed political and religious controversy and debate.[124] Pamphlets were most often produced in small quarto-format and their physical slightness seems to have fuelled a perception of them as insubstantial, rumour-mongering and morally dubious. In part as a result of their influence on Jacobean verse libels they also became strongly associated with scribal culture, as copyists excerpted, adapted and responded to parts of the text to include in their miscellanies. Unlike many of the well-known plays or poems of the period, both *Leicester's Commonwealth* and Martin Marprelate encode the author rather than the object of their critique, and this inversion produces a distinct kind of occulted commentary on governing institutions and ideologies. While the mere fact of anonymity was not inherently controversial, it can be argued that with the growth of libellous writing, anonymity and pseudonymity progressively come to be identified as strategies of subversion and sedition.

Second, I consider how libellous writing generated satirical narratives anchored in the disclosure of intimate details of the lives of real public figures. Examining the rhetorical methods that *Leicester's Commonwealth* and the Martin Marprelate tracts employ in their scathing critiques, I examine the application of satirical techniques to *ad hominem* attack. Composed and originally published from the middle to the end of the 1580s, these texts

[124] Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering*, 11.

just predate the most celebrated decade of Elizabethan satire. Insofar as they are written in prose, they are also formally distinct and issue from a different social and cultural milieu to the better-known verse satires of that period. Not just powerful voices of opposition in their own time, I suggest that these texts had an extended reach, supplying Jacobean verse libel with a representational tradition on which to draw. Scholarship on the proliferation of Jacobean libels often neglects to mention that the writers of these texts were able to make use of the accumulated force of satiric 'typing' that had been popularised by Elizabethan texts like the *Commonwealth* and Martin Marprelate and enriched by the formal verse satire of the 1590s. In other words, by the end of Elizabeth's reign, types as distinct as 'the favourite,' 'the flatterer,' 'the papist,' and 'the puritan,' were legible to readers as possessing an historically specific and recognisably derogatory explanatory value.

Though it had always been essential to satire's effectiveness, a notion of referentiality was now placed at even closer proximity to factual or real events. The overlaying of satirical type onto the popular rumours that circulated about public figures complicated an already difficult distinction between truthful and fictional accounts. The product of the many contingencies, cases, and constructions of a juridical process, the question of what constituted libel was also being worked out through the more uneven movement of larger social and cultural forces. Although never theorised as such, writers were increasingly drawing on a series of identifiable tropes and networks of allusion out of which a firmer notion of libel as a particular mode of writing was being formed.

Finally, I argue that in abandoning more orthodox forms of *ad rem* disputation and debate and electing to foreground *ad hominem* comment, libellous writing of this kind thematized the early modern preoccupation with the problem of regulating the potentially corrupting influence of private interest. Under a system of personal monarchy and, significantly, one in which the monarch was head of both the state and the church, *ad hominem* criticism of key establishment figures in the church as well as the court always risked shading into an attack on the royal prerogative. Although radically divided in terms of their religious beliefs and the putative objects of their critique, the Catholic authors of the *Commonwealth* and the Presbyterian authors of Martin Marprelate were united insofar as both came to represent a 'type of bad subject.' This was because as Joseph Black has noted, 'both, it was argued, owed primary allegiance to a power other than the monarch- the pope on the one hand, a

self-serving conscience on the other.'[125] Leland Carlson identifies the codification of this belief in one of the first Elizabethan acts of parliament: the Act of Supremacy (1558). The Act stated that "'all foreign spiritual jurisdiction" was abolished and the monarch was designated the "supreme Governour" of the church, "as well in all Spirituall or Ecclesiasticall Thinges or Causes as Temporall.'"[126] The terms of the Elizabethan religious settlement, as James Simpson has argued, were unacceptable to large numbers of English Protestants, especially those returning exiles who had been shaped by their experience of more radical forms of Protestantism practised on the continent:

> From this moment we see a main fault line opening up within English Calvinism, between a magisterial form in which the magistrate and the monarch stand at the center of a state-controlled, episcopal evangelical Church, and a more radical, anti-episcopal, proto-Presbyterian Calvinism (i.e. "puritan" Calvinism).[127]

Having a direct bearing on the authority and function of the crown, confessional division thus rather easily shaded into political discord. In the case of both the libels considered in the following two chapters, the state's interest in prosecuting the authors was always presented as a secular as well as spiritual matter. In discussing the persecution of English Catholics, Charles McIlwain has argued: 'It was their [the state's] claim that no Catholic suffered at their hands for his religious belief but only for seditious or treasonous words affecting the State…'[128] Despite being motivated by distinct religious interests, both episodes underscored how inextricably linked were the claims of competing religious and political agendas.

In addition to the seditious, even treasonous intent that hostile readers perceived to lurk behind these texts, the form taken by both the *Commonwealth* and Martin Marprelate transgressed orthodoxies in matters of political or religious discussion. Decorous debate of the issues was substituted for satirico-libellous critique, which was considered threatening, I suggest, because of its forensic attention to personal scandal. The authors of libels disguised themselves behind a veil of anonymity or pseudonymity and intimated the

[125] Joseph Black, "The Rhetoric of Reaction: The Martin Marprelate Tracts (1588-89), Anti-Martinism, and the Uses of Print in Early Modern England," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 3, no. 28 (1997): 718.
[126] Leland Carlson, *Martin Marprelate, Gentleman: Master Job Throkmorton Laid Open in His Colors* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1981), 3.
[127] James Simpson, *Permanent Revolution: The Reformation and the Illiberal Roots of Liberalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019), 35.
[128] Charles McIlwain ed., *The Political Works of James I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1918), xxviii.

existence of special insight, without ever proving that they had the necessary authority to make such allegations. One consequence of this kind of disembodied critique was to draw attention to the dependency of the culture on the mercurial social currencies of status and reputation. Generating scandalous accounts of powerful figures at the court and in the church, these texts provided a uniquely relevant vehicle for exposing the problems attendant on a political culture that 'lacked a fully articulated distinction between the public and private spheres.'[129]

Taken together, both *Leicester's Commonwealth* and Martin Marprelate provide an important counter-narrative to arguments that claim that all critique and complaint of the Elizabethan state had to be coded allegorically or analogically. *Leicester's Commonwealth*, in particular, problematically represents the queen as subject to the Earl's conniving and influenced by her affection for him, raising questions about the queen's ability to rule effectively and impartially. Offering transparent comments and commentaries on public affairs, libellous texts do not just become increasingly legible *qua* libel but also, from this period onwards, I suggest, help to render other literary forms (e.g. drama) progressively more legible to a public audience. Annabel Patterson has suggested, for example, that Jonson's *Sejanus* 'becomes a metaphor for the career of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham.'[130] It can further be suggested that this metaphorical substitution is culturally operative as a consequence of decades of libellous culture that plainly and repeatedly returned to the problematic status of royal favourites.

129 Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, 7.
130 Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*, 19.

CHAPTER 2

LEICESTER'S COMMONWEALTH: A SUBJECT WITHOUT SUBJECTION

> The Queen's favour, to preserve which he had made such sacrifice, must now be secured by all means and all hazards; it was the only plank which he could cling to in the tempest. He must settle himself, therefore, to the task of not only preserving, but augmenting the Queen's partiality –he must be the favourite of Elizabeth, or a man so utterly shipwrecked in fortune and in honour.
>
> Sir Walter Scott, *Kenilworth*

In *Kenilworth* (1821), over two hundred years after the first publication of *Leicester's Commonwealth*, Walter Scott turned to historical sources, reworking Elizabethan history into the material of novelistic romance.[131] Scott took up probably the central scandal of the Earl of Leicester's life: his 'secret' marriage to Amy Robsart and her untimely death. As rumour had it, Dudley had murdered Amy in order to free himself up as a suitor to the Queen. Scott did not go so far as to implicate the Earl in his wife's murder, but through a series of impossible conflations of chronology, character, and event, the story pitted the Earl's ambition for success at court against his tragic love for Amy. Writing in the introduction to the novel, Scott acknowledged the shadowy tradition into which his novel intervened: 'It is possible' he wrote, 'that slander, which very seldom favours the memories of persons in exalted stations, may have blackened the character of Leicester with darker shades than really belonged to it.'[132] Scott's Earl bore many of the hallmarks of the libellous tradition, although a more sympathetic portrait ultimately emerged within the framework of this historical romance. In fact, under Scott, the Earl underwent something of a rehabilitation, with the author conceiving of a certain terrible necessity to playing favourites in the Elizabethan court; it was either that, or end up as Scott's Leicester reflected, 'a man so utterly shipwrecked in fortune and in honour.'[133] The accounts of the Earl on which

131 Sir Walter Scott, *Kenilworth*, (1821; repr., London: Penguin, 1999); William Camden's *Annales: The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princes Elizabeth, late Queen of England* was a key source for Scott's *Kenilworth*. Camden's portrayal of the Earl is saturated with the influence of the *Commonwealth*. As the *Commonwealth's* editor, D.C. Peck has noted, the Jacobean perpetuation of the belief that Leicester had an involvement in his wife's death is also noticeable in the period's drama: *The Yorkshire Tragedy* (1606) and John Webster's *White Devil* (1612), see D.C. Peck, ed., *Leicester's Commonwealth* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985), 199.
132 Scott, *Kenilworth*, 14.
133 Scott, 266.

Kenilworth was based were, as Scott himself acknowledged, deeply implicated in the libellous inheritance. However, if there was any single point of origin for Scott's insights into Leicester's dark history, it was almost certainly the anonymous tract that emerged in 1584, and which quickly became known as *Leicester's Commonwealth*.

Like the authors of the Martin Marprelate tracts, which appeared very shortly afterwards, the authors of *Leicester's Commonwealth* sought a vehicle for their criticisms of religious and political affairs. Instead of ventriloquising their critique through *dramatis personae,* or representing opposition through historical or mythic analogy, both texts focused upon real persons and current events. And yet the roots of this discontent were quite distinct, springing from opposite sides of the confessional divide. While Martin Marprelate developed out of a collaboration between a number of well-known puritans, critical of the Episcopacy, the authors of the *Commonwealth* were English Catholics. Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester and Elizabeth's favourite was especially out of favour with Catholics who saw him (along with William Cecil (1520/21-1598)) as exemplary of the moral decay of the period. He had quietly conformed during Mary I's brief reign (1553-1558) and was now not only a practising Protestant but also known to actively lend his support to the followers of the more radical Presbyterian party at court.

'A Base and Wretched Tongue': Authorising Anonymity

Despite the rise of a commercial print culture, which was progressively more invested in the name of the author, anonymous publication continued to be a pervasive practice of late-sixteenth and early seventeenth-century printed and manuscript media. A capacious and at times morally ambiguous category, anonymity and pseudonymity were associated with an authoritative textual tradition that included scripture, epic poetry and amatory verse, but also encompassed controversial writing, including ecclesiastical debate and libellous or seditious material.

In order to avoid the English licensing laws, which would have resulted in certain pre-publication censorship, *Leicester's Commonwealth* (originally titled, *The Copy of a Leter wryten by a Master of Arts of Cambridge*, *Leicester's Commonwealth*) was printed in Rouen in 1584 by a committed group of exiled Catholics and from there conveyed to England where it almost immediately attracted the attention of agents of the state. Its objective was to promote the

claim of Mary, Queen of Scots to the English throne, a case it sought to progress via the defamatory condemnation of Elizabeth's favourite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Given its discussion of sensitive political matters, particularly the question of succession, which had been expressly prohibited by Elizabeth, it is little wonder that the text was printed anonymously and in secret.[134] The authors of the *Commonwealth* would no doubt have been aware of John Stubbs' punishment for writing 'The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf' (1579), a tract opposing the match between the queen and the Duke of Anjou. Indicating the seriousness with which subversive material was treated, Elizabeth had initially sought the death penalty for Stubbs. Although ultimately spared the scaffold, both he and his publisher eventually paid for their offense with the loss of their right hands.

Within a short period of time after its publication, the *Commonwealth* rapidly gained popularity, circulating widely in England as well as in France. From this moment on, the text continued to resonate with audiences, remaining popular for almost a century after its original publication. The seventeenth-century diarist Lady Anne Clifford recorded her experience of listening to a reading of the text in 1619. It was reprinted in 1641 and again in 1661. The 1641 edition in particular supports an argument that the libel came to be read and repurposed as a treatise against royal favourites, rather than as Catholic polemic. It was timed, as Chris Skidmore has shown, to coincide with the trial for treason of Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, who was a close companion of Charles I.[135] Most likely as a consequence of its potential to offend, the text also proliferated in manuscript editions throughout the seventeenth century. Peter Beal notes ninety-one separate copies, some extracted or partial but mostly complete, ranging from small octavo editions to folio-sized volumes.[136] The *Commonwealth* also spawned or 'fathered' a series of related texts, including 'Leycesters ghost,' a long poem also published in 1641.

In 1706, the suggestively titled 'Secret Memoirs of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Prime Minister and Favourite of Queen Elizabeth' was published. Like Scott's *Kenilworth*, the scandalising form of this text suggests the underexplored but significant connections

134 Decades later, in 1641, the text was reprinted without the name of its author(s) or a publisher's impression; not until the 1661 imprint did the printer's name appear on the title page, although even then there was no authorial attribution.
135 Chris Skidmore, *Death and the Virgin Queen: Elizabeth I and the Dark Scandal That Rocked the Throne* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), 351.
136 *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts*, 1450–1700, ed., Peter Beal (King's College London, 2013), www.celm-ms.org.uk

between the seventeenth-century vogue for libellous fictions and the turn towards fictional 'secret histories' in the eighteenth century.[137] Taking into account 'the book's complex of personal sympathies and enmities and its intimate knowledge of the daily workings of the court,' the *Commonwealth*'s twentieth-century editor Dwight Peck, has weighed up the 'internal evidence' for a number of different candidates before provisionally arriving at Charles Arundell as the writer most closely associated with the text. However, while Peck has aimed to establish the *Commonwealth*'s authorship with greater certainty, he has also acknowledged that the most probable scenario was that the text was the collaborative product of a number of hands, emerging from the efforts of a group of prominent, exiled Catholics in France.

There appears to have been a vibrant trade in foreign published Catholic books during this period. In addition to the *Commonwealth*, at least six other Catholic books emerged from the presses at Rouen in 1584.[138] While collaboration between writers, printers and booksellers was a condition of every pamphlet or book's journey to the marketplace, these relationships were arguably even more critical when the material in question carried the risk of a heavy penalty for the parties involved. Insofar as pamphlets were often used to mount topical and polemical arguments that responded to the social and political issues of the moment, they acted as 'the material embodiment of, if not a consensus, then at least a collective consent.'[139] Conceptualising the *Commonwealth* as a fraught collaborative production locates it in the historical and cultural modes of its publication. When contextualised in these terms, I suggest that the *Commonwealth* can be more meaningfully read as the cultural inscription of Catholic exile or recusant literature than as a product of a single authorial consciousness. In the sense that the *Commonwealth's* governing principles or beliefs were discoverable but not the identity of the author(s) themselves, anonymity also refocused the reception of the *Commonwealth* onto the claims the text contained, rather than enabling questions about the credibility of those claims. The condition of anonymity thus drove readers towards socio-centric methods of interpretation, towards what might

137 Peter Lake has characterised *Leicester's Commonwealth* as a 'libellous secret history,' see Lake, *Bad Queen Bess?*, 5.
138 A.F. Allison and D.M. Rogers, "A Catalogue of Catholic Books in English Printed Abroad or Secretly in England, 1558-1640," in *Biographical Studies*, vol. 3 (Bognor Regis: The Arundel Press, 1956).
139 Adrian Johns, *The Nature of The Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3.

be considered the driving religious and political concerns, rather than author-centric, or what we might think of as individual predilections and commercial concerns.[140]

For twenty-first-century readers, authorial anonymity is an acceptable condition of all kinds of scientific, web-based and 'documentary' texts. However, anonymous texts that claim a literary or aesthetic value still often incite quests for attribution and by association are presumed to possess the integrity and authenticity of a single authorial consciousness.[141] It was not unusual in this period for a range of texts including biblical exegesis, folklore and myth, as well as works of religious controversy to suppress the name of the author.[142] While anonymity then necessarily distanced the author in one way or another from the text, it did not automatically imply that the text contained material likely to offend agents of the state. For social and legal reasons, women writers frequently turned to anonymity, for others, it was a way to avoid the 'stigma of print' or to invoke, as Mary North reminds us, an older tradition of 'humility and amorous discretion'.[143] Catholic or recusant works were frequently published anonymously and by some estimates as many as 'one-third of the English Catholic books published during Elizabeth's reign feature an anonymous author or translator.' The very conventionality of anonymity can tend to conceal the breadth of its function. There is, for instance, as North notes, a distinct difference between 'what is commonplace—both anonymity and naming—and what announces itself as a manipulation of the common (a parodic title or a humorous pseudonym, for example).'[144]

Following the second of these two strategies, the *Commonwealth* was a much more unconventional text insofar as it did more than merely suppress the name of its author. Substituting mere suppression for an elaborate and extended literary artifice, the text claimed to be the printed version of a 'copy of a letter' that was itself the report of a conversation that had taken place between a gentleman, a lawyer and a scholar.[145] This

140 For important examples of criticism that argues for the displacement of 'the author' as the primary interpretative framework see Jerome McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); and D.F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (London: British Library, 1986).

141 For a very recent analysis of this phenomenon see Andrew O'Hagan, *The Secret Life* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017).

142 Mary North, "N.D. versus O.E.: Anonymity's Moral Ambiguity in Elizabethan Catholic Controversy," *Criticism* 40, no. 3 (1998): 355. Notable examples include: John Leslie's *Treatise of Treasons* (1572) and William Allen's, *Defense of English Catholics* which was also published in Rouen in 1584.

143 North, *Anonymous Renaissance*, 25.

144 North, *Anonymous Renaissance*, 115. For a survey of the uses of literary anonymity in English see John Mullan, *Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007).

145 Although the framing apparatus of the text as 'a copy of a letter' evokes a private exchange, in practice, letter writing was not itself a privileged medium of communication. For an account of letters that were

construction also participated in an idea of the text as the product of an exchange between different incarnations of oral, manuscript and print culture, which worked to maintain the discrete impetus of the private, domestic intent of the convocation and the letter in the more public and controversial forum of print. In addition to giving new polemical form to a series of rumours about Leicester and the Queen, the domestic setting was refigured as the crucible in which such rumour and gossip might foment into the material of religio-political subversion.

The *Commonwealth* illustrated that while anonymity might have been a common condition of early printed texts, it was not always a neutral one. Rather than marking an absence, thence to be 'attributed,' cases like the *Commonwealth* drew attention to the incidence of anonymity as a primary performative function of the text. When combined with other elements of the text and its reception, its print publication in Rouen, its staging of a domestic convocation between a gentleman, lawyer and scholar, and the state's vigorous pursuit of its authors, anonymity began to emerge as both a rhetorical function of the text as well as its material condition. In other words, much as the editorial is taken to represent the incorporated position of the newspaper, I suggest that the text's anonymity enabled it to be read as a stand-in for a collective position, rather than as the opinion of an individual agent. A product of acute legal necessity, anonymity would become one of libel's most identifiable and effective techniques.

In the immediate aftermath of the *Commonwealth's* publication, the Earl's nephew, Sir Philip Sidney rushed to his defence, composing the *Defence of the Earl of Leicester* (c.1585) within weeks of the beginning of the *Commonwealth's* circulation in and around the court. With the exception of Sidney's defence, there do not seem to have been any major answering works of apologia, reproach or defence. And indeed, although it was clearly intended for print, Sidney's defence was never published in his lifetime. Official silence does not seem to have been an altogether uncommon response to individual acts of sedition in Elizabethan England. With some notable exceptions, the Crown relied heavily on royal proclamations and acts of parliament to suppress public criticism. In the case of anonymous texts like the *Commonwealth*, there was the added difficulty of dealing with the paradoxes generated by trying to debate with, let alone discredit, an unidentified interlocutor. And yet, libellous

actioned as libels, see Gary Schneider, "Libellous Letters in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England," *Modern Philology* 105, no. 3 (February 2006): 475-509.

texts did tend to incite 'unofficial' responses. Underlining the social and political significance of networks of kinship and patronage, the terms of Sidney's defence strongly suggested that the defamation of Leicester was perceived as impinging on his own reputation, and his defence of Leicester against the libel was organised around a fulsome list of his extended family, contrasting and opposing the ancient nobility of the Dudley line, against the libellous 'nobody'. In his absence, the 'nameless and shameless opposer' was characterised by Sidney as 'clownish', an ignorant fool, who in attacking Leicester as a vehicle for criticising the Queen, opts to use 'so stale a device', and unleashes 'such a bundle of railings', as could only come from the 'mouth of some half-drunk scold in a tavern'.[146] In this context, anonymity was taken as further evidence of the baseness of the *Commonwealth's* author(s) who 'in the speaking, dares not speak his own name.'

The practice of associating anonymity with libelling was common. However, the text's appearance in print was considered an aggravating factor. For Sidney, a printed text was a sign of assiduous planning and organisation; perhaps most importantly of all, it implied the existence of a collective enterprise sharing a common cause. Sidney claimed that anonymous print of this kind was inherently incompatible with a claim of loyal counsel. In one of many of his own caustic remarks, Sidney mocked the authors: 'And yet see his good nature all this while would never reveal them, till now for secrecy's sake he puts them forth in print…' Anonymous publication, it was argued, undermined the traditional sources of textual authority and legitimacy, and inspired the conditions in which falsehoods might be mistaken for the truth. For Sidney, this mode of publication cast doubt on the bare facts of everyday life, for, 'who hath a father, by whose death the son inherits, but such a nameless historian may say his son poisoned him? Where may two talk together, but such a spirit of revelation may surmise they spoke treason?'[147]

Sidney's *Defence* is a work troubled throughout by the absence of social or legal consequences for anonymous defamation, and the irrevocable reputational damage thereby inflicted on its object. The text functions much like official testimony or a character witness, in place of (what is more or less acknowledged) the unlikely possibility that the *Commonwealth* and its author will be legally held accountable. In his closing remarks, Sidney emphasised his own willingness to engage in reasoned and transparent debate by

[146] Philip Sidney, "Defence of the Earl of Leicester,"c.1586, in *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 140; 129; 131.
[147] Sidney, "Defence," 132.

inviting the authors of the libel to allocate a time and place to meet and engage in open discussion. If he were to fail to stand by his undertaking, Sidney writes, 'I am content that this lie, I have given thee, return to my perpetual infamy'. Sealing his commitment to formal processes of state, Sidney calls attention to the official status of his work: 'And, from the date of this writing, imprinted and published, I will three months expect thine answer.'[148] We are to understand that unlike the *Commonwealth*, which had suppressed any authorized publisher's imprint and bypassed the usual routes of publication, the sign of the text's legitimacy is given by Sidney's willingness to submit his work through the channels of official process.

In addition to concealing the *Commonwealth*'s authors, anonymity also played a role in the text's epistolary frame narrative, a device, which as Peck notes, was a relatively common strategy among Catholic writers of this period.[149] The *Commonwealth* opens with 'the copy of a letter' addressed 'To Mr. G.M. in Gracious Street London', but it suppresses the name of the letter's 'author', who, we learn, is the unnamed scholar in the reported dialogue. The effect of the text's anonymity carries over into the reading of its textual form, an informal convocation or 'conference' between a gentleman, a lawyer and a scholar who are enjoying the Christmas period in the same house and one evening after dinner gather together for some 'recreation.'[150] Convivial discussion, however, quickly turns topical, to 'some matters in our state and country.'

Conference or dialogue was a relatively orthodox technique for writers of this period to adopt and was useful, in particular, for its capacity to perform an apparently disinterested exploration of diverse ideological positions.[151] Like other classical rhetorical forms, the dialogue was revived and repurposed by early modern writers; especially those wishing to display their ability to argue on both sides (*in utramque partem*) of the case, as was fashionable in the period. Despite the orthodoxy of dialogue as a rhetorical form however, the convention did not inherently necessitate acts of anonymity. As we learn from Sidney's *Defence*, the higher-order claims this text makes were called into question by publishing anonymously. The 'compiler' of the *Commonwealth*, tells us that his interlocutors have refused to put their names to the text for fear of reprisals and that he is only now circulating

148 Sidney, *Defence*, 141.
149 Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 43.
150 Peck, 64.
151 Jesse M. Lander, *Inventing Polemic: Religion, Print, and Literary Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

a copy of the text because his friend has so emphatically 'demand[ed] and solicit[ed] again the thing that I so flatly denied you' and because he has been 'press[ed]…very seriously at this instant, both by request and many reasons, to yield to your desire.'[152] While many forms of Renaissance polemic relished in the forthright, univocal presentation of argument, the multi-vocal and negotiated structure of a dialogue was able to contain a certain amount of indirection and proliferation of meaning while still sustaining its polemical purpose. In the *Commonwealth* this negotiation is represented through the embodied dispersion of social and ideological difference, between the scholar, gentleman and lawyer, which also provides the conference's narrative structure.

'Feigning New Matters': Railing, Rumours and Satire

Scott's adaptation (in *Kenilworth*) of the scandals that pursued Leicester points to the ongoing influence of the *Commonwealth* on his reputation. In its own time, the *ad hominem* attack advanced in the *Commonwealth* was elegantly used to bridge the confessional divide between Protestant and Catholic through the construction of a common adversary that could subordinate religious difference to a shared political enmity. However, as I aim to show in what follows, the text's hyperbolic 'typing' of the Earl in the role of the ambitious royal favourite also proved to be an exceptionally flexible model for future literary improvisations on both the Earl himself and royal favourites in general. Because typecasting must involve a simplifying or reduction, it turns complex questions of motivation, intention, and even identity into the product of a single cause or characteristic. The text draws on the techniques of satire but also moves beyond them in a couple of ways: firstly, and most obviously, the Earl is no mere type, but a living public figure; and secondly, as Peck has pointed out, very little of the material that the *Commonwealth* uses to demonise the Earl was 'without some foundation in fact, or at least in common rumour'.[153]

Of the six other books printed at the press at Rouen in the same year, the majority fall into the category of Catholic devotional literature. Alongside the *Commonwealth*, one other text, a treatise by John Leslie, relies on the argument from genealogy to make the case for Mary,

[152] Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 64.
[153] Peck, 44.

Queen of Scots' succession.[154] However, the *Commonwealth* stood out from the bulk of what might be called succession or recusant literature in its mediation of the frequently turgid hereditary and legal arguments in favour of Mary's claim to the crown through an engaging focus on courtly scandal. For instance, while the *Commonwealth* at various points directly addressed Mary's 'natural' right to the crown, in its use of the Earl as the vehicle for its claims, the text decisively diverges from the genealogical arguments of Leslie's treatise. Despite sharing an ideological agenda, the authors of the *Commonwealth* mostly subordinated the kinds of technical detail and debate we see in Leslie's treatise to a thoroughgoing character assassination of Leicester. As Peck has noted, while the text is organised across several discursive registers, rehearsing legal arguments around the succession and engaging in a serious discussion of religious toleration, it is the 'assault on the Earl's reputation and position [that] predominates.'[155] Indeed, critical interpretations of the *Commonwealth* have generally argued that the drowning out of the 'serious' registers of reasoned disquisition and debate was the chief effect of the invective associated with this form of *ad hominem* critique.[156]

Although the *Commonwealth* predated the most famous period of Elizabethan satire by about ten years, the text registers an earlier example of libel's confection of satiric typing with living persons. The authors enhance the particular facts of the Earl's life, whether real or perceived, through the moralizing generalizations of satiric type. Drawing on the language of courtly corruption, discussions of the Earl quickly devolve into highly imagistic expression. Sidney suggests that these 'superlative' descriptions, which here means something closer to 'hyperbolic,' are too inconsistent to be taken for a true representation. The *Commonwealth* he argues, has produced a self-contradictory hybrid, depicted as both pathetic and power-mad, lacking (it is implied) in the 'uniformity' of character one would expect to find in the representation of a real person. On these grounds Sidney draws attention to the implausibility of the *Commonwealth's* account:

> The same man in the beginning of the book was potent, to use his term, in that the Queen had cause to fear him; the same man, in the end thereof, so abject, as

[154] John Leslie, "A treatise towching the right, title, and interest of the most excellent princesse Marie, queene of Scotland, and of the most noble James, her graces sonne, to the succession of the croune of England," (Rouen, 1584) *EEBO*.
[155] Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 32.
[156] See, for example, Cyndia Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 91. Joad Raymond articulates a similar vision in *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering* (28) regarding the contemporary reception of *ad hominem* attack in the Marprelate tracts.

> any man might tread on him; the same man so unfriendly as no man could love him: the same man so supported by friends, that court and country were full of them; the same man extremely weak of body, and infinitely luxurious, the same man a dastard to fear anything: the same man so venturous, as to undertake having no more title, such a matter, that Hercules himself would be afraid to do, if he were here among us…[157]

The *Commonwealth* certainly lays a great many accusations at Leicester's door, charging him with 'dissimulation, hypocrisy, adultery, falsehood, treachery, poison, rebellion, treason, cowardice, atheism'. The author(s) entertain ideas of Leicester's own demise, inventing his mock-epitaph ('Hic projectus est indomitae et rabide libidinous catulus', 'Here is thrown in the whelp of unruly and raging lust').[158] With 'lust compelling,' he is accused not just of murdering his first wife Amy Robsart but also of the poisoning of Walter Devereux, first Earl of Essex.

According to the *Commonwealth*, the Earl overturns all social obligation and subordinates all bonds of proper association to his appetites such that 'kindred affinity, or any other band of consanguinity religion, honor, or honesty taketh no place in his outrageous appetite.'[159] In other words, Leicester is figured as a kind of self without society; a figure for whom the traditional commitments to the preservation of social and religious structures have been subordinated to rapacious self-interest. As monstrous as this description no doubt appeared to its earliest readers, the hybridising of images of excess with reference to rumoured events, and more concrete details, positions this account at the threshold between implausibility and credibility, in spite of Sidney's protestations to the contrary.

Sexual impropriety aside, Leicester, the interlocutors claim, functions as a '*dominus factotum.*'[160] Meaning both 'an absolute ruler' as well as 'a servant with control over household affairs', this equivocal characterisation marks a blurring of the boundaries between ruler and ruled. From his position, Leicester controls all access to the queen:

> First in the Privy Chamber, next to her Majesty's person, the most part are his own creatures (as he calleth them), that is, such as acknowledge their being in that place from; and the rest he so overruleth either by flattery or fear as none may dare but to serve his turn. And his reign is so absolute in this place (as also in all other parts of the Court) as nothing can pass but by his admission; nothing can be said, done,

157 Sidney, "Defence," 140.
158 Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 87.
159 Peck, 88.
160 Peck, 107.

> or signified whereof he is not particularly advertised; no bill, no supplication, no complaint, no suit, no speech can pass from any man to the Princess (except it be from one of the Council) but by his good liking…[161]

Concerns about mediated communication and access to the monarch lie at the heart of the *Commonwealth*, as well as serious fears that the Queen herself may be blind to the Earl's connivance. Leicester is accused of confining the queen and by extension, the nation itself in a figurative prison of falsity and flattery, conspiring to:

> Place about the Princess' person (the head, the heart, the life of the land) whatsoever people liketh him best. Who by their means casting indeed but nets and chains invisible bands about that person whom most of all he pretendeth to serve, he shutteth up his prince in a prison most sure, though sweet and senseless.[162]

Moving forward several decades, such language is mobilized with even greater fluency by the anonymous authors of Jacobean verse libels. Just as it became conventional to associate the Duke of Buckingham with Ganymede and Piers Gaveston, Leicester is lined up against a notorious list of historical royal favourites and courtiers, including Gaveston, Spencer, Robert Vere and Thomas Mowbray. In its invocation of historical royal favourites, the *Commonwealth* also reverberates with dramatic representation of the period. If as Sidney suggests, the libellous allegations cannot be resolved into a credible representation of personhood, these various representations of Leicester share many features with the dramatic personae of the Elizabethan stage. Among others, plays like Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* or Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays, reflect the central place that favourites played in the public fantasy of courtly life.

Despite their common theme however, these texts sharply diverge in their representation of the relation between contemporary and historical persons. In the *Commonwealth* the comparisons made between Leicester and other historical favourites are unequivocal and are rendered directly and referentially rather than analogically. Whereas the 'distancing' of analogies produced within, for instance, the dramatic frame of the theatre, or the extended allegories of beast fables and pastoral satire might be argued to 'contain' the more subversive consequences of this identification, the *Commonwealth* insisted on the concretisation of these identifications. The authors develop a candid association between

161 Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 95.
162 Peck, 93.

Elizabeth I and Edward II, Richard II, and Henry VI; a striking move insofar as we know these earlier monarchs were all ambivalent vehicles for royal representation.

In a publication as unambiguous in its political grievances as the *Commonwealth*, the direction and significance of the intimacy between Leicester and the Queen is represented ambiguously and inconsistently. Although the relationship is described in strongly coercive terms, there is an accentuation of the monarch's own appetites. These are emphasised through the pamphlet's sustained attention to her feminine affections and proclivities, suggesting a self-willed limit to her authority, as represented by her desire for Leicester and a readiness to submit to his control. In light of Elizabeth's refusal to marry, so often presented by the queen as the prioritisation of her subjects' interests over and above her own, the *Commonwealth*'s characterisation of her as prisoner to a subordinate, or infatuated mistress, insinuates a version of events that was as topical as it was unpalatable to the Queen herself. Representing the direction of government and politics as unduly influenced by Leicester, the questions the libel raises about the relationship between Leicester and the Queen arguably helped to generate an argument in support of unofficial discussion of the succession.

The *Commonwealth's* description of Elizabeth's relationship with Leicester also offers an important counter-example to a tradition of criticism that regards Elizabeth's rejection of the pressure on her to marry, as well as her manoeuvring of her relationships with her male courtiers, as exemplary of her ability to control and manipulate the sexual politics of the court. In the context of the infamous 1571 act that continued to enforce the prohibition of any public discussion of the queen's marriage or of the succession, the text appears as especially brazen.[163] This statute is frequently mentioned in the *Commonwealth* and it is through their discussion of these matters, despite the prohibition, that its authors align themselves with the interests of the 'commonwealth', 'the plain, simple, and well-meaning subject' versus 'elites' like Leicester.[164]

Just as libelling developed a range of characteristic linguistic markers, it also established favoured narrative patterns. The blurring and inversion of social boundaries between monarch and favourite is one that becomes an increasingly popular theme in the

163 Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (London: Longman, 1988), 16-19. The statute that prohibited discussion of the succession was *13 Elizabeth, cap.1*.
164 Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 140.

manuscript verse libels associated with James I's reign. The monarch-as-prisoner to his desires and affections became one of the most commonly rehearsed micro-narratives in the verse libels that interrogated the relationship between King James and the Duke of Buckingham. For instance, "The King's Five Senses," a verse libel that I explore in more detail in Chapter VI, stages its concern about Buckingham's sway with the King through a refrain that asks for the king to be 'protected' from his senses. This libel implicitly raises questions about the extent to which it is the king's impotence or the favourite's coercive malevolence that are at stake in this dynamic. The *Commonwealth* registers an important antecedent for the Jacobean construction of this relation between the favourite and the monarch. Just as the anonymous author of the "King's Five Senses" worries that Buckingham obstructs King James's knowledge of 'what his subjects undergo,' the author(s) of the *Commonwealth* discuss the obstructive effects of the Earl on the proper relationship between the monarch and her subjects:

> …he holdeth as it were a lock upon the ears of his prince, and the tongues of all her Majesty's servants so surely chained to his girdle as no man dareth to speak any one things that may offend him, though it be never so true or behoveful for her Majesty to know.[165]

The negative and inverted representations of the relationship between monarch and diabolical favourite regularly relied on heavily personalising constructions of this dynamic. It is significant that the obstructive quality of this favouritism is conceived of in terms of an ability to control the senses, often figured as the organs of involuntary or sometimes coercive pleasure. These writers regularly ally an uncontrolled sexual appetite with the instincts of the politically rapacious; more often than not, these drives are presented as inextricably coextensive. As is seen in the case of Buckingham and King James, and perhaps even more intensely in this case, favouritism as a model of relationship is one that antagonises the traditional approach to the appointment of office. The *Commonwealth*'s 'Gentleman' describes how Leicester dispensed with custom, and 'thrusteth into higher rooms any person whatsoever, so he like his inclination or feel his reward, albeit he neither be fit for the purpose nor have been so much as clerk in any inferior office before'.[166] Leicester's 'will' we are told 'must stand for reason' and 'his letters for absolute laws'.[167]

165 Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 95.
166 Peck, 97.
167 Peck, 97.

To these principled but arguably abstract objections, the dialogue relates the kind of circumstantial details that grounds the text's credibility. There are reports of deathbed confessions of members of the Earl's household implicating Leicester in his first wife's murder, and allegedly verbatim reports of Leicester's own admissions to the poisoning of the Earl of Essex. Amongst this the dialogue also integrates a range of plausible and engaging detail; the Lawyer tells the gathering of a recent encounter in Parliament, where he had travelled to listen to a debate about allowing a proposed subsidy to the crown. At the conclusion of the debate, we are told, the man sitting next to him turned and 'said in mine ear secretly':

> These reasons I do well allow and am contented to give my part in money, but yet, for her Majesty's need, I could make answer and one answered once the Emperor Tiberius in the like case and cause: *Abunde ei pecuniam fore, si a liberto suo in societatem reciperetur*— that her Majesty should have money enough if one of her servants would vouchsafe to make her Highness partaker with him…[168]

The Lawyer's neighbour we are told, does not waste any time in identifying this 'servant' as the Earl: 'meaning thereby my Lord of Leicester'. According to this account the Earl exploits the system of patronage by using the royal grant of various licenses and privileges for personal profit at the expense of the crown. Leicester is accused of 'discovering' papers that licensed him to extend his own estate at Kenilworth beyond its traditional boundaries and in the guise of his appointment as chief ranger of Snowden Forest, the Lawyer claims that he dispossessed Welsh freeholders whose land questionably 'encroached' on the forest. The scholar alleges that as Chancellor of the University of Oxford, Leicester has overseen the dissolution of 'discipline', 'the fervor of study extinguished', 'the public lectures abandoned' 'and 'the statutes and good ordinance both of the University and every college and hall in private broken and infringed'.[169] In this role, we are told, Leicester has appropriated the University's rights to bestow 'leases of farms, woods, pastures, parsonages, benefices' for his own gain, and 'so fleeced, shorn, and scraped already that there remaineth little to feed upon hereafter.'[170] All of these claims demonstrate not just the author's (or authors') knack for hyperbole but also a credible familiarity with court and parliamentary affairs, and, moreover, hint at the extent to which these issues were circulating in public discussion.

168 Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 108.
169 Peck, 116.
170 Peck, 116.

However excessive the *Commonwealth* appears it also continuously seeks to ground its claims about the Earl by indicating the existence of evidence. The text's Gentleman, for example, offers a report of one conversation, between the Earl of Sussex and a friend, in which a discussion took place about the existence of evidence against Leicester: 'I will tell you (quoth he), in confidence between you and me, there is as wise a man and as grave and faithful a Councillor as England breedeth…who hath as much in his keeping of Leicester's own handwriting as is sufficient to hang him…'[171] In its explicit suggestion that proof might be supplied to support its claims, the *Commonwealth* participates in another common trope of libellous writing, which regularly claimed to possess (without ever providing) an evidentiary basis for its allegations.

'A Power Above Law': Court Politics and the Legitimacy of Royal Favourites

As described, one method for refuting a libel was to call into question the credibility of its author. However, because authorship was unknown, or perhaps because anonymity did not inherently signify subversion, the second major strand of Sidney's defence involves an attempt to reverse the force of the fictional 'typing' the Earl has undergone and return to things 'not in the air' but so-called manifest truths. Instead of going to great length to repeat and perhaps to risk reinforcing the libel through a point-by-point refutation (that Leicester was not a poisoner, a murderer, an atheist and so on), Sidney introduced the supposedly 'indisputable' and exogenous evidence of the Dudley family lineage. The *Commonwealth* certainly put pressure on the theme of the Dudley line, in order to underscore that Leicester's status was entirely derived from Elizabeth's affection:

> He hath not anything of his own, either from his ancestors or of himself, to stay upon in men's hearts of conceits; he hath not ancient nobility as other of our realm have, whereby men's affections are greatly moved.[172]

Sidney's 'defence' provided a family tree to rival the *Commonwealth*'s own extended arguments from genealogy. Narrowly focused on Leicester's family lineage, the text has been called 'totally inadequate as a reply to the libel.'[173] Sidney's attention to genealogy,

171 Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 103.
172 Peck, 193.
173 Duncan-Jones and van Dorsten eds., *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, 124.

however, is conspicuous for what it regards itself to be counteracting in the libel. Sidney's text reminds us of the seditious qualities thought to inhere to libellous discourse, remembering that libel in this period was considered to be an action against the state and never simply against an individual. The rhetoric of Sidney's defence suggests that libels like the *Commonwealth* were read in the context of concerns about the stability and survival of the aristocratic classes, and unease about the maintenance of a fixed set of social relations governing who, how and what could be said more generally. As Michael McKeon has argued persuasively in a different context, the 'affirmation of tradition and stability is likely to be most insistent precisely at those moments when tradition and stability are most thought to be endangered.' In such moments, 'the symbolic enactment—through language and behaviour—of a system of order signifies not order but crisis, implying through the very invocation of stability an effort to rectify a felt condition of instability.'[174] In other words, Sidney's 're-ordering', his reassertion of the Dudley family lineage, functions to de-personalise, differentiate and redeem that which he believes has become overly personalised and undifferentiated, and is an attempt to re-stabilise that which he takes to have been destabilised by the *Commonwealth*.

Sidney is quite clear that the text should be treated as a libel, but it is not clear that all the earliest readers of the *Commonwealth* would necessarily have interpreted it in these terms. A principal approach to the interpretation of libellous attacks on royal counsellors or favourites was to read them as a strategic, or epideictic way of 'voic[ing] dissent while maintaining a fundamental loyalty to the king.'[175] Such a reading seems to hinge upon what is understood to be the effect of a displaced critique, as well as the extent to which anything like a 'fundamental loyalty' can be said to have remained untouched in texts otherwise so clearly equivocal and ambiguous. For instance, it was axiomatic of some early New Historical work that the mechanism of theatrical displacement onto a historical royal favourite – a Sejanus for instance – were manifestations of subversive positions ultimately 'contained' by the energies of the stage.

The interpretive implications of this reading, which regards the drama as ultimately sealing itself off from the more subversive consequences it sets in motion, sees the theatre in

174 Michael McKeon, "Cultural Crisis and Dialectical Method: Destabilizing Augustan Literature," in *The Profession of Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Leo Damrosch (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 43.
175 Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, 10.

service to (as Perry has argued) 'a socially conservative, cathartic function and thus enables the persistence of the system that generated the resentment in the first place.'[176] Yet, as Perry goes onto suggest, if these displacements are read as 'a condition of practical resistance rather than a substitute for it,'[177] the mediation of English politics through an historical analogue emerges as possessing more radical potential than some new historical accounts permit. However, dramatic performance and historical analogue do not perhaps provide quite the relevant framework here. Displacement on the other hand, despite its antipathy to libellous notions of concreteness can be understood as a key part of the way in which libel gives political significance to personal attributes or activities. There is evidence that it was hoped that the Catholic cause might be able to build on the success of texts like the *Commonwealth,* with it figuring in a larger propaganda campaign against the English government. In a letter composed on 9 March 1586, Sir Francis Englefield, a leading English Catholic residing at the Spanish court, praised the *Commonwealth* for its part in furthering the Catholic cause. For Englefield, in the absence of war:

> …which we can not obtain, we must fight with paper and pens, which cannot be taken from us. The two books of Justice [Allen's *Defence*] and Leicester's life have raised the building much. Let the same therefore be followed and backed with some pamphlets of the kind fresh and fresh from time to time.[178]

Texts like the *Commonwealth* show that there was often a tension between the self-styled allegiance of these texts and their contemporary reception. Like many libellous texts, the *Commonwealth* took an overtly 'loyalist' line in claiming that the purgation of one evil counsellor was for the good of the monarch and the state. This has led some scholars to suggest that the focus on a counsellor allows its author(s) 'to emphasise that the policies to which they objected were emanating not from the queen but from 'the regime,' figured as a self-interested clique of Machiavellian and atheistical evil counsellors.'[179] Such a reading gives precedence to a notion of a devout but fundamentally loyal Catholic subject. Notwithstanding that the mere possibility of a 'loyal' Catholic subject was itself a matter of vigorous debate in this period, we know that the text's ostensible investments did not limit its capacity to also being read more ambiguously. In its first octavo edition, the title page goes to some length to emphasise that the text has been 'Conceyved, Spoken and

176 Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, 10.
177 James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 119.
178 Francis Englefield, *CSP*, 53/15/552, quoted in Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 12.
179 Lake, *Bad Queen Bess?*, 5-6.

published, wyth most earnest protestation of al duetyful good wyl and affection, towardes her most excellent Ma./and the Realm, for whose good onely it is made common to many.'[180] It is evident, however, that Elizabeth was not only unpersuaded by these claims but that she read the book as tending to undermine faith in her monarchy and social hierarchy in general.

On the one hand, the *Commonwealth* aims to show how the proper flow of civil authority is decisively interrupted by the Earl's machinations. However, hostile readings, underpinned and accentuated by sensitivity to the maintenance of a complex social order, would necessarily remain in an ambivalent relationship to texts like the *Commonwealth*, that followed a type of sacrificial logic, or epideixis. The unalloyed critique of royal favourites seems to have attenuated the possible avenues for equivocation or 'functional ambiguity,' for as Sidney put it 'who goes about to undermine the one, resolves withal to overthrow the other.'[181]

Sidney's attitude conforms to what we know about the approach to libel in this period. The acts governing libel, in particular the medieval statute *de Scandalis Magnatum*, made clear provisions for the exceptional status of a defamation against a public official or peer of the realm. The broad wording of the statute that prohibited, 'any false News or Tales, whereby discord, or occasion of discord or slander may grow between the King and his People, or the Great Men of the Realm,' enshrined the principle that personal attacks on individual members of this section of society impugned the honour of the whole.[182]

This tract was one of several pamphlets and books published in the 1580s that gave rise to a royal proclamation ordering its suppression. Chris Kyle has argued that proclamations were a vital technique for communicating quickly and relatively effectively with the people. Serving as 'organs of censorship', proclamations could address particular issues directly where current statute might have seemed inadequate or abstract.[183] Certainly, the content of the proclamation seems to bear out this rationale. It is very explicit on the point that despite the author's (or authors') protestations to the contrary, this text was read as not just libellous of Leicester but defamatory of Elizabeth herself.

180 Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 222
181 Sidney, "Defence," 129.
182 See 3 Edw. 1, ch. 34 (1275).
183 Chris R. Kyle, "Proclamations as News in Early Modern England", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (2015): 782.

As an explanation for the need to suppress texts like the *Commonwealth,* the 1584 proclamation ordering the 'Suppression of Books Defacing True Religion, Slandering Administration of Justice, Endangering Queen's Title, etc.' calls attention to the damage libels like the *Commonwealth* were seen to inflict on both the person and the office of the monarch:

> In some of their most shameful, infamous, and detestable libels they go about to reproach, dishonor, and touch with abominable lies (as is well known to the whole realm) not only many of her trusty and faithful councillors but also her highness' judges and ministers of the law, greatly touching thereby her highness' self in her regal and kingly office, as making choice of men of want both of justice, care, and other sufficiency to serve her highness and the commonweal; and further, in the said books and libels they use all the means, drifts, and false persuasions they can devise or imagine to advance such pretended titles as consequently must be most dangerous and prejudicial to the safety of her highness' person and state (which the Lord long preserve).[184]

Despite this proclamation, however, and many other official attempts to suppress it, the *Commonwealth* seems to have remained extraordinarily popular. Peter Beal has suggested that a major consequence of the proclamation's prohibition was to drive the text into manuscript circulation where it found a keen audience.[185] Despite its significant length, making it a taxing proposition for any scribe, over the course of the following century the text was copied down alone but also gathered with other state tracts, letters and documents with a frequency that attests to its ongoing appeal. One seventeenth-century folio copy gathers the *Commonwealth* alongside another popular tract from the period, Thomas Scott's *Vox Populi*, a text that argues vociferously against the so-called Spanish Match: the proposed marriage of Prince Charles to the Spanish Infanta.[186] Just as the *Commonwealth* mobilised the Earl as the symbolic vehicle of discontent, Scott's polemic is mediated via an attack on the Spanish Ambassador, Gondomar, whilst simultaneously registering a frustration with the perception of James I's pro-Spanish royal policy.

184 Elizabeth I, "Ordering Suppression of Books Defacing True Religion, Slandering Administration of Justice, Endangering Queen's Title, etc.," in *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, *Volume 2/3: The Later Tudors, 1553-1603*, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 506-507. Hughes and Larkin note that the other text referred to here is Leslie's *Touching the Right, Title, and Interest of the Most excellent Princesse Marie Queen of Scotland* (Rouen, 1584).
185 *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts*, 1450–1700, ed., Peter Beal (King's College London, 2013), www.celm-ms.org.uk
186 Harvard fMS Eng 868, *CELM*, ed., Peter Beal.

The two texts emerged from different sides of the confessional divide. However, the collocation of the *Commonwealth* with *Vox Populi* shows the extent to which the Earl of Leicester came to symbolise a certain kind of corrupt Machiavellianism that could be invoked via this echoing juxtaposition, to lend support to other dissenting voices. In one form or another the impetus for both texts lies in a concern about monarchical succession. The putative intention of the *Commonwealth* was to ground the Catholic claim for Mary's succession, while the impetus for Scott's text also lies in a concern about royal succession, in this case the return of Catholic influence through the proposed union of Charles and the Infanta. Both texts use the *ad hominem* attack as a way of avoiding addressing the *ad rem* of state affairs.

As can be seen, the text sets aside religious difference, uniting the three interlocutors through their mutual mistrust of the Earl and of favourites in general. Characterised as a Machiavel, interested only in accruing greater worldly power, the Earl's alleged atheism positions him at the very margins of the social and moral order. As the *Gentleman* comments:

> For whereas by the common distinction now received in speech there are three notable differences of religion in this land, the two extremes whereof are the Papist and the Puritan, and the religious Protestant obtaining the mean, this fellow being of neither maketh his gain of all, and as he seeketh a kingdom by the one extreme and spoil by the other, so he useth the authority of the third to compass the first two, and the countermine of each one to the overthrow of all three.[187]

The view of Leicester presented in the text is of a character ungoverned by any intervening principle or belief, his manoeuvres viewed as entirely calculated toward his own political advantage. Having no commitments beyond his own self-interest, he is freed from any social or religious constraint that might check his appetites. As Peck has argued, one of the uses to which the libelling of Leicester is put is an early theory of the need for state-supported religious toleration. The text suggests, Peck argues, that 'not only is religious dissension an evil in itself, it also permits the destructive opportunism that is manifested in a man like Leicester.'[188] From the point of view of the authors of the *Commonwealth*, libelling seems to signal and is a response to, the excessive power that individual courtiers could acquire and enact. It was the prominence of these powerful individuals, and royal favourites, in particular, who were perceived to undermine the security of the state.

[187] Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 72.
[188] Peck, 35.

Leicester's Ghosts

The execution of Mary, Queen of Scots on 8 February 1587 and Leicester's sudden death from ill-health on 4 September 1588 removed the original impetus for the *Commonwealth*'s publication. Three years later in 1591, Edmund Spenser published *The Ruines of Time*, an elegiac poem paying tribute to prominent members of the Dudley family, primarily Leicester, Spenser's one-time patron, and Philip Sidney, who had also recently died. The poem acknowledges the apparent absence of any positive public memory of the Earl and in doing so registers the lasting cultural influence of the *Commonwealth*. One of the poem's guiding conceits is that it is the effacement of the possible conditions for Leicester's memorialisation that have occasioned the act of poetic memorialisation:

> He now is dead, and all is with him dead,
> Save what in Heaven's storehouse he uplaid:
> His hope is failed, and come to pass his dread,
> And evil men, now dead, his deeds upbraid:
> Spite bites the dead, that living never baid [bit].
> He now is gone, the whiles the fox is crept
> Into the hole, the which the badger swept.
>
> He now is dead, and all his glory gone,
> And all his greatness vapoured to naught,
> That as a glass upon the water shone
> Which vanished quite, as soon as it was sought.
> His name is worn already out of thought
> Ne any poet seeks him to revive
> Yet many poets honoured him alive.[189]

If this poem characterises the unfavourable mood that had formed around the Earl's legacy, a mock-epitaphal poem now attributed to Ralegh illustrates Spenser's point. Whereas Spenser's verse harmonises form and theme, mock-epitaphal verse, like the following, plays on the 'tension between the epitaph's normal function as a positive memorial to the deceased versus the libel's purpose of character assassination:'[190]

> Here lies the valiant soldier
> that never drew his sword.
> Here lies the loyal courtier
> that never kept his word.
> Here lies the noble lecher
> that used art to provoke.

189 Edmund Spenser, "The Ruins of Time," quoted in Simon Adams, *Leicester and the Court: Essays on Elizabethan Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 149-150.
190 May and Bryson, *Verse Libel*, 117.

Here lies the constant husband
whose love was firm as smoke.
Here lies the politician
and nut worm of the state,
Here lies the Earl of Leicester
that God and man did hate.[191]

In their 2016 collection of Elizabethan verse libels May and Bryson have gathered a further example of a mock epitaph written on the occasion of the Earl's death. The first and only known Elizabethan example of the poem is found in Henry Stafford's anthology. Adopting the Queen's nickname for Leicester, 'Robin', the portrait it develops of the Earl seems to participate in the *Commonwealth*'s libellous characterisation of him as deceitful, lascivious and diseased:

Here lies interred to make wormes meate,
Little Robin that was so greate;
Not Robin Goodfelow nor Robin Hoode,
But Robin that never was born for good;
A monster sent from angry fate
To spoile the countrie and the state.
His life was full of divilishe endes:
Traines for his foes, trickes for his freindes.
I care not nor I can not tell,
Whither he be gon to heaven or hell,
But surely here they have earthed the foxe,
That lothsomly stancke and died of the poxe.[192]

As the editors note, while we lack a complete picture of the popularity of this verse at the time of Leicester's death, it appears to have been popularly revived on the death in 1612 of another Robert: Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury and the favourite of King James. In Stafford's anthology the poem is transcribed alongside other well-known contemporaneous material, including the final Marprelate tract, *Marre Mar-Martin*.[193] At the time of its revival on Cecil's death, the poem can be found in one verse miscellany, copied down alongside other mock-epitaphal verses on the dead favourite. There are some minor differences in the poem's transposition but few that might be considered to introduce a significant change in sense. In this new context, however, the poem is placed in a dialogue with a number of other verses that also comment on Cecil's death and becomes, *de facto*, a poem addressed to Cecil's death, rather than Leicester's.[194]

191 "Epitaphium," BL Stowe MS 156, f. 204v.
192 CUL MS Dd.5.75, f.33, quoted in May and Bryson, *Verse Libel*, 117.
193 May and Bryson, *Verse Libel*, 117.
194 BL Egerton MS 2230, fols. 33v-35r gathers five other libels on Cecil's death.

It would be difficult to determine if the copyist of this later version of the poem was aware of the text's original purpose to defame the Earl, although Leicester's 'black legend' was certainly infamous. However, the poem's perceived suitability at the moment of Cecil's death suggests the analogic potential of a language that had been designed with Leicester specifically in mind. In fact, the poem may have been even more popular with audiences who read it as referring to Cecil. Underlining the provisional nature of most inquiries into scribal culture, May and Bryson point out that until recently, scholars were unaware that the poem was originally composed on the event of Leicester's death.[195] The poem's suitability for this kind of retro-fitting, seems to be closely tied to its participation in the conventions of libellous discourse.

Anonymity provides the framework for the poem's subsequent re-ascription; and the coincidence of the poem's hybridising of satiric typing, referentiality and the first-name agreement of the two protagonists, Robert, or 'Robin,' allow for both topicality and fictional distance to coincide**.** The poem's re-emergence in this compilation can be read then as at least doubly discursive; it continues to offer both a unique contribution to a libellous assault on Cecil as well as the accretive movement of a recognisably libellous discourse of royal favourites.

Too narrow an awareness of the multiple uses and adaptations made of this text has led, I would suggest, to an underestimation of the public impact of the *Commonwealth.* For example, in his forensic re-examination of the circumstances surrounding the death of Amy Robsart and the effect of the scandal on the Earl's reputation, Chris Skidmore has suggested that in its own time, 'the suppression of *Leicester's Commonwealth* was so effective that its impact was slight.' It was not, he suggests, until the second edition of the *Commonwealth* in 1641 that the Earl came to take on the 'moral warning against the dangers of an over-mighty courtier.'[196] Even on the evidence of printed material, this is to underplay the significance of the *Commonwealth*'s influence on public perceptions of the Earl. The compilers of *The Phoenix Nest* (1593), which was dedicated to Leicester's memory, preface the collection of verses with a tract titled 'The dead mans Right', which condemns the 'wicked Libellors' who 'have most odiously sought the slander of our wise, grave, and

195 See, for example, Pauline Croft, "The Reputation of Robert Cecil: Libels, Political Opinion and Popular Awareness in the Early Seventeenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6, no. 1 (1991): 43-69.
196 Skidmore, *Death and the Virgin Queen*, 351.

Honorable superior' of whom, 'none have more vilely been slandered than the late deceased Earl.'[197] Skidmore's reliance on the printed history, however, also overlooks the unbroken popularity of the text in manuscript, particularly in the early to middle decades of the seventeenth century.

Whether complete, incomplete or excerpted, more copies of the *Commonwealth* survive in manuscript than in print. Most significantly of all, although it is difficult to measure, the *Commonwealth* entered and influenced the culture through oral circulation, was sustained through hearsay and rumour, and was crucial in sustaining a set of inherited assumptions about royal favourites. It can be argued that the *Commonwealth* is of central significance to the story of early modern libel because it offers a clear and persuasive demonstration of the ways in which libellous techniques worked to gather together and stabilise a mixture of personal and political rumour and innuendo in textual form.

In *Kenilworth,* Scott has forged a tragic figure out of the details of the Earl's life, a man better understood as suffering from the structures of power and patronage, than as their master manipulator. As Scott characterised it, Leicester's life was defined by an impossible choice: to be either 'the favourite of Elizabeth, or a man so utterly shipwrecked in fortune and in honour'.[198] However, the reception of the *Commonwealth* suggests a much more sceptical mood about the Earl and the role of royal favourites in general. The *Commonwealth'*s libel of the Earl was understood as both specific and generalizable, entrenching antipathy not just towards Leicester but also towards the organisation of the court itself. In the *Commonwealth*, it is the crown, not Leicester, which is under threat from 'specialist rock of all other wereat kings and princes do make their shipwracks.[199]

197 R.S. of the Inner Temple, *The Phoenix Nest* (1593), ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1931), 5.
198 Scott, *Kenilworth*, 266.
199 Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, 187-88.

CHAPTER 3

MARTIN MARPRELATE: MAR-QUEENE, MARTIN THE MAR-POTENTAT

> It is more than time…that there were an end and surseance made of the immodest and deformed manner of writing lately entertained, whereby matters of religion are handled in the style of the stage
>
> Francis Bacon, *An Advertisement Touching the Controverseyes of the Church of England*, 1589

The Martin Marprelate tracts, so called for their invention of the eponymous persona, constitute probably the most famous pamphlet exchange of the sixteenth century. Perhaps in part because of the imaginative strength of this device, their place in the tradition of oppositional literature and an enduring preoccupation with identifying the author of the tracts, attention has often been diverted from closer analysis of the texts themselves.[200] The Marprelate tracts, as Jesse Lander has argued, have been 'far more often invoked than analysed.'[201] More recent scholarship, however, has mobilised renewed interest in the tracts, looking to them to investigate matters as diverse as:

> the rise of the public sphere, the social uses of print, the development of anti-puritan satire, the function of anonymity, the history of pamphlets, the dialectical development of polemic and literature, the oppositional potential of Menippean satire, the theatrical appropriation of polemical modes and tropes, and the queer poetics of railing.[202]

In what follows, although I touch on many of these fields of enquiry, as in my discussion of *Leicester's Commonwealth*, my focus is primarily on what might be considered the libellous character or inflection of the tracts, and crucially, the implications of reading the tracts for the broader account of early modern libellous writing which I am seeking to describe. Similarly, while I draw on all of the tracts, I am primarily focused on those moments that vivify the libellous strategies the pamphlets draw on and develop. As with my discussion of the *Commonwealth*, I draw attention to what I suggest are their characteristically libellous

200 Joseph Black, "The Martin Marprelate Tracts (1588-89) and the Popular Voice," *History Compass* 6, no. 4 (2008): 1093. Black estimates that over two dozen different people were known to have been involved in the production and circulation of the tracts.
201 Jesse Lander, "Martin Marprelate and the Fugitive Text," *Reformation* 7, no. 1 (2002): 135.
202 Eric Vivier, "John Bridges, Martin Marprelate, and the Rhetoric of Satire," *English Literary Renaissance* 44, no. 1 (2014): 19.

techniques. In practice, these techniques are almost always overlapping and mutually reinforcing. The Martinist assumption of a pseudonymous persona, for instance, reinforced the tracts' personified satirical mode, which recursively amplified the rhetorical effect of the pseudonym. Moreover, all of these techniques came together in a particular, and still relatively new material form, as part of the period's ongoing experimentation with the uses of ephemeral printed matter.

The broadsheet and six books that collectively constituted the Martin Marprelate tracts emerged from the presses of their clandestine and peripatetic printers between October 1588 and September 1589.[203] Unlike the *Commonwealth*, which had been printed abroad and from there conveyed to London, the authors and printers of Martin Marprelate published their work in England, and were in constant danger of detection and discovery by agents of the state. The tracts were printed on a hand-press that had to be covertly carried by horse and cart between a series of secret locations across the country, from Kingston to Coventry and the north of England. Because of the risks accompanying their production, responsibility for delivering the tracts to print was turned over to several parties over the course of their publication. The tracts were entitled, respectively, *The Epistle, The Epitome, Certain Mineral and Metaphysical Schoolpoints*, *Hay any Work for Cooper, Theses Martinianae*, *The Just Censure and Reproof of Martin Junior*, and *The Protestation of Martin Marprelate*. Robert Waldegrave (d.1604), who later fled to Scotland where he became 'King's Printer' to James VI, was the printer of the first four tracts and the printers John Hodgkins, Arthur Thomlin and Valentine Simmes took over for the fifth and sixth tracts.[204] The final tract was published with those supporters who remained after the discovery of the peripatetic press and the arrest of Hodgkins, Thomlin and Simmes.[205]

Notwithstanding Sidney's countersuit, the *Commonwealth* had incited very little in the way of answering texts. In contrast, the Martin Marprelate tracts instigated a well-documented

[203] Black, "Popular Voice," 1093. Black is the editor of the most recent scholarly edition of the Martin Marprelate tracts, see Joseph Black ed., *The Martin Marprelate Tracts: A Modernized and Annotated Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For now classic studies of the tracts, see William Pierce, *An Historical Introduction to the Marprelate Tracts* (London: Archibald Constable & Co, 1908); Leland Carson, *Martin Marprelate, Gentleman: Master Job Throkmorton Laid Open in his Colours* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1981); Edward Arber, *An Introductory Sketch to the Martin Marprelate Controversy, 1588-1590* (New York: The English Scholar's Library, 1895); Leland Carlson and Ronald Paulson eds., *English Satire* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1972); John Coolidge, "Martin Marprelate, Marvell, and Decorum Personae as a Satirical Theme," *PMLA* 74, no. 5 (1959): 526-532.
[204] Grace Egan and Colin Johnston, "Serving the Turn:" Collaboration and Proof in Illegal Hand-Press Period Books, *Ilha Desterro* 71, no. 2 (2018): 140.
[205] Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, lv.

and vigorous pamphlet-war between the pseudonymous author(s) of Martin Marprelate and the so-called anti-Martinist writers, many of whom were well-known poets and playwrights of the day. John Lyly, Robert Green, Anthony Munday and Thomas Nashe were hired by state officials to repudiate Martin's claims. These responses are crucial in helping to develop an account of the damaging impact libellous literature was thought to have on the quality of public discussion and debate. The episode epitomised the way in which intertextual borrowings and modifications could inadvertently function to generate, develop and define a libellous-style of writing. The difficulty each of these writers experience in responding to Martin without reverting to an *ad hominem* counter-attack raises questions about the extent to which this kind of polemic might have helped to popularize and 'legitimize rather than suppress "Martinist" discursive freedom.'[206]

Anchored in the tumult of the English Reformation and standing in a far longer history of reformist literature, the motivation for these polemical tracts sprang from the Presbyterian claim that the promise of reformation initiated by the break with Rome remained unrealised. Influenced by the injunctions of the French theologian John Calvin (1509-1564) as particularly set out in the *Institutio Christianae Religionis (Institutes of the Christian Religion)* and by the continental experience of church reform, 'puritans' argued that the Church of England was in need of greater and far more radical reorganisation if it were to utterly purge or 'purify' itself of persisting Catholic elements.[207] As Joseph Black, the tracts' twenty-first century editor has pointed out, for the writers of Martin Marprelate, the contours of this debate were principally 'ecclesiological rather than doctrinal.'[208] In other words, all English Protestants were the inheritors of Calvin in matters of belief and it was to all the 'extra' matters of church tradition and governance, ritual and forms of worship, that puritan hostility was directed.

While in practice, doctrinal and ecclesiological matters often intermingled, the puritan concentration on ecclesiological configurations signalled a belief that these structures could act to fundamentally support or inhibit the way to individual salvation. This belief

206 Joseph Black, "The Rhetoric of Reaction: The Martin Marprelate Tracts (1588-89), Anti-Martinism, and the Uses of Print in Early Modern England," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 28, no. 3 (1997): 707.
207 Calvin's *Institutes* were first published in Latin 1536 and in English in 1561; for a detailed treatment of the ecclesiological debate between Anglicans and Puritans in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, see Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?: Presbyterian and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988).
208 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, lv.

lay behind the tracts' focus on the means by which the church conducted the key rituals of Christian worship. In particular, the use of the outward signs of religious devotion, including the clerical use of vestments such as the surplice and the square cap, 'the catercap,' as Martin called it, the use of the wedding ring in the marriage service and the need for parishioners to kneel in order to receive the communion. While the New Testament sanctioned a 'four-fold system of pastor, doctor, elder and deacon,' the puritans insisted that there was no scriptural provision for the higher-order offices such as archbishops, bishops and deans. These offices, the writers claimed, were artificial, the dubious result of custom rather than scripture, and part of a superimposed hierarchy that interceded in the full and proper participation of the congregation in religious worship.

The argument for dismantling these structures abandoned the conventions of decorous debate and was couched in a vociferous attack on individual prelates that blurred the boundaries between satire and libel. In Martin's terms, the bishops were 'intolerable withstanders of reformation, enemies of the gospel, and most covetous and wretched popish priests.'[209] Despite what could be considered the institutional rather than individual structure of these issues, Martin's complaint is striking for the heavily personalised nature of its attack. While puritan problems with church governance are figured as located in individual bishops, the ultimate rhetorical goal of this strategy seems to be to direct the reader beyond the individual cleric, to the polemical point or 'truth' contained in the tracts, a reflection on the allegedly unscriptural and therefore popish and heretical hierarchy of established church government.

Martin was by no means the first puritan to publish polemic. In England, there existed a vital textual tradition of puritan complaint dating back to the Reformation. Earlier iterations of Protestant polemic – pamphlets such as John Field and Thomas Wilcox's *Admonition to Parliament* (1571) and Thomas Cartwright's *Second Admonition to Parliament* (1572) – had made similar arguments against the prelacy. In taking Parliament as their collective addressee, these authors, ostensibly at least, also sought to promote their cause through official channels. Although both these texts were originally published anonymously, Field and Wilcox were discovered and imprisoned, and Cartwright fled the country. Whitgift's response to these pamphlets, *An Answere to a Certen Libell Intituled, An Admonition to Parliament* (1572) tells us much about the efforts of the established church to

[209] Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 25.

marginalize earlier forms of puritan critique through a literal delegitimization of it as 'libel.' Whitgift's lengthy and painstaking response followed an established method of religious disputation, summarising each point of the admonition and 'answering' it.

If these earlier texts were considered seditious in their demands for the root-and-branch restructuring of episcopacy, Martin's approach to arguing the puritan case for reform was radically unorthodox. In his *An Admonition to the people of England* (1589) Thomas Cooper acknowledged the unusual status of the Martinist tracts in the context of reformist pamphlets, which 'are not content to lay down great crimes generally, as some other have done, but with very indecent terms, charge some particular Bishops with particular faults'.[210] Cooper also acknowledges the particular pressure this put on orthodox forms of religious dispute. These Martinist accusations, Cooper writes, 'will not be answered and shifted away with human reason solely.'[211]

Like most libellous discourse, the Martinist tracts worked by implying, without ever evidencing, that they possessed special insight into the individuals they were attacking. Alert to the interpretation of his text as a libel, Martin moved to pre-empt allegations of 'lies and slanders,' assuring his readers that: 'I speak not of things by hearsay as of reports, but I bring my witnesses to prove my matters.'[212] Martin's insistence on the truthfulness of his claims did little to stem the flow of accusations. Writing in one answering pamphlet, *Pappe with a Hatchet* (1589), John Lyly refuses to address Martin as a serious polemical interlocutor. Instead, the pamphlets are dismissed as 'libels, all so taunting and slanderous, as it is hard to iudge, whether their lyes exceed their bitternesse, or their bitternesse their fables.'[213] Again, the frontispiece of Cooper's *Admonition* refers to the 'slanderous untruethes' by 'Martin the Libeller.' In various ways, the accusation of 'libel', or being a 'libeller' became key terms in the controversy. On the one hand, the state-sponsored writers adopted 'libel' as a key term in their quest to delegitimize Martin's claims and undermine the authority of the pamphlets. And yet in responding anti-Martinist writers like Lyly were paradoxically compelled to participate in precisely the degraded and debased

210 Thomas Cooper, *An Admonition to the people of England* (London, 1589), *EEBO*, 36-37.
211 Cooper, *An Admonition to the people of England*, 32.
212 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 26.
213 John Lyly, *Pappe with a Hatchet* (London, 1589), *EEBO*, A1r. As Annabel Patterson has demonstrated, fabulist themes were actually acceptable to Lyly, so long as it was in the service of inculcating loyalty to the crown. For a detailed analysis of Lyly's use of the 'fable' in contesting criticism of the crown see, Annabel Patterson, *Fables of Power: Aesopian Writing and Political History* (London: Duke University Press, 1991), 76-80.

forms of language and polemic they sought to exorcise: 'I was loath so to write as I have done', writes Lyly, 'but that I learned, that he that drinks with cutters, must not be without his ale dagger; nor he that buckles with Martin without his lavish terms.'[214]

As it was for the writers of the *Commonwealth*, the criticism that might also have been conceived of as a structural or institutional problem was activated instead against its most prominent individuals. Rather than foregrounding an imperfect system of church governance, the authors of Martin Marprelate ridiculed, accused, and threatened specific bishops, in order to draw attention to what they also argued was a general need for reformation. The bishops John Aylmer (1520/1-1594), Richard Bancroft (1544-1610), John Bridges (1536-1618), and John Whitgift (1530/31-1604) all came under Martinist scrutiny. In addition to their spiritual crimes which included, for example, publication of the Apocrypha with the Bible, Martin alleged that the bishops were thieves and debtors, 'dumbe dogges.' As I've discussed, this tag was ultimately reprised in Lewis Pickering's mock-epitaphal verse on Bancroft's death. Although all libellous discourse could in principle be considered seditious, the socially destabilising function understood to inhere in personal attack was clearest in the libels that focused on socially significant individuals.

The response to the Martinist tracts concentrated on the threat Martin's 'boldness of speech' posed to the 'settled law or state'. If he could not be stopped, Cooper claims, 'he will prove himself to be, not only *Mar-prelate*, but *Mar-prince*, *Mar-State*, *Mar-law*, *Mar-magistrate*,' resulting in 'Anabaptistical equality and community': in other words, the destruction of the Elizabethan religious settlement through the utter separation of church and state.[215] Intermixing personal satire of the bishops with sustained, if unorthodox, ecclesiological critique of church governance, the libellous quality of the pamphlets appeared designed to draw-attention to and amplify the polemic intent of the puritans' argument. As Joseph Black has argued, 'the primary aim of the Marprelate project was to create a polemic that would generate and legitimate popular discussion of controverted issues.'[216]

In the terms established by this project, the alleged venality and hypocrisy of the bishops could act as a stand-in for the debasement of the episcopacy in general. However, if the

214 Lyly, *Pappe with a Hatchet*, A2v-A3r.
215 Cooper, *Admonition*, 36-37.
216 Black, "Popular Voice," 1093.

critique of the Earl of Leicester offered up by the *Commonwealth* shaped and sharpened an idea of the corrupt favourite as a popular vice-figure, the Marprelate tracts arguably engendered a more complex legacy. As I aim to show, the Marprelate tracts provided an important representational and stylistic resource for other sixteenth and seventeenth-century libellers. It was taken up by those interested in continuing the puritan critique of episcopacy, as well as by writers drawing on the anatomizing Martinist mode to vitalize the heavily personalised form taken by Jacobean, anti-court sentiment. The *ad hominem* nature of the attack was shaped by a novel style of prose, as Black has remarked:

> Through the use of fictional strategies, a racy, colloquial prose, anecdotes anchored in the everyday details of readers' lives, and a willingness to put in to print the personal failings of individual bishops, the tracts courted a notoriety that would ensure dissemination of Presbyterian complaints about the status quo.[217]

These were formally subversive tactics that effectively dispensed with and disengaged from the high-minded and regularly lengthy tracts published by conformist defenders of the church, such as John Bridges' *Defense of the government established in the Church of Englande for ecclesiastical matters* (1587) or Cooper's *An Admonition*.

Perhaps because of the novelty of his approach, critics have argued that Martin's *ad hominem* style of oppositional rhetoric rebounded, paradoxically strengthening a heavily caricatured and pejorative notion of 'the puritan' as a kind of hypocrite and buffoon and ironically, given the playful style of the tracts, as anti-fun or pleasure. Patrick Collinson has suggested, for instance, that it was this incarnation of the puritan that migrated to the late-Elizabethan and early-Jacobean stage, with characters such as Sir Oliver Mar-Text in Shakespeare's *As You Like it* and Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* seen as directly emerging from the concept of the puritan that the Martinist and Anti-Martinist debate generated.[218] As I will discuss, the tracts' performative style caused many of their earliest readers, even those who shared a common cause, to express a profound sense of unease about the probity of Martinism for the address of serious ecclesiological matters.[219] Lyly and Nashe justify their own

217 Black, "The Rhetoric of Reaction," 708.
218 Patrick Collinson, "Religious Satire and the Invention of puritanism," in *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Black suggests in *Marprelate Tracts* (lxxv) that the influence of Martinism on the character of the stage puritan can be seen in a range of plays from the 1590s, including Anthony Munday's *John a Kent and John a Cumber* (c. 1590), the anonymous *A Knack to Know a Knave* (c.1592), and Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors, Love Labour's Lost, Titus Andronicus, As You Like It, Twelfth Night*, as well as the English history plays.
219 For example, anti-Martinists regularly compared Martin Marprelate to the famous English actor Richard Tarleton, see Black, "The Rhetoric of Reaction," 714.

unorthodox responses by reference to Martin's refusal to participate in regular polemic conventions. In *Pappe with a Hatchet* Lyly argues that 'I thought it more convenient, to give them a whisk with their owne wand than to have them spurd with deeper learning.'[220] *Rhythmes against Martin Marre-Prelate*, a text associated with both Lyly and Nashe, shares this judgement: 'Since reason (Martin) cannot stay thy pen,/We'il see what rime will do: have at thee then.'[221] However, in spite of what look to be staunch declarations of intent, there is no question that Lyly and Nashe were on the defensive. With Martinism violating the rules of reasoned polemic debate, these anti-Martinists were forced to succumb to the very forms of language and style whose influence they sought to dispel.

Martin Marprelate and Pseudonymous Proliferation

> Why, his meaning in writing unto you was not that you should take pains to seek for him. Did you think that he did not know where he was himself? Or did you think him to have been clean lost, that you sought so diligently for him? I thank you brethren, I can be well though you do not send to know how I be.
>
> Martin Marprelate, "The Epitome," November 1588

> …that's it I thirst after, that name to name, and knowing one another, we may in the streets grapple.
>
> John Lyly, *Pappe with a Hatchet*, 1589

In taking the pseudonym Martin Marprelate, the notorious 'mar-er' or censurer of prelates embedded a relation to the self-confessed imperative of his own style: 'I am plain,' he writes, 'I must needs call a spade a spade, a pope, a pope.'[222] Possibly gesturing toward the reforming zeal of the theologian Martin Luther, the name also chimed with early associations of 'Martin' with buffoonery and foolishness.[223] The anti-Martinist writers became intensely preoccupied with the issue of identifying this 'dizzard late skipped out upon our stage/But in a sack, that no man might see him.' These writers acknowledged the function of 'Martin' as a kind of type-name, associated with inflammatory pamphlets:

220 Lyly, *Pappe with a Hatchet*, A4v.
221 *Rhythmes Against Martin* (London, 1589), A2r.
222 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 53.
223 Black, "Popular Voice," 1092

> And though we know no yet the paltry page,
> Himself hath Martin made his name to be;
> A proper name, and for his feats most fit;
> The only thing wherein he hath showed with.[224]

In suggesting that Martin is a 'proper name,' the author of this verse implies that it is a name that corresponds to a tradition of precisely the sort of seditious commentary the Marprelate pamphlets present. As a proper name or type-name, the most prominent historical precursor of 'Martin' was Pasquin:

> the person popularly supposed to be represented by a statue in Rome on which satirical Latin verses were annually posted in the 16th century; the statue itself. Hence: an imaginary person to whom anonymous lampoons were ascribed; a composer of lampoons.[225]

It was common practice to name different forms or styles of writing after their historical prototype, hence the terms Pasquils and Pasquinades. The Marprelate tracts generated a similar pattern of naming with 'Martin' and 'Martinism' both taken up alongside these other terms to signal a scurrilous-persona or a potentially libellous form of writing. This practice enjoyed a long and illustrious legacy. Well-known for their revival during the Civil War period, Martinist personas and devices continued to be adopted well into the eighteenth century. Jonathan Swift's reconciliation of 'divinity and wit' in *A Tale of a Tub* recalls the Martinist argument for presenting serious ecclesiological debate in an entertaining form. The 'Martin' persona was a touchstone and a storehouse of representation. In Swift's case, the appropriation of the persona of 'Martin' acted as the vehicle for his own examination of Anglicanism. Members of the Scriblerus club which included Swift and Alexander Pope, developed the persona Martinus Scriblerus, and began to compose his 'Memoirs.' In their version of Martinist literature, Martin is represented as the epitome of the fastidious scholar, excessively committed to a widely applied principle of *sola scriptura* and obsessed with minutiae and trivia. There is more than a touch of the anti-Martinists, Martin Marprelate in the Memoirs' account of Martin Scriblerus, for whom 'it was the most particular talent in [him] to convert every trifle into a serious thing.'[226]

224 *Rhythmes Against Martin*, A2.
225 *OED*, "Pasquin, (n.)."
226 Alexander Pope, "How Martinus became a Great Critic," in *The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq. In Verse and Prose,* edited by Johnson, Wakefield, A. Chalmers (London, 1806), vol. vi, 117.

To an even greater degree than the *Commonwealth*, the Marprelate pamphlets can be understood as the product of a collaborative effort by a particular interest group or as John Benger has put it, 'a microcosm of Elizabethan society can be discerned amongst the Martinists.'[227] Although a strong case has been made for Job Throkmorton as the author most closely associated with the creation of the distinctly Martinist style, the project was both written and received in terms of collaboration.[228] As I have suggested, the danger inherent in producing the tracts meant that they were usually, even more so than licensed publications, the product of many hands. Considering the question of authorship, the editor of the tracts has suggested that 'to reduce Martin to an individual author is in many ways to deprive the tracts of the textual and concomitant moral authority he sought to invoke.'[229] It is apparent that suppressing the name of the author could be understood as an essentially defensive mechanism, a common condition of controversial religious texts that sought to avoid prosecution. [230] However, if anonymity effaced the name, pseudonymity re-introduced the notion of an author, albeit fictitiously. The pseudonymous publication of the Marprelate tracts shared the same self-protective impetus as the anonymizing of the *Commonwealth*, and yet, as with anonymous publication, the consequences of this strategy also exceeded their original impetus in a number of distinct ways. For instance, despite its obfuscatory function, pseudonymous publication persisted in organising the reception of the text around the injunctions of authorship that it also sought to conceal. As North has remarked, 'Martin's chosen name challenges the assumption that an author's status is also a gauge of his courtesy.'[231] Martin's alertness to the advantages that might accrue to an authorial rather than an anonymous form of address, is apparent in the extensive use of pseudonymity's rhetorical effects, particularly the sophisticated imitation of personhood that pseudonymity makes possible.

Martin showed a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which the rhetorical functions of authorship could be weaponised, when he sought to undermine the authority of John Bridges, by alleging that he was the author of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (c.1553), a famous

227 John Benger, "The Authority of the Writer and Text in Radical Protestant Literature 1540 to 1593 with Particular Reference to the Marprelate Tracts" (PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1989), 182.
228 See Leland Carson, *Martin Marprelate* and Black, *Marprelate Tracts* (xlvi). Other names associated with the tracts include John Udall, and John Penry who was tried and ultimately executed in 1593 for his involvement.
229 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, xlvii.
230 North estimates that 'ecclesiastical debate texts account for about sixty percent of anonymous texts published in early modern England.' North, *Anonymous Renaissance*, 24.
231 North, *Anonymous Renaissance*, 140.

English comedy in which the dramatic action turns on a lost needle. Robert Griffin has drawn attention to the specific function of pseudonymity in discussing how Foucault's theory of the author-function might apply to pseudonymous texts. He notes that 'the name of the author establishes a relation of homogeneity and filiation between texts…[that] obtains even when the author is a fiction.'[232] It is precisely these organising effects of authorial identity that the Marprelate tracts were able to draw on, both in the period of their initial publication in the late 1580s and as the texts and the pseudonym were adapted, revised and updated in successive centuries.

The fabrication of a legal name also made it possible for the Martinist authors to challenge and play with the anticipated accusations of libel based on establishing a connection between a work's authorial identity and its credibility or truthfulness. Addressing the bishops in his first tract, *The Epistle* (1588), Martin writes:

> You will go about, I know, to prove my book to be a libel, but I have prevented you of that advantage in law, both in bringing in nothing but matters of fact, which may be easily proved, if you dare deny them: and also in setting my name to my book.[233]

By implication, libels are construed as anonymous texts constituted on lies or unfounded rumour. In 'setting (his) name to my book,' Martin pre-emptively challenges his detractors' claims that the text is a libel which he implies would be, by definition, anonymous. By the same token, this passage can also be read to suggest that simulated naming can itself act as an obstacle to legal action, having no legal existence as it were, 'Martin Marprelate' could hardly be prosecuted.

Together, pseudonymity and the naming of specific targets constituted one of the central techniques of the tracts. Whereas the *Commonwealth* had relied heavily on rumour, skirting around some of the finer points of its accusations against Leicester, the itemizing of allegations in the Marprelate tracts were crisp and detailed in their particulars. In accusing John Aylmer, the Bishop of London of seizing and retaining stolen cloth from a group of thieves, what we would now probably call 'handling stolen goods,' Marprelate amassed plenty of corroborating detail. The dyers, the victims of the theft, are named as 'Baughin,

[232] Robert J. Griffin, "Anonymity and Authorship," *New Literary History* 30, no. 4 (1999): 882.
[233] Black, *Marprelate Tracts,* 35.

Swan and Price' and we are told they 'dwell at the Old Swan in Thames street.'[234] Further along in *The Epistle*, Martin raised the ecclesiological debate between preaching and reading. The Star Chamber decree of 1586, which declared that all works were to be 'first seen and perused by the Archbishop of Canterbury and [the] Bishop of London,' had given the ecclesiastical offices prerogative rights to pre-publication veto.[235] Following this injunction, Martin argued that the licensing practice of the bishops favoured texts that recommended religious inculcation through reading God's word, rather than listening to, or receiving it from a sermon or other form of religious address. Martin alleged that the system was implicitly heretical and suppressive and claimed that the bishops 'are afraid that anything should be published abroad whereby the common people should learn that the only way to salvation is by the word preached.'[236] In support of this allegation he described the latest episode of episcopal interference, whereby after submitting his *Short Christian Instructions* to Whitgift for authorisation to publish, the Scottish minister, John Davidson (c. 1549-1604) had his text returned with a glaring redaction:

> …his grace committed it to Doctor Neverbegood (Wood), he read it over in half a year, the book is a great one of two sheets of paper. In one place of the book the means of salvation was attributed to the word preached: and what did he, think you? He blotted out the word (preached) and would not have that word printed, so ascribing the way to work man's salvation to the word read. Thus they do suppress the truth, and to keep men in ignorance. John Cant. Was the first father of this horrible error in our church, for he hath defended it in print…[237]

The level of detail in both stories promises to guarantee the story's credibility, as well as being presumably intended to promote Martin as a truth-teller in general. More specifically, in accusing Aylmer of theft and Whitgift of heresy, the Marprelate tracts sought to further the reformist cause by casting aspersions on the activity of individual prelates. Perhaps intended as a provocation to the bishops to produce a written response which they had not to that point received, these allegations were restated and accentuated in the preface to the second tract, *The Epitome*:

234 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 13.
235 Edward Arber, ed. *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London*, vol. II (London, 1875-94), 807.
236 Black, 31.
237 Black, 31.

> Martin hath told the truth, you cannot deny it, that some of you do injuriously detain true men's goods, as John of London: and some have accounted the preaching of the word to be heresy, as John of Canterbury etc.[238]

The tracts illustrate the ways in which satirical pseudonymity was developing to become more than strategic manoeuvring or simply part of the para-textual equipment of the tracts. The proper name 'Martin Marprelate' introduced the reader to the satirical persona of Martin Marprelate who was both the author and protagonist of his own work. Regularly shifting between the first and third person, between 'I' and 'Martin,' introduced a self-conscious quality to the pamphlets that extended the characterological effects of pseudonymity, so that as Mary North suggests Martin seems 'at once apprehensible and fictional.'[239] The pseudo-personhood conferred by pseudonymity also made possible a particular kind of personified counterattack. So, for example, the author(s) of *Mar-Martine* envision his execution:

> Here hangs knave Martine a traitorous Libeler he was
> Enemise pretended but in hart a friend to the Papa,
> Now made meat to the birdes that about his carkas are haggling.
> Learne by his example yee route of Pruritan Asses,
> Not to resist the doings of our most gratious Hester,
> *Martin* is hangd, O the Master of al Hypocritical hangbies.[240]

Martin's response to reports of his death is paradigmatic of the kinds of performative contradictions pseudonymity made possible. In these moments it is possible to see, as Black has suggested, Martin as both person and position, in *Hay any Work for Cooper* he writes: 'What though I were hanged, do you think your cause shall be any better? For the day that you hang Martin, assure yourselves, there will twenty Martins spring in my place…'[241] In the same passage, however, he is at pains to step back from this monstrously multiplying and proliferating vision: 'I am alone,' he writes, 'No man under heaven is privy, or hath been privy unto my writings against you, I used the advice of none therein. You have and do suspect divers, as Master Paget, Master Wigginton, Master Udall, and Mater Penry, to make Martin.'[242]

238 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 54.
239 North, "Early Modern Anonymity," 6.
240 *Mar Martine* (London, 1589), A4v.
241 Black, 120.
242 Black, 120.

All seven tracts make use of rhetorical shifts between presenting Martin as at once the particular author of his work and as representative of a movement. In a sudden escalation between the two, he threatens the bishops with exposure: 'First, I will watch you at every half turn, and whatsoever you do amiss, I will presently publish it.' If the bishops ignore his warning, he threatens to: '…place a young Martin in every diocese,' and '…rather than I will be disappointed of my purpose, I will place a Martin in every parish. In part of Suffolk and Essex, I think were best to have two in every parish. I hope in time they shall be as worthy Martins as their father is, every one of them able to mar a prelate.'[243]

Even as they tried to neutralise the popular appeal of Martinism, anti-Martinist pamphlets played an integral role in conferring substance and a kind of credibility to the Martinist pseudonym. Although anti-Martinist writers often stressed the inherent unreliability of pseudonymous writing, once drawn into a polemical engagement, many of their pamphlets mimicked Martinism in their use of a playfully aggressive style not traditionally associated with ecclesiological debate. Following the Martinist evocation of Martin as the author of the tracts as well as a representative position, the anti-Martinists continued to cultivate this ambiguity and uncertainty. Converting the frustrations attendant upon conducting a debate with an unknown interlocutor, in *Pappe with a Hatchet*, John Lyly rhetorically connects Martinism to a tradition of 'levelling' movements that seek to undermine traditional social structures. If 'Martin, a Monarch in his own most conceit,' had it his way, writes Lyly, not only would weighty matters be decided upon by the lowly, or 'ecclesiastical causes to come before Weavers and Wierdrawers,' but he would also threaten to chip away at the monarch's authority. Martinism, according to the anti- Martinist writers such as Lyly, inherently led to treason, since it suggested:

> that to the rule of the Church, the whole state of the realm is linked, and that they filching away Bishop by Bishop seek to fish for the Crown and glue their new Church, their own conclusions…[244]

Martinist writers invoked a groundswell of popular support with their threats of replication in the shape of Martin's progeny, Martin Sr and Martin Jr. The approach to publication through intense collaboration modelled by Martinism, as Black has argued, was intended to outlast the potential discovery of the tracts' original authors, compositors and printers.

243 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 35.
244 John Lyly, *Pappe with a Hatchet*, C3v.

As Martin counsels his opponents, 'the day that you hang Martin, assure yourselves, there will twenty Martins spring in my place.'[245] Following the lead of the Martinist writers, anti-Martinist literature also began to refer both to multiple 'Martins' as well as a range of possible types associated with Martinism. Christopher A. Hill has noted that in the anti-Martinist literature, 'there are Martins with poor Latin, Martins who make lewd advances toward women, Martins who preach without knowledge, and Martins linked with conjurers and alchemists.'[246] It is possible to get a sense of the significance of this process in consolidating 'Martin Marprelate' as a pseudonym that came to function in excess of its original design.

A major consequence of the pamphlet war between Martinist and anti-Martinist writers, as Jesse Lander has remarked, was that by the beginning of the 1590s, the name Martin' had become 'a virtual synonym for religiously motivated activity.'[247] However, what Lyly called his 'thirst' to have Martin 'namefied' would not come to pass. While almost all of those associated with the tracts were ultimately arrested no one ever admitted to being the author of the tracts, and authorship was never able to be established with legal certainty. Nonetheless, just as one of the functions of authorship might be thought to function to collect, organise and control texts under a single name, the pseudonym, 'Martin Marprelate,' continued to promote an authorial relationship *between* texts that was accepted and carried over by succeeding generations.

'I Cannot Keep Decorum Personae': Satire and Ad Hominem Critiques in Martin Marprelate

If adopting a pseudonymous satiric mask tested conventional modes of religious debate, the Martinist satirico-libellous accounts of the prelacy completed the breach. While puritan arguments about ecclesiology were plainly inimical to supporters of the established church, by the 1580s debates between defenders of both sides had been underway for approximately half a century. What stood out about the Marprelate tracts and what seems to have been experienced as deeply unsettling even to Presbyterians who shared the Martinist belief in ecclesiological reform, was the performative, mocking style adopted to

245 Black, "Popular Voice," 1100.
246 Christopher A. Hill, "Dost thou see a Martin who is Wise in his own Conceit? There is more hope than a fool in him," *Renaissance Papers* (2014): 120.
247 Lander, *Inventing Polemic*, 80.

criticise individual prelates in the name of critiquing the church. As Black has noted, these accusations ranged from 'stupidity to bigamy, closet Catholicism to contented cuckoldry, swearing, gambling, and Sabbath-day bowling, to theft, corruption and public brawling.'[248]

Although the *Commmonwealth* had dealt in topical particulars, the authors also made some effort to distance themselves from some of its more seditious elements by using the confines of a private house and the cultivated ambience of legal and theological discussion and debate to frame their argument. The persona of Martin Marprelate on the other hand, presided over a much more direct and provocative form of satire. *The Epistle* announced the arrival of a witty urbanite who claimed to be 'the reverend and worthy Martin Marprelate gentleman…'[249] The tracts employ a profusion of literary techniques and a much commented-upon array of satirical effects, including parody, hyperbole and burlesque. They also parody a range of textual and typographical effects such as black-letter, running titles, marginalia and errata, and there are suggestions of a link between the tracts and folk traditions such as the jig and the jestbook.[250] Other scholars have drawn attention to the ways in which these techniques refashion, through imitation and inversion, the expected practices of humanist discourse and debate. [251]

Demonstrating mastery over the whole gamut of printing techniques and employing them in mocking denigration of the prelacy, it is not difficult to imagine how Martin's parodic use of these techniques drew attention to the artifice of traditional scholarly debate. Such methods seem implicitly designed to cast doubt upon the moral authority of particular texts and printed matter in general. Religious conviction, insight, and understanding, Martin suggested, were not the possession of a small group of church elites. The Marprelate tracts were designed to popularise Martin's ecclesiological arguments using a mixture of proverbial wisdom, classical allusion, and colloquialism, as well as the technical language of ecclesiological debate. In their explicit citation and mimicry of the opposing side, such satirico-libellous texts threatened to stimulate an interminable slew of call-and-response publications. Francis Bacon remarked on this alarming tendency: "*Qui replicat,*

248 Black, "Popular Voice," 1097-98.
249 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 5.
250 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, xxv-xxxiv.
251 See Evelyn Tibble, *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993). Tribble has suggested that Martin reverses the humanist use of marginalia to promote community and consensus as an opportunity for contestation and debate.

multiplicat;" 'he that replieth, multiplieth', and "*Alter principium malo dedit, alter modum abstulit*"; by the one's means we have a beginning, and by the other's we shall have no end.'[252]

With the exception of the broadside, *Certain Mineral and Metaphysical Schoolpoints* and *The Just Censure and Reproof of Martin Junior*, the title pages of all the remaining Martinist tracts ridicule the conventional publishing imprint and the practice of printing *cum privilego*. *The Epistle* discloses that it was 'printed overseas, in Europe, within two furlongs of a Bouncing Priest, at the cost and charges of M.Marprelate, gentleman; *Theses Martinianae* 'without any privilege of the Catercaps' (the bishops), *The Protestation of Martin Marprelate* is 'published by the worthy gentleman Doctor Martin Marprelate, Doctor in all the Faculties, Primate and Metropolitan.' The process of bringing a text to print was strictly regulated and Martin's ludic emphasis on this activity laid down a further challenge to the institution. The stress placed by the authors of the tracts on their subversion of these rules and their success in infiltrating the marketplace of print, was implicitly styled as a challenge to this system and the relatively exclusive culture of debate about religious and political affairs it promoted. *Schoolpoints* and *Theses Martinianae* in particular, explicitly invoked the reform tradition initiated by Luther's ninety-five theses (1517). They both contained lists of contentions that closely mimicked this style, with heavy reference and citation of William Tyndale, and as the only broadside among the tracts, *Schoolpoints* could be regarded as especially fostering this identification.

While the tradition of Protestant reform literature was closely linked to the satiric mode in incriminating particular bishops, the Marprelate tracts far exceeded satire's accepted boundaries. All the tracts presented the plain declaration of Presbyterian ecclesiological debate, however, they also all conspicuously engaged in the direct *ad hominem* attack of particular bishops, in particular, Aylmer, Bancroft and Whitgift. Anonymous and pseudonymous publication, as Mary North has suggested, integrated Martinist writing in a longer tradition of literary satirical writing that included Piers Plowman, Pasquil, Democritus Junior, and Thomas Telltruth.[253] However, most scholars agree that the Martinist tracts represented a new and sensational chapter in the narrative of Protestant reform literature.

[252] Bacon, "An Advertisement Touching the Controversies of the Church of England," 4.
[253] North, "Early Modern Anonymity," 5.

Douglas Bruster's idea of 'embodied writing' provides a persuasive framework for thinking through the operation and effect of the novelty of this mixed satirico-libellous style. Bruster's definition of early modern embodied writing as that which 'drew real and imaginary figures into print for potentially indecorous handling' illustrates the growing interest in blending traditional satiric modes with personal invective.[254] Identifying the Marprelate tracts as the first major episode in this new form of 'personal satire,' Bruster argues that Martinism accelerated a 'loosening of inhibitions' around libellous invective.[255] In this case, the agonistic attitude appears to spring from the perception that the orthodox modes of criticism and debate have become exhausted, or shown to be unproductive. Even at the risk of alienating some of their own supporters, satire's more disruptive energies must have seemed attractive when set against what had hitherto been protracted and ultimately unfruitful calls for reform. The indecorous handling of the intellectual traditions of ecclesiastical debate, as well as the vilification of prelates themselves, signified a disregard for rank and status that would continue to feature as a key ingredient in libellous discourse.

The initial focus for Martin's attack was John Bridges and his *Defence of the Government Established in the Church of England for Ecclesiastical Matters* (1587). Bridges' *Defence* was a lengthy apologia for the Church of England which Martin infamously derided as 'a portable book, if your horse be not too weak.'[256] Referring to the works of the famous reformer Thomas Cartwright, Martin joked that Bridges' book had achieved as much as any puritan pamphlet could have hoped to do in attracting Christians to his cause:

> For I have heard some say, that whosoever will read this book, shall as evidently see the goodness of the cause of reformation, and the poor, poor, poor nakedness of your government, as almost in reading all Master Cartwright's works.[257]

Written against the length and scholasticism of Bridges' weighty tome, in Martin's hands the popularising potential of the pamphlet is endorsed as the most appropriate and accessible vehicle for religious polemic and the satiric persona as its most appropriate voice. In naming his first two works *The Epistle* and *The Epitome* Martin implicitly promoted a much more condensed or summarised form of debate. Mimicking the register of a formal

254 Bruster, "The Structural Transformation of Print in Late Elizabethan England," 53.
255 Bruster, "The Structural Transformation of Print in Late Elizabethan England," 53.
256 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 7
257 Black, 5.

petition, Martin entreats Bridges: 'may it please you to give me leave to play the Duns for the nonce as well as he, otherwise dealing with Master Doctor's book, I cannot keep *decorum personae*.'[258] The fabrications, falsehoods and sheer nonsense Martin claimed to discover in Bridges' book were given as the explanation for his particular unorthodox formulation of *decorum personae*, which in the case of all the tracts involved an unconventional, unscholastic 'duns' style. Finding its *locus classicus* in Horace's *Ars Poetica*, the theory of *decorum personae*, as John Coolidge has pointed out, 'considers the essential thing about a person to be… his social "kind"' and in its formulation of a theory of appropriate behaviour determined by social position, *decorum personae* reflects 'a hierarchical social order, and in this it corresponds to the church polity which John Bridges defends.'[259]

The argument that there should be a correspondence between particular social types and their characteristics was an influential theory in early modern drama, and Martin's invocation of it as a guiding principle for the tracts announced a link between theatricality and Martinist style. In further suggesting that the appropriate form of *decorum personae* in this case would be to 'play the duns for the nonce,' Martin invoked yet another incongruent tradition. Some scholars have interpreted the wording of Martin's threat as a further invocation of a theatrical or jesting frame of reference.[260] However, the word 'duns' or 'dunsmen' historically referred to any follower of the Franciscan friar and theologian John Duns Scotus (c.1265-1308), and, by extension, 'an exponent of excessively pedantic, hair-splitting reasoning.'[261] As well as indicating a general intention to play the dullard or fool, when Martin took on the role of the 'duns' he signalled a quite specific intention to apply a mode of philosophic albeit sophistic and absurd reasoning, that allegedly mirrored Bridges' own.

Martin's argument for substituting or manipulating orthodox forms of religious polemic with satire was shaped by a conviction that spiritual authority did not derive from the 'outward respects' of religion, or the material and institutional forms that overlaid essentially secular traditions of authority onto matters of church governance. For

258 Black, 7.
259 Coolidge, "Decorum Personae," 526.
260 John Coolidge has suggested that the term 'duns' is used specifically as a term of theatricality; for Coolidge the usage indicates Martin's intention to use 'comic effects.' Other scholars shift the emphasis; cf. Raymond Anselment, *Betwixt Jest and Earnest: Marprelate, Milton, Marvell, Swift and the Decorum of Religious Ridicule* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979) connects the theatrical elements this word invokes to a classical rhetorical tradition.
261 *OED*, "dunce, (n.)."

Martinists, one important example of this abuse of power was to be found in the ordination of priests. Puritan repudiation of this activity helps to explain the basis for Martin's ironic style in addressing these high offices as well as the libellous attacks on the individuals who occupied these positions. In *Hay any Work for Cooper* (March 1589) Martin's explanation of the ethical impetus for his project also supplies an additional argument for the libellous tone of the pamphlets. In this tract, Martin implied that criticism of Church governance had been obstructed by a culture still broadly invested in Catholic notions of 'presence' and hence Christian subjects wrongly thought that to criticize a bishop was inherently heretical. Martin's vocation, as he characterises it, is to demystify the purported indissolubility of the ecclesiastical office from the Christian faith. He writes: 'I saw the cause of Christ's government, and of the bishops' antichristian dealing, to be hidden. The most part of men could not be gotten to read anything written in the defence of the one and against the other.'[262] In this tract Martin also expands on his argument from *decorum personae*. It was, he explained, the failure of more orthodox methods of polemic that caused him to reflect on the most appropriate vehicle for his message.

As Black notes, one justification for this new and more appealing style of polemic is through an appeal to classical unities. The circumstances of time, place and persons:

> I bethought me therefore of a way whereby men might be drawn to both, perceiving the humours in these times (especially of those that are in any place) to be given to mirth.[263]

Foreshadowing the intensification of debates about the possession of interpretive authority, the tracts establish that for the Martinists, authority was assured by 'truth', which was to be found in scripture alone and not conferred by status, position or office. seIn other words, it was not his social position that gave Martin authority to speak on religious matters but rather that he made his address as 'a pronouncer of truth' and argued that if 'truth excites laughter he can use mocking tones…without compromising his own authority.'[264]

The tracts developed several variations on this theme, which was of essential significance to the Martinist project and Presbyterian reform in general. However, by the time *The*

[262] Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 115.
[263] Black, 115.
[264] Coolidge, "Decorum Personae," 527.

Epitome was published, many English puritans had distanced themselves from Martinist style, appalled by its offensiveness and uncertain of its efficacy. In answering these shifting tides of opinion, Martin replied:

> The Puritans are angry with me (I mean the Puritan preachers). And why? Because I am too open. Because I jest. I jested because I dealt against a worshipful jester, D. Bridges, whose writings and sermons tend to no other end than to make men laugh.[265]

As the Martinists would have known, the justification for writing satire had a series of well-known literary and scriptural authorities, and their own justification recalls both Juvenal's famous and much reprised apology for satire (*difficile est saturam non scribere*), as well as the injunction from Proverbs 26:5, 'Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.[266] And yet, the tracts are an incredibly mixed affair. The richness of the satire is accompanied by a repeated appeal to syllogistic reasoning, which is applied both sincerely and ironically in order to progress the Martinist argument against the prelacy.

The standard form of syllogistic reasoning as it had been passed down from the Greeks, and from the Aristotelian tradition in particular, contained three separate claims: a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion, along with three key terms, each appearing in two of the three claims. Protestant polemic traditions regularly emphasised the connection between this form of logical reasoning and the authority of scripture. Discussing the link between syllogism and scripture, Peter Lake has argued that:

> syllogisms were formed on the basis of what were taken to be unimpeachable scriptural premises and thus general rules and injunctions were teased out of the bare word of god.[267]

In seeking to undermine Bridges' scrupulous defence of the established church, Martin invoked this tradition of deliberative reasoning, only to call attention to its artifice, or at least to its ability to be turned towards polemical ends. His syllogism sought to prove that the bishops' authority was illegitimate, or in his words, that they were 'petty popes.'

265 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 53.
266 Juvenal, "Satire I," 30-3, in *Juvenal: The Sixteen Satires*, ed. Peter Green (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 4; For extended commentary on Martin's use of this proverb see Anselment, *Betwixt Jest and Earnest*; Black, *Marprelate Tracts*; Vivier, "Rhetoric of Satire;" and Christopher Hill, "Dost thou see a Martin who is Wise in his own Conceit? There is more hope than a fool in him," *Renaissance Papers* (2014): 109-122.
267 Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?* 15.

However, in the concluding portion of the syllogism where just two key terms would be expected, Martin broke with convention and introduced numerous terms, calling the bishops 'that swinish rabble…petty antichrists, petty popes, proud prelates, intolerable withstanders of reformation, enemies of the gospel, and most covetous wretched priests.'[268]

In the margins, the authors of the pamphlet imagine a response to the syllogism that point to the faultiness of Martin's logic: 'M. Marprelate you put more than the question in the conclusion of your syllogism.'[269] Jesse Lander has argued that these marginal interruptions are figured as the 'as-yet-uncommitted bystanders' who Martin intends to persuade, while Evelyn Tribble has suggested that it is the bishops themselves that Martin ventriloquises in these marginal asides and hence this is a technique designed to effectively sideline oppositional voices.[270] In exceeding the form of the syllogism and 'marginalising' the voices of the prelacy, Martin also showed a disregard for philosophical and social convention. Blurring the line between conventions of print and oral culture and moving between direct and indirect address, every aspect of Martinism seemed calculated to entertain and appeal to a popular audience. It was moments like this that facilitated a link between *ad hominem* or libellous attacks (a style of writing unconstrained by any sense of propriety or apparent set of generic obligations) and threatening populism.

In addition to invoking an ethical justification for his movement to satire, one of the most remarkable features of these tracts is found in Martin's vindication of his style through a series of distinctive rhetorical steps. As Coolidge has argued, Martin's satirical characterisation of the bishops as figures of comedy was also intended to be understood more concretely. According to Martin, his license to treat the prelacy like fools sprang from their own reported participation in forms of jest and entertainment. As we know, Martin had spuriously identified Bridges as the author of the comedy *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, and in *Hay any Work for Cooper* he relates the tale of the priest, 'Gibery of Halstead in Essex' who was distracted by his passion for performance, such that he played 'a Vice in a play' and cut short a sermon to join the Morris dancing and may-games.[271]

268 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 10.
269 Black, 10.
270 Lander, *Inventing Polemic*, 91; and Evelyn Tibble, *Margins and Marginality*, 101-116.
271 Coolidge, "Decorum Personae," 527.

Crammed with gossip, rumour and anecdotage, the tracts mostly seem indifferent to the boundary between what might be considered the fictive and the real; they move fluidly between general and specific, satire and libel, type and individual. These characteristics of Martinist style, combined with the suggestion of an intimate knowledge of the bishops and the representation of allegedly discordant aspects of their identities, gestured towards the indivisibility of individuals from their offices. It is this polemical setting of the Martinist tracts that brings, I suggest, another revealing context to Bruster's discussion of the vogue for 'embodied satire' in the 1580s and 90s. Within this polemical framework, personalised satire or libel could be seen to function as a technique for representing puritan beliefs about the wrongful institutionalisation of questions of individual salvation, becoming as it were embodied by individual priests and bishops. A conspicuous example of Martin's excoriation of the prelacy was his repeated identification of the Bishop of London and the Bishop of Canterbury as 'petty popes' and 'petty antichrists.' As we have seen, the pamphlets outwardly relished the performance of a Manichean rhetorical style and evidently hoped it would work to popularise the Martinist position. However, the fanatical language of purging and purification also conveyed a key tenet of Martinist belief. The libellous treatment of individual bishops, combined with the rhetorical performance that collapsed the bishop's position at the pulpit into the jester on the stage, was fundamentally grounded in the Martinist focus on the superfluousness of the prelacy.

After a number of failed attempts to unearth the Martinists and the publication of a series of orthodox scripted responses, including Richard Bancroft's Paul's Cross sermon and Thomas Cooper's tract, *An Admonition to the People of England* (1589), as previously described, the bishops hired a series of celebrated playwrights and poets in an effort to put the matter to rest. Categorising the Marprelate tracts as libels had been a key manoeuvre in the anti-Martinists' campaign to challenge their legitimacy. However, this new approach involved the writers adopting elements of the very libellous style which they had so utterly excoriated in the Martinists' writings. Together, the Marprelate tracts and the anti-Martinist responses unleashed an army of *dramatis personae* into the public domain. As Kirsten Poole has noted, these included: 'Mar-Martine, Pasquill, Marphoreus, Cuthbert Curryknave, Plaine Percevall the Peace-maker, and the sons of Martin the great, Martin Jr. and Martin Sr'. Poole has argued that the 'grotesque' representations of puritanism that the pamphlet war specialised in were a key influence on the dramatic representation of puritanism on

the English stage in the same period.[272] The performative and caricaturish qualities that were deemed to make the pamphlets unsuitable for the discussion of religious matters made them singularly suitable for a theatrical setting. Lyly recognised, and possibly even admired, the suitability of Martinist writing for the stage; 'would these comedies,' he wrote, 'might be allowed to be played as they are penned, and then I am sure he would be deciphered, and so perhaps discouraged.'[273] And yet, despite Lyly's apparent wish to uncover the identity of the author of the tracts, he was met with the seemingly impassable façade of the ready-made satiric persona. Anti-Martinists sought to conflate Martin with a range of different figures of satire and comedy. Writing in *An Almond for a Parrat*, Thomas Nashe identified Martin with the famous sixteenth century clowns Dick Tarlton and Will Kemp and the French satirist, François Rabelais. Even as they denigrated Martin by identifying him with stage-antics and buffoonery, the anti-Martinists explicitly sought to imitate his style. In *An Almond for a Parrat*, Nashe invokes the Greek poet and satirist, Archilochus, and claims to have mastered and perhaps even to have surpassed the Martinist form of expression:

> Much good do it you, M.Martin how like you my stile, am not I old *Ille ego qui quondam* at thee besleeving of a sycophant? Alas, poor idiot, thou thinkest no man can write but thy self or frame his pen to delight except he strain courtesy with one of thy Northern figures; but if authority do not moderate the fiery furnace of my enflamed zeale, I'll assail thee from term to term, with Archilochus, in such a complete armour of Iambics as the very reflex of my fury shall make thee drive thy father before thee to the gallows, for begetting thee in such a bloody hour.[274]

Although he had been solicited to write on behalf of the church, Nashe seems to have been aware that in adopting Martin's censorious style he risked going beyond his brief; his use of Martinist idiom, he writes, will continue so long as 'authority do not moderate the fiery furnace of my enflamed zeale.'

In the 'ringingly alliterative' terms that Martin had used to lambast the bishops as petty popes and dumb dogs, Nashe also returned *ad hominem* fire, adopting a string of insults: 'seely-sophister', 'good muunckie face Machiavell', 'good hedge-creeper', 'olde Martin of

[272] Kirsten Poole, "Saints Alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate, and the Staging of Puritanism," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1995): 58
[273] Lyly, *Pappe with a Hatchet*, D2v
[274] Thomas Nashe, *An Almond for A Parrat, Or Cutbert Curry-knaves Almes* (London, 1589), E2v.

England', 'brother Timorhie', 'his welchnes' 'Masse Martin' 'sweer M. sauce malapert'.[275] However, in mimicking the Martinist style, the anti-Martinist authors remained locked into an extremely contentious identification with their antagonists. One consequence of appropriating the Martinist style, as Poole has suggested, was that the anti-Martinists found that they were 'unable to convert him entirely into an object of satire or to maintain the distance required for hostile satire.'[276] In other words, adopting Martinist idiom awkwardly committed the anti-Martinists to the very form of subversive expression that they excoriated in the Martinists.

In more moderate terms, Lyly sought to justify the apparent contradiction of adopting the Martinist style by recourse to another invocation of what might be understood as *decorum personae*:

> I seldom use to write, and yet never writ anything, that in speech might seem indecent, or in sense unhonest; if here I have used bad terms, it is because they are not to be answered with good terms: for whatsoever shall seem lavish in this pamphlet, let it be thought borrowed by Martin's language.[277]

Lyly's language suggests that the Marprelate tracts had forced a renewed consideration of the relationship between the style of writing and its subject. In responding to the Martinist tracts, anti-Martinist writers like Lyly and Nashe had frequently turned to modes of satire and ridicule but there was also a tendency for this to become a contradictory performance. As Jonathan Crewe has remarked, 'the reliance on wit' became 'subversive of the decorum they [sought to] uphold'.[278] Lyly clearly perceived a certain kind of practical necessity in using Martin's 'bad terms.' However, just as Nashe had discovered, these rationalisations also suggest that this was a rhetorically complex burden as it committed these writers to a profoundly transgressive style, at odds with their instructions to defend the established church. In replying to Martin on his own terms, the anti-Martinists were arguably perpetuating the deformation of those values that they took to be under attack by the Martinist writers themselves.

275 Donald J. McGinn, *John Penry and the Marprelate Controversy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1966), 180.
276 Poole, "Saints Alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate, and the Staging of Puritanism," 73.
277 Lyly, *Pappe with A Hatchet*, *EEBO*, A1r.
278 Jonathan Crewe, *Unredeemed Rhetoric: Thomas Nashe and the Scandal of Authorship* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 33.

As the conflict drew to a close, Francis Bacon reflected on the affair and identified the Martinist controversy and the state's de facto responses as having initiated a process of destabilisation 'whereby matters of religion are handled in the style of the stage.' For moderates like Bacon, Martinism exhibited the kinds of tendencies that lead to the erosion of religious forms and thus logically to universal Atheism. For him, as for other critics of the tracts, the correlative of hybrid discursive forms was volatility and social disorder:

> …to turn religion into a comedy or satire; to search and rip up wounds with a laughing countenance; to intermix Scripture and scurrility sometime in one sentence; is a thing far from the devout reverence of a Christian and scant beseeming the honest regard of a sober man. 'Non est major confusion, quam serii et joci'; 'there is no greater confusion than the confounding of jest and earnest.[279]

Bacon's concerns suggest that in addition to exposing the extent of dissatisfaction within parts of the reform movement, the pamphlet war between the Martinists and the anti-Martinists had also brought to light a series of crucial cultural and political issues. Most importantly, perhaps, were the questions raised about the appropriate style for religious and political debate. Both sides returned repeatedly to these questions, which linked the style of an argument to its substance and object and thence to the legitimacy of the speaker. Or as Lyly would have it: 'Martin writes merely, because (he says) people are carried away sooner with jest than earnest. I, but Martin never put religion into a fool's coat; there is great odds between a Gospeller and a Libeller.'[280] Lyly's undoubtedly hostile reading of the Martinist tracts suggests that their satirical impulse shifted them away from genuine religious disputation and toward libellous allegation. On the other side of this debate was the Martinist injunction that: 'The Lord being the author both of mirth and gravity, is it not lawful in itself, for the truth to use either of these ways?'[281] Martinism seriously tested cultural assumptions about the ideal form, function and method of religious and political debate.

Bacon was characteristically measured in his advocacy of an approach that acknowledged the explicit issues the tracts raised about the state of the reformed Church, as well as registering the importance of attending to the culturally symptomatic significance of the form in which they were uttered:

279 Francis Bacon, "An Advertisement Touching the Controversies of the Church of England," in *Francis Bacon* ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3.
280 Lyly, *Pappe with a Hatchet*, E2v.
281 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 115.

> I do much esteem the wisdom and the religion of that bishop which replied to the first pamphlet of this kind, who remembered that 'a fool was to be answered but not by becoming like unto him.'[282]

His remarks point to the strategic problem of dealing with the dissonance of unconventional forms of discourse that nevertheless sought to intervene in the mainstream political and religious debates of the day. On the one hand, the perceived threat posed to the commonwealth by Catholic partisanship and the pressure from puritans for further reform called for strong polemical and re-unifying interventions. On the other hand and as Bacon seems to imply, in their prolonged one-upmanship and parodic mimicry of one another's styles, the manner of such debates also enacted a symbolic battle over who held the right to interpret matters of public significance, and pushed at the boundaries of accepted political and religious commentary. For readers like Bacon, the breaching of cultural codes that the Marprelate affair enacted conjured up the spectre of seditious and treasonous threats to social order. As I turn to consider in the following section, while this formulation had the rhetorical effect of delegitimising the Martinist position, Bacon's remarks also conveyed a particular understanding of the material effect of this rhetoric on social processes and above all, an underlying assumption about the degrading influence of libellous or 'schismatic' texts on the integrity of high office.

'Private Assemblies and Conferences of the Learned': Personal Attack, Public Debate and Political Agenda

The Martinist belief in the superfluity of many of the higher-order offices associated with church governance was a puritan orthodoxy. As I have been discussing however, rather than elaborating a general institutional critique, Martin delivered his argument against church offices through a series of *ad hominem*, libellous attacks on their incumbents. On one reading, the personal style of the attacks seems radically at odds with a design to persuade the church hierarchy that further reformation was needed. Indeed, as can be seen, Martin acknowledged that his mode of address had alienated reformers of his own kind, who blamed him 'for telling the truth openly.'[283] However, Martin's style begins to make sense if we consider his pamphlets as a bid to catch public attention and an attempt to popularise a radical ecclesiology.

[282] Bacon, "An Advertisement," 4.
[283] Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 53.

In comparison to other puritan pamphlet campaigns from the same period, that entreated the institutions of church and government with careful disputation via 'Advertisements' or 'Protestations' and called for religious reform from above, the Marprelate tracts' personalised approach proffered a far more subversive form of religious and political argument. In setting aside a tradition of controversial yet conventional puritan polemic that took a decorous approach to its addressee, whether that happened to be the church, parliament or crown, Martin Marprelate was identified with radically seditious, even revolutionary energies, urging the overthrow of 'this false and bastardly government of archbishops,' 'traitors to God and his word,' 'enemies to her Majesty and the state.' Whereas the Martinist pamphlets enthusiastically developed the notion of their spreading popularity as a sign of their value, in response the anti-Martinists association of popularity with tyranny sought to draw support away from their cause,

Looking back on the Marprelate affair, the clergyman and church historian Thomas Fuller (1607/8- 1661) remarked on the broad-based public appeal of these 'bastardly libels':

> it is strange how secretly they were printed, how speedily dispers'd, how generally bought, how greedily read, yea, and how firmly believed, especially of the common sort, to whom no better music than to hear their betters upbraided.[284]

Fuller's comments confirm, as previously noted, that there was an avid marketplace for the Martinist tracts and that 'the common sort' in particular were viewed as drawn to the personalised invective of 'their betters.' It was precisely these sorts of concerns about the popular appeal of the tracts, and the imagined threat of their influence on the 'tyrannical' masses that shaped the characteristic mood of anti-Martinist responses. These were of course, heavily rhetorical claims and there are significant challenges in reconstructing the popular reception of these tracts by those who might have been sympathetic to their message. However, the construction of Martinism as seditious libel demonstrates the seriousness with which the state viewed the tracts and how it sought to delegitimate forms of religio-political dispute. It also underlined a belief in the connection between the printed expression of invective and socially destabilising acts of malfeasance.

[284] Thomas Fuller, *The Church-History of Britain* (London, 1655), 193.

The penultimate tract, *The Just Censure and Reproof*, described a London teeming with Martinist pamphlets and their underground supporters. Taunting Martin's opponents, the tract insinuated that the project has become too diffuse to be contained. The bishops are mockingly advised to police a range of well-known sites of business, social exchange, and the commercial book trade such as St Paul's Churchyard and to 'especially have an eye to Boyle's shop at the Rose.' Other 'substitutes,' are advised to 'be every day at the Blackfriars, Lincoln's Inn, Whitechapel, Paul's Chain.'[285] The bishops are warned that they 'must also be sure, if possibly you can, to have a watch at all common inns, to see what carriage of paper and other stuff either goes from or comes to London…And mark if any puritan receiveth any thing, open his pack, that you may be sure he has no Martins sent him.'[286]

The inclusion of realistic details, the impressionistic depiction of the commotion and hubbub of city life and in particular the repeated stress on the traffic between different well-known sites in the capital, as well as the depiction of both oral and written exchanges of communication insinuated the existence of a knowledgeable and eager audience for the pamphlets. In *The Epitome* Martin even enthuses about how his symbolic infiltration of the court has achieved status as a topic of gossip and speculation: 'I have been entertained at the Court,' he writes, and, 'every man talks of my worship'.[287] Taking Martin's claim at face value, Lyly sought to unravel Martin's suggestion that he circulated freely in the corridors of power:

> He saith he is a courtier, I think no courtier so perverse, that seeing the straight rule of the church, would go about to bend it. It may be he is some jester about the court, and of that I marvel, because I know all the fools there, and yet cannot guess at him. What ever he be, if his conscience be pinned to his cognisance, I will account him more politic than religious, and more dangerous for civil broyles, than the Spaniard for an open war.[288]

Lyly's argument for the social and political impact of controversial writing or speech on both religious and civil life, most probably alluded to the attempted invasion of England by the Spanish Armada in May 1588. For those writing against the Martinists, the inextricable link between the church and the crown was always a matter of intense scrutiny and concern, and the position taken by the anti-Martinists was that Martinism's attack on

285 Black, *Marprelate Tracts,* 173.
286 Black, 173.
287 Black, 53.
288 Lyly, *Pappe with a Hatchet*, A4v.

episcopal authority always threatened to shade into a republican attack on royal authority. Hostile responses of this kind underline the inherent instability of any strict distinction between religious and political matters in the period. Indeed, religious controversy, of which Martinism was a radical representative, almost always encroached upon political matters, broadly understood here to include theories of governance and discussions concerning state structures, as well as questions concerning decorous debate and its influence on the maintenance of social order. 'Debates about religion, and in particular debates about church government consequent upon the Reformation in England' as Peter Lake has persuasively argued, 'are one of the best places to look if we want to see contemporaries actually talking relatively systematically about how the polity should be structured and run.'[289]

In a sermon delivered after the publication of *The Epistle,* Richard Bancroft offered an early political treatment of Martinism, explicitly linking Martin's attacks on the episcopacy to outright treason: 'for though he cunningly would seeme to shew his malice onely against bishops: yet hath he left to be implied the verie same reasons against the civill magistrate.'[290] According to Bancroft, Martin was a 'false prophet:'

> So that upon his principles a man may frame this rebellious argument; No pettie Pope is to be tolerated in a Christian common-wealth; But hir Majestie is a pettie Pope: Therefore hir Majestie is not to be tolerated in a Christian common-weath. And his *minor* may thus be proved; Whosoever doe take upon them, or usurpe the same authoritie in causes ecclesiastical within their dominions, which the Pope had, they are pettie Popes: But hir Majestie doth so: Therefore hir Majestie is a pettie Pope: and so consequently not to be tolerated in Christian common-wealth. Now surely if *Martin* were well examined, he is like to prove a verie good subject. But for me he must be as he list, seeing neither in respect of God nor his prince he wil be as he shuld be.[291]

Adopting a syllogistic form and pitting Martin's own 'principles' against him, Bancroft registered the problem of the Marprelate tracts, not simply as a schismatic and therefore seditious belief but he suggests that if Martin were interrogated about his attitude to the Queen he would most likely be able to convince us of his loyalty. In the wrong hands,

289 Peter Lake, "Puritanism, (Monarchical) Republicanism, and Monarchy; or John Whitgift, Antipuritanism and the 'Invention' of Popularity," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40, no. 3 (2010), 463.
290 Richard Bancroft, 'A Sermon preached at Paules Cross,' 9 February 1588 (London, 1588), EEBO, 68.
291 Bancroft, 'A Sermon preached at Paules Cross,' 68.

however, Martin's argument about church government equips subjects with the rhetorical material needed to 'frame' an argument against monarchy.

As the tracts steadily issued from the presses, the anti-Martinist campaign continued in its counter-attack. In 1589, the Queen issued *A Proclamation against Certaine Seditious and Schismatical Bookes and Libels*. This document drew close attention to the connection between ecclesiastical and sovereign power. These 'schismatical and seditious books, defamatory libels, and other fantastical writings' led to the 'abridging, or rather to the overthrow, of her highness's lawful prerogative allowed by God's law and established by the laws of the realm.'[292]

For obvious reasons the Marprelate tracts have mostly been situated in relation to an intensification of religious controversy and debate. However, close attention to the various state responses suggests that the interpretation of the pamphlets was heavily politicised and anchored in fundamental assumptions about the interconnectedness of all forms of social organisation. This vision of the Martinist threat can be seen as a key element in the rhetoric of the anti-Martinist response.

In *An Almond for a Parrat*, Nashe echoed Lyly's view that the enemy within was to be as feared as any foreign power:

> there was a famous Schismatike one Martin newe sprung up in England, who by his books, libels, and writings, had brought that to pass which neither the Pope by his Seminaries, Philip by his power, nor all the holy League by their underhand practices and policies could at any time effect: for whereas they lived at unity before, and might by no means be drawn into discord, he hath invented such quiddities to set them together by the ears, that now the temporality is ready to pluck out the throats of the clergy, and subjects to withdraw their allegiance from their Sovereign: so that in short time, it is hoped they will be up in arms one against another, while we advantaged by the domesticall envy, may invade them unawares, when they shall not be able to resist.[293]

According to this view, Martinism gave hostile Catholic states much cause for celebration, for its 'books, libels, and writings' promoted 'discord', weakening social unity and state control. Nashe's observations on the tracts can be seen to emphasise the specific identification of libelling as an activity that promoted disorder and social harm. Moreover,

292 Hughes and Larkin, *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 34.
293 Nashe, *Almond for a Parrat*, A4r.

as Nashe suggests, these attacks on the established church, and in particular on individual bishops were felt to have a corresponding impact on the crown, for 'the republican polity of Presbyterianism was by nature antipathetic to rule by a queen or king.'[294]

As was the case in the *Commonwealth*, Elizabeth I was mentioned only infrequently throughout the tracts; however, when she was commented on, it was for Martin to directly refute the claim that his attacks on the prelacy had committed him to a de facto attack on the crown. In *Hay and Work for Cooper*, Martin generated an ingenious series of positions that aimed to show that it was the bishops not Martinism that posed a challenge to royal supremacy. This culminated in a comparative account of the nature of religious and civil offices, and the question of which might be considered divinely sanctioned:

> For will you say that you ought lawfully to be here in our commonwealth whether her Majesty and the council will or no? Is this the thanks that her Majesty shall have for tolerating you in her kingdom all this while, that now you will say, that you and your places stand not in this kingdom by her courtesy, but you have as good right unto your places as she hath unto a kingdom? And by this means your offices stand not by her good liking, and the good liking of the state, as do the offices of our lord chancellor, high treasurer, and high steward of England…If you grant this, then you do not hold offices as from God, but as from man. Her Majesty she holdeth her office, and her kingdom, as from God, and is beholding of the same unto no prince nor state under Heaven. Your case is otherwise, for you hold her offices as from her Majesty, and not from God.[295]

Despite Martinist protestations, it was clear that the emphasis on a priesthood of all believers and more radical interpretations of Calvinist principle, did present an implicit challenge to the mediating and hierarchical powers of the church and, by analogy, it was argued, of the monarch. Martin's opponents often accused him of 'standing in his own conceit', by which they meant that in matters of scriptural interpretation, Martin refused to accept the authority of institutional tradition as it had been passed down by the church fathers. The analogy could also be reversed: the anti-Martinists repeatedly aligned their arguments with historical and theological authorities demonstrating not just their commitment to traditions of scholarly learning but also to the maintenance of social order through their use of appropriate forms of address.[296] It can be seen that anti-Martinists

294 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, lx.
295 Black, *Marprelate Tracts,* 124.
296 For a detailed analysis of the anti-Martinist application of a range of theological, intellectual and political authorities to oppose the Martinist arguments, see Hill, "Dost Thou See a Martin:"109–22.

construed the originality of the Marprelate tracts as a sign of their hostility to established religious, social, and political structures.

Anticipating the church's countersuit of defamation, the Martinist authors like the authors of the *Commonwealth* before them, regularly intimated the existence of evidence to ground their claims. Calling to mind a form of the 'truth defence' most commonly associated with seditious libel, Martin declared that he had:

> published not one of your secret faults, what you have not blushed to commit in the face of the sun, and in the justifying whereof you yet stand, these things only have I published. The best servants of God, I know, have their infirmities. But none of them will stand in the maintenance of their corruptions as you do, and that to the dishonour of God and the ruin of his church.[297]

As well as invoking a version of this defence, Martin's explanation for his inclusion of salacious material makes an incipient distinction between matters that were already public and therefore could be freely 'publicised' and those that might be considered private or 'secret'. Martin's tales about the bishops may be justified, he argues, because he has only made known information already in the public domain, exploits that the bishops 'have not blushed to commit in the face of the sun'.

Libel and slander, terms which were still used interchangeably in this period, certainly constituted part of the rhetorical performance of Martinist and anti-Martinist exchanges, challenging the legitimacy of ecclesiology on both sides. Moreover, the use of these terms and the associated activity of *ad hominem* attack also signalled a broader cultural investment in a view of social, religious and political structures as precariously balanced on the moral authority of those who occupied these high-offices, on the one hand, and an escalating concern with the social responsibility of all manner of printed works on the other.

Generations of Martinism: 'Young Martin Mar-Priest, Son to Old Martin the Metropolitan'

While the Marprelate tracts originally issued from the polemical battle between Presbyterians and Conformists of the 1580s, like the *Commonwealth* they enjoyed an extensive afterlife, influencing political satire well into the eighteenth century. Fifty years after their original composition and energised by the more hospitable conditions for

297 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 35.

printing that briefly emerged after the collapse of the Star Chamber and the state's loss of effective control of licensing processes, they resurfaced during the tense political exchanges of the early 1640s.

In 1641, a pamphlet titled *Reformation no enemie*, *or, A true discourse between the bishops and the desirers of the reformation*, issued from the presses. Closer inspection established that this work was a retitled version of the third Martinist tract, *Hay any worke for Cooper* (1589).[298] The continued interest in Martinism, and its usefulness as a model for later forms of oppositional writing, seems to have been fuelled by what I have been identifying as the tracts' libellous elements: those features, like anonymity, that the anti-Martinists had been at pains to point out in their effort to invalidate the tracts. For instance, lacking an identifiable author, the tracts were, as Lander has argued, 'readily available to be attached to a variety of individuals and concepts.'[299]

As previously discussed, the *Commonwealth*'s libellous legacy was concentrated in the 'black legend' of the Earl of Leicester and an accretive idiom for the discussion of royal favourites. The Marprelate tracts arguably went a step further, creating their own identifiable brand of calumny and idiom, mixed with an innovative and theatrical prose style. One striking example of the perpetuation of Martin's style in the mid-century is found in the publication of a series of pamphlets in 1645 by the Leveller, Richard Overton, that advocated for liberty of conscience and freedom of the press. These tracts developed the Martin Marpriest *persona*, a direct descendant of Martin Marprelate, calling himself, 'the son to old Martin the Metropolitan'.[300] The titlepage of *The Arraignment* also makes reference to the dismantling of the mechanisms of censorship, announcing that 'this is licensed, and printed according to holy order, but not entered into the Stationers monopole.'[301] Martinism in this later context was taken up to legitimise a form of opposition to oppressive mechanisms of state. In other words, in these pamphlets Overton

298 Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, lxxxvi.
299 Lander, "Martin Marprelate and the Fugitive Text," 136.
300 Richard Overton, *The Araignment of Mr. Persecution* (London, 1645), EEBO, n.p.n. Overton published six other pamphlets that adopted the Marprelate persona: *Divine Observations* (London, 1646); *Martin's Echo: or A Remonstrance* (London, 1645); *The Nativity of Sir John Presbyter* (London, 1645); *The Ordinance for Tythes Dismounted* (London, 1646); *A Sacred Decretall* (London, 1645); and *Vox Borealis, or The Northern Discoverie*. Amsterdam, 1641.
301 Overton, *The Araignment*, n.p.n.

did not just appropriate and internalise the Martinist strategies, he highlighted the link, or constructed, as Nigel Smith has suggested, 'a genealogy'.[302]

Although both forms of libellous writing, the *Commonwealth* and the Martin Marprelate tracts represent two distinct and heterodox cases. Taken together they underline that although libellous writing was strongly associated with Puritan complaint, it was not exclusively tied to a non-Conformist position but also sprang from a distinct and influential Catholic tradition. Although both texts ostensibly distance their criticism from the crown by each taking key agents of the court or church as the object of their ridicule and denigration, in both cases the function of the crown itself becomes heavily implicated. In the *Commonwealth,* Elizabeth is subordinated in the text as the passive and defenceless subject of the Earl's designs. In the Marprelate tracts, on the other hand, the puritan pursuit of a progressively more autonomous church implicitly challenges Elizabeth's authority to rule as head of the Church of England.

Sidney's 'defence' and the numerous anti-Martinist pamphlets gesture to the particular discursive difficulties that had been introduced to more orthodox forms of religious and political debate by the accumulation of libellous tropes: an unknown, 'anonymous,' adversary; the refusal or subversion of the conventional style for the discussion of state affairs; the amplification of unflattering personal detail to bring both the high-office and the office-holder into disrepute. If one critical interpretation of libellous writing has been that it was insufficiently programmatic to contribute to broader debates about political and religious affairs, the responses the *Commonwealth* and the Marprelate tracts elicited strongly suggest otherwise. Official responses repeatedly register the extent of the perceived threat to the status quo and, however effective they might have been in quelling controversy, any triumph was always set against the dilemma that the libel had to be publicized once again in order to be refuted and purged.

Despite the evident popularity of the Marprelate tracts, Collinson has claimed that 'widespread disapproval of Martinism likely contributed to the decline of organized Presbyterianism in the early 1590s.' If Martinism had failed in its mission to achieve Presbyterian reform, it arguably bequeathed another, quite unpredicted legacy. One

[302] Nigel Smith, "Richard Overton's Marpriest Tracts: Towards a History of Leveller Style," *Prose Studies* 9, no. 2 (1986): 39-66.

indication of the unevenness of this development is suggested by the movement from print to manuscript. Both the *Commonwealth* and the Marprelate tracts mobilised the evolving medium of print, and both these texts can be placed in a broader account of the developing forms of public opposition that printing made possible. Their place in this story also indicates how the narrative of the development of libellous discourse is, in this case at least, not progressive or teleological.

As discussed in the following chapters, it was in the more traditional forms of manuscript circulation that libellous writing flourished in the early seventeenth century.
In the face of an era increasingly invested in and attentive to the legal and cultural status of authorship, the relatively unregulated activity of manuscript circulation enabled continued profusion and proliferation. Moreover, from the late Elizabethan period into the Jacobean period and beyond, the libellous language and style originating in the Marprelate tracts and the *Commonwealth* started to be loosened from the specific religious and political settings of their original composition, as these modes were enthusiastically taken up by the numerous writers of the notorious verse libels of the early seventeenth-century. Rhodes has argued, for instance, that the Martinist and anti-Martinist exchanges had a substantial literary influence, insofar as they introduced a colloquial style into religious debate, which included a series of new 'base coinages,' as well as 'a violent physicality to polemical and satirical writing.' Rhodes traces also how Martin's legacy opened out onto the satirical comedy of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage.[303]

The forging of a new libellous style, which the *Commonwealth* and the Marprelate tracts had initiated was also strikingly refashioned by the writers of anonymous verse libels. The libellous strategies that the *Commonwealth* and the Marprelate tracts initiated and perpetuated became even more strongly identified with an incipient form of oppositional expression in the interval between this late-Elizabethan moment and their mid-century revision and repurposing.

[303] Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque*, 37.

CHAPTER 4

LIBEL, LATE ELIZABETHAN SATIRE AND THE BISHOPS' BAN

> There was yet another kind of Poet, who intended to tax the common abuses and vice of the people in rough and bitter speeches, and their invectives were called Satyres, and themselves Satyricques: such were Lucillus, Juvenal, and Persius among the Latins, and with us he that wrote the book called Piers Plowman.
>
> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, 1589.

> Today every vice has reached its ruinous zenith. So hoist
> your sails, cram on all canvas! But where, you may wonder,
> is a talent to match the theme? and where our outspoken
> ancestral bluntness, that wrote at burning passion's behest?
> 'Whose name do I dare not utter? Lucilius cried: 'Who cares
> whether the noble Consul forgive my libel or not?'
> But name an Imperial favourite, and you'll blaze, a human torch,
> bound upright, half choked, half-grilled, your calcined carcase
> leaving a broad black trail as it's dragged across the sand. (149-157)
>
> Juvenal, 'Satire I', *The Sixteen Satires*.

The previous chapters considered two major examples of Elizabethan libellous writing and focused, in particular, on the ways in which libellous strategies were adopted by writers whose religious beliefs made it more difficult for them to participate in orthodox forms of public debate. This chapter turns to consider how a renewed interest in neo-classical forms of satire can be thought to have influenced the development of *ad hominem* forms of writing, linking the earlier Elizabethan libels to the better-known early Stuart libels that are the focus of the final section of this thesis.

The renewed interest in Roman satiric models was well suited to the ambient sense of disintegration and factional struggle at the Elizabethan court. These satiric models emphasised the personality or persona of the discontented satirist, foregrounded the city as the locus of vice and revived interest in the writing of "characters" anchored in recognisable public figures that had a shaping influence on the development of libellous

discourse.[304] Of all the available Roman models, the influence of Juvenal is arguably most prominent in Elizabethan satiric forms. His avowed commitment to an unsparing examination of the human and mundane resonated strongly with the poets of the 1590s. The first part of this chapter considers how a tradition of Juvenalian 'plain-speaking' was keenly adopted by the late-Elizabethan poets and might be thought to have authorised a certain amount of *ad hominem* matter. In the 1590s, a period of strained political relations, in part due to the intense political rivalries of the final decade of Elizabeth's reign, it is possible to observe through an examination of satires and libels, including Joseph Hall's *Virgidemiarum* (1597) and Edward Guilpin's *Skialetheia* (1598), a culture evermore conversant in the themes and techniques of *ad hominem* writing.

However, the use of *ad hominem* strategies raised troubling questions about how to include topical material as it related to well-known public figures and more broadly, the issue of how to distinguish between a legitimate satire and an illicit or seditious libel. In the second part of this chapter I discuss several poems that illustrate how acts of classification in relation to libel and satire were being negotiated in relation to key figures at court. In particular, I focus on a popular libel attributed to Ralegh, known as 'The Lie' (c.1595) and its perceived criticism of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. An analysis of several scribal approaches to Ralegh's poem and the composition of answer poems by Essex's supporters focuses attention on the ways in which techniques associated with libelling were playing a central role in the factional struggles of the day.

The final part of this chapter considers what the intrusion of legal regulation into this energetic literary scene might be able to tell us about the changing perception of forms of satirico-libellous writing. Inevitably perhaps, the flourishing of more explicitly transgressive modes of literary writing raised political alarm bells and brought further efforts to enforce the boundaries of what could be considered permissible or seditious writing. Of all the various political and legal interventions, The Bishops' Ban (1599) has become a critical touchstone for accounts of the state's attitude toward transgressive writing. Debora Shuger has called it 'the single most sweeping act of censorship during the

[304] Gransden, *Tudor Verse Satire*, 9.

entire period from 1558-1641.'[305] Both Hall's *Virgidemiarum* and Guilpin's *Skialetheia* were included in the Ban's list of prohibited texts.

Although the Ban issued from an ecclesiastical setting on the orders of Archbishop Whitgift and Bishop Bancroft, it carried full statutory force and in its blanket ban on 'satyres and epigrams' arguably suggested a growing sense of state unease with the real or perceived social effects of these modes of writing. The precise motivations of the Ban and its effects on successive phases of literary culture have been widely debated. It arguably placed significant emphasis on the *saevo indignatio* of Juvenalian forms of writing and 'the slanderous effect of contemporary references found in these poems.'[306] Like the libels associated with factional struggle, the advent of the Ban focus attention on the constitutive effect of specific social and political affairs on interpretations of libel.

Plain-Speaking and Savage Indignation: Satire, Libel and the Literary Negotiation of Genre

It is almost certain that many of the specific claims and energies generated by the *Commonwealth* and the Marprelate tracts were either extinguished or temporarily eclipsed by the end of the 1580s.[307] However, with the century's end drawing to a close, English people were in the grip of a number of pressing social and political issues. The country remained caught up in discussions concerning the factional struggles at court and the unresolved question of succession, although it was clear by now that the queen would not produce a natural heir. A *fin de siècle* atmosphere of decline and degeneration seems to have been widespread and was likely to have been aggravated by the conditions many ordinary people were facing, most specifically severe poverty, disease and dearth. Writing about the literary culture of this final decade, Peter Clark has described the 1590s as 'one of the most unstable periods in English history.'[308] There is persuasive evidence to suggest that this period was experienced as a time of deep 'crisis,' characterised by increasing scepticism

305 Debora Shuger, "Civility and Censorship in Early Modern England," in *Censorship and Silencing: Pratices of Cultural Regulation*, ed. Robert Post (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1998), 89.
306 Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander*, 30.
307 For an analysis of the weakening of the Puritan movement at the end of Elizabeth's reign, see Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967).
308 Peter Clark, ed., *The European Crisis of the 1590s: Essays in Comparative History* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985). See especially R.B. Outhwaite, "Dearth, the English Crown and the 'Crisis of the 1590s,'" 23-43.

about the effective functioning of traditional mechanisms of the state and the health of the commonwealth more generally.[309]

For many, the literature of high Elizabethanism seemed out of step with this sense of social decline. Sidney's famous invocation of Horace's dictum that poetry should 'teach and delight' had previously oriented the work of the great courtly poets of the age and stressed poetry's idealised pedagogic function and value for a late-Elizabethan audience. However, by the end of the 1590s, Petrachanism and Romance, forms strongly identified with Spenser and Sidney, were waning. This was in part due to the deaths of these respective poets but also owed something to the ageing Queen herself and the associated stagnation of the 'cult of Elizabeth.' Whereas Sidney and Spenser wrote for (and from within) the court, the new school of poets were associated most particularly with the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and the Inns of Court, each of which had quite distinct institutional identities and traditions of their own.

Courting controversy in appointing himself the 'first' English satirist in the initial imprint of his *Virgidemiarum* (1597), Joseph Hall attempted to peremptorily dispense with the genres that had come to symbolise Elizabethanism. He parodied the stock figures of these forms in order to contain, neutralise and move beyond them, proceeding from Romance to Epic allegory to Petrarchanism to the theatre, and finally to writing for patronage. Like their classical antecedents, the exaggerated personas of the late Elizabethan verse satire eagerly lent themselves to the task of reflecting on the current state of the nation and claimed to give voice to popular concerns and anxieties for the coming century:

> Nor Ladies wanton love nor wandring knight,
> Legend I out in rymes all richly dight.
> Nor fright the Reader with the Pagan vaunt
> Of mightie Mahound, and great Termagaunt.
> Nor lift I Sonnet of my Mistresse face,
> To paint some Blowesse with a borrowed grace.
> Nor can I bide to pen some hungry *Scene*
> For thick-skin eares, and undiscerning eyne.
> Nor ever could my scornfull Muse abide
> With Tragick shooes her ankles for to hide.

[309] See Hannah Betts, "The Pornographic Blazon: 1588-1603" in *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed. Julia Walker (London: Duke University Press, 1998), 153-184; Neil Younger, *War and Politics in the Elizabethan Counties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For a detailed analysis of the social and political conditions of the 1590s, see John Guy, ed., *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

> Nor can I crouch and writhe my fanning tayle
> To some great Patron, for my best avayle.[310]

Although panegyric modes were overtly spurned by the new generation of poets they did not disappear. Encomiastic poetry proclaiming the immutability of the Queen's youth, beauty and majesty continued to be published until the end of Elizabeth's reign, and poets like Sir John Davies continued to celebrate Elizabeth as 'the maid' until as late as 1599. Such discordant representations of Elizabeth's apparently immutable virtues must have sounded a false note, being so extravagantly out of touch with the lived reality of Elizabeth's final years.[311]

The tension between Davies and Hall's representational strategies can be seen as emblematic of the period, in which encomiastic forms now faced vigorous challenges from satirical writing that drew on a different representational tradition and generated a competing narrative of social and political life. Poets seemed to be increasingly drawn to acts of demystification in circumstances where, as Betts has described, 'Elizabeth's material body [was giving] new currency to its metaphorical association with the body politic.'[312] With elaborate glorifications of Elizabeth in terms of the exalted allegorical types of the virgin goddess Diana, and Cynthia the moon goddess, late Elizabethan panegyric arguably reinforced a 'growing gap between reality and myth.'[313] Against literary forms that were beginning to be seen as rhetorically excessive, satiric conventions of referentiality sought to re-establish a more concrete mode of representation. Rather than having a chilling effect on literary production, social and political discord seems to have provided fertile ground and a lively and self-reflexive literary culture emerged in this decade.

Motivated by intergenerational rivalries and anxieties, poets of the 1590s turned to satire in part as a reaction to the 'laureate' careers of the most famous Elizabethan poets, in particular Spenser and Sidney. Richard Helgerson has suggested that alongside the undoubted social and political stressors of this final decade, 'the historical dynamic that opposes generation to generation and the literary system that sets genre against genre' can

310 Joseph Hall, *Virgidemiarum* (London, 1597), EEBO, B2r.
311 John Davies, *Hymnes of Astraea, in Acrosticke Verse* (London, 1599), A2r.
312 Hannah Betts, "The Pornographic Blazon: 1588-1603," 169.
313 Paola Bottalla, "Power Negotations in the Poetry of Elizabeth I," in *Queen and Country: The Relation Between the Monarch and the People in the Development of the English Nation*, ed. Alessandra Petrina (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 84.

also be seen to underly this choice.[314] This new school of poets identifies its anxiety about the influence of their predecessors. Reflecting on the weight of this inheritance, Hall remarks: 'Renowned Spenser: whom no earthly wight/Dares once to emulate, much less dares despite.' Whereas Spenser and Sidney had favoured Virgil and Petrarch as poetic models, and genres like pastoral and the sonnet, this new generation of poets looked to Horace, Ovid, Marital and Juvenal, celebrating an alternative Roman tradition that included the public poetry identified with Pasquil, and electing to write erotic *epyllia*, satires and epigrams.[315]

As discussed, the satire of this period was influenced by two major traditions. It was energised by the return to Roman forms of satire and shaped according to the continued authority of medieval conventions. By the end of the 1590s, the Plowman mode of modest satire that Puttenham had referred to as characteristic of the native English tradition was competing with the more biting forms of invective associated with the Romans, and particularly Juvenal. It was in this decade that poets decisively took up Juvenal's declaration *difficile est saturam non scribere* ('it is hard not to write satire') as a statement of programmatic intent. Poets who sought to revive neoclassical verse satire had a number of possible models to choose from, most prominently, Horace and Juvenal, and via them to Lucilius and Persius.[316]

Interest in comedic and satiric modes flourished beyond poetic circles. Isaac Causabon's edition of Theophrastus's *Characters* (1592) helped bring attention to the idea of psychological and social types. Satire became part of the arsenal of literary controversy with comic prose thriving in the hands of Nashe, Greene and Lodge and, in particular, in the literary skirmishes between Nashe and Gabriel Harvey. The end of this decade saw the initiation of the infamous *Poetomachia*, or War of the Theatres. This period also witnessed first performances of new comedies by Shakespeare, including *The Comedy of Errors* (1594), *Love's Labour's Lost* (1595-96), *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598) and *As You Like it* (1599). Nashe's lost and possibly libellous play *The Isle of Dogs* (1597), Thomas Dekker's *The*

314 Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 104.
315 Rebecca Rush, "Licentious Rhymers: John Donne and the Late- Elizabethan Couplet Revival," *English Literary History* 84, no. 3 (2017): 529.
316 For studies that consider the influence of neo-classical forms on the verse satirists of the 1590s, see Lorna Hutson, *Thomas Nashe in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque*; Kernan, *The Cankered Muse;* Peter, *Complaint and Satire*; Selden, *English Verse Satire*; Love, *Clandestine Satire;* and Schmidt, *Renaissance Hybrids*.

Shoemaker's Holiday (1599) and the anonymous play sometimes attributed to Marston, *Histrio-Mastix* (1599).[317] Jonson turned to ancient humoral theory as the basis for a new form of comedic character introduced in *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) and *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599). In the middle of social and political upheaval, comedy and satire in particular was in the ascendency.

If satire was to be divided into sub-categories of 'toothless' or 'biting,' as Hall suggested, it was this second form of biting satire that arguably drew nearest to libellous expression. More than ever before, as O'Callaghan has argued, satirists of this period were obliged 'to define the generic parameters of satire…in the context of an emergent culture of libelling.'[318] This distinction became especially murky in the case of satirists who pursued the mode of savage indignation that was associated with the Juvenalian style. Against 'obscurity,' Juvenal's promise to shine a light on 'all human endeavours, men's prayers, fears, angers, pleasures, joys and pursuits,' energised this new school of poets. Arguing for the application of the new style of plain, if 'rough' verse, John Marston wrote:

> Know I hate to affect too much obscurity and harshness, because the profit no sense. To note vices, so that no man can understand them, is as fond, as the French execution in picture. Yet there are some, (too many) that think nothing good, that is so courteous, as to come with in their reach. Terming all satyres (bastard) which are not palpable darke…[319]

After the prose experiments of the 1580s, the move to verse marked an important new chapter in the growth of satirico-libellous composition. In particular, the reclamation of the decasyllabic couplet, and the development of sharp juxtapositions of vice and virtue that this metrical form allowed, provided a prominent model for a large number of late-Elizabethan and early Stuart libels. Just as the colloquial style of the *Commonwealth* and the Marprelate tracts had sought to attract a popular readership, the satirists' use of rhymed couplets was overtly designed to distinguish their verse from privileged, stanzaic forms like pastoral and sonnet. Against the elaborate poetic artifice of the previous generation, this new group of poets conceived of the rhyming couplet, as Rebecca Rush has argued, as a fitting reaction to the excesses of the times, returning to a verse form that was associated

317 Roslyn Knutson has persuasively argued that *Histrio-Mastix* has been wrongly attributed to John Marston and that we revert to treating its authorship as unknown. See "Histrio-Mastix": Not by John Marston," *Studies in Philology* 98, no. 3 (2001): 359-377.
318 Michelle O'Callaghan, *The English Wits: Literature and Socialbility in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 31.
319 John Marston, *The Scourge of Villanie* (London, 1598), B4r.

with 'unpretentious poetry and liberty of thought,' and 'a time when the English were bawdier but also more virtuous since they used wit and home-spun wisdom to check the newfangled vices of civilized society.'[320]

Although it is possible to overstress the opposition between those poets who followed the model of Horace and those who drew on Juvenal, there is a persuasive argument for thinking that while 'most of the Elizabethan satirists make passing reference to the Horatian ideal, or a "low" concept of satire,' they then 'proceed with the contemporary fashion for its opposite,' in other words, for Juvenal.[321] Where the Plowman persona was identified with simple piety and humility, exposing the corruption of his age as much by his own example of virtuousness as by overt attacks on vice, the new satirist of the 1590s was characterised by irreverence and inspired by the Juvenalian style of *saevo indignatio* or 'savage indignation.' This new style carried over the plain-speaking associated with native forms but substituted medieval humility for vituperation and a sense of pleasure in attack.

Theories of satire emphasised the suitability of the form for addressing base matters and the 'foolishness of men.'[322] However, given a Juvenalian inflection, this convention was now awkwardly turned on identifiable Elizabethan figures of some prominence and the elite sphere of courtly life. The strong identification between Juvenalian satire and the practice of libelling was not merely the construction of hostile readers. As the epigraph from Juvenal's first satire at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, libelling could be seen to be authorised by the tradition itself. Quoting Lucilius, the speaker contemplates how to respond to political affairs when 'every vice has reached its ruinous zenith:' 'whose name do I dare not utter?' he asks, 'Who cares/ whether the noble Consul forgive my libel or not?' The same satire illustrates the difficulty of rigidly separating social satire and personalised satire or libel, when satire's reformative impulse might work to insinuate an individual sense of culpability:

> But when fiery Lucilius rages with Satire's naked sword
> his hearers go red; their conscience freezes with their crimes,
> their innards sweat in awareness of unacknowledged guilt:
> hence wrath and tears…[323]

320 Rush, "Licentious Rhymers:" 534; 533.
321 Annabel Patterson, "'Savage Indignation:' Elizabethan Satire," in *Hermogenes and the Renaissance: Seven Ideas of Style*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), 100.
322 Kernan, *The Cankered Muse*, 59.
323 Juvenal, "Satire I," 7-8.

Satiric directness Juvenal suggests, however generally intentioned, works to activate the individual guilty conscience. What are accusations of libel, Juvenal might ask, but the 'wrath and tears' of someone forced to recognise an unpalatable truth? This rationale or justification, that *ad hominem* attack only harms the guilty, is directly taken up in Hall's *Virgidemiarum*. In a postscript to the satires Hall asks: 'Art thou guilty? Complain not, thou art not wronged. Art thou guiltless? Complain not, thou art not touched.'[324]

Just as Juvenal's invocation of 'satire's naked sword' signified an intention to move away from the retelling of epic themes, Elizabethan satirists endorsed 'plain-speaking' in place of elevated stanzaic styles and abstract modes of poetic representation. This move beyond the more limited focus on religious disputation and the confessional formations they represented, brought secular and socio-political concerns more sharply into focus and foregrounded the persona of the satirist, who conveyed an increasingly self-conscious and self-referential spirit of critique. Satire's plain-speaking could be justified in several ways. For example, it could be supported through an appeal to *epideixis*, the rhetorical formation of advice-giving or a form of truth-speaking to power. This argument was regularly invoked to defuse the subversive elements of satire; in *Poetaster* for instance, Jonson scripts an encounter between Caesar and Horace, in which Caesar thanks Horace for his 'free and wholsome sharpness/Which pleaseth Caesar more than servile fawns.'[325] Plain-speaking could also be defended as a kind of home-spun wisdom, or as the satiric persona puts it in the prelude to Guilpin's first satire of *Skialetheia*, the objective of satire could be likened to:

> A plaine dealing lad, that is not afraid
> To speake the truth that calls a jade, a jade[326]

As a proposal for a mode of verse, this statement bears more than a passing resemblance to the Martinist characterisation of mode in *The Epitome*: 'I am plain,' he writes, 'I must needs call a spade a spade, a pope, a pope.'[327] In theory, the linguistic transparency promised by satire is connected to a commitment to truth-telling and by implication, more elaborate, allegorical, or highly rhetorical forms of poetry are linked to obfuscation and

[324] Hall, *Virgidemiarum*, H4r.
[325] Ben Jonson, "Poetaster," 5.1.94–5, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* (*CWBJ* hereafter), eds., David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), vol. 2., 135.
[326] Edward Guilpin, *Skialetheia* (London, 1598), C1v.
[327] Black, *Marprelate* Tracts, 53.

concealment. And yet, ironically perhaps, in their frequent use of nested classical allusion and hyperbolic rather than 'humble' speech, many poets who expressed a commitment to plainness can often be seen to call on the prodigal style they are at pains to reject.

In his prologue to *Virgidemiarum* for instance, Hall outlines the objective of his satire 'To claw the back of him that beastly lives/ And prank base men in proud superlatives.'[328] Satiric commitment to eviscerating public figures receives a different formulation in Donne's satires in which criticism of the court and corrupted city life is signified by a rejection of metropolitanism in favour of solitary contemplation. His satires advocate for a more detached, stoical satiric persona, in which plain judgements on social corruption are enriched through the 'constant company' or consultation of scholarly and historical works which can be developed in the confines of the private study rather than through immersion in the everyday.[329] As a point of contrast to the Juvenalian satirico-libellous strain, Donne's third satire recalls the alternative satiric tradition which these scathing satires implicitly reject:

> Kind pity chokes my spleen; brave scorn forbids
> Those tears to issue which swell my eye-lids,
> I must not laugh, nor weep sins, and be wise,
> Can railing then cure these worn maladies?
> Is not our mistress fair religion,
> As worthy of all our soul's devotion,
> As virtue was to that first blinded age?[330]

However, despite his scepticism about the moral efficacy of Juvenalian forms, some years later Donne acknowledged that under certain circumstances the 'railing' attacks of libellous forms might be a fitting response to social ills:

> I dare say to you, where I am not easily misinterpreted, that there may be cases, where one may do his Countrey good service, by libelling against a live man. For, where a man is either too great, or his Vices too generall, to be brought under a judiciary accusation, there is no way, but this extraordinary accussing which we call Libelling.[331]

These literary and polemical shifts had significant implications for the development of libellous writing and discourse. Late-Elizabethan experiments with neoclassical forms

328 Gransden, *Tudor Verse Satire*, 103.
329 John Donne, "Satire 1," in *John Donne: The Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), 154.
330 Donne, "Satire 3," 161.
331 Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, 1612 (London,1651), 90-91.

arguably drove the practice of *ad hominem* critique, that the authors of the *Commonwealth* and the Marprelate tracts had fostered, away from what Kirk Combe identifies as the 'moral Christianity' of earlier forms of complaint literature and towards 'a kind of secular, ethical ideology,' and 'an adherence to "right reason."'[332] On the one hand, this new form 'encouraged,' as Bryan Herek has argued, 'social critique without mediation of religious authority,' in other words, satirico-libellous writing progressively shifted focus away from religious affairs and structures and onto worldly concerns. However, this kind of writing had to surrender its identification with a notion of its own sacred vocation, famously encapsulated by Martin Marprelate in 'Hay any Work for Cooper' when he asks: 'The Lord being the author both of mirth and gravity, is it not lawful in itself, for the truth to use either of these ways?'[333] These tracts had couched their arguments for the use of satiric *decorum personae* as a means to a polemical end, whereas the new school of poets were more likely to justify their use of *decorum personae* in mimetic terms, as a way of holding up a mirror to the world. For instance, in the prelude to *Skialetheia*, Guilpin argues:

> Viewing this sin-drown'd world, I purposely
> Phisick'd my *Muse*, that thus unmannerly,
> She might beray our follo-soyled age,
> And keep *Decorum* on a comick stage[334]

Although it very often retained the sermonizing qualities that were so conspicuous in the earlier formations, Elizabethan satire of the 1590s now justified the use of satire not simply as a rhetorical method legitimised by higher, confessional truth, but in strikingly secular terms as the literary form most suited to representing the 'whirlygigging age.'[335]

In the *Commonwealth* and the Marprelate tracts, the libelling of powerful individuals in the court or church (whether Leicester, Bancroft, Whitgift, or Bridges) had been a polemical tactic designed to advance a religious agenda at the expense of the reputation of the individual who represented an opposing religious position. A libellous style of address can be seen to have actively modified and extended the relatively well-defined space of religious polemic. The use of techniques that were so heavily focused on the 'private' or anecdotal evidence of the lives of these individuals arguably carried the texts far beyond their original

[332] Kirk Combe, "The New Voice of Political Dissent: The Transition from Complaint to Satire," in *Theorising Satire: Essays in Literary Criticism*, ed. Kirk Connery and Brian Combe (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 78.
[333] Black, *Marprelate Tracts*, 115.
[334] Guilpin, *Skialetheia*, B3r.
[335] Guilpin, C3r.

remit, refocusing attention on what was represented as overly-partial, personalised and idiosyncratic modes of governance in the church or court.

Counter-libels, like those composed by Sidney and the anti-Martinists, also engendered a complex legacy, demonstrating the paradoxical difficulty in responding to libel without increasing the risk of the libellous claims receiving yet further publicity. Despite intense efforts by the state to discredit them and curb their circulation, the notoriety of these texts highlighted how satirico-libellous techniques might be used as an effective, albeit unsettling medium of communication, stimulating debate about traditional forms of political and religious organisation. In subjecting issues of the day to a mixture of relentless, caustic analysis in a heightened, performative style, the *Commonwealth* and the Marprelate tracts had announced a new kind of proximity between fictional strategies and the discussion of real or public- affairs. Moreover, as Rhodes suggests, because these pamphlets made emphatic use of a colloquial style, they 'brought into literature the imagery and idioms of everyday life.'[336] Whilst these authors had mixed satirico-libellous techniques with learned arguments from history, scripture, and ecclesiological traditions to further a specifically religious agenda, with Roman models in mind, this next generation of Elizabethan satirists delivered a form of social commentary that focused more closely on the secular experience or 'ethical' dimension of everyday life.

Youthful vigour defined this mode: a number of the poets who became most strongly identified with the new satire of the 1590s were initiated at Oxford and Cambridge on college *comediae*, an energetic, youthful style of performance, associated with lampooning and *ad hominem* satire. Following university, this group of 'wits' converged on London, pursuing various kinds of professional writing careers. Some like Guilpin, Donne and John Hoskyns also pursued parallel careers in the law at the Inns of Court. The universities and Inns became thriving hubs of literary production, and the close association between students, members and figures at court and parliament, provided a ready supply of the kind of topical material on which satirical writing thrived. From 1550-1600, London's population almost doubled in size, growing from around 100,000 to 200,000 by the century's close. This helped to foster an expanding number of possibilities for social, literary and commercial interchanges. Michelle O'Callaghan has argued for example, that it is in the 1590s that a form of literary sociability, centred on often aggressive forms of

[336] Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque*, 21.

speech and writing, flourished around 'a particular geographical and social space, the West End of London…St Paul's and Blackfriars.'[337] Among these socially sanctioned 'ritualized forms of aggression' were bouts of flyting held during the Christmas revels at the Inns of Court.[338] Flyting involved competitive performance in poetic invective between two parties. In this context, personal invective carried a phatic function, designed to reinforce communal bonds, rather than calculated to wound, expose or reform. Flyting provides an illustrative example of the increasing visibility of personalised or *ad hominem* modes of expression and critique in this decade, a mode of invective nurtured in this specific setting but which in any other would have been considered actionable as libel.

The boundary between satiric and libellous styles had perhaps never appeared as porous as it now seemed. The social environment of the 'wits' mingled the production of both satires and libels, with some authors moving between the print publication of satires and the scribal communities associated with libel but within which a range of verse, including unprinted verse satire and epigrams also circulated.[339] O'Callaghan envisions this social and literary milieu as one in which the distinctions between satire and libel were not always strictly drawn or at any rate, strictly enforced. By the late 1590s, members of the Inns of Court were taking part in and increasingly developing satirical postures to comment on the fractious politics of the period, with a particular focus on court factions and the relationships of their leaders, Cecil, Essex and Ralegh.[340]

Satire, Libel and the Social Negotiation of Genre

The escalation of factional struggle between prominent royal ministers became a major theme for the satirico-libellous writing of this period. The vacuum left by Leicester's death was filled by the rise to power of his stepson, Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex (1565-1601); the vacillating fortunes of the sometime royal favourite, Walter Ralegh (1554-1618); and the continuing influence of the Cecils: William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1520/21-1598), and his son Robert Cecil (1563-1612). As previously described, late-Elizabethan satire had a long literary tradition on which to draw, influenced by both classical and native English models, but these forms were adapted according to literary judgements shaped by the

337 O'Callaghan, *The English* Wits, 44-45.
338 O'Callaghan, 44.
339 O'Callaghan, 31.
340 O'Callaghan, 11.

specific social and political pressures and anxieties of day. McRae and Bellany have suggested that the antagonisms generated by factional struggle made it increasingly challenging for the Privy Council to stem the flow of libels and other 'seditious' writing.[341] This decade's revitalisation of Juvenalian or 'biting' classical satiric theories and forms resonated with the highly personalised forms of factional and political struggle, and the period witnessed an expanded circulation of manuscript libels and satires as well as a surge in printed satirical material.

This period can be characterised as one in which the lines between satire and libel begin to be ever more sharply drawn. For instance, it has been suggested that neo-classical satire 'served to clarify the status of verse libel, largely through means of negative definition.'[342] However, formal qualities, which in theory were thought to distinguish a satire from a libel, were not always readily decidable, indicating the extent to which this division rested on a series of interpretive decisions. For example, did the brief character studies offered by verse satire function as generalised types of vice or identifiable public figures; and how could it be determined if the speaker of a poem represented a 'consistent fictional persona' or an 'unalloyed personal voice?'[343] In practice, the boundaries between satire and libel do not always seem to have been as strictly observed or acknowledged by poets or readers, who rarely expected satire to follow the formal unities of other literary forms. As a result, distinctions between satirical and libellous writing became strategically blurred, particularly when subjected to the naturally authoritarian but capricious attention of ecclesiastical licensers. An illustrative example of this kind of strategic distortion can be found in 'Admire all Weakness,' a verse circulating in at least one miscellany as 'a copy of a libel' despite not explicitly specifying the name of any individual courtier. While sustaining a meaningful syntactic structure, whose sense is derived from a series of abstract utterances (Admire, Honnor, Secrette), the verse also weaves together a series of paranomastic or punning references and generates a parallel libellous frame of reference:

> Admire, all weaknes wrongeth righte,
> Honnor in general looseth lighte.
> Secrette ar ever their dessignes
> Throughe whose defecte true honnor pines.[344]

341 *ESL*, "A. Essex, Ralegh, and Late-Elizabethan Politics (c.1590-1603)," http://www.earlystuartlibels.net/htdocs/essex_Ralegh_section/A0.html
342 McRae, *Literature,* 27.
343 R.B. Gill, "A Purchase of Glory: The Persona of Late Elizabethan Satire," *Studies in Philology* 72, no. 4 (1975): 409.
344 BL Add MS 5956, f. 23r

Over four hundred years later, the contemporary allusions to real people in the verse may seem obscure. However, for those involved in the period's factional struggles, to the courtiers themselves, they would have been all too apparent. In BL Add MS 5956 for instance, the link is emphasised by the verse's appearance alongside transcriptions of state proceedings against Essex and it bears all the hallmarks of the Essex faction and their disaffection in the wake of his failed endeavours at court. As Bryson and May have noted 'Honnor' here most likely refers to Essex, as they suggest: 'not only is 'Your honour' the proper form of address for an earl [but] Essex and his adherents took pains to portray him as its embodiment.'[345] The puns on 'Admire, all' and 'Secreete are' refer, in turn, to Lord Admiral Charles Howard, Essex's rival and 'Secretary' Robert Cecil. The use of paranomasia, that draws attention to, even as it conceals its own 'veiled' act of naming, arguably concretises the abstraction. This works to neutralise the effectiveness of any 'functional ambiguity' that might be said to arise from the intentional use of homophonic, homographic and metonymic language. All three techniques are found here but are distinguished from their function in the extended allegorical narratives of epic poetry or dramatic verse in the context of the poem's libellous identifications. This example epitomises the extra-textual framing of satirico-libellous verse, insofar as its polemical sense rests on the reader's knowledge of the factional struggle that motivates its composition. Without disregarding the significance of generic conventions or other textual practices, it is possible to see how satire nevertheless relies on a high degree of specific knowledge for the generation of meaning.

For the 'purpose-driven art of satire,' the relation between an idea of an antecedent and motivating force and a resultant text has always been of central significance, but this relation could be expressed in several ways.[346] This is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the rivalry between Ralegh and Essex, which of all the ardent factional struggles of this period was especially fierce. The escalating tensions between the two led the queen to issue a specific prohibition against their duelling. The removal of the possibility of physical combat did not of course dissolve the source of the dispute, and perhaps one consequence was that the form of the contest became transfigured and transliterated so to speak, and newly expressed in the circulation of *ad hominem*, libellous modes of attack. In this case the

345 May and Bryson, *Verse Libel*, 134.
346 William Jones, *Satire in the Elizabethan Era: An Activistic Art* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 14.

composition of satirico-libellous verse can be seen to take on the function of the social context from which it departs and to which it also forms a response.

Several libels from this period thematize the rivalry between Ralegh and Essex. Ralegh is often thought of as the quintessential Elizabethan courtier and favourite, memorably rumoured to have spread his cloak over a 'plashy place' so the queen could avoid getting her feet wet. For much of his career he performed this role with aplomb. As a famous soldier and explorer, and a courtier poet, he embodied the twin virtues of *vita activa* and *vita cotemplativa*. Through the Queen's gift he oversaw numerous estates and monopolies and he perfectly conformed to the role of royal favourite insofar as he was known for his extravagant tastes and fiscal profligacy. Although devoted to the Queen he was despised by the rest of the court for his pride and ambition. However, by the beginning of the 1590s Ralegh's relationship with Elizabeth had soured. In 1591, Ralegh married Bess Throckmorton, a maid of honour at court, and for fear of the queen's displeasure had sought to keep the union secret. In 1593, on discovering the marriage, Elizabeth had Ralegh and his wife briefly committed to the tower, and upon their release, they were both banished from court. The ban on Ralegh was not lifted until 1597.[347]

Known to be 'a man of great designs,' Essex is often said to have fostered a kind of cult of personality based on his charm, good looks and military prowess and involving a series of public spectacles. As Paul Hammer suggests, one register of Essex's political standing might be found in the remarkable number of printed texts dedicated to him during the 1590s which were unsurpassed by dedications to any other figure at court, including the Queen herself.[348]

A verse known as 'The Lie' and attributed to Ralegh came to epitomize the shape of the conflict between Ralegh and Essex, and to capture what might be accomplished via the medium of written exchange rather than brute force. This thirteen-stanza poem was likely written during the period of Ralegh's exclusion from the court in the middle 1590s. As with much of his poetry, 'The Lie' was never printed in his lifetime, however, it seems

347 Mark Nicholls, and Penry Williams, 2015 "Ralegh, Sir Walter (1554–1618), courtier, explorer, and author," *ODNB*. For an account of the structural significance of social context for interpreting Ralegh's verse, see Marion Campbell, "Inscribing Imperfection: Sir Walter Ralegh and the Elizabethan Court," *English Literary Renaissance* 20, no. 2 (1990): 233-253.
348 Paul Hammer, 2008 "Devereux, Robert (1565–1601), second earl of Essex, soldier and politician," *ODNB*.

likely that it was well received in coterie circles with over forty instances of the verse recorded in manuscript miscellanies. The poem expresses criticism of the major Elizabethan institutions of court and church and issues, in a conventional satiric posture, a 'farewell' to the society and corridors of power in which Ralegh had formerly mixed.

McRae and Bellany note that as a stand-alone verse, 'The Lie' is 'a relatively conventional satire.'[349] The poem is often found collected in miscellanies with other popular poetry of the period; in BL MS Harley 6901, for example, 'The Lie' is found transcribed alongside Spenser's 'Mother Hubbard's Tale' and 'The Ruins of Time,' Spenser's translation of Joachim Du Bellay's 'The Ruins of Rome,' translations of Petrarch's sonnets and a series of epitaphal verses on Essex's death.[350] Despite this rich poetic context, however, the poem assumes a particular significance in terms of the political culture of libelling. It provoked a number of answer-poems that drew on the occasion of Ralegh's more conventional satire, to structure a libellous attack on its author in return.[351] Coinciding with his rise to prominence, Essex and members of his circle were most likely responsible for a large proportion of the poetic libels written against Ralegh at this time.

The poem's expression of disillusionment moves stanza by stanza through the social scale, setting virtue and vice in opposition by naming each idealised space, sphere or figure and identifying it with the negative quality it conceals or disavows. From a stanza on the church and court, to another on 'potentats,' 'men of high condition,' those who 'beg for more by spending,' and finally to a series of stanzas on virtues, institutions and states; zeal, love, time, and flesh; age, honour, beauty and favour; physicke (or medicine), skill, charity, law; fortune, nature, friendship, justice; arts and schools; and faith, manhood and virtue. The final couplet of each stanza directly puts the speaker's claims to the target of the satire to which the speaker 'gives the lie.' So, for example, the second stanza ends, 'If Courte or Church replye/ Give Courte & Church the lye." To give the lie to someone, meant 'to accuse (a person) to his face of lying,' evoking plain-speaking and containing the implicit suggestion of a direct confrontation.[352]

349 Bellany and McRae, *ESL*, A3.
350 BL MS Harley 6901, f.141v.
351 *ESL*, A3.
352 *OED,* "lie, (n.1)."

In the context of what might be considered to be the poem's evasive anonymity, its contrast of the speaker's plain truth-telling with the apparent imposture of Elizabethan political and social structures arguably falters. Indeed, the answer poems turn the matter of the poem's authorship into a question of central importance. Read in this light, it infers that anonymity represents a malign concealment of authorship, a wish to conceal an association with subversive material, rather than a way of indicating humility or amorous discretion. In one sense, this is an example of the relatively straightforward reversal that produces the answering verse. However, it also provides a striking example of how easily the nominal boundary that distinguished satire from libel could be breached. The answer poem makes an explicit claim on the equivalence between the speaker or persona of the poem and its author. It also illustrates the process by which the antagonistic postures adopted by the speakers of satires could revert to negative identifications attaching to satirists themselves. It is possible to see how effectively this was achieved in one copy, found in Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 212, in which the scribe intersperses stanzas from Ralegh's poem with stanzas from an answering verse, attributed to a chaplain, Dr Richard Latewater, a close associate and supporter of the Earl of Essex.

f: Say to the court it glowes
And shines like rotten woode
Say to the church it shows
Whats good, yet doth no good
If Courte or Church replye
Give Courte and Church the lye

A: Say to the Courte it shines
Gone is that rotten woode
From courte & church devine
Which never there did good
If Rawhead this denye
Tell him that hee doth lye[353]

Ralegh's stanza captures one aspect of the poem's extended undermining of idealisation of oppositional qualities, often conveyed through notions of surface and depth, in this case

[353] Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 212, fs. 88r-90r

reproaching the court and church for dissemblance and corruption. However, Ralegh's more conventionally abstracted satiric target, supplies the framework from which the answering poet constructs his libel. As this call and answer version of the poem so richly exemplifies, Ralegh's poem was used by his opponents to carry on a factional struggle for power by other means. The answer poem gives a systematic treatment of the matter of the original verse, mirroring its syntax and reapplying its use of parallelism. In response to Ralegh's lament for the moral decay of the court that 'shines like rotten woode' and the Church that 'showes/whats good, yet doth no good,' the relevant stanza in this answer poem identifies Ralegh as 'the rotten wood,' replying 'If Rawhead this denye/ Tell him that hee doth lye.'

The answer poem can be seen then to serve the more basic function of lifting the veil on the 'hidden' matter of the poem's authorship. The editor of Ralegh's poetry, Michael Rudick, accepts that some scholars such as Pierre LeFranc do not accept the attribution of Ralegh as the author of 'The Lie.'[354] The point stands, however, that the rhetorical effects of poems like these, which were taken to be by Ralegh, or strategically represented as such, are constitutive of the rhetorical effects of a culture of anonymous libel.

A fundamental issue of anonymous verse was that it offered a type of disembodied critique that made it impossible to rebut. To 'give the lie,' or in this case, to return it, relies on knowledge of the author's name. Anticipating the libellous style that would become far more prevalent with successive favourites in the Jacobean court, Ralegh's person or 'Rawhead' becomes the locus of animus, displacing a social critique that might possibly shade into a criticism of the queen and instead turns it onto a single figure. As May and Bryson note, the writers of these libels had some precedent to draw on in the use of puns to libel Ralegh, with Essex himself having attacked Ralegh as 'puddle water.'[355] This insult also took the form of an inside joke as it made use of the queen's pet name for Ralegh ('water'). The intensification and perpetuation of libels was one consequence of the call-and-answer effect of more or less heavily coded satirico-libellous verse. This was to become a strong current in the Jacobean period in the verse libels attacking George Villiers, James's favourite and the verses written by the King in response to libellers. Perhaps a central motivation and theme of Jacobean libels, the envy elicited by royal favouritism can

354 Michael Rudick, ed., *The Poems of Sir Walter Ralegh: A Historical Edition* (Arizona: Renaissance English Text Society, 1999), xliv.
355 May and Bryson, *Verse Libel*, 59.

be seen to be a prime motivator of the Essexian libels on Ralegh. Presumably, in this case, with the intention of influencing the Queen's affections and furthering the interests of one or another courtier.

Another companion piece to 'The Lie,' which one manuscript copy alleges to be 'made by R.Essex,' takes the matter of Ralegh's original poem, and again seeks to return its charges onto its author:

> Courtes scorne, states disgracing
> Potentates scoffe, government defacing
> Prelates nippe, churches unhallowinge
> Artes Injurye, vertues debasing
> Ages monster, honours wastinge
> Beauties blemish, favours blasting
> Witts excremente, wisdoms vomitte
> Physickes scorne, lawes commette
> Fortunes childe, natures defiler
> Justices revenger, frindshippes beguiler
> Such is the songe, such is the author
> Woorthy to be rewarded with a halter.[356]

The verse can be seen to illustrate the slippages between the social satire of vice and a personal satire or libel in several ways. Although the verse presents many of the common tropes of social satire and Ralegh himself is never directly named in the poem, the object of the attack would never have been in doubt to its earliest readers. In part this is evident because it is clear that this verse was collected alongside 'The Lie,' suggesting that early readers regarded this as one of a suite of poems. However, even as a standalone verse its libellous treatment of Ralegh is unambiguous. Recalling that Ralegh had been excluded from court after his marriage to Bess Throckmorton, that he was reported to tend towards atheism and that he was commonly associated with the figure of Fortune, the verse's reference to its object as 'courts scorne,' 'churches unhallowinge,' and 'Fortunes childe' would have specifically called Ralegh to mind. Failing that, the verse uses its final couplet to drive home the libel: 'Such is the songe, such is the author/ Woorthy to bee rewarded with a halter,' in which Ralegh emerges as the object of the libel through a rhyming pun on his first name and the 'halter' with which he is threatened. The aggression of these final lines in dissolving the distinction between the persona of 'The Lie' and its alleged author and the collapsing of any distinction between the fictive and the real, serves to legitimate

[356] Bodl MS Rawl. Poet. 212, f.91r.

a call for Ralegh's execution. This verse thus actively promotes a libellous mode of reading, as the abstract register of the poem is revealed to be more concretely referential and the object of attack is made transparent to its anticipated audience. The offensiveness of the charges contained in the verses attacking Ralegh fuelled further defensive rejoinders, which often sought to neutralise the effects of the libellous attack with an affirmative portrait. For example, the verse, 'Courts commender states mantayner,' attributed to Ralegh in one miscellany, offers a 'reproofe' to the accusations made in 'Courts scorne, states disgracing,' as above.[357]

Just as the mutual dependency of these various poems gestures towards the more extensive scribal and social networks and rivalries of the Elizabethan court, they also bear a relation to the escalating invectives that were characteristic of flyting, as well as the *poetomachia* that was inflaming the playwrights in the London theatres. Libellous verses formed part of this political culture and could often be hedged in and made acceptable by a relation to socially condoned practices such as flyting and the writing of formal verse satire. Overt aggression and play blended in these heavily institutionalised environments, which provided a benign framework for the interpretation of satirical speech and writing. In particular, these contexts encouraged the splitting of a ' particular highly conventionalised persona' of the work and the 'actual, historical writer.'[358] Despite sharing a high degree of textual similarity, once unleashed from these social spaces and circulating freely and unpredictably in manuscript, this kind of verse took on a distinct and more troubling significance.

Censorship, Satire and Libel

On 1 June 1599, the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift and the Bishop of London, Richard Bancroft, issued a ban directing the Stationers' Company to cease the publication of a range of named works and included provisions for the prohibition of any future publication of satires and epigrams. After a decade in which satire and satirico-libellous works had flourished, it looked now to be coming to an end. Works by Hall, Marston, Guilpin, Middleton and Tailboys Dymok headed the list of proscribed texts. The Ban also applied to John Davies' *Epigrams* and Christopher Marlowe's *Elegyes*, two books on marriage and all works by Thomas Nashe and Gabriel Harvey. The Ban was ruthless in its

357 Bodleian MS Ashmole 781, 164.
358 Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes*, 2.

objectives. In addition to withdrawing the proscribed books from circulation, the text of the Ban also announced the bishops' intention to burn all recalled copies and, as the Stationers' Register notes, the following Monday a massive bonfire was held in Stationers' Hall to carry out their orders.

Of the many state interventions and attempts to eliminate what was argued to be seditious or treasonous speech and writing, the ban occupies a central place in literary histories focused on the mechanisms of censorship in this period. Although there were numerous state interventions against so-called seditious language, most of these were relatively indiscriminate in their scope, only identifying specific targets, as with the *Commonwealth* and the Marprelate tracts in acute circumstances, and only then directed at unlicensed and therefore illegal material. The ban in this sense represents a relatively unusual point of contact between agents of the state and identified authors and named literary texts. In particular, it brings into focus the variability of Elizabethan judgements concerning acceptable modes of language and literary forms. All the texts listed in the ban had only very recently been licensed for print, hence the abrupt appearance of the ban seems to point to a shift in the ideological conditions under which particular modes of language and literary forms, hitherto considered acceptable, were now withdrawn.

A great part of each one of the listed satires was given over to detailed justifications for the general literary and social value of satire and its suitability for commenting on the 'mad-cap world' of late Elizabethan England.[359] However, all of these satires also contained identifiable *ad hominem* material and strong intimations of a wider culture of courtly corruption. The first satire in Guilpin's *Skialetheia* for instance, provides an unfavourable character sketch of 'great *Foelix*' whom Clegg has argued would have been understood to embody the Earl of Essex:

> For when great *Foelix* passing through the street,
> Vayleth his cap to each one he doth meet…
>
> Like a Swatrutters hose his puffe thoughts swell,
> With yeastie ambition: *Signior Machiavel*
> Taught him this mumming trick, with curtesie
> T'entrench himselfe in popularitie,
> And for a writhen face, and bodies move,

[359] Guilpin, *Skialetheia*, C3r.

> Be Barricadode in the peoples love.[360]

Guilpin's portrait of a ruthlessly ambitious courtier who is also characterised as a 'man of the people' contains the now commonplace emphasis on dissimulation. Essex is represented as a shrewd actor practiced in the 'mumming trick,' in other words, skilled in miming courteousness to gain approval or 'love.' The intimation of his high regard for 'popularitie' or public esteem could itself be read as suggestive of discord and dissent, as the quest for popularity was considered socially agitative and was considered to be a precursor to rebellion. As Paul Hammer has argued, in this context, the charge of popularity meant that Essex 'sought political support from outside the realm's governing elite and, in doing so, interposed himself between the queen and her subjects, challenging the monopoly a sovereign supposedly enjoyed over their subjects' "love."'[361] Although Essex's 'popularity' is derided in Guilpin's satire, as a symptom of the 'motley fac'd Dissimulation' that 'is crept into our every fashion,' in anonymous verses, Essex's supporters attacked his enemies, Cecil in particular, and defended his reputation as a national hero.

Even though the reference to Essex in *Skialetheia* is relatively brief and somewhat veiled, the wider discursive context in which it circulated accumulatively links Guilpin's portrait to other contemporaneous representations of Essex. Writing to Essex in 1596, Francis Bacon considers how these various prodigal depictions of the Earl's person have taken shape, 'but how is it now?' he writes:

> A man of a nature not to be ruled, that hath the advantage of my affection, and knoweth it; of an estate not grounded to his greatness; of a popular reputation; of a military dependence: I demand whether there can be a more dangerous image than this represented to any monarch living, much more to a lady and of her Majesty's apprehension?[362]

360 Guilpin, *Skialetheia*, C3v.
361 Paul Hammer, "The smiling crocodile: the earl of Essex and late Elizabethan 'popularity'" in *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, ed. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 105.
362 Bacon, "Letter to my Lord of Essex, from Mr. Bacon, Oct 4. 1596," in James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath eds., *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. ix (London: Longman, 1861-1879), 41.

The sensitivity of the period to the representation and criticism of prodigality at court, is accentuated by Hall, who compares the reception of poems that addressed these 'vaunting' types in the classical era to their Elizabethan reception:

> For now our ears been of more brittle mould,
> Than those dull earthen ears that were of old:
> Sith theirs, like anvils, bore the hammer's head,
> Our glass can never touch unshivered.[363]

The ban seems to confirm Hall's suspicion that this was an age that 'readeth guiltily,' and in which even more generalised criticism of vice was insupportable. Certainly, the prominence the bishops give to a series of individually identified satires suggests that their dominant concern was with the 'new formal verse writings' of the preceding period.[364] Although the ban also severely restricted the printing of unlicensed histories and plays, it stopped short of outright prohibition, sanctioning the printing of those 'that be allowed by some of her Majesty's Privy Council' and those that 'be allowed by such as have authority.'[365] In part, because the ban issued from an ecclesiastical source and because the list of banned texts contains an example of Ovidian erotica, there has been an inclination to read the intervention as an expression of moral opprobrium and an attempt to regulate sexual morality.[366] Bryan Herek suggests that the bishops had come to see satirists as asserting a challenge to their own moral authority; satirists, he argues, were increasingly seen to occupy the public position that properly belonged to preachers and were considered all the more threatening because the Roman inflection of this new satire 'encouraged social critique without the mediation of religious authority.'[367] Richard McCabe has argued that the bishops own accounts of the ban in surviving letters suggest that their primary concern was with 'matters of public order and policy.' Other scholars have argued that to conceive of the ban as exclusively motivated by religious concerns assumes an overly rigid distinction between the spheres of religious and political authority.

363 Hall, *Virgidemiarum*, F3v.
364 Richard McCabe, "Elizabethan Satire and the Bishops Ban of 1599," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 11, no. 2 (1981): 189-90.
365 Edward Arber, ed., *A Transcript of the Company of Stationers of London; 1554-1640 A.D.*, vol. 3 (New York: Peter Smith, 1950), 316-316b.
366 For scholars who argue that the Ban was primarily designed to police sexual mores, see Charles Gillet, *Burned Books: Neglected Chapters in British History and Literature*, vol. i (New York: Colombia University Press, 1932); Bruce Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and Lynda Boose, "The 1599 Bishops' Ban, Elizabethan Pornography, and the Sexualisation of the Jacobean State," in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 185-200.
367 Bryan Herek, "Reconsidering the 1599 Bishops' Ban on Satire," in *Renaissance Papers 2011*, ed. Andrew Shifflett and Edward Gieskes (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), 132.

In practice, both Whitgift and Bancroft also held political offices in the Privy Council and High Commission respectively and 'no ban could be issued for any reason whatsoever without the approval and consent of either the Privy Council or the High Commission.'[368] In other words, there is nothing to suggest that in 1599 'the bishops were not acting, as usual, as ministers of state.' With respect to this point 'both men were past masters of the art of censorship,'[369] both having been central figures in Marprelate's attacks on the prelacy. Whilst in the 1580s they had tried to discredit the Marprelate pamphlets by hiring poets to write against the anonymous authors, they now turned to the repressive mechanisms of state, law and licensing.

William Jones connects the ban explicitly to the Juvenalian satires like Guilpin's and Hall's, which he argues were perceived as a 'direct challenge to the ideological stability of a nation undergoing a range of potentially destabilizing political, economic, social and religious crises.'[370] There is substantial critical support for the argument that anxieties about the destabilising effects of *ad hominem* or libellous forms of expression were the chief motivation behind the ban. Kaplan describes the ban as an attempt to contain 'the slanderous effect of contemporary references found in these poems.' [371] Although Elizabethan theories of satire had emphasised the form's suitability for addressing the foolishness of men, they did not authorise its use for commentary on those in high office. In touching on the usurping energies of key courtiers and implicating solemn matters of state in their focus on the "folly-soyled age," these verses broke decisively with conventional decorum. More specifically, Clegg has persuasively argued that Guilpin's satirical portrait of the Earl of Essex as 'Great Foelix' in *Skialetheia*, which headed the list of banned texts, would have likely piqued the interest of Whitgift. Whitgift and Essex were closely allied and Essex's disastrous exploits in Ireland had already resulted in unfavourable comparisons being drawn between the Earl and Bolingbroke on the publication of John Hayward's history of Henry IV. In the months prior to the ban, Hayward's history had been withdrawn from publication on the grounds of its seditious correspondence to current events. As Richard McCabe asks, 'how much less then, could open and explicit criticism be allowed to pass unchallenged?' Clegg connects the ban to several other

368 McCabe, "Elizabethan Satire and the Bishops Ban of 1599," 189.
369 McCabe, 189.
370 Jones, "The Bishops' Ban of 1599 and the Ideology of English Satire," 336.
371 Kaplan, *Culture of Slander*, 30.

contemporaneous political interventions that indicate that the state was keen to suppress literary representations that might be linked to attacks on Essex.[372]

The Bishops' Ban and Satire's Changing Fortunes

Many scholars have identified the significance of the ban as an event that foreshadowed and conditioned the explosion of verse libel in early Stuart England. For example, connecting the ban to the development of popular literary styles in this period, Cogswell has claimed that the effect of the prohibition was to drive satiric verse 'underground,' and that its closest generic relative was then to be found in the verse libels that proliferated throughout James I's reign.[373] McRae has argued that this view is too simplistic and does not take sufficient account of the unfolding of historical events. He suggests that the ban does not warrant this emphasis as it does not seem to have been strenuously enforced very long after its initial publication. He argues instead that the events that followed can be seen as the culmination of a range of separate measures, that included increasingly severely worded royal proclamations, as well as a number of individual acts of censorship designed to protect the late Elizabethan state from perceived criticism. [374]

There is certainly no sign that the ban dissuaded the authors of libels from composing or circulating verse. The ban took effect in the middle of 1599 and Essex's arrest in September 1599, just three months later, prompted 'a veritable flood of libels against the Earl's rivals.' [375] In speeches given in the Star Chamber, members of the Privy Council condemned these personal attacks upon themselves, and as McRae and Bellany note, these libels were perceived to infringe on the governing rights of the crown and its ministers. Lord Keeper Egerton denounced their circulation in the 'taverns and ordinaries' which he claimed:

> …are filled with tales of government and matters of state, and they so far proceed that they scatter libels, which do falsely and traitorously slander her sacred Majesty and her whole council, nay in such manner as though (after 42 years government) she knew not whom to reward. They are dangerous enemies and design to refuse the government of the realm. I

372 McCabe, "Elizabethan Satire and the Bishops' Ban of 1599," 193.
373 Cogswell, "Underground Verse," 307.
374 McRae, *Literature,* 29.
375 McRae and Bellany, *ESL*, A. Essex, Ralegh, and Late-Elizabethan Politics (c.1590-1603).

> call them traitors, for the law condemns [them] as traitors, but our state does not severely punish it, and yet they are traitors.[376]

The sheer scope and manifest excessiveness of the ban, however, seems to indicate the presence of significant ideological forces. The ban's refusal to discriminate between a range of different generic types, and in particular its inclusion of satires which had previously resided in 'the notorious grey area between attacks on corruption and attacks on the corrupt', significantly narrowed the possibilities for the legitimate expression of critique, complaint or opposition. This can be seen to anticipate and resonate with Coke's revocation (in 1605) of any meaningful distinction between a libel's truth or falsehood for its definition. In both cases, the dissolution of formerly legitimate distinctions seems to indicate a form of authoritarian closure designed to neutralise any adverse commentary on the political regime. In suspending the conditions that had hitherto functioned to clarify the status of verse libel, the Ban inadvertently suggested that legitimacy or illegitimacy were not natural or inherent states of texts but were made and unmade according to political exigency and legal fiction.

[376] Folger MS V.b.142, f. 49r-v, quoted in *ESL*, A. Essex, Ralegh, and Late-Elizabethan Politics (c.1590-1603).

PART THREE

Interpreting Authority: Jacobean Libel and the Poet-King

Queen Elizabeth had a Camden, and King Charles a Clarendon, but Poor King James I has had I think none but paltry scribblers.

White Kennett, Bishop of Peterborough, 1718-1728

Since thought is free, thinke what thou will
O troubled hart to ease thy paine
Thought unrevealed can doe no evill
Bot words past out cummes not againe

King James, "Song. The first verse that ever the King made," 1582

I never with God's grace…shall do anything in private which I may not without shame proclaim upon the tops of houses

King James, "Letters" 192.

In the previous chapter I looked at the significance of the revival of neo-classical satire for familiarising and popularising the savage modes of attack strongly identified with libel. Moreover, I considered how the political and literary culture of this final decade instrumentalized forms of libelling to strengthen their own claims; libelling can be seen to have been a prominent mechanism in the intense factional struggles between Ralegh, Essex and their respective supporters, as well as the satire wars of the *poetomachia*. Finally, I considered how the attentiveness of the Bishops' Ban to the *ad hominem* criticism found in Juvenalian inflected satire can be thought to have drawn attention to the political exigencies that determined the status of legitimate or illegitimate forms of writing, or the difference between satire and libel. Throughout the previous two sections, it has been my contention that libellous discourse in this period was both popular and rhetorically effective because it gave a voice to problematic elements of specifically personalized forms of political governance and power. As the *Commonwealth,* Marprelate tracts and satire of the 1590s demonstrated, *ad hominem* attacks can be seen to have served a double function, as both an attack on the person but also conveying a broader religious, social or political agenda. In bringing together the use of anonymous or pseudnoymous forms of publication, the construction of fictive or satiric personae, and the dissemination of scandalous accounts

of the lives of agents of the state, these texts demonstrated the rhetorical effectiveness of libellous techniques for popularising more fundamental political issues.

The chapters in this final section focus on the cultural and political function of libellous discourse in the reign of James I, the period in which the libelling of prominent figures was at its most prolific. As with the Earl of Leicester, there is a long anecdotal tradition associating James's reign with an unprecedented surge in unofficial, libellous writing attacking the monarch and his court. James emerges as a contradictory figure, with scholarly accounts regularly divided over how to characterize his rule. He was known variously as 'the wisest fool in Christendom' and 'Great Britain's Solomon,' celebrated for his intellectual ambitions and huge literary output, and famous for his patronage of Shakespeare, Donne, Jonson and Inigo Jones. However, cultivation was reportedly matched with coarseness and he was also known for his boorishness, drunkenness and decadent tastes, and for his inclination for rewarding and elevating a few cherished favourites over other more worthy members of the court.[377]

Verses written about the king and his court reverberate with these interpretative divisions. Panegyric verse eulogised James as an author and intellect and celebrated his court for its cultural richness, whilst satricio-libellous verse repeatedly returned to his rumoured immoderation and impropriety. His endorsment of the theory of royal absolutism or the Divine Right of Kings, articulated most forcefully in *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) and restated throughout many works of prose and poetry, implicitly elevated a strongly personalized style of governance which arguably fostered and even accelerated the conditions in which libellous writing flourished. Absolutism was pitted against political theories that foregrounded the ancient constitutional rights of Englishmen as enshrined particularly in Magna Carta. Theories of absolutism emphasised the monarch's divine prerogative and implicitly acknowledged his right to employ discretionary, extra-legal powers.[378]

Chapter 5 considers how the energies activated by the transitional movement from Elizabethanism to Jacobeanism were mediated through libellous verse forms. Two verses written around the time of James's accession to the English throne are considered. The first verse, composed by the Queen's god-son John Harington (1560-1612), is an epigram,

377 Jenny Wormald, "James VI and I: Two Kings or One?," *History* 68, no. 223 (1983): 187-8.
378 Johan Sommerville, *Politics and Ideology in England, 1603-1640* (London: Longman, 1986), 9-56.

'England (Men say) of late is bankrupt grown'. It reflects on the acrimony that characterised political affairs in the final decade of Elizabeth's reign and looks forward to the cultural renewal promised by James's accession to the English throne. The second verse is an anonymous distich. Despite its brevity, it expresses an acute cynicism toward court politics. Its trivializing approach to key courtiers and their efforts at advancement is an early illustration of the libellous approaches to political commentary that beleaguered James and his court. These verses illustrate, in different ways, how early modern interpretations of libel were activated at this transitional political moment when satiric forms were especially prone to hostile reading. What becomes evident is the importance of social, political and material contexts to the perception of libellous writing. The circulation of Harington's epigram in particular suggests how these hostile readings could be neutralised or reactivated at different historical moments.

The final part of this chapter turns to a detailed discussion of James's promotion of an absolutist theory of royal power and the popular perception of various elements of his character. In particular, it considers how his self-presentation as an author, and specifically as a poet-king, can be thought to have generated near ideal conditions for the intensification of libellous verse, indirectly authorising even as it sought to suppress the subversive currents of libellous forms.

CHAPTER 5

SATIRE, LIBEL AND THE NEGOTIATION OF SUCCESSION

Every early modern monarch faced the challenge of establishing and naturalizing his or her authority. This challenge intensified in the sixteenth century amid many competing claims to the throne and in the context of unprecedented religious and social upheaval. It is relatively clear why the movement from one monarch to the next might be seen to have encouraged a renewed critical focus on the personal function of monarchy. However, the transition from Elizabethan cultural codes and conventions to distinctively Jacobean forms was distinguished by a number of quite specific features. James was the first in the line of an entirely new royal dynasty and the successor to one of the longest reigning and most popular monarchs England had ever known. Kevin Sharpe has characterised the transition in terms of an extensive promotional campaign where the Stuarts had to 'create a new brand (and brand loyalty) in a culture everywhere marked with the signs of the Tudors.'[379] The differences between Elizabeth and James could hardly have been more stark: a male ruler, James was considered a foreigner, his Catholic mother had been put to death by Elizabeth. At the time of his accession to the English throne he had already been King of Scotland for thirty-six years. He also believed passionately in the divine right of kings and the executive powers of the royal prerogative, viewpoints which were 'at odds with English Common Law and with the longstanding English commitment to representative assemblies.[380]

The writing that addresses the dawning of the new era foregrounds a sense of uneasy acculturation. These writers as Perry has suggested, can be seen 'struggling to respond to a new king whose image [fit] uneasily with received notions of what a monarch was [and] what a monarch did…'[381] As has been acknowledged ever since, comparisons between Elizabeth and James's reigns seem to have been mostly unfavorable for James. Writing in the early eighteenth century, the bishop of Peterborough, White Kennett called attention to the curious historiography of James's reign. In contrast to the accounts of the reigns of Elizabeth and Charles I by the most eminent historians of the day, Kennett remarked that

379 Kevin Sharpe, *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England 1603-1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 6.
380 Pauline Croft, *King James* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 6.
381 Perry, *The Making of Jacobean Culture*, 16.

'poor king James I has had I think none but paltry scribblers.'[382] James fares no better at the hands of more contemporary distinguished scholars, with Macaulay considering the legacy of James's reign, commenting that:

> On the day of the accession of James the First England descended from the rank she had hitherto held, and began to be regarded as a power hardly of the second order.[383]

These earlier historiographical views can be seen to have persisted and even gathered steam. An extreme example is found in Roy Strong's assessment of James in which he describes him as:

> The bloated, pedantic middle-aged father [of Prince Henry], careless of affairs of state, prepared to accept appeasement at any price, bent on the pleasure of the chase, totally unaesthetic, whose penchant for handsome courtiers was hardly becoming.[384]

These negative appraisals of James and his legacy are deeply entrenched. Considered to have been inept and immoderate, it is also argued that his reign indelibly undermined the claims of monarchical authority and England's preeminence as a national power. Kennett's report of the 'paltry scribblers' suggests that one possible source for these accounts was precisely the kind of second-rate satirist or 'poetasters' who were held responsible for the composition of the verse libels that dogged the Jacobean court and which have shaped estimations of his reign.

In spite of these views, at the turn of the century and on the eve of his accession to the throne, James had been the focus of considerable hope and expectation. Dated 18 December 1602, an epigram composed on the eve of the queen's death by her god-son, the diarist John Harington, anticipates the dawning of the new Stuart era, envisaging James as an antidote to the corrupt quagmire within which, so it was claimed, court politics was currently subsumed:

> England (Men say) of late is banckrupt grown:
> Th'effect is manifest, the Cause unknown.
> Rich Treasurers it hath had, and wary Keepers,
> Fat Judges, Counsellors in Gain no-sleepers,
> Auditors, & Surveyors, Receivers many,

382 Bodleian MS Ballard 62, quoted in Jenny Wormald, "James VI and I: Two Kings or One?," *History* 68, no. 223 (1983): 192.
383 *The Complete Works of Lord Macaulay*, 12 vols (1898; rpt. New York, AMS Press, 1980), 1: 72.
384 Roy Strong, quoted in Leeds Barroll, "Assessing 'Cultural Influence:' James I as Patron of the Arts," *Shakespeare Studies* 29 (2001): 132.

Pillers, & pollers too, All for the penny.
As for the Church, that must both pray, & pay:
For Solvat Ecclesia, the Courtiers say.
Can Any tell, how to help this Disorder?
Faith, one good STEWARD would putt All in Order.[385]

Very little distinguishes this verse either formally or thematically from the verse libels that were circulating at the end of the 1590s. Indeed, there was an acknowledged connection between epigrams and libellous verse forms, with libels conceived of as 'a sub-genre of the epigram.'[386] Martial's *Epigrams*, the most significant classical source for early modern epigrammists, refers to his 'epigrammaton libellis,' or his 'little book of epigrams,' suggesting one philological source for the tradition of association between the two forms.[387] A function that epigrams and libels were thought to share was their capacity to act as a form of relief-valve, designed to meet a purgative social need. Puttenham refers to this function in *The Arte of English Poesie*: 'all the world could not keepe, nor any civill ordinance to the contrary so prevaile, but that men would and must need utter their splenes in all ordinarie matters…or else it seemed their bowels would burst.'[388]

Harington's verse resonates with an understanding of the purgative aspect of Puttenham's theory. It contains an implicit critique of Elizabethan modes of governance, caricaturing 'the paucity of able men at the centre of affairs' at the end of Elizabeth's reign and it discusses the unmentionable issue of the succession, which in 1602 was not yet decided. The verse enjoyed a kind of double-life. Everything about the original circulation of it suggests that it was highly esteemed. It was circulated as a series of autograph editions, carefully transcribed and presented to King James as a New Year's gift in 1603 as part of a lavishly designed gift-book of *Epigrams* and then in 1605 to Henry, Prince of Wales on the occasion of James's birthday. The verse was just one of four hundred divided into four books, the whole of which was most likely conceived to function along the lines of Erasmus's *Institutio Principis Christiani*.[389]

The *Epigrams*' prefatory material situates the verses it contains within the advice-to-princes tradition, offering a familiar polemical framework for their reception. Harington appeals

385 BL Add. MS 22601, f.60v.
386 O'Callaghan, *English Wits*, 67.
387 Martial, 'Book 1,' *Epigrams*, ed. Gideon Nisbet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 11.
388 Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesy*, Ch. XXVII.
389 Gerard Kilroy ed. *The Epigrams of Sir John Harington* (Oxford: Ashgate, 2009), 18.

to 'the common lycence, or rather lycensiousnes of Poets' which 'may bee my excuse, if not my Warrant' and hopes that the king 'maie finde some Delectacion in the vearse, yet it shall breede rather detestacion of the vice/ reprooued in the verse.'[390] Although not mentioned explicitly, this verse epistle clearly seeks to locate what follows within the limits of a satiric mode, offering a licensed and reformative space for commentary on vice in general, rather than being, designed as an attack on particular individuals. Following this specific appeal to the king, Harington also includes 'The Epistle to all Readers how Epigrams must be read attentively. That legere et non intelligere est negligere:'

> When in your hand you had this Pamphlet caught,
> Your purpose was to post it over speedie,
> But change your minde, and feede not over-greedy:
> Till in what sort, to feede you first be taught.
> Suppose both first and second course be done,
> No Goose, Porke, Capon, Snites, nor such as these
> But looke for fruit, as Nuts, and Parma-cheese,
> And Comfets, Conserves, Raisons of the Sunne.
> Then taste but few at once, feede not too fickle,
> So shall you finde some coole, come warme, some biting,
> Some sweet in taste, some sharpe, all so delighting,
> As may your inward taste, and fancie tickle.
> But though I wish Readers, with stomacks full,
> Yet fast nor come not, if your wits be dull.
> For I had liefe you did sit downe and whistle,
> As reading, not to reede. So ends th' Epistle.[391]

Harington makes the suggestive connection, for the purposes of drawing attention to the distinction, between the activity of reading (legere) and the achievement of understanding (intelligere), insinuating that the way to *intelligere* involves a discerning treatment of the *Epigrams*, analogous to the care and delectation one might be expected to extend to the desert course of a sumptuously prepared meal:

> Tast but a few at once, feed not to fickle.
> So shall you finde some coole, some warme, some byting,
> Some sweet in tast, some sharp, all so delighting
> As may your inward tast and fancy tickle.[392]

According to Harington's prescription, the key to an understanding of the complete message of the *Epigrams* is accomplished through the proper appreciation of its eclectic

390 Harington, *Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, 93.
391 Harington, 94.
392 Harington, 94.

parts, each of which are designed to elicit a particular reaction. These instructions expressly preclude isolated readings of individual poems without respect to the knowledge of the verse as part of an interactive whole. The allusions to assorted foods also glances at the Roman tradition of satire, implicitly drawing on the analogy of the *satura lanx*, or the plate crammed with food, as a description of the variety of moods and topics found in satiric verse. Harington's preface implicitly emphasises the importance of authorial intention for interpretation, as well as an insistence on the importance of context for the interpretation of any individual text. It could be said that this is particularly the case for those texts such as epigrams, satire and libel that derive their meaning as much from the material and social conditions of their reception as any rigid application of formal criteria. Unlike verse libels, which tended to circulate as separates, the context of this verse's publication as part of a gift-book anchors it to royally endorsed forms of discourse.

Adopting the privileged medium of gift manuscripts, epigrammists of this period hoped to 'control and limit their readership.'[393] However, both prior to and subsequent to its appearance in its authored, ceremonial form, the above verse was subject to quite a different kind of treatment. It was separated out from this collection and anthologized alongside verse by other contemporary poets, circulated in a number of early seventeenth-century verse miscellanies and reached a more extensive and in some cases unidentified audience who would not necessarily have been aware of its original literary and material setting. According to Gerard Kilroy, a handful of the most popular poems enjoyed a continuous presence in manuscript form for over seventy years.[394] Touching on issues to do with the appropriation, revision and exchange of texts within manuscript culture, as well as the relative status and reception of authored works versus anonymous verse, Harington's epigram provides a revealing example of the trajectory of libellous material and the unintended audiences and contexts for which and within which they were reproduced. The *Epigrams* also went into printed editions in 1615, 1618 and 1625. At the same time, the above verse enjoyed an entirely separate and continued popularity in manuscript miscellanies. In this sense, this verse can be viewed as an exemplar of the dynamic exchanges between print and manuscript cultures that were a characteristic feature of this period.

393 James Doelman, "Circulation of the Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart Epigram," *Renaissance and Reformation* 29, no. 1 (2005): 61.
394 Kilroy, *Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, 85.

In Harington's presentation edition for Prince Henry, the above epigram is captioned *How England May be Reformed*, giving a plain indication of the drift of its polemical intent.[395] The verse speaks to the turbulence that characterized the Elizabethan state in the years leading up to the queen's death, in which courtiers jostled for power and privilege, conscious of shoring up their own precarious positions as their professional futures hung in the balance. Interestingly, for a text that is clearly steeped in the political instability attendant upon the end of her reign, the figure of Queen Elizabeth is conspicuously absent. Instead, the poem unleashes a roll-call of bureaucratic types; corpulent and fraudulent treasurers, judges, counsellors, auditors, surveyors and receivers, all of whom it accuses in every sense, of bankrupting the nation for personal gain. The verse's central representation of the embattled national church, in the process of being plundered by courtiers who make demands for funds while all the while conversing in the language of the high church ('Solvat Ecclesia'; 'Let the church pay for all'), adds another discrete layer to the verse's accusations of corruption.

In another context, Harington remarked that Elizabethan aristocrats were as likely to 'pray on the church than in the church.'[396] In its use of the Latin tag, this verse like many other libels of the period contains a critique of the relationship between the affairs of state and the reformed church. In its performative use of the Latin tag, the language of the high church is here parroted by greedy and unconscionable courtiers, gesturing perhaps to the hypocrisy of elements within the reformed church. Although the Catholic Church had itself become a topos of excess, the verse registers the depredation wreaked on the old religion by the national church, in sacral language shorn of its value and as the implied result of the state's excesses. The obligation to both 'pray and pay' shows the national church to be terribly burdened, awkwardly divided between its spiritual duty and the economic pressures exerted on it by the court. This reading accords with what we know of Harington's own strong familial links to Catholic recusants and his vehement anti-Puritan sentiments.[397]

Nonetheless, it is not difficult to see how an accusation of crypto-Catholicism might linger in the imagination and become attached to a larger, negative campaign waged by the libel

395 Harington, *Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, 209.
396 Harington quoted in Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 193.
397 Kilroy, *Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, 7-8.

against an individual's reputation, particularly since Catholicism had become linked to disloyal and even treasonous anti-nationalist sentiment. Thinking about the accretion of libellous texts over time, in which this kind of pejorative inference became the norm, it is possible to see how these kinds of inferences come to accumulate greater force, symbolically linking and mutually reinforcing notions of corruption, popishness, and alien or foreign agendas at odds with the national interest. The coupling of apparently perverted forms of civic duty with true religion gripped the public imagination long after James's accession to the throne, and arguably did much to strengthen conspiracy theories and drive suspicion about the individuals subjected to libellous critique.

The end of the poem looks expectantly to the future and substitutes an anticipated and orthodox plea for the queen to restore order with an appeal to James by way of typographically evoking the indexical meaning of Stuart, which meant, quite literally 'steward'. It would be possible to overstress the effacement of Elizabeth in this verse, especially as it was not uncommon for authors writing in this mode to displace criticism of the monarch onto subordinate courtiers or public officials. However, Elizabeth's famous proscription of any discussion of matters involving the succession or the very real imminence of her death, combined with the barely concealed invocation of the Scottish king's anticipated accession and the satirical typecasting of a range of public officials with whom early modern readers would have been familiar, converts any argument for straightforward or neutral topicality to libellous scurrility. With the benefit of hindsight, it is somewhat ironic that this verse positions James as the healer of a debased court and bankrupted nation, as his reign is commonly seen to have inaugurated a period of unprecedented courtly corruption and placed a series of even greater economic pressures on the national interest.

This verse points to some of the larger complexities associated with the practice of libelling in this period, in particular the highly contingent and paradoxical position libels and their authors occupied. For instance, in order to justify his verse, Harington might have appealed to the conventions of satire that licensed an exposure of courtly vice for the sake of the health of the commonwealth. However, at certain moments, claims to a moral and literary defence of satire were recast by those in authority as just the opposite, and the verses were judged to be malicious gossip, seditious libel or even high treason with no legitimate claim to literary genre or moral probity. As things stood, by December 1602, Elizabeth was only

months from death and the matter of succession had to all intents been settled. If Harington's verse had circulated even a year or two earlier, it is quite possible that it would have been treated as seditious libel.

It should be noted that the above reading of the verse is far from fixed, relying on a single copy of this libel, selected by Bellany and McRae out of eleven possible known variants, to represent this verse in the *Early Stuart Libels* database.[398] As is often the case with the products of scribal culture, copies of the poem proliferate and offer some notable variations to the text. These have the potential to affect and disrupt the sense of the poem substantially. For instance, in one British Library variant, contained in a verse miscellany dating from the late 1620s to early 1630s, either with the benefit of hindsight or as a result of the copyist's error, the cause of England's 'banckruptcy' is transcribed as 'known' rather than unknown; the Judges are 'Grave' rather than the more fleshly and satirically 'fat'; line five substitutes 'Surveyors' for 'Collectors' and changes the order of the line, and in line six, 'pillers and pollers,' both common but unspecific words for stealing or pillaging are replaced for the less pejorative and more formal bureaucratic terms, 'Searchers and customers,' probably referring to types of municipal official responsible for collecting customs or dues. With the inclusion of two additional categories of office, this copy, more so than the earlier version, underscores the range of different Caroline offices designed to collect revenue.[399]

On one account, the effect of this might tend to enhance our sense of the diversity of the Caroline bureaucratic sphere and its spectrum of offices and administrative functions. The verse operates to point the finger at the individual culprits and in the process provides the reader with some real inside-intelligence about the degraded character of public life. However, reading with the expectation of specificity in mind, or assuming an equivalency between the sign in the text and its referent, introduces a libellous motivation rather than a satiric impulse for the verse. In other words, it assumes that the figures referred to in the text would have been readily identifiable to a contemporary audience. Yet, on another reading, the catalogue of names arguably appears as a grotesque taxonomy of dramatis personae, united by their shared, invidious designs on the national purse. Understood in this light, the list of offices and the homogeneity of their function behave collectively as

[398] Their copy-text is Bodleian MS Sancroft 53, p.47.
[399] BL Add MS 10309, f.120r.

an exaggerated and ironic surface performance, in keeping with a satirical rather than libellous schema, more as an indictment of the sin than the sinner. Interestingly, the verse only names one real person, 'one good STEWARD', James Stuart and only then via a punning approximation.

The Latin phrase 'Solvat Ecclesia,' that when linked to the figure of the courtier, arguably underscored latent anti-Puritan sentiment in the poem, is here transcribed as 'Solvat Ecclesia, so the writers say.' In this version, the pun on Steward/Stuart is not typographically emphasized and as a result its effect is significantly downgraded and possibly even overlooked by the copyist. It is arguable that these changes suck some of the wind out of the verse's attack as it was originally conceived, or at least soften its effect. Interestingly, although this poem was composed in the first years of the seventeenth century, this variant appears in a miscellany compiled some thirty years later.

On the facing page, the miscellany includes a copy of a verse entitled 'An Epitaph upon poet Shakespeare' and a few pages later, the famous Jacobean libel known as 'The Parliament Fart.' Earlier sections of the manuscript contain libels that clearly date from the 1620s, censuring the Duke of Buckingham, including a verse staging the debate amongst parliamentarians discussing whether or not to name Buckingham in their Remonstrance to the king. There are also a highly copied pair of poems 'And wilt thou goe' and 'And art return'd againe' which condemn Buckingham for his role in the English defeat at the Île de Ré. Far from recalling the political struggles that dogged the end of Elizabeth's reign, the verse's inclusion in this collection might be seen to register the growing awareness and public concern about the corruption of the Caroline court and its Jacobean inheritance.

Commenting on the verse's earliest moment of copying and circulation, Bellany and McRae suggest that 'Rich treasurers' could be a specific allusion to Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst and treasurer to Queen Elizabeth, while 'wary Keepers' might point to Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper.[400] However, when revived in the context of the late 1620s and 1630s, at a distance of almost thirty years from its original composition, the generic list of public types is easily transliterated, or receives, as Jones would have it, a 'perceptual translation,' for the Caroline moment.[401] The rich treasurer might refer to the

400 Bellany and McRae, *ESL*, A14.
401 Jones, *Satire in the Elizabethan Era*, 9.

Caroline treasurer, Richard Weston. Weston was a key powerbroker during the years of Charles's personal rule without parliament and assisted in his push to secure funds and raise revenue via extra-parliamentary measures. The 'wary Keeper' could easily be transposed onto the person of Sir Thomas Coventry, Charles's Lord Keeper, who tried to hold a more moderate line against the king's insistence on asserting the primacy of royal prerogative in face of a resistant parliament. It is possible, even likely, that the copyist of this variant could have been unaware of the verse's original impetus. Indeed, the verse's author is noted as 'anon.'

As I have suggested, the verse's 'anonymous' ascription, in addition to its unspecific but precise references to court 'types' facilitated the trans-historical appeal it enjoyed. However, the universalizable properties of this verse must raise questions about its generic classification as a libel as distinct from satire. It is precisely the generalized critique of type rather than of specific individuals, in this case the self-serving public figure who has a toxic effect on the commonweal, that fuels the continuing resonance of this verse and that arguably provides the occasion for its resuscitation more than twenty years after its original composition.

'No Bishop, No King:' Verse Libels, Sedition and Social Order[402]

In a letter written in the weeks following Elizabeth's death, James issued very express instructions to the tide of eager English courtiers and counsellors who were 'daily coming' from London to Scotland in order to press their favour with him. Acknowledging the 'earnest and longing desire in all his Majesties Subjects, to enjoy the sight of his Royal person and presence,' James nonetheless cautioned them to remain in London and the provinces:

> for the securitie of the State at this time, is pleased and doeth require, That such concourse and resort into those parts be forborne, & above all others, of those persons that have any place of charge or office, either in the Seacoast or the Inland, or are of good degree & qualitie in their Countrey…[403]

As these men must have been aware, Elizabeth's death inaugurated not just a new monarch and royal dynasty but also signalled the occasion for a reshuffling of the most prominent

[402] James was reported to have made this claim at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604.
[403] King James I, "A Proclamation signifying his Majesties pleasure, That all men being in the Office of Government at the death of the late Queene Elizabeth, should so continue till his Majesties further direction," in *Stuart Royal Proclamations, Volume I, Royal Proclamations of King James I, 1603-1625*, ed. James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 5-6.

of the old-guard courtiers and office-holders. William Cecil's death in 1598 and the Earl of Essex's execution in 1601 left the supporters of these two pillars of Elizabethan politics scrambling for the King's attention and the chance to prove their continuing relevance. Moreover, as the lawyer John Manningham noted in his diary, at the death of the monarch, 'all corporacions and their governors continue, [but] most of the other officers authority is expired with the breath of the prince.'[404] Amongst all the many providentialist paeans of praise or 'weeping joy' written to celebrate James's accession and the future of the English state, we also find what must be one of the earliest Jacobean libels, which takes the definitely secular matter of this eager and anxious group of courtiers as its subject.

In April 1603, Manningham, noted that a 'foolish rime' 'runnes up and down in the Court.' His description of the libel's proliferating circulation in the court suggests that it enjoyed some popularity in these rivalrous political circles. Alongside his commentary, Manningham transcribed the anonymous couplet in question:

> Nevil for the protestant, L Thomas for the papist
> Bromley for the puritan, L Cobham for the Atheist.[405]

The courtiers and counsellors to whom this couplet refer are Thomas Neville, Dean of Canterbury (c.1548-1615); Thomas Howard, first earl of Suffolk (1561- 1626); Sir Henry Bromley (c.1560-1615); Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham and Warden of the Cinque Ports (1564-1619). At first glance, the significance of this verse might appear to be primarily, or even exclusively, historical, located in the access it gives us to topical details. McRae and Bellany note that the verse alludes to 'the religious persuasions' of these men 'who had sped from London at the death of Elizabeth I to greet the King in Scotland.'[406] They further extrapolate from the couplet's referentiality to an identical pre-literary event that is presumed to have acted as the impetus for the verse. I also take it that their explanation of the verse expresses a corresponding assumption that it is the presence of proper names in the verse that guarantees the referentiality of the verse as a whole.

It is important to exercise caution however, when treating terms like 'papist', 'puritan' and 'Atheist.' As Patrick Collinson has persuasively argued in his work on the early modern

404 John Manningham, in *Diary of John Manningham*, ed. John Bruce (London: The Camden Society, 1868), 147.
405 Manningham, *Diary*, 168.
406 McRae and Bellany, *ESL*, B1.

usage of the term 'puritan,' this was 'a term of art and stigmatization which became a weapon of some verbal finesse but no philosophical precision.'[407] Within its very narrow scope, the couplet works with terms including 'puritan,' that we know were at the very least, semantically ambivalent, and very often used for simple denigration. In other words, for the most part, these were polemical designations with little or uncertain descriptive value. Discussing the instrumentalisation of the language of confessional division for political ends, Peter Lake has suggested that:

> while these texts project a view of the political process in many ways centred on the fact of religious division and confessional conflict, many, indeed most, of them at least affected to take a distanced, a-confessional, view of the resulting conflicts, proferring, instead of inflamed religious tirades about the nature of true religion and the enormities of heretical errors, largely politique accounts of the political realm.[408]

With the exception of the 'protestant' Thomas Neville, who the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift had nominated to carry the clergy's felicitations to the king, the verse diverges from what we might regard as a biographical commitment to empirical detail and opens out into a libellous weaving of rumour and gossip with historical particulars. The religious outlooks that the verse links to the three other men share a far looser connection to the positions they were known to occupy. Indeed, with the exception of Neville, the other three men most likely sought the king out in the interest of advancing their own political careers. On the surface, in any case, Thomas Howard, Henry Bromley and Lord Cobham were all religious conformists. At the same time, however, there were also plausible enough reasons for linking each of these men to different confessional practices. The question remains then, as to why the verse sought to construct the men in these particular defamatory terms. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to explore the historical context that gives this verse its explanatory force.

At the time of Elizabeth's death, Thomas Howard, who the verse names 'a papist,' was the Queen's Lord Chamberlain, the preeminent position in the royal household. Despite Thomas Howard's key position in the Elizabethan court, the Howard family had been famous for their recusancy during the Reformation and at the time this verse was composed, there were rumours circulating about the pro-Spanish leanings of Howard's wife. Importantly, in the construction of the day, pro-Spanish and pro-Catholic were

407 Patrick Collinson, *English Puritanism* (London: The Historical Association, 1983), 10.
408 Lake, *Bad Queen Bess*, 12.

almost self-identical accusations. Pauline Croft has suggested that Lady Howard was perceived to be 'the stronger character in matters of politics, religion, and family finance,'[409] it would not then have involved a great imaginative leap to connect her husband to the Catholic cause as well.

Sir Henry Bromley, who the verse refers to as 'the puritan' does seem to have had leanings in this direction. The member for Plymouth, a port city with strong links to Puritanism, Bromley was known to have had an association with the well-known parliamentary puritan, Peter Wentworth. Wentworth's famous tract, openly challenging the queen to settle the question of who would succeed her, resulted in his imprisonment in the Tower, where he died in 1596. Bromley had been a supporter of Essex and his connection with the rebellion of 1601 lead to his imprisonment, though he was ultimately released.

Finally, Mark Nicholls has suggested that Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham ('the atheist' of the verse), was a widely unpopular figure at court, particularly with the Earl of Essex who resented him for his appointment to Warden of the Ports, a position desired by Essex himself. The Earl of Essex called Cobham 'Sir John Falstaff", thought him a 'sycophant,' and bore him a lifelong grudge.'[410] Essex's characterization of Cobham as Shakespeare's Falstaff suggests perhaps that he was both popular but also considered a buffoon. He is noted as a 'conspirator' for his alleged role, along with Walter Ralegh, in the Bye plot, a scheme intended to kidnap King James and pressure him to offer formal toleration to Catholics. Because the verse predates the plot by some months, it seems likely that the construction of Cobham as 'the Atheist' was related to his unpopularity with other members of the court as well as his association with Ralegh, who had also earned a reputation for atheism. Instead of bringing to light the accuracy of the poem's claims, the more detailed historicized reading of this poem works to undermine critical assumptions about its intrinsic relationship to a taken-for-granted referentiality. In the hands of libellers, what looks to be poetic referentiality is precisely the activity that encodes the unknowable admixture of topical detail, rumour, gossip and outright fiction.

As with many other libels about the court, this couplet almost certainly projects or is coextensive with an oral culture of gossip about those close to the centre of power. The precise circumstances and parameters of these discussions can never adequately be known

409 Pauline Croft, 'Howard, Thomas (1561–1626), first earl of Suffolk', *ODNB*.
410 Mark Nicholls, 'Brooke, Henry (1564–1619), eleventh Baron Cobham', *ODNB*.

but are to some extent inferable. Manningham's description of the verse's apparent popularity at court, for instance, suggests that there was a keen appetite for this libellous version of political events. In addition to the scandalizing pleasures it offers its readers, the verse's popularity at court could also be explained by the particular vision of political life it instantiates. Besides ridiculing these men individually, the couplet also opens out onto a well-rehearsed theme of early modern literature: the mutually reinforcing connection between spiritual and political corruption.

In the sense that the libel's referentiality affects the appearance of reality, the verse permits its readers to draw quite direct inferences about the degraded state of political life in general. Moreover, in its depiction of courtiers and counsellors in the act of petitioning the king, the verse reminds us of the febrile political landscape into which it was projected. These were the earliest days of James's reign and it remained uncertain what style of court, government, and religious settlement James would favour and to whom he would grant power.

To return to the question I posed at the beginning of this section: for what reason, and to what ends did the verse seek to construct the men in defamatory terms? If one of the motivations of the verse was to ridicule at least three of these men according to the phantasmagorical terms of the day as 'puritans,' papists' and 'atheists,' it does not seem to have been in order to elevate members of the established church in their stead. In this libellous framework, the protestant, Thomas Neville is rendered as first amongst an equally derisory group. In fact, as has been seen, the verse's apparent disclosures actually deflect attention from the character of its ideological performance.

Although it might seem grandiose to speak in formal terms of so simple a verse, in his use of a compressed form of parallelism, the verse stresses the connection between religious affiliation of all stripes and opportunistic politicking. By equivocating all religious groups, the verse must have been destined to arouse near universal dismay, for its author deflates the claim of any particular religious position to their basest motivations. In doing so, the verse derides these figures for their overreaching, but also punctures religious pieties by bringing to light their investment in the secular concerns of political affairs. This view of the anonymous verse accords closely with Lake's account of the influence of the language of religious conviction and division on the form taken by otherwise secular or politically motivated texts. According to Lake, although texts like these can present a surface engagement with religious concerns, they do not seriously aim to address religious issues.

Nor do they offer, Lake suggests:

> a vision of politics dominated by religious conviction and confessional identity, but rather, as often as not, an account of politics as a process of calculating the odds in a struggle for power and advantage, an account almost entirely secular in its interpretative commitments and ends.[411]

Whereas Elizabethan texts like the *Commonwealth* and Marprelate tracts had been concerned with the pursuit of putatively religious agendas, verse libels like the one above, adopted and instrumentalised the language of religious controversy as a satiric technique for drawing attention to and exposing individuals and the institutional structures they represented.

'Born to Onos rather than Honos:' James I and the Paradoxes of Royal Writing

While Kennet's description of the 'paltry scribblers' of James's reign implicitly tarnishes their achievement, in actual fact these verses were notable for their innovativeness and eclectic approach to literary form. This included mock-epitaph, mock-pastoral, mock-epic, prophecy, dream-vision chronograms, anagrams, and epigrams. They circulated in manuscript separates, were pinned up or scattered about in public places, or were copied down and anthologised in private miscellanies. Anonymous publication and circulation continued to be instrumental in the secure perpetuation of libels, as did the satirico-libellous use of persona and characterisation which continued to supply the reigning aesthetic. A focus on individual identity and the emphatic thematization of the personalised structure of political life had always been a constituent element of libellous writing, and regularly instrumentalized for tactical purposes in specific religious and factional struggle. Jacobean verse libels, in addition, often seem to have been valued by their readers for their topical specificity, ephemerality and humour. The organisation of verse miscellanies and accounts of libellous circulation suggest that these texts were also valued for their historical and social function: collected as in the case of the diarist John Rous as a witness or 'precedent' of the times and secretly shared among friends and acquaintances in a kind of phatic communion, encouraging and reinforcing social bonds. Jacobean writers primarily employed conventions fostered by the well- known Elizabethan prose libels and enhanced by the representational possibilities opened up by late-Elizabethan neo-classical satire. These texts furnished the Jacobean libellants with a

411 Lake, *Bad Queen Bess*, 12.

readymade store of linguistic tropes, literary figures, satirical personae and rhetorical devices that could be updated and repurposed for the new historical moment.

Consuming 'good wit in hateful rhyme' the satirists of the 1590s had emphatically placed the rhyming couplet at the centre of literary culture, establishing it as the form most suitable for the plain apportionment of blame. By this time, certain figures or types and the characteristics associated with them, could also be used as a kind of cultural shorthand. The figures and themes associated with types such as 'the puritan,' 'the papist,' 'the flatterer,' and 'the favourite,' were familiar, requiring very little formal introduction, well suited to incorporation in the verse forms favoured by the Jacobeans. The use of the terms 'puritan' and 'papist' in particular seem to have become increasingly loosened from the polemical contexts for which they had been coined and in which they had flourished in the earlier period.

Whereas prose libels like the *Commonwealth* and the Marprelate tracts had used libellous discourse as a means of advancing a clear polemical end, sophisticated interrogation of religious and political affairs was regularly sacrificed in Jacobean verse libels. Although religious and political affiliations can often be identified in libellous verse, specific polemical goals can appear inchoate or at the very least hard to define. In many cases, individual libels forestall more straightforward programmatic or ideological readings. And yet, the accumulative and nebulous force of libellous scrutiny seems to have reinforced state fears that libellous discourse did indeed represent an existential threat. Jacobean libels recurrently envisaged a world turned upside down, or as a libel collected by John Rous put it:

> A rude presage of danger to this land
> Where lowers strive to get the upper hand
> When prince and peeres to peasants must obey
> When lay-men to their teachers teach the way.[412]

Figured in terms of social role-reversal, the verse reads the disintegration of traditional social formations as a troubling portent. Sentiments like these were paradoxically recontextualized by agents of the state who argued that it was the verses themselves that were the symptom and source of disorder, claiming that such commentary was inherently seditious and alleging that disrespect and indecorum were becoming vital oppositional

[412] BL Add MS 28640, f.68.

currencies.

In their suggestion of social collapse (in particular as it directly involved the 'prince and peeres'), verse libels, like the one above, were seen to require an official response. It would probably not have occurred to Elizabeth to personally address the libels that circulated in her reign. Her corpus included a small number of poems and prayers, as well as translations of Horace and Boethius. None of these were intended for publication, or as part of the self-promotion of the royal image. James on the other hand, was a prolific writer and publisher of his own work which spanned a range of genres. Although now most famous for commissioning an authorised version of the Bible (1611), by the time he came to the English throne he had already written and published numerous works, including his two most well-known works of political theory: a treatise on kingship *Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) and his book of advice on kingship, *Basilikon Doron* (1599). He had also written numerous works of poetry, including acrostics, epigrams, sonnets and a mini-epic. As a teenager, he had published his collection of verse *Essays of a Prentice in the Divine Art of Poesy* (1584) and six years later *His Majesty's Poetical Exercises at Vacant Hours* (1591) was also published. Although these were generically diverse works, they all shared an investment in articulating the terms of James's vision of royal authority and an implicit recognition of the growing authority of both poetry and print.

Such was James's belief in the value of his poetry and prosody that after his accession in 1603 he commissioned his printer Robert Waldegrave (of Marprelate renown) to republish these works with an English audience in mind. James's confidence in his work was not misplaced, as his subjects, curious to discover more about their new monarch, avidly consumed his poetry and prose. Described as a 'bestseller' of the period, *Basilikon Doron* (1599), also known as 'The Royal Gift,' which had only received a small, private circulation when James was monarch of Scotland, was published in a greatly increased run (1603).[413] The book was putatively intended for his first son, Henry, for whom it offered 'instructions to a Prince in all the points of his calling.' However, no one who purchased the book as it went on sale in St Paul's Churchyard or studied the opening sonnet could have been in any doubt that James hoped his address would extend far beyond the confines of the royal court.

413 Jenny Wormald, "James VI and I, *Basilikon Doron* and *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*: The Scottish Context and English Translation" in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Lindy Levy Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 36-54.

In their new king, it seems that the English people inherited a monarch who saw a role for himself as a serious political thinker and as an active participant in the literary and intellectual circles of his day. Whereas Elizabeth had specialized in the cultivation of a series of visual and visible symbols of monarchical power, James actively pursued authorship as a central vehicle for the expression of royal authority. As many scholars of his work acknowledge, James's use of authorship, and poetry writing in particular, were often in tension with his political goals. Peter Herman and Ray Siemens for example, suggest that although publication 'allowed the king to retain a sense of separateness and mystery…[it] also opened James to scrutiny and criticism; the king as poet was available to anyone who could read.'[414]

For all their indebtedness to Elizabethan forms, the libellous writing that took early modern ecclesiastical and court politics as their subject received a decisively new impetus and inflection on the accession of James to the English throne. Despite Elizabeth's status as a ruler in a period deeply skeptical of forms of female authority, the libellous writers of her period generally avoided making direct personal attacks on the queen. Elizabeth was clearly conscious of the oppositional and seditious potential contained in the poetic and dramatic analogues that tacitly commented on her reign, as well as the more candid commentary of the libels attacking her chief ministers and clergy. However, with the important exception of the Marprelate tracts, her own response, and the response of the state apparatus, was to mobilise the formal procedures of government and legislature: royal proclamation, censorship, legal prosecution, and acts of parliament.

Jacobean libellers, by contrast, as well as homing in on the usual suspects, the most prominent members of church and court, were increasingly likely to also connect the king to acts of misgovernance. These critiques came into direct conflict with one of James's most dearly held beliefs. Writing in 1582 that 'thoughts unrevealed can do no evil,' he had articulated a central tenet of his monarchy and one to which he would return throughout his life; that is that ordinary subjects had no business questioning royal governance.[415] The sacred mysteries of the crown, the *arcana imperii* were categorically not open to public discussion or disputation. As Jonathan Goldberg has discussed, this vision of political life encompassed, 'the mysteries of state, the necessity for secrecy, silence, a declaration of

414 Peter Herman and Ray Siemens eds., *Reading Monarch's Writing: The Poetry of Henry VIII, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth I and James VI/I* (Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 175.
415 James VI and I, in *Letters of King James VI and I*, ed. G.P.V Akrigg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)

absolute royal prerogative, and a clothing of actions in announcements of inscrutability.'[416] This over-arching principle of secrecy necessarily placed a high value on the circumscription of the rights of subjects to comment on political affairs. However, these claims were arguably hampered by the tension between James's own insistence on his exceptional status as king and his competing passion to participate in the literary and intellectual circles of the day. As discussed, he is noted for the astonishing range of his literary output, which encompassed, as Jenny Wormald has described:

> …the poet-king and writer of poetic theory; the new David, with his translation of the Psalms; the theologian; the political theorist as well as practicing politician; the speech and letter writer on a huge scale.[417]

It can be argued that in subtle yet crucial respects, James's inclination towards publishing his literary works and his desire to use this medium to contribute to and shape political debate, came into conflict with his strong personal conviction concerning the principles of royal absolutism and specifically the principle of *arcana imperii*.[418] In publishing so prolifically, James gave his subjects unprecedented access to his political beliefs and opinions and provided the terms of reference for discussion, dialogue, and debate about them. Perry has also suggested that to write as a king and as a poet was not just challenging but essentially paradoxical: James's poems encode their author's power in a variety of ways, with the result that they fit only uneasily within conventional lyric forms. According to Perry, James tries to:

> establish a parallel between poet and king, but the performative norms of the two roles interfere with each other. The poet-king is forced to invoke his privileged royal insight in order to avoid the disempowered stances built into poetic performance.[419]

Plainly written and almost exclusively focused on the discussion of topical matters and identifiable public figures, libellous writing of this period stood in glaring contravention to James's dearly held principle of *arcana imperii*. James regularly invoked this topos in response to perceived criticism of his rule and in order to naturalize a heavily mystified vision of state power. However, in persistently drawing attention to the allegedly scurrilous

416 Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983), 63.
417 Jenny Wormald, 2014 "James VI and I (1566–1625), king of Scotland, England, and Ireland." *ODNB*.
418 For a detailed analysis of James's understanding of the relationship between absolutism and the constitutional rights of his subjects, see Johan Sommerville ed., *King James VI and I: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Sommerville, *Politics and Ideology in England, 1603-1640*.
419 Perry, *The Making of Jacobean Culture*, 9.

or obscene details of the lives and personal bodies of public figures, these libels continued to undermine the elevated claims individuals were able to make by virtue of holding particular offices of power.

In observing the public reaction to the succession of the new king, John Manningham noted in his diary: 'Noe tumult, noe contradiction, noe disorder in the city; every man went about his busines, as readylie, as peaceably, as securely, as though there had bin noe change, nor any newes ever heard of competitors. God be thanked, our king hath his right.'[420] Manningham's portrait of social harmony and peaceful continuity finds an echo in the many providentialist expressions of praise, or 'weeping joy' written to celebrate James's accession. In an epigram written soon after James's accession in 1603 and printed in *The Works* in 1616, Ben Jonson developed an associative relation between kingship and authorship as a way of celebrating James's coming to the throne as the coming together of royal and poetic power in King James VI and I.

> How, best of kings, dost thou a sceptre bear!
> How, best of poets, dost thou laurel wear!
> But two things rare the Fates had in their store,
> And gave thee both, to shew they could no more.
> For such a poet, while thy days were green,
> Thou wert, as chief of them are said t' have been.
> And such a prince thou art, we daily see,
> As chief of those still promise they will be.
> Whom should my muse then fly to, but the best
> Of kings, for grace; of poets for my test? [421]

Jonson's rhetoric describes a kind of perfect parallelism and, in this case, is staged as a relation between metonymic correlates, the sceptre and laurel, pointing to the connection between the monarch's assertion of divine authority and the poet's claim on divine inspiration. The interest in a correspondence between royal authority and authorship could thus be said to draw its rationale from a belief in a shared, divine source of power. Jonson presents James as the embodiment of the successful fusion of king and poet. At the same time, however, he also registers the splitting of that common source into competing categories of divine inspiration, which as implicitly evidenced by his verse, are not always concomitant.[422]

420 Manningham, *Diary of John Manningham*, 147.
421 Jonson, 'To King James' in *CWBJ*, vol. 5., 114–115.
422 G. Wither, *A Satyre dedicated to His Most Excellent Majestie* (1614) *EEBO*, D2v.

In the adulating tones suited to its subject, Jonson's verse presents James as a culmination, a monolithic figure, a new kind of statesman, combining the 'rare' coalescence of the 'best' features of a king and poet. It is possible to downplay Jonson's accentuation of James's poetic ability as the highly rhetorical, supplicatory gesture made by a client to a patron, or a subject to a monarch, and in fact it is known that Jonson most likely did not rate James's poetic abilities very highly.[423] William Drummond of Hawthornden reports that Jonson had 'said to the king his master, [that] Mr G. Buchanan, had corrupted his ear when young and learned him to sing verses when he should have read them.'[424] Of greatest interest for our purposes however, is that the verse raises the possibility that poetic address and royal power could be constructed as distinct yet parallel modes of discursive authority. The transmission of royal authority was assured by birthright, however as convention had it, the attainment of poetic authority, following Spenser and Sidney, though understood as a natural gift, also involved a lifelong ascetic dedication to poetry. Its archetype was the figure of the laureate poet whose devotion to his task and imitation of a Virigilian model distinguished him from the mere poetaster.[425]

Jonson's claim for competing or alternative registers of discursive authority provides further support for qualifying the tradition of scholarly thought that has regarded the monarch as the source of all social power and influence. Jonson's verse not only suggests that the terms for making such distinctions were available in the period itself but that James's participation in these circles signalled the authority of poetic form. Many poets besides Jonson engaged with the unusual status of James as a king and self-proclaimed poet. Tropes of doubleness mark the primary poetic strategy of these verses, constructed either like Jonson, as a form of ironic parallelism or formulated in terms of the paradox or extreme self-abnegations involved in celebrating in poetic terms a monarch who also wished to be identified as a poet.

In *Sorrowe's Joy* (1603), a collection of poems published to mourn the passing of Elizabeth and mark the occasion of James's accession, a poem by Thomas Goodrick offers a Jonsonian vision of James crowned twice, as king and as poet:

423 When he collected his epigrams together for publication in the 1616 *Workes*, it came fourth after an epigram *To the Reader,* one *To my Book* and a third *To my Bookseller*.
424 Jonson, "Informations to William Drummond of Hawthornden, *CWBJ*, vol 5., 386.
425 For a detailed account of the poetic practices associate with a laureate career, see Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

Heav'ns wept for joy, and burst forth into raine.
Then powerful Phebus dride those vaprous streams,
By the exhaling influence of his beames,
And set new nappe on earths bare coat again,
In honour of our deare dread Soveraigne.
And that same Phebe, the painful Poets god,
With all the troopes of his celestiall brood,
Unto your worthie Hignes doth bequeath,
A glorious Diademe of Laurell wreath.
The Laurell ever-greene for aye doth spring,
Meede for the Poet and the mightie King.
Oh where on earth should rest those gifts divine,
But in your brest as in their sacred shrine?
A Cesars sceptre, and a Virgils quill.
Which Jove grant Laurelly-like my flourish still.
Oh how his heav'nly dit's, and powerfull songs,
In sugred slumbers, lulls the learned throngs.
Let the celestiall Quire of Muses sing,
Sweet hymn's of praise in honour of our King.[426]

The verse offers a carefully balanced view of James as both a king and a poet, without dispensing with the value of Goodrick's own status as a poet. Other verses, however, suggest that the example of James called into question the possibility of writing commendatory verse. One poet suggests that no one other than 'the man which the *Lepanto* writ' is fit to celebrate the king's 'matchlesse majesties.' This writer was of course none other than the king himself. The poem's central paradox holds that only the writer of the *Lepanto* (the king) can commend the king. The poet argues that the king must 'request him then, that he would thee commend: els nev'r thy worth may worthily be penn'd.'[427] This is both a statement of an inexpressibility topos, and as such the terms in which the poet elevates the king, but it also expresses the redundant position other poets find themselves in when the king occupies this function. A decade later this problem was still preoccupying the poets.

Using the example of the king's writing, in this case of 'his lawes,' the poet George Wither asks whether it is ever possible to gain mastery over the ambiguous meanings generated by language. Wither writes:

[426] Thomas Goodrick, "Heav'ns wept for joy," in *Sorrowe's Joy* (London, 1603), *EEBO*, A4v.

[427] T.B., "To the King his Majestie," in *Sorrowe's Joy* (London, 1603), *EEBO*, B2r.

Nay your owne *Lawes* which (as you doe intend)
In plain'st and most effectuall words are pend,
Cannot be fram'd so well to your intent,
But some there are will erre from what you meant.
And yet (alas) must I be ty'd unto
What never anyman before could doe?
Must all I speake, or write, so well be done,
That none may picke more meanings thence than one?[428]

Wither uses the example of law-breaking here as a way of glossing the act of literary interpretation. If it is possible to 'err' from the king's word in the act of breaking the law how could a mere poet prevent his readers from breaking with the particular intentions of his verse and importing their own meanings into his work?

Jane Rickard suggests that James had a strongly personal investment in writing poetry and that poetry for him was not merely instrumental, or simply another conduit for bolstering royal authority. 'Despite James's royal status,' she writes, 'he engaged with other poets not only as a patron but also as a fellow poet.'[429] Unlike more overtly political works such as *Trew Law of Free Monarchies* and *Basilikon Doron*, James's participation in a range of 'high' and 'low' poetic forms, including epic, sonnet, pastoral, epitaph, occasional verse and even libel, situated him in a practice of literary production in which his royal status, though significant, was not the guarantee of a privileged poetic insight.

Exemplifying this point, James's *The Essayes of a Prentise, in the Divine Art of Poesie* was first published in 1585, six years into James's reign as king of Scotland. *The Essayes* contain a number of original poems by James, including a sonnet sequence known as 'The Phoenix,' and 'A Poeme of Tyme.' Also included is James's translation of Du Bartas's *Uranie*, another translation of a poem by Lucan, and James's rendering of Psalm 104. Finally, *The Essayes* also contain a tract articulating some rules 'to be observit and eschewit in Scottish Poesie,' and an index 'of some obscure words and their significations.'

In its discussion of different poetic genres, this work participates in contemporary debate about the art of poetry. For all intents and purposes these are manuals for writing verse, predating two of the most famous early works on this subject: Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*

[428] George Wither, "A satyre dedicated to his most excellent majestie" (London, 1614), *EEBO*, D2v.
[429] Jane Rickard, *Authorship and Authority: The Writings of James VI and I* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 5.

(1586) and Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesies* (1589). However, unlike these later works, *The Essayes* embeds its 'theory' within a compilation of verse that implicitly stages a relation between poetic theory and poetic practice. On the one hand, *The Essayes* are self-deprecatingly presented as an 'apprentice' work, yet in the treatise on the art of verse, James presents a detailed account of what he believes are poetic conventions most appropriate to the writing of Scottish poetry and clearly asserts his identity as the 'lawgiver of Scottish poetry.' More than just general principles, James's 'Rules and Cautions' provide very precise prosodic guidelines regarding the use of rhyme and metrical variations, as well as advice concerning the most appropriate verse forms for the expression of different themes.

As Ronald Jack has argued, James goes to some length in his 'Rules and Cautions' to reject the prevailing approach that stressed the link between poetic inspiration and the divine and insists that poets should 'avoid matters of commonweal' as 'they are too grave matters for a Poet to mell in.' In other words, James implies poets are too base to comprehend matters of state. Jack notes that this is the only point in the text in which James turns from delivering technical advice to embrace a metaphysical register that suggests an interest in the questions typically associated with the genre of critical treatises, questions such as, 'what is the function of art,' 'what is the poet's role,' and so on.[430]

Poetry was still commonly thought of as a branch of rhetoric and in this context James's understanding of the highly technical components of Scottish verse undoubtedly worked as a virtuoso display of his erudition. However, just as importantly, the 'Rules and Cautions' also show an appreciation of the mutual sustenance of national language and national identity and, more particularly, the importance of vernacular poetry for establishing its distinctive character. James clearly envisioned a prominent role for himself in shaping that identity. Just as Hall claimed to be the first English satirist, James stakes his claim to being the first Scottish prosodist:

> That as for them that has written in it of late, there has never one of them written in our language. For albeit sundry has written of it in English which is likest to our language, yet we differ from them in sundry rules of Poesie.[431]

[430] Ronald D. S Jack, "James VI and Renaissance Poetic Theory," *English: The Journal of The English Association* 16, no. 96 (1967): 208.
[431] James VI and I, "Ane Schort Treatise Conteining Some Reulis and Cautelis to be Observit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie" in James Craigie ed. *The Poems of King James VI of Scotland, Vol. I* (London: William Blackwood, 1955), 67.

In this account, the 'rules' of poetry function to mark a significant point of difference between the operation of the Scottish and English languages. In constructing this set of rules, James indicates an investment in the idea that the composition of vernacular verse has the power to define and control an idea of Scottish national identity. However, despite constructing himself in supplicatory terms as an apprentice-figure, the king stipulates a high level of control over the interpretation of his work. As Wither reminds us, this practice suggests a paradox, for James both apparently writes as just another poet but also makes exclusive claims for his own work to do 'what never anyman before could do.'

A closer inspection of the verse collected in *The Essayes* suggests that the prescriptions implied by the king's prosodic theory deviated from the example of his own work. For instance, the translator of *Uranie* explicitly instructs would-be poets against the production of translated works:

> But since invention, is one of the chief virtues in a poet, it is best that you invent your own subject, yourself, and not to compose of seen (known) subjects. Especially, translating anything out of other language, which doing, you not only essay not your own engine of Invention, but by the same means, you are bound, as to a stake, to follow that book's phrases which you translate.[432]

The divergence between the king's poetic theory and his poetic practice marks him as the maker of laws to which he refuses to submit. The successful construction of royal authority through authorship is effectuated through the enactment of a paradox, which we are to understand only the king is licensed to sustain.

In excluding others from the act of translation or 'imitation' while pursuing this activity himself, James implicitly draws attention to his unique, supra-authorial status. When Jonson writes: 'Whom should my muse then fly to, but the best/Of kings, for grace; of poets for my test?' he evokes not just terms of high praise but also a murkier reality: the double-bind Jacobean poets were faced with in writing about the king. Jonson's intimation of the functional paradoxes entered into when one holds a 'double-office,' foreshadows the major theme of libellous verse in this period: the traversing of political obligation by personal interests.

[432] James VI and I, "Ane Schort Treatise," 79.

CHAPTER 6

LIBELLOUS APPROXIMATIONS: THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM AND THE LIBELLING OF ROYAL FAVOURITES

Of British Beasts the Buck is King
His Game and fame through Europe ringe.
His home exalter, keepes in awe
The lesser flocks; his Will's a Lawe.

Extract from an anonymous libel, BL MS Sloane 826, f.184v.

The 'inward Character of the Duke's Mind […] he said is full of Collusion and Deceipt. He could express it no better than by the Beast (by the Ancients) called Stellionatus; a Beast so blurred, so spotted, so full of foul Lines, that they knew not what to make of it.

Sir John Eliot, speech to the House of Commons, recalled by the Bishop of Norwich, 15 May 1626.

The previous chapter considered the ways in which James's subjects employed libellous verse forms to comment on the accession of the new king as well as how James himself used a range of literary and political genres to assert his vision of monarchical authority. As discussed, the king's insatiable appetite for publishing his own work, in particular his poetry, complicated inherited assumptions about the performance of royal power. James's efforts to be acknowledged as a poet-king promoted a vision of kingship that sought to embrace the roles of intellect and author alongside the traditional functions of the crown. In practice, however, this expanded view of royal authority introduced fissures into the mythic perception of royal power. The perception of inveterate corruption at court, and specifically James's elevation of the Duke of Buckingham to a position of unprecedented influence, ignited a series of libellous challenges. What was now felt to be Elizabeth's exercise of caution and restraint in managing factional struggle at court was sharply contrasted to James's immoderation and his undisguised pursuit of personal gratification over and above the health of the commonwealth. In this final chapter I describe the evolving character of verse libel in the Jacobean period and the significance of James's efforts to try to deal with a dissent experienced as directed for the first time toward the king himself.

As discussed, libellous writing had been honed by the satiric experiments of the late-

Elizabethan period and re-energised by the tussle for power and advantage that had marked the final years of Elizabeth's reign and James's succession. In James, the writers of libellous verse could not have hoped for better material than that provided by his excessive and notorious promotion of royal favourites. In the earlier phase of his reign, this position was occupied by Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset. After Somerset's imprisonment for the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury in 1616, the way was open for George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, who became the chief favourite of James, and after his death, of his son Charles I.

Bellany has discussed in significant detail the events surrounding the death of Overbury and the subsequent trial of Somerset and his wife Frances Howard for murder, events which prompted an enormous outpouring of libellous verse.[433] However, as I discuss in the first part of this chapter, the elevation of Buckingham coincided with a particularly acute period in Jacobean political life, and in this context, hostility towards the personal predilections of the monarch, as embodied in his relationship to Buckingham, was especially pronounced. The scrutiny of royal favourites and their corrupting influence on the monarch and by extension affairs of state, carried on a narrative that had been popular in Elizabeth's reign. However, Jacobean verse libels introduced a new element to this theme. Whereas Elizabethan libels had tended to emphasise the factotum as the source of disfunction, Jacobean libels now freely raised the issue of the monarch's responsibility for the perceived corruption of his court.

The second part of this chapter considers the issue of James's increased vulnerability to libel as illustrated in the case of a popular libel, known as 'The King's Five Senses.' This verse libel adopted the form but reversed the function of a song of blessing for James, found in Jonson's masque *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*. It scrutinises James's vices and draws attention to his partiality to Buckingham and in its blending of licentious and licensed forms, provides a striking example of how sophisticated and institutionally subversive the practice of libelling had become. In the final part of this chapter I return to the question of James's own status as a poet and discuss several verses he is said to have composed in response to the culture of libellous critique, particularly as directed at his favourite Buckingham. James's response to the libels recalls and repeats the problems encountered by the anti-Martinists, who could not answer Martin's libels without

433 Bellany, *Politics of Court Scandal*.

adopting the very elements of style they excoriated.

In any account of royal favourites, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham (1592-1628) occupies a special position. His career followed the now familiar script in which over-mighty advisers acquired enormous power and influence but were more widely held to poison the political atmosphere. Buckingham had all the archetypal attributes of a favourite, 'he excelled in skills such as dancing, fencing, and riding, and since these were combined with exceptional good looks and charm of manner he was well equipped for life as a courtier.'[434] He experienced a remarkable rise to power, arriving at court in 1614 and remaining a central figure of authority and influence until his death in 1628. With the king's support he was gifted and acquired vast country estates and lavish residences in London. Commenting on Buckingham's unique status, McRae and Bellany have remarked:

> No area of royal policy, domestic or foreign, was untouched by his influence; court politics and court patronage were firmly, if never uncontestedly, under his control; and, most remarkably, he established and maintained strong emotional bonds and close working relationships not only with James I, but also with James's son and heir Charles, allowing [him] to become favourite to not one but two English kings.[435]

However, despite the enormous support he enjoyed from both James and Charles, the wider dislike of Buckingham is registered in an enormous and unprecedented amount of libellous verse. As we have seen, libellous writing specialised in these attacks on royal favourites. They were one expression of the very real rivalrous energies that dominated courtly life, but they also functioned as a mechanism for exposing the entangled nature of early modern personal and political affairs. Levy Peck has written extensively about the ways in which the private relationships of patronage structured everyday early modern society, whereby in this period:

> Court patrons acted as middlemen in transaction between the king and the political elite. Despite some increasing bureaucratisation of English government, personal attendance on royal officials up to and including the king himself remained crucial to political favour.[436]

434 Roger Lockyer, "Villiers, George (1592–1628), first duke of Buckingham royal favourite." *ODNB*.
435 Bellany and McRae, *ESL*, L.
436 Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption*, 36-7.

Levy Peck sees the problem of Buckingham's rise in terms of the increasing corruption of the early Stuart court, a perception partially induced by the general inflation of honours and the sale of offices in this period. A number of manuscript compilers record the antipathy elicited by a perception of Buckingham's aggressive manoeuvring. BL Sloane MS 826, for instance, contains a list of grievances against the Duke, one instance noted as 'Divers grants to the Dukes brothers and others of his kindred.'[437] As this list of 'grievances' suggests, with James's authorization, Buckingham was known to have secured a series of titles and offices for his relatives. His mother was made countess of Buckingham in 1618, his elder brother John was made groom of the bedchamber in 1616, and his younger brother Christopher became a gentleman of the bedchamber in 1617. As Roger Lockyer has argued:

> Taken together with his involvement in the shady underworld of monopolists, financiers and projectors in early Stuart England, they explain why he became for many members of the political nation the embodiment of corruption.[438]

The same manuscript collects dozens of libellous verses on Buckingham, with many drawing attention to the gulf created between James and his subjects as a result of the king's excessive affection for Buckingham. Whereas James affectionately referred to Buckingham as 'Steenie,' a diminutive of Stephen, 'since Stephen, according to the Bible, had a face like an angel,' libellous writing, excelled in generating fiendish portraits of the duke that railed against his 'treacherie, neglect and cowardice' and denounced him as the 'most gracelesse duke' master of the 'al goe-naughts'. He was frequently figured as a usurper, known as 'darling Absolon', and 'Lucifer', 'thy kingdoms overthrowe'.[439]

Possessing a monopoly on patronage, Buckingham was figured at the centre of this maelstrom, becoming, as Francis Bacon had astutely observed, 'the trouble of all mens confluence.'[440] This arguably led to the development of a gulf between Buckingham's own sense of 'self-aggrandizement' and the increasing disaffection of all those who found themselves reliant on his mediation.[441] Importantly, this criticism did not tend to be framed

437 BL Sloane MS 826, f.153v.
438 Roger Lockyer, *ODNB*, 5.
439 Lockyer, *ODNB*, 3; Cogswell, "Underground Verse and the Transformation of Early Stuart Political Culture," 312.
440 Francis Bacon, *A Letter of Advice Written by Sr. Francis Bacon to the Duke of Buckingham, when He Became Favourite to King James* (London, 1661), *EEBO*, A2r.
441 Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption*, 4.

as a systemic problem, which is to say as a problem with patronage itself, but rather as a function of the individuals who controlled it. In order to comprehend the ideological status of courtiers like Buckingham, it is crucial to understand that corruption was not yet seen to inhere to a system but was rather thought to derive from the failings of particular individuals.

As discussed earlier, Coke's distinction between 'Magistrates' and 'private men' can hence be situated in a political culture in which there were real reasons to emphasise the continuing significance of the stability of those categories. If, as Levy Peck has argued, it was the personal relationships of patronage that sustained government bureaucracy, libellous attacks articulated in 'the language of corruption became a means of disconnection.'[442] Accounts, like Levy Peck's, that emphasise the personal underpinnings of political life in this period provide a context that helps to infer why many of the libels that attacked Buckingham, as well as other public figures, relied heavily on accusations of corruption. Corruption became such a powerful image of political malfeasance precisely because the notion invoked the unacceptable intermixing of the private and the public. It highlighted the simultaneously accepted but repudiated aspects of everyday life and provided evidence of the debasement of the purportedly virtuous public figure by avaristic, private interest. If corruption was one of the major themes of public life in this period, then the verse libel, which was reliant on a controversial mixing of satire, news and scandal was particularly suited as its form of critique.

Whilst located in the individual and not the institution, corruption was understood to be a containable phenomenon. However, in this period, the idea of the corrupt royal favourite began to take on a greater rhetorical function, and to operate as a topos for political malfeasance in general. In precisely this way, Coke had understood that the imputation of corruption figured by the libel directed at Whitgift and Bancroft had more than a local effect. It threatened not 'onely the breach of the peace, but also the scandal of government,' whereby individuals could come to function as powerful, living symbols for far more general political disenchantment.[443]

442 Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption*, 11.
443 Coke, "de Libellis Famosis," 255.

Acting as unofficial royal gatekeeper, Buckingham's monolithic presence at court meant that 'aspirants to office were encouraged to link their destinies' to him.[444] It has been suggested that 'James's use of Buckingham as chief broker of patronage was calculated to insulate himself,' and as 'a filter for the many demands made by suitors and officeholders upon him.'[445] This strategy had the effect of drawing hostilities to Buckingham that seem to have been as much to do with his symbolic association to widespread court corruption as to any negative perception of his own political manoeuvring. As Buckingham rose to increasing pre-eminence at court, Francis Bacon saw fit to write to him to offer advice as to how he might best occupy such a position. The letter begins by registering the historical convention of royal favourites and situates Buckingham in this tradition:

> It is no new thing for Kings and Princes to have their Privadores, their favourites, their Friends. They have done it sometime out of their affection to the person of the man (for Kings have their affections as well as private men) sometimes in contemplation of their great abilities (and that's a happy choice) and sometimes for their own ends, to make them whom they so stile, and are contented should be so stiled, to be interposed between the Prince and the People.[446]

Occupying a Janus-like position, there was an expectation that the favourite would mediate between private and public spheres, between 'the Prince and the People.' Structured by the conventions of this role, Buckingham's performance of identity was at least doubled by this function and the roles were neither strictly divisible nor equally determining. It was the quality of Buckingham's relationship to the King that governed the shape of his public identity, or as Bacon suggested:

> Remember then what your true condition is, the King himself is above the reach of his people but cannot be above their censures, and you are his shadow, if either he commit an errour and is loath to avow it, but excuses it upon his Ministers, of which you are the first in the eye: or if you commit the fault, or have willingly permitted it, and must suffer for it; so perhaps you may be offered as a sacrifice to appease the multitude.[447]

Bacon implores Buckingham to 'remember what your true condition is,' reminding him that his status is entirely dependent on the good will of the king. Furthermore, Buckingham's person is dependent on the king to such an extent that Bacon characterises

444 Roger Lockyer, *Buckingham: The Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham 1592-1628* (London: Longman, 1981), 39.
445 Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption*, 50.
446 Bacon, *A Letter of Advice*, A2v
447 Bacon, A3r.

him as the king's 'shadow,' suggesting his essential reliance on James for the shape of his own identity but also the possibility that Buckingham's actions will be taken as being a sign of the king's own intentions. Throughout this letter, Bacon returns to the fundamental instability of Buckingham's position. Although he is 'first in the [King's] eye', his preferred status actually makes him more vulnerable; for if the King 'commit an errour and is loath to avow it… so perhaps you may be offered as a sacrifice to appease the multitude.' Or, in another formulation:

> It is true that the whole Kingdome hath cast their eye upon you, as the new rising star, and no man thinks his businesse can prosper at Court unlesse he hath you for his good Angel, or at least that you be not a *Malus Genius* against him, this you cannot now avoid unlesse you will adventure a precipice, to fall down faster than you rose-Opinion is a Master Wheele in these cases.[448]

Despite the exceptional status of the king, Bacon recognises that it is the vagaries of 'opinion' that function as the master discourse in the affairs of state. By implication, the interpretation of public figures and events (such as those contained in libellous discourse) can hence be understood to determine the success or failure of Buckingham's career. Libellous verses, such as the following, illustrate the contested place of the court favourite:

> The Kinge loves you, you him
> Both love the same
> You love the kinge, hee you
> Both buck-in-game.
> In game the king loves sport
> Of sports the buck
> But off all men why you,
> Why see the luck.[449]

Using the imagery of the hunt, a favoured pastime of the king's, the verse carries the accusation that it is James's affections or sexual interest, rather than the inherent merits of the individual, that determines their preferment. On first reading, the verse appears unarguably scurrilous as it operates by supressing an expletive, the expected alternative rhyme to 'Buck.'[450] However, copies of this poem across several different miscellanies provide alternative contexts for this poem, that modulate its satiric force. One manuscript compiler, for example, interprets the verse as a panegyric offering and attributes it to

448 Bacon, *A Letter of Advice*, A3v.
449 Bodl. MS Ashmole 47, f.53r.
450 Paul Hammond, *Figuring Sex between Men from Shakespeare to Rochester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 148.

Buckingham's client Richard Corbett.[451] Perhaps then, it was not simply that libels cast those that they attacked in an unfavourable light, but that in their collection by multiple manuscript compilers they proliferated conflicting views, which was in itself undermining.

In 1618, James appointed Buckingham to the position of Lord Admiral. Already Master of the Horse, Buckingham now controversially occupied two key political positions. James wrote a Latin poem, commemorating these appointments that implicitly acknowledges the potential concerns attached to the appointment by roundly justifying the action (I quote from one of the three widely circulated English translations of the poem):

> Now let us rejoyce sing Peans all
> For Buckingham is made Admirall
> For he that rules the horse our strength by land
> Our strength by sea the Navy doth command:
> Soe in the heavenly Courte that selfe same God
> Neptune I meane that with his three tooth'd Rod
> Brought forth the horse doth with the same appease
> The raging fury of the boysterous seas
> Why then should any grudge that favour graces
> The merrit one person with two places
> Since it soe amongst the states of heaven
> Where none dare doubt but things are carried even.[452]

This verse thematizes several fundamental issues for the poet-king. It articulates a clear concern with the semantic control of political affairs, that is understood to be contested ('Why then should any grudge that favour graces/ The merit of one person with two places'). It goes on to solve this concern rhetorically by presenting this doubled office as divinely ordained ('Soe in the heavenly Courte that selfe same God/ Neptune I mean that with three tooth'd Rod/ Brought forth the horse doth with the same appease/ The raging fury of the boisterous seas'). However, the verse also registers the ways in which 'the poet-king is forced to invoke his privileged royal insight in order to avoid the disempowered stances built into poetic performance.'[453] As well as operating in the terms of conventional panegyric or 'paeans of praise,' this verse also functions as a medium for the articulation of royal authority. With the emphasis on 'our strength,' it is James not Buckingham who is figured as the real source of these military and naval achievements. Where James's verse appeals to a divine precedent to harmonize a contentious political appointment, libellous

451 McRae, *Literature*, 170-1.
452 BL MS Egerton 2725, fol. 37v.
453 Perry, *Making of Jacobean Culture*, 23.

verses tended to draw attention to the extravagance of these terms. In referring to a heavily idealised portrait of Buckingham by Peter Paul Rubens, painted around 1625, one libel suggests how:

> Antwerpian Rubens' best skill made him soare,
> Ravish't by heavenly powers, unto the skie,
> Opening and ready him to deifie
> In a bright blissful palace, fairy isle.
> Naught but illusion were wee, 'till this guile
> Was by thy hand cut off, stout Machabee. [454]

Unlike the portraits of Buckingham, that worked effectively to homogenise authority in the body of the duke, this verse registers the artful construction of the apparently seamless fusion. The rhetorical elisions that can be iconographically represented in Rubens' painting of Buckingham are broken down in their poetic framing and lay bare the ambivalence produced by Buckingham's occupation of both offices. As James's verse suggests, even those poems that ostensibly sought to promote Buckingham, implicitly registered the wider resentment at his rise to prominence, insofar as their more favourable vision of the duke could not help but glance at the libellous culture which provoked their composition. Another translation of James's verse, 'now let us rejoice' functions chiastically, balancing and thus seeking to naturalise Buckingham's 'dubble office' but also evokes the call and answer character of libellous writing:

> Noe sure this dubble office is but one
> For as at spurres the horse doth run apace
> Soe hoyse the seales the shippe is quicklye gonn
> & ferret lyke performes a spedie race
> & as the Ryder by his awfull bitte
> commands the coursers motions at his will
> soe doth the stereman at the Rudder sitte
> & guide the shipp by Mathematicke skill
> A horse is but a ship on solydde grounde
> & beares his maister where he list him guide
> A shippe is but a horse on seas profounde
> Her maister beringe where he makes her slyde
> And thoughe that this a duble office bee
> The Owners harte & tounge in one agree.[455]

[454] Bodl. MS Malone 23, 207.
[455] BL Add. MS 15227, f.2r.

This poem develops a solution to the potential anxiety produced by Buckingham's 'dubble office' through the dialectic relation the poem implies between the ship and the horse:

> A horse is but a ship on solydde ground
> & beares his maister where he list him guide
> A shippe is but a horse on seas profounde
> Her maister beringe where he makes her slyde

These lines rhetorically reproduce Buckingham as capable of synthesising this relation. The speaker attempts to allay any fears the reader might have about the duplicity of this 'duble office' by emphasising the sincerity and transparency of the 'owner' whose 'harte & tounge in one agree.' Again, the total suppression of antipathy that can be realised through the painted image cannot so easily be concealed in poetry, which necessarily registers the ambivalence that motivates its composition even as it seeks to renounce it.

Libels and other forms of dissenting speech and writing preoccupied James throughout his reign but at no time more acutely than in the early 1620s, a period which saw heightened tensions between the king and parliament. The House of Commons were more insistent in the wish to debate foreign policy, including the proposed match between the Prince of Wales and the Spanish Infanta Maria Anna, and there was also pressure to address the expansion of monopolies, an activity in which Buckingham was significantly implicated. James was confronted by debates that were broadly against him, and in response he invoked his royal prerogative in order to insist that parliament cease all discussion on matters that he felt went beyond their proper sphere of activity. In reply, parliament published a protestation asserting its right to free speech in these cases and James's response was to dissolve parliament altogether.[456]

The parliament of 1621 can be seen to manifest the widening gulf between the house of commons and the king and underscores the highly charged character of political debate. It also suggests that political discussion at the time centred on, and was itself structured by, contestation over the very right to have it at all. Facing vociferous opposition from Parliament and aware of the increasing circulation of libels, the king sought to put an end

456 For detailed historical analyses of key parliamentary sessions see, T.L Moir, *The Addled Parliament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958); Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics, 1621-1629* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Robert Zaller, *The Parliament of 1621: A Study in Constitutional Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), and David Harris Willson, "Summoning and Dissolving Parliament," *American Historical Review* 45 (1939-40): 279-300.

to the dissent. In a period of just over six months, from December 1620 to July 1621, James published a number of proclamations against such attacks, two of which directly addressed the problem of libels.[457] The first, published on 24 December 1620, registers the perceived intensification of libellous discourse in this period:

> Yet neverthelesse, forasmuch as it is come 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 every of them, from the highest to the lowest, to take heede, how they intermeddle 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.[458]

James's appeal for his subjects to 'containe themselves' is figured in moral terms as a state that properly expresses 'that modest and reverent regard of matters above their reach and calling, that to good and dutifull Subjects appertaineth.' Figuring libellous discourse as excessive, 'lavish' and contrary to moral probity, this proclamation constructs the problem it presents in terms of a concern for moral welfare in which to produce a libel is self-indulgent and to 'containe' it would be a mark of self-discipline. To a large extent, this rhetoric unravels itself in what follows, as James acknowledges the difficulty the Stuart state is encountering in controlling this activity itself:

> And let no man thinke, after this Our forewarning, to passe away with impunitie, in respect of the multitude and generalitie of Offenders in this kinde; but knowe, that it will light upon some of the first, or forwardest of them, to be severly punished, for example to others. [459]

It is possible to see here the practical necessity for an insistence on the moral dimension of libellous activity. As acknowledged by James, the tide of discourse was so great that most libellers escaped with impunity, and so the invocation of virtue here seeks to gain compliance through greater self-regulation when state regulation is manifestly failing. This

457 See proclamations 216, 217, 239 and 247 in *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, ed. James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973)
458 James VI and I, "A Proclamation against excesse of Lavish and Licentious Speech of matters of State" in *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 495-6.
459 James VI and I, 496.

proclamation does not appear to have acted as a sufficient deterrent, for on 26 July 1621, James published another proclamation:

> And yet Wee are given to understand, that notwithstanding the strictnesse of Our commandment, the inordinate libertie of unreverent speech, touching matters of high nature, unfit for vulgar discourse, doth dayly more and more increase: Wee have thought it necessary to redouble Our Princely Direction, and strait Charge in that behalfe; wishing all men to rest assured, that howsoever Our owne nature hath bin always prone unto mildnesse and clemencie; yet We are, and shall be sensible of such presumption, so highly and directly affronting Us in our Royall commandement. [460]

It is apparent that James was increasingly anxious to prohibit libellous discourse at this time and that he was responding to events in both personal and public domains. Not only did the early 1620s see a period of heightened tension between the king and parliament over the right to discuss and determine the course of public affairs, but the tide of libellous activity directed at his favourite, Buckingham, and by extension the diminution of his own royal authority, was at its height. Buckingham's implication in government corruption increasingly registered more generally the extent to which his identity was externally produced and thoroughly embedded in the semiotics of early Stuart power and corruption to the point of becoming metonymic for that culture.

Libellous Adaptation in 'The King's Five Senses'

I wish to turn now to an examination of the way in which a famous masque, viewed as one of the highest literary forms of the period, was appropriated by a verse libeller, and used as a tool of political critique. As James Knowles has argued, this connection initially appears quite unexpected, as masques and libels:

> appear to be opposite kinds of discourse. The masque is hierarchical, esoteric, refined, mystical, authorized, exclusive, and occasional…while libels are vulgar, bawdy and ubiquitous.[461]

The elaborate spectacles staged by the masques were a central part of the cultural apparatus of the Jacobean court, and despite regularly being dismissed as mere 'toys' they possessed

460 James VI and I, 496.
461 James Knowles, "'Songs of baser alloy:" Jonson's *Gypsies Metamorphosed* and the Circulation of Manuscript Libels,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2006): 153.

a clear homeostatic function, working to promote the court's sense of its own identity and authority.[462] Moreover, the intimacy that is presumed to exist with a monarch in the case of a masque, makes the appropriation of this particular literary form even more effective. This was certainly the case with respect to the libel which started circulating sometime between the summers of 1621 and 1623 and was known as 'The King's Five Senses.' It was appropriated from a song of blessing ('from a gypsy in the morning') for James contained near the end of Ben Jonson's masque, *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*. Taking the supplicatory form of the blessing, the libel turned this piece of courtly praise into a petition against and exposé of the King's vices, particularly his passion for the young men of the court.

'The King's Five Senses' was heavily copied and is extant in thirty-eight manuscripts. It is one of the most well-represented libels from the period and also one of the most popular. Although the poem's relationship to the masque text makes its place of origin almost undoubtedly London, research has shown that collections in which the text is found are widespread and include Somerset, Yorkshire, Leicestershire, Edinburgh and Aberystwyth.[463] Excluding minor textual variations, most of the copies are alike. There are two notable exceptions: one, a copy of the libel in the National Library of Wales which converts the text into a love poem and the other, in the St John's College Library at Cambridge, which takes George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham rather than the King as the subject of supplication.[464]

There has been intense speculation around the question of authorship of this verse, as like the majority of libels, copies of 'The King's Five Senses' typically avoided naming names. Copies of the poem in some manuscript collections have suggested authors, including Alexander Gill, Ben Jonson and William Drummond, but there remains no strong critical consensus. The problem of attribution, which requires that the text is treated as functionally anonymous, is in keeping with the contemporary legal practice as treating as equivalent, the distinct acts of composition, copying and publication. In this setting any person found in possession of a libel was able to be conceived of as its author.

462 David Bevington and Peter Holbrook eds., *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1-19.
463 Knowles, "'Songs of baser alloy," 161.
464 Knowles, "Songs of baser alloy," 161.

Without a famous name to draw attention to itself, the apparent popularity of 'The King's Five Senses' and its relationship to Jonson's masque underlines how a libel's circulation might benefit from cultivating a familiarity with licensed, authorized forms of discourse. One of the major features that the libel and the masque share is their unambiguous relation to the real people they implicate. Whereas the drama of this period often staged its critique at a partially neutralizing distance from the object of its interrogation libels and masques did not trade on these aesthetic terms. In order for these texts and performances to have any purchase, they required that the identity of the person and the social reality implicated in the fiction was apparent. The very similarity of the two texts underlines their reliance on context – whether literary, cultural, social or institutional – for generating meaning. In this case, the most important of these contexts was the institutional or legal framework which ultimately acted as the arbiter of whether the text had primarily literary or criminal status.

Although their primary function was to promote and entertain the court, masques did often contain challenging material. For instance, Jonson's *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* expresses ambivalences, particularly regarding the status of fortune telling, or generating predictions about the future; activities that in other spheres James had strictly prohibited.[465] Removed from its court setting, a text like the masque, that took the king as its subject, could be seen to be primed for subtle and subversive rearrangements. In this case, the song which the libel appropriates, 'The Blessing of the King's Five Senses,' focuses almost exclusively on the mortal aspects of the royal body, those aspects arguably most available for the demystifying reconceptualisation typically offered by libellous writing. As is often the case in this period, the frailty of the king's body comes to stand in for the state of the nation. In addition, the masque's indebtedness to the inflections of folk form – in this case the idioms of the fortune-telling gypsies and the puerile clowns – may also have recommended it to the anonymous verse libellers of the day, for whom the neat resolutions offered by rhyming couplets was a favoured style of critique.

The Gypsies Metamorphosed was performed three times for James in 1621, on August 3 and 5 and at some point in September, at Burley-on-the Hill, Belvoir and Windsor respectively.

465 See for instance, James's poem, "King James on the blazeing starr: Octo: 28:1618," Bodl. MS Rawlinson Poet. 84, in which he warns his subjects not to 'misinterpret…with vaine Conceit/ The Caracter you see on Heaven gate./Which though it bring the world some news from fate/ The letters such as no man can translate.'

I have focused on the Windsor version of the masque, in which Jonson's revisions importantly included the insertion of 'The Blessing of the King's Senses.' Its original presentation to James at Burley-on-the-Hill (which was Buckingham's estate) is notable, as the event was widely seen as yet further confirmation of the exceptional esteem in which James held him; a lavish restoration of the estate had recently been completed and the masque was designed to celebrate these works and commend the achievements of its owner.

1621 was itself a critical year in the life of early Stuart politics. As discussed, James's prorogation of Parliament had the effect of proscribing official, parliamentary avenues of discourse and as might be expected, semi-official news and libels flourished in the breach. As James's favourite, Buckingham, was increasingly the subject of intense scrutiny and from the early 1620s up until his death in 1628, a sharp rise in the number of libels that take him as their focus were circulating. These verses clustered around some common themes and included critiques of his indecently swift rise to power, his relationship with James and fears concerning his perceived crypto-Catholicism. Buckingham's position as royal favourite drew unfavourable comparisons to the previous royal favourite Robert Carr, whom he had displaced. Buckingham's Catholic associations (his mother had converted to Catholicism in the early 1620s) made him a target for Protestant fears of Jesuitism and popishness and the development of closer ties with Spain. Fears concerning the strength of his influence over the king are summed up by one well-known libel of the 1620s which speculated that the country was 'not governed by the Master but his Mate.'[466] It is clear that by this time criticism of Buckingham had become a way of insinuating a forceful critique of both royal personality and policy.

'The King's Five Senses' was evidently a popular verse and copies of it can be found alongside other well-known poems of the day and not just other anonymous or scurrilous verse. It sits beside poems by Donne, Herbert, Carew and Corbett and others in the many verse miscellanies extant from this period. It has been claimed that this libel often finds a home alongside other anti-Buckingham verse thus reinforcing the argument that this poem was predominantly embedded within an oppositional culture. Although this is certainly true in a number of cases, the libel is also found alongside poems that are topical and elegiac rather than satirical. For instance, in one collection it is transcribed immediately

[466] BL MS Sloane 826, f.181r.

after George Morley's elegy, 'An Epitaph Upon King James.'[467] As we've seen, although the printed prose libels of the Elizabethan period were repurposed at several critical moments to meet fresh political demands, they were never properly severed from the libellous and polemical objectives of their original composition. The constitutive ephemerality of verse libels in James's reign, however, and their continuous reframing via the anthologising form of poetic miscellanies worked to promote the neutralisation of the original libellous function as well as its perpetuation. It is striking to note that the only known prosecution associated with this libel concerned Alexander Gill the younger, son of Milton's tutor, who was arrested in 1628 shortly after the death of Buckingham on charges of sedition. It was claimed he had been toasting John Felton, Buckingham's assassin and a copy of this libel was found amongst his papers. A note in BL Add. MS 5832 records that Gill was 'censured in the star chamber for drinking an health to Felton.'[468] In this case the libel was supplementary to the primary focus of the prosecution, which was Gill's so-called seditious celebration of Buckingham's demise. However, it seems that the discovery of the libel amongst his papers was used expediently and as confirmation of his subversive commitments.

'The King's Five Senses' has often been compared to the Anglican litany with its supplicatory sequence of petitions. The song that appears in Jonson's masque engages with this form playfully to ask that James be protected from some of his known aversions such as tobacco, ugly women and sickly hunting dogs. The libel, like many others, begs that the King be protected from his poorly concealed vices: his love of the 'smooth and beardlesse' young men of the court, and Buckingham in particular; his pursuit of 'the daingerous fig of Spaine,' through the negotiation of a marriage alliance between Charles and the Infanta; and popishness, those 'Italian Sallets, Romish drugs/ The milke of Babells proud whore duggs,' in its myriad forms. As Bellany has noted in his reading of the poem, sodomy and popery were frequently paired in libels of the period, as 'the most wicked of sexual transgressions was an appropriate expression of the sheer moral degradation of those who had abandoned true religion.'[469]

Like many libels, 'The King's Five Senses' imitated the high style used by court poets to mythologise and mystify royal power. James is Phoebus, Buckingham 'young Phaeton.'

[467] Bodl. MS Eng. Poet. C. 50, f.25r
[468] BL Add. MS 5832, f.196v.
[469] Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal*, 257-258.

The archetypal language of courtly poetry is rendered problematic as the libel uses the unsavoury descriptions of the sensory real world to dispense with the romance that would be expected to accompany these ideals. The characterization of Buckingham as a beautiful young man, to whom the King is utterly beholden, invested with enormous power and yet politically disastrous, paints a picture of an early Stuart court in thrall to its senses and as such, lost in a moral vacuum. With his mind taken up with young Buckingham, the poet fears that the King 'may with drawe/His thoughts from equitie, and lawe.'

As a reading of this poem suggests, in the case of libels written against the king, any distinction between the two prevailing formulations of 'libel' – as a defamation of a person (in legal parlance), and as an anti-government attack (in demotic expression) – are always already intrinsically blurred. The poem shoes how moral shortcomings and political failing exceed a merely metaphorical or analogous relation when it comes to the king. Instead, reinforcing the prerogative rights inherent in notions of royal absolutism, the 'personal' and 'political' are shown to be reciprocally causative or mutually constitutive. In other words, the consequences of James's personal degeneracy are shown to be indivisible from the prosperity of the state itself. In its depiction of moral depravity, 'The King's Five Senses' sits comfortably with other libels of the period in which the senses are frequently focused upon and characterized as a source of weakness. However, because the pleasure-driven subject of this libel is the king himself, the verse sounds a far more ominous note. Questioning whether James can really claim that his judgment is any less impaired than his subjects with so much evidence weighing in the balance, the author of 'The King's Five Senses' inevitably casts doubt on unconditional faith in royal authority itself.

Despite ridiculing the king's relationship with Buckingham, the libeller closes on a mixed note, perhaps himself uncertain whether this subject is a source for satire or elegiac lament; he writes:

> That thou wilt take the Filme away
> That keeps my Soveraignes eyes from vieweing
> The things that wilbe our undoeing
> Then let him Heare good God the sounds
> Aswell of Men, as of his hounds
> Give him a Taste and tymely too
> Of what his Subjects undergoe
> Give him a Feelinge of there woes

These lines make sense of a reading of the verse which comprehends the tone of this last stanza in particular, as more akin to a lover scorned, than the biting invectives usually associated with libels. As Hammond notes, 'in effect, the love between James and Buckingham displaces the love between James and his people.'[470] Although the senses are predominantly figured as passive and erotically directed, the verse ends by recalling their active function and specifically their ability to induce empathy and identification. If Buckingham could be purged (if 'the filme' could be lifted) the verse suggests that the king's senses might be released and freed once again to act in accordance with the interests of his subjects and of the state. From this standpoint the libel can be read as keeping open the possibility that however corruptible the senses may be, they are also the organ that might allow James to discover 'what his Subjects undergo.' In his commonplace book, the seventeenth-century diarist John Rous argues along these lines, suggesting that the verse carries merely a benign intent and that its author 'wished good things [for James].'[471] And yet, the more propitious quality of the final lines, which also read as a belated apologia, does not seem sufficient to neutralise the extended vision of unscrupulousness and disorder that dominate the earlier five stanzas.

The ambivalence and inconsistency contained in the libel's vision comes in part from the genuine problem James's subjects faced, when trying to think through the implications of actions they found abhorrent, while sustaining the vision of a divinely appointed monarch. When compared to the care with which most libellers treated Elizabeth as monarch, this libel's representation of James's constitutional and personal failings, illustrates how far libellous modes of address had qualitatively shifted from earlier iterations. As McRae has argued, this libel reads as the 'product of a more sceptical age.'[472] Notably, in its persistent attention to the fallibility of the king's natural body the libel implicitly rejects the doctrine contained in theories of the king's two bodies that maintained that the purity of the king's body politic 'wipes away every Imperfection of the other body.'[473]

"The King's Five Senses" foreshadows some of the questions that were to become crystallised in the coming decades. Although Rous opposed politicised readings of the libel,

470 Paul Hammond, *Figuring Sex Between Men*, 141-143.
471 BL Add. MS 28640, f.105v.
472 McRae, *Literature*, 80.
473 Edward Plowden, *Reports*, quoted in McRae, *Literature*, 81.

later in his commonplace book he discusses the drift of early-Stuart sentiment and he notes the particular interest in probing the limits and directional flow of royal authority:

> 1.Whether a King be ordained of God for the welfare of the people, or the people appointed subjects to the King, for the honour and pleasure of a King. 2. Whether a King maketh or imposeth laws upon a people, or the laws and antient native ancient customes of the land doe erect and establish the throne and crowne of a King. 3. What power or priviledge the high court of Parliament hath, assembled as the representative body of the kingdome.[474]

Although never explicitly mentioned by Rous, his questions are unmistakably posed under the sign of the Magna Carta and the 'ancient' rights of the English people. The spectral presence of Magna Carta brings the customary conditions and limits to royal prerogative into direct dialogue with Jacobean theories of royal absolutism. The confrontation between royal authority and obligation cannot be overtly theorised in the libel but it occurs obliquely through the verse's own enmeshment in the process of adaption and inversion of a festive song from Jonson's masque. Together these texts allow us to glimpse the earliest stirrings of the mid-century's far more extreme political ruptures.

Royal Writing and the Authorisation of Libellous Style

As the twentieth-century editor of James's poetry, James Craigie, has remarked, it seems that 'as he grew older the inclination and desire to express himself in verse was only infrequently strong enough to end in action, and then only under some strong stimulus…'[475] The most striking feature of the king's unprinted, manuscript verse in this period is that it almost always seemed to be composed *ex officio,* and not in the mode of his earlier work as ambiguous poet-king. The poems that formed this small but significant corpus were: 'Sonnet of his Majesty' (1604), 'King James on the blazeing starr' (1618), 'To the Duke of Buckingham' (n.d), 'An Elegie written by the King concerning his counsel for Ladies & gentlemen to departe the City of London according to his Majesties Proclamation' (1622), 'The answere to the libell called the Comons teares' (1622), and 'Off Jacke, and, Tom' (1623). In other words, when James wrote these poems, he now made hardly any attempt to bracket his poetic career off from his political status. This was no longer any equivocation or gesture towards either the apprentice-performance, or the vatic career, instead his verse looked evermore like the unadorned practice of politics by other

474 BL Add. MS 28640, f.168.
475 James Craigie ed. *The Poems of King James VI of Scotland, Vol I*, xii.

means. Despite the proclamations of 1620 and 1621 prohibiting their production, libels continued to proliferate. Of all these verses, 'The anwere to the libel called the Common teares' most directly responds to the failure of ordinary political discourse to stem the tide of seditious writing: 'if proclamations will not serve, I must do more,' James declared.[476]

The issuing of this verse in 1622 openly signalled the king's exasperation with the growing tide of libellous verse against the court and crown. One copy of this verse is prefaced with the note 'King James his verses made upon a libel let fall in Court.'[477] Another copy of the poem notes that the libel he was responding to was entitled 'The Common's Teares,' however no copy of this verse has ever been discovered.[478] Directly addressing the circulation of libellous verse, James writes:

> And be corrected for your pride
> That Kings designes darr thus decyde
> By railing rhymes and vaunting verse
> Which your kings brest shall never pierce

It has been suggested that this poem 'embodies the paradoxical and self-contradictory nature of the king's late manuscript poetry, [in which] in order to assert its own powers of discursive imposition, the crown is forced to embrace the very medium that has challenged it.'[479] At once a refusal of the capacity of libels to inflict real damage, these lines from the verse simultaneously epitomise a disavowal in which the poem as a whole partakes. Exchanging the distinctly royal preserve of the proclamation, in this instance for rhyming couplets, a medium he had previously denigrated for its association with the 'rash Imaginations,' of his subjects, James's poem registers the force of libellous verse and yet seeks to respond to it in kind.

James offers a robust defence of Buckingham, responding to the criticism that had been leveraged at his favourite, producing a suggestive connection between the royal prerogative and royal favourites:

476 Bodl. MS Harley 367, f.151r.
477 Bodl. MS Malone 23, f.49.
478 BL MS Harley 367, f.151r.
479 Perry, '"If Proclamations Will Not Serve": The Late Manuscript Poetry of James I and the Culture of Libel,' in *Royal Subjects: Essays on the Writings of James VI and I*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2002), 217.

Kings ever use their instruments
Of whome they judge by their events
The good they cherish, and advance
And many things may come by chance
Content your selfe with such as I
Shall take neere, and place on highe
The men you nam'd serv'd in their tyme
And soe may myne as cleere of cryme
And seasons have their proper intents
And bring forth severall events
Whereof the choyse doe rest in kings
Who punish, and reward them brings
O what a calling were a King
If hee might give, or take no thing
But such as yow should to him bring
Such were a king but in a play
If he might beare no better sway

The vituperative libels directed at Buckingham that had circulated prior to James's proclamations and continues after them were numerous and sustained. It can be argued, that over time, they came to have a significant impact on the public perception of royal authority. James tried on a number of occasions to intervene on his favourite's behalf but perhaps the most well-known example was the poem he wrote in a libellous style, commonly known as 'Jack and Tom go to Spain.' As was typical of libellous manuscript verses, James's poem 'Jack and Tom go to Spain,' was a response to a set of acute political concerns, in this case the popular opposition to the proposed marriage between his son and heir Prince Charles, and the Catholic Spanish Infanta, Anna Maria. James had over some years considered the possibility of a match between Charles and the Spanish princess as a way of securing funds, without the need to petition parliament. James's privy council, the Archbishop of Canterbury and most of parliament were opposed to the match and in addition to the dissent of the most important figures in court and parliament, there was also widespread public opposition to the plan.

In February 1623, as a response to the constant risk of being thwarted by the unpopularity of the match, Charles cut through the diplomatic negotiations, and accompanied by Buckingham, took matters into his own hands and travelled to Madrid purportedly without James's knowledge. 'Jack and Tom go to Spain' is dated just after, in March 1623, and is contemporary to the events to which it refers. The poem adopts a pastoral idiom and provides an account of the secret expedition to Madrid, where

disguised as servants and suitably calling themselves Jack and Tom, the prince and Buckingham travelled to petition for the princess's hand.

The poem begins *in media res* with a vision of an already suspended Edenic scene, an Arcadia in mourning, in which the iteration of the pathetic fallacy underlines that the break in the natural course of things is contiguous with the absence of Jack and Tom. The already interrupted beginning of the poem draws attention back to the external event that has produced this suspension and is the efficient cause of the poem, namely the opposition to the proposed match between James's son and heir Charles and the Spanish Infanta Anna Maria. However, in so far as the event was figured as a kind of 'crisis' at all the external problem the poem tries to deal with is also a problem in public relations. In 'the wiper of the peoples tears,' James had enjoined his subjects against the scrutiny of public affairs and specifically mentioned the Spanish Match:

> The moddell of our princely match
> You cannot make but marr or patch
> Alas how weake would prove your care
> Wishe you onely his best welfaire
> Your reasons cannot weigh the ends
> So mixt they are twixt foes, and friends

Whilst in this poem oppositional subjects are unambiguously figured as lacking the foresight to comprehend providential signs, in 'Of Jack and Tom,' James attempts to neutralize this opposition altogether via the evocation of Arcadia which shares in their ambitions and expectantly anticipates their successful return. Throughout the poem, Charles and Buckingham's concealment as Jack and Tom is presented as the courtly disguise love must take, at different moments concealing and revealing itself as the careful stage-managing of an unpopular political policy. The figuring of Charles and Buckingham, as well as of James himself, as pastoral or Petrarchan lovers also works to mirror the necessary strategic obfuscation encountered in some of the more sophisticated libellous verses of this period.

Remembering that the libels against which James is writing depend on 'pattern[s] of associations' that were linked to the truth but not reliant on it,'[480] James's verse, in contrast, demands to be taken seriously as the dominant interpretation of political events, whilst at

480 McElligott. "The Politics of Sexual Libel: Royalist Propaganda in the 1640s,"87.

the same time maintaining the possibility for renunciation should the plan not succeed. The troping of Jack and Tom as pastoral lovers allows him to do this. Pastoral lovers were habitually characterized by their failure to win the hand of the love interest. Without knowing what the outcome of Charles and Buckingham's journey will be, James exploits the precedent of literary authority to prepare the ground for a failure that if it comes, will be able to be read as archetypal rather than atypical and unbecoming.

The poem also recalls the rivalry between 'court' and 'country' ideologies. In early seventeenth century poetry and drama – and, of course, libel – the court was increasingly figured as a place, 'wicked, extravagant, corrupt, promiscuous, homosexual, drunken, xenophile, diseased, sycophantic, tyrannical and popish,' whilst the country on the other hand was, 'virtuous, thrifty, honest, chaste, heterosexual, sober, nationalist, healthy, outspoken, constitutional and Protestant leading to Puritan.'[481] James's poem activates not just a literary authority but also both literally and figuratively locates itself in the moral heartland that was becoming the key contemporary linguistic site of virtue.

The second half of the poem shows James shrugging off the pastoral mode and more directly announcing himself in the poem. The royal address returns emphatically in the seventh stanza, in which 'love' and 'fortune' are revealed to be the terms that have stood in for the precedence and pragmatic advantage of dynastic marriage. James writes:

> Thy grandsire, godsire, father too,
> Were thyne examples so to doe.
> Their brave attempts in heate of love,
> France, Scotland, Denmarke did approve.
> So Jacke and Tom doe nothing new
> When love and fortune they pursue

The literary precedent is exceeded as Charles's journey to Spain is now set against its royal antecedents, including, for instance, James's marriage to Anne of Denmark. In the final stanzas, 'turning pages back into princes,' James moves between his mythologized analogue Pan and the royal persona and similarly shifts between the personal and analogical figures of Jack and Tom. The last stanza shifts to a declarative register, sitting uncomfortably next to the obliqueness of the stanzas that have come before. James's subjects, these 'kinde shepheards,' are directed to 'Bee not too rashe in censuring wrong:/

481 Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal*, 10.

Correct your feares, leave of to mourne,' and in reversing the earlier, universalized and depoliticizing deployment of pastoral, the register shifts into the assertions only available to a royal author.

Charles and Buckingham returned home and the much-maligned Spanish Match did not occur, with Charles eventually marrying Henrietta Maria of France instead. The writing that was promulgated by this non-event is significant for the further understanding it provides regarding the political operation of libellous verse forms in this period, particularly when these forms were employed by the king. It is very likely that this poem had a strong circulation as it is extant in a large number of manuscript miscellanies from the period where it features alongside other well-known political, satiric and libellous verses.

In one sense, James's poem can be seen to function in purely pragmatic terms: in eschewing the medium of print and proclamation and entering the murkier culture of manuscript circulation, the verse shared a correspondence with the event itself. Like Charles and Buckingham's journey to Madrid, it was designed to cut through the interminable diplomatic negotiations of official process, and where royal proclamations had failed, 'Jack and Tom go to Spain' sought to put an end to the libellous public speculation by addressing itself directly to the source of the problem. The inconsistency of the poem's vision, its abrupt shift from the strong invocation of the pastoral to the emergence of a transparent assertion of the primacy of royal authority suggested that something less resolute had occurred. The existence of James's poem, which modulates the generic conditions under which political statements usually operated, suggests the injunctive quality of libellous verse and shows James attempting to assert his authority over a threatening discursive realm. It can be argued, however, that in doing so, he instead authorized the very textual mode he was seeking to deter.

CONCLUSION

The escalation of libellous verse in the Jacobean period has understandably made it the most common focus for studies of early modern libel. Ironically, perhaps, Jacobean libels have themselves contributed to a vision of Elizabeth's reign as a period of consensus. However, in restricting studies of early libel to this period, it is possible to lose sight of the development and accumulation of libellous strategies and techniques which preceded the more politically reactive libels of the Jacobean period. Comparing libels from both Elizabeth's and James's reigns, which include earlier forms of *ad hominem* critique and complaint, has allowed for a more balanced narrative. In this thesis, Elizabethan libellous writing has been considered alongside its arguably more famous Jacobean counterpart, underscoring not just the quantitative, but also the qualitative shifts in libels between the two periods. Even for studies that prioritise Jacobean libels, comparing these later instances to earlier iterations illustrates more tangibly just how extreme the libellous attacks on James and Buckingham were, and the very real shift in the nature of libellous discourse. This thesis has sought to respond to the call for work that might 'expand the chronological breadth of our approach to early Stuart verse libels.'[482]

A central concern of the thesis has not only been to draw out the variety of the function of libellous forms, but to explore the ambiguity built into the term itself. Libel is now almost exclusively understood as a term of legal language, alleging a written defamation, and generally dealt with as a civil matter. As described in the thesis, however, in the early modern period the term was used to designate several distinct and at times overlapping material and generic conditions of a text. It could imply that a text was considered seditious, but it was also used far more flexibly within a range of social and political settings, as a way of indicating a text's perceived triviality, its topicality or even to refer to a pamphlet that may or may not have contained explicitly libellous content. It was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that libel appears to have stabilised into something like its modern usage, as a technical legal term. Johnson, for example, excluded it from his 1755 dictionary, most likely on the grounds that it was considered a term of 'art' by which he meant a term deriving from a specific technical, scientific or disciplinary domain, and not a word that was in more general usage.

[482] Bellany, "Railing Rhymes Revisited," 1165.

The changing and ambiguous status of the term can make libel a challenging object for scholarly investigation. It is also symptomatic, however, of the Jacobean period's ongoing negotiation of the larger political and ethical questions that libelling brought into view. This included questions concerning what constituted legitimate and illegitimate forms of complaint and critique, and the relationship between the maintenance of individual reputation and the integrity of the social order. Libelling also raised questions concerning the status of authorship and anonymity, print and manuscript, and forms of textual authority. It is noteworthy that in the absence of an entry for libel, Johnson's dictionary records three separate entries for 'lampoon,' defined as 'a personal satire; abuse; censure written not to reform but to vex.' The emergence of the category of 'lampoon' introduced a valuable and clarifying third term to early modern discourse and suggested perhaps some loosening of state concerns with the regulation of language.

As described in the earlier section of the thesis, libels were most often classified in relation to satire, but in practice this distinction was hard to maintain, especially from the end of Elizabeth's reign, when the popularity of Juvenalian satire drew much closer to the *ad hominem* discourse of libellous writing. This mode of satire arguably complicated former notions of the distinction between satiric *personae* and real persons, and the social satire of vice and personalised satiric forms. This satirico-libellous writing arguably blurred the distinction between *ad hominem* criticisms or commentary and those rendered allegorically. The allegorical tradition that was most strongly identified with the drama and epic poetry of the period had offered a distinct and highly literary form of critique. In contrast, the *ad hominem* critiques offered by libellous writing did not take place at an extended or abstracted remove but provided (in Ivo Kamps' terms) a more 'ordinary encounter with ideology' or a mode which dissolves ideology's categories into 'the spontaneity of the "lived."'[483]

In their hybridic slipping between fact and fiction, libels mirrored a high political culture which was reliant on the superlative mixing of such elements for its own mystification. When James turned from proclamation to verse, in response to growing criticism of his rule, he was moving from a largely declarative register to a dominantly symbolic register

[483] Ivo Kamps, *Historiography and Ideology in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 9.

of expression. However, in adopting the form he explicitly sought to repudiate, James confirmed the pressure libels were exerting on authorized forms of political discourse.

I argue that this was also confirmed by the early Jacobean effort to collapse the practical distinction between truth and falsehood when judging whether a piece of writing should be considered libellous and subject to prohibition, as described in Coke's redefinition of libel. Although these efforts to curtail the spread of libellous attacks were unsuccessful in their aim, the fears that prompted them can be seen to have been vindicated by subsequent events, most particularly in the eventual assassination of Buckingham and the celebration of his assassin as a hero. This unparalleled act confirmed, if any such confirmation were needed, that libels had the capacity in this period to set off chains of disruption and destruction far in excess of their apparent intentions, and independent of the truth or falsehood of their content. Although not considered in this thesis, libels celebrating Buckingham's death remain a rich source for exploring how in inflicting reputational damage, libels can be seen to pose a demonstrable existential threat.[484]

Libels had long-lasting effects: *Leicester's Commonwealth* continued to influence literary and historical accounts of the earl unfavourably for centuries after its publication. The Martin Marprelate tracts and the persona of Martin Marprelate were reprised in the mid-century to articulate Leveller opposition to the monarchy. Embodied modes of representation, or 'the use of *persons* as objects of discourse' of which *ad hominem* libellous writing was exemplary, were arguably built in to early modern modes of thought.[485] Of most relevance to this thesis is the famous bodily analogy found in political-theological conceptions of the king's two bodies and its anthropomorphisation of the body politic.

Giving form to abstract theological and political beliefs, by the end of James's reign embodied representation had developed an identifiable and often sophisticated range of techniques that were used as a medium of political and cultural analysis and communication. Libellous writing became emblematic of the early modern fascination with power and privilege as it was both actually embodied by office-holders and the monarch in particular, but also as a productive fiction that helped conceptually to

484 For the significance of Buckingham's assassination (and of his assassin, John Felton) to the combustible atmosphere of the mid-century, see James Holstun, *Ehud's Dagger: Class Struggle in the English Revolution* (London: Verso, 2000). Strong examples of the flurry of libels celebrating Buckingham's death and commending his assassin can be found in BL Sloane 826, Bodl. Rawl. Poet 26 and Bodl. Malone 23.
485 Bruster, "The Structural Transformation of Print in Late Elizabethan England," in *Shakespeare and the Question of Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2003), 65.

construct and define the boundaries of sacred and secular, private and public, personal and political. In addition to its cohesive function, which allowed and encouraged subjects to imagine themselves as part of a social whole, embodied forms of representation also carried over into other discursive fields, and also took on more disruptive social functions. Early modern readers were increasingly habituated to embodiment as an aesthetic form across a range of genres including satire, Ovidian erotica, and Petrachan lyric.

In 'granting a bodily presence to fictional characters, and a fictional identity to real bodies,' these embodied forms of writing fabricated composite identities to produce aesthetic and rhetorical effects.[486] In a personal monarchy, the disposition and personal proclivities of whomever occupied the throne, strongly determined the course not only of political and religious affairs but also of cultural discourse. Jonathan Goldberg has provided perhaps the most influential statement of this argument, suggesting that as the 'articulate and visible centre of society,' James's influence regulated the spectrum of discursive strategies available to his subjects.[487] It has been one of the arguments of this thesis however, that libellous writing has been underestimated in terms of the challenge it provided to this paradigm. The concerns that libellous discourse aroused in this period, suggest that the functional centrality of the monarch to cultural and political forms was not totalizing, and in practice offered more limited protection from the oppositional currents of a wide variety of social and political agendas than previously was the case.

This thesis has sought to demonstrate the social, cultural and political significance of libel in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, particularly when directed towards persons in positions of authority with regard to the central institutions of the state. Through a series of close-readings of exemplary libels, I have described the changing status and significance of libellous discourse; as a vehicle for religious polemic, as an intervention into factional struggle, as a scandalising entertainment, and as an act of dissent, that whether intended or not, was perceived to exert a destabilising force on the state. Through an examination of *ad hominem*, libellous attacks, this thesis has also drawn attention to the problems attendant on the personalised structures of early forms of political and state office, in particular, theories of monarchical absolutism.

[486] Bruster, *Structural Transformation*, 66.
[487] Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), xi.

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MS Ashmole 47, f. 53r, copy of a libel on Buckingham and James, "The Kinge loves you, you him.

MS Ashmole 781, 164, a copy of a libel attributed to Ralegh beginning 'Court's commender, states mantayner.'

MS. Don. d.152 f.4v, verse entitled: "A Libell, fixte upon the French Church Wall, in London. Annº 1593º."

MS Eng. Poet. C.50, f.25r, a copy of "The King's Five Senses."

MS Malone 23, f.49, a copy of James's response to a libel 'The wiper of the Peoples teares.'

MS Malone 23, 207, copy of a libel on Buckingham "Immortal man of glory."

MS Rawlinson 84, a copy of a poem by James on the 'blazeing starr.'

BRITISH LIBRARY

Add. MS 5832, f.196v-197v, Rev. William Cole's notes on libels composed on the death of John Felton.

Add. MS 5956, f.23r, a libellous verse concerning the rivalry between Robert Devereux, earl of Essex and William Cecil, Lord Burghley.

Add. MS 10309, f.120r, a copy of the libel 'England (Men Say)' written around the time of James's accession to the English throne.

Add. MS 15227, f.2r, a copy of a verse thought to be by James, 'O joyfull newse.'

Add. MS 22601, f.60v, a copy of the libel 'England (Men Say).'

Add. MS 28640, f.68, a copy of the libel "The wisest king did wonder when he spied" in the diary of John Rous.

Add. MS 28640, f.168, Rous's copy of questions contained in a 1643 book about the respective rights of king and parliament.

Egerton MS 2230, f.33v-35r, libellous verse on the death of Cecil.

Egerton MS 2725, fol. 37v, an English translation of James's verse on Buckingham's appointment as Lord Admiral.

Harley MS 367, f.151r, a copy of James's response to a libel 'The Common's Teares,' also known as 'The wiper of the Peoples teares.'

Harley MS 6901, f.141v, verse attributed to Walter Ralegh, known as 'The Lie.'

Harvard fMS Eng 868. A large folio volume comprising *Leicester's Commonwealth* and *Vox Populi*.

Sloane MS 826, f.153v, a list of grievances concerning Buckingham presented to Parliament.

Sloane MS 826, f.181r. a libel, "On the Duke 1628."

Sloane MS 826, f.184v, copy of a libel on Buckingham and James, 'Of British Beasts the Buck is King.'

Stowe MS 156, f.204v, "epitaphium" a libellous mock-epitaph on the earl of Leicester.

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