

Your Majesty's Most Humble Slave and Dog: The Duke of Buckingham and The Spanish Match

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Note on Spelling: Some of the primary source quotes have been kept in the original spelling. These are purposeful and kept to preserve the integrity of the quotes.

Introduction

Royal favorites were not an uncommon occurrence in monarchical rule— in fact, they were a nearly universal feature of monarchies and the politics within royal governments. King James VI and I was known for having male favorites— often young, attractive men— both prior to and after his ascension to the English throne in 1603. The first favorite of note was his cousin, Esmé Stuart, whom James met in 1579. While Stuart was significantly older than James, he was still looked upon with great admiration by the young king, who quickly elevated his position. James made his cousin the Duke of Lennox, provided him with money, and appointed him to be Lord Great Chamberlain and First Gentleman of the Chamber.¹ Lennox was installed into James' bedchamber, which gave him privileged and personal access to the king. Lennox was unpopular with many due to his unusual power and French background, and he was banished during the Ruthven Raid of 1582. He died in 1583.² While James was deeply impacted by the death of Lennox, it would not be the end of his affinity and favoritism towards men.

In March of 1607, a young Robert Carr caught the attention of King James.³ In December of 1607, Carr was knighted and subsequently began receiving large amounts of money and lavish gifts from the king. He was then elevated to the position of Viscount.⁴ Carr's time as the king's favorite was marked by scandal surrounding the Overbury Affair. In 1613, Carr married Francis Howard, the Countess of Essex, but not without a significant struggle. Lady Essex was already married — although she claimed her husband was impotent — and Carr's personal assistant, Thomas Overbury, opposed the marriage.⁵ To handle Overbury, James had him imprisoned in the Tower, where he ultimately died. Regarding Lady Essex's husband, she was deemed to be a

¹Michael B. Young. *King James and the History of Homosexuality*. New York University Press, 2000. 28.

²Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*. 29.

³Clare Jackson. *The Mirror of Great Britain: A Life of King James VI and I*. Liverright Publishing Company. 2025. 326.

⁴Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*. 58.

⁵Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*. 59.

virgin and was allowed to marry Carr. During these challenges, James elevated Carr to be Earl of Somerset, which greatly increased his power and influence.⁶ His power was even further increased when he became the Lord Chamberlain in 1614.⁷ However, in 1615, it became clear that Overbury had been poisoned, and Somerset and his wife were placed on trial.⁸ They were found guilty and put in the Tower until 1622, when they were then forced to live in confinement for the rest of their lives.⁹

George Villiers, who would go on to become the first Duke of Buckingham, was the final favorite of King James VI and I. Born in August of 1592, Villiers was the second son and third child born to his father, Sir George Villiers, and his mother, Mary.¹⁰ The young Villiers and his mother were exceptionally close – a relationship that would greatly impact his position in life. It was clear at an early age that Villiers was beautiful. His mother capitalized on his appearance, as well as his indifference towards scholarly pursuits, and had Villiers trained in more physical and charming fields, such as dancing and fencing.¹¹ After the death of Sir George Villiers, Mary remarried twice. Her second marriage – to Sir Thomas Compton – significantly improved Villiers’ opportunities in life. Due to Compton’s brother being a future Earl, Villiers was in a position to prepare for a career at Court.

In 1614, George Villiers was introduced to James while staying at Apethorpe Palace in Northamptonshire. James and Somerset’s relationship was already deteriorating, and Somerset’s opponents, including Archbishop Abbot, saw an opportunity to undermine Somerset’s power and influence.¹² The Earl’s opponents orchestrated the fateful meeting, which would ultimately be

⁶ Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*. 59.

⁷ Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*. 60.

⁸ Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*. 60.

⁹ Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*. 61.

¹⁰ Lockyer, Roger. *Buckingham, the Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham, 1592-1628 [Electronic Resource]* / Roger Lockyer. Routledge. 2014. 8.

¹¹ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 10.

¹² Jackson, *The Mirror of Great Britain*, 322.

successful at creating a connection between the king and Villiers. James would grow to be exceptionally fond of Villiers, and the young man would go on to become one of the most powerful figures in England, even being elevated to the status of Baron, then Viscount, Earl, Marquess, and then eventually Duke of Buckingham in 1623. This will be discussed further in the second chapter of this thesis, which will discuss Buckingham as a favorite of King James VI and I.

In the background of Buckingham's ascendancy, negotiations and work towards the Spanish Match, in which Prince Charles would marry the Infanta Maria Anna of Spain, were occurring. While this will be explained in great detail in the first chapter of this thesis, which discusses the motivations for and logistics of the Spanish match amongst other social and political aspects, it is important to note that Buckingham and Charles would secretly go to Spain in an attempt to win the princess over. The pair left at the end of February in 1623 and would not return until September – a dangerously long time for a favorite to be away from the monarch.¹³

A fundamental understanding on which this thesis is built upon is that it was incredibly risky for a favorite to spend an extended period of time apart from the monarch. The relationship shared between Buckingham and James was rooted in an emotional connection– which was extraordinarily difficult to maintain from a distance. Political rivals of a favorite were constantly looking for opportunities to undermine the power of the favorite for their benefit. Buckingham himself was a result of such an opportunity– as James increasingly felt distanced from the Earl of Somerset, the earl's opposition was able to position Buckingham (at the time Villiers) as a replacement who was more in line with their beliefs. This risk alone made Buckingham's journey

¹³Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *The Scapegoat: The Brilliant Brief Life of the Duke of Buckingham*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2025. 260.

to Spain a threat to his position, and when coupled with the opposition that many at Court felt towards the Match, Buckingham was facing significant challenges to his position.

In this thesis, I argue that George Villiers, the first Duke of Buckingham, was strategic and methodical in countering the negative effects of his absence in 1623. Buckingham was well aware of the risks that an extended absence posed to his precarious position as royal favorite, and it was not uncommon knowledge that his rapid rise to power and influence over the king had caused frustration amongst others at Court. Through the analysis of letters exchanged between Buckingham and James, both prior to and during their separation in 1623, as well as letters exchanged between other prominent figures, and writings by Sir Henry Wotton and Clarendon, I intend to demonstrate that there were legitimate risks to Buckingham's position throughout the duration of his separation from James, and that he was intentional in his efforts to deflect these risks rather than relying on pre-existing favoritism.

Historiography

This thesis sits at the crossroads of multiple historiographical conversations surrounding King James VI and I, the first Duke of Buckingham, and what it meant to be a royal favorite in the 17th century. Regarding James, the three key works discussing his favorites and relation to homosocial/homosexual relationships that will be utilized in developing this argument are David M. Bergeron's texts *Royal Family, Royal Lovers: King James of England and Scotland* and *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, as well as Michael B. Young's *King James and the History of Homosexuality*.¹⁴ The texts all argue in favor of James' favorites being both of

¹⁴ David Bergeron *Royal Family, Royal Lovers: King James of England and Scotland*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991; David Bergeron. *King James & Letters of Homoerotic Desire*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999; Michael Young. *King James and the History of Homosexuality*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

political and romantic interest to James, and that Buckingham was his final and, to an extent, greatest love.

David M. Bergeron's *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire* is of particular interest. Half of the text is dedicated to providing "modernized" copies of the surviving letters between James and Buckingham, as well as providing estimated dates for the correspondence. Bergeron provides in-depth contextualization and connections between the letters and previous or concurring actions. These actions are further elaborated on in his text, *Royal Family, Royal Lovers: King James of England and Scotland*, in which the chapter "England (1613-1625), Nothing but Silence," provides insight into the development of the connection between James and Buckingham.¹⁵ Ultimately, both texts provide context and details that support and argue for James being romantically inclined toward and incredibly attached to his male favorites—providing a necessary gap for this thesis to use in the discussion of Buckingham's ability and methods utilized to maintain his position as Favorite.

While royal favorites were a common occurrence under monarchical rule, what it meant to be a favorite was a constantly developing idea. Regarding royal favorites, articles from *The World of the Favourite* and *Politics, Religion, and Popularity in Early Stuart Britain* by Linda Levy Peck and Thomas Cogswell, respectively, put forth arguments about the dynamics between a monarch and their favorite(s), the power dynamics and distribution surrounding royal favorites, the background of favorites, and the representation of favorites.

The articles "Monopolizing favour: Structures of Power in the Early Seventeenth-Century English Court" by Linda Levy Peck and "The People's Love: The Duke of Buckingham and Popularity" by Thomas Cogswell establish a conversation about the evolving structures,

¹⁵ David Bergeron. "England (1613-1625), Nothing but Silence," in *Royal Family, Royal Lovers: King James of England and Scotland*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991. 124-187.

strategies, and dynamics at Court in the early seventeenth century.¹⁶ Peck discusses the changing power of the Favorite as a result of multiple factors, such as the increase in monopoly organization on behalf of the favorite, as well as the “erotic aspect of kings’ relationships with their favorites” and James’ overlap of “family, sex, and marriage in the seventeenth-century court.”¹⁷ This was especially true in the case of Buckingham. Peck also notes the “paradigm” of the view of the favorite as a “minister-favorite.”¹⁸ She discusses that, in the seventeenth-century English Court, favorites such as the Duke of Buckingham were far more influential than just a political figure, but instead spanned all areas of Court structure, and personal structure of the monarchy. Thomas Cogswell’s article centered around Buckingham’s unusual approach to popularity and examines his attitude towards the public, as well as his desire to control his image and position. Both of these articles highlight the development and changes within what it meant to perform well as a Favorite, and create a space for this thesis to discuss Buckingham’s actions and roles he undertook as Favorite.

There are also discussions about the risks to one's position as Favorite, specifically when frustrating courtiers or causing scandal. In his article, “Faction at the Early Stuart Court,” Kevin Sharpe argues that Buckingham’s incredible level of power threatened others at Court, as he had become one of the only, if not the only, person with true access to the king.¹⁹ Sharpe argues that this made Buckingham as politically dangerous as the Earl of Essex – who ultimately fell from grace. This political power frustrated others at Court who sought to be close with the king, and placed Buckingham in a precarious position.

¹⁶ Linda Peck. “Monopolizing favour: Structures of Power in the Early Seventeenth-Century English Court” in *The World of the Favourite*. Yale University Press, 1999. 54-70; Thomas Cogswell “The People’s Love: The Duke of Buckingham and Popularity” in *Politics, Religion, and Popularity in Early Stuart Britain*. Cambridge University Press, 2002. 211-234.

¹⁷ Peck, “Monopolizing favour” in *The World of the Favourite*. 63.

¹⁸ Peck, “Monopolizing favour” in *The World of the Favourite*. 65.

¹⁹ Kevin Sharpe. “Faction at the Early Stuart Court.” In *History Today* 33 (October 1983).

The instability of being a favorite is further exemplified in Alastair Bellany's text, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England*, in which Bellany details Robert Carr, the Earl of Somerset's, fall from grace after being accused of, and imprisoned, for his involvement in the Overbury Affair.²⁰ He also details the lasting political effects of Somerset's fall— most notably implying that the fall of Somerset set the stage for the future fall of Buckingham. In doing so, Bellany puts forward the idea that Buckingham was in an unstable position from the beginning, making him even more susceptible to losing his position as Favorite.

Sharpe and Bellany's arguments create a narrative that Buckingham was in a very risky position when deciding to distance himself from James for an extended period of time. In doing so, he greatly decreased his ability to defend himself should others attempt to use his absence as an opportunity to sour James' opinion of him. Through this narrative, Sharpe and Bellany create space for this thesis' research regarding how Buckingham would have countered this weakened ability and worked to maintain his powerful position under James.

When looking at the greater historiography about the Spanish Match, the conversations center around the greater social, political, and religious complexities that made the match so difficult. In Robert Cross' article, “‘The Onely Sovereigne Medecine’: Religious Politics and Political Culture in the British–Spanish Match, 1596–1625,” it is argued that the Spanish Match was a much larger and intricate aspect of James' reign and it served as a major diplomatic aspiration for the King. This creates a narrative of the Spanish Match as a significant goal of James', establishing space for this thesis to discuss the negative implications of Buckingham and Charles making secret plans and ultimately failing to “woo” the princess, for not just James and

²⁰ Alastair, Bellany. *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Charles, but the reputation of Buckingham and how that decision held the potential to negatively impact Buckingham's position as favorite, but did not.

The greater historiographical context surrounding James VI and I, Buckingham, their relationship, and the evolving nature of what it meant to be a royal favorite open up the conversation for this thesis to discuss how Buckingham performed as Favorite, preserved his position, and maintained power during his time in Spain for the Spanish Match.

Primary Sources

To develop its argument, this thesis will utilize five main primary sources. First, the letters exchanged between James and Buckingham both prior to and during their separation in 1623 offer extraordinary insight into the development and maintenance of their relationship. The letters will be utilized to analyze differences between subject matter, terms of endearment, and language to understand any changes brought about by separation. There are multiple letters written by Buckingham during this period that indicate efforts on his behalf to remind James of their closeness. In one letter, written in August of 1623— after months of the pair being apart— Buckingham references Saint John (the Beloved Disciple) who writes about the one that he loves, which in his case was Jesus. Buckingham writes about the one James loves most, which is Buckingham himself. While this is teasing and a bit witty, it also calls back to a previous statement that James made in 1617, which was loosely that he “loved the Earl of Buckingham more than all other men and more than all who were there present” and that “Christ had his John” and he “had his George.”²¹ Callbacks such as these indicate that Buckingham was seeking to remind James of the affection he feels towards his favorite.

²¹Young, Michael B. *King James and the History of Homosexuality*. 81.

A limitation of the letters is that they are not all dated, and a fair portion from both Buckingham and James are dedicated towards information regarding the Spanish Match and Charles. However, these factors can also contribute to the argument of the thesis, as they indicate that Buckingham held a position of power in regards to passing along information and relating to his developing connection with Charles.

The letters of John Chamberlain to Sir Dudley Carleton provide insight into the opinions of Buckingham and how they develop upon his departure for Spain, as well as the reaction and feelings at Court surrounding his separation and the increase in his rank despite his absence. The source is weakened slightly as it is only detailing the thoughts of one man and the people he is around, but as he was a wealthy and influential figure the source still maintains its efficacy in validating Buckingham's relevance at court.

Two contemporary tracts on Buckingham also provide insights about his reputation and reported actions. Both the Earl of Clarendon's *The Characters of Robert Earl of Essex, Favourite to Queen Elizabeth, and George D. of Buckingham, Favourite to K. James I. and K. Ch. I: With a Comparison*, and Sir Henry Wotton's *A Parallell Betweene Robert Late Earle of Essex, and George Late Duke of Buckingham* substantiate the claim that Buckingham was aware of the risks a Favorite faced when separated from the monarch for an extended period of time. Wotton's *Parallell* serves as a comparison of the lives and positions of the Earl of Essex and the Duke of Buckingham. Wotton worked for Essex and had direct knowledge of Buckingham, making this an interesting source for gaining an understanding of Buckingham's perception of his own position and the dangers of his time away from James. Clarendon's *Comparison* notes the differences between the two men yet similarities in their positions and stories. Despite both of these sources being published after Buckingham's assassination, they are built upon ideas and

information that would have been circulating during Buckingham's life, and he would have known the parallels between himself and Essex.

Chapters

The first chapter of this thesis will explore the mechanics of the Spanish Match. Specifically, I intend to discuss the political and social aspects that made the match complex—most notably religious differences— as well as the factors that ultimately resulted in its failure to produce a marriage. This chapter will provide necessary context for later chapters in the thesis, as well as show the complexities of the match, why Buckingham and Charles felt the need to travel to Spain despite the risks it presented, and why its ultimate failure was a catastrophic embarrassment for James, Buckingham, and Charles.

The second chapter of this thesis will discuss Buckingham as a favorite. The first part of this chapter will discuss his relationship with the king— from 1614 to 1623— and his changing status under James, as well as what it meant to be a royal favorite. First to be detailed will be Buckingham's developing power following the pair's first meeting in 1614. The chapter will first follow his evolving titles and increasing influence, as well as the changing opinions of Buckingham held by those at Court. To do this, the chapter will utilize biographical information from the Hughes-Hallet biography, *The Scapegoat: The Brilliant Brief Life of the Duke of Buckingham*, and the Clare Jackson biography, *A Mirror of Great Britain: A Life of King James VI and I*. These biographies will be utilized primarily to develop an accurate timeline of Buckingham's developing power and influence within the court, as well as note the strategic methods that were utilized to bring him to a developing position in the first place.

This chapter will then argue that Buckingham was different from other favorites, as he entered into a unique political setting— as discussed in the works of Bellamy and Sharpe— and who combined the roles of mistress and political confidant/advisor to the king. To develop the greater picture of Buckingham as a favorite, this chapter will then utilize the letters exchanged between Buckingham and James after meeting but prior to Buckingham’s departure for Spain in February of 1623. These letters will provide insight regarding the rhetoric Buckingham utilized when speaking to James, and will provide necessary context for the third chapter, which explores Buckingham’s time and efforts made in Spain.

The third and final chapter of this thesis will utilize the context established in the first two chapters to discuss Buckingham’s position as Favorite while in Spain for the Spanish Match. Utilizing Sir Henry Wotton’s *A Parallell Betweene Robert Late Earle of Essex, and George Late Duke of Buckingham*, it will be established that Buckingham was aware of the risks an extended absence posed to his position—which was largely built on emotional intimacy that is dependent on a close proximity.²² Buckingham was advised by Francis Bacon, who was a client of the Earl of Essex prior to his downfall. Buckingham, knowing the story of Essex and where similarities may exist in their situations, would have made efforts to prevent a lost connection or an opportunity for someone to soil his relationship with James. The Earl of Clarendon’s *The Characters of Robert Earl of Essex, Favourite to Queen Elizabeth, and George D. of Buckingham, Favourite to K. James I. and K. Ch. I: With a Comparison* will be used similarly, as it reinforces the comparison between Buckingham and Essex and that Buckingham was aware of

²² Henry Wotton. *A Parallel Betweene Robert Late Earle of Essex, and George Late Duke of Buckingham*. Printed in London. 1641.

these comparisons.²³ This chapter will argue that Buckingham was strategic in maintaining his position as favorite as a result of this awareness.

In order to argue for Buckingham's strategic maintenance, this chapter will utilize the letters exchanged between Buckingham and James from February to September of 1623 and compare his use of language and rhetorical differences to exemplify an intentional change made by Buckingham. This chapter will also examine interactions between James and Buckingham's wife, who would have been dependent on Buckingham maintaining his position as Favorite and would therefore be willing to make efforts to help him. Additionally, this chapter will use *The Letters of John Chamberlain* to exemplify instances of people becoming frustrated with Buckingham's increasing power, further validating the necessity of strategy for Buckingham's continued success.²⁴

The goal of this thesis is to demonstrate that George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham, did not travel to Spain blinded to the risks of his absence, and that he was strategic, intentional, and methodical in maintaining his position as the extremely powerful favorite of King James VI and I. Buckingham's journey to making it to the English Court was built upon the intentions and strategies of his mother. His introduction to James as a replacement for Somerset was a strategic choice of Somerset's opposition. Buckingham's ability to succeed in the nearly impossible task of maintaining a position as Favorite despite months of separation from the monarch was not merely a coincidence, but a methodical decision.

²³ Edward Clarendon, earl of. *The Characters of Robert Earl of Essex, Favourite to Queen Elizabeth, and George D. of Buckingham, Favourite to K. James I. and K. Ch. I: With a Comparison. By the Right Honourable Edward Late Earl of Clarendon.* London 1706.

²⁴ John Chamberlain and Norman Egbert McClure. *The Letters of John Chamberlain / Edited with an Introduction by Norman Egbert McClure.* The American philosophical society, 1939.

The Spanish Match

The Spanish Match was a drawn-out and controversial diplomatic endeavor of King James I. Soon after beginning his reign as King of England, James was first approached by the Spanish who offered a match between James' eldest son, Prince Henry, and the eldest daughter of Felipe III: the Infanta Ana.²⁵ Many Spaniards were hopeful that James would convert to Catholicism, and in their preliminary offer put forth terms and conditions that would push the English Crown away from Protestant ideals and towards a Catholic position. Specifically, in order to even proceed with a discussion of marriage, Spain established the condition that Henry must be raised in the Spanish capital as well as convert to Catholicism.²⁶

Marriage as a method of diplomacy was far from a foreign concept. Dynastic marriage was a common means of creating strong international alliances.²⁷ Such an offer provided an opportunity to create a mutually beneficial relationship and to resolve conflicts without the greater cost of war. The initial Spanish offer— in exchange for Henry's conversion to Catholicism and control over the young heir's upbringing— occurred in 1604. While Spain likely did not expect England to accept these terms, the extension of such an offer indicated goodwill on their behalf. The uncertainty of the match also had its roots in the fact that the Infanta was the heiress presumptive.²⁸ Due to Felipe III's lack of a son, it was imperative for the Infanta to marry a Catholic, as it was likely her husband would inherit the crown matrimonial of Spain. In 1611, however, the situation had changed. Following the birth of Infante don Felipe in 1605, the Infanta Ana was no longer the heiress presumptive and therefore was deemed a much more

²⁵ Glyn Redworth. *The Prince and The Infanta: The Cultural Politics of the Spanish Match*. Yale University Press, 2003. 8.

²⁶ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 9.

²⁷ Steve Murdoch, "Marital Problems? Stuart Alliances, Scottish Politics and the Protestant North, 1603-1641," essay, in *Stuart Marriage Diplomacy: Dynastic Politics in Their European Context 1604-1630*, ed. Valentina Caldari and Sara J. Wolfson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2018), 157–72.

²⁸ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 18.

realistic match for Henry.²⁹ Feeling more confident in England's position to negotiate, James then sent John Digby to Spain to request the Infanta Ana's hand in marriage for Prince Henry.³⁰

The new issue to arise came in the form of the young French monarch, Louis XIII, to whom the Infanta was already betrothed. In order to not flat-out end negotiations with England, the younger Infanta Maria Anna was offered instead— again, with the condition that Prince Henry convert to Catholicism.³¹ Unwilling to meet this condition, James instead turned his attention towards France. Despite being a Catholic nation, France needed protection from the encirclement of the Spanish Hapsburgs and Viennese-ruled Holy Roman Empire. Thus, they would have been more willing to make a match with a Protestant Prince.³² Additionally, an offer of a match came from the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo II, who proposed his sister, Caterina de' Medici, as a potential bride for Prince Henry.³³ Even more, he would include a settlement of 1,000,000 crowns. Then, to further complicate the situation, James' ambassador in Paris, Sir Thomas Edmondes, reported that Marie de' Medici was considering a large settlement of 800,000 crowns if Henry married her daughter, Christine.³⁴ This came shortly after Queen Anne asserted that she would rather a “princess of France without a dower to a Florentine Princess with any amount of gold they might offer.”³⁵

The financial opportunity of these matches cannot be overstated. Compared to the previous reign of Queen Elizabeth, the royal expenditure increased rapidly under James. Certain expenses were necessary— such as supporting Queen Anne and the setting up of a separate establishment for Prince Henry.³⁶ Other expenses, however, were the result of James' tendency to

²⁹ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 19.

³⁰ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 20.

³¹ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 10.

³² Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 10.

³³ Clare Jackson, *The Mirror of Great Britain*, 317.

³⁴ Jackson, *The Mirror of Great Britain*, 317.

³⁵ Jackson, *The Mirror of Great Britain*, 317.

³⁶ Roger Lockyer. *The Early Stuarts : A Political History of England, 1603-1642*. 2nd ed. Longman, 1999. 31.

be overly generous— especially towards those he favored. Just four years into his reign, despite England being in serious debt and with the annual deficit continuing to rise, James paid off not just his own debts, but also the debts of three of close figures: Viscount Haddington, Lord Hay, and the Earl of Montgomery, which ultimately cost £44,000.³⁷ Attempts, however, were made to limit this excessive spending on favorites.³⁸ This was exemplified when James attempted to give his favorite of the time— Robert Carr— £20,000 as a gift. The extremity of this gift was not well received by many, and James was ultimately persuaded to instead gift Carr the manor of Sherborne.³⁹

Although England was much richer than his native Scotland, James did not inherit a wealthy nation. The conflicts with Spain during Elizabeth’s reign were very costly, leaving behind a debt of around £420,000 and a severely underfunded monarchy.⁴⁰ Despite this, James continued to increase the royal expenditure.⁴¹ Much of the English crown’s funding came from the land it owned, the collection of tonnage and poundage, other customs duties, and parliamentary taxation. These sources of income all hung in a careful balance— a balance that, when inherited by a man who assumed his role as king under the impression that the English crown was a wealthy one, was easily thrown into disarray.⁴² While James’ perception was corrected, he struggled to restrain his spending— whether on himself or in the form of gifts that benefited those around him.⁴³ James was soon spending £400,000 a year in peacetime, a significant increase when compared to Elizabeth’s £300,000. The expenditures continued to rise,

³⁷ Lockyer, *The Early Stuarts*, 32.

³⁸ Lockyer, *The Early Stuarts*, 32.

³⁹ Lockyer, *The Early Stuarts*, 32.

⁴⁰ Christopher Durston. *James I*. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 1993. 31

⁴¹ Kelsey Flynn. “The Atlantic Politics of Early Stuart Diplomacy,” essay, in *Stuart Marriage Diplomacy: Dynastic Politics in Their European Context 1604-1630*, ed. Valentina Caldari and Sara J. Wolfson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2018), 110.

⁴² Durston, *James I*, 41.

⁴³ Durston, *James I*, 41.

and by 1610, the Scots that had relocated to England following James' ascension to the throne had received nearly £90,000 in gifts, £133,000 in old debts, and over £10,000 a year in pensions.⁴⁴ By the mid-1610s, James was spending £550,000 and would have most certainly benefited from the significant financial opportunities being offered as a counter to the Spanish Match.

Beyond financial considerations, another obstacle in the match became apparent in November of 1612. Prince Henry unexpectedly passed away as a result of typhoid fever.⁴⁵ James was, understandably, deeply impacted by the sudden loss of his son— with there being record of him crying out that “Henry is dead” and exhibiting emotional distress.⁴⁶ However, despite his grief, James understood that his new heir, the young Prince Charles, would become the new topic of discussion when negotiating marriage matches. Prince Charles did not carry the same public reputation as Henry. Even after becoming heir to the throne, there was a notable lack of self-confidence within the Prince.⁴⁷ Despite this, negotiations for a bride for Charles continued.

A key figure in the continued negotiations was Diego Sarmiento de Acuña, the lord of Gondomar.⁴⁸ As of 1612, Gondomar was the Spanish Ambassador at James' court, and he served as a main point of contact in the negotiations between Spain and England. After reaching England in 1613, Gondomar formed a strong relationship with James. Furthermore, Gondomar did not just connect with the king, but also with the duke of Buckingham and Prince Charles— a degree of connection that could only be established through time and intimacy.⁴⁹ Much of Gondomar's initial intent in England was rooted in ensuring Britain's closer links with France

⁴⁴ Durston, *James I*, 33.

⁴⁵ Jackson, *The Mirror of Great Britain*, 13.

⁴⁶ Hughes-Hallet. *The Scapegoat*, 59.

⁴⁷ Pauline Gregg. *King Charles I*. 1st U.S. ed. University of California Press, 1984. 3.

⁴⁸ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 12.

⁴⁹ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 13.

and Protestant Germany did not ultimately threaten Spanish interests.⁵⁰ However, following James' dissolution of the 1614 "Added Parliament," Gondomar found himself in a position to reiterate the potential benefits of a marriage alliance between Britain and Spain.⁵¹

In his discussion of the continued benefits of the Match, Gondomar leaned into arguments surrounding the English Catholics. Arguing that the English Catholics were James' most loyal subjects, Gondomar asserted that if James placed less importance on the demands of Parliament to increase fines for non-attendance at church, James would find the recusant support to be far more significant than what the members of Parliament could offer.⁵² This assertion rested upon an established Spanish demand within the match, which was increased tolerance for English Catholics. In utilizing this argument, Gondomar implied two things: first, that the Spanish dowry would be significant, as it would help to free James from parliamentary taxation, and, second, that the Spanish Match was feasible. As previously mentioned, debates about whether the previous offers of a match were serious propositions did occur, and Gondomar's willingness to present it as a solution to James' troubles implied that it was a viable offer.⁵³ This allowed for the match to continue developing— even if the conditions were unclear— and for the relationship between Gondomar and James to continue strengthening. It also revamped the conversation and debate (both for and against) the match in Protestant and Catholic circles, with the diplomatic advantages being weighed against the potential societal changes that the match could bring with it.

The diplomatic intentions of the Spanish Match were lost on most of James' subjects. For those who did not support the match, the potential repercussions of cementing ties with the

⁵⁰ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 13.

⁵¹ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 13.

⁵² Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 15.

⁵³ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 15.

religious enemy were horrifying.⁵⁴ To many, Philip IV's insistence on legal toleration for English Catholics posed a risk to what they believed to be the true religion. Additionally, as James' grandchildren would likely be raised Catholic as a result of the Match, there were fears that England would be permanently roped into the Spanish diplomatic orbit.⁵⁵ These fears caused tensions in English political and religious circles, and there was an increase in faction-fighting as discussions and negotiations regarding the Match continued.⁵⁶ The anxieties and conflict put forth by a potential match with Catholic Spain pushed many English Protestants to recall the "horrors" of the last time an English monarch had married a Catholic— calling back to Queen Mary's marriage to Philip II seventy-years earlier— and further validating fears of rebellion should the Spanish Match be successful.⁵⁷

Beyond fears of the Spanish Match breeding rebellion in England, there were apprehensions regarding the intentions of Spain. Specifically, as the negotiations continued to drag on, many began to wonder if the Spanish were intentionally prolonging discussions as a means of distracting James from greater international conflicts so that the Hapsburgs could defeat the Germans Protestants.⁵⁸ As conflict intensified in the Palatinate, James' family became directly involved. In 1613 James' daughter Elizabeth married Frederick V. Frederick, who was initially the Elector Palatine, would be invited to become King of Bohemia by the country's Protestant estate-holders following the revolt against and ultimate deposition of their Catholic king-elect, Ferdinand of Syria, in 1619.⁵⁹ Elizabeth's connection to and involvement in the

⁵⁴ Durston, *James I*, 62.

⁵⁵ Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell. *The Murder of King James I*. Yale University Press, 2015. 3.

⁵⁶ Durston, *James I*, 62.

⁵⁷ Durston, *James I*, 62.

⁵⁸ Bellany and Cogswell. *The Murder of King James I*. 3.

⁵⁹ Jackson, *The Mirror of Great Britain*, 379.

political affairs of Bohemia pulled the House of Stuart into the conflict in Central Europe— over which it did not have significant influence.⁶⁰

While James attempted to separate himself from the actions of his daughter and son-in-law, mounting pressures from both English Protestants and Spain put him in a difficult position. Protestants were pinning hopes of James pursuing a more Protestant-based foreign policy because of his family’s involvement, and the 1621 Parliament session’s predominantly evangelical Lower House greatly respected and supported the King and Queen of Bohemia.⁶¹ Much of this support for the Protestant king and queen was rooted in the commonly-held perception that the conflict was between the “good” Protestants and the “evil” Catholics.⁶² In contrast to Protestant hopes and encouragements, Spain, on the other hand, was steadfast in its insistence that James should try to settle the crisis in the Palatinate, as it began to threaten the Spanish plans to renew previous hostilities with the United Provinces.⁶³ To Felipe III, stretching out discussions of a marriage alliance between England and Spain would serve as a means to discourage hostile actions by the father-in-law of Frederick V— leading to suspicions that Spain was merely utilizing the opportunity as a chance to influence the political decisions of James, rather than truly arrange a marriage alliance.

As Charles matured and entered his twenties, he became restless and began to become more persistent regarding his match with the Spanish Infanta. By 1622, negotiations surrounding the match had been taking place for roughly eight years, with little to show as a result.⁶⁴ At this point, the English had ensured that the children of a marriage between Charles and the Infanta

⁶⁰ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 20.

⁶¹ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 20.

⁶² Peter Wilson, “The Stuarts, the Palatinate and the Thirty Years’ War,” essay, in *Stuart Marriage Diplomacy: Dynastic Politics in Their European Context 1604-1630*, ed. Valentina Caldari and Sara J. Wolfson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2018), 142.

⁶³ Redworth, *The Prince and The Infanta*, 21.

⁶⁴ Durston, *James I*, 72.

would not be baptized Roman Catholic, although they would remain in their mother's care throughout childhood.⁶⁵ Additionally, the Spaniards were asking for Charles' conversion to Catholicism as an alternative to their previous ask of free worship for English Catholics. For their part, the English were unyielding on the dowry size of the Infanta as well as Spanish support in recovering the Palatinate for James' son-in-law, Frederick.⁶⁶ Charles, personally, had not shown a significant interest in the Infanta herself or in the actual marriage, but was supportive of the political alliance, the financial gain presented by the Spanish dowry, which sat at around £600,000, and the ability of the match to assist his sister and brother-in-law.⁶⁷

A significant motivating factor for James and Charles, at this point, was involvement with the Palatinate and the ability of the Spanish Match to resolve the issues between the Protestants within the Palatinate and the greater Hapsburg powers. Given the direct involvement of James' daughter and son-in-law with the conflict, it was imperative that a solution arise. This urgency was felt by Gondomar. Despite the King's and the Prince's relatively close relationship with Gondomar, frustrations regarding his unfounded promises surrounding the Palatinate arose. In 1620, Spanish troops invaded the Lower Palatinate, despite promises that they would not do so.⁶⁸ This resulted in tense meetings between James and Gondomar, in which James reminded the ambassador that there had been a promise against aggression.⁶⁹ Gondomar continued his pattern of putting forth large (and often unsubstantiated) promises on behalf of Spain and encouraging the Spanish Match. It cannot be denied that a successful match between Britain and Spain—coordinated through Gondomar's position as ambassador—would have elevated Gondomar's

⁶⁵ Durston, *James I*, 73.

⁶⁶ Durston, *James I*, 76.

⁶⁷ Durston, *James I*, 73.

⁶⁸ Porfiro Camañes, "War, Diplomacy and Stability in the North of Europe in the Early Seventeenth Century," essay, in *Stuart Marriage Diplomacy: Dynastic Politics in Their European Context 1604-1630*, ed. Valentina Caldari and Sara J. Wolfson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2018), 99.

⁶⁹ Camañes, "War, Diplomacy and Stability in the North of Europe in the Early Seventeenth Century." 99.

social status. This likely served as a motivator for the Spanish ambassador, as his dedication to the match was a significant factor in its ability to remain in negotiation, despite the broken Spanish promise regarding the invasion of the Palatinate.⁷⁰ Gondomar also leaned into the desire of James and Charles to resolve the conflict in the Palatinate by implying that a marriage between Charles and the Infanta would nullify the invasion and restore the Palatinate to Frederick— despite the fact that the discussed marriage treaty did not affirm these statements.⁷¹

By 1623, nearly twenty-years after the initial, uncertain offer of a marriage alliance between England and Spain, Charles and Buckingham had put together a secret plan to finally conclude the lingering negotiations. Believing that negotiations could not be delayed if the prince were to be physically present at the Spanish Court, the pair presented an idea to James that followed this logic— in which, the two men would travel to Spain and successfully complete the match before then bringing the Infanta back to England with them.⁷² Upon first hearing of the plan, James believed the idea to be a touching one, but further analysis of the plan showed many flaws.⁷³ First and foremost, it was incredibly improper and a poor diplomatic decision. To arrive unannounced and in an unplanned manner would go against conventional standards. Furthermore, it put Charles at risk of essentially offering himself as a hostage to the Spanish Court— a situation that would greatly upset the anti-Spanish groups in the English Court.⁷⁴ An additional flaw in the pair’s plan was that it put him at risk of injury, illness, harm, and death. Because Charles was heir to the throne, such risks were unwelcome, and James was hesitant to risk his only son’s wellbeing through the approval of such a plan.⁷⁵ Upon the expression of his disapproval of the plan, James found himself being backed into a corner by the arguments of

⁷⁰ Gregg, *King Charles I*, 72.

⁷¹ Gregg, *King Charles I*, 72.

⁷² Gregg, *King Charles I*, 78.

⁷³ Gregg, *King Charles I*, 78.

⁷⁴ Gregg, *King Charles I*, 78.

⁷⁵ Gregg, *King Charles I*, 78.

Charles and Buckingham. Ultimately, the pair went against James' wishes, and on February 17th, 1623, Prince Charles and Buckingham began what would ultimately be a complete failure of a journey to the Spanish Court.⁷⁶

Buckingham as a Favorite

The introduction of the young and handsome George Villiers and the middle-aged King James VI was not one of coincidence or fate. George Abbott, Archbishop of Canterbury, was the leading force in arranging the meeting of Villiers and James.⁷⁷ At the time of their meeting, James already had a male favorite— Robert Carr, the first Earl of Somerset. Despite the relationship already being in a rough position, many figures (such as Abbott) were searching for ways to lessen the influence of the Howards on the king and in Court.⁷⁸ Carr had strong ties to the Howards for multiple reasons, with his marriage to Frances Howard being the most significant. However, even prior to his marriage, Carr had an alliance with Henry Howard— who was controversially pro-Spanish and pro-Catholic.⁷⁹ These points of alliance worried figures at Court, who were in search of a new favorite for James, ideally one with less connection to Spain and Catholicism.

Carr's position was in a precarious state from the start of Villiers and James' affiliation. In early 1615, James wrote to Carr, pleading with him to change his behaviors in order to maintain James' love, stating that:

...the light of my heart of this burden is not now the only cause that makes
me press you indelayedly to ease my grief, for your own furious assaults of me at

⁷⁶ Gregg, *King Charles I*, 72.

⁷⁷ Bergeron. *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*. 99

⁷⁸ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 99.

⁷⁹ John Cannon. *A Dictionary of British History*. Oxford University Press, 2009. 34.

unseasonable hours hath now made it known to so many that ye have been in some gross discourse with me as there must be some exterior signs of the amendments of your behavior towards me. These observations have been made and collected upon your long being with me at unseasonable hours, loud speaking on both parts, and their observation of my sadness upon your parting, and want of rest.⁸⁰

Letters such as this exemplify that James' love heavily depended upon the clear reciprocation of his affections and a deep dedication to him, through both time and expression. At this point, the scandal surrounding Carr— as well as his poor ability to satisfy the emotional needs of the King— created an opening for Villiers.

The arrangement of James and Villiers was met with success, and as the Earl of Somerset's power declined, Villiers' power grew. While there did exist a brief moment in which James desired to hold onto Carr and bring Villiers into his life, the rising controversy surrounding Carr and his wife, as well as the intense nature of James' favoritism prevented such an arrangement.⁸¹ Villiers, who was soon elevated to the Earl of Buckingham, developed a strong connection with both James' heart and mind, and by 1617 James was openly declaring his love for Buckingham to members of the Privy Council, claiming that:

I, James, am neither a god nor an angel, but a man like any other.

Therefore I act like a man, and confess to loving those dear to me more than other men. You may be sure that I love the Earl of Buckingham more than anyone else, and more than you who are here assembled. I wish to speak in my own behalf,

⁸⁰ James I, King of England, and G. P. V. Akrigg. *Letters of King James VI & I / Edited, with an Introduction, by G.P.V. Akrigg*. University of California Press, 1984. 338

⁸¹ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 99.

and not have it thought to be a defect, for Jesus Christ did the same, and therefore I cannot be blamed. Christ had his John and I have my George.⁸²

James' care for Buckingham was demonstrated through both his actions and his words. Through his actions, James rapidly elevated Buckingham and placed him in positions initially unexpected for a young, untitled man. In April of 1615, Buckingham (at the time Villiers) was elevated from his position as a royal cup bearer through the act of being knighted. In 1616, Buckingham was made Master of the Horse before being made a Knight of the Garter just mere months later. In August of 1616, he was officially created Baron of Whaddon and Viscount Villiers. Months later, in January of 1617, James further promoted him to the position and title of Earl of Buckingham. One year later, Buckingham was elevated to Marquess, before receiving a final elevation to Duke in 1623.⁸³

Being a favorite was not an uncommon phenomenon in the 17th century. As Buckingham rose through the ranks, other young men were having similar experiences in other nations, such as Spain and France. The Spanish Count of Olivares and the French Cardinal Richelieu both entered their respective courts in 1615-1616, although it would take the better part of a decade for both men to reach their fullest potential of influence and power.⁸⁴ These men held power and influence, and also faced opposition as a result. Buckingham, through maintaining an understanding of greater European politics (as well as eventual interactions with the men), would have seen their developing stations and been mindful of what being a favorite looked like across Europe.

⁸² Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 104.

⁸³ Lockyer. *Buckingham*, 22.

⁸⁴ J. H. Elliot. *Richelieu and Olivares*. Cambridge University Press, 1984. 13

However, where Buckingham differed from Olivares and Richelieu is that, to an extent, he combined the roles of mistress and Favorite for James. This created a homosocial relationship between the two, which granted Buckingham a significant degree of not just positional power, but emotional and proximal power. The pair's attachment was demonstrated not just through James' willingness to elevate and promote Buckingham, but also through his vulnerable letters. In a letter written in December of 1622, following his becoming aware of an impending extended absence of Buckingham's, James penned a deeply tender letter, in which he stated:

I am now so miserable a coward, as I do nothing but weep and mourn; for I protest to God I rode this afternoon a great way in the park without speaking to anybody and the tears trickling down my cheeks... But alas, what shall I do at our parting? The only small comfort I can have will be to pry in thy defects with the eye of an enemy, and of every mote to make a mountain, and so harden my heart against thy absence. But this little malice is like jealousy, proceeding from a sweet root; but in one point it overcometh it, for as it proceeds from love so it cannot but end in love... The Lord of heaven and earth to bless thee, and my sweet daughter, and my sweet little grandchild...and send thee a happy return, both now and though knows when, to thy dear dad and Christian gossip.⁸⁵

Being a recipient of an education regarding Court politics, as well as having been groomed for a role rooted in gaining popularity, Buckingham would have been focused on appealing to the emotional nature of James' connection to him. This was especially important when taking into account that one aspect of Carr's downfall had been the growing emotional distance between him and James. Utilizing this knowledge, Buckingham frequently wrote back

⁸⁵ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 150.

to James, especially in times of absence. In an undated letter, Buckingham affirms his devotion to James. The letter, addressed to his “dear Dad and Gossip,” states:

Your last command was I should write merrily and short. How may you expect of performance of this from me, having filled my heart so full of thoughts? For my reception yesterday when I came...I entertained myself your unworthy servant with this dispute, whether you loved me now (my ever dear master, here give me leave to say, a full heart must either vent itself or break, and that oftentimes the senses are better expressed in absence and by letter than otherwise: you know full thoughts cause long parentheses) better than at the time which I shall never forget at Farnham, where the bed's head could not be found between the master and his dog...To conclude, these thoughts are never likely to break your faithful servant's heart, which whensoever it shall be truly and thoroughly searched, shall be found full of love, faith, and obedience to you - in one thing excepted, that. I will not be so hastily rich as you would make me, though covetously I will make myself so in this, eternally to deserve your blessing, which I humbly crave...⁸⁶

Buckingham's letter seeks to satisfy all of James' emotional needs— calling back to time shared together (as well as, as argued by modern historians such as David M. Bergeron, implying a deeply intimate or even sexual moment between the pair), expressing his heart's devotions and exemplifying deep contemplation over the King's words and requests.⁸⁷ Additionally, he appealed to the small interests and affections of James. Notably, he signs the letter as James' “most humble slave and dog.” James had a strong fondness of dogs, and had previously attached

⁸⁶ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 179.

⁸⁷ Bergeron, *Royal Family, Royal Lovers*, 166.

canine affiliations to other influences in his life (as exemplified by his referring to the Earl of Salisbury as his “little beagle”).⁸⁸ Being James’ humble dog (and slave) exhibits a degree of complete loyalty that James would have been seeking in a favorite. Additionally, Buckingham signed his letters as “Steenie” which called back to an affectionate nickname given to him by James. ‘Steenie’ served as an abbreviation for Stephen— a reference to Saint Stephen, who was known for being exceptionally beautiful.⁸⁹ Buckingham’s consistent attention to the detailed needs of James served as a means of solidifying his position and cementing his proximity to James.

James’ elevations of Buckingham opened up numerous doors for the young man, especially opportunities for beneficial marriages. In 1619, after being made a marquess, Buckingham began negotiating a marriage to Katherine Manners.⁹⁰ Katherine’s family, despite having been involved with controversy surrounding the Essex rising towards the end of Elizabeth’s reign, had accumulated a significant amount of money and was in a position of great wealth.⁹¹ Prior to the controversy, the Manners family had acquired the Earldom of Rutland as well as made profitable investments. This, coupled with her father— the sixth Earl of Rutland’s— decision to marry the heiress of a rich gentleman, meant that Katherine was in a position to provide great financial gain to Buckingham through marriage.⁹²

Katherine was not the only potential bride positioned towards Buckingham, but he was far more dedicated to marrying her than the other young women that people attempted to arrange him with.⁹³ By August of 1619, negotiations between Buckingham and the earl of Rutland had

⁸⁸ Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, 115.

⁸⁹ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 128.

⁹⁰ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 58.

⁹¹ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 58.

⁹² Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 58.

⁹³ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 58.

progressed, but they were halted by one significant factor: religion. Rutland had converted to Catholicism, and his daughter was a Catholic as well.⁹⁴ While Buckingham was tolerant towards Catholics, his position as the favorite of James—the head of the Protestant Church of England—created issues within the negotiations. In order to resolve these conflicts, which had also grown to encapsulate disagreements over the transactional aspect of the marriage as well, mediators were brought in. One mediator, John Williams, was one of James' chaplains, and accounts note that James had all but forced him to work alongside Buckingham and Rutland to bring the two conflicting sides to an agreement.⁹⁵

Buckingham turned to James once again in 1620 with issues regarding marriage to Katherine. In March of that year, scandal arose when Katherine slept at the house of Buckingham's mother while Buckingham was there. Rutland, furious, demanded Buckingham marry his daughter. While he may have desired a marriage to Katherine, Buckingham did not enjoy being ordered about and attempted to cut the arrangement off entirely.⁹⁶ As a favorite, Buckingham was headstrong and did not have a reputation for morality at Court. Thus, as a response to Rutland's anger, he utilized his influence over James to ask for assistance in reconciling the father and daughter so that he could eventually marry Katherine on his own, more positive terms.⁹⁷

Buckingham and Katherine married on May 16th, 1620, and the marriage was undoubtedly beneficial for Buckingham. His new wife's dowry included £10,000 in cash, as well as roughly £4,000 a year in land.⁹⁸ Additionally, the new connection to an established, wealthy family greatly benefitted Buckingham's social standing. However,

⁹⁴ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 59.

⁹⁵ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 59.

⁹⁶ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 59.

⁹⁷ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 60.

⁹⁸ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 60.

all of the benefits Buckingham received through matrimony would not have been made accessible to him had it not been for James' extreme generosity in elevating his position, which granted him financial opportunity and growth, and his willingness to intervene in the negotiations and conflicts between Buckingham and the Earl of Rutland.

James also demonstrated a strong support for the pair and their marriage— an affirming action that overpowered the controversy and conflict of the match's negotiations. Following the wedding, on May 17th, 1620, James wrote to Buckingham to convey his congratulations and blessings towards the marriage, stating:

Thy dear dad sends thee his blessing this morning and also to his daughter. The Lord of Heaven send you a sweet and blithe wakening, all kind of comfort in your sanctified bed, and bless the fruits thereof that I may have sweet bedchamber boys to play me with, and this my daily prayer, sweet heart. When thou rises, keep thee from importunity of people that may trouble thy mind, that at meeting I may see thy white teeth shine upon me, and so brear me comfortable company in my journey. And so God bless thee, hoping though will not forget to read over again my former letter.⁹⁹

The messy negotiation process and controversies that arose as a result meant that the support of the King was incredibly significant for the couple— Buckingham especially. The scandal leading up to their union, as well as the risks presented by Katherine's Catholic associations held the potential to cause doubts for James or distance between him and Buckingham. This could have given Buckingham's growing opposition an opportunity to tarnish James' view of him. Therefore, having the clear support of James provided Buckingham a sense of security regarding his position, titles, and both financial as well as social security.

⁹⁹ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 149.

Buckingham also utilized his developing role as the favorite to elevate his family members. His half-brother, Sir Edward Villiers, would eventually be the Master of the Mint, but prior to this reaped significant financial benefits from his brother's closeness with the King.¹⁰⁰ Following his losses when the gold and silver thread patent was cancelled by Parliament in 1621, Edward was compensated by a grant from the King.¹⁰¹ Buckingham's full-brothers, John Villiers (the Viscount Purbeck) and Christopher (Kit) Villiers, were also recipients of social and political promotions, as well as the advantages provided by being close relations to the King's favorite.¹⁰² Even his sister, Susan, reaped the benefits of Buckingham's elevated status, as in 1622 her husband, William Feilding, was created the Earl of Denbigh, which elevated her to the status of Countess.¹⁰³ The financial gain Buckingham earned upon his elevations benefitted not just his immediate family, but his extended one as well. In 1623, Buckingham would provide a dowry for his cousin, Susan Hill, who would then go on to marry the eldest son of a viscount— a desirable position for a woman of the time.¹⁰⁴

It is clear that, as the favorite, Buckingham reaped the benefits of an overly-generous king and ensured the betterment of the status of his family. James' history of giving titles, land, and money to his favorites carried over into his final favorite's life, and Buckingham did not shy away from using his influence to better not just his own status, but the status of others as well.

As a favorite, Buckingham sought out mentorship and opportunity to further advance his political knowledge and social position. His most notable mentor, aside from the King, was Francis Bacon.¹⁰⁵ Bacon was greatly experienced in matters relating to court politics and, with encouragement from the King, was quick to attach himself to the new favorite. While Bacon

¹⁰⁰ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 116.

¹⁰¹ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 93.

¹⁰² Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 116.

¹⁰³ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 116.

¹⁰⁴ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 117.

¹⁰⁵ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 29.

educated Buckingham regarding negotiations and the ins and outs of conduct at Court, he was also quick to encourage Buckingham to solidify his position as more than a mistress of sorts and actually provide a real purpose, as well as develop and utilize his power.¹⁰⁶

In a letter written by Bacon to Buckingham early into Buckingham's time as the favorite to James, Bacon clarified the fundamental rules and role of the favorite, stating that:

You are now the Kings Favourite, so voted, and so esteemed by all...It is no new thing for Kings and Princes to have their Privadoes, their favourites, their Friends. They have done it sometimes 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 greatabilities (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. Take it in either, or any of those significations, let it be a caution unto you. If the King have made choice of you out of his affection, or out of the opinion of your worth, to communicate his bosome thoughts with you, or perhaps to debate them, and so ripen his own Judgement; you are bound in gratitude to return so much as possibly you can to advance your Masters service and honour.¹⁰⁷

This letter, which also included emphasis on the weight and pressures associated with a role such as Buckingham's, drove home the precariousness of Buckingham's newfound position. Advice such as this would have been a consistent theme in Bacon's mentorship. Under Queen Elizabeth's rule, Sir Francis Bacon had frequently advised the Earl of Essex, a favorite of the queen's. Unfortunately for him, Essex fell from favor after making the decision

¹⁰⁶ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 29.

¹⁰⁷ Francis Bacon. "A letter of advice written by Sr. Francis Bacon to the Duke of Buckingham, when he became favourite to King James." In the digital collection Early English Books Online. 1616.

to handle matters in Ireland. This decision left him separated from the monarch for a significant amount of time and allowed for others to gain the attention of the queen. Bacon's experience witnessing the downfall of Essex influenced the advice he gave to Buckingham. As the favorite, Buckingham was aware of the risks presented by missteps or absence. He was a powerful man with a growing opposition at Court. He was aware that there were people hoping to see his demise, and would have taken Bacon's continued advice to heart as he navigated his position and responsibilities as the favorite.

Buckingham's ability to successfully enter Court and capture the attention of James also benefited greatly from his outward appearance. It was a generally accepted idea that Buckingham was exceedingly handsome. Beyond James' obvious appreciation for his young favorite's beauty— as demonstrated through his references to him as “Steenie”— other significant figures noted his appearance. William Laud, who would go on to be Archbishop of Canterbury, even documented an intimate dream based upon his attraction to Buckingham.¹⁰⁸ Many who even just briefly interacted with Buckingham were quick to note his appearance. In 1621, Simonds D'Ewes described Buckingham as handsome and delicate after observing him speaking with French lords.¹⁰⁹ Bishop Goodman described Buckingham in a similar manner— stating that he was “the handsomest-bodied man of England.”¹¹⁰ While the heavy emphasis on Buckingham's well-received appearance and impressions may, at first glance, appear to detract from his accomplishments at Court— reducing them to nothing but a stroke of luck built upon his pleasing appearance— this is not the case. Buckingham's appearance opened doors for his education rooted in charm and his further expansion of his understanding of Court to

¹⁰⁸ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 103.

¹⁰⁹ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 20.

¹¹⁰ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 20.

establish him as an extremely influential figure over the entire Court, but especially James, who continuously demonstrated a strong attachment and sense of affection towards the young man.

As the favorite educated in the politics of his position, Buckingham was aware of the fleeting nature of his role. Even at the beginning of his time as Favorite, James was already well into his forties and therefore middle-aged. The power of the favorite was directly tied to the goodwill and support of the King, meaning that as a man in his early twenties, from the very start Buckingham would have been having to think about and prepare for the point in his life in which James was no longer around to affirm his power. Thus, Buckingham had to gain the affection of the young Prince Charles as well. The pair did not initially connect, but with time they began to establish a friendship.¹¹¹

Connection to James through Charles was a frequent theme of Buckingham's letters to James. He often referenced "baby Charles" and appealed to James' paternalistic affection towards his son.¹¹² In a 1622 letter to James, Buckingham added a post-script note for "baby Charles" in which he states that he will "kiss thy warty hands."¹¹³ By solidifying a relationship with Charles, Buckingham not only further protected his position with James, but also began establishing the future of his time at Court. As this connection with Charles developed, he became more supportive of the Spanish Match. This, coupled with James' affirmed attachment to Buckingham, provided fuel for the growing resentment towards Buckingham and his influence at Court.

James' clear attachment to Buckingham made him deeply susceptible to the influences and wills he may push upon the King, and this deeply concerned many at Court. Buckingham's

¹¹¹ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 34.

¹¹² Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 184.

¹¹³ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 184.

influence over the King could, for example, alter the King's opinions regarding patronage and the matter of appointing offices.¹¹⁴ Or, if he strongly disagreed with an opinion of James' then he could work to delay an appointment.¹¹⁵ Such a degree of influence caused many at Court to feel as though they were destined to fail unless they were held in a positive opinion by Buckingham—much to their frustration.

Patronage and the inevitable factions that occurred as a result were a great source of frustration at Court. Due to limited funding, ability of a monarch to give attention, and available positions to grant, there was an inability to fulfill the aspirations of everyone at Court.¹¹⁶ This fact alone serves as a significant explanation for frustration that many felt towards Buckingham. However, what uniquely fueled the dislike and opposition towards Buckingham, especially when compared the James' previous favorites, was that Buckingham didn't just represent a faction or serve as a puppet of sorts for a greater group seeking attention from the King. Rather, Buckingham actively worked, on his own accord, to prevent the advancement of those outside of his closest circle— and he was in a prime position to do so.¹¹⁷ Buckingham was described by a Venetian ambassador to be the “sole access to the court, the sole means of favour, and in fact one might say the King himself.”¹¹⁸ This made him a political threat to others who subsequently equated him (in the minds of many) to the Earl of Essex— which ultimately put a target on his own head.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 70.

¹¹⁵ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 70.

¹¹⁶ Sharpe. “Faction at the Early Stuart Court.” 40.

¹¹⁷ Sharpe. “Faction at the Early Stuart Court.” 43.

¹¹⁸ Sharpe. “Faction at the Early Stuart Court.” 43.

¹¹⁹ Sharpe. “Faction at the Early Stuart Court.” 43.

By the 1620s, Buckingham was the subject of great frustration in the Commons.¹²⁰ Buckingham had acquired multiple monopoly grants for his relatives. As a result, figures such as his brother, Kit Villiers, were put in positions in which they were financially benefiting. Kit, as well as Sir Edward Villiers, were also involved in a highly unpopular patent. This patent, that Buckingham was advised to encourage the King to cancel, was strongly disliked by the Commons, and as a result, Buckingham was made the target of their anger. The Commons, due to the extremity of Buckingham's power at Court and influence over James and his decisions, made him the face of corruption and abused power, despite the fact that Buckingham himself believed he was rather a champion of reform at Court.¹²¹

Following this accusation, as well as others that had resulted in James feeling the need to openly defend Buckingham, a small group in the Commons felt the need to take action against Buckingham. This group, which contained figures such as Sir Edward Coke, Sir Robert Phelips, Sir Francis Seymour, and William Mallory, coupled with a small number of individuals from the House of Lords, organized an attack on the favorite utilizing Sir Henry Yelverton.¹²² In 1621, Yelverton was called to the House of Lords to testify regarding additional controversial patents— of which Buckingham was associated.¹²³ In this testimony, Yelverton blamed Buckingham for the issues with the patent (which had been managed by Buckingham and had, similarly to the patent on inns, been viewed by many within the Commons as a sign of corruption) and made a comparison of Buckingham to Hugh Despenser the Younger— a wildly unpopular favorite

¹²⁰ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 90.

¹²¹ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 90.

¹²² Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 100.

¹²³ Curtis Perry. "Yelverton, Buckingham, and the Story of Edward II in the 1620s." In *The Review of English Studies* 54 (June 2003). 313.

of Edward II.¹²⁴ This comparison boldly attacked not just Buckingham, but James as well, as it cast doubt upon his decisions and administration.¹²⁵ This attack did not bode well for Buckingham's opposition, and the resulting defense of Buckingham demonstrated the extent to which both James and Charles supported him and his position within the court.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the attack served as a strong reminder for Buckingham that he had an opposition that was willing to vocalize their frustrations and take action against him— a fact that was extremely threatening for a favorite.

Despite being aware of the risks associated with an extended absence— having learned from advice as well as his lived experiences— Buckingham still made the active choice to leave for Spain in 1623 with Prince Charles. As a favorite, Buckingham was well-educated in court politics, connected to and aware of the emotional needs of his king, and conscious of the delicate power in which his position was situated. He knew the danger of being separated from James and allowing those who were frustrated with his power to have the potential opportunity to alter James' opinion of him. His power and position was, by all accounts, one that appeared to be rooted in proximity. However, this did not stop the ambitious Buckingham.

In March of 1623, two young men named Tom and John Smith arrived in Madrid. The poorly disguised Prince Charles and Duke of Buckingham had arrived in Spain— intending to “woo” the Infanta and conclude the long-negotiated Spanish Match. The pair would remain in Spain for months, during which they remained in near-constant communication with James and those waiting at Court. The decision to sneak away was incredibly risky for Buckingham, and threatened his reputation— both at Court and in James' view. However, Buckingham did not just

¹²⁴ Perry, “Yelverton, Buckingham, and the Story of Edward II in the 1620s.” 313.

¹²⁵ Perry, “Yelverton, Buckingham, and the Story of Edward II in the 1620s.” 314.

¹²⁶ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 103.

remain the favorite of James, he further solidified this position with the future king, and he did so through the strategic management of his influence and connections.

Buckingham and The Spanish Match

As previously stated, Buckingham was ultimately successful in his ability to maintain his position of power and influence despite his separation from James in 1623. This was also despite the fact that Buckingham had a growing and openly vocal opposition that was willing to take action against him and his position at Court. Therefore, Buckingham would have needed to be strategic when making the decision to take a highly controversial trip to Spain. Prior to his departure, Buckingham had been the subject of most of James' time and attention— which is one of the factors that so greatly frustrated other courtiers in the first place. For much of his opposition, they likely initially believed that his absence (once he and Charles were revealed to have taken the journey to Spain) would create an opportunity for them to turn James against Buckingham.

Buckingham was not the only one aware of the risks associated with being separated from the monarch. The story of the late Earl of Essex's downfall was well known, and parallels between him and Buckingham were quite easy to draw. As demonstrated in *A Parallell Betweene Robert Late Earle of Essex, and George Late Duke of Buckingham*, written in 1641 by Sir Henry Wotton— who had known Essex and had been aware of Buckingham and his story— the two men were similar in terms of being industrious and intentional. They both served as significant figures at Court, and they both would ultimately meet unnatural ends.¹²⁷ While the similarities listed between the pair are limited, the text itself serves as a representation of the discussions and

¹²⁷ Wotton. *A Parallel Betweene Robert Late Earle of Essex, and George Late Duke of Buckingham*. 14

opinions formed during Buckingham's life. Despite the limited proposed similarities, the text proves that conversations regarding comparisons were occurring, which in and of itself stood as a threat to Buckingham. As demonstrated even by the insinuation of a comparison of James to Edward II, comparisons to fallen favorites could cast doubt upon a current favorite's claim to power, as well as reflect poorly on the monarch. However, despite the risks, Buckingham chose to leave with Charles anyway.

During his absence, Buckingham physically removed himself from James' presence, provided an opportunity for others to step in, and opened the door for attempts to sway James' opinions of him. Thus, he needed to remind James of their closeness and bond, as well as of his deeply rooted position within Court and James' family. Furthermore, given the embarrassing nature of the two men's journey to Spain (which ultimately failed to secure the Infanta, soiled relations with many Spanish figures, damaged negotiations, and was rooted in a defiance of James), Buckingham had to prove that the risk and experience was necessitated, and that his role was a positive one. He would have had to be strategic in his actions and conversations, as well as make the most of his limited opportunities to have some form of interaction with James.

The unexpected aspect of Charles and Buckingham's trip to Spain was intentional. Their desire was to surprise the Spanish and see their true colors— not the carefully calculated and communicated negotiations that had passively occurred for years— and push them to make a decision regarding the Match.¹²⁸ The pair reached Madrid on March 7th, and immediately went to the home of the ambassador, John Digby, who Buckingham would not get along with.¹²⁹ Within days, Buckingham was able to have an audience with the Spanish King, where he insisted

¹²⁸ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 140.

¹²⁹ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 140.

that he and Charles were motivated by the princes' strong feelings towards the Infanta and a desire to more intensely pursue the match.¹³⁰

It was not until March 17th that Prince Charles made a formal entrance to Madrid. The pair were both officially given rooms in the palace for the duration of their stay, and they received a generally warm welcome. The Infanta, however, was less than pleased about Charles' intent to pursue her.¹³¹ Her deep ties to Catholicism made her unwilling to entertain the idea of marrying a Protestant (or in her view, a heretic), which strengthened the continued issue of religious difference and requirement within the match and negotiations.¹³²

Religion would continue to be a leading factor in the conflicts that arose during negotiations. Much of the warm welcome that Charles and Buckingham had received upon their arrival had been rooted in an assumption that, after years of negotiations, Charles had finally agreed to convert to Catholicism. This was not the case. As this misunderstanding turned to frustration, Buckingham spent a great deal of time discussing the details of the match with Olivares. On his second day in Madrid, Olivares proposed to Buckingham that they abandon their wait for papal dispensation and proceed with the match. To Buckingham, on the surface, this was an extremely positive sign for his and Charles' intentions in Spain.¹³³ Such grandiose and relatively unattainable propositions would not be an uncommon aspect of Olivares' discussions with Buckingham (who was ultimately serving as a point of communication for James as well). However, Buckingham did remain wary of new negotiations, conditions, and promises put forth by the Spanish.

¹³⁰ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 141.

¹³¹ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 142.

¹³² Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 142.

¹³³ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 143.

Charles and Buckingham continued to grow concerned regarding the religious pressures put forward by the Spanish. This factor, coupled with the realization that they had been led to believe that the match was more advanced than it truly was, pushed the pair to take matters into their own hands. They sent a message to the Pope, urging him to hasten the dispensation that was necessary to continue negotiations. At the same time, Olivares secretly sent one of his own, urging the opposite, in the hopes that the delay would push Charles to convert to Catholicism.¹³⁴ However, the Pope had already approved the dispensation by that point.

The continued difficulties of the match— such as issues with arranging a meeting with the Infanta, continued pressure and demands for concessions by the Spanish, and the deteriorating relationship of Buckingham and Olivares— led to more concerns regarding the match and even further delays in negotiations.¹³⁵ Despite this, Buckingham maintained James' full support and encouragement. James continued composing affectionate letters to Buckingham, as well as sent gifts to him and Charles.¹³⁶ He wrote to Buckingham about the details of his family— such as Katherine's health and his daughter's milestones.¹³⁷ Such a level of intimacy demonstrated a clear interest in Buckingham's life and happiness, as well as peace of mind, and it boded well for his ability to maintain his position as Favorite during his time in Spain. Additionally, James frequently saw and wrote to Katherine, and sent her gifts as well.¹³⁸ Such a connection served as a physical in-person reminder of his attachment to Buckingham, and Katherine's ability to maintain contact with the King prevented any opportunity for James to shift interests or grow frustrated with Buckingham.

¹³⁴ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 144.

¹³⁵ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 148.

¹³⁶ "Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of James I: 1619–1623." Tanner Ritchie Publishing and The University of St. Andrews, 2005. 560.

¹³⁷ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 152.

¹³⁸ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 154.

As discussions and conflicts regarding the match continued to drag on, Buckingham became more and more eager to return home. He had been advised to do so by friends in England, who informed him that his opposition was utilizing the opportunity provided by his absence to attempt to work against him and his ever-increasing power.¹³⁹ Figures such as Lord Keeper Williams were against the Duke, and they capitalized on claims made by Digby that Buckingham and Charles' arrival in Spain had actually hindered the match rather than served to advance it.¹⁴⁰

By the end of August, it was clear that Charles and Buckingham were going to return to England without the Infanta. Seeing as this had been the main goal of the journey, their inability to win her heart and persuade the Spanish to conclude negotiations served as a great source of embarrassment for the men, and would ultimately breed a strong anti-Spanish attitude within them. However, at this point, negotiation had not ceased, rather, they had just not been able to successfully “woo” the Infanta. Negotiations regarding the marriage would linger, and it would not be until January of 1624 that James would fully end negotiations with the Spanish.¹⁴¹ It was, however, the journey to Spain that would sour Charles' opinion of the marriage as well as damage relations with key figures that they had been dependent on for successful negotiations.

The failed “wooing” of the Spanish Infanta did not paint the Duke of Buckingham in a positive light. Not only was the journey ultimately unsuccessful, but it was costly and drawn-out. Throughout this process, however, there was a near-constant exchange of correspondence between James and Buckingham— in which they discussed all matters of the negotiations and processes. A selection of these letters will be analyzed later in this chapter.

¹³⁹ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 160.

¹⁴⁰ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 160.

¹⁴¹ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 177.

However, discussion surrounding Buckingham's involvement in Spain was not limited to the letters exchanged between him and James. John Chamberlain, in letters to Sir Dudley Carleton, provided detailed information regarding the match as it was understood by those not directly involved. In a letter composed on March 21st, 1623, Chamberlain detailed certain frustrations voiced regarding the financial cost and risk of Charles and Buckingham's journey to Spain. It states:

...jewells are to be sent and presented...estimated by some at 200,000 but by the more moderate at 80,000. There is continuall posting likewise through Fraunce which together with the expence that the other must make from sea-side to Madrid, will so exhaust our coyne (that is so scant alreedy)...and wise men sticke not to say that this match one way or other will stand the King and kingdom in as much as she is like to bring, besides whatsoever els may happen. Many of our churchmen are hardly held in, and their tongues ytch to be talking...¹⁴²

Frustration with the financial impacts of the journey, as well as the greater societal impacts that it had the potential to make were clearly common. This posed a threat to Buckingham, as growing unpopularity held the potential to contribute to opposition against him. The frustration detailed in Chamberlain's letter also served to exemplify the factors that would have motivated Buckingham to be strategic in his correspondence with others, especially James.

In a July 26th letter, Chamberlain detailed many of the articles within the Spanish Match negotiations, as they were discussed amongst many of the Lords. Chamberlain notes some frustrations raised— especially surrounding points relating to religion— but that their concerns

¹⁴² Chamberlain, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, 486.

were silenced by the assertion that, at the moment, it was more important to discuss the truly necessary aspects of negotiations, not matters of “convenience.”¹⁴³ The letter reads:

...the Prince beeing in their hands, and the Kings children being displayed of their patrimonie, which was not to be recovered but by this meanes, or by a bloudie and uncertain warre, and setting all Christendome together by the eares: so that in effect this was not so much a matter of counsaile as a preparative for what they were to do on Sunday...

In this letter, “Sunday” referred to a meeting at Whitehall, during which the Spanish ambassador was hosted and James took an oath to observe all the agreed upon articles. One article of note to Chamberlain was that the Infanta would be allowed twenty-four priests, as well as a bishop that would not be subject to any laws surrounding Catholicism.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, he emphasized that she would have control over the education of her children until their tenth birthdays, and that there would need to be a “favorable toleration” toward the Roman Catholics.¹⁴⁵

Chamberlain’s letter highlighted multiple points that were of concern to many people at Court. From the beginning of Charles and Buckingham’s time in Spain, there was a fear that Charles was essentially offering himself as a hostage to the Spanish. Charles being surrounded by the Spanish pushed members of the anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic factions at Court to worry that negotiations would more greatly benefit Spain.¹⁴⁶ There were also fears that any strong issues that arose during negotiations that posed a threat to Charles would result in a more significant and costly conflict. These concerns and anxieties posed a risk to Buckingham, as they

¹⁴³ Chamberlain, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, 510.

¹⁴⁴ Chamberlain, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, 510.

¹⁴⁵ Chamberlain, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, 510.

¹⁴⁶ Gregg, *King Charles I*, 78.

held the potential to fuel opposition towards him at Court— especially as people were quick to pin the blame for the trip on Buckingham entirely.¹⁴⁷

King James was very fond of writing letters, and the correspondence between him and Buckingham serves as evidence of Buckingham's strategy. As seen in earlier letters, James utilized his writing as a means of expressing vulnerability and seeking the emotional validation of his favorites. Therefore, it makes sense that Buckingham would take advantage of this method of maintaining his power, as the distance forced upon the pair required the use of letters as the only form of communication. However, Buckingham did not simply update James on the advancements (and setbacks) of the Spanish Match while in Spain, instead he continued to remind James of his affection towards him, express his devotion to the King, and reinforce his position as the favorite.

In a letter composed quite early into Buckingham and Charles' time in Spain, the pair updated James and provided hasty evidence for the necessity of their journey, stating that:

... We are now got into Spain, free from harm of falls, in as perfect health as when we parted, and undiscovered by any Monsieur... we saucily opened your letters, and found nothing either in that or any other, which we could 'understand without a cypher, that hath made us repent our journey. But by the contrary, we find nothing but particulars hastened, and your business so slowly advanced, that we think ourselves happy that we have begun it so soon; for yet the temporal articles are not concluded, nor will not be, till the dispensation comes, which may be God knows when; and when that time shall come, they beg twenty days to conceal it, upon pretext of making preparations...¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 137.

¹⁴⁸ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 185.

This letter worked to accomplish two tasks of the pair: first, to ease the anxieties of James. The pair's sudden and secret departure served as a shock to the King, who was greatly distressed by the actions of the two most important men in his life. The update on their safety served to settle the nerves of James meant to dismiss any foul feeling he may have towards Charles and Buckingham— something Buckingham would have been dependent upon. Second, the letter validated their decision for a hasty departure. In emphasizing the drawn out process of Spanish negotiations and the unhurried nature of James' approach, the pair was able to (at least in their opinion) confirm that they did not act foolishly in making the choice to travel to Spain as quickly as possible. Additionally, Buckingham was able to capitalize on his proximity to James' "baby Charles." By co-authoring the letter, the writing itself served as a reminder to James that Buckingham, to an extent, was a gatekeeper and protector of Charles. Should James want to access Charles or receive insight on his involvement in the negotiations, he would have to maintain contact with Buckingham, thus solidifying his maintained communication and emotional proximity to Buckingham, even from a distance.

Shortly after the pair's first letter to James, Buckingham penned a separate, more personal letter to James. In which, he confirmed the quality of the Infanta and Charles' desire for her, stating:

The chiefest advertisement of all we omitted in our other letter, which was to let you know how we like your daughter, his wife, and my lady mistress: without flattery, I think there is not a sweeter creature in the world. Baby Charles himself is so touched at the heart, that he confesses all he ever yet saw, is nothing to her, and swears if that he want her, there shall be blows. I shall lose no time in hastening their conjunction, in which I shall please him, her, you, and myself most

of all, in thereby getting liberty to make the speedier haste to lay myself at your feet; for never none longed more to be in the arms of his Mistress...¹⁴⁹

This letter would have further emphasized to James the necessity of maintaining communication with Buckingham. Such a degree of insight into the gentler, more intimate details of Charles and his view of his desired bride would not have been possible without the deep connection shared between both Charles and Buckingham, and Buckingham and James. Additionally, it sent a message to James that Buckingham did not enjoy the distance between the two, and placed in James' mind the perception that the separation would be made as brief as possible. This limited the opportunity for Buckingham's opposition as Court to capitalize on a lengthy, undefined, and unplanned separation of the favorite from his king. Additionally, the letter is very familial, which served as a reminder of Buckingham's integral role in not just courtly politics, but the family dynamic shared between a father and his son.

Later that month, Buckingham wrote to James again. While the main content of the letter was limited to more general information and opinions, he closed the letter in a very emotionally intimate way— painting an image of himself, in his bedchamber, reading the letters James had sent him. In this conclusion, he wrote:

Here am I, now in a chamber alone, enjoying and reading over and over your sweet cordial letters. I stayed for this purpose only, having nothing more to say than what my other letters which you will receive with this hath in them; yet because in this business I know you will not be weary of repetitions, I assure you once again all goes well and very well, and so shall we continue ourselves, so that we hear often of your health and receive with it your blessing.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 186.

¹⁵⁰ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 189.

Knowing that James so deeply valued when another understood his emotional needs and vulnerability, having those needs met through Buckingham's appreciation of his writing and devotion would have put Buckingham in a very different position than the previous Favorite, Somerset, had been when James had essentially been reduced to begging for attention and a greater expression of appreciation for his care and dedication.

Throughout the continuation of negotiations and attempts to "woo" the Infanta, Buckingham remained steadfast in his correspondence to James— even about the small, personal details of Charles' apparent devotion to the Infanta. In a letter composed on April 29th, 1623, Buckingham allowed James insight into Charles' desire for the Infanta. Furthermore, to once again provide James greater peace of mind regarding his son, Buckingham promised James that he would sooner "lose life, than in the least kind break it" in reference to his loyalty to both him and his son.¹⁵¹

Buckingham's continued dedication to James, as well as reminders of his relation to Charles clearly paid off. In May of 1623, he was created the first Duke of Buckingham. This elevation, which came at the frustration of many, demonstrated that James was not wavering from his devotion to his favorite, even with the challenge of distance. That same month, shortly after his elevation, the new duke once again wrote to James. In this letter, he profusely thanked the King, not just for his most recent status change, but for all that he had been provided. The letter articulated:

...for you have filled a consuming purse, given me fair houses, more land than I am worthy of, to maintain both me and them, filled my coffers so full with patents of honour, that my shoulders cannot bear more...you have not been contented to rest here... for with this letter, you have furnished and enriched my

¹⁵¹ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 192.

cabinet with so precious a witness of your valuation of me, as in future times it cannot be said, that I rise as most courtiers do, through importunity. For which character of me, and incomparable favour from you, I will sign, with as contented, nay as proud a heart, Your poor Steenie, as Duke of Buckingham.¹⁵²

In his expression of gratitude, Buckingham demonstrated to James his awareness of the extraordinary nature of his life and the privileges he had been granted. While Buckingham had previously expressed anxieties to James regarding the risk of such a promotion while he was away from Court, he nevertheless acknowledged the financial, social, familial, and political opportunities that James had provided him with, and in doing so confirmed for James that distance had not robbed Buckingham of his perspective and knowledge regarding the power of favor.

As months passed and it became clearer to the pair that their attempts to conclude the Spanish Match would be unsuccessful, they had to prepare for the embarrassing reality of returning to Court without the Infanta. Shortly before departing for England, Buckingham wrote another letter to James, in which he appealed greatly to James' previously stated fondness for Buckingham. The letter began by stating: "In imitation of St. John I will give you an account of him you love best after your obedient, stout, kind and discreet son: that's my self."¹⁵³

This intro was witty and bold. It depended heavily on an extreme level of closeness and intellectual intimacy shared between a monarch and Favorite. Additionally, given that the pair would have been separated for a significant period of time by the point this letter was composed, it was crucial that Buckingham remind James of a memory— a time in which they were more frequently together. To do so, Buckingham referred to Saint John. This worked in two ways.

¹⁵² Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 193.

¹⁵³ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 198.

First, Saint John was known as the “beloved disciple” who wrote frequently about the one whom he loved. By referring to himself as Saint John in his letter, Buckingham implied a love for James. The reference then worked by recalling a previous statement of James’ from 1617, in which he informed his Privy Council of his fondness for Buckingham, stating that he “loved the Earl of Buckingham more than all other men and more than all who were there present” and that “Christ had his John” and he “had his George.”¹⁵⁴ By invoking that memory, Buckingham worked to remind James of his fondness towards the Duke, even without in-person interaction. Further into the letter, Buckingham stated that one of the greatest troubles to him at the time was their separation, writing: “...there is but three things that troubles me...The second is my absence from you, but in that I have likewise comfort that now I shall be soon with you.”¹⁵⁵

Simply put, this served as a reminder for James that their time apart would soon end, and this ultimately ended any opportunity available for someone who opposed Buckingham to distract James in the final days of Charles and Buckingham’s journey.

The last letter composed during their separation served as a final reminder of their upcoming reunion and the significance of James in Buckingham’s life. It read:

Sir, my heart and very soul dances for joy; for the change will be no less than to leap from trouble to ease, from sadness to mirth, nay from hell to heaven. I cannot now think of giving thanks for friend, wife, or child; my thoughts are only bent of having my dear Dad and master's legs soon in my arms; which sweet Jesus grant me, and your Majesty all health and happiness; so I crave your blessing.¹⁵⁶

Through this letter, Buckingham reinforced the importance of James to him— placing him above his wife and child. To a figure such as James, who so craved the validation of his

¹⁵⁴ Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, 81.

¹⁵⁵ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 198.

¹⁵⁶ Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire*, 199.

favorites, such a statement would have cleared any possible doubts about Buckingham's dedication to him and their connection. It ultimately served to achieve the intent of Buckingham's continuous detailed and intimate writing, which was to maintain their deep connection and ties to each other despite his extended absence.

Buckingham's decision to appeal to the needs of James during his time in Spain was rooted in his understanding of court politics. Buckingham was brought to Court as an effort to undermine Carr, who could not meet James' needs. Additionally, Buckingham was aware of his reputation— which was being compared to fallen favorites—and his growing opposition as a result of it. Therefore, to counter the negative impacts of his separation from James, Buckingham leaned into the King's emotional vulnerabilities and desire to be valued. Buckingham's letters utilized frequent terms of endearment, expressions of gratitude, and intimate detailing to maintain his position as the sole recipient of James' favor. Additionally, he capitalized on his symbolic "possession" of Charles— James' only remaining son and heir. This put James in a position where he didn't only crave connection with Buckingham— he was dependent on it as his source of information regarding not just the technical aspects of the Spanish Match, but also on Charles' feelings, experiences, and opinions. As unrest developed at home, Buckingham stood his ground in Spain and ensured that James could not be swayed into turning his attention towards another.

Conclusion

Much to the relief of James, Charles and Buckingham returned to England on October 6th, 1623.¹⁵⁷ Buckingham had successfully maintained his position as favorite despite months apart from the king, a fact that became evident when James burst into tears of joy at the sight of his two “boys.”¹⁵⁸ The journey to Spain may have been unsuccessful on a political scale— in fact, it established the grounds for future, anti-diplomatic attitudes towards Spain as well as made a mess of years of negotiations— but it did exemplify the power that Buckingham held at Court. Despite having a growing opposition, bearing much of the blame for the Match’s failure, being perceived as putting the prince’s safety on the line, and having an extreme physical disconnect from the source of his influence, Buckingham had managed to return to his place at James’ side, as well as solidify his future as Charles’ favorite.

James would die in March of 1625. While there was initial speculation about whether Buckingham would maintain his extreme degree of power under Charles, the new king was quick to confirm that he would remain the most powerful and influential man in Charles’ inner circle.¹⁵⁹ Charles, who was far less of a pacifist than his father had been, allowed for Buckingham to play a significant role in the failed Cádiz Expedition. Buckingham’s involvement in this failure— coupled with the extreme power he held—would further fuel his opposition, and in 1626 Parliament would attempt to impeach him.¹⁶⁰ While Charles intervened and dissolved Parliament as a means of protecting Buckingham, the fact that such a large and powerful opposition to Buckingham developed served to validate the degree of risk that had been associated with his journey to Spain just a few years earlier. This would be further emphasized

¹⁵⁷ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 165.

¹⁵⁸ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 165.

¹⁵⁹ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 234.

¹⁶⁰ Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 331.

when, on August 23rd of 1628, Buckingham was assassinated in the street by John Felton, a former soldier.¹⁶¹ By the time of his death, Buckingham's reputation had been greatly tarnished, and he had come to represent the corruption that followed such an extreme and rapid rise to power.

When leaving for Spain, Buckingham knew that there was a faction at Court who opposed him. He knew that occupying so much of the King's attention would likely cause trouble for him. Buckingham was aware that his reputation in early 1623 was being compared and contrasted with those who had failed to cling to their power— and yet he still made the choice to risk his position.

For a man whose entire adolescence and adulthood had been carefully curated and planned, such a decision would not have been made without careful consideration and strategic decisions. As a boy, Buckingham's mother had been aware of her son's shortcomings as well as his blessings. Where he lacked interest in formal education, he made up for it in charm and, in line with his mother's plan for him, pursued more gentlemanly pursuits. From a young age, Buckingham was groomed and trained to succeed the English Court, and he carried his lessons with him. When strategic, anti-Somerset figures strategized to limit his power and influence, they turned to the handsome and charming George Villiers— someone who, at the time, lacked titles, prestige, and wealth. The young man understood the importance of strategy at Court from the very beginning, for he himself had started as a strategic move. He then intentionally sought out an advisor to teach him in Court politics and the strategy behind achieving success amongst so many ambitious figures. Through Bacon, Buckingham did not just receive advice, but rather an education. This education instilled in the young man crucial lessons for surviving at Court— teaching him the lessons that Bacon had watched others learn through unfortunate methods.

¹⁶¹ Mark Parry. *Charles I.* Routledge, 2020. 65.

Bacon's proximity to the late Earl of Essex meant that he knew what happened to favorites when they lost sight of the source of their power: the monarch. In sharing the story of Essex to Buckingham, Bacon gave him the resources he needed to understand the risks of separation, emotional distance, and failing to fulfill the needs of the monarch.

By 1623, Buckingham had been equipped with every necessary tool for success as Favorite. He understood the precarious nature of his role, and did not leave his position— and all of the benefits that accompanied it— up to chance. Rather, he maintained strong, useful contact with James. After spending years in such close proximity to the King, as a companion and confidant to an extreme degree, he understood how James thought, processed emotions, and formed opinions. Buckingham applied this knowledge to his correspondence. He reminded James of his fondness towards his “Steenie” and of his closeness with “baby Charles.” He calmed James' anxieties and reminded him that they would reunite at the end of the journey. In doing so, Buckingham kept James' focus and attention away from his opposition. He did not allow them the chance to diminish his power and stability as the favorite.

Buckingham's letters, his wife's continued connection with James, and his strong knowledge of the way he was perceived— and the risks that accompanied such a perception— clearly demonstrate that Buckingham knew the dangers of his absence, and rather than allow others the chance to undermine him, he strategically worked to maintain James' favor, and was ultimately successful.

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