



“Wholly abandoned of human virtue and devoted to wickedness”- The Figure of the Monstrous Favourite in Gossip, Rumour and Libel in Renaissance England, 1558-1628.

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ABSTRACT

The close relationships royal favourites had with their monarchs granted them significant influence and power. As the privileges these men received evoked the disapproval and envy of the other courtiers and noblemen, gossip and rumours about the relationship these men had with their monarch soon spread throughout the royal court and the kingdom. This thesis will focus on the male favourites of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I by tracing how these men were represented in gossip and rumours. I will concentrate on the development of what I term the figure of the 'monstrous favourite' and demonstrate that despite them being different men, of different characters, living in different times, under different monarchs, they were all depicted in similar ways with the same character traits being applied to them.

Statement of Originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes. I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

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For Mum and Dad
Thank you for all your love and support.

*“It doesn’t matter who you
are or what you are as long
as somebody loves you”*

Roald Dahl
from ‘TheWitches’

INTRODUCTION

Here Be Monsters

On the 23rd of August in 1628, George Villiers 1st Duke of Buckingham, the favourite of the late King James I and of the current King Charles I, was stabbed to death at the Greyhound Pub by John Felton. By the time of his assassination Villiers was one of the most unpopular men in England. Villiers' unpopularity led to a 1628 parliamentary remonstrance (a document of protest or reproof) against Villiers, which labeled him the "grievance of grievances" and "the cause of all our miseries."¹ John Felton was heavily influenced by this document so he believed he was doing England a service by ridding the country of this powerful, dangerous and 'wicked' royal favourite. In a declaration sewn into his own hat, he explained that;

That man is cowardly, base and deserveth not the name of a gentleman or soldier that is not willing to sacrifice his life for the honour of his God, his King and his country. Let no man commend me for doing of it, but rather discommend themselves as the cause of it. For if God had not taken away our hearts for our sins, he would not have gone so long unpunished.²

In the aftermath of Villiers' assassination, numerous poems emerged which hailed Felton as an exemplary model of English masculinity and celebrated him as a national hero, while they

¹ *Commons Debates*, 1628 4:115. Edited by Robert C. Johnson, Mary Frear Keeler, Maija Jansson Cole and William B. Bidwell.

² Frederick W. Fairholt., *Poems and Songs Relating to George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham and His Assassination by John Felton, August 23, 1628* (London: Percy Society, 1850) p. xxi.

derided Villiers as an effeminate, power hungry, murderous and traitorous monster, who ruled the kings and was himself ruled by the devil.³

In this thesis I will investigate the construction of royal favourites as monstrous. I will do this by uncovering attitudes that were expressed in rumours and gossip, to help explain the destructive interplay between power and intimacy in the Elizabethan and Jacobean royal courts. Jeffrey Cohen has articulated that monstrous figures are both products and symbols of the times in which they were created⁴. The period from the mid sixteenth until the early seventeenth centuries was one of the stormiest eras of British history, marked by religious changes, the reigns of female monarchs, civil war and the execution of a monarch. During the reign of James I there was also an increasingly fearful preoccupation with the powers of the supernatural, as this era saw a series of witch hunts occur in England, Scotland and Europe from 1580-1750.⁵ As a result, various monstrous characters emerged in literature, such as witches, demons, grotesque births, half man-half beasts. Tyrants and the sexually deviant were included in this mix.

Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, as well as other scholars, have uncovered connections between the supernatural characteristics of monsters and the historical circumstances and societal contexts in which they existed. This literature has connected religious, social and political

³ See in particular the following placard that was placed on Coleman St

“Who rules the Kingdom? the King.

“Who rules the King? the Duke.

Who rules the Duke? the Devil!

Let the Duke look to it; for they intend shortly to use him worse

than they did the doctor; and if things be not shortly reformed,

they will work a reformation themselves” see Fairholt *Poems and Songs*, p xv.

⁴ Jeffrey Cohen (ed), *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

⁵ Brian Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed (London: Longman, 1995), pp.98-102; Geoffrey Scarre and John Callow, *Witchcraft and Magic in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, second ed (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 22-28. See also Gary Jensen, *The Path of the Devil: Early Modern Witch Hunts* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

turbulence with the appearance of monstrous figures.⁶ Jeffrey Cohen has described this correlation in this excerpt from his essay *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*;

Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again.⁷

By focusing on one manifestation of this phenomenon, which I have termed the ‘monstrous favourite,’ I will argue in this thesis that the collective fears and anxieties which existed in Renaissance England became embodied in this figure. By tracing its development in relation to the elite male favourites from the Elizabethan and Jacobean royal courts, I will demonstrate the important role this figure played in not only the lives of the two monarchs and the favourites being featured, but also in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century political and social culture.⁸

To explore the correlation between monstrosity and royal favourites, I will be delving into the relationships which developed between the two monarchs and their male royal favourites, starting with Queen Elizabeth 1, then moving on to her successor King James I. Throughout this thesis I will also trace the figure of the monstrous favourite, from the seeds sown by Robert Dudley to the fully developed ‘wicked’ portrait of George Villiers, to highlight the discursive practice of demonising royal favourites in Renaissance England. To do this I will be investigating how royal favourites were constructed in gossip and rumours during their reigns, by exploring various libelous texts which appeared between the years 1584-1628, to show how common derogatory motifs manifested and developed.

⁶ Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (New York: Zone Books, 2001); Peter Platt (ed), *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999); Cohen (ed), *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*.

⁷ Jeffrey Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in Jeffrey Cohen ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, p. 4.

⁸ Lorraine Daston. “Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe” in *Questions of Evidence*, ed. James Chandler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.243.

To isolate figurations of monstrous favourites I am using what I term a ‘gossip based’ archive, which I will use to uncover and understand obscure and elusive topics. I define gossip as information about a person or event that has been generated through common talk or, as Caillan Davenport’s has defined it, “evaluative social talk.”⁹ Malicious talk or gossip can be a difficult source material to work with, especially when dealing with gossip that is over five hundred years old, as it is not generally viewed by scholars as a credible source of information. Historians such as Susan Doran and Anne Somerset have gone so far as to suggest that gossip should be “treated with contempt” when writing on the lives of Tudor and Stuart monarchs.¹⁰ More recently scholars, such as Filippo De Vivo and Carole Levin, have proposed that gossip can be useful for understanding how the general population engaged in governance and political communications, as well as for uncovering social attitudes towards individuals and events that would otherwise be unknown.¹¹ Furthermore, as Levin has argued, gossip circulating at the time “provides access to the thought patterns and the psycho-social responses to sexuality and political power operating in Renaissance England.”¹² It is my contention throughout this study that gossip can provide valuable information about how the relationships between Elizabeth I and James I and their respective favourites, were being perceived and received within their royal courts and in the public arenas. For this thesis source materials which have discussed gossip and rumours have been used, to help identify and trace the social foundations and discursive practices that aided the construction of the ‘monstrous favourite’.¹³ While there has been scholarly interest on how gossip has constructed the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, studies focusing on gossip as a

⁹ C. Wickham, “Gossip and Resistance Among the Medieval Peasantry,” *Past & Present* 160 (August 1998): p. 5; C. Davenport, “The Sexual Habits of Caracalla: Rumour, Gossip, and Historiography,” *Histos* 11 (2017), p. 95; Nicholas Di Fonzo and Prasant Bordia, *Rumor Psychology. Social and Organizational Approaches* (New York: American Psychological Association, 2007), p. 19.

¹⁰ Anne Somerset, *Elizabeth I* (London: Phoenix, 1997), p. 129.

¹¹ Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.2; Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), pp. 4-5.

¹² Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, pp. 4-5.

¹³ See Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favouritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1-21.

credible source material to understand attitudes towards royal favourites are rare.¹⁴ This is the lacuna I am aiming to fill.

Although gossip can work to undermine a person's reputation, malicious talk such as gossip also has the ability to construct alternative structures of truth and power, or determine the facts and motivations behind the rumours.¹⁵ In the absence of accurate facts from the source/s, gossip serves as a way for others to try and determine the truth, or to 'flush' it out. It also provides an outlet through which the general population can express their anxieties, doubts and fears. Therefore gossip has a social purpose as it can illustrate the values, anxieties and moral outlooks of individuals or groups.

Renaissance England, especially during the post Reformation years, was subjected to years of intense religious, social and political upheavals, where the monarch's power and authority was constantly being questioned. I argue that monsters, in the form of royal favourites, emerged from this atmosphere of chaos and uncertainty.¹⁶ I will contend that the royal favourites, who appeared in gossip and libels in Renaissance England, were in fact portrayed as monsters, as they exhibited qualities or behaviors that the general population perceived to be abhorrent, so it is through this aberrance that it is possible to read what was deemed normal or abnormal at the time and what people most feared.¹⁷ By exploring the gossip and rumours which were circulating at the time in the Renaissance English royal court about these monstrous favourites, I can also gain insights into what was considered culturally acceptable or unacceptable.¹⁸ Monsters therefore

¹⁴ Michael Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality* (London: Palgrave, 1999); David M. Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002).

¹⁵ Davenport, "The Sexual Habits of Caracalla", p.96; See also David Ehrenstein, *Open Secret: Gay Hollywood, 1928-1998* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).

¹⁶ Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf, 1985), p.13; Niko Besnier, *Gossip and the Everyday Production of Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), p.3; L. White, "Between Gluckman and Foucault: Historicizing Rumour and Gossip", *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 20.1 (1994): pp.75-92.

¹⁷ See Cohen (ed). *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, p. 11.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 11.

perform cultural work, as they provide opportunities to question, discuss, reinforce or challenge social and cultural norms and values.

A royal favourite in Renaissance England was a person who had become a trusted, intimate companion of a monarch, who, in addition to titles, land and expensive gifts, was granted significant privileges and powers by the monarch.¹⁹ The male favourite had been a political phenomenon in Europe since at least the Medieval period, with the most notable of these being Piers Gaveston during the fourteenth century reign of English King Edward II; Alvaro de Luna in the fourteenth century with Castilian King John II; and Olivier le Daim with the early sixteenth century French King Louis XI.²⁰ While women (royal mistresses and ladies in waiting in particular) could also be seen as 'favourites,' women did not usually attain the same political positions that male favourites did, which lessened the power that they were able to wield with their monarch and in the political and social arenas. Therefore I have chosen to focus on the male royal favourites who achieved notoriety and positions of power in the Elizabethan and Jacobean royal courts of England.

As royal favourites often played an integral role in the royal courts in early modern Europe, they were not automatically condemned or viewed negatively.²¹ In fact Baldassare Castiglione, in his *Il Cortegiano*, advised courtiers that they should demonstrate their unique qualities, virtues and dedication to obtain the love and affection of their monarch, as this would grant them greater influence in the royal court.²² As David Starkey and later George Bernard have identified, the nobles who inhabited the royal court were the most powerful and influential men in English

¹⁹ John Eliott and Laurence Brockliss (eds), *The World of the Favourite* (Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 6-7.

²⁰ John Eliot, 'Introduction', in *The World of the Favourite*. Edited by John Eliot and Laurence Brockliss. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p.1.

²¹ Antonio Feros, "Images of Evil, Images of Kings: The Contrasting Faces of the Royal Favourite and the Prime Minister in Early Modern European Political Literature, C. 1580- C. 1650", in *The World of the Favourite*. Edited by John Eliot and Laurence Brockliss. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p.206.

²² Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*. Trans. Charles S. Singleton (New York: Norton, 2002), p.115.

society, so gaining a position in the royal court was the primary goal for an ambitious man.²³

However, negative figurations of favourites have since coloured modern historians'

interpretations of their places of importance in the royal courts in Renaissance Europe.²⁴

The monstrous favourite emerged in the context of the royal court from the politics of access to the monarch's person.²⁵ The English royal court was an intricate human environment composed of numerous social networks.²⁶ Within the palace walls a hierarchy of intimates lived and worked, consisting of the royal family (and their extended families), servants/staff, courtiers, clergy, advisors, as well as visiting nobles and ambassadors.²⁷ All these people had to be accommodated in a multiplicity of locations. Hugh Baille observed that in order to regulate and protect the monarch from the continuous crush of petitioners, specific areas in the palace were limited to the monarch and their intimates, better known as the Privy Chambers.²⁸ These private areas, in the words of David Starkey, "marked the frontier between the public and private lives of the monarch."²⁹ King Henry VIII decided to staff his Chamber with high born favourites, which transformed his Privy Chamber into a space in which the King's Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber would jockey for political power and favours.³⁰ Under Queen Elizabeth I, the Privy Chamber lost some of its importance, since her attendants were mainly female and they lacked the political importance of their male counterparts, but it nevertheless was a private space which

²³ George Bernard, "The Tudor Nobility in Perspective" in *The Tudor Nobility*. Edited by George Bernard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 1-48; David Starkey, "Court and Government", in *Revolution Reassessed: Revisions in the History of Tudor Government and Administration*, ed. Christopher Coleman and David Starkey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.29-58.

²⁴ Feros. "Images of Evil, Images of Kings", p.207.

²⁵ C. Perry, "The Politics of Access and Representations of the Sodomite King in Early Modern England", *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (2000), p. 1056.

²⁶ M. Fanton, "The Future of Court Studies: The Evolution, Present Successes and Prospects of a Discipline", *The Court Historian* 16: 1 (2001), pp. 1-2.

²⁷ Ibid, p.2.

²⁸ See H. Baille, "Etiquette and the Planning of the State Apartments in Baroque Palaces", *Archaeologia* 101 (1967), pp. 169-199.

²⁹ On the design of the royal palaces see Baille. 'Etiquette and the Planning of the State Apartments in Baroque Palaces', pp. 169-199; David Starkey, "Court History in Perspective" in David Starkey (ed) *The English Court: From the War of the Roses to the Civil War* (London: Longman, 1987), p. 8.

³⁰ Perry "The Politics of Access and Representations of the Sodomite King in Early Modern England", p. 1056; David Starkey, "Intimacy and Innovation: The Rise of the Privy Chamber, 1485-1547", *The English Court: From the War of the Roses to the Civil War*, ed. David Starkey. (London: Longman, 1987) pp.71-118.

was available only to a trusted select few.³¹ During the reign of King James I, the Privy Chambers (re-branded as the Bedchambers) regained the political importance they had under the Henry VIII's regime, which greatly augmented the influence of his favourites.³² However tensions also increased upon the ascension of King James I, as his Bedchambers were divided between Scottish and English courtiers who all vied to gain his favours and access greater intimate contact with him.³³

The close relationship favourites enjoyed with their monarchs and the influence they had, was viewed (especially during King James I's reign) as improper.³⁴ Notorious favourites could therefore be represented as an inversion of the accepted hierarchy, as they were seen to be indicative of corrupt rule, as well as the root cause of political and personal conflicts in the royal courts.³⁵ The competitive atmosphere that developed bred envy and dissatisfaction among those courtiers who did not receive the monarch's favour or the privileges and rewards this brought.³⁶ Linda Peck and Curtis Perry have argued that the negative discourse surrounding favouritism in Renaissance England can be understood as a symptom of a more general interest in political corruption.³⁷ These scholars have suggested that increasing hostilities towards royal favourites

³¹ For information on the transformation of the Privy Chamber and the Court in general under Queen Elizabeth I see P. Williams, "Court and Polity Under Elizabeth I", *Bulletin of the John Reynolds Library* 65 (1983): pp.259-286; Simon Adams. 'Eliza Enthroned? The Court and its Politics' in Christopher Haigh (ed), *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (Macmillan, 1984), pp.55-77.

³² Perry, "The Politics of Access and Representations of the Sodomite King in Early Modern England," p. 1071.

³³ Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 35.

³⁴ Robert Shephard, "Sexual Rumours in English Politics: The Cases of Elizabeth I and James I", in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, ed. Jaqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p.101; Danielle Clarke, "The Sovereigns Vice Begets the Subjects Error: The Duke of Buckingham, 'Sodomy' and Narratives of Edward II, 1622-28", in *Sodomy In Early Modern Europe*, ed. Tom Betteridge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.52; A. Bray, "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England", *History Workshop* 29 (Spring, 1990), p. 15.

³⁵ Clarke, "The Sovereigns Vice Begets the Subjects Error", p.59; H. Bagerius and C. Ekholst, "Kings and Favourites: Politics and Sexuality in Late Medieval Europe", *Journal of Medieval History* 43: 3 (2017), p. 298; Seymore Phillips, *Edward II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 184-85; Perry "The Politics of Access", pp. 1054-83; Pierre Chaplais. *Piers Gaveston: Edward II's Adoptive Brother* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 82.

³⁶ On this see generally G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government: Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953); Christopher Coleman and David Starkey (eds), *Revolution Reassessed: Revisions in the History of Tudor Government and Administration* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

³⁷ See Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England*, esp pp. 30-47; Perry, "The Politics of Access and Representations of the Sodomite King in Early Modern England", pp. 1054-83.

under Queen Elizabeth I and King James I were associated with frustrations emerging from the increasing number of royal petitioners; the lack of royal funds to provide endless bounties; and in the case of King James I, xenophobic conflicts between Scottish and English courtiers.³⁸ The portrayal of favourites as monstrous was therefore a way for contemporaries, who may have missed out on royal acknowledgements, to express their anxieties about corruption in royal government. As the monarch was viewed as divinely sanctioned, questioning their behaviours or rebelling against their authority, was considered traitorous (and dangerous), so constructing favourites as monstrous allowed for the expression of safer criticisms about the current regime.³⁹ Monstrous favourites were, in other words, important to what Peck termed the “language of corruption,” as they offered a way through the mediums of gossip and libels, to depict and criticise the failure of royal bounty and leadership.⁴⁰ I argue that this abuse of personal intimacies in the royal court, throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, provided the foundations upon which the figure of the monstrous favourite was established.⁴¹

My thesis will feature three main chapters. The first chapter will focus on the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and highlight the main favourites that appeared in libelous materials- Robert Dudley, Christopher Hatton and Robert Devereaux. While there will be a general biographical investigation into Elizabeth’s relationships with these favourites and the gossip which surrounded them, the main focus of the chapter will be on Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, who was the longest lasting of her favourites and the one who attracted the most controversies and criticisms, both in his lifetime and after his death. I will use Elizabeth’s status

³⁸ Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption*, p. 35.

³⁹ Bagerius and Ekholst, “Kings and Favourites”, p. 299; Gregory S. Hutcheson, “Desperately Seeking Sodom: Queerness in the Chronicles of Alvaro de Luna”, in *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hutcheson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 222-49; Claire Sponsler, “The King’s Boyfriend: Froissart’s Political Theater of 1326”, in *Queering the Middle Ages*, ed. Glenn Burger and Stephen F. Kruger (University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 143–67; Richard E. Zeikowitz. *Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the Fourteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); W.M. Ormrod, “Knights of Venus”, *Medium Aevum* 73 (2004): pp.290–305; W.M. Ormrod, ‘The Sexualities of Edward II’, in *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*. Edited by Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson. (York Medieval Press, 2006), pp. 22–47.

⁴⁰ Perry “The Politics of Access and Representations of the Sodomite King in Early Modern England”, p. 1060.

⁴¹ Ibid, p.1058.

as an unmarried, childless queen in a patriarchal society to provide the backdrop for the scandals, gossip and rumours which generated from her court. Gossip will be highlighted from within ambassadorial dispatches for the main part in this chapter, as diplomatic archives, such as ambassadorial dispatches, make major contributions to the history of oral culture as they contain detailed transcripts of conversations. I will use these documents to uncover the thought patterns which appeared in the ephemeral gossip from the beginning of Elizabeth's reign that linked royal favouritism to sexual intimacy and corruption. There is a wealth of information within ambassadorial dispatches and private letters from which I will attempt to isolate the scandals, gossip and rumours that were being discussed at the time. This first chapter will lay the foundations for the stereotype of the monstrous favourite which emerged during Elizabeth's reign, to draw attention to the main themes that occurred throughout the thesis.

Chapter Two will move on to the reign of King James 1. It will begin during his Scottish reign as James VI, so will outline the gossip and criticisms that were aimed at him and his first favourite Esme Stewart, the 1st Earl of Lennox, before discussing the two other major favourites who defined James' reign- Robert Carr, the Earl of Somerset and George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham. Gender issues relating to James' perceived effeminacy and the suspicions that he was engaging in acts of sodomy with his favourites are important here, since they formed the basis for the gossip and rumours that surrounded James throughout his reign. There will be a diverse archive used, in the form of pamphlets and tracts, such as *Corona Regia*; ambassadorial dispatches; diary entries, such as those by Sir Simonds D'Ewes; and Ben Jonson's play *Sejanus, His Fall* (1603). I will propose in this chapter that there was a continuation of the themes I discussed in Chapter One, as well as the addition of others, which aided the construction of the monstrous favourite that appeared in the Jacobean era.

Chapter Three will be different from the first two chapters in that I will not focus on a particular monarch. Rather I will focus on the libels (published written documents that are damaging to a person's reputation) printed between 1584-1628, which featured the two main 'monsters' from

the previous two chapters- Robert Dudley and George Villiers. Using comprehensive written libels, such as *Leicester's Commonwealth* and the *Forerunner of Revenge* and a range of libelous poetry, the themes highlighted in the previous two chapters will be more fully explored, to demonstrate how the gossip already introduced and discussed appeared in these written texts. Using monster stereotypes, I will show that monstrous favourites served as concrete symbols of the social and political unease and fear-based belief systems which operated in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras.

By the turn of the millennium, scholarly interest shifted to the phenomenon of the royal favourite.⁴² This is demonstrated in an edited collection of essays entitled *The World of the Favourite*, edited by John Elliott and Laurence Brockliss, which was published in 1999.⁴³ Cultural historians and literary theorists, such as Siobhan Keenan and Curtis Perry in particular, have explored the artistic and literary representations of court favourites and the implied sexual relationships that they were said to have with their monarchs, and in so doing, have brought attention to a negative discourse of favouritism to expose the political and social conditions that created this discourse.⁴⁴ There has also been a renewed interest in the culture of libeling amongst historians, to better understand the connections between the personal and the political arenas of

⁴² See Kenneth Bruce MacFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); Kenneth Bruce MacFarlane, *England in the Fifteenth Century: Collected Essays* (London: Bloomsbury, 1981); Lewis Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1961); Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics, 1621–1629* (Oxford University Press, 1979); Kevin Sharpe, *Faction and Parliament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England*; Bruce Buchan and Lisa Hill. 'Affection, Interest and Office in Early Modernity' in Bruce Buchan and Lisa Hill (eds) *An Intellectual History of Political Corruption* (London: Palgrave, 2014).

⁴³ John Elliott and Laurence Brockliss, *The World of the Favourite* (Yale University Press, 1999).

⁴⁴ S. Keenan, "Staging Roman History, Stuart Politics, and The Duke of Buckingham: The Example of The Emperor's Favourite". *Early Theatre*, 14:2 (2011): pp.63–103; Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favouritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Robert Shephard. 'Sexual Rumours in English Politics: The Cases of Elizabeth I and James I' in Jaqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (eds) *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West* (University of Toronto Press, 1996). See also Bagerius and Ekholst 'Kings and Favourites', pp. 298–329.

the royal courts in early modern England.⁴⁵ These secondary sources (and many others) have provided valuable insights and information to use throughout this thesis.

As a methodology for this thesis I am using cultural history- a historiographical approach that aids our understanding of cultural representations and meanings- to locate a discourse on the monstrous favourite in relation to a more general historical narrative. I have selected cultural history because of its interdisciplinary nature, as it offers a greater intersection with disciplines such as literary studies, sociology, politics and gender studies. Using this method also allows me to access a wider range of source materials. Cultural history also allows me to investigate the social, political and religious conditions which gave rise to the discourse and negative perceptions of the royal favourites. Using the framework of cultural history, I have been able to trace the development of the monstrous favourite and demonstrate that despite them being different men, of different characters, living in different times, under different monarchs, they were all depicted in similar ways and the same characteristics were applied to them.

⁴⁵ See in particular Andrew McRae, *Literature, Satire and the Early Stuart State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Thomas Cogswell, 'The People's Love: the Duke of Buckingham and Popularity.' In Thomas Cogswell, Richard Cust and Peter Lake (eds) *Politics, Religion and Popularity: Early Stuart Essays in Honour of Conrad Russell* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 211-235; James Knowles. "To scourge the arse / Jove's marrow so hath wasted": Scurrility and the Subversion of Sodomy.' Dermot Cavanaugh and Tim Kirk (eds) *Scurrility and Subversion*. (Ashgate 2000); P.Croft, 'Libels, Popular Literacy and Public Opinion in Early Modern England.' *Historical Research* 68 (1995), pp. 266-85.

Chapter One

“The lord of all affairs and of the Queen’s person” (William Cecil)

The figure of the royal favourite in the Elizabethan Court

Throughout her forty-four-year reign, Queen Elizabeth I had several male favourites who achieved renown. The names of some of these men- Robert Dudley, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake and Robert Devereaux- have become almost as legendary as Elizabeth herself, as they have been figured as heroes or villains in historic and fictional renderings of the Queen’s life and reign. After discussing two of her main favourites, Christopher Hatton and Robert Devereaux, I will focus in greater detail on Robert Dudley, the longest lasting of Elizabeth’s favourites, who held a prominent place in Elizabeth’s court from the start of her reign in 1558 until his death in 1588. These three favourites attracted more gossip in the primary source materials that have been investigated and the gossip about them gives insights into how the behaviours of her favourites were being perceived in the royal courts, so their contributions to the themes in this thesis are noteworthy. I have chosen to focus more on Robert Dudley because I contend that the figure of the wicked, or monstrous favourite, originated with Dudley during Elizabeth’s reign and that he provided the prototype for others that followed.

After giving an introduction to Queen Elizabeth’s main favourites and the gossip that surrounded their relationships, I will take my cue from E.J. Kent and Diane Purkiss who, in their respective discussions on male witchcraft and the figure of the tyrant, suggest that to understand Renaissance and post Reformation masculinities and the cultural fears and anxieties which emerged during these times, the historical record has to be combed for “gaps and ... silences where unreason flourishes.”⁴⁶ I propose in this chapter that the seeds of what would become the

⁴⁶ Diane Purkiss, *Literature, Gender and Politics During the English Civil War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.1-5; E.J. Kent, “Tyrannical Beasts: Male Witches in Early Modern English Culture”, in *Emotions of Witchcraft*. Edited by Laura Kounine and Michael Ostling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.77-78.

monstrous favourite figure were sown in the times of social unrest and chaos during the reign of Elizabeth I.

My main primary source materials for this chapter are ambassadorial dispatches and the information they provided on the happenings within the royal court. Diplomacy in Renaissance Europe was mainly conducted when ambassadors met with sovereigns and their ministers face-to-face.⁴⁷ These diplomats would then write and send dispatches back to their monarchs, to inform them of the current information that was popular in the royal courts and in the general population.⁴⁸ Ambassadors would report what they had received via word-of-mouth, through rumours (usually indicated with “it is said”), or by conversing with powerful or well-connected courtiers.⁴⁹ Ambassadors were eager to make a precise written record of what was being spoken to them, as the context of a dispatch, the tone of writing, or in some cases a single word, could have an impact on international relationships, so accurate reporting was of great importance.⁵⁰ Court gossip was included in these dispatches because, as David Loades has suggested, this ‘common talk’ would often hold important diplomatic clues.⁵¹ These dispatches also demonstrated to the intended audience that the ambassador was not only a skillful orator and negotiator, he was also skilled at recording and capturing the conversations of others and the meaning behind these conversations, which indicated he was close to the center of political power in the royal court.⁵² Elite sources such as these provided a wealth of information about weighty matters, such as the political affairs of state, to other concerns that were based on gossip

⁴⁷ Filippo de Vevo, “Archives of Speech: Recording Diplomatic Negotiation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy”, *European History Quarterly* 46:3 (2016), p. 522.

⁴⁸ De Vivo, “Archives of Speech”, p. 522; Denice Fett, “Information, Gossip and Rumour: The Limits of Intelligence at the Early Modern Courts, 1558-1589”, in *The Limits of Empire: European Imperial Formations in Early Modern World History*. Edited by William Reger (London: Routledge, 2016), p.84.

⁴⁹ Tracy A. Sowerby, “Elizabethan Diplomatic Networks and the Spread of News”, in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Joad Raymond and Noah Moxha (Leiden: Brill, 2016), p. 318; De Vevo. “Archives of Speech”, p. 522.

⁵⁰ Isabella Lazzarini, “Argument and Emotion in Italian Diplomacy in the early Fifteenth Century: The case of Rinaldo degli Albizzi (Florence, 1399–1430)”, in *The Languages of Political Society*. Edited by A. Gamberini, J.-P. Genet and A. Zorzi, eds (Rome 2011), pp. 339- 60.

⁵¹ David Loades, *The Tudor Court* (London: Barnes and Noble, 1987) pp.169-70.

⁵² *Ibid*, pp. 169-70.

and rumours.⁵³ Ambassadorial dispatches therefore provide important information on the royal courts and the happenings in them for this chapter.

Along with the ambassadorial dispatches, for my main primary sources I will also refer to personal letters written by Elizabeth's favourites and other prominent royals, ministers, courtiers and political players. Excerpts from trials have also been included. All these sources provide direct accounts of what was being said about the Queen and/or her favoured men.

Elizabeth Tudor was no stranger to scandals, gossip and rumours and the dangers they presented. She learnt to be wary early in life, as rumours and court gossip had contributed to the execution of her mother Anne Boleyn.⁵⁴ Consequently, Elizabeth lived her childhood under the shadows of slander concerning her legitimacy, as she was viewed as the daughter of a convicted incestuous adulterer (Anne Boleyn's probable innocence notwithstanding), and was variously thought to be the daughter of Sir John Norris or Mark Smeaton- two of the men who had been accused of being lovers of Anne Boleyn.⁵⁵ Gossip continued to follow the young Elizabeth during the reign of her half-brother King Edward VI, as rumours about Elizabeth's improper behaviour with her stepfather Sir Thomas Seymore, were rampant.⁵⁶ Though unproven, the scandal that erupted around the supposed sexual relationship between Elizabeth and her step-father, cost Seymore his life. It also threatened Elizabeth's reputation and her already shaky place in the line of succession.⁵⁷

Due to the precarious position she inherited after the deaths of her two half-siblings who had short reigns, and the religious, political and social upheavals which were occurring at the time of

⁵³ Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King* p.5; Sowerby, 'Elizabethan Diplomatic Networks and the Spread of News.' p.310.

⁵⁴ For the role that gossip and rumour played in Anne Boleyn's downfall see Retha Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁵⁵ CSP *Spain*, 1536-1538. Edited by Pascual de Gayangos (London, 1888); Henry Clifford, *The Life of Jane Dormer, Duchess of Feria* (1643), p.80.

⁵⁶ See Shelia Cavanagh, "The Bad Seed: Princess Elizabeth and the Seymore Incident" in *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed. Julia M. Walker (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), pp.9-30.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp.9-30.

her accession, Elizabeth took seditious words very seriously during her own reign.⁵⁸ Her 1559 Act of Parliament was evidence of this, as she made it a crime of treason to “maliciously, advisedly, and directly say...that the Queen’s Majesty that now is, during her life, not or ought not to be the Queen of this realm.”⁵⁹ Even with this prohibition and her attempts to quell any seditious words being spread about her, rumours and gossip still became features of Elizabeth’s reign. In contrast to previous academic scholarship, what interests me more is not so much what this gossip was saying about Elizabeth and the attitudes towards her rulership, but rather what it can reveal about the men she favoured and how later stereotypical motifs and discourses surrounding favouritism may have had their origins in the gossip which was circulating during Elizabeth’s reign.⁶⁰

To investigate the sources of these rumours and gossip it is important to initially look to the royal court. The Elizabethan court was composed of the Queen herself and an assortment of people- servants, courtiers, office holders, clergymen and Privy Councillors- who advised and attended to her. The court’s composition would vary as courtiers and advisers periodically rose and fell in and out of the Queen’s favour.⁶¹ Described by court poets as being “constant only in its inconstancy,” Elizabeth’s court inspired numerous metaphors, as well as innuendo and gossip to describe the relationships between Elizabeth and her favourites.⁶²

At the start of her reign, Elizabeth (then aged 25) presided over a court that was youthful and exuberant, so she encouraged behaviours associated with the expression of courtly love, where

⁵⁸ Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, p.67; Anne Somerset, *Elizabeth I* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), p.31; Tracy Borman, *The Private Lives of the Tudors: Uncovering the Secrets of Britain’s Greatest Dynasty* (London: Hodder, 2016), pp. 274-275; Anna Whitelock, *Elizabeth’s Bedfellows: An Intimate History of the Queen’s Court* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p.39.

⁵⁹ 1 Eliz.1 c.5.

⁶⁰ For scholarship that uses gossip to explore the reign on Queen Elizabeth I see Shephard. “Sexual Rumours in English Politics”, pp101-122; K..L. Peterson, “Elizabeth I’s Virginity and the Body of Evidence; Jonson’s Notorious Crux”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 68 (2015): pp.840-71; Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, pp.66-90.

⁶¹ John Guy, *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.2.

⁶² Ibid, p.2.

young men competed for her favour and affections.⁶³ The role of a male courtier or prospective suitor in this environment was to make extravagant displays of loyalty, devotion and affection towards the monarch.⁶⁴ They would be wooed with poetry, songs and extravagant gifts. In the case of Elizabeth, where the monarch was a young, unmarried woman, it was inevitable that these displays would take on an overtly flirtatious air.⁶⁵ While these gestures were essentially part of a game of courtship, it should be remembered that these displays involved strict rules and serious stakes, so they could not be viewed separately from their political implications. Their ultimate aim in this case was to impress the queen and/or find her a suitable husband and father to royal heirs. A courtier who failed to perform well could risk exile from court, resulting in social and political ruin, while the man who happened to gain the queen's attention and affection would be given gifts and more influence at court.⁶⁶ However, Elizabeth tried to divide her attentions between the various men who competed against each other for her favours and distribute patronage equally among them to prevent factionalism or rivalry, and to stop any one courtier from becoming too powerful.⁶⁷ While this was a tactful policy, it was not always a successful one, as it led to disputes within the court. It was also a difficult policy to maintain when she found certain men to be more appealing or to have greater prospects than others. These men emerged as her 'favourites,' which only created further dissension in the court.

It is not clear when, or under what circumstances Robert Dudley and Elizabeth met, but it was evident that by the start of her reign in 1558, that the pair had become close. One of the Queen's first acts after her accession was to create Dudley as her Master of the Horse.⁶⁸ This appointment made him the only man in England who was officially allowed to touch the Queen, as his

⁶³ Jonathan Goldberg, *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p.152; Wilson, *The Uncrowned Kings of England*, p. 258; Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, p.70.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.258; Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, p.70; Alison Scott, *Selfish Gifts: The Politics of Exchange and English Courtly Literature, 1580-1628* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson, 2006), pp.47-83.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.258.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.258.

⁶⁷ Susan Doran, *Elizabeth and Her Circle* (Oxford University Press, 2015), p.5.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.119; Wilson, *The Uncrowned Kings of England*, p.254; Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, p.72; Somerset, *Elizabeth I*, p.141.

responsibilities included helping Elizabeth mount and dismount her horse.⁶⁹ This appointment, though important, was not particularly strong evidence of favouritism, as it also followed Elizabeth's policy of rehabilitating men and families who had suffered under the reign of her half-sister Queen Mary I.⁷⁰ Robert Dudley was described as an athletic, handsome man with "comely feature of body and limbs."⁷¹ Apart from these physical attributes, Elizabeth found him attractive in other ways as they had many interests in common. They shared a love of music and dancing, and both Elizabeth and Dudley were skilled linguists, fluent in reading Latin and French and speaking Italian. During the first months of Elizabeth's reign, Dudley was constantly seen in Elizabeth's company, so it wasn't long before observers started to speculate about the precise nature of their relationship.⁷² Robert Dudley attracted a lot of attention in both gossip and later libels, so I will explore his story further and his figuration as 'monstrous' later in this chapter.

While Robert Dudley was Elizabeth's main and longest lasting favourite, Christopher Hatton first came to Elizabeth's attention when he danced before her at a masque in 1561. By 1564 he was initially made one of Elizabeth's Gentleman Pensioners, (a personal corps of bodyguards), before she showered him with more substantial favours in the form of expensive gifts and property.⁷³ Like Robert Dudley, Hatton rose to power because of Elizabeth's affections for him, and by all accounts his deep affection for her. However by 1571, court gossip implicating Hatton, alongside Dudley, for having sexual relationships with the Queen began to emerge.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Master of the Horse was the third most important title in the Royal Household. See M.M. Reese, *The Royal Office of The Master of the Horse* (London, 1976); Whitelock, *Elizabeth's Bedfellows*, p.34.

⁷⁰ Doran, *Elizabeth and Her Circle*, p.119.

⁷¹ Camden. '1560' *Annales Rerum Gestarum Angliae et Hiberniae Regnante Elizabetha* (1615, 1625) edited and translated by Diana F. Sutton <<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/camden/>>; Whitelock. *Elizabeth's Bedfellows*, p.34; Doran, *Elizabeth and Her Circle*, p. 119.

⁷² Doran, *Elizabeth and Her Circle*, p.119.

⁷³ Camden. '1560' *Annales*; Somerset. *Elizabeth I*, p.426

⁷⁴ Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, p.78; Shephard, "Sexual Rumours in English Politics", p.105.

A man named Berny, who had been arrested for inciting to murder both the Queen and her chief advisor Robert Cecil, said under interrogation that Elizabeth,

Desireth nothing but to feed her own lewd fantasy, and to cut off such of her nobility as were not perfumed and court-like to please her delicate eye, and place such as were for her turn, meaning dancers, and meaning you my Lord of Leicester, and one Mr. Hatton, whom he said had more recourse unto her Majesty in her privy chamber than reason would suffer if she were so virtuous and well inclined as some noiseth her; with other such vile words as I am ashamed to speak, much more to write.⁷⁵

In the September of the next year, Archbishop Matthew Parker was told that a man had said “most shameful words...that the Earl of Leicester and Mr. Hatton should be such towards her, as the matter is so horrible, they would not write down the words.”⁷⁶ In 1585 it was noted in German travel writer Lupold von Wedel’s journal that Hatton was the man “the queen is said to have loved after Leicester [Robert Dudley].”⁷⁷ In the mid 1580s, gossip about Elizabeth’s affair with Hatton reached the ears of the imprisoned Mary, Queen of Scots who, in a malicious letter that detailed a number of supposed men Elizabeth had slept with, said of Elizabeth’s relationship with Hatton, “you ran him hard, showing so publicly the love that you bore him, that he himself was constrained to withdraw from it...”⁷⁸ To counteract this gossip Elizabeth’s godson, Sir John Harrington, thought it worthwhile to record that Hatton “did swear voluntarily, deeply and with vehement asseveration that he never had any carnal knowledge of her body.”⁷⁹ The fact that Hatton made this public statement tells us something of the gravity of the gossip surrounding his

⁷⁵ William Murdin, *A Collection of State Papers Relating to Affairs in the Reign of Elizabeth I From 1542 to 1560 Left by William Cecil: Lord Burghly* (London 1759), p. 204.

⁷⁶ Thomas Wright (ed), *Queen Elizabeth and Her Times* 2 vols (Henry Colburn, 1838), vol. 1, p. 440.

⁷⁷ Gottfried von Bülow (ed), “Journey through England and Scotland Made by Lupold von Wedel in the Years 1584 and 1585”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 9 (1895), p. 264.

⁷⁸ *Mary Queen of Scots to Queen Elizabeth, [Oct./Nov.] 1584.*

⁷⁹ John Harrington, *Tract on the Succession of the Crown* (London; Roxburghe Club, 1880), p. 40.

relationship with Elizabeth.⁸⁰ Both these comments indicate how widespread this scandal-mongering had travelled. The rumours and gossip that were circulating were in part due to the fact that during the 1570s, Hatton had gained access to Elizabeth's Privy Chamber after being made Yeoman of the Guard in 1572.⁸¹ This position gave Hatton greater access to the Queen's private apartments, which also allowed him an even closer personal proximity to her.⁸² He was also in receipt of substantial rewards from Elizabeth and more lavish and expensive gifts than were traditional for courtiers.

The relationship between Elizabeth's last favourite, Robert Devereux the Earl of Essex, was altogether different from the ones she had enjoyed with Dudley and Hatton. With Hatton and Dudley there had been genuine feelings of affection, devotion and hopes of marriage, but Robert Devereux's relationship with the Queen was not as healthy.⁸³ Devereux was not as happy to play the subordinate to Elizabeth, or to share her affections and favours with others. However, due to the Queen's age and the improbability that any sexual relationship would produce a child, there was nowhere near the gossip surrounding this relationship that there had been with Dudley, and to a lesser extent Hatton, but this did not mean it didn't exist.⁸⁴ According to court observers throughout the summer of 1587, Devereux (like Dudley before him) was constantly seen in the company of Elizabeth.⁸⁵ At royal banquets, Elizabeth would often have him sit next to, or adjacent to her. She was often caught whispering and touching him, and they particularly enjoyed playing card games with each other well into the night.

⁸⁰ Somerset, *Elizabeth I*, p129.

⁸¹ Nicholas Harris Nicholas, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of Sir Christopher Hatton* (London: R. Bentley, 184-7), p. 26, p. 155, p.33; Doran, *Elizabeth I and Her Circle*, pp.143-144; Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, p79; Wallace MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I: War and Politics, 1588-1603*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p475

⁸² MacCaffrey, *War and Politics, 1588-1603*, p475

⁸³ Alexandra Gadjia, *The Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p141.

⁸⁴ See Doran, *Elizabeth's Circle*, pp.165-192.

⁸⁵ Ibid, pp.165-192.

It was bragged by one of his servants in 1587 that;

“There was no body neer her, but my Lord of Essex and at night my lord is at cardes or one game or another with her that he commeth not to his owne lodging tyll birdes singe in the morninge”⁸⁶

As late as 1601, there were also rumours that Elizabeth (who was nearing seventy) had born the Earl of Essex a child.⁸⁷ Even though this type of unfounded gossip was not new, it highlights the thinking that Dudley, Hatton and Devereux were lovers of the Queen. While these favoured men aroused the most suspicions and attracted the most derogatory gossip during Elizabeth’s reign, most of it which related to Hatton and Devereux in particular, was based on speculations about the seriousness of their relationship and the possibility of them being lovers of the queen or fathering children with her, so this type of gossip arose more from general anxieties about Elizabeth finding a suitable husband, her sexuality, her fertility and ensuring her succession.⁸⁸ While Christopher Hatton and Robert Devereux did attract their share of gossip, they did not attract the same type of venomous gossip that Robert Dudley did.

It would not be overstating it to suggest that there have been few more successful attempts to transform a man into a ‘monster’ than those made against Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester.⁸⁹ Of Elizabeth’s favourites he was the longest lasting, and was the man who attracted the most vitriolic gossip.⁹⁰ For most of Dudley’s lifetime he was a controversial figure who was disliked by Catholics and also by many Protestants.⁹¹ The slanderous gossip which surrounded him went

⁸⁶ Folger Shakespeare Library, I.a.39.

⁸⁷ Sir William Browne to Sir Robert Sidney, November 7, 1601 MSS vol 2, p540.

⁸⁸ Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, p.67.

⁸⁹ Milton Waldman, *Elizabeth and Leicester* (London: Collins, 1944), p. 171.

⁹⁰ Hannah Betts. ‘ “The image of the Queene so quynt”: The Pornographic Blazon 1588-1603’ in Julia M. Walker (ed) *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana* (Duke University Press, 1998), p. 153.

⁹¹ Doran, *Elizabeth I and Her Circle*, p. 142.

towards the creation of what Derek Wilson termed the ‘black legend’ of Robert Dudley, which has since coloured the modern historiographical interpretation of him.⁹²

When in April 1559 Dudley was made a member of the prestigious Order of the Garter, what particularly galled observers was that he now possessed considerable power and influence in Elizabeth’s court, and he also held weight when formulating government policies. The Spanish Ambassador, the Count de Feria, wrote to King Phillip II in April 1559 explaining the extent of Dudley’s intimacy and influence with the Queen and how this was being perceived. He stated that, “During the last few days Lord Robert has come so much into favour that he does what he likes with affairs”⁹³ Weeks later, the Venetian ambassador, Il Schifanoja, wrote that Dudley was “in great favour and very intimate with her majesty.”⁹⁴ While he failed to make any explicit mention of gossip circulating the court, he did allude to it by saying, “On this subject I ought to report the opinion of many, but I doubt whether my letters may not miscarry or be read, wherefore it is better to keep silence than to speak ill.”⁹⁵ While not openly stating the popular gossip, Il Schifanoja indicated that he feared that his letters would be intercepted, so it kept him from reporting popular whisperings. The next year, William Cecil wrote to the new Spanish ambassador, de Quadra, that Dudley had “made himself lord of all affairs and of the Queen’s person, to the extreme injury of all the Kingdom, intending to marry her and that he led her to spend all day hunting, with much danger to her health and life.”⁹⁶ He proposed that Dudley’s power and Elizabeth’s intimacy with him would lead to the ruin of the realm if it was not properly controlled.⁹⁷

⁹² Wilson, *Sweet Robin*, P. IX. Other significant works that look at Robert Dudley are Elizabeth Goldring, *Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and the World of Elizabethan Art: Painting and Patronage at the Court of Elizabeth I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Derek Wilson, *The Uncrowned Kings of England: The Black Legend of the Dudleys* (London: Robinson, 2005); Simon Adams, *Leicester and the Court: Essays on Elizabethan Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Alan Haynes, *The White Bear: The Elizabethan Earl of Leicester* (London: Peter Owens, 1987).

⁹³ CSP Span, 1558-67, pp. 57-8.

⁹⁴ CSP Ven, 1558-80, p. 85; Whitelock. *Elizabeth’s Bedfellows*, p. 35.

⁹⁵ CSP Ven, 1558-80, p. 85; Whitelock. *Elizabeth’s Bedfellows*, p. 35.

⁹⁶ CSP Span, 1558-67, pp.174-6.

⁹⁷ CSP Span, 1558-67, p. 175.

According to the ambassadorial dispatches, this power had a very definite source. De Feria noted in April 1559 that, “it is even said that her Majesty visits him in his chamber day and night,” so instead of acknowledging that Dudley had political nous and that his abilities were trusted by the Queen (who reportedly was a shrewd judge of character), they saw murkier reasons for Dudley’s rise to prominence.⁹⁸ Essentially, Dudley’s rise to power was viewed as a direct result of Elizabeth’s favours, which had their source in the Queen’s *priva molto* (great intimacy) with Dudley.⁹⁹ These suspicions were assisted by gossip the ambassadors heard (and conveyed) that Elizabeth was in the habit of visiting Dudley frequently and that she never allowed Dudley to leave her side.¹⁰⁰ The fact that the pair lived in the same apartment of the palace did nothing to ease these suspicions.

From the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign, there were suggestions that Dudley’s wife, Amy Robsart, was ailing with a “malady in her breast” and that Elizabeth was simply waiting for her to die to marry Dudley. By the mid 1560s her Chief Advisor, William Cecil, had told the Spanish Ambassador de Quarda that he believed Elizabeth and Dudley were plotting the murder of Amy, so were publicly telling everyone that she was ill and close to death.¹⁰¹ The day after these revelations were written, Ambassador de Quarda added a dramatic postscript; “After I wrote this the Queen has made public the death of M. Robsart and has said in Italian- *Que si ha rotto il collo*- that she has broken her neck and must have fallen down a staircase.”¹⁰² Indeed it was true that Dudley’s wife Amy was found dead at the bottom of a small flight of stairs on September 8, 1560. The cause of Amy’s death, whether by suicide, murder, or simply an accident brought on by her illness, has been debated ever since.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ CSP Spain, I, pp. 57-8.

⁹⁹ CSP Ven, 1558-80, p. 85.

¹⁰⁰ CSP, Spain, pp. 57-8.

¹⁰¹ CSP Spain, 1558-67, p. 165.

¹⁰² AGS E814, fol. 24.

¹⁰³ For a recent discussion of the Amy Robsart case, see Chris Skidmore, *Death and the Virgin: Elizabeth, Dudley and the Mysterious Fate of Amy Robsart* (London; Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2010).

This sudden and mysterious death of Dudley's wife marked a turning point in the type of gossip being generated about Elizabeth and Dudley, which also complicated their relationship. Modern historians do not agree on the true cause of death, but Dudley was the main suspect during his own lifetime.¹⁰⁴ The royal courts of Europe buzzed with slanderous gossip about the relationship between Elizabeth and Dudley. Whenever his name was brought up in connection with Elizabeth's proposed marriage, the rumour that he had murdered his wife was inevitably highlighted.¹⁰⁵ The young queen of France, Mary Stuart (as yet untouched by the scandals that would later bring her down) openly stated that Elizabeth was planning to marry her horse keeper, and so he could make room in his bed for her Dudley had murdered his wife.¹⁰⁶

In the summer of 1559, these suspicions reached a crescendo. Dispatches from the Imperial Ambassador Baron Breuner, related an anecdote telling the story of Elizabeth's most intimate Lady of the Bedchamber, Katherine Ashley, falling to her knees and begging Elizabeth to marry to end the disreputable and destructive rumours surrounding her relationship with Dudley.¹⁰⁷

On September 10 1560, Robert Dudley wrote a letter to his chief household officer, Sir Thomas Blount, about the sudden death of his wife Amy Robsart a few days earlier. In it Dudley lamented that;

The greatness and suddenness of the misfortune doth so perplex me, until I do hear from you how the matter standeth, or how this evil should light upon me, considering what the malicious world will bruit, as I can take no rest. And, because I have no way to purge myself of the malicious talk that I know the wicked world will use, but one which is the very plain truth to be known...¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Derek Wilson has suggested William Cecil as a potential culprit, see Wilson, *The Uncrowned Kings of England*, p. 275; See also Chris Skidmore, *Death and the Virgin* (London: Orion, 2011), pp.377-8; Doran, *Elizabeth I and Her Circle* p.123; Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁵ Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁶ Murdin and Haynes, *Collection of State Papers*, vol. 1, p. 36.

¹⁰⁷ Burghley State Papers, p. 95.

¹⁰⁸ G. Adlard, *Amye Robsart and the Earl of Leycester* (London, 1870), p. 32.

This “malicious talk” that Dudley mentioned had followed him and the Queen since her accession to the English throne in November 1558, but after the death of his wife in 1560, it exploded and caused Dudley to be perceived in a more negative light.¹⁰⁹ Writing in 1566, the Spanish Ambassador de Silva wrote that he had heard gossip that Elizabeth had slept with Dudley on New Year’s Day.¹¹⁰ More generally, a man named Marshame had both his ears cut off for making a comment about Elizabeth producing two of Dudley’s children.¹¹¹ These negative perceptions followed Dudley for the rest of his life, and even long after his death in 1588.

Writing from his post as Ambassador to the French court, Nicolaus Throckmorton summarized the popular feelings regarding Amy’s death and Elizabeth’s continued connection to Dudley;

I know not what to think, the bruits be so brim and so maliciously reported here, touching the marriage of the Lord Robert, and the death of his wife, as I know not where to turn me, not what countenance to bear.¹¹²

Throckmorton begged Cecil to convince Elizabeth to do away with any thought of marriage to Dudley, otherwise “the Queen, our sovereign be discredited, condemned and neglected; our country ruined, undone and made prey...the Commonwealth liveth now in great hazard.”¹¹³ In the eyes of Elizabeth’s government the situation was perilous, so any further association with Dudley would be disastrous for her reputation and ultimately her position as Queen.¹¹⁴

While there were no specific accusations of Dudley’s sexual misconduct in the gossip at the time, there was however a link made between Dudley’s power and political influence and his

¹⁰⁹ Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, p. 72.

¹¹⁰ CSP, *Spain*, vol.1, p. 520-21.

¹¹¹ E. Lodge (ed), *Illustrations of British History* (3 vols, London, 1838), vol. 1, pp.512-14. See also Matthew Reynolds, *Godley Reformers and Their Opponents in Early Modern England: Religion in Norwich, C. 1560-1643* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2005), p. 55.

¹¹² Phillip Yorke, Earl of Hardwicke (ed), *Miscellaneous State Papers*, from 1501 to 1726, 2 vols (London, 1778), Vol 1, pp121-3.

¹¹³ Hardwicke. *Miscellaneous State Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 121-3.

¹¹⁴ Whitelock, *Elizabeth’s Bedfellow*, pp. 47-49.

supposed sexual intimacy with the Queen. What is particularly interesting was the emphasis on the hidden nature of the relationship and the secret visits to bedchambers. In early modern England there was a connection made between moral transparency and the more public authority of the monarchy, so any form of secrecy was likely to be interpreted in a scandalous way.¹¹⁵ These erotic imaginings (often expressed as rumours or gossip) about the intimacies between Dudley and Elizabeth in the Privy Chambers, gave rise to the premise that Elizabeth's failure to govern or control herself in these places was linked to the failure to govern and control any other areas of her life, especially the state, so rumours and gossip functioned as informal, safer ways of discussing political or moral corruption.¹¹⁶

Before the figure of the monstrous favourite emerged, the figure of the tyrant was the stereotypical depiction of corrupted masculinity. Figures of the tyrant were central images in the Elizabethan political landscape, as they appeared on the stage and in preachers' sermons, so the figure of the tyrannical male would have been well known to the ordinary English person.¹¹⁷ As A.J. Kent and Robert Zaller observed, the tyrant was representational of someone who had committed absolute transgressions, so was "the most deformed of all monsters."¹¹⁸ These transgressions included the full gamut of social, religious, economic, political and moral deviance.¹¹⁹ In Renaissance England it was believed that tyranny began with a man's ambition and his lust for power,¹²⁰ as these vices would destroy a man's virtue and his reasoning.¹²¹ Ambition was thought to corrupt a man's soul and make him believe, like Dr. Faustus, that he could be "a mighty God."¹²² More importantly, as Kent observed, the figure of the tyrant was viewed as an "embodied masculine evil" that was "associated with rebellion, political

¹¹⁵ Perry, *Literature and Favouritism*, p.131.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.133.

¹¹⁷ Kent, "Tyrannical Beasts" p. 78.

¹¹⁸ Kent, "Tyrannical Beasts", p. 78; R. Zaller, "The Figure of the Tyrant in English Revolutionary Thought", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54:4 (1993), pp.585–619.

¹¹⁹ W.A. Armstrong, "The Elizabethan Conception of the Tyrant". *Review of English Studies* 22:86 (1946), p. 163.

¹²⁰ Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Tragedy of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theatre in the English Renaissance*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 52; Armstrong, "The Elizabethan Conception of the Tyrant", p. 167; Kent, "Tyrannical Beasts", p. 79.

¹²¹ Bushnell, *Tragedy of Tyrants*, p 52.

¹²² Christopher Marlowe, *Tragicall Historie of D. Faustus* [1990], pp. 4-6.

subversion, witchcraft and the rules of Hell.”¹²³ This figuration can be gleaned in ambassadorial dispatches from Spain, Venice and the Holy Roman Empire in relation to Robert Dudley.

It was from this mindset and cultural environment that Catholic recusants began to furtively circulate anonymous polemical pamphlets which abounded in popular anti-court stereotypes. These libels will be explored further in Chapter Three. Using the themes that were popularized through court gossip, this chapter has explored the origins of the anti- Dudley genre of libellous materials, which expanded on the stereotype of the tyrant and the old theme of the power hungry, devious counsellors who had damaging effects on the monarchy.¹²⁴ It was within these texts that the tropes that were associated with the ‘monstrous favourite’ emerged.¹²⁵ In them Dudley was depicted as religiously apostate; cowardly; fond of dancing; vain; sexually voracious; treacherous; ambitious; power hungry; and ready to make use of poison to murder to eliminate his enemies.¹²⁶ These texts were suppressed by Queen Elizabeth and treated with contempt by Dudley himself, but they provide insights into the power and longevity of gossip and other types of unsubstantiated or malicious talk, and the influence they had on the monarchy and historical records.¹²⁷

By focusing on the discursive construction of the royal favourites of Queen Elizabeth I, particularly in relation to Robert Dudley, this chapter has explored the main thematic elements that went into the creation of the stereotypical ‘monstrous favourite’ who was constructed as having predatory passions that were aggressive, bestial, immoral and out of control. By focusing mainly on the gossip and rumours, I have argued that the negative characterization of Elizabeth’s favourites had their foundations in these examples of scurrilous reporting. These ideas were then

¹²³ Kent, “Tyrannical Beasts”, p. 82; Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 86–7; D. Loewenstein, “An Ambiguous Monster: Representing Rebellion in Milton’s Polemics and *Paradise Lost*”, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 55: 2 (Spring, 1992), p. 295; Armstrong, “Elizabethan Conceptions of the Tyrant”, pp. 178-9.

¹²⁴ Adams, *Leicester and the Court*, p. 47.

¹²⁵ Bellamy, *The Politics of Court Scandal*, p.5.

¹²⁶ Perry, *Literature and Favouritism*, p. 2

¹²⁷ Wilson, *The Uncrowned Kings of England*, p. 331.

taken, exaggerated and made into a composite stereotypical figure in libellous pamphlets (which started in the mid-1580s), in which the main favourites (particularly Dudley) were constructed in ways to discredit them, their influences, and indirectly the integrity and leadership of the monarch.

It is clear, just from these examples, that a running theme in the available literature is a connection between sexual intimacy and political corruption. While these sources cannot be read as providing a totally accurate account of events, what they do provide is an interesting framework for understanding how male favourites were being portrayed and constructed in the Elizabethan royal court, as well as the anxieties which arose in relation to them. The libels that resulted from this gossip were published (and suppressed) in the 1580s, but remained popular well into the reign of King James I, so they also informed the construction of tropes surrounding royal favourites in his reign. These ideas, which attached themselves to Dudley in gossip and rumours have, either directly or indirectly, been the foundations upon which the English figure of the 'monstrous favourite' were built, and they also influenced the ways in which later Jacobean favourites were constructed.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Perry, *Literature and Favouritism*, pp. 22-54.

Chapter Two

Devilish and Diabolical: The figure of the favourite in the Jacobean Court

Royal favourites had become topical subjects in England after the accession of King James I to the English throne in 1603.¹²⁹ Dislike and envy towards these favourites had resulted in a proliferation of gossip, rumours and libels about the manner in which these men had achieved their power and position. Robert Dudley's portrayal as an ambitious, devious tyrant had by James' English reign infiltrated the royal court, so after James' accession, this figure of the tyrant or monstrous favourite continued to develop. This was especially evident in the portrayals of the more notorious of King James' favourites- Esme Stewart, the Duke of Lennox; Robert Carr, the Earl of Somerset; and George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham- on whom this chapter will focus.

Even before the start of James' reign, an identifiable image of the tyrant or monstrous favourite already existed. This figure was Aelius Sejanus, favourite of the emperor Tiberius. The Roman historian Tacitus outlined Sejanus' character in his *Annales*. He was depicted well in the following excerpt;

By various means, he cast such a spell on Tiberius, who was inscrutable in his dealings with others, that he made him feel relaxed and off his guard only with him...Secretive about himself, he slandered others, he was a blend of sycophancy and arrogance; on the surface there was calm reserve, inside lust for supreme power (in the pursuit of which there was occasionally lavish gift-

¹²⁹ S. Keenan, "Staging Roman History", p. 63.

giving and extravagant living, but more often hard work and vigilance- qualities just as deadly when developed for acquiring a kingdom)¹³⁰

The pivotal interpretation of this text in early seventeenth century England was Ben Jonson's play *Sejanus, His Fall*. Published in 1603, the play used the rediscovered Tacitean image of the corrupt court favourite.¹³¹ In addition to the attributes listed by Tacitus, Jonson's *Sejanus* gave him the following characteristics- homosexuality, corruption, ambition, religious perversion and the power to overstep the boundaries of sovereignty. According to Robert Cecil, so popular was this image that even during periods of time where no favourite existed, writers of libels would still "look for a Tiberius or Sejanus".¹³² During the latter years of King James I's reign, Sejanus became a byword to describe the royal favourites, especially in relation to George Villiers.¹³³ As Jonathan Goldberg noted, "actual history overtook staged history"¹³⁴. Although Jonson had not intended this when he wrote the play in 1603, Sejanus' rise to power had become a metaphor for the career of Villiers. *Sejanus* became an interesting, if not vital source, for understanding how royal favourites (Villiers in particular) and their relationships with King James were being perceived and received.

Although Elizabeth's reputation as a sexually chaste monarch may have suffered somewhat because of the rumours aimed at her and her favourites, it did not suffer as badly as James' reputation. When King James VI of Scotland arrived in London following the death of Queen Elizabeth I in March 1603, he brought with him a large entourage of Scottish courtiers. This change in the regime produced a political and cultural shock to the English royal court. The Scottish courtiers' apparent rough masculinities, which they displayed in their feasts,

¹³⁰ Tacitus, *Annales* 4:1. Translated by J.C. Yardley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹³¹ Ruth Little, "Perpetual Metaphors: The Configuration of the Courtier as Favourite in Jacobean and Caroline Literature" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1993), p. 173.

¹³² *Proceedings in Parliament 1610*. Edited by Elizabeth Read Foster (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), Vol. II, p. 168.

¹³³ Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1989), p177.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 177.

entertainments and their displays of unrestrained emotions, were at odds with the more restrained environment of the Elizabethan court. Of most concern however was the new king's fondness for male favourites, whom he was alleged to have chosen for their good looks and charm, rather than for their noble ancestry or political acumen. James also reinstated the male orientated Privy Chamber (renamed the Bedchamber) which allowed these men greater access to him. It was to the horror of his English courtiers that James relied on these men (primarily Robert Carr followed by George Villiers) not only for friendship, emotional support and (it was suspected) sexual intimacy, but that he also turned to them for advice about political issues, which granted his favourites significant amounts of power and influence. I will argue in this chapter that it was from this divisive atmosphere in the royal court, during the reign of King James I, that the true figure of the monstrous favourite emerged.

While he was still King of Scotland, James was infamous for his preference for male courtiers who were young and handsome. Scottish courtier Thomas Fowler noted that James was "too much carried by young men that lies in his chamber and is his minions."¹³⁵ This royal preference had long attracted controversy, so has emerged as a popular topic among historians of sexuality for its supposed demonstration of the presence of homosexuality in Renaissance England.¹³⁶ Alternatively this favouritism has been presented as evidence of the opposite- that James and his favourites were engaging in the Renaissance courtly ideal of male friendship.¹³⁷ This chapter is not so concerned with entering into this debate. Rather it will be tackling this subject from a different angle- looking at how these favourites and James' relationships with them were constructed as monstrous.

¹³⁵ CSP Scotland, IX, p. 701; Michael Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), pp. 12-13; Benjamin Woolley, *The King's Assassin: The Fatal Affair of George Villiers and James I* (London: Macmillan, 2017), p. 13.

¹³⁶ Young, "James VI and I: Time for A Reconsideration", pp. 540-67; Randolph Trumbach, "Renaissance Sodomy, 1500-1700," in Matt Cook (ed) *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex between Men since the Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*

¹³⁷ See in particular Alan Bray, *The Friend* (University of Chicago Press, 2003).

The source materials I have selected are quite different from the ones used in the previous chapter, as they are mainly made up of contemporary observations and interpretations of James' behaviour with his favourites. While I will still use ambassadorial dispatches, I have emphasised other forms of written material (some of which are anonymous). They are diverse in nature, ranging from official reports gossip in ambassadorial dispatches and diaries, documents like tracts and pamphlets and more literary works, such as poems and plays, which both used and interpreted gossip to construct a libelous portrait of the king.¹³⁸ These sources contain eye-witness accounts and while they cannot all be taken at face value, connections can be made between James' public behaviours and the interpretations made about them.¹³⁹ I have also used other written sources such as the diary of Simonds D'Ewes. Ben Jonson's play *Sejanus, His Fall*, while based on characters from Classical Rome, does not incorporate current English gossip, but it has been included here because it depicted a young male cup-bearer who gained significant favour with an emperor, so similarities have been drawn between the main characters and James and one of his favourites George Villiers. These materials all highlight the gossip that was circulating throughout London between 1603-1628.

The traits that defined the tyrant and monstrous favourite during Elizabeth's reign became more monstrous when sodomy and witchcraft were added to the list of sins in the Jacobean era. As Stuart Clark has suggested, under demonological discourse, witchcraft was represented as the antithesis of reason and order as it inverted religious, political, social and sexual orthodoxies.¹⁴⁰ The male witch in particular represented political subversion and treason.¹⁴¹ The construction of the monstrous favourite had much in common with the depictions of male witches which

¹³⁸ Young, 'James VI and I: Time for a Reconsideration?', p. 542; Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England*, p. 30.

¹³⁹ Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England*, p. 30. See also David Bergeron. *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire* (University of Iowa Press, 1999).

¹⁴⁰ Stuart Clark, 'King James' *Daemonologie*: Witchcraft and Kingship' in Sydney Anglo (ed) *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012), p. 165. See also *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁴¹ Stuart Clark. 'King James' *Daemonologie*: Witchcraft and Kingship', in Sydney Anglo (ed) *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012), p. 165. See also *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

occurred during the same period. For example, a witchcraft pamphlet published in London in 1612 illustrated the case of Lewis Gaufredy, a French Catholic priest who confessed to witchcraft. Gaufredy confessed that he had been possessed with a “badde affection ... of ambition, to live in great reputation in the world, but especially amongst honest men” and being given the “power ... to know carnally women or maids ... on whom his pernicious and lustful eyes [fell].”¹⁴² This pamphlet listed the major traits that were associated with male favourites during this time. Beliefs about witches influenced the ways that male favourites were being constructed, as the male witch was defined as someone who had relinquished his Christian human status and transformed into an uncontrollable monster who possessed bestial passions, was overly ambitious, corrupt, and driven by lust. As it was believed that they had betrayed God to achieve their own ends, these traits also indicated that they were allied with Satanic forces.¹⁴³ By associating male favourites with witchcraft, writers were offering readers a prefiguration of Hell, where society was governed by the worst of men.

From the Medieval period onwards, while sodomy was still defined as sexual relations between unmarried men and women, or men and boys, in the Renaissance it also became an inclusive term that was linked with heresy, demons, monsters and all kinds of unorthodox sexual relationships, so it was considered an ‘unnatural’ crime.’¹⁴⁴ In his ground-breaking book, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, Alan Bray suggested that sodomy “was not part of the created order; rather it was part of its dissolution,” so he linked the idea of sodomy with blasphemy, heresy, treason and popery.¹⁴⁵ In Jacobean England it was also linked to adultery,

¹⁴² Anon, *The Life and Death of Lewis Gaufredy* [1612], p. 2-4.

¹⁴³ For information on male witches in Jacobean England see M. Gaskill, “The Devil in the Shape of a Man: Witchcraft, Conflict and Belief in Jacobean England”, *Historical Research* 71 (1998), pp. 142–71; E.J. Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593–1680”, *History Workshop Journal* 60 (2005), pp. 69–92; Laura Apps and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁴ Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion In Early Modern Europe*, (Routledge, 2013), p. 25; M.D. Barbezet, “Bodies of the Spirit and Bodies of the Flesh: The Significance of the Sexual Practices Attributed to Heretics from the Eleventh to the Fourteenth Centuries”, *The Journal of the History of Sexuality* 25:3 (September, 2016), p. 398.

¹⁴⁵ Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (Gay Men’s Press, 1982), p. 30.

conjuring, witchcraft and rape.¹⁴⁶ These attitudes about sodomy were linked to the rise in the fears about the influence of demons and witches in Renaissance Europe generally and Jacobean England specifically.¹⁴⁷ Sodomy in other words was viewed as a totally morally depraved act, so was used to vilify and alienate a person, or groups of people, who were seen as the enemy in post-Reformation England, such as Roman Catholics, other foreigners and royal favourites.¹⁴⁸

To understand the importance of his male favourites and to provide the context for the gossip and the development of the monstrous favourite which emerged during James' reign, some biographical information will now be provided. James had become King of Scotland at the age of thirteen months, after his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, was deposed in 1567.¹⁴⁹ For much of his childhood James remained under the control of Scottish nobles who educated him and trained him to take over his royal duties.¹⁵⁰ James' first favourite appeared when he was thirteen, in the form of his male cousin Esme Stewart, who was twenty years senior to James. It was not long after his arrival at his court that observers noted that James was "so much affected to him that he delights only in his company."¹⁵¹ Scottish courtiers remarked on the closeness between the two and were fearful that the thirteen-year-old James was being "carried away" by Stewart, as he was thought to be under his control.¹⁵² In a letter dated May 2, 1582, Sir Henry Woddryngton wrote to Queen Elizabeth I's spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham regarding the scandalous state of affairs between King James VI and Stewart;

¹⁴⁶ Alan Shaw, "A Society of Sodomites: Religion and Homosexuality in Renaissance England", in Laura Gowing, Michael Hunter and Miri Rubin (eds), *Love, Friendship and Faith in Europe, 1300-1800* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 89.

¹⁴⁷ Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, pp. 40-41; Bray, "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship", p. 2. For a New England source in the 1640s that links witchcraft with sodomy see Thomas Shepard, *The Works of Thomas Shepard*, vol. 1, (Boston, 1853), p. 28.

¹⁴⁸ Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, p. 37.

¹⁴⁹ Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, p. 9; David Wilson, *King James VI & I* (London: J. Cape, 1967), pp. 19-27.

¹⁵⁰ Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, p. 9; Wilson, *King James VI & I*, pp. 19-27.

¹⁵¹ Arthur Wilson, *The History of Great Britain, Being the Life and Reign of King James I* (1653), p. 33;; Robert Ashton (ed). *James I, by his Contemporaries* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), p. 115.

¹⁵² CSP Scotland V, p. 355.

The King altogether is perswaded and ledd by him, for he can I hardly suffre him owt of his presence, and is in such love with him, as iu the oppen sight of the people, oftentymes he will claspe him about the neck with his armes and kisse him.¹⁵³

This open demonstrativeness made observers question what the pair was doing behind closed doors.¹⁵⁴ These displays of affection were also commented on by David Moysie, a Scottish Government official, who noted in his memoirs that James had “conceived an inward affection to the said Lord Aubigny, entered in great affection and quiet purposes with him.”¹⁵⁵ Likewise, in a letter to Sir Francis Walsingham in 1580, Robert Bowes observed that Stewart possessed “free and secret access” to the King at all times and that he had grown so much in the King’s favour that none dared to oppose him.¹⁵⁶ The tyrannical aspects of favouritism (outlined in Chapter One) in relation to Robert Dudley, which by the 1580s had become well known in both England and Scotland, reappeared here with the links to sexual favours and Stewart’s influence over James, where he was described as “guiding all as if he were king”.¹⁵⁷

In a pattern to be repeated with his other major favourites, James granted Stewart great rewards, such as money and titles and kept him close.¹⁵⁸ Once James had reached his majority in 1579, Stewart rose to greater prominence when he was made the Earl of Lennox in March 1580, then Duke of Lennox in August 1581.¹⁵⁹ He used this influence to consolidate his power and have one of James’ guardians, James Douglas, the 4th Earl of Morton, executed on an old (but well founded) charge of complicity in the death of James’ father Lord Darnley, in 1567.¹⁶⁰

Additionally, Stewart fostered relationships with Spain and the Catholic faction in France, which

¹⁵³ Joseph Bain (ed), *Calendar of Letters and State Papers Relating to the Affairs of the Borders* (Edinburg, 1894), p. 82.

¹⁵⁴ Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁵ David Moysie., *Memoirs of the Affairs of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1830), p-xiii. Modernized spelling.

¹⁵⁶ CSP Scotland V, p. 423.

¹⁵⁷ CSP Scotland VI, pp. 129-30.

¹⁵⁸ Neil Cuddy, “The Revival of the Entourage: The Bedchamber of James I, 1603-1625”, ed. David Starkey *The English Court: From the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London: Longman, 1987), pp. 180-1.

¹⁵⁹ Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 10.

further alienated the staunchly Protestant Scottish nobility and gained him a reputation for duplicity and dishonesty, especially in the eyes of the English.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, one of the major ‘sins’ of which Stewart was accused was that he was a Catholic. The leading Scottish nobles and Presbyterian ministers expressed fears that since Stewart was controlling the king, he was also planning to overthrow the Protestant religion.¹⁶²

These Presbyterian ministers became particularly vocal opponents. They accused him of a variety of immoralities, with one minister in particular accusing him of “the introducing of prodigality and vanity in apparel, superfluity in banqueting and delicate cheer, deflowering of dames and virgins and other fruits of the French court.”¹⁶³ Stewart and his companions were described as “licentious libertines” who used “devilish” and “diabolical” means to corrupt James.¹⁶⁴ A contemporary observer, David Calderwood, noted that Stewart and his French courtiers instead encouraged James to engage in ‘fleshy’ pleasures and all kinds of licentiousness.¹⁶⁵ Stewart was described as being the master of not only the King’s bedchamber, but also of his person.¹⁶⁶ Above all, Stewart was accused of working to corrupt the king.¹⁶⁷ I argue that this fear of corruption (alongside the anti-Dudley libels in the 1580s) was the turning point in transforming royal favourites into monsters.

Stewart’s tyrannical power over James and the influence he had over Scottish policy, along with fears that Stewart was a French agent sent to Scotland to spread Catholicism caused even further anxieties in the Scottish royal court.¹⁶⁸ One of the Presbyterian ministers confronted James and begged him to remove the “evil company” he was keeping.¹⁶⁹ An English agent reported that Stewart was dragging James into carnal lust, while an anonymous memorandum reported that

¹⁶¹ Pauline Croft, *King James* (London; Macmillan, 2002), p. 15.

¹⁶² CSP Scotland V, p. 423.

¹⁶³ David Calderwood, *A History of the Kirk of Scotland* Vol III, edited by Thomas Thompson (Edinburgh, 1843), p. 642.

¹⁶⁴ Calderwood, *A History of the Kirk of Scotland*, p. 642.

¹⁶⁵ CSP Scotland VI, pp. 171-74.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 171-74.

¹⁶⁷ Calderwood, *A History of the Kirk of Scotland*, p. 642.

¹⁶⁸ Moysie, *Memoirs of the Affairs of Scotland*, p29; CSP Borders, pp. 77-86.

¹⁶⁹ Calderwood, *A History of the Kirk of Scotland*, p. 641.

James' evil counsellor was inviting the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah upon the kingdom.¹⁷⁰ This preaching and criticism eventually led to Esme Stewart fleeing Scotland in 1582. He returned to France where he died the next year. His embalmed heart was sent to James, which reportedly left the young King grief stricken.¹⁷¹

The next major favourite was Robert Carr who came to the king's attention in 1607 and very quickly rose in James' favour. As Sir Thomas Howard snidely observed in a letter to John Harington, "if any mischance be to be wished, 'tis breaking a leg in the King's presence, for this fellow owes all his favour to that."¹⁷² This was a reference to the fact that Carr came to the King's attention by breaking his leg while performing in a tilting match. However, it is likely that Carr would have been noticed anyway. He was described as being a handsome young man, with blonde hair who was "straight limbed, well favourede, strong sholdered, and smooth-faced."¹⁷³ James' attraction was mentioned in the earliest written source about Carr and his relationship with James, in the form of an undated letter from Sir Thomas Howard to John Harington. If we can believe Howard, James very openly expressed his attraction to Carr by pinching his cheeks, leaning on his arm, looking at Carr while talking to others and smoothing his ruffled clothing.¹⁷⁴ Howard also tells us that James took it upon himself to tutor Carr in Latin every morning in his Bedchamber. Furthermore, James showered the young Scot with all kinds of honours and rewards. In the words of Thomas Howard, "Carr hath all favours."¹⁷⁵ This led to a meteoric rise to a position as a groom then Gentleman of the Bedchamber, Knight of the Garter

¹⁷⁰ CSP Scotland, VI, p.149 and pp. 51-52; Robert Pitcairn, *The Autobiography and Diary of Mr. James Melville*. (Edinburgh, 1824) p 174.

¹⁷¹ James Melville, *The Diary of Mr. James Melville, 1556-1601* (Edinburgh, 1829), pp. 59-96. For modern historians' attitudes towards Lennox see Wilson, *King James VI & I*, pp. 32-43 and pp. 58-9; Maurice Lee Jnr, *Great Britain's Solomon: James VI and I in His Three Kingdoms* (University of Illinois Press, 1990), ch2; Pauline Croft, *King James* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

¹⁷² John Harington, *Nugae Antiquae* vol (London, 1890), pp. 390-97; Norman McClure (ed), *The Letters and Epigrams of Sir John Harington* (Octagon Books, 1977), pp. 32-4

¹⁷³ Harington. *Nugae Antiquae*, I, pp. 390-7; McClure (ed). *The Letters and Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, pp. 32-4.

¹⁷⁴ Harington. *Nugae Antiquae*, I, pp. 390-7; McClure (ed). *The Letters and Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, pp. 32-4.

¹⁷⁵ Thomas Park, *Nugae Antiquae Vol I* (London, 1804), pp. 390-97; McClure (ed). *The Letters and Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, pp. 32-4.

and then Viscount Rochester, which made him the first Scot to sit in the English parliament, so by 1608 Carr was being described as “the especially graced man”.¹⁷⁶ After his marriage to Frances Howard, Carr became more powerful than he had previously been and by the Spring of 1614, when James made him the Lord Chamberlain, he was described as having “so great a power of prevailing with the king as never any man had the like.”¹⁷⁷ Interestingly, there was little of the vitriolic hatred that Robert Dudley, Esme Stewart or George Villiers had attracted directed at Carr. This was perhaps a result of the fact that he was widely esteemed not only by the King, but by those in the royal court as well.

However, his popularity lessened in 1615 when Carr, his wife Frances Howard and several of their associates were investigated, prosecuted and convicted of poisoning Sir Thomas Overbury in the Tower of London in 1613.¹⁷⁸ This scandal reflected extremely badly on James and added to the belief that his court was corrupt and decadent. Like with Dudley, political ambition was viewed as the root cause of Carr’s downfall. This theme was taken up in the tract *The Blood Downfall*, whose unnamed character (meant to be read as Carr) was constructed as the antithesis of an honourable courtier, as he was a “master of flattery, stratagem, dissimulation and bribery.”¹⁷⁹ Like Dudley, he was accused of being efficient at eliminating rivals and was disposed to being seduced by sinful ways.¹⁸⁰

Robert Carr’s role in the Overbury Affair generated an immense amount of rumours, gossip and libels. Many centred on the association between demonic witchcraft, court corruption and

¹⁷⁶ Historical Manuscript Commission Salisbury XIX, p. 305. See also Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal*, pp. 25-32; Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, p. 30; Somerset, *Unnatural Murder*, p. 57; Cuddy “The Revival of the Entourage”, p. 193; Wilson, *King James VI & I*, pp. 336-56.

¹⁷⁷ Historical Manuscripts Commission: *Report on the Manuscripts of the Marquess of Downshire Preserved at Easthamstead Park Berks* (London, 1940), IV, p. 385.

¹⁷⁸ Perry, *Literature and Favouritism*, p.97.

¹⁷⁹ Anon, *The Bloody Downfall of Adultery. Murder, Ambition At the End of Which Are Added Westons, and Mistris Turners last Teares, Shed for the Murder of Sir Thomas Ovurbury Poysoned in the Tower; who for the fact, suffered Deserved Execution at Tiburne the 14. Of November Last* (London, 1615), Sig.A4r.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, Sig. A4r.

favouritism.¹⁸¹ Murder by poison was linked to both favouritism and witchcraft and was believed to be the “foulest of felonies,” as it was thought to destroy good society and pose threats to the hierarchical and patriarchal social order. As the author of the tract *Five Years of King James* suggested, the perpetrators of poisonings were always women or cowardly and socially unworthy men- traits often levelled at James’ favourites.¹⁸² During the trial of one of Carr’s co-conspirators, James Franklin, Franklin hinted that the death of Overbury was a part of a larger Catholic plot that had included the poisoning of James’ eldest son Prince Henry.¹⁸³ Carr was also said to have had a hand in the death of the Lord Treasurer, Robert Cecil in 1612.¹⁸⁴

It is arguable that even without the Overbury Affair, Carr’s days as premier favourite were numbered. Letters between the two men indicated that their relationship had become strained, with Carr becoming ruder and less affectionate towards James. Along with this, a new man had appeared on the scene- George Villiers. Villiers hailed from a relatively modest background, being the second son of a minor Leicestershire gentleman. Yet from these humble beginnings, he would rise to great heights, because, until his assassination in 1628, Villiers would remain the premier courtier of the period, whose power and influence was unparalleled.

Villiers had met King James I during James’ Summer Progress in 1614. James quickly became enchanted by the youth and by the end of 1614, it was clear that a new favourite was on the ascendant when Villiers was made the royal cup-bearer to James.¹⁸⁵ Although the position of cup bearer had no formal power attached to it, it brought Villiers into intimate contact with James and granted him access to his person, which allowed Villiers to wield more informal power. Like

¹⁸¹ See in general Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal*; Somerset. *Unnatural Murder*.

¹⁸² L&L, Vol. V, p. 308: Coke, *Third Part of the Institutes*, p. 48; Anon, *The Five Years of King James* (London, 1643), quoted from William Oldys (ed), *The Harleian Misellany* (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 10 vols, p. 48. See also Michael McDonald and Terence Murphy. *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 226.

¹⁸³ Anon, *The Five Years of King James*, p. 355.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 355.

¹⁸⁵ Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), pp.6-7; Roger Lockyer, *Buckingham: The Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham, 1592- 1628* (London: Longman, 1981), p. 18.

Esme Stewart and Robert Carr, signs of royal favour first appeared in the form of promotions within the royal court. By the end of 1615, Villiers had been knighted and made a Gentleman of the Bedchamber, an important position to have, since it allowed Villiers the control of and access to royal patronage. The quick ascent of Villiers was partly orchestrated by a loose group of courtiers, including James' wife Queen Anne, who resented Carr and the influence he had, so they thought the solution was to get James a new favourite.¹⁸⁶

The esteem in which James held Villiers was reflected in the rapid accumulation of titles and rewards he was granted.¹⁸⁷ By January 1616, Villiers was made James' Master of the Horse and later that same year he was made a Knight of the Garter, then Viscount Villiers and Baron Whaddon.¹⁸⁸ It should not be surprising then that Villiers had become the object of envious and negative criticism, so he quickly gained a reputation for being a major source of courtly corruption and vice.¹⁸⁹ This was helped in no small part by the news and popular culture of the period that increasingly focused on Villiers' sins to explain the problems of the period.¹⁹⁰

French ambassadors at the court of King James had long expressed surprise and disgust at the behaviors they saw. One of these wrote that James reminded him of the French King Henry III, whose sexuality had long been queried and who had also had controversial relationships with his *mignons*.¹⁹¹ While another French ambassador observed that James "cannot exist without minions," the most graphic observations came from a third French ambassador during the 1620s, Count Leveneur de Tillieres, who drew his own

¹⁸⁶ Bellany and Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I*, p.7;

¹⁸⁷ Bellany and Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I*, pp.6-7; Woolley, *The King's Assassin*, pp. 51-52; Lockyer, *Buckingham*, p. 26.

¹⁸⁸ Bellany and Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I*, p. 7; Woolley, *The King's Assassin*, p. 54.

¹⁸⁹ Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal*, esp pp. 255-261.

¹⁹⁰ On this see Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal*, esp pp. 255-261; McRae, *Literature, Satire and the Early Stuart State*; D.Coast, "Rumour and Common Fame": The Impeachment of the Duke of Buckingham and Public Opinion in Early Stuart England", *Journal of British Studies* 55 9April, 2016), pp. 241-267.

¹⁹¹ Joseph Cady, "'The Masculine Love' of the 'Princes of Sodom': 'Practicing the Art of Ganymede' at Henri III's Court," in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1996), pp.123-54.

conclusions.¹⁹² He told his French readers that James was a king whose life was devoted to vice and pleasure, describing him as “scandalous” “abominable” and “filthy.”¹⁹³ He reported that just as Tiberius had taken Sejanus to Capri, James took his “beloved Buckingham to Newmarket.”¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, the ambassador noted that James had allowed himself to be controlled by his passions for young men with a *beau de visage* (beautiful face), but lost interest when the young man grew a beard or lost his youthful looks.¹⁹⁵

Other texts were more explicit in their criticisms about the King. In 1615, a book, the *Corona Regia*, was published in continental Europe which criticized James on several different levels, including his love and affection for beautiful boys. James, the text stated, liked boys who were “fresh blooming and lovely” and that he exceeded all others in history for his promotion of these beautiful young men in the royal court.¹⁹⁶ Several of James’ favourites are listed by name in succession, with each being praised for their fair looks.¹⁹⁷ The greatest of these according to the *Corona Regia* was Robert Carr and another “adolescent of incomparable form”, George Villiers.¹⁹⁸ The implication in this text was that James was a pederast. As Paul Hammond has observed, this text was remarkable since it not only noted the “apostolic succession of boyfriends” in the king’s bed, it indicated that James’ proclivities were visible to foreign observers, so were not simply activities which were happening behind closed doors in his Bedchamber.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² Frederick Von Raumer (ed), *History of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, Illustrated by Original Sources*, trans. H. E. Lloyd, 2 vols (London, 18350, pp. 2:219-234.

¹⁹³ Ibid, pp. 2:265-74.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p278.

¹⁹⁵ Hippeau (ed), *Memoires*, pp. 1-16.

¹⁹⁶ G. Schioppus, *Corona Regia* (n.p, 1615), P. 68.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, pp. 79-89.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 89.

¹⁹⁹ Paul Hammond, *Figuring Sex Between Men from Shakespeare to Rochester*. (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2002),p. 140.

Another observer was the antiquarian, parliamentarian and diarist, Sir Simonds D'Ewes, who reported on a number of salacious stories circulating London at the time. On one occasion, D'Ewes wrote that James spontaneously announced publicly, "Becote [By God] George I love thee dearly." Reportedly, on a separate occasion, after having summoned Villiers, James "as soone as he came, hee fell upon his necke without anye moore words" and on another occasion, James was seen "hugging him [Villiers] one time verye seriouslye, hee burst foorth, 'Begott man, never one loved another moore then I doe thee.'"²⁰⁰ However, D'Ewes inferred that they were sodomites and recorded in his diary that he and a friend were lamenting that they "had probable cause to feare" that James was engaging in acts of sodomy.²⁰¹

One of the most outspoken of James critics was the religious minister Thomas Scott, who used accusations of sodomy against James and Villiers. So vicious were Scott's polemics that he had to flee England to the continent to escape punishment. One of these attacks was distributed in a 1622 pamphlet called *The Belgicke Pismire*, which lectured James on the nature of true wisdom. According to Scott;

to eate, drinke, daunce, and rise up to play with the sodomites; to abuse our bodies worse than beasts in sinnes not to be named, there needs to be no other wisdom then to follow the sway of our owne corrupt concupiscence; a beast can do this.²⁰²

The imagery of men abusing their bodies like beasts in this extract is interesting, as it not only subtly suggests sodomy, but highlights the more generalised image about the corrupt environment of the royal court. Scott did not need to rely on subtlety however, since he made it clear that in order to be a truly wise ruler James should "flee from Sodom and avoid the

²⁰⁰ Elizabeth Bourcier (ed), *The Diary of Sir Simonds D'Ewes, 1622–1624* (Paris, 1974), pp. 57-87.

²⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 92-3.

²⁰² Thomas Scott, *The Belgicke Pismire: Stinging the Slothfull Sleeper, and Awaking the Diligent to Fast, Watch, Pray; and Worke out Their Owne Temporall and Eternall Salvation With Feare and Trembling* (London, 1622), pp.40. P. Lake, "Constitutional Consensus and Puritan Opposition in the 1620s: Thomas Scott and the Spanish Match", *Historical Journal* 25: 4 (1982), pp.805-825.

company of sodomites.”²⁰³ In 1623, Scott wrote an even more inflammatory pamphlet, *The Projector*, in which he once again used the idea of Solomon to hide behind. He advised that good and wise kings should make sure that their own characters and behaviours were pure, which implied that a wise king should hold the qualities of virtue and justice closest to him, but “their favourites...their shadowes, their followers I mean, be cleane-hearted, and cleane-handed as well.”²⁰⁴

Meanwhile, a manuscript called *Tom Tell Troath* was circulating London in 1622. The author claimed that while under ordinary circumstances James might expect “not to have your darling sinne layd open” but his current circumstances being what they were, the King could not expect any safety from “that which all the World sees.”²⁰⁵ Like D’Ewes, the author was making reference to James’ public displays of affection towards Villiers and was inferring from these acts that sodomy must have been occurring. James was then compared to a hypothetical Protestant king who made himself “absolute and dissolute”.²⁰⁶ The language used was grossly exaggerated and depicts James as being surrounded by not only favourites, but also incubi (sex demons) and eunuchs.²⁰⁷ While we can consign this text to politically motivated anti-favourite literature, it should also be emphasized that like much of the literature this chapter has explored, it is more anti-monarch than it is anti-favourite.²⁰⁸

This chapter has demonstrated that the influence of Robert Dudley’s portrayal as a monstrous and corrupt favourite had continued to inform ideas about royal favourites into the early Stuart period. Yet there was also a significant change. Under King James VI and I, male favourites

²⁰³ Scott, *The Belgicke Pismire*, p. 40.

²⁰⁴ Thomas Scott, *The Projector. Teaching a Direct, Sure, and ready way to Restore Decayes of the Church and State Both in Honour and Revenue* (London, 1623), pp.20-34.

²⁰⁵ Anon, *Tom Tell Troath, Or a Free Discourse Touching the Manners of the Tyme, Directed to His Majestie by Way of Humble Advertisement* (London, 1630), p. 8.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 25-28.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 25-28.

²⁰⁸ Young, “James VI and I”, p. 545.

were increasingly associated with acts of sodomy, poison and witchcraft, so I argue that Jacobean England saw the true emergence of the monstrous favourite.

This was especially evident in the portrayals of the more notorious of King James' favourites- Esme Stewart, the Duke of Lennox; Robert Carr, the Earl of Somerset; and George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham. All three of these men attracted rumours and gossip about the nature of their relationship with King James, but it was with Villiers that James received the strongest criticisms that were reminiscent of those against Robert Dudley under Queen Elizabeth I. By turning to classical antiquity, critics were able to find a parallel with Tiberius and Sejanus, which helped them to articulate their fears about social upstarts monopolizing royal power and patronage.

Chapter two has argued that the figure of the monstrous royal favourite, which began in Chapter One with Robert Dudley, continued and developed during the reign of King James I. The favourites who achieved prominence in both James' Scottish and English reigns attracted much the same types of commentary and criticism as those during Elizabeth's reign. The most significant development however was the belief that James was engaging in acts of sodomy with his favourites, so sodomy became an important aspect of the scandals, gossip and rumour surrounding King James and his favourites. This aspect therefore became significant in the figuring the 'monstrous favourite'. While James lived, the focus of gossip and rumour was more on him, with his favourites playing a secondary but complicit role. It was only in the years after James' death in 1625 that Villiers became openly despised for his own sake within libellous literature (explored more in Chapter Three), so through him the figure of the 'monstrous favourite' reached its apotheosis.

Chapter Three

This Monster of a Man: The figure of the monstrous favourite in libels.

The previous two chapters have outlined how the royal favourites of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I were negatively constructed through gossip and rumours. By the mid 1580s, this gossip started to become more concrete in written forms and appeared in libelous manuscripts. This chapter will argue that the figure of the monstrous favourite that was born in gossip and rumours, grew in libelous documents and, like Frankenstein's monster, it soon took on a life of its own. I will be specifically focusing on libelous texts printed between 1584 and 1628, with emphasis being placed on major texts such as *Leicester's Commonwealth* (1584) and the *Forerunner of Revenge* (1626). These texts, which were based on the gossip circulating at the time, also presented a more fully formed portrait of the monstrous favourite.

There has been little scholarly attention paid to the figures that appeared in the libelous texts, as existing scholarship focuses more on how a discourse surrounding favouritism developed within the seventeenth century. I am less interested in this and more concerned with isolating the development of the monstrous figure. I have selected these two texts for three main reasons. Firstly, they represent major contributions to the libelous literature. Secondly, they discuss controversial figures from the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods and thirdly, they show the development, or continuation of themes relating to the royal favourites.

As people who exhibit characteristics defined as monstrous challenge the norms of their society, they can also help define what that society fears and finds aberrant, so I will also be exploring the cultural functions of the monstrous favourite in Renaissance English libelous literature.

Robert Shephard and Curtis Perry have observed that there was a 'bogey myth of favouritism'

present within Renaissance literature, as a standard set of recurring disreputable tropes featured to describe successive favourites which appeared in libelous literature between 1584-1628.²⁰⁹ I will argue in this chapter that these tropes defined the figure of the ‘monstrous favourite’ more clearly. This figure was commonly described as being highly ambitious, having a deviant sexual appetite and a willingness to commit murder (usually by poisoning) to achieve their desires.

I will concentrate further on the two prominent favourites from the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I who attracted particularly vitriolic anti-court sentiments- namely Robert Dudley and George Villiers- and will further explore the stereotype of the monstrous favourite. While there were other favourites who appeared in the reigns of each monarch, they have already been discussed in the previous two chapters. These two men not only bookend the two eras, but they were also constructed as monstrous in the libels more than the others and, as I argue, in similar ways. Each of these men was influential in their era, but the resentments and disapprovals they attracted from other courtiers and nobles manifested itself in the forms of slanderous gossip, written libels and invectives.

Monstrous characters tend to emerge in literature during times of political and social crisis, as they can reflect a society’s fears and prejudices, as well as define what it finds acceptable and unacceptable. The monsters that inhabit the pages of these libels are not supernatural, yet they are characters that managed to ‘haunt’ Renaissance English culture, so they can tell us much about the fears and anxieties surrounding unfettered political ambitions, power and moral transgressions during this period. These anxieties which manifested at this time were related to the profound changes to virtually all aspects of the social, political and economic fabric of England that occurred in the years marked by Elizabeth’s accession to the throne in 1558 and the death of James in 1625. These changes challenged ideas about gender expectations and the roles

²⁰⁹ Shephard, “Royal Favourites and Political Discourse in Tudor and Stuart England”, p. 280; Perry, *Literature and Favouritism*, p. 2.

of men and women in society, so were in fact triggered by Elizabeth I and James I themselves and their relationships to their favourites.

It is worth remembering that the etymological root of the word monster, the Latin *monstrum*, means ‘that which warns’ or ‘that which reveals’. It also shares the same root as the English verb ‘demonstrate.’²¹⁰ Monsters both warn cultures and reveal or demonstrate a society’s ethical standards through their transgressions. I define a monster as a figure that possesses signs of what psychoanalyst and literary critic Julia Kristeva has termed ‘abjection’. She further explains this term as;

It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, systems, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the shameless rapist ... any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject.²¹¹

Kristeva argues that ‘abjection’ refers to individuals who have committed crimes against established systems, laws or boundaries and in doing so, they expose the fragility of those systems.²¹² In the case of the ‘monstrous favourite’ this fragility relates to royal power and privilege. This concept also applies to the gendered and sexual norms that the royal favourites discussed in the previous two chapters were defined against.²¹³

The two libels I have selected present royal favourites in a way that clearly demarcates appropriate and inappropriate ways of expressing masculine behaviour. The ‘uncontrolled’ bodies of the male royal favourites, driven by lust and a hunger for power, can also be viewed as

²¹⁰ Cohen, “Monster Culture”, p. 3.

²¹¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers Of Horror: An Essay On Abjection* (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 6.

²¹² Ibid, p. 6.

²¹³ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 121.

“unfixed, grotesque bodies,” as they dislocated and deconstructed the hetero-normative social standards operating in Renaissance England at the time.²¹⁴

As Chapter One demonstrated, the gossip and rumours that surrounded the nature of the relationship between Elizabeth and Dudley and those that focused on the mysterious death of Dudley’s first wife provided the authors of anti- Dudley libels with a substantial amount of material with which to work.²¹⁵ *Leicester’s Commonwealth* in particular added to the gossip surrounding this favourite, as it presented readers with an impressive list of Dudley’s sexual conquests, murders and attempted murders. Published in 1584, the text represented the intense religious and nationalistic emotions that had been dividing Europe at this time.²¹⁶ Catholic propaganda became especially strong and consisted of three main tracts, all published within months of each other. These were a version of John Leslie’s defense of Mary, Queen of Scots dynastic right; William Allen’s reply to Cecil’s *The Execution of Justice in England*; and a tract entitled *The Copy of a Letter Written by a Master of Art*- commonly known as *Leicester’s Commonwealth*.²¹⁷ Termed by Curtis Perry as the ‘Ur text’ of the negative discourse of favouritism, the *Commonwealth* set the stage for the characterizations of royal favourites for the years to come.²¹⁸

From the outset of the dialogue that made up the *Commonwealth*, royal favouritism was associated with predatory passions. In Renaissance England men were seen to be at risk of becoming either beast-like and/or effeminate through ungoverned sexual appetites.²¹⁹ To reinforce this, the *Commonwealth* promoted this idea by making comparisons of them with

²¹⁴ Peter Brooks. *Body Work* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 218.

²¹⁵ Wilson, *The Uncrowned Kings of England*, p. 330.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p. 329.

²¹⁷ William Allen, *A true, sincere, and modest defense of English Catholics* (Rouen, 1584) 9STC 4902; John Leslie, *A treatise touching the right, title and interest of the most excellent princess Mary, queen of Scotland and the most noble king James her grace’s son* (Rouen, 1584); *Leicester’s Commonwealth: The Copy of a Letter Written by a Master of Art of Cambridge* (1584).

²¹⁸ Curtis Perry, “1603 and the Discourse of Favouritism”, ed. Glenn Burgess, Rowland Wymer and Jason Lawrence *The Accession of James I: Historical and Cultural Consequences* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 161.

²¹⁹ Alexandra Shepherd, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 28.

animals such as falcons and bears.²²⁰ By contrast, stoic self-mastery was held as the masculine ideal, so men who deviated from this ideal were stigmatized as bestial.²²¹ Here lay the dichotomy that was the foundation of the *Commonwealth's* subsequent narrative.²²² Throughout the *Commonwealth*, 'dispassionate moderation,' where reason controlled passion, was advocated as the means for a courtier to honour his private bonds and public duties. In the libels Dudley was presented as the opposite representation of this ideal as he was depicted as a man whose passions overtook his reason and whose immoral appetites distracted him from his private and public duties. Dudley was often portrayed as a man of intemperate appetites who made little distinction between his political ambitions and his sexual desires.

The lengths the *Commonwealth* went to prove the point about Dudley's immoral nature were often humorous, because of the exaggerations contained in it. According to the *Commonwealth*, no woman could escape from Dudley's fiery lusts. Apparently it did not matter whether they were allies, kin, or the wives and daughters of friends, he would demand that they submit to his desires, as his unbridled lust was such that no woman could be free of him.²²³ It was even suggested that he had slept with a mother and her three daughters, and that almost every woman had been seduced by his "potent ways".²²⁴ In other words, it was suggested that Dudley was a slave to his uncontrollable lusts, so was a more a beast, who was worse than the lustful Roman emperors Nero or Elagabalus. Indeed, the authors hoped that the epitaph given to the murdered Elagabalus, "Here is thrown in the whelp of unruly and raging lust," would one day serve Dudley as well.²²⁵

Dudley's depravity was not expressed simply in terms of his sexual lusts, but also as a lust for political power. The *Commonwealth* alleges that it was "most evident and clear," that Dudley

²²⁰ D.C. Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 52-53.

²²¹ Shepherd, *Meanings of Manhood*, p. 28.

²²² Perry, *Literature and Favouritism*, p. 26.

²²³ Peck, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, p. 62.

²²⁴ Ibid, p. 62.

²²⁵ Ibid, pp.85-86.

was prepared to commit “murder, treason and tyranny” as his cruelty and bloodlust made him the most dangerous, wicked and “perfidious man under heaven.”²²⁶ Throughout the *Commonwealth* Dudley was referred to as “this tyrant,” as he was supposedly obsessed with obtaining and monopolizing political power and manipulating both “prince and state.”²²⁷ It was stated that his “tyrannous purpose” was to dominate the royal court, the Privy Council and the country, all of which seemingly had no control over him.²²⁸ In short, in addition to being a murderous, sexual deviant, the *Commonwealth* constructed Dudley as a power hungry tyrant whose main desire was to control the crown, the country and religion.²²⁹

The following section towards the end of the *Commonwealth* is worth quoting in full as it gives an exaggerated picture of how Dudley was being imagined as a monstrous tyrant, by placing some of the blame on his ancestry;

His father John Dudley was the first noble of his line, who raised and made himself big by supplanting of other and by setting debate among the nobility, as also his grandfather Edmund, a most wicked promoter and wretched pettifogger, enriched himself by other men’s ruins – both of them condemned traitors, though different in quality, the one being a cozener and the other a tyrant, and both of their vices conjoined, collected, and comprised (with many more additions) in this man (or beast rather) which is Robert, the third of their kin and kind, so that from his ancestors this Lord receiveth neither honor nor honesty, but only a succession of treason and infamy.²³⁰

This section suggested that Dudley’s status and power came from a combination of a lustful, violent personality and royal favour, instead of through the usual routes of nobility and ancestry.

²²⁶ Ibid,p85

²²⁷ Ibid, p. 85.

²²⁸ Ibid, pp. 72-73.

²²⁹ Ibid, p. 102, p. 186.

²³⁰ Ibid, p. 127.

The writers drew attention to Dudley's father and grandfather, who were both executed as traitors, then they went on to claim that Dudley inherited all their vices, then continued this theme by noting that Dudley was worse than his ancestors because he was a man "wholly abandoned of human virtue and devoted to wickedness" which made him offensive to both God and man.²³¹

This following extract also emphasised the opinions which were promoted through this libel;

This man, therefore, so contemptible by his ancestors, so odible of himself, so plunged, overwhelmed, and defamed in all vice, so envied in the Court, so detested in the country, and not trusted of his own and dearest friends; nay (which I am privy to), so misliked and hated of his own servants about him for his beastly life, niggardy, and atheism (being never seen yet to say one private prayer within his chamber in his life) as they desire nothing in this world so much as his ruin and that they may be the first to lay hands upon him for revenge.²³²

Throughout these sections Dudley was referred to continually as a beast or a bear, who had abandoned himself to treason, vice and wickedness, so was hated by all who knew him- with the notable exception of the Queen.²³³

As I demonstrated in Chapter Two, witchcraft had become an important component in the figuration of the monstrous favourite during the Jacobean period. I have also located this trope in the *Commonwealth*.

This passage occurring towards the end of the *Commonwealth* is the closest example of the monstrous nature of Dudley in this document. Here Dudley was not performing witchcraft

²³¹ Ibid, p. 127.

²³² Ibid, p. 127.

²³³ Ibid, p. 127.

himself but had engaged the services of a witch to poison one of his women.²³⁴ It demonstrates the linkage between demonic witchcraft and the perfidious acts of monstrous favourites;

O accursed impiety and un-worthy the ears of a Christian, yet fit enough for such a sorceress as she is, such an old witch whose profession is no other than to consecrate herself body and soul to the service of the devil. But this is a thing marvellous and fearful, that a Christian lord, such a one as Leicester nameth himself, that is to say the protector and patron of so pure a gospel, would offer himself an executor of so damnable a practice, coming from the mouth most venomous of so wicked a sorceress, inducing him not only to be partaker of the sorcery but also to commit a sodomitical act against his own [human] nature.”²³⁵

Later in this passage, Dudley is referred to as “so foul and unsavory as is the villainous, filthy, and brutish corpse of this monster of a man.”²³⁶ Most of the traits assigned to the monstrous favourite all make an appearance-the use of witchcraft, poison, the devil and even sodomy to achieve their goals- so the level of hatred the authors had for Dudley within this libel can be found and are the foundations on which the figure of the monstrous favourite was built. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the 1580s (the decade in which the *Commonwealth* was published) was a turning point in the construction of the royal favourite. This figure evolved from them being depicted as a tyrant who was controlling the monarch, to a man who was deviant, who associated with witches, poisoned their rivals and acted in a beast like manner, in short, they were monsters. I argue that this figuration served to establish the criteria used to describe the monstrous favourite, which continued and developed throughout the Jacobean period and influenced the libels written against George Villiers.

While many of the libelous materials from the Jacobean period had King James as their primary target, this is not to say that James’ favourites did not also attract criticism, but their

²³⁴ Ibid, p. 162.

²³⁵ Ibid, p. 162.

²³⁶ Ibid, p. 162.

misdeemeanours were seen to be more the result of the King's weaknesses or failings and indicated that the monarchy was becoming increasingly untenable. However there were two main favourites of King James who attracted significant criticism in their own right- Robert Carr and George Villiers. While Robert Carr had been the subject of gossip during the early years of his relationship with James, he was not the subject of the sustained criticism that Robert Dudley and later George Villiers attracted in the libels. It was only during the Overbury Affair that he became a target in libels in his own right, and the characteristics of the monstrous favourite were applied to him.

However, one of the more controversial figures of the late Jacobean and early Caroline periods was George Villiers. Originally Villiers was viewed in a positive light and was in fact hailed as an incarnation of St. George, England's patron saint. These feelings of admiration and high esteem were not held by everyone however. By the mid 1620s, George Villiers had become a controversial and divisive figure due to his role in the failure of marriage negotiations with the Spanish Infanta and his mishandling of various missions, such as the Mansfield expedition to recover the Palatinate for James' son-in-law, and assisting the French Protestants.²³⁷ All these diplomatic transgressions damaged Villiers' reputation with the people, making him the target of scornful satires and texts that portrayed him as a dangerous 'beast' that had damaged England, the royal court and the king himself.²³⁸

The public protestations that arose from the commentary surrounding Villiers can be found in letters, diary entries and libels during the mid to late 1620s.²³⁹ These included public plays which derided royal favourites and the policies they were associated with. These staged characters were not so subtle depictions for Villiers as they were portrayed as lecherous, tyrannical, ambitious,

²³⁷ Woolley, *The Kings Assassin*, p. 289.

²³⁸ Ibid, p. 289.

²³⁹ McRae, *Literature, Satire and the Early Stuart State*, p. 51; S. Keenan, "Representing the Duke of Buckingham: Libel, Counter-Libel and the Example of *The Emperor's Favourite*" *Literature Compass* 9:4 (2012), p. 293.

effeminate and low born.²⁴⁰ The accusations leveled at Villiers in these texts were similar to those expressed on the stage, and those that were found in earlier libels against Dudley and Carr. In them he was condemned for being morally, sexually, religiously and politically corrupt.²⁴¹ As Andrew McRae and Siobhan Keenan have suggested, the fact that Villiers was a clear match for the dominant stereotype reinforced the validity of the monstrous favourite figure.²⁴²

These attacks were not restricted to the written word however. Soon after the death of King James I in 1625, the negative portrayal of Villiers seeped into public discourse, most notably into Parliament, which resulted in his assassination in 1628.²⁴³ So, unlike Dudley and Carr, depicting Villiers as a monster actually impacted on his public perception resulting in serious consequences for him. So ubiquitous were the anti-Villiers sentiments, that he began to be seen as an anti-Christ figure, or as Bellamy and McRae have put it, Villiers was an “explanation for the troubles of the age.”²⁴⁴ Therefore I argue here that George Villiers became the epitome of the monster stereotypes applied to royal favourites.

The derogatory attitudes towards Villiers became more pronounced after the death of King James in March 1625. A letter written by an English Catholic, Gabriel Browne, a Spanish priest in May 1626, illustrated the changing attitudes towards Villiers. Browne wrote that in the year before James’ death, Villiers had been one of the best loved men in England, the hero of the people, who had “the art to overreach all the wits of Spain,” but after James death Villiers was “the most distasted man alive.”²⁴⁵ He had become “so covered in the filth” from various “foul crimes” that Browne thought Villiers would have to guard himself, because suspicions against

²⁴⁰ Keenan, ‘Representing the Duke of Buckingham’, p. 294. For Favourites on stage during the Jacobean period, see Worden, ‘Favourites on the English Stage’, pp. 59-83; Margot Heinemann, ‘Drama and Opinion in the 1620s: Middleton and Massinger’, ed. Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring *Theatre and Government Under the Early Stuarts*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 237-65.

²⁴¹ Kennan, ‘Representing the Duke of Buckingham’, p. 294.

²⁴² McRae. *Literature*, p124; Keenan. ‘Representing the Duke of Buckingham’, p294.

²⁴³ Coast, ‘Rumour and “Common Fame”’, p.241.

²⁴⁴ McRae, *Literature, Satire and the Early Stuart State*, p. 432.

²⁴⁵ PPI1626, IV, pp334-7 (Browne to Anon.; 20 May 1626).

him would not be “washed off in haste with all the water in the Thames or ocean.”²⁴⁶ Of most interest in this letter was the mentioning of a certain book that had been published in Europe by a Scottish physician and poet called George Eglisham. Browne noted that in this book Eglisham “bravely” accused Villiers of having poisoned “no fewer or meaner persons than King James, the Duke of Richmond and Lennox, the Lord Marquis of Hamilton, and the Earl of South Hampton.”²⁴⁷ More shockingly, this book “layed sorcery to his charge in combination with infernal fiends and witches.”²⁴⁸

The book being referred to was the *The Forerunner of Revenge Upon the Duke of Buckingham for the Poisoning of the Most Potent King James of Happy Memory, King of Great Britain, and the Lord Marquis of Hamilton, and Others of the Nobility* (1626). Although it was printed in Brussels, this tract (which was translated into Latin and English) was widely circulated in England.²⁴⁹ *The Forerunner* presented a narrative that was both vivid and dramatic as it was based on gossip that had grown around the deaths of the Marquis of Hamilton and of King James I to create a compelling secret history, which gave a believable explanation to a string of mysterious deaths.²⁵⁰ More importantly, the *Forerunner* tapped into current anxieties surrounding court politics, scandals and poisonings. *The Forerunner* was framed as a petition to King Charles I and his Parliament. Eglisham portrayed himself as an honourable and loyal subject of King Charles I, whose only concern was seeing justice done.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 334-7.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 334-7.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 334-7.

²⁴⁹ Perry, *Literature and the Favourite in Early Modern England*, p. 98.

²⁵⁰ Bellany and Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I*, p. 164.

He then went on to paint a damaging portrait of Villiers, begging Charles to remember how he had-

tyrannised ouer his Lord, and master, King Iames, the worldly creator of his fortunes, how insolent, how ingrat an oppressor, what a murtherer and treator he hath proued himselfe towards him, how treacherous to his vpholding friend the Marquis of Hamilton and others....²⁵¹

The libel inferred that Villiers had been corrupting and manipulating the monarchy, with his uncontrolled “ambitious practices” as he was holding kings under its control, so Charles’ subjects were uncertain whether “he [Villiers] is your King or you his.”²⁵² It stated that Villiers was doing whatever he wanted, regardless of the wishes of the king. This even extended to him calling and dissolving Parliament.²⁵³ Eglisham proposed that Villiers had first insinuated himself into the inner circle of King James I and King Charles I, but once he had received political power, Villiers’ ambition and arrogance had made him desire to “match his blood with the Blood-Royal of both England and Scotland.”²⁵⁴ Already traits of the ‘monstrous favourite’ - unbridled ambition, treason and an illegitimate hold on political power- had made an appearance in the libels.

Another characteristic of the monstrous favourite which emerged in the libels, was their willingness to murder anyone who opposed them, or who stood in their way. Sudden or unexplained death in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would create speculations of foul play, as they were linked to the various sins of corruption that were associated with the decadent royal courts. *The Forerunner* particularly focused on the sudden deaths of the Marquis of Hamilton and of King James himself. The use of poison to murder enemies and

²⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 4-10.

²⁵² Ibid, pp. 4-10.

²⁵³ Ibid, pp. 4-10.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

competitors was also one of the major tropes of the figure of the monstrous favourite.²⁵⁵

As a crime, murder by poisoning was viewed at the time as the wickedest of all types of murder, as it was seen as one that was essentially a secretive and cowardly act- best suited to women and effeminate men- and was a symptom of social, religious and political disorder.²⁵⁶ By associating favourites with poisonings, the authors of these libelous materials were saying that these were not ‘real’ men as they lacked the masculine quality of courage.²⁵⁷ As I have already shown, poisoning was present in *Leicester’s Commonwealth* also, as it argued that Dudley was well skilled at using poison. Robert Carr was also accused of using poison to eliminate Thomas Overbury.

In the *Forerunner* Villiers was implicated in a number of murders, all by the use of poison. The first murder was that of the Marquis of Hamilton- a personal friend of Eglisham, who acted as an eyewitness to the Marquis’ death. The principle motive for this crime was reported to be ambition (a typical sin of favourites) because Villiers had wanted to link his family to Hamilton’s, since he was closely connected to Scottish royal blood. Eglisham criticised Villiers for being a low-born ingrate who had risen to unimaginable heights due to his ambition and arrogance.²⁵⁸ To further his case against Villiers, Eglisham described the transformation of the Marquis’ body two days after his death, stating that his nose and mouth had begun to froth with blood; his body had swelled and was covered with blisters; and an autopsy had found his liver to be green and his stomach purple.²⁵⁹ According to the text, one of Villiers’ own doctors took the servants aside and told them to say nothing of what they had witnessed. However Eglisham spent a lot of time demonstrating the viciousness of Villiers’ character, while he created a plausible timeline of events, that

²⁵⁵ Perry, *Literature and Favouritism*, p.98. On this linkage see Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal*; B. Worden, “Shakespeare and Politics”, *Shakespeare Survey* 44 (1992), p. 150; Lindley, *Trials of Frances Howard*, p. 166.

²⁵⁶ Coke, *Third Part of the Institutes*, p. 48.

²⁵⁷ On the linkage between royal favourites and poison see Bellany and Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I*, p. 165.

²⁵⁸ *Forerunner*, pp. 11-12.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 15.

included circumstantial evidence and secret conversations that he said he had overheard, to provide evidence of Villiers' involvement.

Eglisham's retelling of the murder of King James I lacked Eglisham's eyewitness testimony which had characterised his previous accusation, but it was set within the context of the failed Spanish match between Prince Charles and the Spanish Infanta, along with the push for war in 1623. Eglisham explained that while in Spain with Prince Charles, Villiers' had received some disturbing reports from England, which had warned him that in his absence nobles were speaking freely to James against Villiers.²⁶⁰ This apparently made Villiers plan a "new ambitious course of his own" which included sabotaging the Spanish match then returning home, where Villiers attempted to control James' foreign policy.²⁶¹

Eglisham insinuated that this infuriated James, so his attitude towards his favourite began to change.²⁶² After a series of court events that indicated Villiers' fall from favour, Eglisham described how Villiers decided to strike first. James had fallen sick with an ague- an ailment that "was of itself never found deadly."²⁶³ According to Eglisham, Villiers took this opportunity to poison him. While the doctors were at dinner, Villiers offered the king some white powder which he mixed in wine. "Overcome by his [Villiers] flattering importunity at length" James drank the wine.²⁶⁴ The king "immediately became worse and worse, falling into many soundings and paynes, and violent fluxes of the belly..." crying that "o this white powder, this white powder! Wold to God I had never taken it, it will cost me my life."²⁶⁵ A few days after ingesting the white powder, Villiers' mother apparently applied a plaster to James' chest, which caused the king shortness of breath and "great

²⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 20.

²⁶¹ Ibid, p. 20.

²⁶² Ibid, p. 20.

²⁶³ Ibid, p. 21.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 21

²⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 21.

agonie.”²⁶⁶ The doctors, alarmed at the offensive smell of the plaster and the king’s worsening condition exclaimed that “the King was poisoned”.²⁶⁷ A few days after this, King James I was dead.

As with Hamilton, Eglisham explained that while Villiers attempted to hide his crime under a fake veil of excessive grief, he demanded the attending doctors “signe with their handwrits a testimonie that the powder he had given to the king was good and safe medicine,” which Eglisham added the doctors refused to do.²⁶⁸ Eglisham explained that the condition of the king’s corpse destroyed this pretence however, describing how “the king’s body and head swelled above measure, his haire with the skin of the head stuke to the pillow his nayles became loose upon his fingers and toes.”²⁶⁹ Eglisham ended his tract by saying that the murderous traitor should be arrested immediately.

Like the *Commonwealth*, the *Forerunner* also associated Villiers with witchcraft and cavorting with known witches. It told of him,

being infamous for his frequent consultations vvith the ring|leaders of witches,
principally that false Doctor Lamb publikly con|demned for vvitchcraft. VVherby
the Marquis knovving that the king vvas so farre bevitched to Buckingham that if
he refused the match demanded, he should find the kings deadly hatred against
him²⁷⁰

This Dr. Lamb had been taken into Villiers’ service in 1624 to apparently advise treatment for Villiers’ brother, John, who was mentally unwell and according to popular gossip, the victim of witchcraft. Known in London as a cunning man, a man who was talented at the “telling of fortunes, helping of diuerse to lost goods, shewing to young people the faces of their Husbans or

²⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 21.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 21.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 21-22.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 22.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 10.

Wiues, that should be, in a Christall glasse: reuealing to wiues the escapes and faults of their Husbands, and to husbands of their wiue”²⁷¹

He was popularly believed to have had an unnatural influence over Villiers and was blamed for Villiers’ military failings as well as his sexual activities. As Villiers was suspected of being associated with witches, these allegations were used as an explanation for the relatively low-born Villiers’ meteoric rise and political influence in the royal court.²⁷²

The *Forerunner* generally depicted Villiers as a man who was exceedingly cruel, had an insatiable lust for power and who used witchcraft to dominate the courts of King James I and Charles I, so he could be on an equal footing to them. Essentially, unbridled ambition, the use of witchcraft and murder by poison were the primary traits that constructed the figure of the monstrous favourite, in this libel. Villiers was therefore portrayed as the monstrous favourite *par excellence*.

Having compared examples of libellous literature between 1584-1628 this chapter has demonstrated that a literary stereotypical figure emerged during this period. Starting with Robert Dudley in *Leicester’s Commonwealth* in 1584, the prototype for this monstrous favourite appearing for the first time. He was depicted as a man without virtue who had an unquenchable lust for sex and political power; used the services of witches; and who happily committed murder (usually by poison) to further his status and ambition. This general image was repeated then expanded in further anti- Dudley libels in the 1580s, which created something of a sub-genre of anti- Dudley literature. Dudley’s suspected role in the suspicious death of his wife; the failure of marriage negotiations between Elizabeth and the Duc d’Anjou; the Protestant propaganda aimed at Mary, Queen of Scots; and Dudley’s closeness to Elizabeth, along with the level of gossip surrounding his relationship with her, all made him an attractive target for writers of these texts.

²⁷¹ Anon, *A Briefe Description of the Notorious life of Iohn Lambe, otherwise called Doctor Lambe, together with his ignominious death* (Amsterdam, 1628), p. 2.

²⁷² K. Amundson, “The Dukes Devil and Doctor Lamb’s Darling: A Case Study in the Male Witch in Early Modern England”, *Psi Sigma Siren* 2: 1 (2004), pp. 45-46.

These criticisms were not restricted to Dudley however. The long-term favourites of King James I, Robert Carr and George Villiers, also appeared and were vilified in libellous tests. In George Villiers however, we see a man who was perhaps the true heir of the anti- Dudley monstrous tradition. Instead of having an insatiable sexual appetite, Villiers' real sins appeared to be those of ambition and murder, as he was accused of taking control of King James I and of hastening his death with poison. Like Dudley, Villiers was also accused of associating with witches and using their services to further his ambitions. Towards the end of his life Villiers was blamed for all the ills that were affecting England, which eventually led to his assassination in 1628.

This chapter has demonstrated that between 1584 and 1628 a monstrous favourite figure appeared. While this figure was based on real people, through gossip and rumours, it also emerged as stereotypical creation of Renaissance English political and social culture. I have demonstrated through these texts that lustfulness, ambition, manipulation and violence, instead of being ideal qualities of noble masculinity, were in fact viewed in Renaissance England as being symptomatic of disorder, aberrance and social upheaval. It has also been proposed that these men were being 'othered' through libels, as they focused on characteristics that made them marginal, abnormal and abhorrent. The closeness of the favourites to their respective monarchs, while meeting the needs of the monarchs (and their favourites), led to them being alienated and denounced as 'monsters,' so they then became living examples of how an honourable male courtier or nobleman should not behave.

CONCLUSION

I began this thesis with an account of the assassination of George Villiers by John Fulton. I asked why Villiers had become so unpopular and had been transformed into a monstrous figure then discussed how this process had occurred. Reading through the source materials which highlighted the gossip surrounding the male royal favourites to explore the loathing that was generated towards some of them, it became obvious that there were similarities between the portrayals of these different men, which led to the construction of what I have termed the 'monstrous favourite'.

Although previous scholarship has explored the gossip surrounding Queen Elizabeth I and King James I, these studies have tended to place the favourites in a secondary role, as they have focused more on the monarchs themselves or the royal families. Therefore this thesis has contributed to our knowledge about the lives and portrayals of the men who lived in the shadows of these famous monarchs, and questioned why they have been shown in such a negative light. While there has been previous scholarship on the negative discourse of favouritism which existed in Renaissance England, this research project has differentiated itself by focusing more on the characteristics of the monstrous favourite stereotype and its development. I have argued that during the eras under investigation, this stereotypical character underwent an evolution. Initially the derogatory comments and portrayals started in salacious gossip, before they became more formalized in written texts. From the mid sixteenth century, a core set of characteristics became associated with the favourite. These were based on their insatiable appetite for sex and power. Monstrous royal favourites, in order to feed their burning ambitions, were also supposedly prepared to commit acts of violence against their opponents, or murder if necessary.

In the cases of both Elizabeth and James, their favourites were male, which gave a gendered dimension to the gossip and libelous texts. Male favourites could be granted powerful positions at court and receive numerous gifts, honours and titles, so they could become significant power players, but in the competitive world of the royal court they also became bigger targets for destructive gossip and rumours. To 'set the scene' for the emergence of the favourite and to outline their functions, I have provided an insight to the royal court, as this was not only a palace which accommodated large and diverse groups of people, it was also the centre for the social and political interactions which occurred within its walls. I have argued that the gossip and rumours which circulated there played an essential role in constructing the figure of the monstrous favourite. They also served to establish social norms and provided an outlet for the anxieties, fears and prejudices which existed at the time.

The gossip surrounding the relationships that Queen Elizabeth I and King James I had with their favourites shared certain similarities. The most prominent of these was the concern that political power and influence was being exchanged for personal and/or sexual intimacy with men who were viewed as less worthy, or unworthy, being promoted at the cost of those who were deemed more deserving of the honours. While it was expected that a man would gain the favour of their monarch, it was also believed that privilege was to be gained on the basis of a man's noble and virtuous qualities, and/or his inherited rights. Courtiers, noblemen and ministers who felt that they had been overlooked would often express their frustrations by generating malicious rumours and gossip about those who had gained royal favour, in order to discredit them and lessen their powers.

What Queen Elizabeth I and King James I actually did with their favourites was less important to this thesis than what observers thought they were doing. In Chapter One, the consistent talk that surrounded the affairs the Queen was supposed to be having with her favourites reinforced the hetero-normative standards in Elizabethan England, as Elizabeth was fully expected to be

romantically and sexually involved with a man. During her long reign she found herself the subject of gossip many times about her choice of a possible husband and her fertility (or lack of it). While this was not the focus of Chapter One, gossip surrounding Elizabeth's ability to produce children and malicious talk about her rumoured production of illegitimate children with her favourites, highlighted the anxieties that were being felt in England regarding Elizabeth's sexuality and what would happen if she did not produce a legitimate heir. As time went by these anxieties in the royal court and throughout Elizabeth's kingdom increased. These tensions revealed that Elizabeth's reputation, her success as a monarch and her ongoing contributions to the survival of the royal family were strongly linked to the patriarchal society in which she lived and the males she associated with.

The gossip which surrounded King James I was of a different type. While James was a male ruler who came to the throne at a time when England was dissatisfied with fifty years of combined female rule, not only was he not English, he was not a popular choice, and his open attraction to handsome young men coloured the gossip that circulated about him. The gossip about King James was not as persistent, or based on the same fears as those surrounding Queen Elizabeth, which was not surprising, as James was a married man who had produced heirs. However, the early Jacobean gossip presented disturbing ideas about his homoerotic behaviours. Much of the surviving gossip from James' reign pointed to what he may have been doing behind closed doors in his Bedchamber and the roles that his favourites, such as Robert Carr and George Villiers played, especially in relation to certain murders and political plots.

Chapter One focused on the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and the gossip which appeared about her relationships with her male favourites, in particular Robert Dudley. I argued that the figure of the 'monstrous favourite' had its roots in scurrilous reports, found mainly within Elizabethan ambassadorial dispatches. These dispatches were analysed to draw out the main thematic elements that created the depiction of the monstrous favourite, to demonstrate that the ideas that

were located in these dispatches were later exaggerated and made into a composite stereotypical figure during the 1580s. Elizabethan critics portrayed the favourite as a man who essentially could not control his aggressive ambitions and bestial, lustful passions. Chapter One outlined the origins of a connection between political power and sexual intimacy, and argued that Robert Dudley served as the prototype for the monstrous favourite in the following decades.

The ghost of Dudley's portrayal haunted the favourites into Chapter Two, which focused on the reign of King James VI of Scotland and I of England. I argued that the portrait of the monstrous favourite that was originated in Chapter One continued during the reign of the new king. Starting with his Scottish reign, it became evident that James had an attraction and reliance on male favourites from an early age. Unlike the gossip surrounding Elizabeth and her favourites, James was accused of acts of sodomy with his favourites, but he took the brunt of these accusations, as he was initially portrayed as more monstrous than his favourites. This changed in the case of George Villiers who, after the death of King James in 1625, became the epitome of the monstrous favourite..

The examples of gossip that were explored in the first two chapters served as the foundations upon which Chapter Three was built. By using major libelous texts composed between 1584 and 1628 it became obvious that the themes that emerged from gossip were formalised in these texts, so a literary figure developed. It was also demonstrated that these men, Dudley and Villiers in particular, were being 'othered' and defamed through libels. The libels highlighted characteristics, such as their uncontrollable lust for sex and power, their involvement in witchcraft and their murderous ways, to ensure these men were marginalized and judged as aberrant and immoral. This chapter established that these qualities were viewed as symptomatic of a disordered masculinity, as well as the social and political upheavals and the anxieties which existed at the time.

The primary and secondary sources that dealt with royal favouritism and with the monstrous favourite were numerous, so were more than could effectively be analysed in this thesis. Anti-

Dudley and anti- Villiers literature for example, could almost be in their own sub-genres.

Additionally, this whole project could have focused on texts relating to Robert Carr and the Overbury Affair, but due to space concerns, these were kept to a minimum. More could also be said on the ways that favourites were being depicted on the English stage during this time, as favourites were a popular stock character in English Renaissance theatre.

This project began with the simple observation that both Queen Elizabeth I and King James I attracted gossip surrounding their relationships with certain male favourites. From there it led to the realisation that between 1558 and 1628, a stereotypical character emerged in gossip and later within libelous literature. This character I entitled the ‘monstrous favourite’. This thesis has not been concerned with identifying any form of accurate truth that lurked behind the gossip and libellous materials that have been discussed. Instead I have been more interested in what they can divulge about the construction and development of the monstrous favourite figure, and what this in turn can tell us about how gendered role expectations and beliefs about sexuality influenced presentations and perceptions of these men. As there has been minimal scholarship on the presentation of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I’s royal favourites as monstrous, or on how they were represented in gossip and the cultural purposes both gossip and the royal favourite served, it has been my aim to fill this lacuna in this thesis. I have also explored how power, corruption and sexual intimacy in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras were interconnected, the dangers that these connections brought, and how monstrosity has been used, and continues to be used, to express and/or divert anxieties and fears and to disempower leaders.

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