

THE STRUCTURE OF THE COURT AND THE ROLES OF THE ARTIST AND POET UNDER CHARLES I

by R. Malcolm Smuts

Courts are not easy to characterise or define. Conventionally they have been equated with royal households but this definition is at once too broad and too narrow. It is too broad because households included a small army of menials and dependents – like the king's shoemaker or his laundresses – who were never true courtiers. David Starkey has therefore wanted to limit the Tudor court to the privy chamber, the suite of rooms where the king normally lived surrounded by an intimate entourage.¹ But other historians regard this definition as too restrictive, since it eliminates the households of other members of the royal family and court nobles, as well as important sites of royal ceremony, like the Chapel Royal². Moreover focusing on the household and its components can obscure the court's significance as a centre not just of royal life but of national and international politics and of aristocratic society. Thus the medievalist Ralph Griffiths argues that the court developed around the point of intersection between the king's household and the entourages of magnates in attendance upon him.³ The need to regulate interactions between kings and great nobles, while restraining competitive jostling among nobles seeking access, gave rise to an elaborate system of ranks, precedence and ceremony that characterised court society. Broader still is the definition employed by H. R. Trevor-Roper and Perez Zagorin for the early seventeenth century.⁴ They saw the court as an extended royalist interest, in conflict with independent 'country' peers and members of the gentry. Other scholars have disparaged this view because it derives largely from contemporary polemics. But for that reason it provides a useful reminder that the court was not just a place and an institution but an idea. Even in the depths of the provinces, court fashions and manners - and reports of court corruption - played important roles in the cultural practices of the gentry.⁵

The confusion over definitions therefore stems from real difficulties more than loose thinking. A court always served two seemingly opposed functions. It surrounded the king like a protective cocoon, shielding him from unwanted contact with his subjects by physical barriers like the guarded door leading to the privy chamber, by an entourage of attendants, and by a magnificent ceremonial apparatus that created psychological distance when the monarch appeared in public. But at the same time the court connected the king to a larger social and political universe, through summer progresses, forms of cultural representation that maintained his symbolic presence even when he was miles away, and networks of patronage, clientage and alliance that radiated outward from the king's household, connecting it to the provinces as well as to other European courts and ruling nobilities.⁶

Concentrating on the court's role as a protective cocoon will produce a fairly tidy picture, centring on the privy chamber or Bedchamber as the site of a politics of intimacy.⁷ This view can be mapped topographically through the floor plans of royal palaces, and sociologically by identifying the small cohort of people enjoying automatic entry to the privileged rooms in which the king lived. If we focus instead on how the court connected the monarch to the world beyond

1 David Starkey et al., *The English Court from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London, 1987).

2 See esp. John Adamson, ed., *The Princely Courts of Europe 1500-1700* (London, 1999).

3 Ralph Griffiths, 'The King's Court During the Wars of the Roses: continuities in an age of discontinuities', in *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: the court at the beginning of the modern age*, Ronald G. Ash and Adolf M. Birke, eds., (Oxford, 1991), pp. 41-68.

4 Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century', in *Crisis in Europe, 1550-1660* (London, 1965), pp. 63-102; Perez Zagorin, *The Court and the Country: the beginning of the English Revolution* (New York, 1969).

5 A classic, though problematic, discussion is Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1983); for a more subtle recent discussion see Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: changing codes of conduct in early modern England* (Oxford, 1998).

6 Some of the European connections are explored in R. Malcolm Smuts, ed., *The Stuart Court and Europe: essays in politics and political culture* (Cambridge, 1996).

7 For this approach see the essay in Starkey, *Courts of Europe*.

his palaces, the interpretation becomes not only more complex but more dynamic. For we then need to trace movements of people between the privy apartments and other environments. These movements include displacements of the entire court as it travelled between royal palaces or visited the houses of nobles or gentlemen during summer progresses.⁸ They also include the coming and going of individuals between the royal palace and other satellite environments.⁹ For not even the king and his most intimate servants remained permanently within the privy chamber, associating exclusively with one another. Charles regularly visited his wife's palace at St James's, where he mingled with her servants and guests, while many Bedchamber servants and other major courtiers maintained their own substantial households in the metropolis, even though they also had apartments at Whitehall. These households were important sites of social activity, which the king himself sometimes visited, and in several cases major centres of art collecting and patronage. Lesser royal servants, including musicians, poets and artists, also occupied houses near the palace; as did many country peers, members of the gentry and foreign ambassadors. A map of these residences in the 1630s would show dense clusters in Westminster and to the north and east of Whitehall, along the Strand, in St Martin's Lane and Covent Garden, with others in the City of London and more distant suburbs like Bloomsbury, Smithfield and Hackney. Mixed in among the courtiers' residences were the shops of the tradesmen and retailers responsible for consumer goods and service industries that had grown up around the court.

This was a highly cosmopolitan environment, in which French attendants of Queen Henrietta Maria lived near other foreign servants of the king, English courtiers who had spent years abroad in their youth, tradesmen of European extraction and more casual visitors from abroad. An official survey of the mid-1630s turned up over a hundred foreign nationals in the parish of St Martin's-in-the-Fields alone, including French, Dutch and Italian 'gentlemen lodgers', several 'picture drawers', and five itinerant Spanish actors.¹⁰

The constant movement of people between the privy apartments and other environments, and the resultant intermingling of royal servants with individuals not formally attached to the household, were crucial structural features of the English court¹¹ and, indeed, of the English state. For these movements and social encounters allowed the king's entourage to maintain vital contacts with British provincial elites as well as European court nobilities. That is why most ceremonial posts at court were awarded simultaneously to at least four gentlemen who served in rotation, three months on and nine off, returning to their country estates between terms. It is why members of the Privy Council routinely held important posts in the provincial administration; why prominent courtiers always served as chancellors of the universities Oxford and Cambridge; and why provincial towns increasingly elected courtiers as their high stewards.¹² It is also why so many members of Charles I's entourage were former diplomats or men who had spent long periods living in foreign courts.

These conditions meant that the court always remained a place where people of very different backgrounds and outlooks mingled, and where political or religious differences rarely stood in the way of social contacts. When the papal envoy George Conn arrived in England in July 1636, he received a warm welcome from the entire court, but especially from the earls of Pembroke and Holland, two figures associated with Protestant interests who would side with Parliament in the

8 For the Tudor period see Fiona Kisby, 'Kingship and the Royal Itinerary', *The Court Historian* 4 (1999), pp. 29-40; Simon Thurley, *The Palaces of Tudor England* (New Haven, 1993), ch. 5; Mary Hill Cole, *The Portable Queen* (Amherst, 1999). The subject of Stuart progresses still awaits its historian.

9 For an example see Malcolm Smuts, 'George Wentworth goes to Court, 1636', *The Court Historian* 6.3 (2001), pp. 213-35.

10 F. J. Fisher, 'The Development of London as a Centre for Conspicuous Consumption in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series 30 (1948), pp. 37-50; Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 385-98; R. Malcolm Smuts, *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England* (Philadelphia, 1987), ch. 3; idem., 'The Court and its Neighborhood: royal policy and urban growth in the early Stuart West End', *Journal of British Studies* 30 (1991), pp. 117-49; PRO SO16/300/75.

11 See now Jeroen Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles: the Courts of Europe's major dynastic rivals, 1550-1780* (Cambridge, 2003) for an extended argument that such structural overlap was characteristic of courts throughout Europe in this period.

12 Catherine Patterson, *Urban Patronage in Early Modern England: corporate boroughs, the landed elite and the Crown 1580-1640* (Stanford, 1999), esp. pp. 31-40.

Civil War.¹³ Charles I's Bedchamber servants came from a remarkable variety of backgrounds. They certainly included men of Catholic sympathies. Sir Kenelm Digby, the son of a man executed for involvement in the infamous Powder Plot of 1605, had spent much of his youth studying at a court academy in Italy and dabbling in piracy in the Mediterranean. In the late 1630s he left London for Paris, where he struck up an acquaintance with the philosopher Descartes, although he returned to help organise a voluntary contribution of English Catholics to Charles's campaign against the Scots in 1639. Van Dyck's patron, Endymion Porter, grew up as a page in the household of the Count Duke of Olivares, father to Philip IV's great minister. Although he conformed to the Church of England to preserve the king's favour, his wife became an active Catholic proselytiser, part of the circle of recusant ladies around Henrietta Maria. But the Bedchamber also contained firm Protestants, like the king's childhood friend, the Scot William Murray, whose relatives had close ties to the leaders of the Presbyterian rebellion against the king in 1639. Murray went north with the army sent to suppress the Scots in 1640 and, with the king's encouragement, dropped in to dine with the leaders of the rebel army during a pause in the campaign.

From that moment he was involved in conspiratorial negotiations between the royal court and the leaders of the Scottish puritan rebellion. The chief official of the king's Bedchamber and the king's most intimate personal servant was the groom of the Stool. From 1636 this office belonged to Henry Rich, Earl of Holland, the younger son of a man who had made a fortune investing in piracy against Spain during Elizabeth's reign, which had enabled him to buy a peerage from James I. Holland's older brother, the earl of Warwick, continued the family tradition of piracy, while patronising puritan clergy and cultivating friendships with other puritan peers. Holland seems to have acted as the court agent of this group. Although not himself a pious man, he kept a puritan chaplain named John Everard, whose published sermons - including several preached at Holland's Kensington house - were dedicated to Oliver Cromwell in the 1650s. Holland persistently lobbied the king to re-enter the Thirty Years War on the Protestant side. He also procured a charter for the Providence Island Company, whose directors included most of the leading oppositionist peers of the Long Parliament, and whose treasurer was John Pym. Zagorin described the Providence Island Company as the organisational nucleus of an emergent country opposition, without appreciating the irony of the groom of the Stool acting as titular leader of the forces arrayed against the court.¹⁴

The activities of men like Murray and Holland demonstrate that networks centred on the court continued to play a role in British politics right down to the eve of the Civil War. Some of Charles I's policies provoked anger and consternation among English and Scottish peers and members of the gentry but this did not usually lead them to sever their connections with members of the king's entourage. Doing so would have been counter-productive, since the best hope of changing royal policy was by lobbying from within the court itself. Even in 1641 the strategy of the parliamentary leadership was not to replace the court, but to gain control of it as a means of forcing the king to alter his methods of government. Often until a surprisingly late date, normal patterns of civility and alliance continued to operate within court society, between people who would soon be fighting on opposite sides in the Civil War. The earl of Hamilton, who had organised a blockade of Scotland in 1640, changed course by contracting a marriage alliance with the Covenanter earl of Argyll, whom he pointedly began to address as 'brother'. In the spring of 1641 he joined the queen's favourite, Henry Jermyn, and the queen herself in promoting the elevation of several leaders of the parliamentary opposition to important court offices.

Meanwhile, several courtiers forced to flee abroad to escape impeachment by Parliament, including Francis Windebanke and the army plotters Thomas Percy, Henry Jermyn and John Suckling, received a courteous welcome at the English embassy in Paris, from the wife of the future parliamentarian earl of Leicester. Leicester's sister, the countess of Carlisle, cultivated political and

13 PRO PRO31/9/124, dispatch of 25 July 1636.

14 Zagorin, *Court and Country*, p. 103.

personal friendships with figures including the queen, the earl of Strafford and John Pym. The Civil War did not result from a widening division between court and country, at least so far as the upper ranks of English society are concerned. It derived instead from a series of polarising events that overwhelmed the capacity of court society to absorb political and religious tensions in the interest of stable government and the pursuit of personal ambition. In these conditions the court of the 1630s fractured. Some of its members went into exile, to avoid impeachment by the Long Parliament or because they had no stomach for a civil war. Others, including the groom of the Stool, the lord chamberlain, the lord admiral and one of the two secretaries of state, sided with Parliament. Most of the rest followed Charles to Oxford. Courtiers' decisions were often made very late in the day and often seem to have little relationship to their earlier political careers. Men who had been friends and allies with similar political outlooks until the autumn of 1641 sometimes ended in opposing camps. Projecting the partisan alignments of the Civil War back into the previous decade can only distort our understanding of the pre-war court.

How do we place an artist like Van Dyck within this framework? Many scholars have treated court artists as propagandists, early modern counterparts to the image-makers and media consultants of our own times.¹⁵ Although this view contains elements of truth, it is easily overstated and oversimplified, in ways that beg crucial questions. Our concept of propaganda derives mainly from modern experiences of mass politics: it is no coincidence that studies treating baroque art as expressions of power and ideology proliferated during the Cold War, in the aftermath of the media campaigns of the Third Reich. Although such modern analogies can sometimes raise useful questions, they can also obscure understanding of the hierarchical face-to-face societies of baroque courts. Distortions caused by anachronistic comparisons to the present have at times been reinforced by others rooted in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century polemics, which denounced courts as centres of autocratic power, political intrigue and decadent amusements, attempting to hide their squalid affairs behind a facade of cultural and ceremonial opulence. We need to discard these unhelpful stereotypes by asking more precise questions about how painters and the works they created functioned in seventeenth-century contexts. Who were the intended audiences? How closely were artists supervised? How was their work related to inherited conventions of court life and to new social fashions? In short, where exactly did artists fit within the society orbiting around the king's household?

We might begin by asking how artists were retained, paid and housed. It is revealing that the English court never developed a specialised department or royal academy responsible for painting and sculpture. Van Dyck's position differed from that of his Spanish contemporary, Velázquez, who had formal control over other court painters and, eventually, over the interior decoration of Philip IV's palaces.¹⁶ It differed as well from the positions of English court musicians, who were grouped into organised concerts, and of the architect Inigo Jones, who supervised the office of Works, the department responsible for building and maintaining royal palaces. Jones controlled a staff of building craftsmen and a budget of about £8,000 a year, in addition to funds allocated for specific projects. By contrast Van Dyck was simply appointed 'painter in ordinary to the king' and granted a pension of £200 a year that was less a salary than a retaining fee, since he was also paid at market rates for every painting he produced for the Crown. In addition he was given a house, in the Blackfriars district of London, where he set up a studio and took commissions not only from the Crown and court nobility but other patrons. Nothing prevented a court artist from selling his services on the open market when he was not busy with royal commissions. In these respects Van Dyck's position closely resembled those of various retailers and craftsmen, such as the king's apothecaries or his shoemaker, who were similarly retained to supply the household with goods on demand. Indeed the analogy can be pushed further. Successful artisans normally employed apprentices and workshop assistants to speed up production. To maintain sales they had to keep up

15 Recent examples include David Howarth, *Images of Rule: art and politics in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1997) and John Peacock, 'The Visual Image of Charles I', in *The Royal Image: Representations of Charles I*, ed. Thomas Coms (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 176-239.

16 Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez, Painter and Courtier* (New Haven, 1986), ch. 6.

with international fashions prized by London's highly sophisticated consumer market. Having learned to paint through the apprenticeship system used in Antwerp, and in the studio of Peter Paul Rubens, the most financially successful artist in Europe, Van Dyck understood the system thoroughly and exploited it with skill. He quickly took on apprentices and assistants to set up a virtual factory of baroque portraiture. Although we have no precise information, it has been estimated that he and his studio produced as many as 400 paintings during his seven and a half years' residence in London, which he sold for roughly £30 each, about five or six times what an ordinary English portraitist would have charged.¹⁷ In addition to members of the court, his customers included country peers and members of the gentry, among them several who later fought for Parliament and probably one future member of the court that tried Charles I. If our estimates are approximately correct, Van Dyck must have earned around £12,000 from private commissions, more than three times the total of £3,712 I was able to discover in payments to him in a systematic search through the Exchequer records. Although the king's artist, he actually earned the majority of his income from the London market.

Another analogy can be drawn with the role of poets who wrote court entertainments, like Ben Jonson and his successor, Sir William Davenant. Jonson and Davenant were also awarded pensions but paid additional sums for writing masques, and like court artists they lived in their own houses instead of apartments at Whitehall. Poetry did not lend itself to workshop methods of production, but Jonson and Davenant both wrote for the stage while employed by the court. Jonson skilfully exploited the prestige of his connection to King James I to enhance his public reputation and justify the publication of a prestigious folio volume of his collected works. After the Restoration, Davenant founded a professional acting company that pioneered the introduction of courtly forms of music, dance and changeable stage scenery in the commercial theatre. Some scholars like to differentiate sharply between cultural forms supported by court patronage and culture produced for a commercial market. But this is an artificial division, since court tastes frequently influenced consumer fashions, while court artists and artisans routinely earned money from the market. Jonson, Davenant and Van Dyck all displayed considerable entrepreneurial talent in the way they exploited associations with the court to enhance their reputations and income.

If we continue to pursue our investigation, however, the analogy between Van Dyck and ordinary tradesmen begins to break down, for his paintings enjoyed prestige of a different sort from luxury goods like court costumes and jewellery. The latter expressed a traditional ideal of magnificence that had always ranked among the central values of court culture. The king's Chamber was often called the Household of Magnificence, while the entire royal household can be described, with only slight exaggeration, as a large bureaucratic machine designed to procure and maintain the apparatus of magnificence essential to royal life. Although Aristotle had defined magnificence as a capacity to spend large sums of money with discernment and elegance, in practice it consisted essentially of overwhelming displays of exquisitely crafted objects fashioned from rare and costly materials, especially expensive textiles, precious metals and gems. In the Tudor period, court painting often conformed to this pattern of display. Miniatures were treated as a form of jewellery, encased in tiny jewelled frames usually worth many times the value of the painting they enclosed, while large portraits, which normally cost only a few pounds, very often depicted enormously elaborate and expensive costumes with great exactness. They were not themselves particularly costly or prestigious items, but they did bear witness to the magnificence of the people they portrayed. A preoccupation with sumptuous costume remained a feature of many English portraits up to the age of Gainsborough and beyond, but by the reign of Charles I good paintings had also acquired a different kind of significance, at least for an educated minority of collectors and virtuosi. They were now valued for qualities like the skill of the painter's brushwork and the 'conceit' or idea underlying his composition. Behind this essentially new attitude lay a broader transformation in the intellectual values, educational practices and social experiences associated with the life of a cultivated court gentleman.

Here again a comparison with court poets is instructive, since in certain respects they blazed the trail that artists later followed. Until the later sixteenth century, authors of court entertainments did not enjoy any special prestige in England, but this began to change with the spread of humanist culture in court circles. Rhetorical dexterity and a knowledge of classical and European languages and literary forms became highly prized accomplishments, and courtiers who demonstrated these qualities by turning out polished verse or crafting sophisticated entertainments might hope to profit from doing so. In the early seventeenth century Ben Jonson, who had begun life as an apprentice bricklayer in London, used his literary talent to gain entry into court society and recognition as a gentleman. But throughout his career Jonson also showed a persistent insecurity about his status. On the one hand he seized every opportunity to display his erudition, for example by loading the published texts of his court poems with an apparatus of scholarly notes identifying his classical sources. At the same time he tried to distance himself from rivals by associating them with craft traditions. He may have coined the word playwright, as a pejorative label for other writers whose work failed to conform to his standards of dramatic poetry, and he variously likened Inigo Jones's contributions to the court masque to 'painting and carpentry', joinery and cooking.

The elevation of the artist's status in England came slightly later, but was the more rapid and complete when it occurred. It owed a great deal to a series of changes that followed the end of the war with Spain in 1604, especially the establishment of English embassies in leading continental centres of art and art collecting (notably Brussels, Madrid and Venice), the spread of the grand tour as a final stage in the training of young men destined for court careers and the growing number of prominent English courtiers who had lived for a time in Spanish or Italian courts.¹⁸ The attractions of baroque art were bound up with a wider fascination among a segment of the English political elite for European – and especially Italian and Spanish – noble lifestyles. A knowledge of painting and sculpture was becoming part of the equipment a gentleman needed to possess, to demonstrate to potential patrons that he had acquired the skills necessary to move comfortably through noble society anywhere in Europe.¹⁹

Van Dyck's standing as a renowned European painter set him apart from native artists, gaining him immediate access to the highest levels of court society. Despite the fact that he worked with his hands and had been trained in a craft tradition, he received a knighthood from the king immediately after his arrival in London and almost deferential respect from great peers like the earl of Newcastle.²⁰ He pointedly emphasised his cosmopolitan sophistication by the elegance of his Blackfriars house where, according to the seventeenth century art historian Giovanni Bellori, he kept musicians, buffoons and foreign servants with which to entertain the king and court nobility, who came to watch him paint.²¹ At least some of this information can be corroborated from contemporary sources, which show that Van Dyck employed six Dutch or Flemish servants and that a dock was added onto his house so the king might visit him by travelling down the Thames in his barge.²² He also had a collection of Titians. In *The Ball* Chapman and Shirley refer to a foreign painter working in London who must represent Van Dyck:

You shall not sit with him all day for shadows:
He has Regalias and can present you with
Sudrets of fourteen pence a pound, Canary,
Prunellas, Venice glasses, Parmesan.²³

18 For the grand tour see John Stoye, *English Travellers Abroad 1604-1667* (New Haven, 1989).

19 For discussions see Bryson, *Courtesy to Civility*, Smuts, *Court Culture* chs. 5-7 and idem, 'Material Culture'.

20 'Next the blessings of your company and sweetness of conversation, the greatest happiness were to be an Argus or all over but one eye, so it, or they, were ever fixed upon that which we must call yours. What wants in judgement I can supply with admiration, and scape the title of ignorant, since I have the luck to be astonished in the right place and the happiness to be passionately your most humble servant.' Quoted in Richard Goulding, *Catalogue of the Pictures Belonging to his Grace the Duke of Portland at Welbeck Abbey* (Cambridge 1936), p. 484.

21 Giovanni Bellori, *Le vite, pittori, scrittori e architetti moderni* (1672; facsimile reprint Rome, 1931).

22 Oliver Millar, *Van Dyck in England* (London, 1982).

23 William Gifford and Alexander Dyce, eds., *Dramatic Works of James Shirley* (2d ed. 1833; reprint, New York, 1966), v. 3, pp. 45-6.

People who sat to Van Dyck did so in a luxurious and cosmopolitan environment that was an extension of the world of the grand tour.

Van Dyck created a fresh visual rhetoric expressing what it meant to be a member of the English elite through portraits evoking associations extending well beyond the sphere of painting and aesthetics. His art derived its meanings from – while also lending support to – broader realignments in values, behaviour and sensibility among the most cosmopolitan segment of English landed society. That realignment was gradually eroding Tudor concepts of magnificence, as newer ideals of virtuosity and refinement altered attitudes toward material culture.²⁴ Van Dyck's portraits expressed changing values through the air of refinement and intelligence he imparted to his subjects, as well as through his preference for painting them in costumes that were simpler than those customarily worn at court, especially on ceremonial occasions. His canvasses therefore have a more relaxed feel than those of earlier English court artists and of his contemporary Daniel Mytens, evoking a sense of intimacy and informality rather than stiff grandeur. His images captured a shift in values and manners, especially among younger courtiers, who rejected the emphasis on gravity and ostentatious display favoured in the Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods, while prizing elegance, gallantry, beauty, freedom and wit.

Nevertheless it is uncertain how far overall patterns of visual culture did change. If we could travel in a time machine and look around the courts of Elizabeth I and Charles I, would the experience confirm or weaken the impression given by portraiture that a major boundary was crossed in the early seventeenth century? Can we document a consistent correlation between the spread of a taste for baroque painting and larger alterations in outlook and behaviour? If so, did these changes have a political, as well as a social significance? Here the evidence is ambiguous. We can certainly point to individuals like the earl of Arundel, for whom collecting represented one aspect of a wider admiration for Italian culture, which was in turn connected to his sympathy for the Spanish Habsburgs and Catholicism, although not for the gaiety and relative informality of the Caroline court. But, as I have argued elsewhere, if we attempt a systematic reconstruction of the entire panoply of visual culture employed by the royal court, it is surprising how little changed in the early seventeenth century.²⁵ Charles's investments in painting are dwarfed by his household's expenditures on traditional forms of magnificence, especially textiles, precious metals, jewels and food. Repeated attempts to reduce what was spent on obsolete forms of display failed, severely limiting the money available for Jonesian architecture and large-scale painting.

Court culture always reflected not only the values of the current monarch but also the weight of ancient traditions. Traditions survived partly because a society obsessed with custom and precedent venerated them. They also endured because of bureaucratic inertia and resistance from courtiers for whom old forms of display had become a system of perquisites. Visitors to the court in the 1630s encountered a visual culture that was in some ways highly innovative but in others deeply conservative, even old-fashioned. What did they notice? Did they search out baroque art or were they so dazzled by the splendour of court costume and the profusion of embroidered textiles decorating palace interiors that they scarcely observed the paintings on the walls? One suspects that people usually noticed what their previous background led them to value. If they had already acquired a taste for art, they no doubt admired as much of the royal collection as they managed to see; if they had never learned to appreciate good paintings they were probably more impressed by other luxury objects of far greater monetary value than even the finest paintings.

Moreover, inventories of Charles's collection compiled in 1639 and 1650 show conclusively that most of the best paintings hung in rooms to which access was limited.²⁶ There were exceptions,

24 For a discussion of this point see R. Malcolm Smuts, 'Material Culture, Metropolitan Influences and Moral Authority in Early Modern England' in *Material Culture and Cultural Materialism*, ed. Curtis Perry (Brussels, 2001).

25 Smuts, 'Art and Material Culture'.

26 Oliver Millar, ed., *Abraham van der Doort's Catalogue of the Collections of Charles I*, Walpole Society Publications 37 (London, 1960); idem., *The Inventories and Valuations of the King's Goods, 1649-1651*, Walpole Society Publications 42 (London, 1972).

especially Rubens's ceiling in the Banqueting House, a public room normally open to any gentleman visiting the court. The Whitehall Bear Gallery, which gave access to courtiers' apartments, contained two Rubens paintings and three Van Dycks, among many less distinguished canvases.²⁷ But it was in the privy gallery, the first, second and third privy lodging chambers, the Bedchamber, the small rooms adjacent to it and the gallery leading from the privy apartments towards the orchard that the great majority of choice pieces hung.

We should not exaggerate the privacy of this collection, since many people without automatic access to the privy apartments gained temporary admission to conduct business with the king. Some may also have obtained private tours when he was not in residence. Many members of the gentry visiting London must also have seen the major collections owned by courtiers like Buckingham, Pembroke, Hamilton and Arundel. Will Murray had copies made of many of the king's masterpieces, which still hang in his suburban London residence, Ham House, and others may well have done the same. Court art was probably much more accessible to those really intent on seeing it than we might judge, simply from the rooms where it was displayed. Yet the point remains that emphasis on quality paintings increased markedly as one entered the privileged spaces inhabited by the king and the greater court officials. This fact surely ought to qualify our assessment of the political messages that paintings or groups of paintings expressed. The Bear Gallery and Privy Gallery at Whitehall, for example, were filled with fairly undistinguished portraits of the king's ancestors going back to Edward I of England, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain and James IV of Scotland, along with his foreign relations by marriage, such as Marie de Medici and the Elector Palatine. A visitor who paid attention to the paintings in these public rooms would not have been impressed by their quality, but he would have been forcefully reminded of the history and prestige of the royal family. The paintings in the Queen's chapels and the galleries leading into them – regularly traversed by recusants attending mass in her palaces – included a large number of religious subjects, among them a Rubens crucifixion at Somerset House that fell victim to the most important act of parliamentary iconoclasm during the Civil War.²⁸

This art certainly conveyed political messages, which hundreds if not thousands of visitors probably noticed, but it was still not public propaganda in the usual sense. Did the court attempt to disseminate images by Van Dyck and other artists more widely, through studio copies and printed reproductions? This subject needs more systematic research but the known evidence suggests only limited efforts to popularise court imagery, especially in comparison to what was being done elsewhere in Europe.²⁹ Richelieu employed engravers systematically to reproduce paintings and drawings by leading court artists that glorified his rule.³⁰ By contrast only one Van Dyck portrait of Charles and Henrietta Maria seems to have been engraved before the 1640s.³¹ Rubens's allegorical cycle in the Luxembourg Palace was quickly engraved, whereas the Banqueting House ceiling was not. Several magnificent books of engravings commemorated archducal entries into Brussels and Antwerp in this period. The only comparable work published in England represented festivities surrounding a visit by a foreign Queen, Marie de Medici, in 1639.³² The accompanying text was in French, suggesting that it may have been intended for export, or else for the many French courtiers who had followed Marie to England. The leading English patron of engraving was not the king but the earl of Arundel, who recruited Wenceslaus Hollar and Henry van der Borch the younger to England and employed them in making prints of works in his collection.³³ Hollar engraved an equestrian portrait of Arundel in 1639 to commemorate his appointment to lead the army sent

27 Millar, *Van der Doort's Catalogue*, pp. 2–7.

28 Albert J. Loomie, 'The Destruction of Rubens's Crucifixion in the Queen's Chapel, Somerset House', *Burlington Magazine* 140 (1998), pp. 680–2.

29 For a different view see Peacock, 'Visual Image of Charles I'.

30 Jonathan Brown, "'Peut-on Assez Louer cet Excellent Ministre?'" Imagery of the Favourite in England, France and Spain,' in *The World of the Favourite*, ed. J. H. Elliott and L. W. B. Brockliss (New Haven, 1999), pp. 223–35.

31 Margery Corbett and Michael Norton, *Engraving in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. Part III: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 203 and plate 99. Produced by Robert van Voerst, who held the post of engraver to the King, and printed cum privilegio, this does seem to have been an officially sponsored reproduction.

32 Puget de la Serre, *L'Entrée de la Reyne Mere du Roy dans la Grande Bretagne* (London, 1639).

33 Ariane Faber Kolb, 'The Arundels' Printmakers: four approaches to the reproduction of drawings' *Apollo* 144 (1996), pp. 57–62.

against Scotland, for sale by Thomas Walkley, the bookseller responsible for publishing the Caroline masques. No similar engraving appeared of the king.

The absence of engraving cannot be explained by a lack of public demand, since several stationers did sell prints of Charles, Henrietta Maria and their children during the 1630s. But these were pedestrian works showing no court influence. This is especially striking since Van Dyck himself was among the leading print makers in Europe, and produced scores of drawings sent out to be copied by Flemish engravers while he resided in London, including several of English courtiers and court artists.³⁴ But these were published only in 1641, in Antwerp, and did not include images of the royal family. Although English engraving lagged well behind the standard of Antwerp or Paris, if Charles had wanted to engage in an extensive campaign of visual propaganda through print he surely could have found ways of doing so more effectively. The paucity of good engravings of Caroline court paintings, especially royal portraits, speaks volumes about the king's priorities.

The point is reinforced by noting the relatively limited role of allegorical and historical paintings in Charles's palaces. The Banqueting House ceiling is an obvious and important exception, although commissioned in James I's reign; but nothing else in Caroline Whitehall really compared to the Medici cycle in the Luxembourg, the decoration of the Hall of Realms in the Buen Retiro, or the numerous schemes that artists like Vasari had produced in Italy. The closest we come to a coherent programme of historical and allegorical paintings is Gentileschi's work in the Queen's House at Greenwich, for Henrietta Maria.³⁵

Despite a number of exceptions, Caroline court painting consisted mainly of portraits, as Van Dyck's English output illustrates.³⁶ This situation reflected a long-standing English bias, since portraiture had been the dominant genre of English painting for nearly a century. Perhaps partly in compensation, English portraits often acquired allegorical or historical dimensions. They not only represented people but also told stories about them. This remained true for Van Dyck. Precisely because it is conveyed through portraiture, however, Caroline iconography tends to have a highly personal quality even when conveying claims of wide political import. Aside from the Banqueting House ceiling, there were no great historical series glorifying Stuart dynastic history. Instead individual portraits evoked the king's love for his wife and the queen's fertility or else displayed the growing brood of royal children. Rather than an historical cycle commemorating the ship money fleet and the reassertion of England's sovereignty over the narrow seas, we have a portrait of the earl of Northumberland as acting Lord Admiral, leaning against an anchor as ships fire their cannons in the background. During his mission to London in the late 1620s, Rubens produced two allegories of Charles's role as a peacemaker. But although the theme of peace remained prominent in court culture throughout the 1630s, it is thereafter usually represented only obliquely in court paintings, through the tranquil landscape backgrounds in portraits. Moreover Van Dyck's political iconography reflected the views of individual sitters rather than a single coherent royal programme. The ships in the background of the Earl of Warwick's portrait refer to that peer's privateering activities and advocacy of naval campaigns against Spain, a message at odds with Charles's usual policy.

Many portraits have no overt political significance but instead express more intimate messages of concern to the sitter. A number of double portraits that have been analysed by Malcolm Rogers commemorate bonds of friendship.³⁷ Graham Parry has pointed out that Van Dyck often employs emblems and conventions also found in court poetry, such as roses to symbolise beauty and love, pastoral allusions and a preference for outdoor country scenes.³⁸ He is surely right to argue that

34 Carl Depauw and Ger Luijten, *Anthony van Dyck as a Printmaker* (Antwerp, 1999).

35 Gabriele Finaldi, 'Orazio Gentileschi at the Court of Charles I' in *Orazio Gentileschi at the Court of Charles I* (Bilbao, 1999), pp. 9-37. Caroline Hibbard has argued, in an unpublished paper, that the Queen's role as an art patron has been under-estimated. It is possible that Henrietta Maria's attitude toward painting owed something to the influence of her (Florentine) mother, who certainly appreciated the value of historical and allegorical programmes.

36 This point would be qualified but not fundamentally altered if several lost mythological and religious paintings described by Bellori had survived (*Le Vite dei Pittori*, pp. 261-2).

37 Malcolm Rogers, 'Van Dyck's Portrait of Lord George Stuart, Seigneur D'Aubigny and Some Related Work' in *Van Dyck 350*, ed. Susan J. Barnes and Arthur K. Wheelock jr. (Hanover and London, 1994).

38 Graham Parry, 'Van Dyck and the Caroline Poets', *ibid.* pp. 247-62.

portraiture and poetry complemented each other in creating a new image of the courtier - one, incidentally, from which Whitehall and London have been virtually erased. In its painting as in its poetry, the court most often imagined itself as a rural community, whether inhabiting a fantasy world of pastoral romance, enjoying outdoor recreations like hunting or simply relaxing in a garden or rustic scene.³⁹

This imagery certainly helps us understand how Caroline courtiers perceived themselves and wished to be perceived by others. But the statements conveyed through both poetry and portraiture seem to have been intended mainly for the same kind of people that those genres described. Apart from a few verses composed for the stage, court poems were either read in private or recited or sung during fairly exclusive social gatherings. They sometimes circulated in scribal copies, among a fairly limited public with access to London scribes, but before the Civil War they were almost never published. Portraits normally hung in long galleries and other rooms where people of quality entertained guests of similar rank.⁴⁰ They were sometimes presented as gifts to patrons, clients or close friends, as tokens of loyalty, favour or special emotional attachments. (At least some of the contemporary studio copies of Van Dyck portraits of the king were commissioned for presentation to favoured courtiers or other gentlemen Charles wished to honour: one of these still hangs in its original setting in William Murray's Ham House). In this way paintings helped advertise ties of dependence and alliance that united the court and the upper levels of landed society internally. Sometimes they were also seen by people of lower rank, especially servants in great households, but nothing suggests that the painters or their patrons ever regarded this plebeian audience as significant.

In making this argument I am not trying to assert that painting was devoid of political significance, or that the Caroline regime was entirely oblivious to the need to impress ordinary subjects. My point, instead, is that we need to distinguish more carefully between different *kinds* of politics and different forms of political representation. Baroque courts did sometimes attempt to impress and overawe people through an apparatus of visual majesty. But they also provided settings for more intimate political transactions between rulers, their entourages, and a more extended elite with access to the court, whose members normally resided in the provinces. English court art needs to be interpreted within this latter context. It was a sophisticated medium, best appreciated in relatively intimate settings, and although cheaper than many forms of magnificence a typical Van Dyck portrait still cost the equivalent of three years' income for an English labourer. Although studio copies may occasionally have found their way into public settings, such as parish churches, there is no evidence of a systematic campaign to place paintings of the king before his humbler subjects. The evidence of engraving suggests that most of the royal images purchased by people below the level of the gentry remained artistically crude and unsophisticated. Printed images often depict the same themes as court art, especially by emphasising the king's relations with his wife and children, but from a stylistic or aesthetic standpoint they belong to an entirely different world.⁴¹ When the court wanted to address a wider public it preferred other vehicles, including printed sermons, proclamations read out at county assizes and heraldic insignia. The king's arms, rather than his portraits, were routinely painted in parish churches, on the gates of provincial towns and on the coaches and barges in which he travelled.⁴² They were probably much more familiar, as well as far easier to decipher, than Van Dyck's images.

But in recognising this point we also need to guard against exaggerating the exclusivity of court art by making schematic dichotomies between court and country, or between the cultural forms supported by elite patronage and those which depended on the market. Such dichotomies gloss over the complex ties that connected the court to provincial social elites and at least some forms of

39 For Van Dyck's own studies of English rural scenery see Martin Royalton-Kisch, *The Light of Nature: landscape drawings and watercolours by Van Dyck and his contemporaries* (London, 1999).

40 On the social uses of long galleries see Nicholas Cooper, *Houses of the Gentry* (New Haven, 1999), ch. 8.

41 I base this statement on the reproductions in Corbett and Norton, *Engraving in England*.

42 For a survey of heraldic insignia in buildings of this period see Thomas Woodcock and John Martin Robinson, *Heraldry in Historic Houses of Great Britain* (London, 2000).

market capitalism. Although Van Dyck was a court artist, he never lived in a royal palace or worked exclusively for courtiers. We can only adequately understand his English career by looking beyond the role of court patronage in the narrow sense and appreciating the degree to which he tapped a wider demand for sophisticated portraiture among a significant segment of the kingdom's landed elite. The court's artistic culture derived not just from the initiatives of Charles I but also from the activities of other patrons and the influence of practices like the grand tour. Indeed in many ways the sources of that culture need to be sought beyond the British Isles, in wider movements of European fashion. The court of the 1630s never became an isolated enclave dominated by the views of its royal master. It remained what the court had always been: an arena of national and international high politics, the chief focal point for a wealthy metropolitan society that spilled beyond the king's palaces into the surrounding suburbs of London, and a place where the British elite came into contact with European aristocrats and international cultural fashions. Van Dyck's English career was very much a product of these conditions.

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