Rubens's *Landscape with St George and the Dragon*: Relating Images to their Originals and Changing the Meaning of Representation at the Court of Charles I [1]

Abstract

This article argues that the least studied and understood of the works that Rubens painted at Charles I's court, *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* (1629-30), is in fact the most important for understanding Charles's strategies for representation during the period of his personal rule. The article shows that the painting identifies St George as the original and the King as his exact image. In this way, the article suggests, Rubens endorsed Charles's anti-Calvinist policies, especially his reform of the Order of the Garter. The article also shows how Rubens's painting took from masques both the license to represent the King as someone else, as well as a new narrative structure that figured Charles as the herald of peace. It concludes by suggesting that Rubens's painting reinvigorated court masque performances in the early years of Charles's personal rule.

Keywords: Charles I, Henrietta Maria, Rubens, St George, Peter Heylyn, masque, revels

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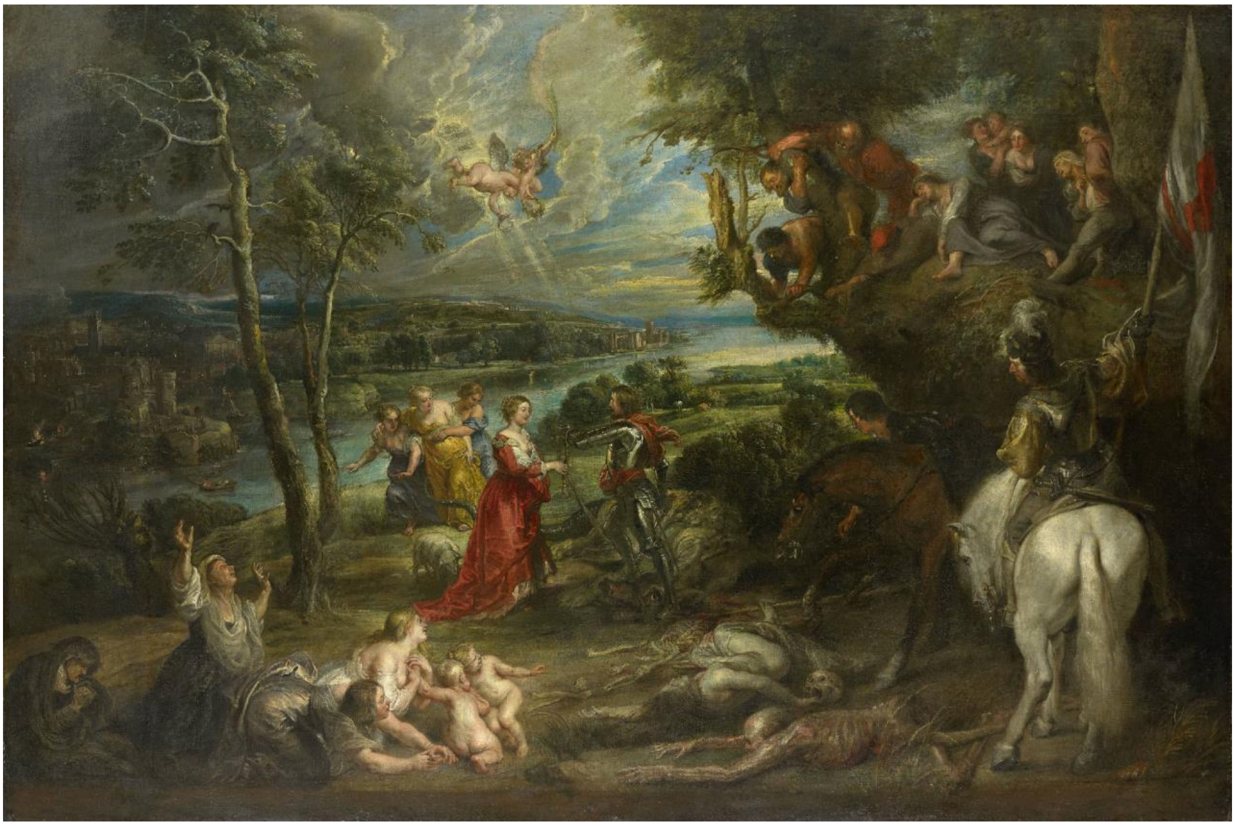
[1] I am immensely grateful to John Bonehill for reading earlier drafts of this article and for many conversations about Rubens and also to Erin Griffey for reading an earlier draft. Diana Dethloff has also made many valuable observations for which I am very grateful. Kevin Sharpe's work has inspired much of my thinking on Rubens and Charles I, and he graciously listened to some early ideas I had about landscape in seventeenth-century England. This article is dedicated to his memory.

I. Introduction

Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) painted *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* (fig. 1) in London in 1629-30. Philip IV of Spain sent Rubens to England to negotiate a treaty with Charles I. The painting is large and almost entirely finished in the artist's own hand. We shall see that Rubens has treated the subject in a highly original way and has given St George the portrait of the Charles I. Such a combination of renowned painter, royal subject and landscape setting makes *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* unique among paintings of the early modern period. The Royal Academy exhibition *Charles I: King and Collector*, reviewed in this journal by David Jaffe, acknowledged the painting's significance for our understanding of Charles I and used *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* as the final room's centrepiece.[2]



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[2] David Jaffe, 'Charles I: King and Collector', *The Court Historian*, 23 (2018), pp. 230-32 293-313.

Fig.1. Sir Peter Paul Rubens, *Landscape with St George and the Dragon*, 1629-30, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 226.9 cm. Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019 www.rct.uk/collection/405356

Scholars have failed to give *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* the critical attention it merits. Their indifference is surprising because Rubens produced the picture in circumstances about which we know a great deal, and at a time when he was Europe's most well-known painter. There are some reasons to explain why historians haven't shown much interest in the painting. In London Rubens produced some of the most well-known pictures in his oeuvre, including the very large *Minerva Protecting Pax from Mars* (1629, National Gallery) which Rubens personally presented to Charles I.[3] The painter also agreed payment for the canvases to decorate the Banqueting House ceiling, Charles received and installed in 1635. A great deal of documentation shedding light on these works survives, as do the works themselves, but there is no external evidence that explains why Rubens painted *Landscape with St George and the Dragon*. A further reason is that the picture's meaning has seemed obvious. Spurred by an interest in Caroline cultural politics, historians have examined how Charles reformed England's premier chivalric order, the Order of the Garter to fashion and communicate the policies that shaped his personal rule (1629-40). St George was the Order's patron saint and so the painting seems to illustrate these politics quite neatly, giving historians little incentive to investigate it further. Finally, Fiona Donovan has suggested that the painting's subject is influenced by masque culture and Malcolm Smuts has noted 'the masques of the next decade consistently elaborated' its message.[4] Yet too few historians have explored how masques might shed light on paintings, and have left a key avenue of enquiry unchartered.

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[3] Exciting recent work on Rubens in London includes: Karen Hearn, *Rubens and Britain*, (London, 2011); Gregory Martin, *Rubens in London: Art and Diplomacy*, (London, 2011); Michael Auwers, 'The Gift of Rubens: Rethinking the Concept of Gift-Giving in Early Modern Diplomacy', *European History Quarterly*, 43 (2013), pp. 421-41; John Adamson, 'Policy and Pomegranates: Art, Iconography and Counsel in Rubens's Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy of 1629-30', in Luc Duerloo and R. Malcolm Smuts (eds), *The Age of Rubens: Diplomacy, Dynastic Politics and the Visual Arts in Early Seventeenth-Century Europe*, (Turmhout, 2016), pp. 143-79; Gregory Martin, 'Rubens, Painter and Diplomat', in Desmond Shawe-Taylor, et al. (eds), *Charles I, King and Collector*, (London, 2018), pp. 149-71. J. Vanessa Lyon, 'A Psalm for King James: Rubens's Peace Embracing Plenty and the Virtues of Female Affection at Whitehall', *Art History*, 40 (2017), pp. 38-67.

To understand Charles I's policies and the politics of representation during the 1630s, it is crucial that we gain a better understanding of *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* and its relation to Charles I's court. The painting celebrates the Order of the Garter, founded by Edward III in 1348 and headed by the monarch. The annual Garter feast and the installation of new knights were important rituals. Charles raised their profile and augmented their religious aspects. The King's investment in the Order's ceremonies ran counter to Calvinist assertions that the relationship between images and the things they signified was purely 'symbolicall'. English Puritans protested that chivalric orders were 'stained with errors and fables inserted […] by the lewd religious sort'.[5] Rubens's painting endorsed the exact opposite view, namely that the Order's ceremony was nothing less than the communion of saints. Peter Heylyn, one of the King's chaplains-in-ordinary, expounded this view in his influential defence of St George, *The Historie of that most famous Saynt and Souldier of Christ Jesus St. George of Capadocia* (1631). Rubens's painting of Charles appearing as St George shared Heylyn's view that images could faithfully and sufficiently represent their originals. Rubens also drew on masque performances that gave the King the licence to appear as someone else. The relationship between masque and Garter ceremony is key to helping us understand the painting's meaning.

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[4] R. Malcolm Smuts, *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England*, (Philadelphia, 1987), p. 249; Fiona Donovan, *Rubens and England*, (New Haven and London, 2004), p. 121.

[5] William Harrison, *The Description of England*, (Ithaca, N.Y., 1968), p. 104.

This article begins by identifying the key questions raised by the painting. The section after that shows how and why Rubens altered and expanded the painting in early 1630. The following sections trace the saint's fortunes in the sixteenth century to better understand what St George signified to a Caroline audience, before showing how Peter Heylyn defended the saint and rebutted Calvinist claims regarding the limits of what images could mean. Charles's representation as St George is reappraised and then the penultimate section explores how the painting follows court masque in its unusual narrative structure, which focuses on the action's resolution rather than its climax and looks forward to revelry. The discussion concludes by reappraising *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* in the light of this evidence, and suggests that the painting enjoys a more complex relationship with masque, ceremony and high church ecclesiology than scholars have been willing to recognise.

II. Composition and subject

Two features of *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* distinguish it from the way other artists treated the subject. In a bold move, Rubens chose not to paint St George in combat with the dragon and instead devised a composition that placed the saint's relationship with the princess centre stage. Most paintings of St George followed Jacobus de Voragine's telling of the story in his thirteenth-century compendium *The Golden Legend*, and focused on the moment when the saint, mounted on a charger and watched by the hapless princess, thrust his spear into the Dragon. Examples of this approach in Charles I's own collection included Raphael's *St. George and the Dragon* (1506, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC), which was given to Charles I by either the 3rd or 4th Earl of Pembroke between 1628 and 1639; a miniature after Raphael by Peter Oliver which is dated to 1628; and a later bronze by Francesco Fanelli from 1635-7 (both Royal Collection Trust, London). Rubens himself had painted a charging St George in an Italian canvas completed in 1606-08 (Prado, Madrid).

Rubens's London version of the subject could hardly be more different from the one he did in Italy twenty years earlier. Rather than rehearse the combat, Rubens improvised an exchange between the knight and the princess. Fiona Donovan rightly argues that it should be called 'Landscape with St George and the Princess'. The picture's details remain true to de Voragine's telling of the story, but Rubens invented the gesture whereby the knight hands the princess's girdle, with which he has bound the dragon, back to her. We shall see that in its original version the composition centred, quite literally, on the princess. In its expanded form, St George is the focus. The light catches his forehead and armour, which are offset by dark distant foliage. His crimson cloak finds its partner in the princess's court dress, giving her a strong visual correspondence that supports the narrative pairing.

St George is popular because the dragon fascinates people, so Rubens, with one eye on his viewer's expectations, kept the dragon centre stage. Defeated but still alive, it waves its tail in protest at the saint's foot planted firmly on its head. A careful look reveals that Rubens has borrowed the dragon's features from Ovid's story of Perseus in the *Metamorphoses*:

> Now his shell-rough-cast backe; now where the taile
> Ends in a Fish.[6]

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[6] Peter Heylyn, *The Historie of That Most Famous Saynt and Souldier of Christ Jesus St. George of Capadocia*, (London, 1631), p. 21.

The wings are occupied by three ladies in waiting on the left, and townspeople and retainers on the right, who together bring colour and movement to the composition and direct the viewer's attention to the central couple. The town lies on the far left of the painting. Mothers with infants in the centre foreground extend the scene forwards and place the saint and princess more firmly in the scene, affording them a strong visual presence to counter the effect of their diminutive size.

A closer look at the saint and princess leads to a surprising revelation: Rubens has given St George, who wears fifteenth-century armour, the portrait and proportions of Charles I. Roger de Piles was the first critic to note this and almost all scholars have agreed with him.[7] For those who knew the King's appearance, Rubens's gesture changed the painting completely and created a centre around which all meanings would orbit. It's a dramatic if subtle gesture, but in fact Rubens was drawing on precedent. Jerry Brotton has noted that the complement of portraying a living emperor as St George was known to Rubens and also to Charles from Habsburg collections.[8] This resolved a dilemma for Rubens, who painted portraits of Charles's courtiers but not the King himself, since England and Spain were still at war.[9] A picture of Charles-as-St George was an appropriate and alternative way to acknowledge the king's military prowess and at the same time praise him as a peace-maker. Another possible source for Rubens is a painted frontispiece on Edmund Bolton's 1617 proposal for an 'academ roial' to be based in Windsor Castle. It shows Rubens's erstwhile patron, George Villiers, a Garter knight and marquess (later Duke) of Buckingham, as St George, armoured and mounted on a white horse (British Library, Harleian MS 6103).[10] It was probably kept at York House, the Duke's former home, where Rubens stayed in London. If this was indeed a source then *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* may also be a tribute to the Duke, assassinated in 1628, a gesture whose sentiments Rubens could be sure Charles would endorse.

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[7] Roger de Piles, *Dissertation Sur Les Ouvrages De Plus Fameaux Peintres*, (Paris, 1681), pp. 115-23.

[8] Jerry Brotton, *The Sale of the Late King's Goods: Charles I and His Art Collection*, (London, 2006), p. 151; see also Francis Haskell, *The King's Pictures: The Formation and Dispersal of the Collections of Charles I and His Courtiers*, (New Haven, 2013), p. 47.

[9] Donovan, *Rubens and England*, p. 123.

The princess does not resemble Henrietta Maria. This author can't agree with the claim made by some historians that Rubens 'clearly depicted' the princess as a likeness of Henrietta Maria.[11] The figure doesn't look like Henrietta Maria as we know her from other paintings: Rubens's princess is built more heavily and has lighter hair colour. Moreover, painting the French king's sister would constitute just as serious a breach of protocol as painting the English King, since France and Spain remained at war. But although the princess does not look like the queen, there is no doubt that she signifies Henrietta Maria. Her iconography is highly personal to the queen. A putto flies above her holding a wreath of red and white flowers (hard to see unless you are very close). These flowers are probably lilies and roses, which formed part of the ceiling decoration of Henrietta Maria's bedchamber at the Queen's House in Greenwich.[12] A pastoral setting was also appropriate for the queen. In 1628 Gerrit van Honthorst painted Henrietta Maria, a picture that is probably 'the Queens owne picture in Sheephirds habbitt' inventoried in the queen's dressing room in Denmark House in 1639.[13] *Landscape with St George* was also displayed in a very private space, the King's breakfast room, and it may be that pastoral image was meant for the King's private enjoyment.[14] A final suggestion that the princess is intended to signify the queen, if not portray her, lies in the narrative structure of the painting. This will be discussed in more detail later.

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[10] The image is reproduced in Timothy Raylor, *The Essex House Masque of 1621: Viscount Doncaster and the Jacobean Masque*, (Pittsburgh, Pa., 2000), pp. 65-66.

[11] Erica Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainments*, (Cambridge, 1989), p. 187; David Howarth, *Images of Rule: Art and Politics in the English Renaissance, 1485-1649*, (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 72; Kevin Sharpe, *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England, 1603-1660*, (New Haven and London, 2010). The quote is from Sharpe, *Image Wars*, p. 197.

[12] I am indebted to Gordon Higgot for making this connection. See G. H. Chettle, *The Queen's House, Greenwich*, (London, 1937), pp. 74-5.

To understand why Rubens painted Charles and Henrietta Maria as St George and the princess, and why he adopted different strategies for each, we need to first look at how the painting developed and its initial reception in London at the outset of Charles's personal rule.

III. Expanding the painting

On 6 March 1630 the Cambridge scholar Joseph Mede wrote a newsletter to the Suffolk gentleman Sir Martin Stutevile. He reported:

> My Lo: of Carlisle hath twice in one week most magnificently feasted the Spanish Ambassador & Monsr Ruben also the Agent who prepared the way for his coming; who in honour of England & of our nation, from whom he hath received so many courtesies, hath drawen with his pensill the History of St George; wherein, if it be possible, he hath

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[13] Erin Griffey, *On Display: Henrietta Maria and the Materials of Magnificence at the Stuart Court*, (London and New Haven, 2015), p. 90.

[14] Van der Doort's inventory records that 'The great St George … Was plist a while sins inde kings brekfast chamer' but that by 1639 it was stored in a passage between the Banqueting House and Privy Lodgings. See Oliver Millar, 'Abraham Van Der Doort's Catalogue of the Collections of Charles I', *The Walpole Society*, 37 (1958), 171. It was probably moved to make way for van Dyck's *Five Eldest Children of Charles I* (1637; Royal Collection Trust, London). See Millar, 'Abraham Van Der Doort's Catalogue', p. 35.

> exceeded himselfe: but the picture he hath sent home into Flanders, to remaine there as a monument of his abode & employment here.[15]

Don Carlos Coloma's arrival in London in early January to conclude a treaty with Charles I effectively marked the end of Rubens's mission: the painter had left by the time Mede wrote to Stutevile. The 'courtesies' mentioned by Mede are probably a reference to the knighthood and gifts that Charles gave Rubens at their final audience.[16] ('They could not have made more fuss with any minister, however important', sniffed the Venetian ambassador.)[17]

We know very little about the painting and its whereabouts between its appearance in Mede's newsletter and 1639, when it appeared in Abraham van der Doort's inventory of Charles I's collection. The canvas consists of eight pieces. A large central piece forms the original composition. This stretches from the putti to just below the princess's feet, and from the trees on the left to the standing retainer's head on the right. The whole assemblage was 'executed within a relatively short time-span'.[18] The painting is remarkably free of identifiable sources such as Rubens would have in his studio; the exception is a sketch of a horse that appears as the white horse on the right, which we know Rubens brought to London.[19] Mede's comment that in the painting Rubens ‘hath exceeded himself’ may refer to the speed with which he completed the painting, which is more than seven feet wide.

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[15] BL, Harley MSS 390, f.501 r. Mede is often spelt Mead but for all names I have retained the spellings used in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. The date is not in Mede's hand: see Per Bjurström, 'Rubens's 'St George and the Dragon'', *The Art Quarterly,* 18 (1955), pp. 27-43, p. 36.

[16] Allen Hinds (ed), *Calendar of State Papers Venetian 1629-32*, (London, 1919), pp. 293-313.

[17] Hinds (ed), *Calendar of State Papers Venetian 1629-32,* pp. 293-313.

[18] Christopher White, *The Later Flemish Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen*, (London, 2007), pp. 219-22.

[19] The quote is from White, *Later Flemish Pictures*, p. 219; for the sketch associated with the painting, see Bjurström, 'Rubens's 'St George and the Dragon''.

We need to explain why Rubens painted a canvas, and then decided to expand it. Rubens most likely painted the original landscape during the early months of his stay, when his duties and leisure took him to a number of locations along the Thames valley. Landscape painting was an accepted occupation for a gentleman and figured prominently in the artist’s output during the 1630s, when he bought a large estate near Antwerp. Rubens pinned the canvas on its own stretcher, which suggests he regarded it as a picture in its own right, before other pieces were joined to it.[20] At this stage, the princess’s figure formed the central vertical axis of the painting, from the putto above her, down through her body (fig. 2). Making the princess the painting’s subject may have been a complement to Henrietta Maria on her second pregnancy, which was announced publicly in early January 1630, but certainly known at court earlier.[21] Rubens – Spain’s diplomat – may also have wished to placate the French queen, who in November 1629 reportedly said ‘she would have nothing to do with Spain, nor with any person there’.[22] But at some point Rubens expanded the painting by including the city on the left, the foreground women and children, the horses, standard bearer and page on the right and above them the townspeople crowded on the tree. These figures add nothing to the story. The effect of their inclusion is to focus the composition on St George by making him the centre of their attention. Rubens has also arranged the additional canvas pieces so that the King’s head sits in the dead centre of the expanded composition. His inclusion of a monumental mounted figure carrying St George's banner further emphasises that the saint is the picture's principal subject.

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[20] White, *Later Flemish Pictures*, p. 219.

[21] Hinds (ed), *Calendar of State Papers Venetian 1629-32*, p. 272.

[22] Joseph Mede to Martin Stutevile, 7 November 1629, from Thomas Birch, *The Court and Times of Charles the First*, (London, 1848), p. 41.

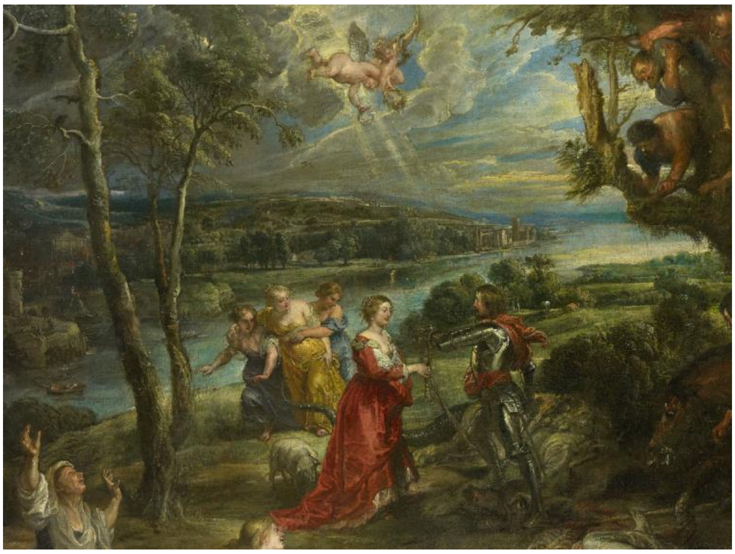

Fig.2. Sir Peter Paul Rubens, *Landscape with St George and the Dragon*, 1629-30, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 226.9 cm. Detail showing the original canvas size. Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019 www.rct.uk/collection/405356

Rubens's decision to expand the picture altered the relationship between the saint and Charles. There's no evidence that Rubens changed the face to look like Charles: the diminutive size and energetic pose suggest that Rubens intended the King to be recognised, even when the picture was in its earlier state. But by making the saint the centre of attention, Rubens made the relationship between Charles and St George the painting's defining subject. When we see this, we can begin to understand what motivated Rubens to expand the work. But to take this inquiry further, we need to look at what St George meant to a Caroline audience.

IV. What did St George mean to Charles I?

English Puritans battered the cult of St George.[23] The saint was an obvious target because of his association with unreformed religion. John Calvin argued that George was entirely fictional and a range of English divines echoed this view in the later sixteenth century. St George was also the focus of critical scrutiny in the Roman Catholic church, but Pius V acknowledged the saint's popularity and his feast survived the cull of saints 'with dubious passions' from the Roman breviary in 1568.[24] In England, popular representations of St George proved harder to reform. 'The most frequently printed English text before the Reformation', John Mirk's collection of sermons titled *The Festyuall*, was based closely on the *Golden Legend* and featured George prominently.[25] The saint continued to enjoy a high reputation and pre-reformation adaptations of St George's life, such as *Bevis of Hampton,* survived as popular texts. Later sixteenth century works such as Richard Johnson's *Seaven Champions of Christendom* (1596), in which George featured not only in his own narrative but also in the stories of other patron saints such as Andrew, Denis and James, rebranded the saint for an explicitly protestant audience, as did Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) where St George appears as the knight 'Redcrosse'. Counter-reformation practices, on the other hand, put saints at the centre of a reconstituted Catholic civil identity. Rubens, son of a protestant father and Catholic mother, would have known that following the Hapsburg defeat of the Calvinist regime in Antwerp in 1586, the city authorities ordered the revival of parochial patron saint processions. The *Sint Joriskerk* was one of four parish churches in the city and it renewed its annual cycle of celebrations.[26] The Calvinists had suppressed processions, so the move was not only a strategy to assert control of civic space, it was also explicitly anti-Calvinist.

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[23] The phrase is Richard Cust's: Richard Cust, 'Charles I and the Order of the Garter', *Journal of British Studies,* 52 (2013), pp. 343-69 349.

[24] I am grateful to Gregory DiPippo for this information.

[25] Susan Powell, 'Mirk, John (Fl. C. 1382–C. 1414), Augustinian Author', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Elizabethan and Jacobean divines faced two challenges when writing about St George. Like their continental counterparts – both protestant and Roman Catholic – they allowed for popular devotion to St George and offered what they considered to be an appropriate channel for these sentiments. Puritan clergy argued vigorously that St George should be understood only as a symbol for the Christian's fight against the Devil, and should on no account be accorded any historical credibility, still less be venerated. The second challenge was more delicate. English divines were critical of St George. In 1587 William Harrison, a canon of St George's chapel at Windsor no less, lamented 'Would to God they might be called knights of honour or by some other name, for the title St. George argueth a wrong patron'.[27] But writing as clergy under the auspices of the established church, whose head also led the Order of the Garter, constrained them to acknowledge St George as the Order's patron and show how he was an exemplar for England's nobility. The Dean of Canterbury, John Boys, was more circumspect than Harrison:

> I write not this to dishonour that noble Order of the Garter. For under correction … I take the GEORGE which adornes those right honourable Worthies, to be symbolicalll onely: signifying that a valiant Knight should alwayes be ready to fight against the Dragon; and other enemies of the Church and state whatsoever.[28]

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[26] See Floris Prims, *Geschiedenis Van Sint-Jorisparochie En -Kerk Te Antwerpen, 1304-1923,* (Antwerpen, 1924); Jeffrey M. Muller, *St. Jacob's Antwerp: Art and Counter Reformation in Rubens's Parish Church*, (Leiden and Boston, 2016), p. 68.

[27] Harrison, *The Description of England*, p. 109.

[28] Cited in Heylyn, *Historie*, pp. 315-16.

Despite such fierce scrutiny, St George survived the Puritan onslaught. As Charles I's chaplain Peter Heylyn noted with satisfaction in 1631, St George continued to occupy a place in secular calendars and the Book of Common Prayer:

> St. *George* doth still retaine his place in our common *Calendars*, not in those onely, made for the state of every yeare, where commonly he shines in Festivall red letters; as doe no other of the Saints, but those whose Feasts are by the Church observed as *Holy:* but also in the *Calendar* prefixed before the publike Liturgie of our most blessed Church of *England*; where he is specially honoured with the name of Saint, as is not any of the rest, excepting those which saw our Saviour in the flesh.[29]

These points undoubtedly encouraged Charles I. From the outset of his reign the King invested a tremendous amount of energy into the Order of the Garter.[30] Charles returned the investiture ceremony to Windsor Castle, beautified St George's Chapel at Windsor, and reformed liturgical practice. These actions show that he wanted the ceremonies re-establish their relationship with ancient practice. Taken together they constituted 'a particularly potent expression of the sacred majesty of kingship'.[31] Charles's concern with where the ceremonies took place and with the reverence he expected Garter Knights to show the Order's rites, reveal a view that images and rituals were fixed to eternal truths and were therefore sacred. Such high churchmanship contradicted the views of Elizabethan Puritans, who insisted that the Garter ceremonies meant nothing in themselves and were merely an occasion for exhortations to godly living. It fell to Peter Heylyn, Charles's chaplain-in-ordinary and his near-exact contemporary, to expound the errors of both Puritans and Roman Catholics, uncover the truth about St George and restore the honour of the Order of the Garter. He set out to achieve this in his book *The Historie of that most famous saint and soldier of Christ Jesus, St. George of Cappadocia*, first published in 1631 and expanded in 1633.

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[29] Heylyn, *Historie*, pp. 298-99.

[30] On Charles's reforms, see especially Cust, 'Charles I and the Order of the Garter'.

[31] Cust, 'Charles I and the Order of the Garter' p. 351.

In his *Historie* Heylyn forcefully refuted the Calvinist view and argued that representations of St George fostered devotion to his memory and to the church's history.[32] The *Historie* conceded immediately that the story of the dragon is 'the first kind of imposture'.[33] Heylyn also scrutinised and dismissed claims that George was Arian bishop of Alexandria and even that he never existed. He found little difference between Roman superstition and Calvinist scepticism:

> But now St George must eyther poast away unto the Land of Faeries … or which is worse, be layed for all eternitie in the put of horror, with Heretickes and Atheists. The onely favour which this our curious and quicke-sighted age, can possible vouchsafe him; is to affirme it by his friends, that he had never any being on the earth.[34]

Heylyn admitted that many stories about St George contained a great deal of fiction but maintained that they do not 'beare downe the truth'.[35] He took an indulgent stance towards legends and argued that the life of St George had been embellished either by authors who were

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[32] For Heylyn's Historie, see Anthony Milton, *Laudian and Royalist Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: The Career and Writings of Peter Heylyn*, (United States, 2012), pp. 29-32.

[33] Heylyn, *Historie*, p. 28.

[34] Heylyn, *Historie*, p. 42.

[35] Heylyn, *Historie*, p. 72.

‘pious in the opinion of that age … not so much writing what they did, as what they thought most proper for such Saints to doe’; or through ‘indiscretion in the choyce of argument’; or a wish ‘to relate such passages, with which they saw the common people most affected’.[36] Taking these points into account, he urged that ‘the intermixture of vaine fables, ought not to bee a prejudice to the truth of storie’. To strengthen his point he appealed to national sentiment, ground where Calvinist critics might fear to tread. Suggesting that his readers ‘cannot meet with more faire instances [of truth intermixed with fables] than here at home’, Heylyn argued for the real existence of popular local figures such as King Arthur, Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton.[37] If readers ‘looke at him [Bevis] in those Idle Rhythmes [sic] which are extant of him’, Heylyn conceded, ‘what shall we find in the whole storie but infinite absurdities?’ He argued that the absurdities are later accretions and in fact they attest to the truth of the story: ‘This is that *Beavoys of Southampton*, whose valour was so great, that the Monks thought they could not extoll him sufficiently unlesse they besmeared his praises with fictions and Fables’.[38]

Heylyn gathered these points and brought them to bear on St George in a few tightly argued pages. He contended that the truth to be found in Ovid’s story of Perseus showed how we might understand St George: ‘For by the *Dragon* if we understand the Divell, that old malicious *Serpent* … we may soone find, how and in what respect, St *George* his fighting with the *Dragon* may be justified’.[39] Heylyn cited Eusebius’s *Life of Constantine* as a precedent his interpretation:

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[36] Heylyn, *Historie*, pp. 64-5.

[37] Heylyn, *Historie*, p. 70.

[38] Heylyn, *Historie*, p. 72.

[39] Heylyn, *Historie*, pp. 77, 81.

> Let us behold awhile the portraiture of *Constantine* the Great, whose “caus’d his portraiture to bee erected up on high” which showed “Over his head the Crosse … and underneath his feet, that great and working enemie of man, the Divell … under the figure of a *Dragon.”*’[40]

The antiquity of Eusebuis’s *Life* suggested to Heylyn that St George’s dragon could also be interpreted as the Devil and that it should not be taken as a fabulous addition from later times. Heylyn argued that modern scepticism and superstition owed much to modern pictures, which followed the superstition of ‘middle times’. ‘One occasion [for the spread of legends] was, *false images,* or rather false inscriptions on their Images: the flattering deceits of Pictures and the *Carver*’.[41] But he concluded that if pictures could mislead, they could also reform. ‘For my part, I rather choose’, Heylyn wrote,

> to make it [the picture of St. George], at the least in part; historicall: as being thus contriv'd of purpose, in those times, and by those men, which most affectionately were devoted to our Martyr; to publish to posterity how bravely he refell'd the Divell, how constantly hee persevered in the profession of his faith; the whole Church praying with him, and kneeling (like the Virgin, by him, in that holy action) that GOD would give him strength subdue that enemy, the *Dragon*’.[42]

Heylyn’s overarching claim, therefore, was that pictures of St George are ‘not very moderne, or of small standing in the church’, in other words they have ancient precedents to back them up.

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[40] Heylyn, *Historie*, pp. 82-3.

[41] Heylyn, *Historie*, p. 66.

[42] Heylyn, *Historie*, p. 87.

Since pictures of St George are very ancient and close to the time when the saint lived, they corresponded much more closely to their original than later popular vulgarisations.[43] Heylyn argued that the Order of the Garter preserved and honoured St George's likeness and character The *Historie* provided Caroline readers with a conceptual framework that encouraged them to see that the ceremonies and celebrations associated with St George, and by extension the Order of the Garter, were sacred because they contained 'truth of storie'. It was a very high view of representation.

V. Reappraising *Landscape with St George and the Dragon*

We can better understand the reasons why Rubens expanded *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* when we see how Heylyn explained the relationship between image (the Order of the Garter) and original (St George, the Order's patron). The painting's organising conceit is that Charles is the exact image of an original, St George. Heylyn had said that St George 'holdeth good proportion and correspondence' to Constantine, and the painting invites a similar comparison between the King and the saint.[44] Rubens certainly understood the Order's relevance for Charles and the court, despite not witnessing a Garter procession to Windsor (to install a new knight) or Whitehall (when no installation was taking place). Rubens saw Charles's own enameled Garter badge at his audiences with the King, as Gregory Martin has pointed out.[45] While staying as a guest of the courtier Balthasar Gerbier at York House Rubens would also have noted how his pupil van Dyck posed the second Earl of Arundel fingering his own gold St George medallion while staring at the viewer, in a portrait from 1620 that Arundel gifted to the marquess of Buckingham (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles).

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[43] Heylyn, *Historie*, pp. 87-91.

[44] Heylyn, *Historie*, p. 85.

[45] Martin, 'Rubens, Painter and Diplomat', p. 160.

It should not surprise us that in his painting of Charles I as St George, Rubens placed the King in a landscape setting that evoked a procession to Windsor. A mounted standard-bearer overlooks the scene and next to him is a second retainer, with a horse. The destination for this small party is the castle or palace on the distant riverbank. Rubens has placed the palace just above St George's head, on the painting's central axis. The nearest that the foreground and distance come to each other, is in the thin strip of canvas between the palace and the saint's head. The effect is that the viewer sees the space in terms of the relationship between the saint and the palace. Rubens invites the viewer to see that the saint and his retainers are headed for the palace, and this gives the scene its spatial and narrative coherence. Historians have noted that the processions to Windsor and to Whitehall were among the most lavish occasions of the Caroline court, a change marked Charles's first years as monarch and continued to be a feature of his reign.[46] The palace in *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* doesn't look like Windsor: it looks more like Greenwich than any other site. This may be because Rubens knew Greenwich, but didn't visit Windsor. But the main point is that the palace is used to bind the space and story together by inferring that St George is on procession.

Contemporary sources suggest that Rubens intended the painting to be understood as referring specifically to the Garter processions. Joseph Mede's newsletter reports that Rubens showed the painting at a banquet given by James Hay, Lord Carlisle. A Gentleman of the Bedchamber

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[46] J.S.A. Adamson, 'Chivalry and Political Culture in Caroline England', in Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (eds), *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 161-97; Cust, 'Charles I and the Order of the Garter'.

(and Groom of the Stool from 1631), Hay was the first to be made a Garter Knight on Charles's accession in 1625, along with William Cecil, Henry Rich and Thomas Howard, Earl of Berkshire. Together they formed a 'nucleus' of companions who helped Charles implement his reforms.[47] The fact that Rubens showed his painting at a reception given by Carlisle suggests he understood not only the painting's significance for an English audience – Mede's report suggests he was successful in this – but also that Charles identified closely with the saint and with the Order of the Garter's historical lineage.

Yet fundamental questions remain. The painting's organizing conceit – that Charles is the exact image of St George – means that Charles might also be the image of other originals. Heylyn set St George in a lineage of dragon-defeating knights that was Christian but also strongly classical (Perseus), imperial (Constantine) and native (Bevis). His claim that images can faithfully represent their originals means we need to revisit and re-cast the question of the figures' identity in *Landscape with St George and the Dragon.* For contemporary viewers, the question was not whether St George was a portrait of King Charles (which is what historians have tended to ask), but whether the King was St George, or whether at the same time he represented other historical figures. High church spirituality, a devotion to the saints and an accommodating view of heroes and stories from classical antiquity and more recent English mythology, together offered a clear rationale for how the King could appear with integrity in the guise of other ancient (but real) heroes. Rubens recognised this and played on it deliberately. To take just one example: in the painting, the three women attending the princess, also remind the viewer of the Hesperides, who guarded a tree that produced golden apples. This tree was watched by a dragon, whom Hercules killed in his labours.[48] This casts Charles not as St George, or Perseus, Bevis, or Constantine, but as Hercules. To understand how the painting overdetermines Charles's identity and to appreciate how Rubens manages this proliferation of meaning, we need to take another detour, this time to look at masques.

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[47] Cust, 'Charles I and the Order of the Garter' p. 348; Heylyn, *Historie*, p. 345.

VI. Masques

Masque offered the best change for a renaissance prince to appear as someone else. These were occasions when the King (or queen) and other noble performers appeared on stage in costume and acted parts, though without speaking. Masques were already a well-established way of allowing the King to identify himself with another person. Rubens surely knew Baldesar Castiglione's injunction regarding the parts that princes could take in masques:

> When people are masked, it would not be right for the prince to choose to play the part of the prince himself … But if on these occasions the prince puts off his royal identity and mixes with his inferiors as an equal (though in such a way that he is still recognizable) in putting aside his own he achieves an even higher stature, by striving to surpass others by prowess and not by authority and showing that it is not being a prince that accounts for his worth.[49]

Rubens's audience at Essex House would doubtless have understood Charles's portrait as St George in terms familiar to them from masque. Masques perfectly suited the high view of representation on which Heylyn based his defence of St George and the Order of the Garter in his *Historie*. John Peacock has insightfully pointed out that: ‘The masques provided the only images of the King from which the King was not absent; they figured him magnificently while sparing him the disadvantages of becoming the object of representation’.[50] In other words, masques were unique because like ceremony but unlike other representational forms such as painting and sculpture, they were both image and original. The King’s appearance in a masque constituted an image, allowing the subject to be presented in full splendour; but it was also the King in person. The King’s appearance related the image to its original and prevented its appropriation by others.

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[48] For contemporary interpretations of the Hesperides, see George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished ... By G.S*, (Oxford and London, 1632), p. 167.

[49] Baldassarre Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, (London, 2003), p. 119.

An image’s relationship to its original drove the meaning in a masque, and it also gave meaning to the Garter ceremonies, Heylyn argued in his *Historie*. But unlike the Garter ceremonies, masques did not feature in Charles I’s court when Rubens visited in 1629-30. Charles began to reform and revive the Order of the Garter’s ceremonies almost as soon as he became King. By contrast, the masques that were staged frequently at James I’s court ceased altogether from 1625 until 1631. However, after 1631 an average of two per year were staged until 1635, when the Banqueting House could no longer be used owing to the installation of Rubens’s ceiling paintings. Heylyn’s claim that many antique and mythical heroes are in fact real, and celebrating their memory with appropriate pomp and dignity enhances their honour and that of the King, provided a mental framework that lent masques a renewed raison d’etre and provided their authors with a fund of material that if familiar (as necessarily it had to be) was nevertheless seen from a new and fresh perspective. Whereas Jacobean masques featured allegorical figures and mythical gods, audiences at Caroline performances were invited to see

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[50] John Peacock, 'The Visual Image of Charles I', in Thomas N. Corns (ed) *The Royal Image: Representations of Charles I,* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 176-239 p. 232.

Charles in the guise of historical figures. Heylyn suggested that compared with Constantine, ‘St. *George*, as he is commonly expressed in picture; holdeth good proportion and correspondence’. This point was driven home when the audience for Aurelian Townshend’s masque *Albion’s Triumph* (1632) witnessed Charles appear as Constantine; and then saw him take the part of St George in Thomas Carew’s masque *Coelum Britannicum* two years later.[51]

The main point to make about *Coelum Britannicum* is that it stresses again and again that Charles and his masquing companions are the exact image of many originals. In the antimasque, Momus looks forward to ‘a divine St George for this nation’ among the constellations (ll.378-381), a wish that was fulfilled when the King appeared in a company of fifteen noble masquers, 'richly attired like ancient heroes'.[52] When Charles was revealed, the chorus sang: ‘Pace forth thou mighty British Hercules, / With thy choice band, for only thou and these / May revel [dance] here, in Love’s Hesperides’.[53] The chorus told the watching Henrietta Maria that she would recognise Charles, in the guise not only of Hercules, but also more native knights:

> We bring Prince Arthur, or the brave
> St George himself (great Queen) to you,

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[51] Heylyn, *Historie,* p. 85; on Charles's role in Albion's Triumph, see John Peacock, 'The Image of Charles I as a Roman Emperor', in Ian Atherton and Julie Sanders (eds), *The 1630s: Interdisciplinary Essays on Culture and Politics in the Caroline Era,* (Manchester, 2006), pp. 50-73 pp. 59-68.

[52] Thomas Carew, 'Coelum Britannicum', in David Lindley (ed) *Court Masques: Jacobean and Caroline Entertainments, 1605-1640*, (Oxford, 1995), pp. 166-93, lines 378-81; 895; for Coelum Britannicum, see also Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong, *Inigo Jones: The Theatre of the Stuart Court*, (London and Berkeley, 1973), pp. 566-97.

[53] Carew, ‘Coelum Britannicum', lines 891-3.

You'll soon discern him; and we have
A Guy, a Bevis, or some true
Round-Table knight as ever fought
For lady, to each beauty brought'.[54]

Heylyn had made Arthur, Guy and Bevis test cases for his maxim that 'the intermixture of vaine fables ought not to bee a prejudice to the truth of storie'.[55] By having the King lay the role of St George and then confusing the saint with Hercules and King Arthur, Carew takes pains to point out that these are all figures for whom Charles is a faithful representation ('you'll soon discern him', the queen is assured). Importantly, they are also originals of comparable standing.

Following Roy Strong's pioneering work, historians writing about *Coelum Britannicum* have consulted the masque to see what its iconography reveals about Caroline policy and the nature of Charles's court. The masque is very sympathetic to Heylyn's claims and also cites many of the legendary figures he mentions. Carew appears to have known Heylyn's work. For his part Heylyn quoted recent translations of Ovid by George Sandys, like Heylyn a geographical writer and anti-Calvinist, who became a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber, a position also held by Carew. While these relations are fertile ground for cultivating the shared conventions on which iconography depends, the details of about meaning may be less significant than the overall message, which is about the dignity and significance of representation itself.

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[54] Carew, 'Coelum Britannicum', lines 967-72.

[55] Heylyn, *Historie*, pp. 70-2; the quotation is from p. 70.

VII. Explaining *Landscape with St George and the Dragon*

At this point our detour ends and we can return to Rubens's painting a final time. To the question of how Rubens managed to multiply and control meanings in *Landscape with St George and the Dragon*, we can answer, that he did so by painting the King performing the role of St George. Masques gave Rubens's audience the license to understand Charles's portrait as St George in *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* as the King playing the role, as he would on stage. A look at the composition reveals that Rubens staged the action in a way that was familiar to viewers because it recalls the dimensions of a masque stage. The foreground is narrow at the rear but opens out dramatically at the front, and the viewer's elevated viewpoint recalls the use of a raked stage and sharply diminishing wings that enable the designer to make the foreground appear more extensive than it really was. The massive oak on the right becomes a 'screen of relieve', with openings through which figures placed on an upper tier might appear. The putti bearing wreaths are lowered in front of the back screen with an extensive prospect. Manipulating the representation of space within the picture enabled the painter to play with proportions in such a way that would guide the viewer's attention most effectively. Rubens was a master at this, and organised the composition in *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* as if it were a stage.

If we see that Rubens organised the pictorial space using the same techniques as staged performances such as masque, we are in a better position to explain the central motif, the action of the saint approaching the princess. This is an unusual choice of moment, because as we noted earlier, Rubens has deliberately eschewed the *istoria*, or culminative narrative moment, namely St George overcoming the dragon in combat. Instead, he painted the saint handing the girdle to the princess. In what Gregory Martin has termed a more 'episodic' compositional framework, this action marks not the dramatic action’s climax, but its resolution.[56] It follows the narrative pattern in a masque. A masque at court ended when the principal figure – in *Albions Triumph* and *Coelum Britannicum* this was the King – approached the queen, who was seated in the ‘state’, with an invitation to dance in the revels. In *Coelum Britannicum,* for example, the chorus sings: ‘We bring Prince Arthur, or the brave / St George himself (great Queen) to you’. Then, ‘the song done, they [the chorus] retire, and the masquers [the King and his fourteen companions] dance the revels with the ladies, which continued a great part of the night’.[57] Scholars have neglected revels, but they formed a critical part of the masque entertainment. In terms of the dramatic action the revels mark the restoration of order and continuity with the past. They also bring together the masquers and the audience. Stephen Orgel has observed that all masques after 1616 conclude (rather than begin with) pastoral 'and embody the ultimate ideal that the masque asserts’, namely the ideal of reconciliation. Moreover, ‘Caroline productions go even further, and tend to resolve all action through Pastoral transformations’.[58]

St George was closely associated with revels in both courtly and more popular traditions. He had featured in courtly entertainments, including ‘disguisings’, a predecessor of the masque form, since early Tudor times.[59] In 1633 Charles re-issued James I’s *Book of Sports*, which stated that:

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[56] Martin, *Rubens in London: Art and Diplomacy,* p. 91.

[57] Carew, ‘Coelum Britannicum', lines 967-8, 985-6.

[58] Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance*, (Berkeley, 1991), pp. 50, 51.

[59] Sydney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*, (Oxford, 1969).

> ‘[F]or Our good peoples lawfull Recreation, Our Pleasure like is, That after the end of Diuine Seruice, Our good people be not disturbed … or discouraged from any lawfull recreation, Such as dauncing, either men or women … nor from hauing of May-Games, Whitson Ales, and Morris-dances, and the setting vp of May-poles’.[60]

Charles, following James, countered Puritan insistence that dancing was not fit ‘vpon Sundayes after Euening Prayers ended, and vpon Holy dayes’. The church observed the feast of St George as a just such a holy day, and the saint occupied a unique place in the Anglican liturgy. Rubens himself was also familiar with traditions of revelry, both as a Catholic and citizen of Antwerp, and as a painter. The genre of the *kermis* was an established genre in Flemish painting. Rubens’s compatriot David Teniers the Younger painted a large *kermis* of St George (Royal Collection Trust, London) and Rubens himself painted a monumental *kermis* a few years after leaving London (Louvre, Paris).[61] The first audience for *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* at Essex House also understood what revelry meant and how in a staged performance it marked the action’s resolution, and brought the masquers and audience together. Lord Carlisle himself (as Viscount Doncaster) sponsored many masques. As we have seen, the Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber and Bedchamber (at this point, Carlisle was in the latter category) included men closely connected with masques such as Thomas Carew.

In *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* Rubens used masque as his model for how to manage space, narrative sequence and meaning. If the viewer sees the painting as a performance, it becomes clear that the painting is structured by a different temporal order to that which is usually found in painting, one that is not organised around climactic moments but instead seeks to resolve all relations. This in turn helps us to understand that the saint's gesture to the princess looks forward to revelry, which is appropriate to the pastoral setting. Perhaps it is too much to suggest that Rubens has painted a masque scene; safer perhaps to say that his is a painting that borrows key elements from masque and dramatic performance, especially the sight of the King playing someone else; and that viewers could understand it because they were familiar with masques. By invoking masque, Rubens discloses the grounds for the painting's organising conceit. This is appropriate for the occasion, because what the painting celebrates is how the Order of the Garter, with Charles as its head, honours the saint and conforms to him as their original. To celebrate representation, Rubens has painted a representation.

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[60] Charles Stuart, *The Kings Majesties Declaration to His Subjects, Concerning Lawfull Sports to Bee Used*, (London, 1633), p. 11.

[61] For Rubens's Kermis, see Svetlana Alpers, *The Making of Rubens*, (London and New Haven, 1995).

VI. Conclusion

This article has argued that Rubens painted *Landscape with St George and the Dragon* to endorse and promote Charles's investment in ceremonies associated with the Order of the Garter, and that he did so on the consciously anti-Calvinist basis that representation allowed the King and his church to fashion themselves in the image of Christ's saints. I have argued that Rubens's highly original composition drew on a knowledge of staged dramatic performances at court in order to establish Charles as the image of St George and the resolver of conflict, a claim that both men would wish to make in the light of Rubens's successful diplomacy.

Readers may object that the relationship between Rubens's painting, Heylyn's *Historie* and Carew's masque are not proven. This charge carries weight since it is very unlikely that Rubens and Heylyn ever met. But Rubens showed his painting to members of Charles's most intimate circles at court, Gentlemen of the Bedchamber and of the Privy Chamber. He must have been confident that his work would be understood, and that he in turn understood Charles's policies, and their premises and contexts. Rubens had long standing connections to the English court and so this is a reasonable assumption. Heylyn intended his *Historie* to speak to these policies and priorities. The principal outcome of Rubens's and Heylyn's work was the revival of court masques equipped with a new raison d'etre. *Coelum Britannicum*, written by a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber, is the most extended essay in this mode. If the issues it addressed suggest that it was inspired by Heylyn's *Historie*, the details of its staging, where the revels conclude with the appearance on stage of 'the prospect of Windsor Castle, the famous seat of the most honourable Order of the Garter', lead us to conclude that Carew was also influenced by the painting that Rubens showed at Essex House in March 1630.[62]

In light of the analysis presented here, it bears repeating that we need to acknowledge Rubens's own cultural agency at Charles's court. This has been a feature of recent scholarship on the cultural politics of the 1630s and it emerges afresh in the study of this painting, in part because causal explanations are hard to come by and evidence about his relationships with key courtiers is only circumstantial.

Landscape with St George and Dragon remains the least studied of all Rubens's work produced in his stay in England between late May 1629 and early March 1630. This article has argued that its scholarly profile does not match its historical significance, because it is by far the most important for helping us understand how Charles I chose to be represented. Unlike *Minerva protects Pax from Mars* it is strikingly innovative and exerted a formative effect on royal iconography. It justified the King's anti-Calvinist policies regarding ceremonies and the

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[62] Carew, 'Coelum Britannicum', lines 1013-14.

Order of the Garter’s rites. Its making and display at the outset of Charles’s personal rule surely begs the question of not only its influence on the King’s representation in that decade, but also its role in his downfall in the decade that followed.

Biographical note. Nicholas Grindle is Senior Teaching Fellow at the UCL Arena Centre for Research-based Education. He was guest curator of the exhibition George Morland: In the Margins, *at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery, University of Leeds, in 2015.*

Contact details: 146 Sherwood Avenue, London, SW16 5EG. Email: n.grindle@ucl.ac.uk.