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Print, Poetry and Posterity: Grinling Gibbons's Statue of Charles II (1684) for The Royal Exchange

Claudine van Hensbergen

Within months of Charles II's death, William Aglionby noted that this great patron of the nation's Art would continue to live on through his statue at the Royal Exchange, unveiled the previous year:

But with our late Blessed Monarch, King *Charles the Second*, all *Arts* seemed to return from their Exile; and to his Sacred Memory we owe whatever Incouragement they have received since; and it may be reckoned among his Fælicities and ours, which were not few, that he did so; for by that means we have him, as it were, yet Living among us, by that noble *Statue* of his, made by the best of *Modern Sculptors* now living, I mean Mr. *Grinlin Gibbons* ... a *Sculptor*, who, if he goes on as he has begun, will be a *Northern Michael Angelo*.¹

Aglionby's prophecies would prove to be ill-made. Gibbons' reputation over the centuries has become one firmly associated with wood carving, and his work as a statuary is rarely celebrated.² And his stone king would live for only a century more. Like so many of the most important public sculptures of the Restoration period, his statue is now lost. Glimpsed at the

¹ W. Aglionby, 'The Preface', *Painting Illustrated in Three Dialogues, Containing Some Choice Observations upon the Art*, London, J. Gain, [1685].

² There is no substantial study of Gibbons' work in stone. David Esterley's *Grinling Gibbons and the Art of Carving*, London: V&A, 1998, offers a brief overview of his stone and brass productions in the conclusion. Esterley states that any study of Gibbons "must at least glance in the direction of his parallel career as a provider of statues, tomb monuments, and decorative stonework" (206), further enforcing the sense of division between Gibbons's work in wood and stone, and viewing the latter as a pursuit that was financially, rather than artistically, motivated. Frederick Oughton's earlier *Grinling Gibbons & The English Woodcarving Tradition* (London: Stobart, 1979) focused solely on wood carving. The title of David Green's 1964 monograph does at least characterise Gibbons as "carver and statuary", although, as Charlotte Davis comments in this volume, Green's discussion of his stonework only accounts for about 10% of the text.

centre of the Exchange's courtyard in a print of 1729 (fig. 1), by the 1780s it was so badly damaged that a replacement was commissioned.

Despite the statue's status in its day, it has received little scholarly attention. Research on this particular statue is made difficult, of course, by the fact that it no longer exists. But through the documentary records it left behind, in print, poetry and manuscript, this fascinating statue tells us much, both about Gibbons' stature in his day, as well as the flaws in our present methodologies in dealing with sculpture of the period. Critical assessments of his sculpture have resisted the artistic value of his output in stone, a situation exacerbated by the inherent problems of establishing and accessing his oeuvre.³ As a result, the significance of his statuary has been lost to us over time. It was, however, the defining sculpture of its own moment, with the Charles II statue for the Exchange the most praised of these works.

Currently, it seems likely that the lack of interest in this statue may soon undergo change. Beyond the 'recovery' ambitions of this special issue, public statues are attracting newfound scrutiny both in Britain and across the globe. Following the murder of George Floyd in Minnesota in May 2020, protestors for the Black Lives Matter campaign pulled down a statue of the slavetrader Edward Colston (1636-1721) in Bristol. The act sparked a media debate in the UK, still unfolding, which saw other statues removed from public display and the emergence of a new dialogue about the continued public presence of statues with similar associations. Current events, then, have shown the crucial importance of research into such works, which must include those statues raised to the man who in 1660 granted a charter and monopoly to the Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading with Africa (subsequently the Royal Africa Company), investing personally in the company himself:

³ The only scholar to argue directly for the importance of Gibbons' work in stone is Katherine Gibson in her survey of the sculptor's full-scale royal statues, executed between 1678-88: K. Gibson, 'The Emergence of Grinling Gibbons as a "Statuary"', *Apollo*, 451, 1999, pp. 21-29.

Charles II. Whilst the statue of Charles which stood in the Royal Exchange (today represented through its later Georgian copy), did not allude directly to slavery activities, it was an imperial work that celebrated the king's global dominion and its implied scope certainly extended to England's naval and mercantile activities in Africa, the Caribbean and beyond.

In the following article I resituate the importance of the Charles II statue within Gibbons' wider sculptural oeuvre, arguing that his reputation as a carver in wood has obscured his achievements as a sculptor in stone. Where previous attention to the statue has centred on its relationship to the site and function of the Royal Exchange, my concern lies with what this work may yet tell us about Gibbons' status and reception as the presiding sculptural genius of his age.⁴ The statue's lost status encourages scholars to lay more emphasis on understanding its design, success and reception through contemporary eyes alone, employing an approach first proposed through Michael Baxandall's concept of the 'period eye'.⁵ To comprehend its achievement, Gibbons' statuary needs to be understood in terms of the aesthetic concerns of his moment and as a product of the collaboration between an artist and a patron.

Yet as critics of Baxandall have pointed out, we need to acknowledge the limitations of the specific 'eye' which we seek to recover. In the case of Gibbons' public statuary, as with Baxandall's Renaissance paintings, the surviving documentation and design of the work is

⁴ The only sustained discussions of this statue are Katharine Gibson, 'The Kingdom's Marble Chronicle', in Ann Saunders, ed., *The Royal Exchange*, Leeds, London Topographical Society, 1997, pp. 151-68; and Christine Stevenson, 'Making Empire Visible at the Second Royal Exchange, London', in Mark Hallett, Nigel Llewellyn and Martin Myrone, eds., *Court, Country, City: British Art and Architecture, 1660-1735*, New Haven, Yale, 2016, pp. 51-72.

⁵ Michael Baxandall first coined this term in his pioneering *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972. In later studies, Baxandall extended this approach to include attention to the material and cultural function of artworks. For a summary of Baxandall's methodology see Jeremy Tanner, 'Michael Baxandall and the Sociological Interpretation of Art', *Cultural Sociology*, 4.2, 2010, pp. 231-256.

that produced within the context of an elite culture seeking to uphold its own perception of the world. As I show, this expensive statue clearly spoke to an imperial and political agenda that mirrored the concerns of its commissioners, the Merchant Adventurers of Hamburg, as well as its subject, Charles II. In his highly successful execution of the work, Gibbons ably demonstrated that he understood the stylistic needs of these parties and could translate their requirements into stone: the extent to which he personally shared their ideological position is yet to be the topic of sustained academic scrutiny. Yet without doubt, during the politically charged decades of the 1670s and 1680s, Gibbons was the leading sculptor producing works for public display in the capital: he was a propagandist in stone, employed on numerous projects related to the royal household.

A Sculptor in Stone

Research undertaken in recent decades has demonstrated that Gibbons was a prolific sculptor in wood and stone. Ingrid Roscoe, Emma Hardy and M.G. Sullivan's biographical dictionary records some 126 known works against his name, including thirty-seven stone funerary monuments, thirteen statues in stone or bronze, a (lost) marble self-portrait bust, two marble chimneypieces, and ten stone pieces of architectural sculpture.⁶ Thus exactly half of Gibbons' known output consisted of works in stone and the occasional bronze. Roscoe suggests that Gibbons' 'marble and stone carving, a new departure in the later 1670s, only occasionally achieved a comparable distinction' to his work in wood.⁷

⁶ Ingrid Roscoe, Emma Hardy, and M.G. Sullivan, *A Biographical Dictionary of Sculptors in Britain 1660-1851*, London, Yale University Press, 2009, pp. 514-519. Rupert Gunnis' earlier *Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660-1851. New Revised Edition*, London, Abbey, 1968, included six statues fifteen funerary monuments and thirteen other 'various' works by Gibbons (pp. 169-170).

⁷ Roscoe, as at note 6, p. 511.

Such assessments are made, chiefly, through examining the incomplete record of works that survive, and they do not reflect the views of many of Gibbons's contemporaries who, like Aglionby, saw him as a Northern Michelangelo. The 'distinction' Roscoe measures here is that of the aesthetic quality of individual works measured by our own modern standards, ignoring the professional achievements Gibbons made in the financial dimension of his workshop or his ability to meet the demands of his clients. As David Esterly acknowledged, whilst Gibbons is 'remembered principally for his Limewood carving, he also pursued a parallel and probably far more lucrative career as the master of a workshop providing statues, tomb monuments, and decorative stonework'.⁸

Gibbons was the leading sculptor of his generation working in England. His appointment by William III as Master Sculptor and Carver in Wood in 1693 acknowledged his distinction in both media. As Esterly notes, in surviving portraits of Gibbons, such as Sir Godfrey Kneller's portrait dating to c.1690 when the sculptor had established his reputation, it is his mastery in stone that is celebrated through the inclusion of a classical marble head.⁹ (fig. 2) This association was mirrored in other portraits, including John Smith's 1691 engraving made after John Closterman's portrait of Gibbons and his wife, Elizabeth. (fig. 3) Here, Gibbons' professional achievement is represented by a marble relief depicting three putti. The carved figures are reminiscent of the marble reredos screen completed for the Whitehall Palace Chapel altarpiece in 1686 (fig. 4), a surviving work that enables us to glimpse his mastery.¹⁰ The beautifully carved reredos displays an impressive craftsmanship on par with the leading workshops on the Continent. Gibbons was assisted on the Whitehall

⁸ David Esterly, 'Grinling Gibbons (1648-1721)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)*, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10596>> Date accessed 26 March 2020.

⁹ Esterly, as at note 8.

¹⁰ Sir Christopher Wren designed the twelve-metre high altarpiece for the Catholic James II. Gibbons executed the statuary. After the Glorious Revolution of 1688 the altarpiece was thought to border on the profane, and was moved and later disassembled. The reredos screen and a pair of large carved angel statues are now in the Church of St. Andrew in Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset.

project by Arnold Quellin, often suggested as the more talented sculptor in marble and as likely responsible for the higher quality statuary emanating from Gibbons' workshop. As I explore, such accounts are based in part on biased, later anecdotal records. The Closterman portrait makes clear how Gibbons actively aligned himself with marble relief carving of the style of the Whitehall altarpiece. In the image, his pose is relaxed and confident, leaning on a left arm stretched out across the top of the work; an extended index finger proudly and directly identifies the sculpted relief as his own production.

The achievement of the Whitehall altarpiece reminds us of Gibbons' work for religious settings, a topic outside the parameters of the current article, but discussed in Lucy Cutler's contribution to this special issue. However, it is worth reflecting briefly that this area is the least studied of his output, and may well prove the most important in progressing future knowledge of his work. From extensive involvement in the rebuilding and ornamentation of St. Paul's Cathedral, to fonts, organ cases and pulpits at a number of churches and royal chapels, Gibbons was at the heart of the redesign and decoration of leading religious sites during the later Stuart years.

His involvement in these sites is even more marked, and geographically extensive, when we consider his production of tomb monuments. These represent over half of his known work in stone and yet a sustained discussion of them is almost entirely absent from the scholarship.¹¹ These monuments were a constant feature of his output from c.1679 to 1717, and varied in size from smaller reliefs to large architectural monuments. The recorded payments that survive range from the modest sum of £10 to the more startling figure of

¹¹ For articles on Gibbons' tomb monuments, see Kate Harris, 'A New Grinling Gibbons Document', *The Burlington Magazine*, 140.1149, 1998, pp. 829-832; Rolf Loeber, 'Arnold Quellin's and Grinling Gibbons' monuments for Anglo-Irish Patrons', *Studies*, 72.285, 1983, pp. 84-101; Edward McParland, 'A Monument by Grinling Gibbons', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 10, 1994, pp. 108-109; J. D. Stewart, 'Some Unrecorded Gibbons Monuments', *The Burlington Magazine*, 105.720, 1963, pp. 124-126.

£1,000 against at least three monuments.¹² Scholars have yet to pay any notable attention to these works that have the potential to complicate and transform current understanding of his career and output. This reflects a general lack of scholarly attention to tomb monuments of the period, despite the fact that, during this time, they represented the most important sculptural category. Indeed, in a recent attempt to rescue this medium from its current state of invisibility, Nigel Llewellyn has advocated new categories and approaches to these works, reflecting how the ‘particular hybrid that we now know as the tomb or funeral monument [...] in terms of scale, cost, and number dominated stone sculpture at this time’.¹³

As I have briefly indicated, two key factors have problematised our understanding of Gibbons’ statuary. The first is that of survival. Whilst his intricate Limewood carvings were produced for interior decoration, his statues were often made for outdoor display rendering them susceptible to the elements. Where these works survive, they have also largely been moved from their original position distorting their initial meanings. A key example is Gibbons’ marble statue of Sir Robert Clayton made for the entrance to St. Thomas’ Hospital, London, completed c.1701-02. (fig. 5) Gibbons was paid some £200 for this work, suggestive of its quality. But today, the once-celebrated Lord Mayor of London cuts a sad and shabby figure on the banks of the Thames. The statue has been moved from its original setting to a secluded garden on the riverbank, and is so badly eroded that all the finer detail has been lost.

A second factor problematising our appreciation of Gibbons as a sculptor is that of attribution. He signed very few of his works in stone, making us reliant on surviving documentation and second-hand accounts to determine attribution. As Esterly again noted, these ‘problems surrounding Gibbons’ sculptural production are unlikely ever to be fully

¹² Roscoe, as at note 6, pp. 514-515.

¹³ Nigel Llewellyn, ‘A Taxonomy for the Invisible: Categories for English Funeral Monuments’, in Mark Hallett, Nigel Llewellyn and Martin Myrone, eds., *Court, Country, City: British Art and Architecture, 1660-1735*, New Haven: Yale, 2016, pp. 501-524; p. 502.

resolved'.¹⁴ Collaboration is also a contributing issue here, and the difficulty of determining his personal involvement with the production of individual works. For he did not work alone, and at times his workshop included up to fifty assistants.¹⁵ He also collaborated with fellow sculptors on many projects, making it hard to determine individual responsibility for the various elements of a single work. Katherine Gibson has noted the detrimental effect of collaboration on Gibbons' reputation, even whilst collaborative activities of the same nature have not proven problematic to assessments of the works of his contemporaries, including Giambologna, Bernini and Quellin himself. As Gibson states, 'Gibbons, in claiming responsibility for the whole [of a work's production], was merely emulating his contemporaries on the continent. He should be allowed similar credit'.¹⁶

'Beyond Comparison': The Finest Statue in London

Gibbons' statue of Charles II was an innovative work, commissioned for a recently redeveloped site. London's Tudor-built Royal Exchange had been destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666. All thirty statues from its celebrated line of kings were lost except the statue of the Exchange's founder, Sir Thomas Gresham. Plans for the City of London's reconstruction began to be offered within the week, drawn by the hands of John Evelyn, Robert Hooke, Peter Mills (the City's Surveyor), Richard Newcourt, and Sir Christopher Wren. These surviving plans remind us that the Exchange, alongside St. Paul's Cathedral, was one of two buildings perceived to lie at the heart of the destroyed city whose reconstruction was a priority.¹⁷ On the 23 October 1667, Charles II visited the site and laid the first pillar of the new Exchange, an event accompanied by a celebratory meal and entertainment in a

¹⁴ Esterly, as at note 8.

¹⁵ See Roscoe, as at note 6, p. 511.

¹⁶ Gibson, as at note 3, pp. 25-26.

¹⁷ See Saunders, as at note 4, pp. 121-123.

purpose-built shed on site that, as Samuel Pepys records, had been ‘hung with tapestry, and a canopy of state’.¹⁸ The new Exchange, modelled on the original structure, was completed in two years and opened for trading on 28 September 1669.

As Gibson has shown, from the incipient moments of the Restoration royal statuary held an important public function at the Exchange. Before the new king had returned to English shores in 1660, a statue of his father had been restored to the front of the Exchange, alongside a statue of the new king commissioned by the Mercer’s Company. The inscription ‘AMNESTIA: OBLIVION’ was inscribed on Charles II’s shield, reminding all who gazed on it of the conciliatory agreement reached between the monarch and his subjects.¹⁹

Following the Great Fire, poetic responses acknowledged the important public role of the statues at the exchange:

within

The *spacious distance* of the *Poles* is seen:

The *Kingdoms Marble Chronicle*. To *Thee*

(*Great Prince*) it shew’d thy *Royal Pedigree*,

For *three times Nine Descents*. Thy *Next*, the *Best*,

Dislodg’d by *Rebels*, by *Thee*, *repossess*:

Now, *with* the *Church* He *hugg’d*, in *Ruines* lies,

But hopes, by *Second CHARLES*, a *Second Rise*.

By *Him*, *You* stood, His *Name’s* and *Vertue’s Heir* ...

Whence though the *Marble*, and the *Paint* be not,

CHARLES living, th’ *Amnesty*’ll ne’re be *forgot*.

Gresham the *Kings* survives. The *grateful Flame*

¹⁸ Samuel Pepys, *Diary*, R. Latham and W. Matthews, eds. London, Harper Collins, 1974, 8: pp. 496-97.

¹⁹ Gibson, as at note 4, pp. 144-145.

The *Founder* spar'd, that would not spare *the Frame*.²⁰

With the Exchange razed to the ground, there were swift attempts to place statuary on the agenda. In December 1667, within two months of laying the foundation pillar of the new structure, the Mercer's Company received:

a Letter from the Right hon^{ble} the Earl of Manchester recommending one Cajus Gabriel Cibber to the making of the Statues for the Royall Exchange and the matter in regard he hath showed his Ma^{ty} some Modellos which have been well liked of [...]. The Committee [...] acquainted him that the buisnesse of makeing the Statues is yett very remote from there thoughts haveing the wholle Exchange to build first.²¹

Despite Manchester's enthusiasm, the commissioning of statuary began only once the Exchange had reopened its doors. In 1669 the Gresham Committee refused an offer from Sir Robert Vyner for an equestrian statue of Charles II for the centre of the courtyard. The Committee stated it was too large and would obscure the views through the main doors. But over a decade later, in 1682-83, they accepted an offer from the Merchant Adventurers of Hamburg for a statue of Charles to occupy this central space. The delayed commission of this work, as Christine Stevenson suggests, may have been due to the increasingly strained relationship between the monarch and the City Corporation, and the City's need to recoup royal favour by the early 1680s.²² The statue was raised as a very public act of

²⁰ *The Conflagration of London: Poetically Described, Both in Latin and English. The Second Edition, with large Additions*, London, S. Gellibrand, 1667, p. 22.

²¹ Cited in Gibson, as at note 4, p. 151.

²² Stevenson, as at note 4, p. 60.

acknowledgment of unspecified favours received from the king, with Gibbons receiving the commission.

Prepared over two decades, Edward Hatton's polymathic work *A New View of London* (1708) allows us to map the sculptural landscape of London at the turn of the eighteenth century and perceive the importance of Gibbons' statue within this schema. The closing two sections of *A New View* are of particular use to those interested in the public function of the Arts at this time. Hatton provides 'An Alphabetical Account of the Publick Statues in and about the City', followed by 'An Explanation of the Terms of Art used in this Treatise'.²³ The very need for a glossary to help contemporary readers to interpret the expanding city reminds us that this was a new and ambitious world, in which innovative styles and ideas were rapidly incorporated into the London landscape, shaping it in new ways.

Hatton's 'Alphabetical Account' reveals a series of useful insights that enable us to recover the public and social role of the City's sculpture. Reading through the eighty plus works listed we can perceive the extent to which public statuary was a key development of the last decades of the seventeenth century. As was the case at the Exchange, the Great Fire may have destroyed much of the City's medieval and Tudor statuary, making it necessary to erect an unusual number of statues in the years following the blaze. Coupled with both the extension of London to new geographical areas, and developing neo-classical tastes in architecture, stone and metal sculpture quickly became an important feature of the city, helping to project meanings onto its buildings, streets and spaces. Roman generals were raised in Lincoln's Inn Fields; classical allegories on the Old Bailey and city prisons; Cibber's two 'very lively [...] Lunaticks' on the gates of Bedlam Hospital; and a curious figure of 'Secret' on the roof of Buckingham Palace. For many of his entries, Hatton provides

²³ Edward Hatton, *New View of London or an Ample Account of that City*, London: J. Nicholson and R. Knaplock, 1708, 2: pp. 799-813.

the year of erection as well as the donor, enabling us to perceive the ways in which the later Stuart period turned to public sculpture as a means of demarcating London's evolving identity.

In light of the decision to retain the line of kings lost in the Great Fire, the Royal Exchange became the site with the greatest number of public statues on Hatton's list. Of these, Hatton dedicates most attention to his description of Gibbons' statue:

And the *Area* under the said Piazzas is a Pavement of White and Black Marble, but that of the rest with fine Pebble, in the Center whereof is erected on a Marble Pedestal about 8 Foot high the Statue of King *Charles II.* in *Roman Habit*; he is lively represented by the Ingenious Hand of Mr. *Gibbon* [sic], with a Battoon in his Hand looking Sd; on this side of the Pedestal under an Imperial Crown, Wings, Trumpets of Fame, Scepter and Sword, Palmbranches, &c. these words are Inscribed;

Carolo II. Cæsari Britannico

Patris Patri,

Regum optimo, Clementissimo, Augustissimo

Generis Humani deliciis,

Utriusque fortune Victori,

Pacis Europæ Arbitro,

Mariam Domino ac Vindici,

Societatis Mereatorum Adventur. Angliæ,

Quæ per C C C C jam [sic] prope annos

Regia benignitate floret,

Fidei Intemeratæ & Gratitude æternæ

Hoc testimonium

Venerabunda posuit

Anno Salutis Humane, MDCLXXXIV.

On the W. side of the Pedestal is neatly cut in Relievo the Figure of a *Cupid* reposing his Right-hand on a Shield containing the Arms of *France* and *England* quartered, and in his Left hand a Rose.

On the N. side are the Arms of *Ireland* on a Shield supported by a Cupid.

On the E. side the Arms of *Scotland*, with a Cupid holding a Thistle curiously done (as the rest) all in Relievo.²⁴

In his *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1725), Daniel Defoe disagreed with Hatton's view by arguing that there was no value in recording London's statuary for readers, but he did agree on the superior merits of Gibbons' statue:

It is scarce worth while to give an Account of the Statues in this City, they are neither many, or are those which are, very valuable.

The Statue of King *Charles* II. in Marble, standing in the middle of the *Royal Exchange*, is the best beyond Comparison; one of the same Prince, and his Father, standing in Two large Niches on the *South* Front of the same Building, and being bigger than the Life, are coarse Pieces compared to it.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 616-617.

The Statues of Kings and Queens, Seventeen of which are already put up in the Inside of the *Royal Exchange*, are tolerable, but all infinitely inferior to that in the middle.²⁵

Aurelian Cook, a contemporary commentator on Charles II's reign, also noted the innovative and impressive nature of Gibbons' statue, calling it a 'most elaborate and curious Statue of him [Charles II] in Gray Marble [...] cut by Mr. *Grinlin Gibbons* (the most Famous Statuary that *England* ever produc'd; and equal, if not superior to the best at this Time in *Europe*)'.²⁶

In keeping with appreciative contemporary assessments of the statue's quality and importance, Gibbons was paid some £500 for the work, a far higher sum than he received for any other single figure statue. In comparison, he received £50 for stone statues of other royals made for the line of kings at the Exchange; £300 for the bronze statue of James II for Whitehall Palace; and £245 for the marble statue of Charles 6th Duke of Somerset for Trinity College, Cambridge. The latter two works followed a similar design to the statue at the Exchange, and in this way further reveal the comparatively large sum that Gibbons received for the work.²⁷

The Statue's Design

Detailed accounts of the design of the Charles II statue survive in two media: print engraving and poetry. Taken together, these accounts provide an insightful means of reconstructing the statue's design, assessing its value, and recovering the cultural resonances it held for contemporaries. Our chief visual record of the statue is found in a high-quality engraving

²⁵ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain, Divided into Circuits of Journies*, London: W. Mears, 1725, 2: p. 152. Defoe references John Bushnell's surviving statues of Charles I and Charles II made for the Exchange, now housed at the Old Bailey, finding them 'coarse Pieces' in comparison to Gibbons' statue. For a discussion of Bushnell's statues see Gibson, as at note 4, pp. 148-150.

²⁶ Aurelian Cook, *Titus Britannicus: An Essay of History Royal: In the Life & Reign of His Late Sacred Majesty, Charles II*, London: James Partridge, 1685, p. 464.

²⁷ Roscoe, as at note 6, pp. 513, 515-16.

produced by Peter Vanderbank in 1684. This print was advertised in *The Observer* on 12 January 1685:

The Exact draught of the Marble Statue of his Majesty in the Royall Exchange so Long Expected. Is now (by permission of Authority) finisht. Curiously Engraven by Mr Vandrebanc, and Printed on a Large Sheet of Imperiall Paper. To be Sold by Dorman Newman at the Kings-Arms in the Poultry. Price 2s 6d.²⁸

A second state of the engraving survives (Fig. 6), including details of a new printer, 'David Mortier at ye Sign of Erasmus's head in ye Strand'. The print is highly detailed and provides a good means of recovering the work's design. Charles stands in a contrapposto pose. His right arm holds a baton behind him which points downwards, whilst his left hand sits confidently on his waist; the pose produces a pleasing symmetrical line from his left elbow down to the baton's point. This line attracts our focus, drawing our attention to the king's torso at its centre. Dressed entirely *all'antica* in classical Roman military garb, Charles's clothes are designed to accentuate the movement created through the contrapposto stance. The fish scale armour of his cuirass seems to move in ripples across his chest, tightly clinging to the outlines of his muscular torso; meanwhile his *baltea* (the straps hanging from his belt) fall away as his right thigh shifts forward. A heavily draped cloak falls down the left side of his body, hitched upon his waist by Charles's hand and revealing the hilt of a sword sheathed and otherwise hidden behind his leg. Wearing the laurels of a victor and emperor, Charles looks into the left distance, his gaze following the symmetrical line created by his baton and

²⁸ R. L'Estrange, ed., *The Observer*, 2.204, 21 January 1685, p. 2.

right elbow. The king stands poised; at once confident and alert, powerful and ready for action.

Overall, Vanderbank's print indicates that the statue conveyed a great sense of movement and that Gibbons here mastered the contrapposto pose with which he had earlier struggled.²⁹ Vanderbank does not incorporate any visual sense of the statue's setting, presenting the work as a standalone sculpture. This encourages viewers to interpret the figure as an individual object, divorcing it from the wider scheme at the Royal Exchange. Such a decision evidently enabled Vanderbank to present the statue in greater detail, untethering it from its topographical context and opening up ways of viewing and understanding it primarily as an artwork rather than as the central piece of an architectural scheme.

This was an early sculptural work to depict Charles in the guise of an emperor and it set a trend, with later Stuart and Hanoverian monarchs similarly depicted *all'antica*.³⁰ Gibbons was not, however, the first to conceive of the later Stuarts through a classical lens. Such analogies were at the heart of much of the panegyric poetry written to welcome the Restoration, and remained an important motif through Charles's reign, evident in diverse forms from architecture to drama, and from portraiture to translation. Gibbons was, however, at the forefront of those making this analogy through sculpture.³¹

In executing his design, he complemented an earlier work, his equestrian portrait of the king commissioned for the Upper Ward at Windsor Castle (fig. 7), cast in bronze by

²⁹ For example, see Gibbons' marble statue of Charles Seymour, sixth Duke of Somerset (1691) at the Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge. For a brief discussion, see Esterley, as at note 3, p. 210.

³⁰ See Charlotte Chastel-Rousseau, 'Royal Public Statues and the Legitimation of the Dynasty of Hanover in Georgian Britain, 1714-1760', in Urszula Szulakowska and Peter Martyn, eds., *Power and Persuasion: Sculpture in its Rhetorical Contexts*, Warsaw, Instytut Sztuki PAN, 2004, pp. 99-112.

³¹ In her survey of the Roman dress in art of this period, Diane de Marly notes that the 'use of the Roman military habit in portrait sculpture became established before it was in portrait painting' (444). This reflects the position in England, where Gibbons was ahead of contemporary artists in adopting this dress ('The Establishment of Roman Dress in Seventeenth-Century Portraiture', *The Burlington Magazine*, 117.868, 1975, pp. 442-451.

Josias Ibach in 1679.³² The king himself chose its accurate Roman dress, giving Gibbons the license to exploit the classical guise more fully with his subsequent statue for the Royal Exchange. The design for both works proved so innovative because he removed all the symbolic markers that would position Charles in the present moment. The trappings of Restoration royalty so standard in court portraiture of the period – wigs, lace, fur, silk, jewels, bows – are absent. This is a statue that promotes the idea of Charles as a timeless emperor, looking back to, and claiming a place within, classical tradition. One of the most striking decisions Gibbons took in both designs was to remove Charles' wig and, indeed, so many of his clothes, allowing us to see much of the king's naked body. In comparison, contemporary statues of Louis XIV in Roman habit saw the French monarch keep his wig on.³³ Indeed, the potentially scandalous nature of this design was not lost on contemporaries. In 1696 Dr. Martin Lister recalled how:

I remember I was at the Levee of King Charles the Second, when 3 Models were brought him, to choose one of, in order to make his statue for the Court at Windsor; he chose the Roman Emperours Dress, and caused it also to be executed in that other erected for him in the Old Exchange in London[...]. Now I appeal to all mankind, whether in representing a living Prince now-a-days these Naked Arms and Legs are decent, and whether there is not a barbarity very displeasing in it.³⁴

³² This statue was erected some years prior to the equestrian portraits of Louis XIV that were produced as part of a propagandistic statue campaign of 1685-6. In the equestrian portraits produced of Louis XIV, the king is dressed *all'antica* but wears a contemporary 17th-century wig.

³³ See de Marly, as at note 31, p. 449.

³⁴ Martin Lister, *A Journey to Paris in the Year 1698*, London, J. Tonson, 1699, pp. 27-28.

Certainly, in Vanderbank's print the fish scale armour cuirass covering Charles's chest is barely there, translucent to the eye and indicating that he needs little physical protection. The king's rippling cloak mirrors and only accentuates the tightly drawn muscles that create the contours of every part of his body. The sculpture seems to invite its viewers to reach out and touch those muscles, to feel the curving planes of the work, and, in so doing, it presents the sheer sensuality of the king at the same as it stresses his powerful masculinity. We can only presume that Charles's delight in the design outshone Lister's more puritan disapproval.

With his design, Gibbons had found a formula that clearly pleased its royal subject. Orders for further statues followed, including a similar statue of Charles II posing as a Roman emperor for The Figure Court at The Royal Hospital Chelsea. (fig. 8) This work is thought to have been completed around 1686, approximately two years after the statue for the Exchange, and was regilded in 2002 to replicate its original design. It is strange, perhaps, that this overtly opulent work, which must have stood out on account of its material finish, did not attract more comment from contemporaries. It may be that its position at the newly founded Chelsea Hospital, a military site well removed from the City, meant that fewer would-be commentators accessed it more readily.

A further commission for a similar work followed with the succession of James II. Gibbons' statue of the new king, originally displayed at Whitehall Palace (c.1686-88), is now at Trafalgar Square. (fig. 9) This work is of far superior quality to the Chelsea figure and is now seen as one of the best works to come out of Gibbons' workshop. As both statues are made of bronze they are unreliable guides for his ability to carve in stone. In executing bronze sculpture he repeatedly brought in experts to help with modelling and to undertake the actual casting process, a process not unusual at the time.³⁵ Nevertheless, the works

³⁵ See Roscoe, as at note 6, p. 513.

demonstrate the successful formula of the design that he had masterminded, first at Windsor and subsequently at The Royal Exchange, Royal Hospital Chelsea, and Whitehall Palace.

The Vanderbank engraving is the only detailed print produced of the statue as Charles II issued a patent to protect reproduction of the work. *The London Gazette* for 12 May 1684 carried an announcement that:

His Majesty being well satisfied with the performance of Mr. Grinling Gibbons in the making His Majesties Statue lately set up in the Royal Exchange, hath been pleased to forbid all Persons to Copy the same in Graving, Etching, or in Mezza-tinto without the Approbation of the said Gibbons.³⁶

The grant of a royal patent of this kind was highly unusual, and Gibbons' control over the reproduction of the image of his statue indicates that he likely benefitted financially from the production of Vanderbank's engraving and would have approved the print. This is not to suggest that the engraving is a perfect record of the statue's appearance since such works often took on an artistic licence. But the close link between Gibbons and this print suggests that we should see it as an authorized record of the statue's design.

The patent was not the only marker of the king's favour. The same issue of *The London Gazette* also carried an advert for a sale of art held by Gibbons and Parry Walton, Surveyor of the King's Pictures, to take place at Sir Peter Lely's former house in the Great Piazza, Covent Garden. Three days later, on 15 May, a further advert noted the sale had been moved to the Banqueting House in Whitehall, a change that can only have been granted with Charles's

³⁶ *The London Gazette*, 12 May 1684, transcribed in 'The Art World in Britain 1660 to 1735', <<http://artworld.york.ac.uk>>, accessed 31 March 2020.

permission.³⁷ Two years later, in May 1686, royal permission was granted for a further sale, organised by Gibbons and Walton, again held at the Banqueting House.³⁸

Gibbons and Quellin: Questions of Collaboration

Characteristically, much discussion about the Royal Exchange statue has turned on Gibbons' involvement in its production. Margaret Whinney thought the statue was certainly the work of Quellin. Much of her substantial entry on Gibbons in her biographically-arranged account of British sculpture involves the reattribution to Quellin of all the higher quality productions in stone bearing Gibbons' name, characterising his stone carving into a style pre- and then post-Quellin's death in 1686.³⁹ Whinney's assessment of Quellin's responsibility for these works turns chiefly upon stylistic assessments and coherencies. Such patterns are hard to assess, though, in light of the fact that, as Whinney notes, Quellin is only known to have executed one monument, the tomb of Thomas Thynne in Westminster Abbey. As further evidence of Gibbons' deficiencies as a sculptor, Whinney cites Vertue's derisive anecdotal accounts of his craftsmanship. In the 1730s Vertue suggested that the statue at the Royal Exchange was 'actually the work of Quelline' and accused Gibbons of being 'neither skilld or practized [...] in Marble or Brass [...] for which works he employed the best Artists he could procure'.⁴⁰ But Vertue himself contradicted this account in a subsequent entry, where he went on to provide proof that Gibbons was personally at work on the Charles II statue:

³⁷ The advert stated: 'His Majesty having been Graciously pleased to permit Mr. Grinling Gibbons and Mr. Parry Walton to expose to sale in the Banqueting House at Whitehall, an excellent Collection of Italian Pictures. These are to give notice, that whereas it was intended (and set forth in the last Gazette) to have been at the late dwelling House of Sir Peter Lely deceased, it is now designed to be in the said Banqueting House; and the Sale to begin upon Monday the second day of June next, at Ten a Clock in the Forenoon; where the Pictures may be seen on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday before the Sale'. *The London Gazette*, 15 May 1684; in 'The Art World in Britain 1660 to 1735', at <http://artworld.york.ac.uk>; accessed 31 March 2020.

³⁸ *Sale of Pictures at the Banqueting House*, 11 May 1686, transcribed in 'The Art world in Britain 1660 to 1735', as at note 36.

³⁹ Margaret Whinney, *Sculpture in Britain 1530-1830*, rev. John Physick, London, Penguin, 1988, pp. 116-129.

⁴⁰ *Vertue Notebooks*, IV, 24, Oxford: Walpole Society, 1935-36, p. 35.

upon a Certain Time King Charles ye 2d came to see a statue of marble done of himself. which Gibbons had got done. [W]hen the King was present Gibbons to shew his skill, found some small fault that wanted to be toucht, and to amuse the King took up a hammer and chisell and strikeing somewhat too hard, broke off a piece that should not have been at which the King laught at his pride & imprudent Vanity & sd could he not leave it when it was well.⁴¹

Gibson has shown that the above reference can only relate to the statue for the Royal Exchange, and that whilst Vertue's account is purposed to reveal Gibbons' deficiencies as a carver it simultaneously proves his presence on site.⁴²

Many of the works Whinney attributed to Quellin, and which she suggested as being those 'upon which Gibbons' reputation as a sculptor chiefly rests', were produced at a time when we now know the professional partnership between the two sculptors had been legally terminated.⁴³ Roscoe has summarised the dates of this breach: 'On 25 October 1683, Gibbons' partnership with Quellin, which had terminated in May that year, was formally dissolved by a proceeding in Chancery[...]. Gibbons and Quellin came together again for a short period in 1685-6'.⁴⁴ The brief reunion of the sculptors was to work on the Whitehall altarpiece, and Roscoe reflects that Gibbons appears to have worked without Quellin on the bronze statues of Charles II and James II produced at this time. In light of this, Gibson has argued that the current evidence indicates that the statue for the Royal Exchange is the work

⁴¹ *Vertue Notebooks*, V, 26, Oxford: Walpole Society, 1937-39, pp. 58-59.

⁴² Gibson, as at note 4, p. 155.

⁴³ Whinney, as at note 39, p. 118.

⁴⁴ Roscoe, as at note 6, p. 513.

of Gibbons himself, marking the ‘moment in the virtuoso wood-carver’s career when he first personally undertook the execution of a stone figure in the round.’⁴⁵

The manuscript diary of Sir Edward Deering for 11 July 1683 indicates that Gibbons had some reputation in stonework by this point. Deering was present at the levee at which Charles selected the design for the Exchange statue, and recorded how ‘this day the King was pleased to see the model of [the statue for the Exchange] as it is prepared by Mr. Gibbon[s], a most famous artist in carving and eminent also for working in marble’.⁴⁶ Gibbons’ recognised eminence as a carver in marble certainly extended to his ability to design works that spoke to the tastes of the moment. His modello for the Royal Exchange was selected over a rival design by Quellin that survives to this day, suggesting its superiority. Quellin’s terracotta statuette is now in the John Soane Museum. (fig. 10) As David Green notes, it ‘shows masterly handling of a majestic subject’, the ‘easy, relaxed pose, the folds of the cloak, the hands, the mild expression, all go to make this small work distinguished’.⁴⁷

Poetic Responses to Gibbons’ ‘Marble Book’

Within months of its unveiling, three poems were published in response to Gibbons’ statue. It was unprecedented that poets, at this time, should collectively respond to the erection of a public statue with such speed.⁴⁸ Whilst these poems may be little revered as works of great literary value, through their different interpretations of the statue they demonstrate the diverse, although consistently royalist, nationalist, and imperialist cultural and political

⁴⁵ Gibson, as at note 4, p. 153.

⁴⁶ Deering’s diary is in private hands but is cited in Gunnis, as at note 6, p. 168.

⁴⁷ David Green, *Grinling Gibbons: His Work as Carver and Statuary 1648-1721*, London: Country Life, 1964, p. 55.

⁴⁸ Christine Stevenson suggests that although the statue received unprecedented attention in print, this was understandable in light of the statue’s position at such a prominent site. See Stevenson, as at note 4, p. 60. It is worth reflecting, however, that only one (of the three) poetic responses substantially focuses on the statue’s relationship to the Exchange, and Vanderbank’s print does not incorporate a sense of its geographical setting, presenting the statue as a standalone work.

meanings that Gibbons' sculpture had at this time, and provide valuable insight into how the work was viewed and understood at the time of its production. The poems figure the statue, on the one hand, as a vehicle for celebrating the sculptor's artistic skills; on the other hand, they perform very different work, turning their lens onto Charles II's relationship with his subjects to rewrite a turbulent national past into a promising political future.

For the established poet and dramatist Nahum Tate (appointed poet laureate from 1692), the statue was one that revealed Gibbons' great gift as a sculptor. 'To Mr Gibbons on his Incomparable Carved Works' (1684) marks a transitional moment in his reputation, providing a survey of his woodcarving output before turning to the production of his greatest work to date, the Royal Exchange statue of Charles II.⁴⁹ The poem's two-part structure reflects this transition. A first section commends Gibbons as an incomparable carver in wood, who brings fish, birds and plants to life:

With silent wonder oft have I beheld
Thy Artful Works by Nature scarce excell'd,
Inhabitants of Air, of Sea and Land,
And all the fair Creation of thy Hand;
Those Figures that when touch'd, are lifeless Wood,
To sight, are Fishes sporting in a Flood ...
Oft from an Oaks firm Trunk with vast design
Thou carv'st the curling Tendrels of the Vine,
Where the resemblance to the life is such,

⁴⁹ Nahum Tate, 'To Mr Gibbons on his Incomparable Carved Works', *Poems Written on Several Occasions by N. Tate: The Second Edition Enlarged*, London: B. Tooke, 1684, pp. 215-6.

The Clusters seem to bleed without a touch.⁵⁰

Tate presents us with the Gibbons with whom we remain most familiar: the master carver in wood able to replicate natural bounty as interior decoration. Yet the second, concluding, section of the poem praises Gibbons in ways that feel less familiar:

Nor is the Conquest on the Marble less,
The hardest Rocks thy softest Forms express.
In thee *Deucalion's* Miracle is shown
While Humane-Race starts up from lifeless stone.
But stay –* What Godlike Figure do I view?
Dare thy bold hand attempt th'Immortals too?
'Tis *Cesar's* Form with such Majestick grace,
As strikes a Sacred Rev'rence through the Place.
What Muse great Artist can perform for thee
That Right, which thou hast done to Majesty?
From *Europe* thou long since the Palm hast won,
But in this Piece thou hast thy self out-done.

**The Marble Statue of his Majesty, erected in the Royal Exchange.*⁵¹

For Tate, Gibbons' carving in stone supplants the genius of his work in wood, with the poem's concluding line revealing the statue for the Royal Exchange as his most impressive work to date. The statue is one that not only rivals, but outshines, the work of his continental peers, with Tate claiming a nationalistic pride in the way Gibbons has shifted the balance of

⁵⁰ Tate, as at note 49, pp. 215-6.

⁵¹ Tate, as at note 49, pp. 215-6.

sculptural achievement from Europe to England. Here, as in other poems written about the statue, his own Dutch migrant origins are ignored to make him better fit the role of the nation's leading sculptor.

A second poetic response to the statue was composed by Samuel Philipps. The poem, 'On Mr. Gibbons his Carving the Matchless Statue of the King Erected in the Middle of the Royal Exchange' (1684), appears to have been Philipps' sole foray into print. The work offers an even greater celebration of Gibbons' skill as a sculptor than in Tate's poem, and is dedicated 'To the Learned and Worthy Artist Mr. Grinsted Gibbons', opening with seven prefatory paragraphs proclaiming him as the matchless artistic genius of the age. Philipps uses the dedication to draw attention to his own artistry as a poet, forging comparisons between Gibbons' glorious skill and his own poorer lines:

SIR,

It was not out of a presumption that these poor Lines could adde any thing to the Glories you have atchieved in the carving of that Matchless Statue of his Majesty, that incited me to lay them at your feet; since you have done that in Symmetry, beyond what Verse is able to shew.⁵²

Here Philipps invokes a hierarchical comparison across the sister Arts in which sculpture is able to produce superior monuments to poetry.⁵³ The dedication, as with the poem's content, reveals a solid knowledge of classical sculpture and it may have been this, rather than an

⁵² Samuel Philipps, *On Mr. Gibbons His Carving the Matchless Statue of the King Erected in the Middle of the Royal Exchange*, London: J. Norris, 1684, p. 1.

⁵³ This was the same hierarchical comparison that Matthew Prior invoked in his later 'Ode, Humbly Inscrib'd to the Queen, on the Late Glorious Success of Her Majesty's Arms' (1706). See Claudine van Hensbergen, 'Carving a Legacy: Public Sculpture of Queen Anne, 1704-14', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37.2, 2014, pp. 229-244; 229-232.

affinity for verse, that drove Philipps to produce this work. He favourably compares the Royal Exchange statue to Phidias' statues of Athena at Athens (here labelled by her Roman name of Minerva) and of Zeus at Olympia (here labelled by the Roman name of Jupiter), and Gibbons' own wider artistic achievement to that of Titian. Demonstrating a knowledge of *paragone* debates about the abilities of sculpture, Philipps suggests that the work is a 'production of the Brain more than the Hand' due to its ability to move the passions of its viewers:

Thus you act the Statuary and the Orator at the same time, and write a Treatise of the Passions in a Marble-book. Speak to me that I may see thee, says the Philosopher; but, Look upon this, and it will speak to thee, says the Carver. Look upon this Royal Figure, and who will not be stedfast in his Loyalty? Look upon this, ye disobedient, and who again dare rebel? A soft, yet powerful Voice seems to issue from it, that cheerfully encourages the one, and formidably deters the other.⁵⁴

In Philipps' view, Gibbons is the master sculptor able to breathe life into stone, and he uses the dedication to set up the two key themes of the poem: Gibbons as sculptural genius, and Charles's statue as a 'matchless' propagandistic work that can move the passions and thereby ensure the loyalty of his people.

The poem opens by describing the piece of white marble from which the statue was cut. Hand-selected by the sculptor from a vast range of potential stones, this is the marble whose quality and pliancy to Gibbons' tools – his 'steel' – makes possible the statue's perfection. Philipps identifies the stone selected from the store as coming from 'Deep in the Bosom of

⁵⁴ Philipps, as at note 51, p. 1.

the *Paphian Isle*'.⁵⁵ The specificity of Cypriot marble is interesting in light of questions about whether the stone used was marble. Indeed, Gibbons' greatest flaw in executing his design may have been his choice of material. Contemporary accounts refer to the statue's medium in various ways, most commonly as marble, but Gibson believes that the statue was likely made out of Portland stone as, by 1789, it was so weathered that the Gresham Committee commissioned a replacement copy from the sculptor John Spiller.⁵⁶ In his reference to Paphian marble, Philipps might then have been drawing on his own wider knowledge in a metaphorical sense, employing the reference to emphasise the classical status of the statue and its place within a tradition of works made by the Ancients; the marble metaphor was a further means of equating Gibbons with Phidias. Yet on the other hand, this seems to be an early reference to Paphian marble, a stone little used in England at this time. This suggests that Philipps was a more informed commentator than we might first imagine, raising the possibility that he may have been commenting directly, and accurately, on the material employed.

Reflecting on the development of sculpture in eighteenth-century Britain, Malcolm Baker notes that a 'familiarity with the qualities of materials and experience in assessing the ways in which these had been fashioned were commonplace in a culture in which the choice between a steadily increasing range of luxury goods involved making such discriminations'. As a result, in the 'reception of sculpture, viewing involved an awareness of making'.⁵⁷ In Philipps' poem we see this awareness registered in an early account deploying a wealth of

⁵⁵ Philipps, as at note 51, p. 3.

⁵⁶ In light of the statue's rapid deterioration, Gibson notes that the 'medium was probably Portland stone, but it was variously described as grey stone, white stone or marble'. See Gibson, as at note 4, p. 153. This replacement statue was completed in 1791 and remains at the Exchange. For details of Spiller's statue, see Phillip Ward-Jackson, *Public Sculpture of the City of London*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003, pp. 324-5.

⁵⁷ Malcolm Baker, *Figured in Marble: The Making and Viewing of Eighteenth-Century Sculpture*, London: V&A, 2000, p. 20.

technical vocabulary and in which the poet (as viewer) shows a fascinating insight into the processes of sculptural production:

Thus to himself the learned Artist spoke,
And did foretell, ere once he gave a stroke.
And now, as in deep Trance, or deeper Thought,
He hunts the fair Idea's that are wrought
Around the Cells of his well-temper'd Brain,
For Figures Royal of a Noble strain ...
He prays his Guardian-Genius would prove kind,
And Shapes Majestick offer to his mind.
He heard, And skilfully did for him frame
A bright Idea, and with force it came:
And soon throughout its Plastick power displays,
Round the whole Mass its Energy conveys.
Each Joynt it works on, and each Tendon small,
And guides his hand, at e'ry stroke let fall.
Thus aided, as he wrought it shap'd apace,
And e'ry motion have a novel Grace.
From its first form still as the Marble rose
And heightened up, and did fresh Airs disclose.
The Artist polish'd with a trembling hand,
And did in awe of the great Figure stand.
In wonder wrapt at his own Products now,

Himself had like to've turn'd to Marble too.⁵⁸

Here Philipps presents us with the image of the meditative and self-reflexive sculptor, who mines his own brain for inspiration. The poem frames Gibbons as the sole figure behind the statue's design and execution: he gives the 'whole Mass its Energy', carving out 'Each Joynt', 'each Tendon', 'e'ry stroke'. This lengthy treatment describing the artist's creative process emphasises Gibbons' ability to rely on his own faculties and resources. Once he beholds his finished work, the 'trembling' sculptor cannot believe the splendour of his own work.

The poem continues with a lengthy discussion of the statue's appearance, flattering and celebrating its royal subject:

With what August and what Majestick meen,
Becoming such a Monarch is, it seen!
How vivid does it look! How aptly fit
The Royal Garb; the Joynts how firmly knit!
The well-wrought Muscles how they aptly swell,
And by their rise their springie Tendons tell.
How duely plac'd is e'ry branching Vein! ...
What Royal Vigour is throughout display'd!
How artfully, yet wonderfully made!
A Kingly Symmetry each part does show,
And an Heroick Air around does flow.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Philipps, as at note 51, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁹ Philipps, as at note 51, p. 4.

Philipps' descriptions of physical detail are rich in anatomical language, revealing a fascinating insight into the work's design. For the poem's preoccupation with the statue's musculature corresponds closely with Vanderbank's print that also emphasises the king's rippling and toned physique, as we have seen. This, then, was surely one of the great achievements of Gibbons' statue, and key to its perceived liveliness and energy. In his emphasis on the statue's anatomical achievement, Philipps reveals his own impressive knowledge of the human body and the technical language needed to describe it. His words set Gibbons within the European and Renaissance tradition of the artist scientist, and thus as a sculptor of the highest status rather than a mere stone mason.

In his study of later Stuart propaganda, Kevin Sharpe has reflected that in Philipps' 'estimation, the statue enacted a vital political performance', with the poet hoping that the 'plastique power' of Gibbons' stone would 'reconcile a divided nation'.⁶⁰ This latter hope is articulated in six lines that conclude the opening stanza:

Thus ting'd from heaven, 'tis virtually bred
A Talisman, or stone constellated;
Which when set up, the Nations Wounds shall heal,
As the Brass Serpent those of *Israel*.
A Stone which will do many a wondrous thing,
When once stamp'd with the likeness of a King.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Kevin Sharpe, *Rebranding Rule: The Restoration and Revolution Monarchy, 1660-1714*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013, p. 127.

⁶¹ Philipps, as at note 51, pp. 3-4.

This particular praise carried a less flattering implication: that the statue may succeed where the real man had failed. The nation's need to be healed, more than two decades into Charles's reign, suggested his ongoing inability to reconcile the nation. Gibbons' sculpted creation, it seemed, was a political miracle in the form of a marble monument.

It was a further anonymously-written 1684 poem, however, that fully politicised the statue, focusing far less on Gibbons as its sculptor. *A Poem upon the New Marble Statue of His Present Majesty, Erected in the Royal Exchange* employs the statue as a vehicle for delivering royal praise and rewriting the past.⁶² As with Philipps' poem, it celebrated Charles' reign, yet in repeatedly projecting the statue's ability to heal political fractures it conversely revealed the deep divides that underpinned the nation's fragile peace. The poem opens by celebrating the Merchant Adventurers for the statue's commission:

HAIL Noble Founders of this vast Design!
Hail Thou the Artist who with Skill Divine,
Could'st shapeless Rock to this Perfection bring,
Worthy such gen'rous Subjects, such a King.
See, brave Adventurers with Triumph view,
What Miracles united Zeal can do.
What wonders loyal Gratitude can raise,
That thus makes lifeless Stone speak *Cæsar's* Praise!⁶³

⁶² Anon., *A Poem upon the New Marble Statue of His Present Majesty, Erected in the Royal Exchange*, London: R. Taylor, 1684).

⁶³ Anon., as at note 62, p. 1.

Whilst Gibbons' role as sculptor is briefly acknowledged, the poem returns quickly to the Merchant Adventurers and envisages the statue as one given life through their 'Zeal' and 'Gratitude'. The work reflects the value of the men who would commission it, as much as the sculptor who produced it. With this praise acknowledged, the remainder of the poem is concerned with the statue's ability to rewrite the past:

Methinks I see Posterity survey
(For sure such Sacred work can ne're decay)
This Marble-*Cæsar*, with such God-like Grace;
As both Adorns and Consecrates the Place.
I hear them descant on his Awful Brow,
And Features that majestic Terrour throw,
Yet with such condescending Goodness join'd,
Displaying all the Mercies of his Mind,
That those Records they'll hold as false and vain,
That register'd the Troubles of his Reign.⁶⁴

As a monument, the statue serves as a marker of the past, but also as a work that has the ability to shape current and future perceptions of that past: it becomes a stone act of oblivion, destroying from memory all 'the Troubles' of Charles's reign. By 1684, those troubles had been manifold: from the Anglo-Dutch Wars of the 1660s and 1670s to the need for the Test Acts of the early 1670s; and from the Popish Plot of the late 1670s to the Exclusion Crisis of the early 1680s.

⁶⁴ Anon., as at note 62, p. 2.

The statue of Charles I, raised in the Exchange to replace the work that had been destroyed during the Protectorate, is brought to life through the poem and thereby resurrects the martyred king:

Directly pointing with the Scepter'd Hand,
Where present *Cæsar* do's in Triumph stand,
While the transported Figure seems to say,
Look Britains, our Establisht Heir survey;
See how th'Assaults of Faction are in vain;
My Race, Heavn's Choice, o'er Albion still must Reign;
If from no other Source your Love will spring,
Let Int'rest reconcile you to your King.
Since, in all frantick Changes you have past,
Heav'n first dislik'd, and you your selves at last,
From thence at least let now your Duty spring;
*Know your own Int'rest and Obey your King.*⁶⁵

Gibbons' statue thus becomes the focal point for reminding subjects of the past, and at the same time rewrites it, inspiring newfound loyalty through its immediate visual power. This loyalty, and the benefits it brings, are given a compelling illustration at the poem's close. Here the anonymous poet again praises the Merchant Adventurers for their 'Example', which issues in an image of imperial prosperity with the world's riches laid at Charles's feet:

⁶⁵ Anon., as at note 62, p. 3.

This Honour, with just Gratitude is paid
By the first Masters of the Oceans Trade.
No less the Figure with the Place agrees,
Where else should stand the Monarch of the Seas?
Then let the World's united Treasure meet
T'enrich Their Bank, with each returning Fleet,
Who lay their Hearts and Wealth at *Cæsar's* Feet.⁶⁶

The poem's focus on Charles as the harbinger of a newfound imperial wealth neatly reflects Stevenson's interpretation of the statue as one that 'had an active part to play' in the period's redefinition of empire, and was raised at a time when the concept of empire was rapidly evolving into an 'ideology, established by the 1730s, of what is now called the "First" British Empire'. This was, as Stevenson notes, 'a fiction' turning 'in part, on the way that monarchy rationalizes, unites, and protects the voices of a myriad of free and self-interested parties'.⁶⁷ Gibbons' statue of the king, then, was a prominent cultural object that shaped and promoted that ideology, proclaiming England's position at the figurative centre of the globe.

Conclusion

Some eight decades after Gibbons' statue of Charles II was unveiled, Tobias Smollett wrote a review of Horace Walpole's *Anecdotes of English Painting* (1762-80) in which he defended the sculptor's reputation:

⁶⁶ Anon., as at note 62, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Stevenson, as at note 4, pp. 51-52, 67.

we cannot imagine what Mr. W. means by saying that the talent of Gibbons did not reach to human figures, while he tells us with the same breath that the statue of Charles the second in the Royal Exchange was his [...]. One should imagine by the number of this sculptor's performances, that his life has been as extensive as his abilities, which, in wood, have never yet been equalled.⁶⁸

Smollett references the statue at the Exchange as the leading example of Gibbons' mastery as a sculptor of the human figure. Yet the quotation also reveals a tension already inherent in such claims. Where Smollett saw the genius of Gibbons as extending to statuary, Walpole does not; where Defoe and Hatton could once agree on the achievement of this work despite their differing views on the value of public sculpture, by the 1760s Gibbons' mastery as a sculptor in stone was in doubt. The topic upon which there is no division – and as remains the case to this day – is that of Gibbons' skill in woodcarving, here singled out as one without equal.

This reveals a fascinating disjunction in the history of the cultural reception of Gibbons' work in the two media, suggesting that his carving in stone, as with so much public sculpture of the period, spoke to the 'period eye' of its moment, whilst his wood carving has succeeded in engaging with a more transhistorical aesthetic. With its representations of birds and fish, leaves, fruits and berries, Gibbons' wood carving speaks of a natural world still familiar to this day. At the same time, the virtuosity of these pieces, found in the ways in which they trick the eye, speaks to an enduring human fascination with novelty and surprise. Gibbons' several statues of Charles II attempted something different: an aesthetic of temporal

⁶⁸ Tobias Smollett, ed., *The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature*, 17, February, London: R. Baldwin, 1764, pp. 113-123; 117.

transcendence, blending the classical past of Roman imperial antiquity with the imperial Stuart present of Restoration England.

The designs and materials Gibbons selected for the latter works have failed to stand the test of time, speaking to an aesthetic that now feels alien to the urban cityscapes for which they were first designed. As the poetic responses to the statue reveal, however, these were not solely artworks designed to reveal Gibbons' mastery as a sculptor in technical ways, but moreover works of political propaganda where the material and design played an important role in projecting their particular message; one whose elitism, monarchism, nationalism, capitalist corporatism, and imperialism should be of more concern to scholars of his work than has been the case to date. The design and material of these statues might seem to share little in common with Gibbons' decorative carvings in wood, yet the latter's rich symbolism of oak leaves and natural bounty can, perhaps, be understood to harbour a similarly propagandistic message.

Smollett's assessment of the achievement of the Charles II statue for the Exchange raises an interesting question as to its fate and material. When Smollett wrote his review in 1764, the statue appears to have been in a good enough condition for him to stress its exceptional quality, yet only twenty-five years later the work was so 'very decay'd and Mutilated' that Spiller's replacement was ordered by the Gresham Committee.⁶⁹ This suggests that the statue may well have been made from marble, a material in keeping with the high price that Gibbons charged for the work, and possibly decayed rapidly within a short period, perhaps due to acts of human vandalism as well as incipient industrial erosion.

Here, as with so many of the facets of Gibbons' sculptural works, questions beg multiple and conflicted responses. To date, the cost of this has been high: the lack of certainty

⁶⁹ Cited in Gibson, as at note 4, p. 157.

around his sculptural output has left scholars sceptical of its value. As a consideration of his statue of Charles II shows, when it comes to public statuary of this period we need to adopt a critical, more contextual approach that centres not solely on the life of the artist but also on the life of these works, and their place within the social and cultural circumstances that produced them. For statues like this one took on an important life of their own in the world for which they were first made, whilst their reception over time reveals much about how quickly, and pervasively, artistic reputations and notions of aesthetic quality can change.