

The Reputation of James VI and I Revisited

Michael Corrie Questier 

Abstract The (in)capacity of the House of Stuart to provide competent royal government, in both Scotland and England, has been a staple topic in the historiography of the British Isles. Despite the increasing volume and sophistication of recent research in this area, the long shadow of past analytical habits of mind still colors modern approaches to the subject. This has been the case with King James VI and I, as with other Stuart sovereigns. Scholarly accounts of the Jacobean period have been affected by a persistent Anglocentricity in this field. Such attitudes have done little for the broader topic of post-Reformation politics and threaten to close several available avenues of research and interpretation. Here it is argued that accounts of Jacobean politics need to be located in their appropriate contexts in order to avoid presentist distortion in future research and publication on this topic and related issues of the period.

In 1974, a timely article by Marc Schwarz, “James I and the Historians: Toward a Reconsideration,”¹ looked again at the historical reputation of the first king of Great Britain, and rejected what some still took to be the established orthodoxies on this contentious subject. These were summarized in the 1950s in David Harris Willson’s notorious character-assassinating biography of the king. This was a fairly systematic discrediting of James VI and I, primarily on the basis of his English reign: scorn for the king’s supposed pedantry; lack of hygiene; obsession with hunting; alleged cowardice; and (again alleged) obsession with the good-looking young men who swarmed about him, presumably for the sake of power, suppressing their own disgust at James’s physical, psychological, and sexual traits that have since thoroughly appalled everyone else. In Schwarz’s words, “add to this his supposed” self-abasement in front of the oily Count of Gondomar, “and the picture is . . . complete.”² Willson’s book, as Jenny Wormald has commented,

Michael Corrie Questier is an honorary research professor in the Centre for Catholic Studies, University of Durham. He thanks Kenneth Fincham, Andrew Foster, Matthew Growhoski, Ariel Hessayon, Peter Lake, Kathryn Marshalek, and several anonymous reviewers for the *Journal of British Studies* for their comments on an earlier draft of this article. Please direct any correspondence to michael.c.questier@durham.ac.uk.

¹ Marc L. Schwarz, “James I and the Historians: Toward a Reconsideration,” *Journal of British Studies* 13, no. 2 (1974): 114–34; see also Maurice Lee, Jr., “James I and the Historians: Not a Bad King after All?,” *Albion* 16, no. 2 (1984): 151–63. For the best summary and appraisal of the existing historiography, see Ralph Houlbrooke, “James’s Reputation, 1625–2005,” in *James VI and I: Ideas, Authority, and Government*, ed. Ralph Houlbrooke (Aldershot, 2006), 169–90. See also the ahead-of-its time short study by S. J. Houston, *James I* (London, 1973).

² Schwarz, “James I and the Historians,” 115; David Harris Willson, *King James VI and I* (London, 1956). Famously, Lord Macaulay fixed James’s reputation and image in the popular historical imagination: “stammering, slobbering, shedding unmanly tears, trembling at a drawn sword, and talking in the style

was an “astonishing spectacle of a work whose every page proclaimed its author’s increasing hatred for his subject.”³ The contrast drawn with the court of that paragon of political virtue and prudential calculation, Elizabeth Tudor, and even of Charles I, subsequently lauded and lionized by Kevin Sharpe and Mark Kishlansky, could not be more stark.⁴ Just as seriously, Schwarz noted, in the practical business of governing, James has been charged with failing to confront the problems that we are told he could have addressed. Like Louis XV of France, he left those difficulties to someone who had less political ability than he did.⁵

Schwarz was, however, pushing at an already partially open door. There was never anything like unanimity among contemporary commentators or subsequently among scholars about the credibility of the tabloid-style accounts by the likes of Arthur Wilson.⁶ Scottish historians have long viewed King James as a successful monarch; Gordon Donaldson described him as “a man of very remarkable political ability and

alternately of a buffoon and a pedagogue”. Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II* (London, 1858), 76, as cited in Schwarz, “James I and the Historians,” 115.

³ Jenny Wormald, s.v. “James VI and I (1566–1625),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/14592>; Houlbrooke, “James’s Reputation, 1625–2005,” 182–83.

⁴ Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven, 1992), esp. chap. 5; Mark Kishlansky et al., “Charles I: A Case of Mistaken Identity [with Reply],” *Past and Present*, no. 205 (2009), 175–237.

⁵ Schwarz, “James I and the Historians,” 115, citing H. R. Trevor-Roper, “James I and His Bishops,” in *Historical Essays* (London, 1957), 130–45, at 131–32; see also Menna Prestwich, “English Politics and Administration, 1603–1625,” in *The Reign of James VI and I*, ed. Alan G. R. Smith (London, 1973), 140–59.

⁶ Arthur Wilson, *The History of Great Britain, Being the Life and Reign of King James the First* [. . .] (London, 1653); see also [Anthony Weldon], *The Court and Character of King James* (1650), reprinted in *Secret History of the Court of James the First*, ed. Walter Scott (Edinburgh, 1811); *Cabala, sive, Scrinia Sacra. Mysteries of State and Government* [. . .] (London, 1654). As Pauline Croft aptly put it, James’s defenders seemed to get lost in the haze—notably Godfrey Goodman (an enemy of Weldon) and the Earl of Clarendon; Pauline Croft, *King James* (Houndmills, 2003), 4–5; see also Houlbrooke, “James’s Reputation, 1625–2005,” 171–73, 175; Schwarz, “James I and the Historians,” 119, citing Sir Simonds D’Ewes, *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds D’Ewes*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell, vol. 1 (London, 1845), 264–65; Thomas Fuller, *The Church History of Britain: From the Birth of Jesus Christ until the Year MDCXLVIII*, ed. J. S. Brewer, vol. 5 (Oxford, 1845), 386, 572–73. Significantly, Schwarz’s reference to Fuller was provided by William Brown Patterson, who later, in *King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge, 1997), produced probably the most enthusiastically positive modern study of the first Stuart king of Great Britain. In the Interregnum, Sir William Sanderson’s *A Compleat History of the Lives and Reigns of Mary Queen of Scotland, and of her Son and Successor; James the Sixth* [. . .] (London, 1656) had reversed all Weldon’s and Wilson’s categories and produced a mirror image of their accounts, with as much or as little justification, depending on the perspective of the reader; see Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I* (London, 2015), 498–502. For the polemics of royalist publication in the 1650s, which saw Sanderson pitted against Peter Heylyn, see especially Anthony Milton, *Laudian and Royalist Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: The Career and Writings of Peter Heylyn* (Manchester, 2007), 175–76, 178, 188; D. R. Woolf, s.v. “Sanderson, Sir William (1586–1676),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24630>. For Heylyn’s critique of James, see also Houlbrooke, “James’s Reputation, 1625–2005,” 173, citing Peter Heylyn, *Observations on the Historie of the Reign of King Charles published by H. L. Esq.: for illustration of the story, and rectifying some mistakes and errors in the course thereof* (London, 1656), 13–25. For the Scots Presbyterian critique of James, primarily from David Calderwood, and for Archbishop Spottiswood’s defense of James, see Houlbrooke, “James’s Reputation, 1625–2005,” 175–76.

sagacity in deciding policy and of conspicuous tenacity in having it executed.” The “problems which Gloriana never solved were solved by this king from Scotland.”⁷

We might think that the issue of James’s reputation was, if not exactly resolved at this point, then at least off the menu and put to one side. In fact, it was raised again in acute form by some of the revisionist historiography of the 1970s and 1980s. Simon Adams’s influential doctoral dissertation on the relationship between England and the pan-European Protestant cause represented James as a rational political actor, reacting in real time to a succession of rapid shifts in European events.⁸ As is well known, Conrad Russell claimed that political dysfunction in the British Isles was the result of deep-seated structural defects rather than the product of adversarial politics *tout court* based on notions of, for example, division between court and country, and between crown and parliament. James’s willingness to dispense with parliaments was understandable when parliaments were plainly incapable of providing him with adequate revenue. The principal thrust of this central strand of the so-called revisionist case about early Stuart Britain was that Charles I wrecked a series of embedded checks and balances that, whatever else one thought of him, King James had preserved. (Here, of course, the thesis concerning the rise of Arminianism associated with Nicholas Tyacke fitted like a glove.) Russell was virtually compelled to assert that James VI and I possessed considerable political talents—hence the compatibility with Wormald’s insistence that James’s English reign could not be seen in isolation from his Scottish one.⁹

⁷ Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland: James V to James VII* (Edinburgh, 1965), 214–15, 237; see also Charles H. Carter, “Gondomar: Ambassador to James I,” *Historical Journal* 7, no. 2 (1964): 189–208; Maurice Lee, Jr., “James VI’s Government of Scotland after 1603,” *Scottish Historical Review* 55, no. 1 (1976): 41–53; Maurice Lee, Jr., *Government by Pen: Scotland under James VI and I* (Urbana, 1980); Maurice Lee, Jr., “James VI and the Revival of Episcopacy in Scotland: 1596–1600,” *Church History* 43, no. 1 (1974): 50–64; Maurice Lee, Jr., *Great Britain’s Solomon: James VI and I in His Three Kingdoms* (Urbana, 1990); Jenny Wormald, “King James VI and I: Two Kings or One?,” *History* 68, no. 223 (1983): 187–209; John Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I, 1603–1625* (London, 2002), 71–72. However, for a frequently divergent reading of the government of Scotland after 1603, see Alan R. MacDonald, “Consultation and Consent under James VI,” *Historical Journal* 54, no. 2 (2011): 287–306; Alan R. MacDonald, “James VI and I, the Church of Scotland, and British Ecclesiastical Convergence,” *Historical Journal* 48, no. 4 (2005): 885–903; see also Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch, “James VI: Universal King?” in *The Reign of James VI*, ed. Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (East Lothian, 2000), 1–31; Houlbrooke, “James’s Reputation, 1625–2005,” 189.

⁸ Simon Adams, “The Protestant Cause: Religious Alliance with the West European Calvinist Communities as a Political Issue in England, 1585–1630” (PhD diss., Oxford, 1973); see also Robert Zaller, “‘Interest of State’: James I and the Palatinate,” *Albion* 6, no. 2 (1974): 144–75; see also Roy Schreiber’s excellent studies of Sir James Hay and Sir Robert Naunton: Roy Schreiber, *The First Carlisle: Sir James Hay, First Earl of Carlisle as Courtier, Diplomat and Entrepreneur, 1580–1636* (Philadelphia, 1984); Roy Schreiber, *The Political Career of Sir Robert Naunton, 1589–1635* (London, 1981).

⁹ See, for example, Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1990); Conrad Russell, ed., *The Origins of the English Civil War* (London, 1973); Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics, 1621–1629* (Oxford, 1979); Conrad Russell, “Parliamentary History in Perspective, 1604–1629,” *History* 61, no. 201 (1976): 1–27; Conrad Russell, “The British Problem and the English Civil War,” *History* 72, no. 236 (1987), 395–415; Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590–1640* (Oxford, 1987); Kenneth Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor: The Episcopate of James I* (Oxford, 1990); Wormald, “King James VI and I: Two Kings or One?,” cf. Theodore K. Rabb, “The Role of the Commons,” *Past and Present*, no. 92 (1981): 55–78. For Russell’s response, see Conrad Russell, “What Was New in the 1620s?,” in *King James VI and I and His English Parliaments: The Trevelyan Lectures Delivered at the University of Cambridge 1995*, ed. Richard Cust and Andrew Derek Thrush (Oxford, 2011), 177–88. For recent returns to earlier accounts of the rise of Parliament as a political institution in its own right, see the

The emergence of revisionist alternatives to some existing consensus in early modern English and British political history, and indeed the subsequent post-revisionist response to those alternatives, constituted a major historiographical raising of the methodological and intellectual bar.¹⁰ But the nuancing and problematizing of the relevant issues proved difficult to incorporate in textbook-style renditions of the same topics. As Wormald has said, to some scholars James remains the king who had “an instinct for absolutism, even tyranny.”¹¹ For others, he remains the egregiously tone-deaf foreigner whose tin ear prevented him from responding to the authentic voice of the people.¹² The Jacobean court is still taken by some to have had within it the seeds and signs of corruption and decay.¹³ It has, in effect, been argued that despite Wormald’s contention that James’s tenure in England should not be viewed separately from his years in Scotland, and that he should be regarded as one king rather than two, James was not one king but three, in the sense that, in addition to his years in Scotland, in England he had not one but two reigns. In the first decade or so, after 1603, it is claimed that the new king must have benefited from and been protected by the experience and guidance of wise and prudent councilors, notably Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury (d. 1612), inherited from James’s well-counseled predecessor. The signs of impending disaster were there in, for instance, the 1610 Parliament and the failure of the Great Contract. But it was Salisbury’s death that triggered the deluge and allowed the Jacobean court to plunge into corruption, decay and, perhaps, tyranny. This descent was a prelude to the even worse disasters of the later 1620s and the 1630s, the direct product of the failure to call parliaments (or to deal with them properly when they did meet), the tendency toward foreign-style absolutism, and all the rest.¹⁴ As Alan MacDonald says, we are still “left with a sense of a king with multiple reputations.”¹⁵

convincing study by Christopher Kyle, *Theater of State: Parliament and Political Culture in Early Stuart England* (Stanford, 2012). Recent unstintingly negative readings of Charles I include Michael B. Young, “Charles I and the Erosion of Trust, 1625–1628,” *Albion*, 22, no. 2 (1990): 217–35; David Cressy, *Charles I and the People of England* (Oxford, 2015).

¹⁰ For the post-revisionist pushback of the later 1980s and 1990s, see esp. the contributions in *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603–1642*, ed. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (London, 1989); Peter Lake, review of *The Causes of the English Civil War; The Fall of the British Monarchies, 1637–1642; Unrevolutionary England*, by C. S. R. [Conrad] Russell, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (1994): 167–97. For Thomas Cogswell’s challenge to Russell’s claims about Parliament’s potential irrelevance when it came to fiscal matters, see esp. Thomas Cogswell, “A Low Road to Extinction? Supply and Redress of Grievances in the Parliaments of the 1620s,” *Historical Journal* 33, no. 2 (1990): 283–303. But for the potential compatibility of Russell’s account and those of his critics, see, for example, Richard Cust, “Charles I and Popularity,” in *Politics, Religion and Popularity in Early Stuart Britain: Essays in Honour of Conrad Russell*, ed. Thomas Cogswell, Richard Cust, and Peter Lake (Cambridge, 2002), 235–58.

¹¹ Wormald, “James VI and I (1566–1625).”

¹² See, for example, J. Richards, “The English Accession of James VI: ‘National’ Identity, Gender and the Personal Monarchy of England,” *English Historical Review* 117, no. 472 (2002): 513–35.

¹³ Neil Cuddy, “The Revival of the Entourage: The Bedchamber of James I, 1603–1625,” in *The English Court from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War*, ed. David Starkey (London, 1987), 173–225.

¹⁴ For an explicit statement of this line, see Croft, *King James*, 86; cf. Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I*, 117.

¹⁵ Alan R. MacDonald, review of *James VI and I: Ideas, Authority and Government*, ed. Ralph Houlbrooke, *English Historical Review* 123, no. 505 (2008): 1548–50, at 1550; see also Robert Zaller, review of *King James*, by Pauline Croft, *Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 2 (2004): 300–303, at 301.

That is precisely the point. We should try to think of those multiple reputations in context—for example, by integrating newer approaches to Jacobean monarchy, notably the post-revisionism of Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell, into older certainties.¹⁶ Back in 1974, Schwarz concluded that one way out of the historiographical maze was to identify those matters in which James had some personal investment. These included the government of the church, diplomacy and the conduct of foreign policy, James's own "political principles," and his reign in Scotland, to which could have been added the issue of the (proposed but failed) union and the problems associated with finance, debt, and taxation.¹⁷ To my mind, and particularly on the basis of recent work by numerous early career scholars, a potentially productive approach is to focus on three discrete but linked clusters of topics. The first concerns the question of how far the recent renaissance in court studies has made us think differently about the image of the king. The second involves looking again at what contemporaries took to be the business of government, and shifting away from seeing early modern government in anachronistic and modern terms—in other words, as if it were primarily about administrative efficiency and balanced budgets. The third is the problem of what one might call Anglocentrism and how, in future, a new approach to the relevant archives might encourage historians to think in not only an English and British context but also a European one.

THE KING AND THE COURT

During the 1980s, there was a revolution in the study of the culture of the early modern court. Many took up the claim that, for all the apparent frippery of the paraphernalia of court masques and other theatrical performances and the seemingly interminable business of jousts, hunting and other amusements, in some sense the court at Whitehall rather than the administrative offices at Westminster was where the real action was.¹⁸ In other words, what was represented even by some contemporaries as royal extravagance and shallowness should not be interpreted as simple self-indulgence but rather as a crucial part of public politics.¹⁹ Yet the contemporary

¹⁶ See esp. Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: News Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603–1660* (Cambridge, 2002); Thomas Cogswell, "Underground Verse and the Transformation of Early Stuart Political Culture," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (1997), 303–26; Bellany and Cogswell, *Murder of King James I*; for a sophisticated popular account of the link between the political and the personal, see Thomas Cogswell, *James I: The Phoenix King* (London, 2017).

¹⁷ Schwarz, "James I and the Historians," 120–33, at 128.

¹⁸ See esp. Starkey, introduction to *The English Court*, 1–24; see also the essays in Eveline Cruickshanks, ed., *The Stuart Courts* (Stroud, 2000), especially the contributions by Murray Pittock, David Lindley, and Neil Cuddy. For a study of 1590s Scottish modes of sending political messages through court-based performance and reports of the same published in print, see Rick Bowers, "James VI, Prince Henry, and 'A True Reportarie' of Baptism at Stirling 1594," *Renaissance and Reformation* 29, no. 4 (2005): 3–22. See also Martin Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture* (Cambridge, 2008), esp. 6–7; William Tate, "King James I and the Queen of Sheba," *English Literary Renaissance* 26, no. 3 (1996), 561–85; Kevin Curran, "Erotic Policy: King James, Thomas Campion, and the Rhetoric of Anglo-Scottish Marriage," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 7, no. 1 (2007): 55–77; Kevin Curran, "James I and Fictional Authority at the Palatine Wedding Celebrations," *Renaissance Studies* 20, no. 1 (2006): 51–67.

¹⁹ For the publicness and opportunity for access inherent in royal participation in hunting, see, for example, Richard Cox to [Thomas Wilson?], 1/11 August 1603, National Archives, London, SP 94/9, fol. 49r–v. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as TNA). The princely vigor demonstrated in

accounts portraying James as a work-shy good-for-nothing did not circulate in a vacuum. The disapproving reports of the Venetian diplomats Giovanni Scaramelli and Zorzi Giustinian are well known; and, notoriously, Archbishop Matthew Hutton penned a semi-public letter on 18 December 1604 that included caustic remarks about the king's passion for blood sports, necessitating an admonitory response from Robert Cecil. But Hutton's censure of the king was accompanied by a claim that too much leeway was being given to Catholics while godly Protestants were being targeted for alleged Puritanism; the one thing could hardly be reckoned not to be a comment on the other.²⁰

Were the king's frequent absences from London a dereliction of royal duty and the mark of laziness? Alexander Courtney has persuasively argued that we need to see the structure, personnel, and function of the court from more than one narrow, inflexible perspective. The king's frequent resort to one or other of his hunting lodges was not the same thing as relinquishing control over the day-to-day business of government; indeed, in such venues he was attended by prominent court officials, including privy councilors.²¹ Courtney argues that medieval paradigms of the appropriate relationship between king and council are actually more relevant to the early seventeenth century than anachronistic models of fixed bureaucracies and conciliar accountability. It was "normal for an active and able personal monarch to deliberate with counsellors apart from their whole council."²²

In a challenge to conventional readings of the accession, Robert Cross has overturned the still prevalent image of the recently arrived lay-about British king. By redating the sequence of events during the negotiations for the peace with Spain with an eye to the basic but crucial difference between new-style and old-style dates used in the relevant documents, Cross shows that, at vital moments, James was geographically much closer to the important meetings of the regime-appointed spokesmen and their Spanish counterparts than has been recognized, and that the processes by which agreement was reached depended heavily upon him.²³

In early 1604 also, the Hampton Court conference was, as its name indicates, staged as a court-based demonstration of James's negotiating skill.²⁴ James had used gatherings of this kind in Scotland in similar ways, in particular the religious

hunting was itself of public political significance; see, for example, William Becher to the Earl of Salisbury, 16 November 1609, TNA, SP 78/55, fol. 223r.

²⁰ Archbishop Matthew Hutton to Robert Cecil, Viscount Cranborne, 18 December 1604, TNA, SP 14/10A/64; Cranborne to Hutton, December 1604, TNA, SP 14/10A/66; Rawdon Brown et al., eds., *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, and in Other Libraries of Northern Italy*, 38 vols. (London, 1864–1947), 10:90, 469, 478.

²¹ Alexander Courtney, "Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I, c. 1615–c. 1622" (PhD diss., Cambridge, 2008), 4–6, 9; see also Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I*, 7.

²² Courtney, "Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I," 95, 97, citing J. L. Watts, "The Counsels of King Henry VI, c. 1435–1445," *English Historical Review* 106, no. 419 (1991): 279–98.

²³ Robert Cross, "To Counterbalance the World: England, Spain, and Peace in the Early 17th Century" (PhD diss., Princeton, 2012); cf. Croft, *King James*, 52–53. For specific instances of where James was said to have intervened in the negotiations in order to insist on specific points, for example, the fate of the cautionary towns in Holland, see Lord Robert Cecil to Sir Thomas Parry, 20 June 1604, TNA, SP 78/51, fol. 193r.

²⁴ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, 11; Mark H. Curtis, "Hampton Court Conference and Its Aftermath," *History* 46, no. 156 (1961): 1–16.

disputations involving Catholic clergy at crucial political moments in the 1580s.²⁵ He continued to convene comparable meetings at key points in England, especially in 1622 during the Spanish match negotiations when it was public knowledge that the Countess of Buckingham was having doubts in religion. The countess's chaplain, John Percy, was summoned to discuss religion with the king, and to dispute with, among others, the rising star William Laud. Such gatherings might irritate some of those who were faced with a king who believed he was the cleverest man in the room. The 1622 conferences saw the exclusion of the undoubtedly infuriated Calvinist circle around Archbishop Abbot; but these sessions were hardly without purpose, as the conclusions drawn there served to underwrite the king's aspirations and agenda at that point, particularly in foreign policy.²⁶

Scholars have still been able to argue that traditional structures of court decorum and access were radically altered, and not for the better, in and after 1603, particularly via the new prominence and power of the members of the royal bedchamber. For Croft, the "rise of the favorites" in the place of career bureaucrats spelled disaster.²⁷ James's promotion of Robert Carr was the product of the same kind of unwise infatuation that he had shown in Scotland toward the Duke of Lennox.²⁸ Briefly, after Salisbury's death, Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, and then Lionel Cranfield, provided counterweights of bureaucratic expertise.²⁹ When, however, Carr's fatal attraction to the murderous Frances Howard led to the Overbury scandal, "the court was exposed as never before," and "courtiers came under increasingly scurrilous attack."³⁰ Carr's dramatic fall (not long after he was promoted in the peerage as Earl of Somerset) led to—in fact was made possible by—an arguably worse instance of royal favoritism, the ascendancy of George Villiers. "Homosocial intimacy" had allegedly replaced bureaucratic expertise as the basic requirement for government.³¹ As Menna Prestwich phrased it, "James's parasites were his most precious possessions, and he was ruled by them rather than by his ministers."³²

²⁵ Michael Corrie Questier, *Dynastic Politics and the British Reformations, 1558–1630* (Oxford, 2019), 153, 179–80.

²⁶ Timothy Wadkins, "The Percy-'Fisher' Controversies and the Ecclesiastical Politics of Jacobean Anti-Catholicism, 1622–1625," *Church History* 57, no. 2 (1988): 153–69, esp. 157–58; Questier, *Dynastic Politics*, 408–9; Michael Corrie Questier, ed., *Stuart Dynastic Policy and Religious Politics, 1621–1625* (Cambridge, 2009), 30, 175, 182, 216; John Percy, *True Relations of Sundry Conferences, 1626* (London 1626).

²⁷ Croft, *King James*, chap. 4. For James's difficulty in "cohabiting" in government with Salisbury, see Russell, *King James VI and I*, 178.

²⁸ Croft, *King James*, 87; Pauline Croft, "Can a Bureaucrat Be a Favourite? Robert Cecil and the Strategies of Power," in *The World of the Favourite*, ed. J. H. Elliott and L. W. B. Brockliss (New Haven, 1999), 81–95.

²⁹ For Cranfield as the prudent bureaucrat and potential savior of royal finance after the alleged disaster of Salisbury's tenure as lord treasurer, see Menna Prestwich, *Cranfield: Politics and Profit under the Early Stuarts* (Oxford, 1966); Cramis, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I*, chaps. 6, 7.

³⁰ Croft, *King James*, 87–91.

³¹ Croft, 97–99; see also David Hebb, "Profiting from Misfortune: Corruption and the Admiralty under the Stuarts," in Cogswell, Cust, and Lake, *Politics, Religion and Popularity in Early Stuart Britain*, 103–23; but cf. Lee, "James I," 157–63; see also Joel Hurstfield, "Political Corruption in Modern England: The Historian's Problem," *History* 52, no. 174 (1967): 16–34.

³² Prestwich, "English Politics and Administration," 159.

But how was office acquired and exercised at court? Forensic investigations of the process, says Courtney, make “sweeping statements about how power swung away from the council, or how councilors were excluded from important affairs, seem quite meaningless,” although over certain issues hostile councilors might well find themselves excluded.³³ The papers of the career bureaucrat Sir Julius Caesar, chancellor of the exchequer and a Puritan to boot, are one of the principal sources for the origins and management of early Stuart commercial patents, monopolies, and projects. If conciliar experience was supposed to serve as a guarantee of efficiency and probity in government, it is odd that Caesar was pushing schemes that are often taken to be synonymous with court corruption.³⁴ Courtney’s radical new interpretation of the series of records known as the signet office docquet books, a crucial source for how royal grants of favor and office were acquired, has conclusively overturned former associations of the bedchamber with “corrupt” access to the king, and has comprehensively refuted claims that James relinquished control over such matters to court minions.³⁵ At several key moments, even late in the reign, the king was not the cipher that the unfettered rise of Buckingham might suggest. It was, for example, James rather than Buckingham who decided that the Earl of Suffolk had to be deprived of the lord treasurer’s office. Sir Thomas Lake’s dismissal not long after was the result of the principal secretary’s provocation of the king; moreover, the appointments of Sir Robert Naunton and Sir George Calvert were also attributable to the king rather than to the undoubtedly (and perhaps uniquely) influential Buckingham.³⁶ Indeed, for much of James’s so-called second reign in England after the death of Salisbury, the king was, if not exactly a micromanager, then, for good or ill, just as actively involved in decision making as he had ever been.³⁷

This does not mean that all contemporary accounts of court-based malfeasance are mythical nonsense. As narrated by John Chamberlain as much as Thomas Scott, though in different registers, the later reign indeed saw prominent courtiers coming to grief and a culture of hostility toward the court, to the extent that Courtney concludes James failed his own tests for good kingship.³⁸ In a European context,

³³ Courtney, “Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I,” 105.

³⁴ Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I*, 32, 34, 38, 86–88, 129, 213; see also the relevant volumes of the papers of Sir Julius Caesar, British Library, London, Lansdowne MSS 123–24, 153, 165, 168. For the perceived and actual link between monopolies and patents and corruption, see Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (London, 1993), 10–11.

³⁵ Courtney, “Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I,” chap. 2; on the Jacobean court, see Cuddy, “Revival of the Entourage.” Courtney demonstrates that to understand how royal favor was procured, one needs to reconstruct, as far as possible, the circumstances of each grant of office or favor made under the king’s signature.

³⁶ Courtney, “Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I,” 81, 152, 170–71, 175, 180–81; Russell, *King James VI and I*, 178.

³⁷ The Spanish ambassador to the British court, Pedro de Zúñiga, noted that as soon as Salisbury was gone, the king swiftly asserted his own authority; see Zúñiga to Philip III, 22 June/2 July 1612, TNA, SP 94/19, fol. 105r–v; the Venetian ambassador said the same in August 1613: Russell, *King James VI and I*, 99, citing Brown et al. *Calendar of State Papers [. . .] of Venice*, 13:33. John Cramsie in *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I*, chap. 6, argues convincingly that after 1614 there was something like a coherent even if ultimately unsuccessful financial reform program, at the direct demand of the king.

³⁸ See Courtney, “Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I,” 223; Peter Lake, “Constitutional Consensus and Puritan Opposition in the 1620s: Thomas Scott and the Spanish Match,” *Historical Journal* 25, no. 4 (1982): 805–25.

however, the court's bad reputation in some quarters does not look particularly unusual. One thinks here of the fall (or, more precisely, murder) of Concino Concini, Marquis of Ancre (his wife, Leonora, was beheaded and burned, whereas Somerset's wife, Frances Howard, simply took up residence in the Tower of London), and of the disgrace and execution of Rodrigo Calderón, accused *inter alia* of witchcraft and put to death in the center of Madrid in October 1621. Though unedifying, this was at one level the sharp end of the kind of public political realignments of interests that were conventional enough inside early modern European monarchical regimes and courts.³⁹ There is perhaps a similarity between Villiers, who made possible the overthrow of Somerset by his enemies at court, and the Duke of Luynes, who masterminded the conspiracy against Concini. Somerset's fall was a reversal of the coup that had seen him detached from his former mentors and drawn into the ambit of the Howard family.⁴⁰

Villiers's meteoric rise inevitably met with adverse comment. Still, his advancement has been interpreted as part of a deliberate strategy on the part of the king, following a series of serious public-relations setbacks, of promoting those who were capable of getting the crown's business done.⁴¹ If the circle of those in the king's confidence narrowed late in the reign, it was rather because of the controversial (Hispanophile) nature of royal foreign policy than the creeping in of favorites and favoritism. These aspects of policy demonstrably remained at the direction of the king, and they were arguably rational enough. That France was in the middle of a brutal internal struggle and Spain was faced with a resumption of the war against the Dutch made James's determination in the late 1610s and early 1620s to continue negotiating with Madrid entirely logical.⁴²

THE KING AND THE PRACTICALITIES OF GOVERNMENT

If during his English reign James did not experience the calamitous personal decline that some have described, this leaves the question of whether his undoubted capacity to talk the rhetorical talk about kingly authority was matched by an ability to deal with the practical problems of government in the way that his experienced English councilors were allegedly able to do. There were, indeed, occasions when

³⁹ Sir Thomas Edmondes to Sir Ralph Winwood, 30 June 1617 and 10 July 1617, TNA, SP 78/67, fols. 140r, 144r; Francis Cottington to Sir Dudley Carleton, 6 June 1619, TNA, SP 94/23, fol. 198v; Questier, *Dynastic Politics*, 371, 377; J. F. Dubost, "Between Mignons and Principal Ministers: Concini, 1610–1617," in Elliott and Brockliss, *World of the Favourite*, 71–78. The contours of the opposition to the French regency government were similar to the outlines of the agitation in England concerning Overbury; see John Woodford's summary in December 1615 of the demands of the general assembly at Nîmes, TNA, SP 78/64, fol. 196r.

⁴⁰ John Woodford to Sir Ralph Winwood, 9 May 1617, TNA, SP 78/67, fols. 109r–v, 110r; Sir Thomas Edmondes to Sir Ralph Winwood, 2 June 1617 and 5 August 1617, TNA, SP 78/67, fols. 128v, 170r; G. Dyfnallt Owen and Sonia P. Anderson, eds., *Manuscripts of the Marquess of Downshire*, vol. 6, *Papers of William Trumbull the Elder, September 1616–December 1618* (Toronto, 1996), 196.

⁴¹ This is one of the principal claims made by Alexander Courtney in "Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I," 80–86, 107, 111, 148–49; see also Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I*, 151, 163; cf. Croft, *King James*, 98.

⁴² Courtney, "Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I," chap. 3, esp. 111–16, 129, 130. James appears to have retained the political initiative despite his periodic poor health in later years; see Courtney, "Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I," 126; cf. Russell, *King James VI and I*, 178.

talk—that is to say, political rhetoric—was apparently not enough. Exhibit A has always been the failed attempt at a perfect union of the kingdoms of the British Isles. The union project had to be quietly shelved when the commission set up to implement it failed to deliver. Exhibit B was James's being what Cogswell calls “mathematically challenged” in fiscal matters.⁴³ In other words, royal glibness was unequal to the task of comprehending and negotiating the day-to-day exigencies and constraints of the business of government and, in particular, the persistent underlying financial challenges and concerns that dogged the post-1603 regime, especially when combined with an aversion to calling Parliament. Even taking into account Russell's conclusions about the inability of the English Parliament to raise sufficient taxation, no one would deny that there were serious glitches in the administration of crown finance.⁴⁴ The claim, though, is that James was profligate beyond the point of no return and even had to be lectured by his own councilors on the value of money.⁴⁵

Still, in the case of the failed union, the bulk of recent work suggests that this was less of a bizarre miscalculation on James's part and more of a high-stakes game in which the king, undoubtedly like others, understood completely what was at issue—in James's case perhaps even to the extent of being able to see into the future and what might happen when, as did happen in the later 1630s, the absence of a perfect union helped to rupture the Stuart monarchy over the British Isles. In fact, thwarted by Parliament, the king resorted to extra-parliamentary methods to achieve the kind of overlapping uniformities that might serve to bring the British Isles closer together politically and culturally.⁴⁶

When it came to money, James's own mordant sarcasm, as in his “disease-and-consumption” address to the council of 19 October 1607, should give us cause to wonder whether the situation was as simple and fiscally black and white as it has often been rendered.⁴⁷ The ostensibly reform-minded Earl of Salisbury was supposed

⁴³ Cogswell, *James I*, ix.

⁴⁴ Conrad Russell, “Parliament and the King's Finances,” in Russell, *Origins of the English Civil War*, 91–116; Russell, *King James VI and I*, chap. 9; Pedro de Zúñiga to Philip III, 22 June/2 July 1612, TNA, SP 94/19, fol. 107r. For the conventional reading of the debt problems of the monarchy after 1603, see Robert Ashton, “Deficit Finance in the Reign of James I,” *Economic History Review* 10, no. 1 (1957): 15–29; for the claim that fiscal problems were the product of political decisions rather than structural difficulties, see Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I*, 8; John Cramsie, “Commercial Projects and the Fiscal Policy of James VI and I,” *Historical Journal* 43, no. 2 (2000): 345–64. For a sophisticated analysis of the way that James dealt with debts contracted in Scotland, see Julian Goodare, “The Debts of James VI of Scotland,” *Economic History Review* 62, no. 4 (2009): 926–52. For a concise reassertion of previous accounts of James's aversion to the calling of parliaments, see Andrew Thrush, “The Personal Rule of James I, 1611–1620,” in Cogswell, Cust, and Lake, *Politics, Religion and Popularity in Early Stuart Britain*, 84–102; cf. Courtney, “Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I,” 2; Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I*, 153, 156–57, arguing that wariness after 1614 about summoning another parliament was driven by prudence rather than by merely a determination to govern without it.

⁴⁵ Croft, *King James*, 73.

⁴⁶ For the legal measures designed to secure union, see Croft, *King James*, 66–67; see also Russell, *King James VI and I*, 72–73; Keith Brown, “The Scottish Aristocracy, Anglicization and the Court, 1603–38,” *Historical Research* 36, no. 3 (1993): 543–76; Butler, *Stuart Court Masque*, chap. 4, esp. 95; Laura Stewart, “The Political Repercussions of the Five Articles of Perth: A Reassessment of James VI and I's Religious Policies in Scotland,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 38, no. 4 (2007): 1013–36.

⁴⁷ M. S. Giuseppe et al., eds., *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Honourable the Marquess of Salisbury* [. . .], 24 vols. (London, 1883–1976), 19:284–85.

to have had considerable financial acumen, but the major reform proposal that he sponsored, the Great Contract of 1610, did not succeed. In any case, James was hardly the only European monarch to have debt problems; and, as often as not, the issue seems to have been one of royal credit rather than simply the sums involved.⁴⁸ Nor was James the only contemporary monarch to resort persistently to indirect forms of taxation in the face of uncooperative representative assemblies.⁴⁹ Equally, a plausible case has been made by John Cramsie that the surge of claims in, say, the 1621 Parliament about financial corruption was driven by political calculation rather than popular dismay about the abysmal rottenness of royal government.⁵⁰

The foregoing discussion suggests that we simply cannot separate James's political rhetoric from the ways that, in practice, royal authority was asserted and exercised. Of course, a number of scholars have paid serious attention to what Prestwich dismissively called James's "pretentious vapourings on monarchy," certainly as far as his Scottish publications are concerned, principally his *Trew Law of Free Monarchies*.⁵¹ The tendency, though, has been to see him intellectually and rhetorically as on something of a downward spiral in England. The acres of print, pro and con, about the statutory oath of allegiance of 1606 are not generally taken seriously, although reams of published works and newsletter commentary indicate that contemporaries knew exactly what was at stake ideologically.⁵²

Matthew Growhoski has shown how deftly James's agents distributed and defended his published work across Europe.⁵³ In these publications, James committed himself, or appeared to do so, to certain Protestant-cause maxims and thus distanced himself from, for example, the regimes in Brussels and Madrid, but not sufficiently to provoke public censure from them. The fact that James's critique of papal authority did not fully map onto other accounts of anti-papery allowed channels of communication to remain open between him and his Catholic subjects. The

⁴⁸ For Salisbury's mixed record as a financial reformer, see Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I*, 75–76; Russell, *King James VI and I*, 75; for the failure of the Great Contract, see Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I*, 108–16.

⁴⁹ For Russell's further sensible remarks on royal debt and taxation, see Russell, *King James VI and I*, chap. 5, esp. 184–85, 186–87; for John Cramsie's qualification of Russell's line here, see Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I*, 210.

⁵⁰ Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I*, 174, 179.

⁵¹ James VI and I, *The Trew Lawe of Free Monarchies* [...] (Edinburgh, 1598); see Peter Lake, "The King (the Queen) and the Jesuit: James Stuart's *True Law of Free Monarchies* in Context/s," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 14, no. 14 (2004): 243–66; Jenny Wormald, "James VI and I, *Basilikon Doron* and *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*: The Scottish Context and the English Translation," in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge, 1991), 36–54; see also Jane Rickard, *Authorship and Authority: The Writings of James VI and I* (Manchester, 2007). For James's poetry, see Robert Appelbaum, "War and Peace in 'The Lepanto' of James VI and I," *Modern Philology* 97, no. 3 (2000): 333–63; Astrid J. Stilma, "The Battle of Lepanto: The Introduction of James VI of Scotland to the Dutch," in Houlbrooke, *James VI and I*, 9–23; Sebastian Verweij, "'Booke, Go thy Wayes': The Publication, Reading and Reception of James VI/I's Early Poetic Works," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2014): 111–31.

⁵² For the debate over the oath of allegiance, see principally Johann Sommerville, "Jacobean Political Thought and the Controversy over the Oath of Allegiance" (PhD diss., Cambridge, 1981).

⁵³ Matthew Growhoski, "The Secret History of a 'Secret War': John Barclay, his *Satyricon*, and the Politicization of Literary Scholarship in Early Modern Europe, 1582–1621" (PhD diss., Princeton, 2015); see also J. P. Kenyon, ed., *The Stuart Constitution, 1603–1688: Documents and Commentary* (Cambridge, 1966), 8.

implications of the king's stance here can be picked up also from the response of some French Gallican Catholics, among whom James would thus retain a degree of influence.⁵⁴ Some of the deputies in the Estates-General of 1614 tried to fashion a loyalty oath that some thought similar to the English 1606 oath of allegiance, and this formulation allowed James personally to weigh in on their side.⁵⁵

THE KING AND PUBLIC POLITICS

James's words on such topics can be studied purely as essays in political theory. But most contemporaries would have seen them in the context of recent events and a range of possible political futures. Thus James's self-alignment with French Gallican Catholics and moderate Huguenots was crucial after the French regency government's decision in July/August 1611 to reveal to the world the already negotiated Franco-Spanish double dynastic marriages.⁵⁶ Inevitably, the revelation elicited protests from the Huguenots and triggered a demand from the regime of Marie de Médicis for shows of their compliance. James was by this point known to be looking for a more explicitly Calvinist underpinning for his rule; to this end, he recruited moderate Huguenot support for a dynastic match between his daughter Elizabeth and Frederick V, the Calvinist elector palatine of the Rhine. In this context, he tried to secure Huguenot unity over and against their tendency to split into doctrine-based factions.⁵⁷

Not least because James had no incentive to commit himself to military intervention in continental Europe, words were his weapons of choice here, and his belligerence was primarily print based. But he had no intention of becoming a verbal prisoner of his court's recent Calvinist turn. We can see this in the reports of those

⁵⁴ Michael Corrie Questier, ed., *Newsletters from the Archpresbyterate of George Birkhead* (Cambridge, 1998), 20, 98; for the favorable reception by some members of the Church of France of James's *An Apologie for the Oath of Allegiance* [. . .] *together with a Premonition* [. . .] (London, 1609), see William Becher to the Earl of Salisbury, 8 January 1610, TNA, SP 78/56, fol. 1r–v.

⁵⁵ Norman E. McClure, ed., *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1939), 1:488; Sir Thomas Edmondes to Sir Ralph Winwood, 21 October 1614, TNA, SP 78/62, fols. 178r, 178v–79r; proposal to Estates-General for a law against papal authority, November 1614, TNA, SP 78/62, fols. 220r–21r; speech of Cardinal Du Perron to Estates-General, 21/31 December 1614, TNA, SP 78/62, fols. 247r–8v; Edmondes to the Earl of Somerset, 27 December 1614, TNA, SP 78/62, fol. 257v; Edmondes to Winwood, 30 December 1614, TNA 78/62, fols. 276v, 277r; 278v–9r; Edmondes to Winwood, with protest delivered to Louis XIII and Marie de Médicis, 9 January 1615, TNA, SP 78/63, fols. 8v–9r, 16r–17r; Edmondes to Sir Dudley Carleton, 10 January 1615, TNA, SP 78/63, fols. 20r–1r; Questier, *Dynastic Politics*, 364, 365. The works of the absolutist English Catholic political theorist Thomas Preston, who had tacit regime protection in London, were well received by Gallicans; see Edmondes to the Earl of Salisbury, 8 August 1611, TNA, SP 78/58, fol. 87v.

⁵⁶ As Sir John Digby reported in early 1612, “these marriages will be accompanied with a new league, defensive and offensive, into which the pope will labor to bring as many Catholic princes as he can”: Digby to the Earl of Salisbury, 25 January 1612, TNA, SP 94/19, fol. 16r.

⁵⁷ Adams, “The Protestant Cause,” 7; Sir Thomas Edmondes to Salisbury, 15 August 1611 and 14 November 1611, TNA, SP 78/58, fols. 97r, 231r; James I to Edmondes, August 1612, TNA, SP 78/60, fol. 67r. For the intra-Huguenot strife caused by the theologian Daniel Tilenus, see Edmondes to Sir Thomas Lake, 24 March 1613, TNA, SP 78/61, fol. 121r; Edmondes to James I, 9 April 1613, TNA, SP 78/61, fol. 129r; Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge, 1995), 404.

who recorded the king's public comments and believed (as James evidently intended) that they could detect strains of political irenicism. John Jackson observed in December 1613 that the king had recently been in full flow and had among other things "lifted up his hands towards heaven, saying, 'Oh that I might be so happy as to live to see a general council in my days to appease these disagreements'" in the church, for "how willingly would I lend my best help thereto."⁵⁸

This was the kind of public message-sending that later in James's reign underwrote, for example, the Stuart court's diplomacy with the Spaniards and the French for a new and fully dynastic alliance, in the sense that there were those in both countries who were prepared to speak in favor of a confessionally mixed union with not just religious but also military and financial implications.⁵⁹ In other words, we need to think, in both a European and a British context, about what the king and court were actually trying to do at strategically important moments, and the way that they appropriated different kinds of political language in order to do it.⁶⁰ To put it another way, we need to integrate accounts of royal words back into the (British and European) narrative structures laid out by Simon Adams, Roy Schreiber, and others.⁶¹

If James had a role model in this respect, it was probably Henry IV of France. Both monarchs rejected leaguer and republican notions (under Catholic and Calvinist forms) of elective monarchy but looked to negotiate with and possibly to incorporate diverse ideological interests on the basis of a proper understanding of the rights of kings. Henry of Navarre had, in order to face down his Catholic critics and at the risk of alienating his Huguenot friends, reconciled himself to his former leaguer enemies, and even invited the Jesuit order to serve as his personal spiritual advisers.⁶² Clearly, as a future king of the British Isles, James was never going to "change religion" as Henry did in the 1590s. But James had brought a number of the nonaligned into the fold in Scotland, notably the Scots who had at one time looked to Spain.⁶³ He did something similar in England.⁶⁴ It was to these constituencies, among others, that he spoke in the *Basilikon Doron*, the *Trew Law*, and his publications on the oath of

⁵⁸ Questier, *Newsletters from the Archpresbyterate of George Birkhead*, 257.

⁵⁹ Questier, *Dynastic Politics*, chaps. 6, 7.

⁶⁰ For the appropriate European contexts, see esp. Jonathan Scott, "England's Troubles, 1603–1702," in *The Stuart Court and Europe: Essays in Politics and Political Culture*, ed. Robert Malcom Smuts (Cambridge, 1996), 20–38, esp. 27–33; Jonathan Scott, *England's Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context* (Cambridge, 2000), chap. 1.

⁶¹ See esp. Adams, "The Protestant Cause"; Schreiber, *The First Carlisle*; Schreiber, *Political Career of Sir Robert Naunton*.

⁶² Eric Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy: Catholic Reform and Political Authority in France (1590–1615)* (Aldershot, 2005). See also Maurice Lee, Jr., *James I and Henri IV: An Essay in English Foreign Policy, 1603–1610* (Urbana, 1970); for the proposal, in time, to inter Henry IV's heart at the Jesuits' "chief house at La Fleche," see Sir George Carew to the Earl of Salisbury, 5 February 1609, TNA, SP 78/55, fol. 35v.

⁶³ For James's claim to Alonso de Velasco, reported in mid-February 1613, that "being king in Scotland, there" was "an infinite company of papists" and James required the children of the "principal lords and gentlemen" to be placed in the royal household, where James in effect "converted them," see Velasco to Philip III, 17 February 1613, TNA, SP 94/19, fol. 259v.

⁶⁴ For a brilliant study of James's dealing with the "contradictory history" of the recent past, see Peter Sherlock, "The Monuments of Elizabeth Tudor and Mary Stuart: King James and the Manipulation of Memory," *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 2 (2007): 263–89; see also Bowers, "James VI," 12.

allegiance, even if, in the case of the latter, particularly his *Premonition*, he appeared to be using conventional Calvinist anti-popish rhetoric.⁶⁵

Despite the almost obsessive concern of some English historians with the relationship between James and Elizabeth up until 1603, in a determination, apparently, to see whether James knew how to behave like the obedient ruler of a subservient client state that he allegedly was, what really mattered was the relationship between the Scots king and Henry IV and, beyond that, between James and, *inter alia*, the regimes in Madrid and Brussels. Moreover, the majority of James's reign in England coincided with what some scholars refer to as the "short European peace," in a period when, unusually, the major European powers decided to opt for a mutual cessation of arms. It is in that context, up until the Bohemian crisis in and after 1618, that so much of what James did has to be located. In fact, his accession and the Anglo-Spanish peace-making of 1604–05 were themselves part of the chain of events and processes that had begun with the Treaty of Vervins in 1598. Robert Cross argues that the 1604 Treaty of London was not a grudging, bureaucracy-led acceptance that the war had to stop merely because both sides were exhausted; it was, rather, a recognition that the old Anglo-Burgundian alliance was a natural basis for English trade and other types of relationship with the Continent. The peace negotiations were also part of the process by which James unleashed what Cross calls "creative discord" in order to shake up the English court, following his appointment to positions of real power of those who had been frozen out by the dead hand of the late Elizabethan regime—on the one hand, Essexians such as the Earl of Southampton, but on the other, crypto-Catholics such as Lord Henry Howard, who during the 1580s had been the partly acceptable face of support for Mary Stuart. Cross also makes the case that the peace negotiations, and the court and other rituals involved in them, provide evidence of a calculated determination to achieve a lasting accord with the House of Austria, though, of course, as in all such diplomacy, there was no such thing as a free lunch, and it was evident that the Spanish court would demand, for instance, substantial guarantees from James concerning the Dutch.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See Helen Georgia Stafford, *James VI of Scotland and the Throne of England* (New York, 1940); letters of John Petit, 19/29 April 1598, 19/29 June 1598, 29 August/8 September 1598, TNA, SP 77/5, fols. 333r–4v, 365r–7r, 382r–v; news from Brussels, 5/15 September 1598, TNA, SP 77/5, fol. 386r–v; letter of John Petit, 28 April/8 May 1599, TNA, SP 77/6, fols. 12r–13r; news from Brussels, 9/19 June 1601, TNA, SP 77/6, fol. 277v; C. A. Fry, "Diplomacy and Deception: King James VI of Scotland's Foreign Relations with Europe (c. 1584–1603)" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2014).

⁶⁶ Cross, "To Counterbalance the World," 120; see also Gustav Ungerer, "The Spanish and English Chronicles in King James's and Sir George Buc's Dossiers on the Anglo-Spanish Peace Negotiations," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (1998): 309–24. For evidence of the real enthusiasm in Spain at the prospect of the peace, see Richard Cox to Thomas Wilson, 11/21 June 1603, TNA, SP 94/9, fol. 35r–v; William Palmer to Wilson, 11/21 June 1603, TNA, SP 94/9, fol. 37r–v; Earl of Nottingham to Robert Cecil, Viscount Cranborne, 28 April 1605, TNA, SP 94/11, fol. 45r. For Nottingham and his delegation's high-profile entry into, and reception in, Valladolid in May 1605, see "A Relation of the Entrance of the Admiral of England [. . .]" 16/26 May 1605, TNA, SP 94/11, fols. 79r–82r; see also Nottingham to Cranborne (now Earl of Salisbury), 2 June 1605 and 3 June 1605, TNA, SP 94/11, fols. 124r–5v, 132r–4v. For Spanish demands concerning the Dutch, see, for example, Sir Charles Cornwallis to Salisbury, 6 June 1605, TNA, SP 94/11, fol. 139r; memorandum [July 1605] on a potential match between the Prince of Wales and the Infanta, TNA, SP 94/11, fol. 216r.

Coexistence was, however, not the same as permanent friendship, and, of necessity, James was as adept at shape-shifting abroad as he was at home. Nor was it possible for royal policy to remain static when faced with, for example, the assassination of Henry IV in 1610. The Anglo-Palatine diplomacy and eventual dynastic union of Princess Elizabeth and Frederick V in late 1612/early 1613 was, as argued above, a response to the French king's murder and the emergent Franco-Spanish rapprochement, as was the treaty with the German Evangelical Union that preceded the marriage.⁶⁷ But this was not necessarily James's diplomacy of choice. In the right circumstances he would gravitate toward involvement with loose associations of mainly southern European (Catholic) states that might be reckoned to constitute a barrier to Habsburg ambition and that, as in the case of Venice, did not invest too heavily in the authority of the papacy—hence James's post-accession fostering of a relationship with the Venetian republic during the Interdict controversy.⁶⁸ Despite his seeming closeness to his Calvinist counselors and subjects, notably George Abbot, who had presided over the Palatine wedding, the problem of the Franco-Spanish entente had not gone away. Indeed, Andrew Thrush has convincingly demonstrated that the 1614 Parliament, rather than being purely a (failed) exercise in representative politics, was itself a council-led response to the looming possibility of an Anglo-French marriage treaty, which was of course one possible response by the king to the increasingly imminent conclusion of the Franco-Spanish double dynastic alliance.⁶⁹

Furthermore, by March 1613, James was faced with the growing belligerence of the forces of the European Catholic League, established in mid-1609. It would have been insanity to allow himself to be drawn into a direct confrontation with it; the logical recourse was the series of approaches made by turns to the courts in Madrid and Paris.⁷⁰ This need for political realignment helps to explain the otherwise seemingly bizarre course of Irish politics between 1612 and 1615. For some English Protestants, the calling of a parliament in Dublin presented the opportunity for a proxy hostility toward Spain, or at least an opportunity to disrupt the 1604 peace that, by their account, was being used to strangle the freedom and prospects of Britain's true (Protestant) friends in Europe. In July 1612, the Spanish ambassador to the British court, Pedro de Zúñiga, reported the planned gerrymandering of Irish parliamentary constituencies and said that George Abbot and other bishops were laboring for a "breach" with Spain, for they could not "endure" that James should have "amity" with Philip III. But Zúñiga also believed that James made "little or no

⁶⁷ Calvin Senning, *Spain, Rumor, and Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Jacobean England: The Palatine Match, Cleves, and the Armada Scares of 1612–1613 and 1614* (Abingdon, 2019), chap. 1, esp. 7–8. For the Hispanophile inclinations of the regency of Marie de Médicis, see Sir John Digby to the Earl of Salisbury, 12 October 1611, TNA, SP 94/18, fol. 211r.

⁶⁸ For the Interdict controversy, see David Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi: Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), chap. 2; Questier, *Dynastic Politics*, 308–9, 311, 312.

⁶⁹ Andrew Thrush, "The French Marriage and the Origins of the 1614 Parliament," in *The Crisis of 1614 and the Added Parliament: Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Stephen Clucas and Rosalind Davies (Aldershot, 2003), 25–35.

⁷⁰ Sir John Digby to James I, 20 March 1613, TNA, SP 94/19, fol. 304r–v; newsletter (March [?] 1613), TNA, SP 94/19, fols. 313r–17r; Digby to Sir Ralph Winwood, 14 October 1615, TNA, SP 94/21, fols. 178r–9r.

account at all of his councilors and scarcely communicates with them anything of importance.”⁷¹

Faced with the publicly professed loyalty of Anglo-Irish Catholics, James concluded that he could not afford to alienate the Anglo-Irish constituency completely and so he stamped on the Calvinists who were pushing for a Protestant ascendancy in Ireland. Despite giving a tongue-lashing to the Irish delegates who came to England to petition for relief, he left no one in doubt about what he thought of Abbot's agenda for Ireland.⁷² This was the case even while diplomats such as William Trumbull were warning that a rebellion in Ireland was imminent.⁷³ The controversial royal progress in 1617 into Scotland was clearly viewed by contemporaries in the context of the king's recent instructions to his ambassador in Madrid to seek a marriage alliance, itself a response to the political instability and incoherence of the French court.⁷⁴ The royal visit had an aggressively conformist compliance agenda (it resulted in the formulation of the articles of Perth), but it appears to have convinced a number of moderates to associate themselves firmly with the court and the king.⁷⁵

Of course, the circumstances in which James, confronted by the rebellion in Bohemia, eventually met the 1621 English Parliament and tried to forestall a European war, even as his son-in-law, Frederick V, after accepting the Bohemian crown, lost everything in central Europe, were hardly business as usual.⁷⁶ In a sense, James's trademark checks and balances, word-based mode of diplomacy had now comprehensively failed.⁷⁷ The king who tended to define himself in European terms was being held hostage by events in Europe now quite beyond his control. The fact was that Habsburg would never fight Habsburg; Spain would not force

⁷¹ Pedro de Zúñiga to Philip III, 22 June/2 July 1612, TNA, SP 94/19, fols. 105r–6r. For Gondomar's view that the attempt in Ireland “to overthrow at once all the Catholics” was meant to cause “a general breach,” see Sir John Digby to James I, 22 September 1613, TNA, SP 94/20, fol. 85r. For the Spanish embassy in mid-Jacobean London, see Kathryn Marshalek, “The Religio-Political Agitation of Luisa de Carvajal in Early Stuart London” (forthcoming, *Renaissance Studies*).

⁷² John McCavitt, *Sir Arthur Chichester: Lord Deputy of Ireland, 1605–1616* (Belfast, 1998), 179–83, 187; Russell, *King James VI and I*, 103; Questier, *Dynastic Politics*, 349, 350, 358; Anthony Champney to Thomas More, 25 September/5 October 1613, Westminster Diocesan Archives, London, A XII, 395; Robert Pett to More, 10/20 July 1614, Westminster Diocesan Archives, A XII, 400.

⁷³ See, for example, William Trumbull to James I, 14 June 1614, TNA, SP 77/11, fols. 77r–8r; see also William Trumbull to secretary of State, 29 September 1614, TNA, SP 77/11, fol. 163v. James knew from his diplomats in Spain that the Duke of Lerma was prepared to use his good offices with the papacy to prevent James's Catholic subjects in Ireland from going into outright opposition, or worse: speech of Don Juan de Idiáquez [1612 ?], TNA, SP 94/19, fols. 216r–17r; Sir John Digby to James I, 7 January 1613, TNA, SP 94/19, fols. 238r–41r. Gondomar himself had been ordered to suppress signs of political agitation among James's Irish subjects: Gondomar's instructions, (enclosed with letter of Digby to James I, 27 May 1613), TNA, SP 94/19, fols. 378v, 382v.

⁷⁴ Questier, *Dynastic Politics*, 375. The new phase of James's approach to Madrid had in fact begun in 1615 in the face of the civil unrest in France, even as the regent, Marie de Médicis, finally forced through the Franco-Spanish dynastic pact; Adams, “The Protestant Cause,” 265.

⁷⁵ William Becher to Sir Thomas Lake, 31 December 1617, TNA, SP 78/67, fol. 236r; Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, 223; Stewart, “Political Repercussions”; Questier, *Dynastic Politics*, 372–83; James Maxwell, *A New Eight-Fold Probation of the Church of Englands Divine Constitution* [. . .] (London, 1617); Arthur H. Williamson, s.v. “James Maxwell,” 2004, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18400>.

⁷⁶ See esp. Brennan Pursell, *The Winter King: Frederick V of the Palatinate and the Coming of the Thirty Years' War* (Aldershot, 2003).

⁷⁷ Houlbrooke, “James's Reputation, 1625–2005,” 190.

the imperial court and its allies to concede to James's demands over the Rhineland Palatinate. James was compelled to seek a mediated peace and a restitution of the Palatinate territories by purely diplomatic means. The pressure was now on him to conclude rather than to delay, and the Spaniards knew it.⁷⁸ James had no effective military answer to the firepower commanded by the Marquis of Spinola in Flanders.

In many accounts of the period, however, all these events merely precipitate the slow train wreck of the negotiations with Spain and looming civil unrest in England. The court's miscalculations provoked the journey to Madrid of Charles and Buckingham—seemingly a ludicrous folly from which Charles and his companion escaped more or less by luck, licensed and presided over by the senile idiot king.⁷⁹ Moreover, the grossly over-promoted Buckingham was a stark symbol of the link between foreign failure and blatant court corruption. Subsequently, in the 1624 Parliament, Buckingham played the populist card, in effect admitting to a serious mismanagement of royal diplomacy, but denying culpability for it. This parliament was swiftly followed by an Anglo-French union that, in turn, failed to deliver (militarily) what the new alliance was supposed to guarantee.⁸⁰

There is of course more than one interpretation of the complex European diplomacy for the proposed Anglo-Spanish dynastic alliance and its failure in mid-1623.⁸¹ The fact remains that with his death in 1625 James delivered, in the wake of that diplomacy, an uncontested succession in the direct line—the holy grail of contemporary dynastic politics. That had not happened in the case of a male successor of full age in England since 1509. Some had covertly speculated that the elector palatine and his patriotically named bride might be a better bet than the Prince of Wales; but they had completely lost out.⁸² Among the consequences of this dynastic turning point were a number of crucial domestic political realignments. These were signaled through arguably novel formulations of religious orthodoxy.⁸³ At the time that Schwarz published his article, although the work of Nicholas Tyacke on Arminianism was becoming known, it was something of a mystery as to why in the early 1620s James should have promoted divines such as Richard Montagu. In the context of the king's foreign policy in the later 1610s and early 1620s, and the favor being shown to Dutch Arminian exiles in Spanish Flanders, it is no mystery at all.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ See esp. Brennan Pursell, "The End of the Spanish Match," *Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (2002): 699–726.

⁷⁹ Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *Prince Charles and the Spanish Marriage* [. . .], 2 vols. (London, 1869); Glyn Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta: The Cultural Politics of the Spanish Match* (London, 2003); Croft, *King James*, 117–22; cf. Alexander Sansom, *The Spanish Match: Prince Charles's Journey to Madrid, 1623* (Aldershot, 2006).

⁸⁰ Questier, introduction to *Stuart Dynastic Policy*, 1–130, at 72–128. For the most convincing account of Buckingham's working of a popular constituency, exploiting the end of the negotiations with Spain so as to crush opposition to himself inside the court, see Thomas Cogswell, "The People's Love: The Duke of Buckingham and Popularity," in Cogswell, Cust, and Lake, *Politics, Religion and Popularity in Early Stuart Britain*, 211–34.

⁸¹ Robert Cross, "Pretense and Perception in the Spanish Match, or History in a Fake Beard," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 37, no. 4 (2007): 563–83.

⁸² See Adams, "The Protestant Cause," 291.

⁸³ Anthony Milton, "The Church of England, Rome, and the True Church: The Demise of a Jacobean Consensus," in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603–1642*, ed. Kenneth Fincham (London, 1993), 187–210.

⁸⁴ Schwarz, "James I and the Historians," 123; Nicholas Tyacke, "Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution," in Russell, *Origins of the English Civil War*, 119–43; William Trumbull to Sir

THE KING AND THE HISTORIANS

For years, many historians have assumed an easily discernible difference between the last of the Tudors and (in England) the first Stuart king. The one was a virtually omniscient political deity who was able to anticipate with near infallibility each move that her opposite numbers and opponents made almost before they made it. The other, if not a drooling imbecile when he got to England, was very soon doomed to cut a ridiculous figure on the European stage, mocked in everything from Latin tracts to popular vernacular libels. There has been a seemingly inexorable determination, particularly among English historians, to go to the stake in defense of the notion that the Elizabethan polity was stable, sustained by the earthy wisdom of Protestant (and/or Puritan) reforming impulses, and that it took an ill-informed foreigner, or rather foreigners—*père et fils*—to upset it. Of course, dissenting voices have denied that James VI and I was the fool that some had taken him to be. There is, however, still a tendency to gloss the advent of Stuart rule in England by reference to the presumed inadequacies and corruptions of Stuart kingship (and particularly queenship) in Scotland and to assume that those shortcomings were imported into the English polity.⁸⁵

Even after all the recent studies of the complex politics of the accession, Susan Doran could claim in 2014 that James's "future English subjects possessed strong evidence that he was devious, duplicitous and capable of treachery."⁸⁶ He was handicapped "by the general perception of him as weak and untrustworthy" leading to "anxieties about his fitness to rule over England."⁸⁷ Moreover, James was so irredeemably foolish as to make repeated public-relations blunders and then try to remedy the damage to "his reputation in England."⁸⁸ This view, I am afraid, is pitched in the language of textbooks published by the likes of J. P. Kenyon and is derived ultimately from the stereotypes associated with Sir Anthony Weldon. Doran writes that, at the accession, the "English government" (as if there was a single entity that could be identified via that label) had "concern" about "James's susceptibility to favorites, his difficulties in asserting royal authority, his unreliability in

Dudley Carleton, 6/16 November 1620, TNA, SP 77/14, fol. 235r; Questier, *Dynastic Politics*, 387; I am grateful to Peter Lake and Kathryn Marshalek for discussions of this point. Arminianism has been viewed as a latent strain in the Church of England, one that emerged and disrupted the middle-ground Protestant consensuses established under Elizabeth Tudor; but on this account, it might well be taken to be almost the other way round—the political implications of the new directions in diplomacy in the later 1610s allowed for the expression of theological and ecclesiological ideas by English (that is to say, Church of England) clerical writers and preachers that were antithetical to the ideological notions that underwrote the pan-European Protestant cause.

⁸⁵ One of the great ironies here is that Jenny Wormald, who tried strenuously to argue that sixteenth-century Scotland was a center of learning and culture (in opposition to contemporary attitudes to the Scots that saw them as barbaric), also tended to subscribe to the view that the Stuarts had, as it were, a stupidity gene that asserted itself in every generation, though much more strongly with Mary Stuart than with James VI and I: see Jenny Wormald, *Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure* (London, 1988); also Jenny Wormald, *Court, Kirk and Community: Scotland, 1470–1625* (London, 1981), 143–45.

⁸⁶ Susan Doran, "Polemic and Prejudice: A Scottish King for an English Throne," in *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of Succession in Late Elizabethan England*, ed. Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes (London, 2014), 215–33, at 228.

⁸⁷ Doran, "Polemic and Prejudice," 224.

⁸⁸ Doran, 226–27.

religion and his tendency to be economical with the truth.”⁸⁹ This account of Anglo-Scots politics drags the topic back at least fifty years, and, furthermore, makes it unlikely to be taken seriously by future scholars who may well conclude that early modern English and British politics is a *passé* subject and should give way to more determinedly intellectual and cultural approaches to the period. To say, as Doran does, that William Cecil and Robert Cecil “suspected that James had deliberately turned a blind eye to the activities of the Catholic earls and Jesuits at his court because either he secretly shared their religion or else he was using them as conduits in his negotiations with Rome and Spain” misrepresents the clear and extensive archival evidence concerning James’s negotiation of his rights to the English crown.⁹⁰ It reduces to confusion the very real sophistications of the way that, during the long-drawn-out accession crisis in British politics, the Scottish king became a British one.

Even some 280 years ago, the Catholic historian Charles Dodd was aware that there were difficulties with what he had seen in print about the first Stuart king of Great Britain. Dodd, an intellectual heir of the appellent Catholic clergymen of the later 1590s, sensed that the categories used up to his own time for discussing James’s reputation were faulty. He concluded, perhaps predictably, that the “scurrilous account” of Weldon and other “disgusted courtiers” was preposterous, and that Gilbert Burnet was not much better. It was not enough, as the king’s critics claimed, to say that “he had a capacity to govern, yet he was indolent.” Was it really the case that “he chose favorites by their faces and shapes . . . and that his glorious title of *peaceful* was indolence”?⁹¹ James’s religion was a matter of complex self-representation, and it would not do “in regard of religion” merely to “make him irreconcilable to himself.”⁹² There was no need “to undertake an apology” for the king, but the peace policy was merely logical—Elizabeth was “a long time before she died . . . sick of this war” and, in matters of trade and commerce, the reasons for James’s diplomacy were completely rational. The claim that he was “pedantick” was a “censure entirely proceeding from ignorance.” What King James’s real opinion was toward the papacy and the major European (Catholic) states could not easily be discerned, and the sources were problematic, yet his actions had to be understood in terms of temporal and pragmatic calculation.⁹³ As for the allegations about “arbitrary power,” “in all governments” it “must be lodged somewhere,” and “we are not always in safety when it is managed by a multitude”; “even at this day,” in the eighteenth century, “these matters are a subject of contention.”⁹⁴ Dodd anticipated, in fact, some of the revisionist scholarship of recent years—the views of Glen Burgess as much as of Conrad Russell and Robert Cross.

It may be difficult to see King James as a champion of diversity in any modern sense,⁹⁵ yet he certainly brought a range of diversities to the new kingdom of

⁸⁹ Doran, 224–25.

⁹⁰ Doran, 225.

⁹¹ Charles Dodd [*vere* Hugh Tootell], *The Church History of England* [. . .], 3 vols. (Wolverhampton, 1737–1742), 2:345.

⁹² Dodd, *Church History of England*, 2:345.

⁹³ Dodd, 2:346–48.

⁹⁴ Dodd, 2:349–50.

⁹⁵ Cf. Michael B. Young, “James VI and I: Time for a Reconsideration?,” *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 3 (2012): 540–67; David Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire* (Iowa City, 1999); David Bergeron, “Writing King James’s Sexuality,” in *Royal Subjects: Essays on the Writings of James VI*

Great Britain and in particular to the new British court.⁹⁶ Virtually every major relevant archival source shows how the Scottish king James VI remade his composite kingdom from the inside out, in the process incorporating those who had previously, certainly as they saw it, been the victims of lockdown and exclusion, even while others protested that what they took to be the orthodoxies of the recent past were being abandoned.

Schwarz and others have argued for a rehabilitation of James on the grounds that he was a much less bad king than many previous scholars had taken him to be, but to my mind that is not necessarily a historical argument. Not that a historian should celebrate a prince's capacity for duplicity, nor is there any requirement for a commentator on the past to be completely detached about contemporary perceptions of such matters. But anyone trying to piece together the contingency-laden course of early modern political events needs to be constantly aware of circumstance and context. Moreover, the ceaseless contemporary public chatter about what constitutes virtue in a ruler must be set off against the realities of the exercise of power by princes.⁹⁷

As Courtney says, the fact that some contemporaries did not regard James as a "good king" is "a political reality that we cannot ignore."⁹⁸ But, as a number of contemporary theorists and commentators knew, whether they had studied Machiavelli or not, the process by which princes took and exercised power was not about ethics per se.⁹⁹ This was something that James evidently understood all too well. He was

and I, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (Detroit, 2002), 344–68; see also Alan Stewart, review of *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, by Michael B. Young, *American Historical Review* 106, no. 4 (2001): 1451–52; Maurice Lee, Jr., review of *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, by Michael B. Young, *Albion* 32, no. 4 (2000): 635–57; Senning, *Spain, Rumor, and Anti-Catholicism*, 12. The question of James's alleged homosexuality is, in the sense of actual evidence, a historical nonissue. This is not to deny the connection, particularly in contemporary pamphleteering, of the link between sex and politics, and therefore of the political significance of the rumor-, gossip-, and print-based attacks on James on this score; see esp. David Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James* (London, 1993), 193–95; for the political significance of allegations of sodomy, see Bellany, *Politics of Court Scandal*, 254–60. But, as Wormald points out, James was "at the very least . . . bisexual," and in sexual terms what actually mattered, to contemporaries, was that he "succeeded, where his three predecessors had failed, in providing heirs to the throne." Wormald, "James VI and I (1566–1625)."

⁹⁶ M. Smuts, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Change at the Court of James I," in Peck, *Mental World*, 99–112.

⁹⁷ Thomas Scott, *Vox Populi. Or Newes from Spayne translated according to the Spanish coppie; which may serve to forwarn both England and the Vnited Provinces how farre to trust to Spanish pretences* ([London?], 1620); Courtney, "Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I," 191–203, 204–08, citing Gainsford's work in British Library, Add. MS 62578. When the ambassador Tillières in 1620 and 1621 sent reports back to Paris about James's errors in government, one suspects the real reason might have been James's diplomacy with Madrid and, in May 1621, for example, the problem, as the French court saw it, of James's support for the Huguenots; Courtney, "Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I," 216–17, citing, inter alia, unfoliated letter of Tillières to Puyieux of 22 April/2 May 1621, TNA, PRO 31/3/54, and TNA, PRO 31/3/55, fol. 231r, and 31/3/56, fol. 1v; Russell, *King James VI and I*, 177, citing Brown et al. *Calendar of State Papers [. . .] of Venice*, 17:56, 43; Questier, *Stuart Dynastic Policy*, 21. It is a reasonable bet that if James had shown himself more amenable toward the French court during 1620 and 1621, the tenor of Tillières's reports at that time would have been rather different.

⁹⁸ Courtney, "Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I," 189.

⁹⁹ See Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1978), 1:131–38, 177–79, 181–86; Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 1981), chaps. 2–3.

endowed with a fair degree of ruthlessness, even if he resorted less often, even in Scotland, to actual bloodshed than, say, the peerless butcher Henry VIII who, in the interests of political stability in England, had scythed his way through the ranks of the aristocracy and political class in the 1530s and 1540s, slaughtering relatives, irreconcilable foes, and former friends alike.¹⁰⁰

The implications of much of the recent research on King James have not yet been fully taken into account in overviews of the period. Here, it has been argued, the recent approaches to court studies, the return to narratives, and so on, indicate that we should look again at this subject, but not merely so as to come down on one side or the other about whether James was a good, or better, king than we once thought. With the appropriate contexts and perspectives restored, the topic of post-Reformation, and particularly early Stuart, monarchy, and the issue of why reputation still seems to matter, supplies us with a way into the politics of the period; and, into the bargain, the subject will retain some sort of scholarly coherence and will not be consigned to the dustbin of intellectual obsolescence or, worse still, to the clutches and clichés of media-based history.

¹⁰⁰ James himself, citing Henry VIII, referred to the necessary disjuncture between purely ethical and political virtue; see Courtney, “Court Politics and the Kingship of James VI and I,” 33–34, citing Evangeline de Villiers, ed., “The Hastings Journal of the Parliament of 1621,” in *Camden Miscellany*, vol. 20 (London, 1953), 1–43, at 27; see also Alessandra Petrina, “The Travels of ideology: Niccolo Machiavelli at the Court of James VI,” *Modern Language Review* 102, no. 4 (2007): 947–59. See also Alexander Courtney’s major rewriting of James’s political life, *James VI and I* (Routledge, forthcoming).