

## The Homosexual Tendencies of King James: Should this Matter to Bible Readers Today?

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**Abstract** The question whether King James, who commissioned the translation of the Bible into English in 1604, had homosexual tendencies has been under discussion in recent years. We review the arguments presented against this view and conclude that they are largely circular and ad hominem. We then consider the evidence presented by those who argue for this view, including the emotional distance between King James and his wife; his intense affection for three men in the course of his life; contemporary criticism of his public expressions of affection toward two of these men; and contemporary allegations that his reluctance to commit England to war was due to his “effeminate” nature. We discuss his family history and his relationship to one man in particular and conclude that the argument he had homosexual tendencies is compelling. We then take up the associations that his own contemporaries made between homosexual behavior, effeminacy, pacifism, and the scholar, and present our view that in authorizing the translation of the Bible into English, he provided a scholarly model for male cooperation that was inherently superior to the martial model of male enterprise advocated by his opponents. We also suggest that his authorization of a new translation of the Bible was psycho-dynamically related to his loss of his mother in infancy and to his guilt for having failed to come to her aid when she requested his help. Finally, we make a case in behalf of the King James Version of the Bible on the grounds that it functions as a cultural selfobject (Kohut), due mainly to its maternal associations; that King James’s favorite Bible verse was Matthew 5:9—“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God”; and that James had homosexual tendencies.

**Keywords** King James · Bible translation · Homosexual tendencies · Peacemaking · Effeminacy · The scholar · Mother guilt · Cultural self object · Heinz Kohut

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## Introduction

When the first author (Capps) of this article was a student at Yale Divinity School, he and many of his student colleagues complained that the first semester of the required course in church history was mostly about popes, kings, and bishops. The assumption behind these complaints was that nothing could be duller and more irrelevant than studying the actions of these three types of mountebanks. While his views on this matter have not changed over the years, he is now prepared to admit that there are exceptions to every truth, and the exceptional case in this regard is King James, who commissioned the only translation of the Bible that was known to the first author when he was growing up. He knew nothing about the American Standard Version, published in 1901, and he was 13 years old when the Revised Standard Version (RSV 1952) was published. Because he received the latter as a confirmation gift from his pastor, he vacillated between the two versions in his high school years, but Bible courses in college used the Revised Standard Version, and his King James Version (KJV 1978) Bible began to gather dust on the shelf. When he set off for Yale Divinity School in 1960, he left it behind. A few years ago he purchased a copy of the King James Version, mainly because he wanted to show students that the verse-by-verse format of the KJV encouraged memorization of verses in a way that later translations that employ paragraphs do not. This format provided visual evidence to boys of his generation that the shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35, “Jesus wept,” and thus encouraged them to claim it as their favorite Bible verse. It also encouraged the practice of seeking divine guidance by closing one’s eyes and pointing the index finger at a randomly selected verse.

The experiences of the second author (Carlin) were a little different. He grew up at a time when the Presbyterian Church that his family attended was no longer using the King James Version. Due to the influence of their young pastor, the church switched to the New International Version (NIV 1973) on the grounds that the NIV was thought to be more faithful to the Greek and Hebrew and more readable than the King James Version. The church also felt that the NIV was more readable than other translations, like, for example, the Revised Standard Version. His immediate family, too, did not use the King James Version, though the Carlin household had a number of translations of the Bible, largely because Nathan’s mother loved to compare translations. But the experiences that he *did* have with the King James Bible were happy ones. These were the times when his maternal grandmother would read to him from the Bible. If he didn’t understand the language of the King James Bible, he did understand his grandmother’s love for the Bible, for God, and for him. We will return to this association between his grandmother’s reading of the KJV and her love for him in our concluding discussion.

The three main purposes of this article are (1) to present contemporary arguments that the question whether King James had homosexual tendencies has enormous significance for how one views the King James Bible and competing translations; (2) to review recent historical research that presents King James as having had homosexual tendencies; and (3) to present our own conclusions concerning the significance of this historical research for how the King James Bible may be viewed by Bible readers today.

## The contemporary discussion

The King James Bible has been gaining increasing scholarly attention in recent years (see, for example, Daniell 2003; Katz 2004; McGrath 2001; Moynahan 2002; Nicolson 2003). With the emergence of alternative translations beginning with the Revised Standard Version

(authorized by vote of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. in 1951), the King James Bible has been neglected in academic seminaries and divinity schools, as it has been seen to be dated and inaccurate. That the King James Bible is being viewed favorably again is surely good news to many. Indeed, there are those who argue that the King James Bible is the only legitimate bible. This view is sometimes called the “King James Only” (KJO) position.

But not all of the attention pleases those inclined to support the KJO position, because a considerable amount of this attention is due to discussion of King James’s own sexuality, particularly concerning the question whether he had homosexual tendencies.

### Bible translation and homosexuality

In *The Facts on the King James Only Debate*, Ankenberg and Weldon (1996) discuss homosexuality and translation committees. “Proponents of the KJO,” they write, “often claim that unbelievers, heretics, occultists, and/or homosexuals have been members of the editorial or translation committees of the modern versions” (p. 22). If a homosexual person is on the translation committee, so the argument goes, then that translation is obviously not of God, thus confirming the superiority of the King James Bible (as it is also assumed that no one on the translation committees of the King James Version could possibly have been homosexual).

G. A. Riplinger argues this view. In *New Age Bible Versions* (Riplinger 1993), he suggests that the alternate translations of the Bible have fueled the transmission of sexually transmitted infections. In a section titled “NIV Positive” in his chapter, “Men Shall Be Unholy,” Riplinger writes: “The NIV aided the AIDS epidemic when their editors and literary consultants silenced all of God’s warnings against the means of transmission of the HIV virus—sodomy” (p. 176). He suggests that the removal of the word “sodomy” in favor of “shrine prostitutes” in key verses (for example, Deut. 23:17; 1 Kings 15:12 and 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7) has misled “millions worldwide who practice sodomy” (p. 176). Apparently, these millions might not have chosen to practice sodomy if they had read the KJV. The KJV translates Deuteronomy 23:17, “There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel”; the NIV translates it, “No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute.” (The RSV translates it “There shall be no cult prostitute of the daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a cult prostitute of the sons of Israel.”)

On the other hand, Riplinger makes no mention of the fact that the KJV and NIV translations of Leviticus 20:13 are nearly identical. The KJV reads, “If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood *shall be* upon them.” The NIV reads, “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.” (The RSV translates the verse, “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.”) It seems clear that Riplinger places high premium on the more dramatic words “sodomy” and “sodomite.” As we will see, the precise meanings of these words in King James’s time are difficult to pin down.

What, according to Riplinger, prompted the NIV editors to prefer “shrine prostitute” over “sodomite”? Riplinger contends that Virginia Mollenkott, a member of one of the NIV stylistic editorial committees, is responsible for this. Mollenkott is an influential feminist scholar who writes extensively about issues of religion and gender. Riplinger notes that she is a lesbian, and he derides *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* (Scanzoni and

Mollenkott 1978, 1994). For Riplinger, this is proof enough that the NIV translation of the Bible is the work of Satan himself. Riplinger sums it up this way: “The deadly virus runs from the pens of the NIV scribes—signing the obituary of millions worldwide who practice sodomy. Immune to their cries, the NIV lies. They focus instead on a sin that is already dead—shrine prostitution” (p. 176). (Riplinger ignores the fact that the RSV uses “shrine prostitute” instead of “sodomite,” and that Mollenkott, who was in grade school at the time the RSV committees were at work, could not have been a member of the RSV committees.)

If Riplinger condemns the NIV on the grounds that it removes references to sodomy, others have attacked the King James Version on the grounds that King James was gay. In the 1985 July/August issue of *Moody Monthly*, published by the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, two articles appeared that questioned the character of King James. In “The Real King James,” Karen Ann Wojahn claims that Esme Stuart D’Aubigny was King James’s homosexual partner. She asks, “What right did [King James] have to ‘authorize’ Scripture? Was he a biblical Christian, that a Bible should bear his name?” (Wojahn 1985, p. 87). In “The Bible That Bears His Name,” which immediately follows Wojahn’s article, Keylock (1985) begins by noting, “Regardless of King James’s character flaws and moral failures....” (p. 89). The implication of this statement is that Keylock agrees with Wojahn’s assessment of King James. But she attacks the King James Bible on different grounds—accuracy and readability. Although she thinks that the King James Bible is a literary masterpiece, she contends that (1) we now have thousands more Hebrew and Greek texts that were simply unavailable during the translation of the King James Bible; and (2) seventeenth century English is hardly the same as twentieth century English. The point we want to lift up here, though, is that both of these authors attack the character of King James to suggest that the King James Bible is itself suspect.

### Coston’s rebuttal

Not surprisingly, the claim that King James had homosexual tendencies has stirred up quite a bit of controversy among many supporters of the King James Bible. Stephen A. Coston Sr., a graduate of St. Petersburg Junior College and subsequently member of the Presidential Escort Unit in the United States Army, was sufficiently incensed that he wrote nearly 400 pages in an attempt to refute this claim. In *King James the VI of Scotland and the I of England*, Coston (1996) reports that he wrote to *Moody Monthly* in 1990 “concerning the inequity of publishing only one side of the story” (p. 205). Apparently, there was no response to his initial letter. Then, however,

After a follow up letter I received a reply from Joseph M. Stowell, II, President of Moody Bible Institute which sponsors *Moody Monthly Magazine*. He affirmed it was the belief of Dr. George Sweeting now Chancellor, and himself as the current President of Moody that King James was in fact a homosexual, and that such reporting was “reliable data and spiritual nourishment for God’s people” (p. 205).

In his reply to Coston’s response that “to be fair a balance of both sides of the issue should be represented,” Stowell said that if Moody decided to print material “in the area of Bible versions, we will consider your interest in being part of the project” (p. 205). Coston responded that 6 years had elapsed since *Moody Monthly* had “printed errant historical information, gossip and to prevent negative fallout they should immediately reconsider their position” (p. 205). Coston contends that to his “point blank” question as to when they

planned to “do justice to this topic,” Stowell responded that they had “no plans in the immediate future to reproduce the subject” (p. 205).

As the subtitle—“Unjustly Accused?”—intimates, the tone of Coston’s work is decidedly anti-gay. In his view, King James has been *accused* of homosexuality, and he devotes a whole chapter to “Law & History,” in which he contends that what we have in the historiography of King James is a case of defamation of character. He identifies those who argue that King James had homoerotic tendencies or leanings as proponents of the “critical” view because anyone who thinks that King James was gay or bisexual is necessarily criticizing both the King and the Bible that bears his name. He observes that “due to the tenaciousness of the critical theory (i.e., that King James was a homosexual) being ingrained in the minds of many, the spiritual character of James has suffered” (p. 333).

Although Coston is not a professional historian, he attempts to show that the claims that King James had homosexual tendencies are not grounded in what he calls “classical historical methodology” (p. 213). The “critical” view, he argues, is fueled by various agendas. Some of James’s “accusers” are motivated by anti-Scottish sentiments: “I posit that if James were by birth an Englishman as king, that his contemporaries and most historians would present a much different view of James than is currently offered” (p. 81). He adds:

Most of those who are alleged to have had sexual indiscretions with James were either Scottish (Robert Carr the Earl of Sommerset etc.), or Englishmen thought to have sold out to the Scots and/or held positions of power that were desired by others and jealously sought after but not attained, and thus held in contempt (George Villiers the Duke of Buckingham), or family members of James from counties politically out of favor with England (e.g. James’ cousin, Esme Stuart from France), and suspect for religious purposes (pp. 85–86).

But when James is understood objectively and in context, Coston suggests that James will be seen as a godly man and a family man. And since he was godly and virtuous, he therefore could not have had homosexual tendencies, so Coston (circularly) argues throughout the book. In his words, “James was a Godly King—not a homosexual/bisexual” (p. 341).

This circular reasoning aside, Coston does marshal some interesting evidence to challenge the claim that King James had homosexual tendencies. First, as we will discuss further below, many of James’s contemporaries called him effeminate, especially because he would not commit England to war. Coston is familiar with these effeminacy claims, and he notes in response that James encouraged the preachers in London to condemn female transvestitism, which had become faddish in that city (p. 4). In Coston’s view, this is sufficient evidence to prove that King James could not have been effeminate. He also states that the “lines of masculinity and femininity were not the same and not exactly or comparably delineated as some ignorant people think” (p. 158). Men can love other men, and write poems for each other, without being effeminate.

Second, much is made of the fact that King James often kissed his favorites, and hung on them, in public. But all this talk of kissing, he asserts, “was a phenomenon common to the period in which James lived” (p. 13). What is harder for Coston to explain is that it appears that King James *French-kissed* other men in public. But here Coston offers a physiological explanation: While it appeared that he French-kissed men, this was, in fact, due to his enlarged tongue (p. 224).

This claim leads Coston to a third point which involves King James’s physical disabilities. He writes, “James’s disabilities are not taken sufficiently into account when

viewing James's relationships with his friends and servants" (p. 36). Even as his weak jaw and enlarged tongue explains his drooling that could have been mistaken for French kissing, his general physical weakness accounts for his habit of hanging on other men.

Fourth, in light of the fact that the bedchamber is often cited as evidence for James's homosexual tendencies, Coston claims that King James's bedchamber practices were nothing out of the ordinary—especially given his physical disabilities—as these practices helped protect the King against plots against his life. Whether Coston is drawing here on his own experience as a Presidential escort is hard to say. In any event, he notes that many “monarchs of James [sic] period commonly slept with attendants on the bed, or at the foot of the bed, had servants dress them in their underwear, and hold buckets while they urinated in them, and even assisted them in observing their bowel movements” (p. 82).

Fifth, as will be noted in greater detail below, several historians have pointed to the estranged relationship between James and his wife and have used this evidence in support of their view that he had homosexual tendencies. Coston, however, does not grant this point. If their relationship was so estranged, he asks, how did they have so many children, and why would he have suffered depression after her death? (p. 38). He points out that “James wrote much good poetry to Anne while alive, praising her beauty and command over his heart and his love to her” (p. 41). Coston quotes in this connection the view of “the eminently critical author D. H. Wilson” (1956) that “[h]e remained infatuated with his bride, whose praises he sung in sonnets and in other verse” (Coston 1996, p. 41, citing Wilson 1956, p. 93).

Sixth, while others, especially Bergeron (1999) have examined James's letters in context and identified the theme of homoeroticism in them, Coston is not impressed by these studies because, on the basis of his own reading of these letters, he has concluded that “James indeed was sentimental, but far from homosexual/bisexual” (Coston 1996, p. 75).

In short, Coston argues that there is little evidence to suggest that King James was a homosexual person, and the evidence that we seem to have needs to be interpreted in light of the historical context. He claims that this, however, has not been done. Male kissing, for example, was a common part of royal affairs, as was men sleeping together and speaking affectionately to one another. The claims made by James's own contemporaries were motivated, in his view, by bias and prejudice, especially anti-Scottish sentiment, and should therefore be discounted. He also argues that King James was a godly man of good character, and homosexual behavior simply cannot fit with a godly life. His greatest fear, it seems, is that if King James were to be queered, we may also be: “In a word, if we let it happen to James it can happen to us!” (p. 127) and “in no wise should we let this happen” (p. 128). Thus, for Coston, the stakes involved in challenging the queering of King James are high indeed!

We would summarize his arguments that are not merely circular (i.e., James was a godly man, godly men are not homosexual, therefore James could not be homosexual) as follows: (1) contemporaries of James who accused him of homosexuality were his political adversaries and guilty of anti-Scottish bigotry; and (2) when our own contemporaries “accuse” James of homosexuality, they are misreading the evidence. We ourselves do not find his own arguments compelling. We were put off by his negative comments regarding psychohistory, for example, “History is not a collection of unprovable assumptions, allegations, opinions and/or rumors. This is psycho-history or an offshoot thereof but not pure history” (p. 124). His assumption that there is such a thing



as “pure history” and the implication that his book is an example of such historical “purity” is also rather mind-boggling. We were also put off by the homophobia—here a literal fear of homosexuality—that seems to be driving his arguments: “The most James’ statements can prove is that he had a close personal attachment to his friends and family—and if this convicts one of homosexuality we are all in BIG trouble” (p. 69).

On the other hand, we recognize the validity of one general point that Coston makes, namely, that the interpretation of the evidence is not self-evident. This very point should, in fact, disabuse him of his own assumption that writing history can ever be “pure.” Coston is right that we cannot prove that James engaged in particular sexual acts, such as anal intercourse, with his favorites. But he concludes from this lack of certainty about particular acts that James therefore did *not* have homosexual tendencies.

As we will see, the case for or against James’s homosexual tendencies cannot, finally, be settled on such clear-cut behavioral grounds. It depends on how one reads the evidence that is available to us. In this regard, it is rather ironic that Coston himself provides a great deal of evidence suggesting that James did in fact have homoerotic feelings toward several men in the course of his adult life. He writes, “James kept a miniature picture of [George] Villiers close by his heart” (p. 180). If this had been a miniature picture of a woman, would we not have concluded that he had strong emotional feelings toward her? A few pages later, Coston states, “It is admitted that James did comment on the handsomeness of Villiers, but it must be remembered that many men in England and Europe also made the same such observations” (p. 189). No doubt they did. But this rebuttal does not count either for or against the view that James therefore was not homo-erotically attracted to Villiers. Finally, noting that some have argued that David and Jonathan and Jesus and John “were in all probability homosexual lovers,” he argues that “simply because Biblical characters kissed, professed their love, described their relationship as a union or bond, and the like, this cannot prove homosexual tendencies. The same is true with James” (p. 259). But if a man like King James finds another man handsome, keeps a picture of this man close by his heart, kisses him and professes his love in public, and shares his bed with him, are we prohibited from classifying this behavior as manifesting “homosexual tendencies” merely because we do not have evidence of anal intercourse? And if these particular behaviors cannot be described as homoerotic, one is left to wonder what sort of actions *would* qualify?

Coston’s skepticism is virtually boundless. It seems that no matter what evidence might be put forward in support of King James’s homosexual tendencies, he would find grounds for dismissing it. If, for example, we knew that James fondled Villiers, we can easily imagine Coston responding: “Just because James and Villiers stroked each other’s penises does not mean that James had homosexual tendencies. Skin is only skin, after all, and in James’s time this was just like shaking hands, a common practice in the English court. Moreover, many men in England and Europe did the same. Do you seriously think that they, too, had homosexual tendencies?”

Coston is not content to defend the KJV. He also wants to discredit the NIV. He takes *Moody Monthly* to task for refusing “to expose facts of admitted known homosexuals they have knowledge of as the case with the New International Version (NIV) (i.e., Virginia Mollenkot [sic])” (p. 207). As noted earlier, Ankenberg and Weldon (1996), defenders of the NIV, acknowledge that Virginia Mollenkott was involved with the NIV translation. But they point out that “once her sexual views were known, she was asked to resign” and further note that had Kenneth Barker, the general editor of the NIV, known of Mollenkott’s “views,” he “would not have consulted her at all” (p. 22). In this sense, Ankenberg and

Weldon agree with Riplinger and Costen: Homosexual persons involved with Bible translation somehow taint the final project.

But why does it matter if King James had homosexual tendencies? And why does it matter that Virginia Mollenkott is a lesbian? Why would either of these facts degrade either translation? Dr. John R. MacLennan of Glasgow, Scotland, provides a clue in his Foreword to Coston's book. He writes:

Throughout human history God has always prepared men and women for special purposes. Many of those chosen have been vilified and slandered terribly by the enemies of God's grace. It was no mere accident but a decree of Divine Grace that the Bible was translated into the English language. It was no accident that such well qualified men were available for the great task of translating the Word of God into English, and it was no mere chance that such a godly King reigned over Great Britain (p. xxxviii).

His point is clear: the KJV came about because of a confluence of circumstances that bore the mark of God Himself. England had men who were "well qualified" for the task of translating the Bible, but what they lacked before King James came to England was the "godly King" who alone could authorize them to set to work. But whenever men set out to do the will of God, there are other men who put obstacles in their path, hoping to cause them to fail and thereby defeat Divine Grace itself. In King James's case, there were men who wanted him to fail in his godly mission because he was a Scotsman. Thus, like Coston, MacLennan dismisses all contemporary references to King James's homosexual tendencies on the ground that they were motivated by anti-Scottish bias. He continues: "It tormented many in England that it was a Scottish King who after centuries of warfare finally united Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland into what is known today as the British Empire" (p. xxx). These "charges" against King James "have lain dormant for hundreds of years," but now, four centuries later, "the enemies of God's Grace are mobilizing to attack the Word of God" (p. xxx). Specifically, "some 'pseudo-historians'" have "picked up these charges hoping that their vilification of King James would tarnish the Bible that bears his name and draw those weak in the faith away from God's word to a more 'accurate translation'" (p. xxx).

So this is where the matter stands: on the one hand, there is what Coston calls "the official position" of the Moody Bible Institute that the article by Karen Ann Wojahn provides "reliable data" that King James was the homosexual partner of Esme Stuart D'Aubigny and that this is itself grounds for preferring translations of the Bible other than the KJV. As Wojahn puts it, "What right did [King James] have to 'authorize' Scripture? Was he a biblical Christian, that a Bible should bear his name?" (Wojahn 1985, p. 87). In her view and that of the President and Chancellor of Moody Bible Institute, the answer is no. Why would God have chosen a man who was not "a biblical Christian" to carry out His desire to make His Word available in English translation? On the other hand, there is Coston's view that those who allege that King James had homosexual tendencies are motivated by a desire to discredit the Bible that bears his name. To Coston, the fact that these allegations would, if true, discredit the KJV itself makes it imperative that they be proven false. Conversely, the fact that the NIV translation had one—possibly more—"admitted known homosexuals" on its editorial board is conclusive evidence that God could not have authorized this translation (i.e., a translation that soft-pedals the biblical condemnation of sodomy).

What we have, then, is a stalemate, and there seems to be no resolution in sight. Due to our own irenic dispositions and our aversion to polemics—traits that, as we will show, we



share with King James himself—it occurred to us that there might be such a resolution, one that offered a third alternative to the ones presented here (see Capps 2005, pp.152–161 on the quest for a third alternative). As good psychotherapists know, however, finding a third alternative to break through the “damned if I do, damned if I don’t” conflict with which many of their clients are burdened typically involves hard work, often requiring some digging into the past to uncover the historical roots of the conflict itself. An obvious place to begin in the case that concerns us here is with King James’s surprising decision to commission a new English translation of the Bible.

### **The KJV: how it came to be**

In *In the Beginning*, McGrath (2001), Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford University, tells an engaging story of how the King James Bible came to be, and of its enormous effects on British language and culture. We will limit our discussion here to what prompted King James to commission the translation and production of a new English Bible.

Even if they have not had any direct experience with the King James Version of the Bible, most Christians know about it, and they assume that it was the first translation of the Bible into the English language. This assumption is, in fact, false. William Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament into English was published at Worms, Germany, in 1526 and smuggled into England (McGrath 2001, p. 73). This was 75 years before the Authorized Version (popularly known as the King James Version) was first printed in 1611. In the meantime, a translation of the whole Bible was published in 1560. It came to be known as the Geneva Bible because the translating was done in Geneva, Switzerland. It was largely the work of William Whittingham who was assisted by Anthony Gilby and Thomas Sampson (McGrath 2001, p. 114). The New Testament was based on Tyndale’s English translation, with some significant modifications, while the Old Testament was entirely new.

The Geneva Bible found its way into England and was very popular (McGrath 2001, p. 78). A product of Puritanism, it was more than a translation of the Bible because it offered additional detailed comments on critical verses. Many of these commentaries, set alongside Old Testament passages that told of the evil and corruption of the kings of Israel, emphasized the obligation of God-fearing people to disobey the commands of the king when these commands are in conflict with the will of God (McGrath 2001, p. 143). Not surprisingly, King James developed a strong personal dislike for the Geneva Bible, as did the bishops of the Church of England, and supplanting the Geneva Bible with one of their own was to their mutual advantage.

The Hampton Court Conference convened in mid-January, 1604, and, presided over by King James himself, was instrumental in bringing the King James Bible into being (McGrath 2001, p. 156). The Puritan leaders who attended the conference hoped that it would authorize the Geneva Bible for use in churches and public worship, thus reversing earlier prohibitions introduced by Archbishop Whitgift. Although King James had no interest in authorizing the Geneva Bible, he had been recently installed as the King of England (having already served as King of Scotland from 1567, a year after he was born), and he was anxious to be seen as conciliatory toward the English Puritans. None of the items on the Puritan leaders’ agenda appealed to him or to the bishops, however, and it appeared that the conference would result in the endorsement of something very like the current status quo. This would have pleased the bishops and alienated the Puritans.

Then, however, John Reynolds, the leader of the Puritan delegation, surprised the conferees by proposing a new Bible translation (McGrath 2001, p. 161). Having recognized that the Puritan demand for recognition of the Geneva Bible as the only Bible authorized to be read in the churches would go down to defeat, he evidently believed that his proposal, if adopted, would open the way for a number of translations to be authorized for use in public worship, including the Geneva Bible. When Bishop Bancroft, the leader of the Anglican delegation, expressed his opposition to this proposal, King James “saw his opening”:

Here was a major concession he could make without causing any pressing difficulties to anyone. A translation of this magnitude took time, so he was not committing himself to anything with major short-term implications. The longer the translation took, the better. It would postpone religious controversy to an indeterminate point in the future. He concurred immediately with the suggestion (McGrath 2001, pp. 161–162).

He directed the “best-learned in both universities”—Oxford and Cambridge—to begin work on a new translation of the Bible. Their work was to be reviewed by the bishops, then presented to the Privy Council, and finally ratified by royal authority so that, as King James put it, “the whole church would be bound by it, and none other” (quoted in McGrath 2001, p. 163). It would contain no marginal notes and would be used in all the churches of England only during public worship. Bishop Bancroft now became a vigorous supporter of the idea of a new translation because the stipulations that were adopted preserved the vested interests of the Church of England against Roman Catholics on the one hand and Puritans on the other (McGrath, p. 164). Furthermore, Bancroft was able to secure for himself a leading role in the selection of the translators and then in limiting their freedom. Of course, his support for the project would win the king’s favor at the very time that Archbishop Whitgift, who was in poor health, would need to be replaced. His diligence in supporting the new translation paid off; he became the new archbishop in October 1604.

King James directed that the Bible would be divided into six sections, with roughly the same number of men allocated to the translation of each section (McGrath 2001, p. 178). Each group would consist of nine men, making a total of 54 men overall. Although fewer than 54 men have been identified as having worked on the 6 year project, this may have been due to the early deaths of several. Some of the groups completed their work in 1608, others in 1609, and still others in 1610. Twelve delegates selected from the six groups then convened and listened as the draft translations were read orally. This procedure was adopted because “the King James Bible was designed to be read publicly in church, and there is no doubt that the translators gave careful consideration to ensuring that the translation could be understood by those *to whom it was read*, rather than just those who read it” (McGrath 2001, p. 187, emphasis in original). Only a few changes, however, resulted from this procedure. The final draft was delivered to the printer in 1611 (the precise date is unknown).

Because the Puritans continued to mistrust the new translation (in part because it included the Apocrypha), King James’s hope that the Authorized Version would become the Bible of the whole English populace was disappointed. The Geneva Bible remained the Bible of the Puritans, while the King James Bible was the Bible of the Anglican establishment (McGrath 2001, p. 280). Many of the families who settled the American colonies had one book only—the Bible—and “the evidence suggests that the first English Bible to be brought to the new World was the Geneva Bible. Not only had this been

available longer, it was the translation of choice for the Puritans, who valued its extensive annotations” (McGrath 2001, p. 293). In 1782, however, the U. S. Congress approved the efforts of Robert Aitkin (who immigrated from Scotland to Philadelphia in 1769 and quickly established himself as a printer and publisher) to print an American Bible. The translation he used was the King James Version (with the Apocrypha omitted). McGrath notes that Aitkin’s

activities had ensured that the King James Bible—despite its British establishment pedigree—would be the translation of choice of the United States. Even in the closing decades of the twentieth century American Christianity continued its love affair with this translation. As rival translations—such as the Revised Standard Version—began to gain the upper hand in the period immediately following the Second World War, a staunch defense of the integrity of the King James Bible was mounted by its supporters in the United States. It was argued that the King James Bible was more accurate as a translation, was based on a more reliable text than its rivals, and used somber and sober language appropriate to such a dignified topic. A series of popular polemical works argued that the King James Bible alone represented the authentic “Word of God”; all other versions involved distortions, additions, or other changes detrimental to the reliability of the text. Although these views are typical of a decided minority of conservative American Protestants, they remain an important witness to the continued respect and admiration in which the King James Bible is widely held (McGrath 2001, p. 299).

McGrath does not discuss King James personally in any great detail, but he does make a brief allusion to his homosexual tendencies. In noting that the commissioning of the new translation of the Bible “was one of the first positive acts of the new king of England” (p. 171), McGrath indicates that James was under severe criticism from almost the very beginning of his English reign. He mentions in this regard a spectacular performance of Ben Jonson’s *The Masque of Blackness*, “which caused consternation and scandal, partly on account of its extravagance,” and then alludes to James’s homosexual tendencies:

Further concerns were expressed over the king’s increasingly obvious homosexual tendencies, which led to certain royal favorites being granted favors that were the subject of much comment and envy. Robert Carr, some twenty years younger than James, was one such favorite: he became the earl of Somerset in 1613. Although James fondled and kissed his favorites in what was widely regarded as a lecherous manner in public, the court was prepared to believe that his private behavior was somewhat more restrained (pp. 170–171).

Unlike his thorough account of how the King James Bible came into being, McGrath’s allusion to King James’s “homosexual tendencies” is exceedingly brief, a three sentence summary of a story that is equally fascinating. Bergeron’s (1991) *Royal Family, Royal Lovers: King James and England and Scotland* and Young’s (2000) *James VI and I and the History of Homosexuality* provide excellent biographical material relating to James’s “homosexual tendencies” and how these tendencies were understood and interpreted by James’s own contemporaries. To place the issue of James’s homosexual tendencies in context, it is necessary for us to provide a brief account of King James’s family history, centering especially on the fact that he was separated from his mother when barely a year old, had no contact whatsoever with his father, and had a very troubled marriage.

### King James's family history

James was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on June 19, 1566. He was the son of Mary Queen of Scots. That he was born at all was something of a miracle. As Bergeron portrays the situation, just a few months earlier in March,

Mary watched in horror as her husband, Lord Darnley, and other conspirators in a struggle for power killed her secretary David Riccio in the Palace of Holyroodhouse. They threatened her, Darnley holding her arms, and apparently hoped to induce a miscarriage. From that horrifying experience Mary lost whatever shred of respect she still had for her husband; she seemed all the more determined to give birth to her child successfully (Bergeron 1991, p. 19).

Young adds that “Although Riccio was dead, the rumor survived that he was the father of Mary’s child. Born 3 months later, on 19 June 1566, James would always be sensitive about this false and painful rumor concerning his legitimacy” (Young 2000, p. 8). The suspicion that her child was the son of her Italian secretary may simply have served as the pretext for the murder of Riccio, and Darnley’s attempt to cause Mary to miscarry may indicate that he genuinely believed that Riccio was the father of the child. In any event, Darnley initially denied that he was James’s father, but Mary forced him to acknowledge his paternity. He did not attend James’s baptism, however, which was conducted according to Catholic rites (Bergeron 1991, p. 21).

The following year, Darnley, who was already suffering from syphilis, which would have been fatal in that era, died in an explosion:

His death, or murder, to be precise, had Mary’s tacit approval. She was now free to pursue her new passion, the earl of Bothwell. Indeed, in a Protestant ceremony in May, they were married. But the moral and political consequences of this marriage forced both of them into separate exile. In fact, the Scottish lords required Mary to abdicate the throne in favor of her infant son. She fled from Scotland, never to see her son again (Bergeron 1991, p. 21).

On July 29, 1567, Mary’s 13-month-old child became King James VI of Scotland. In his early years, James was in the custody of the earl of Mar and his family, who moved into Stirling Castle, and, as Bergeron (1991, p. 21) notes, “the earl’s family was as close as James would come to understanding family life.” On August 3, 1586, Mary was arrested for plotting against the life of Elizabeth, Queen of England. James, then 20-years old, sent emissaries to intervene in behalf of convicted mother, “but he also sent conflicting signals, letting Elizabeth and her government understand that there would be no severe repercussions should Mary be executed” (p. 42). Citing letters that James and Mary wrote one another during this time, Bergeron notes that James asserted to his mother that he had been constant in his efforts to secure her freedom—“I pray you not to take me to be a chameleon”—while Mary called him “a liar and a double dealer” (p. 43).

Mary was executed on February 8, 1587. While some of James’s supporters recommended that he avenge her death, and he himself talked as if he would, Bergeron (1991, p. 44) notes that “James had no intention of avenging his mother’s death; he had truly come to desire it.” Thus, even as his mother had tacitly approved the murder of his father, so James tacitly supported the execution of his mother. Her death, however, continued to weigh on James’s mind:

With Mary dead and his path thereby eased toward the English throne, James nevertheless remained troubled by her execution and his part in it. His reaction all the

way through 1612 suggests that he could not readily assuage his guilt about her. No longer a force in his personal and political life, she lingered in his psychological life as he attempted in several ways to revise history to suit the image of himself as a dutiful son (Bergeron 1991, p. 45).

His access to the English throne was based on the fact that his cousin, Queen Elizabeth, did not have a male heir, and this placed him directly in line for the English title. Now that his mother was safely out of the way, James began to refer to Elizabeth as his “mother,” and, as Bergeron points out,

In many ways Elizabeth functioned as surrogate family for one who knew neither father nor mother, brother nor sister. We remind ourselves that James’s image of the queen came as the product of discourse—letters exchanged, messages sent. Having never met his cousin, James created an image of her, rather as he had of his own mother, through documents that came to him—the raw materials that fed his imagination. In a 1586 document in which Elizabeth assured James of an annual pension and of his potential claim to the English throne, she also used familial terms, claiming to have had “a special and motherlye cair over our said darrest brother and cousing ever since his byrthe, respecting him as our owne sone.” When James made the political decision to abandon Mary’s idea of Association [in which she and James would share the rule of Scotland] and to embrace the alliance with England, he essentially accepted the mother-substitute in preference to his natural mother. This accounts at least in part for his silence concerning his mother’s trial and execution (pp. 48–49).

Although Elizabeth was, for James, a mother-substitute, this did not preclude the possibility in his own mind that she might also become his wife. In August 1586, the very month that his mother had been charged with treason and was awaiting trial, he made an offer of marriage to Elizabeth (who was 33 years his senior) on the grounds that it might be of benefit to the realm. He admitted to the man to whom he later confided this information, however, that she showed no inclination to accept his offer (p. 48). As Bergeron (1991) points out:

No event more clearly reflects James’s calculated abandonment of his natural mother and his attempt to ingratiate himself further with Elizabeth. Since James never met Elizabeth, he seemed to have trouble deciding whether she was his sister, mother, or possible wife. She existed as a political reality but otherwise as an idealized figment of his imagination (p. 48).

A new chapter began in James’s life 2 years after Mary’s death. In 1589, when he was 23-years old, he married Princess Anne of Denmark. As he readied himself to sail to Denmark to claim Anne as his bride, he wrote a letter to the people of Scotland in which he explained his apparent delay in getting married: “The reasons were that I was alone, without father or mother, brother or sister, king of this realm and heir apparent of England” (quoted in Bergeron 1991, p. 3). As Bergeron suggests, he was implicitly acknowledging that “he did not truly know what a family was. Cut off from routine family involvement, James, though surrounded by much noise, some adulation, and occasional threats, lived in a kind of silent world, untouched by a love that may occur in family bonds” (p. 3). Then, presaging the unhappiness of James’s marriage to Anne, Bergeron adds, “Small wonder that he had such difficulty in understanding what it meant to be a husband and a father. He looked at the canvas of familial experience, and it stared back in unrelieved whiteness” (p. 3).

What Bergeron could also have noted is that James may have been engaging here in a sort of equivocation, using his lack of family experience as a cover for his lack of interest in intimacy with women. In *James VI and the History of Homosexuality*, Young (2000) points out that pressures were mounting for James to marry: “Up to this point he had shown no interest in women. As one observer reported, he ‘never regards the company of any woman, not so much as in any dalliance.’ James himself wrote, ‘God is my witness I could have abstained longer’” (p. 14). As Young points out, in the letter James wrote to the people of Scotland, he noted that as king of Scotland and heir apparent to the throne of England, he needed heirs of his own to strengthen his position. He went on to acknowledge that his lack of heirs had “bred disdain,” and that “I was generally found fault with by all men for the delaying so long of my marriage,” and that people had even begun to suspect “my inability as if I were a barren stock” (p. 14).

James’s trip to claim the 14-year-old Anne as his bride was their first meeting together. As Bergeron (1991, p. 50) points out, he became convinced that he was in love with her on the basis of her picture and reports of her beauty. After an attempt to get Anne to Scotland was stymied by violent seas, James sailed to Norway, and made his way to Oslo, where Anne awaited him. They were married in Oslo on November 23, 1589, then traveled to Denmark for another wedding ceremony according to Lutheran rites. They returned together to Scotland on May 1, 1590.

Anne was an instant success in Scotland; her attractiveness and kind manner immediately endeared her to the people (Bergeron 1991, p. 52). But, as Bergeron puts it, “feasting in Copenhagen and pageants in Edinburgh do not a marriage make,” and “the early flush of romantic enthusiasm” soon faded (p. 53). Anne “found herself far removed from the warmth of her own family,” and her husband, “rather uncouth of manner and given to lecturing her, often seemed indifferent to her needs and intent on controlling her” (p. 53). In 1593, Anne became pregnant, and the impending birth of their first child, Prince Henry, spurred new joy. But over the next several years of their marriage, James and Anne “bickered” over the destiny of their children. She “wanted to fulfill her maternal instincts and nurture her own children” while he “had other ideas; he wanted to be sure that he controlled the royal children” (p. 53).

Shortly after Prince Henry’s birth on February 19, 1594, James decided that his son would be placed in the custody of the earl of Mar and his mother, the same man who had cared for James during his own infancy and childhood. Anne resisted this plan and fought to regain custody of her son. The two of them battled throughout 1595 and well into 1596. In Bergeron’s (1991, p. 56) view, each had a solid case: Anne wanted to be a mother to her child, and James wanted to offer maximum security and protection to this fragile infant, the heir to the Scottish throne. But they were unable to work out a compromise and James’s will prevailed, to the lasting resentment of his young wife. On August 19, 1596, Anne gave birth to another child, whom James named Elizabeth, “thereby tightening his grasp on the succession to the English throne” (p. 59). In 1598 another daughter, named Margaret, was born, but she lived only 2 years. On November 19, 1600, Anne gave birth to a second son, who was named Charles. A contemporary noted at the time that James made it clear to Anne that, given his dislike for her at the time, he also disliked this newborn son and felt that he should be baptized with little fanfare. Anne wanted to postpone the baptism until spring, when her brother, King Christian IV of Denmark, could attend, but plans for a December baptism proceeded, and Anne refused to attend it. Charles was sent to live in the household of Alexander Seton, Lord Fyvie. In January 1602, a third son, Robert, was born, but he died 4 months later. Given the genuine sorrow of the royal couple over this loss, arrangements were made for their son Henry to



come for several days to comfort his mother, “a poignant moment that James at least allowed” (p. 61).

One year after the death of Robert, Queen Elizabeth died, and on March 26, 1603, James received the news that he had been chosen King of England (Bergeron 1991, p. 61). On April 5, James left for England alone, with the intention that his family would come later. Anne was pregnant again. With her husband on the road to London, Anne tried once again to gain custody of 9-year-old Prince Henry, basing her renewed effort on a letter from Prince Henry in which he expressed regret over his father’s absence and his desire that his mother would fill the void he felt in his life. When she was rebuffed by the earl of Mar, she had a miscarriage. Receiving the news of her miscarriage, James relented, and allowed Anne and Henry to travel together to England. Bergeron suggests that James and Anne had “reached an understanding of one another. We certainly cannot call it romantic; at best we can note a sense of accommodation that begins to govern their relationship” (p. 62).

When James assumed the throne in 1603, one of his first acts was “to confront the issue of his long-dead mother” (Bergeron 1991, p. 73). In August he had a rich pall of velvet hung over her grave in Peterborough Cathedral. Bergeron notes that virtually every modern interpreter “has seen this action as the beginning of some kind of expiation” (p. 73), and mentions two additional steps that James took in “confronting his mother’s death.” In 1605 Anne gave birth to a daughter, and James named her Mary, in honor of his mother. This meant that the first royal child to be born on English soil in over 80 years bore the name of the executed queen of Scotland. Then he ordered the construction of an elaborate tomb for his mother in Westminster Abbey. Bergeron does not indicate the date that the order was issued, but the tomb was ready to receive her remains in 1612. On October 8, 1612, her body moved in solemn procession through London to its final resting place. Bergeron (1991) comments:

James had finally put to rest his mother and the guilt that he bore about her fate. His mother became memorialized in a tomb—a tangible sign of James’s stilled conscience. This burial in a magnificent tomb also completed James’s fiction of himself as dutiful son, a fiction ironically set into motion by her death, as if her death liberated him not only politically but also imaginatively (p. 74).

In light of the fact that James’s effort to expiate his guilt over his mother’s death began when he assumed the throne of England in 1603, we believe that it was more than coincidental that his commissioning of the new translation of the Bible occurred at the very time that he was “confronting” his mother’s death. In its own way, the Bible translation that was to bear his own name was part of this expiation process. We will return to this issue later.

In 1606 Anne was pregnant again, and on June 22 she gave birth to another daughter. She was named Sophia in honor of Anne’s mother. The baby lived only a few hours and died on the day of her birth. Bergeron (1991) comments:

After seven births and three miscarriages, there would be no more children. Anne did not try to console James or herself, as she had after the death of Robert, that they would soon have another child. A gulf of silence that already existed between husband and wife would widen. After Sophia’s birth and death, Anne sank into a desperate depression (p. 81).

The following year their daughter Mary died, and she was placed in her final resting place near her sister Sophia without benefit of a funeral. When she died, James continued with his plans to go hunting. Bergeron notes that one biographer interpreted James’s reaction to his

daughter's death as a case of "psychic numbing" (p. 83). Even so, to Bergeron, the episode is disturbing:

An obvious insensitivity on the part of both Anne and James strongly suggests that something had been happening to parental and familial sensibilities: an indifference that diminished human feelings had begun to take hold. James's hunting and continuing to live his indulgent life in the immediate aftermath of Mary's death, her almost anonymous burial, and Anne's remoteness speak tellingly about the royal family, one no longer held tightly together by emotional bonds. In the pounding of hooves, the barking of dogs, the scurrying of pursued animals in the chase, we may hear a silent disregard of parental demands (p. 83).

While not discounting these interpretations, we would also conjecture that the anonymous burial of Mary was due, in no small measure, to the fact that she was James's mother's namesake. It is entirely conceivable that he considered that her death to be the price—the final expiation—he was to pay for his failure to intervene in his mother's behalf 20 years earlier. Given his knowledge of the Bible that was to bear his own name, he was surely aware of the prophet Nathan's reproof of King David and of his assurance that David himself would not die but "the child also *that* is born unto you shall surely die" (2 Samuel 12:14 KJV). He could commission a Bible that excluded commentary relating the guilty behaviors of the kings of Israel to the actions of the English monarchy, but he could not silence his own conscience which would attest to his guilt by association.

The year 1610 marked the 16-year-old Henry's investiture as Prince of Wales. As heir apparent to the throne, he was very popular with the citizenry. His appearance as that of a soft-spoken courageous warrior contrasted greatly with the public image of his father as garrulous and self-indulgent. But he seems to have been careful not to offend his father. It also fell to him, as the eldest son, to attempt to mediate between his quarreling parents. From 1610–1612 James was actively involved in securing a marriage partner for Henry, and although Henry indicated that he was in no hurry to marry, he wished "to see my Father a grandfather" (quoted in Bergeron 1991, p. 105). Various potential matches—Spanish, Italian, French—were proposed but, for one reason or another, they did not materialize. In late October 1612, however, King James's privy council approved a match between Prince Henry and Maria, the third daughter of the duke of Savoy, and the very same day Henry took ill. That very month, the body of James's mother was re-interred in the tomb in Westminster Abbey. Henry died, possibly of typhoid fever, on November 5.

While each parent visited Henry during his illness, they went to separate residences as the fateful time drew near, and James did not go to console Anne after receiving the news of his eldest son's death (Bergeron 1991, p. 109). Neither parent attended Henry's funeral in early December. While there is no reason to assume that Henry's death was due to anything other than physical causes, the fact that it occurred when marriage negotiations were being made in his behalf may have contributed to his vulnerability to illness. In a letter to his father shortly before he took to his bed, Prince Henry expressed his desire that his father resolve the marriage issue, indicating that he was determined "my part to play, which is to be in love with any of them" (p. 106).

With Henry's death, Princess Elizabeth became an increasingly important member of the royal family, due, in no small measure, to the fact that she was named after Queen Elizabeth (Bergeron 1991, p. 111). When she married Frederick, Elector Palatine of Germany, her father's choice, in February 1613, 3 months after Prince Henry's death, two great hopes for the kingdom had been lost, one by death and the other by marriage. Seven years later,

her marriage to Frederick was to become a major political problem for James when Spanish forces invaded the Palatinate and Frederick and Elizabeth fled for safety to The Hague in The Netherlands (Bergeron, p. 150). Elizabeth pleaded with her father to commit English troops to the restoration of Frederick's rightful claim to the Palatinate and Bohemia, but James refused to intervene on the grounds that Frederick had gone against his father-in-law's advice by supporting a Bohemian insurrection against Ferdinand, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and accepting the Bohemians' election of him as their new king. In James's view, he had dug his own grave, and it was neither the duty nor the prerogative of the King of England to come to his assistance. Why didn't Ferdinand and Elizabeth, having lost their kingdoms in Europe, not seek refuge in England? Because James would not allow it. He feared that Elizabeth would use her popularity with the people to stir their passions, rousing the Puritans and others who were opposed to Spain. Jealousy, however, was also a factor, as Elizabeth's "presence would have deflected attention from his reign, and James did not like royal competition for attention" (p. 151).

Queen Anne became ill in January 1619 and a contemporary noted that James did not visit her at Hampton Court where she lay (Bergeron 1991, p. 139). Nor was he at her bedside when she died on March 2, 1619. Typically, the funerals of members of the royal family took place about a month after the death, but Anne's funeral was delayed as James and the court engaged in an unseemly search for money to pay for a funeral. A court insider noted that there was talk of melting the Queen's golden plate and making coins from it, and of selling or pawning her jewels for "good value" (Bergeron, p. 162). Finally, on May 13, about 10 weeks after her death, a funeral took place. Prince Charles, who would succeed to the throne when his father died 6 years later, attended the funeral, but James did not. James wrote a letter to Anne's brother, King Christian IV of Denmark, on the day of her death, praising her "felicity of departure" and expressing the hope that he might "conclude the brief drama of this life" in a similar spirit (Bergeron, p.141). He was not, however, there to observe her "departure," suggesting that he was writing for public consumption. As Bergeron points out: "Certainly James's assertion of Anne's saint-like departure did not square with the facts; only under pressure of the bishops did she prepare herself for death. As in other letters that James wrote to his brother-in-law, he did not hesitate to create a fiction of familial love, to put the best face on events" (p. 141).

Six years later, in early March 1625, James himself became ill and within a few days it was evident that the illness was serious. He died on March 27. A contemporary observed: "King James went off the stage not much lamented; and left in legacy to his Son, a discontented People; an unnecessary, expensive War; an incumbred Revenue, and an exhausted Treasury" (Bergeron 1991, p. 185). Bergeron notes that others "joined in such bleak assessments" (p. 185). Nine thousand persons attended the royal funeral which, ironically, was probably the only funeral that King James ever attended. Bergeron observes:

The world now imposed its ceremonies and fictions on the king. Bishop John Williams preached the funeral sermon, itself lasting over two hours. [John] Chamberlain [a court insider] concluded, "In summe all was performed with great magnificence, but the order was very confused and disorderly." Magnificent but disorderly—what an apt image of and commentary on James himself, his government, and his personal life (p. 186).

For Bergeron, it is most telling that the bishop's 2 hour sermon contained "not a word about James's relationship with or love for his family" (p. 186). He concludes that James had

been unable to “reconcile his political responsibilities with familial demands,” and that this man “who had known neither father nor mother, brother nor sister, never fully comprehended the role of parent or husband, torn by conflicting and irreconcilable desires” (p. 186).

### King James’s relationship to Robert Carr

Bergeron’s suggestion that King James was torn by “conflicting and irreconcilable desires” might seem a commonplace where political leaders are concerned. We hear often of a political leader’s conflict between the desire for political influence and the desire to be a good family man. The “irreconcilable desires” in James’s case, however, have much more to do with his desire for intense and loving relationships with other men despite the political and familial costs involved.

In the foregoing account of James’s family history, we have not discussed a major theme of Bergeron’s (1991) *Royal Family, Royal Lovers*, the fact that his homoerotic relationships with men played a very significant role in the mistrust and eventual emotional distance between James and Anne. Nor have we considered the theme, emphasized by Bergeron and by Young (2000) in *James VI and I and the History of Homosexuality*, of the enormous political costs to James himself of these relationships. These themes have direct bearing on the larger issue with which we are concerned in this article, namely, the relevance of James’s homosexual tendencies to his commissioning of a new translation of the Bible into English.

As Bergeron shows in *Royal Family, Royal Lovers* (1991) and further explores in *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire* (1999), the three major male relationships in James’s life were with Esme Stuart, Duke of Lennox; Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset; and George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. His relationship with Stuart occurred between 1579–1583 when James was 13–17 years old. His relationship with Carr took place between 1607–1615, in the early years of his reign as King of England, when James was 41–49 years old. His relationship with Villiers began in 1616, when James was 50 years old, and continued to James’s death in 1625 at the age of 59. James was attracted to other men in the course of his adult life, but these were the most lasting friendships, and the ones that, individually and collectively, support reputable historians’ recognition of his lifelong need for sexual intimacy with other males.

A thorough consideration of all three relationships would make for a much too lengthy article. We have chosen, therefore, to focus our attention on James’s relationship with Robert Carr for several reasons: this was his first significant homosexual relationship after he assumed the throne of England; it had the greatest negative impact on his relations with Anne and his children; and it occurred during the period that the Bible that he had commissioned was translated and produced.

In *Royal Family, Royal Lovers*, Bergeron (1991) discusses the impact of James’s male relationships on his relationship with Queen Anne. His first significant male relationship with Esme Stuart occurred before his marriage to Anne, but his second relationship, with Robert Carr, began in 1607, 18 years after he married the 14-year-old Danish princess. This relationship continued to 1615 when James’s attentions turned to George Villiers. According to Bergeron, James’s relationship with Carr began at the point in James’s and Anne’s marriage when there was not much of a relationship left—“only personal accommodation and separate little kingdoms within the kingdom” (p. 90). He cites historian McElwee’s (1958) observation in his book *The Wisest Fool in Christendom: The*

*Reign of King James I and VI* that the deaths of their daughters Sophia in 1606 and Mary in 1607 “seem to have damaged the relationship between James and Anne irreparably” (Bergeron 1991, pp. 90–91). McElwee also notes that James “had lost the affections of his son Henry and his daughter Elizabeth by 1607 and that Charles was still too young to fill James’s need to spoil and pamper his children” (p. 91). Thus, Robert Carr was more the consequence than the primary cause of the emotional distance that had come to prevail in the royal family. Nonetheless, as Bergeron points out, James’s involvement with Robert Carr “would be a source of continuing tension within the royal family, especially with Anne and Henry. Not only a question of personal behavior, Carr’s rise to power had dangerous political implications” (p. 91).

Carr, a Scot, had come to England with James in 1603 as a lowly page in the royal household. Sometime thereafter he was dismissed from this service. Bergeron does not indicate the cause of his dismissal. He went to France, “where he gained some level of sophistication” (Bergeron 1991, p. 87), then returned to England. Court intriguers had noticed King James’s attraction to Philip Herbert at James’s coronation as King of England in 1603. When Herbert, a mere 18-year-old youth, had come forward to pay homage to the king, he had the effrontery to kiss James on the cheek. This was scandalous in itself, but what shocked the congregation even more was that instead of resenting his insolence, the king merely laughed and lightly tapped him on the cheek (p. 73). Young believes that James, who bestowed on Herbert the earldom of Montgomery, probably had sexual relations with him (Young 2000, p. 147). But Herbert pretended to have no other qualifications than a understanding of horses and dogs (Young 2000, p. 29) and was apparently not considered mature or savvy enough to serve the interests of these intriguers. So they began to search for another young man who would win James’s affections, gain power at court, and see that their own interests were brought to the king’s attention. They settled on Robert Carr.

An accident in 1607 brought Carr to James’s attention. Carr fell from his horse during a tilt attended by James, and James wanted to determine if the young man had been seriously injured. He “took one look at Carr, and apparently became immediately smitten with him” (Bergeron 1991, p. 87). Bergeron adds, “James’s physical attraction to Carr cannot be denied” (p. 87). James soon installed Carr as gentleman of the bed-chamber, a position that placed him in James’s personal company, and made him available to James’s sexual advances. If, as McGrath suggests, “the court was prepared to believe that [James’s] private behavior was somewhat more restrained” (p. 171) than his public behavior, there were many who were prepared to believe the opposite. A contemporary observed, for example, that James’s public behavior of kissing and leaning his head against Carr’s shoulders and neck in public “prompted many to imagine some things done in the tiring-house, that exceed my expressions not lesse than they do my experience” (Bergeron 1991, p. 87). As these “things” were unmentionable, today’s reader is left to guess at what these contemporaries imagined was going on between James and Robert Carr in the royal bedchamber. Whatever they imagined, it certainly exceeded the intimacies in which they engaged in full public view. Meanwhile, Carr steadily gained power in the king’s court. By 1611 he had become viscount Rochester and by 1613 earl of Somerset. Bergeron (1991, pp. 87–88) notes the effect of Carr’s rise to power on the royal family: “James lavished attention and affection on Carr in ways that his own family seldom experienced from him. Carr’s prominence continued to dominate the next period of James’s life in England until his [Carr’s] downfall. Surely Anne saw the danger in Carr’s rise to power and the way in which James’s fixation moved family members a little farther out of his view, to the outer edges of a growing silence.”

Carr's (now Somerset's) political career began to unravel, however, when he decided in 1613 to marry "the treacherous and wily Frances Howard, at the time married to the earl of Essex" (Bergeron 1991, p. 127). Aware of Somerset's desire to marry her, Frances Howard began divorce proceedings against her husband that summer, contending that he was impotent and that the marriage had never been consummated. James intervened in Somerset's behalf by arranging for a commission to rule on the divorce, and when the original panel seemed reluctant to rule in favor, he added two more bishops to the panel who assured him beforehand that they would vote the way he wanted them to vote. By a vote of seven to five the commission reached a favorable decision. Bergeron comments: "Whatever one may think about James's method of securing justice, justice ironically prevailed because the earl of Essex and his wife both genuinely wanted a divorce, just not on each other's terms" (p. 127).

Young, however, takes a more critical view. He notes that a "panel of women who physically examined Lady Essex certified that she was a virgin, though contemporaries found this hard to believe" (Young 2000, p. 30), and cites Essex's biographer's observation that the earl "would find it difficult indeed to forget the humiliating divorce," and that he bore a grudge for the rest of his life, seeking some way to "avenge himself" (p. 115). His chance to "vindicate his name and demonstrate his manhood" came many years later when he was chosen to lead the parliamentary forces in the civil war against Charles I, James's son. Unfortunately, according to Young, "Once again he proved a disappointment. In 1644, when Charles chased him into Cornwall to the town of Lostwithiel, he ran away" (p. 115). Father of seven children, James could not be accused, as Essex had been, of sexual impotence. Due to his affections for other men, however, he was the frequent object of charges that he, too, was less than a man. We will return to James's contemporaries' association of homosexuality and unmanliness later.

Somerset and Frances Howard were married on December 26 and both James and Anne attended the wedding. The festivities concluded with a play by Thomas Campion that included a song with the following lines:

Let us now sing of Love's delight, For he alone is Lord to-night; Some friendship between man and man prefer, But I th' affection between man and wife. What good can be in life, Whereof no fruites appeare? (Bergeron 1991, p. 128)

Bergeron (1991, p. 128) comments: "One wonders if James sensed any special topicality in the song." Even if he did not—after all, he was noted for his tendency to get profoundly drunk at festive occasions—the song's significance lies in its contention that affection between "man and wife" is superior to male friendship because it issues in progeny. James, of course, was aware that his political power derived in no small degree from the fact that he had produced sons who could succeed him. We may assume, therefore, that as a practical matter he shared the point of view this song expressed. On the other hand, his letters to Esme Stuart, Robert Carr, and George Villiers (see Bergeron 1999) are powerful testimony to his belief that, as a matter of the heart, nothing can compare to the love that is shared between "man and man."

Over the next several months Somerset's political career began to crumble. Court intriguers who resented his arrogance, petulance, and insolence began devising means to topple him and to put George Villiers in his place. Meanwhile, James simply grew weary of him. In Bergeron's view, Somerset committed the unpardonable sin of ignoring James and of assuming prerogatives without first securing the king's consent (Bergeron 1991, p. 128). Although James vigorously supported and aided Somerset's marriage, he probably resented the fact that he had lost out to Frances Howard in the battle for Somerset's affections. In a



lengthy and deeply emotional letter in early 1615, James “tried to repair a fractured relationship,” accusing Somerset of mistreating him and taking advantage of his loyalty and support. He concluded the letter with the suggestion that it now lay in Somerset’s power to restore the relationship between them (pp. 129–130). While much of the letter focused on how Somerset had misled him about court factions and opinions, James also mentioned Somerset’s sudden outbursts and sullen behavior toward him, and of having on various occasions withdrawn “yourself from lying in my chamber, notwithstanding my many hundred times earnest soliciting you to the contrary“ (p. 129). As Bergeron notes, “Clearly James alluded to sexual favors being denied him“ (p. 129).

Young (2000) goes further, noting:

By complaining about Somerset’s “long creeping back and withdrawing yourself from lying in my chamber,” James revealed a great deal. First, these words would appear to make nonsense of Maurice Lee Jr’s contention that the king was “simply not much interested in physical sex at all.” What purpose did James have for “many hundred times earnestly soliciting” Somerset to lie in his chamber if it was not for sex? What did James want from Somerset that could not have been obtained elsewhere without requiring “lying in my chamber”? Diehard deniers of James’s sexual relations with other men could argue that these words show that Somerset refused to go to bed with James. But then they would have to admit that “many hundred times” that is what James was asking him to do. It seems more reasonable to infer that Somerset initially won favor by pleasing James sexually but later, probably after his marriage to Frances Howard, withdrew from physical relations. “Withdrawing,” in fact, was the word James used (p. 43).

Young goes on to cite the memoirs of the French ambassador who noted that at the outset Somerset “submitted entirely to the whims of his master, and he appeared to have no other passion than to second all his desires.” Later, however, Somerset became arrogant and “rejected with rudeness the caresses of the king” (p. 43). To Young, it is noteworthy that James did not consider it unreasonable to solicit Somerset to lie with him, nor did he seem to feel any shame, embarrassment, or personal blame for having done so.

When James wrote this letter, he was unaware of the involvement of Somerset’s wife in the plot to murder Sir Thomas Overbury, who had had a very close relationship with Somerset prior to Somerset’s marriage to Frances Howard (Bergeron 1991, p. 131). Aware of the two men’s relationship, James had Overbury confined to the Tower when he refused James’s offer of an ambassadorial position abroad, an offer probably intended by James to remove Overbury as a rival for Somerset’s affections. Frances Howard had arranged for Overbury’s death by poisoning prior to her marriage to Somerset. Since Overbury died on September 15, 1613, she knew of her guilt as she went to her wedding in late December. It wasn’t until October 1615, however, that it became publicly known that Overbury’s death was due to poisoning, and both Somerset and his wife were placed under house arrest. The exact nature of Somerset’s own involvement was unclear, but he surely knew after the fact, if not before, of his wife’s involvement in Overbury’s murder. James was profoundly shocked when he heard the news, and appointed a commission to investigate the charges against Somerset and his wife. According to Bergeron (1991, p. 131): “These startling events dispelled whatever remaining hopes James had for repairing his relationship with Somerset. He now sought to put a safe distance between himself and his favorite, having correctly sensed the potential danger.” When Somerset realized that James would leave him to the workings of the judicial system, he made “ugly” threats against the king. As Bergeron notes, “A few of James’s letters to Somerset would have proven embarrassing for

the king” (p. 132). But James, convinced of Somerset’s guilt, at least as an accessory after the fact, stood his ground. In May 1616 Somerset and his wife stood trial. She pleaded guilty, while Somerset claimed his innocence. After a daylong trial, however, the assembled lords found him guilty as well. James commuted their death sentence, but they were confined to the Tower until 1622 when they gained their release and moved to the country. On October 7, 1624, James granted Somerset, but not his wife, a pardon. Bergeron (1991) concludes that, in 1615,

James had watched an essential part of his world crumble when he encountered the disaffection of the man whom he had loved for eight years, the man who, James wrote, had enjoyed his “own infinite privacy” with James. The king had much time to contemplate and remember, to feel the frustrated desires and lack of reconciliation, to endure the silence that spanned the distance between the palace and the Tower (p. 132).

Bergeron does not discuss Frances Howard’s motivations for arranging the death of Overbury prior to her marriage to Somerset, but it is reasonable to assume that she wanted to insure that her husband would be faithful to her, even as James had desired that Somerset would be faithful to him. She would certainly have been aware that Overbury’s “crime”—the refusal of an ambassadorial position—was hardly grounds for lifelong imprisonment. Thus, by having Overbury poisoned and swearing those responsible to secrecy so that his death was represented as due to natural causes, she eliminated the threat that he would likely have posed to her marital relationship with Somerset.

Even before Somerset’s fall from grace, James had begun to turn his affections toward George Villiers, who managed to catch James’s eye when opponents of Somerset succeeded in having him appointed cup-bearer, a position that brought him into frequent contact with the king (Young 2000, p. 31). Somerset had bitterly protested Villiers’ appointment, but to no avail. In Young’s view, the fact that Queen Anne asked James to promote Villiers to the post of groom of the bedchamber is indicative of the accommodation that she had worked out with her husband: “As George Abbot, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the leader of the Villiers forces, explained, ‘James had a fashion, that he would never admit any to nearness about himself but such an one as the Queen should commend unto him’” (Young 2000, p. 32). This way, she had a voice in the selection, and if she should complain about it later, James could say that she had no grounds for complaint because, as the Archbishop put it, “you were the party that commended him unto me.” Young believes that Queen Anne reluctantly agreed to help the Archbishop and his allies in their promotion of Villiers because of her intense dislike for Somerset. Bergeron notes, however, that Anne’s support of Villiers thereby “sealed the enlarging gap that existed between royal husband and wife,” and, therefore,

Some sense of hopelessness must have governed Anne’s action, a recognition that she had lost James’s genuine interest years ago. Anne may have seen herself as merely playing a role, participating in James’s fiction while fully understanding the reality. Perhaps she held some vestige of hope that her action would endear her to James, a hope nevertheless unsupported by facts. By seeming to be instrumental in Villier’s advancement, Anne temporarily exercised a kind of political power. Any or all of these ideas might have prompted her action (Bergeron 1991, p. 138).

In any event, essentially the same pattern that took place in the case of Somerset transpired here as well. Going further than his wife’s recommendation that Villiers be

appointed a groom of the bedchamber, James made him a Gentleman of the Bedchamber, and from there Villiers rose inexorably through the ranks of the peerage (Viscount in 1616, Earl in 1617, Marquis in 1619), achieving the exalted status of Duke of Buckingham in 1623 (Young 2000, p. 32). Just 22 years old when James met him in 1614, Villiers had become one of the most—perhaps *the* most—powerful men in England by the age of 31. As evidence that James, like Anne, was capable of accommodation, Villiers' marriage in 1620 had all of the formal support and none of the sense of betrayal that accompanied Somerset's marriage to Frances Howard. In fact, James seems to have found in the Buckingham family the family of which he had been deprived as an only son growing up without parents. As Young (2000) puts it:

It is touching to see how happily he involved himself in Buckingham's family, constantly sending gifts, visiting Kate [Buckingham's wife] when she was sick, making a special fuss over little Mall [their daughter Mary]. At the end of his life, James behaved more solicitously towards Buckingham's family than he had previously towards his own. And having never shown much interest in the company of women, he now delighted in the company of Buckingham's mother, wife and daughter (p. 33).

Young goes on, however, to discuss the disastrous consequences of Buckingham's turn to foreign affairs in conjunction with James's son, Charles, and the role that the two young men played in maneuvering England into the Thirty Years' War (a war that began in 1618 between German Catholics and Protestants but eventually involved several other European nations). In 1628, just 3 years after James's death in 1625, Buckingham was stabbed to death "by a disgruntled sailor who was applauded by a nation groaning under the strains of a costly, inglorious war" (p. 34).

### **Was King James a sodomist?**

Thus far, Alister Mcgrath's phrase "homosexual tendencies" has served in this article as a general, descriptive term for James's relationships with Esme Stuart, Robert Carr, and George Villiers. Yet, as anyone who reads even cursorily in the enormous literature on human sexuality that has been produced over the past few decades knows, the very word "homosexual" is a very contested, debatable term, especially when applied to earlier historical periods. It is often pointed out that because the word homosexual did not appear until the last decades of the nineteenth century, it is anachronistic to use it, for example, in reference to King James, who lived at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries. In addition, as Young (2000, p. 3) points out, "Some scholars believe that the whole mental construct of homosexuality, like the word itself, is of relatively recent origin. One school of thought locates the 'invention of homosexuality' at the very end of the seventeenth century. Others postpone it till the eighteenth or nineteenth century." In either case, this means that James and his contemporaries had no concept or understanding of "homosexuality" *per se*.

In Young's view, it is true that James and his contemporaries did not have a concept of "a homosexual" as distinct from "a heterosexual." For this reason, he chooses not to call or label James "a homosexual" (Young 2000, p. 3). On the other hand, although it is probably correct to say that homosexuality is the "invention" of the modern world, he believes that these more modern ways of thinking about homosexuality were already underway in

James's time. Therefore, if pre-modern ways of thinking were still predominant in James's era, "they existed alongside other ways that would eventually come to be thought of as modern" (p. 4). A specific illustration of this coexistence of pre-modern and modern ways of thinking is the fact that the pre-modern concept of sodomy was seldom invoked in contemporary references to King James's behavior. In fact, James himself wrote a vigorous condemnation of sodomy in *Basilikon Doran* (which, in English, means "royal gift"), the book of advice he wrote to instruct Prince Henry on how to be a good king (p. 49). Was he being hypocritical, condemning sodomy if others committed it, but not if he engaged in it himself? Young thinks the answer is more complex, namely, that

James could have been perfectly earnest in condemning sodomy while simultaneously engaging in what we today call homosexual behavior. When James invited Somerset into his bed or succeeded in getting Buckingham into bed, there is no reason to believe that he recognized what he was doing as that "detestable, and abominable sin, amongst Christians not to be named" (p. 48).

Young is quoting here a statement by Sir Edward Coke, the famous jurist of the period, who explained in his *Institutes* that sodomy is "a detestable, and abominable sin, amongst Christians not to be named, committed by carnal knowledge against the ordinance of the Creator, and order of nature" (Young 2000, pp. 37–38). Legally, it was classified as a felony, and anyone convicted of it was subject to execution by hanging. The severity and finality of the punishment, however, meant that even if it could not be named, it needed to be defined, and it was Coke's view that it was necessary to prove that penetration had occurred in order to establish a case of sodomy:

In his own words, there had to be ejaculation or *emissio seminis*, but also "there must be *penetratio*, that is, *res in re*." For Cole, therefore (if we set aside bestiality), sodomy meant two men having anal intercourse to the point of ejaculation. This legal definition was exceedingly narrow. It specified only one sex act between men, anal intercourse, and excluded all other genital sex acts—masturbation, oral sex, and intracural or intrafemoral intercourse. Men rubbing their bodies together or mutually masturbating were not committing sodomy (pp. 49–50).

In Young's view, it is a "good question" whether James in fact committed sodomy. This depends on what he did when he went to bed with his favorites. Young therefore asks whether it may be possible to get beyond the euphemism—"went to bed"—and be more specific about what James and his favorites actually did in bed? He concludes, "There is only one possible clue, and it suggests masturbation" (Young 2000, p. 49). Buckingham and James enjoyed double meanings and wordplay in their letters, and Buckingham may therefore have had a double meaning in mind when he wrote the following thanks to James for creating him a duke: "There is this difference betwixt that noble hand and heart, one may surfeit by the one, but not by the other, and sooner by yours than his own." Young concludes: "Whether or not these specific words refer to masturbation, it is entirely possible that James and his favorites refrained from anal intercourse. And if they did not engage in anal intercourse, it is arguable that they did not engage in sodomy" (p. 49).

Young acknowledges that we cannot know whether James made the same distinction in his mind that Sir Edward Coke had made on legal grounds. A "notorious hypocrite where swearing and drinking were concerned, he could simply have been the same where sodomy was concerned. Or he could simply have felt that, as an absolute monarch, the normal rules did not apply to him" (Young 2000, p. 50), though the latter possibility would seem to pose

a difficult dilemma for his partners who believed that the normal rules *did* apply to them! “But if he refrained from anal intercourse, there is no necessary reason why the accusation of sodomy should even have crossed his mind” (p. 50).

### The charge of effeminacy and James’s pacifism

As Coke’s statement concerning sodomy indicates, sodomy was considered a terrible sin against one’s Creator and the natural order, and a crime against the State whose punishment was death by execution. Clearly, it was a very serious sin and equally serious crime. If James was invulnerable to charges of sodomy, however, this did not mean that his “homosexual tendencies” were without serious political costs. In fact, from a political point of view, he was especially vulnerable to what would seem to have been a much lesser crime than sodomy, and his vulnerability in this regard led him to accede to pressure to reverse his longstanding commitment to peace in the final years of his reign. This was the charge of effeminacy. While his political opponents would not have dared to suggest in print that he was a sodomite, they did charge that he and his court were effeminate and lacking in manliness.

While the word “effeminate” was sometimes used in James’s day to imply that a man was excessively attracted to women, Young (2000, p. 71) states that in a great many more cases it referred to a male who assumed the “female,” that is, the passive or receptive role. This could certainly occur in marital relationships between husbands and wives, but it was believed to be the particular consequence of relations between older and younger men. Anti-theatrical tracts condemned the practice of boys dressing as women on stage on grounds that the direct consequence of such behavior is sexual inversion leading ultimately to sodomy.

Also, a persistent criticism of James by his political opponents, but one that reached a crescendo in the 1620s, was that “he allowed blatantly effeminate favorites who were his known lovers to dominate his court” (p. 72), and these attacks made a direct association between his attraction to effeminate men and his pacifism, his great reluctance to commit the nation to war (p. 72). Young acknowledges that we cannot know for certain how much this association of effeminacy and pacifism was mere rhetorical pose and how much was genuine alarm, but what we can know “is that these authors already defined effeminacy as we do and linked it to male homosexuality. More importantly, unless they had the bizarre intention of writing works that would be unintelligible to their readers, they must have assumed that the public thought in the same terms” (p. 72).

Young discusses the associations that were made at the time between effeminacy, passivity, and sexual behavior between two males. These associations have direct relevance to James’s relationships with Esme Stuart, Robert Carr, and George Villiers. Young cites Roche’s (1996) formidable study of Renaissance Florence in which Roche

showed that a great many Florentine males during the 1440s passed through three stages of sexual activity: as adolescents they were “passive” or “receptive” partners of older men, as young men they became the “active” or “dominant” partners in such relationships, and around the age of thirty they married and more or less stopped having sex with other males. It would have been rare, therefore, for homosexual relationships to involve two adult men. Instead, relationships typically involved adults and younger males (Young 2000, p. 149).

Young notes that there is a growing body of opinion that sexual relations “between active men and passive adolescents” was typical of all Europe until about 1700. There is no

evidence of homosexual relations occurring in England on the scale that Rocke found in Florence, but when they did occur, they followed the same age-differentiated pattern.

How does this age-differentiated pattern relate to King James? Young acknowledges that James does not fit the Florentine pattern because he married earlier and continued to have male lovers after his marriage (Young 2000, p. 149). But marriage was vitally important to him because of his political need to produce heirs. For Young, the more significant fact, therefore, is that, in concert with the Florentine pattern, James's relationships with his major favorites were age-differentiated (p. 149). James was 13 when Esme Stuart arrived in Scotland at the age of approximately 37; he was 41 when he became infatuated with Robert Carr, who was about 20 (Carr's exact age is unknown); and he was 48 when he first went to bed with George Villiers, who was about 23. Young points out that, unlike the relationship between Esme Stuart and James, James's relationships with Carr and Villiers were not, strictly speaking, pederastic, as both were young adults rather than boys: "But Carr and Buckingham were barely adults, and James was twice their age. These were certainly age-differentiated relationships. If we take 20 years as the distance between generations, they even qualify as trans-generational relationships" (p. 150).

Young also notes that neither Carr nor Villiers experienced the second stage in the Florentine pattern. Instead, both moved from the first to the third. Indeed, "Somerset apparently made this passage [from stage one to stage three] all too well to suit James, since he stopped going to bed with him sometime after marrying Frances Howard" (Young 2000, p. 150). This may suggest that, in our terms today, James was more homosexual in his sexual orientation than either Carr or Villiers. In any event, in terms of the "active" and "passive" roles, James was the only one of the three men who experienced both, and in his reign as King of England, he was clearly in the "active" role.

This raises an interesting question: if effeminacy was associated with "passivity," we would expect that Carr and Villiers would be subject to the charge of effeminacy, as indeed they were. In fact, they had the physical appearance that invited the effeminacy label, as they were young, smooth-skinned, and beardless, and had the rather androgynous physique that made them especially attractive to James. But if James was in the active role, would this not have immunized him against the effeminacy charge? This, however, was not the case, for, as Young points out, "the stigma of effeminacy was also attached to James himself" (pp. 153–154). Young therefore wonders

how much the doubts about his manliness arose from his relations with effeminate favorites and how much from his pacific foreign policy. He appeared to be ruled by his feelings or ruled by his favorites. In both these respects, he looked like the passive or subordinate partner, but it was his passivity in foreign affairs that his critics found most irksome.... They scolded, implored and exhorted him to take action. His passivity called his manhood into question and made him more susceptible to charges of effeminacy. If he had been a more martial figure, the effeminacy of his favorites might not have rubbed off on him (p. 155).

In 1604, when James was newly installed as King of England, the French ambassador commented on his "extraordinary weakness" and "unmeasured love of peace," and judged that James "will on no provocation, commence a war, but will endeavor to maintain peace, even by bad, foolish, and disgraceful means" (quoted in Young 2000, p. 78). Young suggests that James's "aversion to war was probably a natural product of his insecure and violent childhood" (p. 78). James's deeply personal letter to Somerset in 1615 also suggests that even though James assumed the "active" role in his sexual solicitations of the younger man, he was, nonetheless, the "passive" one in the sense that his partners



recognized that he was more emotionally needy than they were. If James began to weary of Somerset, it took several hundred rebuffs before he was able to accept the fact that Somerset had wearied of him.

The foregoing discussion of the charge that James was effeminate may not seem to have any relevance to the issue with which we are concerned here, namely, the relationship between his “homosexual tendencies” and his commissioning of the English translation of the Bible. To be sure, McGrath suggests that the commissioning came at a time when he was being criticized for his “increasingly obvious homosexual tendencies,” and goes on to note that the “commissioning of the new translation of the Bible was one of the first positive acts of the new king of England” (pp. 170–171). He implies that the commissioning of the translation of the Bible would have offset, to some degree, the complaints that he was engaging in overt homosexual behavior at court. If the populace did not like his behavior at court, they would certainly applaud his interest in the Bible.

Our discussion of the charge of effeminacy, however, suggests that the relationship between his homosexual tendencies and commissioning of a new translation of the Bible was more complex. This is because a major sign of James’s preference for effeminacy over masculinity in the eyes of his critics was the fact that he considered himself an intellectual, a man of the pen, not of the sword. As Young (2000, p. 78) points out, “James was a scholar, an intellectual, who thought that true manliness required reflection, not impulsive violence.” Young notes James’s efforts to suppress dueling (p. 86), and Bergeron notes that when James signed a peace treaty with Spain in 1604, the same year that he commissioned the new translation of the Bible, he adopted the motto, “*Beati Pacifici*,” a reference to the beatitude, “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9 KJV; Bergeron 1991, p. 78).

Many of his subjects had a very different view and some wrote tracts that were highly critical of James on this very point. One tract writer, Thomas Scott, compared James to the lazy sluggard in the Book of Proverbs (Prov. 26:13–16) and cited as evidence the King’s attraction to sensual pleasures (coded language for his homosexual tendencies?) and the fact that he prided himself on his book learning (Young 2000, p. 92). As Young puts it, “Scott wanted a real man of action, not an effete intellectual” (p. 92). Another polemicist, John Reynolds, noted that Philip of Spain “loves King James his Gowne & Pen, yet no way feares his sword,” since “hee never yet knew the way to draw it” (quoted in Young 2000, p. 93). Reynolds complained that the other nations have no reason to fear the English because “the element and delight of their King is bookes, not battailes, the pen, not the Pike” (p. 93). The pen is mightier than the sword? Not according to Reynolds. Furthermore, Englishmen would command more respect “if they wore worse cloathes, and had better hearts and swords, and if they were more martiall and lesse effeminate” (p. 93).

Young cites another tract by an anonymous author that circulated around London in 1622. This tract

came dangerously close to accusing James of sodomy. It also made a pointed issue of his manliness. What the anonymous author of this tract wanted, in effect, was for James to remake or refashion himself. Whereas James prided himself on being a man of letters and a peacemaker, this author wanted him to become precisely the opposite. He told James that he could obtain “with the sword, [that] which you have so often in vaine desired with your pen” (p. 90).

Thus, in the polemical tracts of the times, there is a strong association between effeminacy and the intellectual life.

The fact that one of James's first acts as King of England was to commission a translation of the Bible was not, therefore, the singularly positive act that McGrath makes it out to be. McGrath (2001, p. 171) is certainly right to point out that "the New Bible would be a rallying point for a Protestant English nation" over and against Roman Catholicism, "which was enjoying a newfound strength and stability on the European mainland." When it became clear, however, that James had no desire to engage England in battle against Spain or in behalf of German Protestants against Catholic Protestants, the new Bible was less a "rallying point" and more a further sign of James's—and hence, England's—effeminacy. Is it any wonder, then, that McGrath himself concludes: "By the time of its [the Bible's] final appearance in 1611, James's popularity had waned substantially. People began to long for the good old days of Queen Elizabeth, with whom James was regularly compared—unfavorably" (p. 171). As Young points out, one of the unfavorable comparisons between James and Elizabeth was that "Elizabeth had been more of a man than James was" (Young 2000, p. 90).

### Male company and mother guilt

We are now prepared to answer the question with which this historical investigation has been concerned, namely, the relationship between James's "homosexual tendencies" and his commissioning of a new English translation of the Bible. Our argument is twofold. First, we believe that in commissioning this translation, James, in effect, created a model of male cooperative enterprise that was no less "manly" than the martial model that was advocated by his critics. This model had biblical warrant, the very beatitude that James was fond of quoting and that he took as the motto for his own kingship: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5:9 KJV).

For a man whose mother left him as a 13-month-old baby, and who had no contact whatsoever with his father, a beatitude that says that peacemaking is the way to become a child of God would seem to have had deep psychological resonance. The model that he proposed for the translation was that the entire text of the Bible would be divided into six sections, and that each "company" would be composed of the same number of men (McGrath 2001, p. 178). McGrath's term "company" suggests a military analogy (as a company is defined in military terms as a small body of troops, normally composed of two or more platoons and a headquarters). King James would be the Commander-in-Chief, with the bishops assigned the task of working out the campaign strategy. The translation companies appear to have set almost immediately to work, but the initial progress was slow, so slow, in fact, that "some accused the translators of laziness" (McGrath 2001, p. 182). Ironically, or fittingly, this was the same charge that Thomas Scott made against King James himself.

Nevertheless, the translators carried out their commission. Significantly for our argument here, they used the military analogy in their preface (which is generally omitted from modern versions of the King James Bible due to its length). Heading the list of several metaphors was this: "[The Bible] is not only an armor, but also a whole armory of weapons, both offensive and defensive; whereby we may save ourselves and put the enemy to flight" (quoted in McGrath 2001, p. 190). They also pointed out that God is "the Author" of the "original," that "the inditer" (the one who dictated it) is "the holy spirit, not the wit of the Apostles or Prophets," and that "the Penmen" (those who wrote it down) "were sanctified from the womb, and endued with a principal portion of God's spirit" (McGrath 2001, p. 190).

The sword is mightier than the pen? Not to the company of men who translated the King James Bible. In effect, the Bible that bore his name was James's answer to the anonymous tract writer who said that he could achieve with the sword what he had been unable to achieve through the pen. James could not have accomplished this alone any more than a general can wage battle without troops, and in a remarkable gesture of goodwill, the translators made clear "that they were building on honorable foundations laid by others" (McGrath 2001, p. 192). At the same time, they hoped that their own work would be appreciated:

As nothing is begun and perfected at the same time, and the later thoughts are thought to be the wiser: so, if we, building upon their foundation that went before us, and being holpen by their labours, do endeavor to make that better which they left so good; no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike us; they, we persuade ourselves, if they were alive would thank us (quoted in McGrath 2001, pp. 192–193).

This is very similar to the rhetoric of military men who carry on the struggle to its ultimate conclusion so that their predecessors will not have died in vain. Our point, then, is that the company of translators created by James's commissioning of a new English Bible was itself a dramatic refutation of contemporary criticism of the effeminate or effete scholar as exemplified by James himself.

Our second point is that James's commissioning of the translation of the Bible was an integral part of his effort to expiate his guilt for going along with—even desiring—the execution of his mother for his own political gain. We have seen that it was in 1603 that he had a rich pall of velvet hung over her grave in Peterborough Cathedral, that in 1605 he named his newborn royal daughter Mary in honor of his mother, and that during the same phase of his kingship he ordered the construction of an elaborate tomb for his mother in Westminster Abbey, where her body was re-interred in 1612 (Bergeron 1991, pp. 73–74). This rehabilitation of his mother coincided almost exactly with the 1604 commissioning, the production, and the 1611 initial printing of the King James Bible. In one sense, there is every reason to assume that the timing of these two sets of events was purely coincidental. In fact, it would have been impossible for him to take steps to rehabilitate his mother while Queen Elizabeth remained on the throne. On the other hand, he was under no political pressure whatever to rehabilitate his mother's reputation, and, as we have seen, modern interpreters of James's efforts to rehabilitate his mother's reputation consider this to have been a very personal matter, a form of expiation, a means to still a guilty conscience. We suggest that his decision to commission the translation of the Bible, however politically expedient it may have been, was integral to this expiation process.

A clue in this regard, one that also has direct relevance to the effeminacy charge, is provided by Erikson's (1958) discussion of "passivity" in *Young Man Luther*: Speaking of Luther's discovery that faith is not something that we do but something that is done for-and in-us, Erikson points out that many a young man

becomes a great man in his own sphere only by learning that deep passivity which permits him to let the data of his competency speak to him. As Freud said in a letter to [Wilhelm] Fliess, "I must wait until it moves in me so that I can perceive it: *bis es sich in mir ruehrt und ich davon erfahre*. This may sound feminine, and, indeed, Luther bluntly spoke of an attitude of womanly conception—*sicut mulier in conceptu*. Yet it is clear that men call such attitudes and modes feminine only because the strain of paternalism has alienated us from them; for these modes are any organism's birthright, and all our partial as well as our total functioning is based on a metabolism of passivity and activity (pp. 207–208).

Erikson notes that before a man develops the active modes that are associated with his father, “a mother taught him to touch the world with his searching mouth and his probing senses. What to a man’s man, in the course of his development, seems like a passivity hard to acquire, is only a regained ability to be active with his oldest and most neglected modes” (p. 208). Erikson concludes:

Intrinsic to the kind of passivity we speak of is not only the memory of having been given, but also the identification with the maternal giver...I think that in the Bible Luther at last found a mother whom he could acknowledge: he could attribute to the Bible a generosity to which he could open himself, and which he could pass on to others, at last a mother’s son (p. 208).

The translators’ preface to the King James Bible captures this very sense of the Bible as a generous mother. To be sure, it does not use the maternal metaphor itself, but immediately following the military metaphor noted earlier, it offers a plethora of metaphors that focus on the Bible’s life-bestowing qualities:

It is not an herb, but a tree, or rather a whole paradise of trees of life, which bring forth fruit every month, and the fruit thereof is for meat, and the leaves for medicine. It is not a pot of Manna, or a cruse of oil, which were for memory only, or for a meal’s meat or two, but as it were a shower of heavenly bread sufficient for a whole host, be it never so great; and as it were a whole cellar full of oil vessels; whereby all our necessities may be provided for, and our debts discharged (McGrath 2001, p. 190).

The idea that the Bible provides for all our necessities and discharges all of our debts seems particularly relevant to King James, both because he lost his own mother in infancy, and also because he carried for years a profound sense of guilt for having failed her in her hour of need. The maternal image is made explicit in the observation, noted earlier, that the Bible’s “Penmen... were sanctified from the womb” (p. 190). Thus, James’s commissioning of the new translation of the Bible was, in Erikson’s words, “an identification with the maternal giver,” an active endorsement of the passivity that James experienced in the months before his mother was expelled from Scotland and he was thrust, prematurely, into the world of political men.

This active endorsement of passivity is also a cautionary note to those who, in pursuing academic careers, have, in effect, endorsed King James’s view that the pen is mightier than the sword. The foregoing discussion of the scholarly literature on the King James Bible makes abundantly clear that academia can be as warlike as any military establishment. As Jesus himself emphasized, it is no less an act of violence to violate the spirit as to attack the body, yet academia is a world in which such violence, often done through shaming, is an almost routine experience (Carlin 2005).

This brings us, finally, to the “third alternative” that we mentioned earlier.

### **The King James Bible as cultural selfobject**

At the beginning of this article, we mentioned the fact that both of us had experience with the King James Bible when we were boys. One of us (Capps) knew no version of the Bible other than the King James Version until he was confirmed at the age of 14 and received a Revised Standard Version (RSV) from the church he attended on that occasion. The other (Carlin) was acquainted with several versions of the Bible when he was growing up, but he remembers that his maternal grandmother read to him from the King James Bible and,

although he did not understand its language, he did understand his grandmother's love for the Bible, for God, and for him. Is there, then, something special about the King James Bible? Does it have a certain iconic status that other translations, however technically superior they may be, do not possess? We think that it does, and we think it is not merely because it is older than its contemporary competitors—though this is a very important factor—but that it also bears the name of a King. It isn't terribly important that one knows anything about this King. The important thing is that his name on a Bible gives it an aura of authenticity similar to a violin bearing the name of Antonio Stradivari.

In *The King James Only Controversy*, White (1995) recounts this scenario:

The salesclerk never saw it coming. He had just finished unpacking the new shipment of study Bibles and setting up the new display. He had been working at the Christian bookstore only a week. All seemed well. And then it happened. She seemed like any other lady looking for a Bible for her grandson. More than glad to help he pulled out a nice NIV down from the shelf and opened the box. He noticed she immediately turned the Bible and looked at the spine. Her countenance changed. She put the Bible back in the box, withdrawing her hands quickly, as a person does when discovering an object is dirty or oily. "I would like a real Bible," she says. "A real Bible?" The salesclerk asks. "Yes," she replied, "a *real* Bible, the Bible God honors, the King James Bible, the A. V. 1611" (p. iii).

One of us had a somewhat similar experience. While he was browsing in the religion section of the Princeton University Bookstore, a woman checking out the Bibles on the shelf behind was becoming noticeably frustrated. Finally, she blurted out to no one in particular, "I can't find a Bible." So he turned around and asked if he could be of any assistance. As he did so, he saw that she was standing in front of a rather substantial number of Bibles. Assuming that she was visually impaired, he offered to help. Apparently realizing that he had assumed she was visually impaired, she said, "There are a lot of so-called Bibles here, but I can't find a single King James Bible among them." Sure enough, no one had thought to stock a King James Bible. He suggested that she might be able to find one at the Princeton Theological Seminary Bookstore but that it was closed on Saturday. Then, he considered asking her if she was aware that King James had homosexual tendencies, and then thought better of it. But why? His hesitancy was undoubtedly due to his awareness that the King James Bible was sacred to her, and that in telling her something about King James that he was sure she did not want to hear, he would be tampering with her almost mystical identification with it.

Neither of us feels the way these women feel about the King James Bible. For them, it is the only authentic Bible. The other translations are inauthentic, unauthorized. They are not "the Bible that God honors." On the other hand, one of us engaged in the following experiment: He went to a local bookstore and stood in front of the Bible section, his eyes scanning the several shelves of Bibles. He discovered that his eyes were drawn, almost involuntarily, to the Bibles that bore the name King James on the binding. Not only this, he had a certain visceral reaction against the Bibles that announced themselves as "New King James" Bibles? This seemed odd to him. Why would anyone think that a "New" King James Bible is an improvement on the original—the "Old"—King James Bible? What happened here was something like what art historian Elkins (1996) describes in *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*:

Sometimes, when I'm shopping, I pause a little too long in front of a counter. A salesperson leans my way and says, "May I help you?" And I reply, "No, just

looking.” I wonder at that question. How did she know just when to ask? Was it something in the way I was standing? Was I lingering, as if I couldn’t quite leave? Maybe I looked a little dazed, as if I weren’t really concentrating. Probably, though, I looked as if I had been caught, hooked by the object in the display case. Some objects have an irresistible effect, as if we were tied to them by little wires. It could be that the salesperson had been watching me from a distance, the way some spiders hide at the edge of the web until a moth becomes so tangled that it’s safe to approach. When the salesperson saw I was half caught, she came a little nearer and asked her question.... I begin to wonder if shopping isn’t like being hunted. Instead of saying I am the one doing the looking, it seems better to say that objects are all trying to catch my eye, and their gleams and glints are the hooks that snare me.... At the same time, shopping is also hunting. After all, I am the one who decides to go shopping, and normally I’m on the lookout for something in particular: I’m hunting for it and trying to pick it out of the thousands of objects that I do not want. If I can find the one perfect watch, it’s because I know what I’m looking for, and I can tell a good watch from imitations and distinguish styles that are very close to one another. In this way of looking at things, the watches are all camouflaged: each is almost identical to the next, and the one I want is somewhere among them. Like a leopard hunting in the jungle, I can look at a tangle of leaves, vines, and flickering lights and pick out just half of the pupil of a frightened deer (pp. 19–20).

If one of us found his eyes being drawn to the King James Bibles, what is going on here? We suggest that the key is to be found in an interview with Heinz Kohut conducted by Charles Strozier in 1981 titled “Idealization and Cultural Selfobjects” (Kohut and Strozier 1985, pp. 224–231). In the course of the interview, they discussed the human need to idealize others, and Kohut mentioned that some years earlier he had discovered two transferences in his clinical work, both of which are “reactivations of frustrated developmental needs” (p. 226). He gave one of them the name “mirror transferences” and the other the name “idealizing transferences.” He notes:

I have no doubt—and now 15 years of observation have made no dent in this basic conviction—these are two of the basic needs of the developing self. One needs to be accepted and mirrored—there has to be the gleam in some mother’s eye which says it is good you are here and I acknowledge your being here and I am uplifted by your presence. There is also the other need: to have somebody strong and knowledgeable and calm around with whom I can temporarily merge, who will uplift me when I am upset. Originally, this is an actual uplifting of the baby by the mother; later that becomes an uplifting feeling of looking at a great man or woman and enjoying him or her, of following in his or her footsteps, of a great idea being uplifting, or a wonderful piece of music, etc. This is extremely important. And when I talk about cultural selfobjects, which is the replica of the culture for the group self of what occurs in individual development, I think that these two basic needs are also present (pp. 226–227).

We suggest that the King James Bible functions as a cultural selfobject, and does so in ways that the other translations, however technically superior they may be, do not. This view is supported by one of the author’s (Carlin) experience of being read to from the King James Bible by his maternal grandmother. It is also supported by the other author’s (Capps) experience of memorizing verses from the King James Bible, a habit that ended when he became a reader of the Revised Standard Version. All the things that Kohut says about the mirroring and idealizing transferences may be said of the relationship the two of us had as



children with the King James Bible. This Bible functioned like a mother to us, and it could do so because it had the “authorization” of the King (the symbolic father).

Is the fact that the King James Bible functions—for some of us, at least—as a cultural selfobject a necessary or sufficient reason to choose it over other translations? No. But this fact, together with the psycho-dynamically related fact that King James drew particular attention to these words of Jesus—“Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God”—are a compelling reason to allow it to catch one’s eye, even, perhaps, to ask the salesperson to use his very best gift-wrapping when one buys it for one’s grandchild. What, then, about King James’s homosexual tendencies? In our view, this is one more reason to insist on the translation that God honors above all others.

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