# *Introduction*

## APPROACHING THE MONARCH

All early modern monarchs were acutely aware that what their subjects wrote about them mattered: the words of others might provide powerful endorsements of royal authority, but they might equally pose significant challenges to that authority. Lancelot Andrewes, in a Gowrie sermon given to King James VI and I on 5 August 1610, emphasised the power of the pen as he explored the different implications of the biblical injunction 'Touch not mine anointed' (Psalm 105: 15, 1 Chronicles 16: 22). This was a familiar enough text for a sermon to a monarch: Thomas Bilson's coronation sermon for James had employed it.[1] But Andrewes, giving his sermon in the midst of the Oath of Allegiance controversy, developed his theme with particular urgency, referring to 'They that have beene scribbling about Kings matters of late, and *touching* them with their pennes'.[2] The King might be safe from violent hands but, Andrewes suggests, this seemingly distant figure can be reached by the pen. Even as he warns against 'touching' the monarch, however, Andrewes himself is doing just that in this sermon. The text complicates its ostensible argument, demonstrating that pens in the right hands may help rather than harm. It crystallises the ambivalent relationship of early modern monarchs to the unpredictable pens of their subjects.

The sermon also, however, highlights what is distinctive about James. This King repeatedly used *his* pen, touching sacred matters, exposing his power to scrutiny, encouraging – sometimes deliberately, sometimes inadvertently – others to respond in kind. These tendencies had been

[1] Referring to this psalm and other related biblical passages, Thomas Bilson asserts that 'Neither is violence only prohibited towards [kings], but all offence in speach or thoght' (*A Sermon Preached at Westminster before the King and Queenes Majesties, at their Coronations* (London: Valentine Simmes for Clement Knight, 1603), sig. B1r–v).

[2] Peter McCullough (ed.), *Lancelot Andrewes: Selected Sermons and Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 178–206 (quotation p. 189).

epitomised in the course of the current controversy; those who had just been 'scribbling' about the Oath of Allegiance had been responding to the works he had published on the subject. James was, of course, not unique among monarchs in exploiting the potential of the press; early modern rule was enacted in large part through proclamations, declarations, ordinances and other such texts.[3] But his publishing activities were unprecedented in nature, scope and volume. By the time that Andrewes gave this sermon, seven years into James's English reign, the King's printed works included two collections of poetry, two scriptural meditations, a treatise on the divine right of kings, a treatise on the practice of kingship, a treatise on witchcraft and a treatise on tobacco, as well as his interventions in the Oath of Allegiance controversy. Through these many publications, the King was, John Donne suggested, entering into 'a conversation with [his] Subjects'.[4]

Donne's term usefully directs our attention to how James's publications shaped the relationship between ruler and ruled. While any royal act, performance or text may provoke multiple responses and interpretations, James's writings seemed by their very nature to *invite* others to engage with him in an ongoing process of dialogue, debate and exchange. As Cyndia Susan Clegg has observed in the context of a discussion of censorship:

> Paradoxically, by opting to employ the written and printed word as tools of his authority, James I unwittingly empowered his subjects as readers, interpreters, and imitators, giving rise to alternative discourses of authority ... Writing and printing in Jacobean England were political acts not only because they directly and indirectly represented and embodied the structures of authority and hierarchy but also because they altered, however minutely, those very structures.[5]

[3] For one of the first studies to recognise that royal texts did not merely present but enacted royal power, see Kevin Sharpe, 'The King's Writ: Royal Authors and Royal Authority in Early Modern England', in Sharpe and Peter Lake (eds.), *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 117–38. James's predecessors had written in other genres including poetry too, but, unlike him, were reluctant to print such material. See Peter C. Herman, *Royal Poetrie: Monarchic Verse and the Political Imaginary of Early Modern England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010).

[4] John Donne, *Pseudo-Martyr* (London: W. Stansby for Walter Burre, 1610), sig. A3r. All subsequent references are to this edition. James's readership also extended beyond his own kingdom. His polemical writings are particularly concerned with that international audience, but were not the only royal works to appear in authorised translations. Further translations were instigated by other parties and here James had still less control over the responses his works met. For further detail and an illuminating case study, see Astrid Stilma, *A King Translated: The Writings of King James VI & I and their Interpretation in the Low Countries, 1593–1603* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

[5] Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Jacobean England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 14.

The opportunities that James's writings created for his subjects extended, however, far beyond the political sphere that Clegg addresses. All kinds of writers, including the most successful literary figures of the age, made use of James's writings to all kinds of ends. Moreover, James did not simply, as Clegg proposes, unwittingly initiate a shift in power which he sought at the same time to counter through a reassertion of state authority in the form of censorship. He responded in multiple ways to the multiple responses – some welcome, some tolerable, some offensive – his writings met, and was even willing at times to answer, emulate or draw upon the works of others in his own. Some of the encounters between James and other Jacobean writers were personal while some were mediated through other individuals and institutions. Others, no less importantly, were constructed imaginatively in the acts of reading and writing.

The Jacobean writers who made the most creative use of James's publications were not those who sought simply to flatter or, conversely, simply to criticise the King, though there certainly were plenty who assumed those familiar stances. The most creative use was made by those whose status within and beyond the court delimited the nature of their response, but who found in James's publications new and unique opportunities. This kind of inventive and sustained engagement with James's writings is evident in some of the literature of Jacobean Scotland, particularly the work of Alexander Montgomerie, as recent scholars have shown.[6] It is also evident in the work of some of the most prominent authors of Jacobean England: Ben Jonson, John Donne, William Shakespeare. Together, these three authors highlight the multi-faceted role that James's writings played in Jacobean culture. For across the genres of poetry, court masque and entertainment, sermon, polemic and drama, in performances, manuscripts and printed books, they engage with the King's writings in especially subtle, complex and diverse ways. It is from Jonson, Donne and Shakespeare that we still have most to learn about the impact of James's writings on literary culture across his English reign, and the opportunities as well as the challenges that these royal writings posed.

The King's role in the literary culture of Jacobean England has, of course, attracted considerable critical attention, but such studies have tended to focus only on royal authority as manifested through the twin poles of patronage and censorship. Jonathan Goldberg's influential 1983 work, *James I and the Politics of Literature*, was one of the first literary

[6] See, in particular, Roderick J. Lyall, *Alexander Montgomerie: Poetry, Politics and Cultural Change in Jacobean Scotland* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005).

studies to give James's writings any attention at all. Goldberg recognises that contemporary authors responded to royal writing in careful and calculated ways, but, operating within a New Historicist model of subversion as always contained, he presents their works as only ever reflecting and reinforcing royal authority. Since the early 1980s revisionist historians have challenged many of the assumptions underlying the work of Goldberg and others, revealing both the limits of royal authority in the period and the considerable political acumen that James showed in managing the difficulties of his position.[7] In the early 1990s, a small number of historians and literary critics began to argue that such political acumen was evident in James's writings too, and that these writings have a significant place in the history of political thought.[8]

The beginning of the twenty-first century saw the kinds of attention paid to the King's writings broaden, and their literary as well as political significance recognised.[9] My own *Authorship and Authority: The Writings of James VI and I* (2007) was the first monograph devoted to James as an author.[10] Spanning his Scottish and English reigns, this study explored the generic and thematic range of the King's writings, the development of his authorial aims and strategies, and his sophisticated engagement with various conventions, traditions and formats. It argued that writing was central to James's conception and exercise of his rule, but that his publications may ultimately have done more to undermine than to reinforce his authority. Subsequent studies have placed James's writings in the wider contexts of monarchical self-representation across the early modern period and considered aspects of their contemporary reception on the

[7] The seminal work is Jenny Wormald, 'James VI and I: Two Kings or One?', *History*, 68 (1983), 187–209. See also her review of Goldberg's study in *History*, 70 (1985), 128–30. More recently, see, among others, Mark A. Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain, 1603–1714* (London: Allen Lane, 1996); W. B. Patterson, *King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Pauline Croft, *King James* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Diana Newton, *The Making of the Jacobean Regime: James VI and I and the Government of England, 1603–1605* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005); and Ralph Houlbrooke (ed.), *James VI and I: Ideas, Authority, and Government* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

[8] See Jenny Wormald, 'James VI and I, *Basilikon Doron* and *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*: The Scottish Context and the English Translation', in Linda Levy Peck (ed.), *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 36–54; Sharpe, 'The King's Writ'; and Johann P. Sommerville (ed.), *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[9] See, in particular, Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (eds.), *Royal Subjects: Essays on the Writings of James VI and I* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002).

[10] Rickard, *Authorship and Authority: The Writings of James VI and I* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

Continent.[11] We still, however, lack modern editions of the full range of James's works.

Despite all of this historical and critical work, the question of how other Jacobean authors engaged with the King's writings – and of how he responded to theirs – continues to attract little serious attention. This lack of attention has encouraged, and been encouraged by, the persistence of a number of misapprehensions and counterproductive critical tendencies. Topical studies of Jacobean literature continue to draw on characterisations of James that have been questioned by revisionist historians and, more recently, scholars of his writings. Thus, for example, James has often been viewed within English literary studies as remote and indifferent to the people, with a dislike of making public appearances (in opposition to Elizabeth, typically characterised as keen to engage with her subjects). As Kevin Quarmby has recently shown, early evidence for this view of the King is unreliable and there is a considerable amount of counter-evidence. It is largely a later construct, which has been upheld in literary studies (especially of *Measure for Measure*) despite being challenged in other quarters.[12] This characterisation has ignored and obscured the King's willingness to engage with his subjects through his books.

Topical literary studies have, of course, invoked James's writings often enough, but in ways that reflect another questionable critical tendency. The practice of situating literary texts in their social, political, religious and cultural contexts requires reconstructing those contexts, and the output of the King has often seemed ideally suited to this purpose. Even Johann P. Sommerville's edition of James's *Political Writings* encourages such usage, the blurb emphasising that 'the king's works shed light on the political climate of Shakespeare's England'.[13] Yet the division of materials into 'texts' and 'contexts' is often hierarchical: the materials relegated to the second position are rarely subjected to the careful analysis reserved for those treated *as* texts. Though James's writings were, as recent work has

[11] Herman, *Royal Poetrie*; Kevin Sharpe, *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England, 1603–1660* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010); and Stilma, *A King Translated*. For a more extended account of the critical history outlined here, see my 'The Writings of King James VI and I and Early Modern Literary Culture', *Literature Compass*, 9/10 (2012), 654–64.

[12] Kevin A. Quarmby, 'Narrative of Negativity: Whig Historiography and the Spectre of King James in *Measure for Measure*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 64 (2011), 300–16. For further discussion, see Chapter 5, below.

[13] Sommerville (ed.), *King James VI and I: Political Writings*. While the introduction explores the importance of James's books in the history of political thought, it also reiterates that they are significant 'documents' for understanding 'Shakespeare's England' (p. xxviii). This remains the standard modern edition of James's selected prose works.

demonstrated, complex and variously legible, they have often been employed as though they have fixed, readily intelligible significations, proving what the King 'believed' or even establishing received opinion on a given topic. They have thus been exploited as a backdrop against which works by more canonical authors can be read.

While literary studies and historical studies have at times remained unhelpfully separate, or reductive in their references to James's writings, a further problem has been a lack of communication between scholars working on Jacobean England and scholars working on Jacobean Scotland. Within the interdisciplinary field of Scottish Studies, a number of critics have recognised that James had wide-ranging literary interests, and that his writings engaged with, and played a part in shaping, contemporary literary culture.[14] These critics are working against a long-standing critical neglect and underestimation of early modern Scottish culture, which has derived in part from the tendency of literary critics of the period to focus exclusively on England.[15] Studies of James produced within this context therefore tend to be confined to his Scottish reign and not to consider how the literary interests he developed in Scotland remained with him throughout his life. Equally, accounts that do address James's literary role in England, produced within the disciplinary context of English literature, continue to pay little attention to his earlier reign and to overlook the valuable recent contributions of Scottish Studies.[16]

All of these different factors have combined to produce an underestimation of the significance of James's publishing activities for the literary culture of Jacobean England. Few studies have even attempted to address this topic. Two notable exceptions are Curtis Perry's *The Making of Jacobean Culture* (1997), which focuses on the early years of the reign, and James Doelman's *King James I and the Religious Culture of England*

[14] See, in particular, Sarah M. Dunnigan, *Eros and Poetry at the Courts of Mary Queen of Scots and James VI* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Lyall, *Alexander Montgomerie*; Kevin J. McGinley and Nicola Royan (eds.), *The Apparelling of Truth: Literature and Literary Culture in the Reign of James VI* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010); and David J. Parkinson (ed.), *James VI and I, Scotland and Literature: Tides of Change, 1567–1625* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013).

[15] For further discussion, and an important attempt to challenge this underestimation, see Theo Van Heijnsbergen and Nicola Royan (eds.), *Literature, Letters and the Canonical in Early Modern Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2002).

[16] For a study that historicises such geographical and disciplinary separations, and argues for the critical significance of 'Anglophone writing' as opposed to 'English literature', see John Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English: Literature, History, and Politics 1603–1707* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Some historians have challenged the tendency to treat James's two reigns and kingdoms separately: see, in particular, Wormald, 'James VI and I' and Roger A. Mason (ed.), *Scots and Britons: Scottish Political Thought and the Union of 1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

(2000), which focuses on religious writing.[17] Both provide a more sophisticated view than had Goldberg of the ways in which other authors responded to royal writing, and ground their analyses in a more nuanced understanding of political and religious culture. Neither study, however, rests upon sustained exploration of James's writings and Scottish background, with the result that each retains some of the questionable assumptions about the King and his role present in earlier accounts. For example, Doelman's account positions the King not as a writer interacting with other writers but as a fixed and distant source of influence: he was 'that '"North Star" from which the religious culture of the period took its bearings'.[18] Though, as noted above, new work on James's writings has appeared in the decade or so since Perry and Doelman's books appeared, little further consideration has been given to the issues these two studies begin to address. Indeed, scholars interested in the relationship between early modern monarchs and culture in England still seem much more drawn to James's predecessor on the throne.[19]

This underestimation has, in turn, led to misapprehensions about other authors. Any comments on James's writings by his contemporaries that suggest interest or approval have typically been condemned as self-serving flattery or excused as symptomatic of the political pressures these authors faced. To take one example, P. M. Oliver responds to a comment in the dedication to *Pseudo-Martyr* on the King's books by questioning their claim even to that name, noting that Donne refers to 'James's "books" (a grandiose term for what in some cases are hardly more than pamphlets)'. Given Oliver's contempt for James's efforts, Donne's reference can only be understood as 'fawning'.[20] Here we see a clear correlation between uninformed disdain for James's works and a narrow view of another writer's motives. Such critical assumptions and tendencies have thus constrained our understanding of the reception of an important body of

[17] Curtis Perry, *The Making of Jacobean Culture: James I and the Renegotiation of Elizabethan Literary Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); James Doelman, *King James I and the Religious Culture of England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000).

[18] Doelman, *King James I*, p. 1.

[19] The past few years have seen the publication of Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Helen Hackett, *Shakespeare and Elizabeth: The Meeting of Two Myths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Ilona Bell, *Elizabeth I: The Voice of a Monarch* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Alessandra Petrina and Laura Tosi (eds.), *Representations of Elizabeth I in Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). There have been no equivalent studies devoted to King James.

[20] P. M. Oliver, *Donne's Religious Writing: A Discourse of Feigned Devotion* (London: Longman, 1997), p. 173. The dedication in question is considered further in Chapter 3, below.

royal writing, and of the complex interrelations between literary and political culture in the Jacobean period.

The present study addresses some of the gaps and obstacles charted here by examining the role of James's writings within Jacobean literary culture. Building on the insights that *Authorship and Authority* and other recent studies have provided into the immediate contexts within which James wrote, the authorial strategies he adopted, and the dissemination of his writings, *Writing the Monarch in Jacobean England* explores how other Jacobean authors, including Scots who followed him to England, received and reworked James's books. It asks how the King in turn responded to the texts other authors wrote to and for him, and how these textual and in some cases actual interactions helped to shape the culture within which they took place. It moves beyond the assumption that the King provided other writers with a fixed, unresponsive and remote source of influence. It resists the temptation to treat James's writings as more stable than the responses they met. And it explores the neglected possibility that major English authors took those writings seriously, a possibility that opens up fresh critical perspectives. In the process, it sheds further light on James's writings themselves, showing how they respond as well as provoke response, continue as well as engender dialogue.

This book, then, proposes a dynamic interpretive model which emphasises that royal cultural 'influence' is a matter of interaction rather than imposition, authority a construction rather than a given, literary culture a complex series of processes rather than a product. Crossing geographical and disciplinary boundaries, it argues that there are important continuities between James's relationship with literary culture in Scotland and his relationship with literary culture in England, and between his 'literary' and 'political' activities. It thus suggests that early modern scholars in the areas of English literature, English history and Scottish Studies have more to learn from and contribute to each other's work than has often been recognised.

In these ways, the book draws upon and contributes to broader critical and theoretical debates about early modern literary culture and how we should conceptualise and study it. In the early 1980s, New Historicist critics emphasised the ways in which power, particularly monarchical power, pervades culture, shaping and being reinforced by literary production. Louis Montrose's influential essay on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, frames its reading with the assertion that 'whether or not Queen Elizabeth was physically present at the first performance . . . her pervasive *cultural presence* was a condition of the play's imaginative

possibility'.[21] This 'regicentric model' was quickly challenged, with Joseph Loewenstein arguing as early as 1988 that it had located 'creative activity . . . in an attenuated political nexus' and largely failed to examine power 'outside the institutional grid of monarchy, aristocratic family, court, or church'.[22] New Historicism's tendency to focus on canonical authors who were closely connected with these institutions was seen to have produced and, in a circular manner, validated this attenuated view.

A number of critics responded by broadening the field of study and arguing for a literary culture that was not centralised. Gordon McMullan's 1994 study of John Fletcher, for example, rejects court-centred approaches, emphasising instead the social tensions – particularly between city and country, men and women – that drive the plays.[23] In 2000, Michelle O'Callaghan's study of 'Jacobean Spenserians' such as George Wither argued for 'A model of cultural politics . . . that does not find its primary reference point in the court, but explores other models of cultural interaction and production'.[24] Other studies of oppositional voices and traditions have followed.[25] These works have highlighted the importance of writers and genres outside of the traditional literary canon and furthered our understanding of the varied, politicised and often contestatory nature of Jacobean literary culture.

The present study extends this challenge to some of the assumptions and approaches of New Historicism while also countering a recent movement away from historicist study.[26] It reassesses, rather than rejects altogether, the 'regicentric model', offering a sustained interrogation of the notion of royal cultural 'influence'. It agrees with those critiques of New Historicism which argue that treating all cultural production as an allegory of power

[21] Louis Montrose, '"Shaping Fantasies": Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture', *Representations*, 1 (1983), 61–94 (62).

[22] Joseph Loewenstein, 'For a History of Literary Property: John Wolfe's Reformation', *English Literary Renaissance*, 18 (1988), 389–412 (394, note). Other important early critiques of New Historicism include Jean E. Howard, 'The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies', *English Literary Renaissance*, 16 (1986), 13–46.

[23] Gordon McMullan, *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).

[24] Michelle O'Callaghan, *The 'shepheards nation': Jacobean Spenserians and Early Stuart Political Culture, 1612–1625* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

[25] See, among others, Andrew McRae, *Literature, Satire, and the Early Stuart State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Jesse M. Lander, *Inventing Polemic: Religion, Print, and* Literary Culture in Early Modern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[26] Bryan Lowrance, for example, has recently contested 'the style of localizing, historicizing reading that is regnant right now in early modern and Shakespeare studies' ('"Modern Ecstasy": *Macbeth* and the Meaning of the Political', *English Literary History*, 79 (2012), 823–49 (p. 824)). This argument is considered further below.

flattens and simplifies that culture, but also maintains that the concern of many Renaissance writers to engage with the monarch is a significant feature. It argues that considering responses to James as a writer – rather than to James as a source of authority and generalised cultural presence – overturns many New Historicist assumptions about the role of the monarch in enabling and limiting cultural production. The King's writings, this book argues, did help to shape aspects of Jacobean literary culture in ways that have not yet been fully explored, but the particular nature of that shaping was not always intended, controlled or welcomed by him. For literary responses to James's writings do not just reflect or reinforce royal authority but reimagine, question, challenge, resist, appropriate and dissipate it. Authors engaging with the King in this way could lay claim to religious and cultural forms of authority, which were able to operate independently of royal authority, and which as an author James also recognised. Their responses shaped the King in turn, contributing to the development of his public image, and, in some cases, informing his writing and publishing activities.

*Writing the Monarch* thus highlights royal writing – which is itself, of course, far from canonical – as another important factor in the diversity and political energy of Jacobean literary culture. It emphasises the extent to which the King and the writers he patronised were embroiled in the conflicts and debates explored in recent work on oppositional literature. And, by exploring the diversity of the interpretations and uses made of James's works, it highlights some of the limits of royal authority and control, showing power to be more unstable, negotiable, dispersed and multi-directional than the New Historicists tended to allow. This work helps to collapse some of the distinctions that have been maintained between 'regicentric' and 'non-regicentric' models, suggesting that a 'regicentric' model of enquiry need not entail an understanding of culture itself as centring upon king and court. Rather, such an approach helps to illuminate the various complex relationships between individuals and institutions through which culture is shaped and reshaped.

The book foregrounds the relationship between this non-canonical royal writing and the work of three English writers who all occupied, at least partly as a result of James's patronage, culturally central roles. Jonson was the most successful and prominent court writer of the Jacobean period; Donne became Dean of St Paul's, one of the most important positions in the Protestant Church, and was chosen by the King publicly to defend royal policy on some key occasions; Shakespeare was the chief playwright for the company that bore the King's name. None of these writers can be