

To the Editor:

I expected some negative reaction to my book about *King James and the History of Homosexuality*. But the review published by Maurice Lee Jr. in *Albion* (32, 4 [Winter 2000]: 635–37) is so unfair that it requires a reply, and I am grateful to the editor for giving me this opportunity.

In this limited space I cannot explain all the misrepresentations in Lee's review. I invite anyone interested in King James, the public perception of his sexuality, its impact on early Stuart politics, the social construction of manliness and effeminacy, or the history of homosexuality to read my book. They will find it is not just a recycling of old material, as Lee implies, but an effort to employ the very latest research into the history of sex and gender.

Lee's view of James and his so-called "favorites" has always been mired in old-fashioned attitudes reminiscent of the 1950s. I criticized him for this reason on the first page of my book and several times thereafter. Lee, in turn, apparently reviewed my book by looking up his name in the index and rebutting every criticism. Of course Lee is entitled to defend his own viewpoint, but he has additional obligations as a reviewer to keep an open mind, read the whole book, and give the author a fair chance.

Instead, Lee makes a shocking assault on my scholarship out of all proportion to any faults he can actually find in my book. He charges that my "method is to pile up references," that I "leap" to unwarranted conclusions, and that I take a "cavalier attitude toward factual accuracy." I can shrug off the charge that I pile up references because I did amass considerable evidence. But the other charges impugn my professional integrity. Fortunately, an earlier and more unbiased reviewer praised my "thoughtful and careful use of evidence." Most of Lee's review, by contrast, is an effort to explain away evidence.

There is only space here to refute Lee's most blatantly false claim—that I treat the gossipy, anti-Stuart, propaganda tracts from later in the century as if they were true. This is the biggest trap awaiting anyone writing about James's sexuality, and I certainly had no intention of falling into it. I made it unmistakably clear at the outset that I knew these partisan works were "untrustworthy regarding matters of fact" (p. 6). I deliberately set them aside in a separate chapter where I examined them to learn how people discoursed about sex between males at mid-century, not for statements of fact about James. No one who actually read my introduction or the whole chapter dealing with this material could possibly think otherwise. Yet Lee quotes what I said in one place about backstairs gossip in a twisted way that makes me appear to be taking this gossip at face value. I would not expect such gross distortion from a man who poses as a guardian of factual accuracy.

Ignoring my painstaking efforts to distinguish between perception and reality, Lee charges that I "spoiled what might have been a sound and useful book on the perceived behavior of the Jacobean court." Lee's own successor at Rutgers University, Alastair Bellany, is incidentally doing excellent work on this very subject. I hope he will find my contribution to the topic more enlightening than Lee did.

What distinguishes my work is my engagement with recent scholarship on the history of homosexuality. I attempted to examine James in light of this scholarship and to speculate on the ways his case might contribute to a refinement of it. A great deal of my book is concerned with this innovative scholarship. Lee says absolutely nothing about any of this in his review. Yet, without reference to that recent scholarship, Lee is in no position to judge either James's sexuality or my book.

By ignoring current scholarship, Lee can only continue to embarrass himself. One almost cringes in sympathy to see him write in his review that James “was not a practicing homosexual,” although he had a “fondness for pretty young men.” Anyone familiar with the history of homosexuality or my discussion of it would not call James a homosexual, practicing or otherwise. And the phrase “pretty young men” raises precisely the issues of effeminacy and pederasty that I explored in my book.

I stand by my conclusion that it is nonsense in the twenty-first century to continue telling our readers and students that King James had “favorites” without addressing the sexual dimension of those relationships. Of course, in the absence of incontrovertible DNA evidence, there is no final way to convince the diehard deniers, and Lee has certainly proved that he belongs in that category. But one has got to wonder why these people are so fiercely determined to go on denying the obvious.

Michael B. Young
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Professor Lee replies:

I urge all those interested in this question to read Professor Young’s book and judge for themselves as to his thesis and his methodology.

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