

INTRODUCTION

Violent in action and memorably written, difficult to perform and yet extraordinarily popular on stage, granted by actors and audiences its own special ‘curse’;¹ William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* strongly resists critical and theatrical exposition. Despite these manifest contradictions, an early-twentieth-century critic asserts that the play ‘is distinguished by its simplicity . . . Its plot is quite plain. It has very little intermixture of humour. It has little pathos except of the sternest kind. The style [of the play’s language] . . . has not much variety . . .’² Like many speeches in *Macbeth*, each of these apparently straightforward claims is paradoxical: each is true and at the same time misleading. Further, these claims are both true and false to the play’s life in the theatres of early Jacobean London and in the theatres of many times and many places since. Moreover, these claims are often false to the play’s complex relation with the social and political circumstances in which it was first written and first performed. As I understand my introductory task, it is to give an account of a magnificent early-seventeenth-century English play as it was originally conceived and as it might have been first played in a faraway and impossible-to-retrieve moment or series of moments in Jacobean London. It is also my task to present its afterlife in times and places very distant from the historical William Shakespeare, from his extraordinary acting company, and from their once living, now irretrievably lost, social, commercial, political, theatrical world.

To that end, I consider here: the play in its Jacobean, early-seventeenth-century moments – especially its possible political meanings – and its likely relation to documentary sources; the play’s treatment of time and of time’s varied evocations (family, succession, birth and death); the many ways in which the play allows or withholds knowledge and belief for the characters and the audience; the ways the play affects the audience through language; the ways the play has been performed in early and later times and in other places and media.

¹ See Iona Opie and Moira Tatem (eds.), *A Dictionary of Superstitions*, 1989, p. 396, and Richard Huggett, *The Curse of ‘Macbeth’ and Other Theatrical Superstitions*, 1981. The nature of the play’s ‘curse’ (which derives at least partly from its representation of the demonic and, practically, from its many sword-fights and the consequent physical danger to the actors) and the remedies for that curse, especially for quoting it outside the theatre, are elaborate. My favourite version is that of the distinguished actor Patrick Stewart, who taught me this remedy when I made the mistake of quoting one of the sisters’ lines in the play: to remove the curse of quoting *Macbeth* outside the theatre, one must immediately speak an equal number of lines from Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Other recorded remedies include walking around the theatre building three times.

² A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 1904, rpt. 1955, p. 309. Later critics have, sometimes justly, derided Bradley’s version of *Macbeth*, but the issues he identified – history, identity, violence, sovereignty, for example – have not gone away. See, among many, Francis Barker, *The Culture of Violence: Tragedy and History*, 1993, pp. 51–92; Sheldon P. Zitner, ‘Macbeth and the moral scale of tragedy’, *Journal of General Education* 16 (1964), 20–8; and Robert B. Heilman, ‘The criminal as tragic hero: dramatic methods’ (1966), rpt. in Kenneth Muir and Philip Edwards (eds.), *Aspects of ‘Macbeth’*, 1977, pp. 26–38.

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Macbeth in legend, *Macbeth* in history

James Stewart or Stuart (1566–1625), the sixth king of that name to rule Scotland, believed, or claimed to believe, that he descended from one Banquo, Thane of Lochaber in the eleventh century when Scotland's king was Macbeth (see illustration 1). In late March 1603, the same King James VI became the first of that name to rule England. Barely two years later, Samuel Calvert commented on political drama, public response to it, and official failure to react:

The Plays [i.e. the players?] do not forbear to present upon their Stage the whole Course of this present Time, not sparing either King, State or Religion, in so great Absurdity, and with such Liberty, that any would be afraid to hear them.¹

Calvert assumes that audiences would be 'afraid' to hear or see plays representing a living monarch, secrets of state, and controversial religious matters ('King, State or Religion'), and that such plays should be treated specially and usually censored.

Samuel Calvert was probably right, or at least conventional for his time. Queen Elizabeth I's first proclamation seeking to control the subject and content of drama (16 May 1559) used words that were regularly repeated and echoed in official and unofficial documents: 'her majestie doth . . . charge [her officers] . . . that they permyt none [i.e. no 'common Interludes'] to be played wherin either matters of religion or of the governaunce of the estate of the common weale shalbe handled or treated . . .', and thirty years later the Privy Council sought closer theatrical control because the companies had 'handle[d] in their plaies certen matters of Divinytie and of State unfit to be suffred'.² To offer the public a play representing living monarchs almost always drew official attention and usually censorship. Less than eighteen months after James's accession, his newly patented London acting company, the King's Men, twice performed a now-lost play, 'the tragedie of Gowrie'. *The Tragedy of Gowrie* presumably dealt with the alleged attempt by the Earl of Gowrie and others to assassinate James on 5 August 1600, when he was still King of Scotland only.³ *The Tragedy of*

¹ Samuel Calvert to Ralph Winwood, 28 March 1605, in Winwood, *Memorials of Affairs of State*, 3 vols., 1725, II, 54. Calvert may refer specifically to the controversy *Eastward Ho* caused; see p. 12 below. The Comte de Beaumont, the French ambassador, an observer admittedly grinding a diplomatic and political axe, vividly noted: 'what must be the state and condition of a prince [King James], whom the preachers publicly from the pulpit assail, whom the comedians of the metropolis bring upon the stage, whose wife attends these representations in order to enjoy the laugh against her husband' (letter, 14 June 1604, quoted from E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols., 1923, I, 325), and Henry Crosse, a fairly temperate critic of the theatre, complains that 'there is no passion wherewith the king, the soveraigne majestie of the Realme was possest, but is amplified, and openly sported with, and made a May-game to all the beholders, abusing the state royall' (*Vertues Commonwealth* (1603), sig. P3).

² Quoted from Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, IV, 263 and 306, respectively. Matters of religion and state were the most frequently censored dramatic subjects throughout the Tudor and Stuart period.

³ See W. F. Arbuckle, 'The "Gowrie Conspiracy"' [in two parts], *SHR* 36 (1957), 1–24 and 89–110. Scottish public opinion immediately doubted official claims about the events (Arbuckle, pp. 13–14), and an Edinburgh pamphlet, *Gowries Conspiracie* (1600), supporting James's version, appeared less than a month later, soon enough for George Nicolson, the English agent in Scotland, to send a copy south on 3 September (Arbuckle, p. 18). Valentine Simmes's London edition of this text, *The earle of Gowries conspiracie*, was entered in the Stationers' Register on 11 September 1600 and published, possibly soon after, with the date '1600'. Such speedy printing and reprinting may indicate a propaganda war and/or contemporary anxieties about attacks on monarchs.

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1 Banquo and his supposed descendants, including King James VI of Scotland; from John Leslie, *De Origine . . . Scotorum* (1578). Banquo is at the base of the tree, James at the crown

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Gowrie was quickly suppressed,¹ and its fate suggests how politically and practically difficult it was to write and perform plays concerning the Stuart monarchy and its well-known vicissitudes in Scotland and in England. Many years later, the British monarchy, now Hanoverian, faced an effort to restore the Stuarts, and after the Battle of Falkirk (1746), when Scottish troops, supported by the French, won a temporary advantage, 'The king was advised to go to the theatre and to command the tragedy of *Macbeth*', and the play was performed.² In the anxious times of a largely Scottish insurrection against the British (or English) central government in 1746, *Macbeth* was considered a pro-English, pro-monarchical, anti-rebel, and (curiously) anti-Stuart play.

Given even this brief context, it is a nice understatement to say that 'Shakespeare's task in writing *Macbeth* was . . . extremely problematic.'³ From a very different perspective, another critic agrees: '*Macbeth* is a play about Scotland, seized at a crucial moment of transition in its history . . .'⁴ However distant these early-seventeenth-century debates and problems may seem, they were living difficulties for the King's Men, for William Shakespeare as playwright, and for their audiences at the Globe theatre and elsewhere. Those difficulties entailed not only who might have rightfully ruled Scotland in the eleventh century, but who might justly rule Scotland and, more controversially, England, in the seventeenth.

Looking back to early Jacobean London, we recognise that these early-seventeenth-century debates affect our understanding of *Macbeth*'s origins. Reversing the telescope of time, we must suppose that those debates shaped the play's creation. The problems of situating the composition and earliest performances of *Macbeth*, and of determining its sources in written documents, contemporary events, and early Jacobean culture, are interdependent matters, often with no certain answers. One place to start is with the often-remarked 'connection' between the play and the accession of the Scottish King James VI as England's King James I, whose family provided England's and Scotland's native monarchs until the death of Queen Anne in 1714. Arguments linking *Macbeth* with King James or with specific events in the early seventeenth century divide into the 'topical' *Macbeth* and the 'occasional' *Macbeth*. First, the play may be studied as a 'topical' or general repository of references to events, ideas, or persons in the years immediately after James's accession,⁵ second, as a more specific response to the unprecedented 'occasion' of a Scottish king becoming England's king, third, as a response to an even more precise 'occasion', when James's brother-in-law, the Danish King Christian IV, first visited England.

¹ For these performances and their suppression, see John Chamberlain to Ralph Winwood, letter, 18 December 1604, in N. E. McClure (ed.), *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, 2 vols., 1939, I, 199.

² See Thomas Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick*, 2 vols., 1780, II, 136.

³ David Norbrook, 'Macbeth, and the politics of historiography', in Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (eds.), *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, 1987, p. 93.

⁴ John Turner, 'Macbeth', in Graham Holderness et al. (eds.), *Shakespeare: The Play of History*, 1988, p. 120. Just before this remark, Turner says: 'two rival Scottish traditions of interpreting relations with England, the unionist and the nationalist . . . have been brought together . . . in *Macbeth* . . . to problematise our understanding of historical progress by the theatrical experience of tragedy'.

⁵ For extensive, sometimes persuasive, arguments about the play's topicality, see Arthur Melville Clark, *Murder Under Trust: The Topical 'Macbeth'*, 1981.

TOPICAL *MACBETH*

Claims for a topical *Macbeth* cannot be substantiated and may be circular. There are some striking pieces of what may be 'evidence'. Consider the Porter in *Macbeth*:

Here's a farmer that hanged himself on th'expectation of plenty. Come in time – have napkins enough about you, here you'll sweat for't. (*Knock*) Knock, knock. Who's there in th'other devil's name? Faith, here's an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven. O, come in, equivocator. (2.3.3–10)¹

Critics have linked the Porter's words with the notorious imprisonment, trial, and execution (1606) of the Gunpowder plotters, who had sought to blow up Parliament, along with the king and his family, and many aristocrats and judges on 5 November 1605. Among those executed was the Superior of the English Jesuits, Father Henry Garnet, who espoused the doctrine of 'equivocation' ('here's an equivocator that could swear in both the scales . . .') and used the alias 'Farmer' ('Here's a farmer that hanged himself . . .').²

Among other topical evidence, there is Matthew Gwinne's brief Latin pageant, 'Tres Sibyllae' (Three Sibyls), welcoming King James to St John's College, Oxford, on 27 August 1605, apparently drawing upon chronicle accounts of Macbeth and Banquo meeting the three witches, and pandering to James's belief that he was descended from Banquo.³ Gwinne's pageant, recited by 'tres quasi Sibyllae' (three persons like sibyls), is quite conventional. Although the repeated uses of 'Salve' (Hail) in addressing king, queen, and royal prince seem close to the witches' words in *Macbeth* Act 1, Scene 3, they do in fact duplicate a sibyl's prophetic greeting that Queen Elizabeth had heard thirty years earlier, when one 'Sibylla' intercepted her as she rode through the Earl of Leicester's park at Kenilworth Castle with the words, 'All hayle, all hayle, thrice happy prince, / I am *Sibilla* she / Of future chaunce, and after happ, / foreshewing what shalbe.'⁴ Gwinne's seemingly significant language may 'prove' only that he could read Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (see pp. 13–15 below) as well as any other author eager to please the new king.⁵ Most of the proposed links

¹ For the contemporary socio-economic resonances of 'plenty', see Richard Wilson, *Will Power: Essays on Shakespearean Authority*, 1993, chapter 4, esp. pp. 83 ff., and the authorities there cited.

² See also 5.5.42–3. Prosecutors repeatedly emphasised the various names ('false appellations' in Sir Edward Coke's words) used by the Gunpowder Plot conspirators and the doctrine of equivocation at Garnet's trial, 28 March 1606; see T. B. Howell (comp.), *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, 33 vols., 1809–26, II, columns 225 (multiple names), 234 (Garnet as 'Farmer'), 234–5, 238–9 (equivocation).

³ See Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols., 1957–75, VII, 470–2, for the Latin text (published with Gwinne's *Vertumnus sive Annus recurrens* in 1607) and an English translation. On equivocation in the play, see Frank L. Huntley, 'Macbeth and the background of Jesuitical equivocation', *PMLA* 79 (1964), 390–400, and, more generally, Lowell Gallagher, *Medusa's Gaze: Casuistry and Conscience in the Renaissance*, 1991, pp. 1–120. Another possible topical reference would place at least some of the play's composition after mid 1606: see 1.3.6n.; see also p. 15 below.

⁴ 'The princely pleasures at Kenilworth Castle', in *The Whole workes of George Gascoigne* (1587), sig. A1r, following p. 352.

⁵ Anthony Nixon's account of James's visit to Oxford, *Oxfords Triumph* (1605), mentions (sig. B1r) 'three little Boyes comming forth of a Castle, made all of Ivie, drest like three Nymphes'; Nixon thus 'echoes' Macbeth's history in Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587) and anticipates Simon Forman's eyewitness account of a Jacobean performance of *Macbeth*. See pp. 13–15 and 57–8 below.

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between *Macbeth*, the Gunpowder Plot, and Gwinne's pageant prove to be vague, circumstantial, or undatable.¹

If *Macbeth* contains allusions to the Gunpowder Plot, some of its text must have been composed after 5 November 1605; if the play alludes to the conspirators' trials, convictions, and executions, some of its text must have been composed about the first quarter of 1606. If the First Witch's mention of a sailor who is 'master o'th' Tiger' (1.3.6) refers to one specific historical ship, as her eerily precise reference to that historical ship's tumultuous voyage might suggest, then her lines could not have been written before that particular *Tiger* returned to England (27 June 1606) and the ship's travails became known.² If William Warner's additions to *Albions England*, published at an unknown date in 1606 (see p. 10 below), echo, rather than anticipate, *Macbeth*, the play must have been publicly performed or its subject-matter and perhaps its text have become publicly known before Warner composed his text.

Verbal similarities between *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra* suggest that the two plays may have been written at about the same time. *Macbeth*, awaiting the murderers, compares himself and Banquo with Mark Antony and Octavian (Shakespeare's Octavius), the man who became Augustus Caesar, the first Roman emperor:

There is none but he [Banquo],
 Whose being I do fear; and under him
 My genius is rebuked, as it is said
 Mark Antony's was by Caesar. (3.1.55–8)

Yet these verbal similarities say nothing certain about priority or proximity of composition.³ *Macbeth*, although its general style is very different, has many linguistic and imaginative links with Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*, published in 1593, many years before *Macbeth* seems to have been written and performed.⁴ Around the same supposed time of *Macbeth*'s original composition, Volumnia in *Coriolanus* powerfully compares mother's milk and blood, two of *Macbeth*'s most evocative liquids:

The breasts of Hecuba,
 When she did suckle Hector, looked not lovelier
 Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood
 At Grecian sword, contemning – (Coriolanus 1.3.40–3)

¹ See J. Leeds Barroll, *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theater*, 1991, pp. 133–52.

² See 1.3.6n. It is impossible to know how widespread the knowledge of the *Tiger*'s voyage might have been.

³ *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Macbeth* are also dramaturgically similar; see p. 24 below and p. 28 n. 1. The plays also have similar 'arming scenes' (*Macbeth* 5.3 and *Antony* 4.4), where love, or memories of love, interrupt preparations for war. More generally, the Shakespearean tragedies that probably preceded and succeeded *Macbeth* – *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, respectively – follow what may be a psychologically or authorially explicable treatment of time. In *King Lear*, time is memorably expressed as ageing, or the coming-into-being of a past; in *Antony and Cleopatra*, time is treated as a present past, as nostalgia (see e.g. Michael Neill (ed.), *Ant.*, 1994, pp. 94–8); in *Macbeth*, time is treated as a future-in-the-present (see 1.5.54–6 and pp. 20–3 below) or as the future made a changeless present.

⁴ See e.g. 2.1.55 n. For the many links between *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Macbeth*, see G. W. Knight, *The Imperial Theme*, 1931, 3rd edn, corr. rpt., 1954, p. 133, and Kenneth Muir (ed.), *Mac.*, 9th edn, 1962, Appendix D.

These lines are part of Volumnia's reply to Virgilia's anxious worry – 'O Jupiter, no blood!' – for her husband's safe return from war. They also rewrite in Shakespearean 'Roman' terms Lady Macbeth's willingness to dash out the brains of the child she suckled (1.7.54–9; see p. 36 below). Blood for milk, in Shakespeare's Rome and Shakespeare's Scotland.¹ The plot of *Coriolanus* also puts ambiguous 'heroes', Coriolanus and Aufidius, into conflict, as does the plot of *Macbeth*: Macbeth *versus* Banquo, who acknowledges 'cursèd thoughts' (2.1.8) which might be thoughts of usurpation; later, Macbeth *versus* Macduff, who disastrously abandons his family and becomes at least technically a regicide; still later, Macbeth *versus* Malcolm, who also flees and whose royal claim rests on Duncan's nomination (1.4.37–9) and remains at best arguable.² By joining an attractive hero–villain with ambiguously moral or ambiguously 'good' opponents, *Macbeth* resembles *Richard III* among Shakespeare's earlier plays.³

Further, Shakespeare's Roman plays and English history plays emphasise *shame* as a motive for royal and aristocratic acts. Macduff cannily manoeuvres Macbeth, who supposes himself invincible ('I bear a charmed life which must not yield' (5.8.12)), into battle by threatening public humiliation:

Then yield thee coward,
 And live to be the show and gaze o'th'time.
 We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
 Painted upon a pole and underwrit,
 'Here may you see the tyrant.'
(5.8.23–7)

Social and political humiliation and near-raucous comedy are closely joined here, as they are in *Antony and Cleopatra* (see p. 28 below); earlier in *Macbeth* (Act 2, Scene 3), the Porter insistently if unself-consciously combines 'high' political events with 'low' bodily functions. Before choosing suicide, Cleopatra imagines public humiliation were she to submit to Roman power (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4.12.33–9, 5.2.108–24); Richard III uses his physical deformity as ambition's spur (*Richard III* 1.1.14–51); and Aufidius cleverly names Coriolanus a 'boy of tears' (*Coriolanus* 5.6.100) when the political, deadly moment is right.

Although traditional chronologies place *Macbeth* after *King Lear* and before *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, those chronologies are uncertain.⁴ Amidst these uncer-

¹ R. B. Parker (ed.), *Cor.*, 1994, p. 52, compares Volumnia's behaviour in general and Lady Macbeth's "unsex[ing]" herself (with a comparable distortion of breast-feeding to child-murder) . . . 'Dying, Cleopatra links death and suckling when she compares the fatal asp to a child: 'Dost thou not see my baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep?' (*Ant.* 5.2.309–10).

² Critical suspicion of Banquo begins with Bradley, pp. 304 and 306–8; for the play's ambivalent treatment of Macduff and Malcolm, see pp. 88–93 below.

³ Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare*, 1971, pp. 199–224, discusses *Macbeth*'s structural (and some verbal) links with Shakespeare's earlier plays, especially *Richard III* and (more surprisingly) *Henry VI*, Parts 2 and 3. For *Richard III*'s relation with *Macbeth*, see also p. 71 below and n. 3.

⁴ For the traditional argument, see E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 vols., 1930, 1, 249–50 and 271, and for *Macbeth*, *ibid.*, 1, 471–6, but Chambers admits (1, 251) that *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* come 'in no certain order'. A counter-claim appears in Barroll, *passim*, but esp. chapters 5–6. Barroll speculates that *Macbeth* was written 'by the end of 1606' (p. 177) and may have been first performed 'at court, December–February 1606–7' (p. 153); Barroll's argument for both

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tainties, there is one highly probable claim. When Scotland's King James became England's King James in March 1603, his accession made a Shakespearean Scottish play commercially viable and creatively attractive. King James and his Scottishness created an occasion, and at some point Shakespeare and the King's Men apparently seized the popular, commercial moment, as they had less successfully done in performing *The Tragedy of Gowrie*.

OCCASIONAL *MACBETH*

Macbeth has been called an 'occasional' play in two senses: first, the argument runs, Shakespeare would not have composed a play on a Scottish subject had not a Scottish king come to the English throne. This claim seems very probable. Second and more specific, some scholars believe Shakespeare composed the play as a 'compliment' to King James, perhaps even as an entertainment when King Christian IV of Denmark, James's brother-in-law, visited his fellow monarch from 17 July to 11 August 1606.¹ James's interest in witchcraft and the King's Evil (compare 4.3.141–61),² and his belief that he was descended from Banquo, have been claimed, plausibly, as links between the new king and Shakespeare's play, but the more specific claim that *Macbeth* was written to honour the Danish king's visit, or that the play was performed before James and Christian – who did not speak English³ – lacks any proof. The royal visit included many dramatic performances – three unnamed plays by the King's Men, another by the company that had recently been punished for anti-Scottish satire in *Eastward Ho*, another by the Children of Paul's – as well as bear-baitings and demonstrations of fencing and wrestling.⁴ Yet John Heminge of Shakespeare's company received the customary £10 per play,⁵ and the records mention no extraordinary costs, as we might have expected if *Macbeth* had been performed, since in a full-blown royal performance it would probably have required some unusual costumes, props, and machinery. Unlike masques and other courtly entertainments, few public theatre plays (such as *Macbeth*) were premièred at court and/or written for a specific royal occasion. In 1606,

composition and performance partly depends upon the frequent theatre-closures for the plague (see p. 9 below, n. 1), and it is weakened by the unargued assumption (pp. 17 and 19) that in the Jacobean period Shakespeare did not continue to write plays when London performances were forbidden. Equally uncertain is *Macbeth*'s chronological relation with *Pericles* (1609), a play deeply interested in birth, death, and parenthood.

¹ See e.g. C. C. Stopes, *Shakespeare's Industry*, 1916, pp. 95–109; J. W. Draper, "'Macbeth' as a compliment to James I", *Englische Studien* 72 (1937–8), 207–20; Henry N. Paul, *The Royal Play of Macbeth*, 1950; J. M. Nosworthy, *Shakespeare's Occasional Plays, Their Origin and Transmission*, 1965, chapter 1; Clark, esp. chapters 5 and 7.

² On James's interest in witchcraft, see *Newes from Scotland* and *Daemonologie*, in James VI and I, *Daemonologie*, ed. G. B. Harrison, 1924; for the topicality of James's ambivalent attitude toward healing the King's Evil, see F. David Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance*, 1992, chapter 16, esp. pp. 276 and 281–2.

³ See Michael Hawkins, 'History, politics and *Macbeth*', in John Russell Brown (ed.), *Focus on 'Macbeth'*, 1982, pp. 155–88; p. 186. Hawkins's entire article is essential for the study of *Macbeth*, and Hawkins's Appendix, pp. 185–8, powerfully refutes the claims of Henry N. Paul.

⁴ See David Cook and F. P. Wilson, 'Dramatic records in the declared accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber, 1558–1642', *MSC* 6 (1962 for 1961), 44–6, and W. R. Streitberger, 'Jacobean and Caroline Revels accounts, 1603–1642', *MSC* 13 (1986), 15.

⁵ Cook and Wilson, 'Dramatic records', p. 44.

plague had closed the theatres for many months. Economic necessity, therefore, as well as the commercial value of performing at court, might have led the King's Men to present *Macbeth* there first.¹

Nothing stronger than hypothesis and circumstantial evidence joins *Macbeth* with either James's accession or Christian's visit, yet no English tragedy (as opposed to comedies and histories) on Scottish subjects earlier than *Macbeth* has survived. Four Scottish tragedies are known to have been written; they are for us only titles: 'a Tragedie of the Kinge of Scottes' (1567–8), 'Robart the second Kinge of scottes tragedie' or 'the scottes tragedi' (September 1599), 'malcolm Kynge of scottes' (April 1602), and 'the tragedie of Gowrie' (already mentioned).² A satiric remark in Will Kemp's *Nine Daies Wonder* (1600) implies that *Macbeth* and what Kemp calls 'Prophetesses' (possibly the beings who later became the 'sisters' of *Macbeth*) had already appeared in a ballad.³ Kemp had been the principal comic actor in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (the earlier name of the King's Men), and he might therefore have known a now-lost *Macbeth*-play.⁴

Before *Macbeth*, English dramatists and their audiences generally understood Scotsmen as a comical, alien, dangerous, and uncivilised people – as Frenchmen who spoke a form of English, perhaps.⁵ The historic Franco-Scottish alliance, the 'auld

¹ Among likely plays and entertainments, George Peele's *Arraignement of Paris* requires Queen Elizabeth as a participant and was advertised as having been performed at court; one version of Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* ends with an address to Elizabeth and was apparently performed at court, perhaps before it appeared at the Globe. Jonson's *Sejanus* may also have been performed first at court; see Philip Ayres (ed.), *Sejanus*, 1990, p. 9, citing E. K. Chambers. A few other plays may have been designed for royal performance before appearing in public theatres: see e.g. Glynne Wickham, 'The Two Noble Kinsmen or A Midsummer Night's Dream, Part II?', in G. R. Hibbard (ed.), *Elizabethan Theatre VII*, 1980, pp. 167–96. Generally, however, plays were performed publicly and then performed (sometimes adapted) at court. For the effort and expenses required by dramatic productions at court, see Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages*, 3 vols., II, pt. 1 (1963), chap. 8. For a different view about *Macbeth*, see Barroll, p. 153; he notes (p. 144): 'Beginning in June 1606, there would be no public presentations of plays in London for seven or eight months' because of the plague 'and thus no performances of *Macbeth* at the Globe'; such a long closure might make original performance at court more likely. Parker (ed.), *Coriolanus*, pp. 86–7, argues that *Coriolanus* may have been written and rehearsed, perhaps before paying audiences, under similarly difficult conditions. If Parker's guess is accurate, both writing and rehearsal of *Coriolanus* contradict Barroll's assumptions about *Macbeth* (see p. 7 above, n. 4).

² For the first and second, see Clark, pp. 11–12; on the second, see Henslowe, p. 124, and James Shapiro, 'The Scot's Tragedy and the politics of popular drama', *ELR* 23 (1993), 428–49; on the third, see Henslowe, pp. 199–200.

³ Bullough, VII, 429.

⁴ David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse*, 1987, p. 34. Dover Wilson (NS, pp. xli–xlii) thought a *Macbeth*-play existed in Elizabeth's reign, and G. B. Evans (private communication, 30 May 1994) has noted many verbal similarities between *Macbeth* and *A Warning for Faire Women* (printed 1599), a Lord Chamberlain's Men's play.

⁵ Typically, Scots and Scotland were material for comedies (such as Robert Greene's *James IV*, which includes an English invasion to rectify Scottish royal abuses, or the anonymous *Pinner of Wakefield*), or for history plays concerning the long medieval wars against Scotland (e.g. Peele's *Edward I*, Marlowe's *Edward II*, and the anonymous *Edward III*, in which Shakespeare probably had a hand and which includes a 'treacherous' Scottish invasion of northern England, repulsed by Edward III in person and involving the capture of David, King of Scots), or for national stereotypes and comic effects, as in *Henry V* and the quarto versions (1600, 1619) of Portia's ridiculed suitors in *The Merchant of Venice*. In the last instance, the Folio discreetly changes a satiric reference to a 'Scottish lord' to 'other lord'; perhaps similarly, Shakespeare transferred the Hero–Claudio plot in *Much Ado* from the Scottish setting of his source (Ariosto) to Italy (see Bullough, II, 62). *Edward III* in particular, and very unlike *Macbeth*, draws

Macbeth

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alliance', made these two countries seem especially likely to take advantage of any English internal dissension: 'If Lincolnshire seke to distroye Englande, what wonder is hit if Fraunce and Scotlande sometime have fought [i.e. sought?] to offende me?', one English propagandist wrote.¹ And the possibly Shakespearean *Edward III* (?1593) dramatises an earlier period, the fourteenth century, when English ambitions in France coincided with the designs of the Scots (England's 'everlasting foe'²) and the French on England. In *Edward III*, David, King of Scots, promises the French ambassador, 'That we with England will not enter parley, / . . . nor take truce' (*Edward III* 1.2.22–3). The text of *Henry V* alludes to this episode, where Westmoreland succinctly gives the English view:

But there's a saying, very old and true,
 'If that you will France win
 Then with Scotland first begin.'
 For once the eagle England being in prey,
 To her unguarded nest the weasel Scot
 Comes sneaking, and so sucks her princely eggs,
 Playing the mouse in absence of the cat
 To 'tame and havoc more than she can eat.'³

Unmentioned in *Henry V* are England's frequent attacks upon and invasions of Scotland. Queen Elizabeth engaged in very few independent foreign military adventures, but her first (1560) was against Scotland, when she intervened in Scottish factional struggles, hoping to install a puppet-régime or even to conquer the country.⁴

Lamenting Queen Elizabeth's death and praising King James as the first monarch to unite 'Britaine', William Warner's *A Continuance of Albions England* (1606) adds to a work first published in 1586 and often republished and enlarged; Warner's 1606 additions include a chapter (94) 'Of *Makbeth* the Tyrant . . .', perhaps alluding to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, another (95) on the Gunpowder Plot, and one (90) 'Of the long continued League and Confederacie betweene the *French* and *Scots* against the *English* . . .'⁵ Although Andrew Boorde practised medicine in Glasgow, his *Fyrst Booke of the Introduction of Knowledge* (?1547) is a compendium of the stereotypes that English popular and political writing kept alive for Shakespeare's audience:

I Am a Scotyshe man, and trew I am to Fraunce;
 In every countrey, myselfe I do auance;
 I wyll boost myselfe, I wyll crake and face;

attention to Scottish speech, using such conventional stage-Scots as 'whinyards' (thought to be an especially Scottish weapon; see Supplementary Note 4.3.162, p. 244 below), 'Jemmy' (for 'Jimmy'), and 'bonny' (see Giorgio Melchiori (ed.), *Edward III* (forthcoming), 1.2.33 and 57, respectively; subsequent quotations cite this edition). Later, King Edward specifically compliments the Countess of Salisbury for her ability to imitate King David's speech: "Even thus", quoth she, "he spake" – and then spoke broad, / With epithets and accents of the Scot, / But somewhat better than the Scot could speak' (2.1.29–31).

¹ Richard Morrison, quoted in Anthony Fletcher, *Tudor Rebellions*, 3rd edn, 1983, p. 5.

² *Edward III* 1.2.15.

³ Andrew Gurr (ed.), *H5*, 1992, 1.2.166–73; Westmoreland's 'saying' has been found as early as 1548.

⁴ For a wry, knowledgeable account, see C. G. Cruickshank, *Elizabeth's Army*, 2nd edn, 1966, pp. 207–36; for English fears of French intervention, see esp. p. 211.

⁵ William Warner, *A Continuance of Albions England* (1606), sig. b2r.