University of Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

INNERVATE
Leading student work in English studies

Volume 9: 2016-17 ISSN: 2041-6776

From Foreign Enemy to Great Unifying Leader: Performances of King James VI and I between 1599 and 1624 in the Works of Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare.

Joshua Caldicott

> '[Players] are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time: after your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live'[1] –Hamlet

The period around the succession of King James VI and I of Scotland and England was a time of great tension, following the death of Queen Elizabeth I whose successor was in question throughout her forty five year reign. During this period, the works of Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare were incredibly successful, and both playwrights were fortunate to have an insight into the relationship between the monarch and his subjects performing both on the public stage and in the privacy of court. Though James, in contrast to his son Charles, is often remembered for not performing in court masques, he still appears (directly or indirectly) on the stages of the time: in Histories such as *Henry V*, in Tragedies such as *Robert II* and *Macbeth*, in Comedies such as *Eastward Ho,* and even in his Court Masques. Considering the plays as 'chronicles of the time', it is possible to map through his appearances in the works of Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare, how the perception of King James VI and I changes over time within England as he takes to the throne.

Before James took the throne in 1603, there was great tension in England surrounding Elizabeth's successor, and subsequently, some people may have already started to look North towards James, thus giving the opportunity for the playhouses to produce works like Jonson's *Robert II*, that try to understand James' position as royalty. In the Autumn of 1599, four years before James would take to the throne, Henslowe's diary records four instances where money was paid to Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, Henry Chettle and another unnamed gentleman, for a play called *Robert II* or *The Scot's Tragedy.*[2] Unfortunately, the play has subsequently been lost and there are no records of its performance or of any payments for specific apparel or materials that could suggest how it would be performed. However, much can be concluded about the play by the context within which it was written. Two years after *Richard II* was published, which seems to have been censored to exclude the deposition scene, potentially due to 'controversial parallels [that] were drawn by contemporaries between Richard II and Elizabeth I',[3] it is clear that the nation was very anxious about who would be the next ruler, and that any discussion on the matter was suppressed by the Queen, perhaps accounting for the disappearance of *Robert II*. Meanwhile, the threat of James in the North leads many to reluctantly predict 'that the King of Scotland will carry [the English Crown], as very many Englishmen doe know assuredly'.[4] *Robert II* could well have been the Lord Admiral's Men's response to the success of the Lord Chamberlain's Men's Henriad, picking up the controversy of succession and linking it with James. Assuming that, having already paid for the play, Henslowe staged *Robert II*, the question that then arises is what would the audience at the time have seen. As James Shapiro notes in his essay on the play, 'Robert II does not figure largely in any famous myths, was not celebrated for any great military

[1] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: Revised Edition*, eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London and New York: Bloomsbury; 2016) 2.2.462-4
[2] 'Robert II, King of Scots (The Scot's Tragedy)'. *Lost Plays Database*. Ed. Roslyn Knutson, David McInnis, and Matthew Steggle. (Melbourne: University of Melbourne; 2009) <www.lostplays.org/lpd/Robert_II,_King_of_Scots_(The_Scot's_Tragedy)> [Accessed: 8 December 2016]
[3] Siobhan Keenan, *Acting Companies and their Plays in Shakespeare's London* (London and New York: Bloomsbury; 2014) p.73
[4] Sir Thomas Wilson, *The State of England (1600)*, ed. F. J. Fisher, *Camden Miscellany* Vol 16, third series, Vol. 52 (London: Camden Society; 1936). p. 2

victories, and ranked low in standing among Scottish monarchs',[5] and as a result the authors were more limited in what they could present of his history. Turning to *The Holinshed Chronicles* as a potential source, two things become very apparent: First how 'ye may perceiue how the Stewards came to the crowne [leading to] lames that now reigneth, being the eight person from this Robert';[6] and secondly how his reign involved many entanglements with the English. Thus, it would appear that the figure of Robert II would be of interest for the Elizabethan playwrights as the origin of the Stuart household, and would be a way of seeing Scottish rule, without the difficulty of performing a play directly about James, that if it was not punished by Elizabeth, certainly would be under James. This image of the Scottish rule in *Robert II*, it must be concluded, was not one that would be enjoyed by James, as it probably depicted Robert fighting the English, playing on the xenophobia between the two nations.

The transition between the houses Tudor and Stuart then forced a change in the way drama was written, particularly when it comes to history plays including Shakespeare's *Henry V*, as the new monarch brings with them a new set of attitudes to theatre and history, which overall may not have been an easy transition for writers to make. Despite tensions surrounding *Richard II*, Shakespeare's Henriad was loved by Queen Elizabeth who apparently 'was so taken with [the character,] that she requested a play be written in which Falstaff falls in love',[7] a delight which was clearly shared by the audience, reflected in the success of the plays. Following several public performances, in January 1605, *Henry V* was performed at court before King James. Problematically, like other History plays before it, *Henry V* includes a discussion of the dangers of Scotland:

> 'HENRY V: We must not only arm to invade the French,
> But lay down our proportions to defend
> Against the Scot, who will make road upon us
> With all advantages. […]
> For you shall read that my great-grandfather
> Never went with his forces into France
> But that the Scot on his unfurnish'd kingdom
> Came pouring, like the tide into a breach,'[8]

It is highly unlikely that James would have enjoyed hearing his nation being called 'the ill neighbourhood'[9] and as a result, measures could have been taken to appease the King. It is not impossible that this passage was omitted from the performance, but a desire to appease the King may be seen in the inclusion of Jamy. The single scene featuring Jamy only appears in Shakespeare's first folio of 1623, and as I will go on to explain, could be an addition made for court performance. Although many critics adamantly reject the idea of Jamy appearing before the king, I would suggest that he is actually a questionable first attempt at creating a Scottish character for the Jacobean stage. Jamy speaks with a heavy Scottish dialect which, in a study of Scottish dialect in seventeenth century drama, Lauren Stewart notes 'is far from a stereotyped depiction, but contains instances of attested dialectal forms and features'[10] suggesting an authorial attempt to accurately create a Scottish character, rather than simply mocking the Scottish. Having Jamy speak with such a strong Scottish accent would inevitably draw parallels with the best known Scot at the time, King James, especially since they share the same name. This is a complimentary comparison for James though, as Jamy is described as a 'marvellous falorous gentleman […] of great expedition and knowledge in th'anchient wars',[11] that

[5] James Shapiro, 'The Scot's Tragedy and the Politics of Popular Drama' *English Literary Renaissance* 23.3 (1993) 428-449. 439
[6] Raphael Holinshed, 'The Historie of Scotland' in *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, Vol 5 (London: Richard Taylor & Co.; 1808) p.390
[7] Peter Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography*. (London: Vintage Books; 2006) p.279
[8] William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, eds. T. W. Craik (London: Methuen Drama; 1995) 1.2.136-149
[9] Ibid. 1.2.154
[10] Lauren Stewart, 'Representation of Northern English and Scots in Seventeenth Century Drama' (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Edinburgh: 2011) p.57
[11] Shakespeare, *Henry V* 3.2.77-79

maintains Shakespeare's previous habit of 'speak[ing] admiringly of the soldierly qualities of [the Scottish]'.[12] Along with the praise from Fluellen, the addition of the character Macmorris and his disputes with the other captains whilst Jamy remains composed and impartial can also be linked with James' work uniting the nations. Thus, the addition of a scene with Jamy before a court appearance allows James to be performed as a strong military leader able to deal with the union of all of the nations in Britain, even if the dialect holds onto an idea of James as a "Scottish" King, which is a questionable decision on Shakespeare's part.

Overtime however, Shakespeare and Jonson adapted to writing in a new state of England, and learnt best how to incorporate the King and his socio-political beliefs into performance, the pinnacle of which is Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Following James' succession 'patronage of the leading companies officially passed into the hands of the royal family, the Lord Chamberlain's Men becoming King James's players'.[13] Now under James' patronage, Shakespeare writes a play perfect for the King, picking out elements of interest from James' life and putting them into *Macbeth*. Much like *Robert II*, *Macbeth* portrays James' early ancestors but highlights their close relationship with England, including scenes of Scottish Lords taking refuge in the English court and a performance of Fleance escaping the murderers before, as is told in *The Holinshed Chronicles*, he 'fled into Wales'.[14] Thus James' ancestors are shown to live without issue between the two nations he would later govern, and in fact the compliment of James' long lineage securing his place as King is extended when his ancestor Banquo is shown to hold a similar attitude towards witchcraft. In 1597, James published *Daemonologie* in which he details 'the fearefull aboundinge at [the] time in [his] countrie, of these detestable slaves of the Devil, the Witches or enchanters'.[15] Banquo then exhibits similar distrust in witches, as 'he shows none of Macbeth's feverish anxiety to know more'[16] when the witches leave. The foregrounding of James' long lineage accumulates up to the reappearance of witches in Act 4 Scene 1, in which James' ancestry takes to the stage. Recalling the Holinshed Chronicles' note that James is 'eight person from'[17] the start of the Stuart house, '*a show of eight Kings'*[18] appears before Macbeth along with '*Banquo last, with a glasse in his hand'*.[19] The word 'glasse' could be interpreted as either a crystal ball or a mirror, and if this copy of the text was close to what was performed in court, the latter is quite likely. The editors of the first folio attempted to present the plays as 'literary' reading texts, 'perfect of their limbes',[20] and as a result would likely favour the practices of court performances, when Shakespeare's work was most highly valued, or at least would have included additional extracts from the court performances as the additional "limbs". Furthermore, as with Jonson's *Every Man Out of his Humour* which has two types of ending in respect of Elizabeth (One in which an actor performs the Queen, one in which speech is addressed to the Queen in her presence,) it is likely Shakespeare took a similar logical choice to have James play James by using a mirror to reflect an image of him sat in the crowd. This action frames the King as a stable monarch whose 'line stretch out to' th' cracke of Doome',[21] whilst also marvelling at his success in uniting the nation, as Macbeth is shocked to see him 'two-fold Balles, and treble Scepters carry'.[22] Thus, *Macbeth* performs a far better image of the King than *Henry V*, dropping the questionable accents and using the King himself, which allows Shakespeare to flatter his patron more effectively.

---

[12] Cumberland Clark, 'Scottish Character' in *Shakespeare and National Character* (London: Williams & Norgate; 1934) p.53
[13] Keenan, *Acting Companies and their Plays* p.29
[14] Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles* Vol 5 p.271
[15] James VI, King of Scotland. 'Daemonologie in forme of a dialogue, diuided into three bookes'. *Early English Books Online.* (Edinburgh, 1597) <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:7990> [Accessed: 9 December 2016]
[16] A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Macmillan; 1985) p.320
[17] Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles* Vol 5 p.390
[18] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedie of Macbeth* in *The First Folio of Shakespeare: The Norton Facsimile*. ed. Charlton Hinman. (New York: Norton; 1968) p.752
[19] Ibid. p.752
[20] John Heminges and Henry Cordell, in *The First Folio* p.7
[21] Shakespeare, *Macbeth* p.752
[22] Ibid. p.752

However, having adapted to a new England, the writers do not necessarily have to present James as the perfect King, and in fact works like Jonson's collaborative piece *Eastward Ho* shows popularity for satirical comedy targeted at James. Like Shakespeare, Jonson had a closer relationship with the King than most, later being 'granted a royal pension [effectively making] him Britain's first poet laureate';[23] but unlike Shakespeare, he had a much more quarrelsome relationship with the law. Before *Eastward Ho*, Jonson had been arrested for his controversial play *Isle of Dogs* that in some way embarrassed the Queen and her council,[24] and he only narrowly escaped hanging for killing Gabriel Spenser by being branded with a "T" for Tyburn 'where his life would end if he offended again'.[25] Undeterred, Jonson would continue to cause trouble, including co-writing *Eastward Ho* in 1605 with George Chapman and John Marston. The main offence lies in a negative portrayal of the King, when the foolish Sir Petronel Flash lands at the Isle of Dogs (a possible reference to Jonson's other controversial work) and meets a "gentleman" with a broad Scottish accent who recognises him as 'one of [his] thirty-pound knights'[26] and discovers that Petronel actually 'stole his knighthood o' the grand day for four pound'.[27] Not only is this a negative portrayal of the King, placing him in a disreputable part of London and bringing back the Scottish accent to isolate him as a "Scottish" King, but this also criticises James' politics in the way he rather freely gave out knighthoods in order to raise funds. The same year Jonson wrote *The Masque of Blackness* at the request of James' Queen Anne, he was arrested for writing disreputably about the king, before then being released and subsequently writing *Hymenaei* for a wedding that James had arranged for early the next year. Some critics like Eric Linklater dismiss the incongruent arrest by shifting the blame to Marston 'who wrote the offensive lines that brought all three of them into danger',[28] whilst others like Ian Donaldson note Jonson's catholic associations who felt 'antagonism to the Scottish presence in London'.[29] Alternatively, as he would probably have seen the finished piece before production, especially since the controversial scene references his *Isle of Dogs,* Jonson might actually have recognised the controversy of the piece, but as a popular satirist familiar with legal scrapes, he may not have minded allowing Marston a quip targeted at James. Regardless of Jonson's association with the controversial passages or the motivation for his contribution, *Eastward Ho* demonstrates that the theatre of King James VI and I's reign did not simply glorify him, and that playwrights were prepared to question his political decision-making, even using his Scottish Heritage as a way to easily isolate and target him as the subject of public humour.

Towards the end of his reign, King James was seen as a strong monarch and had already begun to establish a Stuart succession with his son Charles, thus the drama at the time continued to reflect upon his success as the King uniting the two crowns, including in what would become Jonson's final Jacobean masque, *The Fortunate Isles, and their Union*. Although 'King James never danced after leaving Scotland',[30] he still played a central role in the masque as he sat on 'an elevated chair of state opposite stage centre [reflecting] his rank in the social hierarchy, and the need for him to be seen as well as to see'.[31] Along with the design of the masques such that only when 'his majesty being set'[32] could the performance begin, and the King's apparent interaction with the revels, one time calling out

[23] Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare & Co*, (London: Penguin Books; 2007) p.161
[24] 'Isle of Dogs, The'. *Lost Plays Database*. Ed. Roslyn Knutson, David McInnis, and Matthew Steggle. (Melbourne: University of Melbourne; 2009) <https://www.lostplays.org/index.php?title=Isle_of_Dogs,_The> [Accessed: 8 December 2016]
[25] Wells, *Shakespeare & Co,* p.134
[26] Jonson, Ben, George Chapman and John Marston, *Eastward Ho!* eds. C. G. Petter (London: A & C Black; 1994) 4.1.168
[27] Ibid. 4.1.169-170
[28] Eric Linklater, *Ben Jonson and King James: Biography and Portrait* (London: Jonathan Cape; 1931) p.145
[29] Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford University Press: Oxford; 2012) p.213
[30] Martin Butler, 'The Court Masque', *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online* (2014) <http://universitypublishingonline.org/cambridge/benjonson/k/essays/court_msq_essay/> [Accessed: 6 January 2017] p.1
[31] Ibid. p.2
[32] Jonson, Ben, 'The Fortunate Isles, and Their Union' in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, eds. Stephen Orgel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press; 1969) p.433

'"Why don't they dance?"'[33] to insight more dancing, James plays an important part in the performance of the Jacobean masque, even if he is not onstage dancing. When it then comes down to a question of what value is in performing the masque, unequivocally for Jonson it is a literary one, seeing the masque as an 'enduring monument to the Stuart dynasty'.[34] In what would ultimately be the last Jonson masque performed in front of King James VI and I, only three months before his death, there were plenty of aspects of James' reign that *The Fortunate Isle* could have reflected upon and commended: the commissioning of the *King James Bible*, the peace brought about with Spain, the suppression of the Gunpowder Plot.[35] However, James' greatest achievement that is recognised once again is the union of the nation. Along with the titular reference, the masque has a moving island that ultimately joins '*itself to the shore*' and the gods sing of how the people of this new nation 'all are even-hearted, open, free [and] all day they feast, they sport and spring',[36] presenting before James the image of a perfect unified nation that he would have aimed for with his union. Finally, James is given the title of the 'great lord of waters and of isles',[37] referencing the current power of Britannia and accrediting the nation's success to him. To some extent, this is a counterfactual performance, as the nation would not be fully united until 1707, thus what is shown is just a wish fulfilment for James, overlooking some of the disparities still felt within the nation. However, what Jonson is doing is to extend the power of uniting the crowns into uniting the nation, to praise James and performing him as the great unifier, even if it is a union that has not yet been fully completed. As a result, James' part in the play is as the central spectacle, as he sits in the full view of his subjects for a performance that begins when he is ready and celebrates his successful union of the crowns, even if the reality of the union is overlooked, and ultimately this is how James is performed: as the King that successfully brought together one nation in peace.

King James VI and I of Scotland and England never physically takes to the stage, and yet he appears in the dramatic works of Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare a great number of times. At first, he is a threat from the North, one with a history of challenging England and that the English public wants to know better. Then, as he takes to the throne, the dramatic precedent changes, as flattery for the Tudor house is no longer appropriate and works are adapted to portray James as the new "Scottish" King who can handle the British nations. However, soon into the Jacobean period, works emerge that properly address the King, either recognising his power and glorifying his attitudes, or holding him to account for the decisions he makes. In the end, James was remembered for what had always been recognised as the greatest success of his reign, from the relationship of the four captains in *Henry V,* to the reunited island in *The Fortunate Isle*: James was the king that established the union of Scotland and England.

Bibliography

Ackroyd, Peter, *Shakespeare: The Biography*. (London: Vintage Books; 2006)

Bradley, A. C., *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Macmillan; 1985)

Butler, Martin, 'The Court Masque', *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online* (2014) <http://universitypublishingonline.org/cambridge/benjonson/k/essays/court_msq_essay/> [Accessed: 6 January 2017]

Clark, Cumberland, 'Scottish Character' in *Shakespeare and National Character* (London: Williams & Norgate; 1934)

Donaldson, Ian, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford University Press: Oxford; 2012)

[33] Orazio Busino quoted in Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642,* 3rd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1992) p.207

[34] Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life* p.203

[35] Jenny Wormald, 'James VI and I (1566–1625)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14592> [Accessed: 6 January 2017]

[36] Jonson, 'Fortunate Isles' l.348-350

[37] Ibid. l.431

Gurr, Andrew, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642,* 3rd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1992)

Heminges, John, and Henry Cordell, in *The First Folio of Shakespeare: The Norton Facsimile*. ed. Charlton Hinman. (New York: Norton; 1968)

Holinshed, Raphael, 'The Historie of Scotland' in *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, Vol 5 (London: Richard Taylor & Co.; 1808) p.390

'Isle of Dogs, The'. *Lost Plays Database*. Ed. Roslyn Knutson, David McInnis, and Matthew Steggle. (Melbourne: University of Melbourne; 2009) <https://www.lostplays.org/index.php?title=Isle_of_Dogs,_The> [Accessed: 8 December 2016]

James VI, King of Scotland. 'Daemonologie in forme of a dialogue, diuided into three bookes'. *Early English Books Online.* (Edinburgh, 1597) <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:7990> [Accessed: 9 December 2016]

Jonson, Ben, 'The Fortunate Isles, and Their Union' in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, eds. Stephen Orgel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press; 1969)

Jonson, Ben, George Chapman and John Marston, *Eastward Ho!* eds. C. G. Petter (London: A & C Black; 1994)

Keenan, Siobhan, *Acting Companies and their Plays in Shakespeare's London* (London and New York: Bloomsbury; 2014)

Linklater, Eric, *Ben Jonson and King James: Biography and Portrait* (London: Jonathan Cape; 1931)

'Robert II, King of Scots (The Scot's Tragedy)'. *Lost Plays Database*. Ed. Roslyn Knutson, David McInnis, and Matthew Steggle. (Melbourne: University of Melbourne; 2009) <www.lostplays.org/lpd/Robert_II,_King_of_Scots_(The_Scot's_Tragedy)> [Accessed: 8 December 2016]

Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet: Revised Edition*, eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London and New York: Bloomsbury; 2016)

Shakespeare, William, *King Henry V*, eds. T. W. Craik (London: Methuen Drama; 1995)

Shakespeare, William, *The Tragedie of Macbeth* in *The First Folio of Shakespeare: The Norton Facsimile*. ed. Charlton Hinman. (New York: Norton; 1968)

Shapiro, James, 'The Scot's Tragedy and the Politics of Popular Drama' *English Literary Renaissance* 23.3 (1993) 428-449

Stewart, Lauren, 'Representation of Northern English and Scots in Seventeenth Century Drama' (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Edinburgh: 2011)

Wells, Stanley, *Shakespeare & Co*, (London: Penguin Books; 2007)

Wilson, Sir Thomas, *The State of England (1600)*, ed. F. J. Fisher, *Camden Miscellany* Vol 16, third series, Vol. 52 (London: Camden Society; 1936)

Wormald, Jenny. 'James VI and I (1566–1625)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14592> [Accessed: 6 January 2017]