

REVIEW: SHAKESPEARE AND SCOTLAND

Gavin Miller

Willy Maley and Andrew Murphy (eds), **Shakespeare and Scotland**,
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, 211pp, hb, £50.00,
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Any new volume of Shakespeare criticism enters an unusual segment of the academic market. Courses on Shakespeare are nigh-on mandatory in most English Literature departments at some point in an undergraduate's study. The BA (or, in Scotland, MA) student faces shelf after shelf of Shakespeare criticism; he or she also faces tutor after tutor demanding essays which show autonomy, originality, and mastery of secondary sources. Every new work of criticism offers some fresh aspect to student readers, while at the same time encouraging their perception that everything has been said already. Lecturers and researchers are hardly immune to similar feelings. As Willy Maley and Andrew Murphy, the editors of **Shakespeare and Scotland** recognise, the English Bard is 'an industry' (p. 15). To a potentially sceptical academic market, their volume must seem something more than an undergraduate essay resource.

Furthermore, as Maley and Murphy admit, they must also counteract 'the tendency to see his [Shakespeare's] work as transcending nations and regions' that 'has made topical readings difficult' (p. 14). On the other hand, any project to put Scotland back in the picture must also proceed cautiously. Maley and Murphy are quite adamant that 'rival cultures inhabit the host culture' (p. 6). But attempts to show the English in the Scottish, and the Scottish in the English, can easily seem arbitrary to hostile commentators.

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Maley, Murphy, and their contributors therefore take pains to show the legitimacy of their project. The first of the volume's essays is David J. Baker's examination of the **Henriad** tetralogy, "'Stands Scotland where it did": Shakespeare on the march'. For those who might want to patrol Shakespeare's national boundaries, this essay is a useful reminder that the Bard's early modern nation was imagined very differently. Despite James VI's ambitions for Union, not only were England and Scotland separate nations, they were joined by a border that was far from distinct. The Anglo-Scottish 'march' was an area where the rule of law was replaced by complex and shifting alliances; it is in the **Henriad**, Baker argues convincingly, that 'the tensions between a centralizing English monarchy and a disruptive Anglo-Scottish frontier are played out' (p. 23). Neil Rhodes in 'Wrapped in the strong arms of the Union: Shakespeare and King James' continues this theme, picking up on the idea of British national anxieties over a 'fissured kingdom' antithetical to the imagined 'island fortress' (p. 43). Rhodes explores the intertextual correspondences of the **Henriad** (and also **King Lear**) with James VI's kingship manual **Basilicon Doron**. The resulting analysis is a fruitful recontextualisation of Shakespearean rhetoric within a political discourse of developing statehood and internal colonisation.

As might be expected, **Macbeth** is another focus for contributors to **Shakespeare and Scotland**. In 'The place of Scots in the Scottish play: **Macbeth** and the politics of language', Christopher Highley discusses the linguistic mythologies of Shakespeare's time. Macbeth's fall into tyranny is 'a process of Gaelicization' (p. 61) whereby the tragic hero comes to be associated with the impenetrable barbarity of the 'Irish' tongue. The focus on the language of Macbeth continues in Elizabeth Fowler's '**Macbeth** and the rhetoric of political forms'. Fowler's discussion of 'social persons' in medieval and early modern culture is fascinating. Scotland, though, seems marginal to her argument – this is really an essay that uses an original and interesting theoretical perspective to read **Macbeth**. Perhaps the key question, then, is that raised by Rebecca Rogers: 'How Scottish was the "Scottish Play"?: **Macbeth**'s national identity in the eighteenth century'. Rogers argues that theatrical inertia in the eighteenth century, and an absence of Scots in London, meant that **Macbeth** was routinely staged without any emphasis on the Scottishness of its protagonist. It was only as Scots took a greater role in the British project that they were familiar enough to be imitated on stage. London's eventual familiarity with the Scots contained a great deal of contempt, though, as Rogers illustrate in her reading of **The Three Conjurors: A Political Interlude**. In this verse parody of **Macbeth**,

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John Stuart, third Earl of Bute, whose glorious term as Prime Minister lasted from 1762 to 1763, is cast as the miserly Scotch sycophant ‘Macboote’.

Although Andrew Hadfield makes intelligent connections between Scottish political history and **Hamlet** in ‘**Hamlet**’s country matters: the “Scottish play” within the play’, the remainder of the chapters are less directly concerned with Shakespearean text, and – like Roger’s essay on **Macbeth** – more interested in Scottish dimensions to the canonisation, production, adaptation and dissemination of Shakespeare’s work. Robert Crawford’s ‘The Bard: Ossian, Burns, and the shaping of Shakespeare’ can be seen as a variant on his well-known argument for the Scottish invention of English Literature. In Crawford’s view, the English bard (who is not really a bard at all, of course, but a dramatist) is the product of English anxieties over their lack of a contemporary Ossian: ‘when fully recast in England as “the bard” he [Shakespeare] became not so much the opposite of Ossian as the antidote to Robert Burns. The more Burns’s standing as national bard was accepted, the more Shakespeare was promoted as a cross-border counterweight’ (p. 132).

Lidia Garbin complicates this cross-border balancing act when she discusses the place of Shakespeare in the works of Scott, a writer who both denied and initiated comparisons with Shakespeare. The author of **Waverley** represents Shakespeare and his immediate influence in novels such as **Kenilworth** and **Woodstock**, both of which Garbin discusses in her essay, “‘Not fit to tie his brogues’: Shakespeare and Scott’. The rich and stimulating reading which she provides shows but a fraction of Shakespeare’s influence, a legacy ‘too expansive and profound to be comprehensively described in an article’ (p. 143). Garbin has written a PhD on Shakespeare’s place in Scott; I hope some academic publisher invites her to write a monograph on this topic. Of course, the Scottishness of the topic might well prove an obstacle in a world where, in the words of Andrew Murphy, ‘the heyday of Scottish publishing is long since past’ (p. 167). As Murphy concludes in ‘Shakespeare goes to Scotland: a brief history of Scottish editions’, the days when an editor like Peter Alexander of Glasgow University could collaborate with a local publisher like Collins on a new edition seem irrevocably gone.

Shakespeare and Scotland ends with two essays on the contemporary theatrical and screen transformations of Shakespeare. Adrienne Scullion in ‘Citz Scotland where it did? Shakespeare in production at the Citizens’ Theatre, Glasgow, 1970–1974’ discusses the ‘use – and the alleged abuse – of the Shakespearean text’ in the ‘aesthetic and dramaturgical war that was to be fought on stage at the Citizens’ Theatre’ (p. 184). Mark Thornton Burnett in

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‘Local **Macbeth** / global Shakespeare: Scotland’s screen destiny’ takes another angle: how has globalised cultural production affected representation of Scottish locality in recent films of **Macbeth**? His answer is finely nuanced: although Scotland ‘evaporates’, it can return ‘in the form of history’, as a ghostly repressed presence, or ‘in the form of a supplement’, as, for example, an extra-textual documentary accompanying the main billing (p. 191).

The essays in **Shakespeare and Scotland** are all intelligent and interesting; they will inform students, and inspire researchers. The editors and contributors should also be admired for their wiliness, for this volume works by cannily exploiting the cultural industry that surrounds the Bard. Many of the essays contain no essential relation to Shakespeare (and some struggle even to show a meaningful relation with Scotland). There is no fundamental reason why a history of the Citizen’s theatre, or of Scottish publishing, or the theory of early modern intersubjectivity, or globalisation and Scottish culture, or eighteenth-century Anglo-Scots relations should take Shakespeare as a focus. He just happens to be there to lend his marketability to these academic endeavours. In her discussion of Shakespeare and Scott, one of the few essays that really *has* to be about Shakespeare and Scotland, Lidia Garbin discusses the presence of Shakespeare’s work in the action of Scott’s **Woodstock**: ‘Shakespeare is co-opted not for the last time as a semi-religious rendering of national character. It is not the reading of Shakespeare that is important here so much as the presence of the book. It takes on a role, companion to that of the Bible, in vampire killing or the warding off of evil spirits’ (p. 158). It is up to academics to exploit as best they can the contemporary superstitions of government, bureaucrats, publishers and students concerning the place of Shakespeare in a ‘good education’.

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