

Macbeth and the jacobean scot

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In *Macbeth, the Jacobean Scot, and the Politics of the Union*, Sharon Alker and Holly Faith Nelson demonstrate a well-informed opinion of the relation between the idea of the Jacobian Scot and its arguable relation, or lack thereof, to William Shakespeare's Elizabethan play, *Macbeth*. Though many scholars find it easy to draw a connection between the traditional Jacobian Scot that was typically presented in Elizabethan plays during the Jacobian era, Alker and Nelson seek to highlight the ambiguous nature of the play by demonstrating the various ways in which it can be read and/or interpreted.

Not only this, but Alker and Nelson also manage to shed light on the conflicting aspects of *Macbeth* in relation to its connection with Jacobean ideas and portrayals of Scots at the time. At the time that Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth*, is thought to have been performed in 1606, a huge change was making its way across what we now refer to as Great Britain. During this time, the former king of Scotland, James VI, became the king of England as a result of the Union of Crowns, following the death of his cousin, Queen Elizabeth I of England.

This union caused much friction between Scotland and England, as many English felt imposed upon and thought the Scottish to be inferior and somewhat barbaric in their ways. Due to the attitudes of many English people towards the Scottish during the Elizabethan era, the Scottish were most often characterized as people who were opposed to what was thought to be "legitimate" authority by the English, along with being represented as lesser than and in need of subordination to the English.

The typical 'stage Scot' was often portrayed as dualistic, lacking in loyalty, and intrusive of other's property in their relentless ambitions for power. However, there were three different views regarding the union of England and Scotland. One English view thought that English systems and such should be most prevalent across Britain, while another view (mainly called for by Scots) looked to equality by maintaining political and religious institutions separately. The third view, held mostly by those who supported King James, sought for a unity "in the hearts and minds of the two peoples. Due to the fact that Macbeth is thought to have been performed in the time between the proposal of these 3 policies and the actual implementation of any new policies, many critics believe that the play is a direct representation of English views of the 'Jacobian Scot'. In contrast to this idea, Alker and Nelson would like to "demonstrate that Shakespeare's Macbeth does not present a particular position on the Anglo-Scottish politics that defines itself in relation to the belief system of one small political body".

Instead, Alker and Nelson did a more flexible reading of the play that consisted of possible relations to any of the three models of the union. First of all, Alker and Nelson bring the character of Macbeth into consideration, as he is not only the main character of the play, but also natively Scottish. Although Macbeth does seem to maintain all the traditional characteristics of a Jacobian Scot: disloyal, subordinate, and barbaric, Alker and Nelson point out the characteristics of Macbeth that stand in complete contrast to this traditional model.

To begin with, the traditional stage Scot would never possess noble values such as loyalty, kinship, and hospitality. However, in Shakespeare's play the Scottish character of Macbeth, though troubled and duplicitous, is read to possess such qualities somewhere in the make-up of his conscious. This is apparent in Macbeth's back-and-forth notions of whether or not to kill the king and gain power or preserve his loyalty to the king and maintain his integrity as one of Duncan's kin.

Although Macbeth ultimately proves to allow evil and selfishness to rule his decisions, the agonizing consideration of right and wrong that Macbeth struggles through prior to murdering Duncan shows that Macbeth is not simply a barbaric creature driven solely by greed and desire. Rather, Macbeth is seen working through his conflicting desire for power and his code of honor and sense of respect for the king. The typical stage Scot normally would not embody such qualities as guilt and/or remorse.

Also, there is a hint that Macbeth may not fully understand his own desires and actions, as he was not initially driven by the idea of power when the witches first prophesized his coming kingdom. Instead, it was Banquo who first displayed excitement and anxiousness at the witches' prophecy and spurred later excitement and ambition in Macbeth. Along with Banquo, Lady Macbeth is portrayed to having been more ambitious towards ideas of power and kingship than Macbeth originally was.

This aspect of the play hints at the fact that Macbeth was aided, or led to his violent ways, rather than singularly contriving an evil murder plan against the king. The traditional portrayal of the stage Scot would be that of

stubborn, insistent, uncivilized, and unconcerned with duties or issues of loyalty. In the case of Macbeth, he was more or less guided into such characteristics as he was governed by his wife's unrelenting desire for power in order to first summon up such murderous notions and ideas.

The typical stage Scot would have possessed these qualities initially, without the need of any sort of encouragement. In conclusion, the character of Macbeth in Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth*, as Alker and Nelson would argue, stand in contrast to the role of the typical Jacobian Scot that was predominately presented in Elizabethan plays. Though Macbeth ultimately possessed many of the characteristics that the traditional Jacobian Scot would possess, he also held many contradictory characteristics.

Where Scots were typically portrayed as immoral and barbaric, lacking any sense of guilt and/or consideration for others, Macbeth is portrayed as a less-stubborn, remorseful character that is filled with anxiety and logical dualism over any sort of misdeed or wrong doing he considers. Therefore, although Macbeth may be read as a villainous and selfish character driven by greed and other characteristics thought to have been attributed to Scottishness, he can also be read as a regretful and conscious-stricken man whose inner-turmoil is the result of conflicting instincts of morality and of power.