

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## **‘What think you of this present state?’: Representations of Scotland and Anglo-Scottish union in Robert Greene’s *The Scottish History of James the Fourth* and John Ford’s *Perkin Warbeck***

Steven Veerapen

University of Strathclyde

[steven.veerapen@strath.ac.uk](mailto:steven.veerapen@strath.ac.uk)

As the elderly Elizabeth I's long reign drew to a close in the late 1590s, it became increasingly likely that her Scottish kinsman, James VI, would ascend the English throne, thus uniting two sovereign states under one crown. This came to pass in 1603, as James became the first Stuart king of England, possessed of a dual British sovereignty and eager to embark on an ambitious project of still more ‘perfect union’,<sup>1</sup> a goal not achieved until more than a hundred years after his accession. Given the recent political debates that have thrown into question the shifting loci of power as a result of 1707’s Treaty of Union (and which continue to rage despite its first affirmation by plebiscite in its history), it is useful to consider the ways in which union between Great Britain’s two independent states was interrogated on the early modern English stage, when the first iteration of unity under a Scotsman ruling from London became a realistic possibility.<sup>2</sup> Whilst representations of Scotland and its people on the stage have been recognised, there has been a tendency on the part of critics to blur the divisions between the British states by acknowledging early modern Scots as what Hoenselaars problematically terms ‘British “foreigners”’.<sup>3</sup> Whilst the term is geographically correct, it arguably elides the sense of cultural and national foreignness which existed on the British Isles prior to

---

<sup>1</sup> Steven G. Ellis and Christopher Maginn, *The Making of the British Isles: The State of Britain and Ireland, 1450-1660* (Abingdon: Routledge 2013), p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller discussion of the doubtfulness and obstacles which lay in the path of James’ succession as it was viewed in the 1590s, see Lisa Hopkins, *Drama and the Succession to the Crown, 1561-1633* (Farham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 5-7.

<sup>3</sup> A.J. Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: A Study of National Identity in English Renaissance Drama, 1558-1642* (London: Associated University Press, 1992), p. 13.

political unification. Certainly, in Thomas Wilson's *The Arte of Rhetorique*, the supposed national identity of the Scottish people is listed alongside those of other nations, with no recognition of communal British characteristics:

The Englishman [is known] for feeding and chaunging for apparell. The Dutchman for drinking. The Frenchman for pride and inconstance. The Spanyard for nimblenes of body, and much disdaine: the Italian for great wit and policie: the Scots for boldnesse, and the Boeme for stubbornesse.<sup>4</sup>

The national independence of Scotland and its potential union with England play a significant role in Robert Greene's remarkably ahistorical *The Scottish History of James the Fourth* (c1590). Interestingly, John Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* (c. 1634) also engages with the reign of James IV, from the vantage point of three decades after the Union of the Crowns, which saw James VI of Scotland descend on London with a gaggle of Scottish courtiers as James I of England. Commonalities in both plays certainly exist – not least the theatrical representation of Scotland's early-Renaissance king (albeit with wildly differing degrees of historical accuracy). In both plays one finds competing narratives of dominance, division, unity, nationalism, unionism, assimilation, resistance, might and weakness. Yet the plays also offer alternative views of history and British union, with Greene's largely-fictional, teleological study considering the inevitability of monarchical union and the necessity of English-based dominance (via the collapsing of the historical with the contemporary), and Ford meditating historically on thirty years of that union, positing the imperfections of unified and centralised polity across the British Isles, and raising questions about military might at home versus political might on the European stage.

Lisa Hopkins has persuasively argued that both Greene's *The Scottish History of James the Fourth* and Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* (which share theatrical representations of the Scottish king who laid the foundations of the Stuart claim to the English throne) are closely bound up with the issue of succession. The former, as Jean-Christophe Mayer attests, is 'at the heart of the succession question' (that question concerning who was to succeed Elizabeth);<sup>5</sup> the latter, Hopkins suggests, concerns itself with the potential succession of an alternative claimant to the throne of Scotland at a time when the 'question of succession suddenly and unexpectedly flared up again... as the arrival of a second prince made the division of the kingdoms between two heirs once more a

---

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1560) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909), p. 179.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Christophe Mayer, 'Late-Elizabethan Theatre and the Succession' *The Struggle for the Succession in Late-Elizabethan England*, ed. by Jean-Christophe Mayer, (Montpellier: Institut de Recherche sur la Renaissance, 2004), pp. 371-93 (p. 383).

possibility'.<sup>6</sup> If the plays are indeed as concerned with succession as Mayer and Hopkins contend, then in both cases – and with two separate succession questions – the representations of Scotland's status as an independent country joined with England under one crown are of particular interest.

### **Scots and Anglo-Scottish Union in *The Scottish History of James the Fourth***

Written in the 1590s<sup>7</sup>, *The Scottish History of James the Fourth* is notable for its scant regard for historical verisimilitude, bearing as it does little resemblance to the life and reign of James IV.<sup>8</sup> Though Greene's appropriation of Scottish history predates Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, it is worthwhile to recall G. K. Hunter's adroit assessment of the more famous 'Scottish Play' in considering the history of *James the Fourth*; he acknowledged that 'the history of *Macbeth* is, in fact, a moral rather than factual history, just as the "Scotland" of *Macbeth* is a country of the mind rather than a real geographical location'.<sup>9</sup> Although adopting a markedly different dramatic mode, *James the Fourth* is equally notable for viewing the history of Scotland through the lens of English morality. Whereas Scotland's unlucky early-Renaissance king married Henry VII's eldest daughter Margaret Tudor before being ignominiously slain – along with much of the Scottish nobility – at the Battle of Flodden, Greene's James is depicted throughout as the conspicuously unnamed 'King of Scotland', who marries the fictional Dorothea, daughter of the King of England. That the jurisdictions of the kings overshadow their names is arresting; what seems obvious is that Greene's manipulation of history allows for a drama which, as Hopkins suggests, employs 'riddled identities [and an] oblique relationship to reality' in order to explore sensitive issues.<sup>10</sup> Further, the prominence of the kings' individual jurisdictions serves to collapse history into a semi-mythical study of the office of the Scottish king and his country's relationship with its southern neighbour, with the fictional Dorothea thus taking on a quite different

---

<sup>6</sup> Hopkins, p. 139.

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of the play's dating, see Ruth Hudson, 'Greene's *James IV* and Contemporary Allusions to Scotland', *PMLA* 47. 3 (1932), 652-657, and Sanders' introduction to the Revels Plays edition, which reflects on Hudson's attempt at dating. See Norman Sanders (ed.), *The Scottish History of James the Fourth* (London: Methuen, 1970), pp. xxv-xxix. I have used the most common date of 1590 throughout.

<sup>8</sup> The plot of the play mingles the historical marriage between James IV of Scotland and Margaret Tudor with Cinthio's fictional tale of the King of Ireland, Astatio, and his wife Arrenopia. As a result, Greene simultaneously launches Scotland into the realms of romanticised Irish wildness and European myth-making.

<sup>9</sup> G.K. Hunter, 'Introduction' in G. K. Hunter (ed.), *Macbeth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 37-8.

<sup>10</sup> Hopkins, p. 9.

complexion as an English princess holding sway (and commanding loyalty) in a Scotland fraught with internecine conflict.

Greene's play interweaves references to the lives of his contemporary king of Scotland and queen of England, further encoding recent history in his faux history of Scotland and England. He takes the worst ideas of Scotland and Scottishness and, in his denouement, aligns his James IV with the historical James VI: a pensioner reliant on a mightier England. Yet those faults, whilst ostensibly tamed and duly chastised, remain censured and exposed – albeit through a framing device which sees a mystical, slumbering Scotsman awoken by Oberon,<sup>11</sup> and willing to share the reasons for his withdrawal from the world:

Now, king, if thou be a king, I will show thee why I hate the world by demonstration. In the year 1520 there was in Scotland a king, overruled with parasites, misled by lust, and many circumstances too long to trattle on now, much like our court of Scotland this day (1.1.105-9).<sup>12</sup>

In her bid to date the play, Ruth Hudson amassed considerable evidence that *James the Fourth* engages closely with contemporary historical material relating to James VI of Scotland – a notion underscored explicitly in the play by Bohan's semi-paraleptic claim that the contemporary Scottish court (which, by virtue of his knowledge of it, must have precipitated his seclusion) is plagued by problems which he will not 'trattle' on, but rather encode in the tale he presents.

However, Hudson somewhat surprisingly failed to recognise the importance of Dorothea not only (in dramaturgical terms) as an English counterpoint to the Scottish king's fecklessness and lack of political wisdom, but in the resonances of Greene's queen which she invokes. An English princess hailed as the Queen of Scots (1.1.31), Dorothea immediately supersedes her husband in virtue, as the dissembling king soliloquises on his repudiation of his new bride even as the nuptials are celebrated (1.1.74-91). Imbued at the play's beginning with lessons in statecraft from her father, Dorothea is encouraged to

---

<sup>11</sup> See Hopkins (2011, p.37-9, 57-75) for a useful and pertinent examination of the consistent appearances of Oberon in 'succession plays', and the mythical line of descent from Caesar to Oberon, which gives his appearance in Scotland an interesting dimension. As Hopkins contends, 'Britishness was authorised by Romanness', and so Oberon's visit to Scotland, coupled with his apparent unfamiliarity with its history) both condones and challenges Scotland's 'Britishness'.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Greene, *The Scottish History of James the Fourth*, ed. by Norman Sanders (London: Methuen, 1970). Further quotations are taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

Live, Doll, for many eyes shall look on thee;  
 Have care of honour and the present state;  
 For she that steps to height of majesty  
 Is even the mark whereat the enemy aims:  
 Thy virtues shall be construed to vice,  
 Thine affable discourse to abject mind;  
 If coy, detracting tongues will call thee proud.  
 Be therefore wary in this slippery state;  
 Honour thy husband, love him as thy life,  
 Make choice of friends, as eagles of their young,  
 Who soothe no vice, who flatter not for gain,  
 But love such friends as do the truth maintain. (1.1.41-54)

The advice to Dorothea is presented as quintessentially English, passed from the English king to his daughter. Such wisdom eludes the Scottish king, who remains the ‘foreign’ embodiment of a ‘slippery state’, in a way which gives the lie to his father-in-law’s paroxysms of familial amity. Thus, at an early stage, the King of England hands down a thread of English monarchical political insight, which it is to become incumbent on his daughter to bring to Scotland. Yet the lustful James’ abandonment of state and sense is to become the play’s main dramatic catalyst, inviting him to entertain and encourage corrupt, sycophantic councillors.<sup>13</sup> As Sir Bartram acknowledges, ‘The king hath folly, there’s virtue in the maid’ (1.3.45). That the queen is described as a ‘maid’ after her marriage is telling, and it is difficult not to consider the parallel with the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth. Further, Dorothea herself assumes a role quite atypical of an early modern bride. Whilst employing self-abnegating rhetoric, the queen advises the frustrated Scottish lords that

The king is young; and, if he step awry,  
 He may amend, and I will love him still.  
 Should we disdain our vines because they sprout  
 Before their time? Or young men, if they strain  
 Beyond their reach? No, vines that bloom and spread

---

<sup>13</sup> For a thorough discussion of early modern English conceptions of counsel (and its importance) see John Guy, ‘The rhetoric of counsel in early modern England’ in ‘The rhetoric of counsel in early modern England’ in *Tudor Political Culture*, ed. by Dale Hoak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 292-310. A Scottish dimension on the debate can be found in Elizabeth Fowler, ‘*Macbeth* and the Rhetoric of Political Forms’ in *Shakespeare and Scotland*, ed. by Willy Maley and Andrew Murphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 67-86.

Do promise fruits, and young men that are wild  
In age grow wise. My friends and Scottish peers,  
If an English princess may prevail,  
Stay, stay with him ... (2.2.87-95)

Eschewing the language of romantic love, Dorothea's attitude towards James is one of loving forbearance towards a wayward youth who might with age achieve wisdom. Key also is the strained language of fecundity. Whilst Dorothea is, rather unusually for an early modern queen, never celebrated in the play for her procreative potential,<sup>14</sup> she is quick to conceptualise the king of Scots as a growing vine who will, with maturity, bear fruit. The inference is that the wiser 'English princess' might exercise a positive influence on the young Scottish king – an idea which may well have been comforting to English audiences considering the prospect of a Scottish succession.

Naturally, those audiences would also be interested in another corollary of union between England and Scotland: the relationship between the ministers of Scotland and the play's most prominent English representative. Thus it is unsurprising that the Scottish lords depicted – Douglas, the Bishop of St Andrews and Morton<sup>15</sup> especially – yield allegiance to their new Queen. Recognising the faults in their king, of 'heedless youth, where counsel is despised' (2.2.3), the lords encourage James to recognise and acquiesce to his English alliance. St Andrews pleads:

---

<sup>14</sup> In her attempt to fix the play's date of composition to 1590, Hudson suggests that the inclusion of Dorothea's marriage to James is a reference to James VI's marriage to Anne of Denmark (p. 663). The absence of any reference to future, bodily heirs of James and Dorothea at their marriage and beyond, however, indicates that this is not a play about dynastic succession, but succession via union and politics. Throughout, Dorothea is a loving, tolerant wife and a wise politician; she is never celebrated as a potential mother, despite Hudson's unconvincing suggestion that her state being referred to as 'so-so' is an allusion to contemporary rumours about Anna's pregnancy. If the line has any link to this rumour, it is a throwaway topical joke.

<sup>15</sup> These titles pertain to key figures in Elizabeth's reign: Patrick Adamson, Bishop of St Andrews, was Scottish ambassador to the English court in the 1580s; significantly, he disagreed with Scottish religious policy and fell from James VI's favour in 1588; the Douglas clan contributed the notorious Archibald Douglas (8<sup>th</sup> Earl of Angus and 6<sup>th</sup> of Morton) who succeeded to the earldom of Morton after the infamous Regent Morton had been executed for his role in the murder of James VI's father. Although the latter two contemporaries of Greene were particularly pro-English and anti-Marian, their usage by Greene corresponds to the conflation of office and man seen throughout the play, as their actions (beyond their support for an Englishwoman) bear no notable resemblance to their historical counterparts in either the reign of James IV in Scotland or Elizabeth in England. It is significant, however, that each lord – most importantly, St Andrews, the play's sole religious figure – are stalwart supporters of Dorothea and technically traitors to their own king.

Thou art allied unto the English king  
By marriage: a happy friend indeed  
If used well; if not, a mighty foe. (2.2.130-3)

On hearing James' violent rejection of his advice, St Andrews laments his 'country's fall', and suggestion is thus made that without the amity of England, Scotland will come to ruin. St Andrews' quasi-patriotic concern for the future of Scotland is one not shared by his errant sovereign, who maintains

And for fair Ida will I hazard life,  
Venture my kingdom, country, and my crown:  
Such fire hath love to burn a kingdom down. (1.1.168-172)

That concern for the state is voiced by a Scottish religious figure is notable. The later sixteenth century witnessed a post-Reformation Scotland trafficking peaceably with England via its coreligionist peers, as a succession of regents (following the deposition of Mary Queen of Scots) sought the approval and recognition of the English queen, with James VI himself paid a pension (or annuity) from the English treasury from 1586.<sup>16</sup> As a representative of the Kirk, St Andrews is thus given a position of pseudo-independence.<sup>17</sup> Whilst his licentious king pursues sin, the Bishop displays a superior sense of realpolitik, recognising the need to secure the friendship of Scotland's southern neighbour (and, in Greene's time, coreligionist). The play thus displays a Kirk amenable to English influence in its representative's pursuit of a stable and prosperous future. To St Andrews, the survival of Scotland is best secured not by allegiance to a foolhardy Scottish monarch, but to a sensible Englishwoman. Weight is here lent to the idea that the play engages with what had been a thorny question for centuries: was Scotland an independent country, or a satellite state of England, under the suzerainty of the English

---

<sup>16</sup> Richard Dutton, "“Methinks the Truth Should Live From Age to Age”: The Dating and Contexts of *Henry V*" in *The Uses of History in Early Modern England*, ed. by Paulina Kewes (San Marino: Huntington, 2006), pp. 169-200 (pp. 182-3).

<sup>17</sup> It will be remembered that the Church of Scotland achieved reformation through rebellion in 1560, in defiance of Mary Queen of Scots. Thereafter, prominent Kirk ministers such as John Knox openly disagreed with the Scottish queen. After her deposition, James VI continued to disagree with the Kirk's representatives over the institution's rights, jurisdiction and episcopal structure. Struggles between Crown and Kirk were typified by the 'Black Acts' of 1584; in the aftermath, reformist preacher Andrew Melville was forced to seek refuge in England for seditious preaching. After a twenty-month absence, he returned to Scotland and became Rector of St Andrews. Useful discussion of these tensions can be found in Keith Brown and Alan R. MacDonald's *The History of the Scottish Parliament: Parliament in Context 1235 – 1707* (2010, p.49-50).

monarch?<sup>18</sup> By adopting (and adapting) Elizabeth as Dorothea, the fictional English princess who acts as a unifying mediator between the two countries, the play presents formal union under English dominance as one potentially satisfactory solution to the problem of two Protestant states – of differing size and influence – on one island.

In exploring the relationship between the island's nations, the play makes use of familiar events designed to entrench the notion of inherent English virtues at risk from unchecked Scottish duplicity. On discovering (via the presentation by Lord Ross and Sir Bartram of an incriminating letter) that her husband has hatched a plot to have her killed, a prevaricating Dorothea refuses the proof, questioning the letter's authorship. Only the testimony of the Scottish nobles reluctantly convinces her of her husband's guilt. The image of a virtuous royal Englishwoman threatened by a devious Scottish monarch (betrayed by Scottish defectors bearing the latter's incriminating letters) is a familiar one. It stretches credulity to imagine that contemporary audiences could not have recognised in this episode reverberating echoes of the tumultuous years of Mary Queen of Scots' captivity, during which multiple plots were exposed, culminating in Elizabeth's reluctant acceptance of her guilt and judicial execution.<sup>19</sup> The warning is certainly clear – a union with Scotland (in the eyes of xenophobic Elizabethans) is potentially perilous, unless the devious nature of Scots be tamed, their behaviour Anglicised.

Like Elizabeth,<sup>20</sup> Dorothea recognises – even as she wistfully laments – the importance of unions of state:

... Ah, poor unhappy queen,  
Born to endure what fortune can contain!  
...  
O, what avails to be allied and matched  
With high estates that marry but in show?

---

<sup>18</sup> This prevalence of this question is addressed at some length throughout John Guy's *My Heart is My Own: The Life of Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 110, 232, and 510) Most relevantly, Guy foregrounds the extent to which this notion was floated from the beginning to the end of Elizabeth's reign. That the wiser nobles of James' degraded court reject him in favour of Dorothea is also worth considering in greater depth. Rather than being vilified as traitors, their portrayal is sympathetic. Weight is thus lent to the idea that Scotland, rather than being a fully independent kingdom, could reject its sovereign in favour of supra-national English mediation.

<sup>19</sup> If one accepts the dating of the play as 1590, less than four years had passed since Mary Queen of Scots had been tried for treason against Elizabeth I. The proof of her guilt hinged largely upon intercepted letters in which she was alleged to have sought her English cousin's death.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth's avowed recognition that she was married to her country is well known.



Were I baser born, my mean estate  
Could warrant me from this impendent harm;  
But to be great and happy – these are twain. (3.3.68-78)

Overt in her sorrowful reflections on royal unions, Dorothea is yet keen to recognise that in her particular union with the Scottish king, ‘one soul, one essence doth our weal contain’ (3.3.86). It is James’ inconstancy, lust and lack of political wisdom which impels him not only to reject her, but to seek her death. Donning male apparel to escape (with the aid of her Scottish supporters), Dorothea consequently secures a further masculine role; in addition to acting as the *de facto* ruler of Scotland due to the lack of faith placed by the Scottish nobility in her increasingly self-indulgent husband, she becomes dual-gendered, commanding the adoration of Scottish females. Indeed, in her male garb, further allusions to Elizabeth are visible – both queen and king,<sup>21</sup> the romantic love felt by Lady Anderson towards Dorothea is not only quickly subdued when she sheds her male clothing, but immediately – and not unproblematically<sup>22</sup> – transformed into monarchical adoration reminiscent of the fulsome homages paid to Elizabeth I (5.5.56-66). Further emphasising the Elizabethan connection, Dorothea laments,

Ah, Nano, I am weary of these weeds,  
Weary to wield this weapon that I bear,  
Weary of love, from whom my woe proceeds,  
Weary of toil, since I have lost my dear.  
O weary life, where wanteth no distress,  
But every thought is paid with heaviness. (4.4.1-5)

This calls to mind Elizabeth’s own appropriation of Petrarch’s *Triumph of Chastity*, from which was drawn a motto inscribed on Metsys the Younger’s ‘Sieve Portrait’. It proclaimed *Stancho Riposo & Riposato Affanno* (‘Weary I am and, having rested, still am weary’).<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth’s speech at Tilbury, in which she professed to have the ‘heart and stomach of a king’ might well be recalled.

<sup>22</sup> Sanders remarks that Lady Anderson’s move from ‘guilt to shame to becoming Dorothea’s willing helper ... have not been led up to in any dramatic or poetic sense’ (p. xliv). If one accepts that Dorothea is representative of Elizabeth, the volte face may be attributable to contemporary attitudes towards the confused tangle of romantic lust and chaste adoration expressed about England’s ageing Virgin Queen.

<sup>23</sup> Karen Green, ‘Phronesis Feminised: Prudence from Christine de Pizan to Elizabeth I’ in *Virtue, Liberty and Toleration: Political Ideas of European Women, 1400-1800*, ed. by Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), pp. 23-38 (pp. 32-3).

Inevitably, the Anglo-Scottish war engendered by James' indiscreet and politically inept actions bring to the fore the English perception of Scotland as a weaker – even an unworthy – state. Marching on Dunbar, the King of England accepts the meek submission of the town's residents:

Live, thou and thine. Dunbar is too too small  
To give an entrance to the English king:  
I, eagle-like, disdain these little fowls (5.6.39-40)

Having been absent since the opening of the play, the English king's reappearance at the head of an army heralds the re-entry of Dorothea, divested of her disguise. Acting as intermediary between her English father and Scottish husband, she proceeds to bring about peace with the aid of Sir Cuthbert, who warns of 'a desperate division in those lands / which, if they join in one, command the world' (5.6.102-3). The 'one' is, of course, an oblique reference to James VI, in whose person union between Scotland and England would rest in the event of his succession. Taking up the theme, Dorothea muses that

These nations, if they join,  
What monarch and his liegemen in this world  
Dare but encounter you in open field? (5.6.180-2)

In both instances, the projected union of England and Scotland is, it will be noticed, bound up with imperial grandeur and military might. Having borne witness in the play to Scotland's military weakness (in a move likely to assuage London audiences' anxieties about Scottish armies threatening England), it becomes clear that the perception of Scotland as an ally is not predicated on the nation's military prowess, but rather on the glory that might be achieved by a united Great Britain buttressed by English force and English influence.<sup>24</sup>

If, on the surface, the play presents Scotland as a weak nation, ravaged by internal disputes, divided loyalties and the rule of a callow, devious monarch, questions arise as to how union could be made palatable to contemporary audiences. Answers can be found in the complex treatment which the kingdom and its inhabitants are themselves

---

<sup>24</sup> Earlier in the play, the idea of a Scottish empire is ridiculed by the mischievous Ateukin (1.1.183-4); an imperial Great Britain united under the English banner and governed by English principles of counsel, political wisdom and military might is, however, posited as an acceptable (even a desirable) outcome.

afforded, and perhaps more pressingly, in the threatening international links which an independent Scotland is perceived to possess. The Scotland of *James the Fourth* is a surprisingly cosmopolitan setting, boasting a Frenchman, a lowland-Scots-speaker, a courtier versed in the schooling of Italian political philosophers and, at the borders, friendly Englishmen. Invariably, however, all but the latter are portrayed in either a wholly negative or questionable light. The play's primary villain, Ateukin, is mocked for his subscription to the writings of Machiavelli (2.2.52-3). In tracing the potential origins of Ateukin, McNeir recognised within him shades of the historical James IV's notorious Italian favourite John Damian.<sup>25</sup> More recently, Hoenselaars has suggested that contemporary anti-Italian sentiment led to the creation of a stock Elizabethan figure: the stage Machiavel.<sup>26</sup> However, the presence of Ateukin (and his considerable leverage) in the Scottish court suggests that the corrupting influence of Europe has made inroads in Scotland and, with Scotland as a backdoor to England, the consequent threat is made explicit by Ateukin himself:

I may have means within the English court  
To 'scape the scourge that waits on bad advice. (4.495-6)

The flattering, Italianate Scotsman thus becomes a threat to English audiences; his malign intentions towards Dorothea and his corrupt (and corrupting) political methods pose the danger of infecting Scotland's neighbour. Further, if one accepts that the mythical Dorothea is bound up with representations of Elizabeth, then Ateukin's belief that 'Then better were it that a woman died / Than all the help of Scotland should be blent' is worthy of deeper consideration. As the play anticipates the possibility of a monarchical union between England and Scotland, Ateukin represents the self-seeking Scot, whose desire for union, whilst couched in nationalistic rhetoric, is full of guile. In a significant move on the part of the playwright, Ateukin's misdeeds are never punished; he flees justice, remaining a malignant off-stage force at the play's resolution.

Adding a further continental flavour to *James the Fourth*'s Scotland is French murderer,<sup>27</sup> Jacques, who dwells at the court under the command of Ateukin. Speaking

---

<sup>25</sup> W.F. McNeir, 'The Original of Ateukin in Greene's *James IV*', *Modern Language Notes* 42 (1947), 376-81 (pp. 377-8).

<sup>26</sup> Hoenselaars, pp. 16-17.

<sup>27</sup> Hoenselaars notes the prevalence of 'French assassins' as English stage figures. Hoenselaars is primarily interested in analysing the way in which John Marston's John Fo de King 'was initially presented as a possibly agent of evil in the traditional manner [but] turns out to be more humane than he seemed and is the appropriate scourge of the evil Englishman who needs to be taught a lesson' in *Jacke*

in a comic blend of French, Italian and faulty English, the would-be assassin is more laughable than fearful, but his presence is nevertheless a useful indicator of English concerns about Scotland's historic alliance with France.<sup>28</sup> Dorothea herself acknowledges his Frenchness, and in a characteristic display of strength, she warns him, 'shall never Frenchman say an English maid / Of threats of foreign force will be afraid' (4.4.48-9). Particularly notable is Dorothea's continued self-identification as an 'English maid'; in spite of her marriage and accession as queen of Scots, her nationality remains inviolately English in the hostile face of foreign otherness. Jacques' bastardisation of various continental languages, however, indicates a broader concern, which suggests the embryonic seeds of what Willy Maley has recognised as the 'fundamentally anti-European phenomena' of the first British Empire.<sup>29</sup> Appearing onstage as European rather than simply French, Jacques represents the pervasive force of a mixed European identity as it impinges on intra-British national relationships. It is only with his unseen death that the king of Scots can make amends with his English father-in-law and wife, thereby restoring peace and unity between the two kingdoms. Scotland, the play suggests, cannot be safely absorbed into an Anglo-centric union unless it is purged of continental corruption.

Jacques' eclectic use of language is not the play's only foray into linguistic variation. Indeed, Bohan, who makes prodigious use of lowland Scots in recounting the tale, is the most prolific non-English speaker. As Norman Sanders recognises,

the Scottish words, forms, and phrases which Greene uses... are generally accurate representations of the Scottish dialect and pronunciation. Bohan's speech in the Induction is heavily marked with dialect forms and words, but in his appearances thereafter Greene is content merely to tinge his lines with one or two Scottish forms.<sup>30</sup>

This is particularly significant. In the Induction, Bohan is a remarkably foreign character. He is quick to anger, violent in his language and yet insistent on his noble

---

*Drums Entertainment: or the Comedie of Pasquill and Katherine* (1601) (pp. 68-9). In *James the Fourth*, it is the Machiavellian Scotsman whose plans are ruined by his bumbling French accomplice.

<sup>28</sup> The affectionately-named Auld Alliance, which periodically saw mutual Franco-Scottish support, had been in place since 1295. In the more recent memories of Elizabethan audiences, Mary Queen of Scots had been a dowager queen of France, and kept Francophone attendants throughout her captivity in England.

<sup>29</sup> Willy Maley, *Nation, State and Empire in English Renaissance Literature* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> Sanders, p. lxiii.

Scottish lineage. As the play progresses, his language during the choruses becomes ever more Anglicised, until he graduates from his initial rude, Scots prose to verse. Bohan, the bold, ornery Scotsman is tamed by the morality of his own tale; the inference, therefore, is that the uncivil Scotsman can be brought to civility by the power of English language and the persuasive power of English virtues. Further, one might consider Maley's summation of the absorption of regional British languages into 'regional varieties of English'; like Shakespeare, Greene is keen to illustrate the facility of English in 'cutting the throat of other languages'.<sup>31</sup> Yet the taming of the Scot is not without difficulties. Bohan, whilst his language is gradually transformed into a form of English, is notable primarily for his ethereal nature. Even as he returns to his slumber, the play closes with the sleeping Scotsman, who might reawaken with renewed violence.<sup>32</sup>

One final dimension of the relationship between Scotland and England as represented in the play merits consideration: the borderland areas which mark the liminal zone between the two kingdoms. As has been seen, the presence of Scotland on England's northern frontier can, in the case of Ateukin's threat, mark a backdoor through which corruption and malice can creep. However, the play stresses also the potential for harmony and mutual goodwill in these between-lands, and acknowledges the inevitability of cross-border traffic. Act 1, Scene 3 opens with the Scottish Sir Bartram and the English Eustace – both booted for travel – meeting to discuss the condition of their respective countries. In openly friendly terms, the two exchange gossip, with Eustace recalling their frequent visits to Carlisle (1.3.36), one of the most significant towns on the fringe of Northern England. A counterpoint to the later storming of Dunbar by the English king, a peaceful use of the borderlands is presented as a preferable alternative to violent altercation.

The violence that does erupt, however, provides Greene with the opportunity to indulge in a metatheatrical consideration of the state of England, as his characters ruminate on the state of James IV's Scotland (which, it will be remembered, Bohan has collapsed with contemporary Scotland). During the English invasion, a Lawyer asks a Merchant and a Divine, 'what think you of this present state?' (5.3.46). Ostensibly exchanging opinions on the faults present in Scotland, the trio list a plethora of perceived social, religious and economic problems. What reveals Greene's intention – which is to address the problems he recognises within English society – is his error in ascribing to the

---

<sup>31</sup> Maley, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> See Hopkins (2011, p.49) for discussion of Bohan's depiction as a 'Riddesdale man' and its potentially coterminous status as a Border Reiver – a class of man James VI and I sought to suppress.

Divine sharp criticisms he perceives of the Lawyer's trade, particularly his propensity for delaying 'your common-pleas for years' (5.4.37). Scotland, of course, had an entirely separate legal system which lacked the Court of Common Pleas found in the English common law. Greene, therefore, has a dual purpose in providing this seemingly arbitrary scene. Not only does it allow him to deconstruct English (and particularly London) society, but it has the effect of making Scotland seem familiar to London theatregoers. Indeed, it is arguable that not only does Greene deconstruct London life, but he reconstructs it with a Scottish gloss, leading to an urban, recognisable conception of Scotland to sit, somewhat incongruously, alongside the wild, mystical nation inhabited by Bohan and Oberon. Nevertheless, Greene's conception of civilised, urban Scotland cannot be detached from England, from where it takes its inspiration, its legal system and its attendant social problems.

Ultimately, Greene's depiction of Scotland and its union-by-marriage with England via a fictional princess constitutes a history play that rejects historical sources in favour of considering an alternative history founded mainly on the question, 'what if?' In doing so, *James the Fourth* doubles as a 'what if' for the future, considering the conditions under which union with Scotland could best be achieved, whilst meditating on the potential problems inherent in such a union. These problems include the unresolved – and perhaps unresolvable – issue of the foreignness and autonomy of Scotland (and the perceived traits considered to be bound up with Scottish identity), and how, if possible, Scots might be Anglicised in order to make palatable a putative Scottish succession. Yet it would be a mistake to think that the play presses the suit of James VI by reforming – on English terms – its own James IV. It is a conditional play based on a mythical history, and with the foreignness of Scots made manifest, the conditions for – and stability of – union is predicated on the power of English (and peculiarly Elizabethan) morality to dominate any potential Great Britain. Faced with an uncertain succession, Greene portrays Scotland and Scots in light of the Jacobean claim, and, to borrow Ateukin's phrase, muses, 'And Aristotle holdeth this for true / Of evil needs we must choose the least' (4.5.41-2).

### **Scots and Anglo-Scottish Union in *Perkin Warbeck***

If *The Scottish History of James the Fourth* takes extraordinary liberties with Scottish history (in essence forming a comedic precursor to the loose, moralistic approach of *Macbeth*) in the years of harried (and illegal) speculation about the possibility of monarchical union with Scotland, *Perkin Warbeck's* depiction of James IV's reign is

much more in the mould of the *Henriad*.<sup>33</sup> Likely written at the time of another succession question, Hopkins contends that the play coincides with the arrival of a second prince in the English court: a circumstance which ‘made the division of the kingdoms between two heirs once more a possibility’.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, the claim to the Scottish throne of the Earl of Strathern and its dredging up of an old Stuart scandal added, as Hopkins contends, a further zest to the play’s discussion of succession. Hopkins’ historicisation of the play certainly makes sense of Warbeck’s duality as both opportunistic pretender and self-believing Duke of York: he combines the scandalous and theatrical claim of the Earl of Strathern with the possibility of a separate, legitimate Stuart prince of Scotland, both of which were, at the time, mooted as credible alternatives to Charles I’s dual-sovereignty over both kingdoms. Given the fracturing of power across the British isles depicted in the play, the idea is certainly persuasive; indeed, it is perhaps surprising to find that, in this post-Union-of-the-Crowns history play, one can discern a more dangerously independent Scotland (particularly in military terms) than that envisaged by Greene prior to England’s Stuart succession. Yet Ford’s James IV shares similar characteristics to the monarch imagined by Greene, most notably a susceptibility to flattery and its power to spur political action. It is a susceptibility well-recognised by Warbeck, who commends the king:

You are a wise and just king, by the powers  
 Above reserved beyond all other aids  
 To plant me in mine own inheritance;  
 To marry these two kingdoms in a love  
 Never to be divorced while time is time. (2.1.85-9)

It will here be noted that Warbeck dangles the carrot of union before James and, unlike Greene’s conception of a union mediated and dominated by English influence, the

---

<sup>33</sup> See Miles Taylor, ‘The End of the English History Play in *Perkin Warbeck*’ (2008) for an insightful investigation into the ways in which the play is a result of, and reflects upon, Stuart shifts in historiography from ‘morality to expediency’, or virtue to virtù (p. 398). Also worthy of note is the possible intertextuality with Greene’s text present in *Perkin Warbeck*. In addition to Huntley’s invocation of the presence of Oberon (3.2.11), which may be a reference to Oberon’s role in royal marriage and succession, Ford opens his play by stating that it will show history ‘famous, and true ... / Not forged from Italy, from France, from Spain / but chronicled at home’ (Prologue, 16-18). It is not difficult here to read criticism of Greene’s decision to caparison his *History of James the Fourth* in the tailored garments of Cinthio’s *Hecatommithi*. All references to Ford’s play are taken from *Perkin Warbeck*, ed. by Peter Ure (London: Methuen, 1968) and will be cited parenthetically.

<sup>34</sup> Hopkins, pp. 138-9. Textual evidence can be found in the play to bolster Hopkins’ claims; it will be noted that Crawford discredits Warbeck as a ‘young Phaethon’ (2.3.16): the upstart son of the sun God who mismanaged his father’s chariot.

power to both unify and settle the future of England is one invested in the Scottish king. The rather dangerous suggestion is that both legitimate and illegitimate unions exist, with that proposed by Warbeck unquestionably illegitimate. For all the pretender's seductive rhetoric, a 'marriage' between two separate kingdoms – and with two separate monarchs – is a dangerous prospect. As such, one must consider the play as engaging with the idea of once more dividing the kingdom of Great Britain between two monarchs.

It is impossible to interpret the Scotland of *Perkin Warbeck* without consideration of its relationship to its larger southern neighbour. The court of Scotland as depicted is one which is both enthused and charmed by Englishness, as demonstrated by James' embracement of Warbeck on the grounds that 'He must be more than subject who can utter / The language of a king, and such is thine'. That language is, of course, a courtly and refined form of English verse and, as Peter Ure recognises, 'the thin, rapid eloquence of locution' (or 'the language of civility') is 'especially esteemed at the Scottish court'.<sup>35</sup> Scotland, it seems, measures itself against English civility, and it is a desire to associate itself with this civility that leads to political action. Underlying these pretensions, however, is a latent incivility – a streak of crudity which is made manifest at the wedding celebrations of Katherine Gordon and Warbeck. As Maley notes:

Irish and Scottish entertainers appear, 'in a scene that seems both to recall and parody Ben Jonson's *Irish Masque at Court* (1613)'. Whereas Jonson's *Irish Masque* was ostensibly a compliment to the conversion powers of James I, as the rude Irish masquers revealed themselves to be sophisticated Anglo-Irishmen, in Ford's play the entertainment for James IV is more ambiguous, designed both to expose the lack of cultivation in evidence when popular Scottish and Irish traditions converge, and to suggest that Scotland and Ireland have more in common culturally than either has with England. If the Scoto-Irish combination amuses Huntly, it also serves to point up the difference between the English and Scottish courts.<sup>36</sup>

Further, the competition between British nationalities is explicated in terms of rank and worth, as Frion attests:

... The Scots, I know,

---

<sup>35</sup> Ure, pp. lxi-ii.

<sup>36</sup> Willy Maley, 'The Incorporation of Identities in *Perkin Warbeck*: A Response to Lisa Hopkins', *Connotations*, 7. 1 (1997/8), 105-15 (p. 110).



Will in some show, some masque, or some device,  
Prefer their duties. Now it were uncomely  
That we be found less forward for our prince  
Than they are for their lady: and by how much  
We outshine them in persons of account,  
By so much more will out endeavours meet with  
A livelier applause. (2.3.154-161)

Jocular as Frion's sentiments seem, the assessment of Scotland as nation of less worth, ability and subsequent acclaim than England is telling. Whilst Greene had depicted a Scotland which could be brought to heel either by English might or morality, Ford offers the interesting suggestion that a barbarous Scotland might be civilised through the example of cultural superiority.<sup>37</sup> Scottish culture appears, to Scots, something to be joyfully expressed; to the English Frion, it is something to be subjugated and mocked. Differences along cultural lines are thus a source of disruption and, within the context of the play, a visible fissure in the idea of a common British identity. Yet by staging the antics of the lively Scottish masquers, Ford invites his audiences to form their own opinion of the masque's worth. Undoubtedly Frion – a connoisseur of European culture – associates Scotland with low cultural forms, but, to his chagrin, they provide a certain frisson to the clownish Heron, Astley and a-Water. The Scotland of *Perkin Warbeck* is not a cultural wasteland, but to the courtly Frion, its burlesque demonstrations of national culture are akin to the buffoonery of clowns and the wildness of the Irish. *Sotto voce*, he expresses a most un-jocular exasperation that he must endure the company of such 'muddy-brained peasants' (2.3.183) as Warbeck's rag-tag group of supporters (drawn from a variety of nationalities).<sup>38</sup> That they are visibly animated by Scottish culture makes them, like the enactment of Scottish and Irish dance itself, an embarrassing necessity in the pursuit of power in England. We might read here an anxiety on the part of Englishmen (particularly those with sensitivity to Great Britain's

---

<sup>37</sup> Braddick disputes the extent to which English (and British) policy directed an ideological widening of 'civility'. He instead insists that the period coincided with a pan-European movement that 'drew on renaissance and reformation ideals', which had the non-deliberate result of entrenching ideals and notions of 'civility'. See Michael J. Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England, c1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p 397. Within *Perkin Warbeck*, however, the need for civility is drawn at least partially on geographical and national lines, with the cultural pursuits of the Irish and Scots criticised by an Englishman who expresses an awareness of his own superiority. Further, the 'Scotch antics' mingle with the ostensibly high cultural site of the Scottish court, making problematic any attempt to demarcate wild Scottishness with something entirely separate from the country's elite.

<sup>38</sup> As Ure details, Astley was a nondescript scrivener, a-Water twice mayor of Cork and Heron a London merchant with Irish connections (pp. lxxxiii-lxxxv). Frion himself was Henry's French secretary and Clerk of the Signet before deserting to join the service of Charles VIII of France, who appointed him chief aide to Warbeck.

place on the continental stage) regarding the ruder elements of any 'British' society, with the cultural proclivities of Scots and Irish (and their ability to encourage clownish Englishmen) an embarrassment to the self-conscious, cultured English gentleman.<sup>39</sup> Nor is this the only example of the play's hierarchical model of British nations. Following Scotland's peace with England, the question of restitution for the ravages on either side of the border is posed, with Surrey noting that

Both demanded  
And urged, my lord; to which the king replied,  
In modest merriment but smiling earnest,  
How that our master Henry was much abler  
To bear the detriments than he replay them. (5.2.13-17)

James is keen to recognise (to his own gain) the relatively impoverished state of his own nation in comparison to that of his richer neighbour, and it is difficult not to discern an indication of what Keith Brown has recognised as 'the low opinion that was held by some Englishmen of the Scottish economy'.<sup>40</sup> Evidently, the nations which the play's monarchs seek to unify are mismatched both culturally and economically.

Of course, if the Scotland of the play is presented as one which is keen to measure itself by the benchmark of English civility and wealth, one might question the value of the union with England sought by the English king as well as James and Hialas. An answer to this lies in the play's presentation of differing models of kingship, as embodied by the Scottish and English sovereigns. Although James' susceptibility to the trappings of monarchy and his professed belief in the superiority of royal lineage (which forms the basis for his support of Warbeck against 'Welsh Harry') are presented in contradistinction to Henry's sound political and strategic abilities, they ultimately form his chief value to a victorious Henry. Indeed, Scotland's value to Warbeck is itself built on the triple foundations of geography, military support and, most notably, in the prestige granted him by marriage to the Scottish princess, Katherine Gordon, who is

---

<sup>39</sup> It becomes clear here that England itself is divided culturally and gradations of civility exist; but in Scotland high and low cultures are indistinguishable, as the king expresses delight in a performance which horrifies Frion. Though there was little cross-border cultural interaction (beyond a move towards wider use of the English language), and no evidence of Scottish influences on English culture; see Keith Brown, 'A Blessed Union? Anglo-Scottish Relations Before the Covenant' in *Anglo-Scottish Relations from 1603-1900*, ed. by T.C. Smout (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 37-56 (p. 51). The continuation of Scottish cultural forms here represents not a threat to English cultural hegemony, but a lingering hindrance on Renaissance ideals of civility and cultural development across the British Isles.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, p. 50.

later invited into Henry's court.<sup>41</sup> On securing his own marital bond with England, 'to the good of both the church and commonwealth,<sup>42</sup> James rejoices:

A league with Ferdinand, a marriage  
With English Margaret, a free release  
From restitution for the late affronts,  
Cessation from hostility!  
(4.3.56-59)

It is tempting here to concur with Maley's reading, which proposes that

A union any other way may be not quite so secure, such as the various acts of incorporation or conquest that marked the slow coming together of the British state. Union through marriage furnishes a relatively painless means of fleshing out the body politic. [The] marriage, between James IV and Margaret Tudor, will pave the way for an accommodation with England.<sup>43</sup>

Certainly, the union of James and Margaret secures peace between the two kingdoms at the play's end, but there is a note of dubiety in James' enthusiastic prediction. Historically, the Tudor-Stuart marriage, far from ceasing hostility, ended with James' death in battle against Henry VIII's forces at the Battle of Flodden. In terms of dynastic succession, the success of the marriage lay in the provision of an heir, through whom

---

<sup>41</sup> The importance of Katherine Gordon in the play is stressed at length in Susannah Brietz Monta, 'Marital Discord and Political Discord: Reconsidering *Perkin Warbeck*' 'Marital Discourse and Political Discord: Reconsidering *Perkin Warbeck*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 37.2 (1997), pp. 391-413; Michael Neill, "'Anticke Pageantrie": The Mannerist Art of *Perkin Warbeck*', *Renaissance Drama* 7 (1976), 117-50 (p.143); and Corinne Abate, 'Katherine Gordon and the Art of Marriage Brokering in *Perkin Warbeck*' *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 52.2 (1997), pp.11-29. Neill succinctly recognises that Katherine's marriage to Warbeck serves to 'provide his own shadowy performance with substance it otherwise lacks', due to her undisputed lineage. Brietz Monta (p. 403) further underscores Henry's own weak claim to the throne, and Abate recognises in Katherine a source of continued independence and covert empowerment following her absorption into the English courtly circle.

<sup>42</sup> Beneath Hialas' sunny prediction, which refers on the surface to a Catholic Great Britain, is a suggestion of yet another persistent source of disunity in Ford's time. The Scottish Kirk remained a separate institution from the Anglican Church following the Union of the Crowns, and throughout the 1620s and 30s, pressure was brought to bear on the Scots to more closely align their Kirk with England's episcopal polity. Charles' 1633 Scottish coronation at St Giles was held according to Anglican rites, and one can discern in the play a pro-Caroline desire for British religious conformity, problematised by the fact that it is voiced by a Catholic and thus likely to invite suspicion.

<sup>43</sup> Maley (1997/8), 109.

the Scottish Stuart line would continue the ‘noble race of Jameses’, the sixth of whom united Scotland with England. Crucially, the union produced in 1603 existed ‘only within the person of James [VI and I; and thus within the persons of his successors] himself’;<sup>44</sup> the potential danger of a separate, autonomous monarch for Scotland is illustrated by Ford’s history, as James’ foresight and reliance on marriage and bloodline alone are demonstrably lacking. The play’s James is a source of trouble, possessed of that dangerous Scottish autonomy; willing to engage with European powers independently of English foreign policy; and at the head of an army which can threaten England. Crucially, the latter two remain of concern in Ford’s time, and if Hopkins is correct, the possibility of their once more falling under the will and control of a separate sovereign was a contemporary concern.

Whilst James’ autonomy, his incursions into England, and his European dealings are a source of danger in the play, it is significant that the king of Scots is never celebrated for his political insight. In contrast to the Machiavellian Henry, James is a political featherweight; not only is his championing of Warbeck as an English prince in error, but his decisions as sovereign are, as Huntley warns, likely to result in the bleeding of his subjects’ hearts (2.3.66). Huntley’s resistance to his sovereign’s will is interesting not only for the divisions it opens up in the Scottish state, but for James’ attitude, which is loaded with contemporary concerns about an absentee king resident in another realm, and the perceived importance of a visible royal presence:

... Kings are counterfeits  
In your repute, grave oracle, not presently  
Set on their thrones with sceptres in their fists.  
(2.3.37-9)

In his confrontation with a Scottish subject, James lays bare concerns which, although ostensibly referring to Huntley’s lack of belief in Warbeck’s status, allude to his own preoccupation with the accoutrements of monarchy and their power to consolidate popular support. Although Scotland was a kingdom which Charles I, Ford’s monarch, ruled primarily from abroad, it is significant that he was crowned in Edinburgh with great pomp in 1633,<sup>45</sup> and was thus an evident believer in the need for power to be bolstered by visible performances of monarchical divinity. The play therefore engages

---

<sup>44</sup> Neil Rhodes, ‘Wrapped in the Strong Arms of the Union: Shakespeare and King James’ in *Shakespeare and Scotland*, ed. by Willy Maley and Andrew Murphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp. 37-52 (p. 38).

<sup>45</sup> Though Charles had been crowned King of England and Ireland in 1526, he was an uncrowned and unanointed King of Scots for seven years.

with questions about the authority of monarchs who neither occupy their thrones nor wield their sceptres. The Scottish king, perhaps unsurprisingly, is eager to stress the validity of absentee rule when faced with a recalcitrant subject, even if his own reasons for supporting the pretender are rooted in his willingness to be seduced by the performance and theatricality of royalty.<sup>46</sup> Typically, Ford refuses to provide a simplistic solution to this political dilemma; the play exposes problems both with a resident, separate Scottish monarch and a ruler situated outside the nation and divested of its visible royal estate.

Importantly, James also exhibits a desire to align his own country with England. In attempting to justify his patronage of Warbeck, the king states

The right of kings, my lords, extends not only  
To the safe conservation of their own,  
But also to the aid of such allies  
As change of time and state hath oftentimes  
Hurl'd down from careful crowns, to undergo  
An exercise of sufferance in both fortunes:  
So English Richard surnamed Coeur-de-Lion,  
So Robert Bruce our royal ancestor,  
Forced by the trial of the wrongs they felt,  
Both sought, and found, supplies from foreign kings  
To repossess their own.  
(2.1.18-28)

At once, the historical James is absolved of plotting against England by his presentation as a precedent-led international statesman – albeit a misguided one. As a Scottish monarch, he betrays an insecurity both in his country's position on the European stage (hence his eagerness to adopt the cause of the pretender) and the provenance of Scottish history in a British context. He is, it will be noted, careful to identify the similarities between Scotland and England by invoking the similar histories of both countries even as he mounts a challenge to Henry's crown. Nevertheless, the notion of a Scotland which can appeal to foreign power is an arresting one. As Maley notes, 'the pretender draws support from Scotland, Ireland and Cornwall',<sup>47</sup> in a way which threatens to elide the status of Scotland with that of an English colony and region. Yet, of the various

---

<sup>46</sup> Warbeck's prowess as an actor is investigated thoroughly by Michael Neill in his "Anticke Pageantrie": The Mannerist Art of Perkin Warbeck'.

<sup>47</sup> Maley (1997/8), 111.

British forces that converge upon Henry, it will be noted that only Scotland can lay claim to its own recognised monarch: a ‘young and forward’ Scot whose machinations threaten a ‘sudden storm from the north’. The independent Scotland of *Perkin Warbeck* is both a military danger on England’s northern frontier and an international danger due to its autonomous sovereign.

Ably forestalling the military threat, Henry is not only a political operator whose willingness to negotiate a Spanish alliance via the promise of his son to Katherine of Aragon (a move which outmanoeuvres the Scottish king by securing a Spanish alliance with England); he is portrayed foremost as a military tactician:

We are followed,  
By enemies at home that will not cease  
To seek their own confusion ...  
...  
... But let them come,  
Our forces are in readiness; we’ll catch ‘em  
In their own toils.

Dau: Your army, being mustered,  
Consist in all, of horse and foot, at least  
In number six and twenty thousand; men  
Daring and able, resolute to fight,  
And loyal in their truths.  
(2.2.125-134)

As befitting a traditional-style history play, there is a distinctly martial flavour to Henry’s kingship. Seeking to provide for the possibility of a Scottish invasion, Henry orders the fortification of his northern outposts. Given the independent state of Scotland’s armed forces and parliament during the Caroline period, this is particularly significant. Whereas Greene’s play imagined a wayward Scotland that might easily be humbled by England’s superior might (and its rapacious, marauding king), Ford’s play presents an England apt to be besieged without adequate defensive manoeuvring. Like the leonine King of England in *James the Fourth*, it is James himself who adopts the mantle of the ‘warlike king’ in *Perkin Warbeck*; and whilst Dunbar is threatened by English forces in the former, Berwick is warned of the spillage of English blood in the latter. The reversal of roles is striking – Scotland, depicted by Greene as a nation to be either brought to heel by force or mediatory Anglicisation – is conceived by Ford as a

dangerous, warlike nation which, if possessed of both independent army and monarch, might well pierce England.

With the question of England's frontier thus raised, it is worthwhile considering the presentation of the borderlands in *Perkin Warbeck*. As Hopkins has recognised, particular attention is drawn to the contested town of Berwick. As has been noted, *James the Fourth* depicts the Anglo-Scottish borders as a site of traffic, movement and the (largely genial) exchange of news.<sup>48</sup> In *Perkin Warbeck*, these contested lands, which had become under James VI and I the 'middle shires',<sup>49</sup> are battlegrounds on which are played out competitions (both military and economic) between opportunistic Scots and defensive English. Moreover, Ford draws on a tradition in which 'the English had projected onto Scotland the intemperate characteristics associated with extremely northern complexions – slow wits, ferocity, and barbarism'.<sup>50</sup>

Are all our braving enemies shrunk back,  
Hid in the fogs of their distempered climate,  
Not daring to behold our colours wave  
In spite of this infected air?  
(4.1.14)

This is but a cold phlegmatic country, not stirring enough for men of spirit;  
give me the heart of England for my money.  
(4.2.78-80)

Not only is Scotland geopolitically separate from England, but the border itself marks a recognisable shift in climate and subsequent alteration in the character and physical constitution of its people. Notably, this between-space makes palpable the dividing line between climate and character. It is, further, remarked upon by Warbeck's English supporters and opponents. The implication is that beyond political, military, cultural and economic differences between the realms there is a division so deep it cannot be

---

<sup>48</sup> Lisa Hopkins, *Drama and the Succession to the Crown, 1561-1633* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 140-1. Hopkins' historical detective work has discovered that even in the play's seemingly innocuous reference to Berwick's fish-garths lies an allusion to a contemporary political issue, which brought to the fore the question of Scotland's independent political dealings with Europe, and the country's concerns about a 'lack of recognition' due to being confounded under the name of 'Great Britain'.

<sup>49</sup> See David J. Baker "'Stands Scotland where it did?'" Shakespeare on the March' in *Shakespeare and Scotland*, ed. by Willy Maley and Andrew Murphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 20-36 (p.22), for the rhetoric employed by James VI and I regarding the Anglo-Scottish borders.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 119.

sutured; the air and weather which nurture Scotsmen and Englishmen are themselves so alien that true unity under the banner of Great Britain may be unachievable. Furthermore, the Scotland of Perkin Warbeck is an inscrutable nation: an ‘other’ place in which an army can be shrouded, protected and remote from English view.<sup>51</sup>

Given the acknowledgement of such barriers, it is worth considering whether *Perkin Warbeck*, the dramatic action of which is predicated on the dangers of disunity within the British Isles, offers a solution to the seemingly insurmountable problems it identifies in the pursuit of unity. However, the play consistently refuses to provide solutions without inviting consideration of their concomitant problems and contradictions. In acknowledge-ing these problems, the play’s promotion of unity (and, arguably, its support for the Carolinian policy of retaining one sovereign for both kingdoms) are undermined; one monarch will mean a largely absentee ruler for one realm; cultural and religious differences will persist; the existence of an independent army at the will of an autonomous parliament north of the border will pose a risk; the differences in the countries’ economies will remain problematic; even the climate above Berwick breeds a strange and foreign character. Here we might fruitfully return to the question posed earlier regarding the value to England of a union with Scotland. To do so is to return to the issue of kingship in the British Isles, and in particular to the dynastic necessity of the Stuart succession in England. As has been noted, James and Henry represent two very different monarchical types: the politically-weak but unquestionably legitimate and the politically-astute but dynastically-threatened. It is therefore unsurprising that this opposition has led the play to be considered a ‘lesson in kingship’, with the English Henry’s pragmatic model victorious.<sup>52</sup> This is, on the surface, a familiar enough view. In addressing the competing monarchical figures of *Perkin Warbeck*, Ribner also recognised in Warbeck, Henry and James disparate models of visual kingship, model kingship and arbitrary, divine right kingship.<sup>53</sup> However, the play is less a ‘lesson’ in kingship than an anatomy of what was, in Ford’s time, a relatively new phenomenon: the British monarch. Ford uses the two competing but unified realms to nationalise two aspects of kingship – practical ability (embodied by the English Henry, whose right to rule is questioned by Warbeck and James) and bloodline (embodied by the Scottish James). Ultimately, they must be fused in the formation of a British monarchy. Yet even

---

<sup>51</sup> Here, once again, anxiety specifically about Scotland’s independent military can be felt. We might usefully contrast this notion of the shadowy, recondite Scotsmen-at-arms bred of an unhealthy climate with the later absorption of the resistant Scottish widow Katherine Warbeck into an eager Henry’s household.

<sup>52</sup> Ure, p. liv.

<sup>53</sup> Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), p. 301.



this cannot be considered as a solution to division. As Ford investigates the necessarily dual-role of a British monarch, he calls into question the validity of Great Britain as a political project. Thus, *Perkin Warbeck* owes considerably more to Shakespeare than simply constituting a late homage to his history plays; Ford employs the same outward appearance of ideological conservatism whilst simultaneously exposing the cracks - in this case, the divisions and differences –within a united Great Britain and between conflicting monarchical ideals. Jean Howard’s assertion that the ‘renaissance history play is... an anxious and unstable genre which at once insists that a strong and stable monarchy is essential to the health of entire social order and simultaneously reveals the precariousness of monarchical power’ is thus not only justified, but exemplified by a play which acknowledges the contemporary reality of a single sovereign ruling a multinational union.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

The representations of Scotland in *James the Fourth* and *Perkin Warbeck*, the former written prior to the Union of Crowns and the latter thirty years afterwards, unsurprisingly contain differences – but these differences may be somewhat unexpected. Greene’s play, which features an imaginative version of history (and of Anglo-Scottish union) envisages a weak, northern satellite nation which requires reformation according to English principles (and whose sensible inhabitants will welcome English wisdom); Ford’s play eschews a teleological narrative to provide a far more ambivalent assessment of a nation with which perfect union may be impossible, and meditates on the requirements of a British monarch even as he deconstructs the idea of Britishness. Although both plays are bound up with issues concerning succession, they are concerned deeply with the status of Scotland: the autonomy and independence of the northern nation; what its people (and its monarchs) were like; how it should be governed; and the problems arising from pooling sovereignty as part of a united Great Britain. Thus, *James the Fourth* and *Perkin Warbeck*, in very different ways, combine the historical with the contemporary and, in so doing, each consider the future: Greene envisages a royal union with Scotland, whilst Ford considers the limitations of merely royal union in a Great Britain divided politically, militarily, religiously and culturally. Thus we can trace a gradual move from a perception of the potential benefits and necessary political weighting of a monarchical Great Britain (which, Greene’s play suggests, must be largely Anglocentric and Europhobic) to dubiety in Ford’s play about

---

<sup>54</sup> Jean Howard “‘Effeminately Dolent’: Gender and Legitimacy in Ford’s *Perkin Warbeck*” in *John Ford: Critical Re-visions*, ed. by Michael Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 261-80 (p. 261)

Great Britain's stability, and a recognition of the endurance and hierarchy of separate national identities within that union.