

A man with a map: The Millennial Macbeth

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A Man with a Map: the Millennial Macbeth

In January 2012 David Cameron finally acceded to the view of the SNP that a referendum on Scottish independence should be held. The Edinburgh Agreement was finalised in October of that year, and in 2014 the referendum was actually held. The actual piece of legislation which the referendum threatened to overturn was the Act of Union of 1707, but the process of bringing the two countries together started a century before that, when James VI of Scotland succeeded his cousin Elizabeth I of England in 1603, becoming the first monarch to sit on the thrones of both kingdoms. It was, undoubtedly, this arrival of a Scottish king in England which prompted Shakespeare to write *Macbeth* in 1605. Ultimately, Scotland voted no to independence, but ironically that led to it becoming perceived as more directly Macbeth-like: Rachel Sylvester and Alice Thomson noted in a *Times* interview with its new first minister Nicola Sturgeon that to the English establishment “she is Lady Macbeth, standing behind Ed Miliband, knife in hand, plotting the destruction of the UK” (34).

The historical Macbeth reigned from 1040 until 1057, and according to contemporary chroniclers was by no means the monster depicted by Shakespeare. Shakespeare’s insistence on Macbeth as evil may well reflect the fact that he, like many of his contemporaries, regarded the advent of the Scots king as cause for alarm, and in the centuries since the play was written both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have become bywords for tyranny and cruelty. In this essay, I shall be looking at three books which do this, A. J. Hartley and David Hewson’s 2012 *Macbeth: A Novel*, Susan Fraser King’s 2008 *Lady Macbeth: A Novel*, and Lisa Klein’s 2009 *Lady Macbeth’s Daughter* (which wisely does not claim to be a novel and which an uncharitable reader might consider best termed a teen romance). First, though, I want to look at a book written rather earlier than these, Dorothy Dunnett’s 1982 *King*

Hereafter, which like her better-known *Lymond* and *Niccolò* chronicles self-consciously positions itself as writing Scotland's story in ways which draw on both Scottish literary tradition and Dunnett's own quasi-public position as wife of the editor of *The Scotsman*. As Diana Wallace observes, 'Dunnett was using a genre pioneered by a Scotsman (Sir Walter Scott) to write about Scottish history and nation formation, and she was doing so during a time when nationalism in Scotland and Wales was undergoing a revival' (144).

The eleventh century saw Scotland called upon to make definitive choices not only between paganism and the Christian church but between two different kinds of Christianity, Celtic and Roman. The real King Macbeth went on pilgrimage to Rome but was buried on Iona, which had been founded by the Irish St Columba. During his lifetime England, to the south, was ruled first by the Viking Canute and later by the devoutly Christian Edward the Confessor, who was subsequently canonised, while Orkney, to the north, was firmly under the sway of Jarl Thorfinn Sigurdsson and very much in the cultural ambit of Norway (Thorfinn and Macbeth were cousins, and Macbeth is mentioned in *Orkneyinga Saga*). It is therefore no wonder that books written about Scotland at the beginning of the second millennium should look back to this crucial period of Scottish history at the beginning of the first millennium, when so many aspects of the country's identity were in flux.

Although it was written well before a referendum on independence became a real possibility, the fact that *King Hereafter* begins in the year 1000, as noted in the first sentence (9), clearly suggests that it glances forward to what the Scotland of the future might be like. Dunnett takes the radical and surprising decision to make her Macbeth the same person as Jarl Thorfinn of Orkney. The actual Macbeth was the son of Findlaech, mormaer of Moray, and his mother and Thorfinn's were sisters, daughters of Malcolm, King of Scots; Dunnett gives

Malcolm only one daughter, Bethoc, but has her marrying three times, making Macbeth Findlaech's stepson rather than his son and also the half-brother of Duncan, the son of Bethoc's first marriage, an unpleasant, bumptious youth whose passing no one laments. The beauty of this move is that it allows Dunnett to do justice to the importance of Norse influence on Scotland, and to remind us that it was historically more closely connected to Scandinavia and Ireland than to England (indeed James I's queen Anna of Denmark was a living exemplification of this). The fact that Thorfinn is so closely related to Dunnett's earlier hero Francis Crawford of Lymond also invites speculation on how Scotland will develop, since Lymond's personal destiny is consistently presented as bound up with that of Scotland. Crinan looking at Thorfinn thinks "Any man, if he acted well enough, could conceal his uneasiness. No man whom he had ever known could hide the signs of a leader stretched beyond his capacity. A cough, perhaps; or an irritation of the skin; or the fine play of the muscles by the eye or by the lip that no physician he knew had been able to conjure away unless he took the man's office with it" (277). This emphasis on the body of Thorfinn recalls that placed on the athletic skills of Francis (and Niccolò after him). This is a world in which "the kings of Alba had to fulfil only three requirements. They had to be of the royal blood within four generations; they had to be whole and without physical blemish; and they had to excel, in strength and leadership, any one of their rivals" (279). The man who embodies Scotland must be a perfect specimen.

Like Dunnett's other heroes, Thorfinn does indeed epitomise Scotland. "The new King, whose hair was not the red-gold of the Celt or the straw-white of the Norseman but black as that of the Picts who had ruled this land two hundred years ago" (290) is a walking index to the various peoples who have contributed to the ethnic mix of the nation. When he comes to the throne, "the country had no voice to speak with" (298), but he gives it one, and under his

guidance Alba begins to turn into Scotia. “The kingdom of Alba, you might say, was forged in one sense as the cavalcade of young men who were its heirs moved past the engraved milestones of Agrippa and took the royal road south to Rome the Golden” (509); returned, Thorfinn calls a meeting of his mormaers, “from Thorkel Fostri in Orkney to Thor of Allerdale in the south”, and “uniformity was the theme of the meeting” (568). This is the birth of a nation.

It is therefore not surprising that Dunnett gives her Macbeth children. Although he and Groa suffer from a form of secondary infertility in that for most of the book they are unable to produce any further children, Dunnett’s Thorfinn, like his historical counterpart, has two sons, Paul and Erlend, who succeed him in Orkney while his stepson Lulach, here as in history Lady Macbeth’s son by her first marriage, inherits Scotland (though he will not keep it long). Those who have read Dunnett’s Niccolò series (of eight books) and her Francis series (of six) will realise at once that the implication is that both those heroes are likely to be descended from Thorfinn and are indeed to be understood as in some sense reincarnations of him, just as Francis descends from Niccolò and seems to reincarnate Niccolò’s dead twin; even Johnson Johnson, the hero of Dunnett’s series of sixties-set spy novels, has Scottish ancestry, suggesting that he may be a descendant of Niccolò and Francis. For Dunnett, there is a type of great man who needs to rise again across the centuries if Scotland is to prosper and advance, and Thorfinn/Macbeth was one of them.

The most prominent feature of Dunnett’s early medieval Scotland is its connectedness. “Money arrived from Thorfinn, with a gold arm-band weighing sixteen ounces. A third of the coins were silver pennies from Cologne, and among the rest there were three from Baghdad” (70). When Sulien asks “Thorfinn, why are you so interested in Pope Leo?” the

answer is “Because I enjoy listening to a Breton scion trained in Scotland and Ireland and about to join a major Welsh monastery discoursing on the troubles of the Coarb of St Peter. What else happened at Rheims?” (471); later Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg tells Thorfinn “How, fifty years ago, the Emperor’s great-great uncle opened the tomb of Charlemagne in Aachen, the second Rome, my dear Mak Betta ... He was laid in silks from this bale, among elephants” (490). Some of the emphasis on the material is clearly attributable to the fact that like her other books, this one is visibly inspired by things Dunnett has seen on her travels. “Abbot Maieul and his superior, the Archbishop of Cologne, with his famous crucifix in which Christ wore the piled hair and blue and classical features, carved in lapis lazuli, of the Empress Livia” (504), for instance, has the air of having been inspired by something she has seen; however, it also creates a sense of Scotland as strongly linked to Europe (and beyond) which will be familiar to anyone acquainted with Dunnett’s other books, though they are set in later historical periods (the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries respectively) and readers may not have expected this sense of cosmopolitanism to obtain quite so early. This is very much the Macbeth who made a pilgrimage to Rome, a cultured and well-traveled man, as Dunnett would have known from her typically extensive research that the historical Macbeth did. Dunnett’s early medieval Scotland is pointedly not backward. When the guestmaster in the Alps says “We had a party from the north of the world, from Alba, two weeks ago” the English sheriff Alfred asks “On all fours? In animal pelts?” (512), but these people are no savages:

‘I know what happens at a king-making,’ offered one of the younger Salmundarsons. ‘I’ve a cousin in Derry that told me once. They slaughter a mare -’

Three people groaned.

‘ - and bring her to the new King, and the new King makes ... does ... pretends that it’s a mistress.’

Everyone groaned.

(150)

Anthropologists might say that this is how early Celtic societies operated, but Dunnett's eleventh-century Scots think it would be very silly, and only the greenest of them believes in such a possibility.

Above all Thorfinn/Macbeth himself has a sophisticated geopolitical awareness: when he hears the name Forne, he comments "Crinan's son-in-law. And next door, of course, to Lincoln" (183). Forne is important because he, like Crinan, is a mint-master, and Thorfinn, like Dunnett herself, is well aware of the importance of the sinews of war. The shipmaster speaks of "those that didn't like foreigners, although how the fools thought you got in your wine and your pepper and your sword-blades without them was a different matter" (590) and Thorfinn when offering Siward a division of Lothian says "We have drawings. You will be shown them" (663). This is a man who, in every sense, knows where Scotland sits on the map.

Thorfinn both is and is not Macbeth. At the coronation "Even Sulien, who knew something of Thorfinn's possessions, caught his breath when he entered the hall with the rest and saw the hanging lamps, with their scented oil and golden twined beasts, and the glistening silk of the hangings, and the burden of glass and of silver and gold on the woven cloth of the long boards, set Saxon-style with the cross-table at the far end" (288). This is the first point of direct intersection with the play and Rognvald, Thorfinn's nephew and fellow joint earl of Orkney, functions as a form of Banquo's ghost, but what he embodies is not evidence of any guilt on Thorfinn's part but a Viking identity of which the mainland Scots are nervous.

When Thorfinn punishes his intrusion by having him whipped, he is more Hal than Macbeth,

casting off the companion of his former life at some personal cost. There is a more definite glance at *Macbeth* when after the coronation Groa asks Thorfinn if he could sleep and he says “Probably never again” (295). The true point of intersection, though, lies in the fact that Thorfinn’s kingship, like Macbeth’s, is not properly sacral. Thorfinn does not believe in the Christian God, or possibly in any God at all, and this proves a crucial weakness in his rule. One priest, Sulien, says to another, Eochaid, “No one can know, but they sense it. Is that what you are saying?” (671), to which Eochaid replies “A diverse people in time of hardship need a priest-king” (672). As the book moves towards its conclusion, the number of similarities to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* mounts steadily: Thorfinn eventually stops confiding in Groa, and “deep in the woods, on both sides of the river, the trees stretched, and walked” (737), before Gospatrick tells Earl Siward “Your nephew ... the young lord Siward was killed in the fighting” (752). Dunnett herself has a mystical sensibility, and includes elements of the supernatural in her books (indeed Lulach in *King Hereafter*, who makes prophecies which come true, is such an element). Thorfinn’s lack of belief ultimately makes his achievement lesser than that of Niccolò and particularly of Francis, whose encounters with the Dame de Doubtance leave him little choice but to believe in the supernatural, since it comes up and blows in his face. Whereas they survive and thrive, he is killed without even being able to defend himself, since the injuries he has sustained to his shoulders mean that he can no longer lift his sword.

Thorfinn’s ultimate failure has several consequences for Scotland. It stunts its growth, and keeps its Celtic elements and its Norse elements separate, whereas they had previously been beginning to harmonise. It will hamper trade, and learning will be damaged because so many influential churchmen fought and died with Thorfinn. Most of all, though, there will be political consequences not only in terms of *who* rules but of the basis on which that person

rules. The Orkney in which Thorfinn grows up is predicated on a system of power sharing: all the sons of Jarl Sigurd, and their sons after them, rule as joint heirs, as in the Continental system of inheritance where land is divided evenly among all legitimate male children. In mainland Scotland this system did not obtain; however the Celtic principle of tanistry ensured that different branches of families take it in turns to share power, with none permanently excluded. But Thorfinn's maternal grandfather Malcolm, King of Scots, has already begun to challenge this, and the new Malcolm II will do away with it entirely, introducing an anglicised system of inheritance which permanently consolidates power among his own descendants. When Malcolm kills Macbeth, Scotland changes forever, and a principle of equality is replaced by a privileging of primogeniture.

In Susan Fraser King's *Lady Macbeth: A Novel*, too, what is at stake is not only which individual should rule Scotland but what principle should obtain and what it will mean for Scotland's future, since those who opposed Duncan seek to defend the principle of tanistry; William C. Carroll comments that "King, like some other adapters, will transform the murder of Duncan into a patriotic act, intended to free Scotland both from his treachery, and from his weakness and inability to deal with Danish invasions and other subversions on the margins of his kingdom". *Lady Macbeth: A Novel* is obviously indebted to Dunnett, though the author never acknowledges this: Jarl Thorfin Sigurdsson, though here not the same person as Macbeth, is nevertheless an important and recurring character, and the volume concludes with a sample chapter from its sequel, which is called *Queen Hereafter*. Fraser King's book, which is narrated by Lady Macbeth (here called Gruadh, shortened to Rue), also picks up exactly where Dunnett's left off, though her heroine, unlike Dunnett's, does not marry the new king Malcolm. Again, too, we find a Scotland which can offer luxury goods such as oriental silk (1) and whose monks are Culdees (2), and there is a similar response to things

seen in museums when the Macbeths play with what are obviously the Isle of Lewis chess pieces (77); we also hear of the Loch Ness Monster (192).

Fraser King's book is not, however, as secure in its deployment of detail as Dunnett's, as we see when Gruadh describes a young Viking as having "Danegeld hair" (14). Danegeld was money paid by English rulers such as Ethelred the Unready to make the Vikings go away, so it is hard to guess what this phrase could mean; it certainly does *not* mean "hair of the colour found in particular areas where the Danes live", since the whole point of Danegeld was that they would *not* come to live in areas that paid it. Throughout the book, though, Fraser King struggles to create a sense of an authentically eleventh century narrative voice. There may be conscious archaisms such as "I deemed" (27), but there is also the grating clumsiness of "we kept no pigs, which were disdained as a food source" (28): if pigs are not eaten in this community, why would a child member of it, with no experience of any other way of life, bother to register the possibility that other people, in other times and countries, might possibly eat them? Gruadh's mother clumsily tells her that Macbeth "is not yet fourteen, his majority" (39), a classic instance of a character articulating something purely for the benefit of the reader, and there are inconsistencies such as the fact that when Gruadh first mentions the death of her brother Farquhar she says that he "died of the wounds he took in my defence" (8) whereas later she says that he was beheaded (71), an injury which would not normally be considered a mere wound. At Hallowe'en, people go trick or treating (200) just as if they were in twenty-first century America; Fraser King's own surname is obviously Scots, and there may well be a nod here to the long tradition of emigration (dating back even before the Highland Clearances to James I's deportation of the entire Graham clan to Ireland) which has meant that people in many different parts of the globe can claim Scots ancestry and feel connected to its history and heritage. Actually though the society shown in this book is

one which would have taken the festival of Samhain (the origin of Hallowe'en) very seriously indeed, since it is a world in which Fraser King's Lady Macbeth can say that she knows "more magic than I should admit" (3), and has visions which come true.

Fraser King's Macbeth, like Shakespeare's, is childless; Lady Macbeth has borne him two sons, but both have died in infancy. Although they thus play no part in the novel, the births of those babies are given marked prominence, with a surprising amount of obstetric detail (112-113). This is one of many clear signs that this is a book intended primarily for female readers, who are presumably expected to be interested in details of domestic routine (142) and sympathise with Gruadh's longing for real glass windows (175). There is also a reading guide for book groups, which tend to be made up largely of women. The book's is not a wholly conventional vision of femininity, though, for Gruadh also learns to fight with a sword, something which she achieves by appealing to what she identifies as a long tradition of Celtic warrior women.

Women (or more probably girls) are clearly also the intended audience of Lisa Klein's *Lady Macbeth's Daughter*. Klein's book is unique in making its Macbeth every bit as villainous as Shakespeare's (whose language and actions he follows closely), and Lady Macbeth too is shallow, callous, and self-seeking. The witches, by contrast, are wholly benign, and both they and their protégée Albia, the cast-out daughter of the Macbeths, have genuine magical and prophetic powers. Although the book's treatment of the relationship between the Macbeths themselves is perfunctory, it spends more time on Albia's "feelings" for the woefully undercharacterised Fleance. Albia too learns to swordfight, and in her survivor status has something in common with Perdita: left to die, she has been missing for sixteen years, and Macbeth's reaction when he first sees her is to desire her. Apart from the presence

of Albia, Klein's book follows *Macbeth* closely, but it also shows signs of other influences. The witch Helwain's insistence that she does not "determine anything ... It was not fate", coupled with her explanation that "I see what people plainly desire and I speak it back to them" (166), speak of Harry Potter, specifically Dumbledore's insistence on the importance of choice and the Mirror of Erised, which shows people their heart's desire. When Macbeth on the battlefield discovers that his opponent is female and takes this to be the meaning of the prophecy, we are unmistakably reminded of Eowyn in Peter Jackson's film of *The Return of the King* announcing "I am no man" and killing the Witch King of Angmar. Both Fraser King and Klein thus focus on female empowerment, with the inherently conservative implication that contemporary feminism has its roots in an age-old tradition of "strong women" who will flourish no matter what society does or does not do for them. In a sense, then, the past is not all that different from the present, and Scotland not all that different from America, so it is not surprising that neither of these books has much if anything to say about Scotland's future.

A. J. Hartley and David Hewson's *Macbeth: A Novel* does, though. It was published in 2012, the year in which it was agreed that a referendum on Scottish independence would be held. Hartley and Hewson's book certainly looks at *Macbeth*, but it looks too at what it has meant to be Scottish in the past and also, by implication, glances at what it may mean to be Scottish in the future. In contrast with *King Hereafter*'s pointed differences from Shakespeare, *Macbeth: A Novel* follows him closely. Although Hartley and Hewson say in an Authors' Note that they were resolved "that our book, like a stage production or film of the play, must be a new artistic production in its own right and not simply a slavish 'translation' of Shakespeare's original" (318), a translation is what it often reads like. We are given some of the dialogue of *Macbeth* - "Sleep tight, Duncan, he thought. For this is a knell that summons

you to heaven or to hell" (122) - but mainly it is close paraphrase, as when Skena (Lady Macbeth) wishes "Thicken my blood, remove from me the least temptation to remorse or decency" (81), when Duncan thinks "If only there existed a talent to read the heart of a man through his face" (39), or when Macbeth says after Skena's death "I swear I lack the space for mourning" (284). One wonders if the authors had half an eye to the possibility of its being set for students, since some of its passages would in fact make quite a helpful *vade mecum* to the play.

Inevitably, though, Hartley and Hewson's book does not only gloss the original but also introduces new emphases, and one of these is a marked interest in Scotland's history (and by implication in its future). Although *Macbeth* itself is set in an age that may seem sufficiently distant to us, the book offers repeated musings on a Scottish past even further back than that. The youngest of the weird sisters (they are differentiated and the youngest in particular is given something of a character) has a tattoo on her chest, "the magical triquetra of a race now lost to these lands" (2). At Clava "Skena watched as the elders shook their staffs of ash and mistletoe and recited a series of sonorous prayers and incantations in what she took to be the ancient language of the Picts ... They said these places were the burial mounds of a lost race so distant none could remember its name or begin to imagine what its people looked like, how they lived, what beliefs they followed" (75). We are told as if it were part of a character's consciousness that "The Romans had reached this far centuries ago, briefly turning the hillock into a puny fort from which they hoped to subdue the northern tribes. When the Picts came back to fight and fight again, the centurions fled, leaving behind a strange altar to a distant Persian god called Mithras, a deity the crude, superstitious tribes came to dread" (162), and collectively the weird sisters are a walking *Golden Bough* who could finish Mr Casaubon's book for him.

This forms part of a wider discussion of Scottish national identities, one which has a distinctively modern flavour. Macbeth's sergeant calls the Scandinavian force "Vikings" (7), terminology which differs from Shakespeare's "Norwegians" but reflects contemporary understandings of the ethnic settlement of the British Isles, and this is reinforced later when the sergeant says "These are no bandits. Sueno, the king of Norway himself, is with them. They mean to stay" (8), evoking even more urgently contemporary fears about migration. Moreover, the sergeant understands the incoming Vikings as a threat to a solid and already firmly established Scottish national identity, and other characters concur. Macbeth says of Macdonwald "He has sold Scotland - our land - to foreign rabble" (11) and of himself that "I serve my country" (18); he asks Macdonwald directly, "What's the reward for the Viking's sword? What portion of our homeland have you promised him? Where's your patriotism there?" (19). That these are questions applicable not only to Scotland in the tenth century but also to Scotland in the twenty-first century is suggested by the reflection that "The Viking wanted a kingdom, one he could run from across the cold North Sea. And that would be Scotland's future, to be nothing more than a vassal state for foreigners" (38) and when the Scots in Malcolm's following wear the saltire (290); indeed the youngest witch says of Scotland "Soon it must choose. The old ways or the new" (79). This is a dichotomy sharply pertinent in the year of the referendum but one utterly foreign to Dunnett, for whom the new is merely a modified version of the old.

In other ways, though, Hartley and Hewson's book has much in common with Dunnett's. Theirs is a Scotland marked by a surprising degree of cosmopolitanism and connection to the fashionable capitals of the European mainland - Duncan has a Spanish concubine and Banquo's wife wears "perfume I bought from a French molly in Edinburgh" (51), while

Skena wears a “flimsy French-styled gown ... beneath the sheets” (69) - and an almost Renaissance standard of education: Macbeth thinks of Achilles (294) and MacDuff delivers a footnote about Caesarean section to a Macbeth who knows all about Caesar (301). In their book too what is at stake is a political future and form of government for Scotland, and in order to sharpen our sense of that, Hartley and Hewson need to stress, as Dunnett did, the idea that Scotland already has a well-established shape, identity, and traditions. Thus Banquo says “I’m guessing we’ll have a new prince of Cumberland among us before bed” (94) and Duncan duly fulfils his prophecy by announcing that “we hereby invoke the ancient privilege of Scottish monarchs to name their chosen successor prince of Cumberland” (102): naming a prince of Cumberland is an established rite, recognised by all (it is, in fact, the exact equivalent of the historical Celtic practice of naming a tanist heir). Macbeth is crowned by “a red-hatted cardinal” (163) and has at his disposal “the ancient, comfortable palace of Scone” (168).

Above all Hartley and Hewson’s book, like Dunnett’s, repeatedly displays a considerably more sophisticated sense of space than one might perhaps expect to find in the eleventh century. At an early stage in the narrative, Macbeth

nodded and looked back to the hill fort around which his men had hunkered down, their eyes on its smoking battlements, set on an expansive crag of gray slate. The Great Glen ran like a diagonal sword slash across the neck of Scotland, from Inverness in the north east to Loch Linnhe in the south.

(7)

This implicitly ascribes to Macbeth the kind of awareness of general geography normally given in our own age only by maps, and the same is true later when we are told that “The size of this new kingdom, which not long before was property of the Norsemen, astonished him”

(167). As king, Macbeth “found himself staring at maps of places he had barely heard of, towns, regions, and castles he had dismissed as needless when he had been only the thane of Glamis” (235) and

In his mind, he saw his kingdom now, a vast and diverse land of mountain, glen, and pasture, inhospitable coastline, vibrant, prosperous ports. From the English border by the Tweed at Berwick to the contested lands of the far north to which the Vikings still laid claim, the nation stretched before him, daring him to master it.

(212)

In effect, he sees what we now think of as Scotland, and it is notable that it is a Scotland that has been comprehensively and accurately mapped: the oldest witch gives Fleance “a map that showed the path all the way down to the lowlands, then out to the coast by the Firth of Forth” (231), recalling Thorfinn saying to Siward “We have drawings. You will be shown them” (663). And England too can be fully apprehended and contextualised: Malcolm thinks of Edward the Confessor “The king was hedged about on all sides by factions, by Wessex and the Mercians, by the Normans across the channel, and by the Northumbrians along the Scottish border” (242). This, like Dunnett’s book, is a story not only about Macbeth, but about Scotland.

It is also about what Scotland will become. When Skena goes up onto the top of the castle “Across the river, clear in the moonlight, ran the winding stone path to the lonely wind-blasted moor of Culloden” (74), clearly glancing forward to the calamitous eighteenth-century battle which was to a crucial turning point in Scottish history. Other things too are modern. Macbeth declares that “Cawdor, a politician of the court, is not a Highland general” (9); the term “politician” is obviously a highly charged one in the year in which the referendum was agreed, but it is hardly one that a eleventh-century general might be

considered likely to use. Sometimes there is bleed from other Shakespeare plays, and when this happens it is always from ones set at a rather later period: like Richard III, Duncan pretends to have been praying (24), and Macbeth thinks of the porter “Fergus was his name, a vile thing, but one of his own” (28), echoing *As You Like It*, while a hallowed concept of Shakespearean criticism is nodded to when Skena leaves the castle and feels that “A green world beckoned in the dusk beyond” (270) and again when Macbeth, dying, thinks of “that lustrous great green world beyond” (303); the phrase “the green world” evokes the pastoral comedies, all of which inhabit the Renaissance. Eliot’s dictum on Webster is also recalled when the youngest sister says that true magic is “The unmasking of the hidden self below the surface, the skull beneath the skin” (44).

As in Klein’s book, there are also hints of the influence of an even later source. While others fight, Duncan eats: “The remains of an entire cock pheasant . . . stood on a silver plate in front of him. The bird sat heavy in his belly, its grease rank on his hands and face” (21); this recalls John Noble’s Denethor in Peter Jackson’s *The Return of the King*, eating a fowl while his soldiers (including his son) charge to almost certain death at the hands of Orcs. Malcolm says “us” but corrects it to “you” when Duncan picks him up on it (39-40) just as Gollum corrects Smeagol’s use of “for me” to “for us”, and the mannish witch proposes to snare a rabbit (45), as Gollum does in Ithilien. Banquo holds the ground while Fleance flees as Gandalf holds the Bridge of Khazad-dûm while the rest of the Fellowship makes good its escape (195), and when the oldest witch is “spiderlike on her black crutches” (216) she perhaps suggests Shelob. Another screen favourite seems to be hinted at when the mannish witch says “We *are* the coming storm, you fool” (55), “the Oncoming Storm” being of course the Daleks’ pet name for the Doctor. Connecting the book to modern fantasy in this way

serves to increase the sense that the story it tells is not merely about the past, but still resonates in the twenty-first century.

For all these writers, then, *Macbeth* means some things, and he also needs some things. For two of the books, he needs to have children, and for two of them he needs a map. For Dunnett in particular he needs both these things, because he is both an emblem of Scotland's past and also fundamentally connected to its future, and for Hartley and Hewson too he needs a map because his story is a story about Scotland's position in the world. As for what he means, there may be a range of things. When J. R. R. Tolkien first saw *Macbeth* he was disappointed that the wood did not really move; he redressed that with the Forest of Fangorn, and he also remembered the play when he made the Lord of the Nazgûl unable to be killed by any man. Both *Macbeth: A Novel* and *Lady Macbeth's Daughter* show signs of being influenced in their turn by Peter Jackson's films of *The Lord of the Rings*, and it is particularly apt that Hartley and Hewson's book should home in specifically on the figure of Denethor, for Denethor is of course a steward, and it was the role of steward which lent its name to the Stewart/Stuart dynasty, who ruled Scotland until the death of Queen Anne and whose descendant Queen Elizabeth II is still Queen of Scots as well as Queen of England. The connection thus invites us to consider how Scotland has been stewarded, and while there might not be any king who could return, we could conceivably wonder about the possible advent of a republic, for both *Macbeth: A Novel* and *King Hereafter* are profoundly interested in the question of how and on what principles Scotland should be ruled.

Finally, retelling the story of *Macbeth* means not only engaging with Shakespearean authority but considering more generally the processes of historiography *per se*. Dunnett's *Macbeth* may fail as Shakespeare's does, but her book does not do what Shakespeare's play does.

When Thorfinn says “You are warning me that my reign will be forgotten”, Sulien replies “whatever Lulach may say, men will look back and see a king who strove to build for his people; and although the gales may still blow and the flood come and cover it all, the foundations will stand” (856). In this respect, the book presents its most important cultural work as the rewriting of Macbeth’s reign as a period of which Scotland can be proud, and from which it can take inspiration for its future. In Fraser King’s novel too there is a concern with telling truth to posterity: the newly widowed Lady Macbeth muses,

From what my advisors say, Malcolm Canmore - *cean mór* in Gaelic, or big head, two words that suit him - will order his clerics to record Macbeth’s life. Within those pages, they will seek to ruin his deeds and his name. My husband cannot fight for his reputation now. But I am here, and I know what is true.

(3)

In Hartley and Hewson’s case, despite the many Shakespearean echoes in the text, both Scottish society and the book itself appear entirely innocent of *Macbeth*, the play; indeed the witches prophesy that no one will remember Fleance (307), in a moment which perhaps owes something to the first ever episode of *Blackadder* and the witches’ comic failure to identify Henry Tudor. Duncan, however, resolves to “speak to a chronicler and turn invention into the artificial truth called history” (22). This of course is what Hartley and Hewson themselves are doing, and what Dorothy Dunnett, Susan Fraser King, and Lisa Klein are also in their own ways also doing, just as Shakespeare did before them, and they are doing it because telling the story of Macbeth is a way of telling a story about Scotland and its place on the map of the world.

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