

Banquo's Daughters, a #MeToo *Macbeth*, and Early Modern Alt-Media

Todd Andrew Borlik, University of Huddersfield

Abstract

This article investigates the disturbing accusation, first recorded in 1652, that Macbeth abducted and possibly raped a daughter of Banquo's. Since Banquo himself was apparently fabricated by the Aberdonian chronicler Hector Boece in the 1520s to romanticize the Stuart dynasty's origins, his daughter has no historical basis and tales of her grim fate likely represent a literary embellishment on the scene in which Malcolm reports Macbeth had confessed that kingship would awaken his insatiably lustful nature. These rumours, circulated at least by the early 1650s, would eventually culminate in an obscene prose romance entitled *The Secret History of Mack-beth*, first printed in 1708 shortly after the Acts of Union. Although the article entertains the possibilities that Banquo's daughter may have featured in the legendary uncut *Macbeth*, in deleted or censored additions to the play by Thomas Middleton, or an unrealized adaptation planned by John Milton, the evidence proves too circumstantial. A safer assumption would be that the underground *Macbeth* was spawned by the radical press following Charles II's coronation as King of Scotland at Scone in 1651. Nevertheless, this apocryphal legend illuminates some gaps in Shakespeare's tragedy and affords an early example of how Shakespearean drama might be appropriated by an early modern forerunner of alt-media to feed a twisted sexual politics.

Keywords

Macbeth; William Shakespeare; Thomas Middleton; Adaptation; Lost Plays; Underground Literature; Sexual Politics

One of the most extraordinary retellings of *Macbeth* comes from the mouth of a cat. Not Gray-Malkin, the familiar whose caterwaul summons the first witch at the start of the play, nor 'the Spirit like a cat' (s.d. 3.5.48) that descends from the rafters to greet Hecate, but the feline persona of the anonymous *A Cat May Look Upon King*. The title echoes a Scottish proverb that would no doubt have furnished some philosophical catnip for Jacques Derrida,

whose late writings—in the tradition of Montaigne’s famous provocation about his playful cat—confront the autonomy of other species as a challenge to the supposed sovereignty of the human.¹ Alas, *A Cat May Look Upon a King* is not a proleptic foray into critical animal studies but a scathing chronicle of the foibles, vices, and crimes of England’s monarchs. Published in 1652, it is closer in time and spirit to Milton’s *Eikonoklastes* and is in fact a polemical defence of the execution of Charles I, blaming the English Civil War on the incompetence and corruption of his father King James. This piece of anti-Stuart propaganda might seem of little relevance to theatre historians were it not for a remarkable allusion to an episode of Scottish history portrayed in a certain Shakespearean tragedy. The monarchomach author (hereafter the cat) emphasizes James’ base ancestry, tracing it back to Scotland’s barbaric past, as exemplified by the reign of Macbeth, adding the curious detail that Macbeth lusted after Banquo’s daughter and only slew Banquo (and abducted the girl) after he was refused.²

Banchoo a Nobleman of *Scotland*, had a fair Lady to his daughter, whom *Mackbeth* the King desires to have the use of; *Banchoo* refuses, and *Mackbeth* murders him, and takes the Lady by force.³

Readers’ eyeballs may bulge at the revelation that Macbeth ravished Banquo’s daughter. Whether Macbeth intended to marry her, make her a concubine, or force himself upon her, it goes without saying that no such salacious plot twist occurs in Shakespeare’s version as it has come down to us in the 1623 Folio. Shakespeare’s Macbeths are already married before the play begins and the play makes no reference to Banquo having other progeny apart from a single son, Fleance. In these respects, Shakespeare follows his chief source, Raphael

¹ Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, 331. Derrida, ‘The Animal That Therefore I Am’.

² *The Cat* was formerly attributed to Anthony Weldon, but the latest scholarship identifies Marchamont Nedham as the most likely candidate for authorship. See Raymond, ‘Marchamont Nedham’, and Worden, ‘Wit in a Roundhead’.

³ Anonymous, *A Cat May Look Upon a King*, 45.

Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1587). Holinshed, in turn, derived his information from *The hystory and cronikils of Scotland* (1540) by John Bellenden, itself a translation into Scots of Hector Boece's Latin text *Historia gentis scotorum* (1526-27). Boece also appears to have been the chief source for George Buchanan's *Rerum scoticarum historia* (1582), which Shakespeare may also have consulted.⁴ None of these works speak of Banquo's daughter. This absence raises some tantalizing questions: where did the author of *A Cat* come by this scandalous account of the events of Macbeth's reign? Was this history known to Shakespeare? And how does this impact our understanding of the gender politics of the tragedy?

Discounting the obvious exceptions of Lady Macbeth, Lady Macduff, and the androgynous witches, women are underrepresented in the world of *Macbeth* as in so much Shakespearean drama. As Jonathan Goldberg observes, 'Duncan and Banquo both have heirs but no wives' and no women appear in the line of Scotland's kings or reflected in the mirror, giving the false impression that 'males produce males, just as Banquo and Duncan seem capable of succession without the interference of women'.⁵ What would happen if we tilt the mirror to glimpse the women left standing in the wings of literary history? Lady Macbeth's perplexing claim to have 'given suck' to an infant has given rise to a mountain of speculation about her hypothetical children; yet this seventeenth-century reference to Banquo's daughter has gone unremarked. Digging into the early chronicles of eleventh-century Scotland and an obscure adaptation of the Macbeth story entitled *The Secret History of Mack-beth*, which also provides Banquo with female relatives and corroborates some vital aspects of the cat's version, this article seeks to gauge the trustworthiness of the cat's tale and what it might reveal about the political unconscious of Shakespeare's tragedy. After considering the

⁴ On Shakespeare's sources for *Macbeth*, see Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources*, 1:167-86; Farrow, 'The Historiographical Evolution of the *Macbeth* Narrative'; Norbrook, 'Macbeth and the Politics of Historiography'; and Hudson, *Macbeth Before Shakespeare*.

⁵ Goldberg, 'Speculations', 104.

possibility this anecdote might afford a glimpse of a *Macbeth* that Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton, or John Milton either did write or wished to, but which was simply too scandalous to print or perform, I argue that the underground *Macbeth* more likely emerged from the cauldron of the radical press, transforming a tragedy by the King's Men into a 'porno-political' tirade against kingship.⁶ Although this research was undertaken in the hopes of recuperating a proto-feminist *Macbeth* it instead reveals that apocryphal tales of Banquo's daughter were implicated in the recasting of Shakespeare's tragedy by early modern alt-media as a pro-republican manifesto and that its gender politics are subsumed within a sexual politics that equates the Stuarts with Macbeth rather than Banquo to excoriate monarchy's penchant for libertinism.

Enter Castisa, Banquo's Daughter

Any attempt to prove the historical existence of Banquo's daughter is hobbled from the outset by the fact that the existence of Banquo himself is not well authenticated. The first extant reference to this eleventh-century Thane of Loquhaber occurs in Boece's *Historia*, almost five hundred years after he allegedly lived. Although Boece may have lifted his information about Banquo from John Barbour's lost 'the Stewartis Original', he mainly based his account on John of Fordun's *Chronica gentis scotorum* and Andrew of Wyntoun's *Orygynale Cronykil*, neither of which mention Banquo. Perhaps later chroniclers and royal genealogists supplied the fictitious Banquo with an equally fictitious daughter to lend an aura of reality to a made-up figure. Yet from a plot standpoint, the scenario recounted by the cat in which Macbeth seeks the hand—or, more crudely, 'to have the use'—of Banquo's daughter has a certain cold logic to it: in order to circumvent the weird sisters' prophecy, Macbeth's best

⁶ Wiseman, 'Porno-Political Rhetoric', 134.

hope would be to marry into Banquo's line to beget an heir that would someday rule Scotland.

Given that the Macbeths are already married when the encounter with the weird sisters occurs, it seems extremely unlikely that Shakespeare could have entertained the notion that Lady Macbeth—named in early medieval sources as Gruoch and identified as *filiae Bodhe*, or the daughter of Bodhe—might be Banquo's daughter.⁷ But the idea that Banquo fathered more children than Fleance is not so far-fetched. While Macbeth's use of the plural pronoun 'them' (3.1.65) when speaking of Banquo's 'issue' probably designates his rival's as-yet-unborn descendants, it might be easily misconstrued as signifying his children, and rumours of Banquo's other offspring circulate in seventeenth-century texts besides *A Cat May Look Upon a King*. In the second edition of the popular *Microcosmos*, published two years after *Macbeth* first appeared in print, the Stuart historian Peter Heylyn states that when Macbeth

called to minde the prediction giuen to his companion Banquho whom herevpon suspecting as his supplanter he caused to be killed, together with *his whole kindred*, Fleance his son onely with much difficulty escaping into Wales.⁸

This passing reference to Banquo's 'kindred' could invite the inference that Fleance was not an only child. A 1684 genealogy assumes as much when it states Macbeth 'commanded that Banquo and all his Posterity should be slain' and 'none of his posterity' survived the assault except Fleance.⁹ Perhaps historians conflated Macbeth's order to kill Fleance with his order to slaughter Macduff's family. Or perhaps vague expressions and the embellishments of subsequent chroniclers eager to enliven their narratives gave birth to Banquo's daughter. If the desire to provide the Stuarts with a pedigree worthy of a throne led medieval historians to

⁷ A collection of early sources pertaining to Macbeth's reign can be found in Anderson, *Early Sources*. For more on the historical Lady Macbeth, see Ray, 'Finding Gruoch'.

⁸ Heylyn, *Microcosmos*, 509

⁹ Keepe, *The Genealogies*, 44-45.

invent Banquo out of thin air, a similar wish may have prompted seventeenth-century writers to further embroider the Stuart myth and supply Banquo with more children.

King James was not the only member of the Scottish nobility to profess a connection to Banquo's line; Sir Thomas Urquhart, the Laird of Cromartie, would also publicize his kinship with the legendary thane and credit him with a daughter. A cavalier poet and author of eclectic treatises on geometry and universal language whose prose style has been aptly characterized as a mash-up of *Ancient Pistol* and Sir Thomas Browne, Urquhart remains best known to literary historians for producing the first English translation of Rabelais.¹⁰ But he also dabbled in genealogy. In his *Pantochronocanon* or the *Promptuary of Time* (1652), he claims to have traced the 'the true Pedigree and Lineal descent of the most ancient and honorable name of the URQUHARTS' all the way back to Adam. As he leaps through the branches of the family tree, Urquhart pauses to note that one of his ancestors, Frederick 'had to his first wife, Castisa the daughter of Banco, Thane of Lochabber: but she had no sons to him'.¹¹ The claim hangs on a slender peg. As Urquhart may have known, Wyntoun's medieval chronicle reports that Macbeth's original title was not Thane of Glamis but Thane of Cromartie. This coincidence apparently inspired the literary Urquhart to glamourize his family history by connecting it to a Shakespearean tragedy. More pragmatically, this genealogical romance marks a bold attempt to prop up the nobility of his family and forge a link to the Stuart dynasty and hence the throne at a time when Charles I had recently been executed and his son forced into exile. It is curious that Urquhart's text and *A Cat May Look Upon a King* both date from 1652: Banquo's daughter suddenly makes a belated entrance when the Stuarts appear to be exiting history's stage.

¹⁰ Wilcock, *Sir Thomas Urquhart*, 7.

¹¹ Urquhart, *Pantochronocanon*, 44.

Nevertheless, the idea of Macbeth abducting and ravishing Banquo's hypothetical daughter should not be dismissed offhand. The lurid scenario gains plausibility from a number of medieval and early modern texts that concur in depicting Macbeth as irrepressibly lecherous.¹² The extended conversation between Malcolm and Macduff in act 4, scene 3—in which Malcolm reveals that Macbeth had denounced himself as an incorrigible womanizer in a bid to lure the prince into his confidence—is not Shakespeare's invention but occurs in the fourteenth-century chronicles of John of Fordun and Andrew of Wyntoun. Boece transcribes this dialogue at length and transmits it to Shakespeare's chief source, Holinshed, who renders the self-indictment with notable frankness:

Such immoderate lust and voluptuous sensualitie ... followeth me, that if I were made king of Scots, I should seeke to defloure your maids and matrons, in such wise that mine intemperancie should be more importable unto you than the bloudie tyrannie of Makbeth now is.¹³

The same false confession acquires a particular emphasis in another work Shakespeare may have consulted, Buchanan's *Rerum scoticarum historia*, in which Malcolm claims Macbeth had admitted that kingship would tempt him to indulge his appetite for unbridled 'lust and avarice', sins that the republican Buchanan regarded as the inevitable result of concentrating power in an absolute monarch.¹⁴ Belittling the effectiveness with which Macbeth governed Scotland for ten years as a cunning front to consolidate his power base, Buchanan reports that Macbeth eventually 'broke forth into open Tyranny', putting rivals to death on trumped-up charges so he might confiscate their wealth 'to maintain a Band of *Debauchees*, which he had

¹² On Macbeth's 'defamation' by subsequent historians, see Hudson, *Macbeth Before Shakespeare*, 83-101. It is possible the lecherous Macbeth was spawned out of an accidental confusion of him with Donwald and his successors. Shakespeare based Macbeth's assassination of Duncan on Donwald's murder of Duff. Duff's successor King Cuilén mac Illuib was accused of abducting and raping the daughter of Rhydderch ap Dyfnwal, who avenged the disgrace by killing the rapist. Perhaps mac Illuib morphed into Macbeth in the transmission of the story.

¹³ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, 94.

¹⁴ Buchanan, *History of Scotland*, 213.

about him under the name of a Guard'.¹⁵ Heylyn likewise states that for the first decade of his reign Macbeth behaved with some circumspection, but descended into brazen debauchery after a wizard told him he could not be killed by one of woman born. Reassured by this prophecy, 'he omitted no kinde of libidiousnesse or cruelty', a phrase that in the 1652 edition of *Microcosmos* would be condensed to 'omitted no kind of libidinous cruelty'.¹⁶ This minor emendation might not seem all that remarkable and could be dismissed as a typesetter's shortcut were it not that the date of this revision, 1652, coincides exactly with the first two documented references to Banquo's daughter. This raises the possibility that Heylyn had new information incriminating Macbeth in crimes of a sexual nature. Heylyn's phrase 'omitted no kind of libidinous cruelty' would be picked up and inserted verbatim into the plot summary that precedes William Davenant's *Macbeth*.¹⁷ By the mid-seventeenth century, then, Macbeth's reputation for 'voluptuousness' (4.3.61) was well-established, creating a need to supply him with a victim to confirm Malcolm's accusation. Enter Castisa, Banquo's daughter.

Whatever her origins, Banquo's daughter would soon be enshrined as historical personage. J. Frederick van Bossen's *The History of the Royal Line of Scotland or The Royall Cedar* (a manuscript dated 1688 is housed at the University of Edinburgh) relates that Banquo had married a distant cousin named Mauldvina, the daughter of the Thane of Atholl, with whom he had several children, including Fleance and a daughter Castisa.¹⁸ Unlike Urquhart, the Danish-Scottish van Bossen [or von Bassen] could claim to be a serious antiquarian and in the preface to his work asserts that he derived his knowledge from an ancient manuscript belonging to William Tulloch, the Bishop of Orkney. Unfortunately, this

¹⁵ Ibid., 212.

¹⁶ Heylyn, 509, 302.

¹⁷ Davenant, *Macbeth*, A2^r.

¹⁸ Bossen, *The Royall Cedar*, 96-99. Extracts are reprinted in Cunningham, *The Lost Queens of Scotland*, 119-21. Williams casts doubts on its historical authenticity, dubbing it a 'rich fiction' ('A Danish Scholar', 67).

manuscript is no longer extant, so there is no way of knowing if van Bossen learned of Castisa from Urquhart or from a different source that might independently verify the existence of Banquo's daughter—or rather the antiquity of her myth.¹⁹ Given that van Bossen's genealogy performs a 'miraculous multiplication ... of wives, daughters, and younger sons unknown to any previous scholar', Castisa is probably a fiction but his assigning her the same name as Urquhart and one that appears in the work of a certain Jacobean playwright (of which more later) is striking.²⁰

Banquo's Second Daughter Beatrix as Lady Macduff

On the authority of van Bossen, later historians would multiply Banquo's progeny. In 1816, Thomas Waterhouse sifted through Scottish chronicles and pedigrees like *The Royall Cedar* to compile *A genealogical account of the royal house of Stuart*. According to Waterhouse, Banquo had four sons—Fleance, Malcolm, Ferguhard, and Kenneth—and not one but two daughters: Castisa and Beatrix.²¹ Banquo's second daughter gives this inquiry into *Macbeth's* backstory another turn of the screw since, while Castisa is alleged to have married Frederick, the Thane of Cromartie, Beatrix (according to Waterhouse) reportedly wed Macduff, the Thane of Fife.

If audiences were to imagine Lady Macduff as Banquo's daughter it would have profound implications for their understanding of Shakespeare's tragedy. First, Macbeth's decision to ransack Macduff's castle and 'give to th'edge o'th' sword, / his wife, babes, and all unfortunate souls / That trace him in his line' (4.1.150-52) would seem less like an act of

¹⁹ Williams suggests van Bossen may be referring to the *Historia Norwegie* and confused William Tulloch with his kinsman Thomas ('A Danish Scholar', 71).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

²¹ Waterhouse, *A genealogical account*, 14. Boece refers to a Beatrix as one of the daughters of Malcolm II (the grandfather of Shakespeare's Prince of Cumberland): 'For Malcolm had two douchteris, of quhilkis the eldest namyt Beatrice' (171^v). This Beatrice would have been Macbeth's aunt.

gratuitous carnage but a calculated albeit utterly ruthless plan to extinguish a branch of the bloodline predicted to supplant him. Macbeth's killing of children who represent potential rivals would give him a conspicuous resemblance to another Shakespearean villain, Richard III. Some seventeenth-century texts compare Macbeth's betrayal of his ally Banquo to Richard's execution of Buckingham, and this resemblance is all the more glaring in the chronicles in that the historical Macbeth, like Richard, sought to marry the wife of an enemy to shore up his claim to the throne.²² Richard's scheme to dispose of his wife Anne to make a more politically advantageous match with the daughter of his rival would offer Shakespeare a precedent for Macbeth's plan to wed Banquo's daughter so as to outflank the prophecy and ensure his own descendants inherit the kingdom as part of Banquo's line. It is, moreover, noteworthy that Anne's premature death appears to be hastened by insomnia due to the nightmares of her bedfellow; a coroner's inquest on Lady Macbeth's death would reach a similar verdict. Her husband's restless mind and sleeplessness as much as her own guilty conscience afflict her with the insomnia and madness that drives her to her grave.

If the plot complications created by making Lady Macduff Banquo's daughter seem Shakespearean, as they parallel situations of inter-familial conflict in his other plays, nothing in the extant *Macbeth* points to any relationship whatsoever between her and Banquo. While Ross addresses her as 'dearest coz' (4.2.14), there is no hint of any connection between Ross and Lochaber, and 'coz' is a colloquial term of endearment in early modern English that does not necessarily imply literal kinship. In brief, the identification of Lady Macduff as Banquo's daughter never gained widespread currency and occurs too late in the day to have any traction in the play's writing or early reception history.

²² Wyntoun's *Orygynale Cronykil* reports that Lady Macbeth was the widow of Macbeth's 'eme' or uncle (4:274-75). The comparison between Macbeth and Richard III occurs in the anonymous *Secret History of Whitehall*, 10.

The Secret History of Mack-beth: Banquo's Half-Sister

Prima facie, one might be similarly dismissive of the cat's tale of Macbeth abducting Banquo's daughter as nothing more than a lurid invention. Rumours about Castisa, however, arguably deserve a more serious hearing for they are echoed in part by an anonymous prose narrative with the intriguing title *The Secret History of Mack-beth*. This shocking adaptation of the Macbeth story fleshes out the life and private life of the Scottish king in salacious detail, portraying him as a philanderer and brutal rapist. In this version, the chief victim is not Banquo's daughter but his half-sister and ward. The confusion between younger sister and daughter/ward is understandable considering the negligible age difference between her and Banquo's son. *The Secret History* pronounces her 'of as few years as his own Son Fleans', and later specifies her age at nineteen.²³ Given her youth and the fact she was entrusted to Bancho's protection it easy to see why she might be misremembered as Bancho's daughter. *The Secret History* gives the girl's name as Inetta rather than Castisa, but since Inetta (a variant of Inez) signifies 'pure' the name is more or less synonymous with Castisa or chastity. If some superficial details differ, the core of the narrative matches the bare-bones synopsis found in *A Cat*, as the following summary will clarify.

When Inetta arrives at the Scottish court, Lady Mack-beth (who has an aversion to sex and encourages her husband's dalliances so she can wield power while he is preoccupied) primes her husband with a gushing description of the girl's physical charms. After Mack-beth attempts to seduce Inetta and is rebuffed, Lady Mack-beth arranges for her husband to enter the girl's chamber undetected and spy on her while she bathes 'naked as she was born'.²⁴ Enflamed with desire and instructed by his wife to use 'Force to accomplish his wishes',

²³ *Secret History of Mack-beth*, 49.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

Mack-beth violently gropes Inetta the next time they meet: ‘amidst a thousand struggles, [he] ravished as many Kisses without giving her Leave to speak a Word’.²⁵ But Inetta flees his embraces, protesting ‘tho’ she wou’d not have been displeas’d to have been the Wife of Mack-beth, yet she coul’d not think it agreeable to her Greatness to be his Whore’.²⁶ Anxious that her plan might backfire and Mack-beth cast her aside in favour of a nubile nineteen-year-old, Lady Mack-beth resolves to disgrace the girl. Meanwhile, the frustrated Mack-beth confesses his passion to Bancho and begs him to persuade his sister to consent.

Understandably, Bancho recoils at the prospect: ‘you wou’d not have me prostitute a Virgin of my own Blood to your lust, you have not so mean an Opinion of my Virtue’.²⁷ In an awkward attempt to soften Banquo, Mack-beth, lamenting his lack of an heir, confides that he wishes some discrete friend of his would sleep with Lady Mack-beth to get her with child. Bancho laughs off the indecent proposal as a jest but is secretly alarmed. When Lady Mack-beth learns that her husband has offered her to his friend, she does not fly into a rage but weaves it into her devious plan to eliminate Bancho and his family. Under her direction, Mack-beth again begs Bancho to impregnate Lady Mack-beth. Without too much arm-wringing, Bancho at last ‘yields to the earnest Entreaties of the King’, who escorts his friend to his wife’s bed.²⁸ But when Bancho climbs in and kisses her, Lady Mack-beth grabs a dagger set by for the purpose and stabs him in the heart, killing him instantly. Alarmed by her outcry, the castle guards arrive on the scene to find Lady Mack-beth coated in blood and swearing Bancho had attempted to rape her, clearing her of any wrongdoing. With Bancho now out of the picture, Mack-beth bribes a maid to drug Inetta and rapes her while unconscious until she revives in in the middle of the act and shrieks out in horror.

²⁵ Ibid., 51-52.

²⁶ Ibid., 50.

²⁷ Ibid., 54.

²⁸ Ibid., 57.

Not satisfied with this despicable crime, Mack-beth becomes a serial rapist: he forces himself on the wife of a man named Maclean, threatening to kill her children if she refuses to comply.²⁹ He later gives the same ultimatum to Lady Macduff but does not keep his word, ordering his men to slaughter her children while he violates her.³⁰ At this point, Mack-beth sets his sights on the daughter of the narrator, the still semi-loyal Thane of Angus. Recalling the fate of Inetta and Bancho, he outwardly agrees to grease Mack-beth's way to his daughter's bed but inwardly decides the time has come to flee Scotland. After the daughter Eugenia cleverly buys some time by promising to sleep with Mack-beth tomorrow if he will spare the life of her true lover, Lorne, the trio—father, daughter, and lover—escape in the night by boat. Shipwrecked by a storm, they wash ashore in the north of England, where they are rescued by the exiled Thane of Glamis, arriving just in time to join the invasion of Scotland to oust Mack-beth led by Malcom, Sibert [Siward], and Macduff.

In one of the few studies to examine this obscure and obscene text, William Carroll encapsulates its tenor: 'Mack-beth as Caligula'.³¹ Indeed, an authorial aside explicitly likens Mack-beth to 'Nero, Caligula and Heliogabalus in one', a trio that hints at the writer's republican sympathies.³² To form a crisper picture of the politics of this bizarre adaptation of *Macbeth* it would be helpful to know more of its provenance. Although its titlepage claims it was transcribed 'from an ancient original manuscript', such a shop-worn literary gimmick need not be taken at face value. Carroll assumes that it was composed shortly before its 1708 publication, declaring that it gives us Macbeth transformed into 'an eighteenth-century rake'.³³ The date 1708 strongly suggests that the text was published in protest of the 1707 Acts of Union, the realization of King James's long-deferred dream of merging England and

²⁹ Ibid., 64.

³⁰ Ibid., 66.

³¹ Carroll, 'Afterlives', 80.

³² Secret History, 70.

³³ Carroll, 'Afterlives', 80.

Scotland into the United Kingdom. Behold, *The Secret History* seems to proclaim, the depraved country to which England has now yoked itself. But the date of publication is not necessarily a reliable indicator of the text's genesis. As we have seen, rumours of Macbeth raping Banquo's daughter were swirling in the early 1650s. Internal evidence in the text, meanwhile, points towards a date of composition in the reign of Charles I. In the frame story, a character speaks 'of the Norman Court in Exile, and the foul play I have found in that of England since our good King's Restoration'.³⁴ *The Secret History* could conceivably date from any point between 1660 and 1708 and may have been prompted by the popularity of Davenant's *Macbeth*, which premiered in 1664. But whereas Davenant's royalist version foregrounds the chaos unleashed by regicide, this salacious exposé of Macbeth's private life is far more sceptical of the monarch's divinity.

An understanding of *The Secret History* can be greatly enriched by framing it as an example of what Susan Wiseman terms the 'porno-political rhetoric' of Civil War era England.³⁵ Following the breakdown of press censorship in the 1640s,

political leaders at the highest levels of government—including Queen Henrietta Maria, Oliver Cromwell, and King Charles I—were confronted with extensive and graphic debates about their sexual histories in widely disseminated print polemic for the first time in English history. By the early 1650s, monarchical sexuality was a routine topic of scurrilous political commentary.³⁶

The Secret History of Mack-beth belongs in this genre of porno-political satire: it is a caustic parody not of Shakespeare but of the monarch as despotic libertine. The narrator Angus states that Macbeth's sexual crimes 'rais'd in me the utmost Aversion and Abhorrence of the Tyrant imaginable, and indeed against all Princes, that so far forget their Office as not [to] think their

³⁴ *Secret History*, 4.

³⁵ Wiseman, 'Porno-Political Rhetoric', 134.

³⁶ Fullerton, 'Fatal Adulteries', 793.

Peoples Good the chief Cause of their Being'.³⁷ The text undermines the doctrine of absolute monarchy espoused by Shakespeare's patron King James, employing a *reductio ad absurdum* argument to expose it as a pretext for declaring all women royal property, regardless of their marital status or consent. In the tradition of Buchanan, *The Secret History* constitutes a tour de force send-up of this sexual absolutism, as Mack-beth cajoles women that giving themselves to the king is a patriotic duty that cannot be equated with fornication or adultery:

It is a good Subjects Duty to obey his King in all his Commands; a King is the Viceregent of heaven, not accountable to any but his Principal from whom he received his Power, that is God; and he or she who resists his Will commits an horrid Crime, but those, who are Obedient, can be guilty of none.³⁸

After Mack-beth is deposed and Malcom crowned in his stead, the Thane of Argyle issues a stern warning to Scotland's new ruler that distills the moral of the tale: 'The Example before your Eyes may give you Warning, not to fall into the Errors of your Predecessor . . . In short, my Lord, know that your Office is constituted for the Good of the People, and not they for your Will and Pleasure'.³⁹ Given the earlier reference to the 'good King's Restoration', the speech sounds like a pointed lecture to Charles II not to repeat the mistakes of his father and grandfather. The book's title *The Secret History of Mack-beth* capitalizes on the scandal sparked by other exposés of the sex lives of the Stuarts, such as *The Secret History of King James I and King Charles I* (1690) and *The Secret History of Whitehall* (1697), which would fit with a provenance towards the end of the seventeenth century, when anti-monarchical sentiments were reawakened by the Exclusion Crisis. When the text appeared in print in 1708, its character assassination of Macbeth and the Scottish nobility would aim a blow at Scottish Jacobites and their lingering nostalgia for the Stuarts, while nourishing resentment of

³⁷ *Secret History*, 71.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 95, 97.

the Acts of Union. However, it seems likely that a version of this tale was in circulation much earlier, if not in the cheap pamphlets of the radical press, then in manuscript or in the less inhibited oral culture of ballads and bawdy songs.

Indeed, the allusion to Mack-beth in *A Cat* confirms as much. If *The Secret History* was penned in the early eighteenth century or the mid-1660s, how do we account for the cat's reference to Macbeth ravishing Banquo's daughter in a text published in 1652? The author of *A Cat* seems to know something of *The Secret History* or of the sources that underlie it. It is noteworthy that *A Cat* does not present the gossip about Macbeth abusing Banquo's daughter as a shocking new revelation but as a fact already in the public sphere: James' 'original extract I find was this'.⁴⁰ Moreover, the author of *A Cat* gives the names of the protagonists as 'Mack-beth' and 'Bancho', using the identical spellings found in *The Secret History* rather than Shakespearean spellings. This points to the conclusion that the underground *Macbeth* must have been circulating in some form by the early 1650s at the latest.

If the two separate references to Banquo's daughter in 1652 present a terminus ad quem for the existence of a clandestine *Macbeth*, the terminus a quo remains uncertain. Is it possible that rumours of Macbeth's sex crimes were circulating during the reign of King James and could have reached the ears of Shakespeare or Middleton? Seeking to answer that question forces us into a thicket of speculation but one that is worth traversing for the chance, however slim, of arriving at a new vista of one of the most canonical plays in English literature. Readers are forewarned that what follows should be regarded merely as the testing of an intriguing hypothesis, not the assertion of a proven fact. In the final analysis, I will argue that the evidence is inconclusive, but is nonetheless suggestive enough to justify cracking open a Pandora's box of Shakespeare scholarship: the lost *Macbeth*.

⁴⁰ *A Cat May Look Upon a King*, 45.

The Secret History and the Lost Macbeth

Since A. C. Bradley floated the idea in his landmark *Shakespearean Tragedy*, scholars have marshalled a bevy of evidence in support of the conjecture that the 1623 text of *Macbeth* has been abridged.⁴¹ Weighing it at only 17,121 words, *Macbeth* does not reach two-thirds the length of the average Shakespearean play. While some critics regard the brevity of the Folio version as a deliberate tactic to amp up the pace, this compression could as easily result from retrospective cutting by either Shakespeare or the King's Men as from an authorial intent present from the tragedy's conception.⁴² Quarto texts from this period of Shakespeare's career, such as *Hamlet* and *Lear*, tend to be longer than the Folio versions, increasing the likelihood that the Folio *Macbeth* was whittled down. Simon Forman's account of a performance of *Macbeth* he witnessed at the Globe in 1611 differs in several respects from the Folio's narrative.⁴³ As Bradley observed over a century ago, internal allusions in the extant text seem to assume the audience's familiarity with conversations or events that never occur on stage and hence authorize the supposition that excisions have been made.⁴⁴ Several scenes in the play seem designed for performance in a darkened playhouse, so much so that many scholars believe the script was revised after the King Men's acquired Blackfriars in 1609.⁴⁵ Finally, the character Hecate appears to have been parachuted into the play by Thomas Middleton, indicating that the Folio *Macbeth* was doctored at some point, probably

⁴¹ Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 439-41. For a recent overview of the inconsistencies in the Folio *Macbeth*, see Dawson, 'The Text and its Status' and Clark and Mason, *Macbeth*, 321-336.

⁴² Arguments for the integrity of the Folio *Macbeth* stem from an outdated Formalist obsession with the unity of the text, a position that has become increasingly untenable for playscripts given the abundant research establishing the collaborative nature of early modern drama.

⁴³ Forman's reference to the weird sisters as 'faeries and nimphe's' rather than hags or witches is striking, and his description of Macbeth and Banquo riding 'through a wod' does not square with the Folio's setting of the fateful encounter on a blasted heath. He also states that Duncan made Macbeth Prince of Northumberland rather than Malcolm Prince of Cumberland, and that Donalbain fled to Wales rather than Ireland. Such discrepancies buoy conjecture that 'the version of *Macbeth* Forman saw performed . . . was significantly different to the version we can see for ourselves today' (Loughnane, 'On this day').

⁴⁴ Bradley, 445.

⁴⁵ On *Macbeth* as a Blackfriars play, see Brooke's Oxford edition, 34-35.

after Middleton's *Witch* (c. 1616), which features two songs that also found their way into the Folio *Macbeth*.⁴⁶ A groundswell of scholarship on lost plays in recent years by the likes of Matthew Steggle, David McInnis, and the many contributors to the *Lost Plays Database* has eroded scepticism about the validity of research in this area, and theatre historians increasingly accept that 'quite a few plays existing in only one printed form must have had widely variant versions at different time[s] and on different stages'.⁴⁷ In light of the reasons outlined above, it seems an entirely reasonable assumption that a different version of *Macbeth* once existed than the one printed in 1623.

That *A Cat* and *The Secret History* might furnish reliable material for reconstructing *Macbeth*'s deleted scenes is, however, a much more tenuous supposition. Speculating about the lost *Macbeth* is a perilous enterprise, and many theatre historians are understandably allergic to the figurative sawdust required to stuff such a chimera. But refusing even to grant such claims a hearing seems overly fastidious in the era of the *Lost Plays Database* and misses an opportunity to further unravel the sexual politics of Shakespeare's tragedy. To don the mantle of devil's advocate, then, one might note that glimpses of the lust-crazed Macbeth can be found in the Folio text. Malcolm calls him 'luxurious' (4.3.58), which means lustful in early modern usage. Developing the scene in Holinshed, Shakespeare's Malcolm tests Macduff by feigning to be an insatiable sex addict, before retracting the confession and claiming words to this effect had been spoken to him by Macbeth:

Your wives, your daughters,

Your matrons and your maids could not fill up

The cistern of my lust. (4.3.61-63)

⁴⁶ Gary Taylor's formidable case for Middleton's authorship of the Hecate scenes ('Empirical Middleton') has persuaded most scholars, despite the caveats raised by Brian Vickers in 'Disintegrated'.

⁴⁷ Gurr, 'What is lost?', 67.

Beyond question, the passage in Holinshed in which Malcolm indirectly accuses Macbeth of yearning to deflower maids and matrons was known to Shakespeare in 1606. Yet Malcolm's picture of Macbeth as 'luxurious' or lustful and 'smacking of every sin / That has a name' (4.3.58-60) is not corroborated in the Folio text, prompting some critics to dismiss it as a conventional, generic rant against all tyrants rather than the ad hominem attack that it clearly is.⁴⁸ Such an accusation would, of course, stick deeper if the audience had seen evidence of Macbeth's 'voluptuousness' (4.3.61). Taking a cue from this confession, an inventive playwright wishing to spice up the drama could easily backfill in the gaps by adding some scenes depicting Macbeth's barbaric treatment of women and put Malcolm's words back in Macbeth's mouth. Lady Macbeth drugs Duncan's guards so it is not unimaginable that Macbeth might have drugged a woman to prevent her from resisting. As he steels himself to murder the sleeping Duncan, Shakespeare's Macbeth approaches his chamber with 'Tarquin's ravishing strides' (2.1.55), a self-incriminating comparison to the most famous rapist in antiquity and the subject of Shakespeare's narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece*. More than a canny piece of self-publicity by the playwright, this allusion to Lucrece could indicate that Shakespeare had some inkling that Macbeth had ravished the daughters of the Scottish nobility.

Sadly, such heinous attacks on women are hardly unprecedented in Jacobean drama.⁴⁹ Printed in 1608 and staged a few years earlier, Thomas Heywood's dramatization of *The Rape of Lucrece* centres on a sexual assault and its political consequences and contains several passages that seem to echo Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Meanwhile, the works of Thomas Middleton, who likely revised *Macbeth*, abound with sexual crimes perpetrated by corrupt authority figures. Acts of rape or verging on rape occur in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *Women*

⁴⁸ Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants*, 140-42 and Brooke, *Macbeth*, 184n.

⁴⁹ On rape in Middleton, see MacGregor, 'Undoing the Body Politic' and Solga, *Violence Against Women*, 141-46).

Beware Women, *The Changeling*, and *Hengist, King of Kent*, not to mention his *Ghost of Lucrece* and his possible hand in *Measure for Measure*. Even in the extant *Macbeth*, the sacking of Macduff's castle leaves it open for the audience to imagine the ruffians' pursuit of Lady Macduff concluding, as many stage productions imply, in an off-stage rape.

Although it seems highly unlikely the author of *A Cat* could have seen some uncut version of *Macbeth*, one clue dropped by Urquhart and seconded by van Bossen does demand closer scrutiny: the unusual name Castisa. According to EEBO, the name Castisa is not recorded prior to 1652. However, the almost identical name Castiza does appear in Jacobean plays roughly contemporaneous with *Macbeth*. In fact, the name was a particular favourite of none other than Thomas Middleton, the playwright suspected of revising Shakespeare's tragedy. In Middleton's *The Phoenix* (c. 1603), a woman named Castiza features as the wife of an impecunious captain who sells her to pay off his debts. A Castiza can also be found among the dramatis personae of *The Revenger's Tragedy* (c. 1606): she resists the lecherous advances of the Duke's son despite the persuasions of her own mother and disguised brother—the avenger Vindice (hired by the would-be seducer to act as a pander) who decides to test her virtue. Middleton recycled the name a third time in *Hengist, King of Kent, or the Mayor of Queenborough* (c. 1616-20). This Castiza is the betrothed of Vortigen, who arranges for a confederate to blindfold her and threaten to rape her while Vortigen himself carries her off stage and does the deed—in a sickening twist on the bed trick as marital rape. In all three examples, Castiza is the victim of sexual exploitation or assault, the exact predicament of Banquo's Castisa in the underground *Macbeth*, for the Cat's revelation that the spurned Macbeth 'takes the Lady by force' and wished to 'have the use of her' implies that he abducted Banquo's daughter and possibly raped her. This *Macbeth*, it would seem, does not only murder sleep but also rape chastity.

It must be noted that Castiza is not a common name in English literature. Three of the five hits the name returns on EEBO are from Middleton. The other two come from, respectively, *The Spanish Decameron* (a collection of ten spicy tales by Cervantes and Castillo Solorzano) and a 1599 bilingual English-Spanish dictionary. The latter text defines Castiza as ‘f. of a good race, hauing many children, a stocke’, a singularly appropriate name for a daughter of Banquo, the progenitor of the Stuart line.⁵⁰ But Middleton also repeatedly uses the name as a personification of female chastity under siege. The Middletonian timbre of the name forces us to consider the cat’s version of *Macbeth* more closely. It invites a conjecture that a Castisa may have appeared in lost additions to the play by Thomas Middleton that infused it with elements of sexual intrigue reminiscent of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, *The Lady’s Tragedy*, *Women Beware Women*, and *The Changeling*. Middleton’s plays frequently dwell on the plight of women cajoled (often by family members) or blackmailed into sleeping with powerful men. Bancho’s predicament in the underground *Macbeth* mirrors that of Vindice in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*: solicited by a lecherous tyrant to pimp his sister Castiza for his own advancement.⁵¹ Vindice’s denunciation of Lussorioso even seems to parrot Malcolm’s remarks on Macbeth’s inexhaustible libido:

His heat is such,
 Were there as many concubines as ladies,
 He would not be contained, he must fly out.⁵²

It is usually assumed that Middleton excised scenes by Shakespeare when he revised *Macbeth*; Inga-Stina Ewbank, for instance, speculates Middleton might be responsible ‘for

⁵⁰ Perceval, *A Dictionarie*, 60

⁵¹ When Banquo brings up the weird sisters’ predictions, Macbeth invites him to a tête-a-tête to discuss some ‘business’ (2.1.23) that will “make honor’ (2.1.26) for Banquo, who later professes his ‘duties’ to Macbeth ‘are with a most indissoluble tie / For ever knit’ (3.1.16-18). Marrying his daughter to the king certainly would ‘make honor’ for Banquo. Could Macbeth have contemplated casting his wife aside to wed Banquo’s daughter or begged the girl as a concubine in exchange for nominating Fleance his heir in accordance with the Scottish custom of tanistry?

⁵² Middleton, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, ed. MacDonald Jackson, in *Thomas Middleton: Collected Works*, 1.1.82-84.

cutting one quarter or more of the original'.⁵³ But it also seems possible that Middleton made other contributions to the play, besides the introduction of Hecate and two songs from *The Witch*, which did not survive. Perhaps some passages that besmirched the honour of the Stuarts were cut by the Master of the Revels, George Buc, who censored the unpublished manuscript of Middleton's *The Lady's Tragedy*. Or perhaps Heminges and Condell passed a version to the Folio printers that contained the fewest interpolations by other hands, in line with their stated aim to reproduce Shakespeare's plays 'cured, and perfect of their limbs . . . as he [Shakespeare] conceived them'.⁵⁴ If there is any truth in this line of reasoning, Middleton's quill rather than Shakespeare's may have spawned Banquo's daughter.

But if we base our judgment on the bedrock of the documentary record, it must be conceded that the evidence for the existence of a rape subplot in *Macbeth* in the lifetime of Shakespeare or Middleton is, to put it charitably, circumstantial at best. The christening of Banquo's daughter with an allegorical name favoured by Middleton may be nothing more than coincidence. The case that she may have appeared in an Ur-*Macbeth* founders on the reliability of the witnesses and belatedness of their testimony. The lack of any unequivocal reference to Banquo's daughter prior to 1652 speaks against it. In contrast, the clustering of allusions to her and to Macbeth's 'libidousness cruelty' in this year suggests that the clandestine *Macbeth* took shape around this time when scurrilous pamphlets about royal sex scandals streamed from the radical press.⁵⁵ Embellishing the nasty passage when Macbeth dreams of turning the wives and maidens of Scotland into the 'cistern of [his] lust' (4.3.64), some political satirist likely fabricated a backstory of Macbeth as a serial rapist to smear the Stuarts as sexual tyrants by association to retrospectively justify Charles' execution.

⁵³ Ewbank, 'The Tragedy of Macbeth', 1165.

⁵⁴ William Shakespeare, *Comedies, History, and Tragedies*, A3^r.

⁵⁵ For more on the politics of sex scandals in late Stuart England, see Achinstein, 'Women on Top'; Turner, *Libertines and Radicals*; McElligott, 'The Politics of Sexual Libel', Keating, 'In the Bedroom of the King', and Fullerton, 'Fatal Adulteries'.

This theory would be consistent with Samuel Fullerton's finding that the years 1650-1652 witnessed an unprecedented outburst of semi-pornographic attacks on the sexuality of the Stuarts and their Scottish ancestors—attacks which ramped up after Charles II was crowned King of Scotland on New Year's Day, 1651 in a ceremony held at Scone, the very site mentioned by Shakespeare as the place of Macbeth's coronation.⁵⁶ In 1652, the year in which the first two references to Banquo's daughter appear in print, a political tract indicted Charles I for his 'unsatiable desires' while urging Mary Queen of Scots's troubled marriages and King James's notorious favourites as proof that the whole Stuart bloodline is tainted by 'wanton lasciviousness'.⁵⁷ Given the unpopularity of Scottish kings in England at this time, it is natural that republican satirists would move from Charles to James to Mary Stuart and extrapolate all the way back to Macbeth and Banquo, icons of Scottish royal identity, especially after Charles II's coronation at Scone. While there may well have been an earlier version of *Macbeth* prior to 1623 and of *The Secret History of Mack-beth* before 1708, the latter text is not, alas, the coveted lost *Macbeth* quarto of Shakespearean scholar fantasy.

Nevertheless, reading *Macbeth* alongside its shadowy doppelgänger can offer some valuable new perspectives on the extant play-text as well as on the history of Shakespearean adaptation. First, it throws into the relief the play's strangely womanless families, while demonstrating that the introduction of more female roles does not guarantee a shift towards a more progressive gender politics. *The Secret History* further blackens Lady Macbeth as a Machiavellian schemer, while the roles of Castisa/Inetta, who primarily function as passive victims, reinforce notions of chastity as the supreme feminine virtue.⁵⁸ Secondly, while feminist scholarship on the play has focused on the rehabilitation of Lady Macbeth, this underground version highlights the lack of attention paid to the accusations that Macbeth was

⁵⁶ Fullerton, 'Fatal Adulteries', 813.

⁵⁷ Peyton, *Divine Catastrophe*, 5, 12.

⁵⁸ O'Callaghan notes that Middleton's plays exhibit a problematic obsession with chastity as 'the sole avenue of expression for female agency and virtue' (*Thomas Middleton*, 112-13).

a sexual predator. *The Secret History*'s repugnant scenes of sexual violence against women should interest and outrage critics in its intimation of a #MeToo *Macbeth*, exposing patriarchy as gender tyranny in that it denigrates women as mere objects. Furthermore, the underground *Macbeth* reveals something of the political unconscious of the original tragedy and the constraints under which Jacobean playwrights laboured. New Historicist studies on *Macbeth* by the likes of David Norbrook and Jonathan Goldberg overturned the assumption that Shakespeare works freely and disinterestedly with his sources; just as Shakespeare was obliged to make changes to Holinshed to remove material that might offend his royal patron (notably, Banquo's involvement in Duncan's murder), he was not free to embellish the chronicles in any way he wished. What happens to *Macbeth* after the breakdown of press censorship by a monarchical government enables us to perceive what Shakespeare and Middleton could not say so overtly in print: they could not depict a Scottish king as a sexual tyrant. Viewed from this angle, the clandestine *Macbeth* might enable us to envision some of the contours of the unwritten closet drama *Macbeth* that Milton once contemplated, which doubtless would have developed the Buchananian interpretation of the protagonist's downfall as proof of the lawfulness of deposing tyrants, perhaps by turning Macbeth into a kind of Comus.⁵⁹

Yet this inquiry has also shown that the clandestine *Macbeth* bears an uncanny resemblance to the satires of Middleton. If Middleton himself did not conceive of a scene in which Macbeth ravishes Banquo's daughter, Middleton's reputation following Shakespeare's retirement and the *succès du scandale* of *A Game at Chess* was such that it coloured the reception and transmission of Shakespearean drama.⁶⁰ Long before disintegrationists identified his fingerprints in the extant *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's tragedy was being recast in a

⁵⁹ See Hales, 'Milton's *Macbeth*' and Foran, 'Macbeth and the Political Uncanny'.

⁶⁰ For more on Shakespeare's fate during the closure of the theatres, see Craig, *Missing Shakespeare*, and Depledge, *Shakespeare's Rise to Cultural Prominence*.

Middletonian idiom, intensifying its equivocal nature as a ‘royal play’ staged by the King’s Men that is simultaneously a work of ‘opposition’ or ‘anti-court’ drama.⁶¹ As Andrew McRae has shown, an underground culture of literary libels in manuscript already flourished in early Stuart England within the lifetimes of Shakespeare and Middleton, and the reception and revision of *Macbeth* must be seen within this context.⁶²

Lastly, the underground *Macbeth* also offers a sobering early case-study of how Shakespeare might be appropriated by the seventeenth-century equivalent of alternative media to produce ‘lies like truth’ (5.5.43). Ironically, the King’s Men themselves started down this slippery slope when they interpolated material from Middleton’s *The Witch*, a play that capitalizes on public fascination with the notorious celebrity divorce trial of Frances Howard.⁶³ The satires of Middleton catered to and helped create a growing market for sex scandals of the rich and powerful that exploded during the Interregnum, foreshadowing modern tabloid journalism and alt-media in its subordination of facts to sensationalism.⁶⁴ Tales of Macbeth as a sexual predator were apparently spread by the radical press in the early 1650s or late 1640s, and kept alive by a ‘literary underground’ after the Restoration, eventually resulting in the anonymous publication of *The Secret History* in 1708.⁶⁵ While Davenant’s royalist *Macbeth*—which imitates the operatic court masque, cuts the bawdy Porter scene, and portrays Macbeth as a Cromwell-like figure—dazzled Restoration audiences, an unofficial X-rated knock-off castigated Charles II’s ancestors as depraved libertines. In its defamation of the Stuarts, the clandestine *Macbeth* presents a magic cauldron

⁶¹ Paul’s view of Macbeth as a ‘royal play’ has been resoundingly challenged by New Historicist critics such as Norbrook and Sinfield, who have unlocked its subversive sub-text. Important studies by Heinemann and Tricomi cast Middleton as, respectively, an ‘opposition’ and ‘anti-court’ dramatist.

⁶² McRae, *Literature, Satire, and the Early Stuart State* and Bellany, ‘Railing Rhymes Revisited’.

⁶³ Yachnin upholds *The Witch* as an example of how the commercial stage capitalized on sex scandals (‘Scandalous Trades’).

⁶⁴ In the 1640s, the government was struggling to suppress not only plays but also ‘false news’ and ‘lewd and scandalous pamphlets’ (September 1649) satirizing leading Parliamentarians. The sex scandals about Macbeth and other British monarchs in *A Cat May Look Upon a King* indicate that pro-republican propagandists played the same dirty game.

⁶⁵ Bardle, *The Literary Underground in the 1660s*.

in which one can spy foreglimmers of the fate of the Bourbons, as the French samizdat press would produce a wildly popular series of pornographic libels and prints about Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, which the esteemed historians Lynn Hunt and Robert Darnton have argued did more to undercut the *ancien régime* and ignite the revolution than the writings of Rousseau and Voltaire.

But alt-media operates on both extremes of the political spectrum and—just as the devil can cite scripture—both can bend Shakespeare to their purposes.⁶⁶ In the twenty-first century, right-wing social media outlets can quote Shakespeare or Queen Elizabeth’s license to deport London’s African community to misrepresent early modern England as a white ethnostate and peddle outlandish slanders about cabals of politicians and celebrities involved in child sex trafficking. Prurient tales of Macbeth ravishing Banquo’s daughter probably possess the same degree of veracity as QAnon posts on 8chan, but this survey of *Macbeth*’s afterlife underscores the point that objective truths are especially difficult to pin down when dealing with epistemologically vexed subjects such as sexuality and early modern texts. For better and worse, the instability of the Shakespearean text and its openness to revision and adaptation adds to the instability of its politics. If today’s unregulated public sphere of online media has given conservative ideologues and anti-Stratfordians a platform to attack institutional Shakespeare, this situation strangely parallels the fate of Shakespeare during the explosion of unlicensed journalism in the mid-seventeenth century. Perhaps populist distortion is the price Shakespeare has always paid for popularity.

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⁶⁶ See the forthcoming study on Shakespeare and contemporary alt-right media by Gerzic and Quercia-Thomas.

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