Chambers 1930 E. K. Chambers, William Shakespeare -- a study of facts and problems (Oxford, 1930), vol. 1, pp. 471--6.

XXIX. MACBETH

[F1. 1623.] [Catalogue] The Tragedy of Macbeth. [Tragedies, pp. 131--51, sign. l l 6--n n 4. Head- and Running-titles] The Tragedie of Macbeth.

[Acts and scc. marked.]

Facsimile. J. D. Wilson (1928).

Modern Editions. W. G. Clark and W. A. Wright (1869, O.U.P.); H. H. Furness (1873, *New Variorum*); E. K. Chambers (1893, *Warwick*); J. M. Manly (1896); M. H. Liddell (1903); H. Conrad (1907); H. Cunningham (1912, 1928, *Arden*); C. M. Lewis (1918, Yale).

Dissertations. N. Delius, M. (1841); J. W. Hales, On the Porter in M. (1874, N.S.S. Trans. 255; Notes and Essays, 273); F. G. Fleay, M. (1874, N.S.S. Trans. 339; Manual, 245), Davenant's M. and Sh.'s Witches (1884, Anglia, vii. 128); G. Sarrazin, Shs M. und Kyds Sp. Tr. (1895, E.S. xxi. 328); C. C. Stopes, Sh.'s Materials for M. (1896, Alten. ii. 138), The Scottish and English Macbeth (1897, Sh.'s Industry, 78); D. L. Chambers, The Metre of M. (1903); A. C. Bradley, Notes on M. (1904, Shn. Tragedy, 466); E. Kröger, Die Sage von M. bis zu Sh. (1904); A. Brandl, Zur Vorgeschichte der Weird Sisters in M. (1921, Liebermann Festgabe, 252); L. Winstanley, M., King Lear, and Contemporary History (1922); W. J. Lawrence, The Mystery of M. (1928, Sh.'s Workshop, 24); R. C. Bald, M. and the 'Short' Plays (1928, R.E.S. iv. 429).

Macbeth is doubtless printed from a prompt-copy. The stage-directions are a little fuller than usual. A book-keeeper's 'Ring the bell', noted for his own use, has got into the text at ii. 3. 85. I am not so sure of some other cases brought forward by Bald.

The text is unsatisfactory, not so much on account of verbal corruption, as of a rehandling to which it bears evidence. This seems to have been most obviously a matter of abridgement. The play, as it stands, is shorter than any other except *Comedy of Errors*, and its 2,106 lines, even if allowance is made for the spectacular scenes, would furnish little more than a two-hours' performance. Moreover, although many of its short lines are otherwise explicable, a few (i. 2. 20, 51; ii. 3. 109; iii. 2. 32, 51; iii. 4. 4; iv. 3. 28, 44) are abrupt or accompanied by obscurities,

and may indicate cuts. Any substantial cutting may have involved partial transcription, and this may, as Wilson

thinks, explain the mislineated passages, which are rather numerous in i--iii, although rare thereafter. There seems also to have been some manipulation of the rather scrappy final battle-scene (v. 7, 8). Here the present action gives no opportunity for the removal of the dead Siward, recited at v. 8. 44, and the stage-direction 'Enter Fighting, and Macbeth slaine', placed between two others at 34, is inconsistent with the more dramatic 'Enter Macduffe; with Macbeths head' at 53. Cutting and some consequential adaptation may perhaps also explain the inconsistency which has troubled editors in the accounts of Cawdor in i. 2, 3, the apparent reference at i. 7. 47 to an episode in which Macbeth breaks the enterprise of murder to his wife, and the mysterious Third Murderer (may-be Macbeth himself) of iii. 3.

Probably there has also been some interpolation. I believe this to be confined to three passages (iii. 5; iv. 1. 39--43, 125--32) in the witch-scenes, which can be distinguished from the genuine text by the introduction of Hecate, by the use of an iambic instead of a trochaic metre, and by prettinesses of lyrical fancy alien to the main conception of the witches. Songs are introduced at iii. 5. 34 and iv. i. 43, but their content is only indicated by the opening words in the stage-directions. But the full texts occur at iii. 3. 39 and v. 2. 60 of Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*. This has some echoes of genuine passages in *Macbeth*, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that its author was also the interpolator of the Shakespearean text. Many writers have carried the theory of interpolations in *Macbeth* much farther than I am prepared to do. Coleridge held the Porter scene (ii. 3. 1--47) not to be authentic, and probably now has few adherents. Others -- Clark and Wright, Fleay (although he hesitated in 1876), Conrad, and Cunningham -- have doubted the whole or parts of i. i; i. 2; i. 3. 1--37; iii. 4. 130--44; iv. 1; iv. 3. 140--59; v. 2; v. 5. 47--50; v. 6; v. 8. I have given reasons for rejecting such views in the Warwick edition, and am not convinced by anything which has been written since. Conrad's attempt to isolate v. 6 and arbitrarily chosen

sections of i. 2 and v. 8 by metrical analysis is particularly futile (cf. p. 266), since he has only about 100 lines upon

which to base an induction. *The Witch* has only come down to us in manuscript and is of uncertain date. Lawrence would put it as early as the autumn of 1608. Probably he meant to write 1609, as he thinks that Middleton was utilizing the vogue of the witch-dances in Jonson's *Mask of Queens* on 2 February 1609./1 And he supposes the interpolated version of *Macbeth* to have been that which Simon Forman saw at the Globe in April 1610. Forman's visit was, however, pretty clearly on 20 April 1611 (cf. App. D). I do not find Lawrence very convincing, since Shakespeare himself had furnished the witch motive. Forman gives an outline of the plot, much as we have it, except that there is nothing in the text or stage-directions to confirm or refute his statement that Macbeth and Banquo came riding through a wood in i. 3. The play was not, of course, new in 1611, even if it was new to Forman. The style and metre are not so late as this, and there is a good deal of cumulative evidence for an earlier date. There are topics of special interest to King James; it is, of course, merely a fancy that the royal letter to the poet, said (App. C, nos. xxvii, xxxiv) to have been once in the possession of Sir William Davenant, was in return for *Macbeth*. Some of these allusions would have been appropriate from the beginning of the reign. The King's interest in witchcraft was of old standing. The 'two-fold balls and treble sceptres' of iv. i. 121 can have nothing to do, as suggested by some commentators, with the triple style of King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, adopted by *Procl.* 1003 of 20 October 1604. The earlier English style was triple, and there were no sceptres for France and Ireland. The 'two-fold' balls must be the 'mounds' borne on the English and Scottish crowns, and the 'treble sceptres' the two used for investment in the English coronation and the one used in the Scottish coronation. James was 'touching' for the 'king's evil' (iv. 3. 141) as early as 6 November 1604./2 The bestowal of

/1 *Eliz. Stage*, iii. 382. /2 *Venetian Papers*, x. 193.

Cawdor's honours upon Macbeth is in Holinshed, and can hardly have been inspired, as Hunter thought, by the investiture of Sir David Murray, who had for some years held the lands and honours of the attainted Gowrie family, as Lord Scone on 1 April 1605. It is true that the King's men got into trouble through a play on the Gowrie conspiracy in December 1604,/1 but *Macbeth* cannot very plausibly be regarded as an apology for this. On the other hand, it is likely enough that a hint for the witches came

from Matthew Gwinne's show of 'tres Sibyllae', with which James was greeted, when he visited Oxford on 27 August 1605./2 Subject to the doubts as to the authenticity of ii. 3_ 1--47, a slightly later date is probably given by the 'equivocator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale; who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven'. No doubt the Jesuit doctrine of equivocation had been familiar, at least since the trial of Robert Southwell in 1595. But here it is associated with treason, as it was at the trial of Father Henry Garnet for complicity with the Gunpowder Plot on 28 March 1606. The passage does not, however, oblige us to put the play quite as late as this, since an exposure of equivocation by Lord Salisbury is said to have been 'greedily read' before 5 February 1606./3 The reference is to his *Answer to Certain Scandalous Papers* (1606), which deals *inter alia* with equivocation and cites St. Augustine's disallowance of it. Two other allusions in the same episode do not help very much. A tailor is damned 'for stealing out of a French hose'. This suggests some temporary fashion of wearing tight instead of round hose. But this cannot be dated. A passage often cited from A. Nixon's *Black Year*, registered on 9 May 1606, seems only to refer to a new fashion of wearing lace on hose. A farmer is damned because he 'hang'd himself on the expectation of plenty'. But Malone's evidence for the low price of corn in 1606 is good also for 1605 and 1607, when it was only a little higher, and in fact the suicide of a disappointed engrosser of corn was an old notion, and had

/1 *Eliz. Stage*, i. 327. /2 Ibid. i. 130; iii. 332. /3 *S.P.D. Jac. I*, xviii. 66.

been staged by Ben Jonson in *E.M.O.*, i. 3; iii. 7, 8, originally produced in 1599 and revived at court on 8 January 1605./1 A date late in 1605 or early in 1606 would be consistent with some echoes, not individually conclusive, in other plays. The prick of ambition's spur (i. 7. 25--8) is in the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge*, 1468--9, but this, although registered on 5 June 1606, may very likely be Elizabethan./2 In *The Puritan*, iv. 3. 89, registered on 6 August 1607, but probably a play of 1606, comes 'in stead of a Iester, weele ha the ghost ith white sheete sit at vpper end a'th Table'./3 The 'ghost' is a personage in the play, but an allusion to iii. 4 may none the less be possible. Another may be in *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, v. i. 20--30, almost certainly a play of 1607./4 It may not be a mere accident that William Warner put an account of Macbeth into his *Continuance of Albion's England* (1606). Some

still earlier echoes are traced by Bradley 471 in Marston's *Sophonisba* (1606). They are slight, but taken together suggest a knowledge of *Macbeth*. *Sophonisba* was registered on 17 March 1606,/5 and we must therefore suppose that the equivocation passage, if it forms part of the original text, was written earlier than the actual trial of Garnet. The matter is complicated by the corresponding uncertainty as to the date of *Lear* (q.v.) and as to the time-relation of its metre to that of *Macbeth*. It is, therefore, only tentatively that I put *Macbeth* early in 1606.

Shakespeare's source was the *Chronicle* of Holinshed, itself based, for the Scottish matter, upon the *Scotorum Historiae* (1527) of Hector Boece; and this in turn, with much imaginative elaboration, upon the *Scotichronicon* (c. 1384) of John Fordun and the *Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland* (c. 1424) of Andrew Wyntown. Holinshed probably used a translation of Boece by John Bellenden (1536). Another, by William Stewart (1535) remained in manuscript to 1858. There is not much substance in the suggestions that some of Shakespeare's departures from

/1 *Eliz. Stage*, iii. 360; cf. App. D.
/2 Ibid. iv. 4.
/3 Ibid. iv. 41.
/4 Ibid. iii. 220.
/5 Ibid. iii. 433.

Holinshed are due to this or to Wyntown. We do not know whether Macbeth was the theme of a tragedy of *The Kinge of Scottes* given at court/1 in 1567--8, or of a *Malcolm King of Scots* bought by the Admiral's men from Charles Massey in 1602./2 A 'ballad of Macedbeth' seems to have been before the Stationers' Company in 1596, but Greg rejects the genuineness of the record, which was published by Collier (cf. App. F, xi, l). William Kempe, however, in *Nine Daies Wonder* (1600), 21, speaks of 'a penny Poet, whose first making was the miserable stolne story of Macdoel, or Macdobeth, or Macsomewhat, for I am sure a Mac it was, though I neuer had the maw to see it'. It is unlikely that Shakespeare ever visited Scotland,/3 and no importance need be attached to Miss Winstanley's theory (cf. p. 67) that *Macbeth* is a symbolical allegory, based upon the Gunpowder Plot, St. Bartholomew's Day, the Darnley murder, and the relations of James with Francis Hepburn, fifth Earl of Bothwell.

/1 Eliz. Stage, iv. 144.

/2 Ibid. ii. 179; iii. 435.
/3 Ibid. ii. 269.