

When prophecies served the monarch's interests, of course, they were encouraged; thus the coming of King James to the English throne was interpreted as the fulfillment of virtually every Scottish prophecy, and therefore mysteriously inevitable. When James and his court journeyed to Oxford and witnessed an academic play by Matthew Gwinn on August 29, 1605, a few months before the Gunpowder Plot and the writing of *Macbeth*, they were greeted after the play with a brief, staged prophecy that fused James's claims of succession from Banquo and his (and his offspring's) destined success in the future, while anticipating the prophecies of Shakespeare's witches in *Macbeth*. "Three (as it were) Sibyls" greeted the monarch "as if from a wood":

FIRST SIBYL: Fame says the fatal Sisters once foretold  
Power without end, great Monarch, to thy stock.

One greeted Banquo, proud Lochaber's Thane:

Not to thee Banquo, but to thy descendants

Eternal rule was promised by immortals,

Hid in a glade as Banquo left the Court.

We three same Fates so chant to thee and thine

As, watched by all, from fields thou near'st the City;

And thus we greet thee: Hail, whom Scotland serves!

SECOND SIBYL: Whom England, hail!

THIRD SIBYL: Whom Ireland serves, all hail!

FIRST SIBYL: Whom France gives titles, lands besides, all hail!

SECOND SIBYL: Hail, whom divided Britain join'st in one!

THIRD SIBYL: Hail, mighty Lord of Britain, Ireland, France!

FIRST SIBYL: Hail Anne, of Kings the mother, sister, wife  
And daughter too!

SECOND SIBYL: Hail Henry, Prince and Heir!<sup>11</sup>

THIRD SIBYL: Duke Charles, and lovely Polish princess, hail!<sup>12</sup>

FIRST SIBYL: We set no times nor limits to the fates;  
In worldly rule fame's goal may be the stars.

Thou dost restore the fourfold glory of Canute,<sup>13</sup>

Great ancestor, his crowns and royal thrones.

Nor shall we bear wars, slaughter, anxious hearts,

Or fury 'gainst ourselves; but we'll grow warm

With love and peace through prompting,

the speaker continues, of the spirit of the founder of St. John's College, the site of the prophecy.<sup>14</sup> The monarchy not only tolerated prophecies such as Gwinn's, but rewarded them.

<sup>10</sup> As Thomas notes, "the prominence of women among the religious prophets of this period is partly explained by the fact that . . . recourse to prophecy was the only means by which most women could hope to disseminate their opinions on public events" (138).