

What does "macbeth" have to say about the idea of kingship? essay sample

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



What Does “ Macbeth” have to say About The Idea Of Kingship? Essay Sample

“ Macbeth” was a play written by William Shakespeare, written in the early part of King James I of England and VI of Scotland. “ Macbeth” is a play about a captain the Scottish Army, who usurps the throne. Shakespeare wrote this play for King James, therefore making one of the main themes of the play kingship. At the time Shakespeare wrote the play, Elizabethans believed that the King or Queen, were assigned by God, to rule the country. They also believed that the King was the assistant of God, and to assassinate the reigning monarch was a crime of the highest order.

Being one of the main themes of the play, there is a lot mentioned about kingship. Shakespeare uses a major contrast between the two Kings Duncan and Macbeth. Duncan is used to portray the perfect king, being kind, generous, honest and trusting. These are just some of the many qualities, he is depicted to have. He is also quick to reward any good work,

“ And with his former title greet Macbeth.” (Act 1, sc 4)

Here he rewards Macbeth for his heroics in battle. In the same scene, Shakespeare reveals more of the qualities of a perfect king, through Duncan,

“ He was a gentleman whom I built

An absolute trust.”(Act 1, sc 4)

This time he shows himself to be of an openly trusting nature. This sadly is the blemish, in his character, which leads to his downfall, in an otherwise

perfect character. By keeping to the concepts of kingship, Shakespeare manages to establish Duncan as the perfect King.

As the play continues, we see Macbeth turn villain, and usurps the throne. Shakespeare uses Macbeth to contrast King Duncan, very well. Shakespeare quickly establishes that Macbeth has all the qualities, that a king should not. Shakespeare increasingly associates Macbeth with the forces of darkness, and the supernatural. Through him he presents a concept of kingship contradictory, to that of Duncan, which was of enlightenment and knowledge. The evil caused in Macbeth's reign, is emphasised well by Shakespeare, " good things to begin to droop and drowse" (Act 3 sc. 2) while " things bad begun to make themselves strong by ill" (Act 3 sc. 2). Macbeth, as a king, shows he lacks the major attribute of self-control, the main cause of the series of murders, he carries out, during his reign. His link with evil and the supernatural, is also the main cause for him losing all the respect and loyalty of his subjects,

" Those he commands, move only in command,

Nothing in love....." (Act 5, sc.

The frequent reference to Macbeth as " the tyrant" clearly shows to us that he no longer holds any respect from his people.

Shakespeare associates Macbeth with the supernatural, and the low lives of society, to depict to the reader, that this is something that is usually not linked with a good king, proving Macbeth to be an careless, and scandalous

king. Shakespeare reveals to us more qualities, of a bad king, by showing us how Macbeth turned into a dishonest and untrustworthy king, which is shown well in the murder of his dear friend Banquo. This murder and that Macduff's family, show to us how insecure Macbeth was as king. This is shown when Macbeth talks openly about his suspicion of Banquo,

"..... in his royalty of nature

Reigns that which would be fear'd." (Act 3, sc. 1)

Once again another of Macbeth's weak qualities, this time insecurity, are revealed to us. His insecurity, and uncertainty, are more prominent towards the end of his reign, but the murders he carries out, to feel more secure, prove Macbeth to be a cold-blooded murderer. This is again, very unlike that of a respectable king.

The rightful heir to the throne of Scotland, was Duncan's son, Malcolm.

Shakespeare devotes a whole scene, Act 4, scene 3, towards Malcolm,

proving to him that he has all the right qualities to be a successful king. In this scene, qualities of a good and bad kings, are explained in detail.

Malcolm's first quality, that is revealed is his cautiousness. This is shown in his encounter with Macduff, where he pretends to have bad qualities, to see whether or not Macduff is genuine,

"..... But there's no bottom, none,

In my voluptuousness:....."(Act 4, sc. 3)

While Macduff is being tested by Malcolm, Shakespeare gives more examples of bad qualities, including lust, "... voluptuousness..", greed, "... stanchless avarice..", and rashness, " Sudden...". Qualities of a good king are also mentioned by Malcolm, in his test,

" Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,

Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude..."

This scene is perfect for telling the audience, good and bad qualities for a king, and also to tell us that Malcolm is capable of being king.

The king that we hear about least of all in the play, is King Edward of England. Even though he is hardly mentioned, Shakespeare still uses him to represent a good king, telling us how his healing power, " A most miraculous work in this good king,.. " is because of how religious he is. We can also see that he is a caring king, who is not willing to let others suffer, depicted when he helps Malcolm and Macduff in their uprising against Macbeth.

In the play, " Macbeth", Shakespeare has developed the idea of Kingship very well. This allows the audience to realise the good qualities a king should have, and the bad aspects they should not. King Duncan has a positive character, which includes honour, trust and care, which are identified as the proper features needed for kingship. Malcolm, and King Edward are used in the same way. Macbeth, however, is the exact opposite. He possesses a ruthless and disparaging character, who murders due to insecurity,

demonstrating to the audience a contradictory to the qualities possessed by a proper king.