

Macbeth -kingship :

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MACBETH -KINGSHIP : - Kingship, with its potential for good or evil, is a major theme in Macbeth. - the King was regarded as God's direct representative on Earth - An offence against the King was considered an offence against God. The King embodied the moral and social welfare of his subjects. In the play, the exercise of regal power, whether with potential for good or evil, is so significant a theme that Shakespeare presents four versions of it. - Firstly the ideal kingship of Duncan, whose murder constitutes the perversion of this ideal and causes disorder in nature. This is followed by the tyrannical reign of the usurper Macbeth. King Edward has supreme regal power and his reign represents the opposite to Macbeth's reign of terror. While Macbeth's reign highlights the capacity for evil latent in kingship, Edward's represents the capacity for absolute goodness. Finally, speculation remains as to Malcom's potential as future King of Scotland. Such was the Godlike power that the King exerted over his subjects, the path was left open for the triumph of good or evil. - " Gracious Duncan" is an example of a worthy King. From his introduction to his death, Duncan appears to have been the ideal King. Duncan is the epitome of graciousness and temperance. He is admired by his subjects for his justice, gratitude and generosity. He is generous in his praise of those whom he feels have served him well, in particular Macbeth, " O worthiest cousin/ More is thy due than more all can pay." Duncan's benign guidance is rewarded by the loyal support of his people. However, Duncan is not entirely without fault. While his strengths as a King lie in his mild-tempered nature and generous character, his weakness is displayed in his overly-trusting nature. He is too trusting to notice the corruption in a treacherous subordinate, " He was a gentleman on whom I built an absolute

trust," and of this naiveté the Thane of Cawdor took full advantage. Duncan himself declares " There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face. He " However having scarcely been saved from rebellion by the " bloody execution" of his great warriors (on whom he is heavily reliant,) Duncan once again displays a foolish lack of judgement in his haste to pronounce Macbeth " worthy Cawdor." In doing so, he once again affirms an " absolute trust" in a disloyal subordinate. he is primarily a force of goodness in the play. The trust he places in others is noble in a King, as it is the insecure mind which harbours suspicion. Duncan's murder, therefore, is unnatural, against the moral order, a heinous crime against the course of nature. The regicide is so unjust that even Macbeth himself realises its callous, horrific nature, " This Duncan hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been so clear in his great office, that his virtues will plead like angels trumpet tongu'd against the deep damnation of their taking off." Macbeth's unlawful accession to the throne perverts the ideal and upsets the natural order. Life giving imagery associated with Duncan reflected the harmony in nature, the peaceful concord that existed during his reign, " I have begun to plant thee and will labour to make thee full of growing," while under Macbeth, " Scotland bleeds." - Macbeth's reign exemplifies the latent potential for evil in kingship. He acquires regal power illegally and abuses it when he has it, to the detriment of his country, killing all those who oppose his rule. The achievement of power has not brought him contentment, " To be thus is nothing but to be safely thus." He fears that his " borrowed power" will be taken from him in the same way he achieved it and therefore he seeks immediately to establish a dictatorship, in order to fortify his position on the

throne. His reign, for which he "play'd most foully" is marked by tyranny, corruption and death, as Scotland "sinks" under the rule of the "dwarfish thief" who cannot measure up to the fruitful and just reign of his predecessor. The potential for evil in kingship is explored through the many murders committed by Macbeth. He is able to maintain his regal power only by resorting to murder and terror against his subjects. This heinous crime is indicative of the potential for evil in kingship. Under Macbeth, Scotland, "sinks beneath the yoke/It weeps, it bleeds and each new day/A new gash is added to her wounds." The heinous nature of Macbeth's "blood-soak'd" Reign supports the notion that kingship bears potential for both good and evil. - Edward, King of England, provides a welcome alternative to the diabolical cruelty of Macbeth. There is a pointed contrast between Edward and Macbeth. Having disregarded the natural order, Macbeth used his regal power for purposes of destruction. However Edward, like Duncan, was chosen by God as one of his direct representative's on Earth. He is a true and rightful King as is seen as a saintly force, endowed with virtue and holiness, whose powers of miraculous healing represent the divinity of kingship. The court of Edward, where Malcolm sought refuge from Macbeth's murderous designs, is presented as a holy place, presided over by a King who enjoys divine sanction and special gifts from God that "speak him full of grace." Edward is portrayed as a "holy King," a fitting opponent to the diabolical cruelty of Macbeth. Words such as "prayer" and "blessing" are frequently employed to illustrate the beatific reign of Edward and to convey his healing power and graciousness. The absolute goodness of King Edward highlights the opposing forces of good and evil in the play and represents the potential

of kingship not only to generate goodness but to transform evil into goodness. - The final image of kingship in the play revolves around Malcolm. As the rightful heir to the throne, the son of a good King and a holy mother, his smooth accession to the throne secures his acceptance by his subjects. Not only does this entitle him to the kingship, but it also promises a benign reign. However, Malcolm appears young and ineffectual and seems a slight figure to dispel the dark cloud of Macbeth's reign, certainly when compared to the strength of character of Macduff. His hasty departure following the murder of his father is the frenzied action of a fearful, doubtful character. However, Shakespeare allows for Malcolm's maturing and he quickly grows into his role. He does not squander his time in England, rather he actively seeks King Edward's aid. Malcolm is cautious and careful, wary of becoming "a weak poor innocent lamb to appease an angry god." His caution is commendable and desirable in a future king and he displays none of the naiveté of his father, "To show unfelt sorrow is an office which the false man does easy." He subjects Macduff to an elaborate tests to assure his loyalty to Scotland and he recalls the king-becoming graces, "Justice, loyalty, temperance, stableness, bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness, devotion, patience, courage, fortitude." Malcolm's vision of kingship is admirable and marks a hopeful outlook for the future of Scotland. Malcolm acquires authority and is obeyed. His succession to the throne is significant in restoring the natural order, and it is evident that Malcolm will use his regal power for purposes of good. The future of Scotland looks bright under the new King, although it is hard to imagine his asserting his authority without men of Macduff's calibre on his side. - The theme of kingship in the play

Macbeth is indeed a crucial one. One must be a King and inherit rightfully by succession, and thereby prosper with the grace of God. Malcolm, like Edward and Duncan, is the rightful heir to the throne and this status promises a benign reign. It is evident from the above examples that the position of King is such a potent one that there is immense potential for absolute good or absolute evil. With the death of Macbeth, and the subsequent accession of Malcolm, the universal order is finally restored and Scotland will subsequently thrive. Under Macbeth, Scotland suffered and it is clear then that a country's suffering or prosperity is a direct reflection of the moral nature of its King.