

How is kingship presented in macbeth? essay sample

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



-Refer closely to the words and actions of Duncan, Malcolm and Macbeth.

-Remember to include the role of Edward in England.

In Shakespeare's Macbeth, we are presented with four examples of Kingship; Duncan, his son Malcolm, Edward King of England and Macbeth. Each king represents a different type of leadership, ranging from the almost God-like abilities of Edward to the wickedness and deceit of Macbeth

Duncan is a very good man and a well-respected king. When Malcolm is telling his father of the Thane of Cawdor's death he says that:

" very frankly he confessed his treasons,

Implored your highness' pardon, and sent forth

A deep repentance."

(Act 1, scene 4, line 5).

The Thane of Cawdor respected Duncan enough, even after betraying him, to confess his crimes and ask for forgiveness.

He treats men of all kinds with respect and admiration. When Duncan meets the bleeding captain, he is concerned for his health and sends somebody to get him a doctor:

" Go get him surgeons."(Act 1, Scene 2, Line 44)

This shows him to care about the people who serve him, unlike Macbeth who abuses and laughs at his servants:

“ The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon.

Where got'st thou that goose-look?”

(Act 5, scene 3, line 11).

Duncan shows himself to be quick to punish those who betray him but, quick to reward those who serve him. This is apparent in the way he treats the traitorous Thane of Cawdor, and the hero of the battlefield, Macbeth after the attack:

“ Go pronounce his present death

And with his former title greet Macbeth.”

(Act 1, scene 2, line 64).

Duncan is very grateful to Macbeth but feels that he has nothing, which would repay Macbeth for his service;

“ More is thy due than more than all can pay.”

(Act 1, scene 4, line 21)

Though he is quick to punish the traitor, he feels disappointed and let down because:

“ He was a gentleman on whom I built

An absolute trust.”

(Act 1, scene 4, line 13)

This shows him to be perhaps too trusting. It also shows that Duncan has realised that he mistakenly trusted Cawdor, but he doesn't learn from his mistakes, as he trusts Macbeth too. In reality, both the Thanes of Cawdor betrayed Duncan and both were men he respected and trusted.

Duncan's son Malcolm, only becomes king at the very end of the play, so we cannot tell how he went on to rule. Despite this, from assessing his character, we can tell the kind of king he will probably be. After his father's body is discovered, Malcolm and Donaldbain flee for their lives, Malcolm to England and Donaldbain to Ireland. This shows that neither of his sons possesses the dare and courage that Duncan valued in his friends.

When we next see Malcolm, he is questioning Macduff about his loyalty, he knows that Macduff was once loyal to Macbeth. Malcolm has many reasons to mistrust Macduff. One of them being that he fears Macduff may betray him to Macbeth;

“ I am young, but something

You may discern of him through me,”

(Act 4, scene 3, line 14).

This episode shows Malcolm to be a clever and cunning politician because he makes himself out to be worse than Macbeth to see Macduff's reaction:

“ Better Macbeth,

Than such a one to reign”

(Act 4, scene 3, line 65)

Malcolm declares that he has none of the qualities required in order to be a good king. He lists them as:

“ justice, verity, temp’rance, stableness,

Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,

Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude”

(Act 4, scene 3, line 91)

These are the qualities, which, in Malcolm’s opinion make a good king.

Malcolm says that:

“ My first false speaking

Was this upon myself”

(Act 4, Scene 3, line 130).

He declares that he “ would not betray the devil to his fellow” and we can see that he is in possession of all the virtues he denied having, when testing Macduff. He possesses most of the qualities he deemed necessary for a king.

He shows himself to be devoted to his country:

“ What I am truly

Is thine and my poor country's to command:"

(Act 4, scene 3, line 131)

At the end of the play, Malcolm's speech is full of gratitude and hope for the future. He will settle his debts of honour and give titles to the thanes:

" Before we reckon with your several loves

And make us even with you. My thanes and kinsmen,

Henceforth be earls,..... in such an honour named".

(Act 5, scene 9, line 28)

He talks of starting afresh:

" be planted newly with the time"

(Act 5, scene 9, line 32)

and restoring peace, justice, harmony, law and order to Scotland.

Edward the confessor is King of England during the play. He provides another model of kingship. He is supposed to be blessed with a " heavenly gift of prophecy" that enables him to cure the sick by his touch. This power is deemed a gift from heaven:

" Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand"

(Act 4, scene 3, line 144)

Being endowed with a gift such as this is a sign that he really is a “ good king” and it “ speak him full of grace”. This King is seen to have close links with heaven and appears to be a God-like mortal. This contrasts greatly with “ Devilish Macbeth” of whom it is said:

“ Not in the legions

Of horrid hell can come a devil more damned

In evils to top Macbeth.”

(Act 4, scene 3, line 55).

From the start of his reign, Macbeth did not encourage trust and respect because he didn't trust and respect his Thanes. He has to spy on them and be kept informed of their whereabouts:

“ There's not one of them but in his house

I keep a servant feed.”

(Act 3, scene 4, line 131).

This is the first sign that his rule has turned into one full of murder and tyranny. In the battle at the start of the play, Macbeth proves himself to be worthy of the title:

“ brave Macbeth”

(Act 1, scene 2, line 16)

and to possess many leadership qualities. Lady Macbeth recognises that “Thou wouldst be great”. She knows that he is “not without ambition” but he is without “The illness should attend it”. This shows that she knows her husband well and that he starts off a good man. Macbeth himself confesses that his only excuse for killing Duncan is “vaulting ambition”, a quality which a good king must have but tempered by self-control.

Although Macbeth shows himself to be courageous on the battlefields, yet when Lady Macbeth challenges his manliness, he conforms and submits:

“ I dare do all that may become a man;

Who dares do more is none.”

(Act 1, scene 7, line 46)

This shows him to be weak and easily led by her. Also, as soon as he has murdered Duncan, he is “afraid to think what I have done” and “look on’t again, I dare not.” This again shows he is weak and is already reeling remorse.

Macduff fears that:

“ Lest our old robes sit easier than our new”.

(Act 2, scene 4, line 38)

This shows that, from the start, Macduff is worried that Macbeth will not be a good king. Banquo fears that “Thou played'st most foully for't”. Lennox also, is suspicious that Macbeth is not quite what he appears to be:

“things are strangely borne.”

(Act 3, scene 6, line 3). Lennox also refers to Macbeth as a tyrant:

“the tyrant's feast”

(Act 3, scene 6, line 22).

It is Macbeth's actions that confirm his tyrannical rule, not his words. The murder of Macduff's innocent family:

“I have done no harm.”

(act 4, scene 2, line 71).

, Banquo and the attempted murder of Fleance are all signs of Macbeth's tyranny. Malcolm describes Macbeth as:

“bloody,

Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful,

Sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin

That has a name.”

(Act 4, scene 3, line 57).

I think that this describes Macbeth's rule very well. He has none of the qualities of kingship mentioned by Malcolm later. Here we see him in a stark contrast to everything that is good and just.

So, we see that from among the four examples of kingship, provided in Macbeth, Edward is a God-like king, ordained by God and in contrast, Macbeth is a "devilish" king, ruling as a tyrant by fear and sorrow. Duncan and Malcolm fit somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. Duncan was a "most sainted king" but he was human and has faults. The most major of these was his tendency to be too trusting of the people around him. Malcolm does not have this flaw and by the end of the play has gained the courage he lacked when he ran away to England. He has all the qualities of good kingship mentioned and has a belief in law and order. He has all the makings of a very good, but human king. Out of the four examples, I think that Malcolm will be the best and most effective king.