

# Machiavelli in relation to macbeth

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Throughout history many have oversimplified and extorted Machiavellian ideas about power and adhering in an attempt to create empires and rule almost always at the expense of the people they rule. Throughout the play Macbeth exhibits the ambition of a Machiavellian character, but often lacks the form or any kind of rigidity that would land him firmly among Machiavellian clear cut classifications for power figures. Still it is clear based on the plot and details of Macbeth that Shakespeare was influenced by Machiavelli in writing his famous "Scottish play".

As we read Macbeth we see the story of a man, Macbeth, filled with ambition who even begins the story in a mindset similar to that of a Machiavellian prince. In his most famous work Machiavelli cites a man named Stagecoaches "Stagecoaches, the Sicilian, became King of Syracuse, not only from a private position but from a low and abject one. This man, the son of a potter, through all the changes in his fortunes, always led an infamous life, nevertheless, he accompanied his infamies with such great ability of mind and body, that, having devoted himself to the military profession, he rose through its ranks to be Praetor of Syracuse. (Machiavelli 4950) Macbeth is a ruler of what Machiavelli would have called a principality obtained through wickedness" (Machiavelli 49) Machiavelli believed that "All states, all powers, that have held and hold rule over men have been and are either republics or principalities. Principalities are either hereditary, in which the family has been long established; or they are new. The new are either entirely new, as was Milan to Francesco Sforza, or they are it were, members annexed to the hereditary state of the prince who has acquired them, as was the kingdom of Naples to that of the King of Spain.

Such dominions thus acquired are either accustomed to live under a prince, or to live in freedom; and are acquired either by the arms of the prince himself, or of others, or else by fortune or by ability. " (Machiavelli 1) Under Machiavellian classifications, Macbeth is a grey area. His principality could potentially be considered hereditary because, although he had to murder Duncan, he did technically inherit the throne, although, Macbeth is not a relative of Duncan so the principality could be considered new. In her *Tyranny in Shakespeare*, Mary Ann McGill writes that "[Macbeth] asks what is a tyrant?

Or, what does a tyrant do that sets him apart from others of great political ambition? " (McGill 21) Wassermann 3 When Machiavelli discusses "principalities obtained by arms" (Machiavelli 30) he states that "states which rise rapidly, like all other things that arise and grow rapidly in nature, cannot leave" This would lead one to believe that Macbeth is not Machiavellian in nature. Perhaps not overall, yet Macbeth's reign of Scotland does still exhibit Machiavellian properties. For example where Machiavelli says: "Upon this a question arises: whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved?

It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, it is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with. Because this is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer

y their blood, property, life, and children, as is said above, when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you.