

The king becoming graces essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Macbeth was written in 1605/6, by William Shakespeare. By this time, he had already established himself as one of the countries leading playwrights.

Shakespeare was known for his series of historical plays, looking at the Kings from Richard II to Richard III. He had already written Hamlet, another play about the problems that arise in the wake of a king's murder. Macbeth was written to be performed in front of King James VI of Scotland, I of England, who claimed descent from Banquo. In act IV, scene iii, Malcolm describes what he calls "The King-becoming Graces" these are, "As Justice, verity, temperance, stableness, bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness, devotion, patience, courage, fortitude.

"At the time, Malcolm is trying to test Macduff, to see if Scotland wants him to return because of his good qualities, or just to get rid of Macbeth. Malcolm says that these are all the qualities needed by a king, but that he has none of them. This is just a test, and when Macduff makes his speech (IV, iii, 103-114) "No, not to live...

Thy hope ends here! saying how Malcolm will not do as a leader, Malcolm in fact reveals that he was testing Macduff, and that he is ready to be king, and has assembled an army to go and overthrow Macbeth. The qualities that were outlined as essential for being king by Malcolm were a way for Shakespeare to flatter the current King, James I of England, VI of Scotland, by suggesting he has these "King-becoming graces". And this is the reason he is the King, and that James is a good king. These graces are flattering to anyone, and having them heaped upon you is a good ego boost for anyone, even the king of Britain. This may have also been because Shakespeare's proprietor had been involved in a plot against Elizabeth I, and Shakespeare

had himself been questioned, and disgraced, and as a result he may have wanted to get into the good books of the current monarch.

Since that event, all of Shakespeare's plays have had spies in them, as Lord Walsingham, the head of Elisabeth's spy network, thwarted their plan. It can be said that a person must have these "king-becoming graces" to become king, but more importantly, to stay king. This can be seen by comparing the characters of Duncan, Macbeth, and Malcolm. These three men are all king in the play.

Duncan was a good, successful king, who was admired and loved by the people of Scotland. Macbeth was a tyrant, who was despised, and who used treachery and murder to become king. Malcolm became king at the very end of the play, but we know his line did not last for very long, as in the prophecy by the weird sisters Banquo was told his line was of royal blood. This was seen to happen, as King James claimed a theoretical descent from Banquo.

From this we can deduce that Malcolm was not a very good king, as his line did not stay on the throne for very long. Therefore, we should find that Duncan had the "King-becoming graces", as he was the best king in the play. We see that Duncan is just, as he rewards people for good deeds, like when he makes Macbeth the Thane of Cawdor for his heroic exploits on the battlefield. This also shows that Duncan was generous. Duncan was seen to be brave, and a strong leader, as he had just lead his armies to a great victory over the "Norwegians".

This success in battle would also show devotion to his people, patience, and perseverance, all of which are needed to lead a successful military

campaign. This shows us that Duncan has the graces, and this is why he was such a good king, and why the natural world was unbalanced on the night of Duncan's murder, as described by Lennox " The night has been unruly... What feverous and did shake. " (II, iii, 51-58).

We can also see why Macbeth was such a bad king, and why he failed in his dream, which was sparked by the weird sisters. Macbeth had none of the graces that, according to Shakespeare were needed of a good king. Macbeth was very unjust, as he murdered people who stood in his way, and put spies in the homes of all his Thanes. He was mentally unstable, as he sees the ghost of Banquo while at dinner with all the other Thanes, and starts to break down. Lady Macbeth has to make excuses for him, saying he is sick, and has always had this problem, and makes the other Thanes leave the dinner, to save Macbeth's blushes.

Macbeth also lacked mercy, and bounty. We are shown this by the murder of Macduff's wife and children, in Act IV, ii. Macbeth showed devotion, but it was not of the kingly sort. He did not want the best for Scotland, but merely the best for himself. This shows that Macbeth is also a very selfish character.

Macbeth seemed to have more of the " King-becoming graces" at the start of the play, when he is portrayed as a courageous, loyal and highly skilled soldier, and servant of King Duncan. It seems as if he loses these graces, and maybe we see more of what Macbeth is at heart, after he has heard the initial prophecy given to him and Banquo by the weird sisters, near the start of the play. In the opening scene, he is referred to as " Bellona's bridegroom" (I, ii, 56), implying he would be a fit husband for Bellona, the

goddess of war. This is a very high accolade, putting Macbeth's skills on the battlefield along side those of the goddess of wars. At this same time, before the prophecy, we see Macbeth is a good servant, as when Duncan says he wants to make him the Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth replies " The service and the loyalty I owe, in doing it, pays itself. " (I, iv, 23-4).

By saying this, Macbeth is being modest, and is praising Duncan. This shows good qualities, and that at this point in the play Macbeth is still a loyal servant of the crown. The only one of the graces that Macbeth possesses constantly is courage. We are shown this at the start of the play, when he " Like valour's minion carved out his passage" and again, just before his death at the end of the play with " I will not yield to kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet". This shows a final act of courage, and defiance. The third, and final king in the play is Malcolm.

We know his line was not strong, as Banquos' line soon takes over, as King James is descended from him, and he sat on the throne at the time Shakespeare wrote this play. We know Malcolm is a clever man, as he was wise to flee Scotland after the murder of his father, for his self-preservation, and the intent of returning with an army. He shows good skills in doing that, but it does not display courage. We can see that Malcolm was not very well respected. This is shown by the informal form of address used by Macduff to Malcolm in his speech (V, vi, 93-8).

From this almost patronising tone, we can see he doesn't have same graces that his father was blessed with, and this is why his line did not stay on the throne for very long. By comparing the assets of these three kings, a tyrant,

a bad king, and a loved king, we can see how Shakespeare arrives at his conclusion as to what the qualities of a good king are. Shakespeare also shows the decline of Macbeth through the course of the play. At the start, in his great soliloquy (I, iii, 126-141) he shows good reasoning, by arriving at the conclusion that he will not murder Duncan to become king, but decides to see if it will happen by natural means " If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me without my stir"(I, iii, 143/4). This shows he has thought about the situation rationally.

However, his mind is changed very quickly by Lady Macbeth, when he returns to Glamis, and talks to her about the situation. However, when you compare this to some of the very grim images Macbeth gives us at the end of the play " Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. " This shows the worst of Macbeth's views on life, and is a good illustration of his increasing nihilism throughout the play. In order to understand the full implication of the " King-becoming graces" one has to look at the play in relation to the historical background, literary tradition, the nature of kingship and social influences. Macbeth is a tragedy, and is arguably one of the finest ever written.

The traditional format for a tragedy is that there is the protagonist, who suffers a fall from grace. It is seen that the higher the position, the greater the fall. In Macbeth, Macbeth is the protagonist, and the eponymous character. He is also the tragic character, and has the highest possible fall from grace, as he is king, the highest position in the land.

This fall from grace is caused by a fatal flaw in the person's character.

Macbeth has several fatal flaws in his character, including his fatal ambition.

He is too easily convinced to do something. His mind is changed several times by Lady Macbeth, and the weird sisters chose his mind to plant the seed in, as they knew he had the ambition to let it grow.

This is the biggest flaw in his character, along with greed. This can be simplified by the tragic diagram, in which the character climbs up to the peak, and is then brought crashing down by the flaw in his character, rising slightly at the end, at the realisation of what he has done. This is what happens in Macbeth. He always wants more, and will do whatever he can to get it. The realisation that he was wrong only comes right at the end of the play.

Shakespeare has also tried to make this play true to history, as real history is full of tyrannous kings, and depositions. One must also remember that this play was written specifically to be performed in front of King James I of England, VI of Scotland, and that some areas of it must have been written with him in mind, so as to praise him, and ensure there are no parts which he may find insulting, as Shakespeare wants to be in good favour with the king. This is why Banquo is shown to be a person, who is unfairly persecuted, to act as a device to show how King James has such good ancestors, and should proudly claim descent from Banquo, which Shakespeare knew he did. As when Banquo dies, his son, Fleance escapes, and he goes into hiding, to resurface in the future and take over the royal line. You can also look at Macbeth in relation to traditional tragedy.

Shakespeare wrote this play just after there had been a renaissance of Greek tragedy in Europe. At the time, there was a fanaticism over the theories of Aristotle. He had come up with a scientific method, and had produced the blueprint of the perfect tragedy. This was that there had to be a noble character that falls from grace, as a result of a flaw in his/her character.

The tragedy was also said to have a heightened dramatic affect if it takes place all in one location, and over a period of 24 hours. There should only be one plot. That was the scientific theory as to what a perfect tragedy should contain, according to Aristotle. He came up with this theory by analysing, and observing the Greek tragedies that were the most popular. Macbeth does not conform to this theory, as Shakespeare was trying to show that you could write a successful, and entertaining tragedy by not complying with Aristotle's strict guidelines, but by taking a basic tragic story, and turning it into a literary masterpiece, using poetry, and the beauty and power of language.

In conclusion, I would say that Macbeth, the play, does support the quote "The king-becoming graces, as justice, verity, temperance, stability, bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness, devotion, patience, courage, fortitude." This is when looked at as to what message Shakespeare was trying to get across, and how the play is relevant to the nature of kingship, and the historical, and social influences at the time.