

Is macbeth a political or dramatic text



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Shakespeare wrote “ Macbeth” as a very political text which uses both dialogue and drama in order to convey his views of the time in which he was writing. One has to remember that many plays were cancelled and the authors punished if they were deemed unsuitable – as a consequence much of the satire and irony based around the Tudor/Stuart government and monarchy would have to be well hidden by imagery and drama; it is for this reason that it is difficult to separate the politics from the drama as each one is part of the other. However “ Macbeth” is a very dramatic play due to the fact that it is a tragedy therefore it cannot contain the more obvious humour found in his earlier comedies such as, “ As You Like It”. Tragedies were written to instruct as well as to entertain and take many of the political issues of the time and include them in the play.

In “ Macbeth” Shakespeare focuses on the themes of murder, power struggle and treason; many of the audience watching the play would instantly make the link between the gun powder plot and the way in which Macbeth plots against the King (Duncan). When looking at the dramatic side of “ Macbeth” one has to look at the words they are saying not just at the stage directions or scenery. “ Macbeth’s” main topics run parallel to the political issues at the time i. e. they believed in witches.

“ Macbeth” was written in the 17th century when many people still believed that the sun went round the earth. They were taught that this was the way God had ordered things, and that- in England- God had founded a Church and appointed a Monarchy so that the land and people could be well governed and looked after. Macbeth” is set in Scotland when James I was king he was unpopular to many English people as they did not like the idea

of being under the rule of a Scottish king. James I had just survived the gunpowder plot so treason was a thing that people thought about so Shakespeare has included a lot of it in “ Macbeth”. Macbeth challenges the natural order by killing Duncan but he is wants power so much he is overcome with it and does not think about the consequences. The theme of good and evil is evident in tragedy plays, this keeps recurring throughout “ Macbeth”, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth struggle with it.

Evil is sometimes shown directly i. e. the witches or indirectly inside of an human i. e.

Lady Macbeth, she does fit with the stereotypical evil person. They are shown to be selfish, self-centred and incapable of love, she does though seem to love Macbeth “ my dearest love” however we do not know whether she is saying this to manipulate him or actually means it. Lady Macbeth does not actually ever commit any murders but puts forward the idea and pushes Macbeth to murder Duncan “ look like th’innocent flower but be the serpent under’t. Lady Macbeth is like Eve from the bible in many ways: they both manipulate men to get them to do what they want and once Adam and Macbeth do what they want everything starts to go wrong. “ We have scorch’d the snake, not killed it” Lady Macbeth convinced Macbeth to kill Duncan and now he is consumed by the thought of power. Macbeth did want to be king but did not want to commit treason and needed Lady Macbeth to tell him to kill Duncan and to make the plans this was the same as in the story of Adam and Eve; Adam wanted to know what the apple did but would not disobey God without Eve.

All the way through the play Macbeth is torn between the idea of good and evil; him wanting to be the best he could be which was king this takes him down the path of evil but we do know that he is still good as he feels guilt “ Macbeth shall sleep no more” before he has killed Duncan as well as after, If Macbeth was solely evil then he would feel no remorse. In “ Macbeth” evil is represented by Macbeth, Lady Macbeth and the witches and good by the majority of the other characters e. g. Banquo and Malcolm. A dramatic tool used in “ Macbeth” is the witches, not just the witches but the whole atmosphere that follows them onto the stage. The atmosphere becomes more sinister and evil, their evil is then emphasized by what Macbeth and Banquo say about them “ not like th’ inhabitants o’ th’ earth” Shakespeare makes the witches stereotypical from what they look like to how they speak “ fire burn, and cauldron bubble” he even goes as far to fit in with the stereotypical image they perform curses.

Scotland used to be seen as where the first witches came from and they were blamed for all evil and malicious doings, it is therefore no wonder why Shakespeare chose to have them as his root of evil and them playing the part to influence Macbeth to do evil. Shakespeare’s “ Macbeth” contains many suggestions of the Divine Right; which is where God gives a man his status. Hence the strict class system. When Macbeth murders Duncan because of the witches – who represent the devil and evil – influence he is going against the divine right and therefore is going against God. “ Macbeth does murder sleep’- the innocent sleep. ” Once Macbeth kills Duncan he is so obsessed with guilt that he can never sleep soundly again, this could be seen as God’s punishment for going against him.

I think this is a political issue as Shakespeare is condemning treason by showing nothing but tragedy can come of it. Gender was a big issue when Shakespeare was writing plays. The men were above the women in the social hierarchy, whatever jobs they do. Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband by questioning his manhood, "are you a man" Macbeth sees his manhood as very important to himself so if Lady Macbeth questions it he would want to show her that he is a man and not a mouse. She wishes that she could be "unsexed," she says that she would kill the king if he did not look like her own father, we can tell by this that she is not purely evil as still has emotions.

However this point is then contradicted "dash'd the brains out" she would do anything for Macbeth well that's what she says, but surely if she would be prepared to kill her own baby then she should be prepared to kill someone who only looks like her father. Lady Macbeth encourages her husband to murder, Macbeth provokes the murderers to kill Banquo by questioning their manhood just as Lady Macbeth did to him: "In catalogue ye go for men". Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth think that men should be portrayed as violent, angry and strong. Thus leading to evil and chaos when Macbeth tries to prove himself as a man. However these qualities are very useful to him on the battlefield these are what makes him such a good fighter and are what made him Thane of Cawdor. However at the same time the audience would notice that women are also sources of violence and evil.

The witches' prophecies encourage Macbeth's ambitions and then support his violent behavior "all hail Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter"; Lady Macbeth provides the brains and the will behind her husband's plotting so Macbeth does not do the planning and was not thinking about killing Duncan

until the witches and Lady Macbeth encouraged him. Arguably, Macbeth traces the root of chaos and evil to women, which has led some critics to argue that this is Shakespeare's most misogynistic play. The women who are evil are more striking as they are going against the stereotypical view of women while the men are not. Lady Macbeth uses deception and manipulation rather than violence to get what she wants which is in contrast to Macbeth. Kingship is one of the many political issues which appears in "Macbeth". Malcolm makes a speech about it.

During this speech he is talking about what makes a good king "the king becoming graces- as justice, verity" these are all qualities that James I had. Macbeth however has very few of them. After the gunpowder plot I think that Shakespeare is supporting James. In "Macbeth" we see Duncan as a kind man as he openly and courteously greets his nobles with praise.

"O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman" However, he is a poor leader because in the battle at the beginning of the play Duncan was not fighting with his soldiers but left that up to his nobles; I think this may have been because he was scared of dying or letting his people down by not being a good enough fighter. However we cannot think this solely the case as Duncan was an old man but if he was not up to fighting was he really up to leading the country? At a time when there was lots of wars and they really needed a king that could lead them in a war leading by example. As an audience you would certainly notice the political undertones within an extremely dramatic play. For example the language used in the banquet scene, "" this extract uses very vivid imagery such as the word "gory".

This type of language when juxtaposed with the political themes and motifs make the tense and thrilling tragedy, which not only entertains but educates both a contemporary and an Elizabethan audience. It is for these reasons that “ Macbeth” still has relevance today. In conclusion William Shakespeare’s “ Macbeth” is a typical tragedy written around the 17th century, it shows how men with or without some encouragement can and will take the sometimes more appealing path of evil and corruption. I think that the dramatic elements of “ Macbeth” are more evident than the political ones, they do give “ Macbeth” some of its story lines however with all the imagery and themes make the play exciting and eventful to read and watch. Without the dramatic techniques “ Macbeth” would have not been such a remarkable play and would not still be read and analysed today.