

# Kingship in shakespeare's "macbeth" and "king lear" essay



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## Introduction

It goes without saying that kings are among the most respected personalities in the world. According to King James I, "Kings are justly called gods for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of divine power on earth. For if you will consider the attributes to God, you will see how they agree in the person of a king. God has the power to create, or destroy, make, or unmake at his pleasure, to give life, or send death to judge all, and to be judged nor accountable to none; to raise low things, and to make high things low at his pleasure, and to God are both soul and body due. And the like power have kings." (King James I). In the given paper we will prove that Shakespeare in his plays challenges this view. For the great playwright king are just humans who have their own problems and fears. To prove that we will consider two great works by Shakespeare - "Macbeth" and "King Lear"

### Macbeth

The first play to consider is "Macbeth". The tragedy by William Shakespeare "Macbeth" is a great story about a strong desire for power instead of different obstacles. It is a story of two persons, who became blind because of their eternal desire to have immense power. Shakespeare interpreted the plot of King of Scotland, Macbeth (1040). Duncan was a young ruler, as it is noted in the Chronicles of Scotland. But Shakespeare interpreted it in such a way that Duncan was older and the deed of murder was more tragically reflected in his play. A character of an impulsive lady Macbeth is borrowed by Shakespeare from other Chronicles. The character of Macbeth is not shown as a strong ruler, who he really was in 1040. Moreover, Shakespeare's

representation of the plot was influenced by Queen Elizabeth and later by James VI. During times of Queen Elizabeth the plot was rather dramatic, but during times of James VI it was necessary to polish the plot, because James VI was involved in the story of Duncan murder. James VI was focused on the necessity to kill witches and Shakespeare reflects this tendency in his dramatic play as well.

Therefore, Shakespeare adapted this tragedy to his times. The contemporaries have many difficulties with comprehension of the story. That is why it is relevant to interpret the nature of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth characters, the context of their relations development etc.

Shakespeare does not show us the king who has great power like God. He shows a weak personality with a lot of problems in his private life and his kingship. Macbeth is just human with unstable nature and a lot of fears. Unlike his clever and powerful wife, Macbeth is shown as a weak-willed person, who cannot properly behave in a risky situation. Of course, he is a murderer, but he is afraid even to think about the consequences of his deed and to say "amen". It means that he is afraid of his soul and his inner condition of turmoil leaves him concentrated on his "bloody hands". He does not know what to do next and Lady Macbeth is jockeying at him and tries to redirect his negative thoughts into actions, which should be taken in order to catch up the moment. Macbeth is too emotional and Lady Macbeth strictly criticizes this feature of his character. She is sure that there is something to be done immediately and the murder is only a necessary step taken for further glory. Blood and death do not scare her off. This fact underlines that the character of Lady Macbeth is rather strong and unlike other women she

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is not afraid of cruelty. She is a goal-oriented person and she needs to have the same strong partner. Unfortunately, as it comes out, their efforts were idle and Macbeth is beheaded in the struggle.

He is not a talented general and Shakespeare wanted to show that all our deeds are resembled in the same way in our lives. Once you killed someone, your life will be taken for sure. This idea testifies that for great playwright kings have nothing in common with God, they are humans who are afraid of being punished by God for their misdeeds. Moreover, an attempt of a murder is not shown as a brave deed; it is an escape from responsibility for future fight for a better social position. We can see wild ambitions and a violent corruption of power. Nowadays this theme is relevant to the same extent. The contemporaries may be interested in the depiction of crime and punishment in the 11th century in Scotland and compare it to modern times. Modern power is often vicious and corrupted. It means that the society is developing along the same paths and it is important to show the outcomes of such an unfair power, as it was shown in Macbeth by Shakespeare.

Moreover, it is interesting to read between the lines the theme about great ambitions and a blind desire to have power. This is another crucial theme for the modern businessmen. They often close their eyes, committing crimes and offend innocent people in order to reach their goals. It would be better to think about their inner essence. Who knows, if Macbeth continued his self-concentration and did not listen to pacified speeches of his wife, he would confessed in his murder...

His wife often acclaimed for being more than just a man. She wanted power and she was blinded by a possibility of having immense power if only her husband could commit a murder. Lady Macbeth used her husband to embody her vicious plans. This woman is also a panicking person. She is not strong; she was just affected by a strong desire of having power. She commits a suicide and in case she was strong, she would not do it for sure.

They wanted to become closer by becoming partners in the crime, like Boney and Clyde, but their marriage failed because they allowed their poignant ideas ruling over them. Macbeth dies and Lady Macbeth commits a suicide. There is no matter, where he or she dies. Death finds them because they were not afraid of imposing it on other persons for reaching their goals. Now, it is time to pay for them.

### King Lear

The second play to consider is " King Lear". " King Lear" is one of the greatest plays by William Shakespeare. A depiction of the interesting and challenging personalities of the main characters make the readers think about a challenging nature of human inner world. In this play Shakespear shows sensitive human beings and the King Leer is not an exception. The deepest feeling of humanity, love, is correlated with the personal arrogance and superiority of King Lear., thus making him having nothing in common with God. True love is reflected by Cordelia and Gloucester's sons. Lear's daughter shows her love for her father King Lear, who was misguided by his eldest daughters and got mad finally. Gloucester is misguided by his greedy son, who closes his father's eyes on a true love of his loving son. Therefore, a

concept of love discussed further on in terms of relations between children and their parents.

In spite of the highest social role that King Lear plays in the Shakespeare's masterpiece implies his inability to sort the wheat from the chaff. In the beginning of the play King Lear was misguided by lie of his elder daughters. Lear, longing to beautiful words, cheats himself first of all. His need for power has already clouded his mind. He composes a false letter to his father implicating his brother. He was blind and did not see the power of Cordelia's love for him. Thus, he floods out her daughter from his house with the following words: "..... for we Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see That face of her again. Therefore be gone Without our grace, our love, our benison." (1. 1. 265-267)

Lear continues a chain of persecutions and banishes one of his devoted followers, Kent. Then, Kent returns to the kingdom as a servant, but King's blindness prevents him from identifying Kent. As far as we can see, King Lear lives blind; he is unable to make clear and correct decisions, but he is misguided by the people around him. Vice versa, he does not believe to those people, who want to shed the light on his wrong actions.

Fortunately, his blindness starts gradually disappearing and Lear finds out the real intentions of his eldest daughters and realizes a true love of Cordelia for him. Still, his attempts to save himself from further erroneous judgments fail and thus he loses his life as well as Cordelia does.

What is even more scaring is the fact that King's social role intensifies his wrong actions to the greatest extent. The revelation of truth for King Lear <https://assignbuster.com/kingship-in-shakespeares-macbeth-and-king-lear-essay/>

occurs too late. He says: O my follies! Then Edgar was abus'd. Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him! (3. 7. 91-92). Lear tries to find out how did he manage to live among "men of stones" (5. 3. 258).

King Lear also has nothing in common with gods. He is just human who can be punished by God. Blindness can be cured in case it is prevented by the suffering person himself. Once a suffering person acknowledges a blindness of his heart he may be healed by God. The treachery of a self-loving character leads only to crimes and suffer. Not only King but Regan, Goneril and Edmund are the four exemplary sinners of the play, who ruin others, each other, and themselves. Moreover, a degrading power of blindness makes King Lear going mad. His madness is the result of his weak-willed individuality, his easily confused nature and his intolerant attitude to the most caring person for him, Cordelia. Shakespeare is the great tragic play writer. Therefore, juxtaposing a concept of blindness and a sight, he manages to make the play even more dramatic. Blindness is Lear's essence, but in spite of it he does not make an attempt to fight against it, but continues following the line of erroneous decisions. It is easier for the King's spoiled nature to agree upon the eldest sister's lies than to believe in the innocent, pure and true love of his daughter for him.

## Conclusion

Kings are just humans, not gods; they have their own problems, made mistakes, commit crimes and are afraid of being punished for them. Thus Shakespeare challenges the words of King James I. The masterpiece by William Shakespeare "Macbeth" is a great story about people, just people

who wanted to gain a power despite of different obstacles on their way. On the one hand, Shakespeare shows a " perfect marriage", when spouses are united by their common goals, by their feelings and emotions, by their madness and death. But on the other hand it is clear that Shakespeare appeals for the audience in order to prevent people from committing murders or just allowing their perverted feelings dominate over them. This topic can be met in the creations of many writers, but Shakespeare, like a real genius did his best to help people understand his main idea and reveal the drawbacks all humans have. The kings are just humans who made serious mistakes and are punished for these misdeeds. King Lear has gone through a challenging life and has met with lie, despair and betrayal, fortunately, God blessed him and in the end of his life he got a chance to reveal the truth. Shakespeare puzzled his readers, because he opened the door to the most challenging phenomenon of humanity: to the essence of a human being. Nevertheless, the readers may wonder if King Lear would manage his revelation of truth or whether blindness in his inner world would remain for ages. For Shakespeare kings are characters, who are represented by the great playwright as plain people with their own problems and weaknesses.