

# Kingship in macbeth – act 4 scene 3 essay sample



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In Act4 Scene3, Malcolm identifies “ the King becoming graces”, a list of qualities desirable in a good king. With close references to the text discuss the examples of good kings as depicted by Duncan, Malcolm and Edward the confessor?

In the Elizabethan times, people believed that a king who had acquired the throne legitimately was God’s representative on earth. Therefore, a crime committed against the king, was also considered to be a crime against God. It was also believed that if a crime against the king took place, natural order would be disturbed. This could be shown in things like: very bad storms or unnatural events taking place. An example of this would be when Duncan’s horses attack and eat each other.

In Act4 Scene3 Malcolm identifies 12 qualities which are desirable in a good king, they are: ‘ Justice’ (fairness), ‘ verity’ (truthfulness), ‘ temp’rance’ (self-control), ‘ stableness’ (even-temperedness), ‘ bounty’ (generosity), ‘ perseverance’ (endurance), ‘ mercy’ (forgiveness), ‘ lowliness’ (humility), ‘ devotion’ (piety), ‘ patience’, ‘ courage’, ‘ fortitude’ (strength). All these different qualities would make any king near-perfect.

The qualities that Duncan possessed while he was ruling as king of Scotland varied. At the beginning of the play, Duncan punishes the traitorous Cawdor and rewards Macbeth the hero. “ No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive our bosom interest. Go pronounce his present death and with his present title greet Macbeth.” This is an example of Duncan ruling in justice, and being fair. Duncan is also very truthful, and throughout the play also possessed the quality of verity. He promised rewards, and also admitted that

he misjudged Cawdor: “ No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive.....”

This shows Duncan admitting that he misjudged Cawdor. Fortitude is another quality of Duncan’s which is shown when he calls for the execution of Cawdor who was a friend: “ Go get him surgeons.” This is an example of Duncan’s strength.

Duncan also possess patience, courage and temp’rance whilst he is waiting for news of the battle, and responding to the news from the battle. “ So well thy words become thee as thy wounds, they smack of honour both. Go get him surgeons.” This is an example of how Duncan remained calm in a difficult situation, but as also courageous. Although he was angered by Cawdors betrayal, he remains stable and even tempered. He had a rational judgement on Cawdors betrayal: “ He was a gentleman on whom I built an absolute trust.” He also shows mercy as he hints that he has forgiven Cawdor.

Duncan is also quite generous, he rewards Macbeth with Cawdors title, and gives Lady Macbeth a dimond and complements her and praises Macbeth and Banquo. “ This diamond he greets your wife withal”, this is an example of Duncan’s bounty when he gave her a diamond for her hostility.

Duncan also possessed the quality of lowliness, in his response to praise from his subjects: “ Against those honours deep and broad where with your majesty loads of our house” This shows Duncan’s humility. Whilst Duncan was King, it would seem that his people were quite devoted to him. An example of this would be when Macbeth debates murdering Duncan, and at one point decides not to kill him: “ We will proceed no further in the

business". Overall, looking at all the different qualities that Duncan possessed during the play, he would appear to be the perfect king. However Duncan also seemed to be quite gullible, and easily manipulated which were two of his big weaknesses.

Malcolm, who during the end of the play was posing as a possible future king of Scotland, also possessed some of the qualities of "the king becoming graces", which he himself mentioned in Act4 Scene3.

He appeared to be quite fair, as he wanted to punish Macbeth as he was to blame for the destruction of Scotland. "..... Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell. Though all things foul would wear the brow of grace, yet grace must still look so." Here Malcolm is implying that Macbeth has changed from good to evil, and he thinks that it is only fair that he should be punished.

In Act4 Scene3 Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty. He builds up a bad image of himself which is really to test Macduff. Therefore he isn't very truthful, he lies to test people. He is deceptive, he says one thing and then changes his mind. He implies to Macduff that Macbeth is God compared to him, and that if he were king Scotland would be in a worst state than it is now: "..... Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell, uproar the universal peace, confound all unity on earth." Here Malcolm is implying that he is unfit to rule, but this is really to test Macduff.

Malcolm also appears to be quite even tempered. In Act4 Scene3 he doesn't fly into rage in times of bad news. When the news that Macduff's family had been killed, Malcolm didn't immediately become angry, instead he tried to

comfort Macduff: “.... Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak”.

Here Malcolm is showing that he is relatively stable.

One Quality that Malcolm doesn't possess is that of perseverance. In Act 2 Scene 3, he fled to England, without it seemed any consideration or thought. That is just one example of how Malcolm has low endurance, and generally doesn't stick with things.

Malcolm also, in some parts of the play he appears to be quite humble. An example of Malcolm's lowliness, is when he tries to comfort Macduff at the loss of his family: “ Merciful heaven- What, man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows....” This shows Malcolm being sympathetic and humble towards Macduff's situation.

Malcolm also seems to have a lot of courage and devotion. He is prepared to go back to Scotland and fight for his country: “...we are coming thither. Gracious England hath lent us good Siward and ten thousand men.” This is an example of Malcolm's courage and patience. He also possesses fortitude. He uses the death of Macduff's family to express his anger, and to get revenge: “ Come, go we to the king; our power is ready...” This shows Malcolm is strong, it also shows that he cares passionately about Scotland, but also resents Macbeth. The qualities that Malcolm possesses are not as great as those of Duncan, however he still appears to be a strong and compassionate character. He is also quite clever, he manipulates people to get what he wants- He manipulated Macduff to ensure his own safety. Overall Malcolm's qualities as a future king, are not as strong as Duncan's, although he is probably mentally stronger.

During Malcolm's speech in Act4 Scene3, he identifies the qualities of Edward the confessor, who in the play poses as a role model for kings.

Edward was seen as being fair, he didn't treat people differently according to their status. "..... but strangely visited people All swol'n and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye..." This is an example of Malcolm's words on Edward.

He is also seen as being generous and possessing bounty. He 'cured' the sick by touching them, but he didn't need to. He was the King of England, but he still had the generosity to heal people: "...there are a crew of wretched souls that stay his cure". This is saying that he cured people even though he was king.

The fact that Edward comforted people and healed the sick, also shows his humility. He healed the sick, but he didn't have to: " A most miraculous work in this good king, which often since my here-remain in England". Here Malcolm is complementing Edward on his 'miraculous work', and says that he will always be remembered.

Another of the 'king becoming graces' which Edward possessed was that of devotion or piety. Edward was deeply devoted to his religion: " Put on with the holy prayers and' tis spoken. To succeeding royalty he leaves the healing benediction..." This is an example of Edward's devotion to his religion, which he was respected for.

Although Edward doesn't possess as many qualities as Duncan and Malcolm, Edward's qualities are still very strong, and he makes a good role model for England, as he has a lot of respect from people.

In conclusion, if all the qualities of Duncan, Malcolm and Edward were combined, they would make a near-perfect king.

All three, possess qualities like justice (fairness), lowliness and devotion, although they all have different strengths within those particular qualities. Malcolm and Duncan also share quite a few different qualities between them. They are both, throughout the play complimented on their courage, their fortitude, their lowliness and devotion, their stableness and patience and their verity. Like Duncan, Malcolm doesn't fly into a rage in times of bad news, and they both appear to be strong characters.

The qualities of all three differ slightly, for example Duncan possess more qualities than Edward and Malcolm, but Duncan has some weaker areas. Each character has a different strength within those particular qualities, but the characters differ, when one has a stronger quality than another. For example, Duncan was said to possess the quality of lowliness because of his complements and calm responses. Where as Edward was complemented on his lowliness because he healed the sick. Edward clearly possessed a stronger quality on that occasion. Although all three had weaknesses the combination of all of their qualities would make a king perfect!

Looking at the different qualities, it is possible to see how Macbeth failed as a king. At the beginning of the play he possessed a lot more of the qualities than what he did at the end. For Macbeth, his change from good to evil was a gradual progression throughout the play. He became selfish and ruthless in order to secure his place on the throne. As a result, he threw Scotland into chaos, and turned many of his friends against him. At the end of the play, he

hardly possessed any qualities, if any. Therefore, looking at his progression from good to evil, and the ruthless character that he became, it is not difficult to see why he failed as a king. Without a doubt, a King who possessed the combined qualities of Duncan, Malcolm and Edward would be virtually faultless.