

# Macbeth's depiction of Elizabethan age in Shakespeare's words

[History](#)



**“ An engaging aspect of texts is that authors rarely tell their stories in exactly the same way”**

Compare the extent to which this statement applies to each of your 3 comparative texts.

My favourite thing about studying a new book, play or novel, is that authors very rarely tell their stories in the exact same way. The three texts on my comparative course have very different literary genres, but also have common aspects as well. ‘ Macbeth’ – a play in five acts – follows a conventional structure for a Shakespearian tragedy, detailing the rise and fall of Macbeth in Elizabethan times. This is very different to the organisation of events in my other two texts. ‘ The Great Gatsby’ – a novel divided into 9 chapters – outlines the lives of the ‘ new rich’, a wealthy branch of society in New York in the twentieth century. ‘ Lance Armstrong Stop at Nothing’ is a documentary style film, and tells the story of an egocentric, obsessive and controlling individual driven by his ruthlessness and competitive nature. Playwrights, authors and directors have different tools at their disposal which they can make use of in the telling of their stories, and these variations and similarities make studying and comparing their work extremely fascinating.

To begin, a key element in maintaining the interest of readers or the audience is changing the setting throughout the text. In Macbeth, the setting is constantly changing, grabbing our attention and reeling us into the storyline. The setting moves between the wild heath, violent battlefields, Macbeth’s castle at Inverness, ‘ fatal’ Dunsinane, innocent MacDuff’s castle and the English court of Edward The Confessor. By alternating between these

contrasting locations, Shakespeare establishes an ingenious polarity between family love and civilised Christian values of caring for others and self-sacrifice, and selfish ambition, duplicity, violence and chaos. The heath and Macbeth's castle represent all things dark, supernatural and immoral as we associate these places with the evil witches and Macbeth the 'tyrant'. Macduff's castle acts as a symbol for innocence and moral family values, but is soon marred by the slaughtering of Macduff's family there under Macbeth's orders. Dunsinane and the English court represents justice and morality, as these places are significant in the vanquishing of the evil Macbeth.

Setting is also key in 'The Great Gatsby' and moves between various locations in New York in the "West Egg" and "East Egg". The narrator, Nick Carraway, tells us from the outset that East Egg is the wealthier, more elite of the two Eggs. Despite all his money, Jay Gatsby lives in West Egg, suggesting that he has not been able to complete his transformation into a member of the truly socially elite. The distance that separates him from Daisy, his love interest, isn't just the water of the bay; it's also class. Similar to Macbeth, various locations and events connected with these locations provide a contrast in the values of the story's characters. Here there is contrast between the apparent sophistication and glamour of the New York society, and the reality of the eventual darkness and immorality that emerges from beneath the artificial surface. Gatsby's palace and refuge, or his Shakespearian 'castle', if you will, where he once hosted many glamorous and elegant parties, becomes his grave when he is shot by Wilson in his pool. Additionally, there is contrast between the scenes that take place in the city and the suburbs. Tom only

interacts with his mistress in the city, and Gatsby only sees Meyer Wolfsheim there. They both use the city to hide their goings-on from the people they value on Long Island.

Furthermore, an author, playwright or director makes use of powerful imagery to intensify the dramatic experience of their audience. The difference lies in how they convey these images to their audience. Imagery plays a key role in each of my texts, particularly in 'Macbeth'. Shakespeare's reoccurring use of blood imagery throughout heightens the audience's dramatic experience. After Duncan's killing, it is clear that murder, treachery and an obsession with power have affected Macbeth's mental state. Macbeth references blood throughout stating "blood will have blood" and goes on to tell us that "I am in blood". He has far too much blood on his hands and cannot deal with the responsibility and guilt that comes with all the terrible deeds he has committed. Blood and death have become a key part of his life and he cannot run from his evil acts. Shakespeare conveys this motif of blood imagery through character dialogue and on stage activity such as Duncan's murder.

In contrast, director of 'L. A. Stop at Nothing', Alex Holmes, has many more tools at his disposal to convey key images to his audience. A key colour and image associated with Lance Armstrong throughout the film is the colour yellow - the colour of the winner's jersey in the Tour de France, and also the colour associated with Lance's Cancer Foundation. Yellow is conventionally the colour of hope and courage, which actually provides a direct contrast to everything Lance actually represents. In reality, he couldn't even find the

courage to confess to taking performance enhancing drugs and became a symbol of false hope to millions of his supporters worldwide. On screen, Holmes makes use of the reoccurring motif of yellow, including various strategically placed shots of Lance putting on his yellow jersey on the winner's podium. He also includes low shots of Lance's supporters wearing yellow bands on their wrists sold by the foundation. Throughout these shots, an interview can be heard overlaid of Lance speaking about the importance of his cancer organisation and he denies all doping claims. Holmes also makes use of shots of various towers and significant buildings throughout the film, including the Eiffel tower and the L'arc De Triumphe. These structures become key images and acts as a metaphor for Lance's strength and self-proclaimed invincibility. He stands like a tower above his enemies and he is almost untouchable, or so he thinks he is. While Shakespeare relied on dialogue and on stage activity to convey key images, modern day directors have access to various camerawork and cinematographic techniques to illustrate crucial images. In additional contrast, in the Great Gatsby, images (for example Doctor TJ Eckleburg's all-seeing eyes) are conveyed through descriptive prose, with narrator Nick Carraway forwarding the plot.

A prominent feature of 'Macbeth' is Shakespeare's use of soliloquies. These monologues not only inform the audience about the plot and characters, they also involve us in the story. The playwright brings the audience directly into the mind of Macbeth, full as it is of 'scorpions' in his anguished soliloquy "Is this a dagger which I see before me?.." Macbeth is lured by the witches and taunted by his cunning wife, and he gives in to his hamartia or fatal flaw-

<https://assignbuster.com/macbeths-depiction-of-elizabethan-age-in-shakespeares-words/>

his vaulting ambition and need for power. In his highly emotional and volatile state, the blood stained weapon seems real to him, but in reality, it is a figment of his tormented imagination. His mental state has been irreversibly damaged by his horrifying murder of Duncan, with “dudgeon gouts of blood” on his hands. The riveting soliloquy ends with the simple line “I go and it is done”. He has murdered Duncan, his king and his friend, denying his better nature. He would have liked to have lived up to the ‘golden opinions’ he had won so nobly in battle, but instead he begins his descent into a hell of his own making. A similar effect is achieved through the use of a flash back in ‘The Great Gatsby’. Gatsby, in his misery, tells Nick the story of his first meeting with Daisy. He does so even though it exposes him as a liar and disproves his earlier account of his past. Gatsby and Daisy first met in Louisville in 1917; Gatsby instantly fell in love with her. Realizing that Daisy would never be with him if she knew of his poverty, Gatsby decided to lie to her about his past and his circumstances. Gatsby’s story allows Nick, and us as readers, to understand his lies and desire for wealth at any cost. Fitzgerald’s use of flash back produces the same effect as a soliloquy in Macbeth. The reader (or viewer) gets an insight into the mind of a particular character and we begin to understand why they do what they do.

Shakespeare makes use of dramatic irony in ‘Macbeth’ to disclose chilling truths to his audience. Dramatic irony is the result of information being shared with the audience but withheld from one or more of the characters. An effective example is demonstrated when King Duncan reaches Macbeth’s castle, and he feels secure and welcome at the home of his loyal thane. However, the audience is aware that he may be murdered that very night. It

<https://assignbuster.com/macbeths-depiction-of-elizabethan-age-in-shakespeares-words/>

is also ironic that he calls the castle “ a pleasant seat”, when it’s the place where he is eventually killed. Shakespeare’s use of dramatic irony creates great suspense. Since the audience knows more than the character, we are positioned to wait for the character to gain awareness. I found this kept me engaged and I felt involved in the story.

Although dramatic irony is a device not made use of by director Alex Holmes in ‘ L. A Stop at Nothing’, irony can nonetheless still be seen in the story.

Lance Armstrong founded the Lance Armstrong Foundation (now the Livestrong Foundation), a foundation whose sole purpose is to fight cancer, provide support to sufferers and find a cure. Ironically, according to Journalist Paul Kimmage, Lance Armstrong became the ‘ cancer of cycling’ through his use of performance enhancing drugs. Irony exists in the fact that Lance metaphorically became the very thing that he devoted his life to fighting. Kimmage said in an interview that when Lance temporarily retired from cycling, the sport was in remission, but upon his return two years later, “ the cancer was back”. I found it fascinating that irony can be seen in both ‘ Macbeth’, a play set in Elizabethan times, and also in the ‘ L. A. stop at Nothing’ story, albeit in contrasting forms.

In conclusion, the authors of my three texts make use of many contrasting and similar literary techniques to tell their stories. Shakespeare couldn’t have even imagined using many of the devices available to director Alex Holmes when he staged the first production of ‘ Macbeth’. His story had to be told using carefully crafted dialogue and stage directions. Scott F Fitzgerald decided to tell the story of Jay Gatsby through the medium of a

novel rather than on the screen or stage, giving him access to very different literary techniques that were then available to film makers and playwrights. His work was written to be read, whereas the work of Shakespeare and Holmes was made to be viewed. The lesson to be learned here is, there are many ways to tell a story and each can be just as enjoyable as the next. Whatever art form an individual chooses to tell their story, be it a novel, film or play - the outcome remains the same: literary texts are designed to teach us something about life, to move us and to have an effect on us.

Ossie Davis once said " Any form of art is a form of power; it has impact, it can affect change - it can not only move us, it makes us move."