

# Macbeth Kingship practice

Monday, May 19, 2025 9:03 PM

wise to do this topic!

Macbeth, a Jacobean tragedy written by William Shakespeare, presents kingship as a necessary component that influences a country's power. As the play progresses under the ruling of three kings – Duncan, Macbeth, and Malcolm – Shakespeare suggests that peace and power are only maintained under the right leader, and chaos will take over once a wrong leader takes the place. This is best evident by King Duncan's generous yet somewhat flawed nature, Macbeth's tyrannical ruling, and Malcolm's ultimate restoration.

HK1

good thesis and essay outline!

of the natural order

To begin with, King Duncan is portrayed as the rightful leader who keeps Scotland under control, yet he has his hamartia of trusting people too much. He is depicted as just and benevolent when he announces that "signs of nobleness like stars shall shine on all deservers" in the court when Malcolm is told to ascend the throne next. The simile "like stars shall shine" connotes divine power, <sup>ao1</sup> implying that they will be rewarded for virtue and nobility. This would have demonstrated Duncan's kingship clearly to the contemporary audience, as the majority of the belief was that kings were chosen from Divine Right by God. By obeying this, they would be obeying the Great Chain of Being, ultimately heeding to God's decision since God is positioned at the top of the hierarchy, presenting Duncan as a king who not only nurtures "[deserving]" people through generosity, but <sup>ao2</sup> also is loyal to God himself. However, his nature of building an <sup>ao3</sup> absolute trust reveals that his tendency to rely excessively on his thanes to rule Scotland led him to his downfall as he was betrayed by two different thanes of Cawdor twice. This cyclical perhaps highlights the inevitable downfall of Duncan despite being a strong, righteous king. With King James I having been almost murdered by the Gunpowder plot not long after he ascended the throne, <sup>ao4</sup> Shakespeare could have also framed the plot as a Cautionary Tale for King James to be nurturing and benevolent, yet wary of the divide between appearances and reality to maintain the throne and country in peace.

W great line!

ao1  
ao2

link to motif of light & dark more broadly? - good - evil

ao3 good line

'meek/mild'  
good but weak?  
unlike James I –  
strong reader and  
first to unite  
England and Scotland

ao1

two different thanes of Cawdor twice. This cyclical perhaps highlights the inevitable downfall of Duncan despite being a strong, righteous king. With King James I having been almost murdered by the Gunpowder plot not long after he ascended the throne, Shakespeare could have also framed the plot as a Cautionary Tale for King James to be nurturing and benevolent, yet wary of the divide between appearances and reality to maintain the throne and country in peace.

ao2✓

- v

ao2✓

Macbeth, on the other hand, is established as a foil character of Duncan and acts as a cautionary figure who reveals that when the wrong leader is in power, a country will "bleed". Initially, he is titled "brave", an epithet portraying him as a valiant and admiring warrior. However, because he is not selected by God through Divine Rights, he is ultimately blinded by his "vaulting ambition" and transforms into a "dead butcher" and a "tyrant". This transformation is engendered by his committing regicide and homicide of Duncan and Banquo, respectively, as he violently rids anyone who he needs to "o'erleap" solely to remain as king. The corrupted kingship is revealed through the metaphor "dead butcher", which reduces Macbeth to a mindless killer, juxtaposing "brave Macbeth" at the beginning of the scene when he "unseam'd the nave to the chaps" of the Norwegian adversary out of patriotism rather than his hamartia, "vaulting ambition" which he did for his murder of Duncan and Banquo. Through Macbeth's tragic fall, Shakespeare, therefore, implies that a country will fall into anarchy with a leader only obsessed with maintaining power. Contextually, Macbeth would have already been disqualified as a king immediately after he started to plan to murder

ao1

ao2

ao3

ao2

Banquo. This is because male friendships were extremely valued in a patriarchal society in which males spent most of their time together, and betraying them by murder would have been considered the most vile quality a king could possess in the Jacobean era. Thus, Shakespeare aims to warn of the dangers of unchecked ambition that a king can bring: the murder of a friend, the king, and chaos.

004 00-interesting!

✓great line

Ultimately, though, order is restored by Malcolm, who is depicted as the perfect king among the three. One piece of evidence is that Malcolm, unlike his father Duncan, does not trust others too much. When he meets Macduff in England, he is first dubious whether he is a spy sent by Macbeth or not, thus testing him by lying about his "vices" being "grafted" and "black Macbeth" being "pure as snow" compared to him. Malcolm's cautionary nature and intelligence are evident as he successfully presents as if evil is part of his nature by hyperbolizing the fictional sin that is embedded in him. The juxtaposition of light and dark imagery intensifies this effect as Macbeth being "pure as snow" sarcastically contrasts his well-known "black and deep desires". Thus, Shakespeare hints how Malcolm is capable of distinguishing one's divide in appearance and reality, a fatal flaw that his father could not avoid. Another evidence is that Malcolm, unlike Macbeth, is an epitome of a patriotic and dedicated king who prioritizes the future of Scotland rather than his ambitions. Under the control of Macbeth, Malcolm worries that the country is "[sinking] beneath the yoke" and that it "bleeds" and "weeps". His personification of Scotland indicates his treatment of a country comparable to a loved one, reflecting his true love and concerns for the survival of Scotland. With Malcolm ascending the throne, therefore, Shakespeare gives the audience a sense of catharsis in which the king free of hamartia – both trust and "vaulting ambition" – restores order. Considering that the play was written to satisfy King James, Shakespeare would have intentionally structured the play to deliver the message that, regardless of human attempts to disrupt the natural order, it would ultimately be restored through Divine Rights.

001 good argument!

007

002

honest!

✓great!

001 well-embedded

yes!

002

001

004

Overall, Shakespeare displays how only correct kingship allows a country to be at peace and under control. By exposing each king's hamartia and ultimate restoration, Shakespeare depicts kingship as the determining factor of a country's survival and warns that a wrongful king will create chaos.

✓ great so what?  
conclusion

Masterful and well-  
structured essay.  
you're so ready!  
well done