

MACBETH

There are a number of things to go over before getting into the play itself. First, you need to understand how an Elizabethan viewed the world and how it was organized.

The British explained life and existence as a "Chain of Being", on which every component of the Earth was positioned. At the very top of this "chain" was God. On God, all things depended. Next was the King, God's chosen representative on Earth. Because God had chosen the King, the King himself was seen as almost immortal. Under the King were the Nobility, then the working class professionals, then the commoners, then the peasants. After people, came the animals. The top of the chain, after God, the King, and other people, was the lion. Etc., etc. Then came plants. The top of the plant part of the chain was the oak tree, etc. etc. On the very bottom of the chain was dust, considered the lowest element on the Earth.



Hence, the killing of a King was seen as an assault on God, himself. In fact, in several plays, there are references to the ire (anger) shown by God (or the gods, depending on the setting / time of the play). In Julius Caesar the "sheeted dead did jibber in the streets" after the murder of Caesar, and in Macbeth, after Macbeth murders his King, the horses break out of their stalls and eat each other, the "graves stood tenantless", and a storm of incredible ferociousness knocked down church steeples. Yes, killing a King had its consequences in the minds of most people. Few would dare such an outrage.

SOURCES

Shakespeare got his story from Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Holinshed spends a lot of time on the incident in which Malcolm (who became a popular king) tests Macduff by pretending to be mean when he is really nice. Holinshed talks about the murder of King Duff by Donwald in the century before Macbeth. According to Holinshed, Donwald was nagged by his wife until he did the evil deed. Shakespeare adapted this for Macbeth.

Holinshed's section on Macbeth was apparently largely derived from the work of one Hector Boece, *Scotorum Historiae* ("Chronicles of Scotland", 1526-7). Boece's sources included the *Chronica gentis Scotorum* ("Scotichronicon") by John of Fordun in the early 1500's (he also writes about William "Braveheart" Wallace and Robin Hood), and Andrew of Wyntoun (1400's). By the time the story of Macbeth had reached Holinshed, it was already mostly fiction.

Here's what we think really happened with Macbeth and the other characters.

In a barbaric era, population pressures made war and even the slaughter of one community by another a fact of life. Survival depended in having a capable warlord to protect life and property, prevent infighting, and protect from distant enemies. Groups of warlords would unite under the

nominal leadership of one king to promote their common interests and war on more distant nations. While people pretended to believe in "the divine right of kings" and "lawful succession", continuing effective leadership was assured by warlords killing off the less capable family members.

The name "Macbeth" means "son of life". Macbeth's father Findlaech was ruler ("mormaer", high steward) of Moray, at the northern tip of Scotland. Macbeth's mother's name is unknown, but she is variously said to have been the daughter of King Kenneth II or the daughter of King Malcolm II. In 1020, Findlaech was killed and succeeded by his nephew Gillacomgain. In 1032, Gillacomgain and fifty other people were burned to death in retribution for the murder of Findlaech, probably by Macbeth and allies.

The historical Mrs. Macbeth was not named "Lady", but "Gruoch" (GROO-och). She was the daughter of a man named Biote (Beoedhe), who was in turn the son of King Kenneth III "the Grim" who Malcolm II had killed to become king. (Some say that Biote was the son of Kenneth II instead.) She was originally married to Gillacomgain. Their son was Lulach the Simple (i.e., stupid; he must be the baby that Lady Macbeth talks about braining.) After Macbeth killed Gillacomgain, he took his widow Gruoch for his own wife, and raised Lulach as their stepson.

Centuries before Macbeth, King Kenneth MacAlpin, "founded Scotland" by uniting the Picts and the Scots, i.e., getting them to fight foreigners rather than each other. In this era, Gaelic custom required that the succession go via the male line, and that if an heir was not yet old enough to reign when the king died, the kingship went to whatever male adult was next in line. Since the succession was designed to ensure some stability in a world of warlords and infighting, this made sense. Kenneth MacAlpin's male line continued to King Malcolm II, who had at least two daughters but no sons, and he killed the last member of the male McAlpin line. One daughter, Bethoc, (Holinshed calls her Beatrice) married Abbanath Crinen, the secular hereditary abbot of Dunkeld, and gave birth to Duncan.

Duncan I of Scotland was born in 1001. He ascended to the throne at the age of thirty-three after killing his grandfather, Malcolm II. He was a spoiled and over zealous young man whose reign was wrought with failed campaigns and death for his people. To gain the respect of his people, Duncan decided to invade Northumbria and attack Durman. The campaign was a disaster. When he got back to Scotland, he was greeted by unhappy lords who later revolted. His cousin, Mac Beth, Lord of Moray, was one of the lords involved. Mac Beth later slew Duncan and ascended the throne with his wife cousin, Gruach, at his side. Duncan's sons fled at this time. Malcolm went to England while Donald Ban went to Ireland. Both later returned and reigned as kings. Before Gruach married Mac Beth, she was the wife of Gillecomgain, one of Duncan's sons. He and Malcolm had murdered Mac Beth's father in 1020. Gillecomgain and Gruach, the granddaughter of Kenneth III, had one son named Lulach. In 1027, Gruach was widowed when her husband was

burned alive in his fortress with his men. At this point Mac Beth was appointed Lord of Moray, left open by Gillecomgain, and married Gruach. They were married in 1033 when Mac Beth was twenty-eight. Mac Beth did much for Scotland in his seventeen year reign. Under him, North and South Scotland were united. He organized a military patrol that canvassed the entire country enforcing law and order.

In 1057, Mac Beth's reign was cut to an end. Malcolm Canmore, which means "Big Head" in Gaelic, raised an army with the help of the English and invaded his homeland. He defeated Mac Beth and became King of Scotland under the title Malcolm III, but not without a little trouble.

After Mac Beth's death, his stepson, Lulach, had a brief reign. He was assassinated in March 1058 after seven months of rule. Most believe that Malcolm and his associates played a major part in his death. Finally, Malcolm got what he wanted. At the age of twenty-seven, he was crowned King of Scotland.

Malcolm went on to reign as Malcolm III "Canmore" ("big head" or "great ruler"). He took Thorfinn's widow Ingibjorg for himself, and they had a son Duncan, who later ruled as Duncan II. After Ingibjorg died, Malcolm Canmore married Margaret, a princess of the old English royal family. Margaret was a woman of great personal piety, and is now honoured as a saint by Roman Catholics and Anglicans. Three of their sons became kings in their turns.

Malcolm Canmore was an aggressive and successful warrior who invaded England several times. He was finally killed in Northumberland. The story is that a treacherous soldier, pretending to hand him a key on a spear, put the spear through his eye socket.

Donald Bane, was king twice (deposed for a time by Duncan II, who he later defeated and killed). Donald Bane was finally defeated, imprisoned, and blinded by King Edgar, one of the sons of Malcolm Canmore and Margaret.

Banquo (Banquho, "Thane of Lochabar") and Fleance are supposed to be the ancestors of the Stewarts (Stuarts), including some kings of Scotland and later Scotland-and-England. After Banquo's murder by Macbeth's assassins, Fleance fled to North Wales, and married one Nesta / Mary, daughter of Gryffudth ap Llewellyn, Prince of Wales. Walter the Steward, first "High Steward of Scotland" and the historical founder of the Stewart line, was supposedly their son.

This is all nonsense. Walter's real name was "Walter Fitz Alan Dapifer", son of Alan Dapifer, the sheriff of Shropshire. The sheriff was the son of some ordinary folks. For some reason, perhaps to give his own Stuart king some more glamorous ancestors, Boece made up Banquo and Fleance. Check out the old Scottish genealogies online. You'll find nobody matching their descriptions.

According to Holinshed, Macbeth's father was Sinel, Thane of Glamis (whose existence is otherwise unattested) and a daughter of Malcolm II named Doda (again, modern genealogies mention no such person.) However, Sinel could not have been Thane of Glamis, because Glamis did not become a thaneage until 1264. (Once again, Shakespeare took a few liberties with the "truth". ☺)

KING JAMES I

Around 1950, scholars noticed and argued the obvious. *Macbeth* was written specifically to be performed for, and to please, King James I. James Stuart was already King James VI of Scotland when Queen Elizabeth's death made him James I of England as well. In the late 1500's, Scotland had a witch craze, with many people convicted of wicked secret practices without physical evidence. James I, who believed the witch hysteria, wrote a book about the supposed hidden world of wicked witches, entitled *Demonology*.



Macbeth deals with the fictional ancestors of the Stuart line (Banquo, Fleance) and presents Banquo more favourably than did the play's sources. (In Holinshed, Banquo is Macbeth's active accomplice.) The procession of kings ends with a mirror (probably held by Banquo rather than another king, as in some notes.) James could see himself, thus becoming part of the action. Macbeth says he sees more kings afterwards. Shakespeare has turned the nature spirits of his sources into witches for the witch-hunting king's enjoyment.

In the summer of 1606, Shakespeare sat contented as King James I, rapt with awe, watched *Macbeth*. Shakespeare had wanted such a reaction from the King who used to fall asleep during plays. In fact, his very purpose for writing *Macbeth* was to honour his new King from Scotland. The legend of Macbeth and his deeds was told to James constantly during his childhood because he had a direct claim to the story. He was one of Banquo's foretold descendants to sit on the throne of Scotland.

Many of the events that occur in the play have a direct correlation to James. The fact that this play deals with treachery and deceit is due to the constant attempts to assassinate James. One reason Macbeth might start out as the Thane of Glamis is because James was once held hostage by this very thane. The thane's wife was a reported witch whose meddling caused the delay of James' marriage. Another conspiracy was by one of his favourites, Lennox. Lennox used and manipulated the king to fill his own pockets.

To understand some of the content and the very reasons that *Macbeth* was written, it seems important to know the facts surrounding the life of James. *Macbeth* was written at a time when

England was experiencing a love affair with all things Scottish due to the new King.

James was born on Wednesday June 19th, 1566. The son of Mary Queen of Scots and Lord Darnley, he was the heir to the throne of Scotland and had a legitimate claim to the throne of England. There were rumours that he was illegitimate. The man that was rumoured to be his actual father was taken out of his mother's chambers a few weeks before he was born and stabbed to death. Some believe that this was done in the queen's sight to prompt a miscarriage.

The queen's husband was murdered by a man who was rumoured to be her lover, in early 1567. Fear of an uprising from the people made Mary place James in the custody of the Earl of Mar. Later that year, the queen married Brothwell, the murderer. She never saw her son again. She was captured and forced to abdicate. The crown went to her son. On July 29th, 1567, James was crowned King at the age of thirteen months.

He started his education at the age of four. He led a very sheltered childhood. He had a few playmates, none of which were female. During his young years, he began to express his views of male superiority. As he grew, he started to express more and more of his views including his conviction that the king should be an absolute monarch and that he ruled by divine right (meaning he was answerable only to God.) He believed that the king should be master of church as well as state.

James' feelings toward women were forged mostly by events regarding his mother and aunt, Queen Elizabeth of England. James joined against his mother and with England. He did so on the agreement that his mother would not be killed. Later word that Mary would be executed reached James. He threatened to end the league with Elizabeth and her England if his mother was murdered. Mary was killed any way for being a supposed member of a conspiracy to kill Elizabeth. James did nothing in retaliation.

In 1589, he married Anne of Denmark. They married by proxy on August 20th. On her way to meet him in Scotland, Anne's ship went off course due to a horrible storm and then ended up in Oslo. Witches came to him and told him that the devil had made them send the storm. This was one of the events that sparked James' early fascination with witches. He later wrote a book on witchcraft and how to punish witches.

On February 19th, 1594, his first of nine children was born. Prince Henry was supposed to be his heir. As the young Prince grew, the two spent very little time together. He wrote *Basilicon Doron*, which translated means "the Kingly Gift." This book was an instruction for the young prince on how to be a good king.

In 1603, James became the King of England. He had many enemies and endured much

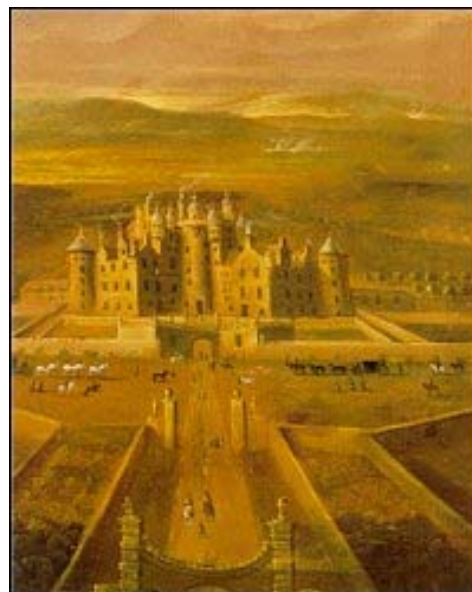
racism. There were plots to kill him at every turn, the most famous of which was the Gunpowder plot which has its roots in the religious tumults and intolerance of the time. James was a Protestant. When he was first crowned, the Catholics thought that James would be tolerant because his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, was Catholic. Their expectations were short lived. He once said of the Catholics that he was so far from favouring their superstitious religion that if he thought his son would tolerate it after his death, he would have him buried before his eyes. Due to this saying and others like it the Catholics devised the Gunpowder plot. The plot seems to have formed in the mind of Thomas Percy who in 1603 told his friend Robert Latesby that he planned to kill the King. This sparked a plan in Latesby's mind. He told four men of his plan in May of 1604. This small infamous group that would go down in history was made up of his cousin, Thomas Winter, his friend, John Wright, Percy, and the notorious Guy Fawkes, who is still burned in effigy yearly. The plan was to place gunpowder barrels under Parliament House. When the King opened the House on November 5th, the gunpowder would explode. It would kill not only the King, but the Queen, Prince Henry, bishops, and nobles. They began to work in May of 1604 by renting a house next to the Parliament building and digging a tunnel directly under the House of Lords. This proved to be tedious and time consuming. Later they discovered that the house next to theirs had a cellar that ran directly under the Parliament. They bought it and tore the wall that adjoined the two foundations down. Fawkes carried approximately 20 barrels of gun powder into the cellar and was never caught. The amount of people involved tripled. One conspirator, afraid for his brother-in-law, betrayed the plot. The conspirator wrote a letter informing his brother-in-law of the explosion. The night before the event was to take place there was a search of the property. The King's men found the barrels and tortured the conspirators.

Accomplishments of James' reign range from being the founding king of a new world to publishing the Bible. Art and literature thrived under his reign. He became the patron of Shakespeare's troop, which came to be known as the King's Men. He was the founding monarch of the United States. His most well known contribution was the publication of *The King James Bible*.

The king suffered from several physical ailments. His legs were handicapped. His tongue was too large for his mouth. He suffered from arthritis, inability to sleep, and kidney pain, to name a few of his problems. He also suffered from severe depression due to the death of his wife in 1619 and the death of Prince Henry in 1612. All in all, James' death seemed to be more of a release from troubles than a horrible event. He passed away at the age of 59 on March 27, 1625 at Theobolds Park in Herts, England. He was buried at Westminster Abbey. Unlike many Scottish monarchs, King James died in his bed at peace with his subjects and foreign countries. He also passed Royal power on, intact, to an adult son, which was also quite unusual.

SETTING

By now you should have figured out that Macbeth is set in Scotland.... about a millennium ago.
(See page four in your text for details on place names in the story.)



WHO'S WHO in *Macbeth*

(Refer to the "Dramatis Personae" - cast of characters - that precedes the first act, on page five of your text. It will present the full cast, as the table below contains only the major players.)

The Royals King Duncan (sons) Malcolm Donalbain	The Noblemen Lennox Angus Ross Caithness Menteith Macduff
The Generals Macbeth Banquo	The Macduffs Macduff<>Lady Macduff (children)
The Macbeths Macbeth <>Lady Macbeth	Three Witches

SYNOPSIS

Macbeth, Thane of Glamis, is one of King Duncan's greatest war captains. Upon returning from a battle with the rebellious Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth and Banquo encounter three witches. A prophecy is given to them: Macbeth is hailed as Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and King; Banquo is hailed as the father of kings to come. With that, the witches evaporate into the mists. Both men nervously laugh off the prophecies until Duncan informs Macbeth that he is to assume Cawdor's title as a reward for his service to the king. When Lady Macbeth is informed of the events, she determines to push her husband's resolve in the matter—she wants him to take his fate into his own hands and make himself king. If Duncan happens to be inconveniently in the way....

Macbeth at first is reluctant to do harm to Duncan. However, when Duncan makes arrangements to visit the castle, the opportunity presents itself too boldly to ignore. Pressed on by his wife, they plot Duncan's death. Lady Macbeth gets Duncan's attendants drunk; Macbeth will slip in with his dagger, kill the king, and plant the dagger on the drunken guards. Macbeth, in a quiet moment alone, imagines he sees a bloody dagger appear in the air; upon hearing the tolling bells, he sets to work. Immediately Macbeth feels the guilt and shame of his act, as does Lady Macbeth—who nonetheless finds the inner strength to return to Duncan's chamber to plant the dagger on the attendants when Macbeth refuses to go back in there. When the body is discovered, Macbeth immediately slays the attendants—he says out of rage and grief—in order to silence them.

Malcolm and Donalbain, Duncan's sons, both flee Scotland (fearful for their own lives). To everyone else, it appears that the sons have been the chief conspirators, and Macbeth is crowned King of Scotland, thus fulfilling the witches' prophecy. Banquo, however, has suspicions of his own based on their encounter with the witches.

Macbeth knows of Banquo's suspicions and the reasons for them; he is also wary of the second prophecy concerning Banquo's offspring. As he prepares for a celebratory banquet on his coronation, Macbeth hires assassins to get rid of Banquo and Fleance, his son. Banquo is murdered that night, but Fleance escapes into the darkness. As Macbeth sits down to the feast, the bloody ghost of Banquo silently torments him, which causes him great despair. Meanwhile, Macduff has fled to England because he too suspects Macbeth of foul play. Macbeth, once a man of greatness, transforms into a man whose conscience has fled him. Upon learning of Macduff's flight, Macbeth exacts revenge by having Macduff's entire household butchered. Macduff grieves, but joins up with Malcolm in England to raise an army against Macbeth.

Macbeth is given another prophecy by the witches as he prepares for Malcolm's assault. His throne is safe until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane, and he will not die by the hand of any man born of a woman. Macbeth feels confident in his chances for victory at this pronouncement. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, has been slowly driven mad by her dreams in the wake of killing Duncan. She sleepwalks, wringing her hands together, and inadvertently reveals her part in the murder. As the English armies approach, Macbeth learns that many of his lords are deserting him, and that Lady Macbeth has died. On top of this, a messenger brings news that Malcolm's army is approaching under the cover of boughs, which they have cut from the trees of Birnam Wood. Resigned now to his fate, Macbeth grimly sets to battle.

None, however, can bring Macbeth down. Finally, Macduff meets him on the field of battle. Macbeth laughs hollowly, telling him of the witches' prophecy: no man born of a woman may slay him. As Macduff retorts, he was "from my mother's womb untimely ripp'd," meaning he was delivered by a Caesarean section (and hence, not technically born of a woman). Grimly, Macbeth presses on. The play ends with the death of Macbeth; Macduff greets the others bearing Macbeth's head. Malcolm is crowned King of Scotland, restoring his father's bloodline to the throne.