

**‘Shakespeare’s play Macbeth still embodies the ethical and political values of contemporary society.’**

Shakespeare mirrored the world in his plays and wrote about problems that are still occurring today since his plays were based around human nature; they explored universal topics that include timeless concerns and ideas due to the ethical and political values of people both when they were written and now and are demonstrated in his historical tragedy *Macbeth*. One reason *Macbeth* still embodies the ethical values of contemporary society is because the characters are imbued with flaws and imperfections; the women as well as the men are given their own motivations and agency, making the plot interesting, engaging and easily adaptable for modern audiences. The literary value of the political views of contemporary society are also presented in *Macbeth* with the ambition and demand for power still present in governing systems today.

Ethical discussions surrounding power, ambition and guilt are shown in *Macbeth* when in Act 1 Scene 3 Macbeth is initially prophesized to become king one day by three witches. Having reason to believe it true; since the witches proved they could tell the future when they greeted him as Thane of Cawdor, saying "All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!", a title which he was soon after given- Macbeth begins to unfold his ambition and act upon what he has been told and hasten the process of becoming king by killing the current ruler (King Duncan), in his sleep. Macbeth acknowledges that he is driven solely by ambition, in the metaphor "I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, only vaulting ambition". Contrasting this with the scene before the murder where he sees a vision of a dagger floating before him and covered with blood and states " Is this a dagger which I see before me, / the handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee. I have thee not, and yet I see thee still/ ... I see thee yet, in form as palpable/ as this which now I draw" we reach the common modern ideology that conspiracies often involve ethical dilemmas and that deception and violence can be the only way to attain power. Macbeth does feel guilt afterwards as shown when he hears a voice, saying that "Macbeth has murdered sleep / therefore Macbeth will sleep no more", where symbolism is used to outline the results he achieved and the guilt it caused.

Further reflecting the accelerating guilt of regicide is the recurring symbolic motif of blood. This is seen in instances when Lady Macbeth states, " A little water washes us of this deed" and is then unable to wash the 'blood' off her hands, when she sleepwalks, and when a 'bloody river' is seen. It is also present when Macbeth is unable to sleep, plagued with images of blood, and when Macbeth sees a bloody dagger floating before him even before he has

committed the treasonous actions and gives the renowned "Is this a dagger which I see before me" monologue mentioned earlier. As A.C. Bradley suggests in his critical analysis of *Macbeth*, blood plays a significant role and is another use of imagery that is important because of its "liquid nature" and the way it is "Strewn throughout the play, marking everything Macbeth touches with shame and guilt". This guilt ties into the message behind ethical morality and brings the timeless universal question of how far actions inspired by ambition and entitlement can go before switching from positive to negative change, something which still hasn't been given a definitive answer due to moral variation.

Typical gender roles have always been present in different societies, are shown in *Macbeth*, and make their way into current media such as news and films. The concept of toxic masculinity and upholding society's expectations, for example, is a common topic in modern society, and is also referenced when Lady Macbeth convinces Macbeth to murder the king by insulting his manhood and calling him weak and a coward, two traits not 'associated' with men then and now as proven by the modern expressions "man up" and "be a man". The traditional Elizabethan patriarchal gender values represented in *Macbeth* are not unlike the equality and effeminacy arguments currently being discussed. Likewise, feminist rights and media have also begun showing females against the typical representation as weak, faint, and oppressed as present in newer protagonists and villains such as Elektra, Ava Starr, Hela, Valkyrie and Diana Prince (Wonder Woman) with depth, character, ambition and personal motivation. Before these characters however, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* already gave the males and females in his plays roles that individualised their characters and didn't necessarily fit such criteria, such as Macbeth being "too full of the milk of kindness", Lady Macbeth being the instigator of murder and the three witches holding power above that of the other main characters. The challenging of stereotypical behaviour is highly present in the play with subverted roles where Lady Macbeth is more ruthless than Macbeth and the witches and Hecate hold more power than all the other characters, also proving *Macbeth's* current relevance.

Furthermore, the concept of power in *Macbeth* ties into the chain of being and the Elizabethan world order, with his ambition for power leading to the downfall of both his wife and he when he wrongly usurps the power of the king. Convinced into action by his wife, Macbeth seizes the throne but induces a reign with guilt and fear since his position of power gave him the ability to forget his righteous past self and become a tyrant, having to kill more and more people to conceal his deeds, showing the transition from a kind, reasonable and honourable man to a selfish ill-propelled leader once he was given an opportunity to gain power. This is the stereotypical life-cycle modern

politicians and governments take, with the aim to receive the power (whether through lies or honest goals) but be helplessly lost once they have it. A prime example of this were the Australian Prime Ministers between 2007 and 2015, where 4 prime ministers were elected to run the government consecutively (Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard, Tony Abbot and Malcolm Turnbull, respectively) in order to find someone suitable for the role. The tyranny, protests, rallies and disarray of America currently occurring during the service of Trump could also be brought up as a prime example of power gone wrong and highlights that ambition for power is a universal experience. Since methods of dictatorship are still present and still display a sense of power this topic is still politically relevant to contemporary society and is relevant to audiences.

In conclusion, *Macbeth* presents themes and ideas that clearly relate to modern society through representing miscellaneous values and thoughts on ethical and political views such as ambition, guilt, gender and power. While it could be argued that the context Shakespeare wrote in and used is irrelevant today, it is the message behind the actions in which he demonstrates eloquence in the display of dialogue and individuals and conveyance of emotions and thoughts which is why the audience can still relate to and understand characters and their situations. *Macbeth* is one such piece of his which does this explores universal themes and values which is why the play has been enabled to transcend time and is pertinent even today.

// Thank you. The End.

(Macbeth was also led to his Macdeath with his bad life decisions and low self-esteem which presents irony which is also relevant and hilariously in-context in society today).

#### Bibliography:

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