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| **1597** | **1603** | **1604** | **1605** | **1606** |
| *Demonology* published | Coronation of James I | New witchcraft laws | Gunpowder Plot | *Macbeth* is written |

**Kingship**

**England was divided** both politically and religiously at the time the play was written and first performed. James I was viewed by many as a ‘foreign’ ruler because he was Scottish, and the relationship between England and Scotland had been fractious (at best) for hundreds of years. In short: **James I’s kingship was by no means secure**. One of the ways **he attempted to emphasise his legitimacy** was through his promotion of the Divine Right of Kings doctrine. He believed – or chose to believe – that monarchs derived their power from God and he was keen to emphasise this viewpoint. To this end, he delivered a speech to Parliament in 1609 stating that ‘Kings are justly called gods’ and that they are ‘accountable to none by God only.’ James I wanted people to unwaveringly accept that the murder of king – what we call ‘regicide’ – or disloyalty in any form would be considered an act of sacrilege.

**Things to Keep in Mind**

* The play reflects the political and religious concerns of the time
* Shakespeare explores what it means to be both a good and a bad king
* There are moments in the play when Macbeth reflects on the terrible nature of the crimes he has committed
* Macbeth is haunted throughout the play by the enormity his actions

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* James I believed that he was descended from Banquo (the Thane of Lochaber)

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**Witches and Witchcraft**

Witches were viewed very differently during the reign of James I to how they are now in the sense that there was a **widespread belief that they existed** and were harmful. Unfortunate events and personal misfortune were often (wrongly) attributed to witchcraft and thousands of people were put on trial. It’s worth noting that almost all of these people were women, many of whom were old and vulnerable. Indeed, James I felt so strongly about **the threat posed by witches** – who he called the ‘detestable slaves of the Devil’ – that he wrote a book called *Daemonologie* about them. As we read the play, we need to be aware that many of the **ideas and beliefs of James I are reflected** in the ‘witchcraft’ scenes from the play.

**Things to Keep in Mind**

* The witches seem to have a greater influence over Macbeth than Banquo
* Macbeth is strongly influenced by the correlation between the witches’ prophecies and Duncan’s decision to reward him
* The witches are presented as powerful, mysterious figures who occupy a place beyond society and the natural world
* The ‘otherness’ of the witches is signified through their grotesque appearance and distinctive patterns of speech

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**Tragedy**

A ‘classical’ tragic hero has a high status and **a good reputation at the start of the play**, and they have the potential to become even greater. However, despite this, they possess a ‘fatal flaw’ and commit an act that is ultimately **responsible for their downfall** and eventual death. As the play progresses, a tragic hero both suffers and causes other to suffer. Before a tragic hero dies, they usually experience **a moment of insight** that provides an opportunity for reflection and this helps them to gain a new perspective on the consequences of their actions.

**Things to Keep in Mind**

* Macbeth has a high status and good reputation at the beginning of the play
* He is a respected and highly skilled warrior in a world largely defined by ruthlessness and acts of physical violence
* Macbeth’s ‘fatal flaw’ emerges soon after the witches prophecise that he will become king
* He later commits the act that is ultimately responsible for his downfall form of murdering of Duncan
* Macbeth is struck by his increasingly isolation towards the end of the play
* Macbeth is eventually killed by Macduff on the battlefield and denounced as a ‘dead butcher’