



DIVINE RIGHT OF KINGS MACBETH

James I conveniently believed that monarchs derived their power from **God** and he was keen to emphasise this doctrine to those around him.

He wanted people to accept that the murder of king – what we call 'regicide' – or disloyalty in any form was an act of **sacrilege**.

The Divine Right of Kings

England was deeply 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. James I was also a Protestant and those who hoped he would realign England with the Roman Catholic faith became increasingly embittered. The strength of this feeling culminated in an attempt by Catholic conspirators to blow-up the Houses of Parliament in 1605 – something we commonly refer to as the Gunpowder Plot. In short: **the kingship of James I was by no means secure and he made a determined effort to emphasise his legitimacy.**

Questions to Consider

- How does Duncan treat and speak of Macbeth in **A1-S2** and **A1-S4**?
- How does Macbeth feel about the prospect of Duncan's death in **A1-S2**?
- Why does Macbeth feel so conflicted about murdering Duncan in **A1-S7** and **A2-S1**?
- How does Macbeth act in the aftermath of the murder in **A2-S2**?
- How does Macduff react when he discovers that Duncan has been murdered in **A2-S3**?
- What signs are we given that Duncan's death is 'unnatural' in **A2-S4**?
- How is Macbeth's kingship presented in **A3, A4** and **A5**?

Key Points

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