

~ Macbeth ~

Historical Background

- Elizabeth I of England was dying childless.
- She named James VI of Scotland as successor, and he became James I of England.
- In 1606, James was at Hampton Court (*a palace near London*) where he entertained his cousin, King Christian of Denmark.
- *Macbeth* was performed for them; it was the story of James I's ancestors, Banquo and Fleance, through whom he had inherited the throne.
- The play is based on *The History of Scotland* by Raphael Holinshed.
- Shakespeare had made many changes from history to the play - in reality, Banquo had joined with Macbeth in the killing of Duncan.
 - Shakespeare's Banquo is innocent.
- It would have been rather tactless to mention to James that he was descended from regicide (*killing of the king*).

Levels of Interpretation

Moral Lesson

- Macbeth murders his king.
- In Shakespeare's time, the murder of a king was the greatest possible crime.
- The king was appointed by God (*Divine Right*).
- Macbeth gains the crown but loses love, friendship and respect.
- Macbeth's crime is rightly punished.

Entertainment

- Royal entertainment.
- Suspense and excitement.
- Murder story.
- Crime does not pay.

Study of Human Nature

- Effects of uncontrollable ambition on a man who, except for his ambition, is noble in nature.
- He has full knowledge of right and wrong.
- Macbeth knows he has committed a great crime by murdering Duncan.
- He becomes hardened by his crime.
- He suffers because of his fears and insecurities.