



Gender Politics in Macbeth

By Katharina Herrmann

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Seminar paper from the year 2008 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Literature, grade: 1, University of Heidelberg (Anglistisches Seminar), course: Shakespeare's Tragedies - Hamlet, Macbeth and King Lear, language: English, abstract: Renaissance tragedy does to a large extent deal with common political, religious and social questions of the time. In most cases, authors use tragedy as the place to question and even criticize those issues, and thus use it as a political space. In Jacobean England, society was profoundly hierarchical with the king on top of the state, and the father or husband as head of the family. "[W]omen were clearly socially subordinate, and the preponderance of discourse on the gender hierarchy was misogynistic". Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's late tragedies, written in 1606, and presented at the Globe Theatre later that year. In Shakespeare's plays sex and gender are crucial for defining human identity and political power. In the course of this essay, I will first take a closer look at gender ideology in the English Renaissance and in Renaissance tragedy and see how society justified the social subordination of women, and what kind of behaviour was considered appropriate for women. As Macbeth is a play that hugely builds on gender stereotyping, I will afterwards work out the play's definition of masculinity and femininity in the medieval social context the tragedy is set in, and subsequently analyse the characters of the three witches and king Duncan regarding their hermaphroditism and androgyny, and see whether the blurring of fixed gender roles might be interpreted as an indication that gender politics in Macbeth are unusual for the medieval Scottish context. The main part of this essay will be dedicated to the Macbeths, two strongly individualized characters. I will examine the characters of Lady Macbeth and Macbeth first, take a look at how their ambition leads to their downfall and afterwards discuss whether it i

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