

## Macbeth in Context

- 1599** King James VI of Scotland publishes a book called *Daemonologie* in which he discusses and condemns witchcraft which he describes as 'the enlarging of Satan's tyranny and crossing of the propagation of the kingdom of Christ'.

*'And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,  
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,  
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's  
In deepest consequence'* (Act 1, Scene 3)

- 1603** King James VI of Scotland inherits the English throne, taking the new title of James I of England. He claims descent from Banquo. He has a double or 'twofold' coronation in Scone and Westminster, becoming 'treble' king of Great Britain, Ireland and France.

*'And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass  
Which shows me many more; and some I see  
That twofold balls and treble scepters carry'* (Act 4, Scene 1)



The Lord Chamberlain's Men, with which company Shakespeare is employed, is appointed James' official troupe of players and receives the new title The King's Men. The company is granted red cloth for new capes and is invited to join James' coronation procession.

- 1604** Fierce debates between James and believers in the supremacy of Parliament over the crown.

*'When I shall tread upon the tyrant's head,  
Or wear it on my sword, yet my poor country  
Shall have more vices than it had before,  
More suffer and more sundry ways than ever,  
By him that shall succeed'* (Act 4, Scene 3)

- 1605** An assassination attempt, commonly known as the Gunpowder Plot, on King James was foiled. A group of Catholic conspirators led by Robert Catesby planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament, with James in attendance, using 36 barrels of gunpowder. The conspirators were either shot dead or tried and executed.

*'Alack, I am afraid they have awaked,  
And 'tis not done. The attempt and not the deed  
Confounds us'* (Act 2, Scene 2)

- 1606** A Jesuit priest, Henry Garnet, was put on trial for his knowledge of the Gunpowder Plot. He was accused of equivocating or deceiving using religious arguments and language.

*'Faith, here's an equivocator, that could  
swear in both the scales against either scale,  
who committed treason enough for God's sake,  
yet could not equivocate to heaven'* (Act 2, Scene 3)

Shakespeare writes the tragedy of *Macbeth*.

