

The role of Malcolm within the play Macbeth

Duncan names Malcolm Prince of Cumberland and heir to the throne. It is clear from this appointment that Duncan believes that Malcolm possesses the qualities of a king.

Malcolm proves to be a shrewd character, immediately suspecting Macbeth, seeing through his false display of grief "to show an unfelt sorrow is an office which the false man does easy". Later he refuses to trust Macduff before first testing this loyalty. He points out that Macduff was a friend of Macbeth and that he has not been harmed in any way yet... "you have loved him well, he hath not touched you yet". Malcolm's claim that he would be an even greater tyrant than Macbeth provokes such a genuinely anguished response from Macduff that Malcolm is left with no doubts about his loyalty or trustworthiness.

Malcolm is a capable leader. He urges Macduff to convert his grief to anger, and to "blunt not the heart", but "engage it". He leads the counter-action against Macbeth, confidently asserting that God is on the side of the forces of good and the time is right to bring an end to Macbeth's tyranny. "Macbeth is ripe for shaking, and the powers above put on their instruments. Receive what cheer you may: the night is long that never finds the day". Malcolm displays his tactical cleverness when he orders his men to carry a branch in front of them as they approach Dunsinane in order to disguise their numbers.

Malcolm's future importance is underlined by the fact that he has the last word in the play. In his closing speech he recalls those forced into exile "by watchful tyranny" and generously rewards

those loyal to him. His use of the planting imagery earlier employed by Duncan suggests that he will follow in his father's footsteps and be a virtuous king. Malcolm's royalty of nature is reflected in his stated intention to rule "by the grace of Grace".