This is an example of a response that attained 25/30 marks. This would be an approximate Grade 7. This response was awarded 4/4 for spelling, punctuation and grammar.

There are 854 words in this response. Spelling errors have been included.



Response 4

During the play ‘Macbeth’, Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a violent character in multiple ways for numerous contrasting purposes. Firstly, violent behaviour is valued highly by his subjects and the king, yet also is violent verbally due to his guilt and his ambition. However, it can be said the most significant way his violent attributes are portrayed are through the encouragement of his wife and the witches, the powerful females in the play.

In the extract, Macbeth is shown to be violent in battle, which is emphasised by the fact that another character is praising his so-called bravery. This is shown in the line ‘brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name’. This is showing that he is praised for his violent valour and might, and exemplifies what it meant to be a man in the 17th century to a modern audience. Contextually in the Jacobean period, men were stereotypically violent and strong, as it was a symbol of their masculinity. They felt that it was their duty to be dominant, and whilst a modern audience may find this an unusual trait to want, men were just trying to adhere to their stereotype. This is also demonstrated in the line ‘with his brandished steel, which smoked with bloody execution’, suggesting that he has killed so many, his sword is steaming and smoking with violence. In addition ‘steel’ is a strong metal, so for Macbeth to have caused it to smoke highlights his violence. The use of the adjective ‘bloody’ also emphasises his violent behaviour. Thirdly, his violence is seen in the line ‘he unseamed him from the nave to th’chaps’ indicating that the action was almost effortless. It additionally suggests that Macbeth killed someone ruthlessly, from head to toe, something again that modern society would not praise, reward or appeal to, especially not with a new title ‘Thane of Cawdor’ later in the act. Shakespeare may have done this to show what was expected of a man in the 17th century and to make the audience feel somewhat sympathy for Macbeth, as he is seen as a victim of society’s expectation.

Later in the play, we see Macbeth become violent verbally as well as physically as a product of his guilt. This can be first seen in the response to his wife’s death and their evergrowing sour relationship. This is exemplified in the line ‘she should have died hereafter’. This merciless insensitive tone indicates how far his mind has disintergrated from the beginning of the play and how guilt leads to violence. This can be contrasted with many things. First with his response and attitudes to his wife at the beginning of the play when it is stated ‘dearest partner of greatness’. This implies an equality in the relationship and how this has been destroyed by the guilt of Macbeth’s violent actions. In addition, it is juxtaposed with Macduff’s response to his wife: ‘But I must also feel it as a man.’ The use of the verb ‘feel’ indicates he is more in touch with his emotions and that not everything breeds violence. Shakespeare may have done this to demonstrate how Macbeth has changed due to violence and the audience may respond by being afraid that people can change so quickly as a product of their violent ambitions.

Furthermore, his violent behaviour towards his former loyals is a result of the encouragement from his wife. This can be seen in the line, ‘do I dear thy Lord/who is too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness’. This shows that she fears his kindness, adhereing to the feeling that men should be mentally violent due to stereotype. The use of the noun ‘milk’ makes the audience picture an image of purity and innocence due to it’s white colour, suggesting that Macbeth is too weak to achieve his ambitions, of being king, in a violent way. This can be why she turns to the supernatural to ‘unsex’ her, to allow for her to take his place and support him, as he is ‘too’ full, putting his kindness in a negative light. This is also seen in the way she emasculates him. This is seen in the line, ‘sweep o’er your rugged looks/Be bright and jovial’, introducing the theme of appearance and reality, as she encouraged him to be something he’s not: positive about the situation. This is also seen in the witches, as he keeps returning to them for knowledge, to quench his dangerous curiousity. This is shown in the phrases ‘But one word more’ and ‘Tell me more’. This suggests he is greedy to feed his violent ambitions and urges making the reader feel unsympathetic towards him. This is unusual for women in the 17th century, as they were expected to be submissive. However, as they couldn’t publicly obtain as much power as a man, they rely on Macbeth’s violence and status.

In conclusion, whilst the exploration of the quality of bravery and the effect of guilt and ambition upon his violent behaviour are extremely significant, the influence of the secretly strong female characters allows the playwright to explore ideas about women in the Jacobean period .