

# Macbeth AND The Dictators of the 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

Or

## How *Macbeth* Rhymes In the Real World ENG3U – Beckett

Tyrant:

- a cruel and oppressive dictator
- in ancient Greece, a ruler who had seized power without legal right to it
- any person who exercises power in a cruel way; "his father was a tyrant"
- A tyrant (from Greek tyrannos) is a usurper of rightful power, possessing absolute power and ruling by tyranny



In his book *Koba the Dread* author Martin Amis compares communist Russia under Joseph Stalin to *Macbeth*. He specifically looks at the passage spoken by Ross as an evocation of a terrorized society:



Alas, poor country!  
Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot  
Be call'd our mother, but our grave; where nothing,  
But who knows nothing, is once seen to smile;  
Where sighs and groans and shrieks that rend the air  
Are made, not mark'd; where violent sorrow seems  
A modern ecstasy; the dead man's knell  
Is there scarce ask'd for who; and good men's lives  
Expire before the flowers in their caps,  
Dying or ere they sicken



Is Macbeth a template for someone like Stalin? While Shakespeare lacked the knowledge of modern society, mass mechanized warfare, and genocide, he very accurately captures the awful spirit of tyranny. The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw its share of tyrants—many of them eerily similar to the mad butcher Macbeth.

Key Questions:

*Does Macbeth's paranoia and bloodlust parallel the brutality of these modern tyrants?*

*Does Shakespeare accurately capture what life is like under a tyranny?*

20<sup>th</sup> Century Tyrants:

**Pol Pot**

**Mengistu Haile Mariam**

**Saddam Hussein**

**Nicolae Ceaușescu**

**Muammar al-Gaddafi**

**Augusto Pinochet**

**Idi Amin**

**Francisco Franco**

**Mao Zedong (Tse-Tung)**

**Fidel Castro**

**Ferdinand Marcos**

**Robert Mugabe**

**Suharto**

**Kim Il Sung**

**Mobutu Sese Seko**

**Slobodan Milosevic**

**Kim Jong Il**

1. Research and analyze one of the dictators.
  - a. You must have three sources (one internet, one book, and one newspaper or magazine)
2. Write a two page double spaced argument discussing whether or not the dictator you chose is Macbeth-like or "Macbethian"
  - a. *This implies that you define what it is to be Macbeth-like*
  - b. *It also means that you must directly compare the text of Macbeth to some research into a dictator*
3. You may write this argument in the form of a dialogue, a letter, a position paper, or a debate.
4. Make this project your own—meaning make it creative and use your own voice when writing.

