

Ambition is often the driving force in one's life. It is supposed to be the motivating factor that drives one towards success. Society also deems ambition a necessary quality of their leader. It can be said that Macbeth exhibits this quality of ambition. He is the strong, valiant warrior who has won in battle and brought victory to Scotland. However, Macbeth's quest to acquire more power-his ambition-ultimately leads to his tragic demise. How can one allow himself to be destroyed by such a thing? Before Duncan's murder, Macbeth questions and second guesses his ambitious tendencies and actions. Despite his anxiety, he succumbs to these tendencies and finds himself in an increasingly precarious situation, with his back against the wall and growing ever closer to his almost inevitable end.

There is no doubt that Macbeth is a noble man. He risked everything he had to protect Scotland from Norway, and single-handedly took down the treacherous Thane of Cawdor.

"Till that Bellona's bridegroom, lapped in proof,

Confronted him with self-comparisons,

Point against point, rebellious arm 'gainst arm,

Curbing his lavish spirit: and, to conclude,

The victory fell on us." (1.2.54-57)

Macbeth was seen as a brave and noble man by all of his peers, and even King Duncan himself. This is why Duncan proclaimed "What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won," (1.2.67) referring to the fact that he named Macbeth to be Thane of Cawdor. One would think that after such accomplishment and high standing that Macbeth would be satisfied with his position. However, this is not the case.

It is obvious that Macbeth has ambition, as most people who are in power do. In fact, ambition is often a necessary quality of people in such high standing as Macbeth is. However, Macbeth's ambition does not just drive him to do great things. It in fact controls him:

"I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only

Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself

And falls on th' other—" (1.7.25-28)

Macbeth clearly realizes that his ambition is too great. It is about to make him do something that he knows is wrong, and is against everything he has supposedly stood for, yet he also knows there is nothing he can do to stop it.

Macbeth second guesses his intent to murder Duncan before he commits the crime:

"We will proceed no further in this business:

He hath honored me of late, and I have bought

golden opinions from all sorts of people." (1.7.31-33)

He realizes that maybe he is just better off in the position he is in right now. Maybe he should wait and acquire his higher standing in a noble way. However, through the persuasion of Lady Macbeth, he commits the murder anyway.

After the murder, one can see a clear shift in Macbeth. It was as if his killing of one man opened the flood gates for a litany of other murders he felt he needed to commit. He orders the killing of Banquo and Fleance, both of whom were once dear to him. It is as if his ambition is blinding him of his wrong-doings. One can look at Macbeth's actions after his murder of Duncan and see that he is clearly headed on a path towards disaster, derived from one source: his ambition.

It is fair to say that Macbeth's actions in the latter parts of the play stem from a sort of madness that has consumed him. It is a madness that has derived from guilt of killing Duncan, paranoia of getting caught, and, most shockingly, a need to protect what he has wrongfully acquired: the throne. His actions are clearly driven by the fact that he wants to keep his place on the throne. Instead of being remorseful of his actions, he is much more worried that he himself will be murdered because of his dastardly deed. This is obviously not the thought process of a noble man, which clearly indicates that Macbeth has lost, to some extent, his sanity.

Through all these things, one can clearly see that Macbeth is headed on a path for disaster; a path started, and forcefully driven, by his ambition. His ambition drove him to kill Duncan so he could acquire the throne. His ambition then drove him to order the murders of Banquo and Fleance. Through that process alone, one could say that Macbeth's ambition did lead to his downfall. However, even more disastrous than the external consequences of his ambition were his internal consequences. Macbeth's ambition was constantly putting him in a struggle between right and wrong. Macbeth finally lost this battle, and succumbed to the evil side of his ambition. Being the successful, proud, and noble warrior that he was, maybe this loss of what was good inside of him was the root of Macbeth's insanity. One will never know, but it can be said that Macbeth's ambition, whether through his actions or through his own internal degradation, did ultimately lead to his demise.