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Evil Ambition

William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* tells the story of a man who is consumed by ambition that brings him greed, guilt, recklessness, and death. Macbeth was once a nobleman who was loved by many for his bravery and determination. However, Macbeth is easily swayed by the promising prophecies of the witches: Macbeth has power dangled in front of his face and takes a risk to chase it. This choice leads him and his wife to find themselves in a chain reaction of guilt and reckless actions that end in both of their deaths. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are both great examples of the corrupting power of ambition because of how their actions become steadily more reckless with their strive for power and fame.

One of the largest themes of this tragedy is ambition; ambition can be used for good or for greed. When the witches tell Macbeth that he will be Thane of Cawdor and eventually King of Scotland, the seed of ambition is planted in his mind. Macbeth becomes guilty when he dreams of becoming king because of his close relationship with King Duncan; however, after talking and planning with Lady Macbeth, Macbeth hesitantly decides to kill Duncan with the intent of having the power for his family. Macbeth shows his uncertainty with this line, "I am settled, and bent up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat." (Shakespeare 1:7:80b-81).

Macbeth knows how evil this deed will be but decides to go through with it anyway.

Consequently, this pushes Macbeth into a deeper need to fulfill the prophecies the witches gave him by planning to kill Banquo and his descendants. Macbeth proves his descent into madness

with his line, “Given to the common enemy of man / To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings.” (Shakespeare 3:1:67-68). Macbeth believes that by killing Duncan, he has given Banquo's sons the throne, which leads Macbeth to employ the murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance so he may secure the throne for himself; this shows the evil ambition that is growing in Macbeth.

When ambition is fueled in the wrong way, a sort of recklessness can ensue. An example of this is when Macbeth decides to return to the witches to seek out more of the prophecies. One of the new prophecies tells Macbeth that he cannot be harmed by a man born of a woman. “Be bloody, bold, and resolute. Laugh to scorn / The power of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth.” (Shakespeare 4:1:87-89). This plants a belief of predetermination into Macbeth, lessening his sense of responsibility for his actions going forward. Additionally, Lady Macbeth is overwhelmed by her guilt and goes mad, which drives her to kill herself. Macbeth hears of this and loses all value of life.

“She should have died hereafter;
 There would have been a time for such a word.
 Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death.” (Shakespeare 5:5:17-23)

This is the peak of Macbeth's corruption; he no longer has a family to fight for; therefore, his reckless actions will increase. We see this during the fight between Macbeth and Macduff when Macbeth learns Macduff was not technically born of a woman but continues to fight him.

“Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane, / And thou, opposed, being of no woman born, / Yet I will try the last.” (Shakespeare 5:7:60-62). Finally, after all of the guilt and the loss of his wife, the corrupt ambition has broken Macbeth into a hollow shell that has no hope to live any longer.

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare portrays ambition as a driving force that leads to destruction. Macbeth’s avid ambition blinds him to what is right and wrong, leading him to commit the murder of Duncan and the betrayal of Banquo. At first, Macbeth hesitates about killing Duncan, but once he begins thinking about the power he could have, his judgment is all the more clouded with the manipulation from Lady Macbeth and the witches’ prophecies.

“Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since
And wakes it now to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time,
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valor
As thou art in desire?” (Shakespeare 1:7:35b-41)

Lady Macbeth questions Macbeth’s manhood and bravery, making him feel as if he needs to prove himself to her. While the humiliation from Lady Macbeth and the witches’ prophecies most definitely fuel his ambition, it is ultimately his own choices and actions that lead to his tragic downfall. This shows that ambition is not inherently destructive, but blinding to those who do not know how to control it.

Macbeth is a captivating story filled with murder, greed, chaos, and grave choices. This story gives a deeper look into how unchecked ambition can corrupt a person. Throughout this

tale, Macbeth and his wife demonstrate how your own ambitious choices can lead to your own tragic demise.