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English

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Ambition in *Macbeth*

In the Shakespearean fictional story *Macbeth* ambition is both good and bad; a force that can control you. Shakespearean literature is based in the 16th and early 17th century, it is known for its powerful stories touching the hearts of readers in its exploration into love, tragedy, and betrayal. The more important characters Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are tested in many aspects: loyalty, goodness, determination, and love. In this story you watch as the characters face challenges and are tested in many ways, one of the main being the battle between ambition and morality. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare portrays ambition as a powerful, yet dangerous force; when left uncontrolled—leads to moral downfall, tragedy, and ultimately Lady Macbeth and Macbeth's death.

Ambition plays a major role in *Macbeth*; it highlights the struggle between want for power and morality. At the beginning of this story you meet Macbeth, a noble warrior in King Duncan's army. As you further explore this character it seems that Macbeth is hungry for power, and thinks the only way to become King—is to kill the King himself. As Macbeth follows through with his immoral murder of King Duncan his ambition increases, wanting for more. Macbeth says this proving the throne is not enough for him

“To be thus is nothing,
But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be feared.” (Shakespeare 3.1.46b-49)

This shows how Macbeth says being king is not enough for him; as his ambition spikes, he explains he needs his position as king to feel secure. Through the rest of this story you find that Macbeth’s want for power increases as he rationalizes his horrible actions and murders.

Because of Macbeth's want for power he makes terrible decisions, which lead to his eventual downfall. The cause of his dreadful fate is his desire for power, because of the witches apparitions he becomes more power-hungry and paranoid. Macbeth reacts to the witch’s apparitions by saying

“Then live, Macduff. What need I fear of thee?
But yet I'll make assurance double sure
And take a bond of fate
— thou shalt not live —
That I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies,
And sleep in spite of thunder.” (Shakespeare 4.1.90-94a)

As you can see from this Macbeth becomes much more paranoid after hearing the witch’s prophecies. What went so wrong was Macbeth’s paranoia and guilt, which caused him to make even worse decisions. One of these decisions being the murder of Banquo, who is said to have an heir to the throne. Macbeth says this as he realizes he does not have a secure spot on the throne

“Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,

And put a barren scepter in my gripe,
Thence To be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding.” (Shakespeare 3.1.59-62).

This shows when Macbeth realizes he does not have a secure spot and thinks he needs to kill Banquo to have full heir. Macbeth in the moment thinks he is doing the right thing but he is really not all of these choices lead to his death.

Lady Macbeth and Macbeth’s eventual downfall is the effect of all of their bad decisions in the story. At first Lady Macbeth seems to be the strong demanding one but as the story goes on she gets upset and guilty. It shows how much this has gotten to her when she says this in her sleep

“Out, damned spot, out, I say. — One, two — why,
then, 'tis time to do't. — Hell is murky. — **Fie**, my
lord, fie, a soldier, and afeard! What need we
fear who knows it, when none can call our power to
account? Yet who would have thought the old man
to have had so much blood in him?” (Shakespeare 5.1.31-36)

This shows when she is sleepwalking and she imagines Duncans blood on her hands and she cant get it off. After this Lady Macbeth’s guilt really gets to her, she then commits suicide by jumping from a window. Macbeth is very upset and says “She should have died hereafter; There would have been a time for such a word. (Shakespeare 5.5.17-18). This shows that Macbeth is saying there was a time and place for this and she shouldnt have done it. Macbeth is then killed in battle by Macduff, “Hail, king, for so thou art. Behold where stands The usurper's cursed head; the time is free” (Shakespeare 5.7.84.85). This is what Macduff says after he kills Macbeth. This proves

the point that Macbeth's ambition and bad decisions only brought Lady Macbeth and his own downfall.

In the end Macbeth and Lady Macbeth both die, and the witch's prophecies only brought false hope and more paranoia. This story shows how you should never put your wants before your morals and what is actually right.