An Unloved King is a Dead King

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In William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth become the king and queen by assassinating King Duncan. However, the kingdom and its subjects dislike the rule of Macbeth, which ultimately leads to Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's downfall by beheading and suicide respectively. One of the first opening lines are said by the three witches, "fair is foul and foul is fair." Foulness and fairness are two conflicting ideals, leading to moral ambiguity. If one were to examine Macbeth's ascent to the throne and descent to death, it becomes clear that that when the witches say that "fair is foul and foul is fair," they mean that what seems to be fair or foul on the surface may be immoral or honest respectively underneath. Numerous reasons can be attribute to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's demise. Three reasons that lead to their descent are Macbeth's poor leadership skills, Lady Macbeth herself, and the three witches' prophecy, all of which feature elements of "fair is foul and fouls is fair."   
 Firstly, one reason that causes Macbeth to be killed is his poor leadership abilities. Macbeth may have ascended to the throne, but his leadership as king draws ire. Macbeth is referred to as a tyrant multiple times. He clearly has a bad reputation. Menienth has a conversation with Caithness where Menienth asks "What does the tyrant [Macbeth]. Caithness. Great Dusinane he strongly fortifies: Some say he's mad; others that lesser hate him," (5.2.12-14). These two people are nobleman of Scotland. Macbeth's leadership has led to him being called a tyrant, a madman, and a hated man. Another quality of Macbeth's poor leadership is his ruthlessness. When Macbeth gets a cryptic tip about Macduff from one of the apparitions of the witches, he reacts upon the tip in the next scene. He says to Lennox, "The castle of Macduff I will surprise, /Seize upon Fife, give to th' edge o' th' sword/ His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls"(4.1.150-152). Macbeth is quick to act on suspicion and even admits to wanting to have innocent people killed. It is already ruthless enough to carry out assassinations, but to admit to wanting to have innocents killed raises Macbeth to another level of ruthlessness. However, this foul act expresses reasonable intentions of Macbeth wanting to keep the throne he worked so hard to acquire and maintain. These traits make Macbeth a poor leader. Poor leaders do not get along with their citizens. If Macbeth was actually liked by ordinary people and the noblemen, he might have had a bigger army to fend off Malcolm and Malcolm might have had less support from noblemen. Hence, Macbeth's poor leadership is a factor in his downfall that contains qualities of a foul act with reasonable intentions underneath.  
 Secondly, Lady Macbeth is another reason for Macbeth and her downfall. Macbeth is having doubts about whether or not he really should kill Duncan to gain the throne. He nearly resolves not to do it, until Lady Macbeth convinces him not to do so. She taunts Macbeth by saying "When you durst do it, then you were a man; And, to be more than what you were, you would Be so much more the man," (1.7.49-51). Lady Macbeth exploits Macbeth's pride in his masculinity to convince him to kill Duncan. If she had not taunted him, Macbeth would have never murdered Duncan. In addition, it is Lady Macbeth who comes up with the plan to murder Duncan. She is the one who drugs the servants and comes up with the plan to frame them. Lady Macbeth has a hand in the murder of Duncan. Macbeth is too scared to murder Duncan by his own volition. If the murder did not happen, then Macbeth would never become king. Lady Macbeth's foul act has good intentions of wanting her husband to be stop being indecisive and to seize the opportunity in front of him. Therefore Lady Macbeth is one of the reasons for a foul act with good intentions causing the downfall of Macbeth and herself.  
 Thirdly, the prophecy told by the three witches is responsible for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's downfall. The three witches are the ones who even put the idea of being king into Macbeth in the first place. The second witch tells Macbeth that he will be Thane of Cawdor, which later establishes the witches as reliable oracles of the future. The third witch tells Macbeth "All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!" (1.3.52). Macbeth would have no ambition of being king were it not for the third witch's statement. It is also the witches who indirectly cause Macbeth to become insane. The third witch states "Thou [Banquo] shalt get kings, though thou be none /So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!" (1.3.69-70). It is the witches' fault that Macbeth now has the idea that Banquo's descendents will become kings after Macbeth instead of Macbeth's descendents. This serves as the motivation for Macbeth sending murders to assassinate Banquo. The murder of Banquo drives Macbeth insane because he murders his own friend. Macbeth later sees an apparition of Banquo at a dinner party with noblemen, which establishes Macbeth as a madman to others. Also, it is the second apparition summoned by the witches that tells Macbeth that "The power of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth," (4.1.80-81). Macbeth believes himself to be invincible because he thinks that there is nobody alive who is not born from a woman. This arrogance which stems from the witches' prophecies backfires on him when he faces off against Macduff. Macduff is not born from a woman in the traditional sense, but was ripped from his mother's womb. Macbeth is caught off guard by this fact and is killed in his fight with Macduff. These warnings are honest warnings, but they cause much death and harm to occur. Thus, Macbeth's downfall can be attributed to the three witches.  
 To conclude, the spiral toward death that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth face is due to Macbeth's poor leadership capabilities, Lady Macbeth's involvement in murdering Duncan, and the three witches' prophecies. These factors have an added layer of complexity under the witches' saying of "fair is foul and foul is fair" where seemingly immoral actions or honest actions have a hidden layer of reasonable motivation or intent to cause harm.