

The Dangers of Ambition: Macbeth

Macbeth's ambition throughout Shakespeare's play acts as a cautionary tale. While ambition itself is not an inherently bad feeling, it requires limits as a lack thereof leads to a path of destruction. Even though the work itself acts as a prime example of this, history does the same with many a monarch and leader such as Caesar, Napoleon, or even the infamous Hitler. With strong unbridled ambition comes sacrifice and without limits these ambitions only lead to obsession and destruction as shown in both the play *Macbeth* and history.

Anything in excess is unhealthy, which in Macbeth's case was his ambition. Ambition is a very tricky concept, while not inherently a bad trait, it demonstrates a strong correlation to greed and desire. Therefore, to be ruled by one's ambition is to be ruled by one's greed and desires. This is especially true for Macbeth, as the three hags and Circe plot to make the former Thane of Cawdor place his ambition above all else. This is demonstrated by Circe who states, "he shall spurn . . . chieftest enemy." (3.5, 30-33) This acts as one of the lesser pivotal moments in the play, but its significance would be the revelation of the witches plan in controlling the fate of Macbeth through influencing his actions. In some ways the witches act like the Three Fates, but also demonstrate similarities to Maniae, the Spirits of Madness in Greek mythology. Overall, one's ambition, albeit a good trait to have, at its roots is self servient. To be drawn into obsession and mania by them is to be ensnared by the roots, thus becoming selfish and greedy, which only leaves behind a path of sacrifice and destruction.

Shakespeare's work, *Macbeth*, shows a clear and concise message about ambition, which echoes the same negatives within history. One such historical figure is Gaius Julius Caesar, who was a Roman general and the first dictator of the Roman Empire. A man of many military accomplishments, Caesar, was born to a prominent Julii Caesares family. While they were not very influential in the political realm,

this changed with Julius's military career in the Gallic wars and the eventual civil war that erupted due to his unprecedented use of his legion along with his unmatched military power. While Caesar eventually won and reshaped the government, many of its issues were left unresolved and his ambition led to his death on the ides of march by the hands of the senate. In many ways this story can correlate to Macbeth as both were renowned warriors with accolades and praise for their great skill and prowess in war. Both sought to claim the power of their country's leadership for their own gain by force. In turn being slain by the very forces they usurped the power from with Macbeth's death by the hands of Macduff working under Malcom(5.8 first page) and Caesar's assassination by the senate. Showing overall, that while Macbeth wasn't the first nor the last to traverse such a path, the history of those who walk it all teach the same lessons by shakespeare on the dangers of ambition.

In conclusion, ambition, while a highly appraised trait to hold, has been both shown by its roots in greed, and the history of those who traverse the path, that without limits and boundaries, ambition becomes selfish and destructive, which must be avoided or exercised with caution, as taught by Shakespeare's work, *Macbeth*.