

Shakespeare's macbeth – ambition

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Throughout William Shakespeare's enticing play, Macbeth, he explores several extremely interesting themes which perfectly correspond to our everyday lives. One of the most applicable of these many themes is the notion that wealth and power, both of which are created by ambition, are not the most important things to life. Furthermore, William Shakespeare even seems to express that aspirations, when taken to their extremities, can lead one to commit horrible acts in order to fulfill their ambitious goals.

In the beginning of act one, Shakespeare portrayed Macbeth as a brave and honorable general who received high praises and admiration from everyone around him.

This praise even included the king of Scotland, King Duncan, who honored Macbeth for his triumphant defeat of the Norwegian rebel, MacDonwald. In scene three of act one, the three weird witches approached Macbeth and prophesied that he was going to become the Thane of Cawdor, and in time, the king of Scotland. At first, the aghast Macbeth scoffed their remarks and didn't believe their outlandish prophecies.

However, soon he would be proved wrong when Ross and Angus arrived to tell him that the king had just named him Thane of Cawdor. This message proves to be one of the most integral events of Shakespeare's Macbeth, and can even be considered the turning point of the novel, despite being so early on in the text. From this point onward, Macbeth will be filled with ambitious thoughts, initially starting with innocent aspirations, yet later, becoming horrible murderous acts.

Throughout act one and two, Macbeth's ambition, greed, and spite gradually increases from a point of heroism to a climax of pure disgust. Immediately upon receiving the word of his newly appointed title of the Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth instantly turned towards malevolent thoughts of murdering the king. "If good, why do I yield to that suggestion whose horrid image doth unfix my hair and make me seated heart knock at my ribs against the use of nature? Present fears are less than horrible imaginings (I. III. 147)." However, Macbeth's ambitions steadily grow with the assistance of his greedy wife, Lady Macbeth. Because of her greed and want for her husband to be king, she prompted him to commit the horrendous act of murder. If Macbeth's prophecy were for him to become Thane of Cawdor and then thane of some other state, would he have committed this murder?

Because these two thane titles are of exactly the same social status, would Macbeth have even thought of murder? Probably not, for this situation has already taken place in the plot so far, and because ambition almost always leads to horrible acts, it can be inferred that if something has already taken place, it will take place again. Banquo, for instance, exemplifies just this. When the witches forecasted that Banquo's sons would be kings, did Banquo become sinister? No, he did not. This is because he himself wasn't going to gain anything, for only his sons were going to become prosperous kings. He had no ambitious goals to set out for, for only his sons would receive the pleasures of a higher social status. Thus, it can also be inferred from this that all humans are naturally selfish and greedy.

The only reason why Macbeth had his ambitious goals and performed these horrible acts was to gain power and wealth. Similarly, Lady Macbeth only had

ambition in order to promote her own well-being, not that of others. It can obviously be seen through analysis of the text that Lady Macbeth doesn't care about Macbeth, but rather, is only using him to get ahead in life. She constantly mocks him and doesn't care about his well-being, as shown by her insult, "and to be more than what you were, you would be so much more the man (1. 7. 56)." If she cared about him, she wouldn't put him through this horrible verbal abuse. Thus, Lady Macbeth is only using Macbeth as a means to get ahead in life, not as a marital companion.

Shakespeare's notion that all humans are naturally ambitious, greedy, and selfish can be similarly seen in a variety of other situations. For example, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock tries to take a pound of Antonio's flesh just because he was a few days late on his debt payment. This shows Shylock's greed, for he still wanted the pound of flesh, even though he would receive the money. The late payment didn't even effect Shylock at all, for he didn't really need the debt to be payed off in such a short amount of time. Furthermore, Shylock didn't care about Antonio's well-being and health, but only his money, thus showing his selfishness.

On the other hand, Antonio can be seen as both greedy and selfish too. For example, his greed can be seen by him taking half of Shylock's gold, and his selfishness can be seen by him not caring about the now jobless and financially broke Shylock. Thus, with these two opposing characters at opposite ends of the spectrum sharing similar qualities exemplifies the notion that all humans hold both greedy and selfish qualities. Intriguingly, because this story, *The Merchant of Venice*, also was written by the same author as *Macbeth*, it further be determined that William Shakespeare is

trying to express this basic aspect of all human nature - that human ambition leads to selfish and greedy desires.