

# Ambition leads to poor choices essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

A Warrior of Freewill In Shakespeare's Macbeth, the constant question of whether Macbeth is a victim of fate or that he chooses his own path looms. Macbeth is not necessarily a play of fate, but rather a tragedy that occurs as a result of uncontrollable greed and ambition by Macbeth and his wife. Macbeth had been given prophecies that came to be true, but also had to make decisions to fulfill them. Macbeth's choices, which are driven by his vaulting ambition, are ultimately responsible for the actions that lead to his fate.

The weird sisters only make suggestions about Macbeth's road to kingship; they do not cast spells to make all their predictions true. Macbeth is responsible for putting power into the hands of Lady Macbeth and letting her influence him. Finally, Macbeth acknowledges his guilt of wrongdoing and is thereby responsible for his actions. Macbeth's ambitions drive him on to follow a plan to acquire the throne as well as secure it. Macbeth is in no way under a spell or curse; he chooses to create a path of evil for himself. The predictions of the witches are only temptations.

The witches try to create chaos by prophesying to Macbeth in order to get him to act. They plant the seed of evil in Macbeth's head that grows to dominate his mind. It is Macbeth who made the choices that determine his fate. He is not forced to kill Duncan nor any of his other victims. The weird sisters never tell Macbeth what to do with these suggestions. Macbeth chose to believe he was cursed by fate. In terms of the fate and magical aspect of the play, solid evidence is missing that says that the witches play a part in any kind of magic or fate altering aspects.

Despite the coincidence of the prophecies coming true, the only spell that Macbeth is under is the illusion he creates from his own decision to follow the persuasive words of the witches. In the opening of the play, the sergeant comments on Macbeth's fate, saying, " And Fortune, on his damned quarry smiling, Show'd like a rebel's whore. But all's too weak; For brave Macbeth - well he deserves that name- Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel, Which smoked with bloody execution"(I. ii. 14-7). The sergeant says here that Macbeth should have died in battle—but he was stronger than his fate.

From the commencement of the play, Macbeth has been introduced as stronger than any fate that would attempt to take hold over him. This implies that all events that happen within the play are because of Macbeth's actions, not his fate. It was Macbeth's free will, with the influence of the witches prophecies that determined his destiny. Macbeth chose to kill Duncan, chose to kill his servants, Banquo, and Macduff's family, and chose to fight to his death. He was not forced to do so; he took each step on the path to his destruction by choice.

Macbeth is initially curious and disbelieving about these deceptive " hags", but he takes their forecasts literally. The witches only make predictions about the future kingship of Macbeth: " All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, that shall be king hereafter! " (I. iii. 50) Macbeth, along with Lady Macbeth, is responsible for making the judgments that lead to the downfall and destruction of Macbeth. The ability for Macbeth to choose his own fate appears as soon as he decides to stop and listen to the witches.

He believes what they say is important when he requests, " Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more" (I. i. 70). His ability to decide the value of the magical qualities of the prophecies is, in essence, the entire proof of his free will. The witches do not actually do anything to make Macbeth kill Duncan. They tempt him, but it is his own ambition that leads him to commit the crime. Although Macbeth's temptation started with the words of witches'; the true cause of his downfall was from his inner struggle, as well as greed and ambition.

Macbeth chooses to follow the path of letting the witches persuade him. Even the witches' prophecies are generally put to make Macbeth choose his own interpretation of what the witches say. For example, the third witch's greeting, " All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter! " (I. i. 70) simply implies that he will be king, not how he will become king. The witch telling Macbeth, a well respected thane, that he is going to become king eventually, is nearly as accurate of a prediction as saying that he will die someday.

Later in the same scene, Ross and Angus meet Macbeth. They tell Macbeth that he is now the Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth then reflects on the predictions and admits that, " Present fears are less than horrible imaginings" (I. vii. 139). Macbeth relates his fear that he may have to take violent action in order to become king, but hopes that it can come about by " chance... without [his] stir"(i. iii. 141-3). Macbeth chooses to allow the witches words influence his life instead of letting things naturally occur. Banquo serves to show how the predictions ere not just destiny and did not control his life. Even when he sees that many are becoming true, he states, " may [the witches] not be my oracles"(III. i. 9). He acknowledges his choice that he will

let events occur and not try to fulfill the prophecies. Macbeth has the option to take this approach. Had he done so, a claim could be made that it was destiny that Macbeth would murder Duncan; however, Macbeth lives on account of the prophecies. Almost immediately after the witches have visited him, Macbeth begins to take their prophecies as reality.

He mulls over the thought of fulfilling the tempting predictions, now that his mind is lustful for power, instead of choosing to remain loyal to the king. Little does he know, Macbeth's ambition to become king will cause him quite a stir. When Malcolm is awarded the title of Scotland, Macbeth makes his steely pivotal resolution to see it as an obstacle or " a step/On which [he] must fall down, or else o'er-leap,/For in [his]way it lies... "(I. iv. 37-9). It was not Macbeth who was destined to become king, but Duncan's son Malcolm.

It was only through Macbeth's decisions and actions that he became king. By murdering Duncan and forcing his heir to flee for safety, Macbeth becomes king. However, this was not his fate but simply Macbeth's ambition taking action on the witches' words. Macbeth " seeks power as an end in itself and sees any means as justified provided it helps him achieve his goal"(Ropp-1). These interpretations lead Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to allow their vaulting ambitions to the death of King Duncan. For the sake of Macbeth's ambition, he is willing to murder his cousin, Duncan.

Macbeth realizes that murdering his king is treacherous, disloyal, perfidious and blasphemous, as every king is set on throne by God; he is driven by his undying aspiration to steal the throne and be king: " I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself /

And falls on th' other. "(I. vii. 25-8) Macbeth does not easily make this decision. In fact, at first he decides against it, but, with the knowledge that he could be king, he can not help himself from considering it. Lady Macbeth is also moved by her avarice to be alongside her husband on the throne. She uses all her strength and intelligence for evil purposes; this confident, arrogant, severe, demanding and controlling woman instills the plan of the murder of Duncan to Macbeth: " We fail? / But screw your courage to the sticking place / And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep. "(I. vii. 60-2). After persistent persuasion from Lady Macbeth, she and Macbeth finally make their decision. Lady Macbeth will load Duncan's attendants with liquor, and then, on Lady Macbeth's signal, Macbeth will creep into Duncan's chamber and slay him with his servant's weapons.

This act surges Macbeth forward on the direct path to his destruction. After killing Duncan, Macbeth acknowledges, " To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" [II. ii. 73]. This line sets the tone for the remainder of the tragedy. He is his deed in his own eyes, and in his own eyes his deed is appalling. Afterwards, when Duncan is discovered dead, Macbeth kills again when he murders the servants who were guarding Duncan. Claiming he acted in rage, Macbeth kills the servants so that they cannot bear witness against him. Macbeth's greed has taken control of him and he can not turn back.

It only took the one idea embedded into Macbeth's head to lead him toward corruption. Macbeth continues to follow this path of corruption by hiring three murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance. He views the witch's prophecy of Banquo being the father of kings as a threat to his throne. Immediately

before the murder of Banquo, Macbeth mutters these lines “ Come seeling night, Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day; And with thy bloody and invisible hand Cancel and tear to pieces the great bond Which keeps me pale”(III, ii, 46-50). He willfully summons the night to protect him and knowingly breaks his bond with god.

He does this to succeed in his ambition. In the second instance Macbeth meets the witches; he seeks them out of his own accord. His ambition to remain in power leads Macbeth to make the decision to find the witches. He makes the choice to assure all is well within his future. Macbeth goes to seek the witches in a dark cave and “ conjures” the witches “ by which [they] profess” to “ answer [him]... even till destruction sicken; answer [him] to what [he] ask [the witches]”(IV. i. 50-61). Regardless of the consequences of the answers to his questions, he chooses to have his future told.

They present him with three apparitions. The first apparition appears as an armed head that says, “ Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! beware Macduff; / Beware the thane of Fife”(IV. i. 69-71) The second apparition is a bloody child that tells Macbeth, “ Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn / The power of man, for none born of woman / Shall harm Macbeth. “(IV. i. 78-81) Finally the third apparition, in the form of a child with a crown on his head, holding a tree, tells Macbeth that he “ Shall never vanquished be until Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him. (VI. i. 92-3)Macbeth now feels assured that he cannot be killed because he assumes that all people are born of a woman, and it is impossible for a forest to move. Even at this point, Macbeth still has a choice of whether or not to believe the witches. The weird sisters have not put any spell on him; they have just filled

<https://assignbuster.com/ambition-leads-to-poor-choices-essay/>

his greedy mind with a sense of security and power for kingship. He could never have guessed that the apparitions meant that Macduff did not have a natural birth and that the English would use trees as camouflage.

This false confidence Macbeth is given is extremely important to allow him to make his final decisions that result in his defeat. The actions which have morphed Macbeth into the tyrannical king causes Macduff to rebel against him, causes Malcom to assert the justice of his title and gives reason for the English king, Edward, to take arms against Macbeth. The apparitions made an effect on Macbeth and he acts foolishly because of them. When he is told that Macduff has fled to England, Macbeth, in fury, orders his family murdered. This only strengthens Macduff's desire to confront and kill Macbeth.

When Macbeth finally realizes that he has been deceived by the witches his overconfidence turns into arrogance. A messenger reports to Macbeth that it appears that Birnam Wood is moving toward Dunsinane, as the apparitions had warned Macbeth it would. But Macbeth now is too determined to fight than to retreat, so he orders his soldiers to attack. On the battlefield he feels trapped. At the same time however, he clings to the prophesy that he cannot be killed by anyone born of a woman. When Macbeth is finally confronted by Macduff, Macduff explains that he was delivered by caesarian section, “untimely ripp'd” (V. viii. 16) and thus, technically, not born. Now Macbeth fully understands the deception of the witches and realizes that he destined to die here. But when he is given the chance to live he does not take it, he would rather die than live in shame. By free will, despite knowing that he will probably die, Macbeth, a “rarer monster... the tyrant” (V. viii. 25-7) fights



Macduff, and is slain. Regardless of his belief, Macbeth is no victim of fate or any kind of magic or curse from the witches.

He is the victim of his own interpretation of prophecies as well as the persuasive words of the witches. He forced the prophecies to come true out of his own disintegrating mental state and fear of death from his own friends. Macbeth made his own decisions and chose his own path which brought chaos and evil to everyone, including himself. Lady Macbeth is a woman of terror and is essentially given permission to kill both herself and her husband. From her introduction to the play, she is seen as a callous, indifferent, horrible person.

She is the first person introduced in the play onstage alone, suggesting that she is extremely independent. In response to Macbeth's letter, she questions his character as weak regarding the actions that would need to be taken in order to achieve King of Scotland. She makes the terrifying decision to summon dark spirits to "unsex" her, to "fill [her] with direst cruelty, make thick [her] blood, stop... remorse, take my milk for gall" and for "thick night" to "pall [her] in the dunest smoke of hell" (I. v. 40-51).

She decides to abandon all that she thinks of as weakness: her womanly feelings, compassion, sensitivity, and milk of human kindness. She does all this within a few minutes of receiving Macbeth's letter. It is apparent that she, along with her husband, is fueled by ambition and obsessed with the notion of power. Immediately after Macbeth arrives home, Lady Macbeth notifies Macbeth of her idea to achieve the throne. She persuades him to leave the preparation to her, asking that Macbeth would "put this night's

great business into [her] dispatch” and “ leave the rest to [her]” (I. vi. 7-74). Macbeth’s only reply to this overwhelming energy of Lady Macbeth is, “ we will speak further”(I. vi. 71). Duncan proves to be an obstacle to the throne which rouses determination, but being impatiently pressured forward makes Macbeth recoil. Macbeth decides to allow his wife to take the reigns of Duncan’s murder plot to secure his reign of the throne. It is in Macbeth’s choice to permit Lady Macbeth’s plan of murder that leads to the primary steps of their paranoia; resulting in the murders of potential threats due to the choice to allow ambition to surmount conscience and morals.

In Macbeth, Shakespeare focuses his attention fully upon that of the criminal who is deeply aware of his own criminality, is repulsed by it, but is driven by ambition and external pressures ever further into crime...Macbeth fully admits the validity and worth of the moral laws he violates and judges himself from the same ethical perspectives as their victims...Macbeth is the most internal of Shakespeare’s tragedies and that the protagonist is his own most formidable adversary Macbeth is the most private and internal of Shakespeare’s tragedies, and the tragic suffering that occurs is the torture of the mind that goes on within the hero and heroine...No other Shakespearean hero has so firm and correct sense of self-knowledge, nor so fully developed a concept of the universe and his place in it.

Macbeth has a unique ability to foresee both the practical and the ethical outcome of his actions...The most terrible thing about his tragedy is that he goes to it with his eyes wide open, his vision unclouded, his moral judgment still in perfect working order. He willfully disregards his own best perceptions and intuitions, but he is never rid of them...More than any other

Shakespearean hero, he has a perfectly clear concept of who he is and where he stands—and it is exactly this perception that torments and spiritually destroys him...Macbeth is fully aware of the enormity of his transgressions and he retains his humanity throughout the play because he retains an awareness of the magnitude of his crimes...Macbeth is the most completely internal of all Shakespeare's tragedies.

It presents us with a man who has a clear conception of the universe and his own proper place in it. But, when confronted with the possibility of committing a daring though criminal act, he willfully deceives himself for a short time and embraces an opposite view of the world. In the aftermath of an permanent act, he finds himself irreversibly committed to a world-view in which he does not believe. (McElroy 204-207) Bernard Mc Elroy compares Macbeth to other Shakespearean heroes and concludes that Macbeth is the most self aware tragic hero of all Shakespearean plays. He believes that this self awareness is one of the characteristics of the tragedy: that he is aware of the wrong doing he commits.

Macbeth grows more sinful and overpowered with ambition and greed and does not make any real attempt to change. His conscious is bothered by this. Slowly Macbeth loses grasp of his sanity and self-control. Being consumed with ambition and power, Macbeth lets nothing stand in the way of his reign, because his reign is all that he has left now. In conventionally ambitious men, anticipation of the fruits of crime blunts the sensibilities to the crime itself. But Macbeth is just the opposite of this; he scarcely gives a thought to the spoils that will proceed from the act and keeps his attention

unwaveringly upon the act itself; and his attitude toward the object of his fixation is mixed attraction and repulsion.

His repulsion springs from the deeply moral side of his nature. No other character is so acutely aware of himself as living in the eye of heaven. When he looks into himself and finds there inclinations that are anything but celestial, he is frightened and revolted, and he extends his abhorrence of his own instinct to heaven nature:                    Stars, hide your fires; Let not light see my black and deep desires. The eye wink at the hand. (i. iv. 50-2) Yet on the heels of this can come a reassertion of the impulse to terrible and forbidden action: “ yet let that be / Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see” (i. iv. 52-3).

It is the very fearfulness of the deed that seems to exert the strongest attraction for him, since it calls for a degree of resolution and daring quite beyond the slaying of rebels. For Macbeth, action is self-definition; he is revolted by the act, but tantalized by the possibility of doing exactly that which is most expressly forbidden by all laws, sacred and humane. He dares to kill his king not so much to become king himself as to become the man who dared to do it. (220) McElroy views Macbeth’s ambition to slay the king as an act of forbidden rebellion, though not to acquire the throne. Regardless of the motives, however, Macbeth is determined to murder Duncan, which will result in becoming King of Scotland.

Macbeth’s desperation to maintain stable power with malevolence and deceptiveness is shown further when he becomes so obsessed with the witches prophecies about his friend, Banquo, that he decides to hire three

men to kill him and his son. Also because Macduff does not attend the banquet and flees to England, Macbeth, in anger, decides to have his family murdered. Guilt is defined as “ the fact of having committed an offence; a feeling that you are to blame. ” Because of Macbeth’s decisions fuelled by his ambition, his guilt begins to physically affect him. The fact that he is guilty points to the fact that he is aware of the wrongs that he has done. Had the events that have happened in Macbeth’s life been the fault of fate, he would have no reason to feel guilty, because then he would have had no hand in the decisions of his actions.

The only explanation of Macbeth’s guilty emotions is that he himself is aware that he has been guilty throughout all his conscience acts to acquire the throne. It is not long before Macbeth’s own ruthlessness begins to greatly disturb him. He suffers from troubled sleep/insomnia, nightmares, loss of appetite, insanity, and full blown hallucinations. He states that he hears a voice after slaying Duncan, “ it cried, “ Sleep no more! ” to all the house. “ Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor Shall sleep no more. Macbeth shall sleep no more”(II. ii, 42-4). Macbeth is disturbed of the murder he has committed. His guilt causes him to hear a voice and notifies him that he will not sleep again, for Macbeth has murdered sleep.

Another incident of guilt ridden insanity is just before he is scheduled to kill Duncan, he sees a floating dagger, exclaiming, “ is this a dagger, which I see before me...fatal vision...a dagger of the mind, a false creation...from the heat oppressed brain? ”(II. i. 32-9) The guilt of plotting and carrying out the murder of his cousin, his guest, and his king are too overwhelming for his mind to handle. Another example of this side effect of guilt is when Macbeth

envisions Banquo's ghost at the banquet in his castle and reacts terrified in front of his guests. Later in the play Macbeth confides, " I am in blood / Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more, /

Returning were as tedious as go o'er"(III. v. 136-8) to Lady Macbeth. This remark paints the image of Macbeth swimming in a sea of blood, having proceeded so far that it is easier to continue than to go back. Macbeth has lost hope. With regret, he feels that he is past the point of no return, he has sinned so brutally and severely that he is unable to atone for it. Macbeth's humanity is entrusted in that world-view of ambition-regardless of the horrors to achieve it-he exposed in his first major soliloquy, and, though his most forceful efforts throughout the play have been to expel that vision of himself, he never comes close to doing so. It remains as a vantage point from which he must assess all that he has done, all that he has lost, all that he has become: " I am sick at heart, / When I behold—" [V. iii. 19-20].

The thought is left incomplete, yet clearly what Macbeth beholds through this scene is himself: I have lived long enough. My way of life Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf, And that which should accompany old age, As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have. [V. iii. 22-6] Honour, love, obedience, and troops of friends are the benefits of the restricted, natural, ordered world he has abandoned; in the greedy world he chose to embrace, they should have no value whatsoever. But these values are terribly essential to Macbeth, and only his loss of them has made him realize how important they are. Alfred Harbage has observed that " no voice in literature has sounded with greater sadness"(Harbage 97) than Macbeth's in the above speech.

To have a fervently understood, evidently valid vision of the world, and yet to be cut off from it by one's own actions, to be despised and cursed by all humanity, to have to resist one's own most intensely felt emotions, and to be aware of all this with perfect, unblinking clarity, is certainly the most tormenting visualization of human loneliness that has ever been realized in drama. The degree of his self-awareness is apparent: he chose and comprehends his situation unflinchingly and refuses either to change it. He drains the ingredients of his poisoned chalice to the last bitter dregs. Macbeth's ambitions drive him on to follow a plan to acquire the throne as well as secure it. Macbeth's choices which are driven by his vaulting ambition is ultimately responsible for the actions that lead to his fate.

Macbeth chose to make himself believe that what is "fair is foul, and foul is fair"(I. i. 1) for a moment and put himself in a position only more violence could rectify. Wyatt Ropp wrote that "Once we accept the cultural limitations imposed on our thought and behavior, once we believe that the limits of the permissible are the extent of the possible, then we happily police ourselves"(Ropp-2). Macbeth chose to reject his cultural limitations of not becoming king and instead overstepped his limits, which lead to his death. The weird sisters only make suggestions about Macbeth's road to kingship; they do not cast spells to make true all their predictions. Macbeth is responsible for putting power into the hands of Lady Macbeth and letting her influence him.