

The corruption of humans caused by ambition in the tragedy of macbeth, a play by ...

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Power has the ability to destroy one's nature, thus making one capable of doing things that they usually wouldn't intend on doing. The main theme that is revealed in *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, written by William Shakespeare, is that humans are corrupted by unchecked ambition. Unchecked ambition is an uncontrollable drive for power or success and can be classified as the greed for more than what one already has. The corruption of unchecked ambition that is illustrated throughout the entire play is most evidently shown through the character of Macbeth. Macbeth is first demonstrated as a courageous Scottish noble, who is not naturally exposed to committing evil deeds, yet he deeply desires power and advancement. After his first encounter with the three witches, Macbeth is determined to do whatever it takes in order to make his prophecies come true along with the push from Lady Macbeth. Throughout the play, he progresses from a noble gentleman to a tyrant, through the killing of Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff's family. Through the course of his actions, Macbeth gradually progresses towards his tragic downfall.

In Act 1, Macbeth is first introduced as a noble respected general, a devoted husband, and a loyal subject of the king. Macbeth is first mentioned by the wounded Captain, as he updates the king on the Scott's battle with the Irish invaders, who were led by the traitor Macdonwald. The captain tells the king that Macbeth fought with great courage and violence, and that he slew the traitorous Macdownald. Macbeth was considered a hero. He was the doer of great deeds, and the possessor of great powers and strength. After the King hears about this good news, Duncan indicates that he is extremely proud of Macbeth's bravery as he states. " O valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman! (1. 2.

24) Duncan's excitement over Macbeth proves that Macbeth was truly viewed as a noble general who will hack his way to victory for his king and country. King Duncan, overjoyed, decides to make Macbeth his new Thane of Cawdor. Later on in the Act, Macbeth has his first encounter with the witches as they grant him his first three prophecies. Up to the point where Macbeth meets the witches, the audience identifies him as an ambitious person through his actions in service to the king. Although he is a courageous Scottish general who is not naturally inclined to commit evil deeds, he deeply desires power and advancement however won't allow himself to think of these evil deeds. In this moment of the play, the witches addressed Macbeth as future king, which lead to Macbeth wanting to become king. He rationalizes with himself the validity of his growing ambition as ' Two truths are told, as happy prologues to the swelling act". (1. 3. 130). In Macbeth's aside, is beginning to consider killing the King, however, he admits to reconsidering his ambition. He declares that the idea of killing Duncan frightens him as he indicates that now that he is Thane of Cawdor, " If good, why do I yield to that suggestion, whose horrid image doth unfix my hair and make my seated heart knock at my ribs, against the use of nature? Present fears are less than horrible imaginings" (1. 3. 138). Macbeth also ponders his duty of loyalty to King Duncan and admits that he should be protecting Duncan instead of committing such a murder. With the temptation of obtaining the crown, Macbeth still shows that he is a man of dignity and noble towards his king. He doesn't want to know himself if he is thinking about these " horrible imaginings", and then states that if fate wants him to be king, perhaps fate will just make it happen, while not having to commit

any murder. His ambition has not yet progressed into greed. Initially Macbeth is said to be “ Brave”, “ Noble” and a “ Worthy Gentlemen” who is willing to puts his life on the line to protect his kingdom, however his desire to become King is greatly influenced by Lady Macbeth, which then leads to Macbeth’s ambition progressing into greed.

In Act 2, Macbeth’s progression into greed is first established by the influence from the witches and Lady Macbeth, and through the plotting of Duncan’s death. Although Macbeth shows his strong desire to be King, he also show’s his noble side by wresting with his conscience. Macbeth being a “ noble gentleman” before the encounter with the witches, is beginning to progress into a man that can be easily manipulated. At first, Macbeth had never considered becoming Thane of Cawdor and the King of Scotland. But with the witches giving him these prophecies, Macbeth is first introduced to the idea of becoming king, which then leads him to wanting to become kill in order to fulfill the prophecies. Rather than accepting the prophecies and allowing fate to happen, Macbeth is determined to know more about how to make these prophecies come true by asking the witches to speak more. He tells the witches, “ stay you imperfect speakers, tell me more” (1. 3. 70). This shows how eager Macbeth is to know more, which shows his desire for power. After Ross delivers the news that the King has granted Macbeth the Cawdor’s title, Macbeth visits the Kings castle where he is thanked for his heroism in the battle. Then, the King announces that his son Malcolm will be the new Prince of Cumberland. Macbeth soon realizes that Malcolm is a threat, and that Malcolm now stands between him and the crown. This is

revealed in Macbeth's aside, as he says, " The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step on which I must fall down, or else o'erleap, for in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires; Let not light see my black and deep desires." By the time Malcolm is proclaimed Prince of Cumberland and heir to the throne of Scotland, Macbeth is willing to push all morality aside. He knows that killing Duncan in order to become king is wrong, which is why he says it's necessary to hide his " black and deep" desires. Here, ambition is portrayed as something dark and ugly. At this point, Macbeth's flaw is beginning to drive him, and that being Thane of Cawdor isn't enough. For the " stars to hide their fires," Macbeth's reveals his dark and deadly intention to kill Duncan. After Lady Macbeth reads the letter from her husband, her thoughts immediately turn to murder. In her mind, Macbeth must take action if he is to become king. However, she indicates that her husband is too kind to do what is necessary to achieve greatness. Lady Macbeth is determined to do whatever it takes to help Macbeth obtain the crown by persuading him to follow through with the murder of Duncan. However, after thinking about all the reasons why they shouldn't kill Duncan, Macbeth declares that he no longer intends on killing Duncan. This shows that Macbeth is still not a corrupted man, and that his ambition has not yet become unchecked. He still honors his King and fears the consequences that will result in the end. However, Lady Macbeth calls him a coward and questions his manhood. She then tells Macbeth her plan on killing Duncan and says that as long as they are bold, they will be successful. Macbeth is astonished at the brilliance and daring of her plan, and agrees to proceed with the murder. Macbeth is so heavily influenced by his ambition, that he loses his original " Nobel" and "

Honest" traits and begins plotting the murder of Duncan. He tells Lady Macbeth that "[he] is settled, and bend up, each corporal agent to this terrible feat" (1. 7. 79). This shows the first stage of the corrupting influence of unchecked ambition that is taking over Macbeth. The fact that he will exert every muscle in his body to commit this crime shows that he has been easily manipulated by Lady Macbeth, and is now on the path to seizing the crown no matter what the circumstances are. Before Lady Macbeth signals that the chamberlains are asleep, Macbeth begins his vision of the dagger. Covered with blood and pointed toward the king's chamber, the dagger represents the bloody course on which Macbeth is about to embark. In addition, Macbeth's vision of the dagger is shown to inform the audience that Macbeth's conscience is bothering him. He is deeply troubled by the fact that he is planning on killing Duncan, which shows that Macbeth hasn't fully progressed into a corrupted man without any pity or remorse. After Macbeth and Lady Macbeth murder Duncan, Macbeth shows a tremendous amount of greed and regret, which proves that Macbeth hasn't fully progressed into a tyrant. Immediately after killing Duncan he says " Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst."(1. 2. 75) which shows he regrets it already. Macbeth's regret over killing Duncan foreshadows the consequences that will follow after Duncan's death and it is with that murder that the greed for power and the lost sense of security lead to Macbeth's progression towards his tragic downfall. At this point in the play, Macbeth's uncontrolled ambition is beginning to take over him. Rather than confessing his role in the murder and allowing Duncan's son to become king, Macbeth is off to Scone to get crowned in order for him to attain the power that he has been wanting from

the beginning. Once Macbeth is King, and realizes that he has power he becomes a person of corruption.

In Act III, Macbeth is now the King of Scotland and shows a tremendous amount of greed and lust for power. With the pressure from his ambition and Lady Macbeth, the murder of Duncan begins to make his rapid changes into a ruthless tyrant with no heart. He shows less and less remorse as the play continues, and begins to commit more sinister crimes by killing his best friend Banquo and murdering Macduff's family. Even though Macbeth has achieved the throne, he realizes that becoming king has made him nervous about his position. He begins a soliloquy which demonstrates how much he cherishes his throne; however he concerns that with Banquo alive, he is not safe. Macbeth worries that "to be thus is nothing;/But to be safely thus: our fears in Banquo/Stick deep." (3. 1. 52-54). Macbeth expresses his concern that he will never be safe until Banquo is gone. This is the climax of the play as well as the height of Macbeth's ambition. At this point, it becomes evident that there is a change in Macbeth's character. He is obsessed with reigning as king, but he does not realize that what he is doing to make himself more powerful is actually leading him to a tragic and fatal downfall. He is greedy, and being king isn't enough for him. He is no longer loyal to his best friend. He is willing to do anything to get rid of Banquo, and prevent his children from stealing his power and receiving the throne. This is very unlike Macbeth because in the beginning of the play, Macbeth was unwilling to kill King Duncan but now he has become a man of action. Macbeth is now willing to do whatever it takes to secure his position and remain in control. Without

any persuasion from Lady Macbeth, Macbeth begins plotting the murder of his close friend Banquo. This reveals that the influence of Macbeth's uncontrolled ambition has now completely taken him over. The influence of ambition on Macbeth to stay as king completely wipes his mind of all his morals and all things that were once important to him. At this point in the play, Macbeth has switched roles with Lady Macbeth. He is confident, and more in control. He plots the murder of Duncan, rather than Lady Macbeth taking over. Once Banquo is killed by the three murders, he admits that there is no turning back. He ruthlessly killed Duncan and his best friend. He reveals that " For [his] own good, all causes shall give away. [He] is in blood stepp'd in so far that, should [he] wade no more." (3. 4. 24). By comparing his heinous actions, Macbeth suggests that once a man commits a murderous act for his own gain, it's impossible to stop. Turning back would be " tedious". Macbeth is willing to do anything to help himself and it will be easier for him to commit any evil deeds. According to Macbeth, he's got to look out for his own interests, thus making him greedy. If someone were there to tell him what he was doing was wrong, Macbeth wouldn't have killed Duncan or Banquo. Instead, his ambitious went unchecked with everyone around him, getting away with it all. The power he gained from his actions pushed him to corruption and is the leading cause to his downfall. Before Banquo was murdered, Macbeth was telling Lady Macbeth that " we have scorch'd the snake, not kill'd it:/She'll close and be herself" (3. 2. 13-14). Macbeth is referring that there is still a job to be done, and that the snake is everything that is against Macbeth. Whatever it is, he is determined to fight it, no matter what the cost. Later on the Act, Macbeth holds a banquet,

celebrating his title as king. However rather than celebrating and having a good time, Macbeth goes insane when he sees Banquo's ghost. He orders Banquo's ghost to "avaunt, and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee." (3. 4. 97). The banquet is simultaneously the high point of Macbeth's reign and the beginning of his downfall. Macbeth's bizarre behavior puzzles and disturbs his subjects, confirming their impression that he is mentally troubled. With no sense of direction and paranoia, Macbeth decides to go see the witches again to learn about his future and who may be plotting against him, now that all of his prophecies have been fulfilled. He resolves to do whatever is necessary to keep his throne, declaring: "I am in blood / Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er" (3. 4. 135-137). Macbeth, greedy and ruthless, will not accept anyone that could harm him and take the throne. The witches tell him "...The pow'r of man, for none of woman born shall harm Macbeth.. Macbeth shall never vanquished, until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him" (4: 1ll. 80-81, 92-93). Macbeth finds reassurance with these prophecies that he misinterprets, and believes that he will hold his reign as king for as long as the future can take him. The witches also warn him of Macduff. At that moment, Macbeth sends the three murderers to murder Macduff, but when they get there, Macduff had already fled to England. The murderers kill Lady Macduff and their children and seize Macduffs castle, and because Macbeth no longer has much of a conscience and cannot distinguish between right and wrong anymore. This is a new low for Macbeth, now having killed his best friend, and a woman with children, remorselessly. His evil makes him ruthless, arrogant, and paranoid which are

the flaws that lead to his downfall. His evil and overconfidence makes him reckless which once again leads to his death.

In Act IV and V, Macbeth has reached the point of his downfall. He is a person of greed, power, and corruption. Rather than fate playing its role in Macbeth's prophecies, he fulfilled them by lying, killing, and getting away with it. Macbeth has lost his once noble and honest path, and everything and everyone that he has ever cared for. Lured into a false sense of security by the final prophecies of the witches, he gives way to boastfulness and a kind of self-destructive arrogance. The witches told Macbeth that "no man that's born of woman" can harm Macbeth. With this prophecy, Macbeth is determined to fulfil any duty that involves him remaining as king, without the any fear of him being destroyed by anyone. Macbeth gains a tremendous amount of confidence that throughout the act, his confidence increases. Macbeth is so overconfident that he will allow any enemy to approach the castle and begin a siege, without the fear of him being destroyed. Because of the visions Macbeth received, Macbeth's pride and ambition overcomes him, and he feels no need to prepare for battle against Malcolm and his soldiers. This leads him to his downfall as he is not prepared at all to deal with such a huge army. Because Macbeth believed he was invincible, he would eventually be killed by Macduff. Towards the end of the play, Macbeth's kingdom has fallen into total disrepair. People think of him as a bad leader and a tyrant and that he is destroying Scotland and its people. Macbeth is so caught up in the idea of having power and acting violently, that he has forgotten the purpose of being a king. He has more savagely descended into

the same level of evilness as the witches. Also, he is at the point where he would prefer the whole world falling into chaos, rather than not having his questions answered by the witches. Before the witches answer his questions, Macbeth says, " Howe'er you come to know it—answer me./ Though you untie the winds and let them fight/ Against the churches, though the yeasty waves/ Confound and swallow navigation up,/ Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down,/ Though castles topple on their warders' heads,/ Though palaces and pyramids do slope/ Their heads to their foundations, though the treasure/ Of nature's germens tumble all together,/ Even till destruction sicken, answer me/ To what I ask you" (4. 1. 50). Through Macbeth's speech, it is evident that Macbeth has lost his way in reality. He is speaking as if he is one of the evil witches. He also shows that he has lost all rationally as he thinks of their words as being more important than the world being destroyed. The influence of ambition on Macbeth to stay as king has completely corrupted him as a person, and everything that he valued and once important to him, no longer was a part of Macbeth. Near the beginning of the play, Lady Macbeth was portrayed as everything that was important to Macbeth and he would do anything to please her. However, when Lady Macbeth dies, Macbeth's only words are " she should of died here after" (5. 5. 17) as he is annoyed at the fact that she died at an inconvenient time. This illustrates how the unchecked ambition that has a corrupting influence upon Macbeth, has turned him against his once noble and gentle path. Once Lady Macbeth is overwhelmed with guilt and turns to suicide, Macbeth's response to the news of his wife's death is just as bleak. The words " to-morrow, and, to-morrow, and to-morrow" (5. 5. 19) suggest that the world

has lost all meaning for him. He says life is a “ tale” “ full of sound and fury” and, ultimately, the story signifies “ nothing” (5. 5. 26-28). In the end, Macbeth sees himself as nothing more than a character in a story that has absolutely no meaning. Macbeth shows neither interest nor care in his wife’s death. He is now so used to his state of madness that he talks about how he has forgotten the feeling of fear. His mind is full of horrible thoughts as he admits, “ I have almost forgotten the taste of fears./the time has been, my sense would have cooled/To hear a night shriek; and my fell of hair/ Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir, /As life were in’t. I have supped full with horrors: /Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts, /Cannot once start me.” (5. 5. 9-15). As perceived, Macbeth is now a very mentally troubled man. Towards the end of the play, Macduff and Macbeth have met and are at the point of fighting for their life. Macbeth, cocky from the idea that he can never be harmed, is determined that he will kill Macduff, and all his fears and threats to his thrones with diminish. However, Macduff points out that he was not of woman born, but rather “ from his mother’s womb / Untimely ripped” (5. 10. 15-16). Macbeth suddenly fears for his life, but declares that he will not surrender. Finally, Macbeth is killed by Macduff, and Malcolm is crowned king.

Throughout the entire play, Macbeth progresses significantly as a person. He is first introduced as a noble subject, worthy gentlemen, and a courageous soldier that will go all his way to protect his country and kingdom. However, with his encounter with the witches, the idea of becoming king is first embodied in his mind. At first, Macbeth wrestled with his conscience to the

point where he dismissed the thought of killing the king, which illustrated that he was still a man with honesty. However, with the influence from Lady Macbeth, Macbeth was pressured into committing his first violent act in order to receive the power and advancement that he has been seeking since the introduction of the prophecies. Rather than accepting the prophecies and allowing fate to happen, Macbeth's ambition to be king alights, as he is determined to know more about how to make these prophecies come true by asking the witches to speak more. Following his desire for power, Macbeth's tragic flaw greed, is at its first stage of driving Macbeth. He murders Duncan, and then stewes in guilt and paranoia. Once Macbeth is crowned as king and is aware of his power, he realizes that the power he attains isn't enough. His greed for more power and control was driving him and that's when it comes unchecked. He switched roles with Lady Macbeth, and began plotting the murder of his friend Banquo because he viewed him as a threat to his throne, and he feared that his children will heir the throne. Macbeth murdered Banquo, and then soon after progressed into a man of insanity. This brings the theme of corrupting power of unchecked ambition. Macbeth only thought of what he desires and achieved his aspirations through the use of power and violence. He is the personification of greed and evil. He kills the king and takes the throne. He did not stop there but he continued to murder other characters to protect himself from being discovered. Macbeth begins to hallucinate and see Banquo's ghost, illustrating his descend to his downfall. As the play continues, Macbeth progresses into a man of corruption with no remorse. After his second encounter with the witches, Macbeth discovers that he must fear Macduff, and that he cannot be harmed by anyone born

from a woman. Soon after, Macbeth murders Macduff's family, evidently proving that he has progressed into a tyrant. Towards the end of the play, Macbeth becomes overconfident and arrogant once he misinterprets the witches' prophecies, thinking that he cannot be harmed by anyone. At that point in the play, Macbeth has lost all his moral senses, and way in reality. Soon after he discovers the death of his wife, he shows neither concern nor distress. He simply says that she would have died the day after. Finally, overconfident Macbeth learns that Macduff was not born naturally from his mother. Macbeth then realizes that he is doomed however refuses to surrender. Macbeth is defeated, killed, and then Malcolm takes the throne. Overall, the theme that is evident throughout the entire play is that humans are corrupted by unchecked ambition. Macbeth's ambition to become king, lead him to his uncontrollable greed for power. The power he attains, allows him to commit any evil deed in order for him to obtain the crown which eventually leads to his tragic downfall.