
The Theme of Ambition in Macbeth, a Play by William Shakespeare

Ambition

With respect to physics, when a building is constructed too high and lacks a robust foundation, it is destined to topple. Such behavior corresponds to humans and their ambition. In the play, "Macbeth," Shakespeare establishes the universal theme that too much ambition can lead to a great fall. He successfully does this by using the motif of Macbeth's decline from being honorable to being evil. Shakespeare ties this element to Macbeth through the actions of others, and like a parasite, it evolves and consumes Macbeth. The master poet uses this motif as a scapegoat and successfully displays Macbeth's tragic flaw of ambition.

Shakespeare manipulates the characters around Macbeth to kindle the flames of his ambition. When Macbeth and Banquo intrude upon the three witches' symposium, the witches tell of the glories Macbeth will be blessed with. They say, "All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!..."(I.iii). Macbeth is befuddled by this comment. He questions the legitimacy of the witches and ignores them. Subsequent to this revelation, Ross confronts Macbeth and says, "he bade me from him, call thee thane of Cawdor..."(I.iii). Macbeth becomes ambivalent. He is perplexed by the witches' accurate prophecy and honored that the king recognizes his achievements. This introduces the first stage of the Shakespeare's motif when Macbeth is in his humble and honorable stage without a hint of corruption.

Macbeth soon progresses into a more corrupt person. Like a cancer evolving to a greater, more detrimental state, Shakespeare's motif advances into its prime. The great Macbeth begins his deterioration when he kills king Duncan and says, "I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?" (II.ii). From this line, one can tell Macbeth is still naïve and pure. When he questions his wife about a noise, it shows he is still sane. The "noise", in fact, is his conscience filling with anxiety for committing a sin that conflict with his morals and duties. However, this simple murder acts a sort of "gateway" sin. It builds Macbeth's tolerance to the crimes he commits and eventually turns him into a notorious fiend. With repeated acts of sin, Macbeth's moral compass points to an evil direction. Macbeth personally says, "I am in blood Step'd in so far that, should I wade no more, Returning were as tedious as go o'er" (III.iv). This monumental quote explains Macbeth's thought that since he has committed so many felonies, it wouldn't make a different to repent or to maintain his streak of crimes. At this point, Macbeth's hands are stained with the blood of others. He becomes an evil scum of the earth, which successfully completes Shakespeare's motif.

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Macbeth's fall from his once honorable stature is Shakespeare's way of depicting the tragic flaw of ambition. The second apparition tells Macbeth, "none of woman born Shall harm Macbeth." (IV.i) Macbeth misinterprets this and believes he is virtually invincible. With the confidence of a god, Macbeth's ambition soars exponentially. He then proceeds to fight against Malcolm, who is backed by the English army. Ultimately, Macbeth kills young Siward without hesitation and is eventually slayed later on. This scene lets Shakespeare show the reader just how corrupt Macbeth had become. His relentless ambition converted him to a darker person and this eventually became the cause of his demise.

Honorable Macbeth was pushed to become evil. He grew cold with desires and it eventually led him to his death. Shakespeare shows how Macbeth changes from being a human to a heartless demon through his crimes. The poet also explains how ambition changed Macbeth into an evil being and finally killed him. This justifies Shakespeare's message of how too much ambition can lead to one's end.

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