

Culminating Writing Task Exemplar Student Response

History is brimming with examples of people who, in a ravenous quest for power, have met their untimely end. Lord John Acton famously quipped: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men." Perhaps, prior to making those astute remarks, Lord Acton had studied *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. The complex characters and their interactions in William Shakespeare's iconic play reveal that corrupting force power can have on man.

In the beginning of the play, the corrupting force of power emerges when Macbeth is transfixed by the prophecies of the weird sisters, dubious fates who delight in meddling in the affairs of man. They tempt Macbeth by calling him by three titles, only one of which he knows to be true. The third witch proclaims, "All hail Macbeth... king hereafter (I.iii.51-53)!" Macbeth is taken aback by their incantations and quickly becomes desperate to know more. Even at the mere mention of a possible kingship, the still-noble Macbeth reveals his susceptibility to power.

As the play unfolds and the plot becomes more complicated, the corrupting force of power is further revealed as Macbeth carries out his murder of King Duncan, hires henchmen to murder his most loyal confidant, Banquo, and savagely murders all of MacDuff's family. First, it is Macbeth's thirst for power, coupled with Lady Macbeth's manipulation of him, that drive the murder of King Duncan. As Banquo becomes suspicious and as Macbeth becomes increasingly troubled by the witches' proclamation that Banquo will be the father of kings, Macbeth convinces himself that Banquo must be killed, proclaiming "For Banquo's issue I have filed my mind [...] the seeds of Banquo kings (III.i.70-75)." Macbeth is paranoid of losing his new-found power to Banquo. This fear is so stout that it drives him to solicit the murder of his most loyal friend. As his morality devolves further, Macbeth senses disloyalty from Macduff, and he resolves to murder MacDuff's entire family. In Act IV, Macbeth says, "But yet I'll make assurance double sure,/ And take a bond of fate: thou shalt not live; (IV.i.94-95)." Even though the prophecy seems to assuage Macbeth's fears of losing power,

he still plans to kill MacDuff, supporting his further descent into corruption and evil- all driven by his thirst for power.

As the play comes to a close, the corrupting force of power is refined by Macbeth's impulsive charge of Macduff and the English forces. As Malcolm and Macduff advance and close in on Dunsinane Hill (Macbeth's fortress) rather than exude patience and hone a strategy, Macbeth rushes to suit up and confront MacDuff. Bolstered by the witches' assurance of his safety but duped by their equivocation, Macbeth meets his fate at the hands of Macduff, who was "from his mother's womb/ Untimely ripped (V.viii.19-20)." Blinded by power, Macbeth makes his last and most grave mistake, resulting in his ultimate demise.

With complex characters and intricate plot details, Shakespeare crystallizes man's susceptibility to the seductiveness of power. Macbeth's descent into moral depravity illustrates how a good man can be transformed by the corrupting force of power.

Shakespeare, William, Barbara A. Mowat, and Paul Werstine. *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. Print.