REFLECTIONS OF INORDINATE AMBITION
IN THE LIFE AND LITERATURE
OF THE RENAISSANCE

REFLECTIONS OF INORDINATE AMBITION IN THE LIFE AND LITERATURE OF THE RENAISSANCE

By

Willia Josephine Ingram

Bachelor of Arts

Ouachita College

Arkadelphia, Arkansas

1930

Submitted to the Department of English

Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

1937

APPROVED:

George H. White
In Charge of Thesis

Alice B. Fraser
Chairman, Department of English

D. G. McIntosh
Dean, Graduate School

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply grateful to Mr. George H. White and Mr. Nat P. Lawrence for their encouragement, helpful suggestions, and constructive criticism which made this thesis possible.

W. J. I.

Preface

The English Renaissance, which brought full harvest during the reign of Elizabeth, was an age of change. It was a time of high aspirations, of prosperity, of large fortunes and benefactions. Whatever a person's status--his birth, profession, religion, or education--he had a better chance to change these and improve his inheritance than his ancestors had.[1] This new opportunity bred daring, initiative, and ambition.

It is with ambition that this thesis is to deal. The purpose of this study is to show that, in this changing period of the Renaissance, ambition was often inordinate; and this inordinacy was reflected in both the life and literature of the period in ostentation, pride or excessive self-esteem, and inordinate desire for sovereignty, honor, high position, or other preferment. The fact that the lives of those people who were immoderate in their ambition ended tragically reflects the attitude of the Renaissance mind toward inordinate ambition.

---

1. William Allan Neilson and Ashley Horace Thorndike, The Facts About Shakespeare, p. 2.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I

Inordinate Ambition in the Life of the Renaissance

This new spirit of change characterizing the Renaissance was seen very early in the Church.[1] The Popes themselves labored to make the government of the Catholic Church monarchial rather than feudal. Their ambition was substantiated by the system of government derived from Roman law, which made possible a pyramid of government with one person at the top supreme over others. The Popes established themselves in the Vatican as Italian princes, with a splendid court and lived in princely ostentation. But this tendency was not limited to the papacy alone, for it manifested itself among the clergy throughout Europe in excessive ambition revealed in their ostentatious mode of living and their immoderate desire for power or high position.

In England, very early in the Renaissance, we find such churchmen in Cardinal Adrian de Costello, papal collector in England, Cardinal Wolsey, and his enemy Polydore Vergil.[2] Cardinal Wolsey seems to be the typical representative of this group, and the fact that his ambition for the papacy was well known is revealed in Shakespeare's portrayal of him in the play Henry VIII (III, ii, 209-229) as Wolsey exclaims:

---

1. J. F. Foakes-Jackson, The Church in the Middle Ages, p.122.
2. Dictionary of National Biography, XLII, p. 328.

"'Tis so!
This paper has undone me! 'Tis the account of
All that world of wealth I have drawn together
For mine own ends; indeed, to gain the popedom
And fee my friends in Rome. O negligience
Fit for a fool to fall by. What cross devil
Made me put this main secret in the packet
I sent the king? Is there no way to cure this?
No new device to beat this from his brains?
I know't will stir him strongly; yet I know
A way; if it take right, in spite of fortune
Will bring me off again. What's this, 'To the Pope!'
The letter, as I live, with all the business
I writ to's Holiness. Nay then, farewell!
I have touch'd the highest point of all my greatness,
I haste now to my setting. I shall fall
Like a bright exhalation in the evening.
And no man see me more.'"

Records of Wolsey's life substantiate this reference by Shakespeare to the Cardinal's ambition. The activity which he showed in organizing and equipping the royal army for the campaign of 1513 won for him a foremost place in the confidence of Henry the Eighth, and the young king lavished dignities on him with a profusion that showed the completeness of his trust.[3] He was given one office after another until finally in 1515, Henry procured from Rome his elevation to the office of Cardinal and raised him to the post of Chancellor, and in 1517 secured his appointment as Legate "a latere" in the realm.[4] Such a legate was entrusted with powers almost as great as those of the Pope himself; all secular and ecclesias-

---

3. John Richard Green, History of the English People, II, p. 106.

4. Ibid., pp. 107, 112.

tical power and honor were in his hand. But Wolsey was not satisfied with this power--he coveted the papacy.[5]

This great figure spent his vast wealth with princely ostentation.[6] His pomp was almost royal. A train of prelates and nobles followed him as he moved; his household was made up of five hundred persons of royal birth, and its chief posts were occupied by barons. Two of the houses he built, Hampton Court and York House, were splendid enough to serve as royal palaces after his fall.

Soon after the Cardinal's death, Cavendish in his Life of Wolsey characterized the churchman in this manner:

> "Here is the end and fall of pride and arrogancy of such men, exalted by fortune to honours and high dignities; for I assure you, in his time of authority and glory he was the haughtiest man in all his proceedings that then lived, having more respect to the worldly honour of his person than he had to his spiritual profession; wherein should be all meekness, humility, and charity; the process whereof I leave to them that be learned and seen in divine laws."[7]

This characteristic was certainly not limited to the Church, for a little later in the sixteenth century Queen Elizabeth and her court typified ambition in the ostentation, the display of the outward signs of position, as

---

5. Ibid., p. 114.

6. Ibid., p. 111.

7. John Calvin Metcalf, The Stream of English Biography, p. 65.

riches, dress, and pomp. The age of chivalry had ended when Elizabeth ascended the throne, but its afterglow still illuminated her reign. The martial pride, the pageantry, the tilts, the tourneys still remained; and the fact that the sovereign was a woman accounted for, as it also enhanced, the chivalrous and romantic sentiment with which her subjects regarded her.[8] The result was gorgeous pageants, and the adulations and devotion of her courtiers. Throughout Elizabeth's reign, she was to the poets the "Cynthia", the "Gloriana", the "fair vestal throned by the west."

This was a new England on which Queen Elizabeth looked. In those years of suspense, preparation, and contest, had risen a generation which included statesmen, soldiers and sailors, various types of adventurers--ambitious men, eager for glory as well as for gain, self-confident as well as self-seeking, ready to plunder the wealth of the Spanish coast and to go shares with the Dutch in appropriating the profits of the trade of the Far East.[9] "The court might be the haunt of speculators, and the scene of a greedy scramble for wealth and positions; favorites might come and go, and the mere courtier who was up one moment might be down the next;" but Lord Cecil, Baron of Burghley,

---

8. Henry Pemberton, Jr., Shakespeare and Sir Walter Raleigh, p. 142.

9. Cambridge History of English Literature, V, p. 384.

whose honors were climaxed in July, 1572 when Elizabeth made him Lord High Treasurer of England, stood firm.[10] He outlived all those who had at one time been his rivals and almost all who had started with him in the race for power and fame.

Of those who pressed forward in the race for honor and wealth, rivals of Burghley and his son, Sir Robert Cecil, among them Walsingham, Leicester, Montjoy, Raleigh, and Bacon, by far the most conspicuous was the Earl of Essex;[11] and so definitely did Francis Bacon's life touch Essex's ambitious plans, that the two must be mentioned together.

In 1599, Elizabeth was sixty-six years old, and had no heir. "Essex, then thirty-two, was her cousin; he was the most popular man in England, he was a brilliant and engaging personality; what other Englishman had a better chance of succeeding her? All he had to do was to secure her 'voice' before she died and the crown was his."[12] Essex was then occupied with his plans of ambition and it became clear to him that Burghley's son, Sir Robert Cecil, was the chief obstacle in his advancement.[13]

---

10. M. St. Clare Byrne, Elizabethan Life in Town and Country, p. 3.
11. Cambridge History of English Literature, V, p. 385.
12. Dover Wilson, The Essential Shakespeare, p. 97.
13. George Brandes, William Shakespeare, p. 252.

Those who hated Cecil cast in their lot with Essex; among them was Francis Bacon. Knowing that the Queen's dissatisfaction with Essex rose chiefly from his desire for military glory and the popularity which follows in its train, knowing too that Essex's enemies at court were always representing this ambition to the queen as a hindrance to the peace with Spain--Bacon, for whom Essex again and again importuned Elizabeth for office, thought it a good move for Essex to display unmistakably his care for the occupations of peace, the acquisition of useful knowledge and other unmilitary advantages in letters which although private were likely to come into Her Majesty's hands.[14]

But Essex, generous and impetuous one minute, moody and suspicious the next, was wax in the hands of intriguers like Cecil, who toward the end of 1598, finding the favorite's power at court and his popularity in the country growing too strong, maneuvered him into demanding for himself the most dangerous post in Elizabeth's service, the Lord-deputyship of Ireland, where he was required to crush the rebellion of Tyrone.[15] He had no sooner been appointed than he realized that he had been trapped and delayed his departure as long as possible. There was every reason to fear that his enemies of the opposite party would avail

---

14. Brandes, op. cit., pp. 252, 253.
15. Dover Wilson, op. cit., p. 97.

themselves of his absence in order to blacken him in the eyes of Elizabeth so that he would never regain her favor.[16]

After a year of delay and failure in Ireland, on August 25, 1599, Essex turned against the Irish, but only to parley and to concede a truce, the advantages of which were all on the side of the Irish.[17] Then, suddenly determined to throw himself upon the queen's mercy, he took horse with a handful of followers and arrived at Nonsuch Palace early on September 28, to burst into Elizabeth's chamber before she was fully dressed.[18] The day after his arrival he found himself a prisoner in the house of the Lord Keeper from which he was only released on June 5, 1600, after making his submission in full council.[19] Here we have a definite example of Bacon's excessive ambition. Wishing to further himself with the queen, he asked to help in the proceedings and was assigned the task of calling Essex to account for his indiscretion in accepting dedication in unbefitting terms of a political pamphlet written by a certain Doctor Hayword.[20] Bacon exceeded his instructions in dwelling on expressions in a letter from Essex to the Lord Keeper in which he had

---

16. Brandes, op. cit., p. 254.
17. Dover Wilson, op. cit., p. 98.
18. Ibid., p. 98.
19. Ibid., p. 98.
20. Brandes, op. cit., p. 257.

spoken of the hardness of the queen's heart. As a result, Essex's sources of income were cut off, and his hope of the queen's relenting was broken. Ambitious as he was, Essex was not likely to remain passive. He was convinced--without reason, as it appears--that his enemies at the court who had deprived him of his wealth, had now laid a plot to deprive him of his life as well. He imagined that Sir Robert Cecil was weaving intrigues to bring about the nomination of the Infanta of Spain as Elizabeth's successor; and in his desperation, he began to nurse the illusion that it was as necessary for the welfare of the state as for himself that he should gain forcible access to the queen and secure the banishment from court of her present advisers.[21] At last on February 8, 1601, aided by Southampton, Essex made a gambler's throw and marched into the city appealing to all to rise in his favor.[22] The whole thing was a miserable failure.

> "To the horror of all decent spirits, Francis Bacon who owed Essex more than any of his other followers appeared in the trial as his chief accuser and architect of his ruin."[23]

When Bacon saw that Essex was incapable of justifying his hopes for advancement he did not hesitate to appear against Essex as one of the prosecuting council; his aim

---

21. Ibid., p. 258.

22. Dover Wilson, op. cit., p. 98.

23. Ibid., p. 98.

was to make himself useful to the party in power and prove his devotion to the queen, who might gratify his ambition by some reward. In spite of Essex's persistent denial that he had aspired to the throne or sought to do the queen any injury, Bacon likened him to a renowned contemporary, also a nobleman and rebel, the Duke of Guise:

> "It was not the company you carried with you but the assistance you hoped for in the city which you trusted unto. The Duke of Guise thrust himself into the streets of Paris on the day of the Barricados in his doublet and hose, attended only with eight gentlemen, and found that help in the city which (thanks be to God) you failed of here. And what followed? The king was forced to put himself into a pilgrim's weeds, and in that disguise to steal away to scape their fury."[24]

Thus Bacon's honor and loyalty were crowded out by his inordinate ambition.

Bacon was not only ambitious in such means of pursuit of preferment for himself but also in his ostentation. He was absorbed to a quite unworthy degree in the pursuit of worldly prosperity. Always deeply in debt, he coveted above everything fine houses, gardens, massive plate, great revenues, and as essential preliminaries, high offices and employments, titles and distinctions.[25] He passed half his life in the character of an office seeker. After Elizabeth's death, Bacon paid assiduous court to James, won his favor, and in January, 1718, gained the

---

24. Brandes, op. cit., pp. 260, 261.

25. Ibid., p. 262.

object of his ambition, the Chancellorship.[26] If it be asked why a mind of such grandeur and comprehensiveness should sacrifice its integrity for ambition, such wealth as office could give and such titles as kings could bestow, we can answer the question only by looking at wealth and titles through Bacon's eyes. Whipple says of him:

> His conscience was weakened by that which gives such splendor and attractiveness to his writings--his imagination . . . . Through his imagination, he saw in external pomp and affluence and high place, something that corresponded to his own inward opulence and aristocracy of intellect; recognized in them the superb and fitting adjuncts and symbols of internal greatness; and investing them with a glory not their own, felt that in them the great Bacon was clothed in outward circumstance.[27]

Alongside these statemen, Burghley, Essex, and Bacon, may be placed another group who typify ambition in their lust for gain, although that gain represents material things alone rather than high offices accompanied by wealth. This group, the Elizabethan sea-dogs, was made up of such courageous men as Raleigh, Drake, Hawkins, Grenville, and the Guilberts.[28] There stood forth among this group of typical representatives of the spirit of adventure and ambition, which pervaded the last

---

26. Edwin P. Whipple, The Literature in the Age of Elizabeth, p. 297.

27. Ibid., p. 301.

28. Walter S. Hinchman and Francis B. Gummere, Lives of Great English Writers, p. 22

years of the Elizabethan age, a man of action who was a man of letters and an intimate of the literary leaders of his time--Sir Walter Raleigh.[29]

> "By the multitude, whom he despised, and by the grave statesmen and showy courtiers with whom he jostled for Elizabeth's favor, he was regarded as an insolent and unprincipled wretch, who feared neither God nor man, and who would not shrink from crime if he could thereby satisfy his ambitious desires."[30]

These charges, frivolous as they may have seemed to those who knew Raleigh, must have had some basis in his character. Looking down as Raleigh did from the height of his genius upon the actions of lesser men, he was too apt to treat them with arrogance and scorn.[31]

It is difficult for anyone of our time to realize the high position held by a "favorite" in the Tudor-Stuart period. To such ones were granted immense power; they were objects of admiration and envied by the entire court, the dispensers of royal favors, and to them the greatest nobles of the land brought their suits. They had their followers, and in many cases o'ertopped the highest officials of the crown. To this position Raleigh was raised by Queen Elizabeth, and it is evident that he would never have reached this height in the age of Elizabeth had he

---

29. Cambridge History of English Literature, V, p. 387.

30. Henry Pemberton, op. cit., p. 76.

31. Ibid., p. 76.

not been exceedingly ambitious.[32] She showered lucrative grants upon him, the wine-licensing patent, the Rangership of Gillingham Forest, the Lieutenancy of Portland Castle, the Governorship of Jersey; he was appointed Lord Warden of the Stanneries, Lieutenant of Cornwall, Vice-Admiral of Cornwall and Devon, and Captain of the Yoemen of the Guard. Elizabeth also bestowed upon him immense estates in Ireland, his fine country seat at Sherbourne, his London palace, Durham House, and much land throughout England.[33] In keeping with this station as favorite he shone in splendid raiment, in costly silver armor, in gems and great pearls.[34]

These promotions were rapid, for this courtier had a mind which, on all occasions, darted at once to the best thing to be done; and, not content with deserving to be advanced, Raleigh outwitted all who intrigued against his advancement.[35] He was also impelled by a feeling that he was the ablest man of the nation and, as a result of this feeling, engaged in those maritime enterprises which are inseparably associated with his name--the attempt to found a colonial empire for England, and to break down the

---

32. Ibid., p. 141.

33. Ibid., p. 142.

34. Ibid., p. 142.

35. Edwin P. Whipple, op. cit., p. 265.

power and humble the pride of Spain.[36]

Raleigh enjoyed no such power during the reign of James I. As long as Elizabeth lived Raleigh was safe, but Cecil took care to poison in advance the mind of her successor with suspicions of Raleigh; and, on James' accession to the throne, Raleigh discovered that he was distrusted and would probably be disgraced.[37] Such an ambitious man was not likely to give up his offices and abdicate his power without a struggle. Since he could hope for no favor, he tried the desperate path of making himself feared by becoming connected with a mysterious plot to raise Arabella Stuart to the throne, trusting in his own shrewdness to avoid the appearance and evidence of treason, and to use the folly of the real conspirator as means of forcing his claims on the attention of James.[38] In this game, however, Cecil proved himself a more astute and unscrupulous politician than Raleigh; the plot was discovered, and Raleigh was tried and finally beheaded for treason.[39]

The defect of Raleigh's character, even when his ends were patriotic and noble, was unscrupulous ambition:

"A flashing impatience with all moral obstacles

---

36. Ibid., p. 266.

37. Ibid., p. 270.

38. Ibid., p. 270.

39. Ibid., p. 270.

> obtruded in the path of his designs. He had a too confident belief in the resources of his wit and courage, and in the infallibility of his insight, foresight, and power of combination, in the unflagging vigor by which he had so often made his will march abreast of his swiftest thought; and in carrying out his projects he sometimes risked his conscience with almost the same joyous recklessness with which he risked his life."[40]

The noblest passage in Raleigh's History of the World, that in which he compares a majestic tree to the power of Rome, has some application to his own splendid rise and terrible fall, and might also be applied to other ambitious courtiers who suffered the same fate as he.

> "'We have left Rome,' he says, 'flourishing in the middle of the field, having rooted up or cut down all that kept it from the eyes and admiration of the world. But after some continuance it shall begin to lose the beauty it had; the storms of ambition shall beat her great boughs and branches one against another; her leaves shall fall off, her limbs wither and a rabble of barbarous nations enter the field and cut her down.'"[41]

---

40. Ibid., p. 277.

41. Ibid., p. 277.

Chapter II

Inordinate Ambition in Renaissance Literature

Having seen the predominance of immoderate ambition in the life of the Renaissance, we may naturally expect to find this characteristic in the literature as well.

Spenser

We find references to ambition in such works of Edmund Spenser as the July Eclogue of The Shepheardes Calender and in Colin Clout's Come Home Again; but ambition is more obvious in the Mother Hubberds Tale, which pictures the rise of the Ape and the Foxe through the three estates--the common people, the Church, and the Court--until they become King and Chief Councillor. Spenser here allegorically expresses inordinate ambition, particularly in the priesthood and in politics.

The fable itself and the ambition involved are much clearer if we understand Spenser's use of allegory in the poem. The duc D'Alencon from France is in England as Elizabeth's suitor (1579-80); and Simier, his master of the wardrobe, a gallant courtier, has apparently entranced the queen, who dubs him "ape" and Alencon "frog", as it is her custom to label her followers with fable-names.[1] Both the court and the people of the country believe that Burghley favors Elizabeth's marriage to the French duke,

---

1. Herbert Ellsworth Cory, Edmund Spenser, p. 197.

who is a Catholic; but Leicester, Spenser's patron, and leader of the Puritan party, is afraid of the match.[2] Therefore, Spenser decides to treat in allegorical fashion this Aesopian court and to show the danger threatening the queen and his patron, the Earl of Leicester; the Mother Hubberds Tale is the result.[3]

At the beginning of the fable, the Foxe, who represents Burghley, and the Ape, who represents Simier, the French gallant,[4] are disappointed courtiers, ambitious to be advanced. The Foxe complains:

> "Thus manie yeares I now have spent and worne,
> In meane regard, and basest fortunes scorne,
> Dooing my countrey service as I might,
> No lesse I dare saie than the prowdest wight;
> And still I hoped to be up advanced,
> For my good parts; but still it hath mischaunced."
> (59-64)

The Ape likewise declares that he has,

> "Wasted much good time,
> Still wayting to preferment up to clime,
> Whiles others alwayes have before me stept."(75-77)

These two rogues decide that since such is their state, and since the world is wide, full of fortunes, strange adventures, and "subject unto change," they will set out together and try to improve their status. Disguised as a soldier and his dog, they meet a simple Husbandman (the

---

2. Ibid., p. 198.

3. Ibid., p. 198.

4. Ibid., p. 199.

Common People) whom they ask for employment. The Ape, suing for his favor, promises:

> "I would be readie, both in deed and word,
> To doo you faithfull service all my dayes." (252-3)

Yet when asked to do labor, he complains of "maymed limbs;" therefore, the Husbandman assigns to them the task of caring for his sheep, which they slaughter. This act gives us a glimpse of what Spenser felt would be the treatment of the people if Burghley and the French gallants held sway in England.[5]

Fearful of the Husbandman, the Ape and Foxe flee, and soon decide to try to advance themselves in a higher order of society as, dressed in gown and cassock, they apply to a priest (the Church) who is somewhat of a hypocrite. His advice, when the Foxe asks how they may obtain a benefice, is:

> "But if thee list unto the court to throng,
> And there to hunt after the hoped pray,
> Then must thou dispose another way:
> For there thou needs must learne to laugh, to lie,
> To face, to forge, to scoffe, to companie,
> To crouch, to please, to be a beetle stock of
> thy great master's will, to scorne, or mock:
> So maist thou chaunce mock out a benefice." (502-9)

So well do they follow his advice that they soon obtain a benefice between them; the Foxe becomes a priest, and the Ape his parish clerk. But so foully do they abuse their office that they again have to flee.

---

5. Ibid., p. 201.

After a short period of adversity, these ambitious rogues meet with a representative of the court, the Mule, who is characteristic in dress of the ostentation practiced at the court,

> " . . . . . all deckt in goodly rich aray,
> With bells and bosses, that full lowdly rung,
> And costly trappings that to ground downe hung."
> (582-4)

To their question of how to first approach the court in order to win favor, the Mule replies that "a good bold face" and "big words with a stately pace" are what they need,

> "For not by that which is, the world now deemeth,
> (As it was wont) but by that same that seemeth."
> (649-50)

Ambitious for preferment, the Ape clothes himself as a gentleman; and with the Foxe as his groom, to the court they go,

> "Where the fond Ape, himself uprearing hy
> Upon his tiptoes, stalketh stately by,
> As if he were some great magnifico,
> And boldlie doth among the boldest go.
> And his man Reynold, with fine counterfesaunce
> Supports his credite and his countenaunce." (663-68)

So ostentatious is the dress of the Ape that people on every side stare at him,

> "For he was clad in strange accoutrements,
> Fashion'd with quaint devises never seene
> In court before, yet there all fashions beene:
> Yet he them in newfangleness did pas." (672-75)

But his proud behavior was even more admired than his dress; they noticed,

> " . . . his lookes loftie, as if he aspyr'd

To dignitie, and sdeign'd the low degree." (678-9)

In this manner, the Ape, representing the French gallants, sought to please the Court.

> "A thousand ways he then could entertaine,
> With all the thriftles games that may be found,"
> (800-1)

such as dice, cards, poetry making, dancing, juggling and magician's tricks. In the meantime his groom, the Foxe, was engaged in financial activities that Spenser might have attributed to Burghley.[6]

> "For he was school'd by kinde in all the skill
> Of close conveyance, and each practise ill
> Of coosinage and cleanly knaverie.
> Which oft maintain'd his masters braverie,
> Besides, he usde another slipprie slight,
> In taking on himselfe, in common sight,
> False personages fit for everie sted,
> With which he thousands cleanly coosined:
> Now like a merchant, merchants to deceave,
> With whom his credite he did often leave
> In gage, for his gay masters hopelesse dett:
> Now like a lawyer, when he land would lett,
> Or sell fee-simples in his masters name
> Which he had never, nor ought like the same:
> Then would be a broker, and draw in
> Both wares and money, by exchange to win." (855-70)

At length, the Foxe is no longer able to hide his Villanies; therefore, he is banished from the court. But now, the Ape, without the Foxe to provide him with new clothes and other needs, cannot keep pace with other ambitious courtiers, who begin to deride him; therefore, he deserts the Court and journeys until he finds his friend.

---

6. Ibid., p. 208.

In their wanderings, the rogues come upon the Lyon, sleeping in the forest, with his crown and scepter lying beside him. The Ape would flee, but the Foxe declares that now is the time for them "ever highly to advance" and at last realize their ambitions. The Foxe argues with his fearful companion in this manner:

> "Who will not venture life a king to be,
> And rather rule and raigne in soveraign see,
> Than dwell in dust inglorious and bace,
> Where none shall name the number of his place?"
> (979-82)

Thus spurred by the ambition of the Foxe, the Ape creeps forward and steals the crown and scepter, but they soon begin to quarrel as to who shall be king,

> "For th' Ape was stryfull and ambicius,
> And the Foxe guilefull and covetous," (1021-22)

and neither of them was willing to have the power divided between them. The Foxe, filled with self-esteem, claims that he is more fit to rule since he has more wisdom and craftiness; then suddenly thinks of a plan whereby he may have the power while the Ape wears the crown. He bargains:

> " . . . . ye shall have both crown and government,
> Upon condition that ye ruled bee
> In all affaires, and counselled by mee;
> And that ye let none other ever drawe
> Your mind from me."

The Ape readily agrees, and arrayed in the crown and Lyon's skin, he returns to the Court with the Foxe as his Chief Councillor, this time to reach the height in unscrupulous and despotic power. After having attained the object of

their ambition, they set out to make themselves secure in their positions of power by first gaining the support of the courtiers, then placing a strong guard at the palace gates and appointing a "Warlike equipage of forreine beasts" for the safeguard of the king's person. Then, while the Foxe craftily uses his power, the Ape begins to tyrannize.

> "No care of justice, no rule of reason,
> No temperance, nor no regard of season,
> Did thenceforth ever enter in his minde,
> But crueltie, the signe of currish kinde,
> And sdeignfull pride, and wilfull arrogaunce;
> Such followes those who fortune doth advaunce."
> (1131-36)

At last, so tyrannical grows this reign, that Jove, looking down upon it, sends Mercury to arouse the sleeping Lyon (either Elizabeth or Leicester).[7]

> "'Arise', said Mercurie, 'thou sluggish beast,
> That here lies senseles, like the corpse deceast,
> The whilote thy kindgom from thy head is rent,
> And thy throne royall with dishonour blent:
> Arise, and doo thy selfe redeeme from shame,
> And be aveng'd on those that breed thy blame.'"
> (1327-32)

Enraged, the Lyon rouses himself and starts toward the palace gates, roaring all the way. Order is soon restored, and he punishes the usurpers by cropping the Ape's ears and tail, stripping the Foxe, and then banishing them.

Thus, we see the end of inordinate ambition according to the Renaissance conception.

---

7. Ibid., p. 210.

Marlowe

Since inordinate ambition, a characteristic of the life of the Renaissance, is reflected in the writings of Spenser, the chief poet of his age, we may reasonably expect to find ambition in the same degree of excess in the most popular form of writing, the drama. Foremost among the dramatists were William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe; therefore, I shall attempt to point out the inordinacy of the ambition which motivates characters in representative plays by these dramatists.

Marlowe gives us more than one type of ambition, for Doctor Faustus is characterized by ambition for boundless knowledge and the power that accompanies it, whereas Tamburlaine embodies ambition for power alone.

Tamburlaine is a gorgeous pageant in ten acts of that sturdy peasant hero's ambitious rise from the soil to the position of emperor and king through victory after victory over decadent nations. He seems the personification of pride and inordinate ambition in his swelling confidence as he says to Thermidas of Persia:

> " . . . . . do but join with me,
> And we will triumph over all the world.
> I hold the fates bound fast in iron chains,
> And with my hand turn fortune's wheel about;
> And sooner shall the sun fall from his sphere
> Than Tamburlaine be slain or overcome."
> (Part I; I, ii, 171-176)

Even Tamburlaine's language, called "bombast" by some, is ambitious in its ostentation, and is characterized by

gross self-esteem. Typical of the many speeches bearing these characteristics are the following:

> "The god of war resigns his room to me,
> Meaning to make me general of the world.
> Jove, viewing me in arms, looks pale and wan,
> Fearing my power should pull him from his throne."
> (Part I; V, ii, 391-394)

> "I'll ride in golden armour like the sun;
> And in my helm a triple plume shall spring,
> Spangled with diamonds, dancing in the air,
> To note me emperor of the threefold world,
> . . . . . .
> Then in my coach, like Saturn's royal son
> Mounted, his shining chariot gilt with fire,
> And drawn with princely eagles through the path
> Paved with bright crystal and enchased with stars,
> When all the gods stand gazing at his pomp,
> So I will ride through Samarcanda streets,
> Until my soul, dissevered from this flesh,
> Shall mount the milk white way, and meet him there.
> (Part II, IV, iv, 115-118, 125-132)

The awfulness of war and murder seem to mean nothing to Tamburlaine for he is thinking only of the crowns that he can win. He revels in the thought of kingship and repeats over and over:

> "Is it not passing great to be a king,
> 'And ride in triumph through Persepolis'?"
> (II, v, 53-54)

His followers, Techelles and Usumcasane, answer that they think it would be glorious and that, in their opinion, to be a king is half to be a god. Thermidas even ventures to express his belief that the joys in heaven could not half compare with kingly joys on earth such as the wearing of a jeweled crown and the exercising of powers of life and death over one's subjects. So strongly do these expressions move Tamburlaine that he decides to take the

Persian crown which he recently helped Cosroe to wrest from his brother Mycetes. The fact that Cosroe made him general-lieutenant of his armies does not satisfy Tamburlaine's thirst for military power; therefore he takes the Persian crown and, on the grounds of mere ambition, excuses himself to Cosroe for having taken the liberty to dethrone him:

> "The thirst of reign and sweetness of a crown,
> That caus'd the eldest son of heavenly Ops
> To thrust his doting father from his chair
> And place himself in the imperial heaven;
> Mov'd me to manage arms against thy state.
> What better precedent than mighty Jove?
> Nature that fram'd us of four elements,
> Warring within our breasts for regiment,
> Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds.
> Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
> The wondrous architecture of the world
> And measure every wand'ring planet's course,
> Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
> And always moving as the restless spheres
> Wills us to wear ourselves and never rest
> Until we reach the ripest fruit of all
> That perfect bliss and sole felicity,
> The sweet fruition of an earthly crown."
> (Part I; III, i, 12-29)

Tamburlaine is the incarnation of the spirit of aspiration, and his swelling confidence seems to hypnotize his friends, and his most bitter enemies feel a fascination for him that they can hardly resist. He trusts no earthly or divine agent; he is his own god and speaks of himself as the "chiefest lamp in all the earth."

Once having tasted of the power of kingship that comes to him after military conquests, he is not content to rest, but wants to go on and on until he has established

a world empire. The kingdoms of Egypt, Arabia, Damascus, Argier, Fez, and Morocous are conquered one after another; but Tamburlaine is not satisfied to rule over and exact tribute from these kingdoms "from Barbary unto the Western Indie." He sweeps on into Asia; and despite the fact that some of the rulers are leagued together for protection, Tamburlaine, met by his tributary kings with their great hosts, declares:

> "Such lavish will I make of Turkish blood,
> That Jove shall send his winged messenger
> To bid me sheathe my sword and leave the field;
> The sun unable to sustain the sight,
> Shall hide his head in Thetis' watery lap
> And leave his steeds to fair Boates' charge;
> For half the world shall perish in this fight."
> (Part II, 165-171)

They press on in this conquest and Natiola, Jerusalem, Trebizond, Soria and Babylon are taken. Tamburlaine continues to revel in his power as he goes about in his chariot drawn by the kings whom he has conquered. He takes pride in the fact that:

> "Where Belus Ninus, and Great Alexander
> Have rode in triumph, triumphs Tamburlaine,
> Whose chariot wheels have burst the Assyrians'
> bones,
> Drawn with these kings on heaps of carcasses.
> Now in the place where fair Semiramis
> Courted by kings and peers of Asia,
> Hath trod the measures, do my soldiers march;
> And in the streets, where brave Assyrian dames
> Have rid in pomp like rich Saturnia,
> With furious words and frowning visages
> My horsemen brandish their unruly blades."
> (Part II, V, i, 69-79)

But Nemesis finally comes to Tamburlaine, as, drunken

with success, he finds that he must yield to a foe stronger than himself. The advance of death is a shock to his aspiring mind and is the only check to his egotism.

Doctor Faustus, another of Marlowe's plays, is the familiar story of the super-talented young man whose flagrant ambition for knowledge, and the power that it would give him, causes him to sell his soul to the devil in order to satisfy this desire. It is this that tempts Faustus; weary of his studies in law, medicine, and divinity which have failed to bring him what he seeks, he turns to necromancy:

> "These metaphysics of magicians
> And necromantic books are heavenly;
> . . . . . .
> O what a world of profit and delight,
> Of power, of honor, of omnipotence
> Is promised to the studious artisan!
> All things that move between the quiet poles
> Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings
> Are but obeyed in their several provinces,
> Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds;
> But his dominion that exceeds in this
> stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man."
> (I, 1, 48-60)

Obsessed with this boundless ambition, Faustus scorns all spiritual values, commits shocking sacrilege, and sets his heart on mere knowledge for its own sake or as a means to wealth; on food, fine clothes, and political or military power:

> "How am I glutted with conceit of this!
> Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,
> Resolve me of all ambiguities,
> Perform what desperate enterprise I will?
> I'll have them fly to India for gold,

Ransack the ocean for Orient pearl,
And search all corners of the new-found world
For pleasant fruits and princely delicates.
I'll have them read me strange philosophy
And tell the secrets of all foreign kings;
I'll have them wall all Germany with brass,
And make swift Rhine circle fair (Wittenberg);
I'll have them fill the public schools with (silk),
Wherewith the students shall be bravely clad;
I'll levey soldiers with the coin they bring,
And chase the Prince of Parma from our land,
And reign sole king of all our provinces;"
(I, 1, 77-93)

Faustus even declares:

"This night I'll conjure though I die therefore."

And once having conjured Mephistophilis, he is so possessed by his ambition that he makes his own bargain with the devil. He promises to surrender his soul in twenty-four years if Satan will allow him to live during that time "in all voluptousness," attended by Mephistophilis who will give him whatever he asks, tell him whatever he demands, and always be obedient to his commands.
(I, iii, 94-101).

He exclaims:

"Had I as many souls as there be stars;
I'd give them all for Mephistophilis.
By him I'll be great empr'or of tho world."
(I, iii, 106-108)

Thus Faustus' ambition reaches its height of excess as he signs with his own blood the deed of gift of body and soul.

Once having gained the power that he thirsts for, he wastes it in many trivial ways; and at last, when the twenty-four years have elapsed, retributive justice comes

to Faustus just as it did to many ambitious courtiers. He attempts to bargain with God but to no avail, for the devils come and carry him away.

Shakespeare

Shakespeare, as well as Marlowe, wrote more than one play reflecting the characteristic of ambition, but Macbeth is the best example of one in which a character is motivated by inordinate ambition.

The first evidence that we have of Macbeth's ambition appears as he, cousin to king Duncan, returns home after a victory over the king of Norway, and is met by the witches who hail him "thane of Glamis," "thane of Cawdor," and "Macbeth that shall be king hereafter!" His reaction is shown as Banquo speaks to him:

> "Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear
> Things that sound so fair?"
> (I, iii, 51-52)

Then Banquo also observes that "he seems rapt withal." To Banquo this prediction of the witches seems no more than curious, but it must be remembered that Macbeth's position in the kingdom as cousin to Duncan is not such as to exclude hope of succession to the throne although that hope is a remote one. To a mind undefended against superstition, this objective presentation of something that may have been in the back of his mind is a temptation that he cannot banish from his thoughts. Almost immediately Angus appears to tell Macbeth, who is already thane

of Glamis, that the king has pronounced him thane of Cawdor; and immediately following this declaration, Macbeth reveals that he is thinking of the kingship as he murmurs to himself:

> "Glamis, and thane of Cawdor
> The greatest is behind.
> . . . . . .
> . . . Two truths are told,
> As happy prologues to the swelling act
> Of the imperial theme . . . .
> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
> Why hath it given me earnest of success
> Commencing in a truth. I'm 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."
> (I, iii, 116-117, 127-137)

Macbeth reveals further that he was thinking of taking the "nearest way" to the throne when he vacillates and declares:

> "If chance will have me king,
> Why chance may crown me,
> Without my stir."
> (I, iii, 142-143)

He had thus resolved to take no steps toward fulfilling the witches' prophecy; but with the proclamation of Malcolm as Prince of Cumberland removing all apparent chance of succession, Macbeth changes his mind and entertains the plan of treason and murder. Thus he commits himself:

> "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;
> The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
> which the eye fears, when it is done, to see."
> (I, iv, 47-53)

This same horrid suggestion presents itself to Lady Macbeth when she receives her husband's letter (I, v), and the letter seems to act on her mind somewhat as the prophecy of the weird sisters has on his. That she fears that her husband, though ambitious, will not be willing to leap over the barriers and make himself king she expresses in soliloquy (I, v, 16-21):

> "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
> What thou art promis'd. Yet I do fear thy nature;
> It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it . . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . . Thus thou must do, if thou have it,
> And that which rather thou dost fear to do
> Than wishest should be undone."

In these last lines she makes clear the fact that Macbeth has no objection to the evil itself, but only fear perhaps of failure or disgrace. Thus conscious of his instability of purpose, and of the fact that her presence is necessary to goad him on to the accomplishment of his promised greatness, Lady Macbeth exclaims:

> "Hie thee hither
> That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
> And chastise with the valor of my tongue
> All that impedes thee from the golden round
> Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
> To have thee crown'd withal."
> (I, v, 26-31)

At this time a messenger enters, bearing the news that

the "King comes here tonight," and so startled is she because of the thing in her mind that she cries out:

"Thou'rt mad to say it!"

At this point Lady Macbeth's ambition for her husband has such mastery over her that she calls upon "spirits that tend on mortal thoughts":

> "unsex me here,
> And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
> Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood;
> Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> The effect and it! (I, vi, 42-48)

Her mastering ambition seems to have overcome, at least for the present, her love for Macbeth; for when she greets him after his return from battle, there is no word of gladness for his safe return; her first word is reference to the prophecy of the witches and to the treason in her mind when Macbeth states that Duncan will remain there until tomorrow:

> "O, never,
> Shall sun that morrow see!" (I, vi, 62)

Lady Macbeth seizes at once on this opportunity, in the form of Duncan's visit, for the accomplishment of all their wished-for greatness. So strong is her will and her presence of mind that only once--when Duncan reminds her of her father as he slept--does she allow weak womanly regrets or affections to shake her from her purpose. The impression which her forceful determination makes on

Macbeth is well described as he exclaims:

> "Bring forth men children only;
> For thy undaunted mettle should compose
> Nothing but males." (I, vii, 72-74)

Macbeth's ambition does not have such mastery over him at this time, and he proves true Lady Macbeth's opinion of his instability. His mind is full of the dangers of treason, as he thinks of the various motives that forbid its execution, and finds himself willing to take his chance of the next world if only he can be guaranteed against penalties of this life.

> "If it were done when't is done, then't were well
> It were done quickly. If the assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With his surcease success, that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
> But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
> We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
> We still have judgement here, that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
> To plague the inventor. This even-handed justice
> Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
> To our own lips." (I, vii, 1-12)

He passes in review the reasons why he should not take Duncan's life--kinship, loyalty, hospitality, pity--and seems to regret that he cannot find more incentives to his villainy. He concludes:

> "I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself
> And falls on other--"
> (I, vii, 25-27)

Macbeth's searching self-examination on their villainous plan results in the thoughts that the deed may attract the general attention of the people since Duncan has

been a good king, and that ambition is apt to defeat its own object for murder is a game in which more than one person can play.

But Lady Macbeth appears, and, through revilings, taunts, and aspersions of cowardice, a thing a man can scarcely endure, particularly from a woman, she drives away those feelings of gratitude, loyalty, and pity. She shows herself a savage creature made so by her ambition, which has become so incontrollable that it is stronger than the greatest of woman's feelings, mother love:

> "I have given suck, and I know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me,
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
> Have done to this." (II, i, 54-59)

In this manner Lady Macbeth holds her husband in the path to which he has committed them; all her energy is brought to bear upon Macbeth's ambition, which had at first been only a desire, then a resolve, and now, spurred by these stinging speeches, becomes a deed. The crime is committed; but when, in his agitation, Macbeth, forgetting the plan of action, brings away the daggers instead of leaving them with the grooms and dares not return, Lady Macbeth, driven by remorseless ambition, wrenches the daggers from his grasp and finishes the act which the "infirm of purpose" had not courage to complete.

When the deed is once done, Macbeth, who shortly before was in hesitation, driven in the course of his

ambition by his wife, now proceeds independently without need of any spurring forward. Macbeth kills the sleeping grooms, seemingly without actual necessity or reasonable motives (III, ii, 112); and Malcolm and Donalbain, charged with parricide, have to seek their safety in flight (II, iv, 26).

Macbeth gains the object to which he aspires, the kingship; and after he has risen to the throne, the woman who has been the "spur" to his ambition retires completely into the background. But this ambition does not cease with the attaining of this end; he must keep that position as sovereign; and all that stand between him and his ambition are cut down. He reasons in this manner:

> "To be thus is nothing
> But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo
> Stick deep; and in his royalty of nature
> Reigns that which would be fear'd.
> . . . . . .
> There is none but he
> Whose being I do fear:"
> (III, i, 47-49, 54-55)

To Macbeth the one thing impossible is to wait; Lady Macbeth can wait for an opportunity to rid themselves of Banquo, but he cannot. Banquo is murdered because of this fear; and an attempt on the life of his son, Fleance, is made because of the happiness which the witches had promised Banquo (III, iii); Macduff's wife and children and all who in any way appear dangerous fall victims to suspicion and revenge. Thus, unscrupulously, Macbeth

heaps crime upon crime in order to make secure his unrightful possession to the throne.

He had said (I, vii, 25-28) that the only reason he had for killing Duncan was "Vaulting ambition which oerleaps itself." That both Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's ambition proves to be "vaulting" is easily seen. Retributive justice comes upon her fitly in madness (V, i), and to Macbeth, first of all, in an old age that receives no honor from others--

> "My way of life
> Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf;
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
> Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honor, breath
> Which the poor hearts would fain deny, and dare not.
> (V, ii, 22-28)

--and then in death.

Conclusion

The English Renaissance was a period of change. It was a time of high aspirations in which a person, regardless of his status, had a chance to improve his fortunes. Ambition was a characteristic of this period, and it was often inordinate.

This inordinacy was seen in the Church in the life of Cardinal Wolsey, who lived in lavish ostentation and aspired to the popedom.

Queen Elizabeth and her court reflected ambition in their dress and the pomp and pageantry which characterized their life. Of all the courtiers who surrounded her and sued for her favor, Essex, Bacon, and Raleigh (all rivals of Burghley, who remained in her favor throughout her reign) were typical courtiers whose ambition is best described by the word, "inordinate". Essex, a lover of honor and military glory, finally attempted a rebellion when he had no chance of being named as Elizabeth's successor as long as Burghley remained her chief adviser. Francis Bacon was ambitious in his self-esteem, his luxuriant manner of living, and his desire for preferment, which he tried to accomplish by loyalty to people only as long as they could justify his hopes for advancement. Raleigh, a sea dog and man of letters, was ambitious in his pride and in his desire for wealth, position and other forms of preferment.

The literature as well as the life of the Renaissance reflected inordinate ambition as a characteristic of the period. Spenser in his Mother Hubberd's Tale pictures the ambitious rise of the Ape and the Foxe through every realm of society until they become king and prime minister. Marlowe gives us dramatic pictures of flagrant ambition in Tamburlaine, characterized by gross self-esteem and the desire to establish a world empire, and in Doctor Faustus, who sold his soul to the devil in order to satisfy his ambition for knowledge and power. Shakespeare, the great dramatist of the age, portrayed the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth so filled with ambition that they remove every obstacle that stands in the way of absolute sovereignty.

It is also interesting to note that the Renaissance attitude toward inordinate ambition was shown in the end that came to each of the characters. The Foxe was stripped, and the Ape's ears and tail were cropped; Faustus was taken away by the devils; Nemesis came to Tamburlaine and Macbeth in death and to Lady Macbeth in madness followed by death. Thus we see the Renaissance idea of ambition as essentially an evil characteristic when it became inordinate. This is the classical idea of the "Golden Mean."

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Complete Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, Student's Cambridge Edition. Houghton Mifflin Co., 1908.

Furness, Horace Howard. Variorum Shakespeare. J. B. Lippincott, 1903.
Macbeth.

Masterpieces of English Drama (Christopher Marlowe). American Book Co., 1912.
Tamburlaine the Great, Part II.

Shakespeare's Complete Works, Student's Cambridge Edition. Houghton Mifflin Co., 1906.
Macbeth.

Spenser, Hazelton. Elizabethan Plays. Little, Brown and Company, 1933.
Tamburlaine the Great, Part I.
The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus.

Secondary Sources:

Brandes, George. William Shakespeare. The Macmillan Co., 1927.

Byrne, M. St. Clare. Elizabethan Life in Town and Country. Houghton Mifflin Co., 1926.

Cory, Herbery Ellsworth. Edmund Spenser. University of California Press, 1917.

Foakes-Jackson, J. F. The Church in the Middle Ages. University Press, Cambridge, 1910.

Green, John Richard. History of the English People, Vol. II. American Publishing Co., 1882.

Hinchman, Walter S. and Gummere, Francis B. Lives of Great English Writers. Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1908.

Lee, Sidney. Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. XLII. The Macmillan Co., 1900.

Metcalf, John Calvin. The Stream of English Biography. Century Press, 1930.

Murray, James A. A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, Vols. I and II. Clarendon Press, 1888 and 1909.

Pemberton, Henry Jr. Shakespeare and Sir Walter Raleigh. J. B. Lippincott Co., 1914.

Ward, A. W. and Waller, A. R. Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. V. University Press, Cambridge.

Whipple, Edwin P. Literature in the Age of Elizabeth. Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1896.

Wilson, Dover. The Essential Shakespeare. The Macmillan Co., 1935.