

Macbeth as Tragic Hero: A Defense and Explanation of Macbeth's Tragic Character

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Julian Markels begins his thoroughly competent essay on *Macbeth* by stating that it “is one of the few masterpieces in English whose protagonist grows in depravity without diminishing our pity for him.”¹ Others, however, make the claim that depravity is the state in which we find Macbeth at the beginning of the play.² This raises a question in respect to the status of the play: is it, indeed, a tale of a man whose destruction renders him worthy of the reader’s pity, or is he a monster

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¹Julian Markels, “The Spectacle of Deterioration: *Macbeth* and the ‘Manner’ of Tragic Imitation,” 293.

²See, for instance, Wolfgang Weilgart’s “Macbeth: Demon and Bourgeois,” as well as its citations.

whose destruction is to be enjoyed?³ In short, is the play a tragedy in the proper sense of the term? Is Macbeth a tragic hero, properly speaking?

In the following, I argue, in conversation with several Shakespearean scholars, that it *is* correct to pity Macbeth in that he is a tragic hero, even to an extent beyond (though, in line with) that of both Aristotle's notion of tragedy and natural reason unaided by grace. To this end, I first establish a proper understanding of the nature of tragedy, particularly its hero. This understanding is based upon the classic Aristotelian model that identifies the catharsis of pity and fear as the heart of tragedy. Next, I examine the character of Macbeth and the nature of his fall. Finally, I distinguish the ways in which Macbeth evokes the tragic emotions of fear and pity.

My argument, in brief, is that Macbeth evokes pity because we see in him a noble man falling due to a flaw in character rather than thorough wickedness *per se*. Moreover, this fall is occasioned by unusual circumstances and fostered by deep evil. The latter point should not only play a part in arousing pity for the protagonist, but also *fear* on the part of the audience; thusly, the play evokes, via its protagonist, a catharsis of fear and pity.

PART I: TRAGEDY AND ITS HERO

Aristotle defines a tragedy as “ἔστιν οὖν τραγωδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχούσης” (“the representation of a weighty and complete doing, having magnitude”)⁴ (1449b24-25) that δῖέλεου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν (arouses “pity and fear” so as to bring about a “catharsis of these emotions”) (1449b27-28). Pity is the emotion one experiences when witnessing “undeserved misery.” Fear can only be experienced insofar as one perceives a “likeness” to himself in the one falling: “οὔτε ἔλεον οὔτε φόβον, ὁ μὲν γὰρ περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιόν ἐστιν δυστυχοῦντα, ὁ δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον” (“[such a composition arouses] neither pity nor fear, the first

³There may be a possible middle to this opposition, but it would only be a middle to the degree it shared in one or another side of the opposition. Macbeth may be something between pitiable or monstrous, but he will have to be closer to one or the other.

⁴ Aristotle, *Aristotle's Ars Poetica*. All translations are my own.

being about one undeserving of misfortune, the latter about one like us [having misfortune]" (1453a4-5). Since no one feels pity when seeing a guilty, depraved man receiving his just deserts, so to speak, the misfortune of a tragedy must not be a result of depravity. Instead, Aristotle argues, the misfortune, or fall, must result from error (1453a14-17). This error must logically proceed from a flaw in character since errant action has to stem from one's character but not necessarily the whole of one's character. Therefore, the tragic hero is one with a flaw or flaws—without being of entirely depraved character—and who is brought low in such a way that evokes pity and fear in the observer.

Aristotle explains tragedy and its hero in such a way because he understands that the only way to feel pity rather than either disgust or horror in someone's misfortune is to perceive that the downfall is both just and yet not wholly deserved. The audience, for example, pities Creon because his overabundant pride would not have caused his misfortune under normal circumstances. Were it not for Antigone's exceptional rudeness and imprudence (not to mention the context of a brutal war started by the vicious Polyneices), Creon may well have peacefully lived out his days while ruling well. His fall may be due to his pride, but not because he is vicious or depraved. *This* is pitiable: a noble man brought to destruction due to character weaknesses that normally would not undo him but which bring him to a terrible terminus when joined with exceptional circumstances. Thusly, the *core* of tragedy and its hero lie before us, for, while Aristotle has more points to make about the accidental qualities of tragedy, this is its center.⁵

Before returning to the primary concern (i.e., Macbeth as tragic hero), I should note that one may distinguish different species of tragedies.⁶ How do these differ? They differ in virtue of the *nature* of the

⁵Julian Markels, in the same article cited above, has more to say on this. He holds correctly that Shakespeare takes a great number of liberties, so to speak, with the *spectacle* of tragedy. Aristotle wants the spectacle to be simpler so as not to distract from the central action; Shakespeare uses a great deal of spectacle to accomplish his ends. While this is the case, it is important to note that this difference is accidental, for Shakespeare does not see himself bound by Aristotle's definition, yet he recognizes the same core to tragic action.

⁶Miguel Bernard also points this out in "The Five Tragedies in *Macbeth*." As the title suggests, he denotes five different sorts and argues that *Macbeth* can be called tragic in each way. Finally, he is arguing more that there are (at least) five distinct ways to consider Macbeth's fall from good into evil (physical, psychological, moral, social, and theological).

fall and in the *way* that the circumstances work on the central action. This will become important because Macbeth's fall is of a graver sort than presented in the classical tragedies. Shakespeare is thus able to move beyond the classical model in a key aspect. He does not violate the classical model, but he does *enrich* it by bringing it into contact with the *Christian* understanding of the world. I examine this point more in Part III.

So, to summarize and clarify, a tragedy is a grave, complete action that inspires fear and pity through the misfortune of the tragic hero. This hero must be neither perfectly virtuous nor vicious. He must also be noble so that the action qualifies as grave. His fall must come from a true *flaw* that manifests itself in his error in judgment. Further, for it to be believable, the circumstances must play a part in bringing the flaw to fruition, so to speak. Finally, there may be different sorts of tragedies, given that there may be different *sorts* of falls and circumstances. Can Macbeth be seen as a tragic hero and *Macbeth* seen as a tragedy in these ways?

PART II: MACBETH'S SOUL

It is easy to grasp why so many people think Macbeth is gravely depraved at the beginning of the play. His first significant on-stage action is to give a guilty "start"⁷. He gives his reason for this guilty feeling by explaining that he is undergoing murderous temptations (1.3.130-140). He then openly declares that if his murder of Duncan were the "be-all and the end-all" of his action, then he would "jump the life to come" (1.7.6). Following this, he throws all of himself into the "terrible feat" (1.7.80.) as soon as his wife urges him to do so. Perhaps most shocking of all, he states outright that he knows he has given his "eternal jewel... to the common enemy of man" (3.1.68) for the sake of gaining the kingship. This last point is highly significant. Charles Moseley takes

While his argument definitely brings these five breakdowns to the surface, it never addresses whether or not these breakdowns are *truly* tragic; he never shows that they fit the classical definition of tragedy as explicated earlier. The falls clearly depress one's spirits, but this does not make them tragic *per se*. So, he is right insofar as he goes, but he thinks he is saying more than he does. I will return to consider one of the types he brings up on Part III.

⁷ Shakespeare, "Macbeth," in *The Plays and Sonnets of William Shakespeare*, 1.3.51, hereafter cited in text.

this passage, along with Macbeth's "jump the life to come" statement, to conclude that Macbeth is fully aware of what he is saying and doing when deciding to murder Duncan.⁸ To be 'fully' aware can mean many things. Moseley means it in a *strict* sense, i.e. that Macbeth *comprehends* the magnitude of what he is doing. If this is so, it is much harder to pity Macbeth. There is something grandly terrible in choosing abysmal evil while comprehending it, yet it is hardly tragic in the senses considered above. We experience pity for those whose sad ending is somehow incongruous with their beginning. The man who wholly sees that he is giving his immortal soul to damnation and who fully *accepts* this damnation as a price to pay for some perceived good is more perverse than he is pitiable. It is hard to call his weakness a flaw so much as a principle of depravity. Indeed, such a man, in Aristotelian terms, is not incontinent; he is fully vicious.

However, there is a key point that Moseley fails to consider. It is possible to have *moments* of clarity in respect to the reality of a situation without these moments *forming* one's thought or action. This is to say that, while one might have an instance or several instances of understanding, one does not necessarily *possess* such understanding as a habitual disposition. Macbeth is such a one. In order to properly grasp this, it must first be comprehended why Macbeth chooses to reject the moral structure forbidding the murder of Duncan.

In a general sense, Macbeth's motivating principle is obvious; he is ambitious. Still, ambition must have some object or end, to which it orients itself. What is the end that Macbeth has in mind? It is too simple to say that he wants the kingship since one may further ask why he wants the kingship. He does not seem to be desirous simply of power over other men, or, at least, there is little to suggest as much. Nor does he

⁸Charles Moseley, "Macbeth's Free Fall," 22-34. I should note that he is trying to prove that Macbeth's fall is freely chosen and not simply *fated*. The problem is that he takes it to extremes. All he actually needs to prove is that Macbeth freely chooses evil; he instead argues that Macbeth *fully* comprehends the evil as he chooses it. In my paper, I am not as focused on the role of fate and its relation to free will. However, if I were to address him directly, I would point out that freedom of the will does not depend *wholly* on the state of our knowledge. Macbeth freely chooses evil, and *knows* that he is doing so. The question is, does this mean he wholly comprehends the nature of the evil? I argue that he does not.

seem to particularly want a life of luxury and pleasure. What, then, does he want?

The first clear insight the audience is offered comes when Macbeth speaks of his ambition as a “Vaulting ambition” which “o’erleaps itself” (1.7.27). It is this sort of ambition that urges him to “jump the life to come.” The kingship is the immediate object of desire, and it is vaulting ambition that “pricks the sides of his intent” (1.7.26-27). Thus, the foundation of Macbeth’s choice to murder Duncan is found in a desire to overleap himself. However, this foundation is not enough since this vaulting ambition “pricks the sides” of his intent without effecting action. The ‘problem’ is that this ambition does not drive out his understanding of the wickedness of his action. Macbeth still sees that “pity” will rouse all against him for committing the “horrid deed,” (1.7.24) the sheer evil of which would “return to plague the inventor” (1.7.10). In other words, though the desire to overleap himself moves him towards evil, it does not overcome his natural prudence, which recognizes the evil for what it is and what its consequences will be. Lady Macbeth understands this aspect of his character when she says, “What thou wouldst highly, / that thou wouldst *holily* [emphasis mine]; wouldst not play false, / yet wouldst wrongly win” (1.5.21-23). Alongside his illegitimate desires, Macbeth also has the desire not to do what he knows is wrong. So, while his ambition to overleap himself is a central part of his character, it is not enough to drive him beyond evil desires for profane action.

In fact, it is Macbeth’s *flawed* understanding of manliness (which is related to his overleaping ambition) that actually does him in. Scotland is obviously a warlike nation, and Macbeth is a consummate warrior. It is his abilities in this arena that thrust him favorably upon our notice at the beginning: “For brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name – / Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel, / Which smoked with bloody execution, / Like valour’s minion carved out his passage” (1.2.16-20). Macbeth is presented to the viewer almost in the visage of a Homeric hero insofar as he strives mightily to make his own fortune as he carves his own way.⁹ One must note that there is a true excellence and goodness

⁹Michael Davis has an interesting take on the same passages I quote here. See his “Courage and Impotence in *Macbeth*.” He wants to say that they provide a view of manliness that continually seeks new obstacles so that it may overcome them. His overarching point is that the society of the time is self-destructive because this conception of manliness *needs*

here. Macbeth stands over and above all the other men in this play in respect to the warlike virtues; however, it is the conception of manliness, out of which he draws these warlike virtues, that his wife uses against him.

When Lady Macbeth is trying to convince him to do the murderous deed, she first impugns his courage. This has no effect since he, along with everybody else in play, knows already that he is courageous. He responds, "I dare do all that may become a man." (1.7.46) Here is the opening into his soul, for which she is searching: "When you durst do it, then you were a man, / And, to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place / Did then adhere and yet you would make both" (1.7.49-51). *Immediately* after hearing this, Macbeth gives in. Macbeth's desire to overleap himself is not in itself enough, but this desire gains the upper hand on his prudence as soon as he thinks that he will not be making his own fortune if he does not act for the throne. This reading of Macbeth's view of manliness gains force when one examines the scene wherein Macbeth employs the murderers to kill Banquo. He asks them, is "Your patience so predominant...? Are you so gossell'd / To pray for this good man... / Whose heavy hand hath bowed you to the grave / And beggar'd yours forever?" (3.1.86-91). They reply, "We are men, my liege," and then 'prove' their manliness by showing their desire to "mend" their "fortune." (3.1.112) A man, in this view, makes and mends his fortune, thereby raising himself above his condition *by his own* power. Macbeth wants to be this sort of man, and his wife knows it. Indeed, she plays upon his desire by both tempting him and goading him with it.

It is therefore clear that Macbeth is driven to do the deed by his desire to be manly in a specific way. He is not *trading* his immortal soul

obstacles to be ever present so that a man may ever be overcoming them. I agree insofar as it is clear that the overcoming of obstacles by one's own power is clearly a criterion for being manly. However, I think Davis misses two things, which I go on to explain. First, it is not the overcoming of obstacles that is desired for its own sake. The shaping of fortune, the raising of oneself by one's own power, is the end aimed at. Secondly, such a view *is* self-destructive, but not because there is some ever present need for an obstacle but, rather, because, no matter how high one can raise oneself, it will not be satisfying. Macbeth chooses to live a life in accord with a flawed view of manliness, one that directly rejects the higher world of Christianity. In effect, his life loses significance.

for earthly success but, rather, *aligning* himself with his understanding of manliness. In the present circumstances, this amounts to the same action, but it is a significant distinction in regards to his motivation. Also, to respond to Moseley in part, he leaves behind the thoughts of the life to come and focuses upon what he thinks it is to be a man in the moment of choice; rather than struggling with guilt as he did before, he praises Lady Macbeth's "undaunted mettle" (1.7.73) in the moment of choice. His brief instant of clarity has faded, and eternity is not even in the background. He does not have a habitual recognition of the full extent of the evil contained in the decision to kill Duncan. Any sin requires that one *ignore* the evil and pursue the perceived good, but Macbeth's sin is striking because his understanding of the gravity of his offense simply seems to fade away as he considers her presentation of manliness. He does not even have to force himself to ignore it; it just disappears. This needs to be further understood; why does Macbeth's understanding of the gravity of his offense seem to fade? To answer this, I turn to a consideration of the worldview that Macbeth rejects when pursuing his view of manliness: Christianity.

Macbeth and Scotland have accepted Christianity on some level. We find multiple references to Golgotha (1.2.40), God (2.1.25), and the devil (1.3.106). When arguing *against* killing Duncan, he will use Christian imagery ("angels," "heaven's cherubim") to *condemn* the deed (1.7.19-22). Moreover, he will manifest perturbation when he exclaims that he cannot say "Amen" to "God bless us" (2.2.26-33).

Nevertheless, Christianity has not *formed* Macbeth. When the three weird sisters appear to Macbeth and Banquo, the latter cautions against listening to the powers of darkness and immediately proclaims that the witches are on the side of the devil. Macbeth merely asks, "What are you?" (1.3.47). Only when their prophecies prove (partly) true does he question whether they are good or evil (1.3.126-140). Banquo knows (or at least strongly suspects) that they are diabolic; Macbeth certainly does not. Pagan witchcraft may simply be "metaphysical aid" (1.5.30)¹⁰ from those with "more... than mortal knowledge" (1.5.3). There is some lingering paganism in his formation. This goes along with his view of self-centered manliness as the chief virtue rather than Christian Charity.

¹⁰These are Lady Macbeth's words, but it is uncontroversial to state that they fit Macbeth's actions towards the witches.

Furthermore, and most significantly for our central questions, when Macbeth learns his wife is dead, he delivers a chilling speech: "Life's but a poor player, a walking shadow / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard of no more. It is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" (5.5.24-28). Rather than sorrowing over the loss of eternal life, Macbeth has reached a point at which life itself seems to lack any sort of significance. A Christian who despairs gives up on achieving the *kind* of significance he wants; Macbeth gives up on the *possibility* of significant action period. His formation cannot have been truly Christian.

Hence, one must answer Moseley by saying two things. First, while Macbeth understands that his actions are evil, his recognition is momentary and fades away (through the machinations of his wife) at the time of decision. Secondly, and most significantly, even his moments of clarity are limited by a lack of Christian formation. He knows he is violating his Christian principles, but these principles are not character-forming in him. Insofar as they are there, they give him moments of understanding; but these moments cannot hold for long because the principles themselves are not rooted deeply enough. Thus, one cannot say that he *fully* grasps the significance of what he is saying and doing.

Therefore, he is not acting out of a *despicably* evil will but, rather, out of a will that has been formed according to a *flawed* understanding of manliness that opposes itself to the deeper morality of Christianity. He makes an error in judgment that arises out of this flawed formation.

So, in summary, Macbeth is not a depraved character in the beginning of the play. His choice to murder Duncan is a result of the imbalance in his formation. His martial virtues, though truly good, have fostered within him a flawed conception of *manliness*, which is used against him by his wife. The greatest calamity of his situation is that he has been affected by Christian principles but not powerfully enough. The principles are there, but they are not fully ingrained. They give him brief instants of understanding but never deeply enough to govern his action or his thought when directly opposed to the non-Christian principles that he has embraced on account of his martial excellence. Let so much be said about Macbeth's character.

However, there should be one more word devoted to the nature of his fall. I pointed out in Part I that Aristotle's definition can apply to

many different kinds of tragedy. Assuming for the moment that this play is a tragedy, it is then one species that Aristotle could not have fully comprehended: namely, a fully *theological* tragedy. Miguel Bernard points to this by arguing that *Macbeth* is, among other things, a tragedy of sin without redemption.¹¹ I think he is absolutely correct, though I want to take his thought one step further. It is true to say that this play is the story of a man who falls into the state of sin and does not strive for or gain redemption. It is, however, even more than that. We can see that it is the story of a man whose *sin* strips away all meaning from the world (insofar as this man is concerned). The *logos* of his world, if you will, is no longer centered on *Theos* (particularly the Christian *Theos*), and, as such, there is no fundamental *account* that holds meaning. The darkening of his understanding is a direct result of his *sin*. The sheer depth of his fall is not something that can be fully grasped without the understanding that Christian understanding brings.

PART III: FEAR AND PITY EVOKED BY MACBETH'S FALL

Thus far, it is clear that Macbeth's error and subsequent fall is due to a *flaw* in character and not to a *depraved* character. It is also noted that the nature of his fall is largely theological. So, the following question remains? 'Does his fall elicit fear and pity in the souls of his observers?' While a good many authors are united in claiming that it does, their reasoning is diverse. Robert Heilman, for instance, contends that we "become" Macbeth in the play. He argues that Shakespeare draws the audience into the soul of Macbeth through the "suffering" of Macbeth. The audience is brought in by sympathy for his "agonizing." His fear "humanizes the warrior and thus brings us closer to him." Then, Shakespeare "establishes a subtle kinship by setting in motion certain impulses which we would rather not admit – anomalous siding with the criminal."¹² Heilman's point is sound but only to a degree. He attempts to argue that the play is not a melodrama, and he proves this beyond a doubt. However, he goes farther than he needs. It would have been enough to say that the play clearly shows Macbeth to be not wholly depraved; Heilman, however, takes it another step by arguing that the

¹¹"The Five Tragedies in *Macbeth*," 60-61.

¹²Robert B. Heilman, "The Criminal as Tragic Hero: Dramatic Methods," 12. See particularly Parts II and III.

play invites the audience to “become” Macbeth even to the point that the audience almost wants him to win. This, taken as forcefully as it is stated, would be highly perverse. The audience, in such a situation, would be rooting for injustice, and the pity would be a wicked form of self-pity. Far from being a tragedy, wherein a purification of the emotions is realized, it would be a personal descent into murder and finally hell; catharsis would give way to despair. Again, Heilman sufficiently proves his overarching statement; he simply goes farther than he needs.

Lisa Low provides a good insight into the question by noting the grave difference between Macbeth as we are introduced to him and as we see him at the very end after his death.¹³ She particularly notes the gruesome spectacle of his severed head. The evil that overtakes him reduces him to something powerless and in every way *small* (Heilman also notes this in passing, saying that we expect the tragic protagonist to expand, yet Macbeth is, to all intents, a contracting character who seems to discard large areas of consciousness as he goes along).¹⁴ This insight is important since there is something strikingly sorrowful about the difference between the living man as he is introduced to us (carving out his fortune with martial virtue) and the insignificant and powerless image his bodiless head presents.

This is sorrowful, but one must also see the descent as, in some sense, undeserved. From the arguments of Part II, we see that his character is not depraved but, instead, flawed. In that discussion, we considered the nature of his fall; let us now return to two points that deserve closer scrutiny: the role of the witches and the role of the wicked wife.

The witches are the ones that set things in motion. Were it not for the witches, Macbeth would not have felt the possibility of becoming king through murder. His added position as Thane of Cawdor might well have been enough for the moment, but the witches link that position with ascension to the throne itself. Then, when he actually overcomes the desire to murder Duncan for the crown, his wife presses him according to his desire to be manly, which, as we have seen, is where he is weak

¹³Lisa Low, “Ridding Ourselves of Macbeth.” See particularly 836-37.

¹⁴“The Criminal as Tragic Hero: Dramatic Methods,” 13.

and susceptible. Thus, the devil, by approaching him through pagan images,¹⁵ seems to lend his ambition supernatural aid. Then, when this is not enough, Lady Macbeth appeals precisely to that in his character that will solidify the already pricked sides of his intent. It takes *both* the witches *and* his wife to bring him to his moral ruin. Without the witches, he might well have been happy enough, though not perfectly so, in the added position of Thane of Cawdor. Without his wife, he would not have overcome his natural prudence and given into vaulting ambition.

Not only is Macbeth's misfortune a consequence of a flawed rather than depraved character, but this flaw would not have undone him under normal circumstances. It takes the incredibly unusual conjunction of manipulatively suggestive prophecy along with a clever and malicious woman's wit to bring about Macbeth's ruin. *This* is the key to pity since the audience recognizes and sorrows in the fact that this misfortune would have been avoided by if Macbeth had been left to himself and his own devices. He might never (probably never, in fact) have become a model of virtue, but he would likely have made it through his life as a noble, respectable man with true excellences. His Christian influences might even have become stronger. His end, while it is not unjust under the circumstances, is *only* just because of circumstances. One may safely feel "sorrow" at "undeserved misery" in the sense that his character would not typically lead to such darkness.

It is even easier to feel fear while witnessing his fall. We should all see the depth of the evil working on him, aiming at the destruction of a man, who, under normal circumstances, would be considered valiant and noble. We can identify with that situation insofar as we are *all* vulnerable and flawed in certain ways. We do not *become* Macbeth, but we should recognize that we, like him, could be manipulated according to our weaknesses. Our fear has a proper object and, as such, can be properly be experienced when watching *Macbeth*.

Ultimately, there is a true and fruitful purgation of the emotions of fear and pity. Aristotle's common sense definition is met. And then, it is *surpassed*. The theological nature of Macbeth's fall cannot be too

¹⁵ I take it as uncontroversial that the devil is at work behind the witches. The satanic imagery is everywhere, from the porter scene to comparisons that others make of Macbeth and Satan to the fact that Macbeth's personal servant at the end is named "Seyton." The witches are doing his bidding.

greatly underscored. This is not a story simply of a fall from natural virtue but, rather the fall of a man from the state of grace. He initially wants to realize his desires "holily," but finally reduces himself to a state where he proclaims in bitter despair that "The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand" (4.1.147). and that this world is full of sound and fury, "signifying nothing." It is the story of a soul losing itself in the final meaningless of the non-Christian world. This is tragedy beyond the classical limitations of nature and unaided natural reason; this is a complete and grave action of a sort that goes beyond Aristotle's (common sense) understanding of tragedy.

CONCLUSION: BRIEF SUMMARY AND ENDING

Thus, in sum, tragedy is found in a grave, complete action that inspires, via the misfortune of its protagonist, the proper purgation of fear and pity (Part I). Macbeth's fall, which is as serious an action as one can have (and more serious than Aristotle could imagine), is in line with this definition insofar as it comes about, not through depravity, but on account of a flawed understanding of manliness (Part II). This flaw, moreover, would not have destroyed him in normal circumstances but, rather, requires massive pressure from the extraordinary conjunction of diabolic efforts and Macbeth's rather singularly motivated wife. The audience properly feels pity at the undeserved misery that follows from this conjunction and also feels fear while witnessing a man subjected to something, to which we are all vulnerable. There is no person who is without weaknesses, and it is a fearful thing to witness such weaknesses so expertly exploited (Part III).

In conclusion, Macbeth has a soul with a real flaw, albeit a flaw that has attended masterful virtue. The circumstances that surround his fall into wickedness are enormous; the consequences are terribly grave. And anyone who thinks the nature of the evil faced by Macbeth to be foreign to common experience has not a good grasp of human experience. Macbeth is to be pitied greatly, and we ought to experience a catharsis of fear as well when witnessing his downfall. He is a tragic hero, and his tragedy surpasses the ancient understanding through the immense gravity of the central action.

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