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English III

25 April 2023

### Pandora's Box

It is the disease that has plagued the world for millennia, intertwined through countless cultures, creeping through page after page of literature, and haunting history books to this day. The disease in question is toxic masculinity: a curse causing even the most honorable and respected men to commit the most vile and horrific acts, where in the name of power and ambition, no one is an exception. Nowhere else is this plague more prevalent than in *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, written by famous playwright William Shakespeare. Whether or not the tragic hero has ever acted heroically is up for debate; however, the title hero and the man are not always synonymous, leading to the question of whether it is an act of revenge that makes a man or breaks him. Or if his hunger for power is harmful or just simply of true masculine nature. And the possibility of whether or not acting on such feelings proves him to be a man or a monster. Macbeth's demand to fit into the drastic and dangerous definition of manhood leads him to his demise in the Shakespearean tragedy *Macbeth*, by the obsession to wield full power, his constant need for revenge, and his lethal and selfish ambition.

Unlike the average fictional man, protagonist Macbeth, wears a badge of ambition and pride right over his heart, yet he does not wear the pants in his relationship: "Your face, my Thane, is a book where men / May read strange matters. To beguile the time, / Look like the time" (I.v.61-3). The tragic hero's wife, Lady Macbeth, is a character before her time, speaking her mind in front of other men, bossing her husband around, placing the idea of murder in his

brain, and her heavy hunger for power brings to light the question of what makes a man.

Although not physically a man, in one of Lady Macbeth's first monologues she asks for the world to "take my milk for gall" as she attempts to hide her femininity, in fear it weakens her chances to ever gain the sense of power she so desires (I.v.46). Lady Macbeth craves masculinity, she bullies her husband for his present conscience and his unwillingness to kill his dear friend, King Duncan. Lady Macbeth also pleads, "Unsex me here / And fill me from the crown to the top-full / Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood" (I.v.40-3). The reasoning behind Lady Macbeth's desire to gain masculinity is not only her hunger for power but also her wish to be able to use that power if she ever wields it. The thick blood is her hope to block off all conscience or 'feminine' thoughts of mercy, and instead to give her the cruel ability to kill like a man or the murderous ability a real man should possess.

Macbeth is an honorable soldier and military chief, killing plenty of men and opposing soldiers in battle, including Scottish traitor Macdonwald as he "unseamed him from the nave to th' chops" (I.ii.22). The brutal murder of Macdonwald only heightens Macbeth's status and made him that much more honorable and beloved throughout all of Scotland. There is no second thought to the killing, no guilt, nothing but praise. However, when it comes to murdering King Duncan, Macbeth hesitates:

He hath honored me of late, and I have bought  
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,  
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,  
Not cast aside so soon. (I.vii.31-34)

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's mutual hunger for power without a doubt exists, however, the extent of what Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are willing to do for that power, is where there is a divide. Lady Macbeth even questions, "As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have / Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life" (I.vii.41-2). Going as to question his ambition, his love for her, and his manhood as a whole, Lady Macbeth manipulates a toxic and dangerous idea of manhood into Macbeth's head, convincing him that to be a man one must be willing to kill for what one wants, doing so without second and conscience thought.

However, Lady Macbeth's destructive definition of manhood might not be completely hers, but instead, society's definition is twisted and turned to fit her needs and wants. As Macbeth seeks out revenge on innocent bystanders, such as Banquo, Fleance, Young Siward, and most of all, Macduff's family, Malcolm encourages Macduff to have a "dispute like a man" to seek revenge on Macbeth(III.iii.220). Malcolm implies that the only fair and logical response to the murder of Macduff's wife and child is to gain revenge and kill Macbeth himself. Such reasoning does not stray far away from Lady Macbeth's argument that Macbeth's cowardness and initial unwillingness to kill Duncan for the power he wants, makes him less of a man. Even after Macbeth successfully kills Duncan, it still takes countless murders until the citizens start to truly have enough of Macbeth's tyrannical behavior. Lennox, a young Thane himself, speaks after Banquo's death: "The gracious Duncan / Was pitied of Macbeth; marry, he was dead. / And the right-valiant Banquo walked too late" (III.vi.3-5). Well suspecting of Macbeth, Lennox fails to point out the horror behind Macbeth's actions until someone completely innocent and unrelated to Macbeth's ability to become king is killed. Lennox does not have to look hard at all, to conclude Macbeth the murderer, due to his reckless and idiotic behavior throughout Duncan's murder, making it obvious from the start that he is behind the killing, going as far as admitting to

killing the guards: “Oh, yet I do repent me of my fury, / That I did kill them” (II.iii.103-4). His confession is enough to place him at the scene of the crime, as well as it puts the death of the only known or possible witnesses to the murder in his hands.

Whether his need for vengeance, an uncontrollable craving for power, or deranged ambition, Macbeth’s search for the true definition of manhood leads him to his tragic downfall. As if he were opening Pandora's Box, Macbeth’s need to be a true man, to prove himself worthy of his prophecy, and to prove himself a powerful and well-deserved king, released an unnatural and uncontrollable evil unknown to man. What Macbeth realizes is what makes a man is up to one's morals, and not one's projection of masculinity. His search for an answer is something that depends on one's morals, and may change from person to person; his disease is what inevitably plagues Macbeth, making him a tragic hero, as well as killing him in the end.