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### **Macbeth, a Tragic Hero**

Heroes are all around us. A hero is extremely courageous, and will risk his life to save another. In books, they are often the main character, and readers usually find themselves feeling compassion for the hero. In the play *Macbeth*, by William Shakespeare, Macbeth is a hero. He is, more specifically, according to Aristotle's definition, a tragic hero. As a tragic hero, Macbeth has a fatal character flaw, which causes his downfall, and that downfall impacts an entire nation.

Aristotle's definition of a tragic hero is one who has many virtues; however, whose misfortune is caused by some flaw in character. Macbeth's character flaw was his intense ambition. At first this quality benefitted Macbeth greatly; it made him a brave, exceptional soldier in battle. He fought for Duncan and his Kingdom against the invading forces; showing his honour and bravery as a noble man. Macbeth was even recognized for his valour by King Duncan (I,2). He had also been awarded the title of Thane of Cawdor for stopping an evil tyrant from becoming king (Smith). He always strived for what he wanted, and this made him a great nobleman; the King's favourite. Sadly Macbeth could not control his ambitious nature. Upon hearing the witches' prediction that he was to become King of Scotland, "All hail, Macbeth! That shalt be king hereafter." (I,3), Macbeth began to desire power. They had planted an evil seed in his mind, and from then on, Macbeth was set on making the prophesy come true (Macbeth Study Guide). In order to become king, he realized King Duncan must die. He was initially torn with thoughts of murder; influenced both by the witches' prophesy and the manipulations of Lady Macbeth. Eventually he made the decision to go against his originally honourable

character, despite knowing the possible consequences. He was blinded by his lust toward gaining a more powerful status (Macbeth Character Flaw). His flaw prevented him from having good reason and judgment. Once he made the decision to murder in order to achieve his desire, "I am in blood/Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more, Returning were as tedious as go o'er."(III,4), he felt that murder was the only way to maintain his rule. Macbeth's character changed from nobleman to deliberate killer. He had started down a murderous path that would only continue to get worse (Macbeth Study Guide). After that fatal decision was made, things begin to unravel quickly; and that was the beginning of his downfall!

Although Macbeth was the play's main hero, his major character flaw of greedy ambition eventually led to his demise. His ambition to become, and remain king, rapidly escalated from him wanting the title, to him obsessing over it. Macbeth was not necessarily evil; he made evil choices. He was completely responsible for his actions, because he had choice. Despite having an outwardly perfect life, a wife who loved him, an honourable status, many friends and a nice place to live, Macbeth was tempted and then infatuated with having more (Macbeth Study Guide). After he darkens his life by committing the crime of regicide, he felt he must carry out more malicious deeds. He first killed Banquo, to stop his descendants from eventually becoming king as the witches prophesied (Smith). His killings were now reckless; he was mad with power, and beginning to lose sight of humanity. Only staying in power was of any importance to him. The murder of Macduff's family had proven to be a grave mistake on Macbeth's part. He was furious at Macduff's betrayal in fleeing to England, and therefore wanted to teach him a lesson (Smith). However Macbeth did not fully realize the extent of Macduff's determination to seek justice. Once Macduff had gotten word of Macbeth's actions, he vowed to kill him, "Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself; Within my sword's length set him; if he'scapes, Heaven

forgives him too!"(IV,3), foreshadowing that Macbeth's death was coming soon. In the end, Macbeth's deeds forced Macduff to take action; he murdered Macbeth, thus ending his evil tirade as king. Macbeth's deliberate choices, a consequence of his flawed character, caused the country of Scotland to erupt into chaos.

Macbeth held such high degree of importance, that his downfall impacted Scotland greatly. His ambition led to an overthrow of order, making him king. Macbeth thus gained the highest level of power, but even as king, he was not happy. With an uncertainty of who he could trust, he became paranoid and scared. Resorting to murder to stay in power was a choice, once made, he could not take back (Smith). A civil war started as a result. One man's desire for power had shaken the natural order of things, impacting an entire nation (Macbeth Study Guide). His murderous actions caused him great anguish, and he lost the ability to rule with honour. His subjects eventually stopped trusting him and began to feel as though they were being ruled by a tyrant. Those around him lost the respect and love they had for him as a war hero, and he was driven down by fear and guilt. In spite of all the negative consequences of his actions, Macbeth continued down this path of self-destruction. Scotland had fallen apart, "Each new morn/New widow's howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows/Strike heaven on the fare, that it resounds/As felt with Scotland, and yell'd out."(IV,3), confirming that, if not stopped Macbeth would be the ruin of it. Fortunately for Scotland, Macduff intervened; beheading Macbeth. Malcolm, the rightful heir to the throne, was then made king, and order was restored to the kingdom (Smith). Malcolm, a fair and righteous man, led Scotland in a much better way. Thus the downfall of Macbeth had a huge, positive impact on Scotland. ✓

As shown by Macbeth's character flaw, his downfall, and the impact of his downfall, Macbeth is a tragic hero. Shakespeare initially portrayed Macbeth as a war hero, which caused

the audience to recognize him as a hero and care about what happened to him. Macbeth was a man of noble birth who demonstrated exceptional bravery. He then fell from a position of honour and respect due to the tragic flaw of ambition in his character, causing his kingdom to suffer as a result. Macbeth had become what he set out to destroy in the first place, a corrupt and evil tyrant. Even a great hero can be tragically bested by his own human nature. Shakespeare showed that within human nature, there is a natural conflict between good and bad, and our choices ultimately determine our path. ✓

Works  
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