

Macbeth: an Embodiment of Human Despair

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Abstract: The study at hand examines Shakespeare's genius in externalizing a dark side of human nature through naturalizing Macbeth's sense of existential despair not just as a falling tragic hero but as a human being. To comprehend Macbeth's horrified image of an absurd world and his vision of himself in that world as expressed in his soliloquies, the study investigates some of the factors that might contribute to one's sense of existential despair. The present study concludes that some of Macbeth's human strains, behaviors, emotions, states such as sin, narcissism, guilt, success, and his fear of death have contributed a great deal to his sense of existential despair not just his tragic downfall. That conclusion naturalizes Macbeth's sense of existential despair where he simply becomes everyman and explains the plays' sublimity.

It is intriguing to reflect on the bewildering psychological state accompanying the downfall of the tragic hero, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Macbeth's crimes are often described as hideous and his willfulness is too great to elicit sympathy within most audiences. Many audiences often blame outside forces, such as the supernatural power of the witches in addition to Lady Macbeth's wicked influence, for validating Macbeth's evilness, yet there is an ambivalent sense of catharsis within many.¹ One can assume that the state of despair that Macbeth expresses in his soliloquy towards the end of the play is a natural desperate feeling experienced by the tragic hero as he recognizes that his tragic flaw is bringing his downfall. This, however, would be an oversimplified assumption. Shakespeare depicts Macbeth as a human being suffering from his tragic flaw, obsessive lust for obtaining and attaining power, who experiences a high sense of existential despair. Throughout most sections of the play, Macbeth appears as a distant detached Aristotelian tragic hero who has a tragic flaw, yet once he expresses his sense of despair the universality of his vision of himself and his world intrigues one to reflect on the factors that might

have triggered such despair within a man who "inspires some fear and much admiration" (Bradley 351). Shakespeare's brilliancy stems from his ability to externalize and naturalize Macbeth's dark sense of existential despair so that it becomes understandable why audiences sympathize and empathize with Macbeth thereby making his existential despair everyman's. To provide a deeper explanation for Macbeth's high sense of existential despair and his bleak vision of an absurd world, the study at hand examines common human strains, emotions, behaviors, and/or states such as sin, narcissism, guilt, success, and fear of death that might exacerbate an individual's high sense of existential despair.

Macbeth's existential despair, which is echoed repeatedly throughout the play, is summed up in Act Five, Scene Five, when Macbeth hears the news of Lady Macbeth's death. He says:

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,

¹ See *Shakespearean Tragedy*, by A.C. Bradley.

And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury (5,5,16-25).
In his final soliloquy, Macbeth expresses his vision
of life as devoid of any meaning and full of
contrived struggles. One senses
that he had sunk in misery so deeply that he feels
that life is not worth living and that Lady Macbeth
"should have died hereafter." It seems that
Macbeth's profound emptiness is slowly verbalized
in "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow"
which conveys his high sense of tiredness and
boredom of a pointless future. He depicts life at
this stage as short, "a brief candle" in the light of
which ignorant human beings, "fools", march
towards a fruitless demise, "dusty death". He might
be even considering suicide since he is asking the
candle of his life, "brief candle" to be "out, out". In
these lines, Macbeth sees a person's life as so
insubstantial that it is comparable to an absurd play
in which the human being plays a minor role. This
actor briefly struggles for substance, "struts and
frets" and soon is heard no more. To see life as "a
tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
signifying nothing," reflects Macbeth's horrified
vision of a senseless obscure world equal in futility
to his actions to obtain and retain the crown of
Scotland.

Though one might instantly assume that
Macbeth's sense of despair has resulted from
natural sadness over his wife's death and his
possible fear of his own approaching death, one
senses that these words are triggered by a more
deeply ingrained sense of existential despair.
According to James Park, existential despair is "the
disclosure of total hopelessness. This hopelessness
arises from within us, and it is comprehensive and
permanent" (Park 11). The individual feels that
"life will not pick itself up again after a while
because our whole existence is infected with
hopelessness and despair" (Park 12). The complete
hopelessness that Macbeth conveys in this horrified
vision of the world and which is expressed in his
soliloquies can be attributed to his experience of an
existential crisis. An existential crisis is
"exemplified in a moment at which an individual
questions the very foundations of his/her life, i.e.
whether it has any meaning, purpose, or value"
(Park 17). Macbeth's existential crisis is succinctly
reflected in his sense of nothingness. According to
Wesley Barnes, the individual, "the existentialist"
experiences a high sense of nothingness when (s)he

"is no longer conscious of himself as being, he feels
that he is nothing" (Barnes 92). To see life as a
walking shadow or as a tale told by an idiot
heightens Macbeth's feeling of an abandonment by
a central power or, in other words, by God. He is
obviously questioning and doubting that life has a
meaning, a purpose, or value. One cannot help
wondering what triggered such despair within a
courageous warrior who seems to have everything
he has aspired to have. It is indeed very ironic that
Macbeth should feel this high sense of alienation
and nothingness when he has accomplished his
life's ambition to become the king of Scotland.

According to Albert Camus, one of the common
philosophical explanations for a human being's
despair is his sin. He states, "Sin is the obstacle to
human fulfillment- a reason of despair" (Camus
18). Shakespeare emphasizes Macbeth's sinful
nature symbolically through borrowing the comic
subplot of the drunken porter from the medieval
"Harrowing of Hell". The drunken porter invites
three imaginary dead sinners who have flaws which
parallel flaws within Macbeth. Like Macbeth, these
three dead sinners: the greedy farmer, the tailor, and
the equivocator live in damnation and despair due
to their sins. Immediately after killing Duncan,
Macbeth is not able to say "Amen" when he
overhears a guest in the adjoining room saying
"God bless us." He even admits his remorse and
fear: "I am afraid to think what I have done/Look
on't again I dare not" (2, 2, 50-51). Macbeth's sin
of regicide creates such a high sense of remorse and
self-loathing that he seems to be troubled by his sin
more than worried about being discovered. His
inability to sleep, his obsession with washing his
hands immediately after killing Duncan, and his
inability to pray all seem logical consequences of
Macbeth's conscious awareness of his sins. It
naturally follows then that he faces his very own
hell with a heightened sense of existential despair.
This is to say that Macbeth's sense of being
neglected by a protective God as a result of his own
previous abandonment of God's law has so far
contributed to his descent even lower in evil deeds.
This in its turn has left him doubtful and confused,
questioning the essence of his own existence, of life
and a loving God; hence life to him becomes "a tale
told by an idiot."

In Existentialism and Humanism, Jean Paul
Sartre discusses, albeit on a much deeper
philosophical level, three different existential

emotions which throw ample light on a person's high sense of existential despair. These emotions are anguish, abandonment, and despair. Anguish is interpreted as an innate feeling of freedom and responsibility not only for one's self but for all mankind: "We are in the state of anguish, performing actions, the outcome of which we cannot ascertain, with a great weight of responsibility" for the human race (52). Abandonment, which could mean abandonment by God, emphasizes the sense of loss caused by the realization that there is "no external source of objective value" (82). Abandonment results in the absence of any objective source of moral law. Despair; therefore, brings about a sense that we "humans cannot rely on anything that is outside our control," (86) but this does not mean we should abandon ourselves to inaction. It should lead us to commit ourselves to a course of action since there is no external reality except in action.

These three existential emotions are applicable to Macbeth's feelings. For instance, Macbeth's high sense of abandonment, maybe by God, which might have led him to descend lower and commit further immoral deeds such as killing innocent people around him just to fulfill his lust for power is obvious. One can argue that Macbeth's inability to pray immediately after killing Duncan marks his separation from God. Heidegger believes that "man can satisfy his own needs, regardless of his social codes, if he has the energy and alienation to act" (Heidegger 123). Macbeth satisfies his lust for power regardless of any social or religious codes simply because he has the energy and the alienation to act. Macbeth's unlawful actions indicate his sense of abandonment and his implied sense of ignoring a source of deity is obviously conveyed in his later remorseless immoral deeds.

Intentionally seeking the consultation of the witches confirms Macbeth's dark realization that he has sunk so deep that he is now beyond hope of redemption. It seems that he is abandoned by God and taken over by the devil, thus sinking lower in sin. He states: "I'm in blood/Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more/Returning were as tedious as go'er" (3,4, 137-38). Macbeth ignores social and religious codes to fulfill his lust for power and has to face the consequences. In addition, feeling alienated and abandoned explains Macbeth's inability, by the end of the play, to rely on any outside sources for help. Though he is urged on by

Lady Macbeth to fulfill the witches' prophecy, which has originally triggered his deep lust for power, by the end of the play Macbeth feels so alienated and alone that he cannot rely on anybody or anything outside himself for advice, guidance or even protection from Macduff's coming revenge. This sense of alienation has contributed greatly to Macbeth's sense of existential despair.

Experiencing this high sense of abandonment and being unable to find trustworthy means of strength and support in outside sources, Macbeth realizes that he has to rely on his own actions alone. That realization creates the sense of anguish, one aspect of which being the knowledge that he has the freedom to do anything. However, this freedom is qualified by a form of responsibility; it implies that actions do not just have an effect on him only as an individual but consequently will influence mankind. For instance, Macbeth's violence and insanity affect his whole nation where distrust, fear, and chaos have become prevalent in Scotland.

Macbeth's contemplation of suicide when he realizes that his end is approaching reveals this high sense of anguish which clarifies his existential despair. He has to choose between facing his enemy as a brave hero knowing that he will be killed anyway or ending his life through "falling on his sword." This shows Macbeth's sense of human responsibility not only for himself but for mankind. In spite of all the criminal deeds he has committed and of his inevitable end, Macbeth chooses to die in dignity which heightens his original noble nature. That choice shows that he is not thinking of Macbeth only, but of all warriors, kings, and heroes. He is trying to find what Camus defines as "the meaning of life in the face of death" (Camus 21). He is clearly grappling with the existential question of how life can be meaningless if in fact it is of great importance. Thus, Macbeth's decision to fight and die an honorable death instead of committing suicide or even trying to flee helps one to understand Macbeth's freedom which has created his sense of anguish which is part of his existential despair.

A possible explanation of Macbeth's pessimistic vision of himself as a human being and of life as a whole can be his narcissism. Freud believes that narcissism is a normal part of the human psyche. He refers to it as "the energy that lies behind each person's survival instincts" (Freud 7). In excess, however, narcissism is said to be "a

psychological condition defined as a total obsession with self, to the exclusion of almost all other interaction with people." (Freud 11). Narcissism is often characterized by a lack of empathy for others, an immature sense of humor, sadistic or destructive tendencies towards people, and a compulsion to satisfy personal needs without regard for others. People suffering from narcissism can be extremely introverted in social situations, tending to avoid deep friendships or commitments to career or family. (Freud 15).

When one applies the previous characteristics of narcissism to Macbeth, one can easily see that the label *narcissist* fits him. That is to say, Macbeth's total obsession with his self to the exclusion of interaction with others manifests itself very early on in the play. One sees it in his gradual detachment from Lady Macbeth and his beloved friend Banquo soon after the murder of Duncan. Surprisingly, he lacks empathy for Lady Macbeth's insomnia and critical psychological condition and later her death. In Act 5, Scene 3, when the doctor says that Lady Macbeth's illness cannot be cured because it is mental, Macbeth cries "Throw physic [medicine] to the dogs." When he was informed of Lady Macbeth's death, Macbeth remarks that "She should have died hereafter." One interpretation for that cold reaction to such a great deal is Macbeth's painful indifference due to his full occupation with his self.

Moreover, Macbeth's destructive tendency is evident in his vicious slaughter of peaceful Duncan, the murder of good Banquo, and the brutal massacre of Macduff's innocent family. As mentioned earlier, the more power he has, the more destructive Macbeth becomes. In addition, Macbeth does not have any deep friendships and has been socially introverted throughout the play. Furthermore, Macbeth seeks witches and hires murderers to get rid of friends and loved ones. Thus, Macbeth can be classified as a narcissist who has been totally obsessed with his self, which has contributed a great deal to his sense of existential despair.

To highlight the connection between narcissism and despair, one needs to amplify on some aspects of Freud's theory of narcissism; the theory has two parts. One part is what he calls "The Theory of Responsibility" in which he argues that people are born without a basic sense of self. It is only through the experiences that occur during infancy

and early childhood that people gain what is known as ego or sense of self. He believes that as children interact with the outside world, they begin "to learn social norms and cultural expectations leading to the development of an ego idea, a perfect image of oneself that the ego strives to attain"(Freud 84). With this definition in mind, one can argue; therefore, that Macbeth's ego strives to attain a perfect image of himself as the king of Scotland, especially after his courageous battle against traitors and his encounter with the witches. The other part of Freud's theory of narcissism has to do with the idea that one's love of his self "could be transformed onto another person or object. By giving away love, people experience diminished primary narcissism leaving them then less able to nurture, protect, and defend themselves" (Freud 89). He adds that in order to "relinquish this capacity" receiving love and affection is "vital" (Freud 89). Thus, paradoxically the more Macbeth's ego is obsessed with attaining a better self-image or having more power the less he is able to "nurture, protect, and defend" himself, his wife, cousin, or friend. One might argue that Macbeth's childlessness has intensified his narcissism. He couldn't "transfer" his love from his self to a child of his own, a friend, or even his life's companion, his wife. Thus, one can easily classify Macbeth as a pathological narcissist.

Pathological narcissism, as Sam Vaknin explains, is a personality disorder which is more of a dysfunction. Its most obvious symptoms are lack of empathy, impairment of ethical judgment, alienation of one's friends, invitation of others' anger or rejection, and a high sense of entitlement. (Vaknin 19). Macbeth's lack of empathy has manifested itself shortly after his crowning. His lack of empathy towards Macduff's innocent family or Lady Macbeth's sickness and even death is almost staggering. Banquo's son's sense of loss after his father's murder heightens Macbeth's lack of empathy which probably stems from his strong belief in his entitlement to the crown of Scotland. This belief blurs Macbeth's vision and impairs his ethical judgment, as is evident in his rapid descent into violence and obsessive lust for power. That impairment of Macbeth's ethical judgment triggers the anger and the rejection of those around him. By the end of the play, Macbeth is alone and lonely and his only window to the outside world is his only remaining lieutenant, Seyton. Having

acknowledged the possibility of losing his throne, Macbeth tells himself that his life is not worth living. In Act Five, Scene Three, he says:

I have lived long enough: my way of life
Is fall'n into the sea, the yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age,
As honor, love, obedience, troops of
friends,

I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour,
breath,

Which the poor heart would fain deny, and
dare not (5,3,22-28).

To have deep curses, mouth-honour instead of honor, love, obedience, and friends at his old age heighten Macbeth's sense of emptiness and his sense of existential despair. In these desperate lines Macbeth's high sense of existential despair seems an inevitable outcome of his lack of empathy, impaired judgment and a high sense of entitlement.

It is interesting to note that Macbeth's symptoms of pathological narcissism increase as he has more power. One psychoanalytical explanation for the relationship between narcissism and power is, according to Freud, a person's success. He describes pathologically narcissistic individuals as "being wrecked by success." He states, "People occasionally fall ill precisely when a deeply-rooted and long-cherished wish has come to fulfillment" (Freud 317). One cannot help wondering why Macbeth feels this high sense of anguish when he has accomplished his wish of becoming the king of Scotland. Freud explains, "It is not all unusual for the ego to tolerate a wish as harmless so long it exists in fantasy alone and seems remote from fulfillment, whereas the ego will defend itself hotly against such a wish as soon as it approaches fulfillment and threatens to become a reality" (Freud 1317). During his crowning banquet and at the peak of the "fulfillment" of his "long-cherished wish," Macbeth's sense of "illness" becomes apparent on the stage. This "illness" is conveyed in Macbeth's impaired ethical judgment, his lack of empathy, his destructive aggressive deeds, regicide and infanticide, all of which mark the "weakness" that is soon to be confirmed by his existential vision of himself, others, and life.

Moreover, one can argue that one of the issues that contribute to one's despair is one's "wrongful use of freedom through the failure to choose to be

oneself" (Beabout 24). This wrongful use of freedom provokes a high sense of dread and anxiety within the 'successful' person who has succeeded in achieving his goal and accomplished his dream, thereby creating an ambiguous sense of alienation. Macbeth's "wrongful" use of freedom and power to attain the crown of Scotland provoke an immediate sense of dread for his regicide and anxiety over Macduff's absence. Macbeth succeeds in becoming the king of Scotland yet fails to remain himself, to be the heroic noble warrior that he has always been.

It seems that this sense of alienation is to be expected; as one attempts to establish one's own identity, one often feels "more alienated from his fellow men" (Freud 318). Macbeth's sense of alienation is therefore expected since he has made enemies of everyone around him in the process of establishing his new identity as the king of Scotland. The more power he has, the more alienated he feels. In the process of becoming the king of Scotland, Macbeth consciously alienates himself from everyone in fear of the possibility of someone discovering his crimes. He gradually even stops consulting Lady Macbeth as he decides the fate of the next victims whom he feels are hindrances to his success and/or threats to the permanence of his power.

In the end, he had no friends or family members; with the exception of Seyton, he is absolutely and utterly alone. He frantically deals with murderers, giving instructions for the assassination of friends, such as Banquo and his son Fleance and the absent Macduff's wife and children. By the end of Act Five, Macbeth has no sense of who he is or what he really wants. That sense of frenetic confusion and alienation forces him to contemplate even falling on his sword as a way to end his psychological torment.

One possible explanation for the association of success with despair, as an "illness", is guilt. In the Encyclopedia of Psychology, guilt is defined as "a cognitive or an emotional experience that occurs when a person realizes or believes that he has compromised his own standard, and bears significant responsibility for that violation." Moreover, Freud, in "Civilization and Its Discontent," sees guilt as the outcome of the struggle between one's ego and superego, which is driven by the conscience. He argues that one's aggressive instincts are usually transformed into a sense of guilt. (Strachey 134). Thus, one can argue

that Macbeth's early and constant sense of guilt is mainly the result of his aggressive instincts towards Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff's family and that it culminates in the existential despair expressed in Act Five. It is obvious that Macbeth's consciousness of guilt, as Bradley notes, is "stronger in him than the consciousness of failure and it keeps him in a perpetual agony of restlessness and forbids him simply to droop and pine"(360).

It is worth noting that there are two types of guilt, according to the philosopher Martin Buber: Freudian guilt and existential guilt. The former is based on internal conflicts between the ego and the superego whereas the latter results from harming others. One can argue, with good reason, that Macbeth is experiencing both types of guilt. That is to say, the immense sense of guilt which has led Macbeth to existential despair has resulted from his internal conflict and from harming others. (Agassi 115). For example, Macbeth starts to imagine a bloody dagger floating in front of his eyes before even killing Duncan "I see thee still." He is also unable to say "Amen" to the prayer next door. Moreover, in Act Two, after killing Duncan, Macbeth hears a voice crying "Macbeth does murder sleep...Macbeth shall sleep no more" (2,2,43). Macbeth becomes obsessed with washing his hands after the murder, feeling that "Not all the water in the ocean can wash the blood" from his hands. He severely panics when he hears the loud knocking on the door of his castle. He is overwhelmed by fear and guilt: "I am afraid to think what I have done/Look on't again I dare not"(2, 2, 50-51). As his sense of guilt and his remorse increase early in the play, Macbeth wishes he has died before killing his own kinsman. He says:

Had I but died an hour before this chance
I had lived a blessed time; for, from this instant,
There's nothing serious in mortality:
All is but toys: renown and grace is dead;
The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of (2, 3, 96-101).

Macbeth feels if he had only died an hour before his regicide he could say he had lived a blessed life. It seems that from this moment on, there is nothing worth living for; to him "all is but toys." That sense of regret and remorse is extended in his vivid

description of dead Duncan to Lennox and Macduff which is abruptly stopped by Lady Macbeth's fake fainting. It is interesting to note that as Macbeth becomes more sinful, his expression of guilt decreases forcing one to wonder if he still feels guilty at all or has become too numb with guilt even to express it. According to Bradley, Macbeth's sense of guilt has a strong effect on him that sometimes it possesses and hypnotizes him wholly. He writes, "What appalls him [Macbeth] is always the image of his own guilty heart or bloody deed, or some image which derives from them its terror or gloom. These, when they arise, hold him spellbound and possess him wholly, like a hypotonic trance" (Bradley355). Thus, guilt is no doubt a major contributor to the existential despair Macbeth expresses in his soliloquy.

In addition to narcissism and the sense of guilt associated with success, a human being's fear of death, Thanatophobia, can trigger a high sense of existential despair within the individual. J. S. Piven asserts that, according to Freud, death anxiety is "not only a symptom of certain modes of psychopathology, but it is a very normal and central emotional threat human beings deal with by impeding awareness of the threat from entering consciousness, excluding horror, dread, and despair" (Piven 4). Moreover, Freud associates the fear of death with our fear of "the unknown, the uncanny, the unconscious, with our fears of vulnerability and passivity; our fear of not being loved, of being abandoned, of not loving" (Piven7). Thus, a human being's fear of death has different psychological emotional layers that can contribute to one's sense of despair. In addition, according to Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development, within the eighth stage known as "The Epigenetic Psychosexual Stage," there is a final stage called "Ego Integrity VS Despair." This stage is a very reflective stage during which the adult individual reflects on his/her own life. According to Erikson, Ego integrity is "the ego's accumulated assurance of its capacity for order and meaning while despair is signified by a fear of one's own death and loss of self-sufficiency, and/or of loved ones" (Newman 551).

This explanation of despair as signified by fear of death and loss of self-sufficiency and loved ones makes Macbeth's sense of despair in Act Five abundantly clear. He has been reflecting not only on his own life but on life in general and his sense

of despair thus reflects everyman's. Macbeth has lost his self-sufficiency; he is about to be killed and he has lost all of his loved ones: Lady Macbeth, Banquo, and Duncan. Feeling deserted and insufficient, Macbeth calls Seyton and confesses to him that his life "is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf" and that he cannot hope to have "honor, love, obedience, troops or friends" (5.2, 25). He becomes so very melancholic and fearful that he asks to "hang those that talk of fear." To recapitulate, once one views despair as signified by an adult's fear of death and loss of self-sufficiency, then Macbeth's sense of despair is scientifically explained. Macbeth's ego integrity that involves an accumulated assurance of its capacity for order and meaning is failing him in the chaotic world that he has created by his excessive lust for attaining and maintaining power. He is scared, confused, and desperate all of which are factors that contributed to his high sense of existential despair.

Moreover, Heidegger argues that one of the causes of despair and anxiety is our human knowledge that we are "finite beings: making choices, living within the horizon of our knowledge that we are finite: we will die one day generates existential anxiety" (Heidegger 299). One can argue that Macbeth's awareness, just like any human being's, of the fact that he is "finite" creates his initial sense of existential anxiety. He describes human life as a "sandbank" that is soon to be covered by "the sea of eternity." Macbeth's awareness of human mortality is summed up in his vision of life as a "brief candle", "a walking shadow" and a "play on a stage" that fades away very quickly. Though his knowledge of human mortality has not softened Macbeth's vaulting ambition nor brought him wisdom, it has contributed a great deal to his horrified sense of existential despair.

In *Macbeth*, death has been surrounding the protagonist from the opening scene with McDonald's death, then that of Duncan, Banquo, Macduff's family, and Lady Macbeth and ultimately that of Macbeth himself. One can argue that Lady Macbeth's death has devastated Macbeth but his pathological narcissism blocks his expression of grief. Lady Macbeth's death might have been a strong indication of Macbeth's approaching death. This is to say, the Macbeths can be labeled as "folie a deux" which is "the way in which two people act together in a way that either one would be unlikely

to do on their own" (Jacobs 132). Lady Macbeth's death/suicide out of madness and/or guilt foreshadows Macbeth's upcoming death. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud argues that when one mourns a loved one "the world becomes poor and empty." (Freud 321). In spite of his narcissistic tendencies, Macbeth's grief over Lady Macbeth's death is obvious; with Lady Macbeth's sickness and death, Macbeth's world becomes poor and empty. This high sense of melancholy, emptiness, and loneliness due to the death of a loved one can push a human being to the edge of despair.

To clinch the argument that Macbeth's fear of death is a major contributor to his sense of existential despair, one needs to analyze the reasons that could make Macbeth fear his own death. One of the explanations for humans' fear of death, according to Heidegger, is the fact that we are "finite" beings. Making choices and knowing that we will die one day generates a great sense of existential anxiety within us. Heidegger adds that as human beings we are "engulfed by nothingness" and to cope with that fact humans live in what he calls "a state of inauthenticity" (Heidegger 298). He defines it as "the attitude with which an individual engages in his projects as his own" (Heidegger 298). This multi-layered fear can be explained in three folds: one's desire for self-preservation, one's fear of human extinction, and one's inauthenticity.

In "Being and Time", Heidegger argues that one's fear of death is in fact a fear of human extinction, and he believes that being "authentic" is one way to deal with that fear. In addition, ontological anxiety is defined as "the deepest truth of our existence, obviously deeper than the external, objective, empirical fact of biological death, but even deeper than our inward, subjective, personal fear of ceasing to be" (Park 32). Is the fear of "ceasing to be" and fear of human extinction maximized within childless Macbeth and contribute to his sense of existential despair? Does his death mean cutting him from the roots forever? The answer to both questions is clearly affirmative. Thus striving to kill Banquo and his son and the horrid massacre of Macduff's family can be seen as rabid blows by "barren" and "fruitless" Macbeth maddened by the realization, conscious or unconscious, of the brevity of his "sway" which he cannot extend into the future through his

descendants. The bitter words, "No son of mine succeeding", thus make him ask the anonymous murderers to kill Macduff's "wife, his babies, and all unfortunate souls/That trace him in his life" (4,1,152-53). Macbeth's pathological narcissism that is displayed in such a criminal act can be interpreted as a way to terminate Macduff's self-preservation. Macbeth's obsessed inquiry about Macduff's absence from the crowning banquet dinner table heightens his haunting awareness that he will not be left unpunished for his criminal deeds. Yet committing such violence against Macduff's family instead of conveying "manliness" reveals Macbeth's fear that death will efface his existence forever. Thus, childless Macbeth's fear of death and his desire for self-preservation is a very essential element that rationalizes his sense of existential despair.

To conclude, one finds it hard to instantly empathize and/or sympathize with Macbeth's downfall, yet Shakespeare's talent in naturalizing

his protagonist's sense of existential despair and universalizing his anguish is obvious. Sin, narcissism, guilt, success, and fear of death are human strains, behaviors, states, and emotions that once the viewer identifies with, s/he would empathize with Macbeth and validate his sense of despair as a human being minutes before he was killed. Over and above Macbeth's own expression which voices his high sense of existential despair, the play strikes a deeper vein. It is more than a didactic play that is about the downfall of a tragic hero who has been suffering from his excessive lust for power; rather it is a humanistic dark universal performance that conveys a horrified vision of one's self, of the world, and of others. Shakespeare's artistic ability that manifests in subtly naturalizing an absurd image of the world from the perspective of an existentially desperate human being on a Renaissance stage marks him as a genius and distinguishes his plays as universal.

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