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Reimagining Aristotle's tragic hero: a comparative analysis of Oedipus Rex and Regulus Black

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Harry Potter

**Abstract**

This paper examines Regulus Black as a tragic hero through the Aristotelian framework of tragedy and its modern reinterpretations. While characters such as Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore in Harry Potter have been extensively analysed as modern tragic figures, Regulus Black remains largely overlooked. This study therefore investigates whether Regulus aligns with Aristotle's model of the ideal tragic hero. The literature review engages with classical tragedy and contemporary tragic theory, incorporating interpretations of hamartia and modern perspectives by Arthur Miller and Raymond Williams. Using close textual analysis and secondary scholarship on tragic heroism in fantasy literature, the study applies Aristotelian concepts of peripeteia, anagnorisis, and pathos, alongside a comparative reading of Oedipus Rex and Regulus Black. The analysis reveals that Regulus fulfils key tragic criteria, including noble lineage, moral flaw, reversal, and recognition. Catharsis is interpreted through a modern psychological lens, emphasising ethical choice rather than public spectacle. The paper concludes that Regulus represents a hybrid tragic hero, blending classical structure with modern psychological depth.

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**Introduction**

Despite developing over 2300 years ago, the Aristotelian framework of tragedy has still not lost its relevance; moreover, his notion of an ideal tragic hero characterized by flaws and virtues equally, remains to resonate with the modern audience for its realism and everlasting insight into human disposition. To figure out how these principles work in contemporary fiction, we must understand Aristotle's key concepts mentioned in Poetics.

According to Aristotle, tragedy is "the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude and achieves catharsis, that is, purification of emotions by inducing the feelings of pity and fear among the audience. He explains that a tragic hero must be of a noble birth and good character, but his downfall emerges from a hamartia an error or flaw in judgment. This fall from happiness to despair involves a reversal of fortune or peripeteia and is rooted in recognition, otherwise known as anagnorisis, thus eventually

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achieving the effect of catharsis. All of these features are true to the story of Oedipus Rex, who is recognized by Aristotle as his ideal tragic hero; but what is more surprising is that several of these characteristics are shared by a minor character, *Regulus Black*, in the modern fantasy series Harry Potter (Aristotle, 1996).

Regulus is first introduced in *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* as the unknown R.A.B (Rowling, 2005, Chapter 28) who had, inside the fake locket, left a note for Voldemort revealing that he had stolen the real Horcrux, and that by the time Voldemort would read the message, Regulus would be dead (Rowling, 2005, Chapter 28). In the last book, when Harry discovers that R.A.B stands for Regulus Arcturus Black, he recounts the story told by Sirius Black about his younger brother who ardently admired Voldemort but later turned up against him (Rowling, 2003, Chapter 6). Thus, Regulus's journey from being a blind follower (hamartia) of Voldemort to realization (anagnorisis) of his evilness, fulfils the trajectory of tragedy: error, reversal and realization. Although several researchers have explored the other characters of Harry Potter as a tragic hero, Regulus black still remains widely unexplored. This paper, therefore, aims to explore the extent to which Regulus can be seen as a tragic hero.

In this paper, it is clearly proved that Regulus Black not only adopts all of the characteristics of Aristotelian tragic model either in their original form or through their modern interpretation, but also adheres to the modern tragic principles presented by Miller, thus demonstrating a unique hybrid tragic framework which highlights the multidimensionality of his heroism. To verify this supposition, the paper first presents how Regulus fit in Miller's dignity-driven modern tragic model and then adopts a comparative framework, comparing Regulus's moral ascension with that of *Oedipus Rex* who is Aristotle's original prototype of tragedy. This juxtaposition not only places Regulus within a classical context but also emphasizes how the ancient tragic form is reinterpreted by Rowling for contemporary audiences.

## Literature Review

### The structure of tragedy.

From the definition of tragedy given by Aristotle which describes it as "an imitation of an action that is complete and whole, and of a certain magnitude... having a beginning (protasis), a middle (epitasis), and an end (catastrophe)" (Aristotle, 1996, pg. 10), we can infer that he prefers a single, linear plot that is complete on its own, devoid of any digressions or subplots. This is further clarified when he mentions that "the plot must be a unified whole... the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed" (Aristotle, 1996, Section 7). This is widely known

as the Unity of Action as introduced by an Italian Renaissance critic Lodovico Castelvetro (1570).

Aristotle states that tragedy is typically completed within a single day (24 hours): "Tragedy endeavors, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit" (Aristotle, 1996, Section 14). Castelvetro (1570) called it the unity of time and emphasized in his commentary that the play must not exceed the set time limit. While Aristotle does not mention it explicitly, the concept of "unity of place" is proposed by Castelvetro and French neoclassicists like Corneille (1660) and Racine (1677) who noticed that the Greek dramas were conducted in a single setting, for example, in front of a castle or a temple.

Aristotle identified three main features of tragedy: peripeteia, anagnorisis (Aristotle 1996, Sections 11–14) and pathos. Aristotle defines peripeteia as "a change by which action veers round to its opposite", which means that the protagonist's life takes such a disastrous turn that it shifts from being prosperous to miserable. This misfortune then leads to anagnorisis "a change from ignorance to knowledge", which is the disclosure of a disastrous truth that causes pathos or the "final scene of suffering such as the deaths on the stage, wounds and the likes" through which the cleansing effect of *catharsis* is achieved by the audience.

The word "*katharsis*" means cleansing or purification in Greek (Aristotle, trans. 2007). In his book *Poetics*, Aristotle never clarifies what kind of purification he is referring to — medical, emotional or spiritual. Later, a Renaissance scholar Jacob Bernays (1880) connected the word *katharsis* in *Poetics* with Aristotle's medical writings and inferred that just like medicine expels the harmful substances out of body, tragedy expels the superfluous feelings like pity and fear out of the soul, hence maintaining a psychological equilibrium. This effect is impossible to acquire by the spectators without the existence of an engaging protagonist whose model personality is explored in the following section.

### Aristotle's Tragic Hero

Aristotle defines the ideal tragic hero as an intermediate person who is somewhere between moral perfection and utter wickedness. According to him, the hero should neither be "pre-eminently virtuous and just" (Aristotle, trans. 1996, Chapter 23) which means that he ought not to possess an unrealistically perfect moral character, nor should he be utterly corrupt. This is because if he is perfect, he may not make an error in judgement (hamartia), essential to cause tragedy and if in case he is outright wicked, then the audience would not sympathise with him and feel his tragedy but rather think that he deserved it (Heath, Aristotle's *Poetics*, 1996, pg. 57). An ideal tragic hero should thus be a respectable and noble figure but at the same time not entirely flawless.

In *Poetics*, Aristotle emphasized that the hero should be "of a great reputation and prosperity" (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450a15–

16) which implies that he must be born in a noble and great family, for instance, to a queen and a king. The hero's high social standing renders their tragedy more important as it now impacts not only him but the entire nation. The higher the height of their misfortune, the greater the impact on the audience of their tragedy, caused by their hamartia (Aristotle's Poetics, 1956, pg. 74)

Hamartia is often interpreted as the "fatal flaw" of the tragic hero but Aristotle described that the hero's misery is caused "not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty" (Aristotle, 1997; Halliwell, 2022). This error refers to a mistake in judgement that is made in ignorance. Unlike any Renaissance tragic hero, the downfall of Aristotle's hero is not a result of his sins or deliberate immoral acts, but a mistake he made out of innocence. This generates pity for the hero and fear among the people that such a tragedy may also befall them.

Though the Aristotelian concept of hamartia is original and raw, it is equally important to consider the later interpretations of this notion since they shaped the great tragedies including the Renaissance plays such as Macbeth and Dr. Faustus. The following section discusses the several shades of hamartia, which are either quite similar or totally different from the Aristotelian concept.

#### **The reinterpretation of Aristotelian hamartia:**

From his commentary and translation of Poetics, it is evident that Stephen Halliwell's (Poetics: A Critical Guide, 2023, p. 89) view of hamartia adheres to that of Aristotle since he writes that hamartia is the noble hero's misjudgment or error made from misunderstanding of reality. The only difference is that Aristotle focused more on its structural importance, hamartia leads to peripeteia, anagnorisis and finally pathos whereas Halliwell emphasized the psychological aspect of the intellectual error and philosophical dimension of the limitations of human intellect and decision making along with the unavoidability of frailty despite being noble and high (Halliwell, 2023).

Just like Halliwell, Leon Golden's definition of hamartia also closely aligns with Aristotle's; however Golden also links his notion of hamartia with the Greek terminology "Ate" (Golden, 1965, p. 72) which means a temporary moral or intellectual *blindness* that leads to the eventual catastrophe. While Golden's view agrees with that of Aristotle, Bradley and Nussbaum's interpretation clearly diverges from it.

In 1904, A. C Bradley proposes a "flaw in character" interpretation in his book, Shakespearean Tragedy where he mentions that the protagonist's misery is caused by his inherent fatal flaw which is an excess of a virtue (Bradley, 1904, pg. 29) like pride, ambition or love. For example, the over-ambitious nature of both Faustus and Hamlet led to their misery. Nussbaum agrees with Bradley's perception and writes: "Tragedy reveals a kind of moral irony, in which the

very qualities that are most admirable in a person become the sources of his ruin" (Nussbaum, 1986, p. 378).

He highlights the irony that in a corrupted world, a person's tragedy ensues from their goodness. For instance, Antigone who died while fighting for a righteous cause to get her brother buried as per commandment of God. Both of these views contradict with the traditional Aristotelian hamartia which is an error in judgement rather than an intrinsic personality trait that follows destruction.

The study of these different interpretations of hamartia assists us in understanding the gradual evolution of a tragic hero from classical plays to modern literature in genres such as fantasy.

#### **Tragic Heroism in Modern Fantasy**

Tragedy, as a literary mode, has evolved beyond classical drama into modern narrative forms like fantasy prose. Despite changes in form, the key tragic elements such as hamartia, anagnorisis, and peripeteia remain central to the depiction of moral fall and human limitation.

Raymond Williams argues that "tragedy is not a fixed dramatic form but a way of experiencing the moral contradictions of life" (Williams, 1966, pg. 4). This quote points out that tragedy ought not be limited to Greek dramas as it expresses how people face ethical and moral complications and sufferings in any era. The form revolutionizes, but the moral and psychological conflict persists. This shows that tragedy's core elements such as moral error, reversal, and recognition are preserved but now emerge in new shapes and forms like internal, moral and psychological rather than public downfall.

Many scholars have drawn parallels between classical tragedy and modern narratives such as novels, fantasy and film. Modern tragedy often emphasizes internal conflict and individual choice, not destiny. George Steiner, in the *Death of Tragedy* (1961, pg. 3), claims that "the tragic vision has waned not because its essence is lost but because modern consciousness has internalized its conflicts." By this Steiner means that in modern times, the misery of the protagonist is not caused by the will of gods, fate or some external force but is a consequence of his own doings (Sanders, 2024).

Martha Nussbaum (1986, pg. 343) similarly explains that "the tragic conflict in modern literature lies not between man and fate but within the self — between reason, emotion, and moral duty." Here, Nussbaum points out the major shift in conflict from being man versus fate to man versus self in contemporary tragedy where the protagonist internally struggles to make a choice between morals and desires.

Together, these critics build that contemporary tragedy converts outward fatality into internal moral challenge which

is a basic principle for comparing historical characters like Oedipus to modern ones such as Snape, Regulus Black, and Dumbledore.

Rowling's world, though fantastical, impersonates moral and ethical challenges similar to those in ancient tragedy. This renders Regulus Black a beneficial case to check whether Aristotle's framework still operates in present-day literature. Modern fantasy redefines tragedy through psychological realism and depth. The noble hero of the past becomes the conflicted moral agent of the present. As C.S. Lewis (1966, pg. 82) mentions that fantasy "makes real the moral imagination," allowing symbolic representation of human error and redemption". Similarly, Brian Attebery (1992, pg. 5) states that "fantasy revives the serious moral concerns of classical narrative through mythic reinvention rather than imitation." Farah Mendlesohn (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. 12) also contributes to these arguments by saying that "fantasy sustains tragedy's moral gravity even when set in imagined worlds."

Hence, the tragedy in fantasy emerges not from public downfall but from moral choice, love, and the limitations of human power and control, quite conspicuous in Rowling's characters.

#### **Application of Tragic Framework: Modern Fantasy Heroes as Tragic Figures**

This section aims to explore how a traditional framework of tragedy is applied on the characters of a modern fantasy novel. This is done by examining how modern fantasy heroes in *Harry Potter*, such as Snape and Dumbledore, have been analyzed by researchers as tragic figures, which helps establish that Regulus can be studied through the same tragic framework. The characters of Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape were examined through the Aristotelian principles of tragedy by O' Donnel and R.K Singh respectively, though with modern interpretation of some of the elements which focuses more on the psychological aspects rather than fate or chance.

#### **Albus Dumbledore as a Modern Tragic Hero:**

"The research paper (O' Donnel, 2020) states that Dumbledore's story adheres to the Aristotelian tragic pattern as it incorporates all the main elements of tragedy. His unquenchable quest for power, passion to control destiny and to overpower death became his hamartia. In the last book of *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 2007, Chapter 25) it is mentioned that in his youth, Dumbledore was seeking the Deathly Hallows (the Resurrection Stone, The Invisibility Cloak and the Elder Wand) which could make one the master of death. His hubris was his excessive confidence in the notion that he could

control and manipulate others for the "greater good". According to O'Donnell, Dumbledore's hubris is subtler than classical heroes but still present. She describes it as his intellectual arrogance: the belief that he alone can orchestrate events, guide others, and "manage" dangerous outcomes. He manipulates people (especially Harry) thinking he is doing good, which shows his overconfidence in his own judgment. This is the modern form of Aristotelian hubris.

O'Donnell does not view peripeteia as an abrupt plot twist but as a reversal in the comprehension of the audience and Harry regarding Dumbledore. Once seen as an impeccable and ideal headmaster, Dumbledore's image was reduced to an emotionally feeble man weakened by past errors. This change was important in the tragedy's structure as the hero becomes humble and embraces his past mistake by abandoning power and feeling guilty for once seeking it. Dumbledore's reversal is internal and moral, not political.

O'Donnell mentions that Dumbledore confesses to Harry that he was not "worthy to wield power" and presents this admission as Dumbledore's moment of realization or anagnorisis where he finally faces the reality of his true disposition. In *Deathly Hallows*, he admits to Harry that he could not be trusted with power because once he was too desirous for it.

The critic states that tragedy's cathartic effect is acquired when readers and Harry come to know about Dumbledore's flaws. His honesty shatters the false illusion of his perfection in the minds of readers. Pity and fear is evoked for Dumbledore by witnessing his weakened state that ensued from haunting guilt and regret. Just like Dumbledore, Severus Snape is also discussed by critics such as R.K Singh as a tragic hero that embodies the key elements of Aristotle's tragic model with modern interpretation of some of the features.

#### **Severus Snape: A Modern Tragic Hero**

Singh (2018) states that Snape's blind love for Lily was his hamartia. He argued that his love made him seek power and prestige by becoming a Death Eater in the hope that he could win respect from Lily and become worthy in her eyes. However, later he regrets his decision as Voldemort marks the Potters as his next killing target. According to the critic, Snape's love becomes an error in judgment since it motivates him to turn into a Death, making him "complicit in the very violence he later tries to undo". Singh declares that Snape's whole tragedy revolves around this flaw.

Singh (2018) states that Snape's anagnorisis (realization) happens when "the news of Lily's death shatters his self-constructed illusions." This is the stage where Snape

“comprehends the enormity of his mistake” and realizes his faithfulness to Voldemort was misplaced and comprehends the price of his problematic decisions. The critic then elaborates that Snape’s peripeteia (reversal) is the turn “from Voldemort’s follower to Dumbledore’s agent,” a change that “fixes his destiny rather than freeing him from it.” Singh points out that this reversal displays situational irony since Snape’s endeavors to rectify his mistake create the very circumstances that cause his death. Hence, his redemption becomes the reason for his demise.

The critic explains that pity and fear for Snape is generated among the readers because Snape’s moral revival “comes too late to save him, yet it reveals the depth of his moral courage.” This late realization induces sympathy for him and hence the effect of catharsis is produced. Aristotle emphasized that the tragic hero must be noble, however, Singh argues that Snape’s nobility is neither by birth nor social, instead it is intellectual and moral:

“His greatness lies in his capacity for loyalty, sacrifice, and self-control, hidden beneath the bitterness that life forces upon him.”

The tragic arc of both Snape and Dumbledore resembles Oedipus’s tragic structure: it starts with moral unawareness, gains reversal and achieves moral realization but only through self-annihilation or death. This shows how Rowling’s fantasy maintains the ancient pattern of morals but blends it with psychological and ethical realism which is an important tragic feature of modern literature.

### Critics on Tragic Features in Modern Context

The famous writer, Arthur Miller (1949) states that in modern age, an ordinary man is just as capable of becoming a tragic hero as a King. He argues with the notion that only the tragedy of a King or a person of noble status is worth narrating, saying that “the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy as kings were”. Moreover, he proceeds to argue that a tragic hero’s hamartia is not his error in judgement but his inability to remain passive when his identity is challenged. Arthur says that a tragic hero is “ready to lay down his life to secure his sense of personal dignity”.

Snape and Dumbledore both demonstrate Arthur Miller’s idea of the modern tragic hero because, like Miller’s “common man”, their decline is not marked by the fall from a high status or kingship but on a vehement endeavor to protect and fight for someone or something they think gives them dignity. Snape’s story embodies Miller’s statement that the tragic hero does not compromise his dignity as Snape’s honor was bound to his love for Lily and he achieved redemption for his wrong choice of becoming a Death Eater by acting as an agent for Dumbledore. This is also true for Dumbledore, whose dignity lay in accepting and acknowledging his past sins and seeking

redemption by refusing to give up conviction that he could still make an atonement.

The tragedy of both the characters is not a consequence of destiny but the determination to stand up for the values that they advocated for, rendering their downfall align with Miller’s view of modern tragedy. Likewise, Regulus’s arc also aligns with Miller’s perspective of dignity-driven tragedy that revolves around a “common man”, demonstrating his multi-dimensional tragic arc that adopts not only classical tragedy principles but to some extent, also the modern ones.

While in this paper, Regulus is presented as a man of noble birth because of his pure bloodedness and aristocracy (Rowling, 2003), both of which mark a wizard’s high class or status, he can still be viewed as a common man since he was not among the ones who are at the top of social hierarchy such as a king or a royal. It can be argued that despite being an aristocrat, Regulus was still a servant of Voldemort (Rowling, 2005) and in that manner, a common man. Additionally, the act of not letting Kreacher drink the torturous potion instead demonstrates Regulus’s dignity. Regulus literally embodies Miller’s statement that a hero would rather die than to compromise on his dignity, by sacrificing his life for redemption rather than staying a Death Eater for the rest of his life. In this way, Rowling narrated the tragic story of a common man who restored his dignity by seeking genuine redemption. However, Regulus’s multi-faceted arc does not only align with the modern, psychological aspects of tragedy but also with the ancient classical structure, the significance of which is discussed in the following section.

### Synthesis: Why Classical Comparison Matters

The review of tragic heroism in contemporary fantasy, specifically through the analyses of Snape and Dumbledore, highlights that these modern characters adopt tragedy in a distinct manner: their downfalls occur not as an upshot of divine law or prophecy but from individual choices, wavering loyalties and moral dilemmas. This highly contrasts with *Oedipus Rex*, the classical model of tragedy, where the tragic arc is steered by an unchangeable fate combined with the hero’s hamartia.

Comparing Regulus Black with Oedipus thus acknowledges what remains and what transforms within the tragic norm. Classical tragedy reflects the ineluctability of downfall through fate and hamartia whereas modern fantasy tragedy displays its inevitability through moral awakening and the one’s ethical choices. Both mediums insist on the human confrontation with error, responsibility, and consequence, but they execute it distinctively—one by means of public spectacle, the other through internal moral conflict.

As Raymond Williams (1996, p.4) observed, “*Tragedy is renewed whenever men and women are made to confront the cost of being human.*” This renewal is exactly what occurs when characters like Snape, Dumbledore, and Regulus are fitted within the tragic frame: their sacrifices and recognitions reshape the classical structure in a contemporary psychological mode.

Hence, the classical comparison is not just a historical practice; it reveals the notion of tragedy moves from the public set up of Greek plays to the more inward, psychological dimension of modern literature. The analysis of Regulus alongside Oedipus in section V directly adds up to this continuing critical tradition, demonstrating how ancient frameworks of tragedy find a new form of expression in the moral sophistications of modern fantasy.

### Methodology

This paper conducts a qualitative study of texts through an analytical lens based upon classical literary theory. Close reading is the primary methodology applied to both *Oedipus Rex* and J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series, specifically *The Deathly Hallows*, where Regulus Black’s complete arc is unraveled. The analysis is based upon Aristotle’s principles from the *Poetics*: hamartia, noble birth, peripeteia, anagnorisis, and catharsis the elements that work as the key lens by means of which Regulus is evaluated.

In order to place the argument within present scholarship, the study also carries out a conceptual review of secondary literature on tragic heroism in modern fantasy, particularly the analytical readings of Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore. This builds the relevance of applying classical framework of tragedy to modern fiction and assists to identify where Regulus adheres with or diverges from the patterns acknowledged by critics.

A comparative method is then applied to explore the similarities and differences between the classical tragic structure embodied by Oedipus and the modern reinterpretation manifested by Regulus. The comparison is not made in order to equate the texts, but to acknowledge how tragic principles are adopted in modern fantasy narrative. This paper also addresses the possible arguments that can raise questions regarding Regulus’s tragic heroism by providing textual evidence and by explaining the novel interpretations of events and tragic principles that justify Regulus’s heroism. This methodology allows an extensive evaluation of Regulus Black within a well-constructed theoretical structure while also illuminating the innovative, modern features that form his tragic arc.

### Comparative Framework

Although *Oedipus Rex* and the Harry Potter series are a part of completely distinctive literary categories, a comparative approach is still applicable because both texts embody the fundamental characteristics of tragedy explained in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Oedipus serves as the prototype of the tragic hero, epitomizing the key features of noble birth, hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis, and catharsis. These elements have become the basis for the literary evaluation of other characters that appear much later in modern literature, rendering Oedipus an important reference point for any research incorporating the Aristotelian framework.

Regulus Black, however, comes from a modern fantasy novel that reshapes these classical principles within a unique cultural and narrative background. His tragedy unravels indirectly, through memory of another character named Kreacher (Rowling, 2007, Ch. 10), and is driven less by destiny than by moral conscience and individual choice. Since modern literature often personalizes the tragic method, moving from public display to emotional depth, a tailored yet still recognizable version of the Aristotelian tragic model is required by the contemporary characters such as Regulus.

It is clarified how the tragic elements operate in a variety of genres if a strong comparative framework is built. It also shows that the tragic structure remains flexible: the tragedy of Oedipus demonstrates the external conflict or the power of outside forces in ancient Greek society, whereas the misery of Regulus exposes his internal conflict and psychological complexities generated as a result of the emotional pressures faced by characters in a contemporary magical world. This comparative structure forms the basis and sets the stage for the following section in which each Aristotelian element is explored to demonstrate how Regulus both adheres with and at some points diverges from the classical tragic hero.

### Comparative Analysis:

#### A. Noble Birth:

As discussed earlier in section II B, Aristotle held the perception that a tragic hero must have a noble birth. Oedipus inherited this nobility from both his biological and adopted parents as the former were the rulers of Thebes (Sophocles, trans. 2010, 31–50) whereas the latter were the king and queen of Corinth (Sophocles, trans. 2010, 70–90). Similarly, Regulus was also born in a noble, aristocratic pure-blooded family. In the Harry Potter world, a person’s social status is determined on the basis of blood purity and wealth. Regulus’s family was the one of the oldest pure-blooded families and were quite proud of it as described by his brother Sirius: “My parents, with their pure-blood mania, convinced that to be a Black made you practically royal” (Rowling, 2003, Chapter 5)

Aristotle explained that the better one's social position is, the larger is the height from which they fall and hence the greater the impact of the tragedy, which is a result of a tragic hero's hamartia.

#### **Hamartia:**

This section aims to explore the hamartia of both Oedipus and Regulus from multiple perspectives. Assuming that his parents lived there, Oedipus's flight from Corinth in order to escape the prophecy is considered an error in judgement or hamartia by Leon Golden. This concept of hamartia as mentioned earlier in section II C, deeply aligns with Aristotle's original concept, though the philosopher never gave this particular example from Oedipus Rex. Golden links hamartia with Ate (Golden, 1965, p. 72) or temporary intellectual blindness which in this case is Oedipus's inability to realize that Polybus and Merope, from whom he was escaping, were not his biological parents; and ironically, the decision to stay in Thebes to avoid the prophecy would directly lead him to its fulfillment. Just like Oedipus, Regulus also displayed a mistake in judgement out of ignorance as he was not aware of Voldemort's cruelty and joined him just in order to make his family proud and win honour. Regulus only came to know about Voldemort's barbarous nature from hearing Kreacher's account that how Voldemort made him drink the torturous potion to secure the locket in its place and left the elf to die in the lake by being surrounded by the deadly Inferis (Rowling, 2007, Chapter 10). Thus, by becoming a Death Eater, Regulus had unknowingly sealed his fate and the cost of redemption was no less than his life.

One of the interpretations of hamartia by A.C Bradley (1904, pg. 31) suggests that it is simply *hubris* combined with the impulsive temperament of the tragic hero. The personalities of both Oedipus and Regulus exhibit these characteristics. Oedipus's hubris as discussed earlier in section II.C is his intellectual pride to uncover the truth whereas Regulus's pride laid in discovering Voldemort's "secret" and his plan to destroy the Horcrux. Oedipus's impetuous nature is shown multiple times throughout the play. His murder of King Laius in a fit of anger (Sophocles, 2010, ll. 805–813), his turning down suggestion of Kreon to discuss the matters behind closed doors instead of public (Sophocles, 2010, ll. 639–640), his shunning down of Jocasta's pleas to stop further investigation (Sophocles, 2010, l. 1078), are all the examples of Oedipus's hasty and thoughtless actions carried out without any consideration for consequences. Similarly, Regulus's act of joining Voldemort (Rowling, 2007, Ch 10) – the darkest wizard of his time – without any serious cause or aim, handing him over Kreacher when he asked for an house elf (Rowling, 2007, Ch. 10), and ultimately devising a plan to steal the locket (Rowling, 2007, Ch. 10) were all quick decisions that bore dire repercussions and eventually led to his demise.

As discussed in section II.C Bradley states that hamartia can also be a hero's virtue in excess. For Oedipus, it is his vehement pursuit of truth that leads him to tragedy. As for Regulus, it is his kindness – firstly, he did not let Kreacher suffer by drinking the torturous potion himself (Rowling, 2007, Ch 10) and secondly, he let him go home and left himself behind in the lake to face death (Rowling, 2007, Ch. 10). Knox's perception aligns with Bradley as he says: "The destruction of the hero comes not from wickedness but from the very qualities that make him heroic." (Bernard Knox, 1964, pg. 18)

This idea can further be discussed from Nussbaum's view of hamartia who sees hamartia as a moral irony meaning the tragic hero's goodness will be the cause of his fall (Nussbaum, 1986, p. 378). This is true for both Oedipus and Regulus since the former faced tragedy while pursuing the truth and by intending to establish justice by avenging King Laius's murderer while the latter died while saving the world from the immortality of an evil wizard by hiding his Horcrux (Rowling, 2007, Ch. 10). Regulus drank the torturous potion himself and asked his house elf Kreacher to leave with the locket Horcrux instead of vice versa (Rowling, 2007, Ch. 10). This showcases his generosity and care for the house elf which resulted in his own death by being ambushed by the deadly Inferis in the lake.

This clearly demonstrates the multidimensionality of Regulus's arc that strongly adheres with not only one or two but majority of the varying interpretations of hamartia including both the classical and modern theories.

#### **Hubris:**

Hubris is defined as the tragic hero's excessive pride in his judgement, intelligence and abilities that lead to his downfall. At many points throughout the play, Oedipus ignored the suggestions of others and stubbornly followed what he thought was right. He turned down Kreon's advice to discuss the matters behind closed doors rather than in public (Sophocles, 2010, ll. 639–640), then he forced Tiresias to tell the truth against his will (Sophocles, 2010, ll. 343–349) and when he finally did, he called the prophet a liar (Sophocles, 2010, ll. 362–372). Moreover, he shunned Jocasta's pleas not to investigate further and finally, though the shepherd wanted to stay silent and warned him, Oedipus threatened to torture and kill him (Sophocles, 2010, ll. 1050–1055) which led him to disclose the truth about Oedipus's birth, subsequently revealing the fulfillment of prophecy. Had Oedipus been less conceited and listened to the people who warned him, the truth would not have been disclosed and the tragedy may not have occurred.

Through the note that Regulus had written for Voldemort (Rowling, 2005, Ch. 28), a similar sense of pride is reflected. His tone was confident and somewhat threatening when he told Voldemort that he had found his secret and intended to

destroy his Horcrux as soon as he could (Rowling, 2005, Ch. 28). The very confidence and determination to smash the locket is what led Regulus to lose his own life. In bringing about Voldemort's downfall, he himself died.

He knew that even if he returned to his home with Kreacher, Voldemort would find and kill him for stealing the Horcrux. This also reflects his pride and ego that he let himself drown in the lake full of Inferis instead of dying at the hands of the man he despised.

*"To the Dark Lord - I know I will be dead long before you read this, but I want you to know that it was I who discovered your secret. I have stolen the real Horcrux and I will destroy it. I face my death with a hopeful heart that when you meet your match, you will be mortal once more".* (Rowling, 2005, Ch. 28)

Had Regulus abandoned his intention to destroy the Horcrux, he would have been saved but apparently he was so proud of himself for finding Voldemort's secret and acting against it that he did not even care about his life.

Hence, Regulus's downfall was caused by his hubris combined with hamartia and started the moment he joined Voldemort which marked his reversal of fortune or peripeteia.

#### **Peripeteia:**

In Poetics, Aristotle quotes the example from Oedipus Rex regarding peripeteia. He states that Oedipus's reversal of fortune occurs when the messenger arrives to give the news that the King Polybus of Corinth is dead and soon after reveals that Oedipus is not the son of Polybus and Merope (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452b, trans. Butcher, 1898/1997). This is a turning point in the story that sets the play towards anagnorisis or the final discovery and then the ultimate catastrophe or *pathos*.

Regulus's fortune took a turn for the worse the moment Voldemort tortured Kreacher by ordering him to drink the vile potion that induced pain and suffering, and left him to die in the lake (Rowling, 2007, ch. 10). This bothered Regulus, who never treated his house elf badly and this moment closely followed the recognition of Voldemort's true disposition.

#### **Anagnorisis:**

According to Aristotle, anagnorisis (realization of truth) comes right after peripeteia. After the messenger revealed that Oedipus was given to him by a shepherd and that he was not the son of Corinthian king and queen, Oedipus calls the shepherd and forces him to tell him about his birth and parentage (Poetics, 1452a–b). This marks the anagnorisis or the realization of the horrifying truth. Similarly, in Regulus's case too, peripeteia is followed closely by anagnorisis. After Kreacher narrated to his master how he was left to die by Voldemort, Regulus finally saw through Voldemort's ruthless nature (Rowling, 2007, ch. 10). Previously, he had joined him

in order to win glory and prestige and to make his family proud (as mentioned by Sirius Black that his parents thought Regulus was a "little hero" for joining Voldemort) but at this point (anagnorisis) he realized that he had made a great mistake (Rowling, 2003, Chapter 6). This recognition made him atone for his mistake by attempting to destroy Horcrux which ultimately led to his catastrophe or *pathos*.

#### **Pathos:**

Pathos is best defined as the final scene of suffering. After Oedipus realized the terrible truth of the fulfillment of prophecy, he blinded himself out of shame by forcing the brooches of Jocasta's dress into his eyes and spent the rest of his miserable life on Mount Cithaeron (Sophocles, 2010, ll. 1477–1487). On the other hand, Regulus ordered Kreacher to destroy the Horcrux and leave him in the lake alone where he died heroically (Rowling, 2007, chapter 10). Thus, both Oedipus and Regulus faced *pathos*, one blinded while the other drowned himself.

In book 5, Sirius Black told Harry: "From what I heard, he got in too deep, panicked, and tried to back out. Well, you don't just hand in your resignation to Voldemort. *It's a lifetime of service or death.*" (Rowling, 2005, ch. 6). From this conversation, we can infer that even if Regulus had not let himself drown in the lake, he would still sooner or later die at the hands of Voldemort for betraying him. Either way, Regulus's fate was sealed, his *pathos* was definite and he was destined to die.

Although pathos is the typical means of providing catharsis to the audience in classical tragedy, the cathartic effect in Regulus's arc is achieved by witnessing his moral transformation rather than seeing his death as discussed in the next section.

#### **Catharsis:**

Oedipus's tragedy achieves catharsis by means of direct and sudden confrontation such as finding of the truth which resulted in Jocasta's taking her own life (Sophocles, 2010, ll. 1320–1325) and Oedipus's blindness (Sophocles, 2010, ll. 1477–1487), all of which are presented to the audience as incredible, appalling incidents. On the other hand, Regulus's tragedy is conveyed to the reader merely by the note that is left by him for Voldemort and through Kreacher's word (Rowling, 2007, ch. 10). Since his death is not shown directly but presented only as a memory, the overall impact shifts from pity and fear to reflection and introspection: the reader focuses more on Regulus's moral change rather than his scene of destruction. In this manner, Rowling redefines catharsis from an ethical lens. Rather than merely presenting it as a dramatic spectacle as done in ancient plays, she reconfigures the tragic effect with the modern features such as contemplation over one's deeds and serious moral reflection.

### Counterarguments and Rebuttal

A possible criticism of Regulus's tragic heroism is that his story does not induce the emotions of pity and fear to as great a degree as a tragic hero must. Since Oedipus is the major protagonist of his story, the audience connects with him easily, rather than Regulus who is a minor character and is mentioned only a few times in the last two books. Since the readers did not directly see Regulus's pitiable plight when he drank the potion cursed by dark magic and his final death scene and only imagined it through Kreacher's memory (Rowling, 2007, ch, 10), critics may argue that his tragedy does not connect with the readers and fails to immerse them due to less page time and indirect narration.

However, these objections only highlight Rowling's ability to adopt the classic Aristotelian principles in modern literature by moulding and framing them according to the requirements of contemporary narratives. Through the technique of indirect narration, Rowling has not removed catharsis but rather transformed it for the modern reader. A unique form of catharsis is experienced by the reader where the focus is not on pity, fear and shock, but on the moral transformation of a man and his great sacrifice for redemption and to protect the world from the immortality of a dark wizard. This inward version of catharsis serves the contemporary tragic theory that focuses more on psychological reflection and moral insight over dramatic spectacle. Likewise, although Regulus's narrative arc is part of a subplot, it still comprises of all the keys elements of a tragic framework including noble birth, hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis and pathos, thus proving that in modern narratives, even subplots can maintain a fully developed tragic structure.

Hence, the counterarguments eventually strengthen the main declaration: Regulus's tragedy stays faithful to Aristotelian principles while simultaneously demonstrating how these elements evolve in modern fiction.

### Conclusions:

This paper argues that Regulus Black represents a hybrid tragic hero who combines classical tragic structure with modern psychological depth. Through Aristotle's framework, Regulus aligns with key tragic elements: noble lineage, hamartia, peripeteia, and anagnorisis, culminating in a conscious, fatal moral choice. Although his story unfolds indirectly through memory, this narrative distance reshapes catharsis from public spectacle to reflective moral engagement for the reader. Incorporating modern tragic theory, particularly Arthur Miller's emphasis on dignity, further supports Regulus's tragic status, as his death signifies a struggle for moral integrity rather than inherited honour. A comparison with *Oedipus Rex* reveals the evolution of tragedy from fate-driven, public suffering to private, ethical sacrifice.

Ultimately, Regulus Black exemplifies how tragedy endures and adapts within contemporary fantasy, demonstrating the genre's capacity to reinterpret classical notions of heroism, moral failure, and redemption.

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