

At the end of the play, Malcolm refers to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as: '...this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen...', consider the accuracy of Malcolm's judgment by reference to their speeches and actions throughout the play. (2,5 pages)

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In Malcolm's eyes, the Macbeths are just tyrannical murderers who snatched the throne away from him and his father and reigned a rule of terror in all of Scotland. But looking carefully from a different point-of-view, we see that Macbeth is driven by the powerful contradictions in his character. Unlike other villains, Macbeth does not enjoy doing evil; he has not totally renounced the idea of morality, although it is apparent that his ambition is stronger than his conscience.

At first, Macbeth had the itch to be king, but he did not have the will to scaratch it. We can see that Macbeth is not a cold-blooded monster in that the very idea of killing Duncan horrifies him, and in Act II he tries to tell Lady Macbeth that he will not go through with the murder. The character of Lady Macbeth is therefore required to provide Macbeth with the extra will-power to fulfil his royal ambitions. Macbeth is almost 'forced' by Lady Macbeth to murder Duncan. After committing the murder, Macbeth seems almost delirious and he says that "...all great Neptune's ocean...hand". We can already see that he is sorry for what he has done.

When Macbeth orders Banquo's murder, he is still in torment, but the cause of his anguish seems to have been changed. He is afraid of Banquo, because Banquo knows about the witches and their predictions of his(Banquo's) descendants being kings. Banquo's death, he says, will put his mind at rest. Banquo's murder, he figures, will serve as an aspirin to his aches and pains.

We are never told how Macbeth feels about the murder of Macduff's wife and children. Their killing gains him nothing. He has good reason to fear Macduff though, but slaughtering his enemy's family is pointless. Macbeth seems to order their murder for spite, out of a feeling of desperation. Despite the witches' new prophecies, which appear to be reassuring, he is afraid of losing the crown. Since he cannot get at Macduff directly, he lets loose this senseless violence to those closest to Macduff.

Macbeth's other unspecified act of violence serve no purpose, as far as we can see, beyond terrifying his subjects so much they won't resist his rule. Macbeth is striking out at random, and his moral sense seems to have disappeared. The brave hero we met in Act I has metamorphosised in to someone or something that is completely twisted. He will do anything and will stop at nothing to preserve the crown in his head.

Once Macbeth has killed to get the crown, the other crimes seem inevitable. In order to keep what he has taken, Macbeth has learned to lie and kill as a matter of course, and seemed to have mastered the art of keeping up appearances. His values and morals become totally pervesed, since his ambitions and the preservation of it is on top of his priorities.

We can see how much these crimes have cost Macbeth. His reaction to Lady Macbeth's death is a sign of complete despair-all feeling is dead in him. His famous speech upon hearing of her suicide-"Tomorrow,....."(Act V Scene V lines 17-28)-is less an expression of grief than it is about the utter meaninglessness in life.

Another aspect of Macbeth is his active and vivid imagination. Considering Duncan's murder, he can vividly picture all the consequences. His imagination pursues him

throughout the play, continually reliving his crimes and fantasizing about present and future possible dangers. Nothing Lady Macbeth says will comfort his mind and bring peace to him even for a minute. At time he seems crazy or haunted.

In retrospect, we see that Macbeth is primarily the victim of his own ambition, supported by his active imaginations. The witches provide him with the idea of being king, Lady Macbeth helps him overcome his natural hesitation to commit murder, but Macbeth himself chooses between honor and the crown, between salvation in the next world and material gain in this one. Figuratively speaking, he chose to rule in Hell rather than serve in Heaven. Lady Macbeth, the iron lady ended up to have some rust in her. Her conscience caught up to her tormented mind and had tortured it further, resulting in her suicide.

We cannot therefore say that Macbeth is just a butcher who murders in cold-blood. He is tormented by his deeds, and he is never to enjoy the crown that he has taken. Yet he is continuously driven by his ambition. Ultimately we see a man who tries to take fate into his own hands, and this action bring him nothing but grief, suffering and torment.