Macbeth Essay, Research Paper

Macbeth: Macbeth A Murderer?

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)

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 invitable. 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 appearences. 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 vivdly 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 consience 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.