

To what extent do you agree with malcolm's description essay



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The initial impression Shakespeare creates of Lady Macbeth might make the audience feel that 'fiend-like queen' is indeed a fair representation of Lady Macbeth's character mainly because of the part she plays in the atrocious murder of good king Duncan, a murder which leads to many others taking place. As she reads the letters so eagerly she comes across as a ruthless and evil person and I think this quote reflects this. She certainly does provoke a varied mix of emotions and reactions from the audience throughout the play and is seen as a very controversial and complicated figure.

The Elizabethans were very interested in witchcraft and with her 'unnatural' behaviour and she would have been looked upon as possibly a fourth witch, defiantly someone who has been possessed by evil spirits. In Elizabethan times people viewed woman as incapable of murder, it was believed they could not kill or do evil because of their 'womanly' caring instincts. They would also have found her controversial because of her dominant role in her relationship with Macbeth, this is not typical of Shakespeare's time when women had little power, they certainly did not order their husbands about nor were they confided in. he fits in with the major theme of appearance versus reality perfectly, more so than any other character in 'Macbeth'.

She tricks and fools everyone with her womanly tricks, she faints when Duncan's death's announced causing Macduff to think she is a 'gentle lady' when she is really behind the wicked deed. She fools Duncan into thinking she is a 'charming hostess', and that he will be well cared for in her name. When we are first introduced to her, she is reading the letter from Macbeth telling her of the prophecies, she is reading in prose, which was considered the language of the lower class or those without morality.

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Prose does suit the contents of the letter because they were talking of murdering the king – a sacrilegious act. In the letter we are given a clue to Macbeth's relationship with Lady Macbeth, we see Macbeth's confidence in his wife and his deep love for her and trust in her. When he writes to her as soon as he hears the witches' prophecies, he calls her his "dearest partner of greatness". Showing he considers her his equal. We also see she is the more ambitious one indeed the most dominant one in the relationship. She acts not because she is self centred but because she is loyal to Macbeth and has huge ambitions for him.

She believes he deserves to be king and this not the attitude of a 'fiend like queen' but of a wife who loves too much. This relationship is not typical of Shakespeare's time when many marriages were arranged, it is more cemented in love and both have a great amount of trust for each other. We learn more about her in her analysis of Macbeth's Character in her lively soliloquy. We see her as immediately understanding what needs to be done and realising that her husband might not be prepared to do it. We see she knows her husband very well, as she knows his conscience will get in the way him being "too full o' the milk of human kindness".

She believes he deserves to be a great person but he's too nice to do something so immoral, he is "not without ambition, but without the illness that should attend it". Here we also see how she criticises on what is normally regarded good, as being under these circumstances loyalty is regarded negative quality. His adds to her "fiend-like" image again. She compares his kindness with being feminine, and this is why she looks to the spirits to make

her more manly and evil. She cries "Come you spirits. That tends on mortal thoughts! Unsex me here".

She fears that her natural femininity will always overcome her ambitions of murder, which was the popular view of women in Shakespeare's times. This shows she could not be a "fiend" as she could not carry out the deeds without supernatural intervention. She must get the evil from elsewhere from the spirits. An audience, especially Elizabethan would feel that the 'evil spirits' would indicate she is eventually as summoning them up is most unnatural and unfeminine behaviour. In Act 1 Scene 7 we really see how Macbeth's indecisiveness gets in the way of his ambitions, Lady Macbeth is clearly strong-willed and more determined about the murder.

Instead of questioning the morality of the deed as her husband does, she questions his manliness using insults in order to convince him to do it. "when you durst it, then you were a man", she then accuses him of cowardice, questions his love for her, before questioning his sexuality and reputation. She also uses flattery to persuade him "Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!... all hail hereafter". Finally she reassures him it will work "But screw your courage to the sticking point, and we'll not fail". We can see by all her devious methods just how determined she is to get her way.

She questions his love for her even though she knows he loves her deeply, she manipulates him knowing he cannot withstand such an emotional challenge, this shows her cruelty and her "fiend-like" qualities at this point. After the murder, when he has done what she wanted, she reassures him by calling him "My Husband" for the only time in the play. She offers

him comfort, as she is very calm, the opposite of Macbeth who is extremely agitated. She is not afraid and tries to calm him by telling him "A little water clears us of this deed", later her frantic hand washing will prove this assertion wrong.

We see after the murder that she has not been completely 'unsexed', she says that if Duncan had "not resembled my father as he slept, I had don't" implying that she is still very much a woman with a woman's weaknesses. I do not think that this is a sign of a 'fiend-like queen' as her strength is enhanced by the wine she has drunk. The wine has given her courage and made her brave; brave enough to sort out the mistakes that Macbeth made and return the daggers to the murder scene. It initially seems as though the whole incident has had no effect on Lady Macbeth, she apparently feels no fear, until she sees Duncan's body.

It then hits her what they have done, the effects of the alcohol disappear and she regains her real feelings, especially fear. These reactions by Lady Macbeth show us that she is actually a normal person overcome by ambition who wouldn't normally do what she did. She brushes aside her qualms and guilt in order to reassure her husband. Soon after the death of Duncan their relationship starts to change. While planning of the murder of Duncan, Lady Macbeth was obviously in control, influencing Macbeth, showing the 'fiend-like queen' side of her. After the death though, both become more distant from each other.

She is not told about his plans to kill Banquo and Macbeth seems to go off by himself. Lady Macbeth actually enticed Macbeth into the first murder, now he

feels confident enough to go of by himself and do what he wants without any more of her help. In Act 3, Scene 2, it is clear Lady Macbeth now knows that the crown has not brought her happiness, "our desire is got without content." She is now alienated from her husband-"Why do you keep me alone".

During the banqueting scene when Macbeth becomes paranoid with delusions of Banquo's ghost which Lady Macbeth does not see show she no longer knows him.

In trying to restore Macbeth to himself after his wild ramblings she uses the same strategy as before, appealing to his manhood - "Are you a man?" This time it is ineffectual, when the audience see her talking over his role as host, they will see how she is standing up for Macbeth and still cares for him however they would also be appalled at her talking over a 'male' role and in ordering the guests to leave without regard to the precedence on which the soured order is established, view her as someone intent on destroying the natural order on which harmony depends.

When the leave we see she makes no further attempt to 'revive' him as she knows he is lost to her forever. The audience cannot avoid feeling sorry for her as she has lost her deep love and is completely isolated. The relationship with her husband is now completely dissolved and later we see how without her husband, she is extremely unhappy and overcome with guilt. By the beginning of Act 5, Lady Macbeth has completely lost her earlier confidence and calmness. She has become withdrawn and disturbed.

She starts to sleepwalk and is being haunted by her thoughts of the murder that she was so much a part of. As she is sleepwalking she sees blood on her

hands, blood that can not be removed, in contrast to what she thought earlier and the way she shrugged off her guilt - " Out, damned spot! " and " What, will these hands ne'er be clean? " This act of sleepwalking is clearly Lady Macbeth paying the price for what she has done, her world has become hellish. The guilt soon becomes too much for her and she commits suicide.

I think that she was trying to help Macbeth get what he wanted and she felt he deserved, I believe that if she was truly a ' fiend-like queen' then she would not have been haunted by her fears and the murders would not have effected her this way. In conclusion I believe that Malcolm's description of her as a " fiend-like queen", is not an entirely accurate representation of Lady Macbeth, contrary to my initial impression of her. This remark may have some truth to it as Lady Macbeth did manipulate Macbeth into doing the things he did, but she does realise finally the enormity what she has done.

She regrets her actions and I don't think that regret is something that a ' fiend' would feel. The witches can be seen as more responsible for Macbeth's actions as they gave him the thought of murder even though it was Lady Macbeth that spurred him on. She died what she did out of love for her husband, so I don't think she is truly evil just someone overcome by ambition for her husband, who acted without thinking of the consequences. Her final remorse reveals her human side rather than her ' fiend-like' qualities.