

Dead butcher and his fiend-like queen essay sample

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



The initial thing that I must do is try to define what is meant by the descriptions; “ dead butcher” and “ fiend-like Queen”. Of course “ dead” and “ Queen” need no explanation as the characters were plainly these things. By butcher I think it is meant to signify that the speaker of these lines; Malcolm, Duncan’s son, believed that Macbeth was an unthinking killer, and a killer of many it also denotes that he was, like a butcher, strong and skilled in his field, though not necessarily brave, as a butcher only kills defenceless animals. Malcolm wanted to say that Macbeth was a slaughterer of masses of people who, when murdered were defenceless. Like King Duncan in his sleep, and Macduff’s family, though he was not directly the murderer of the Macduffs, he did order the massacre.

With Lady Macbeth being described as “ fiend-like” Malcolm sought to make out that Lady Macbeth was a cruel and wicked person, that she was inhuman and like a devil that is an agent of Satan, just as witches were, at that time, considered to be. An interesting definition of fiend is that of a fanatic-“ a person motivated by irrational enthusiasm” (quote from Google ‘ fiend definition’.[<http://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&lr=&oi=defmore&defl=en&q=define:fiend>]). I do however find it interesting to note that Malcolm did not say she was a fiend, but merely that she was fiend-like, which is, at least in part, accurate as Lady Macbeth has said a few witch-like things, but I will explain that later on.

Macbeth; is it fair to say that he is, or was in any part of the play a ‘ Butcher’. In the first scene that we hear of Macbeth [Act 1 Scene 2] he is a brutal and strong fighter, as on the battle field “ his brandished steel,/Which smoked

with bloody execution” we learn from that that he killed so many that his sword “ smoked” from the heat of the blood as there was so much. The other important proof of Macbeth’s brutal strength and a depiction of a kind of butchery in the sense of a man who carves meat is when Macbeth is described as having “ unseamed him nave to th’ chops”, a difficult manoeuvre with the heavy weapons of the time. However Macbeth’s butchery on the battlefield merely earns him respect and praise “ brave Macbeth”, “ O valiant cousin”, as he is fighting for the king and for ‘ good’ at least so from the king’s point of view. Even though Macbeth is already a butcher of a kind, it is at this point that Macbeth is at his most valiant and praised, we could say he was ‘ at the top of his game’, it is after this that Macbeth hears the witches’ prophecies and the seeds are set in his mind that will spell his downfall. Although at first he does immediately think of bloodily murdering the king “ why do I yield to that suggestion,/Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,” which would of course be more killing, more butchery, he does not think of that for long and decides to wait and see if chance, fate, will make him king. “ If chance will have King, why chance/ May crown me”.

In Act 1 Scene 4 Malcolm is announced as the heir, not Macbeth, it may have been at this point that Macbeth realised that murder was the only way for him to be King “ that is a step,/ On which I must fall down, or else o’erleap,” He believes this until in act 1 scene 7 he lays down all the reasons for and against killing Duncan during a soliloquy he has many reasons against; consequences all the way to the afterlife, the he is a good King, the king is chosen by God, so a crime against the king is the same a crime against God

and other reasons against the murder, he can only come up with one reason to commit regicide, and that is of his "Vaulting ambition", he wants to be King. At this point I think it would be fair to say that Macbeth is not a butcher in the way which Malcolm meant it, as he is not some unthinking killer, he has thought long and hard about the consequences and I believe, though he does not state it outright, he decides not to kill Duncan as it would bring more harm than good. However shortly after his speech and decision, Lady Macbeth enters the scene and he offers only one point of opposition to the murder, perhaps indicating that he doesn't really want not to do it, as in the previous scene he could think of many reasons not to kill Duncan, and so, why not give many reasons to her, really he wants her to convince him, although this does not make him a 'butcher' and soon she does persuade Macbeth to kill Duncan by taunting and insulting him.

Macbeth then, in act 2, kills the King; however it drives him mad After the murder Macbeth thinks that there is not enough water in the world to wash the blood from his hands "all great Neptune's ocean wash the blood...my hand will rather/ The multitudinous seas incarnadine." Surely if he was a mindless killer, a butcher, would not fear a little blood. On the battlefield he was not afraid, but if he were truly a butcher then surely nothing he killed, slaughtered even would agitate him. Also after the murder he "could not say Amen" showing that he had broken the 'Divine Right of the Succession of Kings' that states that the King is chosen by God, and so after murdering the King, Macbeth is punished for his crime by God. Whilst it may seem odd in

this day and age, the 'Divine Right' was very much believed in at the time of Macbeth and of Shakespeare.

Even though the murder of the King worried him, in Act 3 Macbeth wants his close friend Banquo and Banquo's son Fleance to be dead. As he fears that the witches' prophesy that the heirs of Banquo would be King would be true "his son that keeps his company, whose absence is no less material to me than that of his fathers..." However he does not murder them himself, instead he gets Murderers, butchers if you will, to do it for him. Whilst he wants them dead he cannot do it himself; whilst this does make him evil, it does not make him a butcher. The ordering of death becomes a pattern for Macbeth with the later order of the Macduffs' demise. Is it that Macbeth no longer has the stomach, or mind, for murder, or is it that he is simply using his kingly powers to do what he would if he had the ability, but since he is the King he can get others to do 'his dirty work'?

During the banquet in Act 3 Scene 4 Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo and is very scared and angry: "If trembling I inhabit then". After the banquet has been brought to an early finish as Macbeth is 'unwell', Macbeth announces to his wife that he is going to seek out the witches: "I will tomorrow.../to the Weird Sisters." During the time of Shakespeare witches were considered to be agents of the Devil, to be visited by one would be terrible, but to seek a witch out was unheard of and a certainty of evil. However, perhaps to explain his actions Macbeth says "I am in blood/Stepped in so far, that should I wade no more,/Returning were as tedious as to go o'er." Showing that he has gone so far into evil that it would be as hard to come out as to

go on, so he must go on, it is easier for him to go on murdering than to seek forgiveness for his deeds.

In Act four Scene 1 before Macbeth arrives at the witches lair, a witch says “Something wicked this way comes” for a witch to call someone evil, must make that person incredibly sinful, but no butcher. Scene 2 sees a scene of familial bliss at the castle of Macduff is shattered by Macbeth’s murderers; as Macbeth was told to “fear Macduff” by the witches’ apparitions, with the first slain being the youngest boy “He has killed me mother,” Macduff however is not among the slain. Act 5 sees Macbeth with confidence, but he also appears fed up of life and nihilistic in his outlook; he states many things that one should have at his age, and that all he has is false, also he compares life to a play, a metaphor utilised in other Shakespearean productions, he also compares life to a “tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/Signifying nothing.” This really shows how tired he is of life.

In act 5 Scene 7, Macbeth’s last act of ‘butchery’ is seen when Macbeth kills Young Siward. Macbeth is then slain at the end of scene 8 by Macduff. Earlier in the act after Macbeth was informed that the wood was ‘moving’, a prophesy by the witches that seemed impossible but was a trick as the army carry branches, Macbeth announces “At least we’ll die with harness on our back.” Showing that though he was weary and his past killings were not at his own hand, Macbeth is still a fighter, and will not see his end without a fight.

The first time we meet Lady Macbeth is in Act 1 Scene 5, in a soliloquy she reads a letter from Macbeth about the witches' prophecies, and from the first time she reads of them, she is determined that Macbeth will get what has been promised him in the prophecies :” to have thee crowned withal”.

However she immediately states that Macbeth is “ too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness/ to catch the nearest way” and then she uses language that is a little ‘ witch-like’ “ pour mine spirits in thine ear,” to persuade him to get what she wants him to have. Lady Macbeth will use other language that is witch or spell like throughout the course of the Act and that play.

At first she appears to be a very strong and dominating woman, however in the interests of context, we must look at women’s position in society at the time the play was written, and most certainly the time the play was set: During those times society was a Patriarchy, and women were expected to be docile, weak and submissive. However Lady Macbeth was plainly not these things and it may be because of her thoughts and aspirations that the play shows her as evil because she did not conform to what was considered ‘ right’. Even Macbeth views her as his equal “ my dearest partner of greatness”, this would not have been normal or right and so Lady Macbeth is shown as wicked, even “ fiend-like”. However her being evil may be true as upon hearing of Duncan’s visit to the castle she asks the ‘ spirits’ to “ unsex me here.../ And take my milk for gall” asking, in an almost spell-like way to make her more manly so she will have the strength to, presumably, kill Duncan. Upon Macbeth’s arrival she moves him to murder the King, but to hide his intent.

In scene 6 Lady Macbeth does what she has just instructed her husband to do and is very nice to the King, even though she intends him to be dead by the next day. Scene 7 shows Macbeth having second thoughts about the murders, but Lady Macbeth taunts and insults him, “ Was the hope drunk/... Hath it slept since?” and shows him her strength by telling him that if she’d promised him, then she would have dashed the brains of her baby out. “ How tender ’tis to love the babe.../Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,/ And dashed the brains out,” really showing either her pure evil, as she would kill the baby that she loves, her devotion to her husband, or the extent that she would go to in order to convince her husband into murdering Duncan. I believe she only is saying these things as she knows what Macbeth and she really wants, but also that he is to ‘ weak’ to do it without goading.

Act 2 Scene 2 is the first sign of Lady Macbeth not being strong, as “ That which hath made them drunk hath/ made me bold;” showing that in order for her to stomach, and play and part in the murder of Duncan she had to gain some ‘ Dutch-courage’ from alcohol. However she is soon, whether owing to alcohol or not back to the strength in the Macbeths’ partnership; taking the knives back to the scene as Macbeth had not, then consoling her husband that “ a little water clears us of the deed.” As he believes that his hands will never be clean. This is an example of ‘ proleptic irony’ as later in the play it is blood on her hands that is the main part of her insanity. However at Act 2 it seems that the murder does not affect Lady Macbeth as she continues to help her husband even fainting in Scene 3 “ Help me hence, ho! [Faints” when it seems that Macbeth will incriminate himself.

During the early part of Act 3 Macbeth organises murders that he does not tell his wife about;

“ Lady Macbeth: “ What’s to be done?”

Macbeth: “ Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,”” this perhaps annoys Lady Macbeth, however Scene 3 of that same act shows her once more supporting Macbeth in a time of need, when he encounters the ghost Lady Macbeth tries to reassure the guests by telling them “ My lord is often thus,/And hath been from his youth.” Then she gets them to leave, presumably so Macbeth can keep face. Finally consoling her husband and saying “ You lack the season of all natures, sleep.” Mentioning that Macbeth has, by murdering the king broken the ‘ Great Chain of Being’, this, like ‘ Divine Right’ was strongly believed in during the times, it stated that everything in the universe had its correct place in a hierarchy, from the lowest being; mud, to the highest; God. If the Chain was broken then nature would be imbalanced, there are several references to this throughout the play; straight after the murder, “ heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.” To Macbeth not being able to sleep. This is another of the consequences to Macbeth’s actions, which he should have been wary of. This is the last Scene in which Lady Macbeth appears for more than one Act, and it is the last time she appears to us sane.

Act 5 Scene 1 Lady Macbeth appears sleepwalking, clearly no longer of sound mind, “ Here’s the smell of blood still;.../ Oh, oh, oh!” She relives past events in a state of insanity. In Act 2 she had told Macbeth that “ What’s

done is done”, however now in act 5 she states, amid her insanity, “ what’s done cannot be undone”, realising she too must face the consequences. I believe that as Macbeth had left her out of his plans of late she was able to dwell on what they had done and the mere thought of it drove her mad. Also her sleepwalking may have been a sign of her punishment for breaking the ‘ Chain of Being’ and ‘ Divine Right’, as the Doctor does say; “ Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles.” Also he’s says he cannot help her as “ More needs she the divine than the physician”; her wrongs were so huge that only God can save her! In Act 5 Scene 5 we learn that Lady Macbeth is dead, we do not at the time learn the cause of her death, but later find out that she was “ self-murdering”. Her exact form of suicide is unknown, but the 1971 Roman Polanski film shows Lady Macbeth jumping off a tower, a likely form of her suicide.

In conclusion of Macbeth I would say that he started a praised killer, butcher yes, but not bad for Scotland. He was then thrust into a situation where his lust for power caused him to do something he ultimately regretted, and had to carry on, as to stop would be harder than continuing. He was not really in my eyes a butcher, but killing the king did upset the ‘ Chain of Being’ and break ‘ Divine Right’ causing many unnatural things to happen to him. Evil he was, but not a mindless killer; not a butcher. We have to see that when Malcolm called him a “ butcher”, Macbeth had murdered his father, caused him to leave the country, Malcolm could not in this situation give a fair assessment of Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth, I believe started off just trying to support her husband and get him what he wanted even if he was too afraid to do it, but as this was unnatural in the time she was made to appear evil. She continued to support Macbeth until he started to leave her out of his plans and she was then driven mad from the guilt as she had so much time to dwell on her actions. She was only apparently fiend-like when she appeared to be enchanting herself, but I believe she was just 'psyching herself up'. Again Malcolm would not have been fair in his description of Lady Macbeth and was likely seeking to discredit their name, though truly it was already disgraceful. Lady Macbeth was never truly 'fiend-like' though she was mad.