Macbeth: Blood As A Symbol Essay, Research Paper

Blood as a Symbol in Macbeth

In Macbeth, many symbols are used that parallel major themes in the play. One of these symbols is blood, and the theme that it reinforces is killing, and the fear associated with killing. Many scenes in the play involving murder also have blood mentioned, although not necessarily during the murder. The use of blood as a symbol is very important when connected to the theme of killing, and is used as a foreshadowing device as well.

The first time Shakespeare uses blood as a symbol takes place in Act II Scene II, when Macbeth is going to kill Duncan. He imagines a bloody dagger in front of him, pointing towards Duncan s room in his castle. As Macbeth describes it, “And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood, which was not so before…It is the bloody business which now informs thus to mine eyes.” (Act II, Scene II, 55-58) The blood in this scene foreshadows that Macbeth is about to kill Duncan. It also shows his fear about killing Duncan, because his mind is playing tricks on him. He is developing a guilty conscience although he has not yet committed the murder.

Another use of blood as a symbol occurs during the feast at Macbeth s castle after he has been crowned king and had Banquo killed. Macbeth imagines the bloody ghost of Banquo sitting in his spot at the table. He says, “Never shake thy gory locks at me.” (Act III, Scene IV, 64-65) This describes the blood on the ghost. Lady Macbeth also mentions the “air-drawn dagger” that Macbeth saw before killing Duncan. Macbeth s fear and guilty conscience from his killings is rising steadily. While he is killing for his own purposes, he does not realize how much it is hurting him mentally. His images of bloody ghosts and knives are evidence of this, as Macbeth is unable to keep a clear mind. This is also foreshadowing that all of Macbeth s killings will eventually cause great mental problems for Macbeth.

Another scene where Shakespeare uses blood as a symbol occurs in the scene where Macbeth visits the witches for a second time, and receives new predictions. One prediction shows a bloody child. The witches tell Macbeth that a man born from a woman cannot harm him. He is tricked, however, as Macduff, who was born prematurely, ends up killing Macbeth. The bloody child is Macduff, right after a Caesarian birth. The bloody child is not Macbeth s imagination, but it foreshadows that somehow Macbeth does not understand the visions as well. Macbeth than has a false sense of security, and will most likely be killed.

There are also quotes referring to blood as a symbol. One quote in Act III, Scene IV, 152-153, Macbeth says, “It will have blood, they say: blood will have blood. This is said right after Macbeth s feast in which he sees Banquo s ghost. It shows Macbeth s confusion, as well as his want for retaliation against the bloody ghost. However, the only way he knows to fight back is by killing more people. Macbeth does do this, and for every kill he becomes desensitized, crazier, and his guilty conscience grows rapidly.

The use of blood as a symbol is very important when connected to the theme of killing, and is used as a foreshadowing device as well. Blood foreshadows many important events in the play, most of which are more deaths. Blood also shows Macbeth s fear of killing because his conscience gets in the way. The theme of the fear of killing is very important, because eventually it affects Lady Macbeth so much that she kills herself because she could not control her guilty conscience. Every time this theme comes up, blood is usually mentioned and used as a symbol in one way or another.