Macbeth: The Symbol Of Blood Essay, Research Paper

Macbeth: The Symbol of Blood

I am going to prove that in the play Macbeth, a symbol of blood is

portrayed often(and with different meanings), and that it is a symbol that is

developed until it is the dominating theme of the play towards the end of it.

To begin with, I found the word “blood”, or different forms of it forty-two

times (ironically, the word fear is used forty-two times), with several other

passages dealing with the symbol. Perhaps the best way to show how the symbol

of blood changes throughout the play, is to follow the character changes in

Macbeth. First he is a brave honoured soldier, but as the play progresses, he

becomes a treacherous person who has become identified with death and bloodshed

and shows his guilt in different forms.

The first reference of blood is one of honour, and occurs when Duncan sees

the injured sergeant and says “What bloody man is that?”. This is symbolic of

the brave fighter who been injured in a valiant battle for his country. In the

next passage, in which the sergeant says “Which smok’d with bloody execution”,

he is referring to Macbeth’s braveness in which his sword is covered in the hot

blood of the enemy.

After these few references to honour, the symbol of blood now changes to

show a theme of treachery and treason. Lady Macbeth starts this off when she

asks the spirits to “make thick my blood,”. What she is saying by this, is that

she wants to make herself insensitive and remorseless for the deeds which she is

about to commit. Lady Macbeth knows that the evidence of blood is a treacherous

symbol, and knows it will deflect the guilt from her and Macbeth to the servants

when she says “smear the sleepy grooms with blood.”, and “If he do bleed, I’ll

gild the faces of the grooms withal, for it must seem their guilt.” When Banquo

states “and question this most bloody piece of work,” and Ross says “is’t known

who did this more than bloody deed?”, they are both inquiring as to who

performed the treacherous acts upon Duncan. When Macbeth is speaking about

Malcolm and Donalbain, he refers to them as “bloody cousins”

A final way, and perhaps the most vivid use of the symbol blood, is of the

theme of guilt. First Macbeth hints at his guilt when he says “Will all great

Neptune’s ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?”, meaning that he wondered

if he would ever be able to forget the dastardly deed that he had committed.

Then the ghost of Banquo, all gory, and bloody comes to haunt Macbeth at the

banquet. The sight of apparitions represents his guilt for the murder of Banquo

which he planned. Macbeth shows a bit of his guilt when he says “It is the

bloody business which informs thus,” he could not get the courage to say murder

after he had killed Duncan, so he says this instead.

Lady Macbeth shows the most vivid example of guilt using the symbol of

blood in the scene in which she walks in her sleep. She says “Out damned spot!

Out I say! One: two: why then ’tis time to do’t: hell is murky. Fie, my lord,

fie, a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it when none can call

out power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so

much blood in him?”. This speech represents the fact that she cannot wipe the

blood stains of Duncan off of her hands. It is ironic, that she says this,

because right after the murder, when Macbeth was feeling guilty, she said “A

little water clears us of this deed.” When the doctor of the castle finds out

about this sleepwalking, he tells Macbeth “As she is troubled with thick-coming

fantasies,”. What this means, is that Lady Macbeth is having fantasies or

dreams that deal with blood. Macbeth knows in his mind that she is having

troubles with her guilt, but does not say anything about it.

Just before the ending of the play, Macbeth has Macduff at his mercy, and

lets him go, because of his guilt. He shows that he is guilty, when he says

“But get thee back, my soul is too much charg’d with blood of thine already.”.

Of which, Macduff replies, “I have no words, my voice is in my sword, thou

bloodier villain than terms can give thee out.”

After the death of Macbeth at the hands of Macduff, the symbolic theme of

blood swings back to what it was at the beginning of the play. It is the symbol

of honour to Malcolm this time. The death of Macbeth is honoured feat that

Macduff is congratulated for.

So as we have seen meaning of the symbol of blood change from honour to

treachery, and then to guilt, after this, it returns to the symbolic meaning of

honour once again after the villain that changed the meaning from honour to

tyranny is killed. Due to these many changes, it has been proved that the

symbol of blood has many different meanings which can be attributed to it

throughout the course of this play.