The Change If The Immagery Of Blood In Macbeth Essay, Research Paper

The Symbolism of the Imagery of Blood In Macbeth and its Change Throughout the Play

Imagery is any piece of language that makes the reader form a mental picture or image. Shakespeare s plays are always interesting for the richness of their imagery, and Macbeth in particular has numerous vivid examples. Macbeth is also particularly rich in repeated images. Shakespeare returns again and again to an idea that he has introduced. One major repeated image of the play is Blood. Also, the meaning of the image of blood changes throughout the play from first being associated with honor and changes to the murder of Duncan and guilt, then evil, and then finally back to its original meaning.

In Macbeth there are more then 100 references to blood in the play. This emphasizes the violent and dark nature of the murders and of the play in general, and it also shows Macbeth s own character. At first blood is associated with honor and with Macbeth s bravery in battle. with his brandished steel that smoked with bloody execution (I.ii.18-19). This is how things normal are at the time of Macbeth; blood is usually connected with battle bravery and honor.

Later on, after Macbeth kills Duncan, the meaning of blood begins to change. In Act II Scene ii, after Macbeth kills Duncan, Macbeth s hands are covered in blood, and later on, Lady Macbeth s. Macbeth reacts to the blood very differently then Lady Macbeth. Macbeth sees the blood as the symbol of his action and as the symbol of his guilt; Macbeth cannot believe what he has done and is in shock. What hands are here! Ha! they pluck out mine eyes! Will all great Neptune s ocean wash this blood clean from my hands? No, this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green on red (II.ii.59-63). What Macbeth is saying is that nothing shall free him of this murder and of his guilt. He feels that what he has done is incredibly wrong, as he does not believe that anything could ever relive him of this action; that all the water in the world could not remove the blood. It would rather turn the ocean to a blood color. Another interpretation of the line my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine (II.ii.63) foreshadows that, since water represents good and purity, while he attempts to remove his guilt, he will defile the purity and goodness of everything else (the multitudinous seas) and kill more and more.

Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, sees the blood as washable; that guilt is easily washed away. A little water clears us of this deed; How easy is it then! (II.ii.66-67). Notice the contrast of a little water to Macbeth s multitudinous seas . These 2 phrases represent the characters guilt at the time. Lady Macbeth s guilt level is low; she thinks it can be washed away easily because she feels little guilt. Macbeth, on the other hand, is enormous. We notice the depth of Macbeth s guilt because he believes that not all the water on the planet can undo the dastardly deed he has committed. Later on, during Lady Macbeth s sleep walking scene, the guilt of Duncan s murder catch up to her, and she realizes what Macbeth realized in the beginning of the play. Out, dammed spot! Out, I say! (V.i.43). She realizes the severity of their actions and begins to feel extremely guilty. In her sleep, she mimics the washing of her hands, yet because she realizes that the deed will never leave her – the blood can never be washed off her hands, she kills herself. This all connects to the Blood/Water symbolism in the play. Blood represents impurity and water represents cleansing and purity.

At the height of his evil, Macbeth says that he is wading in a pool of blood. I am in blood Stepp’d in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o’er (III.iv.135-137). In this case, the meaning of blood has changed to evil. Macbeth is saying that he is stepped so far into a sticky pool of blood that it would be impossible to get out of that pool, meaning that he is so far into evil that it is impossible to go back to being good. Not only is his hand cover in blood now, but his whole body. The change of blood from guilt to evil is also shown when Macbeth visits the witches. The witches tell Macbeth to be evil by using the image of blood and its new meaning. Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn the power if man (IV.i.78-79).

After Macbeth is slain, the symbolic theme of blood swings back to what it was at the beginning of the play. Macduff presents Macbeth s bloody head to the crowd and to the new King of Scotland, Malcom, and the people rejoice. The death of Macbeth is honored and the symbolism of blood has returned to it s original meaning; the bloodiest are the ones most honored. Macduff is congratulated as he proudly walks in covered with blood and with Macbeth s head. Hail, King! For so thou art. Behold where stands the usurper s cursed head. The time is free (V.vi.92-93). Right after Macduff says that line, the crowed rejoices, showing the change of meaning of the symbolism of the imagery of blood. Notice how the meaning of blood is changed by Macbeth and is later returned to it s normal meaning after the rightful King is on the throne. This connects to the theme of natural order in the play. Ironically, it was blood that brought Macbeth to power and blood that brought him to death.