

Macbeth motif

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Throughout the play “ Macbeth” William Shakespeare uses many motifs to emphasize themes and develop the plot. One major motif, blood, is used to symbolize heroism and power as well as corruption and evil. As events play out in the story, the title character and his wife both become progressively more unscrupulous and their immoral acts begin to weigh on their conscious. In “ Macbeth”, Shakespeare utilizes blood as a motif to illustrate the increasing guilt Macbeth and Lady Macbeth suffer as a result of their violent and manipulative actions.

Even before Macbeth commits any crimes, he hallucinates due to the enormous amount of stress he is under. Macbeth’s guilt over his imminent murder manifests itself as a dagger in Act II Scene i lines 45-49, and Macbeth utters, “ I see thee still, / And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood, / Which was not so before. There’s no such thing. / It is the bloody business which informs / Thus to mine eyes.” The blood spattered on the blade and handle of the dagger imply that the dagger was viciously and maliciously used on someone, foreshadowing the violent and gory act that Macbeth soon carries out. Macbeth even recognizes that the dagger is not real; it is the “ bloody business” of the murder that he is about to commit that is causing it to appear before him.

In Act II scene ii lines 78-81, when Macbeth returns to Lady Macbeth after completing Duncan’s murder he cries, “ Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?” After he has committed the horrible deed of murdering his king, Macbeth realizes that he will never be able to wash the blood from his hands, as he will never be able to rid himself of the guilt

he feels. No matter if it is a little water or a whole ocean of water, what he has done can never be undone.

As the play progresses, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth continue to perform nefarious deeds and their guilt greatly increases as do the manifestations it causes. In Act V scene i lines 40-41, Lady Macbeth, in a confused state says, “ Yet who would have thought the old man / to have had so much blood in him?” as she roams about the castle sleepwalking and talking. Lady Macbeth confesses her horror of seeing all of the blood in the grisly place of Duncan’s murder.

Though she had been instrumental in its execution, she had not anticipated the extent of ramifications of her manipulation. In her sleep, the Lady is constantly washing and wringing her hands of the imagined blood of all of the casualties of her and Macbeth’s rise to power. Since the night of the first murder it seems, Lady Macbeth, like her husband, feels that the blood of the crime will never be truly washed from her hands; the guilt of it will always plague her conscious. The overwhelming remorse she feels leads to her eventual suicide.

Shakespeare clearly demonstrates that emotions are hard to hide for long, especially such a powerful one as guilt, and that they can manifest in unforeseeable ways. The bloody visions of Macbeth and his wife, brought on by their violent acts, led to their bloody demises. Every action has a consequence, positive or negative, big or small. If one knows the choice he or she is making is wrong, one is certain to feel guilty.