

Beauty and corruption in mad shadows essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Blais evokes the destructive nature beneath the surface of beauty and vanity through Isabelle-Marie, in *Mad Shadows*. Blais presents a dysfunctional family, which deeply roots its values in narcissistic attitudes. The vanity and importance of beauty establish a hostile and intolerant environment for the people that lack physical attractiveness. Isabelle-Marie, who is considered to be ugly and dreadful in appearance, has been immersed into this unsympathetic atmosphere. Louise, the predominant enactor of this harsh criticism, displays deep contempt for Isabelle-Marie, mainly due to her physical appearance. Isabelle-Marie must live in the shadow of her mother and beautiful brother, where she is forced to face lack of love and her personal hell of constant envy.

Michael temporarily establishes an illusion for Isabelle-Marie to be lost in, but later only cultivates her hatred and envy towards her brother. Her pain and suffering perpetuates her fall from innocence and causes her soul to descend into hell. Once all illusions have been wiped away, Isabelle-Marie finally understands that evil has tainted her soul and led her to corruption. In Blais' *Mad Shadows*, Isabelle-Marie is tainted by overwhelming jealousy, immersing her into destruction and ultimately resulting in the dissolution of her soul. Isabelle-Marie's fall from innocence and path towards evil begins with her deep contempt for her mother and continues with her overwhelming jealousy towards Patrice. Isabelle-Marie detests that her mother always treats Patrice like a prince, while she is rejected and forced to do menial and difficult work. Isabelle-Marie is constantly placed in the shadow of her brother, not only her mother's eyes, but in all other peoples' eyes as well. She constantly feels envious of the attention and affection her brother receives from her mother.

During the beginning of the novella, Isabelle-Marie contains her hatred, “swallow[ing] her fury...rebellion [giving] her strength [as] her hands [grow] sharp as knives” (Blais 19). As Isabelle-Marie returns to the house after a tedious and draining day of working in the fields, she discovers Patrice and Louise resting and living without worry. She feels envious that her brother is receiving royal treatment, while she serves as the slave. This only causes the hatred for her brother and mother to magnify. During this point in the novella, Isabelle-Marie is still able to control her fury and jealousy, however she constantly reflects on physical harm. As she witnesses more unfair treatment and experiences further rejection, her fall from innocence begins. Her hands will ultimately become knives that cause physical pain and deviate into tools of evil and corruption. After some reflection, Isabelle-Marie decides to starve Patrice to destroy his beauty that she despises so deeply.

She “ wanted to make him ugly. For a moment she shie[s] away from this perverse idea, then she [gives] into it” (Blais 25). Through her decision to deprive Patrice of food, she loses her child-like innocence. In the beginning of the novella, she is hesitant towards harming him. She then later gives in to her desires and harms her brother because of her overwhelming jealousy towards him. However, at this point, she is still not ready to totally let go of her innocence. Isabelle-Marie still shows signs of regret in her malicious intent and tries to help her brother afterwards. She has not been blinded by vanity and can still see with reason and truth.

With her contempt and disdain for her Louise and Patrice, Isabelle-Marie begins her first steps towards corruption and evil. Blais establishes a profound change of character in Isabelle-Marie, emphasizing her desire for

beauty and her increasingly vain attitude. During a party for her mother's wedding, Isabelle-Marie meets Michael, a blind boy who is still vain and concerned with physical appearance. However, since Isabelle-Marie longs for affection, she lies to him about her appearance. As her relationship with Michael grows, her vanity replaces her old mentality. She is blinded as she turns away from the truth and starts to become more and more like her mother, whom she despises. Her desire for the affection that she has been deprived of transforms her into Louise. More than anything, she wants Michael to love her.

Once Michael asks to marry Isabelle-Marie, she knows that “ everything would be like Louise, like Lanz, like the vast tragedy in which they all were grave performers” (Blais 66). She understands that her relationship with Michael has become a reflection of Louise's relationship with Lanz. Isabelle-Marie recognizes that they will become soulless dolls in a relationship with no true meaning, and it is this knowledge that saddens her. She despises her mother because of her lack of a soul but she transforms into a doll herself, completely shutting off her old values and beliefs. The relationship with Michael only temporarily satisfies Isabelle-Marie's desires, later aggravating her hatred towards Patrice. After her relationship with Michael ends, her thoughts move more and more towards “ destroying her brother's unjust beauty” (84). Michael leaves Isabelle-Marie once he discovers her true appearance, so she returns to her old home. Here she is forced to witness Patrice's beauty constantly and swallow up her jealousy.

Suffering from an immense and lacerating wound from humiliation, her thoughts of harming her brother grow exponentially. Blais evokes the pain

and jealousy pouring out for Isabelle's heart, emphasizing her desire to harm Patrice. She longs for justice, so that Patrice may experience the agonizing pain that she has. Isabelle-Marie's change in character and her overwhelming sorrow and jealousy are integral to her soul's path towards hell. Isabelle-Marie's decision to act with destructive violence completes her fall from innocence and ultimately leads to her destruction. Throughout the novella, Isabelle-Marie has been able to control her desire to harm Patrice. However, after she experiences such paining sorrow, her overwhelming jealousy and contempt for her brother finally overcome her innocence and conscience. She decides to act upon her impulse, " plung[ing] Patrice's head into ...boiling water" (Blais 95).

Doing this has completely severed all ties to innocence that Isabelle once possessed. Once she commits the act of harming her brother, there is no turning back from her soul's corruption and path towards hell. She no longer feels the regret or shame that she felt during the beginning of the novella. Instead, she takes pleasure from Patrice's immeasurable pain. Isabelle-Marie starts to " laugh and sing, now that there [is] no beautiful face to put her to shame" (Blais 102). She effectively erases the biggest threat she faces constantly, Patrice's beauty. Patrice's face is a constant reminder of Louise's constant contempt and lack of affection, as well as her failed relationship with Michael. His beauty truly emphasizes her ugliness, which she considers to be her curse.

Once she eliminates this beauty, she is able to mentally disregard any condemnation that her mother has directed towards her throughout her life. Beauty and jealousy truly tainted Isabelle's soul and caused her to act out of

spite for her brother. Isabelle-Marie's final dissolution is reached with her decision to burn down her mother's fields. While visiting her mother's farm, she hurls a lantern into the dry straw, "[thinking] that it was Louise's land that she was destroying but suddenly [realizing] that it was God's land" (Blais 121). At this point, she desires total destruction, even if it means destroying the land that she loves so much. Her corruption and tendency towards sin blinds her from the very morals that have been rooted deep inside her. During the ending of *Mad Shadows*, Isabelle-Marie understands the full gravity of all her actions. She calls out for a god, someone to save her soul, but it is too late.

She decides to end to life, her soul searching for any kind guidance as it plummets into hell. In Blais' *Mad Shadows*, Isabelle-Marie is stained with overwhelming jealousy and deep contempt, triggering her fall from innocence and journey towards corruption. Blais evokes Isabelle-Marie's malevolence through her profound change in character and her grave decision to harm Patrice and Louise. Her disdain for Patrice and Louise is rooted in the unfortunate atmosphere she is raised in. Isabelle's suffering and pain from her failed relationship with Michael influences her to act upon her impulse. Through these actions, she loses all sight of innocence and her soul embraces corruption. Ultimately, Isabelle-Marie is the victim of the destructive nature of beauty and vanity, resulting in the dissolution of her soul. A harsh atmosphere that promotes vanity and rejects proper nurturing becomes a dangerous environment for wickedness and corruption to cultivate and penetrate the human soul.