
Murder And Guilt In Macbeth By William Shakespeare

Anne Rice exclaims, "The evil of one murder is infinite and my guilt is like my beauty- eternal. I cannot be forgiven for there is no one to forgive me for all I've done." Most people would never consider killing another person for their own benefit, but those who have feel immense guilt for what they have done. In the play Macbeth, written by William Shakespeare, the protagonist Macbeth and his wife Lady Macbeth plot to kill King Duncan. Macbeth wants to become King and the only way was to commit treason by killing Duncan. Right away Macbeth feels so guilty about what he has just done. In contrast, Lady Macbeth is the opposite, she starts with no guilt, but it then begins to build up. Shakespeare incorporates the motif of blood throughout the plot to demonstrate this guilt. Blood symbolizes guilt and impurity for the murders committed by Lady Macbeth and Macbeth, which affects them differently throughout the course of the play.

Macbeth feels haunted when he murders Duncan and begins to feel guilty. Macbeth is hesitant whether or not he wants to murder King Duncan. He starts to feel a strong sense of guilt even before he goes through with the murder. Macbeth states, "I see thee still And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood" (Shakespeare 2.1.45-47). Macbeth is hallucinating that he sees a knife covered in blood. This foreshadows the death of Duncan. This is the first feeling of guilt that Macbeth experiences. The bloody knife is the symbolism of the gory and impure act of killing King Duncan. This is just the beginning of the guilt that Macbeth is going to feel. Macbeth then proceeds to kill Duncan. He has blood all over his hands and Lady Macbeth tells him to wash the blood off. Macbeth says, "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand" (Shakespeare Act 2.2. 60-62). Macbeth is saying that not even a massive amount of water can wash the blood off his hands. Physically, Macbeth is able to wash all the blood off his hands. Mentally, the blood will be there forever and always having an imprint on him. He cannot change the fact that he killed a man. Duncan's blood in particular represents the guilt that will follow Macbeth. Macbeth's guilt was seen before and after the death of Duncan. Seeing the bloody knife shows Macbeth the goriness and violence of murder and the guilt that will be with him forever. Macbeth could not wash the blood off his hands because that blood represents evil and impurity from the inescapable act he commits. Macbeth is dealt with great guilt that he cannot escape from.

In contrast to her husband, Lady Macbeth handles the death in a very nonchalant and calm matter. Lady Macbeth believes her husband is a coward because of the immense guilt he feels. Lady Macbeth spreads the dead King's blood so they are not framed for death. Macbeth was unable to do this because he was in utter shock, so Lady Macbeth had to do it herself. She explains to Macbeth, "My hands are of your color, but I shame / To wear a heart so white" (Shakespeare 2.2.78-79). Lady Macbeth points out that her hands are also covered in blood. A "white heart" is very bloodless and cowardly compared to her bloody red heart. She is ashamed of her husband's cowardice and his disbelief in what he has done. Lady Macbeth contrast with Macbeth because she does not view blood as guilt and believes that guilt is cowardly. After the murder, Macbeth begins to panic and feel remorse for what he has done. Lady Macbeth orders him to, "go get some water / and wash this filthy witness" (Shakespeare 2.2.46-47). Lady Macbeth directs Macbeth to go clean the blood off his hands. She is not comprehending how significant the blood on Macbeth's hands is. She implies that Macbeth is a coward for being overly obsessed with the blood all over his hands. She displays no remorse

that she indirectly kills Duncan, and is not aware of the consequences. Lady Macbeth is troubled with her guilt and does not come to terms with the act she is involved in. Lady Macbeth contrast with Macbeth because she does not see feel guilt for the bloody deed she commits.

Lady Macbeth and Macbeth develop on how they express the guilt of their murders. The theme of guilt, caused by blood, affects both characters differently. Lady Macbeth finally is overpowered by her guilt and it causes her to go mad. Lady Macbeth starts to sleepwalk and begins to scream that there is blood on her hands. She starts “washing” the imaginary blood off her hands. She screams, “Here’s the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand” (Shakespeare 5.1.53-55). The guilt of killing Duncan never escapes Lady Macbeth. She adds that the smell of the blood is so pungent that not even the strongest perfume can get rid of the stench. This connects back to when Macbeth said that not even an ocean can wash the blood off his hands. Killing Duncan is permit just like how the “blood” on Lady Macbeth’s hands is permanent. Lady Macbeth is now full of remorse which is in contrast to how she felt when Duncan’s assassination was complete. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth both switch roles on how they deal with their guilt. On the other hand, Macbeth’s guilt is not as prominent as it was before. Macbeth murders his closest friend Banquo because he was seen as a threat. After the murder of Banquo, Macbeth begins to see Banquo’s ghost at a dinner party right after he becomes King. After the party, Macbeth exclaims, “I am in blood stepped in so far that should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go” (Shakespeare 3.4.142-144). Macbeth is imagining himself being stuck in a river of blood. He is saying that it would be more difficult for him to receive penance for his bloody actions. He claims that it would be easier for him to just keep carrying out murders because his conscience is already damaged so there is no point in going back. He is no longer feeling as guilty as he was when he kills Duncan. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth contrast on how they handle the guilt. In the beginning, Macbeth felt a sense of impurity for the actions he commits, but as time goes on he becomes numb to the murder and is unaffected by the blood of his victims. However, Lady Macbeth was very cold and unemotional about the death of Duncan, but then she begins to express guilt when she is unable to wash the permanent blood off her hands. As the plot goes on, blood causes them to either grow or diminish in their guilt.

Blood is a major symbol in Macbeth. Blood ties in with the main theme of guilt seen when Macbeth kills Duncan. Macbeth feels like he cannot wash the blood off of his hands because even if the blood is gone the guilt still remains. Lady Macbeth does not have this same effect when Duncan is killed. She tells her husband to just wash off his hands and acts like it is not a huge dilemma. However, their mindsets change. Lady Macbeth is overpowered by the guilt of Duncan’s death. She cannot seem to get rid of the imaginary smell of Duncan’s blood. In contrast, Macbeth starts to become numb to all of his murders and feels like he is too far deep into the bloodshed that he causes. Blood represents guilt and impurity from both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. One can ignore the guilt caused by a bloody murder, but over time it can either cause self-destruction or in opposition can cause one to go completely unfazed by their murderous acts.