

Just Lather, That's All

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A mirror is a testament to one's honour and pride, and a reflection of identity and morals. In Hernando Tellez's "Just Lather, That's All," a barber is faced with the difficult decision of either murdering or following his morals. The blood indicates the potential murder and the contamination that would follow, staining everything including the internal self. On the other hand, the lather represents the barber's moral values and his desire to rejuvenate and to purify while remaining uncontaminated. Therefore, Tellez uses symbols to suggest that only when one's morality is guided by internal values can evil and wrongdoing be eliminated from one's internal self.

Tellez uses the blood to imply the horrifying consequences of murder, and how it causes a chain reaction, eventually coming back full circle to infect the internal self. Faced with the dilemma of good versus evil, the barber realizes that "nothing" is gained from murder and that no benefit come out of it. Furthermore, he realizes that once murder is initiated, it automatically leads to the "uncontainable" plague of bloodlust that begins to spread like a "sea of blood" until it ultimately destroys the innate self. Through the barber's internal dialogue, Tellez is able to reveal that the bloodlust is "ineradicable," as it does not relent until it has destroyed everything in its path. Furthermore, the power of blood and violence leaves its victims unable to "think clearly," forcing them to act without reason. The barber faces this decision, understanding that if he murders the captain; he will be a murderer by identity and no longer a barber. However, if he lets the captain live, he will remain a barber but become a coward to the other rebels. The barber comprehends that killing the captain will completely change his identity, and decides against it, choosing to remain a barber and be acknowledged as one. The terrifying capabilities of bloodlust, including its cyclical destruction of self-identity and creation of internal conflict are what make it such a formidable force.

To neutralize the chaotic effects of violence, Tellez represents moral values and purity through the barber's lather. The barber is depicted on multiple accounts as a proud and reflective person with a strong sense of identity, and the lather is a representation of that. Indeed, the barber is illustrated as being "proud of the preciseness of [his] profession," someone who takes heart in his individuality and is confident in his abilities. Faced with the critical choice of violence or peace, the barber contemplates his decision before recognizing that he "[doesn't] want to be a murderer," because his job is to do the opposite: to make people feel "less burdened," "fresh' and "like new". He sees that he is "only a barber," and knows that it is against his internal values to murder Captain Torres. Just as he "performs [his] work honorably," he desires to be conceived as an honorable person as well. The barber tells himself to "just lather, that's all," repelling the temptation of bloodlust and following his

individuality instead. Using the lather, a shadow of his morals, the barber continues to do his job and sees that “each person has his own place in the scheme of things.” He understands that his place is in his work as a barber, and decides to continue pursuing it. With the inclusion of the lather, the devastating results of bloodlust are nullified by ethical values and innocence.

Tellez implies that violence and bloodlust can only be eradicated from one’s innate self when one’s morality is led by internal principles. The blood symbolizes the infection and violence that follow murder, contaminating everything in its path and eventually the internal identity, while the lather is a representation of morality and purification in an attempt to prevent corruption. Just like a mirror, the lather is an image of one’s dignity and self-esteem, and an imitation of self-identity. Clearly, we should all follow our own morality and ethical values instead of external temptations in order to remove evil and pursue our own identity.