

Compare and contrast the evil nature of shakespeare's antagonists

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The following essay will compare and contrast the evil nature of Shakespeare's antagonists King Richard and MacBeth. Although Shakespeare intended his play Richard 3 to be a tragedy most of the play could be considered historical, but for the purpose of this paper it will be likened the insidiousness of MacBeth's compromising morals. In the dramatic terminology of degradation and tragedy these two works of art encompass the whole of these definitions. While one is comparably a great portrayal of English kings, the other is a supreme example of how circumstance and identity may become the lingering plight of a man corrupted with autocratic power. Both however exemplify human characteristics of paranoia, jealousy and victims of their action's circumstances. The following paper will play on the idea of comparing characters and event from the Shakespeare's plays Richard 3 and MacBeth.

King Richard is a gruesome man, with deformities, and a wicked personality. He himself describes his traits as " rudely stamp'd" and " deformed, unfinish'd", who cannot " strut before a wanton ambling nymph."

I that am curtail'd of this fair proportion, /Cheated of feature by dissembling nature, /Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time /Into this breathing world, scarce half made up, /And that so lamely and unfashionable /That dogs bark at me, as I halt by them;/Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace, /gave no delight to pass away the time, /Unless to see my shadow in the sun And descant on mine own deformity:/And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover, /To entertain these fair well-spoken days, /I am determined to prove a villain.

This speech give insight into Richard's character just as the speeches made by Lady MacBeth organize a reader to realize the depressed nature of MacBeth in comparison to his wife's expectations from him, and his willingness to succeed with such actions,

(Mac) If we should fail?

(Lady M.) We Fail!

But screw your courage to the sticking place,

And we'll not fail. (Act 1, Scene 7).

King Richard begins his Machiavellian procedures in gaining the throne in a similar manner as MacBeth; although, for the argument of this paper, Richard is the more evil of the two.

The theme of the evil nature of man in King Richard the III deals with politics. It is through marriage that the ugly King may become what he wants to be perceived as being; in marrying Lady Anne he allows himself the illusion that he is someone who is worthy of love even though King Richard had Anne's husband murdered. The transition qualities of marriage in this play serve to produce a façade of change in the characters (Hunt 1997).

It is the wooing of Lady Anne that the theme of love or the charade of love as it were in this play becomes apparent to the dynamic of transition. Richard tells Anne that he killed her husband because he (Richard) loved her,

No! why? When he, that is my husband now /Came to me, as I followed Henry's corpse;/When scarce the blood was well wash'd from his hands,/Which issu'd from my otherangelhusband, /And that dead saint which

then I weeping follow'd;/O! when I say, I look'd on Richard's face, /This was my wish, 'Be thou,' quoth I, 'accurs'd, /For making me so young, so old a widow! /And, when thou wedd'st, let sorrow haunt thy bed;/And be thy wife— if any be so mad— /More miserable by the life of thee /Than thou hast made me by my dear lord's death!' /Lo! ere I can repeat this curse again, Within so small a time, my woman's heart /Grossly grew captive to his honey words, /And prov'd the subject of mine own soul's curse:/Which hitherto hath held mine eyes from rest;/For never yet one hour in his bed /Did I enjoy the golden dew of sleep, /But with his timorousdreamswas still awak'd. /Besides, he hates me for my father Warwick, /And will, no doubt, shortly be rid of me.

In this line is found the bewitching personality of Richard. In this personality there are striking similarities between King Richard and MacBeth. Both men demand of their women obedience leastwise they go berserk when not obeyed (as is seen with the later episodes between Lady MacBeth and MacBeth) as is seen in Act One Scene Five of MacBeth as Lady MacBeth states,

The raven himself is hoarse/ That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan /Under my battlements. Come, you spirits /That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, /And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full /Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood, /Stop up th'access and passage to remorse, /That no compunctious visitings of nature /Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between /Th' effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts, /And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers, /Wherever in your sightless substances /You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night, /And pall thee in the

dunest smoke of hell, /That my keen knife see not the wound it makes, /Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark, /To cry ' Hold, hold!'

Thus is MacBeth's evil nature propelled by his wife. However, since MacBeth is the character whom carries on the theme of evil in his autocratic power over the throne, it may also be suggested that MacBeth is the stronger of the two characters, and henceforth, his evil nature becomes entirely his, and not something which is funneled into him from Lady MacBeth. Therefore this demand of obsequious behavior warrents the premise of Shakespeare's play being about the dominance of women and their gullability as Lady Anne commits to marry a man who killed her husband. In this act is found that Shakespeare has created in Lady Anne a female character who is unable to gain retribution for her husband's murder by sticking a knife into Richard's chest. Thus, as Lady Anne as a widow may have been of strong character, Lady Anne as she becomes the wife of Richards is duty-bound, sad, and realizes too late what her actions consists of, which is her culpability.

MacBeth and King Richard are similar characters on other grounds as well. When MacBeth's wife urges him to murder for power, his protests are not long heard in the play, but MacBeth's actions speak towards his depraved state. He is given to pity, and self-loathing as well as introverted nature with his overwhelming power once he achieves the throne. King Richard uses a similar ploy when he convinces Anne Neville to marry him even after he kills her father and her husband. In both characters then the capacity to hoodwink the general populace is exorbitant. However, each character in turn must pay the price of their actions.; it is the hunting of the boar's

quality of karma that kills Richard due to his plotting, and MacBeth dies the way the play began, as a warrior, without much power in politics.

King Richard sees his ugliness as a crutch, as away to get people to feel sorry for him and thus gain power; King Richard does this covertly. Richard has to disguise his true intentions lestwise he will be beheaded for treason.

Richard attempts a charade with Anne when he tells her he had her husband killed because he (Richard) loved her,

No! why? When he, that is my husband now /Came to me, as I followed
Henry's corse;/When scarce the blood was well wash'd from his hands,/Which
issu'd from my other angel husband,
/And that dead saint which then I weeping follow'd;/O! when I say, I look'd on
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in his bed /Did I enjoy the golden dew of sleep, /But with his timorous dreams
was still awak'd. /Besides, he hates me for my father Warwick, /And will, no
doubt, shortly be rid of me.

Thus, in Richard's view of himself and the man he truly has become is the juxtaposition of pity, jealousy and the actions therein.

Another strikingly similar point of evil between these two Shakespearean plays is their willingness to gain power through any means necessary, and often times this involves murder. The realism for MacBeth in knowing that his actions are stygian appears with Banquo's ghost, while with Richard, the realization of evil comes from Queen Margaret. Queen Margaret warns nobles about Richard and his devious nature, but her claims go unheeded by the table of noblemen. Queen Margaret is ushered out or banished from the court, just as MacBeth's choice of denying he really did see a ghost attests to him not accepting his own nature of evil.

In the insanity that visits MacBeth's character in Shakespeare's play of the same name there is a definite difference between Richard and him, as insanity portends to evil. MacBeth becomes increasingly insane throughout the duration of the play due in most part to the predictions and misleadings of the three witches. MacBeth's rise into power in Scotland was begotten due to his first murder (Clausen p. 43).

MacBeth's obvious insanity, and thus his evil nature can be seen most notably in the way in which he rules; his choices of using force, violence, and murder in his autocratic rule tend to be the persuasions of his debilitating sanity. Although his actions may in part speak towards his psychosis, the fact of MacBeth's personality remains in that he cannot cope with his active violence and it is way of ruling as a tyrant which also enables his role as an insane person. MacBeth uses his position to thwart his will on the people and it is his way of ruling which leads to his further violence and his insanity.

MacBeth's evil nature may be submitted to be revealed through the introduction of the play with the three witches. In the dialogue of the play, and the actions therein, which represent this initial scene, the true evil of MacBeth rests within his imagination, for this aggrandized factor of his personality is what drives MacBeth to desire power in its tyrant form, and through murder as Bloom states, "...the play depends on its horror of its own imaginings. Imagination is an equivocal matter for Shakespeare and his era where it meant both poetic furor and a gap torn in reality, almost a punishment for the displacement of the sacred into the secular. MacBeth... is a tragedy of the imagination" (p. 4).

The shortcomings which lead to MacBeth's degradation of mind is due in part to his own ambitions (and imagination) and his dealings with the three witches as well as his inferiority complex which in turn causes him to use violence in order to rule. Another attribute of MacBeth's evil nature is shown with his partner, Lady MacBeth. It is her driving force to have MacBeth kill Duncan which furthers MacBeth's self-doubt. Lady MacBeth is inclusive of MacBeth's insanity since she urges him to commit the necessary crimes to gain power while also disregarding the guilt burdening MacBeth; Lady MacBeth urges MacBeth's evil nature, his criminal acts, because she like her husband is addicted to power and knows the necessary means to gain such power, and so, urges her husband past the guilt, and self-doubt in order to achieve their goals.

Richard plots to have Clarence killed by his own brother by making Edward believe that George of Clarence is trying to kill. This is accomplished by

Edward having a pretense of someone killing him whose name begins with the letter G (George in this case). Richard succeeds in this plot and is named King. However, Richard's nephews are still in the Tower of London and could be successors to the throne once they come of age. King Richard has Buckingham murder the nephews. Not only does Richard succeed in his murdering campaign but he also beguiles the kingdom to believe he is a just king, as least for awhile.

King Richard is abandoned on the battlefield by Lord Stanley and loses his horse and is murdered in a type of boar hunt. These two characters are similar in this scene in their scope of personality and the actions that haunt them (Bradley p. 56).

After Duncan's murder however, Lady MacBeth's character diminishes and so MacBeth is left even more alone in his act of betrayal which further leads to his suffering mind. Plagued by guilt and contempt for himself and his actions, the reader begins to see the disintegration of MacBeth. Thus, it is proven that both characters of Shakespeare's plays, King Richard 3, and MacBeth are evil. Both Richard, and MacBeth's mental powers show a decline in power and cohesion as the plays progress with murder and violence.

The contrast between these two antagonists seem to depict no true relevant difference but in comparison the evil nature of either of these two men is one in which pure evil is seen. In both of their quests for the throne, and the power which comes with the throne, the more evil of the two seems to be Richard, since his thirst for such a prize entails the con of marriage, as well

as of killing his two young nephews, while MacBeth's dirty deeds are supported by his wife (Bradley p. 101).

These two characters are a great fascination because of their striking similarities. Their evil nature warrants great sacrifice, as well as leading them down the path of fast glory, but ultimately ending in betrayal and death (as with Richard's army, and as will Lady MacBeth's eventual self-doubt as to MacBeth's rise in power, and the means by which he gained it so swiftly).

Shakespeare's great accomplishment with these two characters is undoubtedly within the realm of pure evil, in that neither seems to have great remorse at the end of their power reign. It is in the necessity of guilt which makes a character redeemable to an audience, and by denying any remorse for either character, Shakespeare has created two very strong, evil antagonists. The fact that they remain of interest to the audience is found in just how despicable and evil their deeds, and just how far they are willing to push their power onto others in order to achieve the end of their goals.

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Papers on Language & Literature, Vol. 33.

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