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[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

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1. [Compare and contrast the characters of Claudius and Macbeth](#) \n \t
2. [Conclusion](#) \n \t
3. [Works Cited](#); \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Compare and contrast the characters of Claudius and Macbeth

Introduction

William Shakespeare is well known for his plays, from comedies to tragedies to love stories. His plays are popular for their invention of the most powerful characters who give life to these plays. Claudius and Macbeth are characters from two different plays, yet so similar, and still so different in qualities.

These characters are very powerful in their respective plays. Macbeth and Claudius are both hungry for power, irresponsible and insane. The author uses these two characters similarly and differently to depict the different leadership qualities of authoritative kings as well as the characteristics of their kingdoms. William Shakespeare is keen to present two different murders in his tragedies of Hamlet and Macbeth. These tragedies present Claudius and Macbeth similar in their murderous appetite for the greatly desired throne. While reviewing the characters of Macbeth and Claudius from William Shakespeare's Macbeth and Hamlet, this paper seeks to give the similarities and differences between the Shakespearean characters, Macbeth and Claudius.

First, it is important to note that both Macbeth and Claudius of Hamlet are

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kings ruling their empires authoritatively after acquiring power in similar circumstances. Before entering into power, both Macbeth and Claudius killed the reigning kings and took their positions. This similarity even intensifies with the fact that the kings they both murdered are their relatives. Claudius secretly murders King Hamlet, the King of Denmark, who is his brother to usurp the throne and to gain power. Macbeth also secretly murders his cousin, King Duncan of Scotland with similar intentions. In Macbeth, Macbeth kills King Duncan after he is convinced by his wife, Lady Macbeth to kill the ruler so that he can take his position. After meeting with the three witches, who foretell that his ambitions of becoming the king would eventually happen, he is hesitant to commit the murder. However, after his wife successfully persuades him to commit the murder, Macbeth murders King Duncan. Claudius on the other hand gives his reasons for killing King Hamlet. He says that " I am still possessed of those effects for which I did the murder: my crown, my own ambition, and my queen" (Act. 3 Scene 3). This revelation indicates his motive as becoming more powerful and important, becoming the King, and to marry Gertrude, whom he loved so much.

These tragic heroes are also similar since despite committing the initial murders of the kings, they proceed to commit subsequent murders to cover up their initial crimes. When Banquo and the son of Fleance suspect that Macbeth Killed King Duncan, he resorts to killing them so that he can be sure of his security and that of his wife. In Hamlet, Claudius does similar to Macbeth. He kills many people in the play including Gertrude his wife, Hamlet's father, Laertes, Guildenstern, and Rosencrantz, whom he considers as obstacles in his throne.

Despite their rude characters boldly presented in these plays, both Macbeth and Claudius also, show love in their characters. These kings love their wives that they are willing to do anything for them. Macbeth loves Lady Macbeth that he shares with her his interest in becoming king and the revelations of the three witches. When his wife asks him to kill King Duncan to gain the throne, Macbeth does not hesitate. Lady Macbeth uses her feminine manipulation to persuade Macbeth to kill King Duncan. She even refuses to kill him claiming that King Duncan resembles her father in his sleep. On the other hand, Claudius also loves Gertrude, his brother's wife and wishes to do anything for her. Claudius even goes to the extent of killing his own brother to marry Gertrude. He is sure that King Hamlet cannot allow him to marry Gertrude, and he cannot bear the pain of seeing his brother enjoy the marriage with a woman he loves so much.

However, despite these similarities, Claudius and Macbeth have psychological differences. William Shakespeare is keen to present the character of Claudius as an ambitious, evil politician who has little regret for his criminal activities. In most part of this tragic play, Claudius is heartless. Towards the end of the play, his anxiety increases due to the guilt that his wrongdoings might be discovered. Before his criminal activities begin to float about, King Claudius seems to perfectly contented, which implies that his worries toward the end of the play are stimulated by the rumor spreading around. Additionally, Claudius actions indicate that he is an egocentric personality, who has regard for himself and has little concern for other members of the society. On the other hand, Macbeth represents a combination of ambition with self-doubt and guilt. Unlike Claudius, Macbeth

lacks the sense of evil. Instead, Macbeth acts out of ambitious motives coupled with a sense of morality. In the beginning of the play, Macbeth is an honorable and brave soldier who is not inclined to criminal activities. However, after meeting the three witches and after the forceful encouragements from his wife, Macbeth is forced to do things that he never intended to do in the first place.

Conclusion

William Shakespeare is an interesting writer, who appeals to the readers with the manner in which he presents his characters. After reading the plays Macbeth and Hamlet, the major characters Macbeth and Claudius present similarities from extreme love to extreme cruelty. Both Claudius and Macbeth are tragic heroes who had desire to achieve their dreams notwithstanding the circumstances. Claudius and Macbeth kill their relatives, who are the present kings of Denmark and Scotland, and their brother and cousin respectively in order to become king. Despite committing the initial murders, both Claudius and Macbeth continue to commit subsequent murders such as killing Banquo, Hamlet's father, Laertes, Guildenstern, and Rosencrantz among others to cover their trails whenever they considered these people as obstacles to their success. In addition, these characters love their wives to the extent that they intend to do anything for the latter. Claudius kills Hamlet to win Gertrude's love, and Macbeth kills King Duncan because his wife insists that he has to kill the king to achieve his dreams. These people are however different in their psychological contempt. Claudius intentionally kills his brother and inherits his wife since he intends to take these actions. On the other hand, Macbeth was a loyal soldier before

meeting with the three witches. Despite intending to become the king, Macbeth is reluctant to take any action toward this goal until his wife, Lady Macbeth persuades him after he shares with her the revelations of the three witches. Additionally, Macbeth is a gullible personality as he succumbs to the feminine manipulations of his wife. Claudius however does not stop his wife from drinking poison when he learns that she might know he killed her first husband.

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