

Shakespeare, William: Comparing and Contrasting Ha



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mlet and MacBethChristine Tirman

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Comparing and Contrasting

Hamlet and MacBeth

Throughout William Shakespeares plays Hamlet and Macbeth there are many similarities, along with many differences. These plays are both Shakespearean tragedies, which often use supernatural incidents to intrigue the readers interest, and consists of a hero that has a tragic flaw. There are many comparative and contrasting aspects in these plays.

The opening of Hamlet involves a supernatural, as does the opening of Macbeth. In the first scene the ghost of his father, King Hamlet, approaches Hamlet. Similarly, the opening of Macbeth involves the three witches. Although the witches can be seen by anyone they approach, the ghost of King Hamlet is only seen by Hamlet himself, and in one scene by Marcellus and Bernardo, Hamlets servants. Similarly in both plays, the main characters are slightly suspicious of the actual powers these supernatural figures have. As the witches use their apparent powers to tell Macbeth the future, the ghost of King Hamlet tells Hamlet what has happened already. Hamlet states in one of his soliloquies The spirit that I have seen / may be the devil (2. 2. 598-599). Macbeth also has his doubts

because when the witches tell him that he will be named Thane of Cawder, Macbeth himself had not known, but many people had. It is possible the witches could have known. In the same matter in both plays, the presentation of the supernatural began to lead to the final downfall of each of the characters. In Macbeth, the three witches cause him to think and do evil deeds. In Hamlet, if he had not seen the ghost of his father, he would not have known that Claudius has killed his father to claim the throne. In both instances the characters gave into the nagging supernatural beliefs. And hence they lost their lives.

Other characters in these plays show parallels in their plots.

Both plays have a main character that portrays the king of that country. In Hamlet, the King of Denmark, Claudius is directly related to Hamlet. He is his uncle, and also his mothers new husband.

However, in Macbeth the King of Scotland, King Duncan, is not directly related to the main character. Both plays do however, have the main character killing off the king in order to get the throne, which ultimately results in there own death. Horatio, in Hamlet and Banquo, in Macbeth share the same loyalty to the main characters. In both stories these friends are more skeptical of the supernaturals than the main characters themselves. In a meeting with the witches, Banquo challenges them to Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear / Your favours nor your hate (1. 3. 60-61). In a scene where Horatio and Hamlet witness the ghost, Horatio tries to keep Hamlet from going with the ghost. He was even reluctant in the opening scene to go with Marcellus to hear about the ghost.

Some themes in the plays are also similar. The way that the weeds and flowers illustrate good and bad in Hamlet is like the way the birds do in Macbeth. This is also true of the fair and foul theme in Macbeth and the indirections theme in Hamlet. In Macbeth, to the weird sisters, what is ugly is beautiful, and what is beautiful is ugly. Through the play fair appearances hide foul realities. This theme has a lot in common with the theme in Hamlet where the appearance varies from the reality. In contrast, one of the main themes in Macbeth is Manhood, while in Hamlet it is frailty, and more specifically, the frailty of women.

It seems evident that Shakespeare used a strong, similar story line in these two tragedies. Apparently Macbeth and Hamlet are similar stories in numerous ways. These two plays seem different because of the variation in story lines, but in fact are very similar due to the parallel characters and themes.