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EN40SL

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Blood-Stained Hands: The Consequences of Pursuing Power

*only underline
titles of
plays/novels*

Cruelty, greed, and hunger for power describe the actions of both Claudius and Macbeth, but there are additional and more personal characteristics that they share. In fact, they commit the same appalling crime and choose to deal with the internal agitation with the exact same resolution. The dysfunctional relationship of their restrained anxiety and paranoia with their external appearance is also extremely similar. Although Macbeth can confide in his wife while Claudius acts on his own, they share the same taxing sin. Claudius and Macbeth both kill their country's king to inherit the throne, and the guilt they feel later causes them to kill more to hide the truth; they are different in that Lady Macbeth acts as a major instigator while Queen Gertrude is a passive bystander.

Claudius kills his brother Hamlet, the king of Denmark, for the throne; Macbeth kills his cousin Duncan, the king of Scotland, so he can rule the country. The fact that they both murder their relative shows how brutally heartless they are. Macbeth's first inspiration for bloodshed was from three mysterious witches who make veiled predictions of his ascent to the crown. At first he is skeptical, but soon the idea cultivates with the help of his persistent wife. He becomes obsessed with the thought of it, and he plans to make his fantasies a reality. Correspondingly, Claudius could have been jealous of his elder brother for years before plotting his death and

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stealing the throne of Denmark. Along with the throne, Claudius claims his brother's wife as his own, which was his other precedent motive. Macbeth also murders to strengthen a relationship with a woman. He desperately wants to prove himself manly to his wife, Lady Macbeth, who constantly wears him down with degrading comments about his lack of masculinity, such as when she sarcastically inquires, "What beast was't, then, / That made you break this enterprise to me? / When you durst do it, then you were a man; / And to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man." (I.7.52-56). Lady Macbeth verbally punishes Macbeth for having any doubts or fears about murder and high treason, and becomes angry when he expresses any remorse or regrets. Macbeth is convinced that to prove he is a man, he must take King Duncan's life with his own hands, and replace him as king, while Claudius knows he must kill King Hamlet to have the woman he desires along with the crown. Macbeth stabs his king to death while he was sleeping; Claudius poisons his king in the ear while asleep. Both murders are quick, stealthy, and while the victim is sleeping and unaware. However, with the power that assassinating the kings brought, Macbeth and Claudius are both tormented by their consciences.

*without does
any
man do?
tell*

Claudius and Macbeth are subject to intense anxiety and guilt after they are king for a while, but even after reflecting upon their actions, both decide to murder more and travel farther down the path of sin instead of telling the truth. Both feel regretful and terrified at one point, and both remark on how they will never be forgiven and that their horrific crime will never be erased. They both fixate on the blood that will never be washed from their hands. Claudius laments: "What if this cursèd hand / Were thicker than itself with brother's blood? / Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens / To wash it white as snow?" (III.3.44-47). He is terrorized by thinking that there is nothing in the world that will reverse his actions. Macbeth is driven mad by the same realization that his actions will haunt him as long as he lives: "Will all great

Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red." (II.2.60-64). Both are agonized and driven insane by the guilt, but they are even more terrified of someone discovering the truth. They make their second unfortunate decision to silence the people who have suspicions about the murders. Macbeth knows that his best friend Banquo suspects him of murdering King Duncan (he was present at the witches' prophecies); he becomes paranoid and obsessive until finally hiring men to brutally kill him. Similarly, Claudius knows that Hamlet suspects him of murdering his father (he recognizes how Hamlet alters the storyline of a play to reflect his actions); he becomes worrisome about how rumours may reflect on his image, until he hires Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to take Hamlet to England to be killed. Claudius and Macbeth only care about their personal safety and image, therefore they cannot tell the truth or repent. Macbeth basically kills anyone who he suspects may doubt or challenge him in any way, and admits: "For mine own good, / All causes shall give way. / I am in blood / Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er." (III.4.140-142). Macbeth realizes that it would be equally difficult to repent and to continue on, so he decides give up all honourable intentions so he can remain king. Claudius knows he should ask forgiveness for his sins and end his false reign, but he knows these feelings are not sincere; he values his prize of the throne and Queen Gertrude more than his desire to put his conscience at ease. He abandons all attempts at repentance while praying: "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go." (III.3.98-99). He is only praying for the sake of saving his soul when he dies, not because he truly regrets gaining the power and his queen. Therefore, he knows God will see through his insincere words and render them meaningless. Although these

men are similar in relinquishing justice, they differ in their motivation that began the entire predicament, and who they rely on.

Macbeth is heavily impacted by his wife, who forcefully drives him to kill King Duncan, while Lady Gertrude is completely passive and does not react to or have an opinion about anything. Macbeth is significantly influenced by his ruthless wife, Lady Macbeth, who “manipulates her husband with remarkable effectiveness, overriding all his objections; when he hesitates to murder, she repeatedly questions his manhood until he feels that he must commit murder to prove himself.” (Spark Notes: Macbeth: Analysis of Major Characters). Lady Macbeth plays a huge, *avoid vague words* active role in Macbeth’s actions; without her constant abetments, he would not have had the nerve to kill the king at all. Macbeth was content to entertain the mere idea of becoming king one day, but Lady Macbeth was always focused, driven, and severe at the first mention of it. She constantly insults, threatens, and belittles Macbeth, until he reluctantly agrees *citation* with her. On the other hand, Claudius collaborates with no one, and nurtured his plot to kill his brother all on his own. He never shares any of his plans with his wife. Indeed, Queen Gertrude does not seem to find anything out of the ordinary, even when her dead husband’s *vague diction* brother seeks to marry her only two months after the death. She goes along with everything, and loves both Claudius and her son Hamlet. Even if she had any opinions, she does not express herself often or in detail. She is passive in all ways, and seems quite vague and disconnected. Furthermore, she tends to automatically agree with whatever Claudius is saying or doing without giving it any thought. Therefore, Claudius acts on his own instincts and desires, with no help or input from his wife.

In conclusion, Claudius and Macbeth share ties not just in their actions and the consequences but in personality traits and tendencies. It is true that they both murdered the king

of their country for personal gain (Macbeth aided by his wife and Claudius on his own), and they both happened to be related to their king. But what is more significantly similar about them is how they dealt with the destructive guilt later on. Their anxiety results in more death, plots, and lies, not truth or justice. Even after feeling remorse for their actions, they both decided to protect themselves and what they gained instead of ask for forgiveness. They both were comfortable with going back to hurting others for their own benefit, almost as if it became easier to carry on than to feel contrition again.

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Toronto, ON: Harcourt Canada Ltd. Print.

Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Toronto, ON: Harcourt Canada Ltd. Print.

"SparkNotes: Macbeth: Analysis of Major Characters." SparkNotes LLC. n.d. Web.

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Writing Variables

- Central Idea: The central idea is to compare Claudius and Macbeth. They are similar in that they both kill their king and that their guilt drives them to further sin, not repent. They are different in that Lady Macbeth corrupts Macbeth, while Claudius works solitarily.
- Form: Essay
- Purpose: This essay was meant to further educate and reveal an alternative perspective to readers, comparing characters from separate Shakespearean tragedies.
- Public Audience: The audience for this essay is high school or university literary students, who have read both Hamlet and Macbeth, and are looking for background information on the characters.
- Context: This essay could be read on a website about literature or online library, as most students use the internet to research topics they need information on.

Connections among the writing variables

This essay was written to provide an alternative character analysis and comparison between two of Shakespeare's tragic characters, Macbeth and Claudius, not only regarding their actions but their personality traits. The essay format is straightforward and clear, with three main points, explanations, and quotes from both plays to support the main idea. This is ideal for a researcher, who does not have time or need to read through stylistic devices that a short story or poem may contain. The essay contains facts that the reader can apply to their research. This is why a high school or university literary student would find this useful, when researching information to provide a background in Shakespeare's main characters in tragedies. These students may be looking for similarities in Shakespearean plots, which the essay provides, for a broader understanding of his writing. The essay's facts tie together Claudius and Macbeth, down to the same metaphor they use to describe never having enough water to completely wash their blood-stained hands clean. The students would most likely read this informative essay on a website about literature or online library, because the majority of students use the internet as a research tool to find information on topics from their classes.

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