

Note: There are two sample papers here, the first for a "Comparative Essay" looking at a Shakespearean text and a modern adaptation, the second for a "Lens Essay" looking at a Shakespearean text and a modern theory.

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Response Paper 2.1:
Analyzing Parallel Passages

William Shakespeare's *Richard III*
and Beau Willimon's *House of Cards*

1. Evidence

<p>And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover, To entertain these fair well-spoken days, I am determined to prove a villain And hate the idle pleasures of these days. Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous, By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams, To set my brother Clarence and the king In deadly hate the one against the other: And if King Edward be as true and just As I am subtle, false and treacherous, This day should Clarence closely be me'd up, About a prophecy, which says that 'G' Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be. Dive, thoughts, down to my soul: here Clarence comes.</p> <p>(Shakespeare 1.1.29-43)</p>	<p>"There are two kinds of pain. The sort of pain that makes you strong, or useless pain, the sort of pain that's only suffering. I have no patience for useless things. Moments like this require someone who will act, who will do the unpleasant thing, the necessary thing. There... As for me, I'm just a lowly house majority whip. I keep things moving in a congress choked by pettiness and lassitude. My job is to clear the pipes and keep the sludge moving. But I won't have to be a plumber much longer. I've done my time. I backed the right man. Happy new year! Give and take. Welcome to Washington."</p> <p>(<i>House of Cards</i>, Episode 1)</p>
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Analysis:

In both texts, the main character, Richard III and Frank Underwood, play the role of a traditional villain in terms of both personality and actions. Yet, readers and watchers still love them in part because they feel like they're part of the action, because they break the fourth wall and involve the audience, showering them with their attention. Through their soliloquys, which actually start both the text and the show, they are elevated from villain to unexpected hero of the story.

Throughout the rest of the text and the show, the two characters continue to give asides to the audience, in part to explain the plot, explain motivations, and more. Both of these asides directly at the beginning of the text reveal the fundamental nature behind each character. Richard III discusses his deformed appearance, claiming that because he will never be able to receive the love that other men receive, because his deformity robs him of his happiness, he is resolved to become a villain of highest degree. This motivation, so directly intertwined with his stigma, as well as his sly character, is a constant throughout the play. Frank's monologue also serves the purpose, with his discussion of pain revealing his cold hearted, ruthless efficiency. His expectation to be rewarded for his support also sets up the betrayal and action of the rest of the season.

2. Evidence

<p>“Then be your eyes the witness of this ill: See how I am bewitch'd; behold mine arm Is, like a blasted sapling, wither'd up: And this is Edward's wife, that monstrous witch, Consorted with that harlot strumpet Shore, That by their witchcraft thus have marked me...”</p> <p>(Shakespeare 3.4.34-40)</p>	<p>Frank discredits Kern by falsifying evidence that he wrote an editorial years back after Israel's “illegal” West bank occupation, and then plants a story with Zoe Barnes about Durant for Secretary of State. As a result, Durant ends up actually being confirmed as Secretary of State.</p> <p>(<i>House of Cards</i>, Episode 2)</p>
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Analysis

The most interesting part of these passages is their parallel result of turning falsehoods into facts, one of the most dangerous actions of people in power. Richard III, attempting to get rid of Lord Hastings, accuses him of causing his deformity in a room full of people and beheads him for his treachery. The irony of this is that not only has he had his deformity since birth, making it impossible for Hastings to have caused it, but a room full of people have no choice but to agree with him. The dangerous implication behind this scene is having a ruler that forces constituents to accept his version of reality, “alternative facts” if you will, and having to live in fear because opposition means instant death. Frank's dealing is slightly more crafty, as he manipulates his way into confirming facts that are ideal to his situation, but regardless, he still advocates for false facts, manipulating his environment so that people have no choice but to accept his version of reality. These passages, and the actions of the main characters, are unfortunately too relevant to our modern times, and are perfect examples of what we must stand up against and fight in order to retain our democracy.

3. Evidence

<p>Why, then All-Souls' day is my body's doomsday. This is the day that, in King Edward's time, I wish't might fall on me, when I was found False to his children or his wife's allies This is the day wherein I wish'd to fall By the false faith of him I trusted most; This, this All-Souls' day to my fearful soul Is the determined respite of my wrongs: That high All-Seer that I dallied with Hath turn'd my feigned prayer on my head And given in earnest what I begg'd in jest. Thus doth he force the swords of wicked men To turn their own points on their masters' bosoms: Now Margaret's curse is fallen upon my head; 'When he,' quoth she, 'shall split thy heart with sorrow, Remember Margaret was a prophetess.' Come, sirs, convey me to the block of shame; Wrong hath but wrong, and blame the due of blame.</p> <p>(Shakespeare 5.1.24-40)</p>	<p>Frank kills Peter by taking advantage of the fact that he has drunkenly passed out and uses his hands to put the key in the ignition, gassing him and killing him under the guise of a suicide.</p> <p>(<i>House of Cards</i>, Episode 11)</p>
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Analysis

After Lord Buckingham is forced by Richard III to help kill the young princes, he starts to doubt his actions, and realizes that Richard III will probably kill him as well if he ever steps out of line. He runs away and joins the Tudor side instead, and ends up on the victorious side. This is a clear contrast from Peter, who, despite being Frank's steadfast supporter and ally, is left for the dead when he becomes useless. Both Lord Buckingham and Peter are manipulated by the text's main characters, and ruthlessly thrown away when they are useless. This, along with the other parallels I've mentioned throughout this paper, establish a pattern of behavior in the actions of ruthless, power hungry men. There's a tendency to feel very alone, and use everyone around them for their own advantage.

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William. *Richard III*. Edited by Thomas Cartelli, Norton & Company, 2009.

Willimon, Beau. *House of Cards*. Netflix, 2013.

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Response Paper 2.1:
Analyzing Parallel Passages

William Shakespeare's *Richard III*
and Erving Goffman's *Stigma*

1. Goffman describes how stigmatized individuals often experience social anxiety and a lowering of self-esteem that makes it difficult to communicate with “normals”. As examples, he cites the writings of an unemployed German during the Depression and a crippled girl, both of whom describe their feelings of inferiority and humiliation (Goffman 17). Richard III has a similar physical deformity, and he seems to start the play out with similar sentiments, cursing the fact that he “cannot prove a lover / To entertain these fair well-spoken days” (Shakespeare 1.1.28).
2. However, for the rest of the play's action, he never actually lets his deformity get in the way of any of his ambitious plots. In fact, he boldly persuades a beautiful woman whose husband and father he has just killed to marry him. This seems more in line with Goffman's description of individuals who “[bear] a stigma but [do] not seem to be impressed or repentant about doing so” (Goffman 6). How do we reconcile the images of a deeply insecure Richard III with one that is cunning, ambitious, and nearly always successful? Is he overcompensating for his feelings of inferiority, actually confident, or something else?
3. Throughout the play, people criticize Richard's deformity, calling him a “lump of foul deformity” (Shakespeare 1.2.59), “poisonous bunchback'd toad” (1.3.260), and “elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog” (1.3.239), to name just a few. This recalls Goffman's mention of the modern use of “stigma terms such as cripple, bastard, moron in our daily discourse as a source of metaphor and imagery”, through which the speaker “[imputes] a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one” (Goffman 5). In insulting Richard III through his physical appearance, the speaker implies that his deformities are directly tied to his character. This can be viewed from the perspectives of a psychological study of the effects of stigma on a person's character, Richard III's deformity as a symbol (rather than cause) of his character, or simply a politically incorrect form of insult on the part of the characters.

Works Cited

Goffman, Erving. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Simon & Schuster, 1986.

Shakespeare, William. *Richard III*. Edited by Thomas Cartelli, Norton & Company, 2009.