4. A recurring theme in literature is the classic war between a passion and responsibility. For instance, a personal cause, a love, a desire for revenge, a determination to redress a wrong, or some other emotion or drive may conflict with moral duty. Choose two literary works in which a character confronts the demands of a private passion that conflicts with his or her responsibilities. In a well-written essay show clearly the nature of the conflict, its effect upon the characters, and its significance to the work.

A Conflict of Responsibilities and Desires in *Antigone* and *Macbeth*

With many of the classic texts, the central conflict has been one between a character that is driven by passion and one that is driven by responsibility. *Antigone* and *Macbeth* were no exceptions, and one of the main conflicts that took place was between Antigone and her duties as a Theban in *Antigone*, and Macbeth with himself in *Macbeth*. These conflicts illustrated some changes in the characters traits, together with growing tension in the plot. The conflicts have shaped the way the characters are portrayed, and provided the literature with a basis to revolve around, and ultimately affected not only the plot structure, but also motifs and language used.

One of the literature where this is most evident is *Antigone* by Sophocles. The last of the Theban plays, Antigone was not one of the usual mythological stories the Greeks told, but was one that Sophocles later wrote. The characters are inherited from *Oedipus Rex* and similarities are evident but the conflict allows for the comparison of the play to theatrical products of the later centuries. Antigone is the daughter of Oedipus, and has been under the protection of Creon since Oedipus left Thebes, never to come back again. Antigone has a sister, Ismene, and two brothers, Polynices and Euclies. The plot revolves around a story of Antigone’s struggle to give Polynices his last rites, although Creon has forbid for anyone to do so, as Polynices was a traitor to Thebes and its people. The main struggle is between Antigone and Creon as whilst Antigone moves with passion and determination, Creon is trying to assert his rule over his subjects, trying to portray a good king, as he fulfills his responsibilities. The play commences with a conversation between Antigone and Ismene, which reveals the some of the plot. In this, Ismene can be said to portray the
frailty, while Antigone conveys the strength of woman, as while Ismene is obedient and won’t disobey Creon’s rule, Antigone confronts the laws and is determined to give her bother his last rites. This illustration of strength is mainly due to her role as the only character that will disobey Creon’s rule. This determination is not lost as the plot structure continues to evolve, but effects the characters including Haemon and Creon. Haemon, Creon’s son, appears primarily as an obedient son that only wants the wishes of his father to come true. As he learns of Antigone’s punishment, he is deeply moved and after what he sees at the cave-like setting of Antigone’s punishment, he ultimately turns against his father’s wishes and kills himself, as he’s driven by his passion and adoration of Antigone to do so. Creon is another character that is deeply affected by this conflict, and this is most evident in the motifs that arise from his role. Creon first appears to be a good king, and his decisions and actions here prove so. But as he continues to confront Antigone after she tries to give Polynices his last rites, he makes the matter more personal, and loses the sense of good king as he punishes Antigone for her right. The last motif to arise is “The Gods’ Rule”, where Creon says its the fate and the will of the Gods to decide if Antigone will live or die, which is yet another change in motif as Creon wouldn’t leave this decision to the Gods but take the matter to his own hands. It’s also Creon’s responsibility as the ruler of Thebes to assert justice through the laws that he makes, so another conflict between Antigone and Creon arises as Antigone is driven by her determination for the burial, whilst Creon is driven by determination to assert the law. This is important as it shows how Creon has changed due to the conflict and reveals the effect of the conflict upon a major character. The plot evolves around these conflicts, that ultimately arise from Antigone’s conflict of responsibility to Creon and her passion and determination, which makes it the principal conflict that Sophocles illustrates.

Another literary work where a conflict occurs is Macbeth. After the weird sisters reveal a future for Macbeth and Banquo, Macbeth moves quickly to rise to the throne of Scotland, together with the determination and help of his wife, Lady Macbeth, though a series of events that lead to his end. As a general in King Duncan’s army and as the Thane of
Glamis and Cawdor, Macbeth is a servant to the Scottish King. Yet, after learning the news of his new title, Macbeth is dubious of whether the hails might be true some day, but later decides to let things go according to fate, which is the portrayal of Macbeth in the play. But later on, as Lady Macbeth learns of the events and decides to take matters to her own hands, she motivate sand drives Macbeth into choosing desire and passion over his responsibility to the Scottish throne. She uses specific methods in doing so, which include the motif of associating manliness with cruelty and blood, as she knows Macbeth will never take action to gain the Scottish throne. Macbeth faces frequent inner conflicts, even after he kills Duncan, as says he was no murderer before, and says that not even all the water in the worlds oceans can wash away the blood stain on his hands, which show some regret and fear. This changes as Macbeth plots the murder of Banquo and Fleance by himself, without the emasculation of Lady Macbeth. This change can best be observed when Macbeth orders the execution of Macduff’s family, which happens because Macbeth is so used to killing and because he now moves without motivation. This change between the man that talks of the blood in his hands and the man that slaughters families is the main effect of the inner conflict on Macbeth. The letter Macbeth writes to Lady Macbeth also shows how explicit the two are between themselves and how they don’t hide anything from each other. This also changes as after planning Banquo and Fleance’s murder, Macbeth chooses not to tell Lady Macbeth, which shows another effect of the conflict on him. The whole plot structure revolves around the changing character of Macbeth, which puts emphasis on the conflict between his responsibilities as a part of Duncan’s nobility, and his passion for the throne.

The recurring theme of conflict between determination and responsibility is portrayed in both Antigone and Macbeth. The conflict is emphasized in both plays as it is the central conflict upon which the plot is based. The conflict ultimately affects characters, motifs, and plot structure.