

What techniques  
does shakespeare  
use to create  
dramatic tension in  
this scene?

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



Macbeth is known to be one of Shakespeare's darkest and also most powerful tragedies written. In Act 3 Scene 4 Macbeth has finally found his way to the throne and throws his first social gathering as king. Macbeth needs this banquet to be nothing other than perfect, and when it ends up being absolutely horrid, Shakespeare incorporates a large sense of dramatic tension into the play that keeps the audience on complete suspense through the imagery, supernatural theme, and the confusion and chaos between Macbeth's alter egos. One of the most prominent themes in Macbeth is the theme of ambition. Once the weird sisters stick an idea in his mind, Macbeth is so determined to get his way to the throne that he's willing to do just about anything to get there. Originally a man with morals and integrity learns that he has to compromise his own principles in order to get what he wants. This ends up driving him mad, and in a way becomes stuck in an identity crisis. This results in him having many alternate egos, and these are all frequently switched, which adds to the dramatic irony of the scene. The brave, righteous, and noble king Macbeth opens the scene by welcoming his guests to his dinner party. Shortly after, the first murderer enters and he switches from toasting his guests to telling the murder that "there's blood upon (his) face" and questioning if Banquo and Fleance are "dispatch'd." Once he learns that Fleance has escaped, he sees that his plans have failed and his lack of success bring him unhappiness, guilt and blame. This is shown when he rebuts to Fleance's escape, "Then comes my fit again: I had else been perfect; Whole as the marble, founded as the rock." Macbeth shows that he associates his own success, power, and health all together and with perfection. When he's in control he is sane, but when he feels as he's

starting to lose grip he loses his own sanity and becomes mentally unstable due to his own paranoia. These sudden mood changes in Macbeth show instability and confuse the audience creating an unpredictable atmosphere; no one knows what his next move will be. Once he shows a bit of insanity he confuses the audience even more as he begins to hallucinate Banquo's ghost. Macbeth automatically assumes the ghost is real, and that he again failed his duties. He is so afraid of losing the power that he's so far gained that he would rather fight " the rugged Russian bear. " This shows that Macbeth is totally out of his mind and irrational, and creates confusion in Macbeth's audience in the play and the audience watching. One sees that he's hallucinating the supernatural, but the audience at his banquet doesn't. This dramatic irony adds even more to the tension in the scene as one knows that Macbeth is going mad, and the reason as to why, however those in the play do not. Lennox tells Macbeth that he has a place reserved, but questions " Where? " when he sees Banquo in the place that is meant to be his. The idea of him truly taking over the position that Banquo is meant to have adds to the tension of the play because one sees through Macbeth's actions and his guilt. In Shakespearean times, not only as the current King James of Scotland very interested in the supernatural but so was the general public. Shakespeare incorporated a large degree of supernatural all throughout Macbeth, which had the effect of really gaining the attention of the audience. This definitely helped add to the dramatic tension in the play, because the supernatural is something that everyone is uncomfortable with and easily can add suspense, and also represents Macbeth's downfall and how he's beginning to unravel. Macbeth continually begins to hallucinate,

making him fear his own downfall but also begin to feel the repercussions of his actions and how he is about to consequently pay for his actions. The witches corrupt his mind. The supernatural witches create dramatic tension throughout the whole play, and their effects on Macbeth also create dramatic tension as one sees the manipulation that they have on him. One firstly sees the supernatural through Banquo's ghost through whom one sees guilt and punishment for Macbeth's actions and failure. Macbeth shows the audience that nature is what is in complete control over the plot, adding to the suspenseful and unpredictable outcome. One can interpret "Blood will have blood" as Macbeth's prediction of his own afterlife. Macbeth has compromised his after life for his temporary mortal success, and he begins to see that he's been challenged with a trade of between his integrity and future. The ghost or "horrible shadow" represents to one what is real in Macbeth's life now- darkness. Such foreshadowing events create suspense amongst the audience, who awaits his fait. Shakespeare largely incorporates sensory imagery into his play writing, which heightens the tension in the scene. The fact that this all at a "banquet" which has connotations of being fancy, proper, and elegant creates complete tension for the audience at the beginning when something that is meant to be so conventional turns into something so chaotic and dramatic. This shows guests that Macbeth isn't the brave leader that he portrays himself to be, and though power may seem wonderful it sometimes can turn someone mad. The imagery in the scene portrays chaos and what the guests are experiencing much to Macbeth's dismay. Hallucinations and the fight against nature represent chaos and embellish the idea of tension and a lack of control on Macbeth's part.

Shakespeare tries to emphasize the relationship between humanity and nature through this. One learns through Shakespeare's imagery and description of nature that one's fate is beyond control. Shakespeare personifies nature in synchronization with the plot. For example, he says, "Stones have been known to move and trees to speak." This not only emphasizes the supernatural, but also shows how nature reacts to the actions of Macbeth, and forebodes the future. As previously stated, nature predicts Macbeth's downfall and the continual use of blood imagery shows us just that. One sees that his fate begins to spiral down, and Macbeth acknowledges this. He sees that he's so far in this mess that he has created for himself that it's impossible to get out; getting out of the situation he has gotten himself into will be just as difficult as it was getting himself in. This is evident when he says "I am in blood Stepp'd in so far that should I wade no more, returning as tedious as go o'er." Macbeth is truly a "man of blood" due to his traitor characteristics he has developed. Though his actions detach sympathy between the audience and the character, the audience still becomes intrigued by the fate of the tragic hero Macbeth. Shakespeare successfully creates a suspenseful mood for his viewers that adds a lot of tension in the play through his use of the supernatural, the confusion in the audience in regards to Macbeth's conflicting personality, and the imagery that the audience is left to develop. One learns that not even the most powerful human can control fate; more powerful forces beyond mortality control such a plot, which creates an unpredictable twist to the tragic story of Macbeth. Word Count: 1277 Works Cited: Shakespeare, William, and Roma Gill. Macbeth. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.