

Macbeth is a play about the supernatural and its effects on individuals

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



The supernatural was a subject of morbid fascination for people of this time period. Witches and witchcraft were fervently believed in and hundreds of “witches”, mostly women were convicted and executed or burned during the years between 1560 and 1603. There were few who actually protested against this brutal persecution of others based on skimpy superstitious beliefs but against the masses, this was hardly an issue.

Witches were supposed to possess an array of demonic powers. These included physical manifestations of supernatural powers such as flying, sailing across water on sieves, bring on night during daytime hours (ie.

bring on solar eclipses), cause fogs and mists, and kill animals without leaving any physical marks on the carcasses. Witches were also believed to manifest their powers in metaphysical means, such as predicting the future and cursing enemies with fatal wasting diseases, induced terrifying nightmares, sterility and demonic possession. Another hallmark of a witch's powers would be the raising of evil spirits through the concoction and consumption of nauseating brews.

Witches were believed to derive their powers directly from the Devil, who sucked their blood in return for providing them with a ‘familiar’, usually an animal that served as a sidekick of sorts to the witch. Accused witches were searched for the devil's mark, a red mark on a witch from which the devil had drained blood. This led to many false convictions being made on the basis of red marks being discovered that had mundane explanations, such as acne, warts or other skin diseases. In short, those who did confess did so due to psychosomatic illnesses, or duress caused by intense torture, both

physical and mental. In this way, the hold of the supernatural over the minds of the average 17th century person was preserved. The actions of King James also set a precedent for the interrogation and trials of suspected witches as he too believed strongly in their existence and powers.

At the very start of the play, we were greeted by three witches holding a morbid gathering where they give us the hint “ Fair is foul, and foul is fair”. Yet little do we know that they are referring to the character of Macbeth. For in the beginning of the play, Macbeth was portrayed as a noble warrior who fought bravely in the name of his King and country. Subsequently the witches approach him and inform him of what they have seen, in his future. He is corrupted by this encounter, he cannot shake himself of what they have said and their words shine with truth when their first prediction that he would get promoted to the Thane of Cawdor comes to be. We watch with dread as well as anticipation as he becomes drugged with ambition between the words of the three witches and those of his determined wife. Thus the cause of Macbeth’s downfall, the influence of the supernatural, is clearly outlined.

Several symbols indicating the usage of witchcraft or demonic possession can be

recognized throughout Macbeth and it can be correctly assumed that Shakespeare

integrated these ideas into his plays in order to make it more appealing to the public of

that time period. In fact, the concept of the supernatural and was a hot topic at the time and proved to be irresistible to most people of the time, despite the inhumanity with which the public executions were carried out. Some of these signs were obvious, for example in Act 2 Scene 2 where Macbeth was so stricken with guilt it was almost as if he was possessed and he admitted he could not pray, " I could not say Amen". This was a sure indication that if God had truly turned his back on Macbeth and rendered him unable to pray then indeed Macbeth had been converted to a servant of the dark side. It struck the audience of the time cold with fear, as they were all religious Christians who fervently believed in the notions of Heaven and Hell to think that God had turned his back on a fellow man and in a way was advantageous to the Church as it aided in keeping the loyalties of the countrymen.

Lady Macbeth, inviting the dark side into her mind was also a chilling sight in Act 1 Scene 5 with the line " Come, you spirits" and then the harsh follow-up of " unsex me here" indicating that she desired not to be a meek and innocent woman but to taste the blood and hatred that men harbored. These two lines were derived from a speech uttered quite early in the play where she was already embracing her evil half, even going so far as to spurn the thought of motherhood in the line " Come to my woman's breasts And take my milk for gall". Her later line " but I shame to wear a heart so white" also clearly displays her bloodlust and remorselessness in contrast to Macbeth's wail of " Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood Clean from my hand?". Thus we realize it is not only the fault of Macbeth that he has

succumbed to the siren call of power, he has to also contend with the harsh words of his wife as she condemns him to be “ Infirm of purpose!” in Act 2 Scene 2 when he cannot help but sense the guilt of his actions, the murder of Duncan he has just committed.

Other subtler indications at the presence of the supernatural throughout the play include visions like the one Macbeth mentioned in his soliloquy in Act 2 Scene 1. “ Is this a dagger which I see before me”. Though this line is simply a reflection of his guilt and the hallucinations he is suffering as a result of it, it is also a suggestion of the dark side clouding his mind.

In conclusion, Macbeth’s overall disturbed behavior was caused by messengers of the supernatural as well as always accompanied by signs of the supernatural. His fearlessness, unresponsiveness to life and general betrayal of the strong Christian faith that was typical in people of the time showed that Macbeth had indeed morphed into something of the Devil’s damned servant. The supernatural followed the Thane of Glamis from his victory to the Thane of Cawdor through to his death.

It is in my personal opinion that Shakespeare utilized the mention of the supernatural extensively throughout the play to make it more action-packed for his audience of the time. It worked excellently as the general public’s faith was motivated primarily by the Church, which did not want to release its stranglehold upon medieval England. The threats of eternal damnation, coupled with physical torture and death, was to prove a formidable

combination in keeping the populace under control, and tied to the Church for several centuries more.

- * Supernatural are key elements that bring macbeth as a whole

- * Banquo ghost

- * Constant prescence of ladymacbeth is significant to the play- she constantly associates with evil