

The importance of the witches and supernatural to 'macbeth'

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During the 19thC the role of witches in Elizabethan society was important. They were important because the Elizabethans were very religious and superstitious. Witches were always part of anything evil and bad, suspected witches were tortured until they gave in and said they were witches. Any women who were suspected were checked over for devil marks. Shakespeare uses the witches to emphasise the battle between good and evil and the turning of Macbeth. They are a vital role in the play because they have supernatural powers and cast spells which tempt people like Macbeth.

Act I, 1 is a gift for dramatic effect and supernatural importance because we as an audience see the witches for the first time, it is set in an open place with fog, lightning and thunder which to an Elizabethan audience would be a scary and a supernatural setting. The three witches who are Satan's servants was a high risk Shakespeare used because anyone who were Christians hated the supernatural but it drew the audience in.

This scene is dramatic because the atmosphere is 'scary' and it involves a direct link devil worship. Macbeth is mentioned in the opening scene by the witches, Shakespeare is telling us that Macbeth will be evil later on in the play even if he is not now. The audience at Shakespeare's time will know that good always prevails over evil.

The way Shakespeare uses rhyming and chanting in iambic tetrameter for the witches creates their expertise in spells and witchcrafts. The stereotypical view of the witches really emphasises the fact that Macbeth is associated with evil and thus is evil in some way.

The witches use a lot of riddles in the play and in this first scene, for example “ when the battle is lost and won,” this tells the audience that there is a battle and plays on their mind, making them think about the ‘ greyish’ area between good and evil because there is always the area between where sometimes good is evil and evil is good. Because the witches use paradoxes such as “ fair is foul and foul is fair” they hint that evil is good and good is evil, which would frighten the audience because of their beliefs.

This opening scene is related to act I, 3 where they finally meet Macbeth in the evil place they say at the start. This scene’s purpose is to tell the audience Macbeth’s destiny and his flaw in his character and his weakness of loyalty. The dramatic effects of this scene are very important because the concept of witches was both a thrilling and dangerous subject. This is because the witches begin with a demonstration of their powers; this is done by the witches discussing a spiteful treatment of a sea captain until they hear drumming signalling Macbeth’s arrival.

When he does come on stage the first words he says are “ so foul and fair a day a day I have not seen” this is a very important use of dramatic irony because it is a deliberate echo of the witches’ first words of the play. This is to show how much Macbeth is an accomplice of evil. This scene is very good because it shows the temptation of evil in Macbeth. It is shown by the witches greeting him differently: Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor and king “ that shale be king hereafter.” This plays on Macbeth’s mind and the battle of good and evil. The audience would relate this to the temptation of Christ

but Macbeth is losing the battle of good and evil, but decides at the end of the scene that he will let fate chose the path of the future.

But in scene V when lady Macbeth reads the letter that Macbeth has sent her telling her about his encounter, she decides that for Macbeth's ambition to be king is they are going to have to kill Duncan. For this scene Shakespeare uses symbols of death " the raven him self is hoarse." Also there is a comparison for the witches shown in her " come you sprits" almost as if she want to be one " and take my milk for gall." At the end of the scene Lady Macbeth is more evil than Macbeth and is telling him to pretend to be kind, but nasty underneath " look th'innocent flower" and Lady Macbeth will take care of the murder plan. This is the start of dramatic irony in later scenes.

In Act II, 1 Banquo, Fleance and Macbeth meet, Banquo dreamt of the three witches and questioned Macbeth about them. After Banquo leaves, Macbeth sees a dagger leading him to Duncan's room. It seems he starts to get delusional. Illusions are created by his mind. This shows the turmoil in his mind. Thought of him doing the deed has resulted in illusions. The image created here is in the form of a dagger. This image of the dagger is very supernatural and one could argue that it is all in his head and it is his conscience speaking.

" Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?

Macbeth's mind must have been on the idea of killing Duncan. The haunting of this idea in Macbeth's head has resulted in the illusion of the dagger. The dagger maybe showing how easy it is to kill Duncan. It may be tempting him

more to the fact that Duncan would be helpless since he is sleeping and that this would be his only chance of becoming king.

The manifestation of the dagger has driven Macbeth further into killing Duncan. We see how evil is engulfing Macbeth piece by piece. By this, I mean that Macbeth is growing more and more evil. Without realizing it, Macbeth has become a pawn in the witches' hand. What Macbeth doesn't realize is that as you kill one person, you will have to kill others more to cover up for what you have done. "Thou shalt lead me the way that I was going" This quote tells us that the dagger is pointing toward the direction of Duncan. This tells us that the dagger is hypnotizing or tempting him to kill Duncan. The conflict of good and evil is still on.

The turmoil Macbeth is facing in his mind is tremendous. Usually, this kind of turmoil can cause a person to have a nervous breakdown. By this, I mean that we can empathize with him. His wife is tormenting him to do it, Duncan is a close friend to him, and the witches confuse the matter to him. But the thought of being king is in his mind. The only problem is that Macbeth wants to become king in a way where there is no killing. Here, evil is alluring him through his wife because she is in a way dominating his life. The problem we find in Macbeth is that he cannot control his life but takes orders from his wife. He could have said 'NO' but instead, he listened to his wife. Now evil has entered into Macbeth's mind and the hour of death has come for Duncan.

Macbeth grows considerably more evil in the play. His next step is the betrayal of his best friend Banquo because he is very paranoid about his

safety. Macbeth betrays Banquo because of his prophecy made by the witches. Knowing that all the prophecies spoken to him have come true, Macbeth fears that none of his children will become kings or queens. To get rid of Banquo, Macbeth plans another murder. This time, it's not him doing the murder but hired assassins. He hires assassins because he's a coward. He wants other people to do his dirty work. Now, he is thinking that he has killed 'gracious' Duncan just for Banquo's children to become king.

"To be thus is nothing, But to be safely thus: our fears in Banquo." For Banquo's issues have I filled my mind, for them the gracious Duncan have I murdered.....To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings! Rather than so, come fate into the list, and champion me to th' utterance."

He starts thinking that he has to suffer and do all the work just to see Banquo's children become king. At the end of this quote, we see that Macbeth takes matters in his own hands by hiring assassins to kill Banquo. Macbeth makes a perfect choice when he chooses the assassins. The assassins chosen are Banquo's enemies. I think that Macbeth is building the anger in the assassins. He reminds them of how Banquo has made them suffer.

"Well then, now have you considered of my speeches?"

He tells the murderers of how Banquo has tormented them. I think he does this so that their urge for revenge grows stronger. As we read on, Macbeth continues to tell the assassins to kill Banquo immediately or sooner. Macbeth doesn't want Banquo to live any second more. He starts to ask them why

they haven't killed him as yet. After the torment, why are they letting him go?

" Do you find your patience so predominant in your nature, that.....
Whose heavy hand had bowed you to the grave and begged yours for ever?"

Macbeth describes Banquo as an illness, which has to be cured immediately. He also describes him as enemy of his. When the murder is told to Macbeth they tell him that they missed Fleance and he has escaped; soon after this the ghost of Banquo appears in Macbeth's seat, this is a perfect use of the supernatural. It scares Macbeth and he has a fit. The paranoia is settled in Macbeth and is causing his delusions and fears.

In Act IV, 1 the scene is started with the witches in a desolate place, creating a spell. After Macbeth has killed Duncan and Banquo (Macbeth still felt insecure about his position on the throne, he decides to kill Banquo and his sons), Macbeth wants to return to the witches voluntarily to find out his fate in order to see what actions he should take. This shows that maybe the witches did have a great influence on his actions as he returns to them for what he should do next. Macbeth has many mixed emotions. He has many fears as he knows what he has done in terms of the murders and he knows he can trust no one, he has isolated himself, even from the woman who he loves, Lady Macbeth. He comes to the witches for answers, which he relies upon to comfort him. Macbeth comes in as the witches are casting their spell.

The witches' reaction to Macbeth is. " By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes." Unlike the first time that they come

across them in Act I Scene 3, this time his feelings about the witches are different. Macbeth shows far more confidence with the witches in this scene: he commands them; “ What is't you do? ' And ' I conjure you... answer me to what I ask you”. The witches give Macbeth an answer that the action that they carry out is an action with no name, which could be seen as an exploit that is too evil to be shared with anyone else.

Macbeth asks for answers and the witches offer Macbeth to hear it from their masters. One by one the apparitions enter. They give him insights into the future and offer him three warnings. The first apparition is the head of Macbeth, which will later be cut off, there is a bloody child, who is Macduff when he was ripped out of his mother and the last is a crowned child who is Malcolm. These apparitions made Macbeth worried because of Malcolm, and because he now knows that his head will be cut off and he will soon die. He is very bigheaded thinking that no one could kill him. However Lady Macbeth is in the state of guilt and madness and kills herself after admitting to the crime.

In conclusion I find that the witches and the supernatural in Macbeth are very important because if it was not for the witches he would never had the idea that he can be king. And if it weren't for the supernatural and his wife he would never have betrayed Scotland and killed Duncan.