

Discuss the presentation of the supernatural in the tempest and dr. faustus essay...



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As per the dictionary definition, the term 'supernatural' is defined as something "unable to be explained by science or the laws of nature; of, relating to, or seeming to come from magic, a god, etc." (Merriem Webster Dictionary) [1].

Theatre goers were somewhat fearful in regards to the topic of the supernatural - "The Globe play-house shuddered at the appearance of Hamlet's ghost, for it was true, that this might be either Denmark's spirit or the very devil in a pleasing shape" [2]. This idea of the supernatural was something that was embraced during the 16th century, especially for those who were educated. Though magic and the belief in the supernatural was forbidden by the clerical, Renaissance based society of the time, Black and White Magic were the predominant types of magic that were practised by many. During this time however, for anyone persecuted for practising magic, it was punishable by death, as society was quite God-conscious.

As the biblical reference suggests: "Let no one be found among you who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord." (Deuteronomy 18: 9-12) [3].

Statements such as this, as well as being moral tokens for people of the time, haunt the character of Faustus just before his damnation, and merely summarise how people rejected necromancy and the supernatural, and how much of serious of an issue it was perceived to be.

From the offset of *The Tempest*, Shakespeare attempts to establish a foreboding setting. The fact that we are told "a tempestuous noise and

lightning heard” immediately insinuates that this is too powerful of a tempest to be natural. Along with this this form of pathetic fallacy, and due to the fact lightning and thunder were often linked to supernatural entities such as witchcraft and the devil during this period – we as readers already anticipate an unnatural setting. Theatre houses of the time would use fireworks and thunder-sheets, as well as canon-balls to replicate this effect in production. Marlowe follows suit in Faustus.

We are exposed to a supernatural setting from the commencement of the play, “Orion’s drizzling look” foreshadows an absence of heaven and a presence of hell. The fact that Prospero causes the tempest through his manipulation of Ariel (threatening Ariel with ‘ oak’ imprisonment) only to have Ferdinand fall for his daughter Miranda, is arousing in relation to the theme of the supernatural. They embody love at first sight, however nonetheless it remains difficult to ignore Prospero being there, overseeing their entire exchange; “ the fringed curtains of thine eye advance...

no, wench, it eats and sleeps and hath such sense as we have-such. This gallant thou seest...” from this, we can ponder just how naturalistic the love between Ferdinand and Miranda is – are they genuinely in love? Or is it merely Prospero’s supernatural interference, enchanting the meeting between the two and allowing love to do the rest? Certainly, it can be argued that Prospero’s supernatural power stems from his power of language and appearance. His way with words to characters such as Ariel (his servant) and even Miranda (his own daughter) feature undertones of being manipulative.

He is overtly manipulative to Caliban, through which way he attempts to dominate Caliban's very reality - " For this, be sure, tonight thou shalt have cramps, side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up. Urchins shall, forth at vast of night that they may work, all exercise on thee." Prospero makes no attempt to disguise his dominance over Caliban as he does with Miranda and Ariel. Prospero is a figure of great authority that rules through both magic and fear.

Faustus on the other hand is ' duped' through illusion and fear. Claiming to be ' learned' in all of academia has led to a loss in humility for Faustus, and so his credence that magic will bring him true happiness is tragically invalid, as nothing of significance is achieved through his ' magic'. Prospero is undeniably adept in sorcery and magic, whereas Faustus is capable of nothing but small-scale trickery; entertaining Charles V and his accomplices as a meagre entertainer. Faustus' acquisition of magic remains questionable - is using magic to conjure something as mere and insignificant as some grapes as revitalising and as "heavenly" as Faustus first thought? The character of Prospero is almost certainly a template for John Dee, as both have rather notable parallels to each other. Both having been exiled with a daughter and conjuring spirits using Magic (Prospero summoning Ariel; " What would my potent master? Here I am").

We as an audience question whether Prospero uses Black Magic - in the same way the renaissance community accused John Dee of conjuring Black magic. Though Prospero uses his magic for what we essentially view as pure and positive means, the fact that he at one point, in essence ' awakens' Ariel ' from the dead;' " Graves at my command have wak'd their sleepers", is an <https://assignbuster.com/discuss-the-presentation-of-the-supernatural-in-the-tempest-and-dr-faustus-essay/>

intrinsic act of Black Magic. This makes Prospero's dimensions of magic questionable. However as RS. Ellwood (2009) states, it can be counter-argued that " Prospero's magic is White magic, not Black. He summons up no evil spirits, makes no compact with the devil, and does not jeopardize his soul.

The forces he commands are these of nature" [5]. Faustus' magic is quite simply Black Magic; he sells his soul to the devil. Where Shakespeare alleviates Prospero's rise back to supremacy, Marlowe attempts to allude Faustus' downfall. As A. Papahagi (2009) states " The spirits he traffics with cannot offer him more than a theatre of illusions, and fireworks" [4]. It is this ' theatre of illusions' that lead to his failure to repent, and ultimately, his downfall.

He is blind to the fact that Mephistopheles has all the power. The personification of the ' seven deadly sins' presents an allegory for Faustus. During the medieval times, the audience could instantly identify each sin on stage as this was a long standing tradition almost - a characters' attachment with the differing sins would instigate whether they were with God, or the devil. The fact that Faustus takes pleasure in them, sniggering in their presence alludes him to the devil. Shakespeare's rhetoric in leaving Prospero's magic ambiguous, though slightly biased, perhaps reiterates an allegorical defence of John Dee.

" The white magician Doctor Dee, is defended in Prospero, the good and learned conjurer, who had managed to transport his valuable library to the island." - F. Yates (2012) [6]. Marlowe advocates the Renaissance ' new

man' in Faustus. "Faustus's obsession" with the supernatural "is almost erotic" [7] - so much so is Faustus sidetracked by the prospect of power, he loses track of his morals and common sense.

The supernatural overwhelms Faustus throughout. The fact that Faustus is a "servant to great Lucifer, and may not follow thee without his leave" poses a subconscious reminder to Faustus that he cannot escape Mephistopheles' control. During a time where magic was forbidden, Faustus the 'new man' goes against social structures of the time and embraces the supernatural. Both the angel and the devil present Faustus with what is good and bad, allowing him to choose which path he wishes to take. Black Magic is constantly prevalent throughout; with Robin and Rafe being antithetical to Faustus in terms of their logic.

These simpletons are used as comic relief, yet the fact that they are themselves 'learned' enough to accomplish magic, stoops Faustus to an indistinguishable position. Being a conjurer is not as remarkable a feat as Faustus makes out. The supernatural underwhelms Robin and Rafe. Faustus, as someone who is meant to be scholarly and educated is easier led than two caricatures - clearly Faustus is blinded by his ignorance and ego too much to come to terms with reality. He wants to be a White Magician, but his deal with the devil has made him a Black Magician." Know thus far forth.

By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune, Now my dear lady, hath mine enemies Brought to this shore; and by my prescience I find my zenith doth depend upon A most auspicious star, whose influence If now I court not but omit, my fortunes will ever after droop". This deduces a major distinction

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between the supernatural in *The Tempest*, with the supernatural in *Faustus*. We as readers can identify from this that Prospero's affiliation to the supernatural need not rely on sheer capability, but rather - nature. Nature almost dictates Prospero's capabilities, and Prospero is plain and mindful to this fact.

After all, it is a tempest - a powerful element of nature that leads the characters to be on the island. " In the Christian world of the Shakespeare's time, evil is chosen, not destined, and nature provides for all outcomes, those who are virtuous and their counterparts, those who are corrupt."

[8] Prospero acknowledges he has power, but recognises that he is not omnipotent, and so he embraces nature. Faustus on the other hand tries to achieve this, but is trapped between what he thinks is real and what we as readers, know is surreal.

Ironically, he infers that "these necromantic books are heavenly," not knowing that in actual fact "necromancy" is Black Magic. Black Magic alone poses an inextricable paradox to heaven. Both Prospero and Faustus are ' power hungry.' Prospero has lost all his power since his exile, but he exercises his newfound power on all the inhabitants of the island:" The pine and cedar: graves at my command have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth by my so potent art." Faustus has a yearning for a similar type of power also but exercises his yearn in what are arguably, pointless ways - tormenting the pope's friars whilst invisible for instance.

Certainly Prospero and Faustus are both rapt by the concept of being all-powerful. Prospero is looked to as a superior figurehead by all the

characters; “ Pardon, master; I will be correspondent to command and do my spiriting gently” (Ariel) and “ You taught me language; and my profit on’t” (Caliban). Prospero’s political exile leads him to become his own conjurer whereas Faustus – exiled by magic, becomes a puppet for Lucifer. Both *The Tempest* and *Dr. Faustus* are morality plays that indeed bring to mind some moral lessons; Marlowe uses the supernatural to contemplate the idea of predestination – Are we as readers really subject to our own free will, if we cannot learn from the demise of Faustus? Shakespeare on the other hand, uses the supernatural as a metaphorical tool for his own social commentary, even inferring “let your indulgence set me free” through Prospero.

Shakespeare’s indulgence of the supernatural is for the sake of entertaining, whilst Marlowe’s depiction of it, is based on this thesis of religious philosophy.