

What use of the  
supernatural does  
shakespeare make



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to determine the course of action in the playWhat use of the supernatural does Shakespeare make to determine the course of action in the play?

To understand the involvement of the supernatural in Macbeth we must understand the circumstances in which the play was written in 1606 When Queen Elizabeth I was on her deathbed Shakespeare wrote Macbeth he did this for two reasons. Firstly the newly appointed king to be (James I) was very superstitious and had actually written a book about witchcraft, Secondly at the time people were very suspicious and believed in witch craft a lot and therefore it would not have sounded out of place to say that witches could influence the death of kings, thirdly King James I was actually a descendent of Banquo, except that in real life Banquo had actually killed king Duncan, but this would have not pleased James I and so in Shakespeares version of Macbeth, Banquo is innocent so that Shakespeare could get on the good side of the king.

In the play “ Macbeth”, there were many interesting sections, which could be concentrated on due to the suspense and the involvement of the supernatural.

The use of the supernatural in the witches, the visions, the ghost, and the apparitions is a key element in making the concept of the play work and in making the play interesting. Looking through each Act and Scene of the play, it is noticed that the supernatural is definitely a major factor on the play's style.

The use of the supernatural occurs at the beginning of the play, with three witches predicting the fate of Macbeth. This gives the audience a clue to

what the future holds for Macbeth.

“ When the battles lost and won” (Act I, Scene I, l. 4)

Was said by the second witch. It says that every battle is lost by one side and won by another. Macbeth’s fate is that he will win the battle, but will lose his time of victory for the battle of his soul.

After the prophecies of the witches’ revealed the fate of Macbeth, the plan in which to gain power of the throne is brought up.

MACBETH

Speak, if you can: what are you?

First Witch

All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, thane of Glamis!

Second Witch

All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!

Third Witch

All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!

BANQUO

Good sir, why do you start; and seem to fear Things that do sound so fair? I’ the name of truth, Are ye fantastical, or that indeed which outwardly ye show? My noble partner you greet with present grace and great prediction of noble having and of royal hope, that he seems rapt withal: to me you speak not. If you can look into the seeds of time, and say which grain will grow and which will not, speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear your favours nor your hate.

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First Witch

Hail!

Second Witch

Hail!

Third Witch

Hail!

First Witch

Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

Second Witch

Not so happy, yet much happier.

Third Witch

Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none:

So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!

First Witch

Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

(Act 1, Scene 3, ll48-65)

The only way to gain power of the throne was for Macbeth to work his way to the throne, or to murder King Duncan.

Murdering the king was an easier plan since the motivation in his dreams urged him on.

Lady Macbeth also relied on the supernatural by her soliloquy of calling upon the evil spirits to give her the power to plot the malefic murder of Duncan without any remorse or conscience.

Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood, stop up the access and passage to  
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remorse, that no compunctious visitings of nature shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between th effect and it! Come to my womans breasts, and take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers, wherever in your sightless substances you wait on natures mischief! Come, thick night, and pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell, that my keen knife see not the wound it makes, nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark, to cry, Hold, hold!

Enter Macbeth

Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor! Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter! Thy letters have transported me beyond this ignorant present, and I feel now the future in the instant. (Act I, Scene V, ll. 42-57)

The three sisters are capable of leading people into danger resulting in death, such as the sailor who never slept.

First Witch

Where hast thou been, sister?

Second Witch

Killing swine.

Third Witch

Sister, where thou?

First Witch

A sailors wife had chestnuts in her lap and munchd, and munchd, and munchd: Give me, quoth I. Aroint thee, witch! the rump-fed ronyon cries. Her husbands to Aleppo gone, master o Tiger: but in a sieve Ill thither sail, and, like a rat without a tail, Ill do, Ill do, and Ill do.

Second Witch

Ill give thee a wind,

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First Witch

Thart kind.

Third Witch

And I another.

First Witch

I myself have all the other; and the very ports they blow, all the quarters that they know I the shipmans card. Ill drain him dry as hay: sleep shall neither night nor day hang upon his pent-house lid; he shall live a man forbid. Weary sevn-nights nine times nine shall he dwindle, peak and pine: through his bark cannot be lost, yet it shall be tempest-tost. Look what I have.

Second Witch

Show me, show me.

First Witch

Here I have a pilots thumb, wreckd as homeward he did come.

[A drum beats]

Third Witch

A drum! A drum! Macbeth doth come.

All

The weird sisters, hand in hand, posters of the sea and land, thus do go about, about: Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine, and thrice again, to make up nine. Peace! The charms wound up. (Act I, Scene III, ll. 1-37)

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Lady Macbeth has convinced her husband Macbeth to murder King Duncan. On the night they planned to kill Duncan, Macbeth is waiting for Lady Macbeth to ring the signal bell to go up the stairs to Duncan's chamber. He sees the vision of the floating dagger. The interest of the dagger is that it leads Macbeth towards the chamber by the presence of evil of the dagger being covered with blood. Then the bell rings and Macbeth stealthily proceeds up the staircase to Duncan's chamber to commit the murder.

Eventually Banquo has his suspicions about Macbeth killing Duncan to have power of the throne. There is constantly more guilt and fear inside Macbeth and his wife that they decide to have Banquo killed.

Macbeth and his wife attend a banquet in which a ghost appears. Once the murderer notified Macbeth that the deed was done, he observed the ghost of Banquo sitting in his normal seat. This caused Macbeth to act really weird and almost mental way, making people suspicious of his actions.

Macbeth

No teeth for the present. Get thee gone; to-morrow well hear ourselves again.

Lady Macbeth

You do not give the cheer: the feast is old that is not often vouchd, while tis a-making, tis given with welcome: to feed were best at home; from thence, the sauce to meat is ceremony; meeting were bare without it. MACBETH  
Sweet remembrancer! Now, good digestion wait on appetite,  
and health on both!

LENNOX

May't please your highness sit.

The GHOST OF BANQUO enters, and sits in Macbeths place

MACBETH

Here had we now our country's honour roof'd, were the graced person of our Banquo present; who may I rather challenge for unkindness than pity for mischance!

ROSS

His absence, sir, Lays blame upon his promise. Please't your highness to grace us with your royal company.

MACBETH

The table's full.

LENNOX

Here is a place reserved, sir.

MACBETH

Where?

LENNOX

Here, my good lord. What is't that moves your highness?

MACBETH

Which of you have done this? Lords what, my good lord?

MACBETH

Thou canst not say I did it: never shake Thy gory locks at me.



ROSS

Gentlemen, rise: his highness is not well.

LADY MACBETH

Sit, worthy friends: my lord is often thus, And hath been from his youth: pray you, keep seat; The fit is momentary; upon a thought He will again be well: if much you note him, You shall offend him and extend his passion: Feed, and regard him not. Are you a man?

MACBETH

Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that which might appal the devil.

LADY MACBETH

O proper stuff! This is the very painting of your fear: This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said, led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts, Impostors to true fear, would well become A woman's story at a winter's fire, Authorized by her grandam. Shame itself! Why do you make such faces? When all's done, you look but on a stool.

MACBETH

Prithee, see there! Behold! Look! Lo! How say you? Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too. If charnel-houses and our graves must send those that we bury back, our monuments shall be the maws of kites.

GHOST OF BANQUO vanishes

LADY MACBETH

What, quite unmann'd in folly?

MACBETH

If I stand here, I saw him.

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LADY MACBETH

Fie, for shame!

MACBETH

Blood hath been shed ere now, i' the olden time, Ere human statute purged the gentle weal; Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd Too terrible for the ear: the times have been, That, when the brains were out, the man would die, And there an end; but now they rise again, With twenty mortal murders on their crowns, And push us from our stools: this is more strange Than such a murder is.

LADY MACBETH

My worthy lord, your noble friends do lack you.

MACBETH

I do forget. Do not muse at me, my most worthy friends, I have a strange infirmity, which is nothing to those that know me. Come, love and health to all; Then I'll sit down. Give me some wine; fill full. I drink to the general joy o' the whole table, And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss; would he were here! To all, and him, we thirst, and all to all. Lords Our duties, and the pledge.

Re-enter GHOST OF BANQUO

MACBETH

Avaunt! And quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee! Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold; Thou hast no speculation in those eyes which thou dost glare with!

LADY MACBETH

Think of this, good peers, But as a thing of custom: 'tis no other; only it spoils the pleasure of the time.

MACBETH

What man dare, I dare: Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear, The arm'd rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger;

Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves Shall never tremble: or be alive again, And dare me to the desert with thy sword; If trembling I inhabit then, protest me The baby of a girl. Hence, horrible shadow! Unreal mockery, hence!

GHOST OF BANQUO vanishes

Why, so: being gone, I am a man again. Pray you, sit still.

LADY MACBETH

You have displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting, with most admired disorder.

MACBETH

Can such things be and overcome us like a summer's cloud, without our special wonder? You make me strange Even to the disposition that I owe, When now I think you can behold such sights, And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks, When mine is blanched with fear.

ROSS

What sights, my lord?

LADY MACBETH

I pray you, speak not; he grows worse and worse; Question enrages him. At once, good night: Stand not upon the order of you're going, But go at once.  
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(Act III, Scene IV, ll. 31-120)

The use of the supernatural has increased the suspense now that Macbeth is constantly relying on the prophecies of the three witches. Hecate, the Queen of witches is angry with the three sisters for not involving her in their encounters with Macbeth.

The witches plan to lead Macbeth to his downfall by making him feel overconfident.

Thunder. Enter the three Witches meeting HECATE

First Witch

Why, how now, Hecate! You look angrily.

HECATE

Have I not reason, beldams as you are,  
Saucy and overbold? How did you dare  
To trade and traffic with Macbeth  
In riddles and affairs of death;  
And I, the mistress of your charms,  
The close contriver of all harms,  
Was never call'd to bear my part,  
Or show the glory of our art?  
And, which is worse, all you have done  
Hath been but for a wayward son,  
Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do,  
Loves for his own ends, not for you.

But make amends now: get you gone,  
and at the pit of Acheron  
Meet me i' the morning: thither he  
Will come to know his destiny:  
Your vessels and your spells provide,  
your charms and every thing beside.

I am for the air; this night I'll spend  
Unto a dismal and a fatal end:  
Great business must be wrought ere noon:  
Upon the corner of the moon  
There hangs a vaporous drop profound;  
I'll catch it ere it come to ground:  
And that distill'd by magic sleights  
Shall raise such artificial sprites  
As by the strength of their illusion  
Shall draw him on to his confusion:  
He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear  
He hopes 'bove wisdom, grace and fear:  
And you all know, security  
Is mortals' chiefest enemy.

Music and a song within: 'Come away, come away,' &c  
Hark! I am call'd; my little spirit, see,  
Sits in a foggy cloud, and stays for me.

Exit (Act III, Scene V, ll. 1-35)

Further on in the play, Macbeth finds his way to the witches' cave and demands to know what lies ahead for him. The three witches predict what he is going to ask and produce the first apparition, which is an armed head.

“ Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! Beware of Macduff; beware thane of Fife.

Dismiss me: enough.” (Act VI, Scene I, ll. 77-78)

The first apparition tells Macbeth to beware of Macduff. Then the second apparition appears (a bloody child), and says:

“ Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn the power of man, for none of woman born shall harm thee Macbeth.” (Act IV, Scene I, ll. 85-87)

This apparition informs Macbeth that no man born from a woman can harm him. Finally, the last apparition appears and is a child crowned, with a tree in his hand. The apparition is saying that he will never be defeated until Great Birnam wood shall come against him to High Dunsinane Hill.

“ Be lion melted, proud, and take no care who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are: Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until Great Birnam wood to High Dunsinane Hill shall come against him.” (Act VI, Scene I, ll. 98-102)

These apparitions convinced Macbeth that this was his fate and became over confident, and lead him to his death.

The use of the supernatural in Macbeth results quite well with the respect of the unknown. Without the witches, the ghost, the visions, and the apparitions, “ Macbeth” would have been a really boring play. Even people today need motivation to read, and this really old superstition of spirits enhanced the play dramatically.