

# Macbeth – notes on elements of the gothic in the play

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- An Elizabethan audience would have been genuinely terrified by the events on stage as they believed that witches did exist, murder by witchcraft was made punishable in 1563 thus demonstrating that people during this era believed witches were real and had magical powers.
- The theme of equivocation is used by Shakespeare to highlight the witch's evil nature; they use words with double meanings to confuse and disorientate Macbeth's thoughts and cause a conflict in his mind (between good and evil).
- "The weird sisters" - whilst also meaning strange the word weird is derived from the old English 'wyrd' which means fate or destiny, fate is often characterised as 3 old women.

## **Transformation**

- Macbeth is promoted to Thane of Cawdor by King Duncan, the audience have yet to meet Macbeth when Duncan makes this decision thus an impression of Macbeth as an honourable man is formed. The significance of this promotion is that Macbeth goes through a transformation from a brave soldier to a higher ranking, and more noble, position.
- Macbeth's dramatic change in character is amplified in act 3 scene one as he attempts to annihilate Banquo, his close friend who he held in high respect at the start of the play. As the play progresses there is a steady breakdown of Macbeth's identity, causing him to be "not himself" by the end.

## **A Blurring of Fantasy and Reality**

- The line between fantasy and reality becomes blurred; the pinnacle point of this is in act two scene two after Macbeth enters from the murder. His piece of mind has been shattered as he feels that he has "murdered sleep", there is no escape from his evil deeds as he has now become trapped in a living nightmare. To Macbeth (who comes over almost trance-like) he is just as vulnerable awake as asleep and to sleep would be too difficult because his mind has become corrupt with evil thoughts. (Macbeth becomes slightly hysterical during this scene as he struggles to make sense of what is happening to him, this is also an aspect of disorder)
- "Is this a dagger which I see before me" - Macbeth appears tormented by his violent actions, which induce his tragic fall, it is after the murder of the king that he slowly evolves into a mad man who feels out of control with his mental state, it is corrupted thoughts that lead him to become power obsessed and thus a murderous, villainous man, his many delusions add to mounting suspense. (This also has links to transformation - transformation of the mind)

## **Significant Use of Setting**

- Act one scene one opens with "Thunder and lightning" suggesting that the witches, who have gathered to talk about Macbeth, are somewhere outside.
- The play is introduced as dark and dangerous, evil is introduced through the stormy weather that symbolises the disorder to come.

- In act two scene four Ross and an old man talk about the stormy night, symbolising disruption in the kingdom, there is definite mystery as the location of the conversation is unclear, conversation takes place somewhere " outside the castle".
- " A camp near the battlefield" is the setting in act one scene two; a battlefield is a place where many people die, later in the play Macbeth becomes a murderer killing several people for un-just reasons. The king discusses the bravery shown by Macbeth and decides to reward him with the title Thane of Cawdor, he is being rewarded for killing here which could be a slight element of foreshadowing of his ability to kill for his own ends (merciless man).