

Supernatural in julius caesar

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The play *Julius Caesar*, by William Shakespeare, includes many references of superstitions and omens. These references played an important role in the development of the plot and characters. Shakespeare used elements such as weather, old beliefs, and people's visions to portray messages to the audience. Through the use of superstitions and omens, Shakespeare foreshadowed Caesar's death, exposed the changes in various characters, and allowed the characters' true intentions to reveal themselves through the misinterpretations of omens.

The superstitions and premonitions added by Shakespeare were used to foreshadow the death of Caesar.

By doing this, Shakespeare made it obvious to the audience that Caesar was going to die and there was nothing anybody could do about it. On the night before the Ides of March, there was a large thunderstorm that took place. The storm foreshadowed the assassination of Julius Caesar and its negative repercussions. Shakespeare's audience treated the kings as the gods' representative on Earth. So when Casca and Cicero met on a Roman street.

Casca points out:

“ Either there is a civil strife in heaven,

Or else the world, too saucy with the gods,

Incenses them to send destruction.” (1. 3. 11-13)

Casca's words leave an undertone that even the heavens are upset with the plans to murder Caesar. Because Caesar's death would break one of the

human laws, this disturbed a natural law, resulting in a thunderstorm. Casca continues to point out to Cicero things he saw that were clearly omens:

“ Against the Capitol I met a lion,
Who glared at me and went surly by,

Without annoying me...

And yesterday the bird of night did sit

Even at noon-day upon the marketplace,

Hooting and shrieking.” (1. 3. 20-28)

Obviously these things don't just naturally happen, so they were put there by Shakespeare to foreshadow Caesar's assassination. Caesar's servant and wife didn't want him to leave on the day of his death. Caesar's wife, Calpurnia, had a bad dream that his statue was spewing blood and many Romans were bathing their hands in it. Similarly, Caesar's servant cautioned him from leaving his house:

“ They would not have you stir forth today.

Plucking the entrails of an offering forth,

They could not find a heart within the beast.” (2. 2. 38-40)

These two phenomena occurred on the same day, right after the night of the storm and Casca's strange visions, on the day of Caesar's death. Shakespeare strategically placed them to foreshadow an upcoming tragedy.

The use of superstitions and the supernatural shows the development and changes within the important characters throughout the play. Julius Caesar

starts off the play being very superstitious and he allows these beliefs to dictate the way he makes choices. He makes this evident in his conversation with Antonius:

“ Forget not in your speed, Antonius,
To touch Calpurnia, for our elders say
The barren, touched in this holy chase,
Shake off their sterile curse.” (1. 2. 8-11)

Here, two friends speak to each other about a race that takes place on the Feast of the Lupercal. Caesar tells Antonius to touch Calpurnia because he believes it will make her able to bear children, giving attention to omens and superstitions. Unfortunately, Caesar eventually disregards omens and superstitions entirely leading to the day he dies. He believes he is stronger than the supernatural, as he says to his wife, Calpurnia:

No, Caesar shall not. Danger knows full well
That Caesar is more dangerous than he.
We are two lions littered in one day,
And I the elder and more terrible.
And Caesar shall go forth.” (2. 2. 44-48)

In this quote by Caesar, he is expressing his disregard for the bad omens that everyone is experiencing, which pertain to him. As well, Caesar’s words demonstrate his change in attitude. Earlier in the play, Caesar was less ambitious which caused him to pay more attention to what was occurring in

his surroundings, such as superstitions. Shakespeare shows Cassius' change in attitude in a conversation between him and Casca:

“ For my part, I have walked about the streets,

Submitting me unto the perilous night,

And, thus unbracèd, Casca, as you see,

Have bared my bosom to the thunder-stone.

And when the cross blue lightning seemed to open

The breast of heaven, I did present myself

Even in the aim and very flash of it.” (1. 3. 47-53)

Cassius said this to Casca while the two conspirators were speaking about omens. The audience sees Cassius' dangerous and narcissistic attitudes reveal themselves by the way he tested and belittled superstitions, something that the people of that time took so seriously. Cassius' attitude towards omens and superstitions completely changes. Cassius believes and allows superstitions to affect the way he thinks. This is demonstrated when he speaks to Messala in the 5th Act:

“ You know that I held Epicurus strong

And his opinion. Now I change my mind,

And partly credit things that do presage.” (5. 1. 76-78)

Cassius' words express his new belief in the supernatural and omens. It is possible to draw this change in belief towards superstitions, to a change in his attitude and decisions. This new belief, made him more cautious and

realistic when entering the battle at Philippi, as opposed to his previous irrational fearlessness seen during the storm. In both characters, Julius Caesar and Caius Cassius, the audience sees, through Shakespeare's use of superstitions, a significant change in attitude.

In Julius Caesar, some of the most important superstitions and omens were miss-interpreted by the characters. This happened because either the receiver of the omen didn't like the message, or they didn't understand its purpose or its relevance. When this happened, it dramatically enhanced the plot, as well as showed the characters' true intentions. This occurs on the night of the storm, when Cassius says:

“ Now could I, Casca, name to thee a man

Most like this dreadful night” (1. 3. 73-74)

Instead of referring the storm to Caesar's imminent death and its repercussions, Cassius relates the storm to Caesar's powerful existence. If Cassius were able to decipher and accept the real message in the storm, he would have recognized his villainous plans. Perhaps, Caesar would not have been killed, and there would be no negative aftermath to his death. Cassius didn't want the storm to represent Caesar's death, nor did it even cross Cassius' mind that the storm might have to do with his plans. Cassius truly wanted to kill Caesar out of jealousy and nothing was going to get in his way, not even the natural order of things. Misinterpreting omens also occurs on the day of Caesar's death when Decius Brutus, comes to escort Caesar to the senate, he finds Caesar was unwilling to leave his house because Calpurnia

had a bad dream. Decius Brutus, planning to kill Caesar, convinces him that the dream was miss-interpreted:

“ This dream is all amiss interpreted.

It was a vision fair and fortunate”

Caesar believes his friend and goes to the senate house with Decius Brutus, which lead to his inevitable death. There were so many signs guiding Caesar not to go to work that day, some including: The soothsayer told Caesar to beware the Ides of March, and also the sacrificed animal without a heart. Caesar miss interpreted all of these things to be good signs or ignored them entirely, because he believed that he was going to be crowned king that day and his ambition got the better of him. Caesar didn't want to believe the signs were describing bad things to come because he didn't like the idea of that happening. These miss-interpretations eventually led to fatal errors and thus made the play Julius Caesar a tragedy.

In conclusion, Shakespeare's use of superstitions was very important to the play, Julius Caesar, because of the role they had in the play. The weather was used for foreshadowing Caesar's death and showing Cassius' initial attitudes towards the supernatural. The people's old beliefs were used by Shakespeare to show Caesar's change in beliefs and increase in ambition because he purposely translated the sign incorrectly as well as foreshadow his death. People's visions were put in the play by Shakespeare to foreshadow Caesar's death and the negative events to come afterwards, because they were miss translated by Caesar, it advanced the plot and eventually got him killed. Not only was the incorporation of supernatural

things in Julius Caesar intriguing to the audience, it also served a functional purpose towards the overall play as a whole.