

In thus propelled to
set into action



In the time of William Shakespeare there was a strong belief in the existence of the supernatural. Thus, the supernatural is a recurring aspect in many of Shakespeare's plays. In two such plays, Hamlet and Macbeth, the supernatural is an integral part of the structure of the plot.

It provides a catalyst for action, an insight into character, and augments the impact of many key scenes. The supernatural appears to the audience in many varied forms. In Hamlet, the most notable form of the supernatural that appears is the ghost. However, in Macbeth, a ghost, a floating dagger, witches, and prophetic apparitions make appearances. The role of the supernatural is very important in Hamlet and Macbeth. The role that the supernatural plays is important because it is an integral part of the structure of the plot.

A ghost appearing in the form of Hamlet's father makes several appearances in the play. It first appears to the watchmen, Marcellus and Bernardo, along with Horatio near the guardsmen's post. The ghost says nothing to them and is perceived with fear and apprehension; "it harrows me with fear and wonder". It is not until the appearance of Hamlet that the ghost speaks, and only then after Horatio has expressed his fears about Hamlet following it, "What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord, or to the dreadful summit of the cliff". This illustrates how Horatio is concerned for Hamlet's well being.

The conversation between the ghost and Hamlet serves as a catalyst for Hamlet's later actions and provides insight into Hamlet's character. The information the ghost reveals incites Hamlet into action against a situation

he was already uncomfortable with. Hamlet is not quick to believe the ghost, “ The spirit that I have seen may be a devil...

and perhaps out of my weakness and my melancholy... abuses me to damn me”.

Thus, an aspect of Hamlet’s character is further revealed when Hamlet encounters the ghost in his mother’s room. In this scene the ghost makes an appearance to what Hamlet’s almost blunted purpose. Hamlet is now convinced of the ghost and he no longer harbours any suspicion. He now listens to it, “ Speak to her, Hamlet”.

In Hamlet, the supernatural is the guiding force behind the character of Hamlet. The ghost asks Hamlet to seek revenge for the King’s death and Hamlet is thus propelled to set into action a series of events that ends in Hamlet’s death. The supernatural is a re-occurring event in Macbeth. It is present in all the scenes with the witches, the appearance of Banquo’s ghost, the prophecies the apparitions bring, and in the air-drawn dagger that guides Macbeth towards his victim. Of the supernatural phenomenon evident in Macbeth, the witches are perhaps the most important. The witches represent Macbeth’s evil ambitions.

They are the catalysts, which unleash Macbeth’s evil aspirations. Macbeth believes the witches and wishes to know more about the future so after the banquet he seeks them out at their cave. He wants to know the answers to his questions regardless of whether the consequences are violent and destructive to nature. The witches promise to answer and at Macbeths

choice they add further unnatural ingredients to the cauldron and call up their masters. This is where the prophetic apparitions appear.

The first apparition is Macbeth's own head (later to be cut off by Macduff) confirming his fears of Macduff. The second apparition tells Macbeth that he can not be harmed by anyone who is born by a woman. This knowledge gives Macbeth a false sense of security because he believes that he cannot be harmed, yet Macduff was not of born by a woman, his mother was dead and a corpse when Macduff was born. This leads to Macbeth's downfall. The third apparition is a child with a crown on his head, represents Malcolm, Duncan's son. This apparition also gives Macbeth a false sense of security because of the Birnam Wood prophecy. The supernatural is a recurring aspect in many of the plays written by William Shakespeare.

In Hamlet and Macbeth the supernatural is an integral part of the structure of the plot. In these plays the supernatural provides a catalyst for