

How does the inclusion of witches in macbeth heighten the dramatic impact of the ...



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The inclusion of the witches in Macbeth makes the play a lot more dramatic. They make the audience sit up and take notice. People weren't used to seeing witches in plays when Macbeth was first performed. Even now days witches don't appear in films a great deal. Also people in Shakespeare's time had very strong religious beliefs that witches were real and that witches were pure evil. In the 1600s many people were thought to be witches.

They were killed for many reasons, some just had a black cat or wore black clothes. Some had broomsticks and some were convicted for just being female. These days audiences have a greater scientific knowledge and can separate fiction from fact. The first reason that the witches increase the dramatic impact, is the historical and cultural context. In medieval Europe everyone shared a belief in witches and the supernatural.

In 1484 Pope Innocent VIII issued a 'papal bull', this marked the beginning of serious action against witches. In the 1500s the number of witches being discovered rose and by Shakespeare's time they were feared throughout Britain. As well as these fears, people in the 17th century had never seen witches used in a play before. The audience believed that they were seeing actual witches and this must have been very frightening for them. It was a big risk for Shakespeare. The play was made more dramatic by the surprise of seeing witches.

In contrast, today's beliefs about witches are very different. People these days believe less in witches, so they take them less seriously. This is because of advances in scientific research. People have advanced knowledge

nowadays. Also people now days are more used to seeing witches on television etc, and not just bad witches, there are good witches e. g.

Sabrina the teenage witch, Harry Potter. These are of course fictional characters so people are less frightened and less surprised when seeing witches today, this means that Macbeth would not have the same impact as it did in Shakespeare's time. The witches are introduced right at the beginning of the play, they are the first thing that the audience see. The audience would be very shocked to see them, especially in Shakespeare's time. The witches are also very ugly in the play, they are old and have grey hair.

They also wear dark clothes. All this is to show that they aren't good characters. You can also tell they aren't good when hearing what others say to them. In Act 1 Scene 3 when Banquo sees the witches he says, ' So withered and so wild in their attire, that look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth. ' Macbeth says, ' Speak if you can: what are you? ' Also the witches speak in rhyme. In Act 1 Scene 3 the first witch says, '.

.. I'll drain him dry as HAY: , Sleep shall neither night nor DAY. ' In Shakespeare's day, if you spoke in rhyme you were definitely a witch. There are 3 witches and they speak about 3 and thrice etc, this is because 3 was considered an evil number. This would have scared the audience in Shakespeare's day and heighten the dramatic impact of the play.

The setting and sound effects also heighten the dramatic impact of the play. At the start when the witches first appear they're in a ' desolate place', this means nothing is there e. g. a desert.

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The play also starts with thunder and lightning which would surprise and perhaps make the audience jump. Also when the witches re-appear later on in the play, there is again thunder. The dialogue that the witches use also helps heighten the dramatic impact of the play. The witches speak about very unpleasant things. In Act 3 Scene 5, Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft enters the stage, she says, ' And at the pit of Acheron Meet me I'th'morning. .

Acheron was believed to be a river in Hell. When Macbeth visits them in Act 4 Scene 1, three apparitions visit him, one of which is a bloody child, this is a very shocking thing for the audience to see. This is disturbing for the audience because a child is a symbol of innocence and, here it was in front of them, covered in blood. The witches also speak about a prostitute who strangles her baby. The audience would be disturbed by this and the dramatic impact would be heightened.

The witches speak in rhyme. If you spoke in rhyme in Shakespeare's day you were considered to have magical powers. The witches also speak about the number 3, in Act 4 Scene 1 the first witch says, ' thrice the brindled cat hath mewed ' the second witch, ' thrice and once the hedge pig whined". The audience in Shakespeare's time would have known that witches speak in rhyme and about the number 3 so they would have believed the witches to be real, when they were in fact characters.

This would have frightened the audience and heightened the dramatic impact of the play. The imagery associated with the witches would also increase the dramatic impact of the play. In Act 4 Scene 1 they speak about

all different kinds of animals and different parts of them. The first witch says, ' Round about the cauldron go ; In the poisoned entrails throw..

. ' The second witch talks about, ' .. eye of newt and toe of frog, wool of bat and tongue of dog.

.. ' The third witch talks about a half woman, half bird creature. This would have been frightening for the people in Shakespeare's day because they would have believed that all of these things could really happen.

In conclusion, the witches have a big hand in the dramatic impact of the play to Shakespeare's audience, however they would not have the same impact on today's audience. This is because people are much more well educated nowadays. Things like the language, the rhyme and ' thrice' would not bother today's audience, it wouldn't scare shock or excite them and therefore not increase the dramatic impact of the play. But in Shakespeare's time the people actually believed strongly in these things so it frightened them, there are many differences in today's audience and Shakespeare's audience and there will be a big change in the views of the audience in 400 years this is because the world is always changing.