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Thesis Statement: *Macbeth* is a tragic play about unchecked ambition, supernatural influence, and the consequences of power, following a Scottish nobleman's descent into tyranny and his ultimate downfall.

The Function of the Supernatural within Macbeth

William Shakespeare's Macbeth is full of elements of the supernatural, which really help drive along the plot and themes of the play. The witches, the apparitions, and Banquo's ghost all help the story move along, particularly as far as the themes of fate and free will go. These Supernatural forces influence Macbeth's actions, making him question his choices and driving him further into darkness. The supernatural elements in Macbeth do more than simply predict his downfall, they actively contribute to it by manipulating his thoughts and reinforcing his ambition.

The first supernatural beings that the play introduces are the witches, and their influence upon Macbeth is immediate. When they are encountered by Macbeth and Banquo, they address Macbeth with three titles: "All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis! . All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor! . All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter! " (Shakespeare 1.3.48-50). This sets the seed of kingship in Macbeth's mind and triggers his ambition. The

prophecy, as given by the witches, does not say, "Go and kill the king." However, the prophecy makes him contemplate murder as a means of coming into power.

The subtlety in their words makes Macbeth draw his own inference from what they had been telling him, making him feel that fortune was actually favoring him and that he needed to go ahead and complete his destiny. Later in the play, when apparitions finally appear, the security in his mind is manipulated. In Act 4 the witches conjure three apparitions: a head in a helmet, a child covered in blood, and a child crowned with a tree branch in his hand. Each gives him a statement. The first warns him against Macduff, the second says that "none of women born shall harm Macbeth" (4.1.80-81), and the third that he "shall never vanquish until Birnam Wood / To high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him.". These messages engender in Macbeth a false sense of invincibility; he perceives this as reassurance of his security and, hence, proceeds recklessly. The words of the apparitions were devious, though, as Macduff had a cesarean delivery and killed Macbeth, while Malcolm's army used branches of Birnam Wood for camouflage, that is fulfilling the prophecy.

The witches over-nurturing overconfidence and blinded vision regarding reality are a method through which Macbeth is brought to his ruin. Banquo's ghost was another supernatural ingredient that worked at Macbeth's fall. Soon after Macbeth ordered Banquo's murder, he felt pursued by the ghost of his once great friend while attending a banquet. This ghostly vision shows up for him alone; therefore, his freaked-out response in the public view of guests is highly illogical. He shrieks in alarm, "Thou canst not say I did it! Never shake / Thy gory locks at me! "

(3.4.50-51). Further, this insane behavior raises suspicion among the nobility, especially Macduff, who soon flees to England to raise an army against Macbeth.

The ghost reveals how his conscience is being consumed by his crimes and functions to show his feeling of guilt and paranoia. Whereas the witches and the apparitions provide new information to Macbeth, the ghost serves only to remind him of what he has done and of the possibility of Banquo's descendants taking the throne. The use of the supernatural in Macbeth is closely linked to the ideas of fate and free will. The witches' prophecies set Macbeth on his path of darkness, but he himself makes the decision to act upon them. He is not under any compulsion to kill Duncan, to order Banquo murdered, or to slaughter Macduff's family-he does all these things on his own.

The supernatural sets his ambition in motion, but it does not exonerate him from responsibility for his actions. This, of course, begs the question as to whether Macbeth's fall is a matter of fate or if indeed he brings about his own downfall by believing too strongly in the supernatural guidance. In short, the witches, the apparitions, and Banquo's ghost all play an important role in Macbeth because, through them, Macbeth's thoughts and actions are influenced. Although they cannot be said to directly cause his downfall, they manipulate his perceptions of fate and free will in a manner that propels him into self-destruction. In the play, the supernatural is used to show how injudicious ambition and misinterpretation of destiny can lead one to unthought-of depths. Eventually, Macbeth concludes that fate might give one the opportunity, but it is individual choices that decide on the consequences.

Work cited

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