

Molly Shirley

Mrs. Graning

English 11

31 January 2025

## Macbeth

The play *Macbeth*, by William Shakespeare, contains many examples of the supernatural. The first example is when Macbeth visits the three witches. This visit begins a series of many more occurrences from visions and apparitions to ghosts. The occurrence of supernatural elements in *Macbeth* plays big roles in shaping the plot, themes, characters, and the actions they take in many ways.

The plot of this tragedy is shaped by supernatural elements in different ways. This play begins by introducing the three witches. They are explained as being gathered around a fire chanting and planning to meet Macbeth. As the witches are chanting, they say a line that foreshadows Macbeth's downfall, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair / Hover through the fog and filthy air," (Shakespeare 1:1:12-13). This line presents the idea that things are not always as they seem. This applies to Macbeth after the witches tell him his three prophecies; he will be Thane of Cawdor, he will become King of Scotland, and Banquo's descendents will be kings. He is sceptical at first, but once the first prophecy comes true, he begins to entertain the thought of him being king. Macbeth writes his wife, Lady Macbeth, who becomes ambitious and fully determined to make her husband king:

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be

What thou art promised; yet do I fear thy nature

It is too full o'th milk of human kindness

To catch the nearest way, (Shakespeare 1:5:14-17).

Lady Macbeth is acknowledging that Macbeth is ambitious to have power, but fears he is too kind to do what is necessary. This shows that without the influence of the supernatural, the plot would have most likely been different. At first Macbeth is a strong, loyal soldier, fighting for the King. As for Lady Macbeth, she seemed more ruthless than her husband. The prophecies are what corrupted their minds and began their downfall.

There are many themes that can be interpreted throughout the play, but they are all influenced by the supernatural. A major theme in *Macbeth* is fate versus free will. Macbeth's fate was influenced by the witches when they revealed to him his destiny. The words they tell Macbeth push him to do the worst, but he did the deed out of his own free will. Other main themes that are influenced by the supernatural are guilt and power. Macbeth is the first to experience guilt right after killing Duncan:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather

The multitudinous seas incarnadine,

Making the green one red, (Shakespeare 2:2:59-62)

Neptune's ocean signifies that no matter how hard Macbeth tries to wash away the blood from his hands, his guilt will always be there. To add to Macbeth's guilt, he receives a visit from Banquo's ghost who he had killed:

Avaunt and quit my sight; let the earth hide thee.

Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold,

Thou hast no speculation in those eyes

Which thou dost glare with, (Shakespeare 3:4:97-100)

Macbeth is telling the ghost of Banquo to leave because he is afraid and full of guilt. This shows the extent of Macbeth's guilt as he loses his sense of reality and sees a ghost. While Macbeth is talking to Banquo, many people think he is unwell, because they see no ghost. Once again, the supernatural is revealing Macbeth's inner turmoil not only to him, but to others around him.

Not only has Macbeth been affected by the supernatural, other characters have as well.

Lady Macbeth being a main example as she asks dark forces to "unsex" her:

Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full  
Of direct cruelty, (Shakespeare 1:5:39-42).

When she first hears of the prophecies, she is overjoyed and calls upon the supernatural. She asks to get rid of her feminine compassion and to be filled with cruelty. Lady Macbeth knows she will need this cruelty to commit murder. This shows that she is willing to do anything it takes to reach her goals. After the killing of King Duncan, however, she becomes consumed by guilt. Lady Macbeth sleepwalks while having a vision of her hands being blood stained, "Out, damned spot, out, I say. — One, two — why, then, 'tis time to do't. — Hell is murky. — Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier, and afeard," (Shakespeare 5:1:31-33). The blood Lady Macbeth is referring to is actually a cause of her subconscious and is not actual tangible blood. This shows the supernatural's power to corrupt and distort anyone it can influence.

In conclusion, the supernatural plays a big role in *Macbeth*; from the plot and themes to characters and the actual actions they take. Without the supernatural, many of the events in the play would never have taken place. The three witches predict Macbeth's downfall, which leads

to his decision to act on it. Without telling the prophecies, there might not have been a story at all, not a good one at least.

### Works Cited

“Evil and the supernatural in Macbeth - Themes - AQA - GCSE English Literature Revision -

AQA.” *BBC*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zpms82p/revision/3>. Accessed 3

February 2025.

“Macbeth | Act 1, Scene 1.” *myShakespeare*, <https://myshakespeare.com/macbeth/act-1-scene-1>.

Accessed 3 February 2025.

“The Supernatural - English Lit: AQA GCSE Macbeth.” *Seneca*,

<https://senecalearning.com/en-GB/revision-notes/gcse/english-literature/aqa/macbeth/4-1>

-4-the-supernatural. Accessed 3 February 2025.