Super Natural In Shakespeare’s Plays Essay, Research Paper

Super natural in

Shakespeare’s playsIn 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 Mr.

Shakespeare¹s 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 there

appears perhaps the most notable of the supernatural forms, the ghost. However,

in Macbeth, not only does a ghost appear but a floating dagger, witches, and

prophetic apparitions make appearances. The role of the supernatural is very

important in Hamlet and Macbeth. A ghost,

appearing in the form of Hamlet¹s father, makes several appearances in the

play. It first appears to the watchmen, Marcellus and Bernardo, along with

Horatio near the guardsmens’ post. The ghost says nothing to them and is

perceived with fear and apprehension, ³It harrows me with fear and wonder². 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, ³What if it

tempt you toward the flood, my lord, or to the dreadful summit of the cliff². The

conversation between the ghost and Hamlet serves as a catalyst for Hamlet¹s

later actions and provides insight into Hamlet¹s character. The information the

ghost reveals incites Hamlet into action against a situation he was already

uncomfortable with, and now even more so. Hamlet is not quick to believe the

ghost, ³The spirit that I have seen may be a devil… and perhaps out of my

weakness and my melancholy..abuses me to damn me², and thus an aspect of

Hamlet¹s character is revealed. Hamlet, having no suspicion of the ghost after

the production by the players, encounters the ghost next in his mother¹s room.

In this scene the ghost makes an appearance to ³whet² Hamlet¹s ³almost blunted

purpose². Hamlet is now convinced of the ghost and he no longer harbors any

suspicion. He now listens to it, ³Speak to her, Hamlet². In Hamlet, the

supernatural is the guiding force behind Hamlet. The ghost ask Hamlet to seek

revenge for the King¹s death and Hamlet is thus propelled to set into action a

series of events that ends in Hamlet¹s death. The

supernatural occurs four times during the course of Macbeth. It occurs in all

the appearances of the witches, in the appearance of Banquo¹s ghost, in the

apparitions with their prophesies, and in the ³air-drawn² dagger that guides

Macbeth towards his victim. Of the

supernatural phenomenon evident in Macbeth the witches are perhaps the most

important. The witches represent Macbeth¹s evil ambitions. They are the

catalyst which unleash Macbeth¹s 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 consequence be violent and destructive to nature. The witches

promise to answer and at Macbeth¹s 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 Macbeth¹s 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 no one born of woman.

This knowledge gives Macbeth a false sense of security because he believes that

he cannot be harmed, yet Macduff was not of woman born, his mother was dead and

a corpse when Macduff was born. This leads to Macbeth¹s downfall. A child with

a crown on his head, the third apparition, represents Malcolm, Duncan¹s son.

This apparition also gives Macbeth a false sense of security because of the

Birnam Wood prophesy. The appearance

of Banquo¹s ghost provides insight into Macbeth¹s character. It shows the level

that Macbeth¹s mind has recessed to. When he sees the ghost he reacts with

horror and upsets the guests. Macbeth wonders why murder had taken place many

times in the past before it was prevented by law -²statute purged the gentle

weal²- and yet the dead are coming back. The final form

of the supernatural is the ³air-drawn² dagger which leads Macbeth to his

victim. When the dagger appears to him, Macbeth finally becomes victim to the

delusions of his fevered brain. The dagger points to Duncan¹s room and appears

to be covered in blood. The dagger buttresses the impact of this key scene in

which Macbeth slays King Duncan. The

supernatural is a recurring aspect in many of the plays 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 action by the

characters. It supplies insight into the major players and it augments the

impact of many key scenes. The supernatural appeals to the audience¹s curiosity

of the mysterious and thus strengthens their interest.

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