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Topic: Supernatural Elements in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

In Greek tragedies the supernatural figures appears on the stage to resolve some crisis. The supernatural effect is also created by omens and prophesies. The Elizabethan tragedies not only incorporated supernaturalism, but effectively used it such a way that it became an integral part of it. Some of the Elizabethan dramatists used supernaturalism in the convention of the revenge tragedies, such as, Webster and Turner. But, William Shakespeare has added a psychological and moral dimension while using supernaturalism in his plays.

In *Macbeth* the supernatural elements create an uncanny atmosphere. The omens and portents and the three witches are the supernatural elements in the play. The air-drawn dagger and the ghost of Banquo, some critics think, also add to the supernatural. But, on deeper analysis we can understand that they are the creations of Macbeth's fevered mind. They appeared to Macbeth only because he was only guilty. Herein lays the genius of Shakespeare. He enters the psyche of impatient Macbeth. Through the ghost of Banquo the readers come to know the effect that the regicide has created in his mind. It also serves as dramatic irony in the play. Before the murder of Banquo, Macbeth invites him "Fail not our feast" and Banquo keeps his promise by coming to the feast as ghost. Macbeth's act of murder creates disorder to the monarchy and this disorder is suggested through natural calamities. A ghastly tempest occurs symbolizing the evil just occurred.

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The disorder is also suggested by the abnormality in the animal world. A falcon is killed by an owl; King Duncan's horses eat each other.

Many critics think that witch scenes are interpolations (written by somebody else). According to Cunningham, the witch scenes and the Hecate scenes are taken from Middleton's *The Witch*. However, the three witches play a significant role in the play. The mysterious nature of the witches is suggested by their attachments to abominable creatures such as paddocks and grimalkins. They look like women but they have beard. Their favourite sport is to kill swine without any purpose. They predict that Macbeth will become king, but warn him against Macduff and Birnum wood coming nearer. All their predictions come true during the course of the play. They tempt Macbeth with prophesies because they know that Macbeth is an ambitious man. They become the mouthpiece for Shakespeare also when they utter "Fair is foul and foul is fair." The theme is appearance and reality is hinted at the very outset of the play through this line. What appears fair (becoming a king) is actually foul (ambition and murders). Although the witches do not take part in the main action of the play, they undoubtedly influence the course of the play. They symbolize the dark forces in the play and their presence contributes to the atmosphere of darkness and evil.

Please visit the following links for further study:

1. <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-language/the-three-witches-lure-macbeth.php>
2. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337447302_The_Supernatural_in_Shakespeare's_Macbeth
3. <https://www.iasj.net/iasj?func=fulltext&aId=45949>

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