

Supernatural elements play a main part in the action of Shakespeare's Macbeth and the Tempest. The application of the supernatural influence in these two cases is as different as their unique actions and that of tragedy and comedy. In Macbeth the supernatural elements are a force driving the main character to a fatal end, in The Tempest they are not directed to such a heavy end, and in keeping with the comic tradition, are used in a much lighter sense. In Macbeth the supernatural elements are active mainly in and about Macbeth, although they have far reaching state effects, while in The Tempest the supernatural element permeates the whole play and its setting. Control of the supernatural elements, or lack of it, is another difference of these two plays and their depiction of the supernatural. The power of the supernatural force to instill fear and terror into the human element is another mode that will be explored in connection with differences Shakespeare incorporates in the use of the supernatural element in his comedies and tragedies.

The supernatural element in Macbeth is an external force that works on Macbeth and compels him, or at least suggests to him, the course his actions in seizing the state will be. The supernatural influence of the witches turn Macbeth into a vehicle of corruption and murder. Although Macbeth has to make the moral choice of accepting their counsel, he does, as the play shows, fall directly under their influence. The supernatural influence in the Tempest is an internal one that is the direct manifestation of Prospero's study of ~~xxxixixix~~ something akin to practical demonology. Unlike Macbeth who is a victim of the supernatural, Prospero uses the supernatural as a tool to reinstate him in his rightful place in Milan.

In Macbeth the supernatural influence is a product or function of time; it is introduced at a time when Macbeth is susceptible to its influence and likely to act under its guidance. In The Tempest the supernatural is tied directly to the island that Prospero his daughter and the earth and light spirits inhabit. Removed from the realistically functioning world Prospero finds in the supernatural influence of the island the ability to manifest man's power of control over the spiritual. (His tie to the supernatural force of the island is shown in the first full sentence of the epilogue, and reiterated in the rest of that last speech.) The time element the supernatural forces in ~~ixix~~ Macbeth is a rapid one of murder upon murder, and the plot is a device that carries the murder theme on rapidly, in the tragic tradition of condensed eventful happenings, under the influence of the witches. In The Tempest time, and the fulfillment of a tragic plan, force no such necessity of rapid action to a quick cataclysmic end, but rather Prospero and his supernatural liaison exude a timeless quality embodied in the island and in the amount of time past since his forced exile. Time is an element that Prospero has control of with the help of his spiritual aide Ariel, in the ordering and carrying out his plan. Time is also something Prospero has little seeming worry about due to his abandoned situation, he is ~~not~~ about his ability to carry out his plan to reinstate himself, and busies himself in such chores as educating his daughter. When the time finally comes that he can supernaturally capture the assemblage of his arrogators Prospero is in command and his fully developed supernatural abilities make the causitants of his usurpation subject to his will. Not comic in the ribald sense, Prospero gets his comforting and reassuring "day in court."

The supernatural in Macbeth is a force that through a surrogate perpetrates murderous and bloody deeds. In the Tempest it is something pleasant, pleasant to the point that at times it manifests itself in the form of heavenly music. There is nothing frightening in a force that shows itself in this mode, while in the embodiment of the weird sisters in Macbeth it is a most fearful and black motivating force, not only visually, but through its power to take over the life of a basically good man. Prospero,