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THE DRAMATIC FUNCTION OF THE
SUPERNATURAL IN SHAKESPEARE

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IN SHAKESPEARE

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University

September, 1976.

Master of Arts. (1976)
(English)

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: The Dramatic Function of the Supernatural in Shakespeare.

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SUPERVISOR: Dr. B.Jackson.

NUMBER OF PAGES: 88

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: A discussion of the supernatural in The Tempest, Hamlet and Macbeth in so far as it contributes to the dramatic quality of the plays. My concern comes to rest particularly on characterisation of Prospero, Hamlet and Macbeth and the extent to which this is dependent on the various supernatural agencies. I also consider the main themes in each play as they are defined by the supernatural.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I would like to thank Dr. Jackson for his help and advice throughout the writing and organising of this thesis. I would also like to express my appreciation to Dr.D.K.C.Todd whose encouragement and stimulating influence in my final year at Durham University inspired me to undertake graduate work.

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INTRODUCTION

I propose to undertake a close reading of the three Shakespearean plays that use a supernatural framework as their dramatic structure. These are: The Tempest, Hamlet and Macbeth. The plays lend themselves to this grouping as in each, the supernatural, in the form of fairies, ghosts, witches or visionary phenomena, plays a crucial role in defining the themes, the characters and the general philosophy presented in them. I refer in passing to A Midsummer Night's Dream, the other obvious choice for study. However, the play lacked that depth of intensity and seriousness that characterised the others, and a discussion of the role of the supernatural would add little to my thesis, which is mainly concerned with the philosophical repercussions afforded by Shakespeare's treatment of the material.

I will now define the terms of my title, and indicate the limits of my thesis. "Dramatic", I interpret in the full sense of the word, as the basic pulse that makes the play operate logically and emotionally in an effective manner. It describes the process that makes the play credible and convincing. The term restricts my focus to the stage itself and does not afford a study of outside background material on Elizabethan superstition, spiritual beliefs or pneumatology. In short, "dramatic" implies the effectiveness with which the written play is made drama on stage. I will consider how integral the supernatural is in achieving this result, with regard to plot, thematic material,

characterisation and general philosophical suggestion. In each study, my aim is to throw new light on the plays in an interpretive manner which uses the material of the supernatural as a "spring board" for my somewhat unorthodox readings. Throughout, I rely for my support on what I consider to be the fairly typical response of an audience, Elizabethan and modern alike, and in this way, feel justified in offering an assessment of the "dramatic" effect of the supernatural in these plays.

Within the chosen plays, the term "supernatural" describes any occurrences that cannot be rationally explained by the characters. I use it as a blanket term to cover all phenomena, directly presented or only suggested, that transcend the concrete comprehended world. As these supernatural situations or events dominate the victim(s), they would seem to imply a certain spiritual presence or existence that man cannot control or comprehend. The ambiguity surrounding this independent level of spiritual life is essential to my interpretation of each play, and in fact, constitutes the main common feature. To anticipate my thesis: Shakespeare seems to use the supernatural for its very indefinable and perplexing nature. In each play, as I will show, it is used as a dramatic tool to portray uncertainty, ambiguity and doubt, as well as the more obvious functions such as transformation and prophecy, which pertain to the plot. The fact that these plays lend themselves to a variety of interpretations can be explained by the confusing nature of the supernatural agencies. I feel

Shakespeare intended this ambiguity in all cases as it is closely related to the characterisation of the hero and the problems we encounter here. The sinister air of dubiousness that surrounds the realm of fairies in The Tempest, the ghost in Hamlet and the witches in Macbeth are measures, in each case, of our corresponding sympathies for, and reservations about the hero. In so far as they voluntarily play with, or are exposed to the supernatural the heroes are to be viewed with suspicion. In this way, the supernatural seems to be fundamental to the moral subject matter in the plays, in the extent to which it dictates certain moral values, usually by negative implication.

There is little critical material on this connection between the supernatural and characterisation and the other dramatic features I mentioned. Critics who have worked on the topic of the supernatural in Shakespeare seem to fall into two main groups. In the first are those such as Rev. T.F. Thiselton (Folk Lore in Shakespeare) and I.W. Rodgers (Ghosts in Shakespeare), who study the kinds of supernatural beliefs and superstitions Shakespeare was dealing with, and the documented Elizabethan background of thought. There are numerous books and articles that deal with the definition of the witches, the ghost and the fairies in these three plays, which include much speculation on how far Shakespeare and his audience believed in the supernatural. The second group of critics attempt to co-ordinate Shakespeare's attitude towards the supernatural with his biography.

Critics such as C.Clark (Shakespeare and the Supernatural) and L.C.Sears (Shakespeare's Philosophy of Evil) generally follow the moods suggested by the four supernatural plays as indicative of Shakespeare's mental and spiritual development. The following paragraph suggests the kind of focus these critics applied, which is historical rather than interpretive:

Studying Shakespeare's history from the supernatural plays alone, we surmise that he embarked upon life with all the easy optimism of youth [A Midsummer Night's Dream]; that he soon came face to face with obstacles, temptations, and difficulties which sobered his light heartedness; [Hamlet] that, as he battled with all the disillusionment and disappointment which seemed to be the inevitable concomitants of human life he found himself the prey of cynicism and despair; [Macbeth] and finally that he passed through the valley, and came once more to the peace and calm of a new faith and a new confidence in a benign Providence. [The Tempest]

J.Paul S.R.Gibson in Shakespeare's Use of the Supernatural conducts a useful survey of all the supernatural material encountered in the canon. His aim is to list the material and to discuss its significance as far as it relates to Shakespeare's background, to his contemporaries' treatment of the supernatural in literature, and, to a limited extent, its dramatic qualities. His readings of the plays in this light are cursory and orthodox. Again, he seems to aim at definition rather than interpretation.

Although my reading of each play has been influenced to varying extents by different critics there seemed to be no one who proceeded from a dramatic view point with regard to the supernatural. The books I refer to in each chapter are useful

I. C.Clark, Shakespeare and the Supernatural, p.105.

in the fresh light they throw on the plays, but in all cases, the critic concerned directed his study from another point of view. A.D.Nuttal in Two Concepts of Allegory, my main secondary source in chapter I, is concerned mainly with allegory and its metaphysical and philosophical overtones. Miss F.M.Prosser,, in Hamlet and Revenge is interested in Hamlet's ghost from a basically Christian viewpoint.

I will attempt then, to suggest a comparatively new way of approaching the supernatural in Shakespeare which is from a dramatically interpretive angle. My study will be specific rather than comparative, although it will become evident that Shakespeare used the supernatural consistently as a dramatic tool to portray similar ideas and themes in all three plays, namely. ambiguity, confusion, ambivalence and domination.

I

THE TEMPEST

My intention in this chapter is to discuss various moral and metaphysical elements of the supernatural that are not encompassed by the general term of "Romance", in The Tempest. My thesis is that Shakespeare used supernatural material to undermine the usual philosophical standpoint articulated in the traditional Romances, and to suggest new areas of metaphysical speculation. While not disputing his use of the "Romantic" framework, I will argue that he invested it with a quality of philosophical suggestion that ultimately denies it this general title. The term "Romance" implies a final situation of harmony following conflict, reconciliation and total contentment on the part of the characters involved. To interpret the conclusion of The Tempest in this way is, to my mind, to ignore certain dubious elements which, as I will show, are incorporated in the medium and realm of the supernatural. My study concentrates largely on the ambiguous nature of the play, on both the physical and metaphysical levels. The discussion will cover three main areas. These are a study of the major dramatic themes, an analysis of the character of Prospero as illuminated by his magical powers, and finally a general discussion on the value structure offered in the play which is defined by the supernatural. Each area will necessarily involve the others because of the particular focus I am adopting.

I find I must agree with A.D.Nuttall's conclusion that The Tempest can only be interpreted metaphysically and not allegorically.¹ There are too many qualifications in the play that render the latter approach inadequate and insufficient. As Nuttall says: "It will not keep still long enough for one to affix an allegorical label."² This should become clear by the number of half truths that I discover in the course of this chapter. I will attempt to show that Shakespeare used magic as a dramatic means to question and redefine the traditional norms associated with magic and with Romances structured by the supernatural.

There appears to be two major themes in the play. These are: first, bewilderment leading to a questioning and distrusting of external appearances, which is demonstrated by most of the characters exposed to Prospero's magic, and second, tyranny or domination following usurpation, shown in the plot and in Prospero's relationship with Caliban and Ariel. Incidentally, these themes correspond to the states of mind experienced by the victims of Prospero's white magic.³ These states are: confusion and uncertainty, which relates to the theme of the ambiguity of appearances, and surrender to the magical influence, which leads to the theme of domination. This connection indicates, at this point, the integral role the supernatural plays as it contains the sources for both themes in the very nature of its influence. The themes broaden out, as I will discuss, to form general philosophical speculations on

the very nature of reality and freedom. Both thematic areas are closely linked by the general premise that "things are not what they seem." This refers to the deceptive ambitions of men (corresponding to the tyranny theme) as well as to the physical level of transforming reality which the magic promotes (corresponding to the theme of confusion and ambiguity). I will deal with the latter theme first, through a study of the supernatural occurrences, and will attempt to show the accumulating aura of ambiguity that surrounds appearances, with a view to this metaphysical insight that I believe Shakespeare is insinuating.

Ariel's song to Ferdinand serves as an appropriate introduction to the strange indefinable nature of the enchanted island:

These are pearls that were his eyes:
 Nothing of him that doth fade,
 But doth suffer a sea-change
 Into something rich and strange.
 Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell: (I.ii.401)⁴

The song suggests a death that does not decay but rejuvenates. It is suggested to Ferdinand that his father has been transformed into something "rich and strange" yet this is not picked up again or amplified. It remains as it stands, for the curiously evocative mood it casts and for no further dramatic purpose. These words "rich and strange" describe many of the supernatural occurrences, as I will show, which like this one, are not directly related to Prospero's course of revenge and hence, unexplained. These events exude an air of uncertainty

that is never resolved, and which therefore involves the audience along with the characters in the sense of confusion, which is more than mere entertainment.

The play opens with the apparently violent "tempest" and its scale is measured by the terror and panic expressed by the passengers on board. The earthy insults of the boatswain firmly lodge the scene in reality and there is no questioning the physicality of the storm until the second scene. We, the audience, have been deluded in the same way as the characters have been, and we must now rapidly adjust our perspectives to the comic verve that Ariel brings to the scene when describing it:

Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
I flam'd amazement: sometime I'd divide,
And burn in many places... (1.ii.196)

The mood has suddenly changed from fear of imminent disaster to the controlled suavity that Prospero exudes. This dramatic technique is the opposite to that seen in A Midsummer Night's Dream, where the audience is always logically well in control of the dramatic situation. Even when the characters are suddenly transformed, we are always kept informed by some technical source of information that tells us, for example, that Oberon has just administered the love philtre. The spectator sees through the dramatist's eyes and watches him construct the events. In The Tempest, while sometimes watching Prospero set up the situations, we are also influenced

and affected by them. Miranda, who is perhaps representative of the audience's initial reaction to the disaster, says: "Oh I have suffered/With those I saw suffer," and she too must be informed of their safety. This dramatic switch characterises the form of tragi-comedy that defines the play. It is significant that these two realms of tragedy and comedy, by definition, sit uneasily together, and this lack of harmony is integral to my argument. It is unnatural to laugh away an apparent disaster. This serious element inhibits the freedom with which we laugh throughout the play. The two dramatic norms are held in an uncertain balance and contribute directly to that ambiguity that I am pursuing.

Another type of reversal is seen in Prospero's description of the trip to the island. He remembers that Miranda's childish smiles were interfused with his sighs. In hindsight, he remarks that the sea winds: "Whose pity sighing back again / Did us but loving wrong." The presumed result is disproved in the event. Again we are faced with a situation that fares contrary to our expectations. The position has been established then, in this scene, that the storm was surprisingly harmless and illusory and that Prospero is about to work some programme of revenge. However, Miranda and the audience are not told the details; instead she is lulled to sleep and the audience remain as ignorant as she. Not only do we feel a certain frustration in still half believing in the reality of

the storm, but now are forced to speculate on Prospero's plans. This is confusing as he above the others, emerges as our focal coordinator of events. Meanwhile, we are offered no alternative "norm" character, and our attention comes to focus more closely on Prospero than on the magic he is about to work.

The next magical occurrence he manipulates is the "exchanged eyes" of Ferdinand and Miranda. While they are intent only on gazing at one another, Prospero addresses the former in an unexpectedly harsh manner, considering that he has manipulated the encounter. He threatens to "hate" Miranda if she pleads for Ferdinand, and denounces him as a spy and a traitor. After he has charmed him, he sneers at Miranda's intercessions: "What I say / My foot my tutor?" It is only later that this harshness is explained and even then it is not justified. Although I will deal with the characterisation of Prospero later, his attitude is significant here as he behaves contrary to what one would expect of him in his reception of an innocent unsuspecting prince. He then tells Miranda: "...foolish wench! / To th'most of men this is a Caliban, / And they to him are angels." By deliberately misleading her here, despite his good intentions, he is trying to invert the significances of appearances for her. At the end of Act One, we are in a general state of confusion, not only about Prospero's intentions and his character, but

also about the purpose of the magic that lulls Miranda to sleep and which plagues and enchants Ferdinand with music. Its whimsical quality has been established.

The courtly group in Act Two propagate a different kind of reversal of expectations through their dialogue. Gonzalo, the kindly counsellor with his sincere views on government, is mocked by the witty but crooked pair, Antonio and Sebastian. As Bonamy Dobrée points out,⁵ Gonzalo is in fact portrayed as a garrulous, old man, and the jibes against him are accurate and humorous. The natural social situation, where age is revered, has been reversed, and Gonzalo's true values are being effectively scorned. As Dobrée indicates, it would have been easy enough for Shakespeare to show Antonio and Sebastian eventually beaten down by the old man, but he chose not to, perhaps to reflect the social truth that often true virtue is capped by mere empty rhetoric.

The situation is soon transformed by Ariel's magic, and again sleep is forced upon the characters. The strangeness of this languor is emphasised by the men: "wondrous heavy"; "What a strange drowsiness possesses them!" Antonio takes this opportunity to sound out Sebastian's inclinations in joining him to murder Alonso. Sufficiently confused by the sudden drowsiness that has overcome the others, Antonio answers with the image of sleep walking: "This is a strange repose to be asleep/ With eyes wide open, standing, speaking

moving/ And yet so fast asleep." Although this image merely articulates Antonio's surprise at Sebastian's suggestion, it picks up the idea of the island's "strangeness" in its suggestion of unnatural behaviour. Anxiety is then evident in their rapid questioning: "What, art thou waking?/ Do you not hear me speak?/ ... What is it thou didst say?" It would seem that the supernatural influence has affected their language as they now resort to riddles to discover "meanings", and speak at one remove:

Antonio-Thou let'st thy fortune sleep - die, rather; wink'st while thou art waking.

Sebastian-Thou dost snore distinctly;
There's meaning in thy snores.

Antonio - ... what a sleep were this
For your advancement! Do you understand me? (II.i.210)

Meaning then, has been relegated to a level of ambiguous intercourse, reflecting in language a general distrust of outward appearances. The exchange indicates the way in which experience on the island is becoming harder to tangibly contain and define. The sleep image they use to discuss the murder, fits in well with their subsequent deceptive behaviour as they pretend loyalty to Alonso. It is significant that when their plot is ruined by Ariel's intervention, their "excuse" relies on the strangeness of the isle: "We heard a hollow burst of bellowing/ Like bulls or rather lions./...It struck mine ear most terribly." The ease with which the others accept his excuse, indicates the kind of suspicions they feel about the place.

They set off again, shaken and distraught. "Lead off this ground," Alonso orders. We, as the audience, have been one step ahead of the action in this case, but are still uncertain why the men were ever given a chance to kill the king. This is never resolved as the couple never repent outwardly and the conspiracy is kept secret. The event should perhaps be seen in the light of Shakespeare questioning the validity and importance of ambition through this dramatic medium of magic, as it distorts the face of reality and manipulates events outside of chance. Magic renders their maliciousness futile and impotent, and the suggestion is that ambition is also mocked by the dramatist in this way.

The theme of ambiguous appearances lends itself well to the realm of farce and is developed on a lower comic, but equally suggestive, level in the next scene with Stephano and Trinculo. Although the accidents and mistaken identities will provoke laughter, the main focus seems to be concerned with the strangeness of perception that is generally being explored by Shakespeare. Stephano's song is not in a tune that he knows or recognises: "'I shall no more to sea, here shall I die ashore.' This is a very scurvy tune to sing at a man's funeral." He does not respond to the peculiarity with the same seriousness and fear the courtiers did. Upon meeting Caliban, he assimilates his surprise in an earthy logical manner: "I have not scap'd drowning to be afeard now of your four legs." When Trinculo

emerges, Stephano is in a state of mind where he can believe anything: "How cam'st thou to be the seige of this moon calf? Can he vent Trinculos?" His blasé acceptance of the logically impossible, constitutes an amusing contrast to the courtier's responses to the magical events. Although no specific magic is being worked in this scene, the expectation of it influences their thoughts and expressions: (Caliban)"Hast thou not dropp'd from heaven?/ (Stephano) Out of the moon, I assure thee: I was the man/ i'th'moon when time was." Deception and confusion is still being explored but in a comic vein, and in this way, a more insidious, less obvious control over the audience's reactions is being exerted. In the above quotation, the situation has been comically reversed where Stephano, the prosaic Neapolitan, is deluding Caliban, the creature well attuned to magic, as well as being half supernatural himself. The creature's worshipping of the bottle as "celestial liquor" shows a pathetic, misplaced idealism, which develops the theme of confused loyalties and principles. On a comic level, this infatuation perhaps parallels Prospero's. His final renunciation of magic suggests implicitly that his worship of it was also misguided and unwise, as I shall discuss later

The next scene with these three takes on a new note of seriousness, not only because of the further complicated plot. The supernatural interventions become more of a challenge and create confusions that cannot be easily assimilated. The farcical situation of Ariel speaking for Trinculo succeeds on

the comic level when the latter gets repeatedly cudgelled by Stephano. It also develops the theme of ambiguous meaning, in the argument over lying. Caliban's righteous words to Trinculo: "I do not lie." elevate him above the level of counterfeit and pretence because of his simplicity. He can only express his bare feelings, which in the context of the play's plot of duplicity and façade, is a virtue. However, this is mocked in the face of human pseudo sophistication and "knowledge" when Trinculo sneers: "That a monster should be such a natural!" Shakespeare hardly offers Caliban as the recommended "norm", but his straight-forward honesty and narrowness of perception are preferred above the scheming pretensions of the courtiers. However, this is only a half truth as both sides are at different times condemned, and Shakespeare's attitude to the natural savage is never totally clear. Caliban's language is often more sweetly lyrical than Ariel's, which raises the problem of their relative values. His gentle reassurance to Stephano near the end of the third act is winning in its expression of trusting vulnerability:

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
 Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
 Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,
 That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep
 Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming
 The clouds methought would open, and show riches
 Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd,
 I cried to sleep again. (III.ii.133)

Our attitude then, is divided over Caliban and never resolved

as he deserves neither punishment nor praise finally for following his natural instincts. His speech also emphasises the supernatural nature of the island which defies definition.

Back to the dramatic situation, the tunes of Ariel perplex the two fools despite their denials: " Art thou afeard? / No monster, not I." Stephano in his confusion associates the experience with a remembered fairy tale: "I remember the story." and it is obvious that he is now in a state of semi-reverie, blindly following Ariel's cues. As Nuttall points out, much of The Tempest is a study of the configurations different people put on the events, rather than an entertainment based on the sensational events themselves. This is illustrated in the next scene in the different characters' reactions to the proffered banquet. Sebastian thinks of his stomach; Alonso is too mystified and frightened to eat; and Gonzalo is happily contented,, admiring the gestures of the spirits, perhaps because he has no moral cause for alarm. The sudden disappearance of the banquet with Ariel's rebuke develops the theme of expectation mocked on the dramatic level of the moral plot. Gonzalo realises the significance of their horrified attitudes: "All three of them are desperate: their great guilt/ (Like poison given to work a great time after)/ Now 'gins to bite the spirits." Here is an example of the supernatural operating from moralistic grounds and the audience's response is directed and fixed.

However, the next scene immediately perplexes again,

and the value of Prospero's magical powers is questioned. The masque of the reapers is conjured for Ferdinand and Miranda in celebration of their betrothal. There are suggestions contained within it though, which set it outside its traditional role of an elaborate visual celebration of love. R.Egan describes Iris' words as, "overtly artificial and calculatedly unconvincing."⁶ Her description of nature is in contradiction to the expected catalogue of pastoral abundance and fertility: Thy banks...

To make cold nymphs chaste crowns; and thy broom groves
Whose shadow the dismissed bachelor loves,
Being lass lorn; thy pole clipt vineyard;
And thy sea marge, sterile and rocky hard, (IV.i.66)

Although the rest of the masque is conventional in its dialogue, its general lack of vivacity, particularly in the early imagery, promotes a flat "sterile" mood. This accords well with Prospero's insistence on the preservation of Miranda's virginity, and perhaps indicates a certain "sterility" in his aesthetic withdrawal from the world, as I will later consider. It seems appropriate then, that the masque, which seems to have been conducted on a slightly discordant note, should suddenly "heavily vanish.... to a strange hollow and confused noise." The seriousness, of which I spoke earlier, has suddenly imposed itself upon the light hearted scene, although in this case, there is a certain nervous tension and awe in the atmosphere anyway, due to Prospero's command:

...silence!
 Juno and Ceres whisper seriously;
 There is something else to do: hush, and be mute,
 Or else our spell is marr'd (IV.i.I24)

His serious, rather than delighted aspect here, is perplexing as it suggests a certain tone of menace which should not normally attend the trivial, merry demonstration of the aerial creatures. Prospero's deep depression also seems out of place in the midst of a marriage celebration; the sudden recollection of Caliban's plot is not sufficient explanation for it. His thoughts instead, deal directly with our topic: appearances mocking the nature of true reality. He tells Ferdinand that the spirits were actors, which is confusing enough in itself, and that they have vanished into "thin air". However, his thoughts leave the stage and extend over the audience into life itself in his existential conclusion:

We are such stuff
 As dreams are made on; and our little life
 Is rounded with a sleep. (IV.i.I56)

The dream image is very apt in the play's context as it takes the questioning of physical reality one step further than the immediate situation, to contain all of life. Again the audience's standpoint has been undermined. From the stance of watching the masque with Prospero, we are now included in his general vision of life and the dramatic framework has been temporarily abandoned. Reference to A Midsummer Night's Dream is useful again here to illustrate, through contrast, the type of security that the audience is not given in The Tempest. Puck's

last words firmly implant the audience in reality and urge the interpretation of a fictional dream upon them:

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream. (V.ii.54)⁸

There is little significance suggested other than the sheer entertainment value of the play. The audience, in this rationalising approach, can confidently suspend its disbelief. Puck's speech is reassuring, undisturbing and delightful, and in no way unseats the common sense through a questioning of reality. In The Tempest, suspension of disbelief is not always possible or adequate, as in this instance, when it is set aside by Prospero's meditations on the insubstantiality of life. His ideas are not contained within the supernatural framework or related to the situation in hand. They extend outside, without explanation and hence attribute a greater seriousness to the magical scene that has been played out. The speculation can be set beside other metaphysical utterances by Shakespearean characters, notably the tragic ones: "When we are born we cry that we are/ Come to this great stage of fools" (King Lear. IV.iv.183) "All's a tale told by an idiot/ Full of sound and fury. Signifying nothing." (Macbeth.V.v.27) Unlike A Midsummer Night's Dream, the normal fictional scope of dramatic terms has suffered a metaphysical revision, for reasons that we are unsure of. Hence, we, as the audience, suffer that same kind of disorientation I

noted earlier where the dramatic boundaries of credibility or logical progression have been ignored. Nuttall describes this feeling as a sense of being "cheated" of our rights as an audience. The accumulative sense of disorientation and uncertainty has been built up through unexplained capricious feats of magic such as the eerie quality of voices and song in the air, such as the boatswain's report of "...strange and several noises / Of roaring, shrieking, howling, jingling chains/ And no diversity of sounds, all horrible." The peaceful music of which Caliban spoke earlier is evidently not consistent. Other examples are the unexplained drowsiness, the sudden lapse of attention in Stephano's song, and the strange tune they find themselves singing. "Flout 'em and cout 'em (Caliban) That's not the tune." These confusions, rather than promoting the general benevolence of magic, such as that seen in their "new dyed" clothes, tend to simply evoke a mood of wonderment and curiosity which is in keeping with the metaphysical theme I have discussed.

By undermining the traditional stance of the audience in this way, Shakespeare demands a reassessment of values which will not accord with the "Romantic" principles that envisage a life lived "happily ever after". The uncertain conclusion to the play bears this out. Having forsaken his magic in preparation for his return, Prospero seems unnaturally weak and begs for help in the epilogue. Apart from the conventional request for applause, these words convey a

seriousness that leaves one wondering how far The Tempest can be termed a Romance or a comedy:

Now I want
Spirits to enforce, Art to enchant;
And my ending is despair,
Unless I be relieved by prayer,
Which pierces so, that it assaults
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
Let your indulgence set me free (Epilogue.13)

The religious terms in the middle section of this speech would appear very misplaced in a conventional epilogue which deals on a very superficial level, with the desired reaction from the audience. Also, this epilogue seems to take on a didactic, almost confessional form, judging from Prospero's choice of words: 'crimes', 'faults', 'despair'. This professed weakness is too striking to warrant a metaphoric interpretation for the sake of a conventional ending. These words are more easily understood as a cry for help from a man who has learnt certain truths about himself and human nature, who has put his faith in something which has proved empty, and who is now bereft of any philosophical form of comfort. His words to the courtiers emphasise this: "And thence retire me to my Milan, where / Every third thought shall be my grave." This attitude of resignation has already been witnessed in the masque scene. Following his long speech which I quoted earlier, Prospero speaks of his disillusionment from the point of view of an old, tired man: "Sir, I am vexed;/ Bear with my weakness; my old brain is troubled;/ Be not disturbed

with my infirmity:" From the point of view of the main character, a "happy" ending would seem to be very far away at the conclusion of this play.

Satisfaction in the revenge plots is also frustrated at the end of the play. The characters are more frightened into submission than moved by repentance. Stephano and Trinculo are duly sobered by being literally caught in the act by Ariel. Antonio and Sebastian are equally dumbfounded by the discovery of their schemes, but do not show signs of repentance. Sebastian has nothing to say to Prospero, thus emphasising his unchanged, sullen rebelliousness. The audience is not offered a scene of reconciliation, but a situation portraying truthful, likely reactions of real men. Shakespeare, at this point, seems to have moved beyond the premise of the sonnets that love is man's salvation. His final philosophy, like the conclusion of the play, seems to be one of a compromise of discordant elements. This accumulation of evidence around the supernatural medium seems to indicate a dissatisfaction with the traditional benevolence of a love story, and a desire to prove that life is, at best, ethereal and transitory, and at worst, deceptive, many faceted and not to be idealised in any way.

This leads us into the second related theme of tyranny and usurpation, as this is closely associated with the duplicity of external reality. There are two obvious areas of reference here, both of which are defined by the supernatural framework

of the play. These are : Prospero's domination of the elemental spirits and the witch-born Caliban, and the attempted plots against himself and Alonso which are curtailed by Ariel. The theme is introduced by Miranda's question: "What foul play had we that we came from thence?" Prospero's bitter account of the usurpation of the dukedom by his brother sets a general tone which will be associated with other examples of tyranny when we meet them. "Foul play" has been suggested early on, and its seriousness emphasised. Prospero's disillusionment is evident in his harsh words:

I pray thee mark me that a brother should
Be so perfidious...

---he was
The ivy which had hid my princely trunk
And suck'd my verdure out on't (I.ii.66)

He is obviously still bitterly resentful and is constantly brooding on the crime. When he accosts Ferdinand and accuses him of "Usurping" his island, one can believe that for Prospero it was a crime of the greatest magnitude, perhaps because it involved a breach of trust. However, by usurping some of the courtiers' freedom through magic, he sets about to take his revenge, and to punish the two confederates in the crime.

Herein lies one of the anomalies of the play, that Prospero should attempt to dictate to others, having suffered in this way himself. This dominating behaviour particularly grates in connection with the innocent creatures, Caliban and Ariel. In the first act, we hear them both bewailing the loss

of their liberty. "Is there more toil?" asks Ariel, "Since thou dost give me pains/ Let me remember thee what thou hast promised/ ...my liberty." Prospero's assumption of control over Ariel seems to stem from nothing more than an obligation, owed to him by the creature, following his release from the "cloven pine". He reminds the spirit of this in violent terms to elicit an apology and a renewal of his vows. Later, he uses freedom as an incentive, whereby his obedience will be strengthened: "Thou shalt be free/ As mountain winds; but then exactly do/ All points of my command." The resentment Ariel feels here is reflected apparently by the feelings of all the nameless spirits under Prospero's hand, Caliban declares: "They all do hate him as rootedly as I."

His charge over Caliban is somewhat more justified because of the attempted rape of Miranda, but the imprisoning within a rock seems unwarranted punishment. Prospero speaks of Caliban as a slave who carries out certain menial functions and for that purpose is of service to them. His words smack of that easy colonial attitude of expectancy of service from inferiors: "He does make our fires,/ Fetch in our wood and serves in offices/ That profit us." He calls him away from his dinner merely, it seems, to curse him. Caliban accuses him of usurpation following his early loyalty, exactly the same history that Prospero has experienced.

This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me, and made much of me; would'st give me

Water with berries in't; ...
 and then I lov'd thee,
 And show'd thee all the qualities of the isle...
 For I am all the subjects that you have,
 Which first was mine own King.

His simple, gentle attitude of trust, followed by a reasoned sense of outrage seems, at this point to lay the onus of responsibility and blame on Prospero. Caliban, as I have already suggested, is endowed with an endearing child-like qualities. When he thinks he has escaped Prospero, albeit to another bondage, his delight is pathetic and touching:

'Ban, 'Ban, Cacaliban
 Has a new master:- get a new man.
 Freedom, highday! highday! freedom! freedom,
 highday, freedom! (II.ii.184)

His devotion to his new master is equally warming, in its total trusting commitment: "I'll show thee the best springs. I'll pluck thee berries,/ I'll fish for thee and get thee wood enough." His fate is finally left unresolved other than his vow to "seek for grace hereafter", which presumably means, to show no opposition to Prospero's will. If this portrayal represents Shakespeare's answer to Montaigne's essay on the noble savage, then it shows both a sympathy with the latter's views on individual freedom, as well as traces of the colonial attitude.

Prospero's control over these creatures is never considered unjust or wicked by himself, and his reversion at the end is concerned more with his own aesthetic *ism*, as I will discuss. The play is left open ended, with the note of menace that attends the seriousness of his acts of bondage. The fact that there is little repentance from the courtiers as a result

of the magic tricks, suggests that despite tyranny and domination, man alone cannot change human nature or the face of reality. This is realised in Prospero's bitter reflections on his failure to "nurture" Caliban: "on whom my pains/ Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost." The reiteration of "all" here, shows his great sense of failure and disillusionment. His high ideals have suffered a serious setback, ideals not only of personal grandeur and influence, but of faith in the noble qualities of man. This can be linked with his utter abhorrence of his brother, in his words of "forgiveness". The influence that Prospero found in magic, he used to try to effect moral change. His failure to do so is shown by his downcast mood at the end.

The impulse to dominate is exhibited by most of the human characters, from the boatswain's orders at the beginning, to Stephano's at the end: "Monster, lay to your fingers: or I'll turn you out of my kingdom. Go to, carry this," This must surely have been intended, by Shakespeare, to be a comic paralleling of Prospero's domination of Caliban. Stephano's attitude is as domineering as was his previous master's, as Caliban finds out. Antonio and Sebastian are impelled by ambitious thoughts which are not dispensed with finally. Gonzalo's commonwealth perhaps offers a norm of individual freedom against which the pretensions of the others may be assessed:

Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none: contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none; (II.i.I46)

Here, he dispenses with all form of social hierachy and servitude, although, as Sebastian points out "he would be King on't". Shakespeare is hardly recommending a communist way of life, in the play, as he seems to support the hierachical system elsewhere, such as at the end, when Prospero accepts his dukedom. However, the problem of individual liberty and men's pretensions over one another is raised and considered from all aspects. The words "Flout 'em and scout 'em.../ Thought is free." which Stephano finds himself singing after he has accepted Caliban as a subject, mock his own pretensions to power. The words express the fundamental truth that despite external violence, thoughts and opinions cannot be controlled — as has been shown by Caliban's example.

However, Prospero can control physical events and can produce a situation which will challenge the character in some way. In this manner, he engineers the meeting between Miranda and Ferdinand and encourages her to respond. Hence, it can be said that he even attempts to direct feeling and thought: " The fringed curtains of thy eye advance / And say what thou seest yond." His constant, watchful hovering on the borders of each scene indicates his general role of stage manager of each situation. The game of chess at the end is a felicitious symbol of Prospero's attitude towards his victims, as he moves them around the island like chessmen. This statement would seem to suggest that Prospero was ignorant of the type of domination

he effected.: "Here have I few attendants / And subjects none abroad." In contrast to his references to his fate, his "auspicious star" and "bountiful fortune", Prospero shows through his example that man can wilfully dominate another's fate. Shakespeare does not seem to move to any moral position on this issue, but seems intent rather, to question and explore the act of usurpation. He exhibits tyranny from the point of view of master and victim. He indicates the impossibility of thwarting ambition in others. This is suggested by Sebastian's lasting resentment and sullenness and by Caliban's plot against Prospero, despite the latter's earlier efforts to "nurture" him. Shakespeare also suggests, by Prospero's example, the difficulty of repressing ambition in oneself. Prospero never seems actually to realise how far he has been guilty of a certain kind of tyranny, although he comes to a new wisdom when he realises the limits of his power, as I will show. He has, in fact, behaved in a domineering way which is similar to his enemies' former treatment of him, although he exerted this influence over Alonso and the courtiers for more virtuous reasons than those which had motivated the latter; retribution rather than greed. The agencies Prospero chose did not share his motivation and hence, were not morally obliged to assist him. Instead, they were forcibly obliged to participate by Prospero.

This takes me into a discussion of the character of Prospero, which will develop into a study of the value

structure of The Tempest. There are too many variable elements, some of which I have discussed already, to allow the play a "Christian" label. (I use the term in an ethical, rather than orthodox sense.) There is some form of benign charity exhibited at the end by Prospero, but this is heavily undercut by his tone and attitude which indicate the behaviour of an individual rather than a god-like bountiful figure. As Bonamy Dobrée remarks,⁸ his forgiveness has a Senecan quality in its bitterness: "For you most wicked Sir, whom to call brother/ Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive/ Thy rankest fault." An obvious observation is that if he cannot accept or assimilate his brother's crime as he suggests, then he cannot have properly forgiven him. He hardly sympathises with Caliban for his "faults": "As you look to have my pardon, trim it handsomely"; and Ariel is released for services rendered with no response of gratitude. Prospero, the name is Italian for 'Faustus', is still too engrossed in himself to be able to cast a truly tolerant eye over the proceedings. His newly learnt pessimism shadows the ending. His cynical reply to Miranda's delighted exclamation "O brave new world that has such people in't" Prospero: "Tis new to thee," undercuts the expected atmosphere of harmony in reconciliation, and his plea in the epilogue to "Set me free" enhances this qualification. These words, in the epilogue can be interpreted as Prospero directly asking the audience for reassurance that he has done

the right thing in taking up the dukedom and abandoning his magical powers. He is still in grave doubt about his new philosophical position of accepting human folly, following his former retreat from men.

The nihilistic mood following the masque seems to mark the scene of his "epiphany", in the sudden realisation of his true status and position. The futility of life that he speaks of here, in his muttered reply to Ferdinand after the masque has vanished, is hardly Christian in its bitter rejection of all faith in human nature and divinity. It is the lament of the artist, who having committed himself to his aesthetic ideals through magical powers, suddenly becomes aware of the hopelessness of his aspirations and the extent of his egoistical self indulgence.

The essential artificiality of these ideals is perhaps demonstrated by his general impatience and "techiness" with the other characters. Being so involved with his own thoughts and schemes, he responds unsympathetically to others. His behaviour is distinctly anti-social. This can be demonstrated by his anger with Ferdinand on two occasions, his treatment of Caliban and his state of irritability in the opening conversation he has with Miranda: "Dost thou hear? I pray thee, mark me." It also perhaps explains his inordinate relishing of his revenge: "At this hour lies at my mercy all mine enemies." His ferociously stern attitude

towards Caliban seems to suggest an almost sadistic pleasure in exerting pain; He tells Ariel:

Go charge my goblins that they grind their joints
With dry convulsions; shorten up their sinews
With aged cramps; and more pinch-spotted make them
Than pard or cat o' mountain. (IV.i.258)

I do not wish to suggest that Prospero is wantonly malicious but that this extreme behaviour springs initially from unrealised and unfulfilled ideals on how he feels life should be. His cruelty or harshness is his expression for the intense suffering he feels when he cannot organise his life as he would. He is attempting to construct a world around himself where he cannot indulge his interest in white magic without regard to others. Having been betrayed by his brother and having turned in disillusionment to his scholastic studies, he has now emerged firstly with an "academic" set of absolute moral values, and secondly with a distorted sense of his own power and ability to be able to establish those ideals in his life style. Failings in others, then, will not be tolerated in his new aesthetic world view. In the course of the play, he learns the limits and dangers of his egoistical excesses, shown by the masque soliloquy, and eventually learns a new tolerance out of his ensuing self disillusionment.

The study and practise of magic is in itself morally neutral as it can be used for virtuous or mischievous purposes. We see Prospero using it to mock the ambitious pretensions

of others seriously, as in the banquet confrontation, and mischievously, in the hounding of Stephano and Trinculo through bogs. We see magical occurrences that bewilder, confuse and frighten, which do not seem to serve any obvious end: the music, the songs, the harpies, the violence of the storm. In this way Prospero cannot be wholly respected in his whimsical use of magic, despite the fact that the whole magical situation was conceived and set up by him for a dramatically acceptable purpose, namely to bring the usurpers to justice. As Derek Traversi says:⁹ "Intuitions of value are encountered in a context instinct with the atmosphere of ambiguous imagery." Magic in The Tempest is not consistently a representative of the moral norm which measures and judges the actions of others. Too often it seems an expression of Prospero's moods. Hence, the supernatural machinery and Prospero's motivation in controlling it, whether for egoistical or altruistic reasons, have been questioned and a firm moral standpoint, denied to the audience.

The other obvious subject which could indicate some measure of identification and orientation of values is the love between Ferdinand and Miranda. When compared to the love exhibited by the other Shakespearean couples such as Romeo, Juliet, or Antony and Cleopatra, they emerge faded or simplified. They seem "sweet" or "delightful" (as a reviewer of a recent production of The Tempest in London, England, commented) but

hardly dynamic. Dover Wilson suggests a very convincing explanation of this.⁹ He calls The Tempest a "father's play", as the relationship is conducted through Prospero's perception and illuminated by his comments. His cynicism undermines its value, shown by comments such as : "Poor worm, thou art infected." The affair seems to diminish in importance beside other matters that occupy Prospero. He utters one instinctive blessing that recalls his old idealism: "Fair encounter / Of two most rare affections. Heaven rain grace / On that which breeds between them;" The play has Prospero and not Miranda at its centre, and her love is on the periphery of the main concerns. Prospero and his growing maturity of vision form the main focus to which all other events are secondary. This is made obvious in the masque where the major significance is Prospero's reaction rather than Ferdinand's. Therefore, as I mentioned at the outset, Shakespeare has used the supernatural framework to undermine the traditional values of a Romance, which basically revolve around the celebration of human love.

My conclusion then, must be a reiteration of that insidious ambiguity that pervades the play and which cannot be conclusively resolved. Lytton Strachey's conclusion that Shakespeare was "bored with real life, bored with drama, bored with everything except poetry and poetical dreams",¹⁰ has I hope, been refuted. However, there is some truth in this statement

concerning the "poetical dreams", as the play can be seen to represent Prospero's playing out of a dream which is eventually shattered and rejected for reality whatever that future might involve. For the purposes of this thesis, I cite Dover Wilson's evidence^{II} that the last part of the play to be written was the masque which was "added for the second court performance, given for the nuptial celebration of the Princess Elizabeth early in 1613." Prospero's speech seems inseparable from the masque as it is directly related to it, and hence would appear to be the last note sounded by Shakespeare. His mood of dissatisfaction with temporality and impermanence and his general uncertainty concerning the status of human life is in keeping with the speculative material that I have traced. One could feasibly present this speech as articulating Shakespeare's philosophical attitude underlying the whole play, following the themes and the characterisation of Prospero, which as I have shown are at best ambiguous and pessimistic.

I must realistically conclude however, that there are sufficient "delightful" and convincing elements in the play to support the term "Romance", such as the wooing of Miranda, the dance of the spirits, the reconciliation between Alonso, Gonzalo and Prospero. This supports my argument that The Tempest is a "problem play", as the two sides (Romance and non-Romance) co-exist simultaneously. In the final analysis, to use Nuttall's words: "The minutely perceptive scepticism of The Tempest

defeats the stony allegorist and the rigid cynic equally."¹²

NOTES

- ¹ A.D.Nuttal, Two Concepts of Allegory, pp.138-160.
- ² Ibid. p.159.
- ³ I take the type of magic Prospero uses to be the polarized opposite to that used by the witch, Sycorax and the witches in Macbeth. He has the same type of control over nature but does not exercise it for evil or wanton ends, and hence his magic can be labelled 'white' rather than 'black'.
- ⁴ William Shakespeare, The Tempest, Arden edition. All further references will be to this edition.
- ⁵ Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Tempest, ed. Smith. "The Tempest", Bonamy Dobrée. p. 47
- ⁶ "The Tempest: A Problem Play," R.Egan. Shakespearean Studies. VII.
- ⁷ Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Tempest, ed. Smith.
- ⁸ Derek Traversi, Shakespeare: The Last Phase, p. 108.
- ⁹ Dover Wilson, The Meaning of the Tempest. p.11.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. p. 24 .
- ¹¹ Ibid. p.23 .
- ¹² A.D.Nuttal, Two Concepts of Allegory. p.140.

II

HAMLET

The ambiguity of the ghost has been attested by the vast number of critical theses put forward over the last four hundred years. Many of these explanations are convincing but finally inadequate as they usually involve some distortion of the text, or some kind of "special pleading". The initial problem seems to be whether or not the ghost is a "spirit of health", or something in the nature of "a goblin damned", whether his exhortation of revenge is to be admired or condemned. From this stem divergent theories on the cause of Hamlet's wild behaviour. These interpretations are accordingly either sympathetic or depreciatory, depending on the moral status of the ghost.

We are presented with conflicting arguments on this issue because of the popularity of the revenge tradition in the Elizabethan theatre. Critics, such as Dover Wilson, proceed on the assumption that revenge was dramatically if not ethically desirable, and that Hamlet's failure to conform to the traditional Renaissance response formed the root of his dilemma. This involves, however, some elaborate rationalisation, on Dover Wilson's part, of the first act, particularly the "cellarage scene",¹ if his argument is to hold.

Alternatively, critics such as Miss E. Prosser have presented convincing "proof" that the Elizabethans, in fact,

did not support the action of private revenge and that the revenge tragedies of the time exhibit this through a dramatically operative Christian code or an implicit condemnation of revenge.² She then proceeds to emphasise the darker elements surrounding the ghost's appearance to articulate a convincing thesis that Hamlet, not unlike Macbeth, is "incited and "led on" by supernatural visitations. She directly compares the dramatic functions of the two supernatural agents, the ghost and the "weird sisters", when she cites Banquo's statement as an explanation of the ghost's "honesty": "Tis strange/ And oftentimes to win us to our harm/ The instruments of darkness tell us truths." An obvious objection to this argument is that the onus of responsibility is somewhat shifted from Hamlet if we are to understand him as a helpless victim caught in the clutches of a stronger power. It also implies some maliciousness on the part of the ghost which seems to undermine the whole essence of tragedy, namely: the initial act of choice by the hero. Hamlet would be denied this choice, from this reading. These two alternative paths of argument, from this initial orientation of opinion on the ghost's nature, proceed to classify Hamlet's less rational behaviour as either an "antic disposition" interspersed with hysterical loss of control (Dover Wilson), or as the "natural outcome of the savage course to which he has committed himself" (Prosser). Both readings testify to the fundamental dramatic importance of the ghost as a moral

representative of either good or evil.

It seems that the interpretation finally rests on a choice of stage direction for the ghost. There is dramatic scope in the speeches to support both a pitiful, saintly style of delivery as well as a vicious, calculatedly obscene manner. If the entire speech is read in the former manner, the pace of the play is liable to slacken. Speaking of a performance in London in 1824, Tieck noted that the ghost spoke its part as if it were a "cold blooded lecture", using a "slow, dull, monotonous recitation, accompanied by hardly a gesture."³ Also, the more violent passages in the long speech to Hamlet will seem misplaced in such a reading. Alternatively, the second reading, although more dramatically exciting, will be forced to overlook or rationalise firstly, the passages which are obviously sympathetic in tone, for the ghost, such as its final appearance, in Act Five, in a night shirt, secondly, the fundamental integrity of the ghost's message i.e. that Claudius did in fact deserve punishment, and finally, the Christian forbearance pleaded for Gertrude. As both interpretations appear to be lacking in some way and are also mutually exclusive, it seems that a fresh look at the material is called for, perhaps in the light of this very ambiguity.

The limits of my thesis do not warrant an exploration of Elizabethan pneumatology and my study will be confined only to the dramatic effect of the ghost, which is timeless. I will

carry out a close examination of the scenes in which the ghost appears and reassess the dramatic cues the audience are given for their judgement of it. Following this, I will attempt a brief reading of the character and behaviour of Hamlet, in so far as it is enlightened by the dramatic presence and influence of the ghost.

My thesis is that the ghost plays a far larger role than merely instigating the course of the play's action through the news it brings. This can be well illustrated at this point if one considers hypothetically, the difference that would be made to the dramatic and thematic quality of the play if the news bearing function of the ghost was enacted by a witness of Claudius' crime, a servant perhaps. Technically, this would not affect the main movement of the play which is concerned primarily with Hamlet's response to the knowledge. However, Hamlet's subsequent preoccupations and behaviour would become progressively more baffling and his actions, finally unacceptable in their brutality, outside the context of his initial encounter with the ghost. This would suggest then that the revelation itself, although obviously crucial to the plot of the play, is not otherwise of the first dramatic importance. In fact, as is made clear, Hamlet already harbours suspicions of his uncle's villainy before he is told of it. Speaking of the recent accession and marriage, he says in his first soliloquy: "It is not nor it cannot come to good". Also, he responds to the news with the

ejaculation: "O, my prophetic soul", As I will proceed to show then, rather than the message itself, which is half intuited by Hamlet, it is the words of the ghost, its appearance and its significance as a dead person that form the dramatic features that come to dominate Hamlet's behaviour and indeed, the whole mood of the play.

First then, a close analysis of the early scenes, with a view to highlighting that very ambiguity that critics have struggled to overlook or deny with copious rationalisations. In doing this, I will follow S. Johnson's reasoning: "I have always suspected that the reading is right which requires many words to prove it wrong."⁴ If it appears dramatically obvious that one explanation of the ghost's moral status will not hold, then the ambivalence should be acknowledged and appreciated.

The play opens with a startled, shouted question "Who's there?", and an equally distrustful reply: "Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself." This exchange sets the tone of mistrust and duplicity which is to form one of the main dramatic moods of the play. The point that is evident immediately is that the sentinels are frightened, despite the fact that they would normally be accustomed to the long night's vigil. Francisco's statement that he is "sick at heart" is not amplified, and before Horatio's question "What, has this something appeared again tonight?" the impression has been established that the night seems to harbour something fearful

and unhealthy. Throughout this scene, Shakespeare seems careful to emphasise the objectivity of the witnesses and the setting, which will contrast with scene iv, where we will be prejudiced by sympathy for Hamlet. In this first scene, we are offered various rational criteria for assessing the integrity of the ghost. Horatio's scepticism establishes the initial attitude towards the spectre and sets up a norm of scholarly mistrust. His spontaneous fear at the supernatural sight does not negate this impression, and the tenor of his words articulate his suspicion of a malignant spirit who has wrongfully assumed a familiar form:

What art thou that usurp'st this time of night
 Together with that fair and warlike form
 In which the majesty of buried Denmark
 Did sometimes march? By heaven I charge thee, speak.
Marcellus: It is offended. (I.i.45)

Marcellus is quick to make the connection between the ghost's "stalking off" and the mention of heaven. Horatio's reply expresses a menacing sense of foreboding: "This bodes some strange eruption to our state." This comment and the next speech concerning the harbingers of fate that anticipated Caesar's assassination, can be understood to suggest that the ghost is representative of natural order, which will rise up against an evil feature in the state in order to purge it, in a similar way to the diseased landscape in Macbeth, which reflects moral disorder. The audience might assume here that the ghost's appearance signifies a disruption of natural order which must be righted. Hence it could be understood as a

"minister of justice". Horatio's questions enforce this. They also recall the traditional Catholic reasons for the return of a spirit from Purgatory. One of these comes near the truth: "If thou art privy to thy country's fate / Which haply foreknowing may avoid, / O speak." The later revealed "honesty" of the ghost on this point would seem to suggest that it was a benevolent spirit who was sent on some kind of divine mission.

The next occurrence, however, seems to deny this as the Christian context is deliberately evoked for judgement on the ghost. When the cock crows, it "starts like a guilty thing upon a fearful summons." Horatio refers to it as an extravagant and erring spirit" who is recalled to its confines because of the imminent dawn. Marcellus goes further and expressly states that spirits who roam at night and "dare not stir abroad" during daylight are "unwholesome". The specific reference to Christmas day when "no witch hath power to charm" confirms the Christian criterion which is being set up to "place" the ghost. His comment also describes popular superstition and he reduces the ghost to the same level as the amoral fairies and witches.

At the end of the first scene then, the audience will have a confused and probably superstitious attitude towards the spectre. It has failed the Christian "test" in its fear at the word "heaven" and its disappearance on the cock's crow. It has appeared fiercely frowning in martial armour and

seems arrogant. However, Marcellus describes it as majestic; it commands awe and respect through its reticence⁵. In conjunction with the preparations for war which are mentioned, it has also been suggested that it could be a precursor of some direful phenomena which it wishes to either avert or warn against. Various indications then, have been given for an assessment of its nature and motives, and uncertainty will probably be the main reaction of the audience. The next scene in which it appears will be dominated by Hamlet's credulity and our objective evaluation of its significance at this point is obviously dramatically necessary.

Apart from this important objectifying function, the scene builds up the atmosphere and mood of suspense which is to be maintained. The ghost scene, followed by the lively court scene sets the pulse of tension followed by release that operates throughout. The sequence of events is thus arranged to heighten the suspense to the utmost. Significantly then, it is not to Hamlet's reception of the news that we are now taken, but to the court and apparently unassociated matters. Apart from our tension and nervousness which grows as we await Hamlet's reaction, this distancing technique also serves to present an alternative point of view which will conflict with our sympathy for Hamlet, later on. Hence, our introduction to Hamlet is from Gertrude and Claudius' point of view. This objectifying process indicates the way in which our sympathy

will be manipulated for and against Hamlet in the course of the play. Incidentally, the suspension has become so prolonged by the time Hamlet speaks with Horatio that Shakespeare can make use of it through dramatic irony;

Hamlet: Methinks I see my father.

Horatio: Where, my lord?

Hamlet: In my mind's eye. (I.ii.185)

The themes that are established in this court scene throw light on the second appearance of the ghost. They are important in that they portray the character of Claudius and the temperament of Hamlet, before the midnight encounter. Firstly, the rational, glib manner and tone of Claudius' long speech is reminiscent of Milton's Belial. As L.C.Knights says: "We need know nothing of Claudius' previous activities to react to those unctuous verse rhythms with some comment such as: 'slimy beast!'"⁶

(Therefore) Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,
With an auspicious and a dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole
Taken to wife. (I.ii.10)

Secondly, Claudius' propensity for alcohol and his condonement of revelry is emphasised, and is referred to again by Hamlet before the meeting with the ghost. Hence, we see a rather debauched kingdom, which is headed by a suspiciously diplomatic man. However, as Wilson Knight emphasises,⁷ on the dramatic level, the court business seems to be thriving and the state appears to be healthy enough, despite the fact that the audience will be anticipating some sign of disease, following the ghost's appearance. Although the war has been mentioned again, it has

been dealt with positively by Claudius. The only suggestion of social discord or sickness is the black robed figure of Hamlet, who is shown to be exhibiting "unmanly grief", while the rest of the court seems to be in a state of repressed gaiety. In the same way that our first view of the ghost was two sided, in that we were made aware of its sinister qualities, so here, we are offered a point of view that will not accord with Hamlet's attitudes. Despite his "oily" manner, Claudius does not dramatically appear as corrupt as Hamlet would believe.

Hamlet's soliloquy illustrates his deeply melancholic state, following the shattering of his two life defining ideals: the noble example of his father, who has died and the sacredness and purity of womanhood, which has been defiled by Gertrude. The important point to notice here (for my purposes) is his tendency to dwell on sensuous, nauseous imagery in reference to Gertrude's second marriage:

... "Things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. ...
As if increases of appetite had grown
By what it fed on. ...
... O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets. (I.ii.135)

It is clear that what is foremost in his mind is the obsession with Gertrude's infidelity and not grief for his father's death. He is quick to link moral dishonour with physical filth and decay, an association which is established significantly before he listens to the ghost's words. I am

here anticipating my thesis which will be that Hamlet only selects certain things to respond to in the ghost's "advice". His imaginative susceptibility to the connection between sin and physical corruption has been confirmed. The following scene where he hears of the appearance shows his willingness to commit himself to what the night will bring, and his attitude suggests a certain recklessness: "I'll speak to it though hell itself should gape / And bid me hold my peace." The final couplet in this scene anticipates his interpretation of the ghost as a moral agent which has been sent to restore order: "Foul deeds will rise / Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to mens eyes." Before the encounter then, we are aware of the ambiguity of the ghost's purpose, the impressionability of Hamlet's imagination and the relative affability of Claudius, as compared to Hamlet's prejudiced opinion.

The first part of the ghost scene (I.iv.) supports our original dramatic impressions of its dubious nature. Hamlet, upon sight of it, is as terrified as the others were: "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" This spontaneous cry for divine protection suggests that he is facing an evil opponent. Hamlet's complete confusion as to what it represents indicates the "questionability" of its exterior. His language is shot through with violent imagery that is suggestive of a voluntary, brutal visitation, on the part of the ghost:

Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death
Have burst their cerementa; why the sepulchre...
Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws
To cast thee up again. (I.iv.47)

The sight makes night "hideous" and "horridly" inspires "thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls". Hamlet's words as well as the fears expressed by Horatio stress the possible maliciousness and devilment behind the ghost's motives;

And there assume some other horrible form
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
And draw you into madness. (I.iv.73)

His next words confirm Hamlet's recklessness and near hysteria: "He waxes desperate with imagination." Before the ghost speaks then, the audience will be more than half convinced that the ghost harbours some hideous, wicked intent, and secondly, that Hamlet, in his desperate state, will be thoroughly responsive to whatever is to occur.

The following conversation between them depends entirely for its dramatic effect on the tone of voice in which the ghost speaks. His first speech can be understood as a deliberate heightening of the mystery and terror of hell or purgatory, in order to gain Hamlet's sympathy. Having reached a peak of emotional fervour, he pauses, for effect, on the moment of revelation: "List, list, O, list!"; before springing with violent intensity onto the iteration of the crime itself. Alternatively, the words can be read self piteously and tortuously. Either way, Hamlet's attention is rapt. The ghost's words: "I find thee apt" can express a sinister irony, after he has manipulated Hamlet into this position with his colourful rhetoric.

Having announced the purpose of the visitation "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder", the ghost

immediately anticipates Hamlet's delayed action and insinuates an attitude which Hamlet later adopts towards his hesitation:

And duller should'st thou be than the fat weed
That rots itself in ease on Lethe's wharf
Would'st thou not stir in this. (I.v.33)

The insinuation of sensuousness in these words is picked up later by Hamlet when thinking of his "dullness", and reinterpreted in terms of self disgust: "Yet I / A dull and muddy mettled rascal, peak / Like John-a-dreams unpregnant of my cause." The words "dull", "muddy", "unpregnant", seem to vibrate with the type of imagery used by the ghost. Hamlet seems to have subconsciously identified with the fat, rotting weed of Lethe. Further, the ghost begins his exhortation with: "If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not," Nature can be interpreted as "manliness" or "spunk" and in this context, can be seen as expressive of the same approach Lady Macbeth used to incite Macbeth:

When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And to be more than what you were you would
Be so much more the man. (Macbeth. I.vii.52)

"Nature" can also be understood as "filial piety", or "kinship". However, Hamlet seems to respond to the challenge of manhood in his soliloquies, as I will show, and its source can be traced back to this initial supernatural suggestion. In the soliloquies, he meditates intellectually on the conflict between the passions of the blood and the dictates of his reason, (see Miss Prosser) or as Dover Wilson will have it, between the

dictates of the Renaissance code of honour and his natural instincts which are abhorrent to murder, (My concern here, is to show the terms in which Hamlet understands his dilemma, rather than the dilemma itself.) He admonishes himself as a coward because of the hints dropped in the ghost's speech: "Am I a coward?", "For it cannot be/ But I am pigeon livered and lack gall", "Why, what an ass am I." These reproaches make his attitude clear. Cowardice, not reasoned restraint is seen by Hamlet as the basic impediment of his revenge.

Later, we see him distorting the example of Fortinbras' behaviour to reflect against himself. He initially recognises the Norwegian prince's behaviour as reckless and futile:

Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats
Will not debate the question of this straw.
This is the imposthume of much wealth and peace. (IV.iv.25)

"Imposthume", meaning "abscess", indicates Hamlet's fundamental repulsion to the sight of the Norwegian army marching to invade Poland: "a little patch of ground." He recognises the aggression as caused by boredom and restlessness as much as by honour, as is shown by the tone of this image. However, the example of opposite behaviour to his own, serves to remind Hamlet of the tenor of the ghost's advice: "...and duller should'st thou be..", and he distorts the occasion into a condemnation of his own weakness, which he comprehends, not as noble restraint, but as cowardice: "How all occasions do inform against me / And spur my dull revenge." Notice how the word "dull" has been

picked up from the early scene and is reiterated throughout as a term of self reproach and laceration. His language in this soliloquy seems to significantly articulate his moral objection to Fortinbras' attitude to war, despite the fact that he finally rationalises it as bravery and "honour"?

Witness this army of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit, with divine ambition puffed,
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure ...
Even for an eggshell. (IV.iv.47)

These depreciating images - an arrogant figure pulling a scornful face at his fate, and the victory described as an "egg shell", in fact work against Hamlet's intention at this point and subtly show the dilemma operating on the subconscious level of imagery in speech. (The same thing can be seen to happen in Hamlet's inappropriate similes in response to the call of revenge:

Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love
May sweep to my revenge. (I.v.26)

Even at this point, his doubt and hesitation to carry out revenge is anticipated.) The ghost's image of fat weeds nodding on the banks of Lethe serves to imaginatively convince Hamlet, then, that his intellectual hesitation is not admirable but cowardly and despicable: "Hence conscience⁸ doth make cowards of us all." He understands "honour", it seems, as martial pride. I would prefer to call this "vainglory" as Hamlet stresses that it is important only for its own sake, rather than for any integrity of motive or result.

...Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at stake. (IV.iv.53)

The ghost's attitude to "honour" seems to be the initial catalyst of this main theme of intellectual torment and reckless decision.

The tenor of the ghost's next speech to Hamlet in this same encounter (I.v.41f) is striking in that it assumes the same attitude of physical emphasis that Hamlet had attempted to blot out in his mind in the earlier soliloquy. "Let me not think on't", he had cried, sighting, perhaps, a danger of mental imbalance if he were to pursue the kind of associations he was setting up, as I have discussed. The ghost, however, directs his attention to it:

So lust, though to a radiant angel linked
Will sate itself on a celestial bed
And prey on garbage. (I.v.55)

Hamlet is forced to review his mother's infidelity in terms of sexual impetuosity and physical corruption, terms which will recur again and again in his speech. This image of sexual wantonness becomes easily transferred to Ophelia, as is seen in Hamlet's words to her in the "nunnery scene": "You jig and amble and you lisp... and make wantonness your ignorance." The tenor of his words to Ophelia is shown to reap tragic consequences when her "gibberish" reflects the same kind of language in her bawdy songs. Imaginative identification does not stop with Hamlet:

Then up he rose, and donn'd his clo'es,
And dupp'd the chamber-door,

Let in the maid, that out a maid
 Never departed more. (IV.v.51)

The closet scene with Gertrude particularly reflects imagery which is very similar to that used by the ghost, and shows Hamlet's obsessive association of sexual wantonness with physical filth: "Do not spread the compost on the weeds / To make them ranker." He uses the very same garbage image as the ghost, as I quoted earlier. What begins as a context for repulsion at sexual freedom, develops into a general medium of reference for judgement on any moral issue. This can be seen in his image of Rosencrantz as a nut in a monkey's mouth "first mouthed to be last swallowed", and as a sponge: "It is but squeezing you and sponge, you shall be dry again." His direct cynical statements exposing dishonesty, deception and flattery are mostly termed within this very physical frame of reference.

This can be traced back further, to the initial emphasis placed on physicality, when we look at the next section of the ghost's speech, (I.v.65f.) which seems to deliberately indulge in a vision of disease and decay. Significantly, this part is usually "cut" by directors who wish to promote a sympathetic, "gentle" ghost, because of the insistence on the morbid details of physical decay:

So did it mine,
 And a most instant tetter barked about
 Most lazar-like with vile and loathsome crust
 All my smooth body. (I.v.70)

As well as pursuing the emphasis on corruption in sensuous terms, this description initiates Hamlet's absorption with the body's

decay. The catalyst seems to have been the significance of the ghost as a dead person, who can describe the actual event of death. Hamlet's jibes to Claudius concerning Polonius' decay, suggest strongly a note of hysteria because of the intensity of his vision of dead matter:

(At supper) Not where he eats but where 'a is eaten
A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him.
...We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat
ourselves for maggots. (IV.iii.19)

Similarly, in the graveyard scene, his bizarre suggestion to Horatio shows this tendency to brood over the image of death and waste: "Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till 'a find it stopping a bung hole?" (Horatio:) "T'were to consider too curiously to consider so." Horatio's reply perhaps indicates the dangerous mental path Hamlet is following and as our norm character, establishes a reasonable judgement on Hamlet's temperment at this point.

The ghost's vocabulary then, sets up an entire context of identification for Hamlet's moral repulsion, his interpretation^t of his "duty", and his pessimistic musings on the equality of all men because of the fact of death: three central themes in the play. As L.C.Knights expresses it,⁹ it is not that Hamlet is wrongly condemning a debauched kingdom, but that there exists a "particular vibration" in the saying of it. He is fascinated to the point of infatuation with what he condemns, because of the emotional light thrown on the situation by the ghost. We can see then, that the imaginative "heart" of the play is dominated by the ghost's orientation of values and

attitudes. He calls not on Hamlet's sense of outraged piety at the usurpation of the throne, but on his disgust at the incestuous behaviour of his mother and uncle. His final exhortation is: "Let not the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damned incest."

Having focused Hamlet's mind very powerfully on this vision, the ghost's next words can again ring with that same irony I noted earlier: "But howsomever thou pursues this act.." [notice that Hamlet is not recommended to use specifically Christian justice] "Taint not thy mind." The speech seems to have been designed precisely to taint and infect to the utmost, as I have shown. His final command: "Remember me!" can also be effective as an ironic understatement. Hamlet's reply shows that not only will he do this, but he will wipe away all "pressures past" from his memory, "and thy commandment alone shall live." L.C.Knights has admirably stressed the "all" in this speech, as significant of Hamlet's total concentration on the ghost's message:

There is a terrible significance in that repeated "all", for what it means is that Hamlet does not merely see the evil about him, does not merely react to it with loathing and rejection, he allows his vision to activate something within himself - say, if you like, his own feeling of corruption - and so to produce that state of near paralysis that so perplexes him₁₀

The point I wish to make is that this paralysis is born within him because of his response to only one indictment in the message: the condemnation of Gertrude, despite the ghost's last words about her. Significantly, Hamlet's first words are

about Gertrude: "O most pernicious woman." His fertile imagination has been fired and captured by the sensuous images which will dominate his vision of Denmark and blind him to the objective reality and demands of the situation. His reason is forfeited for a course of unreflected, destructive action because of his initial inability to see clearly.

The following "cellarage" scene serves to impress upon the audience firstly, the apparent malignancy of the ghost, (see footnote I) Hamlet's jibes come close to the tone of Faustus' attitude towards Mephistophiles: "Well said, old mole! Can'st work i'th' earth so fast?" Secondly, Hamlet's hysterical temperament is clearly illustrated by Horatio's levelling comments: "These are wild and whirling words, my lord." I do not wish to imply that Hamlet is "gazing with fascinated horror at an abyss of evil" (L.C. Knights).¹¹ As I have already mentioned, his subsequent cruelty, indifference and insolence would lose much of its impetus if occasioned by a deliberately malicious and misleading agent of evil forces. I have described mainly the dubious, actively sinister elements exhibited by the ghost. However, the variety of ways in which the ghost has been handled on stage testifies to a number of possible choices. The manner of delivery has been mentioned. Many of my quotations could be understood sympathetically, such as: "Taint not thy mind." The main point which seems to command respect for the ghost is his Christian forbearance towards Gertrude shown in the early and later scenes which cannot be feasibly denied.¹²

It will be noticed that the dramatic effect of the ghost differs greatly between the first and fourth acts. Following his early martial, ferocious appearance, he now appears in a nightshirt and seems considerably weakened in spirit and purpose as he reminds Hamlet again of his "purpose". We seem to be intended to respond to the "pitiful action" and the gentleness of the ghost, rather than to any veiled or malicious speech as before. In attitude and manner, it resembles most clearly the traditional figure of a spirit from Purgatory who cannot rest until vengeance is effected. The dramatic function for this sudden change appears to me to be designed to throw the utmost emphasis on the extremity of Hamlet's irrational behaviour. The reduced figure of the ghost stresses the unwarranted extent to which Hamlet has imaginatively responded to the ghost's words, and exceeded or misdirected the behaviour prompted by him. Hamlet is suddenly viewed in his true colours, for all his ugly obsessions and sordid preoccupations. Just before this third supernatural appearance, Hamlet's words have reached a pitch of hysterical, obsessive fervour :

Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseam'd bed
Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty-(III.iv.92)

He is shown as having no compassion for his mother, in the same way that he had flouted Ophelia's innocence earlier with his obscenities. Hamlet, by comparison to the gentle "harmless" ghostly figure, is totally lost to the fever of his corrupting

visions and at this point is on a lower moral level than the ghost. This can be paralleled with the contrast between Hamlet and Claudius after the play, where Hamlet's hellish thoughts far surpass the impression we are given of Claudius at that time.

I should perhaps stress here, the obvious point that despite his obnoxious behaviour, the audience's sympathy is still with Hamlet because of his initial high ideals of integrity and aesthetic purity. His outrage at the knowledge of the crime commands an obvious sympathy, and his ideal vision of chastity and fidelity can be respected. Claudius' words, in the prayer scene, are appropriate to describe Hamlet's tragic course: "O limed soul, that struggling to be free / Art more engaged." The more Hamlet tries to articulate his ideals and bring them into effect, the more his actions bring about distress and ruin, because of the very intensity of his vision of evil, which loses all sense of perspective. Hence, Shakespeare is very intent on presenting an objective as well as subjective view of Hamlet, through contrast. The barbarity of his behaviour is vividly illustrated in a dispassionate, rather than sympathetic, manner constantly. Why else are we forced to dwell on Ophelia's pathetic madness and death if not to be shown the tragic outcome of Hamlet's surrender to evil, the evil that paradoxically repels him? It is also important to remember that during Hamlet's speech to Gertrude advising self control, the body of Polonius is visible throughout, at his feet, itself a terrible indictment on the irony of his words.

As a result of the ghost's initial suggestions which have fired Hamlet's imagination, his self control has collapsed and in striving to assert order, he creates more chaos. As Wilson Knight convincingly illustrates¹⁵, Hamlet's imagination or soul has become diseased by the taint of the ghost; he is a sick soul who is commanded to heal, and hence, in order to act as the "minister" of heaven, must also be its "scourge".

We are presented then, with a double perspective for judgement of Hamlet. The objectifying scenes, such as the first three in Act Four, impress us with the consequences of his behaviour. His actions themselves testify to his unwarranted savagery, such as his murderous intentions towards Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which are carried out: "I will delve one yard below their mines / And blow them at the moon." Yet the nature of his "disease" is such that it partially excuses his "madness". In the same way, the ghost has two sides, and at different times must be criticised, feared, respected and sympathised with. His appearances and message contain potentially life and death-giving elements as regards Hamlet's mental balance and the health of the state. Its message is theoretically to be respected, (see Dover Wilson's thesis) and dramatically to be shunned. Its appearance is both startling and soothing. It is perhaps too obvious an observation to point out that had Hamlet responded only to filial outrage and brought Claudius to public trial, the ghost would be considered an instrument of justice. The fact

that this could feasibly have happened indicates the potential for good effects in the ghost's exhortation. In choosing to respond to the vocabulary rather than the central purport of the request, Hamlet chooses self destruction.

To conclude, as Wilson Knight remarks¹⁴, the play is not about indecision but rather, death and corruption, two fundamental themes initiated by the ghost. The shadow of the ghost falls across the whole play, not only as I have shown, primarily through its influence on Hamlet's intellect, but also on related levels of atmosphere, mood and tone. The questionings, pretences, tricks, covert theories and the various façades exhibited by almost all the characters are prepared for and illuminated by the ambiguous character and intention of the ghost. C.S. Lewis' conclusion¹⁵ seems to admirably summarise my thesis on the fundamental dramatic importance of the ghost:

The Hamlet formula, so to speak, is not: 'a man who has to avenge his father', but: 'a man who has been given a task by a ghost.'

NOTES

- 1 Dover Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet? p.36. Wilson argues that Hamlet's conversation with the ghost beneath the battlements is intended to resemble a discourse with the devil so that the witnesses, particularly Marcellus, will be terrified into silence. He suggests that this is the first evidence of the "antic disposition" which is calculated to confuse. As Miss Prosser points out, if this is the case, Hamlet "acts" so well that the audience, like Marcellus, is equally confused and suspicious of the ghost. A more feasible "dramatic" reaction would surely be to respond to the ghost as a devil if in fact he is behaving as one.
- 2 Miss E. Prosser, Hamlet and Revenge. pp.36 -73.
- 3 Ibid. p. 243.
- 4 Ibid. p.88.
- 5 J. Paul SR. Gibson, Shakespeare's Use of the Supernatural
- 6 p.133. He associates this characteristic of Shakespeare's ghosts with an indication of intended respect for their motives.
- 6 L.C. Knights, Some Shakespearean Themes and an Approach to Hamlet. p.183.
- 7 Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire. p.17.
- 8 Either interpretation of "conscience" fits my reading: either "consciousness" or moral "conscience" in the modern sense.
- 9 L.C. Knights, Some Shakespearean Themes and an Approach to Hamlet. p. 196
- 10 Ibid. p. 188.
- 11 Ibid. p. 188.
- 12 Miss Prosser, Hamlet and Revenge. p.196. She argues that the ghost's words, in the closet scene: "Step between her and her fighting soul" (III.iv. 151) imply, by dictionary definition: "To come between, by way of severance, interruption or interception," (O.E.D.) She argues that the ghost deliberately prevents Gertrude's repentance and in so doing, commits her to hell. This logical argument does not seem to accord with the dramatic impression given of the ghost at this time.
- 13 Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire. P.39.
- 14 Ibid. p.42
- 15 C.S. Lewis, "The Prince or the Poem?" Shakespeare's Tragedies. p.65

III

MACBETH

A study of the supernatural material in Macbeth presents us with the two main areas of dramatic interest that I have already defined in Hamlet and The Tempest. A discussion of these, prefaced by some comments on the type of supernatural powers the sisters embody, will form the main divisions of this chapter.

These two areas are as follows. Firstly, the supernatural medium represented by the weird sisters and Macbeth's subjective visions provides the main source of moral challenge for the hero in a similar way to the type of challenge Hamlet and Prospero experienced. The supernatural is pertinent to the moral universe that we see operating in the play, as I will show. Secondly, the type of magic the sisters employ establishes the dramatic imaginative principles upon which the play is constructed. I refer here to the main themes of equivocation and mocked expectation as well as to "tonal" factors such as atmosphere and mood. This is introduced by their opening chant. "Fair is foul and foul is fair " and is similar to the type of ambiguous appearances that the magic in The Tempest afforded. In both plays, the deception and uncertainty provided by the supernatural mediums form the predominant structural mood.

However, the differences between Macbeth and the other two plays as regards the treatment of this ambiguity should be

indicated at the outset. The questioning, confusion, doubt and insecurity is restricted to the perception of the characters only in Macbeth, and does not extend its ambiguity to the audience's apprehension, as it did in The Tempest and Hamlet. In these two, as I have shown, the nature of Prospero's magic and the character and intentions of the ghost are deliberately baffling to the audience in order to broaden the theme of deceptive appearances. The powers and motives of the weird sisters are made dramatically obvious before they exert any influence and there is no undercutting or questioning on the primary dramatic level where the supernatural beings themselves are ambiguous. The characters within the play are fearful and confused but the audience's standpoint is secure as each occurrence is made logically acceptable. As I will show, Macbeth rather than being reliant on subtleties of shifting levels of reality (like The Tempest) or on the complexities of defining a sensitive psyche (like Hamlet), achieves its dramatic success through a narrow, well-defined structure which is the more dynamic and powerful for its simplicity and directness.

I will first show how the role of the sisters can be clearly comprehended before moving on to a discussion of the two areas of dramatic interest that are informed by the supernatural. I am not concerned with the problem of a literal definition of the sisters, whether they be Scandinavian norns or real witches,¹ but rather with their moral status which is established early on. For my purposes, Curry's definition of the sisters will

serve: "tragic creatures who "for the sake of certain abnormal powers had sold themselves to the devil."² Their ritualistic behaviour and speech around the cauldron indicate their attachment to a demonic cult which would be generally termed "witchcraft". Their supernatural characteristics such as vanishing and forecasting the future would, judging from documentary evidence³, have been recognised by the original audience as appropriate to witchcraft. What concerns us in this thesis is their objective presence as testified by Banquo, and their dramatic function as agents or mediums between man and powers of evil or the "devil". They are women who indulge in black magic⁴ for their own whimsical pleasure and a certain sense of sadistic power. Banquo neatly places them for us following his encounter with them:

But tis strange:
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of Darkness tell us truths;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence. (I.iii.I22)⁵

This quotation outlines the main dramatic focus of the supernatural in Macbeth, which is the extent to which it dominates and influences the main character, not the curiosity it prompts for its own sake, unlike our interest in the ghost in Hamlet, provoked by the very reason of its unspecified character and motivation.

The dramatic characteristics of the witches can be easily enumerated. The opening line establishes the kind of demonic sisterhood they share, that they should be dependent

on the elements: "When shall we three meet again?/ In thunder, lightening, or in rain?" Their chant, in its careful rhythm and alliteration suggests they are casting a spell: "Fair is foul and foul is fair:/ Hover through the fog and filthy air." Their chant over the cauldron later on, reaffirms this: "Double, double toil and trouble;/ Fire, burn; and cauldron, bubble." Their conversation together before Macbeth meets them, expresses the malicious amusement they indulge in. The first witch's threats of violence to the sailor in Aleppo whose wife would not give her chestnuts demonstrates effectively the type of whimsical mischief they employ. This is not unlike the type of mischief embodied in the fairies Ariel, Puck and Queen Mab, the difference being that here it is more consistently motivated by malicious intent and not high spirits. An important point in this scene suggests the limits of the witches' power. They can play with the elements and other natural powers in their control but cannot change the face of events or alter the future. "Though his bark cannot be lost, Yet it shall be tempest tost." The confines of their power then, are clearly defined and emphasised before they exercise any influence on Macbeth, and the audience can be in no doubt concerning either their character or their status. Their dramatic function seems to be to provide the initial setting of a gothic "landscape" and to thereby give credibility to the strange "natural" phenomena that occur such as the sun's eclipse. They are important in so far as they provide an imaginative

coherence for the main themes of expectation mocked, and the spreading national "disease". Most important is their function in initially articulating to Macbeth the moral challenge which is then developed on a more subjective level. In all cases, the sisters are necessary for what they initiate and the powers of evil they symbolise, rather than for what they are themselves. As Coleridge says: "The true reason for the first [i.e. opening] appearance of the weird sisters is to strike the keynote of the whole play."⁶

I will now turn to the character and career of Macbeth and indicate the extent to which our comprehension of, and sympathy for, him is defined and measured by the supernatural material. In a paper entitled: "Shakespeare's Tragic Villains",⁷ Wayne Booth explores the ways in which Shakespeare manages to retain sympathy for the villainous hero without lapsing into "punitive tragedy" as he recognises Richard III to be. He demonstrates that the audience responds to the moral decline of a great man who once has been virtuous. He praises Shakespeare's achievement of choice of how to present the moral decline:

He has the task of trying to keep two contradictory streams moving simultaneously: the events showing Macbeth's growing wickedness and the tide of our mounting sympathy.⁸

He demonstrates how Macbeth is always shown apart from his crimes, that we are never confronted with the physical spectacle of Macbeth committing murder, how his poetry marks him out as worthy of our sympathy, how Lady Macbeth partially shoulders some of his guilt through inciting him by false

argument. What he does not mention however, is Macbeth's relative innocence through being "set on" by the sisters. The extent of this influence seems to have been deliberately kept uncertain and indeed, the suggestion of helplessness in the face of diabolical prophecy increases our sympathy for Macbeth.

On this point, we are presented with various critical interpretations that dispute the extent of Macbeth's guilt. Although every one recognises his definite susceptibility to the idea of promotion, as this is made clear in the contrast between his and Banquo's reactions to their respective prophecies, many critics seem to sense a certain helplessness on the part of Macbeth which cannot altogether be termed "weakness". Wilson Knight describes Macbeth's fascination with the supernatural in terms of instinctive compulsion:

Macbeth may struggle but he cannot fight. He can no more resist than a rabbit resists a weasel's teeth fastened in its neck.⁹

Knight comprehends evil, in this play, as having a dynamic will of its own, as is supported by the imaginatively sympathetic natural landscape which seems to respond in outrage to Macbeth's crimes. A.C. Bradley testifies to that same sense of compulsive obedience to some stronger force:

"Macbeth embarks on his career of crime with anguish and reluctance as if it were an appalling duty."¹⁰

Macbeth then, seems to be motivated by three apparently mutually exclusive forces. The first is his strong sense of moral obligation dictated by his active conscience.

His awareness of the moral significance of his actions is reiterated throughout and serves to mark him out as an acutely morally sensitive character:

And Pity, like a naked new born babe,
Striding the blast,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. (I.vii.21)

There are numerous examples: his horror at being unable to reply "Amen" to the chamberlain's prayer, his "hallucination", (more of which I shall discuss later); his insomnia and his general accelerating frenzied fear which, in its intensity, suggests more than mere fear of defeat. The second motivational force, his ambition, seems to be contained in a vacuum, as he desires promotion and yet would not venture for its gain.

Professor Muir points out:

Macbeth has not a predisposition for murder. He has merely an inordinate ambition that makes murder itself seem to be a lesser evil than failure to achieve the crown. II

The third force that impells Macbeth is harder to define and probably contributes to the attraction of his character for us. It attributes to him a depth of sensitivity and intellect that some critics only recognise in his "yellow leaf" soliloquy and in the judgement of Lady Macbeth of his "milk of human kindness". It is the extent to which he is "enchanted" by the witches through fascination at their power, and through his irresistible attraction to their promises concerning himself. Lamb's famous passage on Macbeth testifies

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to this:

From the moment that their eyes first meet Macbeth,
he is spellbound. That meeting sways his destiny.
He can never break the fascination.¹²

This is not to say that he is therefore rendered innocent of his crimes. His independent choice of this course is made clear. However, existing alongside this decision is his preoccupation with his potential greatness as promised by the supernatural powers. Bradley's description of anguish and reluctance is relevant here as Macbeth seems to anticipate his failure and yet wilfully pursues it. This is well expressed in his image of the over eager horseman: "Vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself and fall on the other (side)." He realises the obsessiveness of his fervour and yet will not act against it. Some drive within him forces him on beyond his better judgement, and it is this complex semi-conscious state of mind that provides the intensity of the play. This, as I will show, is developed through the more subjective supernatural visitations he receives. The tension between compulsive desire and reasoned moral restraint is established immediately after the sister's encouragement has been received:

Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murther yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man,
That function is smother'd in surmise
And nothing is, but what is not. (I.iii.I37)

The "horrible imaginings" of his ambitious nature are at odds with his moral principles to the point of near mental anarchy.

Banquo's words "Look, how our partner's rapt " emphasise the power of Macbeth's imagination by drawing attention to his state of extreme preoccupation.

The development of the play shows a man embracing his fate which he knows to be set against him, and yet which he will compulsively pursue despite the protestations of his imaginative conscience. Much of Macbeth's interest for us exists in his almost wilful refusal to recognise and accept his own sensitivity. He ignores the dictates of his moral reason and also the circumstances of his power. He knows that Banquo's sons are to succeed him and yet defies that fate, trusting in the juggling equivocations of the sisters against his better judgement.

The two subsequent "visitations" are subjective and seem to articulate the moral conscience that he strives to ignore. In responding to Lady Macbeth's taunts about his manhood, Macbeth had replied: "I dare do all that may become a man;/ Who dares do more is none." By putting faith in manly courage and underestimating the sensitivity of his imagination, Macbeth allows himself to be driven to the murder, on spurious grounds. In this way, he separates two sides of himself and trusts in his more superficial qualities such as physical prowess. Hence the series of images commence that testify to the lack of correspondence between natural and familiar objects: limbs being envisaged as acting independently of the body, and illfitting garments which will not lie still. As Professor Muir points out:

The opposition between the hand and the other organs and senses recurs again and again. Macbeth observes the functioning of his own organs with a strange objectivity: In particular, he speaks of his hand almost as though it had an independent existence of its own.¹³

On an imagistic level, these expressions articulate the unnatural division he has imposed between his desire and his moral reluctance. "What hands are there? ha! They pluck out mine eyes." He describes his crime as if his hands had acted against his will, to the horror of his eyes that witnessed it. He exhorts the eye to wink at the hand. His footsteps seem to be divorced from him: "Hear not my steps, which way they walk for fear / The very stones prate of my whereabouts." This tension is expressed by Angus towards the end. He refers to Macbeth's inability to accept or carry through the role he has chosen:

Now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief. (V.iii.20)

Menteth replies accurately:

Who then shall blame
His pester'd senses to recoil and start,
When all that is within him does condemn
Itself for being there? (V.iii.23)

This statement aptly describes the type of inward conflict that Macbeth faces.

Both "visions" express the moral conscience that he is ignoring, while containing within them, elements of his ambivalence of purpose. The "air drawn" dagger, with gouts of blood upon it, demonstrates to him the savagery of his intended

murder and yet, while it avoids his hand and seems to lead him toward Duncan, represents his inner defiant impulse to walk into damnation. Significantly the dagger would seem to be detached from him, to the point where some productions have actually shown a physical dagger before him. This seems, to me, to lose that element of intensity that is created by suggesting that Macbeth's overwrought mind has responded with this image. His attitude of surprise and terror at the sight develop that theme of unrelated correspondences of which I spoke. His mind presents him with a symbol of his purpose, while his eyes are horrified at the realisation of it.

Macbeth, however, will not recognise this moral presentiment and rationalises it as fear: "It is the bloody business which informs thus to my eyes." This is the same process that he employed to overcome his initial reluctance to murder Duncan, in the scene with Lady Macbeth. His "public" reaction to Duncan's death accords well with this interpretation as he expresses grief with a genuine sincerity. His words seem heart felt and indicate the way in which his personal philosophy is changing:

There's nothing serious in mortality;
All is but toys; renown and grace is dead;
The wine of life is drawn and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of. (II.iii.93)

This heart sickness seems too appropriate to Macbeth's mental state to be contrived. Murray describes that same sense of the action working against the intention that I discussed earlier

in reference to this speech:

He intends the monstrous hypocrisy of a conventional lament for Duncan; but as the words leave his lips they change their nature and become a doom upon himself. He is become the instrument of the "equivocation of the fiend / That lies like the truth".¹⁴

Our sense of Macbeth's "split personality" is becoming progressively stronger.

The second subjective supernatural occurrence is the appearance of the ghost, Banquo,¹⁵ and the timing of its appearances is relevant to the ambivalence in Macbeth that I am tracing. In the same way that he had plunged recklessly into the murder of Duncan despite this premonition, so, during the banquet, in his courage and self confidence, he seems to deliberately court disaster by speaking of Banquo: "Were the grac'd person of our Banquo present" (Enter the ghost of Banquo) It is dramatically suggested here that Macbeth had succeeded in summoning his ghost. Upon sight of it, Macbeth reacts in terror with feeble protestations of innocence: "Thou canst not say, I did it." His horror is vivid and real and shows strongly his susceptibility to imaginative symbols. On recovery though, he swings sharply back to his former reckless self assurance and defies his apparent power of conjury by deliberately invoking Banquo again: "Would he were here." He is compelled to exploit his own supernatural powers by sheer recklessness and bravado, despite the knowledge that his success will appall him. This second summoning of Banquo provides the main support for my interpretation of Macbeth's demonic obsession. It is as if

his ego insists upon this kind of behaviour, while his more selfless, compassionate side revolts against it. His horror, on both occasions here, springs, not from his visual torment at the sight of the bleeding Banquo, but at the recognition of his murderous behaviour, in all its brutality. I agree with Wilson Knight's thesis¹⁶ that these two supernatural visitations, (in Act II.i. and III.iv.) represent subjectively his moral repulsion at his crimes. His behaviour in both cases shows a wilful embracing of that terror with overtones of masochism, as well as a complete failure to comprehend the significance of the appearances or visions. In the confrontation with Banquo, he again understands his fear to represent cowardice and the rationalisation begins anew:

Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The arm'd rhinoceros, or th' Hyrcan tiger;
Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble: ...

... Why, so; - being gone,
I am a man again. (III.iv. 99)

He can shrug off this fear as effectively as he initially suppressed his reluctance to murder Duncan. He explains the banquet horror in this way: "My strange and self abuse/ Is the initiate fear that wants hard use; / We are yet but young in deed." He concludes that he simply needs more experience. In a sense, this is true, since he is not troubled by his conscience in this way again, having virtually denied it out of existence.

Therefore, at this point, a change occurs in Macbeth's

vulnerability. The knowledge that he is " in blood / Stepp'd in so far that should I wade no more / Returning were as tedious as go o'er " gives rise to a total abandonment to his commitment to evil. It is as if he has finally and effectively crushed his moral pangs in this last act of brazen confrontation. When he next visits the sisters, he takes control of the discussion and orders their compliance. His bold greeting indicates this change of attitude in his total lack of fear: "How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags!" Here, he defies universal chaos in his desire to know his future. He insists on security, despite his knowledge from their first prophecies that he is not to be granted it. The contradictory assurances he is given confirm him in his commitment to his advance, and this statement expresses his decision to become bolder and more immediate in his actions: "From this moment / The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand." He now has almost completely become the insensitive person that he desires to be in his bloody course of action, and the pathos of the scene of the Macduff household comes close to turning the tide of sympathy against Macbeth.

His final soliloquies show signs of his early sensitivity. Bradley says:

To the end, he never totally loses our sympathy.
 In the very depths, a gleam of his native love
 of goodness and with it a tinge of tragic grandeur
 rests upon him,¹⁷

However, the mood of surrender, rather than regret, as expressed

in these last speeches modifies my sympathy. He never attains a recognition of the nature of his obsessions but understands finally how he has become trapped on a level of existence that offers no release from its mental restriction. This is seen in his unemotional response to Lady Macbeth's death:

She would have died hereafter:
There would have been a time for such a word.-
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time. (V.v.I7)

I find the following explanation of this mood very convincing in its recognition of Macbeth's failed potential:

'Hereafter' is purposefully vague. It does not mean 'later', but in a different mode of time from that in which Macbeth is imprisoned now. 'Hereafter' in the not-Now, there would have been a time for such a word as: "The queen is dead", but the time in which he is caught is tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, one infinite sameness. ... For his wife's death to have some meaning, there needs some total change, - a plunge across a new abyss into a 'Hereafter'.¹⁸

Macbeth, having chosen a destructive course which prompts a negative response to creative thought, cannot respond in a positive emotional manner to the news; the greatest he can do is to recognise his flatness of vision. The subsequent heartsickness can be compared to Prospero's, both men having put their faith in vain, empty ideals. These words of Macbeth express basically the same vision of life's transitoriness as seen in Prospero's masque speech, only here they take a more extreme expression because of the tragic context, as opposed to the semi-Romantic form of The Tempest:

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more; it is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing. (V.v. 24)

Macbeth can be compared to Hamlet in the extent to which he is ignorant of his own weakness, and his susceptibility to supernatural suggestion. In both, the supernatural agents appeal to an almost unconscious vulnerability in the heroes. This initial influence is then developed by them, independent of the original stimulus. In this way, the ghost and the sisters cannot be "blamed" for the tragedies. They both have in common an ability to confront the main characters with a challenge or attitude that neither can resist. In both, this confrontation seemed designed to put the hero to the test and not to wilfully cause ruin or chaos. Both plays testify to the ultimate power of which the mind is not in control and which is symbolised by the supernatural. Hamlet and Macbeth both find themselves influenced against their better judgement through some innate mental disposition which is drawn out insidiously by the ghost or the sisters. However, the second "half" of the tragic pattern is dependent on the volition of the main character, having been set up against the challenge. The element of free choice is all important and only in so far as they are shown to act freely without real constraint, do they attain full tragic status. However, in both cases, the supernatural provides the ambiguous "escape clause", as one must decide how free the two characters are in the face of

some independent moral order working in nature which Macbeth's savagery has set in motion. Lennox's description follows the murder, and the association between this and the troubled natural environment seems warranted. The latter is shown to be sympathetic to the moral innocence that has been outraged by Macbeth, evidenced by the long darkness that shrouds the country, the savagery of the animals and birds against their own kind, and the howling and groaning that is reported which seems to be drawn from the very ground itself. Although this is not directly the work of the witches, this upheaval in nature is conceived in the same imaginative terms as those that define the sisters. In the following quotation, the medium of superstitious magic, that Macbeth speaks of, serves as a dramatic construct or context in which all the events are depicted:

-Now o'er one half-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtained sleep: Witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's off'rings; and wither'd Murther
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost. (II.i.49)

The personification of inanimate things and actions, here, emphasises the type of dramatic "landscape" Shakespeare employs, on which to set Macbeth's career. The witches are an essential part of that setting as their trafficking with the "devil" requires that suspension of disbelief that the subsequent events also rely on.

Hence, it can be dramatically acceptable that Macbeth's crimes have literally attained his country. This is demonstrated not only by specific accounts of unnatural events, as mentioned above, but also by the notion of national disease that is maintained, throughout, of which Macbeth is not in control but which his crimes seem to have initiated. He says to the doctor:

If thou could'st, doctor, cast
The water of my land, find her disease
And purge it to a sound and pristine health
I would applaud thee to the very echo. (V.iii.50)

The image is pursued by Angus, speaking of Malcolm's force as the "healing potion":

Meet we the medicine of the sickly weal
And with him, pour we our country's purge
Each drop of us.

Lennox: Or as much as it needs
To dew the sovereign flower and drown the weeds. (V.iii.27)

It would be helpful to an understanding of the dramatic function of this theme to compare with it Shakespeare's treatment of a similar concept in Hamlet. This is the theme of corruption in Denmark that is portrayed through Hamlet's apprehension. In Hamlet, the subject is conveyed only through the hero's consciousness, whereas in Macbeth, we are confronted with a physically diseased landscape which is presented objectively, outside Macbeth's point of view. The corruption then, is dramatically taken one step further and becomes literal rather than imagined. This is described by Ross and Lennox and can be supported by certain stage effects such as storms,

supernatural prophecy and corruption.

I would now like to turn to the other area of dramatic supernatural influence that I indicated and discuss briefly some of the ways in which the play is based on the premises of ambiguity that the sisters establish. It is common in productions of Macbeth to present the three sisters on a balcony or raised platform, to survey the whole action of the play. Although this stage direction runs the risk of attributing too much responsibility to the sisters for Macbeth's behaviour through suggesting that they are stage managing the whole action, it does impress dramatically the extent to which the play is imaginatively controlled by the type of evil they propagate. Firstly, the popular type of magic they use, (shown by their language and their ritualistic chantings) is directly correspondent to the unnatural phenomena that occur the night of Duncan's murder. Lennox's description of the night's events envisage the same kind of riotous evil spirits the witches call up:

...and as they say,
Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,
And, prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion, and confus'd events,
New hatch'd to th' worful time, the obscure bird
Clamour'd the livelong night. (II.iii.55)

The similarity of the gothic setting would seem to suggest that the witches had summoned the night's tempest. However, it is made dramatically clear that these events were caused more by

darkness and shrieking sounds. Roman Polanski demonstrated in his film version of Macbeth the extent to which the film medium can enhance this sense of a supernatural setting. This contrasting treatment indicates the two very different types of plays we are dealing with. The world of Hamlet is basically realistic; the conflicts are internal in so far as the passions do not extend to nature itself. The universe of Macbeth is founded almost totally in the imagination. This is not to say that it calls for the same kind of suspension of disbelief as required by The Tempest, where we saw the interaction of the realistic and the fantastic. In Macbeth, a realistic situation is conceived in imaginative terms which serve to intensify the effect of his crimes, rather than to fantasize them. This can perhaps be described as a type of inverted realism where one feature of the situation is distortedly exaggerated to portray more vividly a psychological truth. As Wilson Knight says: "The logic of imaginative correspondences is more significant and more exact than the logic of the plot."¹⁹ In this dramatic unity, in this close correspondence between setting, mood and theme, it is perhaps the most dynamic of the tragedies because of its limited scope and therefore more intense impact. In Macbeth, more than in any other of the tragedies, we visualise "à l'univers travaillant pour perfection",²⁰ as Macbeth's crimes are shown as having perverted the elements, the birds, the animals and the land as well as his own society.

The attendant theme of the reversal of expectations is developed throughout on the level of dramatic irony, as well as in the action itself. The supernatural setting Shakespeare has chosen lends itself well to the theme of deceptive appearances. The maxim: "Fair is foul and foul is fair" is demonstrated at almost every turn of the action and dialogue as L.C. Knights²¹ thoroughly explores:

It is fitting that the final movement of the reversal that takes place in the last act should open with the command of Malcolm to the camouflaged soldiers;
 "Your leavy screens throw down, And show like those you are."

(V.vi.I)

The supernatural in Macbeth forms the basis for Shakespeare's dramatic structure in toto. It initiates the action, it articulates the moral content, it propagates the dominant moods of distrust, ambiguity, deception and fear, and offers a medium of chaos and havoc that is fundamental to our apprehension of Macbeth's career. In this broad sense, it is appropriate that the sisters who embody the source of this energy, should be presented as onlookers of the action.

NOTES

- 1 Spalding, Elizabethan Demonology. He deals adequately with this question of definition.
- 2 Curry, Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns, p.61
- 3 Reginald Scot, The Discoverie of Witchcraft, p.61. "These can pass from place to place in the air invisible...they ride and flie in the air.
- 4 See footnote 3 in chapter I.
- 5 William Shakespeare, Macbeth, Arden edition. All further references will be to this edition.
- 6 S.T.Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, p.68.
- 7 Shakespearean Tragedies, ed. Lerner. p.180f.
- 8 Ibid. p.184.
- 9 Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, p. 153.
- 10 A.C.Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, p.358.
- 11 Introduction to Arden ed. Macbeth, p. lvi.
- 12 Ibid. p.38
- 13 Ibid. p. xxxi.
- 14 Murray, Shakespeare, as reprinted in Arden introduction, p. liv
- 15 See I.W.Rodgers, Ghosts in Shakespeare, p.38-46. He closely identifies the appearance of Banquo with documented phenomena concerning wraiths.
- 16 Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, p.148.
- 17 A.C.Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy. p.102.
- 18 Murray, Shakespeare, p.335.
- 19 Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, p.141.
- 20 Ibid. ch.VII.
- 21 L.C.Knights, Some Shakespearean Themes and an Approach to Hamlet, p.105.

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