

SHAKESPEARE AND SUPERSTITION: A STUDY OF HOW SHAKESPEARE USES  
SUPERSTITION AND VISIONS IN *MACBETH* AND *JULIUS CAESAR*

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH STUDIES

AT

THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

BY

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200717243

FEBRUARY 2014

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critical analysis of the use of superstition in some selected plays by William Shakespeare. The main purpose of the study was to analyse how Shakespeare uses superstition and visions in the two selected plays, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* to structure his plays. The study investigated the consequences that befell the main characters for following or ignoring superstition. The two plays were selected using purposive sampling and were analysed using the content analysis method. In this study, the researcher selected all the texts from the two plays with reference to superstition. The study used the New Historical Criticism as the theoretical framework. This theory looks at a text by considering all the historical aspects that might have influenced the writer to write the type of text that he or she has written.

The study reveals that Shakespeare uses superstition and visions such as dreams, omens, apparitions and ghosts in his plays to bring in some dramatic effects, chaos and also to bring in some confusion amongst the characters. It also reveals that the visions that are used in the two plays were all warnings which were meant for the main characters and came true in the end. It also reveals that the main characters reacted to the supernatural visions and warnings in various ways, Macbeth follows superstition and Caesar ignores the warnings. In the end they are both affected negatively. Based on the findings of the study, this study recommends that more studies should be done on some other elements used by William Shakespeare in the same plays as well as their effects on the characters. This study is a great

contribution to the study of Shakespeare's work, especially in Namibia where the study of Shakespeare's works is low.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank God, the Almighty for the love He has for me and for giving me this beautiful opportunity to make it to this level. Secondly, I would love to thank my supervisor, Professor Jairos Kangira from the University of Namibia, for the role he played in the writing of this document, by guiding and advising me until I came up with this thesis. Mom, dad, my lovely sister Elizabeth and the entire family, I thank them very much for the love they have shown me from the beginning up to today. To my best friend Kapuka, his motivational words and encouragement have contributed drastically to this thesis. Lastly, I would like to thank all of those who have helped me in this course, I made it this far because of their love and support I am extremely grateful.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all those that love literature.

DECLARATIONS

I, Emilia Ndahambelega Amuthenu, hereby declare that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the orientation of the study, definitions of superstition and visions, the problem statement and research questions. It further provides at the significance of the study as well as the limitations that faced this study.

#### 1.2 Orientation of the study

The purpose of this study was to analyse how William Shakespeare uses visions and superstition in two of his plays, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* as well as the role that superstition and visions play in the two plays. Shakespeare incorporates various supernatural elements into many of his plays in varying degrees and with different intentions. He uses the supernatural and superstitions in many of his plays which are vital to the storyline of those plays, injecting horror, tension and suspense in them.

Various studies have been done on superstition in Shakespeare's work. For instance, Piccotto (2012) carried out a study entitled "Shakespeare, the supernatural, and the female power base". Picotto's project examines the roles of the supernatural in three of Shakespeare's plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale*. Furthermore, Pavlíčková (2009) carried out a study entitled, "Shakespeare's Use of the Supernatural", which aims at comparing three selected plays by Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Tragedy of Richard III*) with three other plays sometimes regarded by scholars as being among the sources of the

respective plays (*Sejanus, His Fall* by Ben Jonson, *Cleopatra* by Samuel Daniel and the anonymous *True History of Richard III*). The main aim was to present a more detailed study which also considered the influence of works by Shakespeare's contemporaries.

Randell (1976) also carried out a research entitled "The dramatic function of the supernatural in Shakespeare" which focused on Shakespearean plays that use a supernatural framework as their dramatic structure.

In addition to the studies mentioned above, Daniel (1992) carried out a study entitled "Shakespeare's Tragic Ghosts: Psychological Manifestations of Guilt". In this study, Daniel attempted to prove that the ghosts in *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar* were imaginary apparitions and that their appearances represented psychological manifestations of character's guilt.

However, none of them focused on the roles that supernatural elements and visions play, especially in the two selected plays, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*. This is the gap which this research intends to fill as well as look at the consequences of following or not following (ignoring) superstition.

### **1.3 What is superstition?**

The Encyclopedia Britannica (2013, para. 1) defines superstition as “a belief, half-belief, or practice for which there appears to be no rational substance.” The encyclopedia further adds that those who use the term imply that they have certain knowledge or superior evidence for their own scientific, philosophical, or religious convictions.

Furthermore, another scholar defines and explains what superstition is by indicating that:

Superstition is anything that people believe, that is based on myth, magic, or irrational thoughts. They are beliefs that are steeped in lore or tradition, and it is usually difficult to pinpoint the exact origin. Superstitions are also known as old wives' tales, legends, and traditions. They may involve animals, graveyards, ghosts, inanimate objects, or even other people (Upson 2013, p. 1).

The above-mentioned supernatural elements are the same as the elements that Shakespeare uses in the two plays that the researcher have analysed in this study.

### **1.4 What is a vision?**

A vision is defined as “something seen in a dream or trance, an image or series of images seen in a dream or trance, often interpreted as having religious, revelatory, or

prophetic significance” (Vision, 2008, para. 2). The words that are associated with visions are those such as prophecy, dream, hallucination and apparition.

### **1.5 Statement of the problem**

The mood of blackness plays a very big role in many of Shakespeare’s plays, which includes the two selected plays as well. Frag (2008, p. 24) states that *The Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* are good examples of the plays where Shakespeare employs paranormal powers. All of them deal with the idea of supernaturalism. He further adds that “[t]he use of fairies, ghosts, Witches and unseen powers respectively has evolved and invested all the circumstances and the features of popular superstition so that it may be readily accepted by the audience” (p. 26).

After having come across the use of such powers in Shakespeare’s work, the researcher was prompted to carry out a study on the roles that superstition and visions play in the two plays. The researcher also wants to unravel the consequences for the main characters in following and not following (ignoring) superstition in the two plays. Superstition was specifically selected because of the dramatic effects it brings into the plays.

Daniel (1992, p. 2), explains that “[i]n Act I of each tragedy, Shakespeare established a supernatural order which he successfully used later in the play to externalise a character’s guilt or fear.” This has left the researcher with questions about why Shakespeare used such a technique in his plays.

## **1.6 Research questions**

This study answered the following questions:

- How does Shakespeare use superstition and visions in the two plays, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* to structure his plays?
- What are the consequences for the main characters for following or not following superstition?

## **1.7 Significance of the study**

The study aims to demonstrate the enduring effects of superstition and how Shakespeare employs literary devices to illustrate the effects of superstition for characters in his plays.

## **1.8 Limitations of the study**

One of the limitations for this study is that it is limited to two of Shakespeare's plays. The researcher selected the two plays because, although Shakespeare used superstition in many of his plays, the selected plays are the only tragedies in which he used more or less the same supernatural elements. The supernatural elements used in both plays are such as dreams and portents. The second limitation is that this study only used one literary theory, which is New Historical Criticism. These restrictions, however, gave the researcher enough time and a very good opportunity to do an in-depth analysis of the two selected plays.

## **1.9 Summary**

This chapter focused on the introduction, description of the background of the study as well as the statement of the problem under the study. The research questions and the significance of the study were also given. It further looked at the limitations of the study.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature related to the research topic. The review is arranged according to the following headings: Supernatural elements and visions in *Macbeth*, Supernatural elements and visions in *Julius Caesar*, as well as, what inspired William Shakespeare to write about superstition in the two selected plays, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*?

#### 2.2 Supernatural elements and visions in *Macbeth*

Knight describes *Macbeth* as “Shakespeare’s most profound and mature vision of evil” (1978, p.140). In *Macbeth*, we find not gloom, but blackness: the evil is not relative, but absolute. Knight further adds:

*Macbeth* is a desolate and dark universe where all is befogged, baffled, constricted by evil. Probably in no play of Shakespeare are so many questions asked. It opens with ‘When shall we three meet again?’ and ‘Where the place? (I. i.I and 6). The second scene starts with ‘What bloody man is that?’ (I. ii. I), and throughout questions are asked of Sergeant and Ross (1978, p. 140).

Such an opening gives the readers an idea of the kind of atmosphere to be expected in the play, especially the introduction of the Witches right at the beginning.

Clark as cited by Coppersmith, (1998, para. 3) says, "*Macbeth* is the Shakespearean play into which the supernatural enters most largely." From the opening lines, where the three Witches are announced with a boom of thunder and flash of lightning, the play seemed completely infused with the supernatural, almost drowned in its influence.

The researcher believes this is true because the whole atmosphere of this play is constricted by evil and unnatural events, which lead to the bloody scenes as they appear throughout the play. Mosely (1991) claims that:

The supernatural soliciting has no power of itself; they do not tell Macbeth to do anything, they do not control him in any way, they merely say what shall be and leave the chain of circumstance leading to it unsaid. Their prophecies could all come true as does the first without Macbeth doing anything at all except continue as 'noble Macbeth', Bellona's bridegroom (p. 26).

The researcher agrees with Mosely here because, although there are some unnatural signs in the play, especially when the Weird sisters appear to Macbeth and Banquo, the Witches do not tell Macbeth to kill King Duncan but simply prophesy that he shall become a king one day.

Bradley describes *Macbeth* as:

Darkness, we may even say blackness, broods over this tragedy. It is remarkable that almost all the scenes which at once recur to memory take place either at night or in some dark spot. Some bad events such as the vision of the dagger, the murder of King Duncan, the murder of Banquo and the sleep-walking of Lady Macbeth, all come in night-scenes. The Witches dance in the thick air of a storm, or, 'black and midnight hags,' receive Macbeth in a cavern. The blackness of night is to the hero a thing of fear, even of horror; and that which he feels becomes the spirit of the play (2011, p. 277).

The darkness being described here is exactly the same with what we have been seeing in *Macbeth*, especially at the scenes where terrible things are plotted to happen.

### **2.2.1 Witches**

The Witches, who are also called or regarded as Weird sisters appear in various scenes in the play. Their appearances had various effects on the play and its characters. What Macbeth has done should not be entirely blamed on him but on the Witches as well. This is because the Witches have played a role as well. Greenblatt and Cohen (1990), indicate that “[i]n Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, the title character kills a king in order to take his throne, and then is overthrown in a bloody battle. However, Macbeth cannot take the complete blame for this defeat, as there are three very important players who set his plan into action and then goad him onward to his death” (para. 4).

According to the Shmoop Editorial Team (2008, para. 8):

The word "weird" comes from the Old English term "wyrd," meaning "fate" so we're betting that they're in some way associated with the three fates of classical mythology. Since the "fates" are supposed to control man's destiny, calling them "weird" might suggest that Macbeth doesn't have any control over his actions, and that his choices aren't really his to make (para.1).

When one looks at the characterisation of the Witches, which is weird, you may say that the fate of the main character, who is Macbeth, has already been determined right from the beginning. As Shmoop Editorial Team indicated, it is clear that the Witches, the Weird sisters have been in control of Macbeth's life. Macbeth's actions in the play are based on the Witches' prophecies, so it is clear that the Witches had control over Macbeth's destiny throughout the play.

Gray (2005) says, "[t]he prophecies of the Weird sisters deal with Macbeth's future as Thane and king, which could be shown to be imagined by Macbeth and Banquo" (para. 6). Looking at this, one will be able to tell that what has prompted Macbeth to do the evil deed is the prophecy from the Witches which in the end forced his life to end up in such a way.

Furthermore, Coppersmith (1998, para. 1) maintains that "[n]ear the end of the opening scene of Macbeth, Shakespeare's three Weird sisters proclaim in unison that

"fair is foul, and foul is fair", providing readers with perhaps the best understanding of the play's theme and the tragic downfall of its central or main character.

### **2.2.2 Ghost of Banquo**

The appearance of the ghost of Banquo is yet another supernatural event that happens in *Macbeth*. Various scholars did some studies on the appearance of the ghost and they have come up with various conclusions. For instance, Dillion (2007, p. 118), indicates that "the appearance of the ghost was a material presence on stage, though it never speaks. It is not incontrovertibly clear that it has substantial reality beyond Macbeth's imagination, since no one but Macbeth sees it." Here Dillion is indicating that the appearance of the ghost might not be a real ghost but an imagination because his guilty conscience is haunting him because of his evil deeds. The researcher agrees with Dillion because it could be that the ghost is only imaginary in Macbeth's head as a result of the conscience that is haunting him.

The eNotes study Master states that:

To Macbeth the ghost is real, but no one else sees him. Perhaps the reason that only Macbeth sees this ghost of Banquo is the fact that it is Macbeth's conscience which is troubled. At the banquet after Banquo has been killed, Macbeth's inner thoughts give way to his fears and guilt; these emotions are manifested in the ghost of Banquo (para.2).

As the eNotes have indicated, Macbeth is the only one who sees the ghost of Banquo. Here there might be so many questions why it is only him who sees it. Meaning, there might be so many reasons, but as stated earlier, it could be that the ghost appears in his imaginations because of his guilty conscience that keeps on haunting him. This can also serve as a warning that, one has to think before taking action because one might regret later, and there also might be some bad consequences of the actions that he/ she has taken. Pavlíčková (2009) adds that: “[a]lthough the Elizabethans did not reject the apparitions of ghosts; they did not regard them as souls of the dead and were sceptical as regards the perceptibility of these to the mortals” (p.19). This is an indication that the Elizabethans believe that the ghosts are not souls of the dead.

### **2.2.3 Apparitions**

The apparitions are the main visions in *Macbeth*. They show Macbeth how his future is going to be, which gives him a picture of how he should take his life from that day.

Crawford explains that:

All the apparitions were prophetic threats at Macbeth's kingship, than his life, though the Macduff of the first two was later to take his life. The third, Malcolm, as the “Child Crowned,” was a challenge both to his kingship and to his succession. The fourth, “[a] show of eight Kings, and Banquo last,” was likewise a challenge to Macbeth's kingship, but, especially, as we shall see later, was a direct challenge to the succession (1924, p. 383).

Crawford further adds that “[t]his fourth and last apparition was probably the most significant and the most appalling of the lot” (p.384).

Crawford is telling us that the apparitions are intended to threaten Macbeth’s crown, which he obtained unlawfully and intends to keep or protect by killing whoever he thinks and sees as an obstacle in his life. This is true that the reason Macbeth is seeking assistance from the Witches is because he wants to make sure that he does not lose the kingship crown. Now the Witches are trying to show him that, for as long as he is keeping the crown, this is how his life is going to be.

On the other hand, Parker (1976, p. 476) claims that “[t]he apparitions of the future which they conjure up represent a further facet of Macbeth's illusion (an apparition is, by definition, an illusion) and serve to point up the impossibility of its realization: by the strength of their illusion shall draw him on to his confusion.” However, the researcher tends to differ with Parker because she believes that the apparitions are not illusions but real visions that Macbeth was shown by the Witches. The apparitions became true in the end. It is clear that Macbeth was being shown what was going to happen to him in the future.

### **2.3 Supernatural events and visions in *Julius Caesar***

When it comes to *Julius Caesar*, Dillion (2007, p. 57) asserts that Caesar was superstitious because of the strange events of the night, the portent of the Augurers

and his wife citing examples of strange incidents which mark the death of a powerful person.

De Sousa (2010, p. 171) adds:

Before the play fully unravels, we see a few signs of Caesar's tragic end. Aside from the sooth-sayer's warning, we also see another sign during Caesar's visit with the Augurers, the latter day "psychics". They find "No heart in the beast," which they interpret as advice to Caesar that he should remain at home.

De Sousa has given out some cases of supernatural events of which he feels they are supposed to serve as warnings to Caesar to remain home because they are signs of his tragic end.

### **2.3.1 Ghost of Caesar**

The ghost of Caesar forms another aspect to the general supernatural background of the play. "The spirit does not make many particular references, but is many times referred to by the characters" (Pavličková 2009, p. 75). She further adds that the nature of the references says that the occurrence of Caesar's spirits is felt continually by all the characters affected and certain speeches also advocate revengeful intentions of the spirit. Furthermore, Dillion (2007, p. 115) concludes that "the appearance of the ghost in Julius Caesar represents a brief and surprising intrusion into the affairs of men."



What Dillion says is true because the appearance of the ghost to Brutus really affected him and other conspirators negatively. The ghost informed Brutus that they shall meet at the battle field (Philippi) and it is at the battle field where most of the conspirators including Brutus lost their lives.

Shakespeare believed in black magic and supernatural appearances. He believed that the ghost Witches and fairies actively interfered in human affairs and controlled the destiny and actions of man; hence the ghost of Caesar was introduced to control the life of Brutus (Bloom, 2008).

### **2.3.2 Soothsayer and dreams**

Shakespeare uses the Soothsayer as one of the aspects to warn Caesar about his death. Michaels (1996) indicates that, “a Soothsayer or fortune teller is central to the opening action of the play. The Soothsayer makes a prediction about the Ides of March (March 15)” (p.112). This is true because the Soothsayer warned Caesar to beware of the Ides of March right at the beginning of the play. Such an introduction gives the reader an idea of the horrible and terrible event he or she is likely to find in the play.

Furthermore, the Shmoop Editorial Team (2008. para. 2) states that:

The Soothsayer's warning raises interesting questions about fate and free will. If Caesar had actually heeded the warning to "beware the Ides of March," could he have changed the course of events that day? On the one hand, the

Soothsayer's warning about his impending doom (along with all the other creepy omens in the play) suggests that Caesar's fate is already decided. On the other hand, why would the Soothsayer bother warning Caesar if there was nothing he could do to prevent his death?

The researcher disagrees with the Editorial Team here because she believes that had Caesar listened and taken the Soothsayer's warnings seriously, he could have avoided what happened to him in the end. To add on that, the researcher would not really say there was nothing he could do because if there was nothing the Soothsayer could do, he could have ignored. So the fact that he has warned him (Caesar) shows that he did something that could have saved Caesar. Therefore, the researcher would say that the remaining part was for Caesar to do his work.

Caesar's own wife, Calpurnia, had terrible dreams, amongst which was the assassination of her husband. She begged him not to go to the Curia and almost persuaded him but one of his most trusted aides (a traitor in fact) convinced him of the need to go Piccoto (2012, p. 56).

Melh (1986, p. 106) concludes by suggesting that as superstition is inter-twined within the basis of the entire play, we can reasonably conclude that it is because of this irrational belief of why certain events occur and how to avoid them, that Caesar retired and eventually avenged.

## 2.4 What inspired Shakespeare to write about superstition?

During the era when Shakespeare was living during the Renaissance, many literary texts dealt with the supernatural. “Of the many writers who used such supernatural themes, Shakespeare stands out from them all because of his profound contributions to literature which embodies and illustrates the current beliefs of the era” (Proveaux, 2010, para.1).

According to Foss (1992, p. 1), “[t]he smallest actions could bring or banish good luck.” To stir a pot or "widdershins" was supposed to spoil the contents, as well as bring bad luck to all who ate from it. An example of this is the “potion” which is prepared by the three Weird sisters in *Macbeth*. Furthermore, Pavlíčková (2009, p. 48), asserts that “[a] superstition that was most influential to them was that Witches exist and they could cast spells on anyone. The spells were understood to be so grave, they could lead to death”. They were also mainly responsible for all unexplainable happenings. One may say that this could even be the reason why the Witches, especially in *Macbeth* were still blamed for the unusual or strange events in the play.

Pavlíčková, (2009) says that the Elizabethan believed in studying the stars as well as the atmospheric conditions to determine what was likely to happen. She explained that:

The interpretation of stars and positions of heavenly bodies and their influence upon man was not only popular among the wider population, but it was used as a political instrument of considerable importance by the ruling monarchs.

Being of general or individual usage, astrology provided predictions, recommendations and advice. In the Elizabethan times stars were said to influence the people (p.17).

Such influence and beliefs could have been the ones which showed the signs that terrible things were about to happen when the weather and atmospheres changed before the killings of King Duncan in *Macbeth* and Caesar, in *Julius Caesar*.

Furthermore, Albright says that:

It is generally thought that Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* around 1606, to celebrate the accession, after the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, of King James VI of Scotland to the throne of England, as King James I. James prided himself on his scholarship, particularly on Witchcraft, the subject of his 1597 book, *Daemonologie* (2005, p. 226).

Albright's explanation on the date that *Macbeth* was written clearly shows that history played a big role in the writing of the play. On top of that, the elements that are used in the play are the same as those that King James was more interested in.

It is a fact that most of Shakespeare's plays were written during the period when England had very strong beliefs in superstitions. Therefore Shakespeare is influenced by history and the era in which he lived to include superstition in his writings.

Both *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* have superstitious and supernatural backgrounds and content, and are products of imitation of sources, and events of that time. In other words, it is clear that the two plays are reflections of what was happening then.

Having briefly outlined the Elizabethan era and supernatural background, the researcher intends to study the various sources and the plays, and discuss how Shakespeare, a traditionalist in many ways, dealt with the supernatural dilemmas each particular play presents. In each play, Shakespeare establishes the occurrence of a supernatural order right away, which later provides Macbeth and Brutus with a possible and credible means of perceiving their psychological fabrications to be actual ghosts.

Pavličková (2009) further describes the plays by indicating that “the two plays are characterised by an atmosphere full of superstitions, astrological phenomena and references to gods, because the Romans were extremely superstitious. Thus, a certain ever-presence of the supernatural or something ‘out of the human world’ can be detected in both plays (p.33).

Williams (2000) indicates that Shakespeare’s use of superstition in *Macbeth* capitalised on King James’s interest in the supernatural. It has been indicated that interest in Witches and supernatural existed during Queen Elizabeth’s reign. Williams further adds that:

News from Scotland (1951) recounts the trial of Scottish Witches from the town of Forres. The Witches allegedly had attempted to kill James while he was king of Scotland by trying to cause a shipwreck during his voyage to Denmark. The Weird sisters in *Macbeth* resemble these Witches in their activity. Before Banquo and Macbeth encounter them in Act I, Scene 3, the Weird sisters discuss sending tempestuous storms to a sailor’s ship because

the sailor's wife would not share chestnuts with one of them. In addition, Banquo, before he sees the Weird sisters, asks Macbeth, "how far is't call'd to Forres?" (I.3.39). Thus, these Weird sisters are linked to the Witches in the news from Scotland both by their behaviour and their geographical location, (p. 21).

When one looks at the explanation given by Williams, one may be totally convinced that William Shakespeare was influenced by the events of that time to write about superstition in his work. It is also clear that the Witches in the play resemble the Witches who attempted to kill King James in Scotland by trying to cause a shipwreck. That is exactly what they tried to do to the sailor in *Macbeth*.

Moving on to *Julius Caesar*, (William Shakespeare info, 2005), indicates that "Julius Caesar is a dramatization of actual events. He was assassinated in 44B.C. It is believed his mother endured agonising surgery in order to extract him at birth. This belief gave rise to the term Caesarean birth" (para. 3).

Furthermore, the Shmoop Editorial Team (2008, para. 2) describes *Julius Caesar* as a play by indicating that:

Written around 1599, *Julius Caesar* is a tragedy by William Shakespeare. The play is based on historical events surrounding the conspiracy against the ancient Roman leader Julius Caesar (c.100-44B.C.) and the civil war that followed his death. Shakespeare portrays Caesar's assassination on the Ides of

March (March 15) by a group of conspirators who feared the ambitious leader would turn the Roman Republic into a tyrannical monarchy.

The writing of the two selected plays was influenced by the era in which William Shakespeare wrote them. In other words, it is clear that the history of the era in which the plays were written played a very big role in the two selected plays.

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used in this study is New Historical Criticism. According to Delahoyde (n.d) “New Historical Criticism seeks to find meaning in a text by considering the work within the framework of the prevailing ideas and assumptions of its historical era.” New historicists concern themselves with the political function of literature and with the notion of power, the complex means by which cultures produce and reproduce themselves. These critics focus on revealing the historically specific model of truth and authority reflected in a given work. This theory does not look at texts independently but consider some other factors that might have influenced the writer.

Brizee and Tompkins (2012, para. 3), describe New Historical Criticism by indicating that:

This school, influenced by structuralist and post-structuralist theories, seeks to reconnect a work with the time period in which it was produced and identify it with the cultural and political movements of the time (Michel

Foucault's concept of *épistème*). New Historicism assumes that every work is a product of the historic moment that created it. Specifically, New Historicism is "...a practice that has developed out of contemporary theory, particularly the structuralist realization that all human systems are symbolic and subject to the rules of language, and the deconstructive realization that there is no way of positioning oneself as an observer outside the closed circle of textuality."

The New Historical Criticism theory was developed because there was a need for an approach that looks at a literary text differently from the ones that existed before. Brewton (n.d) says that:

New Historicism” and “Cultural Materialism” seek to understand literary texts historically and reject the formalizing influence of previous literary studies, including “New Criticism,” “Structuralism” and “Deconstruction,” all of which in varying ways privilege the literary text and place only secondary emphasis on historical and social context (para. 6).

The researcher chose this theoretical framework because she has assumed that the era in which Shakespeare lived influenced him to write about superstitions. For instance, the first time the Witches make predictions for Macbeth, they sing the following spell before encountering him:



The Weird sisters, hand in hand,

Posters of the sea and land,

Thus do go, about, about,

Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,

And thrice again to make up nine.

Peace, the charm's wound up (Act I, Scene III, lines 30 -35).

This is exactly the kind of spell the Elizabethan people believed that Witches would use. They have predicted that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland.

Delahoyde (n.d) further gives us a description of New Historical Criticism by indicating that:

In other words, history here is not a mere record of facts and events, but a complex description of human reality and evolution of preconceived notions. Literary works may or may not tell us about various factual aspects of the world from which they emerge, but they will tell us about prevailing ways of thinking at the time: ideas of social organisation, prejudices, taboos, etc” (para. 2).

This means that superstition played a very important role back then because almost every unnatural happening was associated with something else, either bad or good.

To sum up, the researcher chose the two plays to use in this study because they are both tragedies and full of supernatural events.

## **2.6 Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature on Shakespeare's works, especially on superstition and supernatural elements. It also explained New Historical Criticism theory which was used in the study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the design and research methodology that was implemented to study the use of superstition in the two plays. It also includes a description of the sample size and characteristics used in selecting the sample, the research design and data collection. This chapter also describes the instruments used as well as the data analysis procedures. Finally, it gives the ethics considered in the study.

#### 3.2 Research Design

This study is a qualitative desktop research and it made use of the content analysis method. According to Hale (n.d) “qualitative research is a system of inquiry which seeks to build a holistic, largely narrative, description to inform the researcher’s understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon” (para.2). Denzin and Lincoln (2000), as cited by Wagner (2004), claim that qualitative research involves an *interpretive and naturalistic* approach: “This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Anderson and Asernault (2001) define qualitative research as “a form of inquiry that explores phenomena in their natural settings and uses multi-methods to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning to them” (p. 119). The three scholars here are talking about the studying of a subject in a natural phenomenon, meaning the research will

simply have to try and understand the subject, the way it is. This is exactly what the researcher has done in this research.

Desktop research involves the assessing of information from various published sources. According to the Education and Training Unit (n.d):

Desktop research refers to seeking facts, general information on a topic, historical background, study results, etc., that have been published or exist in public documents. This information can be obtained from libraries, newspaper archives, government, university, websites, NGOs and CBOs etc (para. 6).

This kind of study relies on secondary sources of information and it is also known as secondary research. The desktop research is the appropriate method to use in this study because during this study, the researcher had to read and analyse various sources which are already available or published. In this study, the researcher took materials, which are already available, and studied them, and it is from those available sources that the conclusions were drawn. This means that the researcher did not need to conduct interviews or use questionnaires because they were not applicable to this study, as the focus was only on the materials and information which already exist.

The two plays analysed in this research were selected using purposive sampling procedure from all the plays with supernatural elements that William Shakespeare has written. Babbie (2001) describes purposive sampling as the one that is selected

based on the knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study. The researcher chose this sampling method because of the nature of the study. This means that the researcher chose the plays by looking at some specific aspects of the plays such as the content and characters as well as the supernatural elements that they have in common. The features of the plays that the researcher considered are such as visions, omens, ghosts and all the supernatural features that can be found in the two plays.

### **3.3 Procedure**

Two plays from the work of William Shakespeare were selected based on the elements they have in common and were analysed in this study. An in-depth reading and critical analysis of the two plays was done by critically analysing all the texts or passages that have supernatural elements in them. The conclusions were drawn depending on the analysis made as well as other resources which were consulted. The data from the two plays were categorised or coded into various themes such as dreams, warnings, weather, animals and some other themes that appeared in the two plays. After that, they were summarised in order to bring meaning to the texts.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The data that were collected from the reading of the two plays were analysed using the content analysis method. Content analysis has been defined as, "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1996, as cited by Stemler (2001, p. 3)). The two

plays were analysed in such a way that the texts were identified with reference to superstition and all supernatural elements and features.. The researcher chose the content analysis method based on the fact that she had to make inferences or infer by reading the two plays and analysing the different words, phrases, sentences, and so forth, with reference to superstition, in order to come to a conclusion.

### **3.5 Research ethics**

Due to the fact that this research was only based on information that has been written or the work which has been done by others already, the researcher has acknowledged all the works and resources that were used in this study.

### **3.6 Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the research methodology of this study, explain the sample selection, describe the procedure used in collecting the data, and provide an explanation of the procedures used to analyse the data that were collected during the study. It also looked at the ethical considerations of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analyses and discussion of the data collected from the two plays, with the purpose of illustrating the use of the supernatural phenomenon by William Shakespeare. Since the focus of the study was on the use of superstition in the two plays, the analyses only consist of the texts or passages with supernatural elements or features. The plays were first analysed individually but discussed together.

#### 4.2 Analysis of the data

The analysis of the two plays focused on the supernatural events and visions. The supernatural powers and elements are used by superstitious characters to think and act in various ways.

##### 4.2.1 Supernatural elements and visions in *Macbeth*

*Macbeth* is one of the plays that are full of visions and supernatural elements that William Shakespeare has written. The various elements and visions used are analysed in this chapter text by text. All the texts, which have been used in this analysis, have been taken from Shakespeare (2009). The elements are such as: Witches' prophecies, thunderstorms, atmospheric conditions, ghost of Banquo,

animals and the bell. The researcher further looked at sleep walking and sleep talking, bloody hands, the Witches' potion and apparitions.

#### **4.2.1.1 Witches' prophecies**

Superstition in *Macbeth* starts with the names of the characters. In this play, we have three Witches. The Witches by themselves have supernatural powers.

Marsh and Michael (1997) mention thus "the word 'Witch' comes from Anglo-Saxon word 'wicca' meaning wise one and originally a Witch was either a man or a woman who supposedly had supernatural power"(p. 139). Although the latter definition mentions that a Witch can be a man as well, Shakespeare's Witches in *Macbeth* are all women which portrays that in Shakespeare's time supernatural power was mostly associated with women and not both men and women. The characterisation of Witches as women can also be an indication of how evil and wicked women are, as portrayed in the play.

Furthermore, King James, in his study, as cited by Albright (2005), defines superstition as follows: "Curiositie in great ingines: thirst of revenge, for some tortes deeply apprehended: or greedie appetite of geare, caused through great pouerty" (p. 224). King James was interested in superstition, and wanted to learn more about Witches, therefore he carried out a study in demonologie. From King James' definition, one will be able to conclude that curiosity drives the Witches to do evil things. The definition also tells us that, at times, the Witches also do evil things to



revenge either directly or indirectly on the affected person. At the beginning of the play, we are told that the Witches have failed on some activities that they were doing, for instance in Act I, Scene III, lines 2-9, the first Witch indicates that

A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap,  
 And munched, and munched, and  
 munched. "Give me,"  
 quoth I.  
 "Aroint thee, Witch!" the rump-fed runnion cries.  
 Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o'th' *Tiger*;  
 But in a sieve I'll thither sail,  
 And like a rat without a tail,  
 I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do

The Witches were at the sea, where they were planning to do some evil deeds but they failed. The Witch mentions that she asked the sailor's wife to give her chestnuts but the wife did not instead, she chased the Witch away. The other thing that one might say that has angered the Witch was that the sailor had moved away from the place where the Witches usually found him, and she was now indicating that she would follow him to Aleppo and change herself into a rat to do things to him. One may conclude that, since they were angered by humans as their plans had not worked as they wanted, they had decided to revenge on Macbeth to make a human being suffer as well.

Albright (2005) further continues by indicating that:

Witches, then, are commonplace impoverished old women so greedy and vengeful that they make a bargain with Satan to get what they want. Shakespeare's Witches, however, seem poised between two constructions: either they are disgusting old women with a taste for malice (as King James presents all Witches); or they are evil incarnate, multiple Satans in drag - Macbeth is disturbed to see that they have beards (1.3.46) (p. 225).

Witches are believed to change the natural order of things. They can turn good things into bad things like when they changed Macbeth into a bad person of which he was not at first. The statement made by the Witches in Act I, Scene I, line 12, “fair is foul and foul is fair” gives an indication of what the Witches really liked, because they are indicating that the good deeds are foul (bad) to them and the foul things are beautiful (good) to them. They also plan to meet Macbeth right at the beginning.

In Act I, Scene III, lines 13-25 indicate what types of things the Witches are capable of doing as well as the evil things that they enjoy doing. In this case, the first Witch is indicating that:

I myself have all the other,  
 And the very ports they blow,  
 All the quarters that they know  
 I' the shipman's card.  
 I will drain him dry as hay:  
 Sleep shall neither night nor day

Hang upon his pent-house lid;  
He shall live a man forbid:  
Weary se'nnights nine times nine  
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine:  
Though his bark cannot be lost,  
Yet it shall be tempest-tost.  
Look what I have.

The first Witch is describing how she is capable of making the sailor's life miserable and how she is already in control of many things. She indicates this, "I will drain him dry as hay", which makes one question what kind of power they have that enables them to drain life out of a person because we believe that, it is only God who has the power to take a person's life. This is an indication that the Witches have supernatural and extra ordinary powers. Furthermore, the Witch also indicates that the sailor will not catch a wink of sleep and she can make his journey miserable.

In addition to that, Shakespeare also uses three as a magic number. In this play, Shakespeare deliberately uses the number three to show how supernatural the whole atmosphere of the play is. There are three Witches, who appeared to Macbeth three times. The apparitions in the play are also three. To add to that, there are also three people who are killed in the play, King Duncan, Banquo and Macbeth. Perhaps Shakespeare wants the audience to notice how powerful and supernatural the number three is and also to show how evil the Witches are as well make the theme of superstition clear.

The Witches decide to meet Macbeth and tell him the prophecies of what is going to happen to him in the future. When they meet him, they have decided to call him by his three titles. Firstly, by the one that he already has (Thane of Glamis). The second and third ones (Thane of Cawdor and future king) are yet to come (Act I, Scene III, lines 47-49). One wonders what kind of knowledge they have and where they get it from, for them to be able to foretell what will happen in the future. Here is how they address him:

FIRST WITCH: All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!

SECOND WITCH: All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!

THIRD WITCH: All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter (Act I, Scene III, lines 46 -49).

The Weird sisters have also prophesied that Banquo's children shall be kings in the future. They address him by indicating that:

FIRST WITCH: Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

SECOND WITCH: Not so happy, yet much happier.

THIRD WITCH: Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none:

So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo (Act I, Scene III, lines 60-64).

The two friends Macbeth and Banquo want to believe what the Witches are saying so they have insisted that the Weird sisters explain more what they mean by that.

Banquo asks the Witches:

I' th' name of truth,  
 Are ye fantastical, or that indeed  
 Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner  
 You greet with present grace and great prediction  
 Of noble having and of royal hope  
 That he seems rapt withal. To me you speak not.  
 If you can look into the seeds of time  
 And say which grain will grow and which will not,  
 Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear  
 Your favours nor your hate (Act I, Scene III, lines 50 -59). .

The Witches respond to the request by indicating that “lesser than Macbeth, and greater” (first Witch), “not so happy, yet much happier” (second Witch), and the third Witch indicate these: “thou shalt get kings, though thou be none. So all hail Macbeth and Banquo”. These Witches’ prophecies and explanations are found in Act I, Scene III, lines 62-66. These prophecies are examples of supernatural behaviour because no one besides God has the power to know what the future will be or predict the future. If one has the power to do that then it means he/she has some unnatural power. When one looks at what the Witches say, you will be able to tell that that they do not say their prophecies directly but say them in such a way that one will think about it in detail in order to figure out what they mean.

Part of the Witches' prophecies become true when Ross informs Macbeth that:

And, for an earnest of a greater honour,  
 He bade me, from him, call thee Thane of Cawdor:  
 In which addition, hail, most worthy thane!  
 For it is thine (Act I, Scene III, lines 101 – 105).

This event has forced Macbeth to believe in what the Witches have told him because he finally gets his throne as Thane of Cawdor as the Witches had told him earlier. He even starts questioning himself, "what, can the devil speak true?" Macbeth has fallen victim to the Witches and he is most likely to do anything in his power to make sure that everything that the Witches have told him becomes true. Although at first he could not believe why he has to be given that title while the Thane of Cawdor is still alive, he is later told that the Thane will be killed for betraying King Duncan. In Act I, Scene III, lines 115 - 116 Macbeth further talks to himself and he is indicating that "Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor! the greatest is behind." After that, he tells Banquo that the best part of what they have predicted is still to come.

Banquo has realised that his friend is slowly becoming a victim of the Witches and has therefore tried to convince him about how dangerous it is to believe the Witches' predictions. He does so by saying:

That trusted home  
 Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,  
 Besides the thane of Cawdor. 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 (Act I, Scene III, lines 119 – 125).

Banquo could sense that the way the events are happening and the way the Witches' predictions are becoming true is not something natural or something planned by God but it is something which is being catalysed or being caused by the Witches. This is the reason why he refers to the Witches as the 'agents of evil'. He further explains that they only tell part of the truth which later leads them to destruction. This is exactly what has happened so far because when they met Banquo and Macbeth, they made some statements which were not clear and then all of a sudden they vanished into thin air. One may also begin to wonder as to how Banquo knows all these because this is exactly what happens in the future when his friend becomes ambitious after believing the Witches' predictions. He further adds "... to betray's in deepest consequences" (Act I, Scene III, line 12). This is a warning to Macbeth that he must be careful because the evil's agents will not be there when he is going to suffer the consequences of following their evil predictions.

Banquo's warning has left Macbeth in a dilemma where he is forced to think about the two sides involved. He however knows that the Witches' predictions are not natural elements and that is why he is referring to them as "supernatural soliciting". Although Macbeth has been warned by Banquo not to follow them, he still believes that the opposite of what Banquo has said might be true. In Act I, Scene III, lines 127-141 Macbeth tells himself that:

Two truths are told,

As happy prologues to the swelling Act  
 Of the imperial theme.--I thank you, gentlemen.  
 Cannot be ill, cannot be good: if ill,  
 Why hath it given me earnest of success,  
 Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:  
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
 Against the use of nature? Present fears  
 Are less than horrible imaginings:  
 My thought, whose murder 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.

The Witches cannot lead him into actions that might have a lot of consequences because he is already crowned Thane of Cawdor as the Witches promised, which is something good. However, he still does not understand why he thinks of killing King Duncan which obviously, is evil. Killing a king is evil because no one has the right to take away someone's life. He is also indicating that he gets unusual feelings when he thinks of committing something like that. He however convinced himself that he will not kill the king anymore. He does that by telling himself a very strong statement, "if chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me without my stir" (Act I, Scene III, line 143).



The letter that Macbeth writes to his wife makes things turn around. It makes Macbeth's wife (Lady Macbeth) plant strong ambitious thoughts of killing king Duncan and getting the kingly crown onto Macbeth's head. This means that Lady Macbeth further supports the Witches and also contributes to her husband committing the murder. Lady Macbeth, upon receiving the message that the king will be coming to their house, starts thinking of the following (Act I, Scene V, lines 37-53):

The raven himself is hoarse  
 That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
 Under my battlements. Come, you spirits  
 That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
 And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
 Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;  
 Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
 That no compunctious visitings of nature  
 Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
 The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,  
 And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,  
 Wherever in your sightless substances  
 You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,  
 And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,

That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,  
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

Lady Macbeth here is asking the evil spirit to come and perform miracles. This also shows how evil she is and is therefore asking the evil spirit that she believes in to come and help her. She also talks of the “smoke of hell,” comparing the night in which he is going to commit the murder to the smoke of hell, showing how dangerous her idea of murder is. Hell is associated with pain, suffering, burning and terrifying life, which is exactly what happens to Duncan on the fateful night of the murder.

Macbeth’s bloody hands do not stop doing the evil deeds with Duncan, but still continues to kill more people. The more he kills the more miserable his life gets but he is forced to do that to secure his crown or his kingship. Macbeth orders that Banquo and his son Fleance be killed. He wants both of them to be murdered because he is scared [-of the Witches’ predictions that Banquo’s children will be kings. Unfortunately for Macbeth, Fleance escapes and it is only Banquo who gets stabbed and dies.

Lady Macbeth is very superstitious also because she even prays to evil spirits to come help her when she murders King Duncan and also to come and cover the world with darkness (that she refers to as “dunest smoke of hell”). The darkness will cover the world so that the knife will not see the wound it is going to cut open since it might even affect her emotions. She further indicates that she does not want God to see what is happening or what she is going to do that is why she says that she does

not want heaven to peep through the darkness. The darkness she is demanding is also associated with evil because in most cases, all the evil deeds happen during the night. For instance, Witches are believed to fly on brooms at night, so are owls that are active at night and are also associated with superstition.

#### **4.2.1.2 Thunderstorms**

In Act I, Scene I, the play opens with thunder and lightning and then the three Witches (also called the Weird sisters) enter. This kind of opening already gives us a picture of what kind of atmosphere to expect in this play. For instance thunder and lightning, are often associated with evil or bad things. This is because whenever they appear, bad things are about to happen. Furthermore, when it rains and thunder and lightning appear, chances are that something has been struck by lightning which may result in severe damage if not death. On top of that, everytime the Witches appear in the play, thunder and lightning are observed first and then the Witches later. This is yet another indication that the Witches have supernatural powers.

#### **4.2.1.3 Atmospheric conditions**

The killing of Duncan has been felt all over the place. Some strange things happen on the fateful night of the murder, leaving the citizens to wonder as to what exactly is going on. One of those unusual events is the change in the atmosphere whereby the events are described by Lennox in Act II, Scene III, lines 49-56:

The night has been unruly: where we lay,  
 Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,  
 Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,  
 And prophesying with accents terrible  
 Of dire combustion and confused events  
 New hatch'd to the woeful time: the obscure bird  
 Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth  
 Was feverous and did shake

These terrible events are signs that some bad things are happening during that night and Rome is facing a terrible future. Like Lennox has indicated, they have experienced strong winds and grief cries in the air and the most powerful one is the one of terrible catastrophes that will come in the near future. The death of King Duncan marks the beginning of a new life for the people in Rome. That is the reason why when King Duncan is being murdered, strange voices predicting the catastrophes are heard. In other words, not only Macbeth and his wife are shown images of how their future is most likely to be, but also the people of Rome see visions telling them what they are to expect in the future.

In addition to the visions that Lennox explains earlier, Ross and the Old Man also give more examples of strange events that make them worried. In their conversation with the Old Man, in Act II, Scene IV, lines 4-20, he says:

ROSS:

Ah, good father,  
 Thou seest, the heavens, as troubled with man's Act,

Threaten his bloody stage: by the clock, 'tis day,  
 And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp:  
 Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame,  
 That darkness does the face of earth entomb,  
 When living light should kiss it?

When one looks at the above events being described by Ross and the Old Man, they are all visions that the people of Rome see on the fateful night of the murder and as well as some few days before the murdering of the king. One very strange vision is that of the darkness during the day. Ross indicates, “by the clock, 'tis day, and yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp”, darkness during the day might also be a vision of the dark future that they are facing as Romans and on the other hand it might also be a reflection of the dark and evil event that has recently happened.

#### **4.2.1.4 Dagger**

Before Macbeth commits the murder, he sees a vision of a dagger, which looks exactly the same as the one that he is going to use to kill King Duncan. At first the dagger appears without blood and it leads him to the room where King Duncan is. Macbeth here indicates, “Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?” “Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going; and such an instrument I was to use” (Act II, Scene I, lines 41- 42). As he moves towards King Duncan's room, he then starts to see blood splotches on the dagger's blade and handle, which were not there before, which is an indication that Macbeth is close to committing the

evil deed, to kill the king. All the things that Macbeth keeps on talking about while on his way to King Duncan's room are evil. For instance, in Act II, Scene I, lines 50-56:

Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse  
 The curtain'd sleep; Witchcraft celebrates  
 Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,  
 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

Crowther (2005, p. 20), translates the above quote:

Now half the world is asleep and being deceived by  
 evil nightmares. Witches are offering sacrifices to  
 their goddess Hecate. Old man murder, having  
 been roused by the howls of his wolf, walks silently  
 to his destination, moving like Tarquin, as quiet as a  
 ghost.

The words Macbeth uses here go along with what he intends to do and what is observed right after the murder of King Duncan. Some of the words that he uses here are "evil nightmare", "Witches offering sacrifices to Hecate" (whom they regard as their superior or their chief), and "ghost". When one looks at the words that Macbeth uses, it is clear that he knows that what he is doing is evil but he acts like someone who has no other choice but to do it. For example, the 'Witches' sacrifice' that he

speaks about, could be the same as the one that he is doing. This is because when sacrifices are done, people or whoever is doing the sacrifice usually puts up something very valuable to be sacrificed. In this case, Macbeth was sacrificing the life of a very valuable person in the society, the king, for his own happiness hoping that the Witches' prophecy will become true. In other words, one may say that Macbeth sacrificed King Duncan to the evil spirit.

On the other hand, one may also say that the bloody dagger is a vision that serves as a warning to Macbeth, showing him how evil his idea is and how it might affect him in the end. The researcher may say that the dagger is at least supposed to make him change his mind.

#### **4.2.1.5 Ghost of Banquo**

After Banquo has been killed, Macbeth starts seeing Banquo's ghost on several occasions and it almost exposes his evil deeds to the rest of the people because every time the ghost appears to Macbeth, he goes insane and starts saying things out loud. In Act III, Scene IV, when the ghost appears to Macbeth, this is what he says to the people gathering at this house:

Blood hath been shed ere now, i' the olden time,  
Ere human statute purged the gentle weal;  
Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd  
Too terrible for the ear: the times have been,  
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,

And there an end; but now they rise again,  
 With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,  
 And push us from our stools: this is more strange  
 Than such a murder is.

The things that he is talking about above are those that he did to Banquo, for example, when he says "... twenty mortal murders on their crowns", this is the exact number of wounds that Banquo has in his head after being stabbed by the murderers sent by Macbeth.

When the ghost appears to Macbeth, he tries saying things to scare it away. For instance, in Act III, Scene IV, lines 93-96, Macbeth tells the ghost,

Avaunt! and quit my sight! let the earth hide thee!  
 Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;  
 Thou hast no speculation in those eyes  
 Which thou dost glare with!

This shows that Macbeth knows that what he is seeing is simply a ghost and he is, therefore asking it to go back to the grave because it is not a real person and it even has no marrow in the bones like real humans do. A ghost is an evil spirit of a dead person, so he knows that there is no way that what he is seeing can be Banquo because he is assured by the murderers that Banquo is dead, and he has even seen how bloody their bodies are when they come back.

Although the ghost of Banquo has appeared to Macbeth more than once, and it appears at the gathering where there are some other people, he is the only one who



can see the ghost. In Act III, Scene III line 47, Ross asks Macbeth to sit down but Macbeth responds by indicating thus: “[t]he table’s full” (line 49). After Macbeth indicates that the table is full, Lennox tells him “here is a place reserved, sir” (line 50). This conversation indicates that Macbeth is the only one who can see the ghost. Although Macbeth has indicated that the table is full, others can still see that empty seat for Macbeth, meaning that, in actual sense, the table was not full; it is only that the seat reserved for him has been taken by the ghost of Banquo, which other people cannot see. Regardless of the fact that Macbeth asks the ghost several questions and expects it to respond, the ghost does not say anything to him, but it simply keeps on looking at him until it vanishes. This has makes it difficult for Macbeth because he probably expects to have a conversation with it, so that they may solve their problems perhaps.

#### **4.2.1.6 The animals and the bell**

Before Macbeth murders King Duncan, strange things are observed for instance, the bell rings. It is very unusual because someone has to ring the bell, but for it to ring on its own is not normal. The ringing of the bell might also be a sign of supernatural powers that are motivating Macbeth to kill right away, while for the Romans, it might be an indication that their king has died. Lady Macbeth also says “I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry” (line 15).

Owls are associated with bad luck and the continuous hooting of an owl near a house foretells death or very bad news. When it comes to a cricket, the opposite of an owl is true. Crickets are associated with good luck, meaning if it cries in that house or

close to a house, then it is an indication that something good might happen in that house or there will be good news. In this case, the owl is a representation of King Duncan's death when he is murdered while the cricket represents the crowning of Macbeth as a king after killing King Duncan.

The conversation between the Old Man and Ross in Act II, Scene IV, lines 1-19) , describes some of the unusual events that they have observed, of which animals are not exceptions. This is how their conversation goes:

OLD MAN:

'Tis unnatural,  
Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last,

A falcon, towering in her pride of place,  
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd.

ROSS:

And Duncan's horses--a thing most strange and certain--  
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,  
Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,  
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would make  
War with mankind.

OLD MAN:

'Tis said they eat each other.

Another event which is being described and is regarded as a vision to the Romans is that of a falcon being caught and killed by an ordinary owl. This is another strange

event because actually the opposite is supposed to happen. Ordinary owls do not feed on bigger/larger birds but they feed on mice, fish and snails while the falcons are the ones that feed on ordinary owls. Such an incident leaves the people of Rome wondering what is happening. In this case, the falcon represents the king, while an owl represents Macbeth since the King is more powerful than Macbeth who ends up killing the King. The last strange incident that Ross and the Old Man discuss is that of the horses turning wild and even eating each other. The horses are described as beautiful and best friends of their breed therefore, the two find it very strange for the horses to turn against each other. It is a warning or a vision showing how the people of Rome are going to turn against each other and also fight each other at the same time. The horses are also symbolising the fight between the two kings, the real King Duncan and Macbeth, who will be a king after the death of King Duncan.

#### **4.2.1.7 Sleep walk and sleep talk**

What the servants do while asleep is another supernatural event that happens in the play. One of the servants laughs while asleep and other one cried “murder!” (line 25). All these happen while they are sleeping and Macbeth is murdering King Duncan. To make matters worse, one of the servants mentions the word murder, which is exactly what was happening at that time, as if they could sense what was happening. To add to that, Macbeth has even narrated that while he was busy stabbing the king with a dagger, one cried “‘God bless us!’ and ‘Amen’ the other; As they had seen me with these hangman's hands” (Act II, Scene II, lines 29 to 31).

Macbeth's guilt keeps haunting him, and as a result he even starts imagining or hearing things that do not exist at all. For instance, he tells Lady Macbeth that he hears some voices (Act II, Scene II, lines 44- 46):

Still it cried 'Sleep no more!' to all the house:

'Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor

Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more.

What Macbeth is saying did not happen at all, it could be an illusion that is reflecting on what is going to happen in the future.

After Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have done their evil deeds, their actions keep haunting them, to an extent that Lady Macbeth cannot keep their secret anymore as she keeps saying things out loud unconsciously while sleeping and walking at the same time. For instance, in Act V, Scene I, lines 31-36, Lady Macbeth says:

Out, damned spot! Out, I say!—One, two. Why, then, 'tis  
time to do 't. Hell is murky!—Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier,  
and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none  
can call our power to account?—Yet who would have  
thought the old man to have had so much blood in him

She also adds:

The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?—What,  
will these hands ne'er be clean?—No more o' that, my  
lord, no more o' that. You mar all with this starting.

Wash your hands. Put on your nightgown. Look not so pale.—I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out on 's grave (Act V, Scene I, lines 38-40 and 54- 56).

When one looks at Lady Macbeth's words and the things she was saying, it is clear that those are the things she has done with her husband Macbeth. For example, the spots that she is referring to are the spots of blood of the people they have killed. She also talks about what she said to Macbeth when Macbeth wanted to abandon the idea of killing King Duncan when she said that 'what need we fear?' She also regrets having killed Macduff's wife that is why she said that the Thane of Fife had a wife but they killed her. She is also wondering if her hands will ever be clean after killing so many people. The last thing that Lady Macbeth narrates is exactly what she said to Macbeth after killing King Duncan, which was 'wash your hands. Put on your nightgown' (Act II, Scene II, line 59). This is yet evidence that the blood that she sees on her hands is really haunting her. That is why she says things other people are not supposed to hear. Lady Macbeth keeps on walking and talking until she finally dies. One may also say that Lady Macbeth could see that she was about to die and that she would go to hell. That is why she says that 'hell is murky' and she is not happy with the fact that she was going to go to such a murky place.

#### **4.2.1.8 Bloody hands**

Macbeth's miserable life, a life that one would compare with a living hell all starts after he kills the king. His evil deeds start haunting him right after the murder to an

extent that he could not believe that the hands that did the killing are his own hands.

In Act II, Scene II, lines 62-66, Macbeth asks:

“What hands are here? ha! they pluck out mine eyes.

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will

The multitudinous seas in incarnadine,

Making the green one red.”

The bloody hands here are not referring to too much blood that is on Macbeth's hands but to the blood that he is seeing on his hands. It is a vision of a bloody life that Macbeth is going to live since he will keep on killing people so that he sustains or maintains his happiness. He is even indicating that he does not think there is anything that will wash his hands clean, not even the great Neptune, instead, it will be his hands to stain the water into red. Neptune Ocean that Macbeth talks about symbolises life, because oceans are full of water and water is associated with life. Therefore, one may conclude that Macbeth is thinking that not even ocean water will be able to clean the blood on his hands and enable him to have a life that is free of guilt, pain and suffering. This means that there is nothing that he can do to avoid killing people because there is no way he can run away from his fate which has been determined already.

He also indicates that the bloody hands are plucking out his eyes, which is another vision that he is seeing. When a person is blind, he or she will not be able to see any light, so they remain in the dark until they die if their visionary eyes are not restored.

#### **4.2.1.9 The Witches' potion**

Before the Witches show Macbeth the three apparitions, they first prepare the potion in a cauldron. This potion is made up of various ingredients that make the researcher wonder why the Witches use such ingredients.

The ingredients that they use are in Act IV, Scene I, where the Witches are dancing and singing (chanting) while preparing it. Some of the ingredients used are 'fur from a bat', 'toe of frog', 'a lizard's leg', 'an owl's wing', 'finger of birth-strangled babe ditch-delivered by a drab', 'liver of blaspheming Jew', 'blood of a baboon'.

Looking at these ingredients, one can tell that they are either taken from animals or things that are associated with evil or they have been taken away from their source in an evil way. For example, frogs, bats and owls are all associated with evil. Meaning that, wherever they appear, people will be wondering as to what ill thing will happen next after their appearance. All in all, one should not expect a positive outcome from something that has been prepared with such ingredients. The preparation of the potion has been brought in to demonstrate how bad, wicked, evil and dramatic the Witches can be. This potion has also an effect on the play because one may say that it is because of the way it is prepared that the apparitions appeared.

#### **4.2.1.10 Apparitions**

Macbeth realises that it is difficult for him to get out of the situation that he finds himself in, therefore he is indicating thus "...I am in blood Stepp'd in so far that,

should I wade no more, Returning were as tedious as go o'er" (Act III, Scene 4, lines 136-138). Macbeth indicates that he has stepped into the bloody life whereby he will only survive on blood either by killing people or doing some other evil deeds. He then decides to go back to the Witches to ask them what part of his fate or his fateful life still remains. Upon questioning the Witches, he is shown three apparitions, which at the same time are visions of what to expect in the future. The apparitions are the main visions in the play and they are the ones that really give him a clear picture of his future. The three apparitions appear as follows:

The first apparition is an armed head and says the following to Macbeth: "Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! Beware Macduff; Beware the Thane of Fife. Dismiss me. Enough" (Act IV, Scene I, lines 71 - 72).

The second apparition appears as a bloody child, and tells Macbeth that "Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn the power of man, for none of woman born shall harm Macbeth" (Act IV, Scene I, lines 78-80).

The third and last apparition appears as a child crowned with a tree in his hand and tells Macbeth the following:

Be lion-mettled, proud; and take no care

Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are:

Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until

Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill

Shall come against him" (Act IV, Scene I, lines 89-93).



After Macbeth is shown the three apparitions, he is presented with a show of eight kings followed by the ghost of Banquo. The eight kings represent Banquo's heirs, as Banquo is told by the Weird sisters at the beginning of the play. The apparitions and the ghost are intended to show Macbeth what to expect in the future. Macbeth is shown that one of the things that he is going to see in the future is an army that is going to fight him.

The three apparitions plus the eight kings all represent or symbolise various things. For instance, the first apparition represents Macduff. In the end, Macduff organised an army that fights against Macbeth, meaning that the head represents an army that defeats Macbeth in the end. The second apparition is more on the positive to Macbeth because it motivates him to be happy and live freely because he is told that no one born by a woman shall harm him. This was very good news to Macbeth because he knows that all people are born by a woman. He, however, does not know that Macduff is not born through the normal process but is born through the Caesarean process. He is further told to laugh at the power of other men because he is superior. The last apparition even gives Macbeth more courage because it tells him that he shall never be defeated until Birnam Wood marches to fight him at Dunsinane Hill. The last apparition leaves Macbeth very happy and therefore in Act IV, Scene I, lines 93-98 Macbeth is telling the Witches:

That will never be.

Who can impress the forest, bid the tree

Unfix his earthbound root? Sweet bodements! Good!

Rebellious dead, rise never till the wood

Of Birnam rise, and our high-placed Macbeth

Shall live the lease of nature, pay his breath

What Macbeth says here is an indication that he is really convinced that nothing will happen to him because there is no way a forest will move from one place to another. However, this is exactly what happens in the end when his days start getting sour. Before the fight between Macbeth's army and Macduff's army start, the first thing that Macbeth sees is the forest moving towards Dunsinane. Although Macbeth thought it was not possible, the forest finally moves when the army cut down the trees to cover themselves so that they will not be seen by enemies from far or to disguise the enemy. Furthermore, the Dunsinane hill that the apparition spoke about is at exactly the same spot where the fight starts.

The last vision that Macbeth is shown is of the eight kings that represent Banquo's children who will be kings in the future. The kings also have a mirror which one may say shows Macbeth a reflection of the future. The reason why the researcher is convinced that the apparitions and the show of eight kings are visions is because all the things that Macbeth is shown came true in the end. Before Macbeth's death, he finally gets to learn that Macduff is cut out of the mother's womb before she could bear him naturally because Macduff tells him before he kills him. After learning that from Macduff, he finally realises that his life has come to an end and since he knows there is nothing he can do, this is all he says:

Accursèd be that tongue that tells me so,

For it hath cowed my better part of man!

And be these juggling fiends no more believed,

That palter with us in a double sense,  
 That keep the word of promise to our ear,  
 And break it to our hope. I'll not fight with thee.

Having looked at Macbeth's words, it is clear that Macbeth regrets believing the Witches' prophecies and predictions. That is why he is indicating that they raised his hopes and yet they betrayed him because things did not go as he planned. One may even say that the specific things that Macbeth refers to are the apparitions: after the Witches show him those apparitions, he is totally convinced that he is on the safe side and nothing will happen to him. As Crawford (1924, p.383) explained, the apparitions pose a threat to Macbeth's life because the armed child that appears as one of the apparitions is the one that kills him. As the researcher has indicated, the apparitions all come true at the end. The threat that Crawford discusses is the one of Macbeth's life being taken away.

#### **4.2.2 Supernatural elements or events and visions in *Julius Caesar***

William Shakespeare uses various visions and supernatural elements in this play. The researcher has analysed all the text events that have supernatural elements in them. The elements looked at are: Soothsayer's warning to Caesar, atmospheric conditions, Artemidorus' letter and Caesar's ghost. The researcher also looked at, thunder storms and lightning, animals, Casca's observations and Calpurnia's dream. The researcher also looked at the occasions or events where the main characters either ignored or followed the supernatural warnings. All the quotes in this analysis are taken from Gill, Cantab and Oxon (2010).

#### **4.2.2.1 Soothsayer's warning to Caesar**

In Act I, Scene II, line 18, (at a public place), a Soothsayer warned Caesar to “beware the Ides of March”. According Gill (n.d.), “the Ides of March was a date on the Roman calendar (Idus Martias) corresponding with our date of March 15. It was a fateful date” (para.1).

Gill further describes this day as follows:

A more well-known occurrence on the Ides of March, in 44 B.C., Julius Caesar was assassinated, at the foot of a statue of Pompey where the Senate was meeting. Before Caesar went to the theatre of Pompey to attend the Senate meeting, he had been given advice not to go, but he didn't listen (para.3).

Although the Soothsayer is trying to warn Caesar about this fateful day ahead of him and not to go to the senate, Caesar ignores the Soothsayer. He ignores the Soothsayer's warnings when he says: “he is a dreamer, let us leave him pass” (Act I, Scene II, line 24). Had Caesar listened and believed what the Soothsayer was saying, he probably could not have been assassinated by the senators.

The Soothsayer further warns Caesar of the Ides of March right before Caesar's death by responding to Caesar when Caesar first says “the Ides of March are come,” the Soothsayer responds by saying that “ay Caesar, but not gone.” (Act III, Scene 1, lines I - 2). The Soothsayer's words are a warning to Caesar not to be too comfortable because the worst is still ahead of him. That is the reason why the Soothsayer is indicating that the Ides of March have not left.

#### 4.2.2.2 Atmospheric conditions

In Act I, Scene III lines 128-130, Cassius describes the night as a “fearful night.” This shows that he is also worried by what is happening in Rome, especially the strange things that happen the night before the murder. He further describes the situation or the condition by saying:

There is no stir or walking in the streets,  
And the complexion of the element  
In favor's like the work we have in hand,  
Most bloody, fiery, and most terrible.

When one looks at the way Cassius is describing the situation, it is clear that those events or omens are supernatural. According to the way Cassius is describing the condition, he is saying that the condition of the sky is very strange and unusual, which he continues to describe saying that it looks like the work they have ahead of them is bloody and full of fire. The condition of the sky is regarded as supernatural because the omens foretell that something terrible is about to happen, which usually does not happen like that. All the events, especially the atmosphere of the sky, also get Caesar worried if everything is well. This is found in Act II, Scene II, lines 1-3 where he says, “Nor heaven nor earth have been at peace to-night: Thrice hath Calpurnia in her sleep cried out, 'Help, ho! they murder Caesar!' Who's within?”

#### 4.2.2.3 Artemidorus' letter

Artemidorus also adds to the people or things that are trying to warn Caesar to avoid his murder if it was possible. When Caesar is on his way out, in a street near the Capitol, Artemidorus enters reading a letter which says:

Caesar, beware of Brutus; take heed of Cassius;  
 come not near Casca; have an eye to Cinna, trust not  
 Trebonius: mark well Metellus Cimber: Decius Brutus  
 loves thee not: thou hast wronged Caius Ligarius.  
 There is but one mind in all these men, and it is  
 bent against Caesar. If thou beest not immortal,  
 look about you: security gives way to conspiracy.  
 The mighty gods defend thee! Thy lover,  
 'ARTEMIDORUS' (Act II, Scene III, lines 1-10).

In this letter, Artemidorus is trying to warn Caesar to watch out for all the conspirators and those are the people who are planning to kill him or chose to assassinate him. Artemidorus steps up to Caesar with the letter and tells him that “hail, Caesar! Read this schedule.” He feels that this is a very good opportunity for him to warn Caesar right away before he proceeds to the place where he is going to be assassinated. Upon Artemodorus giving the letter, Decius tries to disturb Caesar not to read the letter by giving him another one and also tells him to read the letter when he has time. He does this because he knows that Artemidorus wants to warn Caesar, which will obviously affect their plan to kill him. Decius in the end persuades him not to read it at all. However, Artemidorus requests Caesar to read his

first by saying, “O Caesar, read mine first; for mine's a suit, That touches Caesar nearer: read it, great Caesar” (Act III, Scene I, lines 6 and 7).

He thought if he indicates that the content of the letter is closer to Caesar then he will probably be convinced and read it right away. Caesar this time ignores the warning that comes in the form of a letter by saying “what touches us ourself shall be lastserv'd”. Caesar says this because he thinks private matters should be dealt with later while urgent matters that affect Rome should be dealt with first. He even asks if Artemidorus is mad after he kept on insisting that Caesar reads the letter urgently. After Caesar ignores all the warnings that he gets from different people and in different forms, he is finally assassinated by the conspirators who stab him with daggers. On the other hand, one can also say that Caesar is superstitious or can tell that something bad is about to happen because before he gets assassinated, he says that “the Ides of March are come” (Act III, Scene I, line 1), which indicates that he could somehow tell or sense that he is about to be assassinated. This is an indication that the end of his life is moving closer.

#### **4.2.2.4 Caesar's ghost**

Caesar's ignorance leads to his assassination. Although Caesar has been assassinated, the unusual, supernatural elements do not stop. One of the supernatural events after Caesar's death is the ghost of Caesar. When the ghost of Caesar enters Brutus's tent, Brutus can sense that something strange or that has supernatural power has entered because in Act IV, Scene III, lines 275-281, Brutus talks to himself and then he tries to talk to the ghost by saying:

How ill this taper burns! Ha! who comes here?

I think it is the weakness of mine eyes

That shapes this monstrous apparition.

It comes upon me. Art thou any thing?

Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil,

That makest my blood cold and my hair to stare?

Speak to me what thou art.

The first three lines indicate that Brutus is talking to himself by describing what is happening, for instance, how the candle burns and also how the spirit is weakening his eyes, while in the last four lines, he is talking to the ghost and demanding for some answers from it. The ghost responds by indicating that it is Brutus's evil spirit and has come to tell him that they will meet at Philippi. A ghost is associated with superstition because it is believed that the spirit in the ghosts is evil and it usually happens when a person who has supernatural power dies. When ghosts appear, the person who is being visited is most likely to experience strange things. This is exactly what happens to Brutus because he says that the spirit that is there makes his blood cold and his hair to stand.

Caesar's ghost continues to visit Brutus even at Philippi, which leaves him unease.

Brutus says:

Why, this, Volumnius:

The ghost of Caesar hath appear'd to me

Two several times by night; at Sardis once,

And, this last night, here in Philippi fields:



I know my hour is come (Act V, Scene V, lines 16-20).

He can also somehow sense that his time has come to an end. He has even indicated that the ghost has appeared twice at night. What makes matters worse is that he is the only one who sees the ghost every time it appears. For instance, when the ghost appears for the first time (in Act IV, Scene III), Brutus asked Licius, Varrus, and Claudio if they have seen anything (referring to the ghost) but they all indicated that they have not seen anything. The appearance of the ghost for the first time is a vision to Brutus to warn him about the war which was being organised by Antony and his followers. That is why the ghost indicates to him that they will meet at Philippi and that is exactly where the war is waged. After the ghost's first appearance, Brutus sends for his troops to be ready. When the ghost appears for the second time, it warns him that his days are coming to an end and his death is approaching. After observing all those events, Brutus finally realises that his time has come to an end, as he has indicated by saying "I know my hour is come". He then asks Volumnius to hold his sword so that he runs to it.

#### **4.2.2.5 Thunderstorms and lightning**

Another unnatural event happens in Act I, Scene III when a terrible storm rages. This is supposed to be an indication to Caesar that something terrible might happen so he should be careful. In Act II, Scene II, at Caesar's house, thunder and lightning are observed. This is also another indication that terrible things are most likely to happen because thunder and lightning are associated with evil things. On top of that, it is

indicated that the storm was a terrible one, which indicates how severe the problem is.

#### **4.2.2.6 Animals**

In addition to what has been happening so far, there is also a situation of a beast that has been found without a heart. Caesar himself could also tell that nature was not in order, so he sends a servant to go to the priests and ask them to make a sacrifice. The servant comes back from the priests who sacrificed the beast and to their surprise, did not find a heart. This is yet another unusual event because a beast is an animal and an animal cannot survive without a heart. A heart is a vital organ that keeps the body alive, and the moment it is not there then that specific organism will die. That is why a beast without a heart is also regarded as supernatural. This happens in addition to Calpurnia's warnings that Caesar should not go out on that day. The servant, after coming back from the priests indicated thus, "they would not have you to stir forth to-day Plucking the entrails of an offering forth, they could not find a heart within the beast" (Act II, Scene II, lines 38-40). This is yet another warning that Caesar could have followed but instead he ignores and even explained that if he is to stay home then people might see him as a coward because he fears the warnings. Caesar tries to justify his idea of going out by saying:

The gods do this in shame of cowardice:

Caesar should be a beast without a heart,

If he should stay at home to-day for fear.

No, Caesar shall not: danger knows full well

That Caesar is more dangerous than he:

We are two lions litter'd in one day,

And I the elder and more terrible:

And Caesar shall go forth (Act II, Scene II, lines 41-46).

Caesar believes that he has to go out to prove that he is not a coward who is scared of the warnings that he has been getting lately. He also believes that nothing will hurt him because he feels that he is strong enough to withstand whatever will come in his way. So here is yet another situation where Caesar ignores a warning that could have saved his life.

In addition to the beast without a heart that we looked at earlier, Shakespeare also uses some other animals in the play. Some of those animals and more supernatural events or visions are being described by Cassius where he says:

Coming from Sardis, on our former ensign

Two mighty eagles fell, and there they perch'd,

Gorging and feeding from our soldiers' hands;

Who to Philippi here consorted us:

This morning are they fled away and gone;

And in their steads do ravens, crows and kites,

Fly o'er our heads and downward look on us,

As we were sickly prey: their shadows seem

A canopy most fatal, under which

Our army lies, ready to give up the ghost (Act V, Scene1, lines 79 – 88).

Cassius himself describes these events as the ones that foretell that something will happen in the future. In this case, the eagles are indications of a new beginning after the fight at Sardis. Eagles kill other animals to feed on. The fact that the eagles have been following the soldiers who were about to start a fight, is an indication that the soldiers are going to emerge victorious by killing the opponents and winning the battle. Since these birds feed on dead animals, including humans, the birds are also symbolising a large number of deaths, whereby so many soldiers will be killed at the battle and the birds will feed on those dead bodies. Furthermore, eagles are associated with power so they are also showing a positive sign to the soldiers that they should not be scared because they are very powerful.

#### **4.2.2.7 Casca's observations**

Casca has observed various happenings that his beliefs are very strange and to him those events indicate something that is forthcoming:

Are not you mov'd when all the sway of earth  
Shakes like a thing unfirm? O Cicero,  
I have seen tempests when the scolding winds  
Have riv'd the knotty oaks, and I have seen  
Th' ambitious ocean swell, and rage, and foam,  
To be exalted with the threatening clouds;  
But never till tonight, never till now, did I go through a tempest dropping fire.  
Either there is a civil strife in heaven,

Or else the world, too saucy with gods,

Incenses them to send destruction (Act I, Scene III, lines 3 – 13).

All these events are unusual; therefore, he is worried and wondering what might happen because, as he indicated, such things only happen when either there is a civil war in heaven or the world is too disrespectful of the gods which made them angry and now want to destroy it. For instance, the swelling and the ‘rage’ that are used to describe the ocean are usually associated with anger and in most cases the oceans only swell when the weather is bad. He has even mentioned that the ocean is rising high almost reaching the clouds, which is not normal at all. What has been happening must have been very bad to the extent that the Casca is comparing what they are now going through to ‘tempest dropping fire’. In other words, what they are going through and what they have been experiencing all these days prior to the assassination is as tough as going through fire that has been caused by storms.

Casca further continues to describe the unnatural happenings after Cicero asks him if he has seen anything strange or why is he asking Cicero such a question. He continues by saying:

A common slave--you know him well by sight--

Held up his left hand, which did flame and burn

Like twenty torches join'd, and yet his hand,

Not sensible of fire, remain'dunscorch'd.

Besides--I ha' not since put up my sword--

Against the Capitol I met a lion,

Who glared upon me, and went surly by,

Without annoying me: and there were drawn  
 Upon a heap a hundred ghastly women,  
 Transformed with their fear; who swore they saw  
 Men all in fire walk up and down the streets.  
 And yesterday the bird of night did sit  
 Even at noon-day upon the market-place,  
 Hooting and shrieking. When these prodigies  
 Do so conjointly meet, let not men say  
 'These are their reasons; they are natural;'  
 For, I believe, they are portentous things  
 Unto the climate that they point upon (Act I, Scene III, lines 15-33).

When one looks at the situation of the hand which is giving off flames and burning like twenty torches put together but the hand is not feeling the fire, and remains unscorched is something very strange. When something has flames and is burning, it is clear that such a thing will be scorched and completely burned to ashes. Therefore, it is unnatural and it is regarded as part of superstition for such a thing to happen. Casca has even indicated that the man, whose hand is burning, could not even sense that his hand was burning, regardless of the fact that the flames looked very big as if it is twenty torches put together. The burning hand symbolises pain and suffering which the Romans will face in the near future.

In addition to that, Casca also says that he met a lion at the Capitol that glared at him and walked by in a bad temper without bothering him. This is yet another

supernatural event that has been used in this play. Lions and humans are expected to have conflicts wherever they meet so for a lion to meet a human being and even look at that person in an angry way without attacking is something which is very unusual and one has to get worried as to what exactly is happening. What makes the situation even stranger is the fact that the lion is met at the Capitol. Lions live in bushes and forests and they always try to stay away from every place that has too much human movement. In this case, this lion is found in town and it is even crossing in front of human beings without doing anything to them.

Casca indicates that the lioness was angry, and yet it did not do anything. Lions are usually violent and dangerous when angry so, it is very strange for it not to attack or even harm the people around. To add to the events that Casca has described earlier, he has also indicated that some women see some men who are covered with fire and walking down the streets. This is yet another supernatural event because the human flesh is normally burnt by fire, and what makes it even stranger is that they are walking in streets. Here one might question as to what type of fire is that, where it comes from and whether it is real or it is an illusion that is used as a warning to the people of Rome to change their attitudes and also to withdraw from their evil plan of assassinating Caesar. Fire is associated with pain and suffering so one can also say that the pain and suffering that the Romans will go through in the future will be as bad as a burning body. On the other hand, one might also think that, what the women see are mere ghosts moving around the streets of Rome but not real humans as they think they are.

Casca further gives us an unusual event in the same Act I, Scene III, lines 26-28 where he says, “[a]nd yesterday the bird of night did sit even at noon-day upon the market-place, hooting and shrieking.”. An owl is a nocturnal bird. . This makes the situation stranger still because it even appeared at a public place and usually owls stay away from places where there is too much movement, so the owl’s appearance must be a sign that something bad is about to happen. Furthermore, owls are associated with Witchcraft, so whenever an owl is seen either during the day or during the night, people will still link that to Witchcraft and might be a symbol that some evil spirits are doing their evil deeds around that specific area or place, especially when it hoots. Casca seems also worried because of the way he describes the owl by saying; “...bird of night” (Act I, Scene III, line 26). The use of the phrase “bird of night” shows that Casca also feels that it is very strange for an owl to be moving around during the day since owls usually move around at night.

Casca himself describes such events as bad omens and might affect the place where they happen, “for I believe they are portentous things, unto the climate that they point upon” (Act I, Scene III, lines 31 - 32), like he has indicated that those are omens showing something that might happen around that specific area, Julius Caesar got killed at a place near the marketplace where the owl was, and it is also at the marketplace where Caesar’s body was brought after the murder. This indicates that the appearance of an owl at that specific place was also a vision for the Romans.

In Act II, Scene I, lines 193-201, Cassius, as one of the conspirators, further indicates how the night is full of superstition and omens and how that might affect their plan when he says that:



For Caesar is superstitious grown of late,  
 Quite from the main opinion he held once  
 Of fantasy, of dreams and ceremonies:  
 It may be, these apparent prodigies,  
 The unaccustom'd terror of this night,  
 And the persuasion of his augurers.

What Caesar has observed forced him to send a servant to go to the priests and ask them to make a sacrifice in order to see what is happening. This is an indication that Caesar has also observed that there are strange things happening of which he is not really familiar with, therefore he feels there is a need for a sacrifice.

#### **4.2.2.8 Calpurnia's dream**

Caesar's wife, Calpurnia, is one of the people who tried by all means to ensure that Caesar did not go out on that day. She tries to convince her husband not to go out because she has had a terrible dream and she is scared that the dream might come true. It is possible that Calpurnia's dream is not a real dream but a vision, which is meant to warn Caesar not to go out of the house because of the bad ideas that the conspirators have against Caesar. At first, Calpurnia tries to tell Caesar not to go out without giving her reasons when she says "What mean you, Caesar think you to walk forth? You should not stir out your house today" (Act II, Scene II, lines 8 - 9). However, although Caesar is warned not to go out of the house by the wife, he replies by saying "Caesar shall forth". One may conclude that this is because she (Calpurnia) does not really explain her reason for saying that Caesar should not go

out. “The things that threaten'd me, Ne'er look'd but on my back; when they shall see. The face of Caesar, they are vanished,” (Act II Scene II, lines 10-12). It is clear that had Calpurnia clearly explained her reasons to Caesar, Caesar could have been convinced.

This shows that Caesar is ignoring the wife's warnings. Caesar is indicating that he will go out because he believes that nothing will happen to him. He is indicating that whoever has bad plans against him will not succeed. Calpurnia, however, did not give up but continued explaining by giving reasons why she thinks that Caesar should not leave the house. She continues:

Caesar, I never stood on ceremonies,  
 Yet now they fright me. There is one within,  
 Besides the things that we have heard and seen,  
 Recounts most horrid sights seen by the watch.  
 A lioness hath whelped in the streets;  
 And graves have yawn'd, and yielded up their dead;  
 Fierce fiery warriors fought upon the clouds,  
 In ranks and squadrons and right form of war,  
 Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol;  
 The noise of battle hurtled in the air,  
 Horses did neigh, and dying men did groan,  
 And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets.  
 O Caesar! these things are beyond all use,  
 And I do fear them (Act II, Scene II, lines 13-26).

The events that are being described by Calpurnia are all unusual. For instance, lions are animals that live in the forest or bushy places which are far away from human places with a lot of movement, so it is very strange for a lion to give birth in a street which is in town for that matter. She also talks of graves opening and giving up their dead. Such an event is clearly supernatural as they are coming out as ghosts or as some evil spirits. This is a vision showing her what is going to happen in future: This is exactly what happens to Caesar. After he is buried, Caesar comes back as a ghost that keeps appearing to Brutus on various occasions.

Calpurnia further talks of 'fierce fiery warriors fight in the clouds'. This is another unusual event because real warriors fight on the ground. The fact that the warriors are fiery makes the event to be strange, so clearly, there is a very strong message. Calpurnia also says this "in ranks and squadrons and right form of war, Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol" The fight that she is shown in her dream is meant to give her vision of the war that was going to erupt, as the Romans fought against each other as a result of Caesar's death. "The drizzled blood upon the Capitol" that she has seen in the dream might be indicating how the blood is going to flow when the war begins in Rome. This is because he uses the word 'drizzle' that refers to any form of precipitation, so it is simply showing how blood is going to drop, when the war begins.

Furthermore, the sounds used, for example, when she says that "dying men groaned" are also an indication of how people are most likely to suffer. The Meriam Webster Dictionary (n.d) defines groan as "to make a deep sound because of pain or some strong emotion (such as grief or disappointment)." It is clear that a person usually

groans when he/she is in pain or to express strong emotions of grief or disappointment. It is clear that the use of the word groan here could be referring to the anger or the pain that the people of Rome have as a result of the current situation that forces them to fight against each other. She further indicates that “ghosts shrieked.” Ghosts are associated with evil spirits, and they shriek when they are angry or crying, so it means in the end, the evil spirit (which in this case refers to Caesar’s ghost) will not be happy with what is happening to Rome. This includes the pain and suffering that ordinary people of Rome are going through or what they will go through.

Regardless of the fact that Calpurnia explains all that to her husband, Caesar, he still insists on going out because he believes that those signs are for everyone and the world in general but not specifically for him. He also explains that what has been planned by the gods cannot be avoided. These words are found in Act II, Scene II, lines 27-31 where he says:

What can be avoided?

Whose end is purposed by the mighty gods?

Yet Caesar shall go forth; for these predictions

Are to the world in general as to Caesar.

Calpurnia continues to explain and tries to convince her husband by indicating that when ordinary people (whom she refers to as ‘beggars’) die, such omens are not seen but the death of the princess is proclaimed by the heavens and that is why events like that are happening. Calpurnia wants her husband to realise that the events they have been observing lately are not normal, so there could be a possibility that he might be

affected by the warnings since Caesar is one of the important people in their community. However, such explanations do not move Caesar's heart. He still ignores her and tries to make Calpurnia understand that what is meant to happen will happen and one cannot run away from it. He explains:

Cowards die many times before their deaths;

The valiant never taste of death but once.

Of all the wonders that I yet have heard.

It seems to me most strange that men should fear;

Seeing that death, a necessary end,

Will come when it will come (Act II, Scene II, lines 32-35).

Although Caesar has been insisting that he will go, he finally decides to stay home because of his wife's fear. He indicates thus, "Mark Antony shall say I am not well, And, for thy humour, I will stay at home" (line 55 and 56). However, Julius Caesar gets convinced again to go out of the house by Decius, who is one of the conspirators who assassinates him in the end. He convinces Caesar to go out of the house by wrongly interpreting Calpurnia's dream that Caesar tells him. Decius explains the situation by indicating thus:

Calpurnia here, my wife, stays me at home:

She dreamt to-night she saw my statue,

Which, like a fountain with an hundred spouts,

Did run pure blood: and many lusty Romans

Came smiling, and did bathe their hands in it:

And these does she apply for warnings, and portents,

And evils imminent; and on her knee

Hath begg'd that I will stay at home to-day Act II, Scene II, lines 75 -82).

Decius managed to convince Caesar by explaining or interpreting the dream by saying the following:

This dream is all amiss interpreted;

It was a vision fair and fortunate:

Your statue spouting blood in many pipes,

In which so many smiling Romans bathed,

Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck

Reviving blood, and that great men shall press

For tinctures, stains, relics and cognizance.

This by Calpurnia's dream is signified.

After Caesar gets that explanation, he is convinced it is safe to go out of the house together with the conspirators. Although that dream is wrongly interpreted by Decius, and finally convinces Caesar, it is actually telling what will happen to Caesar on that fateful day. Decius wrongly interprets the dream because he wants to convince Caesar to go out so that their plan of assassinating him will not fail.

### **4.3 Discussion of the Results**

The two selected plays have many supernatural elements in common. This means that the elements that William Shakespeare uses in both of the plays are almost the same, although there are few differences.

### **4.3.1 What are the supernatural elements used in both plays?**

The various supernatural elements used in both plays are given below.

#### **4.3.1.1 Ghosts**

Ghosts are some of the elements found in the two plays. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare has the ghost of Banquo while in *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare has the ghost of Caesar. The ghosts that appear are for the characters that are killed for no apparent reason, except for the murderers to satisfy their own happiness. The two ghosts in the two plays only appear to the main people who are behind their murders, meaning that some other characters in the plays do not see the ghosts.

Furthermore, in *Julius Caesar*, Brutus is visited twice by a ghost, that he believes to be the ghost of Caesar.

In *Macbeth*, Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost, sitting at his place. Shakespeare uses the two ghosts (of Banquo and Caesar) to say, what goes around comes around. Therefore, those ghosts appear to those who commit the murders. The appearance of Banquo's ghost is used as a pointer, to tell the characters in *Macbeth* the person who is responsible for Banquo's death. At this time, the murder of Banquo is not known by the characters. Although the two ghosts have appeared to the people behind their murder, the affected people reacted in various ways. For instance, the ghost of Banquo appears to Macbeth twice but does not say a single word to him but it instead keeps looking at him. This ghost affects Macbeth psychologically because everytime it appears, Macbeth goes insane and starts saying unusual things, which are supposed to be hidden.

On the other hand, the ghost of Caesar does not really affect Brutus like Macbeth is affected by the ghost of Banquo. The ghost of Caesar speaks to Brutus and warns him what to expect in future, as well as where they shall meet again. The ghosts bring in very strange feelings within the affected characters that almost result in the characters getting insane. The researcher would say that the two ghosts in the plays represent the souls of the dead people who have returned, and come to serve as a punishment to the perpetrators. However, this is the opposite of what Pavlíčková, (2009) says because she indicated that:

“Although the Elizabethans did not reject the apparitions of ghosts, they did not regard them as souls of the dead and were sceptical as regards the perceptibility of these to the mortals” (p.19). The researcher believes that the two characters affected by the presence of the ghosts are sceptical, that is why they are worried by the presence of such ghosts.

#### **4.3.1.2 Main visions in the plays**

The main characters in the two plays are shown visions either directly or indirectly. For instance, Macbeth's vision is shown through apparitions while for Caesar it is shown through his wife's dream. The visions in both the plays are a true picture or reflection of what will really happen in the future. For instance, Macbeth is shown three apparitions and these apparitions are: an armed head that represents the army that fights against Macbeth in the end, a crowned child that represents the son that takes over the kingship crown after his death, and the army carrying trees from the



forest moving towards Dunsinane where they fight Macbeth. After the three apparitions, Macbeth is shown eight kings that represent Banquo's children. This is not an apparition but he is simply shown the kings to remind him of what the Witches told Banquo when the Witches meet them (Macbeth and Banquo) after the battle. All these events come true in the end and Macbeth sees them as they approach and unfold one by one.

When it comes to Caesar, the vision comes through Calpurnia's dream but it is exactly what happens to him in the end. Calpurnia indicates that she sees Caesar's statue with a hundred spouts and some Romans who come smiling and wash their hands in his blood. This is exactly what happens. The dreams and the apparitions are meant to confuse the characters that are directly affected by such visions. For example, in the case of Caesar, he is left confused and in a dilemma because he does not know whether to ignore the warnings and go out or to remain in the house.

Macbeth is also left confused by the visions because on one side he thinks or he wants to believe that what the visions have shown must be true, but on the other hand, he still wants to know about the prophecies the Witches have told him earlier. Although it is difficult for him at the beginning, he is left with no choice but to believe them in the end.

#### 4.3.1.3 Animals

A third element that William Shakespeare has used in both plays to give some signs or warnings to the characters in the plays is done in the form of animals. Animals play a very important role in the two plays because whenever something bad is likely to happen, especially close to the murdering of King Duncan and Caesar, some animals, especially those associated with bad luck, are observed. One of the animals that appear in both plays is an owl. Owls in general are believed to be associated with superstition and Witchcraft, and whenever they appear one would always think that something unfortunate will happen. Since the two plays are written during the Elizabethan era, whereby the whole society was very superstitious, as Frag (2008) stated, such animals are common during that era. Shakespeare brought in such animals to bring suspense amongst the audience and also to keep the audience thinking and questioning what will happen since they already believe that owls are associated with evil things.

Before *Macbeth* kills King Duncan, an owl shrieks and in *Julius Caesar*, an owl is seen at the marketplace where Caesar gets assassinated. However, it is even worse in the case of *Julius Caesar* because that owl is seen during the day and people believe that owls are only seen at night when they do their evil work. To add to that, that owl is seen in public, at a marketplace where there are many people, so all these aspects raise eyebrows of the audience. Animals and birds are used in the two plays as a sign of superstition. Furthermore, Shakespeare also uses birds such as ravens/crows, eagles and kites. Most of those birds feed on dead bodies so they are used as symbols

of soldiers, war and death. Those symbols inform the readers that war is about to start in Rome. Furthermore, in *Julius Caesar*, two eagles are seen together in the atmosphere. These eagles are symbols of power. They represent Brutus' and Cassius' military power. Therefore, the use of eagles in the plays informs the readers that Brutus and Cassius want to take over Rome illegally, the same way the two eagles invade the atmosphere.

#### **4.3.1.4 Thunderstorms and lightning**

Thunder and lightning add to the list of elements that Shakespeare uses in both plays. Thunder and lightning are observed in most of the scenes in the two plays. In *Julius Caesar*, the night Cassius and other conspirators plan to murder Caesar, thunder and lightning strike the streets, as a sign that something bad might happen. In *Macbeth*, the Witches first meet in thunder and lightning, which symbolises supernatural power of the Witches. Thunder, in this case, shows how strong the Witches are because a normal person cannot be active in thunder and lightning. There is a terrible storm all over Rome the night King Duncan is murdered. That storm symbolises King Duncan's death. Because Duncan was a king therefore, something extraordinary had to happen to show the world that the king had passed on. For instance in *Macbeth*, before the Witches appear, lightning and thunder must be observed first. Even when Macbeth is being shown the apparitions by the Witches, before each and every apparition, thunder is observed first and the apparition later. This is to show Macbeth how powerful the apparitions are. Shakespeare uses thunder and lightning when terrible things are likely to happen to show us how dangerous

and evil the following scenes are. Therefore, Shakespeare introduces thunder and lightning prior to terrible things to stir the emotions of the characters within the play.

#### 4.3.1.5 Atmospheric conditions

The deaths of the main characters who are also very important people in their societies is predicted and shown through atmospheric conditions. For example Casca interprets the weather as, "either there is a civil strife in heaven, or else the world, too saucy with the gods, incenses them to send destruction" (Act I, Scene III, lines 11 – 13). Shakespeare uses Casca's interpretation to say, omens are part of every society, and usually societies interpret them in different ways however, the atmosphere of that specific day indicates something bad that is most likely to happen. On the other hand, in *Macbeth*, Ross comments that the skies look like they are upset about what mankind has been doing and they (skies) are threatening the earth with storms. The atmospheric conditions are really terrible to such an extent that it is regarded as threatening. Furthermore, the Old Man says:

Threescore and ten I can remember well,  
 Within the volume of which time I have seen  
 Hours dreadful and things strange, but this score night  
 Hath trifled former knowings (Act II, Scene IV, lines 1- 4).

Judging from the way the Old Man is talking, it is clear that the atmospheric conditions for that specific night were extraordinary. He indicates that he has lived for more than 70 years but he has never witnessed something like that. This could be

that, over all those years, the Romans have not lost a very important person like King Duncan who is killed by Macbeth. This means that the condition of the atmosphere was really worrisome. One may say that Shakespeare is warning the Romans to learn to be vigilant and watch out for any signs that they see because such signs might be warning them about something very important.

#### **4.3.1.6 Darkness**

Darkness plays a very big role in the two plays. Like thunder, darkness is associated with evil things because all the terrible things usually happen in the dark. The researcher agrees with Knight (1978) when he said that “Macbeth is a desolate and dark universe where all is befogged, baffled, constricted by evil” (p.140). In *Macbeth*, the Witches meet during the night, when it is dark. To add to that, the morning after King Duncan's death, Lennox says, “the night has been unruly: where we lay...new hatched to th' woeful time...” (Act II, Scene III, lines 49 - 54). One may also say that the night is foretelling a terrible disaster that happens in the castle, which is the death of the King.

Night and darkness are further used the day Lady Macbeth chants to evil spirits to "unsex" her or make her more masculine in Act V, Scene I. Lady Macbeth asks the evil spirits to change her. She speaks of night as something portraying evil and mischief. That is why they have planned to kill the King during the night because they know that when it is dark, they will be able to do their evil deeds without being noticed. In *Julius Caesar*, conspirators plot at night. The night before Caesar's death

is described as strange. That night is a prediction of the death shadow that is about fall over Rome.

### **4.3.2 Other supernatural elements used by William Shakespeare in the two plays.**

#### **4.3.2.1 The Witches**

The Witches which are referred to as Weird sisters play a very big role in *Macbeth*. They have planted seeds of ambition into Macbeth, which forces him to do evil things. Perhaps they are behind all the evil things that Macbeth does because they have told him some prophecies that become true, so Macbeth is convinced that whatever they say is going to come true. For instance, when they first meet him, the Witches refer to him as Thane of Glamis, a title he has already and they have also called him by the title of Thane of Cawdor (a title that he receives some hours after the Weird sisters tell him that he is Thane of Cawdor), and the last title that they call him by is that of the king. Were it not for the Witches, Macbeth would not have done all the evil things. Macbeth has even indicated towards the end of the play that the evil creatures tricked him with their word games, raising his hopes and then destroying the hopes. The introduction of the Weird sisters into the play simply brings complications in people's lives and more complications. To sum up, one may say that the Weird sisters really play a dramatic role in the play.

#### **4.3.2.2 A beast without a heart**

A beast without a heart is yet another supernatural element that Shakespeare uses in *Julius Caesar*. It is not possible for an animal to be alive, breathing and moving around while it does not have a heart. A heart is a vital part of each and every organism, so it is introduced to attract attention and to warn Caesar about his forthcoming tragic event.

It is clearly brought in to warn Caesar not to go out of the house but at the same time one may also say that it is brought in to demonstrate the power of superstition.

#### **4.3.3 How does Shakespeare use superstition and visions in the two plays, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* to structure his plays?**

William Shakespeare has used superstition in the two plays in such a way that when something terrible is likely to happen, there must always be a certain warning or sign preceding such an event. The introduction of supernatural events in such a way always brings tension and confusion among the other characters who are affected indirectly, as well as the audience.

Right at the beginning in Act I, Scene I, the Witches indicate that they will meet when the battle is over, when one side has won and the other side has lost. At the same meeting, the Witches have indicated that they will meet Macbeth at the open field. By looking at such a conversation, one would question how the Weirddcreatures know that Macbeth's side is the one that is going to win the battle.

Furthermore, when it comes to *Macbeth*, the Witches do not meet at public places where they can be seen by people but instead they meet at Weir and strange places where no one can see them such as in a cavern where they meet Macbeth and show him the apparitions. On the other hand, when it comes to *Julius Caesar*, we have seen how confused the people are when they talk about the strange events that they have observed lately. For instance, when one looks at the conversation between Casca and Cicero, it is clear that these people are worried by the strange and supernatural events which have been going on lately. In the conversation, Casca indicates to Cicero:

Are not you mov'd when all the sway of earth  
Shakes like a thing unfirm? O Cicero,  
I have seen tempests when the scolding winds  
Have riv'd the knotty oaks, and I have seen  
Th' ambitious ocean swell, and rage, and foam,  
To be exalted with the threatening clouds;  
But never till tonight, never till now, did I go through a tempest  
dropping fire.  
Either there is a civil strife in heaven,  
Or else the world, too saucy with gods,  
Incenses them to send destruction (Act I, Scene III, lines 3 – 13).

He continues by explaining further the events that he has been observing lately which he describes thus:

A common slave--you know him well by sight--



Held up his left hand, which did flame and burn  
 Like twenty torches join'd, and yet his hand,  
 Not sensible of fire, remain'd unscorch'd.  
 Besides--I ha' not since put up my sword--  
 Against the Capitol I met a lion,  
 Who glared upon me, and went surly by,  
 Without annoying me: and there were drawn  
 Upon a heap a hundred ghastly women,  
 Transformed with their fear; who swore they saw  
 Men all in fire walk up and down the streets.  
 And yesterday the bird of night did sit  
 Even at noon-day upon the market-place,  
 Hooting and shrieking. When these prodigies  
 Do so conjointly meet, let not men say  
 'These are their reasons; they are natural;'  
 For, I believe, they are portentous things

Unto the climate that they point upon (Act 1, Scene III, lines 13 – 32).

Judging by the way Casca is describing, it is clear he is confused, worried and he finds himself in a chaotic situation, which he cannot explain.

The use of superstition in the two plays brings in confusion, chaos and conflicts, leaving the affected characters in limbo. In other words, Shakespeare uses such elements to bring in the rhythm in the two plays.

#### **4.3.4 What are the consequences for the main characters for following or not following superstition?**

The two main characters in the two selected plays have both been faced with various warnings or visions or supernatural temptations which they handled differently.

##### **4.3.4.1 Caesar's warnings and how he handled them**

When it comes to Caesar, he has been given so many warnings and signs for him not to go out of the house. One of the warnings that Caesar gets was from the Soothsayer to be aware of the Ides of March but he ignores the warnings. He ignores without knowing that he is actually being warned about his fateful day that is approaching. Another warning that Caesar gets is that of a letter from Artemidorus, which is warning him about all the conspirators who were organising to assassinate him but Caesar ignores the letter too. Artemidorus even begs him to read the letter right away but Caesar tells him that personal things must be dealt with later. Artemidorus writes this letter hoping that Caesar will read it at that moment and after reading it, he will not proceed but change his mind and go back home. However, Artemidorus' idea does not materialise as he wishes because Caesar ignores the letter.

The content of the letter:

'Caesar, beware of Brutus; take heed of Cassius;  
 come not near Casca; have an eye to Cinna, trust not  
 Trebonius: mark well Metellus Cimber: Decius Brutus  
 loves thee not: thou hast wronged Caius Ligarius.  
 There is but one mind in all these men, and it is

bent against Caesar. If thou beest not immortal,  
 look about you: security gives way to conspiracy.  
 The mighty gods defend thee! Thy lover,  
 ARTEMIDORUS' (Act 2, Scene III, lines 1 – 16).

This is a warning that comes from someone who really wants Caesar to stay away from the conspirators.

To add to the warnings that Caesar gets, the priests also tell Caesar not to go out because the beast that they have sacrificed did not have a heart. They warn him because they know that all animals are supposed to have hearts and that an animal without a heart must be a representation of something important that is most likely to happen. Although this is an unusual event, Caesar interprets it differently. He feels that if he does not go out then he is a coward because a beast without a heart symbolises a coward. This is another warning that could have saved his life but instead he ignored the warning.

The last and main warning that could have prevented Caesar from going out and probably saved him from being killed is the wife's dream. Calpurnia has the following dream:

She dreamt to-night she saw my statue,  
 Which, like a fountain with an hundred spouts,  
 Did run pure blood: and many lusty Romans  
 Came smiling, and did bathe their hands in it:  
 And these does she apply for warnings, and portents,  
 And evils imminent; and on her knee

Hath begg'd that I will stay at home to-day (Act 2, Scene II, lines 76 – 83).

The images or visions in this dream are supposed to be strong enough to convince Caesar to remain in the house because the dream is a very strange one. It is clear that Caesar is supposed to be threatened by the fact that his wife is shown his body which has been stabbed and with so many wounds but yet to him, it is not strong enough to convince him. He has indicated that the signs that they have been seeing all those days prior to his assassination are for the whole world in general but not for him personally. He even goes to the extent of saying that what has been planned by the gods cannot be avoided. After several warnings that come in various ways, Caesar ignores all of them and as a result, he is killed in the end.

#### **4.3.4.2 Macbeth's prophecies and how he handled them**

Macbeth's fall into a miserable life starts right at the beginning of the play when the Weird sisters meet him to tell him about his new title that he will get for being successful at the battle- field. In addition to the title they give Macbeth first, they also give him a more important one, which is future king. Although Macbeth does not believe the Weird sisters at first, he is made to believe them later because the first title they have given him first becomes true. He thinks that since he is now the Thane of Cawdor as the Weird sisters told him, then it is obvious that he will also be a future king. His fall into their hands is found in Act I, Scene III, where he indicates thus:

This supernatural soliciting  
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,

Why hath it given me earnest of success,

Commencing in in a truth? I am Thane of Cowdor.

The above quote shows that the Weird sisters have already trapped Macbeth and he has started to believe their evil prophecies. Since Macbeth knows that there is no way he could become king while King Duncan is still alive, he develops some bad ideas which are to kill the king so that he will inherit the crown from him. Things start getting worse after Macbeth kills King Duncan first and later also Banquo. Therefore, he decides to go back to the Witches, because he believes that the Witches are the only ones that can save him from the situation in which he now finds himself. After visiting the Witches again, Macbeth is shown the three apparitions of which it makes him to believe the Witches more. The apparitions make him live positively because he thinks he is safe and he shall not live in fear of anyone without knowing that the opposite is true.

While being shown the three apparitions, this is how he reacted to each of them. After the first apparition, Macbeth reacts to each of them thus in Act IV, Scene I, lines 72 - 73:

Whate'er thou art, for thy good caution, thanks.

Thou hast harped my fear aright. But one word more

After the first apparition disappears, or vanishes, the second one comes and after listening to it, he responds:

Then live, Macduff. What need I fear of thee?

But yet I'll make assurance double sure,

And take a bond of fate. Thou shalt not live,

That I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies

And sleep in spite of thunder (Act IV, Scene I, lines 81-85).

When the second apparition disappears, the third one comes and speaks to him and in response, he says:

That will never be.

Who can impress the forest, bid the tree

Unfix his earthbound root? Sweet bodements! Good!

Rebellious dead, rise never till the wood

Of Birnam rise, and our high-placed Macbeth

Shall live the lease of nature, pay his breath

To time and mortal custom. Yet my heart

Throbs to know one thing. Tell me, if your art

Can tell so much: shall Banquo's issue ever (Act V, Scene I, lines 93-102).

By looking at the way Macbeth reacts to each of the apparitions, one can tell that he truly believes the Witches and the apparitions. He is now in a comfortable zone where he feels that he is invulnerable because he feels protected by the supernatural power. Although Macbeth has been comfortable after he is shown the apparitions, things start getting worse as his end approaches. His wife starts walking and talking while sleeping and suddenly dies. Macbeth also dies in the end because the evil deeds keep haunting them and all they can see mostly is either bloody hands or a ghost of Banquo.

The researcher concluded that the Witches' prophecies play a critical role and they are to be blamed entirely in Macbeth's downfall. If Macbeth had not listened and followed the Witches' prophecies, he would not have fallen into the tragic life in which he finds himself. Macbeth was not supposed to follow the Witches and commit such crimes but could have waited and seen what would happen as he had stated in Act I, Scene III, lines 142 - 143 "if chance will have me king, why chance may crown me without my sir". This is because it could be that Macbeth is supposed to be crowned as a king of a different country or even after King Duncan, had he waited for the right time.

To sum up, when it comes to the way the characters reacted, the conclusion emerged from the study that the main characters of each play handled superstition differently but in the end they are both affected negatively. There is Caesar, who ignored all the warnings that he got and ended up being killed. At the same time, there is Macbeth who followed the Witches' prophecies which dragged him into a bloody life where he lived by killing people and in the end he is killed as well. In other words, one may conclude that none of the characters benefitted from the way they reacted towards superstition. If the characters could have done the opposite of what they did then maybe they would have survived and they would not have ended up in the situations in which they found themselves in the end. Shakespeare appears to use the two tragedies *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* to make the readers compare the two societies in which the two leaders ruled. One society is ruled by a leader who believes in Witches and their prophecies like Macbeth, and on the other hand, another society is ruled by a leader who does not believe in prophecies and superstition, like Caesar.

#### **4.4 New Historical Criticism and the two plays**

There is a connection between the texts or the plays that William Shakespeare has written and the era in which the plays have been written. The New Historical Criticism theory used in this study helped the researcher to analyse the two plays by looking at the history around the period in which the plays were written. Pavlíčková (2009) has supported the argument in her study when she states that “the two plays are characterised by an atmosphere full of superstitions, astrological phenomena and references to gods, because the Romans were extremely superstitious” (p.58). That is a clear indication that history has played a role in the writing of the plays.

It also came to light in this study that the same supernatural elements that existed during the Elizabethan era are the same as those that are used in the plays. Some of the elements that they have are such as Witches, ghosts, cats, owls and so forth. These are the same elements that Shakespeare has used in the two plays as well, making one believe that his era has really influenced his writing of the two plays. Furthermore, we have also learnt that the Ides of March is an event that happened in 44 B.C. On that day, a very important person in Rome was assassinated and those are the same features that Macbeth used in his play.



As it emerged from literature review, William (2000) further gives some events that show that history played a role in the writing of the two plays. He specifically focused on the source of Macbeth by indicating:

News from Scotland (1951) recounts the trial of Scottish Witches from the town of Forres. The Witches allegedly had attempted to kill James while he was king of Scotland by trying to cause a shipwreck during his voyage to Denmark. The Weird sisters in Macbeth resemble these Witches in their Activity. Before Banquo and Macbeth encounter them in Act I, Scene 3, the Weird sisters discuss sending tempestuous storms to a sailor's ship because the sailor's wife would not share chestnuts with one of them. In addition, Banquo, before he sees the Weird sisters, asks Macbeth, "how far is't call'd to Forres?" (I.3.39). Thus, these Weird sisters are linked to the Witches in News from Scotland both by their behaviour and their geographical location, (p. 21).

To sum up, as Albright (2005) has indicated, Macbeth is a history play that tells us about the love that King James had for Witchcraft. Furthermore, Shakespeare also tells us that Julius Caesar is a dramatization of actual events, meaning that history played a role in the writing of the plays therefore, they have such elements to show what was happening during that time. The two plays further demonstrate that although they are both written during the era when England was very superstitious, there were still some people who did not believe in superstition such as Julius Caesar who ignored all the supernatural warnings until his death. This clearly shows that he

did not believe in superstition. It is clear that the plays analysed in this study are Historical tragedies.

#### **4.5 Summary**

This chapter has looked at the analysis and the discussion of the collected data based on the research questions. It has also looked at the theoretical framework which looked at how Shakespeare's work has been influenced by the era in which he has written his work, as well as how the supernatural elements of their time have emerged in his work.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary and conclusions of the study. Recommendations are made based on the findings of the study.

#### 5.2 Summary

William Shakespeare has used superstition, supernatural elements and visions in the selected plays. Some of the supernatural elements that he has used are such as ghosts, dreams, Witches, and animals such as owls and eagles. Of all the plays, there are two tragedies in which the supernatural elements that he has used are almost the same. The two tragedies were the ones that were selected and used in this study.

One scholar explained the use of superstition in Shakespeare's work by indicating that "The use of fairies, ghosts, Witches and unseen powers respectively has evolved and invested all the circumstances and the features of popular superstition so that it may be readily accepted by the audience" (Frag, 2008, p. 26).

This study was, therefore, undertaken to find out how Shakespeare uses supernatural elements and visions in the two selected plays of *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*. The research problem was identified on the basis of the fact that in the so many plays by William Shakespeare, one element that they have in common is that of superstition. Therefore, the results of the study would provide insight as to what roles superstition plays in the selected plays.

The following study questions were addressed:

- How does Shakespeare use superstition and visions in the two plays, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* to structure his plays?
- What are the consequences for the main characters for following or not following superstition?

A qualitative desktop research was carried out whereby a critical reading of the two plays was done. The texts from the two plays were selected with reference to superstition.

### **5.3 Findings**

The major findings of the study were that:

1. Shakespeare uses supernatural elements and visions such as dreams, omens, apparitions and ghosts in his two tragedies to bring in some dramatic effects and also to bring in some confusion, conflicts and chaos amongst the characters.
2. It also reveals that the visions that are used in the two plays are all warnings which were meant for the main characters and came true in the end.
3. It also reveals that although the main characters reacted to the supernatural visions and warnings in different ways, whereby Macbeth follows and Caesar ignores all the warnings, they were both affected negatively in the end.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, this study recommends that more studies be done on some other elements used by William Shakespeare in the same plays as well as their effects on the plays. This research further recommends that a study be done that will compare superstition in Shakespeare's plays and superstition in some Namibian novels.

#### **5.5 Conclusion**

The study has investigated the role that superstition plays in the two selected plays by William Shakespeare. The study was motivated by the fact that the researcher has read so many plays, most of which have supernatural elements in them. The researcher believes that there must be some aspects that influenced Shakespeare to use superstition in his plays. The study focused on how Shakespeare uses visions and superstition to structure his plays. Findings indicate that such elements are simply introduced into the plays in order to bring in dramatic effects, confusions, and chaos amongst the characters and also for the plays to be more interesting, which will also make the reader curious, as to what is going to happen next.

Shakespeare introduces those elements in the play so that he brings in rhythm. The combination of all these elements creates the inducing force of the play leading to a final climax and denouement. The rhythm also creates mood of the play, as it has been observed in the plays.

The study was also aimed at determining the consequences on the main characters of either following or ignoring superstition. The findings revealed that although the two main characters in the two selected plays reacted differently to the supernatural warnings, in the end they were both affected negatively and had to suffer because of the way they had reacted to superstition. Macbeth suffered because he believed in the Witches' prophecies and followed what they told him, while Julius Caesar suffered because he did not believe in superstition, so he ignored all the warnings that he received. This study makes a contribution to the study of Shakespeare's work, especially in Namibia, where according to the observations the researcher made, Shakespeare's works are not really popular.

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