SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF THE SUPERNATURAL

Shakespeare's Use of the Supernatural

BEING THE

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BY

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"He that will have a cake out of the wheat, must needs tarry the grinding."

—*Troilus and Cressida*, I. i. 15.

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To

My best Friend

and

Helpmeet

REFERENCES

The Shakespeare references are according to the "Temple Classics Edition" of the plays.

Those from *Doctor Faustus* and *Friar Bacon* are according to the *Old English Drama*, by A. W. Ward.

Those from the *Witch of Edmonton* according to Dekker's Works in the "Mermaid Series."

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PREFACE

I am specially indebted in Chapter I. to certain ideas taken from *The Ghost Belief of Shakespeare*, by Alfred Roffe; in Chapter II. to *Folk-lore of Shakespeare*, by Thiselton Dyer; in Chapters III. and IV. to Moulton's Works; in Chapter VII. to certain data taken from Furness and Fleay.

In all cases, however, the arrangement and working out has been my own, and practically every reference has been verified.

Chapters V. and VI. are original work. By this I do not mean that the ground has not already been covered, but that in writing the chapters I was seldom conscious of indebtedness to a previous writer.

The term *The Supernatural* has been taken to mean—"Phenomena subject to laws and powers beyond or exceeding those of Nature, as she is at present understood by Science."

J. P. S. R. G.

CAMBRIDGE,
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SHAKESPEARE'S BELIEF REGARDING THE SUPERNATURAL

Considerations of Race—Environment and Time Spirit—Evidence of the Plays generally—Specific instances—The Sceptic discountenanced—Shakespeare's Will—Conclusion.

We can hardly enter upon the discussion of such a subject as Shakespeare's use of the Supernatural without pausing at the outset to enquire into his beliefs. In this attempt to reach the foundation on which he built, we must consider the influence exercised over him by his race, his environment, and the Time Spirit of his age. Though we cannot agree with Taine that man is merely the resultant product of these forces, yet they are important factors which cannot be neglected.

A priori considerations.

Shakespeare belonged to a race which has ever been predisposed to a belief in the Supernatural, a race to whom the Unseen has always been a deep reality. "Dark and true and tender is the North," and no man

has more completely fulfilled this description of the great northern race than the poet which it produced.

Shakespeare lived at a time when superstition had not been broken down, nor even seriously assailed. The Reformation had to a certain extent modified the medieval conceptions of the people, but its influence was felt mostly in the large centres; and as yet small country towns, such as Stratford-on-Avon, were scarcely affected. The materialism of the eighteenth century was but faintly foreshadowed. Therefore, as influenced by environment, Shakespeare would naturally have a superstitious mind. These impressions are confirmed as we consider the spirit of his time. The Reformation had come; men were re-considering their position in things secular as well as religious; but nearly a century was to pass before reformation became revolution. Thought had been started, but had not given place to violent action or re-action. From all these influences which were at work we expect to find a man questioning his hereditary faith, but with a bias towards belief. Such we see to be the case

as Shakespeare reveals himself to us throughout his plays. He has a belief in the Supernatural, although he closely questions and philosophises with regard to its origin. He puts the words of Hamlet (IV. iv. 37) into practice:

> Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and God-like reason
> To fust in us unused.

His belief links him with all ages, and his enquiry into the Supernatural shews him to be a true son of his own age, while the resultant philosophy stamps him unmistakably as the prophet and poet centuries in advance of his time.

Evidence of the Plays.

Let us now turn from these *a priori* considerations to the works of the man himself, and see whether they confirm or destroy our theories. Throughout his plays Shakespeare's manner of dealing with the Supernatural tends to strengthen our preconceived opinion of him, and proclaims him the seer, for no man can touch the Unseen with a serious thoughtful and masterly hand, unless there be in the man himself a belief in, and a grasp of,

those things with which he is dealing. Only he who has seen and heard can make us see and hear.

In turning to Shakespeare's plays for evidence we are well aware that it is necessary to exercise exceptional care, for he is the most impersonal of all great writers. But although we cannot take the sayings of any particular character, and declare that these are the feelings or beliefs of the poet, yet we are surely justified in drawing conclusions from the general drift of the plays as a whole, or of any one play in particular. As Roffe truly says in *The Ghost-belief of Shakespeare*, "Shakespeare cannot make all persons speak belief, but he can make his plays act it."

The independent words, however, of the *dramatis personæ*, when in accordance with the drift of the play, must be given their due weight; for be the writer never so impersonal, his words must, while they half conceal, also half reveal the soul within. Even Thomas Carlyle, who says that in the works of Shakespeare "we have no full impress of him," not "even as full as we have of many men," yet adds at once, "His works are so

many windows through which we see a glimpse of the world that was in him."

If we examine each play we shall find that in every one there is a keynote which indicates Shakespeare's condition of mind at the time of writing.

The keynote of *Hamlet*, for instance, seems to be the gradual proof of the revelation made by the ghost of Hamlet's father. Doubts are thrown in the way, but one by one they are overcome, and in the end we are convinced that the assertions of the Ghost were accurate.

In *Macbeth* we find the supernatural predictions worked out first with the co-operation of Macbeth, and afterwards, despite all his attempts to prevent their realisation. As the play closes we are made to feel that the flashlight sent by the Witches into the future revealed in truth things that were to come. The play of *Hamlet* corroborates the supernatural statements as to the past; the play of *Macbeth* corroborates them as to the future. The keynote of both plays is that the Supernatural proved correct. The *Tempest* also strikes no uncertain note. Could Shakespeare

have allowed such great plays as these to put their whole influence on the side of belief, had he not himself been a firm believer in those manifestations which come to us from the unknown country?

Specific instances.

Turning from the general drift of plays to more specific instances, we find that the Sceptic is always placed in opposition to the facts of the story. Thus in *I. Henry IV.* (III. i.) we find the sceptic Hotspur to be in opposition to believing Glendower, who says,

> I can call spirits from the vasty deep;

and Hotspur challenges him to give auricular proof of his power over the other world, after a cheap sneer thus expressed—

> Why so can I, or so can any man;
> But will they come when you do call for them?

The proof demanded is at once given. Had Shakespeare wished to impress people with his disbelief in the Supernatural, surely here was his opportunity.

Again, in *Troilus and Cressida* (II. ii.) we find Troilus sceptical of the real powers of divination which were in his sister Cassandra.

> Because Cassandra's mad; her brain-sick raptures
> Cannot distaste the goodness of a quarrel.

He also scoffs at Helenus—

> You are for dreams and slumbers, brother priest.

In the *Midsummer Night's Dream* (v. i.) we find Theseus expressing his belief that the things which had happened were "more strange than true," and in corroboration we find him placing the lunatic, the lover, and the poet together in one category; but he has no answer to give to Hippolyta's speech—

> But all the story of the night told over,
> And all their minds transfigured so together,
> More witnesseth than fancy's images,
> And grows to something of great constancy.

His silence means consent. Should this be doubted, it may be further argued that Shakespeare, even granting that he did not believe in the Supernatural, would not allow Theseus to emphasise this disbelief by classing together the lunatic, the lover, and the poet. Surely the man who cannot distinguish lunacy from poetry can be no supporter of the beliefs of the greatest of all poets.

We see then that the Sceptic is discountenanced. So also is the fraudulent abuse of this sacred subject. For in *II. Henry VI.* (I. ii. and I. iv.), where the true and the false

Supernatural are brought together, how easily could Shakespeare have given a prominent place to his indiscriminate contempt of both. On the contrary, the false is confounded and the true exalted.

Shakespeare's conception of the Supernatural is not only subjective, as for example we find it in *Richard III.* (v. iii.) when the ghosts appear to Richard and Richmond in their sleep, or as expressed in *Macbeth* (iv. i.) when the apparitions seen by Macbeth are not seen by Lennox, and again (iii. iv.) when Banquo's ghost is seen by none but Macbeth; but he also wishes to emphasise clearly the objective side of the Supernatural by arranging for the Witches to appear on the stage alone, and by making both Banquo and Macbeth see them (i. iii.), and in *Hamlet* (i. iv.) by allowing three people at once to be conscious of the Ghost's presence.

Conclusions.

From these data I think we are justified in saying that Shakespeare's attitude towards the Supernatural is clearly expressed by the well-known words in *Hamlet* (i. v. 167)—

> There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

And also by the less well-known words which just precede, where, in speaking of the Supernatural, he says to Horatio—

> And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.

Or by the speech of Lafeu in *All's Well that Ends Well* (II. iii. 1)—

> They say miracles are past; and we have our philosophical persons, to make modern and familiar, things supernatural and causeless. Hence it is that we make trifles of terrors, ensconcing ourselves into seeming knowledge, when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear.

The supernatural world exists, but we cannot always hear its harmonies because of "this muddy vesture of decay" (*Merchant of Venice*, v. i.).

The words we find beginning his Will act as a final corroboration: "I commend my soul into the hands of God my Creator, hoping and assuredly believing through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour to be made a partaker of life everlasting."

The foregoing considerations do not pretend to be an exhaustive treatment of the question of Shakespeare's belief, but perhaps enough has been said to shew that the great dramatist of the seventeenth century believed

in the Spirit world, and thus holds his place among the master-minds of all ages.

'Tis but a base ignoble mind
That mounts no higher than a bird can soar.

—*II. Henry VI.* II. i. 13.

II

VARIOUS FORMS OF THE SUPERNATURAL USED BY SHAKESPEARE

Fairies and their Characteristics—Witches: those human and those supernatural—Ghosts, objective and subjective—Devils proper and people possessed—Dreams and their Truth—Prophecy and Astrology—The Genius—Characters from Old Morality Plays—Religious Supernaturalism.

We shall in the course of our enquiries discuss the philosophical and dramatic use that Shakespeare makes of the Supernatural, but we must first examine the material which he uses.

Fairies may well begin the procession of supernatural agencies which is to pass before us.

FAIRIES.

Origin.

Fairies are said to be descended more from local deities and patrons than from the gods of serious mythology. Before the time of Shakespeare there is little fairy literature,

but in his day it had become very popular. We are therefore not surprised to find the fairies occupying a prominent place in his plays.

Nomenclature

In the *Merry Wives of Windsor* (IV. iii. 49) urchins, ouphes, and fairies are classed together in a loose way,

Colour.

and their colours are described in the same line as green and white, and again in the same play (V. v. 41)—

> Fairies black, grey, green, and white,
> You moonshine revellers, and shades of night.

Time.

Their preference for night-time, in order to carry out their work, is referred to in the latter line, and again in *The Tempest* (I. ii. 326)—

> . . . . . Urchins
> Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
> All exercise on thee . . . .

Haunts.

The haunts of the fairies are the flower-covered fields, and the secluded spots of Nature, whether land or water. *Midsummer Night's Dream* (II. i. 249)—

> I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
> Where ox-lips and the nodding violet grows;
> . . . . . .
> There sleeps Titania, sometime of the night,
> Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight.

And (II. i. 83)—

> Met we on hill, in dale, forest, or mead,
> By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
> Or in the beached margent of the sea.

The Tempest (V. i. 33)—

> Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,
> And ye that on the sands with printless foot
> Do chase the ebbing Neptune.

Names.

Of the fairies specially mentioned we find Oberon and Titania as King and Queen at enmity over the changeling boy (II. i. 20).

Titania is referred to as the sender of dreams under the title of Queen Mab: *Romeo and Juliet* (I. iv. 53)—

> Oh then, I see, Queen Mab hath been with you.

Their messenger Puck embodies nearly all that is known of fairy life and fairy lore. In *Midsummer Night's Dream* (II. i. 16) he is addressed as, "Thou Lob of Spirits." Peas-blossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustard-seed seem to be the poet's own creation; we do not find them elsewhere.

Size.

The size of fairies is diminutive. Queen Mab comes

> In shape no bigger than an agate stone
> On the forefinger of an Alderman.
> *Romeo and Juliet*, I. iv. 54.

and in *Midsummer Night's Dream* (II. i. 30) we read—

> . . . . that all their elves for fear
> Creep into acorn cups and hide them there.

And again in Ariel's song in *The Tempest* (v. i. 88)—

> Where the bee sucks, there suck I;
> In a cowslip's bell I lie.

Mischief.

The spirit of mischief is one of the chief of fairy characteristics. Even Queen Mab

> plats the manes of horses in the night,
> (*Romeo and Juliet*, I. iv. 89.)

and is not above stealing children and leaving changelings (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, II. i. 120), whilst Puck is

> . . . . that merry wanderer of night. (II. i. 43.)
> That frights the maidens of the villagery;
> Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern,
> And bootless make the breathless housewife churn,
> And sometime make the drink to bear no barm;
> Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm.
> (II. i. 35.)

The prominence of their mischief is so much felt, that in *Cymbeline* we find Imogen (II. ii. 9) praying:

> From fairies and the tempters of the night
> Guard me, beseech ye!

But intermixed with their mischief is goodwill (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, v. i. 396). Puck says: Goodwill.

> I am sent with broom before,
> To sweep the dust behind the door.

The goodwill of the King of the Fairies is expressed by his command in *Midsummer Night's Dream* (v. i. 423)—

> Every fairy take his gait,
> And each several chamber bless,
> Through this palace, with sweet peace;

He and the reconciled Titania say (v. i. 410)—

> To the best bride-bed will we,
> Which by us shall blessed be.

Throughout the play of *Midsummer Night's Dream* we associate the fairies with beauty and power. These qualities are inherent in them, and appear in all their actions. Beauty.

They are also immortal. We find Bottom addressed by the fairy as "Hail! mortal" (III. i. 178), which would point to the fact that she herself was immortal; and the way Titania speaks of the changeling's mother implies the same idea: Immortality.

> And she, being mortal, of that boy did die. (II. i. 135).

Puck's scornful exclamation (III. ii. 115) suggests fairy superiority—

> Lord, what fools these mortals be!

Vanishing.

They had the power of vanishing at will:

> I am invisible, and will overhear their conference.

And again in *Macbeth* (I. iii. 80), where Banquo, speaking of the ghosts, says:

> . . . . whither are they vanish'd?

And Macbeth answers:

> Into the air; and, what seem'd corporal, melted
> As breath into the wind . . . .

Metamorphism.

We find too that they can take any forms. Puck, for instance, in *Midsummer Night's Dream* (II. i. 46) says:

> . . . . Sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl
> In very likeness of a roasted crab;

or still more forcibly (III. i. 111)—

> Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,
> A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire.

Speed.

Their transit is very swift, and space and time mean but little to them (II. i. 6)—

> I do wander everywhere,
> Swifter than the moon's sphere.

and III. ii. 100—

> I go, I go; look how I go,
> Swifter than arrow from the Tartan's bow.

And again (II. i. 175)—

> I 'll put a girdle round about the earth
> In forty minutes.

Music.

We find the fairies exhibit a special fondness for music. The magic isle of *The Tempest:*

> . . . . is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears . . . .

And *Midsummer Night's Dream* (II. i. 84)—

> So dance our ringlets to the whistling wind.

Fairy Kings.

Fairies, too, are connected with those interesting circles of bright green grass that we find so commonly in our meadows (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, II. i. 8)—

> And I serve the Fairy Queen,
> To dew her orbs upon the green.

And again in *The Tempest* (V. i. 36)—

> . . . . you demy-puppets that
> By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make,
> Whereof the ewe not bites . . . .

The origin of these is now known to be fertilisation from mushroom growth, and in connection with this discovery the words

immediately following are especially interesting—

> . . . . And you whose pastime
> Is to make midnight mushrooms . . . .

Guardian angels.

We find it the duty of female fairies to guard graves (*Cymbeline*, IV. ii. 217)—

> With female fairies will his tomb be haunted,
> And worms will not come to thee.

It was regarded as serious to speak to a fairy:

> They are fairies; he that speaks to them shall die.
> —*Merry Wives of Windsor*, V. v. 51.

Shakespeare's general treatment of fairies suggests mirth, jollity and goodwill, intermixed with a certain amount of harmless mischief. The Poet wishes to amuse, not to express his belief, nor yet his unbelief, in those fascinating and airy spirits which gambol before us.

WITCHES.

Shakespeare deals with two classes of witches—on the one hand with those women, usually old and decrepit, which were looked upon by the vulgar, and often by the more educated, as witches; and with those whose character is clearly supernatural.

Human witches.

We find human witches referred to in *I. Henry VI.* (III. ii. 40), Joan of Arc being referred to as—

> Pucelle, that witch, that damned sorceress,
> Hath wrought this hellish mischief unawares,
> That hardly we escap'd the pride of France.

And she accepts the position, for in (v. iii. 2) she says:

> You speedy helpers that are substitutes,
> Under the lordly monarch of the North,
> Appear and aid me in this enterprise.

and immediately the fiends appear, though they will not help her.

In the *Merry Wives of Windsor* (IV. 2. 100) we have an allusion to the Witch of Brentford—

> Let's go dress him like the Witch of Brentford;

in *II. Henry VI.* (I. ii.) to Margery Jourdain, the cunning witch; and in *Richard III.* (III. iv. 70) we find reference made to Jane Shore:

> And this is Edward's wife, that monstrous witch,
> Consorted with that harlot strumpet Shore,
> That by their witchcraft thus hath marked me.

But these human witches play a minor part, and we feel that Shakespeare is not seriously impressed by the current opinion concerning them. The supernatural witches,

Witches proper.

on the contrary, have a very important place allotted to them. They control the whole action of one play. We need not discuss here whether they are the Norns of Scandinavia or real witches. This subject is fully treated in Spalding's "Elizabethan Demonology."

W. W. Lloyd, in his critical essay on *Macbeth*, seems to express the truth when he says: "Creative imagination has blended together the revolting horrors of the witchcraft known or imagined by the penal statutes, and the boding solemnity of the nobler superstitions of the Highlands and the Western Isles without any incongruity."

Nameless.

No names are given to the witches, and they call themselves the three Weird Sisters (*Macbeth*, I. iii. 32). Their mistress Hecate is superfluous, and has no part in the real action of the play. She was probably introduced to satisfy some demand from the Court. Of their characteristics the chief is a beard, which is referred to in the *Merry Wives of Windsor* (IV. ii. 202)—

Beard.

By yea and no, I think the 'oman is a witch indeed; I like not when a 'oman has a great peard; I spy a great peard under her muffler."

And in *Macbeth* (I. iii. 45)—

. . . . You should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so.

They assume all manner of shapes, often that of a cat (*Macbeth*, I. i. 9)— Shapes.

I come, Graymalkin,

but whatever form they take, the tail is wanting (*Macbeth*, I. iii. 9)—

And, like a rat without a tail,
I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do.

We find that they are the producers of all that is evil in their magic cauldrons. Into these they throw things terrible and abominable, as in *Macbeth* (IV. i. 4)— Evil.

Round about the cauldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw,

. . . . . .

Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork and blind worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

This evil traffic of theirs is referred to again in the play scene in *Hamlet* (III. ii. 268):

> Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,
> With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,
> Thy natural magic and dire property,
> On wholesome life usurp immediately.

Storms. They have great power in creating storms (*Macbeth*, IV. i. 52)—

> Though you untie the winds and let them fight
> Against the churches . . . .

And again (*Macbeth*, I. iii. 11)—

> *Second Witch:* I'll give thee a wind
> . . . . .
> *Third Witch:* And I another,
> *First Witch:* I myself have all the other;
> And the very ports they blow,
> All the quarters that they know.

They sail upon the sea in sieves (*Macbeth*, I. iii. 7)—

> Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger;
> But in a sieve I'll thither sail.

Night. Their habit of coming out at night we see in *Macbeth* (IV. i. 48)—

> How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags!
> What is't you do?

Vanishing. Witches, like fairies, have the power of vanishing at will (*Macbeth*, I. iii. 81)—

> They vanish into the air,
> And what seem'd corporal melted
> As breath into the wind.

And Hecate in *Macbeth* (III. v. 20) says:

I am for the air . . . .

In Macbeth's letter to his wife we read (I. v. 3)—

When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves air into which they vanished.

Prophecy.

It was recognised that they had the power of prophecy. This is illustrated in the whole play of *Macbeth*, but especially in I. iii. 58, where Banquo says to them:

If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me . . . .

Hate.

We naturally expect them to be prone to hate and spite (*Macbeth*, I. iii. 1)—

First Witch: Where hast thou been, sister?
Second Witch: Killing swine.

and (I. iii. 18)—

I will drain him dry as hay;
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his pent-house lid.

Odd numbers

Their fondness for odd numbers is very marked, especially for the number three (*Macbeth*, IV. i. 1)—

Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.

and (I. iii. 35)—

Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
And thrice again to make up nine.

They purposely avoid the use of even numbers by adding odd ones (*Macbeth*, IV. i. 2)—

> Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined.

and again in *Macbeth*, I. iii. 22—

> Weary se'n-nights nine times nine
> Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine.

The supposed reason for this is given in the *Merry Wives of Windsor* (v. i. 3)—

> They say there is divinity in odd numbers, either in nativity, chance, or death.

Wax figures.

One of their special devices for carrying out their evil designs was making wax figures. It was alleged that whatever they did to these would actually happen to the human being represented. This practice is frequently referred to. Compare *King John*, v. iv. 22—

> Have I not hideous death within my view,
> Retaining but a quantity of life,
> Which bleeds away even as a form of wax
> Resolveth from his figure 'gainst the fire?

and the *Merry Wives of Windsor* (IV. ii. 185), where Ford says that the witch of Brentford

> Works by charms, by spells, by the figure.

The antiquity of this superstition is very

great. It is of interest to find it possibly referred to in Psalm lxviii. 2—

As wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

One of the special methods in vogue in Shakespeare's time for detecting witches was that of the trial by stool referred to in *Troilus and Cressida* (II. i. 46)— Detection.

Thou stool for a witch.

A supposed witch was so tied to a stool that the circulation of the blood was stopped, thus causing great pain. Here she had to stay twenty-four hours, or confess herself a witch.

Another favourite test was that of drawing blood (*I. Henry VI.* I. v. 7)—

Blood will I draw on thee; thou art a witch.

Protection against witches could be obtained in various ways. There were special seasons of the year when witches did not appear (*Hamlet*, I. i. 158)— Protection.

Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes,
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated.
. . . . . .
. . . . . No spirit dare stir abroad,
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.

Or one might propitiate the witch, as in the *Comedy of Errors* (IV. iii. 72)—

> Some devils ask but the parings of one's nail,
> A rush, a hair, a drop of blood, a pin,
> A nut, a cherrystone.

The attempt, though in this case fruitless, to court the favour of the Supernatural by gifts is well illustrated in *I. Henry VI.* (v. iii.), where La Pucelle offers not only blood, but first a member of her body, then her whole body, and lastly her "body, soul and all," that aid may be given to France against England. But she has to confess—

> My ancient incantations are too weak,
> And hell too strong for me to buckle with.

But the greatest method of all, which could always be used, was the exercise of faith (*Comedy of Errors*, III. ii. 148)—

> I, amazed, ran from her as a witch;
> And, I think, if my breast had not been made of faith, and my heart of steel,
> She had transform'd me to a curtal dog, and made me turn i' the wheel.

Conclusion.

Shakespeare's treatment of this subject throughout leads us to believe that he had a strong conviction of the powers of evil repre-

sented by the witches, though he did not think much of the evil influence of those old hags or Amazons to whom the name of witch was applied.

GHOSTS.

Subjective and objective.

Shakespeare clearly realised the difficulty that lay in people's minds with regard to ghosts, and he illustrates the various opinions held, by making his ghosts at times objective, at others subjective. We find the Ghost objective in *Hamlet*. On one occasion he is seen at the same moment by Marcellus, Horatio, and Hamlet.

Subjective ghosts are more frequent. In *Hamlet* (III. iv.) the Queen does not see the ghost to whom her son speaks; in *Macbeth* (III. iv.) Macbeth alone sees the ghost of Banquo; in *Richard III.* (v. iii.) ghosts come to Richard and Richmond in their sleep; the ghost of Julius Caesar comes to the drowsy Brutus before the battle of Philippi; and in *Cymbeline* (v. iv.) apparitions come to Posthumus as he sleeps in his prison.

Exorcism.

The power of exorcists, who could raise

spirits or make them depart, is referred to in *Cymbeline* (IV. ii. 276), where Guiderius says:

No exorcisor harm thee.

and in *Julius Caesar* (II. i. 323), where we find Ligarius exclaiming—

Thou, like an exorcist, hast conjured up
My mortified spirit . . . .

and again in *All's Well that Ends Well* (V. iii. 306), when the widow returns with Helena, the King exclaims—

Is there no exorcist
Beguiles the truer office of mine eyes?

Actual exorcisms are enacted by La Pucelle, who calls up the fiends in *I. Henry VI.* (V. iii.), and by Glendower in *I. Henry IV.* (III. i.), at whose summons the distant musicians immediately appear.

But such an exorcist must be a learned man, and as a rule know Latin. We find Pinch in the *Comedy of Errors* (IV. iv. 57) called to act as exorcist—

I charge thee, Satan, housed within this man
To yield possession to my holy prayers.

And in *Hamlet* (I. i. 42), Marcellus says:

Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.

Ghosts and Light.

The approach of an apparition was heralded by a change in the lights. In *Richard III.* (v. iii. 180)—

> The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight
> . . . . . .
> Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd
> Came to my tent . . . .

Again, Brutus in *Julius Caesar* (IV. iii. 275) cries out—

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

Mode of appearance.

Regarding the habits and peculiarities of ghosts, we find that they appear clad just as in the time of their mortal life (*Hamlet*, I. ii. 199)—

> . . . . A figure like your father,
> Armed at point exactly, cap-a-pe.

Again, in *Macbeth* (III. iv.), Macbeth clearly recognises Banquo's ghost.

Questions.

They are impatient of questions (*II. Henry VI.* I. iv. 31), where the ghost exclaims in impatience:

> Ask what thou wilt; that I had said and done!

This is one of the fine touches of the poet, for the unseen world is so little known to us that it would be unreal to make spirits speak glibly of their lives or thoughts in that

land. Not only do the ghosts say little, but the poet urges silence on those who have seen and heard them (*Hamlet*, I. ii. 249)—

> And whatsoever else shall hap to-night,
> Give it an understanding, but no tongue.

So Prospero before the masque in *The Tempest* (IV. i. 59)—

> No tongue! all eyes! be silent.

Preference for night.

Ghosts, like witches and fairies, prefer the night season (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, III. ii. 380)—

> And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger,
> At whose approach, ghosts, wandering here and there,
> Troop home to churchyards . . . .
> For fear lest day should look their shames upon;
> They wilfully themselves exile from light,
> And must for aye consort with black-brow'd night.

And *Hamlet* (III. ii. 404)—

> 'Tis now the very witching time of night,
> When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
> Contagion to this world . . . .

Also *II. Henry VI.* (I. iv. 16)—

> . . . . . wizards know their times,
> Deep night, dark night, the silent of the night,
> The time of night when Troy was set on fire;
> The time when screech-owls cry, and ban-dogs howl,
> And spirits walk, and ghosts break up their graves.

The masterly way in which Shakespeare deals with the question of ghosts is such as to suggest that he had a definite belief in these apparitions. Conclusion.

DEVILS.

Fairies are derived from local deities and patrons; devils trace their origin back to heathen gods, and bring thence all the terror and wickedness of ancient mythology. They can assume any shape (*Timon of Athens*, II. ii. 115)— Origin. Shape.

. . . . sometime it appears like a lord; sometime like a lawyer; sometime like a philosopher . . . . and, generally, in all shapes that man goes up and down in from four score to thirteen this spirit walks in.

And *King Lear* (III. vi. 31)—

The foul fiend haunts poor Tom in the voice of a nightingale.

As Shakespeare deals both with witches proper and also with the human beings called by that name, so he deals with devils and with the people possessed by them. The chief instance of the latter is that of Edgar in *King Lear*, the madness of Lear being contrasted with the pseudo-possession of Edgar. Possession.

The fiends that hold sway over Shakespeare's characters are many and various:

Merry Wives of Windsor (II. ii. 311)—Amaimon, Lucifer, Barbason.

King Lear (III. vi. 7)—Frateretto.

„ (III. iv. 146)—Smulkin.

„ (IV. i. 61)—"Five fiends have been in poor Tom at once: of lust, as Obidicut; Hobbididance, prince of dumbness; Mahu, of stealing; Modo, of murder; and Flibbertigibbet, of mopping and mowing."

People possessed by devils were subject to peculiarly harsh treatment, as we see from the *Comedy of Errors* (IV. iv. 95)—

> Mistress, both man and master is possess'd;
> . . . . . .
> They must be bound, and laid in some dark room.

Madness and possession were considered one and the same thing (*As You Like It*, III. ii. 420)—

> Love is merely a madness; and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do.

Compare also *Romeo and Juliet* (I. ii. 56), where love-sick Romeo exclaims that he is

> Not mad, but bound more than a madman is.

Shakespeare very seldom introduces fiends on to the stage. Though they are frequently referred to, they only actually appear once (*I. Henry VI.* v. iii.), where they answer the conjurations of La Pucelle. Appearance on Stage.

The best known reference to their presence in the air is *Macbeth* (I. v. 41), when Lady Macbeth calls them to her aid—

> . . . . . 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 . . . .

Shakespeare has not given this subject any serious consideration, and his general treatment of it suggests humour. Conclusion.

DREAMS.

Shakespeare constantly introduces dreams into his plays, not only incidentally, but also as part of the main action, and the study of them is not without interest.

Origin.

It is the Fairy Queen Titania who sends them. We find in *Romeo and Juliet* (I. iv. 53)—

> Oh, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you,
> . . . . . .

. . . . she gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love.
O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on court'sies straight;
O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees.

She brings both sorrow and joy (*Troilus and Cressida* (v. iii. 6)—

My dreams will, sure, prove ominous to the day.

And (*Romeo and Juliet*, v. i. 1)—

If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,
My dreams presage some joyful news at hand.

Chief Dreams mentioned.

Among the chief dreams mentioned are Gloucester's dream (*II. Henry VI.* i. 225)—

Methought this staff, mine office badge in court,
Was broke in twain . . . .

Clarence's dream (*Richard III.* i. iv. 10), where he foresees his murder at sea; Calphurnia's in *Julius Caesar* (ii. ii. 76)—

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.

The Soothsayer's in *Cymbeline* (iv. ii. 346)—

Last night the very gods shewed me a vision—
I saw Jove's bird, the Roman eagle, wing'd
From the spongy south to this part of the west,
There vanish'd in the sunbeams: which portends
. . . . . .
Success to the Roman host . . . .

In *Henry VIII.* (IV. ii.) Katharine in her sleep sees the angels coming to welcome her; Posthumus' dream (*Cymbeline*, V. iv. 29), when the various spirits appear before him; and Hasting's mention of Stanley's dream in *Richard III.* (III. iv. 84)—

> Stanley did dream the boar did raze his helm.

Special feature of Antigonus' Dream.

The dream of Antigonus (*Winter's Tale*, III. iii.) presents a feature of special interest. In his dream the spirit of Hermione rises up before him. At the time of the dream Hermione is supposed to be dead, but at the end of the play it is discovered that she has been miraculously preserved. Hence the spirit which visited Antigonus was not, as he supposed, the spirit of one dead, but that of a living person. This is the only instance in which Shakespeare uses the supernatural presence of the living. The ghosts which come in other plays usually make mention of their death. In the few lines spoken by the spirit of Hermione, predicting the doom of Antigonus, we naturally find no mention of her having left this world. Shakespeare realised what he was doing, and wrote with

the pen of the prophet. In these days such appearances scarcely provoke comment.

Veracity.

It will be noticed that all these dreams, save that of the Soothsayer in *Cymbeline*, predict death or misfortune, which sooner or later comes as foretold.

Interpretation.

The difficulty of the interpretation of dreams is raised in the case of two of the preceding, that of Gloucester and that of Calphurnia. The duchess attempts to persuade Gloucester that his dream was nothing but an argument (*II. Henry VI.* I. ii. 33)—

> That he that breaks a stick of Gloucester's grove
> Shall lose his head for his presumption.

And Decius, in the case of Calphurnia's dream, urges (*Julius Caesar*, II. ii. 83)—

> 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 . . . .
> This by Calphurnia's dream is signified.

Conclusion.

But in both these cases the forced interpretation proves false. The plain meaning of these and the other dreams is in every case fulfilled, which leads us to imply that

Shakespeare placed some reliance at least on these workings of our sub-conscious brain.

PROPHECY AND ASTROLOGY.

Various Prophecies.

There are many instances of prophecy and astrological portents in Shakespeare's plays, though only in *Macbeth* does the working out of a prediction control the whole action.

In *II. Henry VI.* (I. iv. 33) the spirit which comes in answer to the conjurations of Bolingbroke, prophesies with regard to the king:

> The duke yet lives that Henry shall depose;
> But him outlive and die a violent death.

And concerning Suffolk:

> By water shall he die and take his end.

We find Margaret prophesying in *Richard III.* (I. iii. 245)—

> The time will come that thou shalt wish for me
> To help thee.

And (I. iii. 299)—

> O but remember this another day . . . .
> And say, poor Margaret was a prophetess.

Her forecast is fulfilled later, when Queen Elizabeth confesses (*Richard III.* IV. iv. 79)—

> O, thou didst prophesy the time would come
> That I should wish for thee to help me.

And Buckingham (V. i. 26)—

> Thus Margaret's curse falls heavy on my neck—
> When he, quoth she, shall split thy heart with sorrow,
> Remember Margaret was a prophetess.

In *I. Henry VI.* (III. i. 195) Exeter meditates when left alone—

> And now I fear that fatal prophecy,
> . . . . . .
> That Henry born at Monmouth, should win all;
> And Henry born at Windsor, should lose all.

The great prophecy of the Bishop of Carlisle in *Richard II.* (IV. i. 136)—

> And if you crown him, let me prophesy—
> The blood of England shall manure the ground
> And future ages groan for this foul act;

was only too truly fulfilled by the Wars of the Roses.

In *Macbeth* (I. i.) the third witch reveals the exact time; the second is a prophetess with regard to place; and the first vaguely predicts the times to come—

> *First Witch:* When the hurlyburly's done,
> When the battle's lost and won.
> *Second Witch:* Upon the heath.
> *Third Witch:* That will be ere set of sun.

The apparitions in *Macbeth* also prophesy as to future events:

First Apparition (IV. i. 71)—
Beware Macduff.

Second Apparition (IV. i. 80)—
None of woman born shall harm Macbeth.

Third Apparition (IV. i. 92)—
Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him.

In *Troilus and Cressida* (II. ii. 111) Cassandra comes in raving, and prophesying:

Cry, Trojans, cry! an Helen and a woe,
Cry, cry! Troy burns, or else let Helen go.

We meet with a soothsayer in *Antony and Cleopatra* (II. iii. 16), who tells Antony that Caesar's fortunes shall rise higher than his, and with another in *Cymbeline* (V. v. 454), who interprets the paper left by the Spirits (IV. iv. 138), and who also predicts the success of the Romans (IV. ii. 346).

Astrology.

References to astrological portents are extremely frequent. They occur in almost every play. *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, and *The Tempest* perhaps contain the most. One or two are quoted as examples.

In *I. Henry IV.* (III. i. 16) we read of the signs attending the birth of Glendower—

> . . . . . At my nativity
> The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes.

The old man outside Macbeth's castle tells Ross (II. iv. 1)—

> Three score and ten I can remember well:
> Within the volume of which time I have seen
> Hours dreadful and things strange, but this sore night
> Hath trifled former knowings.

Prospero in *The Tempest* (I. ii. 180) tells Miranda—

> . . . . and by my prescience
> I find my zenith doth depend upon
> A most auspicious star, whose influence
> If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes
> Will ever after droop . . . .

Caesar expresses his belief in such manifestations (*Julius Caesar*, I. iii. 31)—

> For, I believe, they are portentous things
> Unto the climate that they point upon.

Veracity.

In the *Winter's Tale* we have reference to the oracle at Delphos. In every case these prophecies or portents prove correct. We conclude therefore that Shakespeare held such prognostications to be accurate.

GENIUS.

Johnson defines the Genius as the power that watches for man's protection. Bulloker, in his "English Expositor," 1616, gives a broader definition, "a good angel or a familiar evil spirit." Definition.

The modern meaning of the word "genius" is not met with till Edward Phillips' "Dictionary," 1657.

Shakespeare uses the word seven times, and only once with the idea of evil (*The Tempest*, IV. i. 26)— Evil.

> . . . . . the strong'st suggestion
> Our worser Genius can, shall never melt
> Mine honour into lust . . . . .

We might infer from this that a man has a good and a bad Genius, but elsewhere in Shakespeare we only hear of man's one Genius, except perhaps *II. Henry IV.* (II. iv. 362)—

> For the boy—there is a good angel about him; but the devil outbids him too.

The spiritual Genius is contrasted with the material hands and feet in *Julius Caesar* (II. i. 63)— Contrasted with "mortal instruments."

> Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion all the interim is

> Like a phantasma or a hideous dream:
> The genius and the mortal instruments
> Are then in council, and the state of man,
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
> The nature of an insurrection.

Appears at Death.

A man is visited by this Genius shortly before death (*Troilus and Cressida* IV. iv. 50):

> Hark, you are called, some say the Genius so
> Cries, Come, to him that instantly must die.

The Genius is like to the man he protects. Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse cannot be distinguished the one from the other, and it is said of them (*Comedy of Errors*, V. i. 332)—

> One of these men is genius to the other;
> . . . . which is the natural man,
> And which the Spirit? who deciphers them?

Not only is the Genius like man, but influenced by human plans. Sir Toby says of Malvolio (*Twelfth Night*, III. iv. 142)—

> His very genius hath taken the infection of the device.

Lastly, the Genius is not independent of other men (*Macbeth*, III. i. 54)—

> . . . . . There is none but he
> Whose being I do fear: and under him
> My Genius is rebuked, as, it is said,
> Mark Antony's was by Caesar . . . .

The allusion is to *Antony and Cleopatra* (II. iii. 18)—

> Therefore, O Antony, stay not by his side:
> Thy demon, that thy spirit which keeps thee, is
> Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable,
> Where Caesar's is not; but near him thy angel
> Becomes a Fear, as being o'erpower'd: therefore
> Make space enough between you.

This is the only instance of Shakespeare using the word Demon as an alternative for Genius.

Characters in Mystery Plays.

Fear was a character in the old Morality Plays. Another such character, the Vice, is alluded to in *Hamlet* (III. iv. 98). The king is termed—

> . . . . . a vice of kings.

Compare also *Henry V.* (IV. iv. 74)—

> This roaring devil i' the old play.

In *I. Henry IV.* (II. iv. 500) two other characters from these plays are mentioned—

> That reverend Vice, that grey Iniquity, that father ruffian, that Vanity in years.

The porter in *Macbeth* comes from the same source.

RELIGIOUS SUPERNATURALISM.

Since religion is the progenitor of the whole subject, we should have been surprised

if Shakespeare had not touched on religious supernaturalism. But as transition was the key-note of Shakespeare's age, especially transition in religious thought, we notice that the writer for all time has been particularly careful to refrain from giving too important a place to what might eventually prove to be but a one-sided view of truth.

No play is based on doctrinal theology, but there are numerous references to religious dogma.

Original sin.

Original sin (*Henry V.* I. i. 29)—

> Consideration like an angel came
> And whipp'd the offending Adam out of him.

Atonement.

Mention is made of the Atonement in *I. Henry IV.* (I. i. 24)—

> . . . . . those holy fields,
> Over whose acres walked those blessed feet,
> Which, fourteen hundred years ago, were nail'd
> For our advantage on the bitter cross.

And in *Measure for Measure* (II. ii. 73)—

> Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once,
> And He that might the vantage best have took
> Found out the remedy . . . .

Baptism.

Reference is made to Baptism in *Henry V.* (I. ii. 31)—

> That what you speak is in your conscience wash'd
> As pure as sin with baptism.

Romeo and Juliet (II. ii. 50) suggests the doctrine of the new birth— New Birth.

> Call me but love, and I 'll be new baptised.

We also find constant references to prayer, of which perhaps the most pregnant is in *Hamlet* (III. iii. 97)— Prayer.

> My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
> Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

Providence is spoken of in *Macbeth* (II. iii. 136)— Providence.

> In the great hand of God I stand.

And in *II. Henry VI.* (II. iii. 28)—

> And God shall be my hope,
> My stay, my guide,
> And lantern to my feet.

And in *The Tempest* (I. ii. 158)—

> *Mir.:* . . . . How came we ashore?
> *Prosp.:* By Providence divine.

And (I. ii. 63)—

> By foul play, as thou say'st, we were heaved thence;
> But blessedly holp thither.

Frequent mention is made of Heaven and Hell, of Angels and Devils, but the following quotations must suffice: Heaven and Hell.

In *Henry VIII.* (IV. ii.) angels appear to

Katharine and comfort her as she lies on her bed of sickness.

Constance, when in grief about the death of Arthur her son, says(*King John*, III. iv. 76):

> And, father Cardinal, I have heard you say
> That we shall see and know our friends in Heaven.

Faith.

Faith is given its due recognition in *II. Henry VI.* (II. i.)—

> Now, God be prais'd that to believing souls
> Gives light in darkness, comfort in despair.

Bible.

And we hear of the value of the Holy Book in *Hamlet* (I. ii. 131)—

> Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd,
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter . . . .

Divine Kingship.

The Divine right of Kings is referred to in *Richard II.* (III. ii. 54)—

> Not all the water in the rough rude sea,
> Can wash the balm from an anointed king.

The power of the king to cure through Divine sanction is spoken of (*Macbeth*, IV. iii. 141)—

> . . . . . there are a crew of wretched souls
> That stay his cure and their malady convinces
> The great assay or art; but at his touch
> Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand,
> They presently amend.

Transmigration of souls is referred to under the name of the Philosophy of Pythagoras in two instances (*Merchant of Venice*, IV. i. 130)— Transmigration.

> Thou almost mak'st me waver in my faith,
> To hold opinion with Pythagoras,
> That souls of animals infuse themselves
> Into the trunks of men . . . .

And in *Twelfth Night* (IV. ii. 54) the Clown says:

> What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild fowl?

Malvolio answers:

> That the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird.

And Shakespeare very characteristically makes the Clown question further:

> What thinkest thou of this opinion?

to which Malvolio replies:

> I think nobly of the soul, and no way approve his opinion.

The reverence with which Shakespeare treats the fundamental truths of the Christian faith makes us feel that he is a sympathiser, though, except for the reference already quoted from his Will, we have no grounds for believing that he had any real faith in the dogmas of the Church. Conclusion.

Superstition.

The endless superstitions connected with birth, death, the calendar, the weather, folk-medicine, comets, birds, plants and animals, are too numerous to be discussed, seeing that they are merely a fringe to the subject of Supernaturalism.

III

THE EVOLUTION OF SHAKESPEARE'S CONCEPTION OF THE SUPERNATURAL

A priori Considerations—Evolution in Shakespeare generally—Evolution in Plays specially dealing with the Supernatural: *Midsummer Night's Dream*, The bright morning, Fairy Supernaturalism—*Hamlet*, The cloudy noon, The Problems of Life—*Macbeth*, The Storm, Magic courted—*The Tempest*, The clear star-lit night succeeding Life's Tempest, Magic renounced.

A priori considerations.

We expect, and rightly, to find considerable traces of evolution in Shakespeare's treatment of the Supernatural. The mind of every thinking man must evolve as he grows from youth to manhood, but especially should this be true of a mind like Shakespeare's, which was capable of taking in so much, and grinding it leisurely at its own mill. Moreover, he lived at a time when there were many conflicting forces at work. A spirit of freer thought was undermining the religious superstitions of the people, and as yet nothing

definite had come to replace these. It is just at such epochs of the world's history that a great mind has the opportunity of evolving, for the multitude of new facts and experiences, which such troubled times bring with them, give a man unlimited supplies on which he may work, and as he works his position must be constantly changing and advancing.

Period of Superstition.

We see Shakespeare first in the small town of Stratford-on-Avon, holding the beliefs of his childhood, and full of all the superstitions that were held by the rustics around him; no doubts had entered into his mind, and evil had no real meaning. At most we find speculation as to the next petty annoyance to be wrought by the mischievous fairies. His knowledge of all the fairy stories and superstitions around him, and his implicit and unquestioned belief in them, gave him ample material, and a mind prepared for working out at an early period such a play as *Midsummer Night's Dream*, where we seem to enter into the very heart of fairy-land, and to know all about its methods and mysteries. But in due course Shakespeare comes to town and finds himself face to face with the reali-

ties of life, and for the first time his faith is shaken and his mind is given up to doubts and questionings. This period was especially long in his case, because England at large was passing from the phase of implicit superstitious belief to that of doubt, and it was perhaps only the greatness of his powers, inspired by Divine Providence, that enabled him at last to return to a maturer, riper faith in all that was good and true and noble. We can trace in his plays how the erratic supernatural interference gives place to law, and the idea of destiny slowly makes way for that of Providence.

Doubt.

Faith.

This evolution might be traced through all his plays, for it is an evolution which not only affects the Supernatural, but also the natural. We might trace it through the early comedies to the histories, and from the histories to those plays which shew us the dark side of life, such as *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well that Ends Well;* and on again to the great tragedies where he works out the problems that are racking his heart, until we see him once more in the clear sunshine of *A Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest.* Or we

Evolution in Plays in general.

might trace it through his characters, especially those of women, from the pure Juliet and Rosalind to the faithless Gertrude, the brutal Lady Macbeth, and the ungrateful daughters of Lear, until we find him once again introducing such characters as Imogen, Perdita, and Miranda.

Investigation limited to evolution in particular Plays.

But we must limit ourselves to the discussion of his evolution as specially revealed in the plays which deal with the Supernatural, and trace his development through *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet*, till we reach the maturity of *The Tempest*.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

Careless mirth.

In *Midsummer Night's Dream* we find, as might be expected, the material world and the spirit world brought into very close contact, for such was their position in the poet's untroubled mind. Nor are we surprised to see the spirit world introduced with all the freshness of mirth, jollity, and sprightliness of action, to which is added the beauty of the greensward and the charm of nature.

The keynote of the play might be taken from Puck's speech (II. i. 43)—

> I am that merry wanderer of the night.
> I jest to Oberon and make him smile,
> . . . . . .
> A merrier hour was never wasted there.

Knowledge assumed.

Shakespeare writes as one who knows everything about the fairy world; there is no mystery connected with it, and he has no reticence in speaking of its airy spirits and their ways. To him all is as clear as daylight. The fairies are merely fairies, and we have as yet no sense that they are the living realities of departed spirits. There is no question of the power or the terror of evil.

As it has been tersely put (Lloyd, "Critical Essay on *Midsummer Night's Dream*"): "The limitation of their [the fairies] mental scope implies no very robust moral control."

Mischief.

It is only mischief that we find. *Midsummer Night's Dream* (II. i. 38), where Puck is asked whether he does not

> . . . . sometime make the drink to bear no barm,
> Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?

When the opportunity occurred (III. ii. 18) he fixed an ass's nole on Bottom's head.

And this tendency to teasing is not only seen in Puck, the Lob of Spirits, but we find the same spirit of mischief present in the King and Queen of the Fairies, for Oberon says (II. i. 166):

> It fell upon a little western flower,
> Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
> . . . . . .
> The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
> Will make or man or woman madly dote
> Upon the next live creature that it sees.

And in line 177 he continues:

> I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
> And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.

Leading to goodwill.

But there is no hate in this mischief, which leads in the end to goodwill. Cp. III. ii. 366, where Oberon directs Puck to

> Crush this herb into Lysander's eye:
> Whose liquor hath this virtuous property,
> To take from thence all error with his might.

And then line 374:

> Whiles I in this affair do thee employ,
> I'll to my Queen and beg her Indian boy;
> And then I will her charmed eye release
> From monster's view, and all things shall be peace.

Whilst the third act ends—

> Jack shall have his Jill;
> Naught shall go ill;
> The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well.

This same spirit of goodwill closes the play—

Now, until the break of day,
Through this house each fairy stray,
To the best bridebed will we,
Which by us shall blessed be.

Though, as we have already seen, scepticism is discountenanced by the check Hippolyta gives to the unbelief of Theseus, yet throughout the play there is an atmosphere of imagery and imagination well expressed by the lines in v. i. 12 :

Scope for imagination.

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The form of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and give to airy nothing,
A local habitation and a name.

And again, by the closing words of Puck (v. ii. 431)—

Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber'd here,
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream.

Though he takes a full measure of poet's licence, Shakespeare is still enveloped in the folds of his faith and belief as he writes this play. Nevertheless we can just discern early

Germs of serious thought.

foreshadowings of something that was destined to become very terrible, but as yet he was not seriously troubled. Puck knows (III. ii. 381)—

> . . . . . ghosts, wandering here and there,
> Troop home to churchyards: damned spirits all,
> That in crossways and floods have burial.

But this gives Oberon the opportunity to protest—

> But we are spirits of another sort:
> I with the morning's love have oft made sport.

This is only a hint of the dark cloud that is coming, and were it not for the later plays we should not notice it. As, however, in all evolution we find latent germs of the final stages in the earlier ones, so here in an early play we see traces of the darkness which is to settle over the poet.

Shakespeare's evolution might be likened to one of those days in midsummer which open so brightly, but whose beauty is broken by some terrible though passing storm, which leaves the evening clear and calm. We are now at the midsummer morning; all is fair; there is as yet but one little cloud as small as a man's hand, which, however, is destined to

grow until the whole heavens are black with cloud and wind.

HAMLET.

Effect of experience.

We pass on some eight or nine years, and find Shakespeare engaged on *Hamlet*. Things which he has seen and heard, sins which have been committed by him or by others, have darkened the bright light of the morning.

Heaven may lie about us in our infancy, but—

> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing Boy.

The dark forces of the world have been met, and Shakespeare's faith has been shaken. He has lost his trust in that which is mirthful and fairy-like, and as yet no great ruling power of righteousness has come to take its place. The playfulness of the fairies has given way to the great Nemesis, and we find Hamlet saying (v. ii. 10):

Nemesis.

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough hew them how we will.

And Gloucester in *King Lear* (iv. i. 38):

> As flies to wanton boys, are we to the Gods;
> They kill us for their sport.

So also Caesar in *Antony and Cleopatra* (III. vi. 81):

> . . . . . Cheer your heart;
> Be you not troubled with the time, which drives
> O'er your content these strong necessities,
> But let determin'd things to destiny
> Hold unbewail'd their way.

This same idea of Nemesis, crushing when it comes, both good and evil irrespectively, is seen in *King Lear* and in *Othello*. In the former, Cordelia, the righteous daughter, and her two sisters alike perish, and both Othello and Desdemona come to a violent end.

Also in *Richard III.* we feel the brooding of Nemesis in the constant apparitions of Queen Margaret.

Reality of spirits.

The meaningless fairy world has been left behind, and we are dealing with the real spirits of departed men, spirits of the dead who can only come at night, for they are no longer part of this world's life. They do not now appear for sport; it must be some great crisis that brings them.

The murder of Caesar (*Hamlet*, I. i. 114):

> A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
> The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead
> Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets;

or the murder of Hamlet's father (I. iii. 255):

> My father's spirit in arms! all is not well;
> I doubt some foul play . . . .

Question of origin.

Thus we realise that the spirits have become serious beings in Shakespeare's mind, and he is in doubt as to whether their origin be of heaven or hell. The Ghost comes to stir Hamlet to execute justice for a foul murder, yet the spirit of the Ghost does not embody the highest good.

> Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Yet the Ghost exhorts Hamlet (I. v. 25) to—

> Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

The question of the origin of ghosts will be more fully discussed later.

Faith in man retained.

Shakespeare has so far retained his faith in man. In *Hamlet* (II. i. 87) we read Ophelia's description of Hamlet's interview with her. These remarkable lines, which none but a true lover could ever have written, end:

> He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
> For out o' doors he went without their helps,
> And to the last bended their light on me.

Faith in woman shaken.

This powerful passage expresses the noble love of man, but his faith in woman has been shaken (I. ii. 146)—

> Frailty, thy name is woman!

Nevertheless, Hamlet and the Ghost are still chivalrous to them (I. v. 85)—

> . . . . . nor let thy soul contrive
> Against thy mother aught . . . .

Dishonesty of world.

He now sees the world full of dishonesty: his youthful optimism has been rudely shattered. Hamlet tells us (II. ii. 178):

> Ay, Sir; to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.

And Polonius answers—

> That's very true, my Lord.

And again (I. iv. 36)—

> . . . . . the dram of eale
> Doth all the noble substance of a doubt
> To his own scandal.

Power of evil seen by weakness of women.

Evil has grown powerful, and the Beatrice, Rosalind and Viola, the Helena and Isabella, who could control evil, making it a means of good, have been replaced by women who cannot cope with the evil around them, but instead become its prey; a Portia, (Julius Caesar,) an Ophelia, a Desdemona.

Auto-biography.

In *Hamlet* we have portrayed to us the mind of the poet at the time of writing—Hamlet's pessimism and indecision have their counterparts. Shakespeare has become a cynic as to this world, and he is full of doubts, questionings, and misgivings as to the next.

Reticence of ghosts.

The talkativeness of the fairies has been replaced by reticence, and the Ghost impresses us with his two silent entries. Shakespeare can tell us glibly about the affairs of fairy-land, but he feels he has no power nor right to reveal that which is hidden—that after-life, so real and so terrible. This, at least, he makes the Ghost tell (I. v. 13)—

> . . . . . But that I am forbid
> To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
> I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
> Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
> . . . . . .
> But this eternal blazon must not be
> To ears of flesh and blood . . . .

The dread of the after-life seems to have settled on Shakespeare (III. i. 78)—

> But that the dread of something after death,
> The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
> No traveller returns, puzzles the will
> And makes us rather bear those ills we have
> Than fly to others that we know not of.

Of these ills the Ghost tells us something (I. v. 3)—

> My hour is almost come,
> When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
> Must render up myself.

Whatever Shakespeare tells us through the medium of his ghosts is always in the form of a direct statement, and not a logical deduction. Ghosts do not in these plays enter into discussions. If they have something to say, they say it; if not, they remain silent. It is only the foolish or the careless who talk of that which they do not understand, and we feel that Shakespeare is shewing us the dignity of his character, and the control that he has over his poetic imagination, in being reserved on this great question.

The fairies, when they came, raised mirth, pleasure, and amusement, but the ghosts produce physical terror.

Physical terror.

Horatio and Marcellus are both afraid of the Ghost, but the fear is merely physical (I. iv. 69)—

> What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
> Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
> That beetles o'er his base into the sea.

The Ghost has not yet become a spirit of evil, with power over the souls of men. Hamlet, who thinks more of his soul than of his body, has no fear, and exclaims (I. iv. 64): Limitation of power.

> Why, what should be the fear?
> I do not set my life at a pin's fee;
> And for my soul, what can it do to that,
> Being a thing immortal as itself?

Before we turn to the darkest picture of all, it is interesting to notice that in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, written just before this time, Shakespeare has let his mind for a minute return to fairyland, with this difference: the fairies of *Midsummer Night's Dream* are real to the poet; those in the *Merry Wives of Windsor* (v. v.) are but children dressed up as fairies. Could any touch shew us more clearly the transformation that was taking place in Shakespeare's mind? Fairies in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*.

MACBETH.

The cloud which we scarcely perceived in *Midsummer Night's Dream* has darkened. We have seen it brooding over *Hamlet*, and now it is at its blackest. This is not the period of good or even weak women, but of women whose whole spirit seems to be that Women now bad.

of evil—a Lady Macbeth, a Goneril, a Regan, a Cressida, and a Cleopatra.

In *Hamlet* we dealt with the serious spirits of the other world, and their attempts to make men carry out their desires, which were prompted by righteous aspirations: though a Nemesis stronger than the Right could crush good and evil at one fell blow. In *Hamlet* the Ghost at least spoke the direct truth, and did not quibble. Now in *Macbeth* the apparitions do not hesitate to deceive Macbeth, and to put an ungrounded courage in him by means of their prevarications.

The Spirits now evil.

Ruin of Macbeth.

The play of *Macbeth* is a study in the ruin of a character which at first was promising. This downfall is brought about largely by the help of spirits whose watchword is, "Evil, be thou my good."

Moral judgment gone.

In *Hamlet* good and evil are pitted one against the other. In *Macbeth* the power to distinguish between good and evil seems to have gone (I. iii. 130)—

> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill; cannot be good:
> . . . . . .
> . . . . . and nothing is
> But what is not.

In *Macbeth* (I. i. 11)—

> Fair is foul, and foul is fair,

and in I. iii. 38—

> So foul and fair a day I have not seen,

we have the keynote of the play—the break-down of moral judgment. These are the darkest days. The voice of conscience is scarcely heard. It is no wonder that now the poet conceives (V. v. 26) that life

Conception of life at this time,

> . . . . . is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

As we compare this with *As You Like It* (II. vii. 139) we see the change that has taken place in the poet's mind. There at least life is an ordered process, and has its meaning:

And before.

> . . . . . All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players;
> They have their exits and their entrances,
> And one man in his time plays many parts,
> His acts being seven ages.

The very pictures Shakespeare gives us of murderers depict the same devolution. In *Macbeth* (III. i. 108) the second murderer says:

Character of Murderers now

> . . . . . I am one, my liege,
> Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
> Have so incensed that I am reckless what
> I do to spite the world.

And before. The first murderer adds, "And I another," whereas in the earlier plays we see murderers repenting of their evil (*Richard III.* I. iv. 279)—

> How fain, like Pilate, would I wash my hands
> Of this most grievous guilty murder done.

And in *II. Henry VI.* (III. ii. 3)—

> O that it were to do! what have we done?
> Did'st ever hear a man so penitent.

Resultant conception of Supernatural. If the world of sense has become foul, so has also the Supernatural. The spirits are terrible in appearance. We no longer see

Moral evil. fairies nor even ghosts, but evil witches (*Macbeth*, I. iii. 40)—

> So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
> That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth.
> . . . . . .
> . . . . each at once her choppy finger laying
> Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,
> And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
> That you are so.

Reticence. They are still reticent, and only when Macbeth conjures them, and as it were sells his soul to them, do the apparitions appear and tell him what he desires to know; but even then reticence is their rule, and they refuse to be commanded. And though they

speak at times they will not brook questioning (IV. i. 89)—

Hear his speech, but say thou nought.

And (IV. i. 108)—

Listen, but speak not to 't.

Hate.

The mischief of the fairies has been replaced by hate in real earnest, and the witches that are now before us deliberately brew evil in their accursed cauldrons (I. iii. 18)—

I 'll drain him dry as hay:
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his pent-house lid;
He shall live a man forbid:
. . . . . .
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost.*

And the object of all their brewing is (IV. i. 18)—

For a charm of fearful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

And the ingredients of the cauldron are all suggestive of moral evil (IV. i. 22)—

Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf,
Witches' mummy; maw and gulf
Of the ravin'd salt-sea shark,
Root of hemlock digg'd i' the dark,
Liver of blaspheming Jew,
Gall of goat and slips of yew.*

* It is only fair to state that the authorship of these passages is doubtful.

Terror.

Is it any wonder that these witches raise fears in the minds of those who think of them, and haunt the memory of those who have seen them? They become a terror to Macbeth, whether asleep or awake (II. ii. 58)—

> How is 't with me, when every noise appals me?

So great is Macbeth's obsession that he sees what is but a subjective dagger (II. i. 33)—

> Is this a dagger which I see before me,
> The handle toward my hand?
> Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
> To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
> A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
> Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?

And again, this haunting fear makes him apperceive the Ghost of Banquo (III. iv.), which none but he can see. Horror too seizes Lady Macbeth in her sleep (v. i. 48)—

> What! will these hands ne'er be clean? No more o' that, my lord, no more of that: you mar all with this starting.

The very elements seem affected, and behave unwontedly (II. iii. 59)—

> 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 woful time.

Again, v. i. 79:

> Foul whisperings are abroad: unnatural deeds
> Do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds
> To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.

Moral fear.

The fear which we saw in Hamlet to have been physical has now become for the most part moral. The Ghost was feared because his origin was not understood: the witches are feared because they come with an oppressive sense of evil.

We have passed from the dark doubts and religious questionings with regard to the other world to the greater dread of the magical power the spirits possess. It is a gloomy picture. We have studied the downfall of a man who might have been noble. We have had the portraiture of Lady Macbeth, the human witch, more terrible than the supernatural witches; and but for one redeeming element we might feel that the cloud would settle down for ever. But through all the darkness there gleams one light; some small sense of the distinction between right and wrong is still left in Macbeth, despite his and the witches' combined efforts to root it out. He does at times think of his better self.

One break in the dark cloud.

Near his end Macbeth moralises in these words (v. iii. 22):

> I have lived long enough: my way of life
> Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf,
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have; but in their stead—
> Curses . . . . .

He knows what he has lost.

Nemesis is replaced.

We might also catch some ray of hope from the fact that Nemesis has been replaced by a more just retribution. Macbeth's death does not involve the death of all that is good; and Macduff, bringing in Macbeth's head, is rightly hailed by all as King of Scotland.

So again, man is no longer a pawn on the chessboard of fate (*All's Well that Ends Well*, I. i. 231)—

> Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
> Which we ascribe to heaven: the fated sky
> Gives us free scope; only doth backward pull
> Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.

These gleams of hope find their expression in the words of Malcolm (IV. iii. 240)—

> . . . . . Receive what cheer ye may;
> The night is long that never finds the day.

THE TEMPEST.

As we read this play, beginning with tempest and ending with peace, harmony and forgiveness, we feel that in truth the storm of life is over, and that the calm and quiet of a midsummer night has settled over the poet.

Human retribution replaced.

The Nemesis of *Hamlet*, as we saw, was replaced by human retribution in *Macbeth*. The Great Law is now seen to be Divine Providence "delaying—not forgetting" (III. iii. 73). Prospero tells Miranda that they were "blessedly holp thither," and that they came ashore "by Providence Divine."

New ideas on the world.

With the changed ideas concerning the ruling Power has also come a new conception of the world itself. It is now a happier place.

Miranda says of Ferdinand (*The Tempest*, I. ii. 457):

> There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple:
> If the ill spirit have so fair a house,
> Good things will strive to dwell with it.

And (v. i. 182) exclaims:

> . . . . . O wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
> That has such people in 't.

Woman enthroned.

Woman has at last come to us in her true character as saviour of man (I. ii. 153), where Prospero says to Miranda:

> . . . . . O, a cherubin
> Thou wast that did preserve me. Thou didst smile
> Infused with a fortitude from heaven
> . . . . . .
> . . . . . which raised in me
> An undergoing stomach, to bear up
> Against what should ensue.

New ideas on life.

Shakespeare's altered view of the world led naturally to a new conception of life in general (IV. i. 156)—

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on.

A dream—not thought of as fantastical or unreal, but rather as the embodiment of freedom; that which is not limited by time and space; that which is unbounded.

Our limited earthly life is to the freedom before it as the fantasy of a dream to its unlimited possibilities. Only in this sense is our life like the baseless fabric of a vision.

Forgiveness.

We strike in this play a great and new keynote—that of forgiveness. At the end of *The Tempest* (V. i. 78) we read:

> . . . . . I do forgive thee,
> Unnatural though thou art.

v. i. 292 shews us that even Caliban could hope for pardon.

This note of forgiveness characterises *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*: there, as here, the very worst are pardoned. The terror of the present life and the fear of spirits have been dispelled and replaced by the soothing music which haunts the island (*The Tempest*, III. ii. 143)— Peace for present.

> Be not afeared; the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.

The future life no longer appals (IV. i. 157)— For future.

> . . . . . Our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep. . . . .

A calm, peaceful sleep leading to a glad awaking, not the troubled sleep of Hamlet (III. i. 64)—

> . . . . . To die, to sleep;
> To sleep; perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub.

The dogging dread has departed, and our minds are led back to the mirth of *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

But into this mirth has been introduced an element of gravity. We no longer have the careless jollity of youth, but the mature joy of advanced years. The influences which Gravity.

led Shakespeare to write such a play as *Macbeth* must have a sobering effect on all his later work. We can imagine him saying in the language of the poet Wordsworth:

> . . . . . For I have learned
> To look on Nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
> The still, sad music of humanity.
> . . . . . .
> . . . . . And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused.

Power of spirits gone.

The power of the spirits for good or evil has gone; the witches who had such a controlling influence on Macbeth are on their downfall (*The Tempest*, v. i. 269)—

> His mother was a witch; and one so strong
> That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs,
> And deal in her command, without her power.

Such was the witch of old times, but now Caliban says of Prospero (I. ii. 372):

> I must obey: his art is of such power,
> It would control my dam's god, Setebos,
> And make a vassal of him.

Ariel too is a captive, and Prospero tells

us it was his art which freed him from the cloven pine (I. ii. 291):

> . . . . . it was mine art,
> When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape
> The pine, and let thee out.

Man is now lord.

All authority has been taken from the spirits, and it is Prospero who delegates power to them, for he tells Ariel (IV. i. 37)—

> . . . . . Go bring the rabble,
> O'er whom I give thee power.

Prospero's power, as we have seen, is not only over Caliban, Setebos, and Ariel, but also over the "Shapes" which he makes to appear (IV. i. 120)—

> . . . . . Spirits, which by mine art
> I have from their confines call'd to enact
> My present fancies.

And over men; for example Ferdinand, when he attempts to draw his sword, is charmed from moving (I. ii. 466).

Self-control.

As we think of this authority which Prospero possessed over the spirit-world and over man by his magic arts, we are struck by the self-control he exercised, and by the moral uses to which he put his superior knowledge. He felt that all this supremacy, however

powerful, was not to be the chief instrument in moulding the work-a-day life of this world, and with the majesty of a conqueror he gives up his supremacy, and decides henceforth to leave the Supernatural untouched (v. i. 50)—

Abdication of power.

> . . . . . But this rough magic
> I there abjure . . . .
> . . . . . I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound,
> I'll drown my book.

Mutual freedom.

The intercourse between human and supernatural beings, which was so prominent in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, is not to be. Man has freed himself from their power; he has even lived to control them in turn. But as forgiveness was the word to those who had sinned, so freedom should be the reward of those who were captive, and Ariel is to "be free as mountain winds" (I. ii. 498).

Conclusion.

Shakespeare's evolution is complete; his mirth has been mellowed into joy. Pessimism and cynicism have been replaced by a deep sense of final good and a trust in both men and women. For bitterness, has come the milk of human kindness; and all this change

in his character is due to his superstition having ripened, despite many frosts and tempests, into a mature and reasonable faith. His new insight into the glory of the natural is largely due to his evolution in the Supernatural.

IV

THE INFLUENCE WHICH SHAKESPEARE GAVE THE SUPERNATURAL OVER HIS CHARACTERS

Fairies have no Moral Power—Ghosts have limited influence—Assist but do not originate—Greater Power of Witches in *Macbeth*—Spirits controlled by man in *The Tempest*.

Fairies have no moral power.

In *Midsummer Night's Dream* the conceptions of the Supernatural as expressed by fairies are so airy and light that they cannot have much power over the morals and the souls of human creatures. Their intellectual development is so slight that one does not give them a serious thought. Shakespeare allows them to exercise mischief or to work out meaningless miracles, but they cannot touch the fate of man. They may and do manage the love affairs of their human friends by their magic, but there is never any question of their obtaining real mastery. Turning to *Hamlet* we feel at once that we are dealing with spirits of a far more serious calibre. They are no longer different in

kind from us. On the contrary, they are most intimately related. They have themselves been men or women, and are only separated from us by the grave. They have power over us even as men have, and in some ways greater, since they have the added experience of death.

Ghosts related to us, therefore have influence.

But powerful though they be, we shall see that their influence is limited to strengthening ideas or encouraging courses of action already latent in the person to whom they appear. For instance we find Hamlet, before the appearance of the Ghost, meditating bitterly on the action of his mother (I. ii. 137)—

Though strictly limited.

. . . . . That it should come to this!
But two months dead! nay, not so much, not two:
. . . . . .
. . . . . O, most wicked speed . . . .
It is not, nor it cannot come to good:
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!

He recognises himself (II. ii. 627)—

. . . . The spirit that I have seen
. . . . . .
. . . . . perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
(As he is very potent with such spirits)
Abuses me to damn me.

Thus we see, though Shakespeare allows

They assist, but not originate.

his Ghost to emphasise and assist the impressions of Hamlet, yet he does not permit him to originate ideas. Man is his own master, and the ghosts cannot force their will upon him. The play in fact lays stress on the failure of the Ghost. In very truth our wills are ours, though we know not how.

The King does at last fall at the hand of Hamlet, but it is for reasons quite unconnected with the appearance of the Ghost.

Moreover the Ghost cannot compass the death of his murderer; he must act through a living person. Hamlet must be stirred to do the deed. It is no longer a question of fairies who carry out their own revenge. The supernatural is (in the mind of the poet) gradually becoming dependent on the natural. The Ghost realises this lack of power, and comes back to quicken the impressions which he had already strengthened. The appearance of a ghost does not in itself carry conviction, for Hamlet demands proof of the story unfolded to him. We are reminded of the words of St. Luke xvi. 31:

Human agents necessary.

> And neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead.

Word of Ghost not conclusive.

Hamlet is at first sceptical as to the very existence of the Ghost, and insists upon seeing it himself. He is next sceptical as to the truth of its story, and devises a scheme by which to test the veracity of the statements made (II. ii. 627)—

> . . . . . The spirit that I have seen
> May be the devil . . . . .
> . . . . . I'll have grounds
> More relative than this. The play's the thing
> Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

Proof required.

And not trusting in his own powers, he makes Horatio watch the King, and when conviction finally comes to him, it is through the play, and not through the revelation of the Ghost (III. ii. 297)—

> O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pounds. Didst perceive?

Increased power.

As we turn to *Macbeth* we are struck with the greater power allowed by the poet to the supernatural agencies. But though increased, their power is still limited. They are unable to destroy the life of man (I. iii. 24)—

> Though his bark cannot be lost,
> Yet it shall be tempest-tost.

Again, we gather in *Macbeth*, as in *Hamlet*,

Can still only assist.

that the suggestion of murder is in Macbeth's mind before he meets the witches. Their acclamation of him as thane of Cawdor, and especially the "All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter," have such an effect on him that Banquo exclaims (I. iii. 51):

> Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear
> Things that do sound so fair? . . . .

Macbeth could not have been thus moved had not the witches' words been an echo of his secret thoughts.

In I. iii. 134 we read:

> . . . . . 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?

The witches have made no foul suggestion. On the contrary, their prediction that he should be thane of Cawdor has been quite naturally brought about. The foul suggestion is in Macbeth's own mind, and the witches have but expressed his silent ambitions. They undoubtedly bias him, but it is Lady Macbeth and not they who bring about the final determination to do the dread deed (I. vii. 60)—

> But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
> And we'll not fail.

And soon after (I. vii. 79) Macbeth tells us:

> . . . . . I am settled, and bend up
> Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.

Proof required.

Again, like Hamlet, Macbeth does not implicitly believe the witches; he only believes their prophecies one by one as they are worked out. He doubts his being thane of Cawdor, and (I. iii. 73)—

> . . . . . to be King
> Stands not within the prospect of belief.

Though Macbeth appears to put more confidence in the statements of the apparitions, it is only because they appeal to his reason.

When, after being told to "beware Macduff" (IV. i. 71), he hears (IV. i. 80)—

> . . . . . none of woman born
> Shall harm Macbeth . . . . .

he at once says:

> Then live, Macduff: what need I fear of thee?

Again, when the third apparition rises and predicts (IV. i. 92)—

> Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until
> Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
> Shall come against him,

he replies with joy—

> . . . . . That will never be.
> Who can impress the forest, bid the tree
> Unfix his earth-bound root? Sweet bodements! good!

These prophecies appear reasonable, and he accepts them, little suspecting the black-dyed treachery that lay behind them.

Cause of Macbeth's ruin.

The spirits here succeed in their object of ruining Macbeth, partly through the unscrupulousness of their methods, and partly through the hold evil already had over the heart of their victim.

The supernatural powers that Shakespeare conceived as being about us when he wrote *Hamlet* were noble and serious; but when he penned *Macbeth* we must imagine him as filled with the horror of having to contend against foul and terrible spirits. This darkest time in Shakespeare's life came just before the dawn of a bright day.

Change of attitude in *The Tempest*.

We do not know what caused the darkness to become light, but as we turn from *Macbeth* to *The Tempest* we realise what a change has taken place.

The tables are completely reversed; the spirits who could gain such an ascendancy over a man who trusted in them are now the very slaves of his will, and obey his least command. Ariel can exercise no power without Prospero's permission.

There is so strong a note of forgiveness in the last plays of Shakespeare that we conclude that love must have been a prominent characteristic of his life at that time, and love came to cast out fear.

Possibly we have the solution to this mysterious and sudden change in the words of the Epilogue: Cause of change.

> And my ending is despair,
> Unless I be relieved by prayer,
> Which pierces so, that it assaults
> Mercy itself, and frees all faults.

V

COMPARISON BETWEEN SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF THE SUPERNATURAL AND THE USE OF IT BY HIS CONTEMPORARIES

(i) Differences between Marlowe, Greene, Dekker, Middleton, and Shakespeare: General treatment—Mingling of serious and grotesque—Pageantry—Magic—Masques—Conjuring of devils—Devils desire for souls—Communicativeness of Spirits—Superstition—Relation between spirits and mortals—Poet's control in use of Supernatural—Immorality—Discontinuity of action—Conflict between good and evil objective—Conclusion.

(ii) Similarities: Limitation of influence of Supernatural—Information vouchsafed by Spirits—The Power of Learning—Necromancy finally abjured—Moralising—Shapes adopted by Spirits—Powers of vanishing—Conclusion.

We shall fail to realise with what a master-hand Shakespeare touched this great subject unless we compare his work with that of his contemporaries.

Method. For this purpose let us examine, from the comparative standpoint, four of the greatest supernatural plays of his period: Marlowe's

Doctor Faustus, Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, Middleton's *Witch*, and Dekker's *Witch of Edmonton*.

Differences.

We shall first examine the main differences, and later the points of agreement. Prominent amongst the differences is a general looseness in the treatment by the four contemporary dramatists of such questions as affect the soul and the supernatural.

General treatment of Supernatural.

In *Doctor Faustus* (III. 62) such a line occurs as—

> But, leaving these vain trifles of men's souls.

And again, Faustus says (III. 103):

> Had I as many souls as there be stars,
> I'd give them all for Mephistophilis.

In *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* we find Miles speaking loosely of hell (Scene XV. 32)—

> Faith, 'tis a place I have desired long to see: have you not good tippling-houses there?

And again, (line 41) Miles, referring to the office he would like to hold there, says:

> By my troth, Sir, in a place where I may profit myself. I know hell is a hot place, and men are marvellous dry, and much drink is spent there; I would be a tapster.

In Middleton's *Witch* we have Almachildes trifling with the witches, and saying:

> Call you these witches! they be tumblers methinks,
> Very flat tumblers.

And again, in Dekker's *Witch*, Mother Sawyer thinks so lightly of her witchcraft that she exclaims (II. 1)—

> We shall have sport.

The prologue of the play opens in the same vein—

> Here is mirth and matter.

Mingling of serious and grotesque.

The second point of difference is a natural consequence of the first: the mingling of the serious with the trivial and grotesque. This is repeatedly illustrated in *Doctor Faustus*. In Scene IV. when two devils enter and chase the clown Wagner; in Scene VII. in the Pope's privy chamber, when Faustus snatches the dishes away from the Pope's table; and again Scene VIII. between Ralph, Robin, and the ostler; Scene X. at the Emperor's Court at Innsbruck; Scene XI. in the incident of the horse courser; and lastly, Scene XII. at the Court of the Duke of Vanholt, when Mephistophilis appears with the grapes.

The whole setting of the play is opposed to Shakespeare's plan. The Supernatural loses all its dignity, and, until the last terrible scene, nearly all its seriousness.

In *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* the same attitude is apparent. A stage direction (Scene VI.) orders the devil to come in and carry off Bungay on his back.

The only comments are:

> Bacon, I laugh to see the jolly friar
> Mounted upon the devil.

and—

> So be it, my lord: but let us to our dinner.

Bungay in Scene IX. conjures and makes the Hesperian tree appear with the dragon shooting fire, after which Hercules comes in in his lion's skin, and is greeted with Vandermast's "well done," and the commendations of the king.

We are dealing with competitive jugglery, not with spirits who have any real place in the writer's mind.

In Middleton's *Witch* the very names of the witches, as Hecate calls them to her, strike us with amusement (I. ii.): "Titty, Tiffin, Suckin, Pidgen, Liard and Robin,

white spirit, black spirit, grey spirit, red spirit, devil toad, devil ram, devil cat, devil dam, why Hoppo and Stadlin, Hellwain and Puckle." How different from the three nameless Sisters of *Macbeth*.

And the action of Firestone throughout illustrates the same point. Compare I. 2, where he jests about the devil being a fruiterer because he tempted Eve to take the apple.

In I. 2 and III. 3 we have a spirit parading before us several times as a cat, and in Dekker's *Witch* the devil is throughout introduced as a fawning dog. Compare II. 1, etc.

Again, our sense of ridicule is aroused over the platitudes of the brazen head, "Time is," "Time was," "Time is past" (*Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, Scene XI.).

Shakespeare may, and indeed does, tell us that spirits can assume any form they please, but he is careful not to introduce them under contemptible shapes.

He exhibits no trace of such loose and childish treatment of vital matters. The mental attitude which makes this impossible also renders him incapable of mingling the

serious with the grotesque. To him supernatural beings are always *super*-natural, and he gives them due reverence and dignity; so likewise he treats of things human as human, giving them also the majestic treatment they deserve. Dekker makes a human witch, Shakespeare makes real witches the pivot of a play. At the best the hag witch is but a parody, and the Master mind wisely selected the deeper and more serious theme. We find in Shakespeare very little of the pageantry of the Supernatural; no reference for instance to the commonplace seven deadly sins, introduced as a masque in *Doctor Faustus* (Scene VI.); nor does Shakespeare make much use of magic and astrology, which play so great a part in *Doctor Faustus*. Compare Scene III. 5:

Pageantry.

Magic.

> Faustus, begin thine incantations,
> . . . . . .
> Within this circle is Jehovah's name,
> Forward and backward anagrammatiz'd,
> The breviated names of holy saints,
> Figures of every adjunct to the heavens.

Compare also *The Witch of Edmonton* (II. 1). The Dog says:

> I 'll tell thee: when thou wishest ill,
> . . . . . .

. . . . Mumble this short orison :
If thou to shame or death pursue 'em
Sanctibicetur nomen tuum.

Magic also occurs childishly in Middleton's *Witch*, in the ribbon scene between Almachildes and Amoretta. The tale of the magic handkerchief in *Othello* (III. iv.) is but a story to affright Desdemona.

The only incident in Shakespeare that recalls the crude pageantry of the Supernatural is in *The Tempest*, when the spirits bring in a table and refreshments, and set them before Ferdinand and Miranda. Even this passage is questioned.

Masques.

Shakespeare does, no doubt, in his plays introduce processions of spirits or ghosts, as in *Richard III.* and *Cymbeline*; appearances of angels in *Henry VIII.*; music in *I. Henry IV.*; the descent of goddesses in *The Tempest*. These are, however, nearly always in some direct connection with the action of the play, and seldom for the mere satisfaction of a desire for pageantry. The exceptions lie in the late plays of *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*, and we feel that pressure must have been brought to bear on Shakespeare by the

Court of James I., which ever exhibited an insatiable craving for the sensational.

We hear little of the conjuring of devils in Shakespeare, and then only incidentally, or as a side issue. In the *Comedy of Errors* (IV. iv. 57) Dr. Pinch conjures the devil out of Antipholus of Ephesus: Conjuring.

. . . . . .

I charge thee, Satan, housed within this man,
To yield possession to my holy prayers,
And to thy state of darkness hie thee straight;
I conjure thee by all the saints in heaven!

La Pucelle in *I. Henry VI.* (V. iii.) raises the fiends, and Bolingbroke the conjuror, with Margaret Jourdain, practice the same art in *II. Henry VI.* (I. iv.), but these are mere incidents in the main plot.

This subject, however, is constantly mentioned and elaborated by Shakespeare's contemporaries. The following may be taken as instances:

Doctor Faustus (Scene III. 16). There is a long Latin invocation beginning—

Sint mihi dei Acherontis propitii.

Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay (Scene II. 118). The hostess enters with a shoulder

of mutton on a spit and a devil, in answer to the conjurations,

> Per omnes deos infernales Belcepheron!

And Dekker's *Witch* (II. i.). The Dog instructs Mother Sawyer how to conjure him up—

> Mumble this short orison:
> If thou to death or shame pursue 'em,
> Sanctibicetur nomen tuum.

Devils' desire for souls.

The next point of difference to be noted is the desire which the devils are made to express for the free gift of men's souls. It is only on the surrender of the soul that the fiends will obey man. This motive forms the pivot for the play of *Doctor Faustus*.

Scene v. 45, Mephistophilis asks—

> But tell me, Faustus, shall I have thy soul?

and 73—

> O, what will not I do to obtain his soul?
> *Faustus:* Consummatum est; the Bill is ended,
> And Faustus hath bequeath'd his soul to Lucifer.
> . . . . . .

Then Mephistophilis says at once:

> I 'll fetch him somewhat to delight his mind.

The same point is illustrated in Dekker's *Witch* (II. i.)—

> And I 'll effect it, on condition
> That, uncompelled, thou make a deed of gift
> Of soul and body to me.

This compact must be in proper form, and written or sealed with blood (*Doctor Faustus*, v. 54)—

Faustus: I cut mine arm, and with my proper blood
Assure my soul to be great Lucifer's.
. . . . . .

Meph.: But, Faustus, thou must
Write it in manner of a deed of gift.

And Dekker's *Witch* (II. i.)—

Dog: And seal it with thy blood.

Study and the gift of the soul could command the temporary obedience of evil spirits; but with Shakespeare only patient toil and a worthy life could control all spirits for all time. How different is Prospero's mastery over the Supernatural from that of Faustus'.

Lack of reticence.

The witches and devils of Shakespeare's contemporaries are very communicative; they both ask for questions and answer them freely. Scenes III. and V. of *Doctor Faustus* are good examples of the freedom with which the devils speak; and in Scene V. 112 we actually find Mephistophilis saying—

Now, Faustus, ask what thou wilt.

In Middleton's *Witch* (I. ii.), where Sebas-

tian and the Duchess are on intimate terms with the witches, Sebastian says:

> . . . . . I would I were read
> So much in thy black power as mine own griefs!
> I'm in great need of help; wilt give me any?

and he obtains the help for which he asks.

In Dekker's *Witch* (II. i.) we find Mother Sawyer actually taking money from Cuddy, and then saying:

> You seem a good young man, and (*aside*) I must dissemble,
> . . . . . .
> But—for this silver, what would'st have me do?

Superstition.

Shakespeare paints the Supernatural for us as he saw it with his great mind's eye. His contemporaries put it before us as conceived by the common people of the day. With Shakespeare it is always real and dignified; with the others it is but idle superstition, and correspondingly coarse.

Relation of spirits and mortals.

Shakespeare's contemporaries bring the supernatural and the natural into very close connection. Shakespeare did the same in his early play, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, but with this essential difference, that though he intermingled spirits and mortals, he never lost sight of the gulf which separated them.

They may apparently be jostled together, but we are kept conscious of the fact that each is governed by special laws.

Dekker and Middleton never rise to that conception of the Supernatural which possessed Shakespeare in his maturer years, and Marlowe, though he reaches a higher level than the other two, falls far short of the serene heights attained by the Seer.

Control in use of Supernatural.

In Shakespeare the Supernatural is only used to produce some special effect, except in the case of Hecate in *Macbeth*,* and in the two instances already referred to in *The Tempest*; but in Middleton, Dekker, and in Marlowe, the Supernatural is forced upon the spectator in season and out of season, and is in consequence very much overdone. What is effective when used with care and caution becomes farcical when introduced repeatedly. The cauldron scene in *Macbeth* impresses us with a sense of terror. The malignant brewing of evil is for a minute brought before us, the rest is left to the imagination; but in Middleton's *Witch* the constant recurrence of the same idea makes

* Almost certainly not Shakespeare's.

us smile, not tremble, and familiarity must of necessity breed contempt. The whole story of Dekker's *Witch* reproduces the words of Mother Sawyer:

We shall have sport.

Respect for the Supernatural.

Shakespeare respected the Supernatural; his contemporaries did not. There lies the fundamental distinction between them, which works out in so many of the details. The unseen had gripped Shakespeare's soul, and in some measure that of Marlowe. Middleton and Dekker were untouched by it; to them it was but something to amuse and to astonish.

Immorality.

Thus the gross immorality which we find in Middleton's *Witch* between Firestone and Hecate, between Almachildes and Hecate, and in fact throughout the play, finds no counterpart in the drama of the great poet.

We cannot conceive of immorality between Shakespeare's men and Shakespeare's spirits. These latter belong to a different world, where different laws control life and death and marriage. It is true that Titania does become enamoured of Bottom, but only after a very

special spell has been cast over her. In the later plays such a delusion even as this would be impossible. Shakespeare does not think of spirits as subject to human passions.

Discontinuity of action.

The discontinuity of action which we find in *Doctor Faustus* is absent from any play Shakespeare wrote. It is entirely foreign to his dramatic genius. We cannot conceive of his adding scene after scene, as did Marlowe, for the mere purpose of shewing us the childish ends for which Faustus exercised his control over the Supernatural. We realise that it was to bring out the majesty of the last scene; but the end does not justify the means. Shakespeare seldom allowed such a great subject to be treated frivolously; still less would he have permitted such treatment to dominate a play.

The Supernatural in Shakespeare, when it is present, permeates the action of the play, or at least part of the action, and does not content itself with disjointed appearances.

Opposition of God and devils.

The opposition between God and devils, angels and fiends, which played such an important part in the early miracle and mystery plays, finds scarcely any place in Shakespeare.

Angels appear on the stage in *Henry VIII.* (IV. ii.)—

> The Vision. Enter, solemnly tripping one after another, six Personages clad in white robes, wearing on their heads garlands of bays, and golden vizards on their faces; branches of bays or palms in their hands . . . .

and fiends in *I. Henry VI.* (v. iii.) appear to La Pucelle, but they are only connected with one character, and do not control the play as a whole.

Subjective and objective conflict between good and evil.

Angels and fiends do not contend for mastery on the stage. Shakespeare felt these conflicts between good and evil, which are fought out in the heart of man, to be completely subjective, and gives them no supernatural objective counterpart.

Macbeth, I. iii. 130 (*aside*)—

> This supernatural soliciting
> . . . . . 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 *Hamlet* (III. iii. 50), where the King prays, we see the same subjective conflict—

> . . . . . Then I'll look up;
> My fault is past. But O, what form of prayer

Can serve my turn? Forgive me my foul murder?
That cannot be, since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder.

In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* the influences which work on man are made objective. Good and evil agencies repeatedly appear to Faustus, and attempt to draw him the one or the other way (Scene I. 68)—

Good Angel: O, Faustus, lay that damned book aside,
And gaze not on it, lest it tempt thy soul
. . . . . .
Read, read the Scriptures.

Evil Angel: Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art
Wherein all Nature's treasure is contain'd.

So again in Scene V. 15. In Scene VI. 12 we read:

Good Angel: Faustus, repent; yet God will pity thee.

Evil Angel: Thou art a spirit; God cannot pity thee.

and the same idea is contained in VI. 77.

The scholars in Scene XIV. and the old man in Scene XIII. are the human representatives of the good angels, but are at once challenged by the devils.

The dignity with which Shakespeare invests his supernatural spirits is felt but in part in Marlowe, and not at all in Middleton

or Dekker. In the *Witch of Edmonton*, Mother Sawyer is in her own words (II. i)

. . . . . made a scorn
To all degrees and sexes . . . .

and Mephistophilis, who can at times be full of dignity, yet deigns to introduce (Scene v.)

A devil dresst like a woman, with fireworks.

He is serious when he answers Faustus' questions, but grotesque when he helps him to fulfil his childish fancies.

C. Lamb on witches.

The different methods adopted by Shakespeare and his contemporaries is well exemplified in Charles Lamb's comment on Middleton's *Witch*: "Shakespeare's witches are distinguished from the witches of Middleton by essential differences. Hecate in Middleton has a son, a low buffoon; the witches of Shakespeare have neither child of their own nor seem to be descended from any parent. They are foul anomalies, of whom we know not whence they are sprung nor whether they have beginning or ending. As they are without human passions, so they seem to be without human relations. They come with

thunder and lightning and vanish to airy music. This is all we know of them. Except Hecate they have no names, which heightens their mysteriousness."

Similarity.

Turning now from dissimilarity to points of agreement, we notice that in the plays of other dramatists, as in Shakespeare, the power of the Supernatural is strictly limited. With Marlowe, Mephistophilis has no power over Faustus until the deed of gift (v. 60), and with Middleton the power of the witch is limited to inflicting mental and physical injuries; she cannot hurt the soul, nor can she dissolve that which God hath made or joined. Sebastian asks:

Limitation of power.

> You could not do a man that special kindness to part 'em utterly now? Could you do that?

and Hecate replies:

> No; time must do it. We cannot disjoin wedlock;
> 'Tis of heaven's fastening. Well may we raise jars,
> Jealousies, strifes, and heart-burning disagreements,
> Like a thick scurf o'er life, as did our Master
> Upon that patient miracle; but the work itself
> Our power cannot disjoint.

The same idea of limitation is expressed in Dekker's *Witch* (II. i.), where Mother

Sawyer, referring to Old Banks, commands the Dog—

Go, touch his life.

and receives the answer:

> . . . . . I cannot
> Though we have power, know it is circumscribed
> And tied in limits . . . .
> . . . . . his cattle
> And corn I'll kill and mildew; but his life—
> Until I take him, as I late found thee,
> Cursing and swearing—I've no power to touch.

Information.

The spirits in all cases tell us more of purgatory or hell than they do of heaven.

The Ghost in *Hamlet* (I. v. 10) tells us that he is

> Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
> And for the day confined to fast in fires,
> Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
> Are burnt and purged away . . . .

Mephistophilis reveals much concerning hell to Faustus in Scenes III. and V.

In Scene III. Mephistophilis, in answer to questions from Faustus, explains that Lucifer is (line 64)—

> Arch-regent and commander of all spirits,
> Lucifer was an angel once
> . . . . and most dearly lov'd of God, but fell
> . . . . by aspiring pride and insolence.

In answer to the question—

How comes it then that thou art out of hell?

Mephistophilis replies in the great line—

Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.

Again (Scene v. 119)—

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd
In one self place; for where we are is hell;
And where hell is, there must we ever be,
And to conclude, when all the world dissolves,
And every creature shall be purified,
All places shall be hell that are not heaven.

And in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (Scene xi. 9), Bacon tells Miles—

Thou knows't that I have dived into hell,
And sought the darkest palaces of fiends.

In Scene xv. the devil vouches for the correctness of Miles' surmising. Speaking of hell he says:

Have you not good tippling-houses there? May not a man have a lusty fire there, a pot of good ale, a pair of cards?

Of heaven we hear little. When Faustus asks who made the world (vi. 69), Mephistophilis replies—

I will not.

and again—

Move me not, for I will not tell thee.

He can reveal only—

> That is not against our kingdom, but this is.
> Think thou on hell, Faustus, for thou art damned.

Power of learning.

Mastery over the spirits is in all cases obtained by learning and the use of books of magic. In *The Tempest* (I. ii. 89) Prospero tells Miranda of his training:

> I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated
> To closeness and the bettering of my mind.

And again (III. ii. 95) Prospero says:

> I'll to my book.

In *Doctor Faustus* the good angel (Scene v. 15)—

> Sweet Faustus, leave that execrable art.

And Faustus in Scene v. 163:

> Thanks, Mephistophilis; yet fain would I have a book wherein I might behold all spells and incantations that I might raise up spirits when I please.

And Greene makes Friar Bacon in Scene XI. 16 tell us that by reading of his magic book and

> With seven years' tossing necromantic charms,
> Poring upon dark Hecat's principles,
> I have fram'd out a monstrous head of brass,
> That, by the enchanting forces of the devil,
> Shall tell out strange and uncouth aphorisms.

Necromancy abjured.

For one reason or another, necromancy is at last abjured by all. In *The Tempest* Prospero gives up his power over the Supernatural because he has acquired that which he sought, and now feels that great though necromancy be, it fails to satisfy the highest requirements of this life. Faustus desires to abjure it in the end because it has proved to be evil. As the devils enter to carry him off he, in his agony, cries out:

> Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer!
> I'll burn my books! Ah, Mephistophilis!

Friar Bacon abjures necromancy because he finds that it has failed (Scene XIII. 86)—

> I tell thee, Bungay, it repents me sore
> That ever Bacon meddled in this art.
> The hours I have spent in pyromantic spells,
> The fearful tossing in the latest night
> Of papers full of necromantic charms,
> Conjuring and adjuring devils and fiends,
> With stole and alb and strong pentageron.

Moralising

There is a certain element of moralising common to all the writers. In Shakespeare it takes the form of philosophy, as in the great passage (*Hamlet* III. i. 56) beginning—

> To be or not to be.

In *Doctor Faustus* the tendency is more

theological; questions of repentance, sin, and God's pity are repeatedly introduced (Scene VI. 18)—

> My heart's so harden'd I cannot repent;
> Scarce can I name salvation, faith or heaven,
> But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears,
> Faustus, thou art damn'd!

And in the last great scene the whole dogma of salvation, eternal torment, and forgiveness is dwelt on in most majestic lines—

> O, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?
> See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament,
> One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah my Christ!

And line 96—

> O God,
> If Thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,
> Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransom'd me,
> Impose some end to my incessant pain;
> Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
> A hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd!
> O, no end is limited to damnèd souls!

In Dekker's *Witch* we have neither theology nor philosophy, but moralising proper (v. i.)—

> I'll thus much tell thee: Thou never art so distant
> From an evil spirit, but that thine oaths,
> Curses, and blasphemies pull him to thine elbow;
> Thou never tell'st a lie, but that a devil

Is within hearing it; thy evil purposes
Are ever haunted; but when they come to act,
. . . . . .
He's then within thee: thou play'st, he bets upon thy part
Although thou lose, yet he will gain by thee.

Forms. The power of spirits to appear in various forms is also common to all. For instance, Puck in *Midsummer Night's Dream* (III. i. 111)—

Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,
A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire."

And *Hamlet* (II. ii. 628)—

. . . . . and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape . . . .

Faustus tells Mephistophilis (III. 25)—

Go and return an old Franciscan friar;
That holy shape becomes a devil best.

The Dog in the *Witch of Edmonton* (v. i.) declares the devil can take

Any shape to blind such silly eyes of thine; but chiefly those coarse creatures, dog, or cat, hare, ferret, frog, toad.

Vanishing. The power that spirits had of vanishing at will is illustrated throughout Shakespeare and all contemporary plays. It is a natural consequence of their power to assume what form they please. The idea has been im-

mortalised by Shakespeare's inimitable line (*Macbeth*, IV. i. 111)—

> Come like shadows, so depart!

"Fly." The common name of "fly" which was given to evil spirits of all kinds, and which occurs so frequently in Jonson's *Alchemist*, is absent from Shakespeare's plays, with the exception of *Titus Andronicus* (III. ii. 66), where Martius explains of the fly he killed—

> . . . . . 'twas a black ill-favoured fly,
> Like to the empress' Moor; therefore I kill'd him.

William Watson, in some beautiful lines (*After reading Tamburlaine the Great*), has summed up the comparison between Shakespeare and his contemporaries. They refer immediately to Marlowe, but with slight modification might apply to all:

> Your Marlowe's page I close, my Shakespeare's ope.
> How welcome—after gong and cymbal's din—
> The continuity, the long slow slope,
> And vast curves of the gradual violin!

VI

SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC USE OF THE SUPERNATURAL

Pivot of Relationship—Dignity—Masques—Discussion of relationship between Spirit and Man—Their ends attained by Obedience, by Free Will, by Indifference, or by Opposition of man.

The dramatic features of the four supernatural plays: Study in Failure (H), and in Success of Supernatural interference (M); effect produced in mingling of Spirits and Man; Dramatisation of an idea (T).

(M.N.D.) deals with imagination; (H) with the serious; (M) with moral facts; (T) returns to imagination.

Great Dramatic Principles: Association—Partial Association—Differentiation—Disassociation of False from True.

Minor Dramatic Principles: Attitude of Players towards Natural and Supernatural—The question of the Origin of Ghosts—Their dramatic environment—Ghosts objective and subjective—Their reticence—The Supernatural background in Shakespeare's plays generally—Conclusion.

THE one central point of Shakespeare's skill in dealing with the subject of the Unseen is that he always remembers that the Super- Pivot.

natural is not something absolutely apart from man, but rather just beyond man, and therefore has an influence over him which the completely extraneous could never have. The Supernatural is extra-human and super-human, and therefore intimately connected with the continuation of our human life. Yet he never forgets the different conditions under which the super-human and the human exist. He keeps them distinct even in the early play *Midsummer Night's Dream*, where inhabitants from the two worlds are brought into such close contact.

It has been said that every man, woman, and even child in Shakespeare has his or her own peculiar spirit and character, which can always be recognised. If then Shakespeare respects individuality to this extent in those who belong to this world, it is but natural to expect that he should be careful to maintain the fundamental distinctions that exist between the two great classes—the human and the super-human—while at the same time giving weight to their relationship.

Dignity. The spirits do not come in and out among ple of the play in such a

way as to make us grow familiar towards them. They maintain their dignity and majesty throughout. This is true even of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the fairies, though frequently introduced, are not vulgarised. In *Hamlet* the ghost only returns to stir up Hamlet, and in *Macbeth* the witches only appear at the beginning of the two great divisions of the play. In *The Tempest*, though Ariel is constantly before us, yet we never feel the airy spirit to be associated with mortals, but rather acting upon them from outside. This judicious use of the Supernatural has the effect of giving added meaning to the spirits when they appear. They impress us, whether they come as prophets of doom to Richard III., as prophets of victory to Richmond, or as an evil omen to Brutus before the battle of Philippi. We realise that the ghost of Banquo returns to stir up terror in his murderer's heart, the ghost of Hamlet to reveal the past, and the witches in *Macbeth* to reveal the future.

Masques.

Shakespeare does, however, introduce into some of his plays masques and processions of the dead—for example, *Cymbeline* (v. iv.),

The Tempest (IV. i.), *Macbeth* (IV. i.), *Richard III.* (V. iii.), and *Henry VIII.* (I. iv., IV. ii.). Some of these have been much questioned. Men have argued that Shakespeare introduces them against his will to please his audience, and satisfy the demands of the Court of James I.

Capel, the critic, writes: "They were written against the grain, being weak throughout, faulty in rhyme, and faulty in mythology."

This is too strong a statement of the case. The desire to please his audience influenced the dramatist, but on the other hand we must remember that Shakespeare recognised the truth of the re-appearance of the dead; and though he relied on single appearances for his main effects, yet he was not ashamed of appealing to the more common-place minds by arranging for processions of spirits from the other world. We can scarcely doubt Shakespeare's hand in *Richard III.* and *The Tempest.*

In *Richard III.* the solemnity of the night preceding the battle is greatly enhanced by the presence of the spirits, bringing to

one, despair, to another, encouragement. *The Tempest* is a play of the imagination, and though the masque may have been inserted only after pressure from outside, yet Shakespeare set himself to his task with such success that the imagery of the play is improved.

Relation between man and spirit.

The great problem which Shakespeare was trying to work out in his supernatural plays was the relation between man's will and the will of the powers of the other world. Though his views on this question varied considerably from time to time, he never failed to rationalise the operations of destiny. In *Macbeth* we study the working out of a prophecy. In *Hamlet* we await the long-delayed accomplishment of the ghost's demands.

Destiny rationalised.

But these effects are brought about by natural causes. The spirits cannot themselves attain their desires, nor realise their predictions; they can at most enunciate a wish or cast a flashlight into the future. The causes by which their will is accomplished, or their prognostications proved correct, are the natural events of every-day

life. We do not feel oppressed as by the furies of Aeschylus, nor do we ever feel that events could not have been prevented. Though Shakespeare for a time seems to be the prophet of predestination, yet he never produces in us a sense of the inevitable.

The predictions of the ghosts in *Richard III.* are not brought about by their agency, but follow as the natural consequences of the past actions of Richmond and Richard.

Macbeth becomes thane of Cawdor, not by magic, but by the death of the last thane, and he becomes king by a murder which he executes of his own free will.

End attained by obedience.

These realisations of the dictates of destiny are accomplished by various means. Sometimes we find the results attained by the blind obedience of those concerned. It is Macbeth's unquestioned reliance on the prophecies of the apparitions that enables Macduff to slay him. In IV. i. 71 the first apparition—"an armed head"—tells him to

. . . . beware Macduff.

and the second—"a bloody child"—bids him (IV. i. 79)—

> . . . . . laugh to scorn
> The power of man, for none of woman born
> Shall harm Macbeth.

And again, the third—"a crowned child"—tells him that (IV. i. 92)—

> Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until
> Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
> Shall come against him.

By free will.

At other times the destiny is realised by the free will of the person concerned. The first part of *Macbeth* exemplifies predicted ends thus attained. Macbeth is told he shall be king, and he sets himself to become king and succeeds. It is interesting to note that he attempts to hide his aims under assumed indifference (I. iii. 143)—

> If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me
> Without my stir.

By indifference.

In *Hamlet* we have a signal instance of the failure of free will. Despite all Hamlet's attempts the King remains untouched. It is only when the desires of the Ghost seem wholly forgotten that the death of the King is realised. We may say then that the Ghost attained his end, not by the free will of Hamlet, but by his indifference.

The fulfilment of the prediction of the Soothsayer* in *Cymbeline* (IV. ii. 346) is accomplished independently of the wills of those concerned. The fact of the victory promised to the Romans did not affect the combatants.

Opposition.

Very often direct opposition to the things prophesied may be the way to their realisation. It is Macbeth's attempt to prevent the accomplishment of the oracle of the third witch (I. iii. 67)—

> Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none—

prophesying that Banquo's children shall come to the throne that brings about his fall so enigmatically referred to by the second witch in I. i. 3—

> When the hurlyburly's done,
> When the battle's lost and won.

The four plays.

Turning to the four directly supernatural plays, we see that each presents special dramatic features.

Study in failure of Supernatural.

In *Hamlet* Shakespeare has made a study of the failure of the Supernatural to accomplish the desired ends. Hamlet will not act by himself (I. ii. 159)—

> But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

* The authorship of this passage is questioned.

He will not act after the Ghost comes to him, for he questions its origin; he will not act when he has proved the truth of the Ghost's revelations, for he fears to kill the King while he is at prayer; and he fails to act, though the Ghost comes back to stir him to perform that which he has promised, for other interests now engross his mind.

Success of Supernatural.

In *Macbeth* we have a study of the success of the Supernatural. The witches set themselves with dire result to tempt Macbeth on to evil. The glory which they prophecy overpowers the better self which lies latent within him, and he commits the foul murder. Not content with having damned his soul, the witches are intent on bringing about the destruction of his body. They return, and by treacherous prevarications create in him a carelessness and over-confidence, which are the chief instruments in his physical downfall.

Effect produced by mingling mortals and spirits in play.

In *Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare's dramatic powers have been employed in very cleverly mingling the natural with the Supernatural. He makes the Queen the centre of his play in order to emphasise the

majesty of the "imperial votaress" who—

. . . . passed on,
In maiden meditation, fancy free.

He purposely introduces into the life of both mortals and fairies various love troubles and intrigues from which the sovereign was so happily free. Helena and Lysander, Hermia and Demetrius are at cross purposes in their love; Oberon and Titania are at strife about the changeling boy. The clownage of the play is linked to the fairies by the love of Bottom and Titania, and the noble Athenians are brought into touch with fairyland through the medium of Puck.

Thus the chief dramatic art of the play lies in so deftly mingling supernatural and natural that the great fact of the virginity of the Queen rises in sublime grandeur above both mortals and fairies.

Dramatisation of an idea.

In *The Tempest* we seek in vain for a great dramatic plan carefully worked out. We are dealing here rather with the spirit of the older drama, which contents itself with dramatising an idea, and does not attempt to work out an intricate plot—the drama of China and of Japan. Shakespeare has come

to his conclusions with regard to the Supernatural. He knows that it has no terrors for man; he can control it, but realises his safest policy is to leave it untouched.

The Tempest is a chain of connected incidents by which Shakespeare is enabled to set before us these great central ideas.

Imagination.

The general lines of Shakespeare's dramatic treatment of the Supernatural may in these four special plays be looked at from a different standpoint. In *Midsummer Night's Dream* he allows the imagination to have full play, without troubling whether he shall make us believe or disbelieve the reality of the circumstances described. The play is full of jollity and mirth. Fairies who are but children of the imagination manage the working out of the plot. Shakespeare for a time gives himself over to the offspring of his fancy, and knowing that they can do no real harm, he gives to them much power, and to himself and us much careless pleasure.

Reality.

But in *Hamlet* we find him dealing with the Supernatural through a mind now become serious. He leaves the imaginative and deals with facts. The reality of the ghosts

is made evident; unimpeachable evidence as to their existence is brought before us.

Moral facts.

In *Macbeth* Shakespeare deals with moral facts, and not with those of the senses; not harmless ghosts, but the power of evil spirits is his theme, and this is brought home to us by many infallible proofs.

Imagination "with a difference."

In *The Tempest* we return to the imagination, but imagination now brought under the control of belief. That which Shakespeare writes in *The Tempest* is not a mere conception of the mind; not the thoughtless delineation of youth's fancies, but the sober expression in the form of an allegory of that which he has proved in his life to be a deep reality. Hence, instead of the fairies managing the affairs of men, it is godly man who can control both men and spirits, and help on the world to a righteous consummation.

Shakespeare's dramatic talent returned in its maturity to the instruments it had already so successfully used in early manhood. Had we not the intervening plays, we should scarcely imagine how far that genius had to go and return before it found its rest.

Leaving individual plays, we see that

Shakespeare brings the Supernatural dramatically and powerfully before the notice of his hearers by three principal methods :—

Association.

First by association, as in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, where supernatural beings go in and out amongst the players.

Partial association.

Secondly, by partial association, as in *Macbeth*, where on the one hand we have witches who are quite distinct and hold aloof from the players, but where on the other hand we have Lady Macbeth, herself an evil witch, whose influence is constantly felt by those who are the chief personages of the play.

Differentiation.

Thirdly, and perhaps the most powerful means, is that of absolute differentiation. This method, as well as that of association, is exemplified in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The Supernatural is brought into sharp contrast with the clownage of the play. If we want to realise the gracefulness and agility of Puck, Cobweb, and Peasblossom, we only have to look for an instant at such characters as Bottom the weaver, Flute the bellows-mender, or Snout the tinker. The method

of dramatic differentiation is also employed in *The Tempest*. To enable us to appreciate an Ariel, Shakespeare introduces personifications of the grossest human nature, in the shape of a Stephano, a Trinculo, and a Caliban.

In *Hamlet* the Ghost, as coming from the land of the dead, has nothing cognate to him in the land of the living.

This differentiation is either from a certain portion of the actors, as in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, or as in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* from the actors as a whole.

In *King Lear* we find the true madness of the King strongly emphasised by the pseudo-possession of Edgar. So also the superstition of Gloucester is accentuated by the scepticism of the other characters of the play.

Disassociation of false from true.

In *II. Henry VI.* we again have a highly dramatic effect produced by disassociation. Shakespeare was as conscious of the charlatanry connected with the Supernatural as he was with its profound truth. In I. ii. and I. iv. he cleverly introduces both elements—the false and the true—and brings them into

opposition. Hume says that the Duke of Suffolk and others—

> Knowing dame Eleanor's aspiring humour,
> Have hired me to undermine the duchess,
> And buzz these conjurations in her brain.

Accordingly he arranges with Margaret Jourdain, the cunning witch, and Roger Bolingbroke, the conjuror, for a faked apparition. All is prepared for the delusion, and the spirit is conjured to appear. To the horror of Bolingbroke and the Witch a real spirit arises, and answers the questions to the extreme satisfaction of the Duchess, but to the confusion of those in the pay of the Duke of Suffolk, of whom it prophesies—

> By water shall he die and take his end.

The anger of Bolingbroke the conjuror is roused, and he exclaims—

> Descend to darkness and the burning lake!
> False fiend avoid!

More charlatanry is introduced shortly afterwards (II. i.): Simpcox is said to have just received his sight, though born blind; not content with this blessing he wishes to be cured of his lameness, and for this purpose comes to the King. Gloucester, seeing

through the whole trick, orders the Beadle to strike him, and another miracle is performed. The man "leaps over the stool and runs away."

The humour with which Shakespeare treats these forgeries, and the serious tone he always gives to true manifestations, make us realise how deeply he felt the truth of the unseen, while he did not lose sight of the deceptions which necessarily come in its train.

Attitude of players.

Amongst minor methods adopted by Shakespeare for the purpose of adding to the dramatic effect of the Supernatural, is that of presenting to us the different attitudes adopted by the chief characters in the plays, on the one hand towards the world of spirits, and on the other to the events of ordinary every-day life. For instance, while Hamlet has no fear of the Ghost (I. iv. 64)—

> . . . . . Why, what should be the fear?
> . . . . . .
> . . . . . I 'll follow it.

he is fearful and hesitating, and refuses to take deliberate action when he has to deal with the things of this world.

Macbeth, on the contrary, is strong in the world of action, but a coward before the spirits. We find the servant (I. ii. 16) saying:

> . . . . brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name.

and yet (I. iii. 51) Banquo has to say to him:

> Good Sir, why do you start, and seem to fear?

And again, Macbeth, when thinking of the suggestion of the witches, confesses to himself (I. iii. 135) that the

> 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.

And so throughout the play, whenever there is any question of the Supernatural, Macbeth is weak, whereas on the battlefield we find him strong.

Question of origin.

Shakespeare greatly adds to the effect of his ghosts by bringing into question the philosophy of their origin. In his time we have seen that the tendency of all people was to believe in ghosts; it was only their origin which was questioned. The common people looked upon them as the returned spirits of those who had departed this world,

but the divines of the period, who carried with them the more educated of the people, held that they had an evil origin, and that they were devils come from hell.

We see references as to the question of their origin in *Julius Caesar* (IV. iii. 278), where Brutus asks of Caesar's ghost—

> . . . . . Art thou any thing?
> Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil?

though afterwards (V. v. 17) he expresses his belief that the apparition he saw was truly Caesar's ghost.

The same doubt we find in *Macbeth* (III. iv. 100), where Macbeth implores the spirit to take any terrible shape he may choose, but not that of Banquo—

> Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
> The arm'd rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger;
> Take any shape but that.

It is in *Hamlet*, however, that the question is fully discussed. Hamlet's first impression with regard to the Ghost is that it is some devil (I. ii. 245)—

> I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape
> And bid me hold my peace . . . .

And again (I. iv. 39)—

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou comest in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee . . . .

In this latter quotation we realise that Hamlet is in doubt, though he leans to the explanation given by the more educated classes, but in I. v. 92 we find that though still doubtful he leans towards the supposition that the Ghost comes from heaven—

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell? . . . .

In II. ii. 627 he is still uncertain—

. . . . . The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil.

In III. ii. 85 he decides to let the action of the King settle the question—

. . . . . if his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damned ghost that we have seen.

Horatio's attitude as expressed in I. iv. 69 is distinctly towards that of diabolic origin—

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form,
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason.

But at last (III. ii. 297) we find Hamlet finally deciding that the Ghost is none else than the returned spirit of his murdered father—

O good Horatio, I'll take the Ghost's word for a thousand pounds.

Dramatic environment.

The dramatic effect of ghosts and witches is again enhanced by the surroundings into which they are introduced. They do not casually enter into every-day life as did the spirits of Shakespeare's contemporaries, but they come at special times and to special places, and to people specially prepared for them.

The ghost of Hamlet's father appears to Bernado and Francisco (I. i.) on a platform before the castle in the dead waste and middle of a winter's night. They are on the *qui vive*, and there is

Not a mouse stirring.

When Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus await the Ghost (I. iv.) it is on the same platform, and past midnight; and, until the flourish of trumpets and ordnance shot off within the castle turns Hamlet's mind to

philosophising, they try to work off their fearful anticipations with most graphic frivolities. The authorship of the underground ghost scene is rightly questioned.

To Richard, Richmond, and Brutus the ghosts appear again at night, but to each one alone in his tent, as he takes his last fitful sleep before an important battle.

The ghost of Banquo comes into the midst of the great banqueting hall, and takes his place at the very head of the table. Macbeth alone is to see him, but the action of the play requires that a great company should witness the confusion and terror caused by his presence in the mind of his murderer.

The nameless witches encamp on the deserted and blasted heath. They appear to Macbeth, whose mind is no less a prey to dire thoughts than the heath to the tempestuous winds.

Later the dark cavern and boiling cauldron typify the moral blindness and seething thoughts of Macbeth as he ponders on his new schemes.

In every case the circumstances, both

moral and physical, are most carefully prepared; nothing is left to chance, but all is directed with consummate dramatic skill.

Ghosts objective and subjective.

Shakespeare further increases the effect of his ghosts by sometimes making them objective and sometimes subjective. The objective reality of the Ghost is borne in upon us when Horatio, Marcellus, and Hamlet all see it at the same time, and the opinion that it is an hallucination of the mind is driven away. The same is true when the witches appear on the stage by themselves. And yet Shakespeare feels that the reality of ghosts cannot always be objectively appreciated. Some percentage at least of his audience could only conceive them as subjective. Therefore, in many instances, ghosts appear in this aspect, being seen in sleep by Brutus, Richard, Richmond, and Posthumus, or seen by only one person, though two or more are present, as in the last ghost scene in *Hamlet*.

Again, Lennox fails to notice the witches as they leave Macbeth; and in the banquet hall Macbeth is reduced to a state of terrified stupor at the apparition of Banquo's ghost,

whom none of the guests, and not even Lady Macbeth herself, can perceive.

Belief and unbelief.

The controversy, which rages at all times, as to the reality of ghosts is made use of for dramatic ends. In several plays the sceptic and the believer are introduced in close connection, and give utterance to their views. Thus in *Midsummer Night's Dream* (v. i.) we find Theseus and Hippolyta talking together on the subject of the Supernatural, the one a sceptic, the other a believer. Hamlet and Horatio are also brought together in the same relation. Hotspur and Glendower in *I. Henry IV.* respectively enunciate their unbelief and their belief, and in *Macbeth* (I. iii. 79) Banquo, the unbeliever, says to Macbeth when speaking of the witches:

> The earth hath bubbles as the water has,
> And these are of them.

Reticence of ghosts.

Lastly, the reticence and the silence which characterise the ghosts is very important from the standpoint of dramatic effect. When the ghosts and the witches appear, our expectations are aroused; we hope that they will say something to lift the veil which separates their world from ours, and yet we know at

heart that nothing they could say would satisfy us; and Shakespeare has wisely kept them from saying more than is just sufficient for the exigencies of the play.

Background of Supernatural.

Shakespeare, realising what a great influence the Supernatural exerts over the life of an average man, and how superstitions hedge in men's minds and control their actions, has carefully introduced a general background of superstition into most of his plays.

Thus we find that some 50 lines in *Twelfth Night*, 85 in *King John*, 80 in *Richard II.*, 150 in *Richard III.* (apart from the ghosts), 65 in *Antony and Cleopatra*, 85 in *Cymbeline* (apart from the apparitions), 40 in *Romeo and Juliet*, and some 65 lines in *Othello* contain allusions to the Supernatural.

Hence while only four of Shakespeare's plays centre wholly upon the Supernatural: *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*, yet in all of them there are frequent references to supernatural ideas, dreams, prophecies, astrological and astronomical events, portents and omens, etc.

Shakespeare knew how to force the

Supernatural upon us, but he was no less of an artist in his power of subtilly instilling it into our minds.

We never in any play feel that we are living in a world which is wholly material, or that we are dealing with subjects which are absolutely outside the range of the Supernatural.

This chapter may fitly be closed by a classic instance of the power of Shakespeare's treatment of the Supernatural. Mrs. Siddons, when about twenty years of age, settled down one night to learn her part as Lady Macbeth, but being gripped by the horror of the character and its supernatural connections, she took her light and fled from the room. She tells us that as she went upstairs "the rustling of my silk dress seemed to my panic-stricken fancy as more like the movement of a spectre pursuing me."*

* "Notes and Essays of Shakespeare" (Hales).

VII

SOURCES OF SHAKESPEARE'S SUPERNATURAL CHARACTERS

Midsummer Night's Dream—Hamlet—Macbeth—Tempest—Cymbeline—Richard III.—Julius Caesar—King Lear.

THE discussion of Shakespeare's use of the Supernatural would not be complete without at least some reference to the sources from which he drew his ideas. Much will not be said on this subject, for even in the cases where we can trace a source, the mind of the poet, like the philosopher's stone of old, has worked so potently that the original is almost unrecognisable.

We have studied the gold; we shall but cast fleeting glances on the base metal.

Midsummer Night's Dream.

The whole art of *Midsummer Night's Dream* is Shakespeare's. He knew, however, the popular tales of *Robin Goodfellow*, and may have found the name Oberon in Greene's *James IV.*, and Titania in Ovid, and taken the idea of the quarrel between

Oberon and Titania from Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*—

> Pluto that is Kyng of fairye,
> Folwynge his wyf, the Queene Proserpyne.—*E.* 2227.
>
> Dame, quod this Pluto, be no lenger wrooth,
> I am a Kyng, it sit me noght to lye.
> And I, quod she, a Queene of faiery!
> . . . . . .
> Let us namoore wordes heerof make.—*E.* 2311.

Popular tradition, romantic lore, and classical mythology are the main sources of his fairy knowledge.

We might say of most men, but especially of Shakespeare, that some time in their lives Titania has taken them away with her to fairyland. There is profound truth underlying the story of the changeling boy.

Hamlet.

There is no ghost in Belleforest's version of *Hamlet*. In the old play, possibly by Shakespeare, but more probably by Kyd, there seems to have been a ghost. If so, Lodge in *Wit's Miserie* (1596) is jeering at it when he talks of the "Ghost which cried so miserally at the theator, like an oyster wife,—*Hamlet, Revenge.*"

But there are probably two ghosts in the play. The first, in the early scenes taken

from the old play, a Senecan ghost, making prolonged speeches and moralisations; the second, which appears to Hamlet in his mother's chamber, a Shakespearean ghost, making but one short speech full of sympathy, and tersely to the point. The ghost which from beneath the ground cries "Swear!" is probably an interpolation.

Macbeth. Macbeth was drawn from Holinshed and Reginald Scott's *Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584). Shakespeare may also have seen King James' *Demonologie* (1599). Holinshed tells us that Macbeth and Banquo were "met by three women in straunge and ferly apparell, resembling creatures of an elder world." These apparitions were first doubted, but then it was supposed that they were—"eyther the wierd sisters, that is ye Goddesses of Destinie or else some Nimphes or Feiries endowed with knowledge of prophecie by their Nicromanticall Science."

Later we hear that Macbeth was warned by "certain wysardes" to beware of Macduff, but that owing to the ambiguous statements of a witch, in whom he had great trust, he rejected the warning. Here then, as in

Hamlet, there seem to be different sources for the two supernatural appearances at the beginning and middle of the play.

There are strong resemblances between certain scenes in *Macbeth* and Middleton's *Witch*, but it is still a moot question whether Shakespeare or Middleton be the debtor. The introduction of Hecate was almost certainly a later interpolation.

The appearance of Banquo's ghost is Shakespeare's own idea, though Macbeth's subjective hallucinations are referred to in Sommer's *Tracts*.

The Tempest.

The Supernatural in *The Tempest* is, as far as we know, Shakespeare's own conception, though a lost play may have given to him some faint ideas, and also to Jacob Ayrer, whose *Die schöne Sidea* has certain resemblances to *The Tempest*. His Runcifal is cited as the joint original of Ariel and Caliban, but need we look further for their origin than to the words "aerial" and "cannibal"?

The Masque in *The Tempest* (IV. i.), if Shakespeare's at all, originated in the desire to satisfy a court greedy of pageantry.

Cymbeline. In *Cymbeline* Shakespeare turned his attention to an old and honoured fairy story, *Schneewitchen or Snow-white.* This accords very strikingly with what we have already seen as to Shakespeare's evolution. His last years bring him back to the themes of his early days. The story tells us how "Snow-white was dead and remained dead. The dwarf laid her upon a bier, and wept three long days. Then they were going to bury her, but she still looked as if she were living, and still had her pretty red cheeks."

Surely this is the foundation for the death and re-awakening of Fidele, and the sorrow of Arviragus, Guiderius and Belarius in IV. ii. The vision, masque, and prophecy in V. iv. are, according to Pope, not Shakespeare's.

Richard III. The ghosts which appear to Richard III. are an expansion of some words in Holinshed. According to this historian he had "troubled dreams" and saw "diverse ymages like terrible devilles."

Julius Caesar. For the ghost in *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare drew on Plutarch, who says that

"A wonderful straunge and monstruous shape of a body appeared to Brutus."

The names of devils in *King Lear* are derived from Harsnett's *Declaration of egregious Popish Impostures"* (1603). *King Lear.*

VIII

CONCLUSION

Our brief survey of Shakespeare's use of the Supernatural is now complete. We have seen the poet in his time play many parts, but behind each of his acts we have felt the same personality—that of

> One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
> Never doubted clouds would break.
> Never dreamed though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
> Held—we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
> Sleep to wake.*

Some may put their trust in fickle fortune who

> Brings in some boats that are not steer'd.†

Shakespeare had learnt to pray—

> But He, that hath the steerage of my course,
> Direct my sail‡ . . . .

And though he in his bark was 'tempest-tost,' yet in due time he reached a safe harbour,

* Robert Browning—*Epilogue.* † *Cymbeline*, IV. iii. 46.
‡ *Romeo and Juliet*, I. iv. 112.

and came to recognise that the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

O strong soul, by what shore
Tarriest thou now? For that force,
Surely, has not been left vain!
Somewhere, surely, afar,
In the sounding labour-house vast
Of being, is practised that strength
Zealous, beneficent, firm! *

To us there remains—

The debt immense of endless gratitude,
. . . . . still paying, still to owe.†

* Matthew Arnold—*Rugby Chapel.*
† Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV. 52.

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