

Wicked Witches and Powerful Plots:

*The influence of the supernatural in the ancient world as
a guide to the supernatural in Macbeth*



Name: Claudia Paffen

Student number: s4101022

Supervisor: Prof. dr. B.M.C. Breij

Date of submission: 17/02/2017

Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	2
<u>Chapter 1: Witchcraft, ghosts and prophecy in the ancient and early modern world</u>	4
1.1: Studies in ancient magic	4
1.2: A definition of magic	5
1.3: The role of magic in Roman society	6
1.4: Roman world: witchcraft	7
1.5: Roman world: ghosts	8
1.6: Roman world: prophecy	9
1.7: Early modern England: witchcraft	10
1.8: Early modern England: ghosts	11
1.9: Early modern England: prophecy	12
<u>Chapter 2: Magic in Roman Poetry</u>	14
2.1: Horace, <i>Epode</i> 5	14
2.2: Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> 7.1-424 (The Story of Medea)	19
<u>Chapter 3: Seneca's Tragedies</u>	24
3.1: Prophecy	24
3.2: Witchcraft	26
3.3: Ghosts	29
<u>Chapter 4: Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i></u>	34
4.1: Context	34
4.2: Witchcraft	35
4.3: Prophecy	40
4.4: Ghosts	42
<u>Chapter 5: Comparison and Conclusion</u>	45
5.1: General parallels	45
5.2: Prophecy	46
5.3: Witchcraft	46
5.4: Ghosts	48
Conclusion	49
Bibliography	50

Front page:

Left: *The Three Witches from "Macbeth,"* Alexandre-Marie Colin, Oil on canvas 1827, The collection of Mr. and Mrs. Sandor Korein.

Right: *Jason and Medea,* John William Waterhouse, Oil on canvas, 1907, Private collection

Introduction

It is said that a group of witches cursed Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth* for eternity and that King James I banned the play for five years, because he was no fan of its supernatural incantations. This supposed 'curse' featured heavily in discussions and reception from then on:

"It is one of the most enduring superstitions in theatre lore, still swirling around like the Scottish mists of its setting, more than 400 years after Shakespeare first scratched Macbeth out with his quill. And while these days tales of a curse are generally dismissed as superstitious hocus-pocus, there is no denying the storied examples of ill-fortune visited upon players and companies mounting Mac-er... the Scottish play."¹

Even its name was cursed. People used to (or still) refer to it only by *The Scottish Play* in fear of bad luck. This legacy of *Macbeth* shows that the play definitely had an impact on people.

It also gives a good indication of the prominence of the role of the supernatural in the play. It is therefore one of Shakespeare's finest examples of a play containing supernatural elements. This tragedy contains witches, incantations, ghosts, prophecies and prophetic hallucinations and these supernatural elements are a significant part of the plot and its meaning, but the ideas that Shakespeare used were not all his own. He was influenced by existing ideas about the supernatural from his own time and arguably even by ideas about the supernatural that stretched as far back as antiquity. We know, after all, that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were influenced by classical texts and used many classical elements in their work.

The supernatural also had a prominent role in antiquity, in society as well as in literature. Because of this, it would be interesting to see whether the way the supernatural was dealt with in antiquity was in any way similar to the way it was presented in *Macbeth*.

Within the concept of the supernatural I will focus on magic, with which I mean magical elements that occur in the texts. The elements that I will examine are witchcraft (and in connection to that magical practice), prophecy and ghosts, because these are the most prominent supernatural elements that occur in *Macbeth*. Therefore, my research question will be: Do supernatural elements occur in a similar way in Roman literature as they do in *Macbeth*?

These elements lend themselves very well for comparison because they are also prominent in ancient texts, notably in Roman texts and especially in Senecan drama. I will therefore restrict myself to the Roman world, more specifically the late republican era and early empire, with some references to earlier times, and literature. Topics that I will discuss are, among others, whether these supernatural elements could enhance any particular emotions or thoughts in the minds of the readers or the audience, whether certain elements may have been used to give the plot a specific tone and whether they affect the identity or image of a person because of the supernatural.

In chapter 1 I will discuss the three themes of witchcraft, prophecy and ghosts in Roman society as an introduction to the role of the supernatural in the literary examples. These I will discuss in chapter 2, because we need to understand what the place of these supernatural themes in society was, to know why authors dealt with the supernatural in the way they did. Then, in chapter 2, I will make an analysis of some texts of Horace and Ovid that contain supernatural elements. I have selected these texts because they contain very clear supernatural elements (especially two very well-known witches) and they are thus a good example of how a classical author used these elements in his work. This is also the case in chapter 3, where I will discuss some texts of Seneca. Seneca deserves his own chapter because of the large amount of supernatural elements in his play and the major influence he

¹ http://www.telegraph.co.uk/film/macbeth/scottish_play_curse/

had on Renaissance drama, which will present us with some interesting parallels between Seneca's work and *Macbeth*. I will refer to four of his plays that feature these elements, namely *Medea*, *Oedipus*, *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes*.

In chapter 4 I will make an analysis of the supernatural elements in *Macbeth* and I will investigate whether they are similar to the ancient material I discussed in the previous chapters. Finally, chapter 5 will be my conclusion in which I will answer the research question.

Chapter 1: Witchcraft, ghosts and prophecy in the ancient and early modern world

If we want to research the role of the supernatural in Roman literature and *Macbeth*, we first need to take a look at the way in which the supernatural played a role in Roman and early modern English society. I will do this primarily by looking at what role the three elements witchcraft, prophecy and ghosts played in these societies.

Ancient World

1.1 Studies in ancient magic

Magic as a field of study has not always been received in a positive way. For a long time magic and religion were not very popular subjects for scholarship. There was a strong aversion towards magic as a field in general, for the subject was not taken seriously and the source material was not easily accessible, as this mainly consisted of papyri that were difficult to decipher.

This attitude towards magic changed in the twentieth century, when the study of magic was taken seriously and was revived, but there were some different approaches towards this research. I will briefly name the milestones of research done in the field of ancient magic in Europe and the United States.

In Europe, the real establishment of the study of ancient magic came about as a result of the work done by James Frazer.² Frazer was born in Glasgow in 1854 and was a classicist at Cambridge until he died in 1941. His most influential work was *The Golden Bough* (1913). Frazer's main argument was that in human evolution there was first magic, which changed into religion and then into science. These three elements were, according to him, distinct and occurred in this fixed order.³ Frazer was of enormous importance for later scholars, who responded to his work. An example is his disciple Malinowski, who published an article in 1925 called *Magic, Science and Religion*. Another important scholar influenced by Frazer was Yates, who published her work *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* in 1964, in which she commented on Frazer's conception of magic in relation to science. Frazer argues that magic could be seen as bad technology and false science, whereas Yates claims that magic is the first step towards modern science and technology.⁴ These were scholars that looked into actual magic, magic that was 'performed'.

On the other hand there were scholars who studied magic as an ideology. This means that they did not research the actual practice, but rather the impact of magic on society. Examples are Marcel Mauss⁵ and E. Evans-Pritchard,⁶ who both focused on the effects that magical practice had on society.

In the United States the study in ancient magic was established by Betz (1982), who translated papyri about magic and by Gager, who translated *defixiones* (1992). These *defixiones* were tablets, mostly made of lead, that contained magical curses.

From then on, the discussion was mainly about the distinction between magic and religious rites. In relation to that discussion another discussion was raised about the question: Do we limit our definition of magic to what the Greeks and Romans considered as such, or do we apply our own

² Graf (1997): 8-12.

³ Copenhaver (2015): 9-12.

⁴ Copenhaver (2015): 19-22.

⁵ Mauss opposed Frazer, who focused on how magic belonged to the same collective as religion, myth and rite. He focused more on the opinion of society about what magicians did. (Mauss (1902) *Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie*. In: *L'Année Sociologique* 7 (Paris). Mentioned in: Graf (1997): 17).

⁶ Evans Pritchard studied the function of accusations against magic and witchcraft in society. (Evans-Pritchard, (1937) *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azende* (Oxford). Mentioned in: Graf (1997): 17).

definition of magic to antiquity?⁷

Thus, because of the different trends in scholarship and because of the difficulty of the topic it is hard to find a working definition of magic. However, for this thesis it will be necessary to have a working definition of magic to make clear what it is that I am talking about. This definition will help to better establish what the three elements witchcraft, ghosts and prophecy meant to the Romans.

1.2 A definition of magic

It is important, when you want to give a definition of ancient magic, to study how the ancients perceived magic. An example of an ancient conception of magicians is given by Hippocrates in his work *The Sacred Disease*, where Hippocrates talks about people in older times who are like magicians in his time (τοιοῦτοι εἶναι ἄνθρωποι οἳ καὶ νῦν εἰσι μάγοι, 2.2):

τοιαῦτα λέγοντες καὶ μηχανώμενοι προσποιέονται πλέον τι εἰδέναι, καὶ ἀνθρώπους ἐξαπατῶσι προστιθέμενοι αὐτοῖς ἀγνείας τε καὶ καθάρσιας, ὃ τε πολὺς αὐτοῖς τοῦ λόγου ἐς τὸ θεῖον ἀφήκει καὶ τὸ δαμόνιον. καίτοι ἔμοιγε οὐ περὶ εὐσεβείης τοὺς λόγους δοκέουσι ποιεῖσθαι, ὡς οἴονται, ἀλλὰ περὶ ἀσεβείης μᾶλλον, καὶ ὡς οἱ θεοὶ οὐκ εἰσὶ, τὸ δὲ εὐσεβὲς αὐτῶν καὶ τὸ θεῖον ἀσεβὲς ἐστὶ καὶ ἀνόσιον, ὡς ἐγὼ διδάξω. (Hippocrates, *The Sacred Disease*, 3.12-20)

*Saying and devising such things, they claim to know something more, and they deceive men by imposing purifications and cleansings upon them, while much of their talk turns to the gods and divinity. But to me these words do not seem to be about piety, as they think, but rather about impiety, and as if the gods do not exist, and that which is pious and divine to them is impious and profane, as I shall point out.*⁸

We see here that at least in some cases the people who performed magic were clearly distrusted in antiquity. They ‘deceive men’ (ἀνθρώπους ἐξαπατῶσι) and they are considered ‘impious’ (περὶ ἀσεβείης μᾶλλον). They also seem to divert from conventional religion (ὡς οἱ θεοὶ οὐκ εἰσὶ) and their religion is considered to be ‘impious’ and ‘profane’ (τὸ δὲ εὐσεβὲς αὐτῶν καὶ τὸ θεῖον ἀσεβὲς ἐστὶ καὶ ἀνόσιον). This gives an indication of what ancient society considered magic to be, namely that they thought of it as something negative and profane. Ancient magicians claimed to be religious, but their religion was by society regarded as the opposite of conventional religion.⁹

Modern scholars have also attempted to define what the ancient concept of magic was. Graf’s (1997) idea of magic is that it is a concept which is consciously shaped by doctors and philosophers. Dickie (2001) disagrees with Graf and argues that magic is a spontaneous and ever evolving creation, not consciously shaped. His explanation is: “Magic is better viewed as the creation of a very special set of circumstances in which different forms of religious practice came into conflict.”¹⁰

Bailey (2007) connects magic with religion. His definition of magic is: “magic is any attempt to manipulate supernatural or natural forces by anything other than direct, physical means.” From that definition he then draws the conclusion that: “religion itself (another term difficult to dissociate from its often historically inapplicable modern connotations), or at least much religious ritual and ceremony, is not in any clear way separable from magic itself. In fact, religion may better be conceived as a subcategory of magic itself.”

⁷ Graf (1997): 14-18.

⁸ All translations, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

⁹ Dickie (2001): 26.

¹⁰ Dickie (2001):26-27.

Bailey argues that this is a definition that would fit in with the ancient conception of magic, since it fits into ancient thought. This does not mean, however, that the ancients did not draw a distinction between magic and religion,¹¹ such as in the passage of Hippocrates above.

Thus, magic can be defined in many different ways and there is not one ultimate definition. My preference goes out to Dickie's definition, because I do not think it likely that it is something people would deliberately make up, as Graf argues, since then it would be hard to believe that so many people would actually believe it, as we know they did. I also agree with Bailey in that religion and magic are closely connected, although I would not go so far as to call religion a subcategory of magic, since that would suggest that 'all religion' is magic, which would be a dangerous thing to say about something as broad as religion. I would rather suggest that magic is a 'form of religion', although a form that is not as conventional or generally accepted. Thus my working definition of ancient magic is: Ancient magic is a non-conventional form of religion, a 'religion' consisting of practices that are not universally accepted by society and are seen as 'non-conventional'.

Now that we have a clear definition of ancient magic, we can examine what role magic played in ancient society and subsequently ancient literature.

1.3 The role of magic in Roman society

As the previous sections already indicated, magic was not always received positively in Roman society just after the early principate. Pliny the Elder heavily criticizes magic in his *Natural History*, calling it *fraudentissima artium*¹² (most deceitful of arts). Pliny argues that magic was born from three *artes*: religion, medicine and astrology. He also argues that magic has two functions: healing (although he describes this as being false) and divination, which is something quite different from the function of the *carmina mala* in the Republican era.¹³ Pliny covered with his *magicae vanitates* (magical failures) most of the practices which we would nowadays regard as magical. He also equates these practices with false or improper religion, thus coming close to the concept of superstition.¹⁴ This negativity had such an impact on Roman society that magical practice was even opposed by the law.¹⁵ There were several laws against certain forms of magic. For example, some writers refer to one of the laws of the Twelve Tables, which refers to 'black magic'. This law can be found in Seneca's *Quaestiones Naturales*, for example, where it is stated:

Et apud nos in XII tabulis cavetur: "ne quis alienos fructus excantassit.

(Seneca, *Quaestiones Naturales* IV.7.2)

And among us, in the Twelve Tables it is warned: "That no one may cast incantations against another's crops."

And also in Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis*:

quid? non et legum ipsarum in duodecim tabulis verba sunt: qui fruges excantassit. et alibi: qui malum carmen incantassit?

(Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* 28.17)

¹¹ Bailey (2007): 12-13.

¹² Plinius, *Historia Naturalis* XXX.1.

¹³ Graf (1997): 49-53.

¹⁴ Bailey (2007): 19.

¹⁵ Dickie (2001): 142.

What? Are these not the words of the laws themselves in the Twelve Tables: Whoever shall have bewitched the fruit' and elsewhere: Whoever shall have uttered a harmful spell?

Another law against magical practices was the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*. This law was passed in 81 B.C. by L. Cornelius Sulla. The original law did not survive, but it is referred to in later sources. The law consisted of several sections (at least six), one of which concerned the *venefici*. The law dealt with people who had killed someone by means of a harmful drug (*venenum malum*). This law was not new at this point in time, but probably already existed and was reworked by Sulla. It is unknown whether he added something. Accusations of murder through *veneficium* fell rather easily because when suspicious deaths arose and no explanation could be found, it was easy to explain it as *veneficium*.¹⁶

Magicians who were condemned for their magical practices, were mostly from the margins of society and the people who performed these magical practices would be perceived as posing a certain threat to this society. But these persons could also be successful, because, despite all the negativity that surrounded these magicians, many people would still consult them, because they believed in these practices. This was a dilemma for the government, because, although magic was regarded very negatively, people kept coming back to it. The solution for this matter was a trial, in which it was decided whether the magician would be either banned from society or completely integrated into it. This way social order was re-established.¹⁷

1.4 Witchcraft

Already in antiquity witches were part of the popular belief and people would believe that women, who were involved in magic, could change into animals, fly through the air and brew potions for inspiring love and hatred.¹⁸ Latin words for 'witch' are: *cantatrix*, *saga* (old woman who conjured up ghosts and nullified bad dreams), and *venefica*. These terms can be used interchangeably.¹⁹ There was also a mythological witch that was feared, called the Lamia, who had slept with Zeus and punished Hera. She became a night-wanderer and preyed on children of other women.²⁰ That the ancients connected women with magic is not a surprise as we look at how Beard describes how the Romans regarded women: "Women were regularly associated with the 'Other' in all its forms –the alien world of distant lands, the antitypes of civilization, the wild, transgressive madness of those who broke the rules of civic life."²¹

'Other' is a very important term that can also be applied very well to witches and other persons involved with the supernatural. With the term 'other' I will in this thesis, therefore, mean: everything that deviates from what is regarded as normal and trustworthy within Roman (or any) society. I will use the term 'other' to define everything that the ancients would have regarded as 'abnormal' or

¹⁶ Rives (2011): 77-79. An example of a trial which might concern the *Lex Cornelia* is that of Apuleius in 158 or 159 A.D. His defence speech in front of the proconsul of Africa, his *Apology*, is what we have left of this trial. Apuleius had married a wealthy widow named Aemilia Pudentilla. The brother of her first husband, Sicinius Aemilianus and her son's father-in-law Herennius Ponticius did not agree with the marriage and accused Apuleius of being a *magus* and of having used love charms to win Aemilia's heart. In court, he is officially accused of buying a certain type of fish to use for *venena* and of putting a slave boy into trance, Rives 83-85.

¹⁷ Graf (1997):64-65.

¹⁸ Baroja (1964): 39.

¹⁹ Dickie (2001): 13-15.

²⁰ Bailey (2007): 33.

²¹ Beard (1998); 299-300.

‘threatening’.²²

In Greek and Roman mythology, goddesses that were closely related to witchcraft were Diana and Selene, but especially Hecate, who was also closely related to the underworld. She was imagined as a three-faced spirit, roaming the earth and only visible to dogs.²³ Priests attached to the cults of such deities could be seen as magicians and were performing magical practices.²⁴

1.5 Ghosts

Perhaps the most well-known examples of ghosts in antiquity are the ghosts rising from the underworld in book 11 of the *Odyssey* and those that Aeneas visited in book 6 of the *Aeneid*. But literature aside, people in Roman society believed these entities actually existed.

Some examples of Latin words for ghosts were: *umbra*, *anima*, *larva*, *manes*, *lares*, *lemuria*. The exact difference between the terms is not entirely clear, but *larvae* were perceived negatively, because they were ghosts who had gotten punished for their misdeeds in life. They had hideous faces or looked like skeletons and they also tortured the dead in the underworld. In general, ghosts looked very pale, but humanoid. They were perceived as being transparent, but they could also be very substantial, up to the point where they would even be able to give a hug.²⁵

The Romans had special festivals to honour and respect the dead and ghosts. The *Lemuria* were held on May 9th, 11th and 13th. With this festival the Romans honoured the ghosts of the dead who had no family left. This festival was mostly a private and domestic practice, wherein, in order to drive ghosts from their house, the father would walk bare-footed at night and would throw black beans over his shoulder for the ghosts to collect. He would do this nine times.²⁶

Another festival that was in honour of the dead was the *Parentalia*, held in February, where the whole family would gather to visit the graves of family members and would drink something and adorn the tomb with flowers.²⁷

Next to this accepted form of honouring the spirits of the dead, there was also a more sinister tradition called necromancy. The Roman tradition of necromancy follows up on the Greek one. One of the clearest literary examples of this practise is described in Seneca’s *Oedipus* (this play will be discussed in chapter 3).

There is, however, no clear evidence of a historical performance of necromancy in antiquity.²⁸ The Romans’ view on necromancy was very negative because it was often associated with human sacrifice.²⁹ The practice was also mostly associated with the emperors and their enemies. Some emperors, for example, were allegedly haunted by ghosts, such as Nero (who killed his mother) and Otho (who killed Galba).³⁰

²² I will use this term as well when discussing *Macbeth*

²³ This importance of the moon-goddess and Hecate is something that we will see much more of in the literary section.

²⁴ Bailey (2007): 27-28. In ancient literature, sorcerers were described as being able to control the forces of nature. In reality (which means in actual magical practice) magic was performed for more practical reasons, with divination as one of its most important rites. (Bailey (2007): 20-22).

²⁵ Ogden (2001): 219-224.

²⁶ James (1961): 173-174.

²⁷ James (1961): 174-175.

²⁸ Ogden (2001): xxii-xxiii.

²⁹ Ogden (2001): 149

³⁰ Both examples can be found in Suetonius. For Nero: [*iussit*] *matrem occidi, quasi deprehensum crimen voluntaria morte vitasset. (...) Neque tamen conscientiam sceleris, quanquam et militum et senatus populi gratulationibus confirmaretur, aut statim aut umquam postea ferre potuit, saepe confessus exagitari se*

Necromancy is a very complicated and varied process which I will not explain in detail here, but I will lay out some key elements. Consultation of ghosts usually took place at night, which was considered the time of the ghosts. Elements that were needed for the ritual were a pit, for animal sacrifices with blood and libations, and a fire. In the ritual, the first time the ghost would be asked nicely to appear. If this did not happen, he is asked a second time, but now in a very threatening and frightening way, which would then always have worked.³¹

1.6 Prophecy

To know what role prophecy played in ancient society, we must look at divination, because prophecy was understood to be a part of that. According to 'The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Ancient Greece and Rome' divination is defined as: "attempting to predict the future or to determine if the gods approve of a course of action."³²

Divination was received differently in ancient society than witchcraft and was more accepted, for the Roman authorities often publicly consulted means of divination. They often consulted the *Haruspices*³³, which were priests that were specialised in *extispicium*³⁴ and weather-signs. According to the Romans they were of Etruscan origin and maintained their status of priesthood during Roman times.

The authorities also made use of the augurs, a group of priests who by "taking the auspices"³⁵ could tell the opinions of the gods. This meant that they observed the flights and behaviour of the birds or interpreted thunder and lightning. The augurs were one of the four major groups of priests of the Roman state and they were very important. Augury was mostly used as a political means and not so much used in private matters.³⁶ When the predictions contained alarming information the authorities would often turn to the Sibylline books. These were three books with poems written in Greek hexameters. When read in a specific way they could give an explanation of the alarming predictions.³⁷

Besides public forms of divination, it was also a domestic practice. In private divination the Romans made use of *extispicium* and *haruspicia*, but they also had the inclination to make use of more unconventional methods of divination, for instance astrology. This method of divination was considered violent, because it was believed that it could predict the fate of your enemies.³⁸

materna specie verberibusque Furiarum ac taedis ardentibus.: [He ordered] that his mother was to be put to death, as if she had escaped the detected crime with a voluntary death (...) And yet he could not then or ever afterwards bear the conscience of his crime, although he was comforted by the congratulations of the soldiers and the senate and the people, often confessing that he was tormented by the ghost of his mother and by the whips and blazing torches of the Furies. (Suetonius, *Nero* 34.3-4)

For Otho: *Dicitur ea nocte per quietem pavefactus gemitus maximos edidisse repertusque a concursantibus humi ante lectum iacens per omnia piaculorum genera Manes Galbae, a quo deturbari expellique se viderat, propitiare temptasse*: It is said that on that night he was frightened in his sleep, having emitted loud groans, and was found by those who ran towards him, lying on the ground beside his bed, and that he had tried to propitiate, through every kind of placatory rite, the ghost of Galba, by whom, he dreamt, he was struck down and driven out. (Suetonius, *Otho* 7.2)

³¹ Ogden (2001): 166-176.

³² Fantham and Gagarin (2010): 434.

³³ Practicers of the *Haruspicina*: "art of divining" (Lewis and Short: 841).

³⁴ "An inspection of the entrails for the purpose of prophesying" (Lewis and Short: 708-9).

³⁵ Practicing of *auspicium*: "divination by observing the flight of birds" (Lewis and Short: 208).

³⁶ Fantham and Gagarin (2010): 434-436.

³⁷ Scheid (2003): 121-122.

³⁸ Scheid (2003): 124-126.

Furthermore, the practice of necromancy, which has been discussed in the previous section, can be seen as a form of divination as well, since spirits had knowledge of the future (see also Seneca's *Oedipus* in chapter 3).

Early modern England

Dewald (2004) defines witchcraft in the early modern world as: "witchcraft is the belief in and use of unusual, secret, or even supernatural forces in order to force or promote specific desired ends."³⁹ You could even say that this is a definition of 'magic'.

The Jacobean audience (*Macbeth* was first performed under King James I) for the biggest part would have still believed in magic, which means that in this time magic would have had an elaborate impact on society.⁴⁰

1.7 Witchcraft

Witches were regarded as apostates of Christianity, as fallen Christians who had given up on God, to follow Satan.⁴¹ One of the things that people were most terrified of was the witches' Sabbath.⁴² From the 15th century onwards, people began to associate witches with the worship of demons and diabolical witchcraft or cults.⁴³ People believed that witches were not capable of performing black magic on their own and thus called upon spirits to help with evil actions was not something unfamiliar for a witch. In Early Modern England people believed that witches needed assistance of a supernatural entity to perform their black magic, which was often some sort of devil.⁴⁴ And furthermore, the invocation of evil spirits was registered as a capital offense, according to the 'Witchcraft Statute of 1604'.⁴⁵

Witchcraft was a topic for discussion among scholars in early modern England. King James himself had published a book called *Daemonologie* in 1597 in which he wrote about the practice of witch hunting, arguing firmly that witches really existed.⁴⁶ This implies that the fear of witchcraft was spread widely over the country.

Witches existed in all levels of society. The modern stereotype of a witch as just an ugly old woman is not true for early modern England, where it was believed that witches could have all kinds of appearances: male or female, young or old. Some witches were apparently beautiful and attractive.⁴⁷ Actions known as "witch hunts" were held in a frenzy, to prosecute people who were perceived to be menaces to society. There is little evidence for "real" gatherings in order to worship the Devil and therefore it is believed that in reality there were only very few witches, but not in the contemporaries' mind.⁴⁸

³⁹ Dewald (2004): 220.

⁴⁰ Davidson (2012): 82-83.

⁴¹ Davidson (2012): 23.

⁴² Witches (it was believed) would gather to worship demons, engage in orgiastic sex, desecrate crosses and murder and eat babies. One of the most iconic elements of this gathering was the night flight. Witches would come to these gatherings flying on animals, sticks or brooms. (Bailey (2007): 144-145).

⁴³ Bailey (2007): 144.

⁴⁴ Davidson (2012): 23.

⁴⁵ Levin (2002): 39.

⁴⁶ Clark (1971): 27.

⁴⁷ Davidson (2012): 57.

⁴⁸ Davidson (2012): 60.

1.8 Ghosts

From ancient times there has been a fear of the malevolence of ghosts, a fear which continued in early modern times. In Early Modern England, ghosts were mostly imagined as unhappy spirits of unbaptised or violently deceased persons who wandered around the earth and disturbed the living.⁴⁹ The uneducated believed that they were departed spirits of humans who had once lived, returning to earth for a special reason, for example revenge. Scholars of this time believed that these apparitions were manifestations of evil which was not properly understood. They were regarded as a devil in visible form.⁵⁰ Ghosts and spirits were also believed to have been invaded by the Devil and an apparition of a dead person was believed to be a trick of the Devil.⁵¹ A good example of how ghosts were regarded in early modern England (as a trick of the Devil) is James I who writes about ghosts in his book *Daemonologie* (book 3, chapter 1). He argues that the Devil would enter dead bodies to make people believe they have communicated with the dead.⁵² He divides these spirits in four kinds:

That kinde of the Devils conversing in the earth, may be divided in foure different kindes, whereby he affrayeth and troubleth the bodies of men: For of the abusing of the soule, I have spoken alreadie. The first is, where spirites troubles some houses or solitarie places: The second, where spirites followes upon certaine persones, and at divers houres troubles them: The thirde, when they enter within them and possesse them: The fourth is the kind of spiritities that are called vulgarlie the Fayrie.
(James I, *Daemonologie* 3.1)

He also compares the first kind he names to some of the ancient forms of spirits (*Lemuria*) we already saw in chapter 1.5:

For if they were spirites that haunted some houses, by appearing in divers and horrible formes, and making greate dinne: they were called Lemures or Spectra.
(James I, *Daemonologie* 3.1)

He also explains why spirits will only visit people when they are alone, which is because at that time they will be at their weakest:

The cause whie they haunte solitarie places, it is by reson, that they may affraie and brangle the more the faith of suche as them alone hauntes such places. For our nature is such, as in companies wee are not so soone mooved to anie such kinde of feare, as being solitarie, which the Devill knowing well inough, hee will not therefore assaile us but when we are weake:
(James I, *Daemonologie* 3.1)

This last citation will be significant for the following chapters, for we see that in the literary examples that the encounters with spirits are often very private matters, such as we will see in *Macbeth*.

1.9 Prophecy

⁴⁹ Davidson (2012): 143.

⁵⁰ Clark (1971): 31.

⁵¹ Davidson (2012): 23.

⁵² Davidson (2012): 145

There were many forms of divination practices in private life. The reason for this practice could be any problem or a decision that had to be made. The techniques that could be used are too many to describe, but some examples are: scapulomance (looking at the shoulders of animals), oneiroscopy (the interpretation of dreams) and necromancy (making contact with the dead). Other, more domestic methods, often involved looking at animal behaviour.⁵³

Besides the contact with spirits, which had already developed in antiquity,⁵⁴ astrology was also an important method for making prophecies. Beaver argues that this could be seen as a form of popular religion rather than popular magic.⁵⁵ I would say that this is true, but that it must be noted that magic could as well be seen as a form of religion, albeit sinister and not generally accepted.

In early modern (English) politics prophecy played a major part as well. The Sibylline prophecies, which, apart from the Roman, played a major role in Christian tradition, made way to the early modern period and very particularly Elizabeth's ascension to the throne.

Writers often incorporated Elizabeth in their prophetic texts, such as John Fox, who promoted Elizabeth as a second Constantine. Another example is *Divine Prophecies of the Ten Sibylls* (1589) by Jane Seager, which is arranged in such a way as to put Elizabeth in a leading role.⁵⁶ These are just two of many examples of apocalyptic and prophetic books in which Elizabeth played an important role. Elizabeth herself seemed to accept these predictions and the art of divination. Allegedly she wished, in a prayer, for the gift of prophecy for herself.⁵⁷ This indicates that also in the early modern political environment prophecy played a major role.

Conclusion

To conclude, magic was a phenomenon that the Romans would strongly believe in and a phenomenon that almost everyone of them was afraid of, perhaps afraid to get cursed. However, some of them would seek help from a magician to solve their problems. You could perhaps say that magic had two sides.

We can also conclude that magic was very similar to religion and even a 'form of religion'.

Concerning magic, the ancients had priests, rites and even special gods that they prayed to (we see that goddesses related to the moon and Hecate were of particular importance). These practices were all very similar to conventional religious practices and in this way magic can be seen as a 'religion' as well, although by Roman society was deemed a 'false' religion.

Witchcraft is both in antiquity and Early Modern England seen as something sinister and suspicious. It is also something that is closely associated with women and, especially in Roman society, associated with the connection between women and 'otherness', because women were already regarded as 'outsiders' in Roman society.

Ghosts are in both periods closely related to witchcraft as well as divination and seem to be sometimes the combining factor between the two, since it was believed that you needed witchcraft to perform necromancy and that the ghosts would then tell you the future. Both in Roman and Early modern times they were feared for their supposed malevolence.

Finally, I would suggest that divination, and within this field also prophecy, was used both in Roman

⁵³ Beaver (2008): 220.

⁵⁴ A literary example of this will be given in chapter 3.

⁵⁵ Beaver (2008): 259-260.

⁵⁶ Petrina and Tosi (2011): 178-180.

⁵⁷ Petrina and Tosi (2011): 189.

and early modern England in public and seems therefore to have been a more accepted supernatural phenomenon than witchcraft and ghosts. It comes closer to actual religion and the Romans even incorporated it into their religion. It had, however, still its sinister forms as well, such as the use of necromancy, and these sinister methods within the art of divination will be the ones that both the ancient authors and Shakespeare will focus on, as we shall see in the following chapters.

In the next two chapters, I will discuss two literary case-studies where magic features prominently and which are a good example of how ancient authors used magic in their texts. I will discuss how these authors dealt with the concept of magic as being something negative, defying the norm and how they incorporated the relationship of magic with religion and women into their work. I will also research why they included aspects of magic in their work.

Magic was widely represented in ancient literature. It occurred in genres such as epic, elegy, comedy and tragedy. Poetic witches had powers to raise the dead, change themselves into birds or other animals, split the ground, bring the moon down from the sky, affect the weather and reverse the course of a river.⁵⁸ They were mostly portrayed as old, drunk or as procuresses (as magic was often closely related to prostitution).⁵⁹ Witches were mostly female, as harmful magical forces were often associated with women. This connection can be explained in that, as we have seen, magic is closely related to the concept of the 'other' in ancient society, as well as that women were often regarded as 'other'.

Baroja (1964) also argued that the black magic these witches practiced cannot be separated from desire and that the witches in literature seem to be dominated by passions,⁶⁰ something which was also often associated with women.

To illustrate these points I will discuss case-studies of magic and witchcraft in literature, to show how ancient authors described magic in their work. The reason that I have chosen Horace's *Epode* 5 and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is that they use elements that keep recurring in magical practice, in literature as well as in society and also include very clear examples of the practice of magic. Furthermore, they give us a clear image of how these authors viewed magic and how they relate magic to other literary themes, for example love and revenge.

2.1 Horace, *Epode* 5

Context

The first example is Horace's *Epode* 5 in which we can see that Horace made extensive use of the theme of witchcraft. In this *Epode*, a group of witches, with Canidia as their leader, have kidnapped a boy and intend to bury him up to his neck and starve him to death. They do this because they want to use his liver and marrow for a love charm, to recover the affections of Varus (Canidia's paramour). Canidia has already tried to lure Varus back into her bed, but this plan failed. As a last resort, she intends to try to enchant him by using a love-charm created by using the boy's liver and marrow. The boy, once he has lost the hope of rescue, curses the witches, vowing to haunt them forever as a ghost.

Canidia only appears in poems of Horace and appears or is mentioned in six of them.⁶¹ She is ironically portrayed as a matron (*Epode* 5.5-6) and lives somewhere near the Esquiline. Her appearance is ugly and her breath poisonous. She is a very skilled sorceress, but necromancy seems to be her speciality.⁶² Canidia is the 'ultimate other', the outsider, and a depiction that is the complete opposite of the modest Roman housewife. She is a good example of the argument that magic and women are related to everything that defies normality and what is accepted by society. She has a vile tongue and unbridled sexuality and her name has several possible meanings. It can derive from *canities*, which means 'old age'. The name is also very similar to the word *canis* (dog), which can be an allusion to Canidia's ravenous hunger for love, because dogs are also a misogynistic depiction of female powers and desires.⁶³ She is often accompanied by dogs as well. Her name could

⁵⁸ Dickie (2001): 188.

⁵⁹ Dickie (2001): 176.

⁶⁰ Baroja (1964): 32.

⁶¹ She also appears in *Satires* 1.8 and *Epode* 17 and is mentioned in *Satires* 2.1 and 2.8 and *Epode* 3.

⁶² Mankin (1995): 299.

⁶³ Oliensis (1998): 69.

also come from the word *canere* (to sing), which alludes to the fact that Canidia is a witch and uses magical incantations.⁶⁴

The poem

What is striking is that the kind of magic that is practiced by the witches in *Epode* 5 was by the Romans believed to be practiced in real life as well, the love charms as well as the human sacrifice. Thus, Horace's poetry, whilst still fictional, situates itself within a world of actual magical practices that people could relate to.⁶⁵

The poem starts with the boy, who speaks and wonders what is going on (10-14). Canidia is described and it immediately becomes clear that she is no normal woman:

Canidia, brevibus illigata viperis / crinis et incomptum caput, (Horace, *Epode* 5.15-16)

"Canidia, her hair and dishevelled head interwoven with short vipers,"

Canidia's appearance is not something that would be accepted as decent and is regarded as something 'abnormal'. She has a dishevelled head (*incomptum caput*, 16) and her hair is interwoven with snakes (*implicata viperis crinis*, 15-16). With these snakes, Canidia associates herself with chthonic powers, for she relies on their aid and in particular on the aid of the Furies, who had snakes in their hair as well and were thought to be, like Canidia, repulsive old women.⁶⁶ Another depiction of Canidia as a Fury is in *Satires* 1.8, where she and Sagana (another witch) conjure up Hecate⁶⁷ and the fury Tisiphone, whereupon Priapus calls them "two Furies" (*Furiarum...duarum*, 45).⁶⁸

The element that returns, which was made clear in chapter 1, is that we see a woman who is depicted as 'abnormal' or 'other' and is, through the snakes, associated with infernal practices.

Horace depicts Canidia as what the Roman public would have associated with a witch.

Horace shows more evidence of the witches' disheveled appearance when the other witches are described:

*at expedita Sagana, per totam domum
spargens Avernalis aquas,
horret capillis ut marinus asperis
echinus aut currens aper.*

(Horace, *Epode* 5.25-28)

"But girt-up Sagana, sprinkling Avernall water through the entire house, bristles with rough hair, like a sea-urchin or a running boar."

Witches often have a close connection with nature. In this passage for example, there is a mention of (infernal) water (*Avernales aquas*, 26). Nature was very important in magical practices, and witches are in many cases connected with nature, especially with threatening nature, which is something that will also return in *Macbeth*.

Furthermore, *expedita* refers to Sagana's girt clothes. The reason that she wore them was that they

⁶⁴ Oliensis (1998): 68-69.

⁶⁵ Watson (2003): 176-177.

⁶⁶ Watson (2003): 198.

⁶⁷ As we saw in chapter 1.3

⁶⁸ Oliensis (1998): 69.

would give her easy movement and because (partial) nakedness was a central feature in magic ritual. This way, there would be no barrier for any supernatural forces.⁶⁹ Like Canidia, she is presented as a shabby woman, having rough hair (*capillis...asperis*, 27).

The way in which Horace presents Canidia's magical abilities is very clear in the passage when Canidia starts demanding all sorts of ingredients that she needs to perform her magic:

*iubet sepulcris caprificos erutas,
iubet cupressos funebres
et uncta turpis ova ranae sanguine
plumamque nocturnae strigis 20
herbasque quas lolcos atque Hiberia
mittit venenorum ferax,
et ossa ab ore rapta ieiunae canis
flammis aduri Colchicis.*

(Horace, *Epode* 5.17-24)

"[Canidia] orders wild fig-trees, dug out from tombs, orders funereal cypresses and eggs, besmeared with blood from an anointed toad, and the feather of a nocturnal screech-owl and herbs, which lolcus and Hiberia, productive in poisons, send, and bones, snatched from the mouth of a hungry dog: [all] to be burnt in the Colchian flames."

All the items that are named would have been recognised by the readers as items that belong to magic. Fig trees (*caprificos*, 17) were believed to be *arbores infelices*. They were known to grow on graveyards and were believed to be powerful ingredients in any spells that had something to do with the dead. Their negative connotation and the fact that they were pulled from a tomb indicate that they were very effective for magical spells. As well as the fig-tree, the cypress (*cupressus*, 18) was closely related to death. It was the sacred tree of the deities of the underworld.⁷⁰

Toads and frogs were also used a lot in magic, because of their ugliness, and because they could be poisonous. Eggs were extensively used in erotic magic and they were also important in the cults of Hecate and Dionysus.⁷¹ What these ingredients have in common and imply is that magical items should be as repulsive as possible, for example an egg that is besmeared with the blood of a toad. There is also a close relationship with funerary rites. The cypresses, for example, are called funerary (*funebres*, 18).

Horace thus presents Canidia's magic as something negative. What she is doing is evil (she forces someone to her own will) and by including those elements that were already known by the readers as sinister magical elements and were closely related to infernal rites, those elements function as a means to enhance the power of Horace's poem, and therefore emphasize the negative reputation of magic in Roman society.

Furthermore, we see an appearance of the *strix*, the screech-owl, which people believed drank children's blood. Owls were creatures of the night that very often featured in magical rites and curses. Their cries were interpreted as announcements of bad news and are often mentioned in the context of magic or ill-omen.⁷² Other examples of the owl appearing as a bad omen in literature

⁶⁹ Watson (2003): 208.

⁷⁰ Watson (2003): 199-201.

⁷¹ Watson (2003): 201-203.

⁷² Mankin (1995): 116.

include (among others) Virgil's *Aeneid* 4.462 and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 15.791. Pliny the Elder wrote about the owls as ill-omens:

Uncos unguis et nocturnae aves habent, ut noctuae, bubo, ululae. omnium horum hebetes interdiu oculi. bubo funebris et maxime abominatus publicis praecipue auspiciis deserta incolit nec tantum desolata sed dira etiam et inaccessa, noctis monstrum, nec cantu aliquo vocalis sed gemitu.

(Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 10.34)

"Nocturnal birds also have hooked nails, like the night-owls, the eagle-owl, and the screech-owl. The eyes of all these are dimmed at daytime. The eagle-owl, a funerary bird and an extremely bad-omen, especially in public auguries, lives in deserted [places], not only desolate, but also ominous and inaccessible, a monster of the night, and its voice is not something musical, but a scream."

Mentioning the owl puts emphasis once more on infernal rites, since it is regarded as a funerary bird (*funebris*) and this bird also literally lives outside society (*deserta incolit*), which makes it very appropriate for witchcraft.

What is also significant in this passage is: *Iolcos atque Hiberia* and *Colchicis*, which should be interpreted as references to Medea, an archetypal witch⁷³, since these refer to places where she lived or was born and emphasizes Canidia's relationship with witchcraft.

In the next passage, we learn more about the abilities of the witches:

*non defuisse masculae libidinis
Ariminensem Foliam
et otiosa credidit Neapolis
et omne vicinum oppidum,
quae sidera excantata voce Thessala
lunamque caelo deripit.* 45

(Horace, *Epode* 5.41-46)

Idle Naples and every nearby town believed that Folia of Ariminum, of male desire, was not absent, who with a Thessalian incantation bewitches the stars and steals the moon from the heaven.

It is argued that *masculae libidinis* implies that Folia was a lesbian ("of male desire"). With this, Horace could mean that people would think that because being lesbian was regarded as something 'against nature', she practiced magic because of her sexual orientation.⁷⁴

She apparently has the ability to alter the course of nature, since she is able to steal the moon from the sky (*lunamque caelo deripit*, 46), which was a well-known 'ability' for a witch in that time.⁷⁵ The witches deviate from what is regarded as 'normal' and are often mentioned together with natural elements, of which they appear to be 'in control'.

In the next passage Canidia speaks, pleading with the goddess Diana, who is intimately associated with magic (because of her affiliation with the moon) and the Night for help:

*hic inresectum saeva dente livido
Canidia rodens pollicem
quid dixit aut quid tacuit? 'o rebus meis
non infideles arbitrae,
Nox et Diana, quae silentium regis,* 50

⁷³ Bailey (2007): 31-32

⁷⁴ Watson (2003): 217-218.

⁷⁵ Mankin (1995): 119.

arcana cum fiunt sacra,
nunc, nunc adeste, nunc in hostilis domos
iram atque numen vertite.
formidulosus dum latent silvis ferae 55
dulci sopore languidae,
senem, quod omnes rideant, adulterum
latrent Suburanae canes
nardo perunctum, quale non perfectius
meae laborarint manus. 60 (Horace, Epode 5.47-60)

“Here the savage Canidia, gnawing her uncut thumb with a grey tooth, what did she say or what did she conceal? “O faithful witnesses of my business, Night and Diana, who is the ruler over silence, when mystic rites come to pass, now, help now, now against hostile homes turn your anger and divine power. While in terrible woods wild beasts lie, drowned in sweet slumber, may the dogs of Subura bark at the adulterous old man, something which all laugh at, anointed with nard-oil, such as my hands never made more perfect.”

In this passage, we again see features of magic that were seen in society as 'stereotypical'. Canidia appears to be very shabby: her nails are not cut (*inresectum...pollicem*, 47-48) and her tooth is grey (*dente livido*, 47), which emphasizes the repulsive character of magic. She prays to Night (*Nox*, 51) and Diana, who is connected with silence (*silentium*, 51), which are the perfect circumstances to perform magic (*arcana cum fiunt sacra*, 52). Magicians apparently preferred to search for a lonely spot at night, where they were able to *perform* their magic in peace.⁷⁶

The first potion Canidia uses is the *nardum*, which will make Varus forget his previous lovers. Later (61-66) it becomes clear that Canidia modelled her potion on that of the witch Medea.⁷⁷

Thus magic is performed out of people's sight. Circumstances that witches prefer for this are night and silence and they favour nature over civilization. They make use of sinister things, such as terrible woods and wild beasts (*formidulosus cum latent silvis ferae*, 55). Thus, Horace makes use of well-known, sinister circumstances for magic, which will enhance the uncanny atmosphere of the poem. However, the potion does not seem to work and Canidia says she will prepare something stronger (70-82).

At the end of the poem, the boy swears to haunt them at night as a Fury and to attack their faces with nails as a ghost (*nocturnus occurram Furor petamque voltus umbra curvis unguibus*).⁷⁸ It is suggested that in this way, the boy becomes a *strix* as well. According to Ovid, *striges* used to claw at their victim, just like the boy threatens to do here.⁷⁹

Thus to conclude, Horace makes use of familiar magical themes (such as the prayer to the night, emphasis on nature and close connection to the funerary) and he puts Canidia, depicted as a repulsive witch, at the centre of his poem. Mankin argues that the epode can be interpreted as 'an exposé of actual sorcery activity' or as an 'entertaining ghost story'.⁸⁰ Dickie agrees with him and argues: “it is an activity that bears a close resemblance to the mystery-cults of regular religion, but which is in fact a travesty of or perversion of proper religious practice; it is not only at odds with regular religious practice but seeks to overturn the natural order of things; Those who engage in sorcery are not only devoid of any sense of moral scruple, they are also impious and lacking in due

⁷⁶ Watson (2003): 224.

⁷⁷ Mankin (1995): 128.

⁷⁸ 5.93-94: “I will come to meet you at night as a Fury, and as a ghost I will seek your faces with curved nails.”

⁷⁹ Stocks (2016): 167 and Ovid, *Fasti* 6.143-6

⁸⁰ Mankin (1995): 110.

respect for the divine. This is essentially Plato's conception of magic with the addition of the idea that magic is an essentially misguided attempt to defeat the ordinary course of nature."⁸¹ What Dickie thus implies is that Horace draws heavily on practices that are known to the public, but connects it with the idea that magic was a 'false' religion. Watson argues that the practice of magic by the 'scum of the polis' would imply a warning for the upper-class not to engage in such activities.⁸² What I would add is that Horace most likely used a very 'realistic' form of magical practice to incorporate in his literary piece, which means that his intention was probably to show the reader something that was familiar to him, because this way a 'warning' would have been better believable. Putting magic, something that was mostly despised and mistrusted, in such a position and even putting a woman, who is also a witch, in such a central position is, in my opinion, a literary tool to make a poem or story extra powerful. It was an attempt to enhance its meaning.

2.2 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.1-424 (The story of Medea)

Another good example of magic depicted in literature can be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* book 7, which tells the story of Medea. Medea, as was said before, can be seen as an archetype for witchcraft. Ovid gives us an extensively detailed description of Medea in action in his *Metamorphoses*.

Furthermore, Ovid was very interested in magic and made it a theme in several of his works (for example the *Ibis* and the *Heroides*).⁸³ It occurs in several of his stories in the *Metamorphoses* and the Medea-episode is one of the clearest examples of magical practice in the *Metamorphoses*, since magic in this episode is described in much detail and Medea has all the characteristics of a witch. Segal argues that Medea makes "the transformation of a young girl from a helpful enchantress to a murderous witch."⁸⁴ Rosner-Siegel (1982) argues that this transformation is a result of *amor*. Another reason for this transformation, he suggests, could be that Jason shows no affection towards Medea and that he uses her as a tool, specifically as a magic tool.⁸⁵ Gender plays a major part here, because the roles are reversed: Medea, a woman, is the person who takes initiative, whilst Jason, a man, does not have a major role in the poem and does not do anything. And here again, a story about a woman in action is connected with magic.

That this transformation is a result of *amor* is not a surprise, since magic in the *Metamorphoses* has a close connection with love. Segal argues that magic is in the *Metamorphoses* in many cases associated with passion and will occur at the point when disorder and irrationality enter the poem.⁸⁶ Medea's story begins in Colchis, where she helps Jason to steal the Golden Fleece. Here it immediately becomes clear that Medea is love struck and suffers from a strong passion (*et luctata diu, postquam ratione furorem/ vincere non poterat*),⁸⁷ which is thus, according to Rosner-Siegel, the *amor* that will transform Medea into a witch. In a speech she contemplates whether she should help Jason or not (7.11-74). In this speech, Medea still seems very innocent and insecure, unsure whether she will do the right thing by helping Jason. She is torn between her love for Jason and her loyalty to her country and thus she asks for the help of the three-formed goddess (Hecate/Luna/Diana), who is

⁸¹ Dickie (2001):140.

⁸² Watson (2003): 181.

⁸³ Segal (2002): 3-5.

⁸⁴ Segal (2002): 11.

⁸⁵ Rosner-Siegel (1982): 234-238.

⁸⁶ Segal (2002): 11-12.

⁸⁷ 7.10-11: "After having fought for a long time, with reason she could not conquer her passion."

known for her heavy involvement in magic. Here, however, Medea calls and swears upon her to help her suppress her love. Eventually her love still wins and she agrees to help Jason. At this point, Medea's magic is not described in that much detail and she still seems to be mostly an innocent girl. When she is not yet 'evil' magic does not seem to play an important role yet. She gives Jason some herbs (*accepit cantatas protinus herbas*)⁸⁸ and then uses some incantations and some unexplained secret arts in case the herbs are not strong enough (*Carmen auxiliare canit secretasque advocat artes*).⁸⁹

In the next episode, which is about the rejuvenation of Jason's father Aeson, the magical powers of Medea (and especially the practice of them) become more explicit and more detailed. She is slowly making the transformation from the 'innocent girl' into the 'evil witch'. In this episode, as we will see, magic has a far more negative connotation.

When Jason asks Medea to take a few years from his life to give to his old father, Medea is moved by his plea and agrees. She tells Jason that she will rejuvenate Aeson with her magic without taking years off Jason's life (159-176). Then Medea waits for the moon to be in the correct position, before she starts her magic (177-180) and she sneaks out of the palace. She walks barefoot and with loose hair, because knots are said to counterwork magic,⁹⁰ in the stillness of the deep night. These actions, as we have already seen, all indicate that Medea is gradually turning into an actual witch instead of the innocent girl she was at the beginning of the story.

She prepares to start her prayer and it is striking that all her actions before her prayer involve the number three:

Ad quae sua bracchia tendens

ter se convertit, ter sumptis flumine crinem

inroravit aquis ternisque ululatibus ora

190

solvit et, in dura submisso poplite terra,

"Nox" ait (.....)

(Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.188-192)

"Stretching out her arms to these, she turned **three** times, **three** times she besprinkled her head with water taken from a stream and with **three** cries she opened her mouth and, her knee placed on the hard ground, she spoke: "Night..."

The repetition of the number three is significant. Other places in the text where the number appears are: *diva triformis* (177), *tres...noctes* (179), *triceps Hecate* (194), *terque...flamma, ter aqua, ter sulphure* (261). The number three was very important to magicians as it was believed to possess magical powers,⁹¹ which is why it is also often connected with Hecate (*diva triformis*, 177 and *triceps Hecate*, 194).

Medea then prays to the night, stars, Hecate, earth, mountains, air, rivers, lakes and the gods of the forest and the night, (192-218). The Olympian gods are not mentioned, but the emphasis lies on natural elements again. She starts her prayer with a recital of things she has done in the past, in which we see that her abilities are those of a typical witch:

quorum ope, cum volui, ripis mirantibus amnes

⁸⁸ 7.98: "Straightaway he received magical herbs."

⁸⁹ 7.137-138: "She sings a song to help and calls upon her secret arts."

⁹⁰ Hill (1992): 200.

⁹¹ Hine (2000): 189. (This returns in Seneca's *Medea* in chapter 3)

in fontes rediere suos, concussaue sisto, 200
stantia concutio cantu freta, nubila pello
nubilaque induco, ventos abigoque vocoque,
vipereas rumpo verbis et carmine fauces,
vivaque saxa sua convulsaue robora terra
et silvas moveo iubeoque tremescere montis 205
et mugire solum manesque exire sepulcris!
te quoque, Luna, traho, quamvis Temesaea labores
aera tuos minuant; currus quoque carmine nostro
pallet avi, pallet nostris Aurora venenis! (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.199-209)

“With your⁹² help, when I wanted it, the rivers ran backwards to their sources, with their banks marvelling, and I calm down the shaken, stir up the calm seas by my incantation, I expel clouds and bring clouds on, I drive away and invoke winds, I break serpents’ throats with words and song, and living rocks and oak trees I uproot from their own earth and I move the forests and I command mountains to shake and the earth to rumble and ghosts to come from their tombs! You as well, Luna, I pull down, although the Temesaeian bronze lessen your labours; Even the chariot of my grandfather pales at my song, and Aurora pales at my poisons!”

Thus it is clear that, besides making use of natural elements, Medea is also very much in control of nature. She is able to make a river go to its source, which was a recurring ability for a witch in antiquity (*amnes in fontes rediere suos*, 199-200)⁹³ and again we see that a witch has the ability to pull down the moon (*Luna, traho* 207). She can control the weather, like the clouds (*nubila pello*, 201) and the winds (*ventos abigoque vocoque*, 202). There is also, as in *Epode* 5, a close connection with the infernal, since she calls ghosts from their tombs (*manesque exire sepulcris*, 206) and emphasizes her connection with snakes (*vipereas rumpo...fauces* 203). Medea puts heavy emphasis on herself, boasting about things she has achieved to expose her own power and independence. At the end of the passage she names her poisons (*venenis*, 209). This already sounds more evil than the ‘magical herbs’ that were described in 7.98. Medea then leaves in her chariot pulled by snakes (219-221), which are very important creatures for Medea as well and are also closely associated with magic. The snake-motif in relation to Medea is something that returns in Seneca as well.⁹⁴ She looks for herbs in different regions for nine days and nine nights (*nona dies....nonaque nox*, 234-235). Nine is another significant number in witchcraft, since it is three times three. After setting up her turf altar she starts her ritual sacrifice and utters incantation to the gods of the earth (*verba simul fudit terrenaue numina civit*, 248). Aeson is laid on a bed of herbs and Medea starts brewing her potion. For this potion she uses items which are well-known for being used in a magical context:

Interea validum posito medicamen aeno
fervet et exultat spumisque tumentibus albet.
illic Haemonia radices valle resectas
seminaue floresque et sucos incoquit atros; 265
adicit extremo lapides Oriente petitos
et quas Oceani refluxum mare lavit harenas;
addit et exceptas luna pernocte pruinas
et strigis infamis ipsis cum carnibus alas
inque virum soliti vultus mutare ferinos 270
ambigui prosecta lupi; nec defuit illis

⁹² Literally ‘whose’, referring back to the gods in the previous passage.

⁹³ Hine 2008: 188 (see also Seneca’s *Medea* 762).

⁹⁴ More about Medea and snakes in chapter 3.

*squamea Cinyphii tenuis membrana chelydri
vivacisque iecur cervi; quibus insuper addit
ova caputque novem cornicis saecula passae.*

(Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.262-274)

“Meanwhile, the strong drug is boiling in the copper pot and jumps up and is white with swollen foam. Therein she boils roots cut off in the Haemonian valley and seeds and flowers and black juices; She adds stones sourced from the far East and sands which the flowing sea of the Ocean washes; She also adds hoarfrost, taken under the full moon and wings of the infamous screech-owl with the flesh itself and the guts of a werewolf, able to change his wild face into that of a man; Nor was the scaly skin of a slim Cinyphian water-snake absent from these and the liver of a long-lived stag; to these she also adds eggs and the head of a crow, who passed nine generations.”

This passage emphasizes the ‘otherness’ of her ingredients and just like Canidia, Medea is working at night (*exceptas luna pernocte*, 268). She makes use of a boiling pot (*posito aeno fervet*, 262-263), which is something that we will be seeing again in *Macbeth*. Other items she uses that we already saw before are the screech owl (*strigis infamis*, 269) and eggs (*ova*, 274). We also see an appearance of the number 9 again (*novem secula*, 274). This passage is very reminiscent of the passage we saw in *Epode* 5, where Canidia is making her potion and also makes use of a lot of repulsive and ‘magical items’.

After the potion is finished and successfully tested with an olive branch (277-281), she cuts Aeson’s throat and replaces his blood with the potion and he miraculously turns young again (285-293).

In this scene, Medea is mostly acting as a witch, rather than as an innocent girl. In comparison with the previous passage, magic is described in full detail instead of swiftly being brushed over.

In the next episode it becomes clear that Medea completely turned to evil as a result of her magic.

The first verse of this story already indicates this: *Neve doli cessent* (Lest the treacheries ceased 7.297). There is no mention of love in this episode and the emphasis lies on Medea’s deceit. She is also called a *venefica* (316). Segal also argues that the cutting of Pelias’ throat happened with more violence than the cutting of Aeson’s throat: *guttura Colchis/ abstulit et calidis laniatum mersit in undis*,⁹⁵ whereas she only cuts Aeson’s throat and does not tear up his body parts (7.284-285).

Thereafter she flees in a winged chariot pulled by snakes (*pennatis serpentibus*, 350). Now Medea has been fully transformed from the innocent love-struck girl into the wicked witch. She then poisons Jason’s new bride (395),⁹⁶ murders her children (396-397) and attempts to poison Theseus (406-407), perhaps because she feels threatened by him and his influence on his father (her husband Aegeus). She mentions her abilities, which would by the public have been closely associated with the abilities of a witch. All the ingredients she uses in her potion are also closely associated with magic.

The function of magic changes in this story from a positive element to a negative element. The magic used to help Jason and Aeson seems innocent and is only used to help rejuvenate Jason’s father. But the magic Medea uses thereafter is mainly used to deceive and kill. It becomes a powerful tool that makes Medea transform from the innocent girl to the murderous woman we know. The more she turns towards magic, the more evil she becomes. Her influence and power in the poem also change because of her magic. Before she became a witch, she was a girl who obeyed the orders of her father and husband, but after she seriously starts using magic, she begins to make her own choices and

⁹⁵ 7.348-349: “The Colchian cut his throat and immersed his torn members in the boiling water.” Segal (2002): 16.

⁹⁶ Seneca wrote an extensive scene in his tragedy *Medea*, in which she uses magic to kill Jason’s new bride. This scene will be discussed in chapter 3.

transforms into a strong and powerful female character. Thus women in connection with magic are often depicted as being very independent. This independent woman might not be something society would like to see and Segal argues that with Medea in Ovid: "Magic becomes increasingly an expression of the dangers of the predominantly female mode of exercising power over life and death."⁹⁷ This connects well with the idea of women being 'other' and 'outside of society'.

Conclusion

We can conclude that Horace and Ovid often depict magic in a 'realistic' way. Items that are used and gods that are invoked are often the same as those that people believed were used and invoked in the real world as well.

There are also multiple themes that seem to recur in relation to magic. Both authors show a clear example of listing magical ingredients for a potion or magical rite. Items that are used by these witches are often depicted as repulsive and are closely associated with night and death.

Furthermore, both witches also show a close connection with nature. They make use of natural elements to perform their magic, and Medea even states that she can control nature.

These themes that are clearly related to the use of magic in the works, will return in Seneca's plays and *Macbeth* as well and will eventually reveal some interesting parallels.

Besides this, women seem to take a prominent role in relation to magic in these literary works. They are depicted as negative and 'other', which happens in society as well, but their prominence within the works is striking. Both Canidia and Medea perform a central role in the works and they are very influential on what happens in the story. By representing otherness and by acting suspiciously, they show that magic emphasizes 'otherness', is outside normality and is supposed to be distrusted. Especially Medea made a clear transformation from being an innocent girl to an evil witch, with magic as a major contributing factor within this transformation.

⁹⁷ Segal (2002): 14.

Chapter 3: Seneca's tragedies

After two brief case-studies about the supernatural in Horace and Ovid, I will discuss Seneca in more detail, because he wrote several tragedies that involved supernatural elements. Seneca is a very well-known Roman tragedian, who wrote during the first century AD. There are eight plays known that are certainly written by him.⁹⁸ Features that these plays contain which were very influential on Renaissance drama are according to Boyle (2006): “vivid and powerful verse, demanding verbal and conceptual framework, and a precious preoccupation with theatricality.”⁹⁹ Thus, since Senecan drama was definitely influential on Renaissance drama, I will therefore, in this chapter, look at the supernatural elements in Seneca. I will discuss the elements that feature most heavily in Senecan drama and also prominently in *Macbeth* as well, which are witchcraft, prophecies and ghosts

3.1 Prophecy

In two of Seneca's plays, prophecy has a major role. One of them is *Oedipus*, where prophecy is a central element of the plot. *Oedipus* focuses on the well-known story of Oedipus, the king of Thebes who, to free his city from a plague, consults an oracle. The oracle orders him to find out who killed the previous king, Laius. Oedipus calls in the help of the blind seer Tiresias, in order to discover the culprit. Tiresias first attempts to find out the truth by using traditional rites. He cuts up a white bull (*candidum...bovem*, 299) and a heifer (*numquam depressam iugo*, 300) and asks Manto (his daughter who is helping him) to look at the entrails (*extispicium*). This was a common Roman practice, which has already been discussed in chapter 1.6.

Tiresias and Manto are not able to elicit any answers with this traditional rite. Therefore, Tiresias proposes that they try something else, which, as we see, has all the signs of necromancy¹⁰⁰:

<i>Nec alta caeli quae levi pinna secant</i>	390
<i>nec fibra vivis rapta pectoribus potest</i>	
<i>ciere nomen. alia temptanda est via:</i>	
<i>ipse evocandus noctis aeternae plagis,</i>	
<i>emissus Erebo ut caedis auctorem indicet.</i>	
<i>reseranda tellus, Ditis implacabile</i>	395
<i>numen precandum, populus infernae Stygis</i>	
<i>huc extrahendus.</i>	(Seneca, <i>Oedipus</i> 390-397)

“Neither [birds], that cut through the heights of heaven with light wing, nor the entrails, snatched from living breasts can summon the name. Another way must be attempted: He himself must be summoned from the regions of eternal darkness, sent from Erebus, in order to point out the culprit of the murder. The earth must be opened, [we] must pray to the implacable power of Dis, the people must be hither extracted from the infernal Styx.”

We see that the alternative way, that Tiresias uses to see the truth, contrasts sharply with use the white bull. Here, Tiresias suggests to open the earth (*reseranda tellus*, 395) and to call upon the power of Dis (*Ditis..numen*, 395-396) and the dead (*populus...extrahendus*, 396-397). These are all elements that are associated with the infernal and thus also with magic, as we saw in Ovid and

⁹⁸ These are: *Agamemnon*, *Hercules Furens*, *Medea*, *Oedipus*, *Phaedra*, *Phoenissae*, *Troades* and *Thyestes*.

⁹⁹ Boyle (2006): 189.

¹⁰⁰ See chapter 1.5

Horace as well. In this passage, there is a sharp contrast between the traditional rites being in the upper world (*alta caeli*, 390) and focused on living things (*vivis*, 391), and the magical rite which is in the underworld (*noctis aeternae plagis*, 393), and the dead (*populus infernae Stygis huc extrahendus* 396-397). There is also a contrast between light (for instance the white bull in the traditional rite) and darkness (the lands of eternal darkness in the magical rite). Seneca possibly used this contrast between traditional rite and magic to give the play a darker tone.

It is ironic that Tiresias is not only blind in real life, but also 'blind' in seeing the future. He is thus, in the eyes of Oedipus, flawed as a prophet, since he is not capable of seeing the future in the traditional way. At least, he is only flawed as a conventional prophet. But as an alternative, since conventional predictions did not work, Tiresias looks for more sinister ways to find out the truth, through magical practices (these will be discussed in more detail below in 3.2).

Another play which features a prophet is *Agamemnon*. The play *Agamemnon* is about Clytemnestra who murders her husband Agamemnon when he returns home from the war. In the play, Agamemnon comes back from Troy and has brought a mistress, Cassandra, with him. She is a prophet of Apollo, but not by her own choice. When her body convulses as the prediction is about to start, she seems unwilling (*maenas impatiens dei*, 719) and attempts to resist (*reluctantes....fauces*, 717-18). In mythology, she is known as a prophet in whom no one believes, even though she always predicts events correctly.¹⁰¹

In this play as well, people tend to distrust the predictions that Cassandra makes. Agamemnon, for example, thinks that her predictions are a madness (*furor*, 801) and that she must be restrained (*retinete*, 801):

*Hanc, fida famuli turba, dum excutiat deum,
retinete, ne quid impotens peccet furor.*

(Seneca, *Agamemnon*, 800-801)

"My trustful band of servants, restrain her, until she casts the god off, lest her impotent madness causes some offence."

Thus, Cassandra is depicted as a prophet who nobody believes in and who seems to be in a sense a 'failed' prophet. He calls her 'gift' an impotent madness (*impotens...furor*, 801) and think it is offending (*peccet*) rather than frightening. The protagonist of the play is thus unable to see the truth that the audience can.

We can conclude that Seneca makes use of 'failed' prophets. This means that they fail to transfer the message of the god to the listener correctly. The listeners do not take the prophecies seriously, whilst the audience, of course, knows that these predictions are the truth. They are a text-book example of dramatic irony.

This also connects to the fact that these prophets are people who are considered as 'other' or outside normal society, just like Canidia and Ovid's Medea were. Tiresias was an old blind man, who needed help from his daughter. Cassandra is a woman who was taken to Mycenae as a victory prize for Agamemnon and thus takes on the role of a mistress, someone who could not have a high status in society. However, in these plays they do receive a central role as outsiders with an ability that is regarded very negatively by the protagonists. This will emphasize the negativity of the supernatural in a central position, just as it did in Horace's and Ovid's work.

¹⁰¹ Apollo tried to seduce her by giving her the power of prophecy. However, when she refused, he cursed her so that nobody would believe her prophecies.

3.2 Witchcraft

Another important supernatural element in Seneca's plays is witchcraft. The most prominent appearance of witchcraft in Senecan drama is the so-called black mass in the *Medea* (670-848). The plot of the play revolves around the act for which Medea is most famous in ancient mythology, namely the murder of her children.¹⁰² Seneca depicts Medea as an archetypical witch¹⁰³ in the fourth act of this play.¹⁰⁴

Medea opens the play with a prayer to the gods, and especially to Hecate who is associated with witchcraft (see chapter 1.4). This immediately identifies her as a witch (1-55). She initiates her magic in act four (lines 670-848), which starts with the nurse describing Medea's actions. This kind of 'black mass' is unique in Greek and Roman tragedy.¹⁰⁵ She starts by telling how she saw Medea practicing magic before. It becomes clear that in this story she already is a powerful witch: Medea is able to draw the heaven from the sky (*caelum trahentem*, 674), which is an alternative version of the phenomenon of pulling the moon down from the sky. Seneca emphasizes she also uses her left hand (*laeva...manu*, 680), to denote the aspect of magic, since it was the ill-omened hand, only used for sinister actions.¹⁰⁶

In lines 694-704 Medea summons all kinds of supernatural snakes, known from mythology. The power to control and destroy snakes was a very important feature of magic. Snakes and snake venom were known ingredients for magic in literature and, as we also saw in Ovid, Medea herself was closely related to snakes and snake-imagery.¹⁰⁷

After the snakes, Medea turns to the herbs and plants (705-730), which used to be the most prominent feature of Medea's magic.¹⁰⁸ She names Athos *Haemonius Athos* (720), which metonymously refers to the whole of Thessaly. This region was strongly associated with witchcraft. In the present context, *Haemonius* is also thought to refer to the Greek word αἷμα (blood).¹⁰⁹ After this is done, the nurse describes how Medea makes her poison, using different 'magical' ingredients:

*Mortifera carpit gramina ac serpentium
saniem exprimit miscetque et obscenas aves
maestique cor bubonis et raucae strigis
exsecta vivae viscera. haec scelerum artifex*

¹⁰² According to tradition, Medea fled her fatherland with Jason, whom she helped to steal the Golden Fleece. After many adventures, they finally settled in Corinth, where their two sons were born. After some years, however, Jason decided (or was forced) to marry King Creon's daughter Creusa to become Creon's heir to the throne. Medea was to be banished from Corinth and leave her children behind. When Medea hears this, she is enraged and swears revenge on Creusa and Jason. She eventually murders Creusa (by magic) and decides that the best way to punish Jason would be to murder their children (Euripides, *Medea*; Seneca, *Medea*, for more on the adventures before Corinth, see the section on Ovid in chapter 2).

¹⁰³ More on Medea as an archetypical witch can be found in the Ovid section in chapter 2.

¹⁰⁴ The inspiration for this act must have come from Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 7.1-424), since Ovid heavily emphasizes Medea's magical powers, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Although Euripides wrote a tragedy about Medea as well, from which Seneca most likely derived the child-murder, the Roman poet must have taken his inspiration from the topic of magic from Ovid. Euripides did not expand on this topic in his play. See Boyle (2014): 296-297.

¹⁰⁵ Boyle (2014): cxi.

¹⁰⁶ Hine (2000): 178.

¹⁰⁷ For an elaborate description on the imagery of snakes in the *Medea*, see: Nussbaum, M. C. (1997): 219-49.

¹⁰⁸ Hine (2000): 180.

¹⁰⁹ Boyle (2014): 308.

*discreta ponit: his rapax vis ignium,
his gelida pigri frigoris glacies inest.
addit venenis verba non illis minus
metuenda. -sonuit ecce vaesano gradu
canitque. mundus vocibus primis tremit.*

735

(Seneca Medea 731-739)

“She plucks the death-bringing herbs and she squeezes the venom of serpents and mixes it with ill-omened birds and the heart of a sorrowful owl and the entrails, cut out of a living hoarse screech-owl. She, mistress of wickedness, lays them out separately. These have the tearing force of fire, these have the frosty ice of the numbing cold. She adds words no less to be feared than these poisons. – Listen, she makes a noise with her raging footstep and she sings! The world shudders by her first words.”

We see how Seneca, like Horace, depicts the gathering of sinister ingredients: dead-bringing herbs (*mortifera gramina*, 731) and venom of snakes (*serpentium saniem*, 731-732). Medea uses owls as well: The *bubo* (733) and *strix* (733).¹¹⁰ The *strix*, which was known as a child-eater, fits in very well with the story of Medea, who killed her own children.¹¹¹ Apparently she can draw the force of heat and cold from these ingredients (*his rapax vis ignium his gelida pigri frigoris glacies inest*, 735-736), connecting her with natural elements.

Her appearance is described as very powerful and 'loud'. Her feet make a lot of noise (*sonuit ecce vaesano gradu*, 738) and she makes the earth shudder by her words (*mundus vocibus primis tremit*, 739).

After the nurse finishes her description, Medea enters the stage to perform her magic. She invokes the shades and gods of the underworld (740-751) and calls upon the moon (750: *sidus noctium*), which is identified with Hecate. This goddess is often portrayed with three faces (751); This is important because three is an important number in magic as we already saw in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (7.188-192).¹¹²

In this play there is an enormous emphasis on Medea's power over nature and in the following passage there is a description of how she controls it:

*Tibi more gentis vinculo solvens comam
secreta nudo nemora lustravi pede
et evocavi nubibus siccis aquas
egique ad imum maria, et Oceanus graves
interius undas aestibus victis dedit;
pariterque mundus lege confusa aetheris
et solem et astra vidit et vetitum mare
tetigistis, ursae. temporum flexi vices:
aestiva tellus horruit cantu meo,
coacta messem vidit hibernam Ceres;
violenta Phasis vertit in fontem vada
et Hister, in tot ora divisus, truces
compressit undas omnibus ripis piger;
sonuere fluctus, tumuit insanum mare
tacente vento; nemoris antiqui domus
amisit umbras vocis imperio meae.
die relicto Phoebus in medio stetit
Hyadesque nostris cantibus motae labant:*

755

760

765

(Seneca, Medea 752-769)

¹¹⁰ Chapter 2, p. 17

¹¹¹ Hine (2000): 183-184.

¹¹² Hine (2000): 186.

“For you, unfastening my hair from a fillet, in the manner of my people, I have roamed the secret forests with bare foot and I have summoned water from dry clouds and have driven the seas to the depths, and Oceanus, after his tides were defeated, has drawn his heavy waves deep within, and, when the law of the heaven was overturned, the world saw the sun and stars at the same time and you, Bears, have touched the forbidden sea. I have changed the alternations of the seasons: the summer earth shuddered by my song, Ceres was forced to watch the winter harvest; Phasis turned its violent waters to their source, and Hister, divided over so many mouths, held back its rough waters, sluggish in all its banks; Waves roared, the mad sea swelled up, although the wind was silent; The home of the ancient forest has lost its shades at the command of my voice. After the day was abandoned, Phoebus stood in mid-course, and the Hyades, shaken by my incantations, give way.”

Medea describes what she has achieved in the past in favour of the moon (i.e. Hecate). She has been able to summon rain from dry clouds (*nubibus siccis*, 754) and to change the seasons (*temporum flexi vices*, 759). This indicates again that witches were in control of nature (especially the weather and heat and cold) and were closely drawn to natural things. In lines 752-753 Medea says that she has loosened her hair and walks with bare feet. This is because knots had magical powers and therefore should be undone before practicing magic (Roman sandals had knots as well).¹¹³ And perhaps, I would suggest, bare feet would make her stand in closer contact with nature. This control over nature was also prominently present in the works of Horace and Ovid and thus seems to be something that was typical for a witch in the literary tradition. Medea seems so powerful that even nature itself shies away from her: Summer earth is afraid of her song (*aestiva tellus horruit cantu meo*, 760) and Phasis and Hister turn their waters away (*violenta Phasis vertit in fontem vada*, 762). In line 772 Medea talks about nine snakes (*novena...serpens*, 772), three times three: again, we see the importance of the numbers three and nine. Then follows another invocation of Hecate (787-842), in which Medea also mentions her altar made of bloody turf (*sanguineo caespote*, 797). In sum, in *Medea* Seneca intended in this play to put emphasis on the depiction of Medea as a powerful witch, who controls and frightens even nature.

Instead of a female witch, such as Medea, in Seneca's *Oedipus*, witchcraft is practiced by the seer Tiresias. After a failed attempt to see the future in a conventional way (as was discussed above), he turns to magic and decides that it is necessary to consult the dead. Oedipus sends Creon to the performance of Tiresias's dark rite. Creon later recounts to Oedipus what he saw and heard at Tiresias' alternative rite. A ditch is dug (*effossa tellus*, 551) and Tiresias is wearing funeral attire (*ipse funesto integit vates amictu corpus*, 552). He sacrifices black instead of white animals (*nigro bidentes vellere atque atrae boves*, 556): again this contrasts between light and dark and between the upper and underworld come to the fore. The passage on Tiresias is strongly remindful of the practice of necromancy as discussed in chapter 1.5. Then he calls upon the dead:

<i>Vocat inde manes teque qui manes regis</i>	
<i>et obsidentem claustra letalis lacus,</i>	560
<i>carmenque magicum volvit et rabido minax</i>	
<i>decantat ore quidquid aut placat leves</i>	
<i>aut cogit umbras; sanguinem libat focis</i>	
<i>solidasque pecudes urit et multo specum</i>	
<i>saturat cruore; libat et niveum insuper</i>	565

¹¹³ Hine (2000): 187.

*lactis liquorem, fundit et Bacchum manu
laeva, canitque rursus ac terram intuens
graviore manes voce et attonita citat.
latravit Hecates turba; ter valles cavae
sonuere maestum, tota succusso solo
pulsata tellus.*

570

(Seneca, *Oedipus* 559-571)

“From there he calls upon the dead and you, who rule over the dead and who possess the lock of the Lethean lake, and he recites a magical incantation and threatening he keeps singing with a frenzied mouth, whatever placates or coerces the insubstantial ghosts; He pours blood on the hearths and he burns whole animals and fills the pit with lots of blood; He also offers moreover a white liquid of milk, and pours wine with his left hand, and he sings again and, looking at the earth, he summons shades with a heavier and terrifying voice. The pack of Hecate howled; Thrice did the deep valleys make a mournful sound, the whole earth struck, whilst the ground was shaken.”

We can see here that Tiresias has turned into a more sinister figure that is clearly practicing magic. He utters magical incantation, whilst literally using the word *magicum* (*carmenque magicum*, 561), to call upon the spirits and ghosts (*quidquid aut placat leves aut cogit umbras*, 563-564), something that Canidia and Ovid’s Medea did as well. A parallel with Medea is that when Tiresias starts to sing, this is also described as rather scary or 'loud'. Here it is described that Tiresias sings with a frenzied mouth (*rabido minax decantat ore*, 561-562), his voice is heavy and shocking (*graviore voce et attonita*, 568) and the ground is also shaking (*tota succusso solo pulsata tellus*, 570-571).

He pours wine with his left hand (*fundit et Bacchum manu laeva*, 566-567). In society the left hand was, as we have seen before with Medea (680), considered to bring bad luck and thus fit for someone who practices magic.

Another clear indication for witchcraft is the fact that Hecate is mentioned (569), who is the goddess of witchcraft. She is accompanied by a pack of dogs, creatures which are closely associated with her. In Medea, Hecate is even known to bark herself (*Medea* 840-41).

Tiresias manages to summon a troop of ghosts (*Saeva prosiluit cohors* 587) and monsters (582-607) and also ghosts of famous Thebans and eventually Laius himself (608-623), who cryptically describes what is happening and vows to seek revenge on Oedipus with the help of a Fury (644).

Thus Seneca uses witchcraft in at least two of his plays. He offers detailed descriptions of the practices that take place, which indicates that he has certain knowledge of the literary tradition of the supernatural in his time. In both plays, magical practices take place at a very crucial moment in the plot. In *Medea*, Medea’s magic initiates her act of revenge against Jason with the poisoned garments that will kill Creusa. In *Oedipus*, by using magic, Oedipus will find out the truth about his identity, the central theme of the plot. Therefore, magic is used as an incentive that will eventually lead to Oedipus’ downfall. In *Oedipus* magic forms a sharp contrast to more traditional rites and in the *Medea* there is again a female character that seems to act very independently while she is practicing magic. Thus these two texts have a very detailed description of the practice of magic and give a good example of how magic was used in Roman literature.

3.3 Ghosts

Ghosts can be seen as entities between the people of the upper world (*superi*) and people of the underworld (*inferi*). They are not as powerful as the highest gods, but are more powerful and more knowing than the common people. They tend to bring knowledge from the underworld to the upper world.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Mowbray (2012): 111.

Ghosts are often accompanied by Furies (also called Erinyes), who are spirits of the underworld that avenge bloodshed, cause terror and carry out curses. One of the prime tasks of the Furies is to avenge wrongs that happen within a family. That is why one of them appears in *Oedipus* (590-594).¹¹⁵ In Senecan tragedy, ghosts, often appear as prophetic prologue speakers. Tarrant suggests that ghosts are often introduced as prologue-speakers, because it was as though they could only be released from the underworld for a limited amount of time. Therefore, it would restrict their appearance to only one episode. Ghosts also have significant foreknowledge of the plot.¹¹⁶ Seneca often compares ghosts with clouds, leaves, flowers (*Oedipus* 598-607), waves and birds. With this, Seneca takes over similes from Virgil (*Aeneid* 6.309-12).¹¹⁷ Thus, like the witches, ghosts have a strong connection with nature. However, in this comparison it is made clear that they are acting the complete *opposite* of nature, which means that they are portrayed as ‘unnatural’. In Seneca’s plays it is implied that the ghosts do not want to be in the upper world and that they have a negative effect on it.¹¹⁸ In *Oedipus* the troupe of ghosts that appears seems to be afraid of light and seek out the darker places:

*pavide latebras nemoris umbrosi petunt
animae trementes.* (Seneca, *Oedipus* 608-609)

“Fearfully, the trembling spirits seek out the hiding-places of the shadowy forest.”

In *Agamemnon*, the prologue is spoken by the ghost of Thyestes, who is chosen as a prologue speaker because he knows the background of what tragedies happened in the family.¹¹⁹ He was the grandfather of Agamemnon and was betrayed himself as well, just as is already made clear in the fourth verse, that Thyestes, as a ghost does not want to be in the upper world (He wants to flee from its people (*superos fugo*, 4), which is also visible in verse 12 (*libet reverti*). The last verses of his speech also imply that he is the cause of the altered course of nature and shun daylight:

*Sed cur repente noctis aestivae vices
hiberna longa spatia producunt mora,
aut quid cadentes detinet stellas polo?* 55
Phoebum moramur. redde iam mundo diem. (Seneca, *Agamemnon* 53-56)

“But why are the alternations of a summer night suddenly prolonged by the long winter-delays, or what keeps the setting stars in the sky? I am delaying Phoebus. Bring back the day to the earth now.”

The fact that ghosts can alter the course of nature connects them with witchcraft, because, as we have seen in the previous sections, witches are able to manipulate nature as well. However, witches do this voluntarily, while ghosts seem to do it involuntarily. Thyestes is initially not even aware that he is altering the course of nature (*quid cadentes detinet stellas polo?*, 55), but only later realizes that he is the cause of this (*Phoebum moramur*, 56).

Thyestes longs for revenge (44-48), as becomes clear in the prologue. Tarrant argues that: “Thyestes

¹¹⁵ Boyle (2011): 249-251.

¹¹⁶ Tarrant (1976): 158-159.

¹¹⁷ Boyle (2011): 251.

¹¹⁸ “mittor ut dirus vapor tellure rupta vel gravem populis luem sparsura pestis?": *Am I sent like an awful vapor from the ruptured earth, or like a plague, intending to scatter foul contagion among the people?* (Seneca, *Thyestes* 87-89).

¹¹⁹ Tarrant (1976): 157.

sees the death of Agamemnon as a requital of his own sufferings to be effected by Aegisthus.”¹²⁰ Because of these sufferings, he has his own tragedy that features a ghost in its prologue as well. The *Thyestes* focuses on the plan of Atreus, king of Mycene, to avenge his brother Thyestes, for adultery with Atreus’ wife.¹²¹ The play starts with a prologue, spoken by the ghost of Tantalus and a Fury. Tantalus, the grandfather of Thyestes and Atreus, is summoned from the underworld and is ordered by the (unnamed) Fury to create disturbance in his family’s house and to rouse them to *insano tumultu* (83-86). Tantalus refuses at first, not wanting to thrust the same horror upon his grandsons, but the Fury causes his hunger and thirst to worsen, which forces Tantalus to give in. After this is done, Tantalus immediately returns to the underworld, since the earth cannot bear him (*iam tuum maestae pedem terrae gravantur*: Already the saddened lands are burdened by your foot, 106-107). Normally (as is common in Greek drama) the function of the prologue would be to inform the audience of the background of the play and to tell them about what is to come. However, in their Latin counterparts, this is not the case. For example, in the *Thyestes*, nothing is explained about the feud between Thyestes and Atreus that had occurred, or about what is to come in this play. Tarrant remarks concerning the function of the prologue: “Thus in *Thyestes* the prologue creates an atmosphere of anxiety and disorientation.” He also suggests that this atmosphere that is created sets the scene for the rest of the play.¹²² Thus, this makes clear that the reason that Seneca put ghosts in his play, as is implied by Tarrant’s argument, is to create this particular atmosphere, which would be an additional function to the other function of the prologue (which is an account of the background of the play).

Although there are no literal references of what is going to happen, there are still subtle hints to be found. There is a heavy emphasis on the motifs of hunger and thirst in the prologue, which will of course play a major role in the rest of the play.

Something else that is very significant in this passage (as we also saw with Thyestes in *Agamemnon*) is that Tantalus does not want to be in the upper world and wants to flee back to the underworld:

*abire in atrum carceris liceat mei
cubile;* (Seneca, *Thyestes* 70-71)

“Allow me to return to the dark lair of my prison;”

And another example:

*quando continget mihi
effugere superos?* (Seneca, *Thyestes* 82-83)

“When will there be the chance for me to escape the upper world?”

This is important because it implies that ghosts are not used to this world and are thus seen as ‘abnormal’. Tantalus wishes to return to his horrible punishments in the underworld, which means that even these must be less cruel for him than to remain in the upper world. This is again, as we have seen in the passage of Tiresias, a contrast between light and dark.

¹²⁰ Tarrant (1976): 158

¹²¹ He cuts the children of Thyestes into pieces, cooks them and serves them as a meal to Thyestes. Thyestes eventually eats his own children.

¹²² Tarrant (1998): 85.

Another very significant example of the appearance of a ghost is a passage of *Medea* in the lines 958-971, Medea is about to kill her children and the Furies approach, together with the ghost of her brother Apsyrtus, whom she killed and tore to pieces. This action may be regarded as a fulfilment of her prayer in the lines 13-18, when she wished for the Furies to come and help her take her revenge on Creon and his family. However, the Furies come for an entirely different reason. They come to punish Medea and to avenge the death of her brother:

<i>Quonam ista tendit turba Furiarum impotens?</i>	
<i>quem quaerit aut quo flammeos ictus parat,</i>	
<i>aut cui cruentas agmen infernum faces</i>	960
<i>intentat? ingens anguis excusso sonat</i>	
<i>tortus flagello. quem trabe infesta petit</i>	
<i>Megaera? cuius umbra dispersis venit</i>	
<i>incerta membris? frater est, poenas petit:</i>	
<i>dabimus, sed omnes, fige luminibus faces,</i>	965
<i>lania, perure, pectus en Furiis patet.</i>	
<i>Discedere a me, frater, ultrices deas</i>	
<i>manesque ad imos ire securas iube:</i>	
<i>mihi me relinque et utere hac, frater, manu</i>	
<i>quae strinxit ensem— victima manes tuos</i>	970
<i>placamus ista. quid repens affert sonus?</i>	(Seneca, <i>Medea</i> 958-971)

“Where goes this unrestrained band of Furies? Whom does it seek or whom does it prepare its flaming blows, or to whom does the hellish troop point its bloody torches? An enormous twisted serpent hisses when the whip is cracked. Whom does Megaera seek with a hostile torch? Whose shade is coming, indistinct, with dispersed members? It is my brother, he seeks punishments: We will give them, indeed all [of us shall]. Drive the torches into my eyes, tear in pieces, burn, look, my breast is open for the Furies. Command the avenging goddesses to leave me alone, brother and go to the deep shades, unconcerned: leave me to myself and use this hand, brother, which has drawn a sword—with this sacrifice I placate your shades. What brings this unexpected sound?”

It is clear that the ghost of her brother seeks revenge (*poenas petit*, 964), however, Medea wants him to leave her alone (*mihi me relinque*, 969) and attempts to placate him with the murder of her son (*victima manes tuos placamus ista*, 970-971). It is striking that, whereas in an earlier passage Medea was still in control of snakes, here she is threatened by them (*ingens anguis excusso sonat tortus flagello*, 961-962). The Furies, as is well-known in mythology, have them in their hair. This time, unlike in the witchcraft-scene, Medea is the one who is ‘victim’ to the violence of supernatural entities. Her insecurity becomes clear from the tone of her speech. She asks a lot of questions in her speech and is in contrast to the confidence she expresses when she is telling about her past achievements. Medea is feeling what could be argued to be guilt for her brother’s murder, which is why she feels threatened. Visions of the Furies were (in Roman society) associated with a guilty conscience.¹²³ The apparition is also very personal and meant only for Medea. It is even the question whether these figures were supposed to be genuine supernatural entities or just hallucinations or figments of Medea’s imagination.

It is significant that Thyestes as well as Apsyrtus and Laius all long for revenge. This factor ties them to the Furies and leads them onto a path where they, as supernatural entities, have significant impact on the protagonist and course of the play.

Thus, by their ability to see into the past and the future, ghosts are mediators between the

¹²³ Hine (2000): 205.

underworld and the upper realm.¹²⁴ They shy away from this world, which indicates that they 'do not belong there'. This notion is something that will be returning in *Macbeth*.

Conclusion

The supernatural in Seneca is very important and viewed as essential to the plot of each play. For example, the prologues of *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes* need infernal entities in their prologue to foreshadow what is to come in the play and to cause fright and excitement. Medea needs her witchcraft to act out her revenge and complete her identity and Tiresias needs magic to perform his divination, as he is 'blind' to the traditional rites.

Again we see that the people involved in magic are mostly people who were regarded as 'other'. Medea is a stereotype image of the barbarian 'other' (following her Colchian background) and she is also a woman who does not behave in the way that she is supposed to do. She makes her own decisions and acts very independently, something which was not regarded as normal, for a woman, in ancient society. Tiresias is an old blind man who needs the help of his daughter. It is striking that such characters, which seem to be outside the norm, perform key roles in the plays and seem to be very independent and in control of the course of the play.

There is again a strong connection with nature. Medea, as a witch, seems very much in control of nature and can alter it at will. Ghosts can influence nature as well, however, they do not seem to do this on purpose. They are also portrayed as the polar-opposites of nature.

The supernatural mostly occurs at key moments of the play. Medea uses magic to instigate her plan for revenge, Tiresias reveals the answer to Oedipus' mysterious identity and Cassandra predicts Agamemnon's death. These are all key plot elements that are essential for the course of the play. If these plays of Seneca had not had these supernatural elements, they would not have had the same ending or impact that they have now. This means that the supernatural elements are essential for the play and had an important role in Senecan drama.

¹²⁴ Mowbray (2012): 98.

Chapter 4: Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Now that we have looked at the role of the supernatural in Roman society and literature, we can examine whether these elements had a similar function and influence in *Macbeth*.

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's best known tragedies especially concerning its supernatural elements that serve an important function within the play. The witches' prophecies and the appearance of several ghosts influence Macbeth's actions heavily, as we will see later on. Thus, Shakespeare very clearly makes the supernatural elements a central theme in this play.

In this chapter I will discuss the supernatural elements in Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* and I will examine how the supernatural is depicted and what its function is within this play. As in the previous chapters, I will focus again on the themes of witchcraft, prophecy and ghosts.

4.1 Context

To compare Shakespeare depiction of supernatural themes with the classical depiction of those themes, it is important to know whether Shakespeare knew anything about antiquity at all. We know little about Shakespeare's education, but it is presumed, in light of his father's position (he became a bailiff and justice of peace in 1568),¹²⁵ that Shakespeare attended the local Grammar school in Stratford-upon-Avon. This is where he would have studied Latin. The curriculum in such a school would have included Plautus' *Menaechmi*, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹²⁶

Shakespeare's plays are clearly influenced by classical themes, for example *A Comedy of Errors*, the plot of which is based on that of the *Menaechmi*.¹²⁷

This classical knowledge of Shakespeare most likely included Seneca, who was a major influence for playwrights in early modern England. Renaissance dramatists looked at Seneca to enliven their plays. They used him as a source for ideas, words, style and technique and they took over the idea of the structure of five acts. The interest in Seneca in England arose around 1560, when students of the Inns Court started translating some of his works, including his plays. In 1581 Thomas Newton published his *Tenne Tragedies*, from which contemporary playwrights (among whom Shakespeare) started adapting elements for their plays.¹²⁸ Thus, although not always directly, classical plays certainly indirectly influenced Shakespeare's plays.¹²⁹

Macbeth was allegedly written in 1606, thus making it a Jacobean play. In 1603 King James the VI of Scotland succeeded Elizabeth and became King James I of England. In that same year he changed the name of Shakespeare's theatre company (the Lord Chamberlain's Men) into the King's Men and he also became the patron of the company. This change in situation altered the performance of the plays and also the content, audience and dramaturgy. Shakespeare's Elizabethan plays were mainly historical plays and comedies, whereas half of his Jacobean plays were tragedies. Scholars argue that this change could have been made because Shakespeare was allegedly in a depressing period of his

¹²⁵ Wells and Taylor (2005): xv.

¹²⁶ Wells and Taylor (2005): xvi.

¹²⁷ For more information on Shakespeare and the classics see: Martindale, C. and Taylor, A.B., (2004).

¹²⁸ Winston (2006): 29-30.

¹²⁹ Shakespeare also extracted inspiration from other sources. For *Macbeth*, he mostly used Raphael Holinshed's *The Description and chronicles of Scotland, from the first originall of the Scottes nation, till the year 1571* as a source. This historical text involved witches as well, but not as extensively as Shakespeare's version. (McLuskie (2009): 64).

life, maybe saddened by the death of his father (1601).¹³⁰ More likely would be, I would suggest, that the change of government marks the beginning of his new 'style' and has influence on what he writes.

4.2 Witchcraft

The most prominent supernatural elements in the play are the witches, because they pronounce the prophecy to Macbeth which results in Macbeth's usurpation of power.¹³¹ This central role of the witches in the play and especially the impact they have on the play is striking, given that witchcraft was in Shakespeare's time mostly feared and rejected by society (see also chapter 1.7).¹³²

The witches in *Macbeth* clearly exert a certain amount of control over Macbeth's actions, because he believes that their prophecies are true and bound to happen. The prophecies will decide the course of the play (more on this will be explained in section 4.3).

This control is also accompanied by Shakespeare's apparent goal to give the witches 'a higher purpose' in this play. McGuire (1994) argues: "They embody the spectre of a world in which women rule over men (...). They also serve, however, to define and legitimate the male-dominated social and political order of which they are the antithesis".¹³³

This is significant because of the change in society. When Elizabeth was on the throne, the impact of the patriarchal society partly subsided, however when Elizabeth died and James I took over, the practice of a patriarchal society increased. McGuire argues that: "With James on the throne, the fit between patriarchal theory and actual practice in England was conspicuously tighter." Thus, England became a more male-dominated society, something that had been slightly suppressed while there was a woman on the throne. Shakespeare himself appears to have reacted to this shift, but not in the way that you might expect. In his Elizabethan plays, for example in *Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus*, his female characters play very submissive role. However, in his Jacobean tragedies, for example *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, he made his heroines defiant of male power and gave them monstrous and unruly features. In these plays, the female dominance plays an essential role in the hero's destruction.¹³⁴ Maybe he wanted to emphasize how women in power can be very threatening. It could also be suggested that, because the importance of the female role is something that was seen in Greek and Roman (Senecan) tragedy as well, Shakespeare, in this period of his life, took over more elements from ancient theatre.

It is argued that Shakespeare wanted to depict the witches as 'superior' to normal (he regarded them as more intelligent and perceptive than people of his time would have regarded 'normal' witches), which is why he only once calls them witches (1.3.5). Everywhere else they are referred to as 'Weird Sisters', 'Weird Women' or 'Weyward Sisters'. They could do more than what was believed to be 'normal' for witches to do in that time ('normal' witches would for example kill live-stock or make children sick).

But Shakespeare still connected them with popular ideas about witches, perhaps to ensure that

¹³⁰ McGuire (1994): 17-19.

¹³¹ The prophecies will later be discussed in more detail.

¹³² Davidson (2012): 82-83.

¹³³ McGuire (1994): 111.

¹³⁴ McGuire (1994):30-31.

people would recognise them as witches. Their appearance for example was conventional for the Renaissance witch, such as Macbeth's friend Banquo describes them:¹³⁵

*What are these,
So withered and so wild in their attire,
that look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth,
And yet are on't? –Live you? or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me,
By 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.* (1.3.37-45)

Beards and withered looks are external characteristics that were traditional for witches of that time to have.¹³⁶ The witches in the play are not even considered as female, because of their bearded appearance and must definitely be considered to be 'other'.

The play opens with the witches, accompanied by thunder and lightning. In fact, every time the witches are on stage they are accompanied by thunder. Such an entrance would have been highly dramatic and had an enormous and frightening impact on the audience because of the loud noises that were most likely produced. In my opinion, this opening resembles the prologue of Seneca's *Thyestes*. This prologue opens with supernatural figures as well. Its content is also not really related to the play, but, as Tarrant argued, is there to cause fear and excitement in the audience. Perhaps this is the purpose of the first act of *Macbeth* as well. Three frightening characters that appear on stage, accompanied by thunder and lightning, could easily have caused fear and excitement in the audience.

Seneca connects the witchcraft of Medea with natural elements and Shakespeare does the same here. They seem to be able to communicate with animals such as a cat (*Graymalkin* 1.1.8) and a toad (*Paddock* 1.1.9). These were kinds of animals that in Early modern England were believed to be 'familiars' (assistants) of witches.¹³⁷ And, just as the witches discussed in the previous chapters, the witches are in control over nature.

The witches appear again in act 1.3. They first discuss actions that are considered to be normal practices for witches (which could be because Shakespeare first wanted to make clear to the audience that they were witches):

First Witch: *Where hast thou been, sister?*

Second Witch: *Killing swine.*

Third Witch: *Sister, where thou?*

First Witch: *A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap,
And munch'd, and munch'd, and munch'd:— 'Give me,'
quoth I.
'Aroint thee, witch!' the rump-fed ronnion cries.
Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' th' Tiger:
But in a sieve I'll thither sail,
And, like a rat without a tail,*

¹³⁵ Clark (1971): 84-85.

¹³⁶ Clark (1971): 85.

¹³⁷ Braunmuller (2008): 118-119.

I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do.

Second witch: *I'll give thee a wind.*

First witch: *Thou'rt kind*

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

I'th'shipman's card.

I'll drain him dry as hay:

(1.3.1-17)

Killing animals and tormenting people are practices of witches that the bigger part of the audience would have actually believed in. Sailing in a sieve was also an action that witches were believed to have done. And an incident of conjuring a storm has once been recorded that was possibly also an inspiration for this conversation.¹³⁸ This was the affair of the North-Berwick witches. They were a group of women who were put on trial by King James VI of Scotland. They were accused of conjuring up a storm during a journey of King James across the North Sea.¹³⁹ This is an important example of evidence that suggests that Shakespeare used elements of the supernatural from his own time in this play.

The actions of the witches become more elaborate as the play continues. In act 4.1, the Sisters circle around a boiling cauldron and they recite the list of ingredients for their wicked potion whilst chanting an incantation:

First Witch: *Round about the cauldron go;*

In the poison'd entrails throw.

Toad, that under cold stone

Days and nights has thirty-one

Sweltered venom sleeping got,

Boil thou first i' th'charmed pot.

All: *Double, double toil and trouble;*

Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

(4.1.4-11)

The list of ingredients goes on, including things such as: the eye of a newt, toe of a frog, tongue of a dog, an adder's fork, a blind-worm's sting, a lizard's leg, wing of an owl, the scale of a dragon, witches' mummified flesh, the liver of a blaspheming Jew and Tiger's entrails. Eventually the witches finish with: *Cool it with a baboon's blood, Then the charm is firm and good* (4.1.36-37). The yew tree (*slips of yew* 4.1.27) was associated with death, churchyards and funeral and the moon's eclipse (*Silvered in the moon's eclipse* 4.1.28) was allegedly the best time to gather magical herbs.¹⁴⁰ The listing of magical herbs and other magical ingredients, before brewing a potion, is familiar from Horace (*Epode* 5.15-24) and Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 7.262-274). We see ingredients returning such as a toad, entrails and owls. All the ingredients the witches use can be seen as filthy and nasty and this spectacle and song would probably have frightened and excited the audience.¹⁴¹

Thus, this scene strongly recalls Medea dancing around her cauldron in the *Metamorphoses*¹⁴², Canidia in Horace's *Epode* 5 gathering ingredients at night¹⁴³ and of Seneca's Medea performing her

¹³⁸ Braunmuller (2008): 126.

¹³⁹ Bailey (2007): 158.

¹⁴⁰ Braunmuller (2008): 207.

¹⁴¹ Clark (1971): 90.

¹⁴² Ovid, *Met.* 7.1-424.

¹⁴³ Horace *Epode* 5.17-24.

magic on the stage.¹⁴⁴

The witches also use a tree that is connected with funerals, as we already saw in *Epode* 5. This does not necessarily mean that Shakespeare read this poem and that he used this particular passage for *Macbeth*. It shows us that in both texts, this passage is used to give the audience or reader a feeling of repulsion and of recognition, because of these common features the audience would have recognised them as witches.

Thus, the witches have several functions within the play. They function as a plot device, as McLuskie (2009) argues: "Each time the witches appear in the play, they offer a possibility for the development of the action."¹⁴⁵ After their first appearance, Macbeth plans to kill King Duncan. After their second appearance Macbeth proceeds to attack Macduff and kills his family.

Secondly, the witches *physically* defy our expectations, because despite the fact that they are expected to be female, they are bearded figures (*you should be women, /And yet your beards forbid me to interpret /That you are so* 1.3.43-45).

Thirdly, their self-assured authority destabilizes the patriarchal society. They are 'other' who are in control of a male protagonist. They not only predict, but also manipulate Macbeth's behaviour.¹⁴⁶

Clark argues about the function of the witches: "Shakespeare meant his Weird Sisters to be the symbolic representation of the inward temptation of Macbeth's restless ambition."¹⁴⁷ So he argues that Macbeth's deep desire was to be king and to be indestructible, things that the witches implicitly propose to him. I agree with this statement, since everything that the witches predict are events that Macbeth wants to happen (to become king, not to be harmed by any man). This means that what the witches predict plays in on the temptations of Macbeth and in that way the witches manipulate him. The 'female' power in the play causes primitive fears about male identity and autonomy. Especially because Macbeth seems to echo the words of the witches (1.3.36: *So foul and fair a day I have not seen* is an echo of 1.1.11: *Fair is foul and foul is fair*).¹⁴⁸ It indicates that perhaps Macbeth is *like* the witches and is himself supernatural in a way. Of course, it must have been a frightening idea to see the male protagonist being under the influence of a 'female' power and to even act like them.

Thus, just as in antiquity, Shakespeare used characteristics of a witch that were already well-known and thus could be deemed 'realistic'. Shakespeare tried in this way to connect with elements of witchcraft that would have made the play more exciting.

Scholars have been struggling for years on how to interpret the witches and even argued that the witches are interpolations of the play, because they have such a great influence on Macbeth.¹⁴⁹

Apparently their influence seemed out of place. The reason that I would suggest the scholars might have had is that such repulsive 'other' creatures could, in their view, never play such a significant part in the plot and could have influence on the male protagonist who is supposed to be 'normal'. But I would argue that Shakespeare used repulsive characters for an important role in the play on purpose. Such an important role for such a character is something you would not expect, which would enhance the effectiveness of the play's sense of peril and excitement.

Another dominant power in the play is Lady Macbeth. Scholars have often connected Lady Macbeth to the witches because both incite Macbeth's ambition. Another indication of witchcraft becomes clear in the speech in which Lady Macbeth invokes evil spirits:

*Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here
And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull
Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,*

¹⁴⁴ Seneca, *Medea* 670-848.

¹⁴⁵ McLuskie (2009): 13.

¹⁴⁶ Chamberlain (2005): 80.

¹⁴⁷ Clark (1971): 94.

¹⁴⁸ Adelman (2004): 294.

¹⁴⁹ Braunmuller (2008): 32.

*Stop up th'access and passage to remorse
 That no compunctious visitings of nature
 Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
 Th'effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,
 And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
 Wherever in your sightless substances
 You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,
 And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
 That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
 Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
 To cry 'Hold, hold!'* (1.5.38-52)

Conjuring up evil spirits would by the audience have been associated with witchcraft and, although Lady Macbeth is never called a witch in the play, she would have been a witch according to the 'Witchcraft Statute' of 1604 (see also 1.7).

The line *Come to my woman's breasts, And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers* could be an indication that she would give up her breasts to nurse evil spirits, which is, as said before, a sign of witchcraft and also puts emphasis on the theme of motherhood that is often connected with Lady Macbeth. Another connection with motherhood is that Lady Macbeth is often accused of 'imaginary' infanticide because of the lines:

*How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
 I would, while it was smiling in my face
 Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
 And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
 Have done to this.* (1.7.55-59)

There is a strong indication for a connection between witchcraft and femininity. Motherhood is of course one of the strongest feminine themes, especially in this time, and would have been regarded very appropriate and natural for 'normal' women. Lady Macbeth completely turns this around by rejecting motherhood. This is another form of becoming 'other'.

Both Lady Macbeth's line *unsex me* (1.5.39) and her implication of infanticide were found by scholars to also be evidence for Lady Macbeth's attempt to seize control of Macbeth. Infanticide was a sensitive subject in Early Modern England, because it threatened the continuation of the bloodline.¹⁵⁰ Another indication of her connection with the supernatural is in act 5.1, when Lady Macbeth is described to be sleepwalking. Many critics suggest that this is a demonic possession as a result of the invocation of spirits in 1.5,¹⁵¹ which is another connection with the supernatural. It is not something you would expect from a 'normal' woman. So this is another way in which Shakespeare works 'against' nature and thus makes Lady Macbeth *supernatural*.

It is clear that Lady Macbeth was *witchlike* and that she fulfilled a role quite similar to that of the witches: manipulating and controlling Macbeth and acting against nature (by rejecting motherhood). This brings women that Shakespeare depicts in this play, together with the supernatural, in connection with evil or negative power. Seneca's *Medea* is possibly a direct inspiration for Lady Macbeth's connection to child-murder.¹⁵² They are both women that endeavour to gain control over their respective husbands and that are portrayed as powerful and dominant characters, who both reject motherhood.

Lady Macbeth represents a more subtle depiction of the supernatural in the play. If Lady Macbeth is

¹⁵⁰ Chamberlain (2005): 72-76.

¹⁵¹ Braunmuller (2008): 20.

¹⁵² Miola (2004): viii.

meant to be a witch, she was a secret one to Macbeth. Maybe this was meant as a form of dramatic irony, because the audience would have suspected that she was a witch (because she called upon spirits) and the other characters did not. This could have made the play extra exciting.

4.3 Prophecy

Prophecy is central in *Macbeth*. The prophecies that the witches utter in act 1.3 (see below), are a strong motivator which will cause Macbeth to perform the actions that will decide the further course of the play. If Macbeth had not known that he would become king, he might never have killed King Duncan and created his own destruction.

Because these prophecies are a vital element of the plot, it is striking that something so important and influential is uttered by three 'repulsive' women, who can be seen as outcasts, especially since it was not common in early modern England for prophecies to be spoken in literature by women of the lower classes. This was something that was more commonly done by men.¹⁵³ Thus again an important role is carried out by persons whom we would not expect to have such a role. This is reminiscent of Seneca, who made characters outside of normal society utter prophecies, as was mentioned before.

The first prophecy is uttered in act 1.3. Macbeth, the thane of Glamis, and Banquo have just returned from battle and encounter three witches. They greet the men and predict to Macbeth:

First Witch: *All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!*

Second Witch: *All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!*

Third Witch: *All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!* (1.3.46-48)

The witches also make a prediction for Banquo:

First Witch: *Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.*

Second Witch: *Not so happy, yet much happier.*

Third Witch: *Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none.
So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo.* (1.3.63-66)

Both men are struck by what the witches have just told them. They are in doubt whether to believe this or not (*I'th name of truth / Are ye fantastical, or that indeed / Which outwardly you show*).¹⁵⁴

After Ross announces that Macbeth will indeed be made thane of Cawdor (1.3.103), Banquo's interpretation of the prophecies seems to come closest to what might be their true nature and intention.¹⁵⁵

*And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence.-* (1.3.122-125)

¹⁵³ McLuskie (2009): 73 (see also chapter 1 for more information on the role of prophecy in Early modern England).

¹⁵⁴ 1.3.50-52.

¹⁵⁵ Clark (1971):97.

Banquo tells us that evil will sometimes tell the truth to provoke harmful consequences, which means that they tell things that are true or will come true and sound advantageous, to seduce that person into doing something evil. This fits well in the argument of the witches who are manipulating Macbeth and this exactly will happen to Macbeth eventually. It was perceived as such by the audience, but not by Macbeth at this moment. We can compare it with Seneca's *Oedipus* and *Agamemnon*, where the audience clearly notices what is going on, but the protagonists are blind for the truth. These are some very clear examples of dramatic irony.

Macbeth's initial reaction to the prophecy is mainly acquiescence and confusion. He accepts the prophecy as his fate: *If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, Without my stir.* (1.3.142-143). He is confused by the predictions, as becomes clear in his language.¹⁵⁶

*Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings:
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not.* (1.3.134-141)

Macbeth has become confused and uncertain about the prophecies, but he is also intrigued by them. He is still in doubt as to what to make of them and he does not show any intention of forcing the events of the prophecy to happen (yet). For this, he first needs another motivator, this time Lady Macbeth, who, in a manner similar to the witches, exerts power and influence over Macbeth and the course of the play (see also 4.2).

Macbeth writes a letter to his wife to inform her about his situation and she thinks that he is too kind and not 'evil' enough to gain what he desires:

*Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
What thou art promised; yet do I fear thy nature,
It is too full o' th'milk of human kindness* (1.5.13-15)

She will eventually be the one to push Macbeth into action (*O, never Shall sun that morrow see.* 1.5.58-59). And, as we have already seen, Lady Macbeth has a connection with the supernatural as well.

The second set of prophecies occurs in act 4 and divides the play in two halves. Everything that was predicted to Macbeth has come true and has also been a cause for Macbeth's actions to transform. Whereas before the prophecies Macbeth was a loyal servant to the king, after these prophecies he has become a usurper. We saw this happen as well in the *Metamorphoses*, where Medea's actions were transformed from those of an innocent girl to actions of an evil witch. This would indicate that the supernatural works as a motivator to turn people from good to evil.

With these prophecies, the witches do not approach Macbeth, but he visits them voluntarily. The witches also do not pronounce the prophecies themselves, but they conjure up three apparitions to utter them. The first apparition (an armed head) predicts: *Beware Macduff, beware the Thane of Fife.* (4.1.69-71). The second apparition (a bloody child) predicts: *Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn/ The power of man, for none of woman born /Shall harm Macbeth.* (4.1.78-80). And then a

¹⁵⁶ McLuskie (2009):20.

third apparition (a crowned child with a tree in his hand): *Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care/ Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are:/ Macbeth shall never vanquished be until /Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill /Shall come against him.* (4.1.89-93). Macbeth's attitude towards the prophecies has changed slightly. The first time he encountered the witches, he was somewhat insecure and did not entirely believe the witches' prophecies. He decided that he would just accept his fate as it should come about as they had predicted it. This time, however, he seeks the witches out himself and directly engages with the prophecies. He seems quite confident that he will benefit from them. This suggests that the witches, via the prophecies, have exerted an influence on Macbeth's actions and belief, thus in a way they manipulate his will and actions to their own accord.

Also notice that this time the prophecies urge Macbeth into action. They tell him to: *be bloody, bold and resolute* and to: *be lion-mettled, proud*. Last time this was not the case. The difference is that this time Macbeth has visited the witches and asked them for advice, which means that Macbeth is putting some 'trust' in the predictions the witches make. This indicates that their manipulation is working. The prophecies are spoken in a way which makes Macbeth believe their sincerity. But this will eventually be his fatal mistake, as he will himself confess in 5.8: *And be these juggling fiends no more believed, / That palter with us in a double sense,* (5.8.19-20). The prophecies emphasize the relationship between fate and choice in human affairs.¹⁵⁷ Because although the witches predicted what Macbeth would become, Macbeth still *chose* to kill king Duncan. This meant that he became the orchestrator of his own fate since he could also have decided not to kill the king. In this way the witches cannot be said to have complete control over Macbeth. He still exhibits free will, even though by being deceptive and manipulative in what they are saying the witches can provoke Macbeth into evil action, just like Banquo says in 1.3.122-125. I would suggest that this deception is similar to what happens to Oedipus and Agamemnon, who are also both misguided by prophecies. (see chapter 3).

4.4 Ghosts

Ghosts play an important role in the play, especially Banquo's ghost. The first time that the ghost of Banquo appears on stage is at a banquet in act 3.4:

Macbeth: *Which of you have done this?*

Lords: *What, my good lord?*

Macbeth: *Thou canst not say I did it; never shake
Thy gory locks at me.*

Ross: *Gentlemen, rise, his highness is not well.* (3.4.49-52)

Macbeth is the only one who can see Banquo's ghost. This way it looks as if Banquo's ghosts visited Macbeth personally and 'in private', maybe only even as a hallucination in his head.

Macbeth seems to be disturbed by the fact that the ghost has taken the form of Banquo:

*What man dare, I dare:
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The armed rhinoceros, or th'Hyrcean tiger,
Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble. Or be alive again,*

¹⁵⁷ McGuire (1994): 112.

And dare me to the desert with thy sword; (3.4.99-104)

I would say disturbed rather than afraid, since Macbeth does not seem to be afraid of the supernatural in other scenes, especially because he visits the witches of his own free will in 4.1. I would argue, therefore, that Macbeth is prompted by guilt rather than fear, since he cannot bear to see the ghost of someone whose death he caused and that he rather wishes him any other terrible shape than that of Banquo (*The armed rhinoceros, or th'Hyrcean tiger*). The fact that Macbeth reacts in this way means that the death of Banquo affected him despite the fact that he himself caused it. This reminds us of Medea who is confronted by the ghost of her brother, whom she killed herself. They are both confronted with their past, and more specifically with their past crimes. Thus these confrontations function as a warning or an incentive for them to do better in the future.

The next appearance of Banquo's ghost is in act 4.1 together with a series of apparitions of kings. This is just after Macbeth has heard the second set of prophecies. Before these apparitions, Macbeth has a confident view of the future, based on what he has learnt from the prophecies in act 4, but this confidence is shaken as soon as the troupe of the kings and the ghost of Banquo appear. In this scene Macbeth is reminded of the fact that Banquo's prophecy is still to be fulfilled and the possible meaning is that Macbeth has failed to take full advantage of the prophecies:¹⁵⁸

Macbeth: *Thou art too like the spirit of Banquo. Down!
Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs. And thy hair,
Thou other gold-bound brow, is like the first;
A third, is like the former. -Filthy hags,
Why do you show me this? -A fourth? Start, eyes!
What, will the line stretch out to th'crack of doom?
Another yet! A seventh! I'll see no more.
And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass
Which shows me many more. And some I see,
That two-fold balls and treble sceptres carry.
Horrible sight! Now I see 'tis true;
For the blood-boltered Banquo smiles upon me,
And points at them for his.* (4.1.111-123)

Macbeth seems to be troubled by these appearances. The ghost of Banquo 'sears' his eyeballs. He says *I'll see no more* and the appearances of the other ghosts he calls a *horrible sight*. The appearance of these ghosts could be meant as an act of vengeance from Banquo. This is akin to the appearance of Apsyrtus before Medea in Seneca's play, where the ghost also appears at a crucial point in the plot to make the character feel disturbed (just before she is about to murder her children). The fear of Macbeth could be interpreted as guilt, since he is the one that ordered Banquo's death. In both plays the ghosts appear at a stage where the main character has acquired a sense of invincibility. When the ghost of Apsyrtus appears, Medea has already killed Jason's new wife and is about to kill her own children, thinking that she will totally destroy Jason with her act. Macbeth has just listened to the prophecies of the apparitions, which he interprets as things that will never occur, such as a moving forest or a man not of women born. He deems himself invincible and at the height of his power. This could mean that the ghosts could function as some sort of tool to

¹⁵⁸ McLuskie (2009): 11-12.

bring the characters 'back to earth' and to remind them of what they have done and what (literal) ghosts haunt them.

Conclusion

We may conclude that magic was mostly depicted as something frightful and repulsive in *Macbeth*, such as the ghosts, the witches and the thunder and lightning. These elements, just as in antiquity, play a prominent role within the play. They cause development of the action, influence Macbeth's judgement and play on his desires and fears. The witches, who can be seen as outcasts, become the characters that control the plot and represent an, in that time, widely feared power and control over men. The fact that this power is connected to the supernatural is important in this thesis, because this is what also happens in antiquity with, for example, Canidia and Medea, who are also portrayed as 'other'. We see this also in the character of Lady Macbeth, who (arguably) acted like a witch. She invokes spirits and uses her control over Macbeth to carry out her will.

The prophecies affect Macbeth in his judgement and his actions. They initially make him confused, but eventually overconfident. Banquo is the only one who can see what the prophecies really accomplish, namely that, by telling the truth, they provoke harmful consequences. The prophecies serve as a means to change Macbeth's behaviour. They force him to act evil. We see this in Ovid's version of Medea as well, where witchcraft transformed her personality from good to evil.

Furthermore, ghosts function in *Macbeth* as an instrument to put Macbeth back in his place, reminding him of the deeds he has done and showing him that he is not the invincible king he thought he was.

Chapter 5: Comparison and conclusion

We have seen that magic played an important and varied role in Roman poetry as well as in *Macbeth*. Are these supernatural elements used in a similar way in Roman literature as they are in *Macbeth*? Can we see any similarities or differences?

In this thesis we have already seen that there are several themes and elements from Roman literature and theatre that return in *Macbeth*. From this information we can deduce a certain pattern of how magic functions in these literary texts. I will first discuss a couple of general parallels, then I will go into the three themes of prophecy, witchcraft and ghosts.

5.1 General parallels

Firstly, it has become clear that magic has on the one hand a very negative connotation but on the other hand a great impact on the texts that have been discussed. Roman society regarded magic as something negative and brought it into close relation with the 'other'. We see that this view on magic returns in ancient literature. Witches in Horace and Ovid are seen as the 'ultimate other'. They are women that stand outside 'normal' society, which means that they do not conform to the criteria that the reader *expects*. It was not considered normal behaviour for women in Roman society to gather sinister ingredients at night or to use the entrails of a boy for a love spell. Horace's Canidia has a vile tongue and is strongly associated with dogs. She represents elements that are opposed to what is to be expected of a 'normal' woman and this abnormality is what makes the importance of her role in the epode so striking. Prophets in Seneca's plays seem to be on the margins of society as well. They are seen as outcasts and are compared with beggars. This concept of 'otherness' is something that returns in *Macbeth*, especially with the witches, who are not portrayed as women but as 'other'. Yet their role within the play is of major importance. Their magic is what makes Macbeth turn towards evil (just as in Medea's story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*). This tells us that both in ancient literature and *Macbeth* the supernatural is used by the author to change the tone of the story and can have influence on decisions characters make.

The audience is confronted with something that they would normally want to 'keep at a distance', but in these stories these elements are put on the foreground, which influences the tone and impact of the story significantly. I would argue that these supernatural 'negative' elements in such an important position can be very influential and come across as very powerful. The supernatural can force someone's character to change from good to evil, it causes fear and excitement and it is used as a powerful plot device, as well as enhancing the element of surprise. This is perhaps a way to enhance the impact and strength of the story.

Secondly, in both cases you could say that the supernatural practices that occur in poetry and drama are a form of religion. We already saw this in antiquity, where Hippocrates claimed that magic was a 'false' form of religion. It has, however, many similarities with 'normal' religion (see chapter 1). But it seems that magical rites are also very much in contrast with normal rites (as we saw in the Tiresias-scene in *Oedipus*) and you could say that magic is in fact an 'anti-religion'.

Thirdly, nature plays an important role in all the texts that were discussed. Nature is something that is outside of normal life, just like the supernatural. You could say that nature is another 'world', outside the inhabited world. The supernatural is outside the normal world as well. In this way the supernatural and nature have a close connection. And this could be the reason for both ancient authors and Shakespeare to present the supernatural and nature so closely related to each other.

Fourthly, since the supernatural can in both Roman poetry and drama and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

function in the same way, the audience or reader could in both cases be considered to react in a similar way to these supernatural elements. Those are of course audiences from two different times, but we know that in both antiquity and in Early Modern England people at least partly believed in the supernatural elements that were displayed. This would have been something that would have both scared and excited people. Both in the *Thyestes* and *Macbeth* the 'prologue' could function as a way to scare and excite people at the start of the performance.

The supernatural is also used as a tool for dramatic irony, of which we have seen many examples. The audience often knows about the supernatural, whereas the characters are unaware of it. For instance the prophecies uttered by Cassandra that are ignored by the other characters, or the ghost of Banquo that visits Macbeth, which only he and the audience can perceive. This is a good example of dramatic irony.

The supernatural is thus also a device to give the audience or reader information about characters that these characters do not know yet themselves and is a very efficient way to create dramatic irony.

5.2 Prophecy

In both Roman poetry and *Macbeth* supernatural elements are used to manipulate characters into embarking upon actions that will decide the course of the play and that will often lead them to do things that will eventually cause misery. We see this very well in *Macbeth*. The witches seem to have control over Macbeth and articulate his true desires via the prophecies. These prophecies cause Macbeth to embark on a course of action that will eventually end in disaster.

With the prophecies, Shakespeare seems to give the witches a higher purpose in the play than what was normal for witches. Instead of some simple 'village magic' and something that was preferably kept out of sight, their magic becomes a central and prominent theme in the story. In Seneca's play, Oedipus finds his true identity through magic and prophecy. Thus the prophecy is employed as a key plot device to move the action forwards, as well as to influence the characters in a certain way. The role of the prophecy is to be manipulative and motivate characters into doing evil things. Macbeth is encouraged to do evil things by the witches and prophecies and is also deceived because of the wrong interpretation he gives to the second set of prophecies. This is what happens to Agamemnon as well, who, by ignoring the prophecies, creates his own doom.

In the Roman poetry, prophecies were perhaps more feared. Macbeth, however, does not seem to fear the prophecies, but even seems confident about them; They give him a feeling of invincibility. The witches in *Macbeth* are also more confident with the gift of prophecy, whereas Tiresias fails in his first attempt and Cassandra is not pleased with her gift at all. Also, in Seneca's *Oedipus* the act of prophecy is closely related to necromancy, whereas in *Macbeth* the prophecies are closer related to the witches, since they seem to be responsible for them. There is, however, in both cases the connection with a troupe of ghosts (past kings) that appears during the speaking of the prophecies.

5.3 Witchcraft

In ancient society, witches were mostly regarded as female and in this thesis we have seen two ancient witches who were also very powerful women, Canidia and Medea. In the case of Medea, with respect to her actions, she appears more of a man than Jason and this is partly due to the fact that she has magical powers.

The witches in *Macbeth* though, can be regarded as 'beyond' female in nature, something that is

comparable to the way in which Roman witches were considered to be 'other'. However, these witches are still an 'antithesis' to a male-dominated society and thus challenge gender expectations. This is also the case with Lady Macbeth, who is a very influential woman, possibly a witch, and most certainly witchlike. Her influence on Macbeth does seem to be more than what could have been expected from a woman in that time, as she is publicly manipulating his behaviour. She thus appears, at least at the beginning of the play, to be more of a man than Macbeth. Lady Macbeth also rejects motherhood, since she gives multiple hints for infanticide within the play and she wants to be, in her own words, 'unsexed'. This indicates that she is acting 'against' nature, because in this time motherhood would have been a female trait that was considered to be 'normal'. Whilst acting against nature, she can thus be considered 'supernatural'.

There is a strong parallel between her and Medea. Medea murders her own children and thus rejects motherhood as well. Thus by rejecting motherhood, which was, in both antiquity and the Renaissance one of the most important aspects of female sexuality, Medea and Lady Macbeth seem to reject their own sexuality. This brings both Medea and Lady Macbeth in closer resemblance with the witches, whose sexuality is questioned as well (they are 'other' rather than 'female').

Medea is also, like Lady Macbeth, very dominant over her husband, far more than was expected from a woman of her time. Ovid's Medea, when turned to magic, also starts to create her own will and starts to act independently from Jason. So this example indicates that magic can contribute to the independent role of women and is used as a way for women to become more dominant than men. However, *Macbeth* differs from the Roman poetry in that its author did not make the witches or Lady Macbeth the protagonists of his play, as opposed to Medea and Canidia, who are the protagonists in their respective texts.

But what this tells us is that women, regarded as other in both ancient and Shakespearean literature, can through magic gain a prominent role in a story. They can, by rejecting their natural role (motherhood), destabilize a patriarchal society and challenge the audience by surpassing their expectations.

But although these witches are seen as figures that act *against* nature, they are also closely connected to natural elements. A lot of the magic they do involves elements of nature. In *Epode 5, Metamorphoses*, Medea and Macbeth the witches use all kinds of plants and animals, when practicing their magic. In Seneca's *Medea* as well as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Medea tells us how she can control nature. When the witches in *Macbeth* appear on stage, they are accompanied by thunder and lightning and they can interact with animals. This indicates that magic and nature have a close relationship and almost always appear together.

Furthermore, when the witches as well as Medea and Canidia are brewing their potion they use specific ingredients. Ingredients that occur in both ancient literature and Shakespeare are, for example, snakes, owls and toads, as well as entrails. What is common about all the ingredients that they use is that they are all sinister, repulsive and things that are normally either feared or rejected in meals and cooking. But although they must have seemed repulsive to the contemporary audience, they would also have been very recognisable and in this way the audience would know that there was witchcraft on stage.

Also, magic is preferably done at night and in silence and was thus something that was kept out of sight. The moon is also a very important element in magic and mentioned in all the chosen texts. The moon is closely related to the night and this concurs with the close relationship with nature and thus outside of normal society. Witches walked out with loose hair and on bare feet. Lady Macbeth, at some point in the play, is sleepwalking. When you think of sleepwalking, bare feet and loose hair are

things that easily spring to mind. Even the act of walking at night, reminds us of the witches in Roman poetry who walk at night. This was perhaps a way to show the audience that Lady Macbeth behaved as a witch, unbeknownst to Macbeth. This would have enhanced the dramatic irony of the play.

5.4 Ghosts

Ghosts have a special function as well within the texts that have been discussed. They are creatures between the under and upper world and appear to have more knowledge than the common people, because they know things about past and future. The ghosts come in at an important point in the story. They resemble a conscience to remind the character of what he has done (we see this happen in *Medea* as well as in *Macbeth*). This occurs at a point when the character is feeling very confident and is under the impression that he is invincible. The ghost then arrives as a reminder of what the character has done in the past and puts the character back in his or her place, shattering the character's confidence and possibly making the character feel guilty. Both Apsyrtus and Banquo have this role. It is also striking that both these ghosts were very close to the protagonist (Apsyrtus was Medea's brother and Banquo Macbeth's friend). It is imaginable that Medea and Macbeth did not want to kill people that are close to them, but that because of the evil magic incentive they decided to choose for themselves instead of their friends. This emphasizes again the impact magic can have on a character's behaviour and strengthens the argument that Medea and Macbeth possibly feel guilt when these ghosts appear and therefore explains their disturbed reaction. But although their appearance is perhaps meant to give the character a conscience, it could also cause the character to rush his decisions and actions, which will lead to the character making a mistake. This can then be the cause of their eventual downfall and shows again that the supernatural is an incentive for disaster.

Furthermore, ghosts in the Roman texts also do not seem too comfortable with the upper world, because they only show up at night and leave very quickly after they came, again emphasizing the contrast between light and darkness. This fear for the upper world is, however, not something that can be found in *Macbeth* as well and there is also not a very sharp contrast between light and darkness in this play.

Thus, ghosts can thus function as a conscience to a character and possibly even change his will or feelings. They show up at the point that when the character is at the height of his power and then mark the point in the play when it is starting to go downhill. Ghosts function as a powerful plot device and have significant influence on the character's behaviour and fate.

This manipulation that occurs in *Macbeth* can lead us back to a quotation from Tarrant I mentioned in chapter 3 about the *Thyestes*, where he argues that Tantalus and the Fury are: "dramatized metaphors, embodiments of the inherited passions that drive Atreus and Thyestes". With this he thus means that they are physical representations of inner emotions. This ties in with what was argued in chapter 4, namely that the witches are a representation of Macbeth's inner desires. Thus supernatural entities can be used to represent feelings and desires of main characters. These are desires that the characters themselves do not know that they possess (yet).

Conclusion

The role of the supernatural in Roman poetry is very similar to that of the supernatural in *Macbeth*; It is a phenomenon that was in society regarded as 'other', on the margins of society and as something negative, lends itself well in literature (and especially drama) for several functions. For example, it can function as a device to forward the plot, becoming a key aspect of the work, it can function as a device to change and manipulate the behaviour, feelings and personality of a character, it can destabilize a patriarchal society by putting women in control through magic, and it can also challenge the expectations of the audience, by showing them things that they are not used to.

We cannot be certain whether the influence of the role of the supernatural in the ancient world on Shakespeare was direct and whether he actually looked at these ancient examples as an inspiration for *Macbeth*, but what is clear is that the depiction and functions of the supernatural in Roman poetry in various ways agrees with the depiction and function of the supernatural in *Macbeth* (or perhaps I should rather say *the Scottish play...*).

Bibliography

Dictionaryes

- Lewis, C.T. and Short, C. (1975) *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford (Clarendon Press)
- Liddell, H.G. and Scott, R. (1968) *A Greek-English Lexicon*, eds. Jones, S.H., Oxford (Clarendon Press)

Text editions

- Boyle, A.J. (2014) *Seneca: Medea*, Oxford (Oxford University Press)
- Boyle, A.J. (2011) *Seneca: Oedipus*, Oxford (Oxford University Press)
- Braunmuller, A.R. (2008) *The New Cambridge Shakespeare: Macbeth*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press)
- Corcoran, T.H. (1972) *Seneca, Natural Questions Volume II*, Cambridge (MA) (Harvard University Press)
- Craige, J. (1981) *Minor Prose Works of King James VI and I: Daemonologie, the trve lawe of free monarchies, a counterblaste to tobacco, a declaration of sports*, Edinburgh (The Scottish text society)
- Jones, W.H.S. (1923) *Hippocrates Volume II: Prognostic. Regimen in Acute Diseases. The Sacred Disease. The Art. Breaths. Law. Decorum. Physician (Ch. 1). Dentition*, Cambridge (MA) (Harvard University Press)
- Jones, W.H.S. (1963) *Pliny the Elder, Natural History Volume VIII: Books 28-32*, Cambridge (MA) (Harvard University Press)
- Mankin, D. (1995) *Horace: Epodes*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press)
- Miller, F.J. (revised by Goold, G.P.) (1916) *Ovid, Metamorphoses Volume I: Books 1-8*, Cambridge (MA) (Harvard University Press)
- Tarrant, R.J. (1985) *Seneca: Thyestes*, Atlanta (American Philological Association)
- Tarrant, R.J. (1976) *Seneca, Agamemnon*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press)

Secondary sources

- Bailey, M.D. (2007), *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present*, Plymouth (Rowman & Littlefield)
- Baroja, J. C. (1964) *The World of the Witches*, London (Weidenfeld and Nicolson)
- Beard, M., North, J. and Price, S. (1998): *Religions of Rome volume 1: A History*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press)
- Beaver, E. (2008) *The realities of witchcraft and popular magic in early modern Europe: culture, cognition and everyday life*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Boyle, A.J. (2006) *Roman Tragedy*, London (Routledge)
- Chamberlain, S. (2005) *Fantasizing infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England*. In: *College Literature*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 72-91
- Clark, C. (1971) *Shakespeare and the Supernatural*, New York (Haskell House)
- Copenhaver, B.P. (2015) *Magic in Western Culture: From Antiquity to Enlightenment*, New York (Cambridge University Press)
- Davidson, J.P. (2012) *Early Modern Supernatural: The Dark Side of European culture, 1400-1700*, Santa Barbara (Praeger)
- Dewald, J. (2004) *Europe 1450 to 1789: encyclopedia of the early modern world*, New York (Charles Scribner's Sons)

- Dickie, M.W. (2001), *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, London (Routledge)
- Fantham, E. and Gagarin, M. (2010) *The Oxford encyclopaedia of ancient Greece and Rome*, Oxford (Oxford University Press)
- Graf, F. (1997) *Magic in the Ancient World*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press)
- Hill, D.E. (1992) *Ovid: Metamorphoses V-VIII*, Warminster (Aris & Philips)
- Hine, H.M. (2000) *Seneca, Medea*, Warminster (Aris & Philips LTD)
- James, E.O. (1961) *Seasonal Feasts and Festivals*, London (Thames & Hudson)
- Levin, J. (2002) *Lady Macbeth and the Daemonologie of Hysteria*. In: *ELH*, Vol. 69, No. 1, pp. 21-55
- McGuire, P.C. (1994) *Shakespeare: the Jacobean Plays*, London (Macmillan)
- McLuskie, K.E. (2009) *Macbeth*, Hordon (Northcote House)
- Mowbray, C.M. (2012) *"The Vates" in Senecan Drama: Prophecy, Poetry, Problems and Possibilities*, University of Pennsylvania
- Nussbaum, M.C. (1997) *Serpents in the soul: A reading of Seneca's Medea*, in J. J. Clauss and S. Iles Johnston (eds.) *Medea: Essays on Medea in myth, literature, philosophy, and art*, Princeton (Princeton UP)
- Ogden, D. (2001) *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, Princeton (Princeton university press)
- Odgen, D. (2009) *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: a sourcebook*, Oxford
- Oliensis, E. (1998) *Horace and the Rhetoric of Authority*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press)
- Pertina, A. and Tosi, L. (2011) *Representations of Elizabeth I in Early Modern Culture*, Macmillan
- Rives, J.B. (2011) *Magic in Roman Law: The reconstruction of a Crime*. In: *The Religious History of the Roman Empire* (eds.) North, J.A. and Price S.R.F., Oxford (Oxford University Press)
- Rosner-Siegel (1982) *Amor, Metamorphosis and Magic: Ovid's Medea (Met. 7.1-424)*. In: *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 77, No. 3, pp. 231-243
- Segal, C. (2002) *Black and White Magic in Ovid's "Metamorphoses": Passion, Love, and Art*. In: *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 1-34
- Scheid, J. (2003) *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, Edinburgh (Edinburgh University Press)
- Stocks, C. (2015) *Monsters in the Night: Hannibal, 'Prodigia', and the parallel worlds of 'Epode 16' and 'Ode 4.4'*, Oxford (Oxford University Press)
- Taylor, G. and Wells, S. (2005) *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, Oxford (Oxford University Press)
- Watson, L.C. (2003) *A Commentary on Horace's Epodes*, Oxford (Oxford University Press)
- Winston, J. (2006) *Seneca in Early Elizabethan England*. In: *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 1, pp. 29-59

Digital sources

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/film/macbeth/scottish_play_curse/ (consulted on: 07-06-2016)

Images:

http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/Colin.Witches.html (consulted on: 14-06-2016)

http://allart.biz/photos/image/John_William_Waterhouse_6_Jason_and_Medea.html (consulted on: 14-06-2016)