

SCENE I. A desert place.

The use of pathetic fallacy creates a sense of foreboding danger and hints at the theme of the supernatural that runs throughout the play. The fact that the play begins with a storm could represent how the changes and disturbances in the weather match with the events of the play i.e. conventional expectations are about to be upset and a change in society is about to happen.

Moreover, 'thunder and lightning' is also unexplained, powerful and deadly, showing a possible link between the supernatural characters within the play and the dangerous weather.

The first Witch asks where they will meet next, and the second replies that the Witches will meet "upon the heath," or in an open field.

These highland heaths, or moorlands, are the wilderness of Scotland. It is significant that Macbeth meets the Witches here, in a setting beyond the borders of the civilized world. This allows the Witches to act in a way that is outside of the rules and expectations of society.

The second Witch also has a familiar (companion spirit) in the form of a toad, whose name is Paddock.

This links to the theme of appearance VS reality - all is not what it seems. This quite literally means "good is bad and bad is good", a suggestion that appearances can be deceiving.

Macbeth echoes this line in Act 1, Scene 3:
"So foul and fair a day I have not seen."

Macbeth's first words mimic the Witches' (though in inverse order), linking him to them and foreshadowing the harmful effects of their prophecy.

Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches

First Witch

When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Second Witch

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

Third Witch

That will be ere the set of sun.

First Witch

Where the place?

Second Witch

Upon the heath.

Third Witch

There to meet with Macbeth.

First Witch

I come, Graymalkin!

Second Witch

Paddock calls.

Third Witch

Anon.

ALL

Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

Exeunt

The "Three Witches," or Three Weird Sisters, are the equivalent of the Fates of Greek mythology, and they reveal their prophetic insights to Macbeth and Banquo by making predictions for them.

Another example of pathetic fallacy – the Witches shall meet again in bad

The Witches use several paradoxes and contradictions throughout the play to foreshadow the future events. This is suggestive of their deceitful nature and links to the theme of equivocation.

This links to the symbolism of light and dark which is prevalent throughout Macbeth. The fact that the Witches will meet Macbeth at the set of the sun is suggestive of their evil nature and creates a sense of foreboding for the audience.

The first Witch has a "familiar" (companion spirit) in the form of a cat, whose name is Graymalkin.

Witches call their familiar spirits ('familiars'): demons who assisted with their evil work and commonly took the form of animals; in this case a grey cat ('Graymalkin').

Anon: "shortly, soon," or, in this case, "I'm coming. The third Witch, too, is answering her familiar or companion spirit, who is presumably calling to her.

The Witches will indeed "hover" like presiding spirits over Macbeth, in all their moral ambiguity and darkness (fog and filth). They appear directly in only a few scenes, but their unsettling presence pervades the atmosphere of the play.

Additional Annotations

- The Witches' rhyming speech makes them seem supernatural and otherworldly. It also reflects the idea of a spell or enchantment, emphasising their inhuman powers.
- Shakespeare wrote Macbeth at a time when people were extremely fearful of witches. Witches were blamed for such things as illness, misfortune, failing crops and much more. Women accused of being witches were often subjected to torture and in most cases, death.
- King James the VI of Scotland was deeply concerned about the threat of witches as he believed that a witch attempted to drown him whilst he was at sea. He made the crime of witchcraft a capital offence, meaning that anyone found guilty could be executed.
- By including the characters of the three Witches, Shakespeare knew that his audience would feel a mixture of fear and fascination - therefore holding their interest.