Shakespearean Supernatural Elements

The vast and diverse powers in many forms of fiction feature characters attributed with superhuman, supernatural, or paranormal abilities, often referred to as "superpowers" (also spelled "super powers" and "super-powers") or "powers". The supernatural has been claimed to exist, which cannot be explained by the laws of nature, including things characteristic of or relating to ghosts, gods, or other types of spirits and other non-material beings, or to things beyond nature. Supernaturalism, as opposed to naturalism, is a belief in the supernatural in interpreting the world or attempting to control it. It can vary from those who believe that supernatural powers or entities are constantly or continuously intervening in the natural world to those who like Deists.

Shakespeare's specific scenes focus the suspense and involvement of the supernatural. The use of witches, apparitions and ghosts are an important element in making the play interesting. Shakespeare has created immortal characters whose characteristics transcends those of the normal supernatural beings, but most students of literature agree that his uses of the supernatural aren't merely figments of his creative imagination. Every man, woman, and child is influenced by the age into which they are born and Shakespeare was no exception. Not only does his use of supernatural elements within his works reveal the Elizabethans' obsession with mythical beliefs, but it also reveals his attitude toward these beliefs at different points of his writing career.

Witches appear in Macbeth, a ghost appears in Hamlet, and fairies appear in A Mid-Summer Nights Dream. In addition, magic cures are given in All's Well, evil curses are chanted in Richard III, and prophecies are told in Julius Caesar. Most of Shakespeare's works contain some form of the supernatural. Shakespeare, however, was too great of a writer to lower the quality of his work to satisfy the taste of the Elizabethans. Although the court sometimes pressured his into including some form of the supernatural in his plays that had nothing to do with his themes, he rarely allowed Elizabethans' demands to affect his own conception of how the supernatural should be used.

To understand how far Shakespeare exceeded other writers, a comparison of their supernatural characters is necessary. In other pieces of literature the ghosts, witches, and devils are merely monsters whose purpose is to scare. However, the characters are real in Shakespearean literature, and while they are evil and terrifying, and embody most of the current superstitions, they never fail to be impressive and dramatic. Another point that sets Shakespeare apart from other writers is his refusal to use the supernatural for its own sake and not for the purpose of his plot.

I. In *A Winter's Tale,* III, 2, an oracle tells what the spectator already knows, its chief part being its effect upon the mind of Leontes, furnishing also a reason for his sudden conversion after the death of his son.

II. In *Henry VI, Part I,* V. 3, the English and the prevailing French view of the demoniac character of Joan's power is indicated by fiends, which appear to her upon the field of battle. Except to enfeeble her powers, they play no part.

III. In *Henry VI, Part II,* I, 4, Eleanor, of Gloster, consults witches and dabbles in magic. The incident is brief and plays but little part.

IV. In *Richard III,* V., 3, ghosts appear to both Richard and Richmond. In both cases the supernaturalism is merely a convenient stage expedient for representing the dreams of good and bad men upon the eve of battle.

V. In *Henry VIII,* IV, 3, Catherine's dream of peace is presented in the form of a vision. This is a mere stage expedient.

VI. In *Cymbeline,* V, 4, a vision of gods and mortals appears to Posthumus, and a written tablet is left, upon whose interpretation depends the denouement. While this is otherwise one of the most delightful dramas the master has left us, both the vision and the interpretation are unworthy the great dramatist, apparently a mere clumsy invention to get the play ended. It is pure supernaturalism of the poetic kind.

VII. In *Troilus and Cressida,* Cassandra prophesies in II, 2, and in V, 3.

VIII. In *Julius Caesar,* IV, 3, the ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus. This is such stage expedient as we have in "Richard III." It is mere personification of the inner thoughts and sentiments.

IX. Diana appears to Pericles, V, 2, and gives him such directions as bring about the denouement.

X. The ghost of Banquo, “blood-boltered,” appears to Macbeth. This is mere personification, for stage purposes, of the diseased fancies of Macbeth. It is presentable and is sometimes presented, without the actual appearance, although not best presented so to any modern audience. It differs in no essential way from the dagger soliloquy, which is giving, in words and actions, the assassin's thoughts and feelings upon the threshold of murder.

Shakespearean Fools and Clowns

The appearance of fools and clowns in Shakespeare's plays is one of the most interesting stage characters in the Shakespearean oeuvre (works) and has frequently captured the interest of contemporary critics and modern audiences. Taking many forms, Shakespearean fools may be generally divided into two categories: the clown, a general term that was originally intended to choose a rustic or otherwise uneducated individual whose dramatic purpose was to evoke laughter with his ignorance and the courtly fool or (jester) clown, in whom wit and pointed satire accompany low comedy.

The dramatic sources of Shakespeare's simple-minded clowns are at least as old as classical antiquity. In the plays themselves, such figures Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* are typically classified as clowns, their principal function is to stir the mirth of audiences. The history of the courtly fool or jester in England is somewhat briefer, with these fools making early appearances in the courts of medieval aristocracy during the twelfth century. By the time of Queen Elizabeth's reign, courtly fools were a common feature of English society, and were seen as one of two types: natural or artificial. The former could include misshapen or mentally-deficient individuals, or those afflicted with dwarfism. Such fools were often considered pets—though generally dearly loved by their masters—and appear infrequently in Shakespeare's writing. The artificial fool, in contrast, was possessed of a verbal wit and talent for intellectual repartee. Into this category critics place Shakespeare's intellectual or "wise-fools," notably Touchstone in *As You Like It*, Feste in *Twelfth Night*, and unnamed fool in *King Lear*.

Shakespearean fools and clowns has largely explored the thematic function of these peculiar individuals. Many commentators have observed the satirical potential of the fool. Considered an outcast to a degree, the fool was frequently given reign to comment on society and the actions of his social betters; thus, some Shakespearean fools demonstrate a rebellious

potential. They may present a radically different worldview than those held by the majority of characters in plays. Likewise, such figures can be understood as disrupting the traditional order of society and the meaning of conventional language. As for so-called clowns—including the simple "mechanicals" of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Trinculo in *The Tempest*, and Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*—most are thought to parody the actions of other characters in the main plots of their respective plays and to provide low humor for the entertainment of groundlings. Several critics, however, have acknowledged the deeper, thematic functions of Shakespeare's clowns, some of whom are said to possess a degree of wisdom within their apparent ignorance.

The significance of certain Elizabethan actors who were thought to have initially enacted the roles Shakespeare wrote. Preeminent among these is the comedic actor Robert Armin, for whom several critics have suggested Shakespeare created the witty, even philosophical, fool roles of Feste, Touchstone, and Lear's Fool. Still other critics have focused on Shakespeare's less easily categorized clowns. Falstaff is multifaceted function in the *Henry IV Part I*, which bears similarities to those of Shakespeare's other "wise fools." The darker side of foolishness by exploring the title character of *Hamlet* as a unique form of the Shakespearean fool. Shakespeare's characteristic blending of comedy and tragedy through the use of clowns and other source of amusement in his tragic plays.

SHAKESPEARE'S WOMEN

Shakespeare's illustration of women and the ways of his female roles are interpreted and enacted have become the subjects of scholarly interest. Shakespeare's women are more remarkable than his men. His women are mostly unclear visions of youthful fancy, and they are in form of exaggerated qualities. The mind of Elizabeth was particularly instilled with every weakness for woman. The weakness of the court-life was worshipping a woman in every form especially her beauty, speech, action, thoughts and manners. Her qualities and vices were planted too high in the eyes of the new renaissance. Shakespeare portrayed various types of women with every point of difference and similarity. He has given another type of women only through the feature of her distinct soul, tongue and even own limbs. Shakespeare was the one who discovered the real mystery of woman's nature. The nature of woman caught in her very flesh and blood, and viewed her total personality in the light of earthly perfection and worldly limitation. Shakespeare has also used with his irony paints the affections of womanhood. Women are never more practical than men, they are also extremely sentimental. Men are extra-imaginative, thoughtful, calculating, prudent and practical with a touch of imagination and sentiment.

Shakespeare has shown how his woman characters are wit and humour, their courage and love, hatred, nobleness, malice, jealousy and even their smiles and tears are the fruits of indistinct. Some critics believe that Shakespeare's heroines have got more freedom and thought, more of deliberate forwardness, more of personality and rational character, which other women lack. Even Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Portia and others are not very much under the domination of their motivation. Their courage also fails when the moment comes for screwing it up to the sticking place. Some critics said that Shakespeare's women are mostly timid, petty, shy, impulsive and without any independent personality of their own. These things happen only when the situation is weak.

Shakespeare has covered the entire gallery of women and his plays focused on the absolute portrayal of the "essence" of femininity. His portraits of women have never been surpassed. Critics have classified Shakespeare's heroines into different types:

Clever and assertive - Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*,

- Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*

- Rosalind in *As You Like lt*

Loving and fanciful women – Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*.

- Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

- Viola in *Twelfth Night*

- Ophelia in *Hamlet*

- Miranda in *The Tempest*

Tragic heroines - Desdemona in *Othello*

- Cordelia youngest daughter in *King Lear*

- Hero in *A Much Ado About Nothing*

- Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*

- Aggressive and dominant women is Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*

- Goneril is eldest of all three daughters in *King Lear*

- Regan in *King Lear*

- Cleopatra in *Antonio and Cleopatra*

Viola, **Beatrice**, **Rosalind** and **Portia** are bright, beautiful and witty. They can solve their problems in which they are involved by their cleverness.

Helena in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' is a passive and sentimental young woman. Juliet is passionate constant and self-sacrificing. **Ophelia** is pitiable and weak. **Miranda** is a loving and fanciful but she is a passive character. **Desdemona**, the tragic heroine evokes our sympathy. **Cordelia** is passive but is selfless.

Lady Macbeth, who stands first in the list of aggressive and evil women, has an iron will. **Goneril** and **Regan**, the wicked or evil daughters of King Lear are remorseless. **Cleopatra**, the vanquished queen of Egypt, she is considered as an earthly Venus both in her power of attraction and wealth and charm character of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's Theatre and Audience

Theatre

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England, descended from tenant farmers and landed gentry. His traditional birth date, April 23, 1564, is conjectural. Baptism was on April 26, so April 23 is a good guess—and a tidy one, since that date is also St. George's Day as well as the date of Shakespeare's own death.

Shakespeare lived during a remarkable period of English history, a time of relative political stability that followed and preceded eras of extensive upheaval. Elizabeth-I became the Queen of England in 1558, six years before Shakespeare's birth. During her 45-year reign, London became a cultural and commercial center where learning and literature thrived.

When Queen Elizabeth ascended to the throne, there were violent clashes throughout Europe between Protestant and Catholic leaders and their followers. Though Elizabeth honored many of the Protestant edicts of her late father, King Henry VIII, she made significant concessions to Catholic sympathizers, which kept them from attempting rebellion.

Queen Elizabeth also recognized the importance of the arts to the life and legacy of her nation. She was fond of the theater, and many of England's greatest playwrights were active during her reign, including Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare. With her permission, professional theaters were built in England for the first time, attracting 15,000 theatergoers per week in London, a city of 150,000 to 250,000.

The Performance of the gospel stories within the church was the beginning of the theatre in England. As interest grew in the plays, the performance was shifted to the churchyard. Due to the large number of Spectators, this resulted in the desecration of the graveyards. The stage had to be shifted thus into the green or any other open space in the outskirts of the town, particularly to inn-yard. In the year 1576 three theatres were setup either in the open air or in some yard in London. The original Globe theatre was built in 1599, destroyed by fire in 1613, rebuilt in 1614,

and then demolished in 1644. It is considered quite realistic, though contemporary safety requirements mean that it accommodates only 1400 spectators compared to the original theatre's 3000.

The stage had a bare room whose walls were covered with tapestry. The theatre was a rectangular platform with a thatched roof and hangings above. It had no side or front curtains. It projected far into the yard which was occupied by the lower classes who watched performance while standing. They were known as "the groundlings of the pit". A groundling was a person who visited the Globe Theatre in the early 17th century. They were too poor to pay to be able to sit on one of the three levels of the theatre. If they paid one penny, they could stand in "the pit", also called "the yard", just below the stage to watch the play. The nobility sat either in the boxes on each side of the stage or on the rough strewn stage. The back of the stage has two wings. Each wing had a door opening obliquely on to the stage. The recess between the two doors formed the inner stage. Lastly there was a balcony or gallery behind the inner stage, and above the actors, "tiring house". Scenes of the inner stage were performed in the inner stage. The gentry would pay to sit in the galleries often using cushions for comfort! Rich nobles could watch the play from a chair set on the side of the Globe stage itself.

A flag was unfurled on the roof of a theatre when a performance was about to be given. A flourish of trumpets was the signal that the play was about to commence. When trumpets had sounded a third time, a figure clothed in a long black robe came forward and recited the prologue. Most common way to change of scene was by hanging out a board bearing in large letters the name of the place of action.

Although there was no scenery, mangers spared no expense on the most lavish costumes. Plays were not acted in the period of costume, though some bizarre attempts were made to suggest a period. Women were not allowed to act by law, and their parts had to be taken by boys with broken voices. This was the reason dramatists preferred women characters so few.


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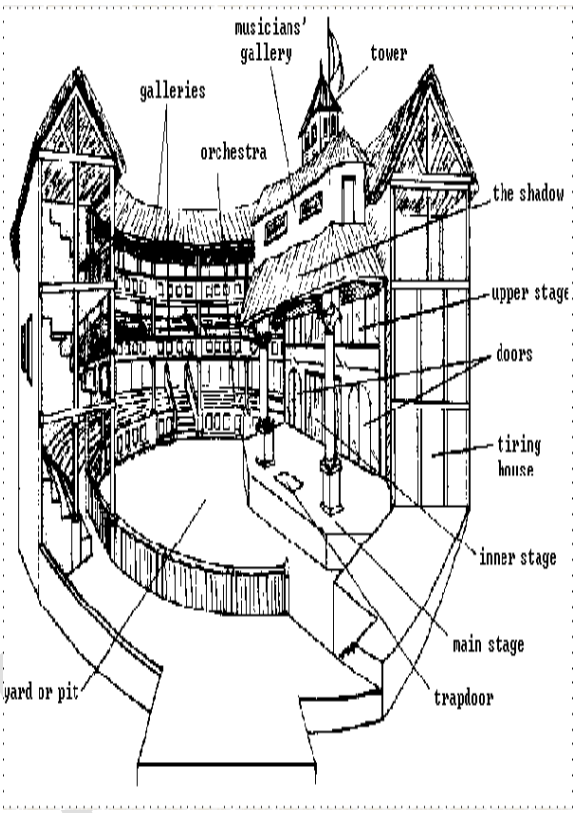
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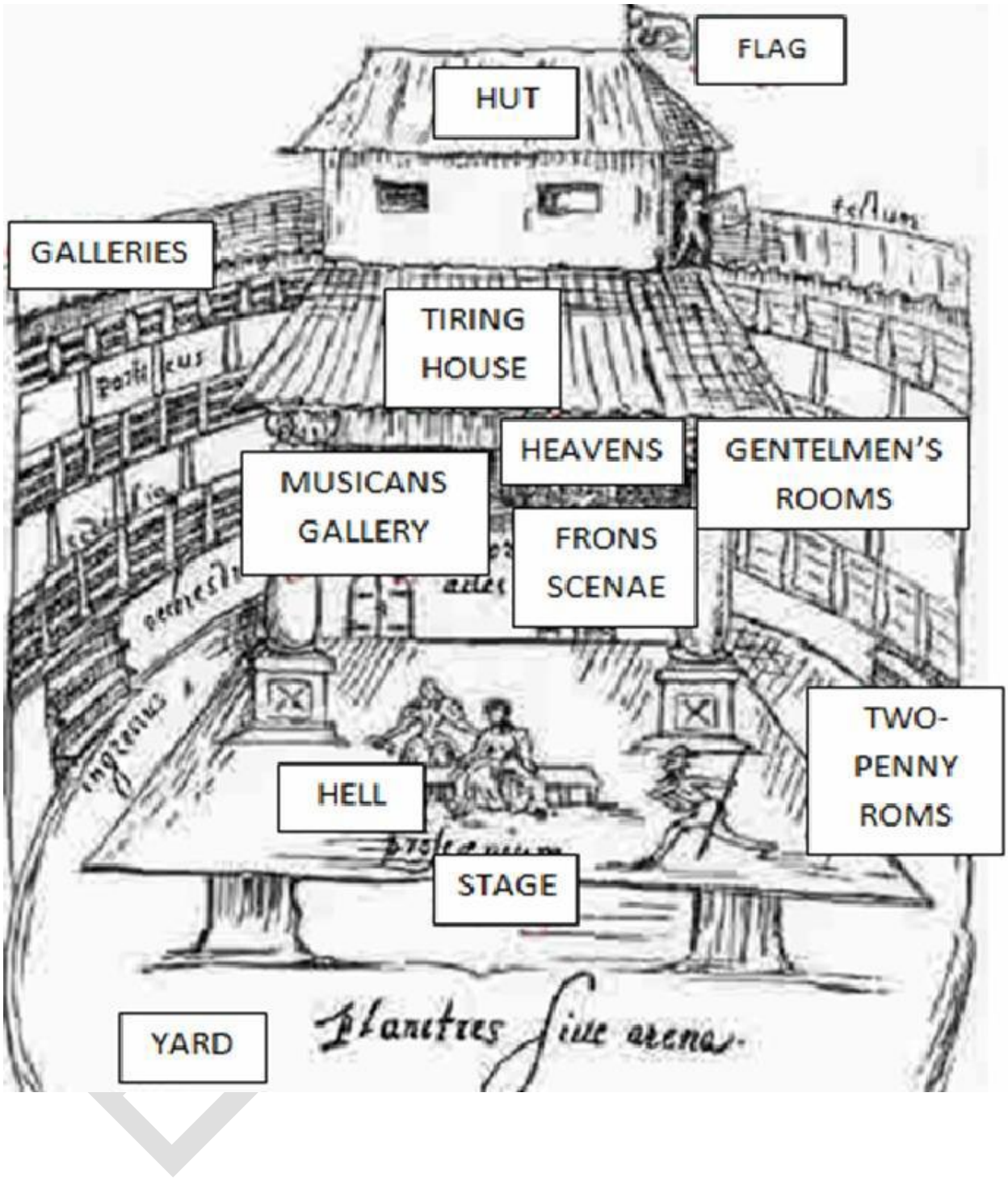

Audience

Audience London theaters like the Globe could accommodate up to 3,000 people watching popular plays. There were three different class people were accommodating the theatre. The 'groundlings' would pay 1 penny to stand in the 'Yard' of the Globe Theatre. One penny was one day income of daily wages. The gentry would pay to sit in the galleries often using cushions for

comfort, and the cost of their ticket started from 6 penny. Rich nobles could watch the play from a chair set on the side of the Globe stage itself. With theaters running most afternoons, that could mean as many as 10,000-20,000 people could see a play every week! Who were these people? Shakespeare's audience was the very rich, the upper middle class, and the lower middle class. All of these people would seek entertainment just as do today, and they could afford to spend money going to the theater. Audiences in Shakespeare's time behaved much differently than think of today when go to the theater. In general, audiences were much noisier and directly involved in the show than today. There was no electricity for special theater lights, so both the stage and the audience were in broad daylight, allowing them to see each other and interact. Shakespeare's soliloquies would be said directly to the audience, who could potentially answer back! The audience would move around, buy food and ale in the theater, clap for the hero, boo the villain, and cheer for the special effects. The audience might dance at the end of a comedy along with the characters onstage. If an audience didn't like a play, they might even throw furniture and damage the theater! Shakespeare used several tricks to get and hold his audience's attention.

One that may notice that his plays rarely began with the main characters onstage; usually a minor character began the first scene. This was because at an Elizabethan theater the lights could not dim to indicate the beginning of a play, it would just begin with characters walking onstage and beginning to speak, usually over the audience's noise as they settled in to watch the play. The first scene would usually set the mood of the play, but the opening dialogue would not be vital because it might not be easily heard. Another trick that Shakespeare used was to break up the main action of the play with clowning. In most of his plays, there is comic relief in the form of "clown" or "fool" characters sprinkled throughout the show, making jokes or clowning around onstage. This ensured that even during a 3-hour history play, there would be something that appealed to everyone. Most of the poorer audience members, referred to as groundlings, would pay one penny (which was almost an entire day's wage) to stand in front of the stage, while the richer patrons would sit in the covered galleries, paying as much as half a crown each for their seats. In 1599, Thomas Platter, a Swiss doctor visiting London from Basel, reported the cost of admission in his diary: "There are separate galleries and there one stands more comfortably and moreover can sit, but one pay more for it. Thus anyone who remains on the level standing pays only one English penny: but if he wants to sit, he is let in at a farther door, and there he gives another penny. If he desires to sit on a cushion in the most comfortable place of all, where he not only sees everything well, but can also be seen then he gives yet another English penny at another door." Shakespeare's audience would have been composed of tanners, cobblers butchers, iron-workers, millers, seamen from the ships docked in the Thames, glovers, servants, shopkeepers, wig-makers, bakers, and countless other tradesmen and their families.

Shakespeare's audience was far more boisterous than are patrons of the theatre today. They were loud and hot-tempered and as interested in the happenings off stage as on.