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MACBETH



Master Class 2023

20 PAGES



CH 23

LC
ENGLISH

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Macbeth 2019 Sample Essay

Discuss the reasons **why**, in your opinion, Shakespeare's use of a variety of **horrific**, **bizarre** and **unbelievable** elements does or // does not heighten the **tragic intensity** of his play, *Macbeth*. Develop your answer with reference to the text. LC 2019

Purpose	Question	30%
Cohesion	Structure	30%
Language	Appropriateness of language to the task	30%
Mechanics	Spelling and Grammar	10%

Discuss the reasons **why**, in your opinion, Shakespeare's use of a variety of **horrific**, **bizarre** and **unbelievable** elements does or // does not heighten the **tragic intensity** of his play, *Macbeth*.

1. On the day of exam each significant part of the question will be coded
2. You will get a code for every fully developed question focussed, supported point that you make.
3. The number of codes that you get will determine your marks for P.

Reading a question

On the day of the exam the question will contain a division in it. Frequently the division will be between technical and character / theme etc

The question will always contain a number of discriminating adjectives

There are two types of discriminating adjectives technical / ordinary

Evocative

Lyrical

Insight

Effective

Interesting

Captivating

Riveting

Essay writing

Every essay should contain a beginning, a middle and end.

Write a short question focused statement.

Mark ex 60 by reference to the criteria for assessment using the breakdown of marks below.

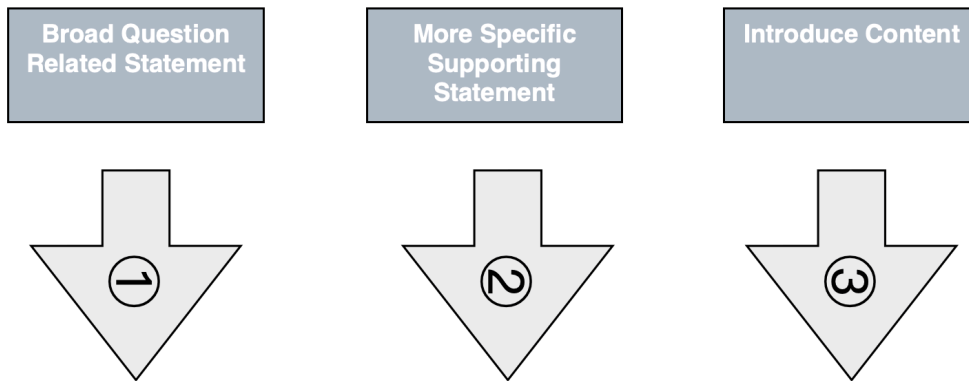
P: Focus / relevance of response / well chosen, compelling points / originality of thought / understanding of dramatic elements / evidence of critical literacy, etc.

C: Sustained focus / **appropriate management and sequencing of ideas** / coherence / points effectively substantiated / apt use of examples, references and **quotations**, effective engagement with the text, etc.

L: Language managed and controlled to achieve clear communication throughout / fluency / quality of expression, etc.

M: Accuracy of mechanics **Etc. Code E/HT** for use of horrific/bizarre/unbelievable element(s) does/does not heighten tragic intensity

Every paragraph should begin with a topic sentence sequence



What / Why / Where / How

What is horrific in play = the witches

How do the witches heighten the dramatic intensity of the play ??

Discuss the reasons *why*, in your opinion, Shakespeare's use of a variety of *horrific*, *bizarre* and *unbelievable* elements does or // does not heighten the *tragic intensity* of his play, *Macbeth*. Develop your answer with reference to the text. LC 2019

Shakespeare's use of a variety of *horrific*, *bizarre* and *unbelievable* elements heightens the *tragic intensity* of this play. We see this during: ¹Macbeth's first encounter with The Witches; when the ² Witches' prepare a vile spell intended to offer him false reassurance; and also, ³during the arrival of Banquo's ghost.

① ➡ One of the most **bizarre** and **unbelievable** aspects of the play is the **inclusion of the Witches**. ② ➡ These **horrific** creatures are used by Shakespeare to **shape our understanding** of the **tragic intensity** of his play. ③ ➡ We first meet the witches in **Act I, scene i**. We quickly learn that they possess the ability to control the elements, and when they exercise this power, it is to create unfavourable weather conditions: [??]

When shall we three meet again

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

④ ➡ The witches are then presented to us in a series of almost **unbelievable visual images** that underscore their **horrific natures**. (E) Banquo describes them as looking: “**not like the inhabitants of the earth.**” (E) He lays emphasis on their “**choppy finger[s],**” “**skinny lips**” and their **bizarre androgyny** is seen in his description of their “**beards.**” ④ ➡ So during this first encounter, we witness the **grossness, the horrible reality and mystery of evil influence** that they exert both on the natural world and the human world. ④ ➡ HT?? However it is Macbeth’s reaction to their **disturbing appearance** that heightens the **tragic intensity of the play**. **Unbelievably**, the first words that he speaks echo their opening pronouncement:

So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

④ ➡ These words remind us of the **otherworldly metaphysical link** that exists between Macbeth and them; and in process, alert us to the **malign influence** that they **tragically** exert over him. ⑤ ➡ So our first encounter with the Witches emphasises at once their **horrific natures** and the **tragic influence** they exert over Macbeth.

① ➡ The unusual metaphysical link, between Macbeth and the Witches, that is established by Shakespeare in the opening moments, becomes more obvious as the play progresses. ② ➡ In ways that are increasingly bizarre to witness, we see that the Witches act ④ ➡ E/HT? as potent catalysts in his tragic downfall. They tempt him and awaken in him “**dark and deep desires**.” We see him struggle with the evil that they represent almost immediately. His reaction to the first encounter is one of startled “**fear**,” and then, later in soliloquy, as he begins to absorb the ④ ➡ tragic implications of what they have said, he acknowledges the visceral effect that these creatures have had on him. ④ ➡ It is difficult to ignore the pathos and poignancy of such moments:

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair

And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,

Against the use of nature?

④ ➡ As we witness Macbeth reluctantly “**yield**” to the idea of murdering a kind and benevolent king, our understanding of the tragic dimensions of his character is heightened; **because**, we are forced to acknowledge the frailty of the human condition. ③ ➡ Once Macbeth has given into the “**suggestion**,” he bizarrely chooses to place further trust in the Weird Sisters. And in Act IV, scene i, just before he decides to visit them again, we witness the witches prepare a spell that further highlights their role in his downfall. ④ ➡ The ingredients of this horrific concoction are nearly all drawn from venomous, dead or nocturnal creatures and reinforce our sense that the witches are deeply disturbing beings bent on visiting destruction and tragedy on the world. In every

sense of word, this spell is a **symbol** for evil. Amongst the **strange and unsettling** ingredients we find, “**Root of hemlock digg'd i' the dark, Liver of blaspheming Jew,**” and most **horrific** of all, the:

Finger of birth-strangled babe

Ditch-deliver'd by a drab,

As we witness the preparation of a spell that is so repugnant and aberrant as to be almost **unbelievable**, our **understanding of the tragic intensity of the play is heightened**; ④ ➡ **because**, we realise that Macbeth is about to place his future in these creatures' hands. ⑤ ➡ So in the play Shakespeare uses the Witches and the **imagery** surrounding their evil spells to shape our understanding of Macbeth's downfall.

① ➡ **Earlier in the play**, Shakespeare uses a **horrific, bizarre and unbelievable** moment of drama to shape our understanding of **Macbeth's downfall**. The Banquet Scene encapsulates Macbeth's **tragic downfall** in a perfectly **symmetrical** manner. ③ ➡ The **bizarre** arrival of the ghost of Banquo puts an end to Macbeth's carefully constructed attempt to appear majestic. The assembled guests know nothing of Banquo's murder. So, when Macbeth insists to the **horrific apparition** that:

Thou canst not say I did it: never shake

Thy gory locks at me.

they must suspect that he is referring to the murder of Duncan. ④ ➡ In this manner, the Ghost of Banquo hastens Macbeth's **downfall**. Their suspicions are captured in Ross' puzzled reply to Macbeth:

What sights, my lord?

There is no answer to this question and while Lady Macbeth's timely

intervention saves her husband from making a full disclosure, it must also emphasise to the guests that he is concealing a dark secret. ④ ➡ At this point our understanding of the **tragic inevitability** of Macbeth's downfall is heightened; *because* we know that from this point on, he loses the respect and trust of his kinsmen. ④ ➡ And it difficult not to feel pity for Macbeth at this point in the play. The sight of Banquo, whose: "**bones are marrowless**" and who "**has no speculation in [his] eyes**" reduces Macbeth to feeling like "**The baby of a girl.**" Banquo's "**horrible shadow**" destroys his self-confidence and his ability to project a sense of majesty. It is only when the apparition vanishes that he feels like a "**man again.**" ④ ➡ However we realise that it is too late and that the tragedy of his eventual downfall is assured. ⑤ ➡ So in one short scene Shakespeare relies on the the **bizarre** arrival of Banquo's ghost and Macbeth's reaction to the horror of this visitation, to shape our understanding of the **tragic inevitability of his downfall**.

Throughout the play, Shakespeare's relies on a series of truly **horrific**, **bizarre** and **unbelievable** elements to direct and shape our understanding of the **tragic intensity** of *Macbeth*. The disturbing arrival of Banquo's ghost is used to demonstrate the futility of Macbeth's attempts to **usurp** the throne and the inevitability of his downfall. Similarly, the Witches' spell amplifies our awareness of the danger of placing trust in such vile creatures. And of course, Macbeth's first encounter with the Witches emphasises the fragility of the human condition by demonstrating his tragic predisposition to evil.

Indicative material:

the use of horrific, bizarre and unbelievable elements (e.g. witches, metaphorical dagger, gory ghost, savage violence, disturbing imagery, apparitions, etc.)

does heighten

the tragic intensity of his play by demonstrating the profound impact of Macbeth's tragic flaw on himself/others/Scotland; by amplifying the tragic nature of Macbeth's fall from grace; by representing the embodiment of evil/Macbeth's conscience; by enhancing the tragic suspense and tension; by delivering pathos and poignancy; by emphasising the frailty of the human condition; by eliminating all hope of joy, redemption or a happy ending, by increasing the psychological pressure on the audience **Etc.**

does not heighten

the tragic intensity of his play by introducing contrived horrific, bizarre, and unbelievable elements as these reduce the tragedy to melodrama, pathos to pantomime and fear to farce; such elements lessen the psychological pressure on the audience

does not heighten

the tragic intensity of his play by introducing contrived horrific, bizarre, and unbelievable elements as these reduce the tragedy to melodrama, pathos to pantomime and fear to farce; such elements lessen the psychological pressure on the audience

Leaving Cert 2014 Sample Paragraph

2014

- (i) “Macbeth’s relationships with other characters can be seen primarily as power struggles which prove crucial to the outcome of the play.”

Discuss the above statement in relation to at least two of Macbeth’s relationships with other characters. Support your answer with suitable reference to the play, *Macbeth*.

Code PS for power struggles within relationships.

Code CO for relationships crucial to the outcome of the play.

Indicative material:

- Macbeth’s volatile relationship with Lady Macbeth is central to their tragic downfall
- the strained dynamic between Duncan and Macbeth propels the political conflict
- Macbeth loses the moral battle with the witches whose influence hastens his demise
- the Macbeth-Banquo power struggle leads to murder and accelerates a reign of terror
- Macduff is both Macbeth’s nemesis and Scotland’s saviour Etc.

① ➡ Macbeth's volatile relationship with Lady Macbeth is central to their tragic downfall. Although Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's relationship is a very close one at first, it is characterised by a series of **power struggles**, each of which **prove crucial to the outcome of the play**. ③ ➡ To begin with, Lady Macbeth appears to hold most of the **power** within the complex dynamic of their relationship. ③ ➡ On reading his letter, the contents of which outline his encounter with the Witches, ④ ➡ she displays her **resolve to take control of the situation, and is confident that she can exercise power over him**:

Hie thee hither,

That I may pour my spirits in thine ear

And chastise with the valour of my tongue

④ ➡ Although it can be argued that she is motivated by love, there is no denying **her desire to exercise her powers of persuasion** in order to see her husband achieve his potential and satisfy his ambitions. ③ ➡ **And for the next number of scenes in the play**, it is patently obvious that the sexual tension and passion that stems from ④ ➡ Lady Macbeth's **decision to exercise power** over her husband is the main motivator that perversely catalyses Macbeth's desire to murder Duncan. ③ ➡ For instance, When Macbeth returns home and vacillates about the killing, he tells her that they: ***"will proceed no further in this business."*** ③ ➡ Lady Macbeth then urges him on by questioning his ambition:

Art thou afeared

To be the same in thine own act and valour

As thou art in desire

She then continues to exercise power over him by challenging him to be a man:

When you durst do it, then you were a man

And to be more than what you were, you

would

Be so much more the man

These lines are filled with sexual tension, and in them, Macbeth's wife is calling on him to prove himself as a man. She is, in effect, seducing him. It is a kind of perverse seduction scene **where she exercises the most intimate power over him!** ④ ➡ And his decision, taken freely, yield to her exhortations has the most **tragic consequences** for both of them. **To be continued ...**

Sympathy For Macbeth

The character and response of reader and sympathy

Macbeth's actions / crimes – horrific and horrifying

Macbeth's crimes are many: he murders Duncan, his king, kinsman and guest, an ageing king who has lavished praise and honours upon him. He is motivated by his own ambition. He murders the two sleeping grooms, innocent men on duty, to protect himself. He hires killers to murder his close friend, Banquo; again to protect his security. He arranges for the murder of Lady Macduff and her children, all innocent victims. **These actions result in a reign of terror in Scotland that culminates in genocide.**

Our response

- And yet somehow our sympathy for Macbeth is sustained throughout.
- Our **reaction** / response goes beyond good and evil, beyond conventional morality and moves in the deeper realm of human instinct.
- We can feel pity for the latent nobility of Macbeth at the end and at the same time recognise with horror the evil, the pain and the suffering he causes.

In the play, we watch the growth of evil in a noble soul.

① One of the ways Shakespeare shapes our sympathy for Macbeth is through our first impressions of him as a hero.

(First impressions; Macbeth at top of social / political hierarchy)

② Shakespeare endows Macbeth with all the qualities we expect of a hero.

- He is unquestionably a brave soldier. ③ When we first hear of him in the play he is lauded as “**brave Macbeth**”, “***Bellona’s bridegroom***”, “***valour’s minion***”, “***noble cousin***”, “***worthy gentleman***”. He possesses outstanding leadership qualities and has been an inspiration to his fellow soldiers.
- He is thus introduced to us as a general of extraordinary **pro prowess** who has quelled a rebellion within Scotland and repelled the invasion of a foreign army. “***Everyone, we are told by the bleeding captain, “did bear his praises in his kingdom’s great defence”***”.
- Macbeth is not only a fine soldier; his wife tells us he is a loving husband “***full of the milk of human kindness***” and what “***he would’st highly, would’st holily***”.
- It is the tension between this potential for greatness that we witness at the outset of the play and Shakespeare’s depiction of Macbeth’s horrifying crimes that makes this play so fascinating / shapes our understanding of Macbeth’s downfall.

Our Response 1: Interest and sympathy

① What is emphasised most of all throughout Act 1 is how difficult it is for Macbeth to come to terms with the evil he is contemplating. He hesitates; he agonises; he considers the moral and political consequences of killing Duncan.

- After the meeting with the witches he confronts “**black and deep desires**” which had lain dormant within him. He believes their “**supernatural soliciting cannot be ill, cannot be good**”.
- He tells us the thought of murder “**shakes so my single state**” and that to contemplate yielding to his desires gives rise to “**a horrid image [that] doth unfix [his] hair and make [his] seated heart knock at [his] ribs against the use of nature**”.
- Macbeth has a finely honed sense of morality; and in the early acts of the play, he is far from an amoral monster.
- He knows that killing the king is a violation of God’s natural order and yet his ambition is such that he decides to proceed. (It is this duality in Macbeth that makes this play such a compelling piece of drama.)
- Both before and after Duncan’s murder we are shown Macbeth’s agonised conscience through his **soliloquies** which are expressed in poetic, lyrical evocative and emotive language.
- His description of Duncan’s virtues is **lyrical** when he claims the king: “**hath borne his faculties so meek [...] that his virtues will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against the deep damnation of his taking off**”.
- He describes “**pity**” for Duncan as a “**naked new born babe**” striding the winds of heaven.

- No sooner has he committed the deed than he reaches the anguished realisation that he has murdered his own peace of mind. ***“Methought I heard a voice cry sleep no more, Macbeth does murder sleep”***.
- He is quick to realise that his actions have resulted in his: ***“eternal jewel given to the common enemy of man”***.
- **What makes Macbeth so interesting for the audience** is that he, the experienced soldier who previously: ***“carved out his passage with bloody execution,”*** the man whose ***“sword smoked” with the blood of his enemies*** does not foresee the disastrous effect on his own character / **psyche** of murdering his way to the throne.
- He is ignorant to the impact of civil violence on his conscience. **(2) Macbeth’s powerful ambition to be king is balanced throughout by his powerful imagination and conscience. ①+② His sensitivity and sense of loss expressed so movingly in poetic and lyrical language reveals his suffering and arouses our sympathy.**

Our Response 2: A free man / his decision / responsibility

- In responding to Macbeth and his actions we must be clear that **Lady Macbeth** can in no way be blamed for the murder of Duncan. **While she is a catalyst and supporter she does not make the grim decision to kill Duncan and Macbeth never tries to lay blame on her.**
- **He decides to do so in the full knowledge of the political and moral consequences of the deed.** To portray Macbeth as a man guided by his wife or controlled by the witches would rob him of his freedom of choice and deny him any status or standing in audience’s mind. These external influences are not responsible for his dreadful crimes.

Our Response 3: Macbeth is not a completely evil man

- **Despite his crimes we remain aware that Macbeth is not a completely evil man and that his goodness and his nobility have been corrupted. Thus our conflicting emotions of horror and sympathy are maintained.**
- After the murder instead of hearing the cries of an old king, we hear Macbeth's heartfelt lament for what he has done: "***I am afraid to think what I have done!***"
- We are more aware of the conscience of the criminal than the crime itself or the sufferings of the victim; Duncan's murder is **elided** by Shakespeare and this decision not to show the murder on stage is significant in shaping our sympathy for Macbeth.
- **Had Macbeth from the beginning been a hardened criminal, had he undertaken the deed without any conflict of mind or soul he would have lost the sympathy of the audience.**
- However it is his conscience which now forces him to murder many others. Its agony drives him on to eliminate all threats and danger, innocence and remorse.
- He thus hires murderers to kill Banquo whom he sees as a living rebuke to his actions. Banquo's "***valour***" and "***wisdom***" serve only to remind Macbeth of everything that he has lost and so Banquo's death is arranged.
- Banquo's killing is shown on stage but because we see hirelings it does not destroy our sympathy for Macbeth.
- ¹Immediately after this murder we watch Macbeth's tortured mind and conscience in his vision of Banquo's ghost at the banquet, a manifestation of his guilt and fear.
- With the murder of Macduff's family we almost lose sympathy but then Shakespeare presents us with the madness of Lady Macbeth.
- **①+②The essential point is that Shakespeare presents the perpetrator's sufferings as being almost proportionate to his crimes and much more vividly than the crimes. Each murder is followed by a scene of Macbeth's suffering.**

¹ See Banquet Sample Essay

Our Response 4: Macbeth's understanding of what he has done

- It is not only Macbeth's suffering but his understanding and recognition of what he has done that invokes further sympathy (interest / fascination / admiration) for the **protagonist**.
- The villainous aspects of his behaviour are not stressed by lessening his nobility. As Macbeth brings terror to Scotland and "*each new day widows howl,*" "*new orphans cry*" and "*sighs and groans and shrieks*" rend the air, he becomes incapable of feeling.
- He is intelligent enough though to understand that a life without feeling is simply not worth living: "*My way of life has fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf, and that which should accompany old age as honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have*".
- The greatest evidence of this is when on hearing of his wife's death he proclaims: "*She should have died hereafter*".
- Despite the apparent lack of feeling in his words he understands the utter futility of all his actions. This is expressed in one of his greatest speeches: "*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death.*"
- In this dark and strangely beautiful speech Macbeth sums up the emptiness underlying human existence and at the same time captures the awful waste of human potential in his own life. **This speech is central to sustaining our sympathy for Macbeth.**

Our Response 5: Macbeth's heroism

- Macbeth's heroism is distinguished by his determination to fight "*till from [his] bones [his] flesh be hacked*".
- In the dying moments of the play we see glimpses of the great warrior that deserved our admiration early in act one. He faces Macduff fully aware that the witches are "*juggling fiends*" who have "*paltered with him in a double sense*".

- Yet despite this knowledge he chooses to face Macduff in open combat. His conscience is not entirely silenced as he claims his: “**soul is too much charg’d with blood**” of Macduff’s family.
- Our last image of Macbeth recalls our first image of “**Bellona’s bridegroom**,” proud and fearless: “**before my body I throw my war-like shield**”.
- It is the clear-eyed awareness of the futility of the life he has created for himself, coupled with his grim acceptance of his fate that goes a great way to restoring Macbeth in our eyes. We refrain from judging.