



MACBETH: WITCHES: MODEL ANSWER

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MACBETH: WITCHES: QUESTION

Read this extract from *Macbeth* then answer the question that follows.

This extract is from Act 1, scene 3, where Macbeth and Banquo meet the Witches for the first time.

Enter Macbeth and Banquo.

MACBETH

So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

BANQUO

How far is 't called to Forres?—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.

MACBETH

Speak if you can. What are you?

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!

Starting with this extract, how does Shakespeare presents the Witches.
Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents the Witches in this extract.
- how Shakespeare presents the Witches in the rest of the play.

(The real question is, 'How do the Witches help us understand the meaning of the play?')





[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]





MACBETH: WITCHES: 100% MODEL ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction

Hook (quote, question, metaphor, shocking fact/statistic)	“What basis did early modern beliefs about witchcraft and magic have in reality?”
Building sentences (some background/contextual info)	This is the question that Edwards Bever asks in his book ‘The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe’ in 2008; however, 500 years before him, Reginald Scott had already expressed scepticism about beliefs in witchcraft, magic and superstitions in his treatise, ‘The Discoverie of Witchcraft’. Yet, during the time of King James, Scotland was one of the most active witch hunting centres , consigning about 4000 people to the flames (mostly women); a striking number for a small country and double that of England. However, it is widely believed that Shakespeare had read Scot and that the book is one possible source for the witches of Macbeth, the mock trial of King Lear, and for Bottom’s transformation and the hobgoblin character Puck or Robin Goodfellow in A Midsummer Night’s Dream.
Thesis statement (your position on the argument you are presenting)	While the Witches are often viewed as powerful supernatural beings, Shakespeare appears to have left numerous clues in the play that they may not have any supernatural powers in the play or in real life.

Body paragraph 1(a)

Topic sentence (introduce what this paragraph is about)	One of the interesting aspects of Act 1, Scene 3 is that Shakespeare suggests that the Witches are, at least, ambiguous.
Supporting sentences (your your analytical and contextual evidence)	Banquo says to the witches: ‘... You should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret’ (1.3.45 - 46), which highlights a juxtaposition in their appearance and, thus, their ambiguity; one view is that Shakespeare is making use of metatheatre to break the fourth wall and call attention to the strangeness, artificiality, illusoriness, or arbitrariness -- in short, the theatricality – of certain aspects of the play world, and, by extension, the real world in which we live. Additionally, Banquo’s reference to their ‘beards’ could also function as embedded stage directions which instruct that masculine, and facially-hairy men should play the Weird Sisters, rather than young boys,





as would have been the norm. This instruction that men with facial hair in particular should play the Witches may also be a strong emphasis that the actors playing the 'Weird Sisters' were men and not women, which emphasises the artificiality of the Witches characterisation, thus breaking the fourth wall'. From this point of view, the audience is drawn into the realm of the play and, perhaps, are reminded of the play's own equivocal dealings with illusion and reality, reflected in the witches' paradoxical line 'fair is foul and foul is fair'. Once again Shakespeare foreshadows the conflict and central concerns of the play within the realm of antithesis. From this perspective, Shakespeare may be trying to force the audience to ponder what is real and what is illusion, both within the play and in real-life, therefore asking us to consider the difference between real-life and theatre and whether there is, in fact, any difference at all. If we take this view even further, it could be suggested that Shakespeare is in fact subtly undermining James's belief in witches. By reminding us that they are simply an illusion within the play, he could be pushing the audience to question whether or not they were an illusion, not only within the play, but outside of it as well: in real-life

Concluding sentence(s)
(final thoughts this paragraph)

Additionally, perhaps this perspective also gives further credence to the idea that Shakespeare may well have been influenced by Reginald Scott's scepticism about beliefs in witchcraft, magic and superstitions in his treatise, 'The Discoverie of Witchcraft'.

Body paragraph 2 (b)

Topic sentence
(introduce what this paragraph is about)

However, if we explore the medieval theatrical technique of psychomachic theatre, we may see the Witches as a dimension of the protagonist's mind.

Supporting sentences
(your your analytical and contextual evidence)

It is often asserted that the early modern theatre left long behind it medieval forms of psychomachic theatre. Psychomachic theatre saw the play's characters representing not complete and separate individual human beings but qualities or personifications giving the whole drama the sense of taking place within a single mind, pulled in different directions. We are always told that this form of theatre was abandoned by the newly realist psychological models of the early modern stage. However, it may not be entirely true that we did leave behind psychomachic theatre; perhaps as Shakespeare writes we can see him experimenting with different ways of creating character through dialogue and soliloquy, but also through foils and duplications and perhaps by splitting a single psychology between different figures on the stage. For example, just as Banquo can be seen as a conscience figure for Macbeth, who resists the Witches' temptations, the Witches themselves can also be seen as a part of Macbeth's psychology. Therefore, perhaps the Witches' predictions such as 'Macbeth... shalt be king hereafter!' simply function as them speaking out his ambition to make it audible for the viewers. In essence, we can see them as extremely important dramatic devices that speak out Macbeth's desires on the stage. Perhaps, from this perspective, we should think of them not as a separate agents and more as strange internal voices which direct his actions and which are externalised on the stage in some sense for our benefit as a model of psychological projection.





Concluding sentence(s) (final thoughts this paragraph)	Therefore, if the Witches are not actually responsible for Macbeth’s actions, it suggests that we need to dig deeper to find to true cause.
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Body paragraph 3 (OPTIONAL)

Topic sentence (introduce what this paragraph is about)	
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Supporting sentences (your your analytical and contextual evidence)	
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Concluding sentence(s) (final thoughts this paragraph)	
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Conclusion

Restated thesis (your position of the argument you are presenting)	In conclusion, while the Witches are often viewed as powerful supernatural beings, Shakespeare appears to have left numerous clues in the play that they may not have any supernatural powers in the play or in real life and, which, perhaps, serve to expose Shakespeare’s criticism of a deeper problem in early modern society;
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Summary of controlling concept (central theme)	an elaborate cult of honour had exerted a powerful grip, and its effects extended beyond the ideals all other aspects of life, including identity. Therefore, it should be noted that despite the mistakes the protagonists make, historically, the tragic plot structure does not simply lay all the blame at the feet of the protagonists or fate, such as being controlled by supernatural powers. For example, in Renaissance England, Sir Philip Sidney suggested that tragedy is a didactic form that lays bare the corruption that rulers and statesmen may attempt to conceal, while the tragic plot structure has also often been used to criticise the values of the societies in which the protagonists live, such as violence, war (civil war in this case), kingship, extreme masculine ideals and honour. Therefore, although the protagonists must take responsibility for the decisions they make, tragedies encourage us to pity these fallen heroes because they are essentially trapped in a society whose values are almost impossible to attain or live up to. The plot of Macbeth reflects the values of Early Modern Society in which, in the words of Niccolo Machiavelli, ‘the highest good to aim for was honour and glory’.
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Author’s purpose (why the author wrote the text)	This incessant pursuit of honour, which appears to be the root of Macbeth’s faults, was reflected in many of the tragedies of the period, where the male characters struggle to live up to their society’s standards of masculinity or carried them to the extreme, and so destroy themselves as well as others. Yet, it is these very same extreme masculine
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values that Duncan and the other thanes praise in Macbeth at the beginning of the play as 'worthy', 'good' and 'valiant', because he defeats the rebel Macdonwald as well as the invading Norwegian army. Duncan's valourising of violence brings us back full circle to the Witches' concluding couplet in act 1, scene 1: 'fair is foul and foul is fair / hover though the fog and filthy air'; the play appears to be a warning not only to individuals but to entire societies to be careful of the values we expound, and to be weary of what we wish for, because the very things we think are worthy, 'good' and 'valiant' may well be the very same things that destroy us.

Final thought
(What key idea(s) do we
learn?)

In essence, he suggests that obsessions with honour were meaningless, and, ultimately, an unnecessary a major cause of tragedy. Perhaps Shakespeare is implying that, instead, we should fight against corruption and aim for higher ideals such as truth.

MAKE SURE YOUR ESSAY CONTAINS ALL OF THESE QUALITIES

Tick these off when you have added them to your essay

- Methods - author's techniques
- Context
- Effects of the author's methods on the audience/reader
- Link to another part of the text - talk about the meaning of the connection
- Symbolism
- Themes
- Author's purpose

MCELSTA





MACBETH: WITCHES: 100% MODEL ANSWER

HOW DOES SHAKESPEARE PRESENT THE WITCHES?

“What basis did early modern beliefs about witchcraft and magic have in reality?” This is the question that Edwards Bever asks in his book ‘The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe’ in 2008; however, 500 years before him, Reginald Scott had already expressed scepticism about beliefs in witchcraft, magic and superstitions in his treatise, ‘The Discoverie of Witchcraft’. Yet, during the time of King James, Scotland was one of the most active witch hunting centres , consigning about 4000 people to the flames (mostly women); a striking number for a small country and double that of England. However, it is widely believed that Shakespeare had read Scot and that the book is one possible source for the witches of Macbeth, the mock trial of King Lear, and for Bottom’s transformation and the hobgoblin character Puck or Robin Goodfellow in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. While the Witches are often viewed as powerful supernatural beings, Shakespeare appears to have left numerous clues in the play that they may not have any supernatural powers in the play or in real life.

One of the interesting aspects of Act 1, Scene 3 is that Shakespeare suggests the Witches are, at least, ambiguous. Banquo says to the witches: ‘... You should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret’ (1.3.45 - 46), which highlights a juxtaposition in their appearance and, thus, their ambiguity; one view is that Shakespeare is making use of metatheatre to break the fourth wall and call attention to the strangeness, artificiality, illusoriness, or arbitrariness -- in short, the theatricality – of certain aspects of the play world, and, by extension, the real world in which we live. Additionally, Banquo’s reference to their ‘beards’ could also function as embedded stage directions which instruct that masculine, and facially-hairy men should play the Weird Sisters, rather than young boys, as would have been the norm. This instruction that men with facial hair in particular should play the Witches may also be a strong emphasis that the actors playing the ‘Weird Sisters’ were men and not women, which emphasises the artificiality of the Witches characterisation, thus breaking the fourth wall’. From this point of view, the audience is drawn into the realm of the play and, perhaps, are reminded of the play’s own equivocal dealings with illusion and reality, reflected in the witches’ paradoxical line ‘fair is foul and foul is fair’. Once again Shakespeare foreshadows the conflict and central concerns of the play within the realm of antithesis. From this perspective, Shakespeare may be trying to force the audience to ponder what is real and what is illusion, both within the play and in real-life, therefore asking us to consider the difference between real-life and theatre and whether there is, in fact, any difference at all. If we take this view even further, it could be suggested that Shakespeare is in fact subtly undermining James’s belief in witches. By reminding us that they are simply an illusion within the play, he could be pushing the audience to question whether or not they were an illusion, not only within the play, but outside of it as well: in real-life. Additionally, perhaps this perspective also gives further credence to the idea that Shakespeare may well have been influenced by Reginald Scott’s scepticism about beliefs in witchcraft, magic and superstitions in his treatise, ‘The Discoverie of Witchcraft’.

However, if we explore the medieval theatrical technique of psychomachic theatre, we may see the Witches as a dimension of the protagonist’s mind. It is often asserted that the early modern theatre left long behind its medieval forms of psychomachic theatre. Psychomachic theatre saw the play’s characters representing not complete and separate individual human beings but qualities or personifications giving the whole drama the sense of taking place within a single mind, pulled in different directions. We are always told that this form of theatre was abandoned by the newly realist psychological models of the early modern stage. However, it may not be entirely true that we did leave behind psychomachic theatre; perhaps as Shakespeare writes we can see him experimenting with different ways of creating character through dialogue and soliloquy, but also through foils and duplications and perhaps by splitting a single psychology between different figures on the stage. For example, just as Banquo can be seen as a conscience figure for Macbeth, who resists the Witches’ temptations, the Witches themselves can also be seen as a part of Macbeth’s psychology. Therefore, perhaps the Witches’ predictions such as ‘Macbeth... shalt be king hereafter!’





simply function as them speaking out his ambition to make it audible for the viewers. In essence, we can see them as extremely important dramatic devices that speak out Macbeth's desires on the stage. Perhaps, from this perspective, we should think of them not as separate agents and more as strange internal voices which direct his actions and which are externalised on the stage in some sense for our benefit as a model of psychological projection. Therefore, if the Witches are not actually responsible for Macbeth's actions, it suggests that we need to dig deeper to find the true cause.

In conclusion, while the Witches are often viewed as powerful supernatural beings, Shakespeare appears to have left numerous clues in the play that they may not have any supernatural powers at all in the play or in real life and this perhaps, serves to expose Shakespeare's criticism of a deeper problem in early modern society; an elaborate cult of honour had exerted a powerful grip, and its effects extended beyond the ideals of love to all other aspects of life, including identity, which is the central obstacle to Romeo and Juliet's marriage. Juliet recognises this in her profound 'what's in a name?' soliloquy, which questions the true value of names, the object of Capulets and Montagues' feud. On the contrary, Juliet suggests that a name is simply a label to distinguish something from another. It does not create worth nor does it create true meaning. What is important is the worth of the individual or thing because 'that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet.' Juliet likens the rose to Romeo - Romeo is still the man she loves had he a different name; Romeo's name does not define him as a man. Just as he does through Samson and Gregory, Shakespeare uses Juliet here to expose the ridiculousness of the feud between the two families over, simply, who they are. What the feud is about is, therefore, unknown and irrelevant. Juliet's soliloquy suggests that Shakespeare believed that a name means little - it is the worth of the individual that counts; however, he illustrates how even the most trivial of obstacles can result in the most regrettable tragedy and, perhaps, therefore, Shakespeare wants us to see the play as a criticism and warning about going to extremes in beliefs such as the Early Modern beliefs about honour. In essence, he suggests that obsessions with honour were meaningless, and, ultimately, an unnecessary obstacle to happiness. The reconciliation at the end between the two families, therefore, can be seen as the lesson of the play; peace is only achievable when we put our pride aside and see each other as family, not enemies by look beyond superficial qualities such as names, to see the true worth of people.



