

FOLKLORIC ELEMENTS IN THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

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Abstract

This paper attempts to investigate how Shakespeare incorporates elements of folklore into several of his works, primarily Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, Othello, and Julius Caesar, as well as The Twelfth Night and As You Like It. During the time that Shakespeare was writing his plays, he frequently incorporated folk elements into his writing. Ghosts, proverbs, folktales, riddles, tradition, culture, habit, belief, and superstitions, among other things, appear to be used frequently in the works of Shakespeare. As a result, any reader with a conscious mind can easily understand the roots from which Shakespeare draws inspiration when writing his plays. Shakespeare's plays testify to the fact that he was familiar with a wide variety of folk issues, having read about, heard about, or seen them. His plays offer a vast treasure chest of information of many different kinds, including myth, folklore, history, and so on and so forth. His plays incorporate significant amounts of folklore as a source of inspiration and an integral part of the narrative. The presence of folklore is acknowledged in virtually all of his plays. In most of his plays, he incorporated a wide range of folkloric elements, though varying degrees and with various purposes in mind. This paper demonstrates that Shakespeare's plays contain allusions to a wide variety of folklore. It also indicates that Shakespeare utilized the prevalent folk belief of his period in a skilful manner in creating his tragedies. It is undeniable that most of his plays include elements of folklore, such as ghosts, witches, birds, animals, atmospheric conditions, etc. These elements are very noticeable. The evaluation of the content is the primary focus of this piece of research. Primary sources have been identified as the original works written by Shakespeare. In contrast, secondary sources include various reference books, journals, and online resources discussed and noted.

Keywords: *Folklore, treasury, elements, works of Shakespeare*

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare was the first playwright to make the journey to the very centre of England to concentrate on the folkloric aspects of studies. Although a lot of work had been done by others, he was the one who laid the groundwork. Rather than discovering, Shakespeare was a meticulous collector who saw the underlying beauty of popular mythology and then gave it to the public in all its splendour. He did not discover the mythology himself but instead saw its beauty. He was successful in achieving this goal to the greatest extent possible in the manner in which he portrayed the fairies. It is common knowledge and the subject of much debate that Shakespeare incorporated folk elements into his writing.

He became well-known due to the skilful use of elements of folklore, such as ghosts, witches, fairies, unseen powers, various tales and legends, apparitions, thunderstorms, atmospheric conditions, animals, sleepwalking, and so on. Early modern popular culture was heavily influenced by folklore, which played an important part. It provided people with much-needed entertainment and allowed them to investigate the fears, concerns, and emotions that ran the deepest in them. Behind its charming veneer, folklore typically centres on a handful of reoccurring emotional occurrences that are, objectively speaking, not particularly complex in their make-up. Shakespeare was well aware of this, and he used popular beliefs in his plays for the humorous plots they inspired and the tumultuous appeal they generated.

Literature Review

This section presents a review of the relevant literature on the research topic. There has been a significant investigation into the folk elements present in Shakespeare's tragedies. There is a strong connection between folklore and aspects of the supernatural. According to Frag (2008), the plays *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Tempest*, *King Lear*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are excellent examples of Shakespeare's works in which common belief is strongly associated with supernatural forces. He then goes on to say that using supernatural elements such as fairies, ghosts, witches, and other unseen forces has evolved all of the circumstances and characteristics of popular culture to make them more readily acceptable to the audience. An exhaustive investigation was conducted by Daniel (1992) and titled "Shakespeare's Tragic Ghosts: Psychological Manifestations of Guilt." In this investigation, Daniel made an effort to demonstrate that the ghosts that appeared in *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Julius Caesar* were not actual apparitions but rather psychological expressions of the characters' feelings of guilt. The appearance of Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth* is yet another baffling event that takes place in the play. The belief in the existence of ghosts is part of folklore. Research has been carried out by various academics looking into the apparition of the ghost, and their findings have led them to multiple conclusions. For instance, Dillion (2007, page 118) asserts that the ghost manifested itself in the flesh on stage, even though it was silent the entire time. It is not immediately apparent that it exists outside of *Macbeth*'s imagination because no one other than *Macbeth* pays attention to it. Consequently, it is not immediately obvious that it exists. Dillion seems to be implying that the ghost's apparition is a hallucination brought on by his guilty conscience, tormenting him due to his terrible actions. The researcher shares the same opinion as Dillion, namely that the ghost is nothing more than a figment of *Macbeth*'s overactive imagination brought on by his insanity.

Research Methodology

In this particular piece of research, the focus is placed squarely on the more traditional aspects of Shakespeare's plays. The researcher engages in data collection through qualitative research until the threshold for data saturation is reached. There are two distinct kinds of data sources: primary data and secondary data sources. Preliminary data are collected in their original form, and several of Shakespeare's tragedies serve as this study's primary source of information. Secondary data are gathered from a variety of sources that are pertinent to the preliminary data. These sources include articles, websites, journals, and books related to the research. In this particular piece of work, the researcher has chosen to collect data through library research. This method involves collecting and selecting primary and secondary data sources pertinent to the subject matter.

Folklore

There are many different ways to define "folklore." Differences in semantics and theoretical frameworks are responsible for the recent explosion in the prevalence of folklore. Folklore has been interpreted in various ways by various people, including students of literature and anthropology. Anthropologists and literary experts consider folklore a form of literature; however, educated experts view it more as art. The definitions of what constitutes folklore offered by various academics are strikingly dissimilar. Some people believe that the term "folklore" only refers to songs and certain superstitions involving witches or ghosts. According to the findings of some studies, "the components of folklore might belong to the past," whether they take the form of literature, beliefs and customs, drama and dance, art and craft, painting and sculpture. (Islam, 1985). According to Brunvand, "folklore encompasses all information, understanding, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and beliefs that are prevalent in traditional forms by word of mouth or by customary instances" (1978). "Folklore currently encompasses a wide range of topics, including multilingual folk tales, proverbial wisdom, folk dramas, witches, ghosts, and fairies." Other topics covered in folklore include popular medicine, joke books, totem and taboo, and Pagan and Christian religious ceremonies. It extends back to Freud and Jung's "Golden Bough" (Muir, 1981).

According to Frazer, folklore is the accumulation of all of a society's collective knowledge. Because no one member of a community has complete command over all of the facets that make up folklore, folklore in this sense must be an abstract construct built on the information, tradition, beliefs, and knowledge that is shared by the entire community. The aspect

of the definition of folklore that has remained constant over time is the role of folklore as a medium of transmission. The oral transmission of folklore has been widely recognized as one of its defining characteristics almost from the very beginning, regardless of whether the folklore in question is regarded as knowledge, thought, or art. The fundamental presumption is that this particular mode of transmission brings with it specific characteristics that are not already present in the materials. In this regard, the study of folklore as an academic discipline existed before Marshal McLuhan proclaimed, "The Medium is the Message" (McLuhan, 1964). Because it incorporates so many different kinds of information, the breadth and depth of folklore have expanded. In a nutshell, folklore comprises the beliefs, actions, and creations that are common among the residents of a particular region throughout a specific amount of time.

Discussion

Ghosts: From time immemorial, few subjects have retained a bigger attention than ghosts, and the superstitions linked with them are very popular. In the past, ghost stories were told to the young in firelight in almost every house. In Shakespeare's day, things were not different. And it was very natural that the generation who heard a lot about ghosts would expect to see the incorporeal creatures in the corporeal forms and shapes. Shakespeare, as one of the inseparable members of the theatre, had this very issue in his mind when writing the plays. As a result, his plays incorporate numerous references and allusions from ghost lore. In folklore, it is believed that ghosts "assume the exact appearance by which they are usually known when in the material-state, even to the smallest detail of their dress" (Dyer, 1884). For example, Hamlet starts with the reference to the ghost that was also seen by Hamlet himself.

Horatio reported to Hamlet:

"A figure like your father,
Arm'd at point, exactly, cap-a-pe.
Appears before them, and with solemn march"
(Act 1, Scene II)

In *Macbeth* we get the allusion to the same belief in the description of Banquo's ghost:

"Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The arm'd rhinoceros, or th' Hyrcan tiger;
Take any form but that, and my firm neuron
Shall never tremble. Or be alive again
And dare me to the desert with the sword;".(Act 3, Scene IV)
We see, the ghost in *Macbeth* also appears in the form of Banquo.

It is noted that ghosts in Shakespeare bear all the prevailing traits believed by the folk: they talk to the particular persons-only, quit the mansion of the dead for particular reasons, seem to have been enjoyed by way of penance etc. And, as they cannot bear the daylight, They vanish with the dawn. Usually the signal is the cock-crow. At the beginning of the day, the ghost of Hamlet's father says, "methinks I sent the morning air;/ Brief let me be" (Act 1, Scene V). In the similar case he also says:

"Fare thee well at once.
The glow-worm shows the mating to be near,
And 'gins to pale his ineffectual fire:
Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me".

In *King Lear* Edgar says, "This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet: he begins at curfew, and walks till the first cock" (Act 3, Scene IV). Flibbertigibbet is also shown as the ghost who disappears in the early morning. Thus, Shakespeare has incorporated the folk belief of ghost into his tragedies.

Another folkloric event that occurs in *Macbeth* is the sight of Banquo's ghost. Various experts have conducted research into the appearance of the ghost and have come up with a variety of conundrums. Dillion (2007), for example, claims that the ghost's appearance was a physical presence on stage, despite the fact that it never talks. It is undeniably evident that it has a genuine reality outside of *Macbeth*'s imagination.

The presence of Caesar's ghost in *Julius Caesar* adds to the play's overall legendary context. Shakespeare believed in the supernatural and black arts. He was a fervent believer in ghosts, witches, and fairies interfering with human events and controlling man's fate and actions. The presence of the ghost had a bad impact on Brutus and the other conspirators.

Fairies: Fairies are common in folk worldwide. They are seen incorporated in literature of all languages. Fairies were thought to be the same as the traditional nymphs, Diana's attendants, at that time (Dyer, 1884). Fairies held a prominent position in the English literature; they are found in many of Shakespeare's plays that include Titania and Oberon in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Ariel in *The Tempest*, 'great fairy' in *Antony and Cleopatra* etc. In *Macbeth* the reference of the fairy is mention-worthy. Hecate says,
"Like elves and fairies in a ring,
Enchanting all things that you have put in (Act 5, Scene I)".

In *The Tempest*, Ariel is a "sylph" rather than a true fairy. Because of the way he acts, it is challenging to determine whether Ariel is good or evil. He is generally as impartial as fairies or spirits can be. Ariel occasionally experiences mood shifts, as his element would suggest. He constantly experiences mood swings; one second he is terrified of Prospero, the next he falls in love with him.

Fairies have a great influence on the characters to shape their own beliefs and actions. Macbeth believed strongly that no man can kill him since he got the assurance from the fairies. Hamlet, on the other hand, notices a kind of imputed malignity of the fairies.

Witches: Witchcraft is not a modern idea but it occupies a very strong position even in the modern British beliefs of folklore. Witches were thought to exist in Horace's time, just as they were in Shakespeare's time. Texts of the Shakespearean time were full of allusions which have emerged from these popular witchcrafts available in the 16th and 17th Century Europe. Shakespeare like all other writers cannot avoid the contemporary beliefs and customs in his writings. So, it is clear that belief in witchcraft would lure Shakespeare.

Witches in *Macbeth* are very significant for the development of the play. The play opens with the enchanting prophecy of the witches. "The weird sisters' prophesies relate with Macbeth's destiny as Thane and King, which may be proven to be imagined by Macbeth and Banquo," writes Gray (2005). Looking at this, it is clear that the prophecy from the witches pushed Macbeth to do evil, and that his life was ultimately obliged to end in this manner. Witches were thought to be able to alter the natural order of things. They demonstrated their ability to change good things into terrible ones when they transformed Macbeth into a wicked personality he was not initially. The witches' philosophical comment in Act 1, Scene 1 "fair is foul and foul is fair" gives an idea of what the witches really liked. The reference of witches is also seen in *King Lear* when the Duke of Albany tells Goneril:

"She that herself will silver
and disbranch
From her material sap, perforce
Must wither
And come to deadly use (Act 4, Scene II)".

Sycorax, the mother of Caliban and yet another witch portrayed in one of Shakespeare's plays, is the only one mentioned but not really mentioned in *The Tempest*. Although Sycorax has long since passed away by the time Prospero and his daughter enter the stage, one cannot help but observe how she has evolved into Prospero's one and only rival—albeit an intangible one—against whom he will never be able to test his strength. She is thought to have been a powerful sorceress who was banished to the island because of her powerful (black) magic. Shakespeare willingly used the popular belief of witchcraft to develop his plots and stories and he knew very well that audience loves folk things alive on the stage.

Birds: People throughout ages believed that certain birds are very ominous and bring bad luck, while some others are treated as symbols of good luck. In maximum cases, birds of bad luck or ominous future are used in literature. Shakespeare has this folk issue in his mind while using allusion to birds in his plays. "His depth of knowledge of ornithology is evident in his plays, as he "has again illustrated his topic by alluding to the countless traditions, popular sayings, and superstitions, which have collected about the feathered race, in this and other locations" (1984, Dyer). For example, chough or jackdaw is a kind of bird that is considered ominous by forefathers. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* has accumulated this belief:

"Augurs and understood relations have.
By maggot-pies and coughs and rooks brought forth
The secret'st man of blood. (Act 3, Scene 4)"

Cock also plays a significant role in folklore. It is believed from the ancient time that evil spirits fly away at cock-crow. When dawn appears, ghosts disappear. This folk belief is present in *Hamlet* when we see the reference of cock by Horatio. Cock-fight is another form of traditional folk belief. In ancient time, according to Dyer (1884):

"Cockfighting has permeated both the old and the new generation. Cockfights were held in schools. Travelers promised with the coachmen that if there was a cockfight in any town they passed through, they would wait a night."

Owl in traditional folklore works as a symbol of ominous time. It is associated with darkness and calamities and deeds of darkness. In *Macbeth*, when the murder is being committed, Lady Macbeth hears the shriek:

"Hark! – Peace!

It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman,
Which gives the stern'st good night". (Act 2, Scene II)

And then Macbeth, the murderer, comes in, saying, "I've completed the task. Didn't you hear something?" "I heard the owl scream and crickets cry," Lady Macbeth responds (Act 2, Scene II).

In folk tale pelican is believed to pierce her own breast to feed her young. It has also" been used to illustrate a crucial issue when Laertes in *Hamlet* says:

"To his good friends thus wide I'll open my arms
And, like the kind life-rend'ring pelican,

Repast them with my blood. (Act 4 Scene V)"
And in *King Lear* there is an allusion of pelican when the king says:
"Is it the fashion, that discarded fathers
should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot
Those pelican daughters.(Act 3 Scene IV)"

Similarly, crow, cuckoo, domestic owl, dove, duck, eagle, goose, hawk, falcon, heron, kingfisher, kite lapwing, lark, magpie, nightingale, ostrich, parrot, peacock, raven, robin, rook, sparrow, starling, swallow; swan, vulture etc. have been used, symbolically and significantly, in many of Shakespearean plays. At the market where Caesar is assassinated, an Owl is observed. It's bad under Julius Caesar's care because the Owl may be seen during the day, contrary to popular belief that owls can only be observed at night when they're doing their evil work. Furthermore, the owl is observed in public, at a crowded market place. As a result, all of the elements raise the audience's eyebrows.

Animals: Animals are a very important part of folk stories throughout ages. Animals that can speak and animals that are used as omens good or bad all are parts of popular folk tales. Literature of all languages has used animal tales to give amusement or to render implied meanings. Shakespeare has also incorporated a large amount of strange animal folklore into his plays. Aesop's fables about ass are likewise well-known over the world. Shakespeare used the word ass to express the usual sense of the word. To allusion to Aesop's fable, the Fool in *King Lear* remarks, "thou borest thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt" (Act 1, Scene IV). Cat, since times past, has been greatly used in a wider folk-lore. According to Dyer (1884), "among the Egyptian, this favored animal was held sacred to Isis. In the legend the cat keeps a proper place; and its link with witches is well known." In folklore, it is sometimes believed that witches, at night, take the form of cats. In Shakespearean plays cats are presented to give this same meaning related to witchcraft. In *Macbeth*, the first witch says, "Thrice the branded cat hath mew'd" that illustrates the idea that cat is the idea that cat is familiarly assumed the form of the spirits of witches".

Crocodile is thought to be the most devious animal in folkloric belief. Its tears are proverbially deceptive. In this regard Othello's speech in *Othello* can be quoted:

"O devil, devil!
the earth could teem with woman's tears,
Every drop she issues would prove a crocodile. –
Out of my sight". (Act 4 Scene I)

Animals play a very vital role in Julius Caesar. A beast without a heart has been discovered. Caesar himself might believe that nature is out of balance. As a result, he sends a servant to the priests, requesting that they offer a sacrifice. It's also a folk belief.

Plants: Folkloric superstitions associated with flora and fauna were also very prominent in the Shakespearean days. Willow, for example, has been considered an unlucky plant (Daniels, 1983). Shakespeare aptly infuses this folk belief in *Othello*. We get the reference of willow in Scene III, Act 4, where Desdemona anticipates her death:

"She was in love; and she lov'd prov'd mad,
And did forsake her; she had a song of willow,
An old thing 'twas, but it expressed her fortune,
And she died singing it: that song, tonight,
Will not go from my mind".

Darnel, another plant, was considered harmful in the age of Shakespeare. And he has used it in *King Lear* to associate a symbolic meaning for the unexpected situation. Cordelia states, "Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow/In our sustaining crow" (Act 4, scene IV) to describe the unpleasant happenings in a happy kingdom.

Again, hemlock is practically a poison tree. The associated meaning in folklore is also close to it. According to folk belief, Hemlock is used as an important ingredient to cook witch's broth, in *Macbeth* the witches talk about "the root of hemlock, digged I' the dark" (Act 4, scene I). Rose, a beautiful flower, is normally associated with something lovely, fair and holy in traditional folk tale. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet says:

"Such an act, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
And sets a blister there". (Act 3, Scene 4)

Atmospheric Conditions: Folk beliefs are closely linked to various atmospheric conditions. Duncan's assassination has left an indelible mark all around the country. On the night of the killing, weird things occurred, making the citizens perplexed as to what is happening. The awful incidents are warning indications that something bad is about to happen. Aside from that, the thunderstorms in *Macbeth* give a bleak picture. Thunder and lightning are frequently associated with evil or negative events. Because horrible things are about to happen whenever they are viewed.

The performance begins with thunder and lights, followed by the entrance of the three witches in Act 1, Scene 1. When a violent storm rages in Julius Creaser's Act 1, Scene III, it is feared that something horrible will happen (Julius Creaser). Thunder and lightning were thought to be associated with evil.

Folktales

Since at least the late nineteenth century, folklorists have recognized that "Cinderella," a popular folktale, is a variation on the basic plot of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Folklorists even categorize these connected folktales under the heading "King Lear" because of the play's prominence. For instance, in a piece he titled *The Outcast Child* and published in 1886, Sidney Hartland outlined five different sorts of the story. He dubbed his first classification the "King Lear type." Marian Roalfe Cox used "King Lear judgment" as a defining trait in her description of one of the three main classes of such tales. Cox compiled hundreds of variations of the Cinderella story in her renowned 1893 study. The love test, the father's rejection of the youngest daughter for her response to the test, the king being out of control and being mistreated by his two older children, the youngest daughter's and her foreign husband's attempt to save the king leading to a war, and even the father's insanity are some of the many elements in this story that we are familiar with from *King Lear*. The Cinderella components include the prince's determination to wed whoever the shoe fits and the princess's extraordinary beauty and humble estate, as well as her animal disguise and stunning gowns.

Conclusion

Shakespeare is well known for incorporating many folkloric themes into his works. Shakespeare's works contain folkloric aspects, as mentioned in the above section. Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* introduces the character of Puck, a cunning fairy. Puck is in charge of wreaking disaster and confusion in the lives of the human characters. Shakespeare's plays have made use of ghosts. Several of Shakespeare's plays, including *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar*, prominently depict ghosts and other afterlife creatures. These supernatural characters are commonly included in stories to intensify the tension and intrigue. Shakespeare used his well-known witch trio in his play *Macbeth*. These witches are in charge of predicting the future and setting the play's plot in motion. These witches play a significant role in English rural folklore. Shakespeare regularly used references to folktales and tales from diverse civilizations around the world. For instance, the play-within-a-play in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was influenced by the story of *Pyramus and Thisbe* from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Superstitions Many of Shakespeare's characters hold fervent superstitions and place great faith in paranormal factors like fate, omens, and the potency of curses. These beliefs reflect the folklore of England in general and the superstitions common during Shakespeare's day. Shakespeare had a very close familiarity with natural history, myth, folklore and so on. As a dramatist, he also possessed remarkable versatility to incorporate them in his plays aptly. His careful and manipulating uses of folk issues show not only his skill of inserting them in his writings, but also his deep knowledge of folklore that he gathered by extensive reading of folk stories, and enthusiastic listening to folktales. The age he belongs also contributes a lot for his masterful use of folklore in his plays. Being enacted in his plays, folk has left a significant influence upon the audience of that time. It seems that his plays have become a storehouse of folk tales that were available and popular in his time. Shakespeare's plays introduced a kind of magic that was not there in the world before. He merged several mythologies and folklore into a single, coherent shape, one that even today develops with each new work of writing. Although the human mind is limitless, it requires a foundation to function. Fairy tales and folklore serve as great sources of inspiration, which is exactly what is needed in order to come up with fresh ideas. In general, Shakespeare's use of folklore gives the depth and richness of his writings while also tying them to the cultural customs of the time and serving as a reminder to modern readers of similar concepts. However, due to its limitations, this study requires more examples and explanations, which cannot be provided. Nevertheless, this study may inspire future research on the folkloric elements in Shakespeare's works.

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