

Archetypal Dimensions of the Supernatural: A Review of the Universal Symbols Found in Shakespeare's Tragedies

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Abstract

This study examines the utilisation of supernatural motifs within Shakespearean tragedies, seeking to uncover the overarching significance of these symbols while also exploring their psychological and cultural implications. The phenomena of ghosts, witches, and prophecies are regarded as manifestations of the supernatural, which the framework of Archetypal Criticism, as developed by Carl Jung and Northrop Frye, seeks to analyse and elucidate. The elements are examined through the lens of Jung's notion of race memories of archetypal patterns, wherein the features analysed pertain to a collective level that transcends cultures and time, thereby embodying profound universal themes of human existence, encompassing fear, desire, and struggle. This paper seeks to examine the influence of supernatural objects as they relate to archetypes, focussing on how these motifs shape characters' behaviours and the ensuing tragedies in Hamlet and Macbeth. It further examines the cultural and mythological contexts in which these archetypes operate, aiming to offer a nuanced interpretation of their relevance. Microanalysis and qualitative approaches have been employed to comprehend the intricate applications of the supernatural, serving to illuminate Shakespeare's investigation of the human experience.

Keywords: Archetypal Criticism, Carl Jung, Northrop Frye, Shakespearean Tragedies, Supernatural Elements, Universal Symbols, Ghosts, Witches, Prophecies.

Introduction And Background

This suggests that supernatural has been important especially as an asset in literature as it engages the audience producing both fascination and anxiety. According to Carl Jung (1964), ghosts, witches, and other premonitory signs, are all archetypal images that nestle in the collective consciousness of our social group, since they address core concerns that are an inherent part of the human experience. And even though these figures are universal, they provide archetypal significance and reveal much about the psychological dispositions of the human mind. For Shakespeare, the supernatural is not simply a fictional invention; it is a complex element in the definition of tragedy and tragic character, paradoxical plot and dark meanings, the struggle of good and evil, timeless genuinely recognizing by audiences' archetypal principle (Frye, 1957). The supernatural always represents an aspect of the individuals or a society in Shakespearean plays more so the Hamlet and Macbeth plays. The ghost of the first king, for instance, turns into the image of guilt and justice, which leads the protagonist into a moral and existential dilemma (Bevington 1997). Also in Macbeth, the witches are termed not only mere predictors but are characters signifying the evils of pride, destiny and degeneration of morality (Bradley, 1905). These supernatural elements work with the darkest potentials of the human self-identity as well as illustrate the most basic human concerns of life and death, choice and sin. Following these premises, this research draws on Archetypal Criticism to understand how Shakespeare builds these supernatural aspects to give a symbolic and thematic approach to his tragedies. Using Jung's and Frye's concepts of archetypes, the study amplifies the ways in which supernatural characters affect character action, plot development, and ethical conflicts. By setting these elements in their cultural and mythological perspective, this dissertation seeks to explain why the supernatural aspects remain such an interest and are timeless and can be shared across cultures.

The supernatural in Shakespeare's plays, particularly in Hamlet and Macbeth, pertains to both the individual and the collective unconscious. The ghost of King Hamlet is translated into shame, justice, and the family's unsolved drama, which propel the Pakistani protagonist

into a moral and existential quandary (David, 1997). Similarities can be observed in *Macbeth*, where the witches represent not merely supernatural beings but also embody malevolence, prophecy, greed, and the deterioration of moral character. These supernatural elements resonate with the archetypes awakened in human consciousness, illuminating the timeless themes of existence and mortality, free will, and malevolence.

This study utilises the framework of Archetypal Criticism to analyse how Shakespeare exploits supernatural elements to construct vision and meaning in his tragedies. This study analyses how supernatural characters shape character development, plot, and conflicts through the lens of Jung and Frye's archetypal theories.

Similarly, *Macbeth* is driven not just by external elements but also by its witches, who symbolise the tempters and manipulators that govern the protagonist's avarice. The witches, through their confusing words, incite *Macbeth*'s most nefarious vices and ambitions, ultimately leading him to commit murder and, in turn, meet his own demise. They represent avarice and fervour, the intricate interplay of fate and volition, the essence of humanity as shown by Shakespeare. A.C. Bradley (1905) posits that the predictions serve as "the motives by which *Macbeth* is incited to action." These forecasts symbolise *Macbeth*'s internal spiritual struggle, rendering the witches as archetypal representations of the fight between fate and free choice.

It should be emphasised that the supernatural operates more significantly than merely as a mechanism for advancing the story; it enhances both the psychological and thematic dimensions of the tragedies. As representations of the characters' psyches, they illuminate the ethical dilemmas, ontological challenges, and psychological struggles that are prominent themes in Shakespeare's works.

This research uses the mode of Archetypal Criticism in the analysis of how Shakespeare weaves supernatural motives into his plays in the creation of the symbolic and thematic elements. This paper established that it is suitable to harness Archetypal Criticism, which was developed by Jung and expanded by Frye, to study symbolism and psychology present in the Shakespearian work. It enables an academic approach to

the impact of supernatural beings on the Protagonist personalities in the performa of Hamlet and Macbeth more so, on their behavioral pattern, ethical compass, and character arc. This author is therefore going to try and provide a cultural and mythological grounding for these aspects of Shakespeare's works with an eye towards providing a broader and more nuanced look at supernatural motifs and motifs of his present day. The important motifs will be clarified as to how they combine archetypal affects of fear, desire, and the Other, together with cultural and historical differences to stress the relevance of Shakespearean tragic genre.

Research Statement

The purpose of this present research is to conduct symbolic analysis of seemingly typical motifs connected with the supernatural in Shakespeare's tragedies as well as refer to the rich cultural and historical background pertaining to the semiotics of imagery commonly identified in world civilisations. Based on the Archetypal Criticism theory studied by Carl Jung and Northrop Frye, this study aims to examine the psychological implication, cultural and ideological meaning, and theme pattern of supernatural images and roles such as Wailing ghost, Witch and Prophecy. Additionally, it examines and compares the cultural-mythological context of these supernatural archetypes, aiming to extend their significant relevance. This research will provide a comprehensive analysis of the significance of supernatural motifs, exemplified by archetypal symbols, in relation to character motivation, dramatic action, and themes in the selected plays. When these aspects are recontextualised within the appropriate cultural, psychological, and mythological frameworks, the analysis will unequivocally demonstrate their timelessness and the extent of Shakespeare's contemplation and commentary on the human condition.

Literature Review

The supernatural has consistently intrigued authors as they endeavour to encapsulate the mirror of human fantasies, fears, and various psychological dilemmas. Supernatural has been examined both as a rhetorical method and as a perennial basic metaphysical framework that elucidates an individual's experience in relation to the broader world. Examining the Symbolic Aspect in Relation to Archetypal Criticism

Examined by Carl Jung and Northrop Frye: The role of the supernatural in Shakespearean tragedies. Carl Jung expanded on archetypes as predetermined concepts or pictures within the collective unconscious of humanity. In his writings, Jung emphasises how archetypes influence human behaviour and patterns. In Shakespeare's tragedies, symbols such as ghosts, witches, and prophecies exemplify the aforementioned archetypes. For example, Jung (1954) delineates the shadow archetype, representing unacknowledged fears and wants, as exemplified in Hamlet by the ghost of King Hamlet and in Macbeth by the three witches, who emerge to reveal their concealed objectives.

Northrop Frye advances this notion while highlighting the structures of archetypal narratives. Le brilliant Frye (1957) asserts that archetypes regulate the repetition of individual life narratives and reorganise them, forming the cycle of literary plots. Supernatural elements in Shakespearean tragedies anticipate either conflict or resolution, thereby aligning with Frye's theory of archetypal forms. In "Macbeth," the three witches serve a prophetic function, not only foretelling Macbeth's demise but also facilitating it; they exemplify the "temptress" archetype and illustrate the detrimental effects of avarice.

The literature review undertaken on the current field of investigation indicates that previous studies have explored the psychological themes of the supernatural in Shakespeare's works. Bradley (1904) elucidated that these aspects reflect internal psychological tensions, particularly shame and dread, into a character's actions, so influencing their fate. Similarly, Gieskes (2017) examined the socio-political dimensions of the supernatural in early modern England, contending that these elements reflected society's primary concerns about power and legitimacy.

Consequently, it is essential to consider the cultural and mythological dimensions related to these supernatural figures to ascribe significance to their existence. The witches in Macbeth conform to the European folkloric and cultural demeanour of evil spirits while the ghost in Hamlet fits with the Renaissance than realistic notion of spirits and purgatory as conceived in the idiom of Shakespeare's time (Greenblatt 2001). These contextual layers enrich the analysis based on archetypes

because they prove that every idea Shakespeare was dealing with up to this level remains topical up to this day.

The Shakespearean play analysis based on Archetypal Criticism reveals important information about the relation between the supernatural and psychology. The purpose of this work is to discover the ubiquitous nature of these referents as well as their function in the progression of narrative and themes in the Shakespeare's play by discussing them in relation to archetypal, cultural, and psychological types.

Research Methodology

This research is undertaken using qualitative research and focuses on assessing the work of supernatural beings in Shakespearean tragedies using a textual analysis approach. The aim of the study is thus to identify the purpose and functions of these items in/outside the archetypal system that reveals essential tendencies and mood states. Thus, the theories chosen to study symbols of ghosts, witches, and any other sort of prophecy are of Carl G. Jung and Northrop Frye, who set the line of Archetypal Criticism.

The need to identify relevant points of intersection between the supernatural and behavioural, moral, and narrative alludes to the choice of the technique based on an analysis of the plays Hamlet and Macbeth. The purpose of this study is to further explain why and how these aspects continue to captivate audiences and why they remain so important by framing them within the proper cultural, mythological, and psychological frameworks. This technique exposes the relations of figures and shapes of symbols and the concealed significances of Shakespearian creations.

Theoretical Framework

This study applies the method called Archetypal Criticism, built upon the concepts of Carl Jung and Northrop Frye. Explaining inherent thinking processes at play in Shakespeare's tragedies: Jung's archetypal theory of ghosts, witches, and prophecies from the collective unconscious. These are not only subjective personal archetypes but universal reflection of the basic fears and desires, as well as moral development of each person.

In turn, Frye's concept of archetypes concerns not only the storytelling and imagery aspects of the archetypes but also myth-making and the thematic premise at work within them. In the concern, he uses categories within the creative writing to exemplify how the archetypes are used to create character development, the source of conflict, and a resolution of the work in question.

The analysis of the supernatural in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Macbeth is done within this framework. Moreover, specter of King Hamlet and the witches in the play "Macbeth" can be viewed as abstractions, which underscore regularities of experience including guilt, aspiration and predetermination. This theoretical perspective studies reactions between the supernatural leitmotifs and outstanding themes for Shakespeare's tragedies, focusing on the interaction of the inner world, ethical questions, and the plot.

This paper explores the gothic elements in the works of Shakespeare and dispels cultural relativity and timelessness to Shakespeare's dramatic performances.

Data Analysis

In the tragedies of Shakespeare supernatural motives which are devoid of a clearly defined narrative function, are in fact, allegorical. Therefore, while using the elements, such as ghosts, witches and prophecies as symbols, meanings of which are quite obvious, it is possible to consider the supernatural elements in The Witcher as archetypes, as defined by Carl Jung and Northrop Frye. In the texts of the plays the archetypes function as symbols of collective archetypes; each supernatural event is an image of specific experience of a human. The following dissertation explores the features of supernatural symbols and their contribution towards the characterization behaviour of his plays to show how Shakespeare used these archetypes as a means of depicting the primary purpose of man's existence; sin, desire, predestination, etc.

According to Carl Jung, archetypal theory holds it that some perceptions and pictures exist in the collective unconscious of every individual, in every culture, and at every period of history. In the Jungian theory, archetypal form is described as the ideological patterns of

behaviour, thoughts and feelings that constitute the collective people psyche.

Speaking of the spectre in Hamlet I would say that it represents the avenger, and that means retribution is here as well. The figure can also in psychoanalytic terms operate as a sign of Hamlet's guilt over his father's death, or the very motivation for his actions throughout the story. As Hamlet articulates upon encountering the apparition:

*"I am thy father's spirit,
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away."
(Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5)*

This passage depicts the latter as a clichéd embodiment of the immaterial—the ghost—caught in a liminal state between life and death, primarily driven by vengeance and a quest for justice. From a moral standpoint, this compels the ghost to urge Hamlet towards vengeance, a prophecy that profoundly influences both the narrative and the protagonist's internal conflict. Jung's concept of the "shadow," representing the concealed and darker facets of the self, is seen here: Consequently, Hamlet's hesitation to take action appears to stem from an innate aversion to surrendering to the profound darkness embodied by the ghost in the play. Hamlet's indecision and passivity exemplify the 'conventional' hero, who must confront the predetermined fate before embracing it.

The ghost's discourse acts as a catalyst for action while simultaneously reflecting the psychological turmoil within Hamlet's psyche. The Ghost's revelation of his murder introduces an ethical issue that will torment Hamlet throughout the play, leading to the repercussions of procrastination. Consequently, the instances of York in Henry V and Hamlet's reflection on the purveyor of fate and revenge to the ghost illustrate the struggle between the protagonist's principles and wants. Consequently, although Hamlet grapples with profound psychological anguish, the ghost epitomises unresolved sin that must be faced.

In Macbeth, the witches symbolise the malevolent seducer and the catalyst that leads the protagonist to embrace malevolence. The feast scene signifies a psychological transformation as the witches' involvement incites Macbeth to cultivate his avaricious and insubordinate nature. Upon initially prophesying Macbeth's ascension to power, the witches declare to him:

"All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!

All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!

All hail, Macbeth! That shalt be king hereafter!"

(Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 3)

Their utterances resemble a conventional summons to power and excellence; nonetheless, the ambiguous quality of their language propels Macbeth towards actions that culminate in his downfall. The witches serve as "trickster" figures, instilling in Macbeth a perilous illusion of security. Macbeth's belief in their prophecies stems from his desire for control and knowledge of his destiny, as seen when he declares:

"If you can look into the seeds of time,

And say which grain will grow and which will not,

Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear

Your favors nor your hate."

(Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 3)

In this scene, Macbeth meets the witches, enquiring about his future and seeking to exploit witchcraft for personal advantage. This exchange suggests his initial belief that he was a chosen individual capable of controlling his destiny, a concept that ultimately warped his perception of the consequences of unrestrained ambition. The witches, whose major role is to cast predictions, simultaneously shape the futures of men, so embodying the concept of fate. The dual role of revealing and concealing is a significant characteristic of the trickster figure that propels Macbeth into deeper internal conflict and moral degradation before to his downfall.

Another valuable critical theory for examining the supernatural in Shakespearean tragedies, as previously emphasised, is Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism models. Mythos and symbols significantly influence the schematic method suggested by Frye and the arrangement of forms

that constitute narrative systems. Frye indicates that these archetypal patterns are both psychological and ontological, encompassing the narrative structures of the story and characters.

In Hamlet, the ghost's apparition and his revelations to the prince establish the narrative of vengeance and the pinnacle of moral conflict. Frye's concept of the 'tragic cycle' can be extended to Hamlet's narrative: the ghost's appearance serves as the catalyst that propels Hamlet into a series of increasingly morally questionable deeds. The ghost is epitomised as the 'in-between spirit'—a being that cannot be classified as entirely alive or deceased—one that roams until justice is attained. These behavioural tendencies establish the retribution motif integral to Hamlet, culminating in his own demise. Hamlet's indecision and oscillation between action and inaction are highlighted in his statement:

*"O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right!"*
(*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5)

This statement encapsulates the theme of Hamlet's tragedy: procrastination stemming from indecision due to an internal conflict on the appropriate course of action. According to Frye's tragic cycle, Hamlet is trapped in a perpetual configuration that leads him to increasing despair. The encounter with the ghost establishes this cycle and lays the groundwork for Hamlet's tragedy.

Similarly, in Macbeth, the witches contribute to the play's tragic narrative by introducing a significant motif: predestination and the prophecy of an impending tragedy. Frye's perspective on the narrative is encapsulated in the myth of the hero, as Macbeth receives a prophetic vision from the witches that he is unable to alter. Macbeth's conviction in his invulnerability is seen in his reaction to their initial prophecy:

*"If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favors nor your hate."*
(*Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 3)

In this passage, Macbeth genuinely believes in and embraces the witches' prophecy as if it were an inevitable fate. Frye posits that the

tragic hero's condition, characterised by hubris, results in Macbeth's downfall due to the prophecies of the three witches.

In addition to the psychoanalytic interpretation of the supernatural, both Hamlet and Macbeth embody the cultural and mythological elements of society, enhancing their appeal to a broader audience. Supernatural themes are crucial when analysing works from a particular historical setting, and in early modern England, ghosts, witches, and prophecies were integral to the traditional expectation framework. Superstition in Shakespeare's tragedies is viewed as a reflection of the anxieties of Renaissance society, particularly over power, succession, and mortality.

In the play Hamlet, the depiction of the ghost addresses Renaissance enquiries concerning the afterlife and the principles of purgatory. It is seen that there are requests for revenge that show the spectre as tightly involved with the world of the living, and that the spectre's appearance provokes in Hamlet reflection on the cosmic scheme of things. The ghost is the symbol of the semantic opaqueness of the other world, its otherness, and therefore the conflicts of the culture and the religious beliefs of the time. Hamlet's scepticism about the ghost's legitimacy and ethical standing is apparent when he states:

*"The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape."
(Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2)*

In the following passage, one can simply see how skeptical Hamlet is of the supernatural claim, because he feels that even if these things are possible, he cannot accept them on account of their religious beliefs. This is a struggle between meaning of getting revenge or dealing justice and the need for morality as a drive in the play as well as the renaissance time. Thus, the prophecies made by the witches are working even more effectively as anticipating the concerns of the Renaissance regarding the supernatural and witchcraft. In Elizabethan England witchcraft was considered evil and destructive quality of men which is linked to female characters who do not fit the mold of the nineteenth century woman. That is the kind of things that occupy women's minds because the movie

is about the unique character of Macbeth and his evil intertwined with the meaning of power based on the misinterpretation of the prophecies. This is also consequent upon their function as figments of destiny, indicating that culture portrayed individuals as beings who cannot control their fortunes.

Hence, the supernatural is not used merely as allegory of misfortune, but as signifier of necessity in the two tragedies of Hamlet and Macbeth. They are its specific incarnations of the human soul and spirit and it articulates specific issues of the human experience including guilt, ambition, fate and revenge. On the other hand, building on Carl Jung's archetypes and Northrop Frye's myths, the present research aims at showing how Shakespeare employed spirits to comment on the human condition. Therefore, the research explains the positioning of these elements regarding their psychological, cultural, as well as mythological concepts existing in the current theme. With help of the supernatural elements Shakespeare provides a strong social comment related to the subjects of fate and sin, guilt and punishment.

Conclusion

This research shows that though the usage of ghosts, witches and prophecies, supernaturalism is an integral part of the thematic, psychological and cultural detail of both Hamlet and Macbeth. Analyzing the elements, the author relies on Carl Jung's notion of an archetype and Northrop Frye's critical approach as related to the collective subliminal and mythological archetypes and their psychological and symbolic manifestations. Hamlet's ghost appears for me as the shadow archetype that evokes moral and existential crisis in the main character. In the same way Macbeth's witches represent a trickster which are the undeniable patterns that are inside Shakespeare plays. These latter elements are more than narrative topics since they highlight the goals, phobias, and ethics of every epoch. Placing these archetypes into the context of reference concerning the Renaissance English culture and mythology, the research underscores the relevance of these motifs for socio-cultural concerns, namely, death, power and morality.

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