

The Representation of Folk Narratives in the Works of William Shakespeare and Thomas Hardy A Comparative Literary Study

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تمثيل الحكايات الشعبية في اعمال وليام شكسبير وتوماس هاردي - دراسة أدبية مقارنة-

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المخلص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في دلالات ووظائف الحكايات الشعبية في الاعمال الأدبية لكل من وليام شكسبير وتوماس هاردي. يوظف شكسبير الحكايات الشعبية الفلكلورية والكائنات الخارقة والعناصر الأسطورية بوصفها أدوات لإحكام البناء الدرامي، وتكثيف الإيحاءات الأخلاقية والتعبير عن الاهتمامات الاجتماعية. حيث اتقن توظيف الفلكلور في مسرحه بطابع منفرد يجمع بين الحداثة والجاذبية. من المعلوم ان الفلكلور يعد أساس الاشكال الأدبية الحديثة وجذورها الثقافية واللغوية وعلى الرغم من انه يُداول غالباً خارج المدونات المكتوبة فانه يندمج ويتحول داخل الأطر الأدبية وهو ما برع شكسبير في تحقيقه. ويعد الفلكلور مفهوماً واسعاً يشمل كل ما يرتبط بالإنسان وثقافته، وقد استلهم شكسبير مادته من هذا المخزون في معظم مسرحياته. أما هاردي فيدمج العادات الريفية والمواسم الاحتفالية والتقاليد الشفهية في نسيج عالم ويسيكس القصصي بهدف استكشاف التحولات الاجتماعية ودوار الرجل والانثى وبناء الهوية الثقافية، وغالباً ما تصور رواياته بوصفها مشهداً تاريخياً وحافظةً لتقاليد آيلة للاندثار. ففي حكايات ويسيكس، على سبيل المثال، يشير هاردي بوضوح الى ما يتلاشى من الذاكرة ويوفر تركيزه على الحياة الريفية والفلكلور المصاحب لها خلفية غنية يتحرك الابطال في اطارها وسط تحولات اجتماعية عميقة، من آثار التصنيع الى موجات التمدن.تمزج هذه الدراسة بين التحليل الادبي المقارن والنقد الثقافي لتبين ان الفلكلور لا يزال عنصراً حيوياً وفاعلاً في تشكيل البنية السردية، وتطوير التصورات، وصياغة الدلالات الثقافية الممتدة عبر الزمن. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** الحكايات الشعبية، وليام شكسبير، توماس هاردي، الفولكلور، الهوية الثقافية، الادب المقارن، التقاليد الريفية.

Abstract

This study explores the associations and functions of popular narratives in the literary works of William Shakespeare and Thomas Hardy. Shakespeare uses folk themes, supernatural beings, and mythological elements as a means of developing dramatic coherence, expressing moral ambiguity, and expressing concern about society. He mastered the use of folklore in his plays with a new taste and charm. As is known, folklore is the foundation of modern literary forms, rooted in cultures and languages. It is generally agreed that it is not available in any written forms, but is adapted to modern literary forms. Shakespeare excelled at this. Folklore is a broader term that includes everything related to humans and their cultures. In most of his plays, Shakespeare borrowed material from folklore. Hardy embeds rural customs, festival, and oral traditions within the fabric of Wessex to explore social change, gender roles, and cultural identity. His novels are often depicted as a historical landscape and a repository of vanishing traditions. For example, in The Tales of Wessex, Hardy clearly disappearing from memory. This focus on country life and related folklore provides a rich backdrop against which characters navigate periods of deep social transformation, including the effects of industrialization and urbanization. This research syndicate's comparative literary analysis with cultural criticism to illustrate that folklore remains a dynamic and vital component in shaping narrative structure, thematic development, and lasting cultural meaning. **Keywords:** Folk narratives, William Shakespeare, Thomas Hardy, folklore, cultural identity, comparative literature, rural traditions

1. Introduction

Folklore is defined as the collection of customs, traditions, and beliefs transmitted orally among people, such as folk songs, dances, folk medicine, and folk tales. Interest in and study of folklore increased significantly in the 19th century, when folklorists and anthropologists considered these customs and traditions to be nothing more than people's imagined expressions of their desires, behaviors, and cultural values. Folklore is considered an important factor in studying primitive societies and understanding human history in general, as almost every country possesses its own unique folklore culture. The importance of folklore lies in its role as a means of transmitting knowledge and culture from generation to generation, and this cultural wealth is a source of attraction for tourists. Their passion drives them to learn about new cultures and experience everything related to them, such as food, rituals, and so on. This encourages cooperation between cultures, strengthens the bonds of tolerance and peace, and builds bridges of understanding between them. Heritage is also considered a means of connecting the past, present, and future, which ensures the preservation of this legacy. Folklore is considered very important because it ensures continuity, survival, and the existence of a kind of identity for all of humanity. Folk narratives are among the oldest forms of storytelling; function as sources of cultural memory, common values, and moral guidance (Dorson, 1972; Zipe, 2006). English literature has long been involved with these oral traditions, from medieval mystery plays to (Renaissance drama) and (Victorian fiction). William Shakespeare and Thomas Hardy are two influential figures who combine folklore into their writings through special ways formed by historical and cultural contexts. Undoubtedly, Shakespeare was world's great dramatist. Apart from this, if we look at him through his plays, we find that he was such a man who had deep interest in mankind that is why his understanding about folks is beyond of time and limit. He will have been a very good listener of tales. He uses supernatural creatures, folk visions, and legendary narratives to determine human desire, ethical dilemmas, and societal principles. Hardy, on the other hand, add folk customs, ceremonies, and countryside festivals into his realist novels to manuscript changing social organizations, explore human psychology, and critique Victorian society. This study seek out to investigate and associate how each author practices folk narratives to transport meaning, highlight moral and cultural questions, and reserve or reinterpret traditional knowledge.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study depends on many theoretical outlooks. Propp's (1968) structural context allows the analysis of recurring narrative functions in folklore. Zipe (200) highlights the cultural resilience of folklore, whereas Assmann's (2011) cultural memory theory classifies storytelling as a mean of preserving collective identity. Besides, modern literary theory, including narrative and cultural studies methods, provides tools for examining how folklore functions within dramatic and realistic literary forms. By generating these visions, the study sorts the thematic, structural, and symbolic roles of common narratives in the works of Shakespeare and Hardy.

3. Literature Review

Scholarly research on folklore in literary studies highpoints its complex functions and its skill to function instantaneously at psychological, cultural, and structural points within narrative methods. Warner (1994) emphasizes the psychological depth and symbolic character of fairy tales, arguing that these narratives embody collective fares, social types, and archetypal designs that continue to shape the interpretive frameworks of readers across generations. Supplementing this perspective, Briggs (1970) provides a comprehensive documentation of English fairies, provided that a basic classification of mystical beings that has influenced successive literary analyses of their representation, mainly in early modern texts, recent studies enlarge these foundations by inspecting folklore as a means of cultural criticism. Hass (2018) and Benson (2020) display how the use of folklore themes in literature authorities authors to experiment dominant thoughts, exchange power structures, and give voice to marginalized spectators. Their studies prompt the growing critical status of common narratives, mainly in modern literary and cultural theory. Taken together, these studies propose a necessary basis for understanding the constancy, adaptableness, and informational fruitfulness of folkloric physical through different literary periods. These studies show that folklore is not only a source of cultural memory but also assists as an active and developing outline through which literary texts reproduce, critique, and reimagine the social worlds from which they arise. The research reviewed here also highlights the expressive possible of common narratives. By observing how writers across eras - from Shakespeare's early modern drama to Hardy's nineteenth-century novels - interrelated with and transformed common materials, researchers highlight forms of continuity and innovation. This research underlines the necessity of placing literary texts within their wider cultural framework, taking into account folklore as a historical archive and a creative resource

at the same time. It also proposes that future studies may continue to benefit from interdisciplinary approaches, integrating insights from anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, and performance theory to deepen our understanding of the function and development of popular narratives in literature.

4. Methodology

A relative literary and cultural analysis is engaged, focusing on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer (Night's Dream)*, (*Macbeth*), and (*The Tempest*), together with Hardy's (*The Return of the Native*) and (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*). Each work is inspected for thematic significance of folk basics, narrative and structural functions, and symbolic and cultural significance. The analysis combines close reading, textual clarification, and cross-textual contrast, highlighting contrasts between Shakespeare's theatrical use of folklore and Hardy's ethnographic realism. Limitations include concentrating on selected works and English-language sources, certifying a wide scope.

5. Folk Elements in Shakespeare's Works

5.1. A Midsummer Night's Dream

Shakespearean fairies—Oberon, Titania, and Puck—are based on English folktales, summarizing the irregular nature of love and lust. Their interference in human matters suggests multifaceted stories that equilibrium the comic and the moralistic, a hilarious tale fixed in a framework of moral instruction. Puck's mischief undergirds plot problems and represents the impulses of fortune with a shorthand precision that shows off Shakespeare's workmanship in merging folklore into the anatomy of drama.

5.2. Macbeth

The witches in *Macbeth* are extremely rooted in Scottish folk culture and are more than just paranormal rivals. Rather, they symbolize a compound interweaving of forecast, moral worry, and collective social fear. As figures drained from folklore traditions, they signify the cultural imagination surrounding fate, the cruelty of the natural order, and the dangers associated with unrestrained ambition. Their insights illustrate (*Macbeth's* inner fights), projecting his latent desires, moral faintness, and psychological confusion onto a supernatural level. The witches act as catalysts that reveal, rather than create, the moral dissonance within. Moreover, witches represent a cultural response to early modern fears of transgression—politically, morally, and metaphysically. Their presence reflects a society grappling with questions of legitimacy, authority, and human agency in a world where the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural are still blurred. In this viewpoint, witches indicate social terror, embodying fears of chaos, disturbance, and the treason of established hierarchies. Through them, Shakespeare exploits popular beliefs about witchcraft widespread in Scotland, especially those influenced by (King James VI's) writings on demons, improving the play's cultural resonance for contemporary audiences. Shakespeare's skillful mixture of folklore into the dramatic construction of *Macbeth* exposes his skill in altering collective beliefs into narrative devices with profound psychological and moral impact. Witches generate dramatic tightness, deepen thematic difficulty, and highlight the relationship between fate and free will. Their folkloric origins enable Shakespeare to involve audiences through familiar cultural symbols and, at the same time, interview the moral consequences of ambition and the fragility of human virtue. In this way, the integration of widespread beliefs with dramatic structure not only enriches the play's narrative but also shapes its interpretive possibilities for modern and contemporary audiences.

5.3. The Tempest

Both (*Caliban* and *Ariel*) employ European folklore with themes of colonial worry as well. The “man of nature,” *Caliban*, stands for untamed natural forces and servitude, whereas the beneficent supernatural force is personified in *Ariel*. Freedom, domination, and the friction between civilization and nature are themes tailored to showcase the flexibility of folklore in portraying complex stories.

7. Folklore and Rural Culture in Hardy's Fiction

7.1. The Return of the Native

Hardy shows the ritual of the bonfire on Egdon Heath as a symbol of communal tradition and emotional intensity, rooted in prehistoric pagan celebrations, underscoring conflicts between individual desire and collective norms, and showing Hardy's integration of folk practices into the social landscape. Detailed narrative passages illustrate how folk customs shape character motivations and thematic concerns.

7.2. Tess of the d'Urbervilles

Through harvest festivals, seasonal customs, and pagan symbolism, Hardy frames *Tess's* experiences. Folklore provides a framework of social commentary and a storytelling tool linking characters with continuing cultural

ideals. Tess's interactions with these traditions reveal the tension between personal agency and societal expectation, highlighting how folk narratives mediate between individual and community.

8. Comparative Discussion

While Shakespeare and Hardy both draw on folklore to depict human experience, their methods diverge. Shakespeare employs metaphorical, symbolic, and theatrical use of folk elements to stress universal themes. In contrast, Hardy uses ethnographic realism to text rural life and interrogates social change. Both approaches evidence folklore's versatility in exploring morality, cultural identity, and social tension across historical contexts. Examples across texts illustrate continuity and adaptation of folk motifs.

9. Contemporary Relevance of Folklore

The works of Shakespeare and Hardy clearly prove the continuing importance of folklore and its ability to maintain relevance across changing historical and cultural contexts. Their writings show that folkloric – whether embodies in supernatural figures, rural rituals, or collective beliefs – have a structural and thematic flexibility that allows them to be constantly reinterpreted in the light of new social realities. This elasticity has ensured the continuousness of folk narratives beyond their original oral environments, permitting them to serve as vital cultural texts that shed lights on questions of identity, collective memory, and moral analysis. In present – day literature, theatre, and film, these traditional stories continue to experience reconfiguration and renewal, and are often used as tools to explore modern concerns such as cultural belonging, political resistance, gender dynamics, and the negotiation of tradition in an increasingly globalized world. Modern adaptations often highlight the symbolic wealth of folk motifs, using them to express tensions between innovation and heritage, individual experience and collective history. Whether in cinematic retellings of Shakespearean drama, postmodern rewritings of folktales or neo-Victorian interactions with Hardy's rural world, folklore proves a valuable resource for cultural commentary and artistic investigation. The continual presence of these motifs in contemporary media also highlights their pedagogical value. The study of folk narratives allows researchers and students to trace the development of cultural imagination, analyze mechanisms of revision and reinterpretation, and understand the ways in which societies build meaning through shared symbolic systems. By mediating between historical continuity and contemporary innovation, folklore provides a critical framework for examining how cultures' values are preserved, transformed, and transmitted.

10. Conclusion

The results of this study confirm that folklore represents a pivotal and indispensable element in shaping both narrative structure and thematic depth of the works of William Shakespeare and Thomas Hardy. In Shakespeare's works, folkloric elements serve not only as ornamental narrative devices but also as significant structural elements that improve the dramatic experience, deepen metaphysical examination, and shed light on the psychological and moral dimensions of human behavior. Through his adaptation of folk, popular beliefs, and cultural archetypes, Shakespeare creates a theatrical space in which the boundaries between the natural and supernatural, the real and the imagined, become rich ground for exploring existential and moral questions. In contrast, Thomas Hardy approaches folklore with a documentary compassion, joining rural customs, oral traditions, and collective rites into the social and cultural fabric of his narratives. His use of folklore is a lens through which he explores the tension between tradition and modernity, revealing the profound transformations of rural England in the nineteenth century. By highlighting popular beliefs and practices, Hardy not only preserves a rapidly vanishing cultural heritage but also uses it as a critical tool to examine issues of social change, class dynamics, and human agency. Together, the works of Shakespeare and Hardy highlight folklore's skill to dynamically familiarize across historical eras and literary forms. Their writings demonstrate that folkloric materials, far from being static remnants of the past, have a remarkable ability to be reworked in accord with developing artistic, cultural, and intellectual contexts. This flexibility underscores the continuing importance of folklore as a narrative and cultural resources capable of shedding lights on universal human concerns. Future research may benefit from the visions of this study by increasing its scope to include relative analyses of folklore in global literary traditions, discovering the junction and deviation of folkloric themes across diverse cultures, and examining the reinterpretation of contemporary folk narratives in modern literature, drama, film, and digital media. These tendencies will not only improve our understanding of the universal functions of folklore but will also disclose how traditional narratives continue to inform and inspire new modes of artistic expression.

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