

The Role of Superstition in Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: A Comparative Study

Jamal Subhi Ismail Nafi¹

¹ Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Al-Quds University, East Jerusalem, Palestinian Occupied Territory

Correspondence: Jamal Subhi Ismail Nafi¹, Department of English, Al-Quds University, P. O. Box 51000, East Jerusalem-Abu Dies, Palestine. Tel: 972-598-562-214. E-mail: jamalnafi@gmail.com; nafi@staff.alquds.edu

Received: January 8, 2016 Accepted: February 5, 2016 Online Published: February 26, 2016

doi:10.5539/ells.v6n1p37 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ells.v6n1p37>

Abstract

This article is an attempt to explore the inclusion and the use of superstitious elements in Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* (1611). Superstition involves a deep belief in the magic and the occult, to almost to an extent of obsession, which is contrary to realism. Through the analytical and psychological approaches, this paper tries to shed light on Twain's and Shakespeare's use of supernaturalism in their respective stories, and the extent the main characters are influenced by it. A glance at both stories reveals that characters are highly affected by superstitions, more than they are influenced by their religious beliefs, or other social factors and values. The researcher also tries to explore the role played by superstition, represented by fate and the supernatural in determining the course of actions characters undertake in both dramas. The paper concluded that the people who lived in the past were superstitious to an extent of letting magic, omens; signs, etc. affect and determine their lives; actions and future decisions. They determine their destiny and make it very difficult for them to avoid it, alter it or think rationally and independently. And that, man's actions are not isolated, but closely connected to the various forces operating in the universe.

Keywords: ghosts, horror, mystery, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Macbeth*, magic, superstition, Shakespeare, supernatural, Twain

1. Introduction

The focus of the research falls on the critical and psychological analysis of Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* (1604) to highlight the authors' use of superstition and the role it plays in both narratives to determine characters' behaviors. Superstition is the belief in the magic and the occult, which is contrary to realism or rationalism. Where the people of the past superstitious to an extent of letting magic, omens, etc. determine their lives and actions? The following few lines from Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* best illustrate the idea or the point that they were superstitious or, less rational that the people living in the 21st Century; during the course of the narrative, Huck, the main character says:

Pretty soon a spider went crawling up my shoulder, and I flipped it off and it lit in the candle; and before I could budge it was all shriveled up. I didn't need anybody to tell me that that was an awful bad sign and would fetch me some bad luck, so I was scared and most shook the clothes off of me. (Twain, 1884, p. 8)

These words illustrate idea that the very beginning of the story tells us that Huck is superstitious. This characteristic is inherent in him since birth, and was instilled in him by his own culture and surroundings. According to Halliday (2005), religion seems to have no effect on Huck, and the boy is controlled by the superstitious beliefs of his time; he thinks that the stars and magic control his life, and his whole being is controlled and determined by them. In light of the above words, we cannot consider him a rational person, but he can be viewed as superstitious and illogical. This view supports the belief that sometimes religion is overpowered or subsided by superstition and the belief in the occult.

Twain explores the theme of superstition through the conflict between civilization and natural life. Huck represents the latter by being uncivilized and primitive, and his strong wish to escape the civilized society. Being so, "Huck's actions and thoughts are determined by his superstitious nature, which controls his whole being" asserts Clemens (1962, p. 3). This analysis of Huck's psyche is very much valid, for Huck, in his attempt to run

away from civilization, is no more realistic, and is completely savage; savagery is what he prefers and strives for. The primitive kind of life is seen by him to be superior and much more attractive than the civilized one.

Likewise, in Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*, written in the Elizabethan Age, when people had strong beliefs in superstition, Macbeth utters few words that suggest his strong belief in omens, which bring bad luck. Soon after his arrival from battle, he says: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1.3.40). These words suggest his superstitious nature. His words also echo the ones uttered by the Witches in the opening scene of the play, when they say: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.12). These words suggest the evil nature of these weird sisters. They mean that everything pleasant or fair to human beings is unpleasant to them, and everything that harms human beings is pleasant or fair to them. Ross (2005) argues that "a particular aspect of modernity, re-enchantment, discovers its image in appropriations of supernatural aspects in Shakespeare's play" (p. 247). This point of view is evidence that supernaturalism exists in almost all of Shakespeare's plays; the reason for this inclusion is that superstition was very much common in the 16th. Century and, people viewed it as something normal and part of their beliefs. Even in the modern age, one can find some people who are still connected with the past through rituals that can be considered superstitious.

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare explores the theme of superstition and the supernatural through the character of Macbeth. To illustrate this point, it is worthy to consider the scene in which Macbeth views an imaginary dagger in one of his hallucinations. In this connection and in one of his soliloquies, he says: "Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?" (2.1.1). Macbeth considers the dagger as real, while in fact it is imaginary and sprung from his disturbed mind; it can be considered as an instigator to murder Duncan, which means that his whole fate or future course of action is determined by this imaginary dagger. The same can be applied to his seeing the Ghost of Banquo, which directs Macbeth to continue with his unjustified and heinous murder of the innocent and loyal citizens. The Ghost instilled in his heart a kind of uncertainty about his future as a king, and made him more and more violent and reckless. As we see, Macbeth's actions are determined by external influences, and that his free-will is being suppressed and rendered invalid. According to Campbell's (1930) psychological study of the character of Macbeth, one can assume that Macbeth is the only one to blame for his tragedy and downfall; his excessive ambition made him reject moral values and deceive all the innocent people around him; he lost his conscience for the sake of achieving his ambition, regardless of the suffering that his actions may cause to others. Therefore, it can be assumed that his superstitious nature is linked with his aspiration to fulfill his ambition and become a king, even if he had to rely on false promises of the supernatural and evil forces, represented by the Witches.

An analysis and examination of Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and of Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* would best illustrate the above-stated assumptions about the past. From the psychological point of view, humans develop superstitious behaviors in the belief of what will happen to them in the future is determined by mere signs and omens. Jarvis (2005) is of the opinion that the behaviorist approach in the Psychological criticism focuses on the behavior of individuals. This "behavioral approach seeks to explain behavior as being learnt, for example by imitating others or by repeating behavior that brought about a reward" (p. 7), added Jarvis. This opinion is very much valid when it comes to approaching literary texts such as *Huckleberry Finn* and *Macbeth*. In both texts characters behave and act by imitating their ancestors and holding the opinion that what they believed in was true and factual in the past; this makes characters in both stories think that believing in omens is rewarding and will protect them from future dangers or menaces. Therefore, we find major characters in both narratives prone to superstitions. People who lived in the past were simple and primitive; they, very little, questioned their existence by thinking rationally. The paper also tries to examine how the actions of certain characters are determined by their superstitious beliefs, and this illustrates the idea that individuals in these two literary texts are not free to act and are controlled by the unknown.

2. Discussion

2.1 Autobiography VS Superstition in Huck Finn

Although Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been based on the realistic experiences of the cub pilot (Twain) on the river Mississippi, dreams, omens, superstitious beliefs in the magic, ghosts and Witches are all portrayed in the novel. The life in the South, the feudal aristocracy, the violent deaths and the murder, the swindling by the Duke and the King, Jim's predicament as a slave, his primitive love of superstitions, his sufferings as a slave and escape from imprisonment are truthful and vivid aspects of the life delineated in the novel. The use of different types of dialects, according to Brooks (1886, p. 12), "the Missouri Negro dialect, the extremist form of the backwoods" reflect the culture that produced this novel. South-western dialects, the ordinary "Pike Country dialect and four modified varieties of the last" (Pritchett, 1991, p. 5) are all used to

arouse humor; and this made the portrayal of characters and dialects more effective. This kind of humor can also be linked to the way characters behave and believe in superstitious beliefs. Twain did it “on personal familiarity of these languages,” (p. 5), added Pritchett, as he wrote in this book; he did not do it on any guesswork.

Both of the main characters Huck and Jim have blind faith in the supernatural world around them, and they believe that it determines their future and influences their actions. Twain has made children, Negroes and riff-raff as the bearers of the folk superstitions in his novel. “Some of the superstitious beliefs had their origin in the African culture,” stated Solomon (1961, p. 11). In fact, they were held by the white people and originated in Europe. Twain wrote the novel long after he had left the company of superstitious people, and it was by some error that, in him, the Negro slaves became synonymous with all sorts of magical practices and witchcraft. Twain wrote in his *Autobiography* (1906):

The original of Jim was uncle Dan'l, a middle aged slave on the farm of Mrs. Clemens's brother, John Quarles. I can see the white and black children grouped around the hearth of the slave's kitchen, and I can hear Uncle Dan'l telling the 'mmoral tales... On such nights Dan'l favorite encore was no animal fable, but... 'De Woman wid de Gold'n Arm, a ghost story widely collected by folklorist since. In these days 'every old woman' was an herb doctor; in Hannibal and Florida the young Sam Clemens knew also old Aunt Hannah, so old she had talked with Moses, who tied threads in her hair against witches. (p. 109)

2.2 *The Linking of Superstition, Slavery, Freedom and Boyhood*

In Twain's narrative, Jim has been associated with the black and the white both, the superstitious and the novelist have linked superstition, slavery, freedom and boyhood together. In Levy's (2015) point of view “Tom uses Jim as a plaything for the last third of the book, creating a pantomime of freeing him” (p. 27). These words suggest a kind of hypocrisy on the part of Tom. In trying to free Jim, who is actually free, he is just offering assistance to someone who is not in need of it. Jim is to blame in this case, for he is actually free and doesn't need the help of Tom. The word ‘pantomime’ suggests the imaginary world in which the three characters are locked up. Therefore, they cannot relate themselves to the reality around them, with the result that they started to hallucinate and imagine the unimaginable.

The superstitions and the magic, introduced in the novel, have been connected with the theme of moral growth and maturity in Jim and Huck. They are not only picturesque descriptions of the local color, and the past predilections of the village people, but are also important from the viewpoint of the development of the theme in the novel. Another significant point about the world of the supernatural forces, as shown by Hoffman (1961), is that there are three attitudes in which the imaginative fulfillment of the life is realized in this novel, and all the three ways are connected with “Supernaturalism”; the following words are worthy to be quoted:

Each typifies the moral nature of those who profess it. Two of these imaginary supernatural worlds prove morally inadequate; the third, which pays homage to the river god, gives dignity to human life. These attitudes, so compellingly dramatized by Mark Twain, are the conventional piety of the villagers; the irrelevant escape of the romantic imagination (as played by Tom Sawyer...): and the world of supernatural omens which Jim, the runaway, slave, best understands. (p. 399)

With these three attitudes, Twain has thrown light on the relationship between man and nature, and man and man. The words also reflect the kind of life people lived at the time this novel was written.

2.3 *The World of Superstition in Huck Finn*

It is the world of superstition in *Huckleberry Finn* which has become important. Even in *Tom Sawyer*. The superstitious beliefs of the children and faith in omens find their place and are emphasized too much. In the novel, Huck, averse to the sermonizing and the religious teaching of Miss Watson, wishes he were dead. He has no faith in Moses and Miss Watson's heaven. He hears an owl in the distant woods. The blowing breeze creates a mysterious sensation in Huck. He hears the sound produced by the ghost coming out of the grave as a warning against some evil. These mysterious phenomena make Huck uneasy and distress him too much. He has flipped off the spider crawling over his shoulders and it has got burnt and shriveled. He regards it as ominous and an indication of some evil to come. In order to get rid of the coming dangers and to overcome his sense of fear, he observes some superstitious practices, in this connection he says: “I got up and turned around in my tracks three times and crossed my breasts every time; and then I tied up a little lock of my hair with a thread to keep witches away” (Twain, 1884, p. 13). These words suggest Huck's obsession with the coming evil due to portents, in fact, increases his agony. The faith in superstitions presupposes the existence of evil in the order of the universe, as the bringer of calamity and death, and Huck makes efforts to mitigate the effects of evil by his superstitious acts.

In a large part of the story, Jim is seen as a superstitious person who is haunted by many superstitions in whose

he believes, what makes Jim think that they are true, is actually determined by what happens to him in the course of the action. Huck, who is more realistic than Jim, views them as meaningless. He believes Jim's superstitious beliefs make him avoid the accepted norms of social teachings.

Huck has faith in a few simple superstitions and is simply a child before the nigger Jim who is the arch-sorcerer, the teacher, the adept in communion with the other worldliness. According to Cunliffe (1966), "the Nigger's faith in ghosts and witches is deep-seated" (p. 3). This is another point of view that illustrates the fact about the superstitious nature of Jim. During his sleep in the back-yard of Miss Watson's kitchen, his hat is placed on the branch of a tree and Tom drops a five cent piece in the kitchen. The nigger, when awakened, is puzzled and mystified, and believes he has been visited by the Witches, and the devil has given him a five-cent piece which he wears in his neck on a ring to arouse the supernatural powers. He is treated as an authority on the knowledge of the supernatural powers and consulted by other slaves. The following quotation is worthy since it reflects of Jim's character:

Afterwards Jim said the witches bewitched him and put him in a trance, and rode him all over the State, and then set him under the trees again, and hung his hat on a limb to show who done it. (Twain, 1884, p. 15)

Just as superstition serves some purpose in the case of Huck, it urges him to think of his freedom from the taints of civilization, similarly Jim's superstitions give him a status. He becomes important in the eyes of the other Negro slaves. Jim runs away to Jackson's island to escape his slavery, or for fear of being sold away to some rich merchant from New Orleans, unable to realize the fact that he is free, and what he fears is only an unjustified disillusion created by his imagination and fear of the unknown.

Even in Jackson's island, his mind is haunted and ridden by the thought of the ghost. Jim had seen Huck on the island when he ran away from Pap's cruelties and Miss Watson's civilizing influence, through creating the circumstantial evidence of his murder. The entire village is convinced that Huck has been murdered. Jim also has learned that Huck has been brutally done to death. "He is under the delusion that it is Huck's ghost which has emerged from the river and prays to it not to harm him" (Twain, 1897, p. 12). At length when he knows the facts, his illusions are dispelled, but that doesn't stop believing in superstitions, as it is clear in the discussion below. Huck and Jim both live as free persons and drift on the river in a raft. The raft is the symbol of peace to which Huck returns when disgusted with the hardships of life. The river journey here is physical and spiritual, physical because it carries him from one place to another, and spiritual, because it made his character develop and change; it's a kind of moral growth.

2.4 Interpreting the Significance of Dreams, Omens and the Weather

Jim has the capacity to interpret the significance of dreams and probe into the future course of events. He has got a magic hairball with which he can scan the future, and he believes that he has obtained it from the fourth stomach of an ox. Huck has sought his opinions regarding Pap's behavior because Huck has judged from the foot-prints on the snow that it is likely that Pap has come. Jim does not say anything with precision and asks Huck to keep himself off the river. But it is through the river that Jim achieves his freedom. This has been described, as stated by BOUTOUIL (2014), as "a mockery of prognostication, because events take place contrary to Jim's prophecy" (p. 4). Further, in their journey on the raft on the Mississippi, Huck has been separated from Jim in a foggy night and when Huck meets him in the morning, he impresses upon Jim that the latter has been dreaming. Jim comes to believe what Huck says, and he starts interpreting dreams. Jim explains the significance of the dreams and the symbols. The two heads and currents represent men, who will cause difficulties, and the cries indicate impending calamity; but the end will be happy. Jim's prophecy comes true. Jim's noble soul and virtue of his heart have been revealed when he offers his interpretations and make statement. He has a dignity which is revealed here. Huck is also made aware that he cannot be separated from Jim and such pranks on him are not desirable. Trilling (1948) points out that Jim has a dignified personality, which is realized by Huck, who decided not to play more tricks on him. This dignified personality is seen and interpreted that he still believes in superstitions and cannot think rationally.

In the next chapter, Huck's raft has been destroyed by the steamboat. Huck is separated from Jim who later is discovered in Phelps' farm. He has lost his shamanistic role, and it is at the Phelps' farm that "the nigger slave Nat talks of witches" (Smith, 2014, p. 6). He wears wool in his hair to ward off the evil effects of these and tells that he has been possessed by them.

Jim also has a complete knowledge of omens and the weather. The thought of death associated with omens is also present in his mind. The skipping of the birds indicates rain, and their catching implies death. Jim further enumerates a few more omens and superstitions, and in the course of the narrative, he claims that "you mustn't count the things you are going to cook for dinner, because that would bring bad luck. The same if you shook the

table-cloth after sundown” (Twain, 1884, p. 52). These words create humor and are in a sense funny. Even simple things, according to him, bring bad luck. This is part of some of Jim’s beliefs about the harbingers of good or bad luck. These words wouldn’t make any sense to a rational reader in the 21st. Century. But in the past, when this story was written, they must have made much sense.

Jim knows all the signs of bad luck and says there are a few good signs too. If a person has got hairy arm and hairy breast, he is to become rich. Huck had been rich and will be rich again. Jim seeing birds flying foretells the coming rain, and there is a heavy downpour and the river is in spate. The house of death floats on the river in the storms and Huck has been asked by Jim not to look at the corpse. Jim sees the dead body of Pap first. Pap, the drunkard, is dead and it is Jim who appears as Huck’s spiritual father and protector. Huck will no more play tricks on Jim. When Huck tells Jim that the touch of the snakeskin has not brought bad luck, but it has been auspicious because they have got eight dollars and many more things in ransacking the two-storeyed house floating on the river, Jim replies that the worse is yet to come. His prophecy comes true when he is bitten by the dead snake’s mate. Jim cures the wound by drinking whisky and eating the snake’s meat. This act can be considered irrational and ridiculous.

Twain has distinguished Jim from the other white characters by the former’s knowledge of the supernatural world. Twain knew that the belief in superstitions and supernatural beings was common among slaves and children in the West. The white children and low people also believed in ghosts and magic. With the introduction of the supernatural agencies, the author invests Jim with a moral dignity and maturity at the end, and Jim and Huck both achieve freedom. There is an important motive behind the delineation of the mysterious phenomena of the other worldliness, mainly in Jim’s character.

2.5 *The Supernatural in Macbeth*

Likewise, in Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth*, as in *Hamlet* (1603), supernaturalism exists and is created through the presence of the Witches, Banquo’s Ghost, Portents and the character of the English King. The imaginary dagger is not strictly a part of the supernatural. The visionary dagger that Macbeth perceives, just before committing Duncan’s murder, has been interpreted more as a projection of Macbeth’s heated mind than as a concrete reality to be felt and known. Hunt (2001) is of the view that Macbeth gets corrupted when Duncan promoted him soon after his return for battle; he conferred upon him the title “Thane of Cawdor” (p. 2). The words of Duncan seem to echo the words spoken by the weird sisters to Macbeth upon his return from the battle. They, moreover, strengthen Macbeth’s belief and faith in superstition, represented here by the Witches. This act also led to Duncan’s downfall, which can be considered as a self-destructive act, or as some innocent person, throwing himself in front of a wolf. This emphasizes the idea that characters sometimes help in bringing about their own downfall, and this is what exactly happens to the good king when he reposed blind trust in Macbeth. Similarly, Macbeth’s failure to utter the word “Amen” (2.2.36) is also accepted only as a psychological problem and not as something invested with a “supernatural significance” (Craig, 1960, p. 15).

2.6 *The Witches and the Atmosphere of Mystery*

More than the other supernatural elements, the Witches create an atmosphere of much mystery and fear in *Macbeth*. They are, as Coleridge (1836) points out “as true a creation of Shakespeare’s as his Ariel and Caliban” (p. 238). Their vague and undefined nature is brought out by Lamb (1893), who thinks that they are shapeless, formless, and without “human passion” (p. 372). They have no links with humans, and there is no indication of their appearance and exit. They can be compared to ghosts, therefore, they are supernatural beings that are difficult to identify or recognize. The different views suggest the vague and mysterious nature of the weird sisters. They appear and vanish suddenly. They do not have human relations, since they are inhuman. Therefore, it is difficult to identify them or relate to them.

Ross (2005) is of the opinion that “the prophecies of the Witches confidently indicate realities to come in the physical world, a metaphysical system unique in Shakespeare’s dramatic worlds” (p. 91). This point of view can be compared to that of Jarvis (2005); the advocate of behavioral linguistics and which has been hinted at above. These words will be valuable and of a great impact when we see the confidence Macbeth repose in their words when their prophecies come true. This made Macbeth put more and more confidence in what they say, later on in the story. But one should not forget that their words are only meant to deceive Macbeth and will cause his destruction and suffering.

2.7 *The Witches in the Opening Scene*

It is significant that the play opens with a brief meeting of the three Witches. The scene is important in that “it creates a sense of mystery and strikes the key-note of the play” (Muir & Scholnbaum, 1971, p. 120). Their

appearance at the outset can be considered suitable since it prepared the readers for the weird and mysterious atmosphere, influenced by superstitions that will dominate the whole of the drama. The apparent confusion implied in their words “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.12) which point to the general upheaval of order to which Scotland is led by Macbeth, and which constitutes the main action of the play. Their words are echoed in Macbeth’s opening remark in the play “So foul and fair a day I have not seen” (1.3.40). This coincidence establishes a link between Macbeth and the Witches; it also brings out the possibility that Macbeth has a somewhat tainted soul and is, therefore, vulnerable to their machinations.

About the Witches in this scene, Wilson (1973) presents the importance of the inclusion of the Witches by expressing the opinion that they set the story in motion, and they create an atmosphere of evil exercising its influence on the people, and this may remind us of the evil, represented by Satan, in the Garden of Eden. Shakespeare begins *Macbeth* where Milton begins *Paradise Lost*, in Hell. This metaphoric comparison is valid since it reminds us of the machinations of evil in different cultures and different stories. Because Macbeth is a play about evil, the forces of evil represented by the Witches have to be introduced in the opening scene to set the stage for that is to follow. What is to follow is the evil in the character of Macbeth, which is already there, but it needed to be aroused by the weird sisters. The Witches are likened to the serpent which tempted our mother, Eve. The serpent did not force Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, it was Eve’s choice to disobey God and succumb to this temptation; likewise, Macbeth had the ambition to become the king, so he would have murdered Duncan, even if the Witches were not there to arouse that ambition.

2.8 *The Appearance of the Witches*

The Witches are introduced to us at the beginning of the play as aliens, without any resemblance to human beings; their physical appearance is deceptive; they are strange, for one cannot identify them at all. They do not look like ordinary humans and they are like women, yet they have beards. They can at will vanish into air, can foresee the future, and they possess more than mortal knowledge. They are by no means the ordinary witches of popular superstition; they are much more powerful beings, resembling rather the “Goddesses of Divine” (Mabillard, 2000). This criticism is relevant in the sense that these supernatural forces should have some power to be able to manipulate a character like Macbeth. They are a convenient dramatic symbol of the forces of evil in the world. They are contrary in nature. They await men, as evil waits for man to fall into its trap. But they do not suggest evil to man, merely lead the susceptible minds to the path of evil. A man like Banquo can resist their appeal, thus showing that man has in him “the grace of God as well” (Tillyard, 1998, p. 6), which means that people with good intentions will not be affected by their evil doings, and not all characters can be prone to their predictions. The witches offer a promise of worldly good, as evil must, in order to be attractive enough to tempt man. But the promises of evil are false; the forces of evil tell lies like truth. It is Macbeth’s tragedy that he is blind to the deceptive nature of evil. He realizes only when it is too late to turn back that these “juggling fiends” (5.8.19) are not to be trusted, that they “palter with us in a double sense” (5.8.20). The word “fiends” is used by the author to suggest their evil nature.

2.9 *The Malice and Power of the Witches*

The Witches, in the play, do not have absolute power; their power is limited. They may harm human beings, but they cannot kill them or cause great damage. Though a ship can be tempest-tossed by them, it cannot be wrecked or lost. They may have power over a man’s soul, but that power is not absolute either. They succeeded in swaying the soul of Macbeth because he is vulnerable, but they cannot affect Macduff’s soul or deceive him because he does not have the seeds of evil inside him. Macbeth independently thought of assassinating Duncan, and they cannot be guilty of instigating his mind; their prophecy only gives a definite shape to the dark thoughts that have already been smoldering in Macbeth’s mind. Macbeth reads into the prophecies a “supernatural soliciting” (1.3.138) to murder and lady Macbeth looks upon them “metaphysical aid” (1.5.30).

It will also be a mistake to regard them as the instruments of punishment. Macbeth himself is responsible for the sufferings that he has to endure. It is his own illogical reliance on the equivocating warnings of the apparitions that makes the impossible conditions possible. It is he who makes it possible for Birnam wood to come to Dunsinane by shutting himself up in the castle, and by not acting as a good king; and it is he who by senselessly murdering Macduff’s family rouses Macduff, who is “none of woman born” (4.1.80) to revenge. It is noticeable that Macbeth himself never blames the Witches for his sinister actions. Before his end, and after he realizes that he has been deceived by their words, he simply blames the “juggling fiends” as they “keep the word of promise to our ear and break it to our hope” (5.8.21).

2.10 *The Importance of the Witches in Macbeth*

The importance of the Witches in the play lies in the fact that they contribute to the story's weird nature and create the atmosphere of wildness, though one might say that the role they play in its action is very scanty. The play, from its very beginning, continues under their veil shadows until the shadows are finally lifted in the last scene with Macduff's entry with "the usurper's cursed head" (5.8.57). The tragedy would lose all its magnificence without its strange atmosphere; and the atmosphere would amount to nothing without the presence of the Witches.

The Witches in *Macbeth* serve to reinforce the theme of appearance versus reality through their association with deceptive evil forces. "Fair is foul and foul is fair" (1.1.12) is their motto indicating the confusion and uncertainty in the appearance of evil. The theme of equivocation, which is central to the play, operates most obviously through the Witches, and they are the most striking voices of unnaturalness and disorder. But ultimately *Macbeth* is deceived not by the Witches, but by his ill-founded reliance on his own interpretation of what they say.

2.11 *The Ghost of Banquo*

The Ghost of Banquo can be viewed as the main supernatural element in the play. Much debate has been dedicated to this element, and critics hold different opinions with respect to its being real or hallucinatory. Wain (1994) for example believes that "the question becomes immaterial when we try to assess the dramatic value of the Ghost" (p. 26). One should think of Shakespeare's intention behind introducing this Ghost; did the author try to create an illusion about its reality? This question can be answered if we can see with *Macbeth* the uncanny apparition of the blood blotched ghost. Banquo's Ghost plays an important role in the action of the tragedy. The horror of its sight compels *Macbeth* to make many a compromising disclosure. It contributes a little also to the play's atmosphere of mystery and terror.

According to Bradley (1905), "The suggestions that the Ghost on its first appearance is Banquo's, and on its second Duncan's, or vice versa, are worth discussion" (p. 492).

The following reasons may be given for the hallucination view:

- 1) We remember that *Macbeth* has already seen one hallucination, that of the dagger; and if we failed to remember it Lady *Macbeth* would remind us of it here: "This is the very painting of your fear; / This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said; / Led you to Duncan" (3.4.61-63, qtd. in Bradley, 1905, p. 492).
- 2) The Ghost seems to be created by *Macbeth*'s imagination; for his words:
 "now they rise again / With twenty mortal murders on their crowns" (3.4.61-63, as cited in Bradley, 1905, p. 492). He describes it, and they echo what the murderer had said to him a little before: "Safe in a ditch he bides / With twenty trenched gashes on his head" (3.4.61-63, qtd. in Bradley, 1905, p. 492).

Streufert (2004) thinks that characters like the Ghost of Banquo have some "dramatic power over the audiences" (p. 77); they excite and attract the spectators, and get them involved more in the action of the play. Thus it is clear that Banquo's ghost plays a major role in the play, since it affects all other major characters, in addition to *Macbeth* himself. Even the audiences are extremely affected by its appearance, which made the spectators more involved in the actions of the play.

Ross (2005) argues that the Ghost of Banquo may be considered as a sign for the future king, since *Macbeth* is not the rightful king, the real monarch should be someone like Macduff, or monarchy must pass to the one who deserves it. This emphasizes the fact that the imaginary in *Macbeth* leads to the real; what is imagined materializes and comes true. All these imaginations spring from *Macbeth*'s heart, and whatever he does in the course of the play, is done willingly and is instigated by his excessive and uncontrolled ambition, which is not always an advantage. Excessive ambition may cause hallucinations and have dire results on the one that harbors it.

A number of unnatural portents and signs occur on the night of Duncan's murder. In Act II, Scene iii, Lenox describes that 'unruly' night in some detail:

Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
 Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,
 the obscure bird...Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the
 earth Was feverous and did shake. (2.3.60)

It has been a stormy and violent night. The chimneys of the house were blown down by the storm. It has been

reported that lamentations and strange screams of dying men could be heard. People also heard prophetic announcements of terrible commotions and convulsions newly brought forth by times of distress. The owl shrieked throughout the night, and some say that the earth quaked as if it was in a fit of fever. This speech prepares us for the disclosure of Duncan's death. The death of a royal personage, which is considered a catastrophe and his murder is a heinous act.

In the very next scene Rosse and the Old Man discuss similar events that have taken place during the fateful night. We are told how a falcon was killed by "a mousing owl" and how Duncan's horses "turned wild in nature" (2.4.18) and also ate each other. These portents suggest a topsy-turvy situation in Nature and emphasize the unnaturalness of Macbeth's heinous deed in murdering Duncan who is at once his king, kinsman and guest. Also these supernatural happenings help to increase the atmosphere of horror and fear in the play (Kranz, 2003). They also remind us of the circumstances in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, which are related as predictive of the death of its hero.

2.12 *The Divine Powers of the English King*

In Act IV, Scene iii, the good king of England is referred to as one endowed with divine powers for his ability to heal the sick. This reference might have been included for the sake of flattering James I. This description may be used to contrast this good king with the three weird sisters, endowed with supernatural powers, or to contrast him with Macbeth (Craig, 1960). The image of the good king suggests innocence, faith, love, passion, while the images of the other evil forces in the play suggest treachery, ugliness and unfaithfulness (Spurgoen, 1993).

The divine powers of the good king are to be contrasted with the evil powers of Macbeth, who instead of healing his nation; he wounds it and causes all its suffering. Similarly, the way King Edward is described in the play makes us believe that Duncan, who might be considered a good king, is faulty and "not a blessed king," for his decision in promoting Macbeth proved to be a disaster that harms the whole nation, not only Duncan himself (Hunt, 2001, p. 3). Therefore, Duncan is to some extent responsible for his own downfall. He is unlike King Edward, who was not rash, and who was more careful when taking decisions, for a good king should care about his own life, which concerns all humans.

3. Conclusion

As has been seen in the discussion, magic and the supernatural in both *Huckleberry Finn* and *Macbeth* collaborate to create the belief that Fate controls man's life. They determine his destiny and make it very difficult for characters to avoid it, or think independently. Man is seen as resigned when future action is concerned. When something good happens, characters often reward themselves for their achievements, but when something bad happens, they often blame fate (the Supreme Power) or bad luck. Meanwhile, it can be deduced that the influence of the supernatural would be less if man is not swayed by the evil forces around him. The supernatural elements and magic; however, give both narratives a rich texture that raises them to a cosmic dimension. Twain himself was certain that the belief in superstitions and supernatural beings was common among slaves and children in the West, even the white children and low people also believed in ghosts and magic. With the introduction of the supernatural agencies, the authors invest their stories with a moral dignity and maturity at the end, and Jim and Huck both achieve freedom, and Macbeth learns a lesson, though too late.

Characters in both stories think that, whatever they do or think of, are divinely controlled; they think they are helpless beings, and they need to submit to whatever the future holds for them through the supernatural forces. According to Hawkes (1977), the evil deeds done by Macbeth are inspired by the "evil forces around him" (p. 2). This opinion is valid, but one should bear in mind that man is also free to act and make decisions; it is not always fate that determines his actions. The research also concluded that the people of the past were superstitious and less realistic than people in the 21st. Century. They used to believe in omens, superstitions, luck, etc, and this was common to them and they very much surrendered to it.

References

- Boutouil, S. (2014). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Plucking the momentous authentic elements*. Published MA Dissertation. Faculty of Letters, Languages, and Arts, University of Oran. Retrieved from <http://www.univoran1.dz/theses/document>
- Bradley, A. C. (Ed.). (1905). *Shakespearean tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (2nd ed.). London: Macmillan.
- Brooks, V. W. (1886). *Mark Twain's humour: from a collection of critical essays by Henry Nash Smith* (p. 13).
- Campbell, L. B. (Ed.). (1930). *Shakespeare's tragic heroes: Slaves of passion* (pp. 1-248). Cambridge: CUP.

- Coleridge, H. N. (Ed.). (1836). *The literary remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (pp. 238-239). London: William Pickering.
- Craig, H. (1960). *An interpretation of Shakespeare*. Lucas Brothers.
- Cunliffe, M. (Ed.). (1966). *The literature of the United States* (pp. 1-384). London: Penguin.
- Halliday, S. (2005). History, 'Civilization,' and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's court*. In P. Messent & L. J. Budd. (Eds.), *A Companion to Mark Twain* (pp. 416-430). Oxford, England: Blackwell. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9780470996874.ch27>
- Hawkes, T. (Ed.). (1977). *Twentieth century interpretations of Macbeth: a collection of critical essays* (pp. 1-140). Michigan: University of Michigan.
- Hoffman, D. G. (1961). *Form and fable in American Fiction: from Black Magic and White in Huckleberry Finn*. Mark Twain (A Collection of Critical Essays). Henry Nash Smith. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hunt, M. (2001). Duncan, Macbeth, and the Thane of Cawdor. *Studies in the Humanities*. Published by Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Department of English. Retrieved from <http://go.galegroup.com>
- Jarvis, M. (2005). *Theoretical Approaches in psychology: Routledge Modular Psychology* (pp. 1-224). Retrieved from <https://books.google.ps/books>
- Kranz, D. L. (2003). The sounds of supernatural soliciting in Macbeth. *Studies in Philology*, 100(3), 346-383. The University of North Carolina Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/sip.2003.0013>
- Lamb, C., Lamb, M., & Morris, H. S. (1893). *Tales from Shakespeare including those by Charles and Mary Lamb*. Retrieved from <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp>
- Levy, A. (2015). "Personal Interview" by Richard Ernsberger Jr. *American History* (pp. 26-28). New York: The Granger Collection.
- Mabillard, A. (2000). *Shakespeare's sources for Macbeth*. Retrieved from <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sources/macbethsources.html>
- Muir, K., & Scholnbaum, S. (Eds.). (1971). *A New companion to Shakespeare studies* (pp. 1-304). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pritchett, V. S. (Ed.). (1991). *Huckleberry Finn and the cruelty of American humour*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ross, S. (2005). *Scare quotes from Shakespeare: Marx, Keynes, and the Language of Re-enchantment*. Retrieved from <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?>
- Shakespeare, W. (Ed.). (1611). *The complete works of Shakespeare*. (pp. 1046-1079). Rev. Ed. Darden Craig and David Bevington. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- Smith, C. L. (2014). "Nigger" or "slave": why labels matter for Jim (and Twain) in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. *Papers on Language & Literature*, 50(2), 182. Retrieved from <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1->
- Solomon, R. B. (Ed.). (1961). *Mark Twain and the image of history*. CT: New Haven.
- Spurgoen, C. (Ed.). (1993). *Shakespeare's imagery and what it tells us*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Streufert, P. D. (2004). Spectral others: Theatrical ghosts as the negotiation of alterity in Aeschylus and Shakespeare. *Intertexts*, 8(1), 77.
- Tillyard, E. M. W. (Ed.). (1998). *The Elizabethan world picture*. Pimlico; New Ed edition.
- Trilling, L. (1948). Introduction. In L. Trilling (Ed.), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (pp. 1-16). New York: Rinehart.
- Twain, M. (Ed.). (1884). *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Twain, M. (Ed.). (1897). *How to tell a story and other essays*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Twain, M. (Ed.). (1906). *Autobiography of Mark Twain* (vol. 1), 1-440.
- Wain, J. (Ed.). (1994). *Shakespeare: Macbeth*. Palgrave: Macmillan.
- Wilson, J. D. (1973). Hank Morgan, Philip Traum and Milton's Satan. *Mark Twain Journal*, 16(4), 20-21. Retrieved from <http://d.lib.rochester.edu>

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).