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# Shakespeare`s ethos in the spotlight of interpersonal communication and language

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# Shakespeare`s ethos in the spotlight of social communication and language

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**Abstract.** Shakespeare is known in the world literature as one of the most influential writer that the English theatre has ever had. Therefore, the topic of this article aims to delve into the Shakespeare`s ethos in the spotlight of social communication and language. Furthermore, this study covers the main characteristics of Shakespeare influential works, aiming to illustrate some of the most important features of his masterpieces through a detailed and separated review on Shakespeare, with a critical analysis of their characters, including their performance in the stage, concept of identification with the world, as well as, the communication and relationship; their behavior, habits, and what is the most important his ethos. Respectively, this paper is designed to provide different analysis, comparisons, and elaborations from various authors and literary critics on English literature and wider with the purpose of providing a more colorful view on Shakespeare`s ethos and his interaction to the public.

**Keywords:** ethos, interpersonal relations, concept of identification, social communication.

## Introduction

This article presents a new approach to the study of *Shakespeare`s ethos in the spotlight of social communication and language*, specifically on his most famous works: *Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello and King Lear*, as all of them, share some common characteristics in implying Shakespeare's taste, character`s conception and dramatic techniques, especially for what Shakespeare is known-some taste on his concept that makes his characters examine their social and interpersonal experiences. Although, there is a wide range of articles, papers, analysis and books about Shakespeare, still his literary work isn't fully analyzed. Furthermore, the topic will focus on his most well-known plays, what indeed makes this paper an important research by presenting a new approach among literature in the country and wider. Hence, our aim was not only to criticize but to examine practical analyzes among Shakespeare`s plays, in relation to interpersonal and social relations as well as, the communication to the public. The main advantage in his work repertoire is his growing dose of subjectivity among characters, in order to help them face the challenges. Examples in Hamlet, how he interacts well in the scene, but suffers from his dilemma and insecurity inside him. Macbeth, a character full of ambition, and errors which deepens in his sins to portray the human world. Othello, full of jealousy and hate, as well as King Lear, that suffers from his bad communication with his daughters. Therefore, in all of the plays we see that Shakespeare uses the defects of society he lived to portray in his artistic world.

## Literature Review

In the early part of Elizabethan era, people were severely divided into classes, taste and style of living. They served to each other due to some specific and technical interests. However, in the sixteenth century, from literary critics to the ordinary people, Shakespeare`s works were considered of the greatest achievement. This period, was known for printing press, as an utmost flourishing era for reading and learning. Shakespeare`s work was mostly motivated by history stories and old sayings, that passed from folks and people among each other's. People in Elizabethan period went to hear a play rather than see it, and it was a time of a great encouragement in creativity in language, which enables poets and playwrights like Shakespeare, experiment with imagery, personification, repetition, alliteration, rhyme, rhetoric, hyperbole, irony, etc. They even were free to create new words and insert it into their works,

## Shakespeare`s ethos in the spotlight of social communication and language

Undoubtedly, that the first and foremost purpose of the language is communication both in a spoken and written form. In the framework of globalization there has been witnessed concerning the importance of English language especially in the broad scope of professional field and in interrelation between people responsible to carry out in-depth scientific inquiries mainly in the field of social sciences. In this perspective, I would like to argue that it is worth browsing in the ancient libraries who contain the gist of Shakespeare's remarkable masterpieces. His outstanding persona such as kings, queens, dukes, and generals embroider priceless virtues and qualities when it comes to building up a positive attitude concerning the interpersonal communication. The imperfect harmony, the meticulous chronology in his masterpieces and persona, has a significant influence even nowadays. The greedy, cunning, evil-minded which he masterly mirrored in his masterpieces provide a panorama of today's reality.

Surprisingly nowadays the cruel reality is reflected on interpersonal relations and communication that determines the conflicts for money and power, the hopeless and poor people who wander around in pursuit of earning a living. On the other side there exists is a totally different reality of the bloated, "bloodthirsty" sovereigns and merciless entrepreneurs who oppress the majority. As Shylock is perceived as an embodiment of justice, lacks mercy. Being object of consistent oppression injustice and abuse he opts for revenge. This reality is commonly displayed even in the broad network where people are reckless and directly unfold the underlying features of human and interpersonal nature.

Shakespeare used a language in the scene that were spiritually, emotional and pragmatically modified to meet the needs of his characters. In Hamlet, we see the eloquence of prince Hamlet, his powerful language and reflection, as a young scholar, brought to scene among other characters that reflect, his relevance, his attitude as well as his desperate desire to revenge. Hamlet successfully establishes a sense of duty, which is naturally portrayed as a driving force, inside him. Based to Medieval tradition, Hamlet is given a rude task to perform (Bloom, 1999. Pg. 407). His avenge to his uncle was considered as a perverse act. However, over the course of the play, Hamlet is seen to change his mood, from being too slow and unmotivated, over his intention to take the revenge to an outrageous and canning person. There are voices that Hamlet is mad and unable to act, compared to Laertes and Fortinbras, two pragmatic characters that showed to be useful, when it questions their impulsive reaction of their vengeance motive. After taking away the question of insanity, there still remains a very great difference of opinions. In regard to the

character of Hamlet, one considers him to be courageous- another, that he is wicked; one that he possesses vast energy of will- another, that he has little or no power of action (Watts, 2002 : 43).

Despite these theories, critics have considered him a universal man; in him every individual sees on some side a picture of himself. He must be able merely not to understand the world but to communicate with the world, set language standards that as he says in his lines: "*The time is out of joint: O coursed spite / That ever I was born to set it right*!" He complains of external world which intrudes to his privacy and mystery by disturbing his quiet intercourse with himself (Abrams, 1993:83).

The competence of a social communication and interpersonal relations along the plays raises on the incentive of his characters, making them more aggressive, and more communicative. In this respect, the language of Hamlet changes as the play progresses. In the beginning, he is quiet and calm in relation to his mother, uncle, and everyone in the play, but latter, his personality changes as the development of the story progresses. Northrop Frye explains in his book that: "*in Shakespearean tragedy, man is not really man until he enters what is called a social contact*" (Frye, 1967: 47). In fact, the social contact is a code that Hamlet needs to be more brave and more secured in his actions and at least more dynamic. We used to see Hamlet as an educated person, a university boy who has some more moral to show among all this mess. He takes this responsibility for putting things right, in spite his limited perception of his abilities to do that. He ascertains himself that attribute not by his choice but by his fate, tragic fate.

> *Hamlet (...)*
> **The time is out of joint. O cursed spite**
>    **That ever I was born to set it right!**
>    **Nay, come, let's go together.**

In his famous soliloquy, "*to be or not to be- that is the question*", act III, scene I, Hamlet shows his inner conflicts in search of identity and meaning, (Berghaus, 2001). This conflict is part of his world or his bad luck that has followed him throughout his life.  In this way, this speech connects many of the play's main themes, including the idea of suicide and death, the difficulty of knowing the truth in a spiritually ambiguous universe, and the connection between thought and action. In addition to its crucial thematic content, this speech is important for what it reveals about the quality of Hamlet's mind (Bradley, 1991: 129-175).  In conflicting between thought and action Shakespeare tries to bring his only solution to the audience by letting them know his spiritual state, which sometimes prepares them for suicidal actions. He summons for taking arms against, as he calls "*sea of troubles*", and give up of this long sleep, for what he is well aware and wants to get out of this veil in preventing his action (Bloom, 1999: 508). Based on these lines he wishes that such an action was made possible, "*To die- to sleep / No more; and by a sleep to say we end*".

These unanswered questions in Hamlet, and to some extend for the audience itself, are set to portray and prepare anyone for his big dilemma and the need to get out of this. According to him, there are two possible ways- *to be or not to be,* according to modern concept of interpreting the literary concepts- to *live or not to live.*  John Keats, who adored Shakespeare, wrote in a letter of March 1819 that it would be a delight to know that "what position Shakespeare sat when he started writing the words "*to be or not to be*", (Wilson, 1951). But as an audience we know what does it mean "*to be*" for Hamlet, as he keeps repeating it to his beloved Ophelia, that to be means *to be honest*.

Unlike other plays, in Macbeth we don't see any battle for dignity, where people are saved, instead it's a play sunk in blood and sin due to their ambitious, selfish as well as unscrupulous

character. Shakespeare uses this situation to beset the scene of murder and interpersonal interactions among his characters. In his book Raffel Burton, *William Shakespeare`s Macbeth*, compares Macbeth with the *Satan* in Milton`s *Paradise Lost,* for the level of rationality: "*Macbeth is tormented by the evil he does, he is- like Milton`s Satan- fundamentally unable to resists"* (Burton, 2005; 38). Jan Kot, a literary critic, announces that in Macbeth, history and crime is shown through personal experiences, hence he tries to bring the communication to the internal effect (Kot, 1966: 86). But in this survey we need to measure to what degree the personal responsibility has overcome the social responsibility, with the aim to portray the general force of the whole play. His problems as a character start in this moment when he tries to interact with his fate, trying to direct it. But this reaction on fate and supernatural prophecies bring him much confusion and inactivity; rather than opens him as a character. Everything comes as a surprise for Macbeth.

*First Witch* *(…)*
**When shall we three meet again**
**In thunder, lightning, or in rain?**

*Second Witch* *(…)*
**When the hurlyburly's done,**
**When the battle's lost and won.**

*Third Witch* *(…)*
**That will be ere the set of sun.**

Thus, throughout the play Othello, it is much more confused that he didn't feel well among these many misunderstandings. Three moments in the play when Othello gets the promotion. The first and most important is his jealousy. Othello's jealousy converted nature into chaos. His mind is excited by emotion; therefore, he is not a man of deep observation. He is opened to others, sincere and trustful, although he has a passionate nature. For him, love must be like heaven where he must live or otherwise not exist at all. But these are the attributes that will convert his nature into chaos (Bradley, A. C, 1991). Othello does not deserve readers' purest sympathy because on the one hand he charms, elopes, marries and seduces Desdemona without the knowledge of her father and on the other he calls Iago "honest", (Matthews, 1912).

In the play many of the characters display jealousy which caused them to act without any control (Kastan, 1999). It`s Iago, Emilia, Bianca, Roderigo and Othello who are seen to be pray to the jealousy, but all have a solution except Othello, as he goes till the end, disabling him to see the reason among his acts. We cannot say that jealousy is momentous to Othello, this jealousy is instilled to his mind as early in the play when he confronts Brabantio, and reminds his warning that one day Desdemona will deceit him, the same as she did on her father. Desdemona is a respectful daughter and a faithful wife. Many critics see in her figure a sensible, pure, and chaste nature. But nature can be both good and evil. But with all her naiveté, Desdemona remains utterly true to herself. Desdemona is a victim of her own love. As Kott notes: "*Othello kills Desdemona in order to save the moral order, to restore love and faith. He kills Desdemona to be able to forgive her; so that the accounts are settled and the world returned to its equilibrium* (Abrams,1993).*"*

Among all Shakespeare`s tragedies, Ernest Dowden sees Lear, the one that conveys the largest portion of passion, acting in the widest theatre and attaining their absolute extremes. He writes

that "Shakespeare seems to have created the sounds of the death of the human heart, to inquire into the darkest and saddest parts of human life, to study the great mystery of evil" (as cited in Kastan, 1999). This evil becomes the substance of the tragedy in the play, such a tragedy that is traditional in that respect that human action often brings about chaos and catastrophe associated with deaths of persons of high ranks. Today`s historians link it more with the legends than facts, which appears to have been derived by the Celtic god Lyr. Despite having an abundant source that served Shakespeare in creating his tragedy *King Lear*, still there were some original and real characters such as: *King Lear*, in none of the previous versions is portrayed as a mad man, and the characters of loyal Kent, together with Oswald and the Fool which are completely Shakespeare`s own. However, the poet laureate Nahum Tate goes much further by publishing the most radicalized version of *King Lear*, seventy-five years after its first publication. In his version Tate gives a happy ending, and neither Lear nor Cordelia dies at the end, while the Fool`s character is eliminated, and the love of Cordelia and the King of France is replaced with the love of Edgar. Gloucester, Kent and Lear goes off into a happy retirement. This version would hold the stage well until the nineteen century.

King Lear, is typically a play of misunderstanding between characters. The lack of communication moves King Lear to the end of his decision, in dividing the kingdom into three parts, based on the most love shown by his daughters. Most of the audience, as in the start of the play, are speechless to see how he analysis the heritage of his kingdom. Here, the misery prevails over the honesty, sincerity and modesty. Cordelia who is the sincerest and honest among his daughters, doesn't want to be fake, just in front of her father, and reflect beyond what in fact she feels, just for the sake of the inherited portion. While Goneril and Regan, they both fake their feelings in their favors.

If it`s any questions unanswered to *King Lear*, it would be the question: What is the play about? Is it a simple story, a story about a foolish King who wants to divide his kingdom into three parts, and give one part to each of his three daughters? Or is it about an old folk tale that is not worth anymore!? I think the big question is how we see it, how we feel it! The most probable, *King Lear* is about everything, about growing old, about universe; about the relationship and communication between parents and children, between life and death; about power, justice and rule; about the bonds of human love, the depth of human despair, evil, and cruelty.  It explores much more than: what is the meaning of life. It asks whether the humanity is the victim of cruelty, indifference or meaningless universe. Shakespeare was very careful when designing *King Lear*, he portrays the motive which would allow his passion and anger to overwhelm his decisions. Lear is a monarch of his kingdom, a powerful man, who is ruling the whole country in a great respect and gratitude. His thoughts and ideas come from inside him, from his internal state, as a kind of representation of someone else who is inside him.


## Conclusion


Considering the effect of social and interpersonal communication and language that Shakespeare uses in his most well-known works: *Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello and King Lear*, we can conclude that he implies very diligently all the artistic and authentic thought to play this relationship. Moreover, there is a close relation between Shakespeare`s language and his communication in his plays, where each of them has given a great contribution in mirroring the reality, where his ethos enabled a broad social and interpersonal communication. Shakespeare's universal virtues and reflection on them is a reason of such a close interrelation, between language and communication. So, it's worth mentioning that his masterpieces have a great impact and explain the dark gloomy labyrinth where humanity will go through in life for the years to come. However,

Shakespeare has become central to the whole world literature which is the most globally translated, interpreted and criticized. This focus on Shakespeare and his works, has made it easier for us to see his influential concepts of communication among the youths, what in fact remains crucial to linking literature with other concepts.

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