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**UNIVERSITY “ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI”  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
BITOLA**

**Third International Conference  
EDUCATION ACROSS BORDERS**

**EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
ACROSS TIME AND SPACE**

**(1100<sup>th</sup> Death Anniversary of St. Clement of Ohrid)**



**6-7 October 2016  
BITOLA**

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# Conference Proceedings

**University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in Bitola**  
**Faculty of Education**



Third International Conference “Education across Borders”  
**Education and Research across Time and Space**  
(1100<sup>th</sup> Death Anniversary of St. Clement of Ohrid)

6-7 October 2016

Bitola

### **Organizing Institutions:**

University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in Bitola (Faculty of Education in Bitola) together with the University „Fan S. Noli“ – Korçë (Faculty of Education and Philology in Korçë), University of Niš (Faculty of Education in Vranje and Center for Byzantine-Slavic Studies in Niš), Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (Faculty of Education in Plovdiv) and Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology and Institutes for Slavic and Polish Philology in Poznań).

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Dimitar Pandev, Faculty of Philology Blaže Koneski“ in Skopje

*A Word on the Slavic Patterned Teachings*

Grozdana Gojkov, Serbian Academy of Education in Belgrade

*Education and Research in Postmodern World*

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## TIMELESSNESS OF SHAKESPEARE'S LITERARY WORKS

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### Abstract

Analysing and discussing Shakespeare's works still present an immense challenge and undertaking not only to literary critics, but also to psychologists, philosophers, politicians, artists, language and literature teachers and their students, etc. Four centuries after Shakespeare's death his fame and popularity still have neither subsided nor lost their intensity. Hence, it is no exaggeration to state that his plays literally transcend time and culture and are rightfully called immortal or 'of all time'. This certainly could be attributed to his investing profusely in diverse and solid building blocks such as, for instance, an innovative language use while compiling his opulent corpus of literary works.

The present paper aims to deal with one aspect of his works which without doubt contributes greatly to the timelessness of his works – the immaculate depiction of a wide range of human emotions which are an inextricable segment of his full-fledged characters. The point we purpose to make is that while modern men and women can certainly boast about evolving and progressing in every conceivable sense of the word, yet, they can very closely and distinctly relate to their distant predecessors when it comes to the realm of emotions they experience and the ways in which they normally manifest them.

**Keywords:** *Shakespeare, plays, emotions, timelessness*

### Introduction

As the Bard of Stratford-upon-Avon rightfully assumed in his *Sonnet 18*, his literary works are indeed timeless and in all probability will last as long as mankind lasts. As unbelievable as it might sound, centuries after its composition, Shakespeare's immortal literary corpus still wholeheartedly welcomes renewed analyses and interpretations. Various scholars are constantly lured to unfold new significant layers of meaning of his works, and to uncover their relevance to today's massively globalized world.

It is by no means an exaggeration to state that, despite all the existing modern literary movements and trends, Shakespeare's writing is still credited with many valuable artistic achievements. Thus, for instance, his fresh and vivid language which abounds with reams of skilfully coined idiomatic and metaphoric expressions still provokes amazement and even awe. Another equally salient aspect of Shakespeare's plays is definitely the characters he so gracefully brings to life. In fact, whether purposefully or not, Shakespeare manages to enrich his works substantially by devising very dexterously a pool of characters whose versatility is virtually impressive beyond words.

What all Shakespeare's characters, no matter if they are the protagonists or the antagonists in his comedies, tragedies, histories and romances, have in common is the realm of emotions he ascribes to them (e.g. love, hate, anger, jealousy, doubt, vengeance, pride, disappointment, etc.). Interestingly, all these emotions are not unknown to modern men and women too. People today live in an era of so-called digital natives and are surrounded by all these technological advents, but still, just like Shakespeare's heroes and heroines, they are equally psychologically vulnerable, fragile, and, consequently, susceptible to the same emotional experiences.

Hence, what this study proposes is that modern men and women worldwide keep exploring and reinventing the Bard's works, simply because, they are still able to recognize their own psychological underpinning and traits in Shakespeare's characters. In other words, regardless of their place of residence, the culture they belong to or the language they speak, modern people still undergo the same complex range of emotions varying from the most positive to the most negative ones. This, in turn, accelerates and alleviates the process of their understanding and relating to Shakespeare's characters to a considerable extent.

### **Shakespeare's characters and their emotions**

Upon reading Shakespeare's play, one immediately realizes that the literary mastermind of Stratford-upon-Avon, during his prolific writing career has set his mind on depicting a broad array of both male and female characters – representatives of all walks of life. Thus, his spectrum of characters comprises kings and queens who are at the top of the social hierarchy; then, numerous greater and lesser nobles; court fools; soldiers; merchants; sailors; servants; mad men as well as ordinary peasants and countrymen who are at the very bottom of the same social hierarchy.

Faced with the challenge to render human nature as convincingly as possible, this literary genius relies heavily on the theory of the four humors<sup>105</sup>. According to this theory each person's temper is clearly determined by the humor which prevails in their body. Thus, some of these characters are truly joyful, energetic, lively; whereas, some are moody, melancholy, spiteful and even outright evil.

Furthermore, in creating his characters Shakespeare obviously draws on a variety of different sources. For some of his characters he is clearly inspired by real historical figures (e.g. Richard III, King Henry VIII, Julius Caesar, etc.) who have been eternalized in various historical chronicles and official documents. But Shakespeare does not leave it at that. He plunges deeper and due to his ingenuity, he manages to enrich almost all of these historical characters so masterfully with traits completely in line with the themes depicted in the respective plays. For a great number of his characters he turns to his literary predecessors and contemporaries for inspiration. Nevertheless, more often than not, he is prepared to go to much greater lengths and, in some of his plays, Shakespeare ventures to devise equally powerful, convincing and vivid representatives of human kind solely by relying on his boundless imagination.

One underlying feature of all these characters is that they are all endowed with specific emotions which are so convincingly presented that one cannot help but completely believe in them. The range of emotions is in fact as prolific and impressive as the characters themselves. Thus, quite a number of Shakespeare's characters fall passionately in love (Romeo and Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*; Helena, Hermia, Lysander and Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Bassanio and Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*). Sadly, Shakespeare sometimes allows love to blindfold some of his characters to the extent that vile emotions uncontrollably arise in their souls. Jealousy is also one of the by-products of love (e.g. Othello in *Othello*). Another one is despair which leads some characters to sheer madness (e.g. Ophelia in *Hamlet*). Moreover, some of Shakespeare's characters are simply infected by malevolent emotions such as hatred and envy and take enormous pleasure in causing other people's downfall (e.g. Jago in *Othello*). Whereas some are so badly hurt that they cannot help but feel spiteful, moody and vengeful (e.g. Hamlet in *Hamlet*, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*).

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<sup>105</sup>Hippocrates, and later Galen, hypothesized that a person's character was influenced by a combination of four humors that governed the body: black bile, phlegm, yellow bile, and blood. Centuries later, the Elizabethans adopted these ideologies to their medical practices, and associated each humor with one of four temperaments: melancholy, phlegmatic, choleric, and sanguine (Fahey, 2004).



The enumeration of emotions depicted by this truly rare and exquisite playwright, can easily proceed but this paper does not have pretensions to be all-encompassing and conclusive. Therefore, in the following section we limit our discussion on a small set of emotions – love, jealousy, despair, hatred, envy and vengeance as experienced by some of Shakespeare's most memorable characters. The aim is to verify the hypothesis that these emotions are still part of the human psyche today, and that they present a unique aspect of Shakespeare's works which not only prolongs his plays' lifespan, but also makes them immensely popular and widely enjoyed by various audiences all over the world.

### ***Love in Shakespeare's characters***

Love is generally recognized as an extremely powerful feeling capable of binding people with invisible but unbreakable strings. The supremacy of love is undeniably acknowledged in Shakespeare's works too. The theme of love is central to many of his plays across all genres.

In many of Shakespeare's comedies the theme of love is strongly interlinked with the theme of marriage. The comedies are primarily concerned with young women and men who fall in love but face certain obstacles such as strong parental or societal disapproval. The powerful emotion they nurture one for the other emboldens them to undertake a precarious journey. In the end, good fortune befalls them and they complete their journey as totally changed individuals whose love is also finally accepted by everyone (McEvoy, 2000: 126). This is especially nicely depicted in Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the case of Helena and Hermia, the two beautiful young friends who are involved in intricately entangled love triangles. Namely, when Cupid strikes them with his love arrows, they immediately abandon their comfortable and luxurious way of life and flee from the civilized world of Athens into the woods just to be in the vicinity of the two youths they are passionately in love with. In the enchanted woods full of fairies, the four youths undergo an amazing dream-like experience made possible by means of magic tricks performed by the fairies. In the end, they come out of that experience enabled to embrace a new phase in life in which all those who previously opposed their love and marriage, now accept them gladly.

Logically, the theme of love is not restricted solely to Shakespeare's comedies. It is also the major driving force of many of his tragedies. The tragic endings of *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet* could certainly be attributed to huge misunderstandings engendered by this same divine feeling. Thus, for instance, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare deals with a specific type of young and irrational love instigated and completely controlled by passion. Shakespeare's most famous lovers, Romeo and Juliet, despite their young age, experience such an intensive surge of love that they readily discard not just the long lasting family feud and their parents, but the rest of the world altogether, just to be able to quench the overwhelming passion they feel one for the other. This is how young Juliet expresses the intensity of this passion very succinctly (1):

(1) "My bounty is as boundless as the sea,  
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,  
The more I have, for both are infinite." (Act 2, Scene 2)

Desdemona and Othello, in *Othello*, experience a similarly genuine and deep affection for each other. Desdemona publicly defies her father by swearing allegiance to her husband Othello– the black Moor (2).

(2) "My noble father ...  
But here's my husband.  
And so much duty as my mother showed  
To you, preferring you before her father,  
So much I challenge that I may profess

*Due to the Moor my lord.*" (Act 1, Scene 3)

The mixed genre play *The Merchant of Venice* also tackles the theme of love but in a much more favourable light. Portia, the wealthy heiress from Belmont, bearing on her shoulders the burden of her father's dying wish which obliges her to marry only the man who chooses the right casket, faces a huge challenge. She has to find a way to ensure that out of her numerous suitors she will give her hand in marriage to the only man she truly loves, the young and handsome scholar and soldier, Bassanio. Thanks to her sharp intelligence and discernibility she accomplishes both of these goals by chanting a song with useful hints which leads Bassanio to choose the lead casket which is, in fact, the right casket (3).

(3) "Tell me where is fancy bred,  
Or in the heart, or in the head?" (Act 3, Scene 2)

The famous Jew, Shylock, in *The Merchant of Venice*, also loses his daughter Jessica to love. By eloping with her beloved Lorenzo, a young Christian fellow she is enamoured with, she shows readiness to give up on both her father, who is her only living relative, but also her Jewish faith too. Additionally, in order to secure the future of her love with Lorenzo, she risks upsetting her father even more by stealing his precious casket full of ducats and jewels despite knowing how piously devoted he is to them.

### ***Jealousy in Shakespeare's characters***

What sometimes goes hand in hand with love even nowadays, is the feeling of jealousy – an emotion which can paralyse completely a person's intellect to the extent that one becomes totally incapable of making a reasonable judgement.

The emotion of jealousy is prevalent in Shakespeare's tragedies but it is not excluded from the other genres as well.

Othello, the main protagonist in *Othello*, is the most severely afflicted by jealousy. Initially he is presented as a person who has a rare stroke of good luck. He has high status, influential social position and respect. On top of that, he has won Desdemona's love, which completes his happiness. However, in a blink of an eye, he is deprived of everything as he is utterly overpowered by the green-eyed monster, i.e. the feeling of jealousy of his beloved Desdemona. He mistakenly believes that she has made him cuckold. The person who stirs Othello's grave doubts about Desdemona's unfaithfulness and who persistently and devotedly sparkles the destructive feeling in Othello's bosom is his ensign and close friend Jago. This human embodiment of evil, in fact, is himself a victim of the same emotion since he is convinced that his wife has cheated on him with Othello too (4).

(4) Jago. "For that I do suspect the lusty Moor  
Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof  
Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards;  
And nothing can or shall content my soul  
Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife ..." (Act 2, Scene 1)

Thanks to his inconspicuous shrewdness Jago's plans work, and, in the end, he manages to bring about both Othello and Desdemona's demise.

Even the two supreme fairies in the woods near Athens, Oberon and his wife Titania, in the romance play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, despite all their magic powers, are not immune to this merciless green-eyed monster. Oberon accuses Titania of having feelings for the Duke of Athens in response to her accusations that Oberon is interested in Hippolyta, the Duke's wife-to-be (5).

(5) Oberon. "How canst thou thus, for shame, Titania,  
Glance at my credit with Hippolyta,

*Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?  
Titania. These are the forgeries of jealousy."*(Act 2, Scene 1)

### ***Hatred and envy in Shakespeare's characters***

Another set of feelings Shakespeares handles with a special care comprises hatred and envy. These are quite common in the context of Shakespeare's tragedies, and are closely related to the urge to revenge.

Hamlet's complex psychological state in *Hamlet*, becomes even more puzzling when he ascertains the fact that his uncle is the outright culprit for his father's death. Understandably, the chain of emotions he struggles with is enriched with excessive frustration and unquenchable anger and hatred, which, consequently, instigate him to contemplate revenge. In an attempt to answer why Hamlet prolongs his vengeance on his uncle, Ulrici (1839) claims that "Hamlet greatly doubted the moral legitimacy of revenge" and that "he was thus plunged in a struggle between his natural tendency to avenge his father and his highly ethical and Christian views" (in Jones, 1910).

Cassius, Caesar's closest associate, in *Julius Caesar*, is also hit hard by envy and hatred towards Caesar, the great military commander, aspiring to become Emperor of the enormous Roman Republic. He cannot accept the fact that someone like Caesar, whose fallibility he has witnessed on numerous occasions, has achieved such a glory and fame. He is especially repulsed by the thought that Caesar now even threatens to undermine the already established republican social order of Rome. He pushes himself past his limits just to organize a group of conspirators who would willingly end Caesar's life (6).

(6) *Cassius*. "Caesar cried 'Help me, Cassius, or I sink!'  
I, as Aeneas, our great ancestor,  
Did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder  
The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber  
Did I the tired Caesar. And this man  
Is now become a god, and Cassius is  
A wretched creature and must bend his body..." (Act 1, Scene 2)

When Caesar's chief confidante and ally, Mark Antony, who is also one of the main protagonists in *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, finds out about Caesar's brutal assassination, he is totally devastated and instantaneously resolute to avenge Caesar's death (7).

(7) *Antony*. "O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,  
That I am meek and gentle with these butchers!...  
Over thy wounds now do I prophesy, ...  
A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;  
Domestic fury and fierce civil strife  
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy;  
Blood and destruction shall be so in use ..." (Act 3, Scene 1)

Thus, while weeping over Caesar's dead body, Mark Antony solemnly pledges to take revenge on Caesar's assassins.

Envy and hatred have captured the mind of the infamous Jewish usurer, Shylock, in *The Merchant of Venice* too. He is determined to completely destroy his compatriot Antonio. Firstly, he hates Antonio because he is a Christian ("I hate him for he is a Christian"), then, because he has humiliated him in public many times ("You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog, and spit upon my Jewish gaberdine"), and, finally, because Antonio lends money without charging any interest and thus undermines Shylock's chances to make profit ("He lends out money gratis and brings down the rate of usance here with us in Venice.") (Act1, Scene 3). Blind with hatred, Shylock sees a perfect opportunity to take avenge on Antonio when Antonio fails to pay off his debt to him and insists on receiving "a pound of Antonio's flesh".

### ***Despair in Shakespeare's characters***

Shakespeare's depiction of despair is primarily visible in the tragedy of *Macbeth* in the character of Lady Macbeth. Driven by ambition she pushes her husband to go to unimaginable lengths, such as slaying their good and benevolent monarch, Duncan. They perform this atrocious act just to be able to come to the throne and grab hold of the power that inextricably goes with it. The price that Macbeth's wife pays for her insatiable zest for power is, first, guilt-stricken conscience, then, despair which erupts in madness and, eventually, leads her to her death.

King Lear in *The Tragedy of King Lear*, also grows desperate when he realizes the gravity of the mistake he has made by entrusting his two evil and unscrupulous daughters with his kingdom. To make things worse he banishes his only loyal and loving daughter from the kingdom simply because she refuses to partake in the vain love contest he devised just to feed his weak ego. His despair gradually overpowers his intellect and, ultimately, turns him into a mad man.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this study is to make a small but meaningful contribution to affirming the contention that, centuries after their composition, the British Bard's impressive literary works still pulse with life and emit energy which renders contemporary readership and theater audiences incapable of resisting the temptation to go back to them time and time again.

The brief overview of some of Shakespeare's characters and the emotions vested in them clearly illustrates that none of these emotions has vanished from the wide and colourful array of feelings experienced by people nowadays. Quite on the contrary, these same feelings are still part of the human psyche and present a major driving force which determines the course of actions people take in their life time.

The analysis of the protagonists and antagonists of some of Shakespeare's comedies, tragedies, histories, romances and problem plays suggests that there is a clearly visible parallel between our contemporaries and Shakespeare's characters in terms of emotions. Namely, celebrities and ordinary people alike, to this day, still fall deeply in love and are ready to give up on everything just to be with the person their heart, not their reason, has selected for them. In some patriarchal societies, for instance, in which the honour of the family members is put on pedestal, we still hear of tragic news stories of young people who decided to follow their heart and, thus, incurred the anger of their families and who, in the worst case scenario, faced capital punishment. Similarly, people still succumb to feelings of hatred when their rivals and adversaries prevent them from achieving their goals. This is particularly visible in the corporate world where the keen and unhealthy competition turns people into unscrupulous human beings ready to go over the edge. Disappointment, anger and the unstoppable urge to avenge are the emotions felt by someone who is deeply hurt by somebody else, especially by close friends or relatives. Feeling superior to the others is as appealing to overambitious people as it used to be in Shakespeare's time. Some or, perhaps, most politicians surely fit nicely in this framework. Envy or the 'green-eyed' monster still bereaves people of their peace and quiet pushing them towards unreasonable actions, and, eventually, to their ultimate downfall. Hence, even nowadays it is not uncommon to come across a news story about someone taking the life of their beloved simply because they "loved them too much". In short, as Maguire (2004: 1) puts it "seeing oneself or one's contemporaries in Shakespeare characters and situations is nothing new".

The range of emotions related to Shakespeare's characters discussed in this study is definitely far from exhaustive and conclusive. Yet, the discussion provides insights in favour of the hypothesis that people still engage themselves in exploring Shakespeare's works

primarily because of the emotional similarities they bear with the characters depicted in Shakespeare's plays. More importantly, what this study suggests is that this single aspect of Shakespeare's plays – his characters and their emotions, is in fact what still most vigorously "breathes life" to Shakespeare's invaluable literary 'offsprings'.

The timelessness of Shakespeare's works, without a doubt, can be sought elsewhere. Nevertheless, the bottom line that should be borne in mind is that, as Shakespeare's contemporary Ben Jonson very elegantly put it in his eulogy dedicated to the Bard, "Shakespeare is not of an age but for all time".

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