

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE: THE RELEVANCE OF SHAKESPEAREAN CANNON FOR THE NEW GENERATION: SHAKESPEARE AND AI

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Abstract: *The paper explores the relevance of Shakespeare's works in the context of contemporary digital transformation and the AI revolution. Drawing on themes from plays like "Hamlet", "Macbeth", "The Tempest", and "A Midsummer Night's Dream", it examines how Shakespeare addresses foreseeing the future, coded language, and the influence of powerful figures such as witches and fairies. The article presents an analysis of how Shakespeare's insights into human behaviour and power dynamics can shed light on the challenges of the 21st-century business transformation. Specifically, it highlights the importance of focusing on people, not just technology, during digital transformations, emphasizing that AI and tech innovations should augment human roles rather than replace them. The paper also addresses the conflict between technological advancements and human welfare, illustrating this tension through Shakespeare's quote from "Hamlet": "By indirection find direction out!" Ultimately, the presence of Shakespeare's haunting ghosts and provocative characters continues to resonate with us today. They live alongside us, shaping our understanding of the human condition. To navigate our relationship with these figures and the complexities they represent, perhaps we should turn to Shakespeare's profound philosophy and seek the answers within his works.*

Keywords: *artificial intelligence (AI), digital transformation, power and tyranny, predicting the future, technology and society, leadership and control*

Introduction

In an age increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence (AI) and rapid technological advancements, it is both intriguing and necessary to reflect on the relevance of classical works in understanding modern phenomena. William Shakespeare, whose

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plays have transcended centuries, offers profound insights into the complexities of human nature, power, and ambition – issues that resonate strongly in the contemporary world of AI. His exploration of themes such as the abuse of power, manipulation, and the psychological toll of ambition, as seen in his tragedies like Macbeth, The Tempest, and A Midsummer Night's Dream, provides striking parallels to the current discourse on AI and its impact on society.

Shakespeare's characters often "fight" with their limitations and the consequences of unchecked ambition – traits that are all too familiar in today's technological landscape. As we stand on the precipice of a new era dominated by digital transformation and AI, it is vital to question how Shakespeare's themes of tyranny, fear, and the unpredictable nature of power can inform our understanding of these emerging technologies. While AI holds immense promise for solving complex problems and advancing human potential, it also carries inherent risks, especially when power and control are left unchecked.

This article seeks to explore the intersection between Shakespeare's timeless works and the modern challenges brought by AI. By examining how Shakespeare portrayed the consequences of power, manipulation, and destiny through supernatural figures and coded language, we can uncover valuable insights that help us navigate the ethical and societal dilemmas posed by AI today. Just as his characters faced the consequences of their actions, so too must we confront the potential dangers of AI, ensuring that its development aligns with human welfare, accountability, and transparency. Through this lens, Shakespeare's works continue to offer a mirror through which we can examine our relationship with technology and the future of humanity.

Even nowadays Shakespeare's exploration of tyranny and abuse of power remains timeless, resonating even with modern world demands. His plays offer profound insights into the human condition particularly how power can lead to corruption, destruction, and societal breakdown. While comparing these depictions to the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the parallels become interesting, especially regarding the psychological and societal effects of power and control.

Shakespeare's message is clear: those in power can become isolated, detached from reality, and willing to commit brutal things to maintain control. The public, in turn, often falls into cycles of fear, manipulation, and moral confusion, impacted by the misuse of power by their leaders.

Control over the resources of power must be maintained, but public control is also necessary as a less explicit means by which challenges to rulership can be deterred; furthermore, it determines responses to acts that threaten to usurp the ruler's material power.

Representations of issues such as greatness, moral or sacred virtue, and inherited rights continue to shape the belief in the distinctness of leadership, elevating it above the everyday struggles for power seen among less influential figures. In essence, the illusion of permanence remains crucial: it suggests that power and public control are inseparable in the hands of a legitimate leader.

Contemporary narratives reveal the vulnerabilities of this idea of unity, emphasizing the divide between power and public control in modern leadership struggles, particularly in the context of AI, which increasingly challenges traditional concepts of authority and governance. Much like in Shakespeare's later tragedies, the rise of AI brings into question the balance between centralized power and decentralized influence, exposing the complexities of leadership in a rapidly evolving world.

Shakespeare does write about predicting the future and the ability to create coded language by a few highly skilled "experts" – witches, wizards and fairies – to influence people's future behaviour (*Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*).

Shakespeare often explores the themes of predicting the future and the creation of coded language through the use of supernatural characters like witches, wizards, and fairies, who possess unique powers to shape or influence people's destinies. These characters often use enigmatic language, prophecies, and illusions to manipulate the thoughts and actions of the other characters. The following examples from *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* illustrate Shakespeare's exploration of predicting the future and the use of coded language by supernatural figures to influence human behaviour and destiny.

Historical Review

Shakespeare's works, written during the late 16th and early 17th centuries, were deeply influenced by the socio-political and cultural upheavals of his time. The Elizabethan and Jacobean periods were marked by rapid shifts in political power, religious conflict, and growing economic instability, all of which can be seen in the themes of Shakespeare's plays. Power struggles, the role of the monarch, and the consequences of ambition are central themes in many of his works, reflecting the era's preoccupation with authority, divine right, and the fragility of human society.

In particular, Shakespeare's exploration of power dynamics in his tragedies responded to the turbulent political climate of his time. Queen Elizabeth I's death in 1603, which led to the rise of James I, brought about uncertainties regarding the stability of the monarchy. These transitions were fraught with the risk of civil unrest, rebellion, and shifting allegiances, much like the political machinations

seen in Shakespeare's plays. His depictions of monarchs like Macbeth, Hamlet, and Lear, who grapple with moral and psychological dilemmas, reflect the period's tension over the nature of rulership and the ethical limits of power.

The supernatural also played a significant role in Shakespeare's works, often used to reflect and amplify the uncertainties of the time. Superstitions and beliefs in the supernatural were widespread in Elizabethan England, where astrology and prophecies were often believed to influence human fate. In plays like "Macbeth" Shakespeare utilized the supernatural to explore the dangerous consequences of ambition and the influence of forces beyond human control. This mirrors the way technological forces – such as artificial intelligence – are often seen today: as powerful, unpredictable entities that influence the course of human actions.

Shakespeare's era also witnessed the early stirrings of the modern world, with the rise of commerce, exploration, and the beginnings of scientific inquiry. These shifts were laying the groundwork for the future transformation of human society, much like the ongoing technological revolution today. Just as the characters in Shakespeare's plays are faced with monumental shifts in their worlds – whether through political upheaval, personal loss, or supernatural forces – modern society finds itself similarly grappling with the profound and often unpredictable effects of technological advancements, including AI.

In this sense, Shakespeare's works are not only historical artefacts but timeless reflections on human nature, power, and the forces that shape our lives. His explorations of these themes provide insight into how people throughout history have faced – and will continue to face – transformative changes, whether through political upheaval, technological innovation, or the manipulation of societal forces.

1. Macbeth

In *Macbeth*, the witches famously use coded language to predict Macbeth's future, planting the seeds of his ambition and ultimately influencing his behaviour. The witches' mysterious predictions guide Macbeth's actions, even though their true meaning is often hidden in layers of ambiguity.

- The Prophecy of Kingship: When Macbeth first meets the witches, they greet him with a series of mysterious predictions:
- “All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!” (Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, Folger Shakespeare Library, 2004, Act 1, Scene 3)

- “All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!” (Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, Folger Shakespeare Library, 2004)
- “All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!” (Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, Folger Shakespeare Library, 2004)

These predictions play on Macbeth’s existing title and ambitions, leading him to believe that he is destined for greater power. However, the coded nature of their words doesn’t immediately reveal the cost of achieving this destiny – his moral downfall and eventual ruin. Similarly, in the context of AI, the promises and potential of artificial intelligence can seem like a clear path to progress and power, but the complex, often ambiguous nature of AI’s influence doesn’t immediately expose the ethical dilemmas, societal consequences, or risks that may come with its unchecked growth. Just as Macbeth’s desire for power blinds him to the dangers ahead, there is a parallel in how AI’s rapid development might lead society toward unforeseen consequences, emphasizing the need for caution and a deeper understanding of the broader impact.

2. The Tempest

In *The Tempest*, Prospero, the magician and rightful Duke of Milan, uses his knowledge of magic and the supernatural to control the fates of those around him. He orchestrates events using illusions, enchantments, and symbolic language, ultimately teaching lessons about power, justice, and forgiveness.

- **Prospero’s Magic and Illusions:** From the very beginning of the play, Prospero uses his magic to create the storm that shipwrecks the characters on the island. He controls the future by shaping the circumstances surrounding the shipwreck, influencing how the other characters interact with each other.
- **The Vision of the Masque:** In Act 4, Scene 1, Prospero creates an elaborate masque, a magical performance meant to distract and delight Ferdinand and Miranda. Through this spectacle, he symbolically represents their future, showing the potential for joy and harmony in their marriage:
- The masque’s images of goddesses and blessings illustrate Prospero’s vision of their future, creating an illusion of an ideal, harmonious world.

Prospero's ability to manipulate reality and predict outcomes through his magic is a form of coded language, where his illusions shape the behaviour and perceptions of others. Similarly, AI has the power to manipulate reality and influence outcomes, often through complex algorithms and data-driven processes that shape how individuals perceive information and make decisions. Just as Prospero's illusions alter the actions and beliefs of those around him, AI systems – whether through recommendation algorithms, personalized ads, or predictive analytics – can subtly guide human behaviour, often without full awareness of the individuals involved. Both Prospero's magic and AI demonstrate how unseen forces can shape perceptions and actions, raising important questions about control, ethics, and the consequences of wielding such power.

3. A Midsummer Night's Dream

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare explores the theme of fate and the manipulation of people's desires and actions through magic, especially by the fairy king Oberon and his servant Puck.

- **The Love Potion:** Oberon instructs Puck to use a magical flower to make Titania fall in love with the first creature she sees. This action sets off a chain of misunderstandings and magical interventions, illustrating how the future can be shaped by coded, enchanted language and actions:
- “Flower of this purple dye, / Hit with Cupid's archery, / Sink in the apple of her eye.” (Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Edited by Peter Saccio, Bantam Classics, 2004)
- **The Riddle of Love:** Throughout the play, love itself is portrayed as a kind of coded language – something mysterious, irrational, and difficult to understand. The magical influences on the characters' romantic entanglements highlight how easily the course of love can be changed by external forces, just as Shakespeare presents these magical elements as a kind of future-altering language that dictates the outcomes of the characters' relationships.

Many literary critics have examined the way Puck's magic in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* functions as a form of control and manipulation over the lovers.

Marvin Rosenberg in his essay “The Play of the Play: Shakespeare's Use of the Supernatural” (Rosenberg, Marvin. “The Play of the Play: Shakespeare's Use

of the Supernatural." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 35) discusses how the supernatural elements, particularly Puck's interference with human relationships, expose the instability of human emotions and the dangers of manipulation. Rosenberg suggests that Puck's magic represents the fragility of human will, as characters lose agency to forces beyond their control. Similarly, David Bevington, in his introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Bevington, David. "Introduction to A Midsummer Night's Dream." *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, Pearson, 2014), argues that the play critiques the arbitrary nature of love and suggests that human relationships, much like the forces of magic, can be easily manipulated or altered by external powers.

In today's world, artificial intelligence holds a kind of power over society that, while not human, echoes some of Shakespeare's concerns about tyranny. The question of AI misuse, control, and manipulation is a pressing issue. While AI has the potential for incredible advancements, from healthcare to solving complex societal challenges, it also poses risks of becoming an instrument of unchecked power.

"By indirection find direction out!" (Hamlet): this was Shakespeare's suggestion – to taste and learn!

The investigation of changing early modern cultures of fear will be approached in two ways: first, by using digital humanities methods to model large-scale patterns of language use, tracing a cultural and conceptual history of fear written into the language itself; second, by arguing that Shakespeare's tragedies anticipate the phenomenology of objectless fear by shifting received accounts of the place of fear in tragic pathos.

In a world ridden with what may seem to be new fears, we are tempted to turn to Shakespeare's plays as we turn to a sacred text, hoping to find providential lessons and words of comfort, for Shakespeare too lived in a time rife with religious tensions and anxieties about plots and treasons – we desire Shakespeare to be both a prophet and "our contemporary."

The excess of fear and the fear of self collide with a senseless fearlessness in which life becomes "its terrifying ghost": Shakespeare in his masterpiece 'Hamlet' embodied the Elizabethan period superstitions phenomena. He employed the ghost as the rising point of the play and showed it as the main motive for the whole situation.

Also, through the ghost, Shakespeare was able to make the picture clear for the reader about the beliefs and doctrines at the time of Queen Elizabeth 1. He uses a well-convincing plot to turn the play into a historical story that can fit all ages and centuries. The modern reader can easily indulge and interact with the events.

This “ghost” eventually transfers into both fear and punishment. What was the example of Hamlet? “To be or not to be” is an unsolvable question: Hamlet cannot choose life over death or death over life. Unlike the hero of classical tragedy, he cannot commit the envisioned suicide nor even blind himself, submitting himself to penal-like punishment. He is trapped in fear and is condemned to consider his life as an enemy through the process of sublation.

So, why do people fear AI?

One of the most common fears surrounding AI is that it will replace jobs, leading to mass unemployment, poverty, and loss of control in decision-making. Decision-making is one of the main reasons for fear.

The thing that has worried human beings since 1606, that Hamlet struggled with what to do and which path to take. I just asked the AI what Hamlet could do, and what would be the righteous decision for him:

Here is the answer:

In Hamlet, the “right” decision for the title character is a complex issue that has been debated for centuries. Hamlet is faced with multiple dilemmas, including whether to avenge his father’s murder, how to deal with his mother’s marriage to his uncle Claudius, and how to confront the nature of life and death.

AI speaks about the hesitation and the necessity of taking immediate action.

But do people who have power use the advantage of taking immediate action? When we go deeper, we can’t avoid what character has Shakespeare created through Hamlet.

Hamlet was suffering from several psychological problems and maybe the biggest was controlled mostly by his superego because he tried to do things in a morally and socially acceptable way.

Critics consider Hamlet’s hesitation as a defect of no-fit of his personality to take action against the murderer of his father immediately after unveiling his guilt. Here is the point where the AI and critics’ minds coincide. But literature is not about taking reasonable steps, it’s about the “story win” rather than a “hero win”.

Shakespeare, with his proficient instinct, managed to find an advantage precisely in this variation and to turn it into account. His Hamlet believes in the ghost and doubts.

Much of the originality of the figure, and the drama as a whole, springs almost inevitably from this discrepancy between the medieval character of the fable and its Renaissance hero, who is so deep and many-sided that he has almost a modern air.

Here is the reason why taking immediate action would fail.

While AI offers exciting possibilities for engaging with Shakespeare's works, it also raises important questions about creativity, originality, and the nature of human expression. Can AI truly capture the depth of Shakespeare's genius, or is there something inherently human about his works that resists replication by machines?

Abuse and Tyranny in Modern AI Tools:

Similarly, modern discussions around AI often focus on the potential for abuse and the risks of unchecked power. Here's how they parallel the themes in Macbeth:

Unrestrained Ambition in AI: Just as Macbeth's ambition led to his abuse of power, AI's potential can be misused by those seeking control or profit. Tech companies and governments may deploy AI systems for surveillance, data manipulation, or warfare, raising ethical concerns. For instance, AI algorithms can manipulate social media, influencing elections or public opinion without transparency, much like Macbeth's covert manipulation to secure his power.

Moral Degradation: When AI is used for harmful purposes – such as deepfakes, biased policing systems, or predictive algorithms that unfairly target minorities – there's a moral degradation at play. The ethical concerns in AI reflect Macbeth's moral unravelling, as the tools themselves are neutral but can lead to societal harm when used improperly or without moral oversight.

Fear and Control: AI can create systems of control and fear in societies, similar to Macbeth's rule. Examples include AI being used in authoritarian regimes to monitor citizens, restrict freedom of expression, or impose censorship. In countries with mass surveillance powered by AI, citizens may live under constant scrutiny, creating an atmosphere of fear, much like Macbeth's tyranny over Scotland. The "AI arms race" also speaks to a modern form of paranoia, with countries and corporations trying to outdo each other in AI capabilities, echoing Macbeth's fear of losing his throne.

Common Lessons: The Importance of Ethical Constraints:

In both Macbeth and modern AI, the abuse of power comes from a lack of ethical restraint. Macbeth's unchecked ambition led to his downfall, just as the misuse of AI has the potential to harm society if not governed by moral and legal frameworks.

Transparency and accountability are crucial. In Macbeth, the deceit that Macbeth uses to obtain and hold power leads to chaos and destruction. Similarly, if AI development lacks transparency (e.g., in its decision-making algorithms), it can lead to unpredictable and harmful outcomes for society.

Consequences of Tyranny: Macbeth's tyranny ends with his demise, reflecting the unsustainability of such a rule. In AI, unchecked power without ethical

governance can lead to social collapse, inequality, or oppression, much like Macbeth's Scotland fell into despair.

In both Macbeth and the modern AI era, unchecked ambition and abuse of power lead to catastrophic results. The lesson is clear: whether in leadership or technology, ethical boundaries, accountability, and governance are essential to prevent tyranny and abuse. AI, like the power Macbeth sought, is a tool that can be used for good or ill, depending on the values and intentions of those who possess it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as we stand on the cusp of unprecedented technological advancements, the lessons embedded in Shakespeare's works, particularly in Macbeth, provide profound insights into the challenges we face in the age of artificial intelligence. As witnessed by the detailed elaboration above, the unchecked ambition of Macbeth, which ultimately led to his downfall, mirrors the potential dangers of an uncontrolled rise in AI. Both Macbeth's thirst for power and the development of AI carry immense promise but also the possibility of great peril. The key to avoiding a tragic outcome lies in our ability to establish ethical boundaries and approach AI with caution, ensuring that it serves humanity in a way that is transparent, accountable, and governed by clear moral principles.

Thus, much like Shakespeare's tragic characters, whose ambitions often led to their undoing, we must recognize that the power embedded in AI, while capable of revolutionizing society, must be harnessed with great care. The future of AI rests in the decisions we make today: will we wield its potential for the greater good, or will we allow it to become a tool of manipulation, control, and exploitation? Shakespeare's tragedies serve as a timeless reminder that the abuse of power leads only to destruction, and this lesson is especially relevant as AI becomes more deeply integrated into our lives. Overall, Shakespeare's characters were driven by ambition and the desire for control, often to their detriment. As we continue to advance in the realm of AI, it is critical to remember that technology—much like human ambition—is not inherently good or evil; rather, it is the intentions and ethical considerations behind its use that will ultimately shape its impact on society. The tragedy of Macbeth teaches us that the cost of unchecked power is steep, and the consequences extend far beyond the individual. In our rapidly changing world, we must ensure that AI is used to enhance human well-being rather than diminish it, safeguarding our collective humanity in the process. Only through careful reflection, ethical governance, and a commitment to transparency can we avoid the tragic fate that befalls those who lose sight of the very humanity they seek to serve.

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Լ. Զանինյան – Հայացք դեպի ապագա. շեքսպիրյան թեմաների արդիականությունը նոր սերնդի համար. Շեքսպիր և Արհեստական բանականություն. – Հոդվածն ուսումնասիրում է Շեքսպիրի ստեղծագործությունների արդիականությունը՝ ժամանակակից թվային փոխակերպման և արհեստական բանականության հեղափոխության համատեքստում: Հիմք ընդունելով «Համետ», «Մակբեթ», «Փոթորիկ» և «Ամառային զիշերվա երազ» պիեսների թեմաները, այն ուսումնասիրում է, թե ինչպես է Շեքսպիրն անդրադառնում ապագայի կանխատեսմանը, ծածկագրված լեզվին և այնպիսի կերպարներին, ինչպիսիք են կախարդներն ու փերիները: Հոդվածում վերլուծվում է, թե ինչպես է 21-րդ դարի վերափոխումը

հիմնականում վերաբերում է մարդկանց, ոչ թե տեխնոլոգիաներին: Թեև բոլորը խոսում են տեխնոլոգիաների և ԱԲ-ի մասին, այդուհանդեռձ, թվային փոխակերպումների ճանապարհը լցված է տեխնոլոգիական նախագծերով, որոնք հաճախ հաշվի չեն առնում մարդկանց վարքագիծը և դրանք օգտագործելու դրդապատճառները: Տեխնոլոգիան և ԱԲ-ն լավագույնս աշխատում են, եթե նրանք մեծացնում և աջակցում են մարդկանց դերը, այլ ոչ թե փոխարինում նրանց: Հոդվածն անդրադառնում է նաև տեխնոլոգիական առաջընթացի և մարդկային բարեկեցության միջև առկա հիմնախնդրին՝ ցույց տալով այս լարվածությունը «Համլետ»-ից մեջբերումով՝ «Անորոշության մեջ գտի՝ ու ուղղությունը»: Ի վերջո, փաստն այն է, որ շեքսպիրյան չարագույժ ուրվականն ու հուշող դերակատարները հայտնվել են մեր կողքին, ապրում են մեզ հետ և նրանց հետ ճիշտ հարաբերություն ձևավորելու համար գուցե հարկավոր է անդրադառնալ շեքսպիրյան խոհափիլսոփայությանը և փորձել պատասխանները հենց այնտեղ գտնել:

Բանալի բառեր. արհեստական բանականություն (ԱԲ), թվային փոխակերպում, իշխանություն և բռնապետություն, ապագայի կանխատեսում, տեխնոլոգիա և հասարակություն, առաջնորդություն և վերահսկողություն

Л. Джанинян – Взгляд в будущее: актуальность шекспировского канона для нового поколения: Шекспир и ИИ. – В статье исследуется актуальность произведений Шекспира в контексте современной цифровой трансформации и революции в области искусственного интеллекта. Опираясь на темы таких пьес, как «Гамлет», «Макбет», «Буря» и «Сон в летнюю ночь», рассматривается, как Шекспир затрагивает предвидение будущего, закодированный язык и влияние могущественных фигур, таких как ведьмы и феи. В статье представлен анализ того, как понимание Шекспиром человеческого поведения и динамики власти может пролить свет на проблемы бизнес-трансформации XXI века. В частности, подчеркивается важность сосредоточения внимания на людях, а не только на технологиях, в процессе цифровых трансформаций, акцентируя внимание на том, что ИИ и технологические инновации должны дополнять человеческие роли, а не заменять их. Также рассматривается конфликт между технологическими достижениями и благосостоянием людей. В конечном итоге, присутствие преследующих призраков и провокационных персонажей Шекспира продолжает резонировать с нами и сегодня. Эти персонажи живут рядом с нами, формируя наше понимание человеческой природы. Чтобы разобраться в наших отношениях с этими фигурами и сложностями, которые они представляют, возможно, нам стоит обратиться к глубокой философии Шекспира и искать ответы в его произведениях.

Ключевые слова: искусственный интеллект (ИИ), цифровая трансформация, власть и тирания, прогнозирование будущего, технологии и общество, лидерство и контроль