

Shakespeare's proverbial expressions of adversity: A significant communication style



 **Arnest Kharmawlong¹**

 **V.M. Berlin Grace²**

 **Abisha A. P.³**

 **Shiny Karunya T.⁴**

 **D. David Wilson⁵⁺**

^{1,3,4,5}Department of English, Karunya Institute of Technology and Sciences, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

¹Email: arnestkharmawlong@karunya.edu.in

²Department of Biotechnology, Karunya Institute of Technology and Sciences, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

²Email: berlin@karunya.edu

³Email: abishaa22@karunya.edu.in

⁴Email: shinykarunya@karunya.edu.in

⁵Email: davidenglishgroup09@gmail.com



(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 24 February 2025

Revised: 1 May 2025

Accepted: 26 May 2025

Published: 27 June 2025

Keywords

Adversity
Communication style
Proverbial expression
Shakespeare
Socio-cultural
Stylistics.

The theme of *adversity* is communicated with many proverbial expressions in Shakespeare's plays, which contain rich linguistic features and significance that form a noteworthy communication style of Shakespeare. This study explores and analyzes the proverbial expressions of adversity and examines their significance to the plays' characters, to the communication style and their relevance to the socio-cultural contexts of the time. The study uses descriptive analysis of the select proverbial expressions of adversity in three plays of Shakespeare – *As You Like It*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, through the framework of stylistics theory, investigating the communication patterns, the stylistics, and significance. The proverbial expressions of adversity in the plays are carefully chosen and crafted by Shakespeare with a distinguished communication style in diction, syntax, semantics, and rhetoric, which are helpful for the development and transformation of characters in thought and emotion and showcase the stylistic expertise of Shakespeare. The proverbs are a part of the communication style that adds aesthetics of expression in language that can change perception about adversity, to learn lessons of the realities of life, just like the characters in the plays.

Contribution/ Originality: This study pioneers the analysis of Shakespeare's proverbial expressions on adversity through a stylistic lens, focusing on select Shakespeare's plays. It uniquely explores their role in character transformation, communication style, and socio-cultural relevance, revealing Shakespeare's rhetorical ingenuity and the enduring wisdom of adversity as a literary theme.

1. INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare is honored for his incomparable contributions in drama and literature. Shakespeare uses a unique communication technique that connects with audiences of all ages in addition to his poetic mastery and engrossing stories. One fascinating aspect of his linguistic expertise is his skillful use of proverbial terms to portray the theme of *adversity*, which has a part to play or a value to communicate to the play's target characters and the audience. Adversity is the frightening or difficult experience of events and circumstances in life (Daniel, 2010). It also refers to situations that can cause unfavorable results by interfering with regular functioning, and are a particular kind of risk factor that a person encounters, which may or may not be adjustable (Noltemeyer & Bush,

2013). The theme of adversity runs across Shakespeare's plays, be it comedy or tragedy. Characters such as Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth, Duke Senior, etc., are thrust upon with challenges and difficulties in various ways and forms with a purpose in the play and to create an impact on the audience. Shakespeare's work is distinguished by a rich tapestry of language. Proverbs function as linguistic jewels that capture everlasting wisdom and the human experience through the topic of hardship. Shakespeare's communication style is impressive and makes him unique in literature. Unfortunately, the theme of adversity in his plays, particularly related to proverbial richness and style of communication is not explored and analyzed though this theme plays a great role in character development, transformation and rhetorical functions. Shakespeare conveys lessons that arise from facing misfortune through language in his unique way. Thus, this part of Shakespeare's writings has to be noted and analyzed. For this purpose, this study has the following objectives:

- a) To analyze the proverbial expressions of adversity found in Shakespeare's plays.
- b) To examine the significance of proverbial expressions of adversity as a significant communication style that plays a great role in the development and transformation of characters.
- c) To assert the relevance of the proverbial expressions of adversity to the contexts of the time.

The significance of this study lies in the unexplored research on Shakespeare's proverbial expressions, particularly of adversity. This study will throw light on the understanding of how Shakespeare's language and proverbs, in expressing the theme of adversity, can provide insights into his communication style and the role it plays in character development and transformation in the plays. It will shed light on how Shakespeare uses language to convey the complexity of life and moral lessons through adversity. It will also help us understand how Shakespeare uses language to convey messages and themes related to adversity by examining the rhetorical devices, linguistic choices, and techniques employed and the relevance of such proverbial expressions of adversity to the society of the time.

Therefore, the research question is given below.

How do the proverbial expressions of adversity in Shakespeare's play a significant communication style in character development and transformation, and how do they reflect the real context of the time?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Elizabethans, the time when Shakespeare lived and wrote were proverb-conscious and loved proverbs, for they were sure that proverbs made them close to man and assisted them to be wise. Shakespeare's plays are full of proverbial expressions thrust upon them with different themes that are of value to the definition of characters and situations in the plays. Rezaei (2012) defines a proverb as either a brief, sharp remark that reflects a universal truth in a form of language that dates back a considerable way, or as a straightforward, tangible adage that is widely recognized and used to convey a truth that is grounded in human experience or common sense. Proverbs can represent the wisdom of numerous people expressed through the wit of one person. Shakespeare was influenced by ancient proverbs and understood their innate ability to entertain and convince receptive audiences. Shakespeare has adopted this style of expression and communication to bring out the significance and application of the conversation. Proverbs are most powerful when used in the right context. Choosing a fitting proverb for a situation enhances communication, wisdom-sharing, and cultural resonance (Mieder, 2018).

Shakespeare's proverbs are typically witty statements of timeless truths or useful information and observations made by previous generations, cautions, admonitions, behavior guidelines, and collected wisdom that has withstood the test of time throughout human history. Attempts have been made by different authors to explore, analyze and explain the proverbial expressions found in the plays of Shakespeare. The proverb's primary purpose, which is seen in every play by Shakespeare, is to shed light on character. Proverbs were employed by Shakespeare to describe, evaluate, or subtly manipulate another character through speech, and to disclose a trait. In both cases, the audience

can discern the subtleties of the character that the proverb specifically highlights. Harp (2009) points out that learning to use proverbs is learning the activity of bringing them usefully, or interestingly or wittingly.

Estill (2011) in her work titled “Proverbial Shakespeare: The Print and Manuscript Circulation of Extracts from ‘Love’s Labor’s Lost,’” has attempted to explore the proverbial expressions in Shakespeare’s works, particularly in the play *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. She says that Shakespeare’s writings have been called proverbial in two senses – new proverbs and repurpose old ones. She continues to delve into a particular proverbial expression found in the play and tries to find out whether the proverb is a creation of Shakespeare or has gone through different hands in its expression. She concludes that the particular proverb has got resemblance to the phrase devised by other authors earlier than Shakespeare. Therefore, it is not Shakespeare’s creation, but the style of expression belongs to the creativity of Shakespeare. Her work is limited only to one proverb used by Shakespeare in the play *Love’s Labour’s Lost* without giving much importance to other proverbs that indicate different realities of life and their effectiveness in communicating the message to the audience or readers.

Orkin (2014) in his work “Shakespeare’s Proverbial Tongue,” has attempted to uncover the “proverbial tongue of Shakespeare.” He has tried to probe into the use of proverbs as allusions in the works of Shakespeare, in relation to the socio-cultural and literary background of Shakespeare’s time. He has also dealt elaborately on some of the texts and the language used in those texts. He concluded that Shakespeare’s proverbial tongue reflects an ingrained early modern humanism and contains allusions that are more provocatively challenging to early modern shibboleths about language. He has not dealt in particular with the significance of such proverbial expressions in the communication style of Shakespeare.

Commenting on Mary Cowden Clarke’s book *Shakespeare’s Proverbs*, Saraan, Mamentu, and Kamagi (2021) in their article “Analysis of Metaphorical Expressions used in the book entitled Shakespeare proverbs inscribed by Mary Cowden Clarke” have endeavored to analyze ontological metaphors in Shakespeare’s proverbs, and to interpret the meaning of those metaphors. They conclude that there are altogether 44 proverbs alluding to different moods, emotions, attitudes, and realities of life, such as arrogance, crime, cruelty, meanings of life and love, politics, stupidity and wisdom. However, their research is limited to only the number of proverbs and their allusions in brief. Harp (2009) explores the proverbs found in “*The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear*” and their philosophical significance. Tilley (1924) explores the proverbial wits and wisdom of the jesters in the court to entertain the audience but has not done particularly on the proverbial expressions of adversity in Shakespeare’s plays with whose communication the competence and style of Shakespeare is known.

The proposed research fills these gaps by interrogating how Shakespeare’s proverbial expressions of adversity constitute a significant communication style—one that transcends mere ornamentation to become a vehicle for strategic persuasion, emotional depth, and cultural critique. This study will reveal how adversity, articulated through proverbs, shapes interpersonal dynamics, character ethos, and audience engagement in ways previously unexamined by synthesizing linguistic, rhetorical, and contextual analyses.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study follows a descriptive analysis of the texts from the primary sources complemented by the secondary sources. A thorough reading of Shakespeare’s plays viz., *As You Like It*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet* will be done. A detailed study of the proverbial expressions will be deliberated by taking into consideration the communication patterns employed and the linguistic features used, identified as the proverbial expressions in the conversations between and among characters in the context of adversity. Three proverbial expressions are taken: a) Sweet are the uses of adversity’ from the play *As You Like It*. b) The robbed that smiles, steals something from the thief. He robs himself that spends a bootless grief from *Othello*. c) Adversity’s sweet milk, philosophy’ from *Romeo and Juliet*. The discussions on the stylistics of the proverbial expressions are done under the theoretical framework of stylistics theory. The stylistic analysis is made based on the diction, syntax, semantics and rhetorical functions of the

expressions. Their significance to stylistics and the Elizabethan society will be implicated. A conclusion is made based on the findings from the discussions and analysis.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Proverbs are easy to remember and may be utilized at any moment as effective oral or written communication since they are composed of people's common observations and everyday experiences in brief, formulaic language, in a succinct or understated style. Succinct communication begins with clarity and conciseness. The use of understatement, pauses, and silences defines a succinct or understated communication style. An author or a writer chooses specific linguistic techniques to use in literature in crafting the conversation or communication between and among characters with a specific intention which is known as his or her communication style (Conti, 2022). Language is a vital component of communication that is indispensable to daily existence and allows people to share their ideas, opinions, and wishes with others (Herman, Saputra, Sitanggang, Sirait, & Fatmawati, 2024). Communication styles act as catalysts for the clear and effective communication of the intended message. Proverbs or proverbial expressions serve as powerful discursive tools in a variety of communicative contexts, from sermons to gossip, lyrical poetry to dramatic dialogue, short stories to novels, conversational banter to forceful political rhetoric, and rap music to slogans and headlines in the mass media, though the frequency of their use may differ among speakers and writers (Mieder, 2018).

The theoretical framework for the study will be based on *stylistics theory*, since the study's goal is to investigate the relevance of proverbial expressions as a significant communication style. The concept that the processes involved in comprehending a literary text are linguistic is the foundation of stylistics, an approach to literary analysis (Rana, 2018). Ellis (1970) citing Riffaterre asserts that style in language is the expressive, emotive, or aesthetic emphasis placed on the information transmitted by the linguistic structure without affecting the meaning; or in other words, style emphasizes the language used. Gonzales and Flores (2016) define stylistics as the study of language use in literature as well as an examination of literary discourse from a linguistic perspective. It can also be seen as an expressive style, a manner of putting things together with a certain goal in mind. Gonzales and Flores (2016) also talked about the stylistic approach to the text or expression, which is a method or technique that entails the observation and analysis of stylistic elements such as syntax, phonology, graphology, semantics, rhetoric, and others, which are significant during text analysis because they present the rational and emotional states in expression. They also allow readers to view a literary work objectively while it appears to their subjective senses and also reveal the author's subjectivity, which includes the purpose and moral of the literary work.

A literary work of text is seen as a communicative discourse, Gonzales and Flores (2016) continue to note, speaking in the context of English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language in Southeast Asia. Herman et al. (2024) define discourse analysis as the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used whether in written literature or verbal communication. It can also be thought of as a fully developed linguistic element made up of a series of cohesive and coherent phrases that are appropriate for the given situation. In the context of pragmalinguistics, Yerznkyan and Harutyunyan (2024) note that the communicative meaning of the discourse needs to be focused. Within this framework, the stylistic method seeks to identify linguistic elements within a literary work and deduce the meaning from those same elements. The structure, breaking conventions, foregrounding, parallelism, grammatical patterns, and the author's word choice and its roles are all highlighted along with how they contribute to the text's meaning with this method. Yerznkyan and Harutyunyan (2024) also assert that attention should be paid to word choice, the syntax and non-verbal means which will help the author to achieve the intended communicative goals through the discourse. Thus, the select proverbial expressions will be discussed under this theoretical framework of the stylistics approach. The discussion will not take all the elements for analysis, but some of them such as the dictional elements, structural-syntactical elements, semantic elements, rhetorical functions, pragmatics, and communicative significance.

Diction refers to the author's use of words to achieve a particular tone or impact in their writing, which might alter the reader's perception of the literary work. Analyzing a work stylistically means investigating this reciprocal link between the writer and the reader. The study of syntax is a subfield of linguistics that aims to comprehend sentence construction and the formation of language grammar. The goal of the study is to determine the connections between various words in a sentence. Such an exercise provides insight into the stylistic effect while also indicating the writer's thought process. Semantics is the study of meaning as it is expressed in language, or the level of language analysis at which meaning in a text is examined. Rhetoric is the art of successful language use for communication. In other words, it is an effective communication strategy that mostly relies on powerful persuasion.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. *Sweet are the Uses of Adversity*

The full expression of the proverbial expression above is "Sweet are the uses of adversity / which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, / wears yet a precious jewel in his head." The expression is applied to the speech of the Duke Senior in the play *As You Like It* (Act 2, Scene 1). The Duke Senior has been banished by his brother, Duke Frederick who has also usurped the Duke Senior's position. The Duke Senior has fled, with several loyal lords, to the Forest of Arden, where they live like Robin Hood and spend their time idly, as people did in the golden world – the concept, originating from classical mythology, particularly from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which describes a time when humans live in harmony with nature, free from conflict, toil, and corruption. It is an era of innocence, abundance, and peace where people lived without the need for laws, wars or work. The Duke Senior is happy about the life in the forest, and he expresses his satisfaction and contentment. From his expression, one learns that the court is full of wickedness and corruption, which is just contrary to the forest or pastoral life. The Duke Senior also expresses that he experiences hardship only with the change of seasons. He welcomes the chilly, blistering winds of winter with others. He says that through the winter winds he can understand himself.

5.1.1. *Diction*

In its diction, the expression gives an impression that Shakespeare has carefully chosen and crafted the words to convey his intended meaning fit for the context. "Sweet" implies a positive or pleasant quality; "Uses of adversity" suggests that there can be beneficial or valuable outcomes from challenges and difficulties. The metaphorical concept of sweetness is used to convey the positive aspects or benefits derived from adversity. If we consider further the following words, "Toad" is used as a metaphor for adversity, emphasizing its unpleasant and potentially harmful nature; "ugly and venomous" further emphasizes the negative aspects of adversity. "Wears" suggests that there is something hidden or intrinsic and "precious jewel" symbolizes a valuable and positive aspect that may not be immediately apparent despite the outward appearance of adversity.

5.1.2. *Syntax*

The syntactical elements in the expression are paradox and juxtaposition. Sweetness and adversity can be seen as a paradox and are juxtaposed to emphasize the significance of the expression to the context. It employs parallelism in one way, emphasizing the contrast between the bitterness of adversity and the sweetness of its uses, to give a clear idea that though these two concepts are contrasting to each other, they can also be connected or correspond to each other. It also presents an antithetical relationship between the hardship of adversity and the positive outcomes it yields. Thus, the phrase evokes imagery, conjuring the contrasting sensations of sweetness and adversity in the mind of the reader. The repeated sounds in "Sweet are the uses" create a pleasing rhythm and emphasis on the positive aspect. The structure of the phrase follows a simple subject-verb-object pattern.

The subject is "sweet".

The verb is "are".

The object is "the uses of adversity".

The use of "are" emphasizes the plurality of the uses of adversity, indicating that there are multiple beneficial aspects to challenges.

5.1.3. Semantics

In its semantic nuances and pragmatic reflection, the expression suggests that adversity can lead to personal growth, resilience, and wisdom. It highlights the constructive outcomes of facing and overcoming challenges. The interpretation of what constitutes the "uses" of adversity can vary from person to person, thus depending on one's subjectivity. What one individual learns or gains from adversity might differ from another's experience. The phrase implies that the benefits of adversity might not be immediately apparent but unfold over time. It suggests a long-term perspective on the impact of difficulties. By juxtaposing "sweetness" with "adversity," the phrase accentuates the emotional contrast between hardship and the eventual positive effects, emphasizing the transformative power of challenges. A positive mental outlook can also be a powerful coping mechanism when facing adversity (Farmer, 2010).

5.1.4. Rhetorical Function

The proverb can be seen as persuading individuals to adopt a positive attitude towards adversity by highlighting its potential benefits. It encourages resilience and perseverance in the face of difficulties. It serves as a moral instruction, advising individuals to embrace challenges as opportunities for personal growth and development. It also encourages reflection on personal experiences with adversity, prompting individuals to consider the lessons learnt or the positive changes resulting from difficult situations. Thus, it fulfils the function of rhetoric.

5.2. *The Robbed That Smiles, Steals Something from the Thief; He Robs Himself that Spends a Bootless Grief*

This is a proverbial expression taken from the play *Othello* (Act 1, Scene 3). Brabantio, Desdemona's father accuses Othello of using sorcery to seduce Desdemona, his reasoning being that she would never marry Othello voluntarily. Brabantio wants Othello to be arrested and imprisoned through the judgement in the court that would be decided by the duke. On questioning Othello and Desdemona, and after hearing their responses, the duke finds that Desdemona has married Othello of her own free will, without any seduction or force by Othello as accused by Desdemona's father. However, Brabantio feels that he is defeated, and finds himself robbed of his daughter by Othello.

5.2.1. Diction

Shakespeare, through the mouth of the duke in the play has reflectively chosen the apt words for the occasion in context. The word 'robbed' suggests a sense of victimization, of being deprived of something against one's will; 'smiles,' in this context suggests a subtle defiance or resilience in the face of adversity; 'steals,' is used metaphorically which gives the idea that by maintaining a positive attitude (smiling), the robbed person gains a psychological victory over the malicious intent of the thief; "He robs himself" suggests self-inflicted harm; 'spends' implies the investment of time and energy on something that is ultimately futile or without benefit; "bootless" means useless or without advantage and "grief" refers to sorrow or distress, which indicates that the person who invests time and energy in fruitless or unproductive sorrow is causing harm to himself.

5.2.2. Syntax

The construction of "The robbed that smiles, steals something from the thief." He robs himself that spends a bootless grief,' with its parallel structure and rhythmic flow, showcases stylistic elements that enhance its

memorability and impact. The use of parallelism, 'The robbed that smiles steals something from the thief' not only creates a balanced structure but also emphasizes the interconnectedness of actions and consequences. The proverb employs paradoxical elements according to syntactical analysis. It juxtaposes the act of smiling while being robbed, suggesting that the robbed person gains something while the thief loses. It also contrasts the act of spending futile grief with self-robbery indicating that investing in unproductive sorrow is similar to robbing oneself. It uses metaphors of "theft" and "robbery" to symbolize deeper emotional and psychological states, emphasizing that reacting positively or negatively to a loss can impact both the victim and the perpetrator. It sets up an antithesis between smiling while being robbed and experiencing useless grief, highlighting the opposing reactions to adversity. The repetition of the 'r' sound in "robbed that smiles steals something" and "robs himself that spends" creates an alliterative rhythmic effect, emphasizing the connected nature of the actions. All these indicate the intended literary devices that Shakespeare has employed in the phrase. The expression can be divided into two parts, each presenting a distinct idea and linked by the semicolon. a) The robbed that smiles, steals something from the thief where

The subject is "the robbed."

Action is 'smiles' and "steals."

Object is something from the thief.

b) He robs himself that spends a bootless grief where

The subject is "he."

The verb is "robs."

The object is "himself."

The modifier is 'that spends a bootless grief.'

All the parts of the phrases or sentences, when put together highlight the deep cause-effect relationship between actions and their consequences.

5.2.3. *Semantics*

Semantically, the proverb has nuances, implying that smiling while being robbed signifies resilience and the ability to find positivity even in adverse situations. It implies that maintaining a positive attitude can be empowering. Positively restructuring our relationship with reality moves us through grief, and we can turn adverse situations into something meaningful by focusing on learning, not on the experience itself. This highlights the first semantic nuance of the proverb. Spending "bootless grief" that implies useless, unproductive sorrow is portrayed as self-inflicted robbery which highlights the negative response to adversity. It conveys the idea that dwelling on an irretrievable loss is detrimental and unproductive. The proverb implies reciprocity in actions – the robbed person gains something, perhaps resilience or peace of mind, while the thief loses something, may be the satisfaction of causing distress.

5.2.4. *Rhetorical Function*

The proverb persuades individuals to adopt a positive outlook during challenging times, suggesting that maintaining composure and finding a silver lining in adversity can empower them. This can be seen as its rhetorical function. It cautions against the wastefulness of indulging in unproductive grief, emphasizing the need to channel emotions constructively. It imparts a moral lesson about the consequences of one's emotional reactions. It encourages individuals to choose constructive responses to adverse situations rather than succumbing to despair. In essence, this proverb encapsulates the complex relationship between one's emotional reactions to adversity and their impact using vivid imagery and rhetorical devices to convey its message.

5.3. *Adversity's Sweet Milk, Philosophy*

This proverb is taken from the conversation in Act 3, Scene 3 of *Romeo and Juliet*. The expression is the consequence of the dispute between Romeo and Tybalt. Romeo kills Tybalt, and consequently, Romeo is sentenced to banishment. In the house of Friar Laurence, Romeo is overcome with grief and thinks that the prince has not done justice by pronouncing banishment for Romeo. Friar Lawrence uses the above expression of words as consolation for Romeo.

5.3.1. *Diction*

The choice of words by Shakespeare through the character of Friar Laurence is very reflective and philosophical. Adversity suggests hardship, difficulty, or misfortune that reflects the challenges and obstacles that Romeo is currently facing in the play, particularly in the context of his banishment. Sweet contrasts with the negative connotations of 'adversity', which adds a layer of irony suggesting that even in difficult times, there can be something positive or beneficial. Milk is a word and metaphor associated with nurturing and sustenance, typically providing nourishment and comfort which indicates that adversity is portrayed as a source of nourishment, implying that challenges can lead to personal growth and wisdom. Philosophy refers to a way of thinking or an attitude towards life that Romeo must have in the face of adversity and gain wisdom and a more profound understanding of life.

5.3.2. *Syntax*

The expression has employed a metaphor likening adversity to nourishing milk. It suggests that difficulties, like milk, possess a certain sweetness or value when faced with the right perspective. The repetition of the "s" sound in "Adversity's sweet milk" enhances the rhythmic (alliterative) quality, and emphasizes the interconnectedness of adversity and sweetness. The juxtaposition of "adversity" and "sweet" within the same phrase creates a contrast, elucidating the unexpected positivity or benefits that can arise from hardship. The structure of the expression follows a parallel pattern. This parallelism enhances the cohesion and rhythm of the phrase. The omission of certain words ("is" or "contains") creates a concise and impactful expression, inviting the audience to fill in the implied missing elements, which refers to the literary exercise known as ellipsis.

5.3.3. *Semantics*

The expression acknowledges the multifaceted nature of adversity. It implies that challenges, though bitter or difficult, contain inherent value and opportunities for growth. The expression implies that wisdom gained from introspection during tough times is a source of sustenance for the mind and soul by associating philosophy with milk. Philosophy can enhance one's problem-solving capacities, and will help a person to analyze concepts, and understand arguments and problems. In other words, it helps us solve our problems -mundane or abstract and it helps us make better decisions through our critical thinking. In this way, philosophy becomes the armor for one who uses it that will prevent mistakes and suffering. It will be correct to say that a practical philosophy will help us experience a better touch with life and situations (Janning, 2015).

5.3.4. *Rhetorical Function*

The expression persuades individuals to reframe their perception of adversity. It urges seeing challenges as opportunities for personal and intellectual development. It provokes thought by presenting an unexpected relationship between adversity and sweetness. This prompts reflection on the paradoxical nature of difficult situations. The expression serves as a teaching tool, imparting wisdom about resilience and the transformative power of philosophical contemplation in navigating life's hardships. Its poetic and concise nature aids in its memorability, making it easier for individuals to recall and reflect on its message when faced with adversity.

5.4. Stylistic Significance

Proverbial language in the form of proverbs as wisdom sayings, and proverbial phrases as expressive metaphors certainly play a major stylistic and expressive role (Mieder, 2003). The proverbial expressions discussed above are significant to communication style or stylistics because of the following:

Paradox: All three expressions contain paradoxes. Paradox plays significant roles in stylistics by adding complexity, depth, and nuance to language and literary expression. The use of paradoxical language is a common stylistic device in Shakespeare's works, adding depth and complexity to the characters' reflections. Stylistics is the study of how language is used to convey meaning. Paradoxes are powerful linguistic devices that contribute to this process. A paradox involves apparent contradictions that reveal a deeper truth upon closer examination. The use of paradox in language can create irony and ambiguity, forcing readers to think more deeply about the meaning. This adds layers to the text, making it more intellectually engaging. Paradox is often used to emphasize themes that involve contradictory elements by expressing conflicting ideas within a single statement or concept. Paradox can emphasize the complexity of human experience or abstract concepts. It encourages creative thinking by challenging conventional wisdom and pushing the boundaries of language.

Writers use paradox to express ideas in ways that are unexpected and original, contributing to the uniqueness of their work. It can also prompt readers to reconcile seemingly contradictory ideas, stimulating cognitive processes and encouraging deeper reflection. This engagement with the text can enhance the overall reading experience. The proverbs probe into the complexities of language and meaning. It suggests that adversity has beneficial outcomes, challenging the conventional perception of hardship as wholly negative despite its challenges. This challenges the dichotomy of positive versus negative connotations in language, illustrating how words and phrases can carry nuanced meanings. In its semantic complexity, it suggests that adversity has hidden benefits or lessons, emphasizing the complexity of meaning within language. A paradox encourages a rhetorical analysis that focuses on persuasion and argumentation. It invites scholars to consider how the phrase persuades individuals to perceive adversity differently, emphasizing the benefits hidden within challenges. This aligns with stylistic methods such as rhetorical devices, tone and mood analysis, word choice and diction, syntax and sentence structure, and appeal to emotion that scrutinizes the persuasive and emotive impact of language.

Contrast and Irony: Contrast highlights differences between ideas, characters, or situations that can create irony and ambiguity as well. Writers can draw attention to the complexity of the subject matter, prompting readers to question assumptions and explore deeper meanings by juxtaposing contrasting elements. Contrast is effective in emphasizing differences between concepts or themes, helping to highlight the nuances of a text. The juxtaposition of contrasting elements allows for a more profound exploration of themes and ideas. By presenting opposing elements, writers can create vivid and memorable images or expressions. Contrast adds variety to language, preventing monotony and making the text more interesting and dynamic. It forces readers to actively compare and contrast elements, making them more involved in the interpretation of the text. The irony of the expressions lies in the reversal of expectations regarding the nature of adversity. This engagement fosters a more active and participatory reading experience.

Literary Allusions: The expressions exemplify Shakespeare's mastery of language and his ability to convey complex ideas in a concise and memorable manner. They have become notable quotations, often cited and referenced in discussions about the human experience. Language is not solely denotative, but is layered with connotations, metaphors, and implied meanings. The use of imageries such as sweetness, robbery, smiling, grief, metaphors like thief, and milk, and the personification of philosophy conveys the idea that adversity though bitter in experience can provide valuable lessons and insights, and at times can nurture with pleasant and mature experience. In this context of Romeo, philosophy refers to a calm and rational attitude towards life's challenges. Friar Laurence is expressing that in the face of adversity; the wisdom and perspective gained through a philosophical approach can be comforting and sustaining. The metaphorical representation in "The robbed that smiles" steals something from

the thief. He robs himself that spends a bootless grief' showcases how language can convey complex emotions and actions through concise and vivid imagery.

Stylistic Nuances: The proverbs feature the stylistic nuances present in linguistic expressions. Sweet are the uses of adversity' showcases how language can be used poetically to convey paradoxical or seemingly contradictory ideas. This aligns with stylistics theories such as foregrounding, cohesion, speech act, functional stylistics and cognitive stylistics that focus on how linguistic devices contribute to the aesthetic and emotional impact of language. It invites scrutiny of its linguistic features, such as its structure, diction, and rhetorical devices, showcasing how language choices contribute to conveying deeper meanings and emotions. Stylistic analysis of this proverb involves exploring its semantic layers. Stylistics also examines the cultural and contextual implications of language use. It can investigate the cultural background and societal norms that shape the reception and interpretation of such proverbs. The proverb, likely of ancient origin, reflects cultural values emphasizing resilience, inner strength, and the significance of perspective in dealing with adversity. It transcends linguistic analysis by embedding socio-cultural wisdom within its linguistic structure.

The phrase "The robbed that smiles" steals something from the thief. He robs himself that spends a bootless grief' emphasizes the stylistic choice to convey emotions through carefully selected words, highlighting the power of language in expressing complex emotional states. The juxtaposition of the contrasting elements in "Adversity's sweet milk, philosophy' sparks curiosity in stylistics" inviting an exploration of how language is employed to convey nuanced meanings and evoke emotions. It invites stylistic analysis regarding the connotations and implications of philosophical thought in the face of adversity. Shakespeare's effective communication does not depend only on the organization and disposition of components in a conversation or discourse, but also his peculiarity and originality of his language which encompasses more than just rhetoric (Sidgi, 2021).

5.5. Proverbial Expressions: A Significant Communication Style

Adversity, in the expressions discussed above, as portrayed by Shakespeare serves as a pivotal role in character development and plot progression. The playwright masterfully weaves adversity into the fabric of the plays, thrusting characters into situations that demand resilience and growth in all three contexts in the plays. The Duke Senior in the forest, Brabantio in the court, and Romeo face adversity. Through the proverbial expressions, we come to understand that through their flexibility, they can bring about growth, wisdom and self-discovery in them. Shakespeare communicates the transformative power of adversity. Characters facing adversity often undergo profound transformation. That is why we see Duke Senior, Brabantio and Romeo transformed in their way. The audience witnesses the bitterness of adversity and also the potential for personal growth and self-discovery. All three proverbial expressions introduce ironic elements. They suggest that there is sweetness in the lessons learnt, smiling and the strength gained despite the inherent bitterness of challenging circumstances. This irony becomes a powerful tool as a communication style, forcing the audience to reconsider their perceptions of adversity and to recognize the hidden benefits within hardships. For this reason, Syzdykov (2014) says that the main goal of proverbs is to provide people's judgement of the objective reality of phenomena as an expression of the world.

Another communication style employed involves the use of sharp contrasts between adversity and sweetness, the act of being robbed and smiling. This stark contrast serves to heighten the impact of adversity on characters and audience. This communication transcends time and cultural boundaries. Malik (2017) says that proverbs and proverbial expressions have for centuries been equally popular with all nations due to the enormous significance and function which they intend to carry and the due influence they have made with their communicative significance and value. The exploration of adversity, its sweet uses and nurturing nature resonates with audiences across centuries. According to Satyan (2022) the message here taps into the timeless nature of human suffering and the potential for redemption and wisdom since proverbs are a great source of wisdom and understanding. The Duke Senior grows in wisdom while experiencing the hardships of life in the forest. Friar Laurence wants Romeo to grow

in wisdom of life personified by philosophy and the Duke gives a piece of wisdom to Brabantio. Nordstrom (2007) who quotes Nicholas Maxwell, tells that wisdom is the ability to recognize what is worthwhile in life for both oneself and other people. Syzdykov (2014) has also stated that proverbs and sayings are the people's way of expressing their wisdom and spirit.

According to Nordstrom (2007) Shakespeare's writings can provide what one seeks implying that Shakespeare's works are like the real world. Thus, the wisdom implied in the expressions is a significant communication style of Shakespeare in the play and in relation to the audience or readers. Shakespeare's works contain wise phrases that are appealing to all people while also having a poetic flair and a profound understanding of the many dimensions of human character and circumstance. Shakespeare's tragedies aim to shatter the gloomy walls of impenetrable obscurity and allow the light of wisdom to shine through Nordstrom (2007).

The proverbial expressions also indicate the values which are universal in nature. Values are the opinions or beliefs that people hold to be admirable, significant, and desirable. They serve as a guide for our actions and decisions (Hong & Hong, 2022). In all three expressions, the values of patience, perseverance, courage, optimism, self-control, flexibility, adjustability, adaptability, openness, reconciliation, and experience, are implied, which are necessary for personal growth self-discovery, inner peace and happiness in life. The expression of the Duke Senior in the forest, in *As You Like It* embodies the values of experience and optimism about adversity that come out of flexibility, perseverance and adaptability, which lead him to personal growth, self-discovery and inner peace as compared to earlier life. The words of the Duke to Brabantio in the court persuade Brabantio to imbibe the value of courage, resilience and self-control through the change of attitude that can lead to inner peace, reconciliation and satisfaction. The advice of Friar Laurence to Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet* is with the intention of inculcating the value of optimism and perseverance in Romeo related to the adversity that he is undergoing, to change his attitude to learning from adversity since through adversity wisdom comes about the realities of life.

In the expressions, Shakespeare has a remarkable ability to convey complex ideas with brevity and precision. In just a couple of lines, he captures a big portion of life experiences of realities. This succinctness is a hallmark of his communication style where each word is carefully chosen for maximum impact. This communication style is effective in inspiring others to approach challenges with a more philosophical and open-minded mindset. This can foster a sense of resilience, optimism and a willingness to extract valuable lessons from life's challenges.

Shakespeare uses a lot of imagination when he portrays a hardship. He is adept at putting proverbial phrases to good advantage. As a result, proverbs are described as useful and effective instruments for demonstrating creative language use (Baharian & Rezai, 2014) which alludes to Shakespeare's writing's capacity for communication. The aforementioned proverbial expressions are employed in discourse when a character or group of characters is facing difficulties. Shakespeare can understand the nuances of similar situations in the audience and communicate the message in his own style through the use of appropriate proverbial expressions in the conversations of these characters and situations: the Duke Senior in the forest, Brabantio in the court, Friar Laurence and Romeo (who is being banished). In this way, Amuah and Wuaku (2019) have accurately said that the capacity to use proverbs is the most widely recognized component of their communicative competencies. Shakespeare is a varied writer with aesthetic flair, poetic expression, and inventiveness. He also has a broader understanding of socio-cultural situations. Agyekum, Amuah, and Arhine (2020) say that we can benefit from Shakespeare's proverbial expressions because of the poetic writing style that employs proverbs in the appropriate sociocultural context and illustrates versatility in language and culture. Additionally, the clever ways in which the expressions are aesthetically woven enhance the communicative functions and further highlight the artist's creativity. These expressions enhance, persuade, and embellish speech.

Proverbs are used for advising, warning, criticizing, encouraging, informing, expressing feelings, etc. Speaking in terms of functions, Malik (2017) opines that proverbs have been observed to occur in all communication events and their occurrences proved to be of great significance due to their influence and their effectiveness. They are used

in oratory, counselling, judging, embellishing, speeches and enriching conversations. It is common knowledge that proverbs and proverbial expressions, like the ones mentioned above have a special meaning when it comes to audience or reader communication in plays. According to Mieder (2003) proverbs had a popular side even during the Age of Reason, characterized by a genuine interest in teaching morality. The generational and experiential wisdom found in folk proverbs was, in fact, well suited for disseminating common sense ethics and virtues, both orally and in writing.

5.6. Significance to Contextual Realities

Elizabethan England was marked by various social, political, and economic challenges. "Sweet are the uses of adversity" is an expression with a purpose signifying the contextual realities of the time. The idea that adversity can have "sweet uses" suggests a stoic philosophy that encourages resilience and the ability to find positive outcomes even in difficult circumstances. This sentiment would have resonated with the prevailing attitudes of the time. Barnaby (1996) observes that the play engages socio-political conflict that emerged with the capitalist development in late Renaissance England. It reflects the belief that facing challenges can lead to personal growth and moral development. The Elizabethan era was part of the broader Renaissance period characterized by a renewed interest in classical learning and humanism. The idea of finding value in adversity can be seen as a reflection of humanist ideals, emphasizing the capacity of individuals to overcome difficulties and learn from their experiences. Wasting time and emotion on something that cannot be changed was considered unwise. The phrase "bootless grief" implies grief without purpose or benefit. The moral values of the time are also reflected in the proverbial expression. It suggests that maintaining one's inner peace and emotional well-being is more valuable than succumbing to bitterness or revenge. The emphasis on personal responsibility for one's emotional state aligns with certain moral and ethical codes prevalent in Elizabethan society. The emphasis was on enduring hardships with dignity and maintaining composure in the face of adversity. The era was also marked by political instability and uncertainty, including the transition between monarchs and religious tensions. The notion of finding sweetness in adversity may have offered a comforting perspective during times of political and social upheaval, encouraging people to endure challenges with grace and optimism. Individuals could develop their intellectual and moral capacities through experience and reflection. Moreover, the use of the term "philosophy" in the context of adversity suggests a Stoic influence (Tapas & Patel, 2017). Stoicism, an ancient Greek philosophy was revived and adapted during the Renaissance. It emphasized the importance of virtue, self-control, and the acceptance of fate, including facing adversity with resilience and a rational mindset. The expressions fit into the broader themes of Shakespearean drama, where characters navigate personal and societal challenges, ultimately leading to personal growth and resolution.

6. CONCLUSION

Shakespeare has used proverbial expressions, particularly those discussed in this study, effectively in dissecting his purpose and message. The proverbial expressions are used with a purpose for character development and transformation in thought, attitude and emotions. We find the characters of the Duke Senior, Brabantio and Romeo develop with new insight and wisdom while facing hardships and difficulties that lead them to transformation and self-discovery. The words used in the expressions are stylistically rich in diction, syntax, semantics, rhetorical functions, containing paradoxes, contrasts, imagery and metaphors, that display the communication style of Shakespeare and his linguistic expertise. These not only add to the aesthetics of expression in language but also create an impact on the audience to change their perception about adversity - that facing adversity is not to be lamented, but an opportunity to learn lessons of the realities of life, just like the characters in the plays. It is also found that the proverbial expressions are not taken at random just for the sake of drama, but are carefully crafted, that reflect the mind of Shakespeare which was drawn from his knowledge and experiences of the socio-cultural

realities of the time. The values that are conveyed through the expressions are universal, that is, they were not only relevant to the time they were written, but are universal, and are relevant across cultures and times. Thus, Shakespeare's proverbial expressions of adversity in his plays are a significant communication of the purpose they are intended for, the style of which is highly appreciated.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Agyekum, K., Amuah, J., & Arhine, A. (2020). Proverbs and stylistic devices of Akwasi Ampofo Agyei's Akan highlife lyrics. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 31(1), 117-144. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v31i1.5>
- Amuah, J. A., & Wuaku, H. M. (2019). Use of proverbs as communicative tool in Ghanaian choral music compositions. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 30(1), 133-160. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v30i1.6>
- Baharian, E., & Rezai, M. (2014). The effect of proverbs on learning vocabulary through visual organizers. *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, 2(4), 16-32.
- Barnaby, A. (1996). The political conscious of Shakespeare's As You like It. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36(2), 373-395. <https://doi.org/10.2307/450954>
- Conti, L. (2022). Communicative style in the prologue of Antigone: The interaction between Antigone and Ismene. *Veleia*, (39), 53-64. <https://doi.org/10.1387/veleia.22350>
- Daniel, B. (2010). Concepts of adversity, risk, vulnerability and resilience: A discussion in the context of the 'child protection system'. *Social Policy and Society*, 9(2), 231-241. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746409990364>
- Ellis, J. M. (1970). Linguistics, literature, and the concept of style. *Word*, 26(1), 65-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00437956.1970.11435581>
- Estill, L. (2011). Proverbial Shakespeare: The print and manuscript circulation of extracts from Love's Labour's Lost. *Shakespeare*, 7(1), 35-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2011.557508>
- Farmer, T. A. (2010). Overcoming adversity: Resilience development strategies for educational leaders. *Georgia Educational Researcher*, 8(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.20429/ger.2010.080101>
- Gonzales, W. D. W., & Flores, E. R. (2016). Stylistics in the Southeast Asian ESL or EFL classroom: A collection of potential teaching activities. *Online Submission*, 11(1), 96-107.
- Harp, R. (2009). Proverbs, philosophy, and shakespeare's the Merchant of Venice and King Lear. *Ben Jonson Journal*, 16(1-2), 197-215. <https://doi.org/10.3366/E107934530900056X>
- Herman, H., Saputra, N., Sitanggang, A., Sirait, J., & Fatmawati, E. (2024). Discourse analysis: A reference approach to investigating a good speech script. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 13(2), 109-122. <https://doi.org/10.55493/5019.v13i2.5001>
- Hong, R., & Hong, Y. (2022). Experience, imagination and integration: Creative drama for values education. *Sustainability*, 14(18), 11113. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141811113>
- Janning, F. (2015). Philosophy for everyday life. *Journal of Philosophy of Life*, 5(1), 1-18.
- Malik, M. (2017). A theoretical analysis of the communicative significance of proverbs in English language. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 22(3), 54-58.
- Mieder, W. (2003). Now i sit like a rabbit in the pepper": Proverbial language in the letters of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. *Journal of Folklore Research*, 40(1), 33-70.

- Mieder, W. (2018). The Humanistic value of proverbs in sociopolitical discourse. *Humanities*, 7(1), 28. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h7010028>
- Noltmeyer, A. L., & Bush, K. R. (2013). Adversity and resilience: A synthesis of international research. *School Psychology International*, 34(5), 474-487. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034312472758>
- Nordstrom, A. W. (2007). Shakespeare on wisdom. *London Review of Education*, 5(2), 185-196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14748460701440962>
- Orkin, M. (2014). Shakespeare's proverbial tongue. *Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare*, (31), 43-58. <https://doi.org/10.4000/shakespeare.2809>
- Rana, R. (2018). Stylistics in language and literature. *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature. JOELL*, 5(4), 13-17.
- Rezaei, A. (2012). Rhetorical function of proverbs based on literary genre. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 47, 1103-1108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.06.786>
- Saraan, R., Mamentu, C. A., & Kamagi, S. (2021). Analysis of metaphorical expressions used in the book entitled shakespeare proverbs incirbed by May Cowden Clarke. *SoCul: International Journal of Research in Social Cultural Issues*, 1(01), 1-10.
- Satyan, U. (2022). Proverbs: The carriers of ancient wisdom with timeless pertinence. *Towards Excellence*, 14(1), 1275-1282.
- Sidgi, L. F. S. (2021). Critical review of shakespearean language: Linguistic perspectives. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 6(6), 233-240. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.66.37>
- Syzdykov, K. (2014). Contrastive studies on proverbs. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 136, 318-321. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.05.336>
- Tapas, C., & Patel, H. (2017). Sticism in the renaissance and shakespeare. *Smart Moves Journal Ijellh*, 5(7), 111-116. <https://ijellh.com/index.php/OJS/article/view/2108>
- Tilley, M. P. (1924). Pun and proverb as aids to unexplained shakespearean jests. *Studies in Philology*, 21(3), 492-495.
- Yerznkyan, Y., & Harutyunyan, L. (2024). A pragmalinguistic study of the strategies in motivational discourse (Based on Mark Zuckerberg's Harvard commencement speech). *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 13(2), 97-108. <https://doi.org/10.55493/5019.v13i2.4982>

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.