FATHER FIGURES IN SELECTED SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS

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Abstract: Shakespeare and his works are widely analyzed and studied, however, you can always find something to discuss about or study, since Shakespeare's works are always challenging and attractive. This time my focus is on the father figures that appear in some of his greatest works, like King Hamlet and Polonius in *Hamlet*, Barbantio in *Othello*, Lord Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, King Lear and Gloucester in *King Lear*, Leonato in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, etc. Actually, this paper aims to give an insight and compare the major characters as fathers.

It covers an analysis of father-son relationship and the father-daughter relationship, fathers' attitude towards their children, the influence they have in the life of their children, their love and authority, expectations, their image in the eyes of their children and so on. Each and every one of these characters has a specific relationship with their child; they are all authoritative, some more and some less, they are proud and they influence their children's lives by accepting their decisions or not, by requesting very important and delicate tasks from them, by deciding themselves for their children, etc. Focusing on the issue of authority, power and ownership, the article aims at showing how stereotypical social and gender roles resonate with various political and social contexts of power.

However, the paper will also analyze the dreams, duty, as well as defiance children have, show or express towards their fathers. A special importance in this paper is given to the relationships between fathers and daughters, having in mind the social position women had at that time, the role they had in their families etc. In these relationships, it is clearly that there is more likely to find a tyrannical possessiveness in excess of normal parental affection in the father's behaviour—or, as the case may be, a capriciousness, coldness, or disloyalty unwarranted by the daughter's exemplary conduct, which in fact results in the creation or not of a father figure in these plays. Namely, it is clear that Shakespeare depicted the struggle and entanglement of a father character who realizes the lonely emptiness he has to face after fulfilling the happiness of his child.

As I mentioned, no matter the uniqueness of these relationships that are presented between parents and children, we can find some similarities as well, as many of the plays depict the same situations but with similar circumstances. Consequently, I hope that this paper will be just a small contribution in the field of literature and that future scholars will find it useful in their further studies and analysis of Shakespeare's works, which is really a never-ending 'struggle.'

Keywords: Shakespeare, father, children, relationship

INTRODUCTION

Early modern England was a highly patriarchal and male dominated society, where the father controlled his wife and children, inheritance went through the male line, and men, in general, held a disproportionate amount of power. To be considered a real man in Shakespeare's England, a male had to act in a specific manner. He had to demonstrate both physical and moral strength, as well as a sense of duty. He also became the protector of the family name and the family's reputation.

In fact, the era Shakespeare lived in, the Elizabethan Era, was probably not the best time to be a "good" father, at least by today's standards. In the 1500 and 1600s the paterfamilias dictated everything from the family's coat of arms to its holiday travel plans. As far as marriage is concerned, fathers had financial interest in their daughters' marriages, so it's understandable that his dads get bad-tempered when their daughters try to marry against their wishes, and for sure, it was the father's call. In short, only complete submission and respect was tolerated from children.

So, as far as Shakespeare's literary works are concerned, in tragedies and comedies alike, he shows us that fatherhood came with a lot of responsibilities, including selling your daughter to the highest bidder. Shakespeare not only nailed the expectation for obedience in his works; staying true to universal teenage rebellion, most children in his plays are not on board with their controlling fathers' ridiculous demands. Many of the fathers in Shakespeare's plays are old, widowed, feel deserted, and respond with anger to their children's actions, leaving them alone to deal with their old age. 'Shakespeare tries to overturn the patriarchal frame while casting his characters in the non-governmental territory, in which Shakespeare depicts the struggle and entanglement of a father character who

chooses to fulfil the happiness of his child even though realizing the lonely emptiness he has to face'. This paper analyzes exactly what is the relationship between father and children and describes the father figures in some selected plays.

FATHERS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Fathers and fatherhood play important roles in *Hamlet*. All things considered, King Hamlet is the best of a worthless —mainly because he isn't around all that much. Appearing as a ghost to certain characters, his communication with his son, Prince Hamlet, is mainly focused on avenging his death. Prince Hamlet finds himself in a kind of a trap, emotionally confused, whether to believe the ghost, and on the other hand, as a son, he is given a task by his 'father', and has to fulfil his filial duties and respect his father by obeying him and revenging his death, since he adored him, and when Horatio described the elder Hamlet as "a goodly king," the son Hamlet replies, "*He was a man, take him for all in all. I shall not look upon his like again.*" (I, 2). His father's sudden death totally unsettles Hamlet, even before he sees the ghost, and that points to the close and mutually respectful relationship the two had that we actually sense in their conversation.

In Hamlet, we meet another father, so we have another study of a father in Polonius. No matter Polonius is described as a fool, an innocent victim, an honest counsellor, or a suck-up courtier, here is described his status as a father. Polonius can be annoying but reasonably decent person and father. Despite him talking a lot, mainly rudely or insolently, readers can easy notice Polonius's sincerity in his preoccupation with his children, Ophelia and Laertes. He's something silly in his preaching the principles to Laertes, and he's somewhat bossy in admonishing Ophelia to keep away from Hamlet. When Laertes departs for France, Polonius gives him fatherly wisdom, and later sends his servant to go and spy on him to ensure that he is behaving morally. However, the rules are good fatherly advice, and in the context of the play his instruction to Ophelia is wise, since it is very understandable that at that time royalty could only waste time with the commoners, and his warnings about Hamlet turn out to be true, no matter what Hamlet's motivations and state of mind may be. However, as I mentioned, Polonius is often longwinded and annoying. Even Queen Gertrude becomes frustrated with him, demanding "more matter with less art" (96- II.2). He completely controls Ophelia, denying her relationship with Hamlet and using her as a tool in his warped plans for spying on the prince. Further, he does not even trust his own son, hiring Reynaldo to spy on Laertes in France. Thus, audiences would have likely considered him devious and back-handed. Nevertheless, Laertes returns to revenge his father's death, an act presumably justified, since to be judged a good man in early modern ideologies, a son had to be loyal to his father and fulfil his duty to avenge his father's murder.

Shakespeare tackles the state of fatherhood fully, and bitterly, with *King Lear*. The play deals with the relationship of Lear and his three daughters, two of whom are serpent's teeth and the third a clumsy fool. The play's subplot as well has a similar theme, involving Gloucester and his two sons, one who is literally a greedy bastard, the other a blundering fool. Both Lear and Gloucester wrongly disown their true children, and both suffer major impairments—Lear madness, Gloucester blindness—indirectly but most surely at the hands of their vengeful children. Both fathers rely completely on the mere duties owed to fatherhood, totally unaware that they are dealing with children who have absolutely no respect for the state of fatherhood.

Lear has a personality that is easy to despise, but Shakespeare indicates that his predominant characteristic is old age and the mental and psychological weakness, so his downfall is the dissolution of fatherhood. His insecurity is certainly to blame for his questionable expressions of fatherly "love." Or, his dream of being king while his children handle the responsibilities of the position simply drives them further away. Lear stages a test of flattery to determine which of his three daughters loves him most, so that he can give the biggest piece of the kingdom to. His ego I fed with the flattering words of his two older daughters, Goneril and Reagan, who do not spare the words of praise and 'excessive love' for their father, and he appears to the proudest dad ever, but everything turns upside down when his youngest daughter and his favourite one, Cordelia tells him that she loves her father as much as a father should be loved, and not flattering him, Lear's excessive pride is hurt so he orders her out of the kingdom and disowns her. However, Cordelia was just the most sincere and honest daughter, and we see that Lear remained her father after all, she didn't make any remark and didn't oppose her father's decision. Proud Lear understood his mistaken judgment only when his older daughters showed their real faces and forgot whatever they said about how much they loved their father, but left him alone, outside, in the middle of the storm, what descended the king into madness. Essentially, Lear and his children manage to turn a family argument into a real civil war. In fact, in King Lear, we don't have the usual scheme of a father finding a husband for his daughter, but there is a deeper issue, that of a

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desire for power, that of devolving the figure of a father who should be an authority, and especially a nobility, in this case a king. At the beginning, we see the authoritative Lear, an authoritative father and a ruler, Lear the king, but later he is only an old fool, despised, hated father.

The same happens to Gloucester, as he is manipulated by his bastard son Edmund, and wrongly rejects his sincere son Edgar, and he pays his misjudgement with his blindness. Notably, both Lear and Gloucester are rescued only when their fatherhood is restored by their true children. The blind Gloucester, thrust out on the heath, ends up with Edgar, disguised as Mad Tom, and we get a sequence of scenes of the son leading his father not only to Dover but to salvation from despair. Edgar remains in disguise, and his revelation to the dying Gloucester comes only through Edgar's description. We get to see the restoration of Lear with his youngest daughter, Cordelia, a reunion scene that, on the page and when played well, is a tear-duct wringer. In act IV, scene 7 we hear "I know you do not love me," Lear tells her, "for your sisters have, as I do remember, done me wrong: You have some cause, they have not." "No cause," Cordelia replies; "no cause." Upon their capture after the battle, Lear sees Cordelia as daddy's little girl again, and they'll go to prison as if it were her playroom where "We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage." Here actually Lear admits his fault, considers him himself guilty, by calling himself 'I am a very foolish fond old man', Ignorant, not in my perfect mind'...However, he will always be his father in Cordelia's eyes, the king, the authoritative ruler, and not the proud, unjust person who turned out to lose all his power and dignity due to his misjudgement and hubris. And the image of this old king, but first of all, father that lives to subsequently carry his dead Cordelia onto the stage is Shakespeare's most emotionally powerful visual in the entire canon.

When it comes to *Othello* we have *Desdemona's father Brabantio*, who is typical renaissance father, very possessive over his daughter, who wants to control her every move, who has to choose for his daughter, and cannot allow her choose someone that does not fulfil the standards he had set. However, Desdemona falls in love with the moor Othello, and finds it difficult to agree with her father's beliefs. In fact, Othello is a general of the Venetian army, highly respected for his abilities, strength, sincerity, loyalty and decency, and has often been invited him onto his home. The fact that Othello is a moor, not Venetian, much older than Desdemona, gives Barbantio more 'right' to be against her daughter's choice and doesn't accept Othello as his son-in-law, and tag him as both racist and sexist. Brabantio does not think it is possible his daughter actually fell in love with the moor, unless being drugged or bewitched, saying: "Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her! (I, 2), considering that her daughter is 'abused, stolen from me and corrupted." (I, 3)

Brabantio's pain is evident; in fact, he virtually wishes his fatherhood away. He expresses a similar sentiment, but with more bitterness and intensity, after Desdemona confirms that Othello is innocent of using potions or dark magic to steal her away:

For your sake, jewel,

I am glad at soul I have no other child;

For thy escape would teach me tyranny,

To hang clogs on them."(217-220, I, 3)

Desdemona is truly in love, and with all the respect for his father, she decides to fight for herself, and chooses to marry Othello leaving Barbantio betrayed. Desdemona declares her love for Othello and her father gets enraged by her words, no matter she clearly states and explains her love towards her husband and her respect for her father, Barbantio disowns her after unsuccessfully trying to strip Othello of his title. His only redeeming fatherly act is that he dies of grief upon his daughter's escape. This over protective father, in fact does not protect her daughter, but shows no respect for her choices, decisions and feelings.

In "Romeo and Juliet" Lord Capulet is presented as a typical father of the time. He is strong, authoritative father figure in this tragedy, and his main characteristic is to be a loving father and do what is best for Juliet as she is his only child. He appears caring since he wants Juliet to marry for love, he is protective as he doesn't want Juliet to be hurt, since she is very young, and is proud as well, and his Juliet is his entire world. He clearly shows this at the beginning when he puts Prince Paris off when discovering that Paris wants to marry his much-too-young daughter. He also speaks well of Romeo, the son of his rival, lord Montague. It is only when Tybalt is murdered that Capulet agrees to marry and begins to force the marriage of her young daughter in order to ensure her safety and the prosperity of the family. Thus he allows Paris to propose to her and her refusal throws him into a rage. He also shows his short temper and itchy finger as well, what makes him quite a horrible father, what makes him different person in the eyes of Juliet and the audience.

Thus, through the development of the story, we see a very different image of lord Capulet, he becomes a real villain. He shows his authority when speaking the first line almost every time that he enters the scene, which puts the attention on him, and also the importance of Capulets over Montagues.

At first, as mentioned above, he is caring and cares about his daughter's feelings and opinions; he tells Paris he can only marry Juliet if she says yes as well. "My will to her consent is but a part; / And she agreed, within her scope of choice / Lies my consent and fair according voice." (12-4 I, 2). He directly links his approval with hers here and the rhyming couplets used exaggerate this point to the audience. This rhyming couplet also puts emphasis on the words "choice" and voice". The "voice" he is referring to is his own, rather than Juliet's, suggesting that Juliet only has a voice through him as her father. This shows that although Lord Capulet is a good father because he cares about her feelings, he does not want Juliet to have her own voice or opinions outside his. This reflects the attitudes to women's places in marriage and families at the time. On the other hand, later on in the play in Act 3 Scene 4 he talks with Paris and decides Juliet will marry Paris without her consent. He believes that she will be easily persuaded by her father "I think she will be ruled / In all respects by me. Nay, more, I doubt it not." (13-4 III, 4). Although Capulet seems to care for his daughter he does not respect her feelings throughout the play. The use of the word "ruled" shows that Lord Capulet has the final say in the matter, unlike in Act 1 Scene 2 when it seems like her choice is also important. Lord Capulet believes he is being a good father when he says yes to Paris but the audience sympathizes with Juliet who he threatens to kick onto the street if she does not marry Paris: "Hang, beg, starve, die in the streets, / For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee," (193-4 III, 5).

So, by forcing her daughter marry someone she doesn't love, Lord Capulet gives way to the tragedy, when, as known, Juliet and her beloved Romeo prefer to die that not be together. In his grief over her daughter's death, is only when he turns to his family by their relationship, 'wife', and daughter.

It is only at the end of the play when Lord Capulet makes peace with the Montagues and agrees to bury the lovers together that he seems to follow Juliet's wishes. Shakespeare begins the play by presenting him as a good father but complicates this impression through the rest of the play, and at the end we are left with the impression is a complex father character that is both good and bad. It is also very evident that through the text there is very little meaningful communication between father and daughter, which might have avoided the tragedy.

Not in tragedies only, the authoritative fathers appear in comedies as well. Like most other Shakespearean fathers, **Leonato** from *Much Ado About Nothing* is completely controlling of his daughter, Hero. Leonato is the governor of Messina, and appears as a tender, overprotective father, gracious host, affectionate brother and kindly uncle. As the story opens, Leonato is awaiting and welcomes Don Pedro and his return from war, and is willing to house them, showing his hospitability, generosity and compassion.

As the play progresses, the bulk of the action takes place under Leonato's roof and watchful eye, including the courtships of his daughter and his niece, and the deception perpetrated against them, which Leonato investigates and remedies. In short, Leonato is the glue that holds the storyline together, through his seniority, stability and wisdom.

In fact, he can be considered the best father, no matter of his flows. First of all, he appears to be patriarchal father, since he wants his daughter and his niece to find husbands, and says: "By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue." (II 1)

As far as his personality is concerned, from the beginning we see him let himself easily be influenced in a way by the circumstances around him, including other people's opinions and ideas. For example, at first he agrees with the relationship between his daughter Hero and Don Pedro, which later changes into a relationship between his daughter and Claudio. However, when Don John plots against Hero and Claudio, and a rumour is spread that Hero is no longer pure, Leonato initially believes the accusations, and then changes his mind, he is both outraged that his daughter is unchaste *and* affronted that people are talking negatively about his child.

Leonato also appears to be very just interested in seeing justice done in the wake of the accusation against his daughter, Hero. His punishment for Claudio is to require the man to declare Hero's innocence to everyone in town, and to marry a mysterious family member believed to be Hero's cousin (revealed to be Hero herself). Leonato also stops Don Pedro and Claudio from fleeing his home after the accusation against Hero is made, until he is able to reveal the truth of the situation - whatever that may be. This indicates his patience and wisdom. He leads the investigation into the matter, with others falling in line behind him. This illustrates not only Leonato's quest for answers, but also his desire to protect his family. The fact that he wishes to die when Hero is accused, saying "Hath no man's dagger here a point for me?" (IV, 1), implies that he is very honourable too. His sense of dishonour is so great that he would prefer suicide than to live with the disgrace of his daughter's apparent misbehaviour. However, his efforts to hurry the ceremony up and to retain control which Claudio gradually wrests from him indicate his dominance of Hero whose marriage was to be the crowning event of his social life. His failure to understand the accusations immediately is a presumption of Hero's innocence. Yet once they have sunk in, he is credulous and dwells upon his dishonour rather than her suffering: 'hath no man's dagger here a point for me?' (IV.1.102). When she faints, he rashly gives voice to a wish that she should die or he would finish her off himself, not to spare her a lifetime of dishonour but to revenge her sin. In the prolonged lamentations and the later

threats of vengeance that follow, the proliferation of the first person 'I' or 'mine' reveals a callous and possessive egocentricity, assumption of male privilege and superiority and a latent aggression underlying his courtly, senile mask. He embodies the irrationality and impotent violence which are the hidden face of the Italian courtier, patriarch and old man. His egotism appears more culpable on the page than in the theatre, where it deepens our sympathy for Hero. The picture of old age in the play as a whole is critical – conventional, hypocritical, rash and morally blind. The old are responsible for the world which youth has to strive against and try to remake.

The authority of fathers lives even after their death. It is best portrayed in *The Merchant of Venice*, where Portia's deceased dad leaves a will forcing his daughter's suitors to pass a test of chests without allowing for her desires at all. Ironically, and luckily for her, Portia ends up with her choice passing the test. No matter how strong, independent, intelligent and mature Portia is, she has to respect his dead father's will, since she idealizes her father, and he is the hero of the family, the one who protects the family, the 'boss'. A paternalistic and controlling figure in the play, Portia's father reaches out from the grave in his attempt to protect his daughter from her own innate xenophobia and from the greed and duplicity of the world around her. By requiring her various suitors to seek out the truth beneath the appearance of each of the caskets, he hopes that Portia's eventual spouse will see her personal value clearly through the highly polished surface of wealth and privilege. In this fashion, he can bequeath her directly from father to husband as if she were inherited property being handed down from one generation to the next, in much the same way Shakespeare must have presided over the lives of his two surviving daughters.

However, more can be said about **Shylock**, the Jew, as a father, since there is a more complicated relationship between him and his daughter, Jessica. Specifically, Shylock embodies the idea of a Jew who is cold-hearted, villainous, and obsessed with money. Driven by his hatred for Antonio and the other Christians, he is consistently antagonistic and plotting, and, because of his religion, alien to both the community on stage and in the seats. Even before his final scene, Shylock demonstrates money-grubbing coldness that would have turned off an audience. This is also visible in his attitude towards his daughter Jessica and their father —daughter relationship, clearly presented when he found out about Jessica running away, and he began yelling:

My daughter! O, my ducats! O, my daughter! Fled with a Christian! O, my Christian ducats! Justice! The law! My ducats and my daughter! A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats, Of double ducats, stol'n from me by my daughter! And jewels, two stones, two rich and precious stones, Stol'n by my daughter! Justice! Find the girl! She hath the two stones upon her, and the ducats! (2.8.15-22)

At a moment when the audience would have expected Shylock to be grieving over the loss of his daughter, he seems to be more focused on the loss of his money. If the audience was ever to sympathize with Shylock and disagree with Jessica's actions, this would be the part of the play in which he could win their favour. However, his response continues the antagonistic, early modern Jewish stereotype. Given the deep aversion the audience has for Shylock, if they are to like Jessica, she must set herself against her father. Not only does she verbalize a hatred for her father and physically separate herself from him, her overall nature is the opposite of Shylock's, as described by other characters. She is the goodness juxtaposed to his wickedness. Any badness she may have, although it appears she has none, would come directly from Shylock. Otherwise, her character is completely innocent of the evils of her father. She demonstrates a capacity for love in her relationship and she even embraces Christianity. The audience likely viewed Shylock as a despicable stranger and Jessica as one of "them," so they would have been able to support her rebellion against him. Shakespeare coupled Jewish stereotypes with dynamics of the father-daughter relationship to manipulate the audience's perceptions of Jessica. Traditionally, they would not have accepted a rebellious daughter who is not reconciled with her father, but since they did not like or trust Shylock, they would not have wanted Jessica to return to his good graces. The values of entertainment are only a temporary escape from the confining ideologies of gender, but anti-Semitic stereotypes enabled Shakespeare to construct a daughter character that rebels against her father for an entire play.

In Jessica of *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare used father-daughter dynamics in yet another way to create yet another type of daughter. He especially utilized the juxtaposition with a disagreeable father. Jessica is one of the only daughter character that Shakespeare constructed both positively and rebelliously for the entire duration of a play. Because Shakespeare represented Jessica's father, Shylock, as so despicable, Jessica's sustained rebellion would have been justifiable to his audience. From the very first time she is on the stage, Jessica exhibits not merely noncompliance with her father's wishes but a very strong disdain for Shylock and hints at her desire to escape him. In an aside near the beginning of the play, Jessica laments:

Alack, what heinous sin is it in me To be ashamed to be my father's child! But though I am a daughter to his blood, I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo,

If thou keep promise I shall end this strife,

Become a Christian and thy loving wife. (2.3.15-20)

Jessica's disdain for her father creates a desire for complete physical freedom. Jessica successfully runs away from Shylock and spends the majority of the play free from his presence. Shakespeare played to the audience's sympathy by juxtaposing Jessica with a father they would have found completely offensive. Shylock, in his manners, his business of money lending, and his religion, would have been highly repellent to early modern audiences. The relationship between a father and his child was highly wrapped up in this gender ideology of early modern England. The father-daughter relationships more often present a challenge to the audience. That is not to say that the daughters that Shakespeare created do not fit into the preconceived categorizations of the audiences. And, as Elizabeth Dreher says, 'Beset by jealous anxiety, unwilling to lose their daughter's singular love and obedience and face the bleat prospect of life in decline, Shakespeare's fathers hold on tightly to their parental prerogatives'²

CONCLUSION

To conclude, father, for generations, is always the central authority of the family. In Shakespearean plays, in order to attain another patriarchal power, young man is set to be divided from his father. With lack of father's protection, the young men have the chance to grow up and have the real independence physically, spiritually and financially. The quality of the relationship between a father and son is central to the character development of the son. The way in which he treats his father would have demonstrated to an audience his overall character; an audience typically saw a son who abuses his father as a villainous character, while they would have viewed a son who is dutiful to his father as a good character. Moreover, the "good" son is often in some way his father's protector, either saving his father's honour by revenging his unjust death or literally saving his father from an imminent threat.

By contrast, to expose the patriarchal authority in the family, daughter is the one to obey the father. As mentioned above, father has dominating power towards the daughters. Clearly, father's mission in Shakespearean plays is to select their daughters' husbands, or to create difficulties on their daughters' way to get married. The daughters who are obedient of their fathers typically have all the qualities desired in a woman: she is meek, submissive, and strikingly silent. On the other side, the disobedient or rebellious daughters demonstrate the characteristics of independence and eloquence. When Shakespeare presented a daughter who bends to her father's commands, she has very little lines and rarely offers an interesting personality, but his rebellious daughters typically demonstrate great amounts of stage presence and also rival the male characters in intelligent dialogue. Obedience is consistently characterized by silence and rebellion is likewise accompanied by high levels of expression. Using Jessica in *Merchant of Venice*, Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia in *King Lear*, we see the ways in which intensity of submission to a father is essentially linked with intensity of voice in the daughter. A woman's life of submission began with obeying her father, and a man's greatest commitment of loyalty lay with his bloodline.

So, as we see, fathers are mainly very authoritative figures, and as Tom MacFaul says, 'The father is judging and validating presence, whatever his personal motivations, and this contributes to our sense of his doubleness'

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² Dreher, Elizabeth; *Domination And Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare* The University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1986. p.43

³ MacFaul, Tom; *Problem Fathers in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, p.15