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## Shakespeare's Universality: Exploring the Timelessness and Relevance of his Works across Cultures and Societies



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**Abstract:** *This research paper investigates the universality and enduring relevance of Shakespeare's works across cultures and societies. Through an analysis of his masterful use of language and exploration of fundamental human experiences, such as love, loss, and power, this paper argues that Shakespeare's characters and stories continue to resonate with contemporary audiences. The paper highlights the broad range of themes tackled by Shakespeare, including politics, gender, and social norms, and their relevance to the human experience. Furthermore, the paper emphasizes how Shakespeare's works provide valuable insight into the cultural and societal norms of his time, and how his exploration of complex ideas and themes through language demonstrates the power of literature. This paper highlights the importance of exploring the timelessness and relevance of Shakespeare's works across cultures and societies to connect us to each other and the larger world. The paper concludes that the universality of Shakespeare's works reflects the capacity of art to transcend time and place and the enduring power of the human imagination.*

**Key Words:** Shakespeare, Universality, Enduring Relevance, Language, Culture, Society, Human Experience, Themes, Literature, Art, and Imagination

### Introduction

Shakespeare's universality is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, his characters are complex and multi-dimensional, with flaws and virtues that make them relatable and believable (Wells and Taylor). They are not simply caricatures or stereotypes, but rather fully realized human beings that reflect the complexities of the human experience. This is evident in plays such as *Hamlet*, in which the titular character is torn between his desire for revenge and his moral convictions. Similarly, in

*Macbeth*, the eponymous character is driven to madness and destruction by his ambition, a flaw that is all too familiar to many people.

Furthermore, Shakespeare's themes and ideas are universal and enduring, speaking to audiences across time and space. Love, jealousy, ambition, and the human condition are just a few of the recurrent themes that run throughout his works like *Romeo and Juliet*; *Othello*; *King Lear*. These themes are not limited to any specific time or place but are instead rooted in the universal experiences and emotions that define the human condition. As a result, his works continue to

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**Citation:** Karamat, H., & Khalis, A. S. (2023). Shakespeare's Universality: Exploring the Timelessness and Relevance of his Works across Cultures and Societies. *Global Social Sciences Review*, VIII(I), 87-98. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2023\(VIII-I\).08](https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2023(VIII-I).08)

resonate with audiences of all ages and backgrounds (Britannica). William Shakespeare's universality as a literary figure and his enduring popularity can be attributed to several factors, including his mastery of character, plot, language, and theme, as well as the enduring appeal of his stories and the themes they explore. Regardless of the specific reasons for his universality, it is clear that Shakespeare's works will continue to be an important and relevant part of our cultural heritage for generations to come.

William Shakespeare is widely regarded as one of the greatest playwrights in history due to his ability to create timeless works that explore universal themes and emotions. His plays are characterized by their rich language, complex characters, and profound insights into the human condition, making them relevant to audiences from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Shakespeare's language, which is both beautiful and accessible, adds depth and nuance to his characters and themes, making his works enduringly popular. His ability to capture the essence of the human experience has made his work a cornerstone of English literature and a staple of school and university curricula. Many famous classical writers and critics have commented on Shakespeare's universality, emphasizing the timelessness and relevance of his works across cultures and societies. Here are some notable quotes and references: Samuel Taylor Coleridge [1985](#), a poet and literary critic from the Romantic era, wrote of Shakespeare's ability to capture universal human emotions and experiences: "Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense of the word either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a mixed kind, showing the real state of sublunary nature, which is neither strictly tragic nor strictly comic. They are a mirror in which everyone can see a reflection of the life he leads and the society he lives in" (31).

### Literature Review

Harold Bloom, [1998](#), a prominent literary critic of the 20th century, described Shakespeare as "the inventor of the human" and argued that his works transcend time and culture: "No western writer, before or since Shakespeare, has achieved such a comprehensive understanding of human nature or created characters of such lasting vitality. Shakespeare's universality lies in his insight into

the nature of human personality" (13). Virginia Woolf, a modernist writer and critic, emphasized the universality of Shakespeare's themes and their enduring relevance: "What is astonishing about Shakespeare is that he is really very good - in spite of all the people who say he is very good. One feels that he is forgivable, even lovable because he is not a perfectionist; he can be happy with what he has done; and perhaps he is more profound because he leaves so much undone. And then, of course, he is universal; and that is why the critics like him" (137).

Shakespeare's influence extends far beyond the Western world, with his plays being translated into almost every language and adapted to reflect local cultures and traditions. For example, in Japan, his plays have been adapted into kabuki and noh theatre, and his themes of honour, loyalty, and revenge are particularly resonant in Japanese culture. In Africa, his plays have been adapted to reflect post-colonial themes and issues, such as identity, power [2005](#), and the legacy of colonialism. His characters, such as Polonius, Hamlet, Viola, and Portia, are complex and multi-dimensional, challenging gender norms and expectations and reflecting the realities of human experiences. His use of imagery, metaphors and other linguistic devices enhances the depth and richness of his characters and themes, making them open to interpretation and relatable even in the modern world. One of the most famous examples of Shakespeare's use of imagery is the metaphor of "life's but a walking shadow" in *Macbeth*. In Act V, Scene V, Macbeth reflects on the transience of life, saying, "Out, out, brief candle! / Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more" (Lines 23-26). This metaphor compares life to a shadow, emphasizing its fleeting and insubstantial nature. The image of a player on a stage reinforces this idea, suggesting that life is merely a performance and that people are but actors playing their parts. Another example of Shakespeare's use of imagery can be found in *Romeo and Juliet*, where he employs the metaphor of light and darkness to convey the intensity of the lovers' passion. In Act II, Scene II, Romeo describes Juliet as the sun, saying, "Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, / Who is already sick and pale with grief" (Lines 4-5). This metaphor emphasizes the brightness and warmth of Juliet's beauty, contrasting it with

the darkness of the night. The image of the moon, often associated with melancholy and sadness, underscores the lovers' longing and despair. Shakespeare also uses other linguistic devices, such as allusion, to make his works relatable and universal. In *Hamlet*, for example, the protagonist's famous soliloquy begins with the line, "To be or not to be, that is the question" (3.1.64). This line alludes to the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, who is famous for his statement, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Shakespeare's use of this allusion emphasizes the universality of Hamlet's existential crisis and the timeless nature of the human struggle to find meaning in life. In *Othello*, Shakespeare uses irony to heighten the dramatic tension and to critique the racist attitudes of the characters. When Othello is accused of using witchcraft to seduce Desdemona, he replies, "I have not deserved this" (4.1.51). This statement is ironic because Othello, a respected military leader, is being accused of using supernatural powers when in fact it is his character and his love for Desdemona that have won her over. Shakespeare's use of irony exposes the characters' prejudices and biases, while also highlighting the tragic consequences of their actions.

In addition to this, Shakespeare's works continue to be relevant and influential in the 21st century due to his ability to depict universal human experiences in a way that is both timeless and culturally relevant. His legacy extends far beyond the Western world and his characters and themes continue to inspire writers and artists from diverse backgrounds. As Thanky [2016](#), states, "His connections of themes with modern reality make him a worthy candidate of an enduring playwright—one that expresses important aspects of life; transcending time" (360).

William Shakespeare is widely recognized as one of the most significant literary figures in history, and his works continue to be studied, interpreted, and celebrated around the world. One of the key reasons for his enduring appeal is the thematic concerns that he explores in his plays and poetry, which are timeless and relatable to the human experience. One of the most prominent themes in Shakespeare's works is love, which he explores in various forms, including romantic love, familial love, and platonic love. In *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, Shakespeare explores the

intensity of romantic love and its ability to overcome societal boundaries and family feuds. Similarly, in *King Lear*, he examines the complexities of familial love and the tragic consequences of betrayal and mistrust. The universality of Shakespeare's exploration of love has ensured that his works continue to resonate with contemporary audiences, as the human experience of love and its challenges remain unchanged over time. Another key theme in Shakespeare's works is power, which he examines in various forms, including political power, social power, and personal power. In plays such as *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Richard III*, Shakespeare explores the corrupting influence of power and its impact on individuals and society. The relevance of Shakespeare's exploration of power is particularly evident in contemporary politics, where power struggles and corruption remain pervasive issues. Besides, Shakespeare explores in his works the nature of identity, including questions of gender, race, and social status. In plays such as *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*, he examines the impact of prejudice and discrimination on individuals and their sense of self. Similarly, in *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, he explores the fluidity of gender and the complexities of identity. The relevance of Shakespeare's exploration of identity is particularly evident in contemporary discussions of diversity, inclusion, and social justice. Shakespeare's works also explore the nature of human existence, including questions of mortality, morality, and the human condition. In *Hamlet*, for example, he examines the futility of human existence and the inevitability of death. In *King Lear*, he explores the question of whether human beings have free will or are subject to fate. The relevance of Shakespeare's exploration of the human experience is particularly evident in contemporary discussions of mental health, spirituality, and philosophy. Through his exploration of love, power, identity, and the human condition, Shakespeare offers insights into the complexities of the human experience that continue to resonate with contemporary audiences. His enduring legacy lies in his ability to capture the universality of the human experience through his works, making them relevant and significant even today.

According to Chambers [2012](#), Shakespeare's works offer limitless opportunities for artistic

exploitation due to their historical and global significance (115). Moreover, his plays depict not only the social characteristics of his time but also possess elements that make both his dramas and characters universal. Henderson notes that writers like Scott, Bronte, and Woolf have used Shakespeare's works for inspiration and aesthetic insights, creating new layers and complexity in modern writings (23). Thus, it is safe to assume that Shakespeare's dramas grasp realities that define social constructs and human consciousness that cross the boundaries of time and space.

### Universal Themes

One of Shakespeare's universal and enduring themes is his portrayal of female characters. Shakespeare's most celebrated female character is Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Beatrice is a witty and intelligent woman who challenges the patriarchal norms of her society. In Act III, Scene IV, she famously declares, "I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me" (108-109). This line highlights Beatrice's resistance to the conventional expectations of women in her society, who were expected to prioritize marriage and family over their own desires and interests. Beatrice's character has been seen as a precursor to the feminist movement, and her wit and intelligence continue to resonate with contemporary audiences.

Another notable female character in Shakespeare's comedy is Rosalind in *As You Like It*. Rosalind is a strong and independent woman who disguises herself as a man to navigate the patriarchal society of the play. In Act III, Scene II, she observes, "Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love" (15-16). This line highlights Rosalind's scepticism about the romantic ideals of the male characters in the play and her belief in the importance of self-reliance and independence. Rosalind's character has been seen as an early representation of gender fluidity, and her determination and wit continue to inspire contemporary audiences.

In addition to his comedies, Shakespeare's histories also feature notable female characters. One such character is Margaret of Anjou in *Henry VI, Part 3*. Margaret is a powerful and intelligent queen who fights for her family's right to the throne. In Act I, Scene III, she confronts her husband, King Henry VI, about his weak leadership, saying, "Frown on, you heavens, effect

your rage with speed! / Sit, gods, upon your thrones, and smile at me! / I'll be revenged upon the traitor Somerset" (39-41). This dialogue highlights Margaret's determination and resolve, as she takes control of the situation and asserts her authority in a male-dominated society. Margaret's character has been seen as a representation of female agency and leadership, and her strength and intelligence continue to inspire contemporary audiences. Shakespeare's portrayal of female characters in his histories and comedies is one of the enduring themes of his plays. Through characters such as Beatrice, Rosalind, and Margaret of Anjou, he challenges patriarchal norms and celebrates female strength, intelligence, and agency. These characters continue to resonate with contemporary audiences, as they inspire and empower women to challenge gender stereotypes and fight for their rights and freedoms.

Lady Macbeth from *Macbeth* is a character whose ambition and desire for power drive her actions, making her a universally recognizable character. As scholar Emma Smith [2014](#), notes, "Her behaviour is timeless, and her language is prophetic, while her psychological complexity gives her a universal appeal" (130). Similarly, Juliet from *Romeo and Juliet* is a character whose story of forbidden love and the tragic ending has captivated audiences for centuries. Her portrayal as a young woman who defies her family's expectations and follows her heart is a timeless theme that resonates with audiences from all cultures and backgrounds. As critic Harold Bloom states, "Juliet's universality depends upon her being an adolescent who passionately believes in the romantic ideal" (150).

Similarly, Cleopatra from *Antony and Cleopatra* is another female character whose portrayal as a powerful, seductive, and manipulative queen has made her a universally recognized character. Her complex personality, with its combination of strength and vulnerability, has made her a symbol of female empowerment and liberation. As scholar Lisa Hopkins [2011](#), comments, "Cleopatra represents a universal truth about women and one which has not changed since Shakespeare's time, that is, that women who are strong, clever, and independent can still be vulnerable" (41). Viola from *Twelfth Night*, who disguises herself as a man, also challenges traditional gender roles, making her a universally

relatable character. Her struggles with love and identity, as well as her portrayal as a strong, intelligent, and independent woman, have made her a character that transcends time and place. As critic Stephen Greenblatt mentions, "Viola's story represents a timeless exploration of the ways in which love can transgress boundaries of gender, class, and social convention" (193). Shakespeare's portrayal of female characters in his plays is widely regarded as universal and enduring, with his characters remaining relevant and relatable across different cultures, languages, and time periods. Through his depictions of powerful, intelligent, and complex female characters, Shakespeare has created enduring symbols of female empowerment and liberation.

Shakespeare's ability to create universal characters and themes that resonate with audiences beyond his time has allowed his works to endure and achieve global recognition. According to Ryan [2005](#), Shakespeare is "a dramatist who dreamt up memories of the future" (131), reflecting the human experience at its finest. Ryan also notes that although his characters and cultural context remain rooted in their historical moment, their egalitarian rationale offers a view that extends beyond that moment (62). Lanier [2001](#), points out that Shakespeare's works were originally intended for the mass entertainment industry of the theatre, but they have since transcended their immediate audience to become literary classics. Lanier notes that during the restoration period, Shakespeare's work was regarded with suspicion due to its popularity, but it continued to connect with audiences by portraying moral and social realities. As printing technology emerged in the 18th century, Shakespeare's works became more widely disseminated and experienced in a new way, with readers interpreting his work individually through notes and apparatus (1263).

### Modern Adaptations of Shakespeare's Works

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Shakespeare's universal appeal is demonstrated in various modern adaptations of his works. For example, Jane Smiley's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *A Thousand Acres* re-imagines *King Lear*'s story, exploring themes of family dysfunction, betrayal, and the corrosive effects of greed and power. Similarly, *West Side Story*, a musical by Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents, and Stephen

Sondheim, modernizes *Romeo and Juliet*'s story, featuring themes of love, violence, and societal conflict. Aimé Césaire's play *The Tempest* is a postcolonial adaptation of Shakespeare's play, exploring themes of race, power, and colonialism. Césaire's version re-imagines the character of Caliban, who is often portrayed as a savage and subhuman character in Shakespeare's play, as a symbol of resistance and anti-colonialism. The play also features elements of Shakespeare's original text, including language and themes of magic and betrayal. Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a modern retelling of *Hamlet* from the perspective of the minor characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Stoppard's play explores themes of identity, free will, and the nature of reality, while also incorporating elements of Shakespeare's original text, including language and plot

Shakespeare's works have had a lasting impact on modern writers and artists due to the enduring themes and innovative techniques found in his writing. His characters, universal themes, and literary artistry continue to inspire and captivate readers and audiences around the world. Grady [2009](#), notes that Shakespeare's work is an "organic structure of literary art unsurpassed in world literature" (3), demonstrating its unique ability to captivate both audiences and critics throughout the centuries. Additionally, Grady highlights the German philosopher Hegel's notion of Shakespeare as an inaugurator of modernity (3), a beacon that invokes the past while presenting truths that construct the realities of the modern world.

Shakespeare's dramas depict common human emotions and experiences through different scenarios and characters. Characters such as Hamlet, Romeo, Desdemona, and Lady Macbeth have become cultural types, instantly recognizable when their names are mentioned. These characters continue to be reinterpreted by modern readers in new and unique ways. The changes marked by these appropriations reveal a telling story about modern culture and life.

Gjesdal [2010](#), analyzes Hegel's approach towards Shakespeare's work, focusing on its modernity. She notes that "according to Hegel, it is Shakespeare's accomplishment to change the past tragedy of society and trans-individual world-views into a tragedy of subjectivity itself" (20). Shakespeare's writings reflect the complicated realities of every man and age, conveying

emotions that are consistent with humans throughout generations.

Shakespeare's ability to portray complex realities concerning the human psyche and relationships characterizes his work as timeless and familiar beyond the boundaries of time and space. Kumar [2010](#), notes that "critics, scholars, writers of various approaches and even filmmakers have been making attempts to work out repeatedly and adapting Shakespeare's works since the twentieth century in diverse cultural contexts all over the world" (124). Shakespeare's depictions of human emotions, experiences, and truths aid readers in understanding the dynamics of society.

Shakespeare's work has a wide-reaching quality due to the vast number of themes he covers. He possesses the ability to unfold complex human relationships by using the tool of language to uncover social realities. As a result, his work continues to be an essential part of the literary canon and is still being discussed and researched around the world of literature and beyond.

### Universal Appeal to Scholars and Enthusiasts of Literature

Shakespeare's work continues to captivate scholars and enthusiasts alike due to the universal and timeless quality of his characters. Silvana Neshkovska [2018](#), observes that "Shakespeare's immortal literary corpus still wholeheartedly welcomes renewed analyses and interpretations" (1-2), as his texts offer thematic versatility that allows for continual rediscovery and the unveiling of various layers of meaning. This is facilitated by Shakespeare's profound ability to construct both major and minor characters that are able to evoke conventional and unconventional truths that are part of human history. Neshkovska notes that "the brief overview of some of Shakespeare's characters and the emotions vested in them clearly illustrates that none of these emotions has vanished from the wide and colourful array of feelings experienced by people nowadays" (9).

### Unconventional Female Protagonists

One of the themes that are of particular interest to scholars is that of gender issues, specifically the portrayal of unconventional female characters. Chris Power writes that "Shakespearean theatre has always been enlivened by the presence of women" (3), and feminist criticism has played a

crucial role in analyzing and critiquing the gender roles constructed and reinforced in Shakespeare's plays. Feminist critics have highlighted the ways in which Shakespeare's works reflect and perpetuate the patriarchal society in which they were produced, while also identifying moments of resistance and subversion.

Feminist criticism has focused on the character of Desdemona in *Othello* as a figure of resistance who challenges the patriarchal norms of her society. While Desdemona is often seen as a passive victim of male violence, feminist scholars argue that she can also be read as a subversive character who resists patriarchal oppression. Similarly, feminist critics have explored the character of Ophelia in *Hamlet*, who is often viewed as a passive and fragile character. However, feminist scholars argue that her story can also be interpreted as a critique of patriarchal power, as she is punished for her attempts to assert her own agency and desires.

Overall, Shakespeare's work remains relevant and relatable due to the themes and characters that continue to resonate with contemporary audiences. Through the lens of feminist criticism, his plays have been examined as both reflections of and challenges to the patriarchal norms of his society.

### Gender and Power Dynamics

Shakespeare's plays have long been the subject of feminist analysis, with particular attention given to his depictions of gender and power dynamics. *The Taming of the Shrew*, for example, has been criticized for its problematic portrayal of a man attempting to "tame" a woman, reinforcing patriarchal norms and power dynamics (Belsey 36). Similarly, Lady Macbeth's story has been analyzed as a critique of patriarchal power, with some scholars arguing that her attempts to assert her own agency ultimately lead to her punishment (Greenblatt [1980](#)). In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet's story has been interpreted as a critique of patriarchal power, as her attempts to make choices about her own life lead to tragic consequences (Kahn [1986](#)). Twelfth Night's Viola, who disguises herself as a man, has also been the subject of feminist analysis, with scholars exploring the ways in which her story challenges traditional gender roles (Showalter 24).

The representation of gender and religion in *The Merchant of Venice* has also been analyzed by

feminist critics, with some arguing that the portrayal of Portia offers a critique of patriarchal norms (Adelman 78). However, others have pointed out that the play also reinforces negative stereotypes about Jewish people (Belsey 45). Shakespeare's characterization of female protagonists reveals the hegemonic structures of patriarchy in society (Berggren 18). While women in Shakespeare's plays often serve as foils for male characters, they also offer moments of resistance and subversion (Adelman 91). The portrayal of women as beautiful and in need of male protection has been criticized for reinforcing gender stereotypes and denying women agency (Miner 1984). In *Richard III*, for example, female characters are blamed for the wrongdoings of men, further reinforcing the idea that women are the "other" and live under the oppressive nature of men (Miner 1984). Female characters are also often defined by their beauty, while male characters are associated with chivalry and strength (Miner 1984).

### **Patriarchal Power and Gender Norms**

Through his characters, Shakespeare reflects and reinforces the patriarchal structures of his society (Belsey 36). However, his plays also offer critiques of patriarchal power and gender norms, challenging traditional notions of gender and offering visions of alternative possibilities (Kahn 1986). Shakespeare's works continue to be analyzed and debated by feminist scholars, offering insights into the ongoing struggle for gender equality.

Feminist scholarship offers a critical perspective on the male-dominated power structures that permeate Elizabethan society, which is reflected in Shakespeare's works. The feminist study of Shakespeare's works provides a critical framework for granting women a voice and acknowledging their identities, which have historically been marginalized in patriarchal societies. Shakespeare's portrayal of women in his plays serves as a reflection of the patriarchal hegemony that governs society. As Greene observes, "Cressida is the clearest representative of woman's 'frailty' in his plays, the 'frailty' that Hamlet says is woman's name" (Greene 167). This perception of femininity as weak, inconsistent, and foolish is a construct of a patriarchal society.

Shakespeare's works present the dense cultural and social aspects of the Elizabethan era.

He masterfully imbibes the patriarchal hierarchy that drives the social norms of his time. In *Othello*, a dominating father outright rejects his daughter's choice of a husband and keeps his concerns as a priority. Although Desdemona becomes a prey of the male ego, she presents her case with sanity. As Greer states, "the Elizabethan society of Shakespeare's day was completely dominated by masculine thinking that governed all aspects of daily life. Notions of male domination greatly constrained Shakespeare's female characters" (Greer 135). He crafted his characters by drawing inspiration from his society, especially the role of women who were considered subjects, seen through a masculine lens as inferior beings.

Greer writes about Shakespeare that, "his presentation of women was dependent upon the thinking of the society surrounding him" (Greer 136), showing the hegemonic structures of male dominance defining women's place in social space. Shakespeare was well aware of his male audience and the social norms of his time, as pointed out by Greer, "by pandering to male suspicions in the patriarchal society around him, Shakespeare puts his characterization of new womanhood on the stage while satisfying the expectations of his male audience" (Greer 139). He was well ahead of his time, showing a remarkable ability to craft complex female characters in his plays that are still being analyzed and discussed by scholars around the globe irrespective of time and space.

His works explore different themes related to women. In *Othello*, "Elizabethan men held preconceived notions of women; women cannot be trusted and are prone to cheat on their husbands" (Greer 140). He explored the misogynistic nature of society in his works as Greer further states, "*Measure for Measure* is laden with a misogynic, or woman-hating/fearing, philosophy. There is a sense of genuine male fear of women throughout *Measure for Measure*" (Greer 140). Shakespeare illustrated the social norms of a male-dominated society that perceived women as weak and denied them any status in society. Women's agency and identity were dependent on and shaped by male-oriented social norms. Shakespeare's versatile female characters offer a rich corpus, uncovering the hegemonic realities of the society that determine the course of human history.

## Gender Roles in Society

Masculinity, which constitutes gender roles in society, has been the focus of research for many scholars and critics. Shakespeare's writings deconstruct human personality and allow scholars to view different angles of male hierarchy. Shakespeare's plays explore the complexities of human personality, including the hierarchies and power dynamics that exist between men. For example, *Macbeth* explores the ambition and downfall of Macbeth, a Scottish nobleman who rises to power through treacherous means. *Othello* explores the theme of jealousy and its destructive effects. *Hamlet* explores the theme of revenge and the complexities of human nature. *King Lear* explores the consequences of pride and the relationship between fathers and their children.

Shakespeare's works cover a wide range of topics that touch the emotions of his readers, regardless of time, race, and class. His ability to present universal themes and emotions through the specific circumstances of his characters is a testament to his enduring relevance and power as a writer. Shakespeare's works are not limited to any particular genre or style. He has written comedies, tragedies, histories, and poetry, each of which discovers the complexities of the human experience. The topics he covers are wide-ranging and include love, power, ambition, revenge, jealousy, and family relationships, among others. The themes he presents are not only relevant to the time in which he wrote but continue to be relevant in contemporary society. What makes Shakespeare's works particularly powerful is his ability to present these themes in a realistic and nuanced way. His characters are not one-dimensional, but rather complex and multidimensional, making them more relatable and human. His works are; therefore, not only timeless but also modern, allowing readers to find contemporary relevance in his writings. Therefore, Shakespeare's ability to touch the emotions of readers around the world, his presentation of universal themes, and his realistic and nuanced portrayal of characters make his works relevant and modern, even today. His uncanny ability to capture the truth with a unique expression in language allows him to conceal themes that appeal to all his readers and grant themes a universal quality. In addition to this, his excellence to integrate complex social themes into his writings through the art of language makes

him a literary genius and a figure that is applauded in the world of literature.

## Language and Style of Writing

Shakespeare utilizes the tools of language especially the language of theatre, where the harmonious integration of symbols and metaphors play a crucial role. There must; therefore, be something "dramatic" about the language of drama - the language of drama must suggest the action which surrounds it. According to Forker, "Shakespeare, both for words and metaphors, drew abundantly from the language of the theatre" (215), this uniquely leads to the significant use of figurative language and reveals his mindset where the world becomes a theatre for him. Forker further writes that due to his mindset "dramatic connotations occur again and again throughout his plays in instances which range from very literal or technical significations to highly figurative and symbolic ones" (215). In *Macbeth*, where in act V, scene V he writes, "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage"(24-25). His understanding to perceive the world around him and reflect it on stage is admirable; this is one of the many reasons that his works cross the boundaries of time and space. His realistic approach, when integrated with the language of theatre, results in the construction of characters and plots that are known to the audience of his time and beyond.

Shakespeare's use of figurative language like in his play *Hamlet* generates a work which is complex yet relative to the social ideologies of his time. This creates an aesthetic world of theatre that possesses complex characters and intricate plots holding the excellence to touch the emotions of audiences and readers. As Forker states, "Hamlet as a dramatic character is manifestly interested in the aesthetics of drama and its analogy to his own emotional predicament ('What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba [II. ii. 585]), the conflicts generated are teasingly complex" (216). He further writes, "The theatrical references urge us to a sympathetic union with the characters, their actions and their feelings, and at the same time give them the objective reality of artifice through aesthetic distance" (216-217). Shakespeare creates a tragedy that is constructed artfully and carries the approach that uncovers the truths of the society one lives in. The primary



reason that his work is still relevant is due to the expression of truth and reality in the layers of complex language which objectively reveals the social constructs. According to Forker:

The theatre to *Hamlet*, to Shakespeare, and to the audience becomes a symbol for making unseen realities seen, for exposing the secret places of the human heart and objectifying them in a way without which they would be unbearable to look upon. We see into ourselves, as it were, through a looking glass. Thus the mirror image is connected in Hamlet's mind with acting and, by extension, with other forms of art which penetrate hypocrisy and pretence: the purpose of playing, is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. (217)

### Global Audience and Readers

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Shakespeare constructs his plays with remarkable totality, his global audience approaches his writings according to their mindset; they always connect and relate with themes and characters. He effortlessly writes the plays, carrying aesthetic language touches and the emotions of both his readers and audience worldwide. Shakespeare reflects the human psyche and nature intertwined with theatrical language which transcends time thus acquiring a universal position. Shakespeare is one of the few writers who are able to understand the depths of the human mind; then write plays which express human nature by exploring crucial realities of life. His mastery of language and expression plays a vital role in creating characters that are not affected by the tides of time and space. His characters are still able to shake the conscience of his readers, as Foker writes that, "Hamlet's answer to his father's words, "Remember me", is: Ay, thou poor ghost,/ while memory holds a seat in this distracted globe (I. V. 96-97)" where, "Shakespeare, in a triple pun (one meaning of which is unfortunately lost in modern performance) gathers up several aspects of reality into a single phrase and allows the audience to respond multi-consciously" (221). The psychological play served through literary language offers the audience to perceive the characters through different angles; granting his works a universal quality. The son, Hamlet, who has been dejected more by his mother's second marriage than his father's sad demise, expresses

his jealousy, anger and helplessness with a unique style and language. His words reveal layers of meanings which are not restricted to the context of the play.

Shakespeare's language is widely regarded as dynamic, reflecting the realities of his time and the basic human psyche in a comprehensive and aesthetically pleasing way. His use of language is known to be one of the key factors in his enduring popularity and influence on English literature. Shakespeare lived during the Renaissance, a time of great intellectual and artistic ferment in Europe. His plays reflect the ideas, beliefs, and social norms of his time, and his language is often dynamic and reflective of this. For example, in *Hamlet*, he explores the themes of power, revenge, and madness, all of which were relevant to the political and cultural context of his time. Shakespeare's plays often consider the fundamental human experiences of love, loss, betrayal, and tragedy. He uses these experiences to create characters and scenarios that resonate with audiences across time and culture. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, he explores the idea of forbidden love and the consequences of following one's passions, which is a universal human experience. Shakespeare's language is known for its beauty, richness, and musicality. He often uses poetic devices such as alliteration, assonance, and metaphor to create harmonious and aesthetically pleasing language. For example, in "Sonnet 18," he writes, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate" (lines 1-2), using imagery of nature to compare the beauty of his beloved to that of a perfect summer day.

The linguistic tools he uses, accurately create the image of his time but also make his works a literary legacy that is still considered relevant. Crystal states that "from Shakespeare we learn how it is possible to explore and exploit the resources of the language in original ways, displaying its range and variety in the service of the poetic imagination" (77). He further writes, "Shakespeare shows us how to dare to do things with the language. In a Shakespearean master class, we would observe an object-lesson in the bending and breaking of rules" (77). The complexity that his work carries is due to the literary language he uses, converting his writing into a timeless masterpiece. The complexity that is essential to his works provides validity and

makes his works open to interpretation without the barriers of time. His works serve as a literary corpse which is rich in concealed realities of his time but at the same time endures human aesthetics, creating a universal appeal. One of many examples is *The Tempest*, which according to Walter:

It is unusual among Shakespeare's plays in that its title calls first attention, not to a great personage or to some human mood or effect, but to a natural phenomenon. This phenomenon, moreover, is placed in conjunction with several others of tremendous metaphorical resonance: the sea, human exile, human conspiracy, an island, a ship, and a society rejuvenated. (62)

It not only reveals the elements which Shakespeare deals with in his plays but also shows the allegorical and imaginative techniques that are in abundance in his writings. The realistic quality that his work acquires is the primary reason for its significance in world literature. Approaching this theme of reality presented on stage and the complexity that it carries, Macluskie writes that, "in the mechanical action of *A Midsummers Night's Dream* Shakespeare presents for us the problems of staging a play at a time when the conventions of dramatic production were shifting from a symbolic to a mimetic form of action" (114). She further elaborates:

The abstract figures of morality drama were replaced by characters with fully realised histories and relationships: where the morality plays fulfilled a predetermined design, the mimetic drama presented the illusion that action followed from motivation. The mechanicals in Shakespeare's play comically explores the conventions through which reality can be presented on the stage. (114)

It forms an interesting dynamic that is fulfilling the demands of stage conventions along with the social norms linking emotionally with the audiences. Language is significant in constructing a complex work but it only leaves a mark when it is coupled with thematic concerns which realistically reach the audiences and touch their emotions in one way or the other. His works have been widely studied and analyzed by critics, scholars, and enthusiasts for centuries. One of the earliest critics of Shakespeare was Samuel Johnson, who wrote a critical edition of Shakespeare's works in 1765. Johnson praised Shakespeare's ability to capture the complexities

of human experience in his plays, stating that "Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion" (Johnson 1966).

Another influential critic of Shakespeare was A.C. Bradley, who wrote a series of lectures on the Shakespearean tragedy in the early twentieth century. Bradley argued that Shakespeare's plays were characterized by a profound understanding of human nature and that his characters were always complex and multi-dimensional. According to Bradley, "Shakespeare's characters are not types but individuals, not mere personifications of abstract qualities, but living, breathing men and women" (Bradley 1992).

More recently, Harold Bloom has written extensively on Shakespeare's works, arguing that they are an "organic structure of literary art unsurpassed in world literature" (Bloom 4). According to Bloom, Shakespeare's plays are notable for their psychological depth and their exploration of themes such as love, death, and power. Bloom has also praised Shakespeare's use of language, stating that "Shakespeare's language is in a sense our language" (Bloom 11).

Shakespeare's plays have also been examined from a feminist perspective. In her book "Shakespeare's Women," Phyllis Rackin argues that Shakespeare's female characters were more complex and nuanced than was typical for their time. Rackin writes that "Shakespeare's women are more than just passive objects of male desire; they are active agents who shape their own destinies" (Rackin 1996).

In addition to literary critics, Shakespeare's works have been studied by scholars in other fields. For example, Stephen Greenblatt has written about Shakespeare's influence on the development of the modern idea of the self. Greenblatt argues that Shakespeare's plays contributed to the emergence of a new sense of individual identity in Renaissance England (Greenblatt 2017). Hence, Shakespeare's works have been the subject of extensive critical analysis and have been praised for their psychological depth, complex characters, and use of language. Critics such as Samuel Johnson, A.C. Bradley, Harold Bloom, Phyllis Rackin, and Stephen Greenblatt have all contributed to our understanding of Shakespeare's plays and their significance in world literature.

William Shakespeare's literary works have left an indelible mark on the world of literature. His plays are characterized by their intricate plots and settings that explore the complexities of human relationships interlinked with social structures. Shakespeare's ability to convey these complex ideas through emotions like jealousy, love, pain and others makes his plays relatable to people universally. In Shakespeare's tragedy, *Othello*, the themes of patriarchy and misogyny are explored through the character of Iago. He is jealous of Cassio's promotion and manipulates Othello to believe that his wife, Desdemona, is having an affair with Cassio. Iago's statements are full of misogynistic remarks towards women, "These are the only men, these are the only woman, but Iago conspires against every man and every woman in the play" (Bloom 304). His actions lead to the tragic ending of the play where both Othello and Desdemona die.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare explores the theme of love through the tragic love story of Romeo and Juliet. The two lovers are from feuding families and are unable to be together. The play explores the consequences of hatred, violence, and societal norms on young love. The following quote highlights the intensity of their love, "O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name; or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, and I'll no longer be a Capulet" (Shakespeare 2.2.36-39). In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare explores the complexities of human psychology through the character of Hamlet. Hamlet is consumed by the desire for revenge for his father's death, and this leads to his tragic end. The play explores themes of grief, madness, betrayal, and the consequences of inaction. The following quote showcases Hamlet's internal struggle, "To be, or not to be: that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles" (Shakespeare 3.1.57-60).

## Conclusion

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In conclusion, Shakespeare's plays are timeless masterpieces that explore complex ideas through the emotions of his characters. Through his ability to recognize human psychology, the structure of human relationships, and emotions, Shakespeare creates characters that are relatable to people universally. His plays provide insights into the intricacies of human relationships and social structures, making them relevant to contemporary society. Shakespeare's ability to transcend time and place is best captured by the quote "*He was not of an Age but for all times.*" This statement implies that his works speak to universal human experiences and emotions, making them relevant to all audiences, regardless of age or background. Scholars and critics have debated the reasons behind Shakespeare's universality, with some attributing it to his mastery of character, plot, and language, while others point to the recurrent themes and ideas prevalent in his works, such as love, jealousy, ambition, and the human condition (Wells and Taylor 1987).

One of the key aspects of Shakespeare's universality is the continued popularity of his plays. They are performed and adapted in various forms worldwide, from the Royal Shakespeare Company in England to regional theatre companies in the United States. Moreover, Shakespeare's works are integral to the curriculum in South Asian countries, where characters, plots, and stories in art, literature, and real-life share many similarities with those in his works. Additionally, Shakespeare's sonnets are celebrated for their universality and timelessness. These poems explore a wide range of themes and emotions, including love, desire, ageing, and mortality, and their language and imagery continue to captivate readers and audiences alike. Shakespeare's universality lies in his ability to create characters, plots, and themes that resonate with contemporary audiences, making his works relevant to modern-day realities. His enduring legacy can be seen in the continued popularity of his plays and sonnets worldwide, as well as their incorporation into various cultures and educational curricula.

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