

## Shakespeare's Literary Legacy: A Luminous Guiding North Star

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### Abstract

*Strolling amidst the literary bowers of English literature flavor- of the period between the dawn of Chaucer and till now, we find ourselves miraculously enmeshed into the variegated labyrinth of Shakespeare's versatile personality. In a large galaxy of poets and dramatists, he stands aloof as Gulliver among Lilliputians. He enthused luster in English language and changed its landscape from dusky to delightful. Shakespeare's genius remains elusive, but its fruition is manifest in his works as it evokes our pent-up feelings and incite ideas. The paper is, however, a humble attempt to explore his timeless legacy that shakes, shapes and adorn new evolving English language and literature invariably. The study pinpoints his immeasurable and inexplicable contribution to literature by adding gleam that was not seen before him to various genres – tragedy, comedy, history, romance, long poems, and sonnets etc. He employs very ornamental language and iridescent imagery, and painted human nature vehemently, vigorously and vivaciously. Shakespeare delineated characters that we find ourselves very close to, they earn our empathy and esteem. Apart from his immense contribution to the evolution of English language and literature, he substantially exerts influence on the modern writers irrevocably. The paper hovers around the adaptations and allusions of his themes, motifs, imagery and his tireless and tenacious command over language.*

**Keywords:** English literature, literary legacy, language, themes, imagery and Dramatic devices.

William Shakespeare remains to be a timeless and towering personality, inspiring incessantly every generation after him. Born in 1564, and living up to 1616 A.D., he has cemented his place at the cusp of monumental minaret of English literature. The echo of the charm of his creation still reverberates in our hearts, He has rightly been regarded as glory and gloss of English stage, Talisman of English drama, who reflects in every character, navigates every channel of human nature, and expresses genius of human race. His literary oeuvre is large, and transcends tenaciously time and space- touches the strings of hearts not of England but all across the globe. He began his illustrious literary journey flying high on the chariot of his two long poems Venus and Adonis (1593) and The Rape of Lucrece (1594), and the caravan of his

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Received 17 June. 2025; Accepted 19 August. 2025. Available online: 30 August. 2025.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

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literary flight carried on seamlessly culminating with 37 plays and 154 sonnets, and other innumerable works of poetry till 1612 when he returned to his native nest Stratford to rest. The irresistible charm of his legacy still reigns supreme, and exerts influence on contemporary literature. His plays are still performed and adapted to films worldwide, his themes, symbolism, imagery, and interplay of words still inspire modern writers. Thomas Carlyle is highly appreciative of Bard of Avon in the following words:

Shakespeare is the chief of all Poets hitherto; the greatest intellect who, in our recorded world, has left record of himself in the way of literature. Overall, I know not such a power of vision, such a faculty of thought; if we take all the characters of it, in any other, such a calmness of depth; placid joyous strength, all things imagined in great soul of his so true and clear (Thomas Carlyle *The Hero as a Poet*, 17)

Shakespeare's enduring legacy in the realm of literature lies not only in lustrous literary output but also in the abyssal influence of his varied themes, motifs, imagery and characters. His plays travel and traverse wide range of genres- tragedies are romantic and also cathartic, the tragic depth and poignancy of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra* is still unsurpassed in English Literature; comedies that exhibit the spirit of humanity, wit, humor and larger vision of life as the comic brilliance of *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Merchant of Venice* etc. are unparalleled yet; historical plays unravel his unflinching interest in history and love for authority and order, the plays like *King John*, *Richard II*, *Henry VI, Part I, II and III*, *Richard III*, and *Henry IV* establish his prowess in delineating historical heroes as they were, aiming to show human life in action, and drawing life from dead bones; last plays like *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* mark a distinct departure from golden span of great tragedies- *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *The King Lear*, and *The Hamlet* whereupon the breeze of peace and pardon descends, In his sonnet Shakespeare, Mathew Arnold pays tribute to the Bard of Avon:

Others abide our question. Thou art free,  
We ask and ask-Thou smilest and are still,  
Out-topping knowledge. For the loftiest hill.  
Who to the stars uncrowns his majesty(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org>).

Shakespeare's enduring influence and impact on upcoming writers, poets, and dramatists has been intense and intrusive. His works served subsequent writers as an inspiring and guiding force, influencing their employment of linguistic virtuosity, characterization and dramatic technique. Shakespeare showcased the themes of power and authority, love and its variegated hues, over credulity, ambition, jealousy, and moral complexities that his characters are

engrossed with. Shakespeare's dramatic excellence, coruscant craftsmanship, innovative use of words, soliloquies, asides, images, pun, wit, dramatic irony and embellished language electrified the English drama, and remains a model to dramatists and theatre artists. Undoubtedly, his works not only depict the current cultural, social and political scenario but also touch cross cultural and geographical frontiers, rejuvenating and reconnecting audiences and influencing creative minds all across the globe. He influenced and incited many writers with his mastery on language, phraseology, syntax and semantics. He has, however, stood the test of time by virtue of his giving voice to human emotions and nature in the garb of eloquent phrases and words. Shakespeare's works transcend time, space and culture, and inspiring writers to adapt to them. He serve as a role model to many English poets like John Milton, Alexander Pope, John Dryden, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Mathew Arnold and John Keats etc. In letter to Benjamin Robert Haydon, dated 10th May 1817, Keats writes:

I remember you saying that you had notions of a good Genius presiding over you. I have of late had the same thought –for things which I do half at Random are afterwards confirmed by my judgment in a dozen features of Propriety. Is it too daring to fancy Shakespeare this Presider? ([https://www. Shakespeare-online.com](https://www.Shakespeare-online.com))

Shakespeare exerted huge impact upon the world of literature upon the various writers worldwide. They develop penchant for Shakespeare's works, enduring themes, characters full of verve and vitality, plots, style and language. The great novelists like Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, William Faulkner and Tony Morrison seem enumerated with charm of his language and style, and they make feel Shakespeare in their novels by using his quotations phraseology. Dickens' deep love of Shakespeare in many of his novels, like in *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Great Expectations*, we see reflection of Hamlet, the brutal killing Nancy in *Oliver Twist* reminds us the murder of Duncan in *Macbeth*, and in *Old Curiosity Shop*, we feel the presence of Cordelia and King Lear. Herman Melville was highly influenced by Shakespeare, his skill to explore intricate themes, various hues of human nature and organic language. Melville exploits Shakespearean dramatic technique, and style in the novel *Moby-Dick* (1851), especially the character of Captain Ahab is modelled after *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. Melville used Shakespearean phraseology, themes, symbols, style, and imagery to evoke passion, mood and atmosphere of the novel.

Tony Morrison, the Afro-American novelist, makes direct allusions to William Shakespeare as in the novel *The Bluest Eye*, the character of Pecola and Ophelia are compared and contrasted, the novel shows thematic and structural parallels with Hamlet. Tony Morrison's play *Desdemona* reenacts Shakespeare's *Othello*, giving voice to women to amplify their vices for

their rights. His plays serve cultural touchstones, exerting influence on literature, cinema, and other genres all across the world. Thus, his enduring influence on writers is palpable, and they who get inspiration for creative discourse across diverse cultures. Hamlet, Ophelia, Othello, Desdemona, Falstaff, Iago and Caliban are the characters whose impact is found in her works. Shakespeare's influence on poets after him has been primly, profound and deep, including John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mathew Arnold, and Alexander Pope, they paid tribute to him in an ebullient way. His long poems and sonnets, have a perennial source of inspiration and stylistic emulation for many poets of diverse languages and across different eras. John Keats was so much enamored of him that he kept his bust before him while writing, and his poems often reverberate with Shakespeare's style and imagery. Percy Bysshe Shelley was not far behind in adulation and admiration of Shakespeare's charming verses, and his Ozymandias immensely show Shakespeare's style and sensibility. One of the pioneers of Enlightenment, Alexander Pope also exhibits his influence in his use of language and phrases. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were not untouched by his style, language and philosophy. Lord Tennyson, Gwendolyn and Maungwudus, a Chippewa American denizen, was so much bewitched with arresting charm of Shakespeare's poetry, that he visited Stratford-upon-Avon, changing his name to George Henry wrote a poem for his icon, and printed it on a small pamphlet. It is the potential of Shakespeare's poetry that inspire across different cultures, and remains to incite till today. Mark the following lines from Maungwudus' poem Indians of North America:

For there is yet life in thy bones,

Thy spirit is Mun-nid-do,

Who gave thee all thou didst do:

When we are at our native home

We shall say we have seen his tomb ([https:// findingshakespeare.co.uk](https://findingshakespeare.co.uk))

We, however, witness huge influence of William Shakespeare's plays and poetry on contemporary dramatists, cinema, and theater. His plays are extensively translated and adapted into different languages and cultural divides, and thereby fostering cross cultural discourse and understanding of human predicament. He is also an indispensable part of educational curriculum all over the world. Shakespeare's profound psychological insight into characters like Falstaff, Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, and Imogen brings before us the themes of love, ambition, envy, loyalty, guilt and yearning for survival, and philosophical overtones underlying his messages, his perspicacious portrayal of human experiences electrified future writers to probe deep into intricate psychological and moral assertions. Shakespeare's depiction of

romantic love in plays like *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It*, *Cymbeline*, and *Twelfth Night* is timeless and diverge in various hues-from passionate attraction to abiding desecration. His historical plays like *Richard II*, and *Richard III*, and *Henry V*, give a prying into power, authority, monarchy, aristocracy, and nationalism of his time, but they serve as a light pole to upcoming writers to shape their understanding of history, a developing perception about the political upheaval, establishment order and peace. We see that his plots, characters, style and motifs enamor writers to weave their works around them, and thus his enduring legacy still rules the roost.

Shakespeare's wide popularity and appeal has unleashed a large adaptations, reinterpretations, translations in literature, culture, theater and cinema etc. His works serve paraphernalia to various theatrists and film production houses to weave the plots of their movies- straight adaptations or modern interpretations or reinterpretations. Many English films showcase hued interpretations of his works, from real to fantastical, and modern to stylized adaptations. The famous films like *Hamlet* (1948) directed by Laurence Olivier, *The Lion King* (1994) by Allers and Minkoff are adaptations of the play *Hamlet*; *Romeo Juliet* directed by Baz Luhrmann; *Valley Girl* by Martha Coolidge drenched in the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Forbidden Planet* by Fred M. Wilcox (1956) is weaved around the story of the play *The Tempest*; *Ten Things I hate About You* (1999) by Gil Junger adapted to *Taming of the Shrew*; *Strange Magic* is reflection of his famous comedy *A Midsummer Night Dream*; *She is the Man* (2006) by Andy Fickman is replica of *Twelfth Night* and *Scotland, Pa* (2001) by Billy Morrisette and *Men of Respect* directed by William Reilly (1990) are reflections of play *Macbeth*., and so many films in most of the languages of the world are adapted to his works.

Shakespeare's plays have cast influence on theater and cinema worldwide, Indian films are not left behind to be touched by the charm underlying his works. Shakespeare's exploitation of universal themes like love, loyalty, desertion, ambition, revenge, envy has got mention in Indian Cinema. *Maqbool* (2003) directed by Vishal Bhardwaj reenacts the atmosphere of *Macbeth* in the Mumbai underworld; *Omkara* (2006) by Bhardwaj adapts to the story of *Othello*, and the terrific role of Iago is assayed by Langda Tyagi adding gleam to his influence; *Haider* (2014)relives his poignant play *Hamlet*; *Angoor* directed by Gulzar reflects the ambience of *The Comedy of Errors*; Malayali film *Veeram* (2016) also inspired by *Macbeth*. Shakespeare's influence forays into Tamil cinema through *Amaladityan* (1806) translated by Mudaliar and still reigns, and in Bengali cinema, the journey begins with *Bhranti Bilas* (1963) by Manu Sen is the adaptation of *Comedy of Errors*, famous film *Zulfeqar* (2016) is adaptation of two Shakespearian plays *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Thus, we see enduring

influence of his works on cinema worldwide-from the point of penchant for melodrama to monologues, from themes to plots, and so on and so forth.

William Shakespeare casts the magic of his skill not only on literature, but he also enthused verve into English language, he was not a linguist or a scholar of Oxford and Cambridge universities though. He standardized grammar, semantics and vocabulary- all these were accepted and practiced by his successive writers. He is regarded as doyen of the blank verse, a style of writing wherein ten syllables are used in a line- a pattern of five accented and five unaccented syllables. This style was extensively exploited by most of English poets. Shakespeare approached all styles traditional and modern, and interweaved then inextricably. He began new naturalistic poetic style, hovering around metaphors, images, humor, wit and pun. His plays *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Richard II* etc. Mark the following lines spoken by Hermia in the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

If then true lovers have been ever crossed,  
it stands as an edict in destiny:  
The let us teach our trial patience,  
Because it is a customary cross,  
As due to love as thoughts and dreams and sighs,  
Wishes and tears, poor fancy's followers (A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act I, Scene I, SW&W, 43)

Shakespeare experimented with language and style. He chiseled his style by bringing variations, pause and interruptions, invigorating his style and imparting flexibility and felicity to his poetic expression. He magnifies his poetic style, and increases intensity of emotions in tragedies. A.C. Bradley in his introduction to *Hamlet*, finds emotional intensity in his later style that evolved after *Hamlet*., gives his appraisal of his style as grander, sometimes wilder, sometimes more swelling...it is more concentrated, rapid, varied, and, in construction, less regular, not seldom twisted or elliptical (<https://theplaystheblog.wordpress.com>). In *Macbeth* and *Othello*, the language runs rapidly playing with metaphors and similes. Mark the following lines of the play *Othello*:

Our bodies are gardens, to the which our wills gardeners; so that if we plant nettles, or slow lettuce  
...supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness, or  
matured with industry, why', the power of and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills (SW&W, 18)

Shakespearean romances are the carnival of dramatic elements, depicting a world where love, loss, magic, fantasy and reconciliation to integrate and explore extreme human experiences and behavior. These romances establish a poetic style that affords juxtaposing sentences, complex



structures, and simplicity. He transported material for his romances from the works of Petrarch, Boccaccio, and created an enchanted gleam to its nimbus, embellishing it with florid poetic craftsmanship. The theme of love, magic, storm, and views on colonialism in *The Tempest*; showcasing themes love, loss, envy, and restoration at the end of *The Winter's Tale*; featuring subjects as love, loss, betrayal, banishment, and forgiveness in the play *Cymbeline* blew a trumpet to give a creative call to future writers to weave their thoughts and feelings around his paraphernalia. He influenced so many writers from romantic poets to modern writers who vie for theme of self-consciousness. In the book of Ronald L *Shakespeare: Text, Subtext, and Context*, writes George Steiner that in all poetic dramas from Coleridge to Tennyson feeble variations on Shakespearean themes (Shakespeare: Text, Subtext, and Context, p.108). He also elaborates about Bard's enduring impact on the later writers, influencing them themes, form, style and structure, enforcing them consider his works as touchstones of perfection.

Shakespeare embellished English language, and enthused phosphorescence in the language to radiate eloquence and felicity. He standardized the Englishmen language and grammar vivaciously. Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) included various words, phrases, and idioms from his works. He created about 1700 words, combining them, changing nouns into verbs, verbs into nouns, and utilizing new prefixes and suffixes. He created so many words that still fascinate us today like Bedroom, fashionable, gossip, phrases like tempest tossed, fume of sighs, strange bedfellows, a sorry sight, break the ice, fortune's finger, passion's slave, giddy fortunes, women's eyes, the salt of the earth, Egypt dying, brief candle and the world is my oyster etc still haunt our minds. He shaped and strengthened English language, contributing immensely to its vocabulary, imparting immeasurably with phrases, idioms, syntax, and grammar, revolutionized the language that is seen today.

We see Shakespeare's paramount and pivotal role in standardizing the English language. He enriched the vocabulary, phrases, grammar, and syntax that shaped and strengthened the fabric of the language. Though English language saw so many innovations and evolutions, yet his influence is perceptible till today. His works are still relevant today as they exhibit universal themes and his mastery on language, and popularizing it inalterably. In every channel of human knowledge, his influence is discernible. His dialogues and characters are immensely used in films, theater, and showing his dominant presence in advertising and reflecting liveliness of human society and culture. It has also cast influence in the realm of music, songs and operas etc. His works also impact philosophy and human psychology, prying and probing insights into human nature and human predicament. It also proved very useful in the field of politics,

personality development, and trade, searching for subjects of power, greed, ambition, and taking decisions wisely. His plays and characters also offer a psychoanalytical probe.

Thus, we see that William Shakespeare stands out as an iconic figure in annals of English literature, his enduring legacy still reigns supreme transcending cultures and countries. The irresistible charm of his writings has influenced and intrigued the readers as well as writers worldwide. His innovative literary technique embellished and enigmatic mastery over language, eternal exploration of universal themes, his deep imaginative insight to pry into human nature, and tenacious understanding of its intricacies still reverberates robustly in the canons of literature. Like light pole, he'll keep radiating rays of inspiration and guidance to generations of writers and enriching and enlightening the prism of English literature and language. The rhythm of life clothed in chiseled and captivating rhyme, has cast spells on the minds and hearts of the readers. His works serve as a touchstone not only for English literature but also language, theater, music, and other offshoots of human knowledge and entertainment. He has proved an icon to the romantic poets like Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats, Lord Tennyson; novelists like Herman Melville, Charles Dickens, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison; dramatists like Tom Stoppard, Mike Bartlett and Samuel Beckett inter alia. Empires will come and go, but Shakespeare's legacy will live forever. We sign off with the following lines:

O' Bard of Avon, thou shine like a sun,  
Like a muse, will amuse ever and anon,  
To creative minds, you are a bandwagon,  
Will resonate in hearts, for charm you spun.

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