

Shakespeare – why is he still so widely studied and relevant today? essay



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Analyze why Shakespeare is relevant and so widely studied and performed today? Denise Ooi The History of Theatre Mrs 24 September 2008 For over four hundred years, the works of British playwright William Shakespeare has remained fundamental in the role of theatre, study of the English language and presumably, skills in the study of business management as critics claim. 1 Shakespeare's works had cultured the stage all over the world as well as in the development of English literature, which was amongst his contributions to the Westernized societies. Another significant contribution of his works is the expansion of the English language by over 1700 commonly used words and phrases. This is clear evidence of an ever-lasting reminiscence of his works. 2 His works include around thirty-eight plays which had survived are grouped into three categories, namely comedy, tragedy and history.

Shakespeare also produced fine poetry and sonnets. All of these have been studied and performed world wide in many different languages. The provenance of his works is dated during the Elizabethan era in London, where royalties and people from the higher social strata patronised his productions. 4 During this time, the stage had very much depended on words to communicate the plays to the members of the audience. There was an absence of theatre technology, props and other general forms of visual media unlike today, where modern theatre has greatly advanced.

5 Therefore Elizabethans London had very much likely encouraged the result of the massive manipulation of language used in Shakespeare's writings.

Despite significant changes in the way theatre is run during the Elizabethan era and now, there are several common elements with regards to

Shakespeare's style and bodies of writings which had not changed with time.

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Firstly, the plots in Shakespeare's plays had unique contexts as well as characteristics which allowed them to be appreciated by people throughout history, and thus explain why it is still so influential today. This is because Shakespeare's characters and plots in his plays were taken at face value; this means that there were no assumptions or expectations by the audience about the characters in the play.

Unlike in modern motion pictures, the audience is encouraged to create expectations; this refers to how and what the characters should be like in the minds of the audience based on the race of the characters in the story for example, to bring these characters into life. Take for example the 1996 motion picture *Romeo and Juliet* directed by Baz Luhrmann.⁶ It showed that Shakespeare's work could be successfully remade for the general public even though the original play was performed centuries earlier. This movie had the general public interested in it, regardless of whether they were interested in Shakespeare's original play. This illustrated that Shakespeare's works can still be widely appreciated today in a very distinctively different time and across cultures.

The essence of the play is in the movie, and even though the director, Baz Luhrmann, modernised it (e. g. introduction of guns and bombs as compared to zero props in *The Globe*) members of the audience could still identify the movie as based from Shakespeare's original play. Secondly with regards to use of language, his works included sonnets and poems which were written in prose with poetry devices like iambic pentameters which stressed on the dialogue and creates a rhythm in speech.⁷ As a result, Shakespeare's works encourages effective imagination, creativity and induces feelings for the

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readers and audiences while reading. Apart from poetry, Shakespeare also made a laudable contribution to the English dictionary with new words and phrases.

This is commendable because since people find it difficult to communicate their thoughts and feelings in words to other people, the new words and phrases allowed communication to be more efficient. Thirdly, the study of his works is widely practiced as part of the syllabus in schools and in many stage and film productions. Schools use Shakespeare as a tool to educate and thus stimulate a widespread familiarity in his works. Schools believe that by performing and reading Shakespeare, students are equipped with extensive language skills as well as being able to explore their imagination and ideas through drama. Similarly, stage and film productions reuse Shakespeare's scripts as this allows room for creativity for each new performance.

Since his scripts are used, this means that there is a standard story for the audience to make comparisons on the casts and characters played over various performances. Hence the performers will have to inject new and creatively interesting ways of bringing Shakespeare's works into life, lest they lose their audience. In addition, although each audience will view every performance with varied interpretations as Shakespeare's plays bring the audience into real life situations. Due to the differing personal experiences of each member of the audience, emotions and thoughts will be provoked. This keeps the thinking and feeling person wanting to come back for more of Shakespeare's works to discover more about him or herself. Thirty-eight plays and his poetry have won many fans for William Shakespeare for many centuries.

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His works have survived many intellectual revolutions and still rank above many other talented playwrights and writers since his death. There are some reasons why his works have managed to last for so long. Shakespeare's works are timeless because there is an absence of acculturation. This means that culture is not weaved into the plays and since culture is ever-evolving, this absence ensures Shakespeare's plays can be appreciated at any time or place by anyone. Shakespeare's works also invoke imagination and emotions for the person reading his works or enjoying the plays he wrote.

Another reason for why Shakespeare's works can be appreciated globally is because the stories involve universal and enduring ideas like love and politics for example. Such ideas are part and parcel of our lives; hence we can relate to and also appreciate the stories Shakespeare wrote centuries ago. The expert usage of language by Shakespeare in his works like his poems and sonnets also help to capture the imagination and feelings of people. Another significant contribution, albeit unrelated to theatre directly, by Shakespeare to the general public is the injection of words and phrases into the English language. This opens more ways in which we can communicate our ideas to one another, which enriches our lives a tad bit more. All these reasons have helped the legacy of William Shakespeare to live on throughout time.

Notes 1. Neelam Aggarwal, " William Shakespeare: playwright, poet, management guru: several critics suggest that Shakespeare's plays could be taught not just in English Literature classes but also in Business Management lectures and leadership seminars. Shakespeare provides thought-provoking insights into issues related to power, authority, leadership, management of <https://assignbuster.com/shakespeare-why-is-he-still-so-widely-studied-and-relevant-today-essay/>

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