

Are shakespeare's plays ahead of their time?

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It is a common misconception that Shakespeare's plays are only relevant to their time, and I would argue that some of Shakespeare's work also links closely to more modern foundations.

The language he uses and the themes that appear within his stories are sometimes more linked to modernity than we make think. But the question that I am trying to answer is: are Shakespeare's plays really, ahead of their time? To begin with, although it is not explicitly mentioned within any of Shakespeare's text, there is some suggestion towards this. Shakespeare has some characters which have the potential to be considered as gay or bisexual based on the context within the play. Some of these characters are Antonio from 'Twelfth night' who takes a strong liking towards Sebastian. He says to him 'If you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant'.

This shows that he loves Sebastian but the context of that is not specified. Although this could be considered as 'gay' at the time of writing this that was probably not Shakespeare's intention. Even though Shakespeare didn't quite intend to show Antonio as gay, his character does come across like that which means (unintentionally) Antonio is presented as homosexual. Another character that could be linked to this theme is Antonio from 'The Merchant of Venice'. He is generous towards his friend Bassanio. He is happy to lend him money even though Bassanio is in debt to him already and Antonio must borrow money to do so.

Solanio, another character within the play, says of Antonio and Bassanio's friendship when Bassanio departs to Belmont, 'I think he only loves the world for him'. This again can be interpreted as homosexuality as within the

play it is never mentioned that Antonio wants a wife. A final character that is often considered to be gay is Mercutio, who is in 'Romeo and Juliet'. He is deeply fond and protective of Romeo, and Romeo and he do exchange a long embrace which has been considered 'passionate' but has not been spoken out as gay, as such. Nothing is explicitly stated, however, but there are still people debating this to this day.

Homosexuality as a topic only recently has become something that isn't really 'taboo' anymore and can be spoken of and put on the table.

Shakespeare's intentions with these characters love interests is unclear but the concept of homosexuality is on the table. Another theme within Shakespeare's plays is Feminism, something which really only came to prominence in the 1970's. But we must remember that in Shakespeare's day there was no such thing as a female actor. Women were not allowed to perform, so all female roles were played by boys or young men - something audiences were, obviously aware of.

This is important to remember when exploring the portrayal of female characters within Shakespeare's plays. Women were often considered, during that period, to be less intelligent than their male counterparts or not as brave, but the two characters I am going to write about now go against the grain I have just stated. One of them is Maria from 'Twelfth Night'. She outwits Malvolio and tricks him into believing that the lady Olivia has a love interest for him. And even though this is not the case the well written and carefully planned letter which Maria writes manages to fool Malvolio. And to show that she could be considered a feminist the point I am making here is

that she outwitted Malvolio without any help from any of the other men such as Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek who are both in on the plan.

This shows Maria doesn't need men to help her outwit another man, and this could be considered feminism. The second character which I am going to analyse is Lady Macbeth from 'Macbeth' who is often interpreted as being a feminist. Macbeth who is the main character of this play is shown to be influenced by women within the play: the three witches, who promise him power through prophecies and Lady Macbeth who uses those prophecies and controls the way Macbeth achieves them. She has an ardent desire to fulfil these prophecies and this allows us to see her power as she controls and leads Macbeth on his way to murder King Duncan while he is asleep as she says, 'when you durst do it, then you were a man' which shows she is challenging his manhood which encourages him to murder Duncan, giving us the sense that she has control over Macbeth. He carries out her wishes, which shows how powerful she is even as a woman in a time where women had so little power over men. Feminism is something that is again often considered to be a modern concept of women having power and not needing men to show them that, but Shakespeare's plays show this to be an older concept that began much before our time but had never really come above the surface until recently.

One final topic is something that is often not considered when covering Shakespeare, and it is the topic of his effect on the modern language we use today and how Shakespeare helped build some of the words we use. Some estimates say that Shakespeare created as many as twenty thousand words, which seems highly improbable. Other estimates like one thousand or two

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thousand words, may be closer to the truth but are still considered and exaggeration even for the world's most well-known writer of English. Most of the English language was formed from Latin but every new conquering age saw the creation of innovative words. Shakespeare was always trying to learn more about the way humans use emotions and with this he wanted to develop ways to describe emotions that has since not been written about.

Because of this many of the words that first appear in Shakespeare's plays, with no other origins shown are often about human qualities. Here are some examples; accessible, countless, to grovel, distrustful, majestic, bold-faced, colourful, rumination, foregone and silliness. These are some words that are typically attributed to Shakespeare. These words are used today and again show that Shakespeare could be ahead of his time in not only the way he writes but how he writes and his language. Although he is often considered to have created many words people often say that because we love Shakespeare we often want to portray him as the creator of many words and so we fall into the trap of belief the he is one of the founders of our modern language. So, although he could be argued to be ahead of his time because he used words in his plays for which there was little evidence of their prior use we must remember that this does not necessarily mean he created all of them.

Overall, I believe that Shakespeare's plays aren't necessarily ahead of their time but the concepts and the language within them are. He wasn't solely influenced by the culture around him which many writers are, but instead he created more of his own culture within his plays through the characters he created and the language he used. He still didn't have Female actors and he <https://assignbuster.com/are-shakespeares-plays-ahead-of-their-time/>

still didn't have any explicit content pointing out any of the points that I have stated but from his work we have developed ideas and views that are closer linked to modernity than you may think. He may not be writing his plays in future but some concepts within in them may have seemed futuristic at the time of writing, if they were fully understood at that period. It is important to view Shakespeare's work as not intentionally ahead of its time but because of Shakespeare's creativity did become ahead of its time.