

W. SHAKESPEARE`S LEGACY IN 21 CENTURY

Research advisor: *Elmurodov Ulug`bek*

Jo`rayeva Chamangul

Chirchik State Pedagogical university

XTA/22.7 2nd year bachelor

Abstract: William Shakespeare's extremely significant legacy has been left behind for our present and future world. This is thoroughly demonstrated through his 2000 coined words and phrases, his well known progression plots, his expansion of expectations on language and his substantial influence on dramatists and films to incorporate his universal themes.

As a result of this, many of his plays are, still to this day, are continuously adapted and appropriated into successful films, novels and songs. For example, many of Shakespeare's plays discuss common themes tropes such as love, power, greed, discrimination, hatred and despair. Therefore, William Shakespeare's ultimate legacy is still extremely well known and mentioned in today's society, through his unforgettable plays.

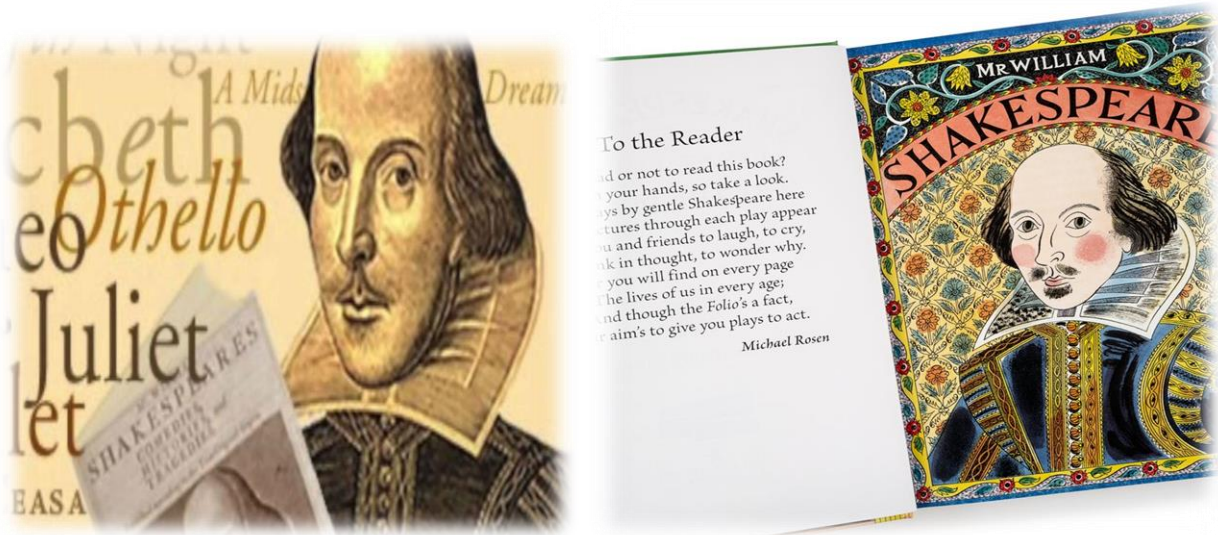
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Although Shakespeare is over 450 years old, his plays seem to have the gift of eternal youth. Eighty percent of Britons have seen or read his plays, and it is estimated that there are 410 annual productions of Shakespeare plays around the globe, meaning there is almost always a production on at any given time. These statistics in themselves demonstrate the Bard's global reach, continuing popularity and enthusiastic consumption. His works have shaped our perception of history, contributed to the English language and influenced the writing style of his contemporaries and those who followed. To explore the reasons behind the impact and legacy his works have, we can use a handful of productions from across the globe during the last century or so to begin to look for answers.

An increasing number of productions in recent history have sought to recreate the original staging of Shakespeare's plays, whether through setting (for example,

The Globe in London and the RSC's Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon), costuming, music, casting or audience engagement with the ensemble. One production that did all of the above was *Twelfth Night*, starring Mark Rylance as Olivia, which first premiered at Middle Temple Hall in London in 2002 and was revived at The Globe in 2012. These kinds of productions have been termed “original pieces”, and seek to reproduce the performance style and practises of the first company that performed Shakespeare's texts. Although skirting controversy with all-male casting, the results of painstaking research into different elements of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre are productions that create thought-provoking connections between the politics of past and present.

Shakespeare's plays have always had a complicated relationship with race, and recent shifts in scholarship on his works has opened up debate about how depictions of ethnography, politics, religion and identity can resonate more powerfully when viewed through a present-day lens. The history of *Othello* on stage — as argued by actor Hugh Quarshie, who played the titular role recently at the RSC — unearths as much about the societies in which it is staged as it does about the text itself. More recent productions such as Quarshie's and the most recent at the National Theatre drew the emphasis away from race relations, emphasising how the play's tragedy is that of the effects of jealousy. The staging of *Macbeth* in Harlem in 1939 has been described as a diversity landmark in its innovative transposition and success in promoting African-American theatre. Organised by the female-led Federal Theatre Project with the 750-strong cast made up entirely of black actors, the production played in front of fully integrated audiences across the country at a time when Jim Crow laws institutionalised the disenfranchisement of the black community throughout the USA. Taking place nearly thirty years before the American Civil Rights Movement, unemployed and struggling black actors being given the opportunity to play established roles significantly advanced the national dialogue on racial equality.



On average in Shakespeare's plays, women have less than 17% of the dialogue. To lessen this huge gulf, many productions today have either blind cast the roles or gender-swapped them, creating new gender dynamics from the original text and pulling them onto the stage. Glenda Jackson's *King Lear* on Broadway transformed the play into a study of maternal relationships rather than paternal ones; Lear's rejection of Cordelia in the play's first scene became a rejection of the daughter's straying from her mother's ideal of womanhood. Furthermore, when the same is done with *Hamlet* – a role as definitive for a younger male actor as Lear is for an older one – when gender roles are reversed. The text's original critiques on the male hierarchies of the Danish kingdom and the father-son relationship are overturned. However, this doesn't warp the central traits of the Prince of Denmark or move the conversation restrictively to gender dynamics. Unlike Michelle Terry's staging which also flipped Ophelia's gender, Maxine Peake's at the Royal Exchange in Manchester didn't; the production as a result also explored internalised and implicit homophobia through Hamlet's rejection of Ophelia and Laertes' protection of his sister respectively.

Globally, the staging of Shakespeare plays has grown throughout the 20th century and continued into the 21st. One of the world's longest-running productions of *Hamlet* was in Lithuania and was used to disseminate political ideas that resonated with a population only recently removed from Soviet governance. In China, Shakespeare is frequently translated into Mandarin due to the commonality

between the complexities of his work and China's dramatic culture and heritage. You can read translations of his plays in over 100 different languages. The reasons behind this are varied and hard to define. During the Renaissance, it has been argued that his works were part of cultural exchange between Britain and the European continent; during the height of British colonialism in India, Shakespeare was made compulsory on the curriculum; George Washington even repurposed a quote by Prospero, famously Caliban and Ariel's captor, in a polemic against British colonialism. In each of these places and beyond, the texts have been assimilated and given new formats, settings and concepts; the Bard's origins abroad as the poet of the British Empire have evolved with time to take on new national meanings.

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