

## Shakespeare: Fading Away

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### ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's literary works are characterized by intricate or hidden meanings, complex vocabulary and elaborate imagery that often challenge present-day English readers; it is very difficult for modern readers to extract and understand his works. The inherent difficulties are the reason why many modern readers do not appreciate the Shakespearean mode or way of writing and thus do not utilize Shakespearean writings. Another reason why people have not taken much to Shakespearean works is the rapid development of technology. Individuals using modern technology have developed literary works that are more appealing than the otherwise Shakespearean classics. Additionally, the perception that Shakespeare's works are too difficult in contrast with other literary works makes individuals ignore such works. Producers of social networks like 'YouTube' do not endeavour to develop content in the Shakespearean tradition. This implies that modern technology does not support literary works by the likes of Shakespeare.

### KEYWORDS

Shakespeare; Complexity of Works; Modern Media vs Shakespeare.

### Introduction

Perception in learning anything is a factor that inspires or discourages the learning process. Societal perceptions are captured in works of literature; most literary works are contextual in terms of time and style of writing. The literary style used depends on the tastes of the recipients. Therefore, to appreciate a work of art, one has to involve oneself in the context in which it was created.

Students form their opinion of a work of art based on the general perception of society. Thus, when a student is made to believe the subject he or she is intending to undertake is difficult then the interest tends to fade. Taking a Shakespearean course is perceived to be challenging; society has equated it to rocket science designed for intellectuals,

as it is impractical for an average student to comprehend. Additionally, assignments on Shakespeare given in school do not seem to encompass critical reading, thinking or study skills that give rise to avid readers (Cartmell 20). This cycle continues as the student in the same education system ends up as a professor in institutions of higher learning. With such negative attitudes towards given literary works, a negative reading culture is established.

The perception in recent years over a persistent drift towards taking easy and more contemporary literature courses, therefore, cannot be ignored. There is a need to make literary criticism compulsory since it encourages a reading culture that promotes inclusivity and extensive learning in modern Universities.

According to Cartmell (23), some academicians insist on the study of Shakespeare. As the school is mandated to provide such a course, it is important that others are consulted and their opinions are taken into account. The opinions of all stakeholders have to be taken into account to ensure acceptance and ownership. Without the participation of parents and educators, any such course is considered an imposition that is punitive and does not add value.

### **Contemporary Literature**

The study of literature encompasses a wide range in terms of different periods, authors or thematic concerns. According to Callaghan (18), Shakespeare was notably a practical dramatist; both his protagonists and villains are presented, not in their entirety but also for entertainment. It would be unconventional to present romantic “heroines” in the Elizabethan period without considering Shakespeare’s work (Vicker 99). Many of his protagonists are men and women, who are the pure embodiment of sophistication and intelligence. In his works, women are presented as fair and tender. It begs the question if his attempt was to empower women in comedy or well-crafted work to challenge a well-defined male-dominated society that did not allow women even on stage (Bevington and Halio 78).

Modern feminists have challenged the kind of women empowerment that is evident in Shakespearean works. Some of the critics of empowerment as embodied in Shakespearean thinking include Virginia Wolf and Jane Austen. These writers believe that an empowerment process should be inclusive in view of different generations. Feminists argue that in order to capture the interests of women across generations, there is a need to include a study of comparative literature in the curriculum (Callaghan 21).

It was an Elizabethan habit to draw literary masterpieces from their

immediate environment. This meant that works of literature were not purely a mere creation in the head of the writer or inventions of their own. Moreover, the works tended to have central themes and did not include too many unnecessary scenes. According to thinkers, learning Shakespeare can be enjoyed if readers see the sense of the plot without necessarily being tied to the language. Aer (29) notes that curriculum change in literature is necessary to ensure literary truths from different writers and epochs are appreciated.

Some academicians insist on the study of Shakespeare. Parents contend that their children cannot understand why Shakespearean literature is being imposed on them when other literary works are available. While it is appreciated that schools have the mandate when it comes to which course units are to be offered, decisions should be made in a democratic way to avoid unnecessary issues. Participatory approaches to decision-making enhance ownership of decisions and parents appreciate why the schools adopt certain policies or courses of action.

### **Culture**

Literary works tend to reflect the time and period when they were written. Many contemporary people grew up reading Mills and Boon and Nancy Drew books and thus insist that a shift to Shakespeare is an uphill task. According to Lupton (1997), educators have to facilitate this transition with many deliberations and ensure both student and parents’ active participation because their reading culture at home tends to be reflected in their academics. This change is possible if universities include other unexplored writers in the syllabus rather than repeating pedantic material considered too narrow in perspective (Aers 61). Modern writers such as Joyce and Wool (1882-1941, D. H Lawrence (1885-1930), George Orwell (1903- 50) and William Golding (1911 – 93) present

their literary works in a simple yet integrating manner (Aer, 98). Hence, the appeal of their literary works across institutions of higher learning is contributing to fading away of Shakespeare. Learning aesthetics and literary criticism help a student to develop a taste of art and a personality that is open and flexible, which helps towards making better literary critics.

Other aspects have to be considered in studying literature, including authors, relevance, and form of literary writing.

Literature being diverse, it is a gross mistake to generalize that Shakespeare's writings are difficult or boring, just as not all contemporary writings are simple. To make students' excursion into literature complete, there is a need to be inclusive and understand other writings besides Shakespeare (Marchette 56). This is the most critical reason why Shakespeare is no longer a compulsory course in schools while literary criticism on the other hand is a compulsory course.

### **Language**

Modern English language is used widely to enhance understanding of rhythm and expression of original works of art. It has achieved this without major distortions. Vicker (16) argues that Shakespeare's work uses archaic language. The kind of language Shakespeare uses is deliberate and is a common poetic device widely used during his era. Presently, its relevance in conceptualizing his content is largely criticized. According to (Bevington and Halio70), the evolution of language and patterns of conveying ideas should be considered. Modern literary works are programmed in line with the ever-evolving modern English. Therefore, the point of imposing Middle English is a question many critics continue to ask. Interaction with other languages is an aspect, which influences or leads to the

change of another language. Linguists suggest that for communication to occur, vocabulary and grammar play a major role. In his expression of real issues like love and challenges like grief or betrayal, Shakespeare employs apt vocabulary. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the need to change is dealt with in order to understand prejudices and biases in society.

In Macbeth vocabulary and style help in conveying the message while ambition is good, it can be destructive too. These are very relevant issues today but the language to convey this is complex. In the process of reading and comprehension, the reader is lost in the syntax (Davidson 17). It is true if at all there is an understanding that students are able to sharpen their analytical skills. This representation of literature cannot be limited; instead, the opportunity to link concepts is crucial to present traditional and classical literature vis-a-vis more contemporary writing in relevance and interpretation (Marchette 32). This awakening was canonized in the '90s with many ideologies. For example to emphasise feminist ideals, a writer like Nancy Drew offers one perspective on Shakespeare's contribution to historical fiction. Some critics argue that his usage of the word 'whole' in his writings is an implication of the place of women in Shakespeare's world (Callaghan 31).

Each writer influences the development of different literary genres. Throughout history, different authors have contributed significantly to the development of given literature i.e. African-American, Russian or American. For example, Equiano or Baldwin helped to shape slaves' narratives. Most slave narratives are their cultural history written with literary intent. Studying renowned Russian writers like Leo Tolstoy whose writings serve to explore human psychology in expressing beliefs and philosophies on their political and

social issues can be very informative (Callaghan 44).

### **Technology**

Technology can be useful in comprehension, analysis, understanding and appreciating Shakespearean writing. Reading a book compared to watching a movie or using the internet to research is more time-consuming. Besides, interactive technology through multimedia systems makes it enjoyable and enhances participation. Literary devices have embraced technology off-late. Besides, internet technology has simplified how literary work is consumed (Burton 39). By using technology such as the internet, the modern author and students can interact freely, hence making it easier for understanding the literary work in context. This is unlike Shakespeare's era, where interaction was only limited to the literary work itself. According to Burton (101), it takes a shorter time for an author to come up with his or her works. Thus, when tackling academic work taking a piece of literary work in the form it was originally intended in the first instance is key in comprehending and appreciating how the author uses fiction to bring art to life (Bevington and Halio 83).

Social media is designed to appeal to a certain section of the population that comprises young people. They have been made to believe that reading is tedious compared to sitting down and watching a movie-like 'Romeo and Juliet' that lasts an hour or so than taking the book itself. According to Burton (26), Social Media are

available freely or on subscription online and grant an opportunity in utilizing modern pieces of literature. Therefore, it is difficult particularly for younger generations to uphold conventional reading culture.

### **Conclusion**

Literature is the best criticism of life and Shakespeare plays a central role in the heritage of literature. However, it is important to realize the contributions made by many others like the classic Russian, Latin American or black writers and contemporary writers.

Curriculum change has been influenced by several factors, including relevance to the contemporary world, perception, technology and the need to appreciate other literary works in creating an inclusive system of education. Therefore, literature classes meant to make a holistic literature student have to draw substantially from all aspects of life. This will contribute to a greater understanding of literary works and their influence. Besides, the growth of technology has prompted and increased ways of reading culture among students. Students can easily access updated literary books online and interact with the authors directly. This is unlike the past, where students had to access only literary works. When this perspective is appreciated, it becomes obvious that not only Shakespeare's works are fading, but also the works of other old distinguished authors are on wane.

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