

Shakespeare's Influence and Impact on English.



The influence of the works of William Shakespeare is beyond dispute. In terms of the written word, only the various translations of the Bible can be considered to have had such a profound and enduring effect upon the development of English. Shakespeare's plays have been translated, read, taught, performed and revered across the globe for centuries. No other write has attracted such disciplined scholarship or provoked so much debate and interpretation. Shakespeare remains at the centre of the standard curriculum in schools in the United Kingdom and the United States. Stage, film and television versions of Shakespeare's plays continue to be produced and enjoyed around the world; all a testament of the lasting appeal of the greatest writer in the English language.

However, although most people can name a Shakespeare play and many have read or seen one performed, few can cogently explain why Shakespeare has remained the pre-eminent figure of English literature for four hundred years.

The beauty of Shakespearean language lies in its adoption of new forms of poetic and linguistic expression. Written English remained relatively fluid and unstructured in the mid-sixteenth century, outside the 'official' language of the law and governance.

Shakespeare's highly stylised and mannered method of writing speech was to provide actors with lines they could declaim to the audience, thereby drawing a distinction between the speech and the actions of the characters on the stage and the crowd watching from the stalls below.

The Elizabethan theatre was a hugely popular form of entertainment for the public, with the participation of the crowd often volatile and ribald in the extreme. In this sense, it seems incongruous that a largely illiterate population would be able to understand the language Shakespeare used, given its richness of metaphor and allusion, and unconventional speech rhythms. However, by popularizing stories from historical sources and creating engaging comedies, tragedies and romances, the Elizabethan theatre promoted the development of the English language.

Shakespeare was a prolific wordsmith. The Oxford English Dictionary cites over two thousand words found in Shakespeare's poetry and plays, which were not written down elsewhere prior to the late sixteenth century. Some words he coined for particular effect or to expand dramatic expression; others were borrowing from other languages. Many common phrases and idioms we take for granted or even regard as clichés today can be traced back to Shakespeare's works.

