



## Contribution of Shakespeare in English literature:

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**KEYWORDS**

William Shakespeare's influence extends from theatre and literature to present-day movies, Western philosophy, and the English language itself. He is widely regarded as the supreme writer in the history of the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. Shakespeare changed European theatre by increasing outlook about what could be accomplished through novelty in characterization, plot, language and genre. Shakespeare's writings have also impacted a large number of famous novelists and poets over the time, including Herman Melville and Charles Dickens, and continue to influence new authors even today. Shakespeare is the most quoted writer in the history of the English-speaking world after the different writers of the Bible; many of his quotations and neologisms have passed into everyday usage in English and other languages.

Early Modern English as a literary medium was unfixed in structure and vocabulary in comparison to Greek and Latin, and was in a constant state of flux. When William Shakespeare began writing his plays, the English language was rapidly absorbing words from other languages due to wars, exploration, diplomacy and colonization. By the age of Elizabeth, English had become widely used with the expansion of philosophy, theology and physical sciences, but many writers lacked the vocabulary to express such ideas. To accommodate, writers such as Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare expressed new ideas and distinctions by inventing, borrowing or adopting a word or a phrase from another language, known as neologizing. Scholars estimate that, between the years 1500 and 1659, nouns, verbs and modifiers of Latin, Greek and modern Romance languages added 30,000 new words to the English language

**Influence on theatre**

Shakespeare's works have been a major influence on subsequent theatre. Shakespeare created some of the most admired plays in Western literature (with Macbeth, Hamlet and King Lear being ranked among the world's supreme plays), and transformed English theatre by expanding expectations about what could be accomplished through plot and language. Exclusively, in plays like *Hamlet*, Shakespeare "integrated characterization with plot," such that if the main character was different in any way, the plot would be totally changed. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare mixed catastrophe and comedy together to create a new romantic tragedy kind

**Influence on European and American literature:**

Shakespeare is cited as an influence on a large number of writers in the following centuries, including major novelists such as Herman Melville, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy and William Faulkner. Examples of this influence include the large number of Shakespearean quotations right through Dickens' writings and the fact that at least 25 of Dickens' titles are drawn from Shakespeare, while Melville frequently used Shakespearean devices, including formal stage directions and extended soliloquies, in *Moby-Dick*. In fact, Shakespeare so influenced Melville that the novel's main antagonist, Captain

Ahab, is a classic Shakespearean tragic figure, "a great man brought down by his faults." Shakespeare has also influenced a number of English poets, especially Romantic poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge who were obsessed with self-consciousness, a modern theme Shakespeare anticipated in plays such as *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's writings were so influential to English poetry of the 1800s that critic George Steiner has called all English poetic dramas from Coleridge to Tennyson "feeble variations on Shakespearean themes."

**Influence on the English language**

Shakespeare's writings greatly influenced the entire English language. Prior to and during Shakespeare's time, the grammar and rules of English were not standardized. But once Shakespeare's plays became popular in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, they helped contribute to the standardization of the English language, with many Shakespearean words and phrases becoming embedded in the English language, particularly through projects such as Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* which quoted Shakespeare more than any other writer. He expanded the scope of English literature by introducing new words and phrases, experimenting with blank verse, and also introducing new poetic and grammatical structures. He also inspired modern terms commonly used in the twenty-first century.

**Vocabulary**

Among Shakespeare's greatest contributions to the English language must be the introduction of new vocabulary and phrases which have enriched the language making it more colorful and expressive. Some estimates at the number of words coined by Shakespeare number in the several thousands. Warren King clarifies by saying that, "In all of his work – the plays, the sonnets and the narrative poems – Shakespeare uses 17,677 words: Of those, 1,700 were first used by Shakespeare." He is also well known for borrowing from the classical literature and foreign languages. He created these words by, "changing nouns into verbs, changing verbs into adjectives, connecting words never before used together, adding prefixes and suffixes, and devising words wholly original." Many of Shakespeare's original phrases are still used in conversation and language today.

**Poetry**

He introduced in poetry two main factors – "verbal immediacy and the moulding of stress to the movement of living emotion". Shakespeare's words reflected passage of time with "fresh, concrete vividness" giving the reader an idea of the time frame. His remarkable capacity to analyze and express emotions in simple words was noteworthy:

"When my love swears that she is made of truth, I do believe her, though I know she lies-" —(Sonnet CXXXVIII)

In the sonnet above, he has expressed in very simple words "complex and even contradictory attitudes to a single emotion".

The sonnet form was limited structurally, in theme and in expressions. Liveliness of Shakespeare's language and strict discipline of the sonnets imparted economy and intensity to his writing style. "It encouraged the association of compression with depth of content and variety of emotional response to a degree unparalleled in English". Complex human emotions found simple expressions in Shakespeare's language.

### Characters

His plays exhibited "spectacular violence, with loose and episodic plotting, and with mingling of comedy with tragedy". In King Lear, Shakespeare had deliberately brought together two plots of different origins. Shakespeare's work is also lauded for its insight into emotion. His themes regarding the human condition make him more acclaimed than any of his contemporaries. Humanism and contact with popular thinking gave vitality to his language. Shakespeare's plays borrowed ideas from popular sources, folk traditions, street pamphlets, and sermons. Shakespeare also used groundlings widely in his plays. The use of groundlings "saved the drama from academic stiffness and preserved its essential bias towards entertainment in comedy". Hamlet is an outstanding example of "groundlings" quickness and response. Use of groundlings enhanced Shakespeare's work practically and artistically. He represented English people more concretely and not as puppets. His skills have found expression in chronicles, or history plays, and tragedies.

Shakespeare's earliest years were dominated by history plays and a few comedies that formed a link to the later written tragedies. Nine out of eighteen plays he produced in the first decade of his career were chronicles or histories. His histories were based on the prevailing Tudor political thought. They portrayed the follies and achievements of kings, their misgovernment, church and problems arising out of these. "In shaping, compressing, and altering chronicles, Shakespeare gained the art of dramatic design; and in the same way he developed his remarkable insight into character, its continuity and its variation". His characters were very near to reality.

"Shakespeare's characters are more sharply individualized after Love's Labour's Lost". His Richard II and Bolingbroke are complex and solid figures where as Richard III has more "humanity and comic gusto". The Falstaff trilogy is in this respect very important. Falstaff, although a minor character, has a powerful reality of its own. "Shakespeare uses him as a commentator who passes judgments on events represented in the play, in the light of his own super abundant comic vitality". Falstaff, although outside "the prevailing political spirit of the play", throws insight into the different situations arising in the play. This shows that Shakespeare had developed a capacity to see the plays as whole, something more than characters and expressions added together. In Falstaff trilogy, through the character of Falstaff, he wants to show that in society "where touchstone of conduct is success, and in which humanity has to accommodate itself to the claims of expediency, there is no place for Falstaff", a loyal human-being. This sentiment is so true even after centuries.

Shakespeare united the three main streams of literature: verse, poetry, and drama. To the versification of the Old English language, he imparted his eloquence and variety giving highest expressions with elasticity of language. The second, the sonnets and poetry, was bound in structure. He imparted economy and intensity to the language. In the third and the most important area, the drama, he saved the language from vagueness and vastness and infused actuality and vividness. Shakespeare's work in prose, poetry, and drama marked the beginning of modernization of English language by introduction of words and expressions, style and form to the language.