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## Shakespeare: Context and Contextuality in the 21st Century

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### Abstract:

In Ben Jonson's words, Shakespeare "was not of an age, but for all time." Nature herself praised his creation. Shakespeare's continued popularity in the 21st Century is a testament to his relevance. Shakespeare's works illuminate the human experience in straightforward yet profoundly eloquent verse, transcend time and culture, feature unequal characters and their various interpretations, and he coined phrases like "to be or not to be." He also contributed to how people think and act, as well as to English. Shakespeare frequently makes generalisations and shifts from the specific to the broad in his writings. The plot of a play thus becomes a component of the larger narrative of humanity and its men and women, a component of the human storey that "continues unbroken from generation to generation." He deals with strong primary passions, universal joys, and sorrows so that we can all partake vicariously in his characters' experiences. His works are still relevant today since human nature is fundamentally the same across all eras. Even in the twenty-first Century, his plays are still studied, performed, and reinterpreted in various social, cultural, and political contexts across the globe. This is not because Shakespeare is well-known but because Shakespeare's characters come to life for the audience. Even though they are kings, queens, and princes, they face the same problems as many theatregoers and are portrayed in ways that audiences can relate to.

### Introduction:

Carlyle praised William Shakespeare, saying, "Shakespeare was the most elaborate production we have yet produced. The Indian Empire will undoubtedly disappear at some point, but Shakespeare remains with us forever. 1 Shakespeare's great stories, which cross all boundaries of time and culture, can help us understand his relevance in the twenty-first Century. Because of his plays' evocative language and dramatic structure, their stories are considered classics of English literature. Students learn to analyse language with a specific mental discipline through studying and enjoying the plays' narratives. They discuss the amorphous subject of shared cultural values. In the introduction to her book *Stories from Shakespeare*, American novelist



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Marchetti Chute states: “The most excellent storyteller the world has ever known was William Shakespeare. Sophocles and Tolstoy wrote about tragedies and troubled characters, whereas Homer wrote about adventure and soldiers in battle.

Terence and Mark Twain penned comedic tales, Dickens wrote melodramatic ones, Plutarch chronicled historical events, and Hans Christian Anderson wrote fairy tales. On the other hand, Shakespeare told every form of tale—comedy, tragedy, history, melodrama, adventure, love stories, and fairy tales—and he did so masterfully that each became legendary. It is the first persistent attraction and relevance of Shakespeare’s plays and poems that have kept generation after generation travelling to his city as a pilgrimage to a literary shrine. In all the worlds of narrative, his is the greatest name. Shakespeare’s plays have a limitless power to entertain, comfort, and illuminate countless human interactions throughout history, ensuring that the name of Stratford is forever associated with him.

### **Shakespeare: Context**

Shakespeare is not a person but a continent full of breathtaking landscapes, scenarios, and circumstances spanning a broad spectrum, 1200 characters in various colours and tints, glorious and absurd, everyday, and spectacular. When Sri Aurobindo compares him to Valmiki, Vyasa, and Homer from a certain perspective and refers to him elsewhere as “a seer of life,” he pays him a unique honour. Shakespeare continues by stating that “life thinks itself out in him through many mouths in different moods and periods, not so much through the poet himself thinking about life “2. Shakespeare’s concept of the man is practically lost in the vocabulary surrounding the criticism, tourism, adaptation, and use of his plays in the 21st Century. Shakespeare is now widely represented in new media, offering alternate plot lines, characters, and settings. This movement is expanding as quickly and widely as technology, live performance, social media, and film will allow.

Shakespeare’s work still has universal appeal due to the calibre of his source material, his treatment of the various dimensions and textures of the verse, and his metre use. Shakespeare provides a framework for outstanding composition and inventiveness, but new forms of representation do not always require the new content to be welcomed. Shakespeare is still relevant in the twenty-first Century for a second reason: it sheds light on the human experience. His understanding of human nature and sensitive imagination beyond time and space is more metaphysical than any other varied poet. He has a unique, unequalled perspective on human



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psychology that combines abstract ideas with themes that show the hard reality of the gorgeously twisted universe rounded out with such individuals. We could classify Antony and Cleopatra as a drama of illicit love, Othello as a storey of deception or self-delusion, Macbeth as a drama of ambition, and King Lear as a drama of social pride. This ethereal idea of the human being is given a real-world, physical form.

Shakespeare's creativity is so all-encompassing and pertinent that any theory becomes constrained in understanding. Shakespeare's plays defy anyone to see any interpretation as insufficient since they are filled with countless levels of meaning, perfectly capturing all the subtleties of human psychology and the range of emotions. Shakespeare's comedies still have an application to the twenty-first Century due to the fair and egalitarian representation of women in them. Although Shakespeare's feminist critics have unnecessarily and unfairly split into two ideological camps, one of which emphasises that the playwright was preoccupied with male themes and characters. On the other hand, the portrayal of emancipated female characters who are as strong, assertive, outspoken, and contemporary as his male characters is another highlight of his plays. These women occasionally bow to male control but occasionally outsmart them. Shakespeare shows knowledge of women throughout history, not only those in seventeenth-century England and Europe. Shakespeare is still relevant today because he gave English thousands of new words and phrases, fresh ideas, and grammatical constructions. Shakespeare's language may appear archaic to our ears, but it was highly bold and progressive at the time.

Shakespeare was such a skilled playwright and had such an excellent ability to give life to unpromising subjects that, to a considerable extent, he could overcome his challenge, according to A.C. Bradley in his book *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Shakespeare's plays have produced heroes driven insane and into self-destruction by their thoughts, such as Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and King Lear. Humour, love, betrayal, rage, dishonesty, generosity, envy, fighting, and murder are all present in the plays. He portrays human problems that won't change in great detail. As Thomas Jefferson adequately noted, a vibrant and enduring feeling of filial obligation is more effectively imprinted on a son or daughter's mind by reading King Lear than all the dry books of ethics and divinity. We have all encountered his famous Hamlet soliloquy, "to be or not to be," sooner or later. It now plays a role in the decision-making process. Shakespeare's "Hamlet's wonderful reflection on the waste of human life, compared to Falstaff's quibbles quibbling on the term honour in the face of imminent death, is one of Shakespeare's most

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prevalent, gripping comments on the folly of war and the intrinsic value of life,” claims Daphinoff (a professor at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland). The topics of bigotry, religious issues, injustice, and plea for mercy are sensationalised in *The Merchant of Venice*. The representation of issues that dates back centuries is still applicable on a national and international scale. If we limit our discussion to India, the headlines of the new papers are rife with the same issues. Shakespeare still has a following.

### **Shakespeare: Contextuality in 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Shakespeare greatly enriched the English language by creating words to describe previously inconceivable things. The “gems of practical wisdom and philosophical truth,” such as “To be or not to be” and “All is well that ends well.” Hamlet’s “That is the question,” As You Like It’s “All the world’s a stage/men and women are merely players,” Julius Caesar’s “Cowards die many times before their death,” Macbeth’s “Life is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing.” *The Merchant of Venice*’s “More Sinned than Sinning” is still as relevant today as they were written. Shakespeare’s importance extends beyond his innumerable poetically beautiful passages, which successive generations have come to adore. It includes moral truth and valuable advice for dealing with day-to-day issues in life. He also broadened the application of the English language and explored poetic form, setting the foundation for writers who came after him. Shakespeare’s works go beyond conventional limitations as well. His tragedies, for instance, deviate significantly from how tragedies are typically presented by including a lot of comic relief. Similarly, his comedies have featured profoundly tragic and human moments, even though the mixing genre is now generally accepted and occasionally even expected. Shakespeare’s plays are extremely relevant in the twenty-first Century because of his mastery of character development. As variegated as life itself are Shakespeare’s characters. Shakespeare is the most prolific writer in all of literature. All are unveiled with a master’s touch, from the king to the clown, the madman and the demi-devil to the saint and seer, and the lover to the misanthrope. He portrays both the good and the evil, the wicked and the virulent, with the same loving care and is entirely objective and impartial. His characters come from various backgrounds, represent both sexes and span all ages. Faithful living men and women, they are. They are nature itself and have nothing artificial about them; they were not created from a piece of art or even from nature.



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The Chicago theatre director Barbara Gaines discusses the political significance of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. We discussed Vietnam and the Korean War a lot, she says. Concerning Troy and ancient Rome, all human history. Additionally, if humans exist on our planet for a few thousand years, they will face the same issues. The politics and power battles in the latter may have involved Brutus, Julius Caesar, and Antony rather than Colin Powell, Saddam Hussein, and George Bush, but they are incredibly familiar. According to Marjorie Garber, another Shakespeare scholar, Shakespeare's Julius Caesar has political relevance. The play speaks "pertinently, and impertinently, to the modern and postmodern condition, to modern history, and modern politics, rhetoric, and oratory," according to the study. It is just as likely to be taught and read in political theory, business, and "leadership" classes as in the context of Shakespeare and his literary contemporaries. The world political situation as it stands today is nothing more than a contemporary Julius Caesar.

Shakespeare was aware that, in real life, Good and Evil frequently coexist in human nature and are not contained in airtight boxes. Because of this, he lacks both monsters and villains who have not been atoned for their crimes. Even the most vicious Caliban experiences a redeemed bit of humanity thanks to Iago, the worst of them all, who goes motive haunting and sees the good in others. His characters, whether good or bad, living in a fantasy world or among the horrors of history, are characterised by an unchanging universality that keeps them perpetually in our sympathies. For instance, Shylock comes to life in his hands and gains depth and meaning entirely at odds with the tale Shakespeare accepted. Instead of being the monster the mediaeval story requires, he transforms into a pitiful towering figure that makes Antonio and Bassanio pale shadows and Portia appear to be little more than a cunning trickster. Shakespeare's characterisations of objectivity and impartiality apply to the literary figure of the twenty-first Century.

### **Conclusion:**

Shakespeare's unbiased and unbiased approach demonstrates how the playwright completely erases his personality and maintains himself in the background so that everything, every phrase, and every action appear to have come from his creations rather than from him. Each word fits its respective character, and vice versa. Romeo's passionate outburst immediately before he consumes the poison, Othello's envy, Ferdinand and Miranda's love, etc., are all in character. The poet's command over the fundamental forces and principles guiding human behaviour

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allows this flawless adjustment. Being the subtle souled psychologist he was, he had a rapid and certain understanding of how the human mind functioned. He could inhabit a character and portray him from within his mind. Edmund, Edgar, Iago, and Desdemona are all portrayed by Shakespeare with equal fairness. It's as if he's sworn to tell the complete truth and nothing but the truth in his reporting. Shakespeare has, therefore, "come down to us as an English man of letters, he has been separated from his fellows, and recognised for what he is: Perhaps the greatest poet of all times, one who has said it better; whose works are the study and admiration of divines and philosophers, of soldiers and statesmen, so that his continued popularity on the stage is the smallest part of his immortality; who has touched many spirits finely to fine issues, and has been for delight and unde Shakespeare's plays are still well-liked today because of the period-appropriate clothes and setting—the people of the twenty-first-century demand entertainment with remarkable language and indelible imagery of bold and memorable personalities. Shakespeare's plays are still relevant today—possibly much more so than before.

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