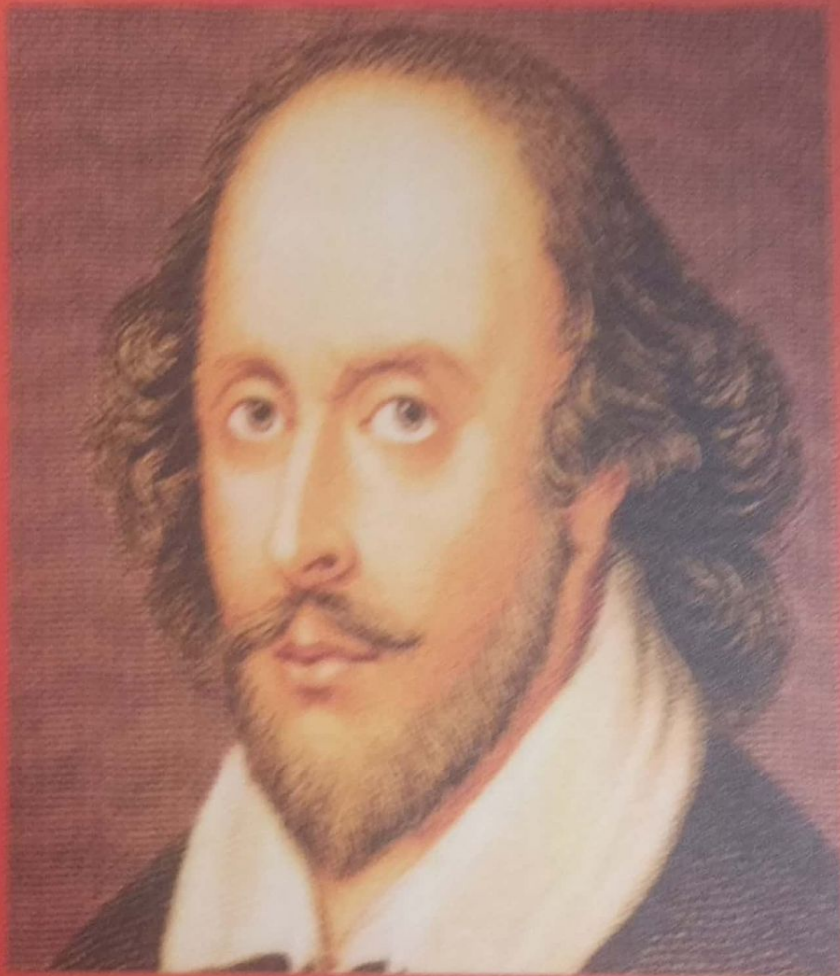


# *SHAKESPEARE FOREVER*

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## CONTENTS

- 1 "Deep Down In DeJungle" : Re-Articulating  
Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* And Shakespeare's  
*The Tempest* 1  
**Dr. A. Roselin Mary**
- 2 The Flowers In The Garland of Shakespeare 11  
**Dr. A. Muthu Meena Losini**
- 3 Shakespeare's Gendered Chaos: Male Dominance  
And Female Exploitation 22  
**Dr. Fancy Paul**
- 4 Shakespeare - The Meridian Glory 28  
**Dr. Gomez Sophia**
- 5 A Scanning Of Feminist Trait Through Family  
Relationships In Shakespeare's "The Winter's  
Tale" 35  
**Dr. Sylvia Flavia**
- 6 Macbeth's Damnation Through "The Instruments  
Of Evil" 40  
**Mrs. T. Uma Rani**
- 7 Universal Shakespeare 48  
**Mrs. G. Vijayalekshmi**
- 8 Shakespeare's Women Characters: An Example  
Of A Living Society 53  
**D. Sarulatha**

# UNIVERSAL SHAKESPEARE

Mrs. G. VIJAYALEKSHMI

The supremacy of our myriad-minded Shakespeare is sufficiently assured when Garrick remarks,

“When learning’s triumph o’er her barbarous foes  
First rear’d the stage, immortal Shakespeare rose;  
Each change of many coloured life he drew  
Exhausted worlds, and then imagin’d new”.

In other words, Dryden determines his merit saying, “A happy genius is a gift of nature”, for Shakespeare is the poet of nature who holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of man and his environment, manners and life. All his works substantiate his idealising power of constantly generalising and constantly moving from the particular to the general. His characters do not belong to any particular place or time or profession but they are the genuine progeny of common humanity from all walks of life. Moreover they run the whole gamut of the world, motivated by general passions and principles and conforming to the common pattern of life. Shakespeare’s characters are not individuals; they are a species eternal and true taken from nowhere in particular, though met here, there and everywhere.

Shakespeare’s work has a universal appeal since it imitates not what just a few people think, speak or do, but what most people in most ages think, speak or do- it is a just representation of general nature which pleases many and pleases long. Every reader recognises in the plays of Shakespeare his

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*Shakespeare Forever*

own thoughts, words and deeds; his characters in their new setting please the readers like a familiar face in a strange place. Hence, as a poet of all the time, of all the people, and of all the places, Shakespeare has surpassed even the Greek and Latin dramatists.

Shakespeare's work possesses the organic strength and infinite variety, the throbbing fullness, vital complexity and truth of nature herself. The issues of life and of evolving those issues dramatically with strength, subtlety and truth emerge out of his power of piercing into the hidden centres of character. This quality raises him immensely to the height of the best playwright of his predecessors and his successors.

Unlike other dramatists, Shakespeare is so bold and creative with perfect knowledge of the passions, the humours, and the sentiments of mankind. A pageantry of characters, from kings down to peasants, has been presented by him realistically that even if human nature had entirely been destroyed with no relic except his works, other beings might know 'what man was' from his writings. Since poetry is an imitation of life which represents not only the particular, with which it deals, but, through it, the universal, it's found remarkably illustrated in Shakespeare's plays. Nothing but 'All The World's A Stage' sung by Jacques in *As You Like It* is sufficient to serve as a minuscule evidence of Shakespeare's universality.

Another important factor is that every single character in Shakespeare is as much an individual as those in life itself; it's impossible to find any two alike. In fact universality of idea and individuality of character are the speciality of Shakespeare. With

all the versatility of a dramatist he changes himself into every character and enters into every condition of human nature. Though myriad in shapes and persons, they are all so bright and clear, and so true to life. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood who speak human sentiments in human language like men that we are in touch with.

There's a note of stark realism in the portrayal of lovers who are all mundane and human. The humanity of his nature and heart is one of his most wondrous qualities, which bears testimony to Shakespeare, a psychologist.

Shakespeare is also a philosopher and a prophet whose mind was unfathomable even for great thinkers and poets. He proved it to be true that it is folly to be clear where vagueness is bliss. According to Goethe, he was second only to God, to Coleridge he was million-mouthed and to Wordsworth, a mountain. Perhaps an Aristotle alone could place Shakespeare in clear-cut category and he could flourish once in the remote past and is not going to flourish again. Whereas Shakespeare, a great genius of all times, of all places and of all the people in unique and could flourish eternally since Gods and groundlings alike, or every mother's son of us could enjoy the magic of him. For the life portrayed by him is also nothing but a musical miscellany of pleasure and pain, high seriousness and hilarious laughter.

Shakespeare is didactic, but he is much more careful to please the readers than to instruct them by sacrificing virtue to convenience. It is through the imitation of those aspects of life which satisfy the requirements of verisimilitude and morality

that he performs the duty of the writer to make the world better. The idea of poetic justice is nowhere more clearly worked out than in the plays of Shakespeare. The plays and the people of Shakespeare are the embodiments of real life in their representation of the virtues and vices, which keep a true record of our fellow-beings and the (universal) appeal of poetic justice in our life. Of course he never appears to be didactic, yet none can deny the vivid implication of moral retribution implicit in his works.

The factors mentioned above account for the universality of Shakespeare whose works will last as long as the world exists. All magic dies with the magician, but Shakespeare is the enchanting master-magician who plays the role of a universal charmer. Though it is not easy to praise Shakespeare justly in a single sentence of him like "Age cannot wither him" it's appropriate to sing the eulogy of Shakespeare in the words of a modern poet:

"Revolving years have flitted on,  
Corroding time has done its work,  
Pilgrims and worshippers have gone  
From Avon's shrine to shrines of dust;  
But Shakespeare remains unrivall'd still  
And unapproached by mortal mind,  
The giant of Parnassus' hill,  
The pride, the monarch of mankind".

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