

## **THE RELEVANCE OF SHAKESPEARIAN STUDIES TO THE AFRICAN YOUTHS' CULTURE, LITERATURE IN CRISIS PREVENTIONS**

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### **Abstract**

The paper reveals among others the fundamental teaching of literature, the relevance of Shakespearian studies to the African youth, violence in Shakespeare works, and the theory of universality which is used as the theoretical framework. The work is perceived to solve several youth restiveness, ethnic and religious crisis in Nigeria and the entire African sub-region. This research reveals the importance of the suitable words and approach to solve several social menace/problems in Africa through special orientation for teaming youth population in Africa.

**Keywords:** Relevance, Shakespeare, African, Youth, Crisis, Prevention

### **Introduction**

The teaching of literature fundamentally encompasses extensive reading, pleasurable reading as well as the provision of vicarious experience, and the development of passive vocabulary. Unfortunately in many ESL countries, literature is still considered to exist for a 'luxury' while unbalanced emphases are already placed on utilitarian subjects such as technology, which is also poorly managed. But the study of literature usually yields inestimable value in the development of the educated person, since it enables student to develop qualities of character which will greatly enhance the completion and acquisition of skills and knowledge. According to Philip (1965:18) cited in Ellis and Tomlinson (1980). The coverage of literature is a better World than the real World and it is presented so that the reader is fascinated, stimulated to try and imitate it in his own practice. Literature springs out of our innate love for telling a story, by structuring words in pleasing patterns, of using words to express and to dramatize some special aspects of our human experiences. Literature is a product of the human mind, a "creation and a real part of our existence". It is concerned with people – human beings, human activities and experiences, nature, the environment, philosophical thoughts, a world of

fiction- human imagination with either real or impressionistic effect. Recent literary theory attempts to divide imaginative literature into Drama, Narrative Fiction and Poetry. Drama, which is concern of this paper is the earliest and richest of the literary forms, and manifests (whether in prose or verse form) as tragedy, comedy or tragicomedy. Briefly, the goals of literature, that is to say, reasons why we should study literature in African schools, colleges and universities, are:

- (1) It enables African students to compare their society experiences with those of other peoples, thereby making them more aware of both the virtues and limitations of their own inherited attitudes and values.
- (2) Literature provides insights into the nature and potential of man and by so doing makes the student more aware of themselves as a result of comparison with characters they have studied in the past.
- (3) Literature provides vicarious experience of other cultures, philosophies and attitudes, thereby enabling our students to become more informed, and tolerant of the world outside their own environment.
- (4) It encourages students to the development of creativity, literary appreciation and creative writing.
- (5) Literature helps to stimulate in students constructive thoughts about important issues and ideas.
- (6) Literature helps, both directly and indirectly to improve students' passive, and sometimes active, knowledge of English language.
- (7) It also helps student to become more aware of the possibilities of language, including the implication of various styles and ways of using words.
- (8) It encourages student's development of critical and reflective thinking and general awareness.
- (9) It encourages student to become more adventurous with languages (as they mimic and imitate others) and so gradually and steadily attain communicative competence in language performance.
- (10) Literature enables students to enjoy their leisure, thereby keeping them mentally alert and busy.
- (11) Literature helps students to become discriminating both in their reading and in their assessment of real life situations.
- (12) Literature helps students to improve their reading/writing competence, not only English languages but also in all the content areas. Remember that an idle brain is the devils workshop. Thus it plunge them into academic engagement.

Specifically, the goals of Drama for African students are the same as those mentioned above, and many more. scholars philosophers and thinkers, such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Sigmund Freud, Pestallozi, Froebel, to list a few, have all recognized the importance of drama for emotional development, intellectual development and Imaginative or creative development, social development. All these are very important if we must develop all rounded, well-cultured and educated youth who will be assets to the society. It will be important, at this point, to discuss briefly the sort of books that should be included in a literature programme, as a prelude to discussing the relevance of Shakespeare studies to African cultures and literature.

Texts which are capable of providing the students with illumination – books which are capable of making the pupils wiser as a result of stimulating them and engendering critical thinking; and starring high sense of modeling should be selected.

- (1) Texts which are written in correct, acceptable variety of English language with serious regard to the notion of the common core of the International Standard English (I.S.E), Received Pronunciation (R.P) of course should be selected. However, texts which are written in acceptable, Nigerian standard variety English, the type which Chinua Achebe eloquently nicknames the “new English” should also be acceptable since very few Nigerians can actually write like the educated citizens of South –East England (London) who acquire “Queen’s English” (i.e. the Received Pronunciation, R.P). The concept of the common core has internationalized English Language and has also laid out condition for the development of acceptable regional varieties of English language.
- (2) Literature programmes for African schools, colleges and universities should not become culturally exclusive by dwelling so much on the literature of one area or society. While local books and local themes should be encouraged, the classics of English literature such as Shakespearean plays should also be promoted. Shakespearean works are still very much welcome, though there are quite a few of the classics that have outlived their usefulness (e.g. Chaucer in the original, the ambassadors by Henry James or Ulyses by Jaes Joyce because of their remoteness from contemporary English, or their intellectual and linguistic complexity. It will be quite indeed interesting to balance cultures and ideas and not seclusiveness.

## **The Relevance of Shakespeare's Studies to Nigerian Culture, Literature and Youths**

From our discussion so far, it is clear that Shakespeare's studies are still very much relevant to Nigerian and African generally. Based on the discussion of the goals and functions of literature, we stated some reasons why literature should be studied in African schools, colleges and universities. Remarkably, the first two functions of literature extol the advantages derivable from providing African students "the vicarious experience of other cultures, philosophies and attitudes", thereby helping the youth to become more informed and tolerant of the world outside their own environments. In addition, foreign literature texts such as Shakespeare's books will enable "African youths to compare their own society and experiences with those of other people, thereby making them more aware of both the virtues and limitation of their own inherited attitudes and value". This has a great impact on their lives as it sharpens the thinking about the world generally. The remaining other functions or goals of literature also lend credence to the advantage which are apparently derivable from Shakespearean works, in addition to other classical and local studies.

The next discussion was on the sort of texts that should be included in Nigerian/African literature programme. Of course, Shakespeare's drama (as well as poetry) was highlighted as model all over the English language speaking world. A question might be asked here why Shakespeare studies are deemed to be development with better understanding and appreciation of Nigerian culture and literature?. Most of Shakespeare's themes are still relevant and indeed address a large number of issues concerning not only Nigerian but the entire world today. His themes have world-wide appeal.

### **The Theme of Religious Tolerance**

The central issue in the play, *The Merchant of Venice* is that of relationships between adherents of different religious groups/persuasions – Christians and the Jews of Venice. All of us in Nigeria, can compare and contrast the Venetian experience with the Christians, the Muslims, and the adherents of Traditional Religions. In recent times, Nigeria seems to be sitting on the keg of gun powder as a result of religious extremism, a theme which Shakespeare intelligently explored over decades. It stands to reason that if we can bring ourselves to learn from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, and not just parroting, and aimless parading (or is it quarterly or bi-monthly?) religious riots would be a thing of the past. Shylock had found out, though not without very bitter experience, and I suppose that Antonio did learn his lesson

too in spite of his triumph, there was no reason why people of different religious persuasions should not live peacefully and harmoniously together. All they need is some orientation and tolerance, and harmonious coexistence and above.

### **The Universal Theme of Love and Friendship**

With careful observation as regards this play, one will find out that the central motive of Shakespeare's comedies is love, which Nigeria's literature also needs. For example, in *The Merchant of Venice*, the love interest of Bassanio and Portia is the main-spring of action in the main plot, while the love interest of Jessica and Lorenzo in the subplot parallels the courtly love, and indeed leads to Jessica's conversions to Christianity. From the subplot we find that true love can conquer religious differences and wars. It should be clearly stated that nothing good can come out of war because war is destructive.

### **The Universal Theme of Education of Love**

The general atmosphere of Shakespeare's plays it usually give raise to large issues, such as love's abundance and loves obedience. In *The Merchant of Venice*, for instance, there find expression in the idea of mercy and grace which are central image of the play. For example, when Portia finds herself in conflict between obedience to her father's will and choosing the man she loves, she chooses to obey her father's will. In risking all for her father she finds salvation as well as Bassanio, the man she loves. Antonio also risks all for his friend, Bassanio, and he too finds salvation at the end. Twice Bassanio hazards all and gains all. During the choice of the caskets he gives up all his gold and silver for lead, and joy is the consequence. During the court proceeding hazards Potia, his love and wife in order to save a true and bosom friend, and in the end he did not only save Antonio but had is love restored. The education of love also stand tall and crucial as sub-theme here. For example, we cannot help to marvel that in spite of Portia's wealth, beauty and virtue she is still very modest and enters into marriage with the desire to learn. Garrulous Gratiano after his experience.

"Well, while I'll live in fear no other thing

So sore, as keeping safe Naressa's ring".

With all sense of condense there is no doubt that Nigeria's culture and literature, youth can benefit immensely from Shakespeare's treatment of love and the education of love.

### **Theme of Discipline**

Shakespeare handles most the issue of individual and societal discipline. He teaches morality to sharpen people altitude and behavior in the society, this act is a deliberate action to put man on a social scale without man become worse than the wild animals. We take our example again from our text, *The Merchant of Venice*, where Portia teaches us the virtue of absolute discipline. With all her wealth and unchallenged position as the heiress to a large empire in Belmont, she would not do what pleases her. So it was on her virtue that the plot revolves. Had she been less virtuous she could easily have arranged things so that Bassanio, the man she loved, would pick the leaden casket without any pains and agonizing anxiety and waste of time during the contest. Besides, making her marriage depend on the choice of the casket not only sound puritanical but actually messy for Portia royalty. What of the Prince of Morocco or the prince of Arragon whom Portia clearly hate has choose the right leaden casket? Portia, with all her wealth and beauty would have condemned caged to a forced and unhappy marriage forever! I strongly belief that most Nigerian would have gone "doing the grave-yard" i.e "rigged", as we conduct our general elections, census and what a few, the choice of the caskets, so that what the people can witness would only be a force and standards. But Portia, who all knows the right casket, the knowledge which was reinforced after the wrong choice of the golden and the silver caskets by the Prince of Morocco and Arrangon respectively, shows such beautiful self discipline that she would not even help Bassanio her choiced suitor.

I could teach you

How to choose right, I am then forsworn.

So will I never be!

Later on she asserts with finally: "let fortune go to hell for it, not I". So, although she suffers as much, if not more, mental torture than Bassanio, she would not arrange, tamper through he is of a different race and colour, mind and orientation from hers.

"The lottery of my destiny Bars me the right of voluntary choosing...."

Can't Nigerians with regard to all ethnic sections learn to behave like this before we can morally carry on the crusade of racial tolerance to South African and the rest of the world? This will greatly protect and douse the tension in the face of communal crisis in issues to chieftaincy, marriage, boundary affairs etc. NTI (NCE/DLS Circle 3, Module 7, 2000).

### **The Theme of Justice and Mercy**

Literature made us witness how Portia displays social virtues, which include her warm relationship with Nerissa, her maid, is her noble virtue, her modesty and her sense of her own inadequacy. Her charming modesty parallels religious piety, which is interwoven with the theme of justice and mercy. We are truly compelled to recognize that 'a condition of solution is recognition that however good we are, we are not good enough by own goodness alone to merit salvation, if the world depend wholly on justice and fairplay, salvation including the good things of the present, and even justice itself, will eludes most if not by the grace of God. For instance, the Duke of Arragon wants justice but Portia elude him, Shylock asks for justice but he does not like it when he gets it. So as the indefatigable Portia teaches us, what we need is the quality of mercy, mercy and true mercy

'We do pray for mercy

And that same prayer, both teach us all to render

The deeds of mercy"

Her genuine and humane commitment to mercy enables her to liberate Antonio from shylock's death bond, and equally to obtain mercy for shylock during his helplessness. Nigeria's culture and literature can certainly become richer by the study of Shakespearean texts, and this will teach the youth a lot of lesson morally.

### **The Theme of Salvation and Fidelity in Love**

The themes of salvation and fidelity in nuptial affairs (marriage) are often explored by Shakespeare. *In The Merchant of Venice* it is even the most humble or lowly person such as the comedian, Lancelot Gobbo, who raises the issue of fidelity in wedlock first, in his powerful humors: "my honest friend Lancelot- being an honest man's, or rather an honest women's son, for indeed my father did something smack, something grow to; he had a kind of taste". He goes on to make a trifle of wives – he reads from his palms (he pretend to be a

palmist) that he will marry fifteen wives, have eleven widows and nine maids in an essentially monogamous society, and that for a poor jester and Shylock's servant! Although Africa is essentially polygamous society, Lancelot's vituperations nevertheless contain a message for most Africans.

The issue of fidelity in marriage is displayed by Portia and Nerissa, who as the trial judge and his clerk at Venice, had forced Bassanio and Gratiano into surrendering to them their wedding rings in lieu of legal charges. But that their fidelity is proven is a lesson for Nigerian couples to give each other a chance to prove their faithfulness in patience, and trust rather than being erratic. Fidelity and mutual trust are the roads to personal salvation in marriage, and of course to a successful and happy home for husband and wife.

### **The Theme of Revenge**

Shakespeare also dealt with the theme of revenge which, as we can see, does not help anybody. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock is hell-bent on revenge –“an ancient grudge”- but at the end of the play it did not help him. What he got were more than what he bargained for, and he met his Waterloo. Thus, he is to forfeit half of all his wealth to the state, and the other half to Antonio of all people. He had been crushed! But because Antonio is not Shylock's type, he declines his share, and instead proposes that the second half of Shylock's wealth should go to Jessica and Lorenzo, his daughter and her husband, who should normally inherit him however much he hates them. Second, Antonio requests that Shylock should become a Christian in order that he might gain true salvation. This shows that rather than descend to Shylock's mundane revenge, Antonio means Shylock well. In his tragedies, we equally observe this concern by the great playwright. For instance, you have witnessed the dominating revenge theme in Hamlet and the worrisome uncertainty which the revenge culture unleashes on people who get yoked to it. The biggest problem for young Hamlet is that the tragedies (deaths) he unleashed never produced any true satisfying revenge since he lost his fiancée's mother, uncle, in-law, etc finally his own life and entire Denmark with nothing not even his dead father's crown, to show for it. This has a great lesson for every, most especially the youth that revenge is of God.

### **Shakespeare's Tragedies and Comedies**

It is worthy of note that Shakespeare normally tries to achieve a mixture or balance in his plays, tragedies and comedies alike. This is why Shakespeare's tragedies always have some comic elements in them (comic relief) while his



comedies often have a strong element of tragedy in them. This obviously stems from Shakespeare's mature conviction or theory that the real world is not, and cannot be divided sharply into two part of good and bad, or the kind- hearted and the wicked. Hence, Shakespeare's characters, the actor and actresses in the plays, are invariably a mixture of the good the bad and the ugly, just as in real life or in our experience there is no one who is all good or all bad. Everybody has a mixture of these traits – "no one is perfect" part of the reality of life is that human existence anywhere in the world is a mixture of tragic and comic circumstances. Shakespeare offers a realistic mixture of these, it serve as style which makes universal appeal to human to consider these things and be wise. The examination of Shakespeare's literature, therefore, is a sinequanon to cultural and literary development, not only for Nigeria but also for the entire world. Shakespeare's works have still so much relevant yet to be fully explored in Nigerian. Shakespearean studies are top of classic, and Nigerian and the entire Africa need to tap from his fountain of knowledge, experience, humanism insights in language use, poetry, and versatility. Shakespeare's use of imagery, symbolism and language and verse from, especially in the tragedies, make Shakespeare a "primus inter pares" (first among equals) in play writing poetry,(especially his sonnets) and use of English language. Hence he is undoubtedly the most celebrated writer British says, the world has produced, who demonstrates the highest level of language of literature in terms of diction, themes, style and otherwise.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For thoroughness and linguistic relevance, every research in literary field is rooted and underpinned by certain linguistic theory. This work "The relevance of Shakespearean studies to the African Youths, culture and literature in Crisis Prevention" is grounded on the theory of universality of Shakespearean texts. This concept appeals to the relevance and the workings of William Shakespeare's works any time, any place and anywhere. This is evident in several works among these are: Kean and Dudley (1912), Remillard (2003), Ryan (2015) and Cartmell (2016).

### **Violence in Shakespeare Works**

Violence takes many forms in the work of Shakespeare, including warfare, murder, suicide, rape, and mutilation, and it appears to serve a variety of purpose. As debatable topics, Shakespeare's uses of violence has been both attacked and defended by modern day literary writers' analyses. Shakespeare

also excels in the area of addressing the essence of love drunk in relation to youthful exuberance which is aptly represented in the fatal love as demonstrated by Romeo and Juliet, its addled and destructive spirit of maturity which is greatly intensified by emotional bargain which in true love, is caught up in the dealing between Anthony and Cleopatra. Thus, other relationship yet to be defined is psychic control of one person by another, for instance Lady Macbeth (Ward 1969).

Can the youths in Africa these days apologize and feel remorse for the offence they commit advertently? Julius Caesar is a household name, so popular, a majesty, lord as addressed by some of the notable characters, yet he apologized to the public, then who are we, as youths in Africa that we cannot apologize for peace to reign.

Ezeh (2004) says that:

As Caesar and his procession leave, Brutus and Cassius prevent Cassius from going forward by asking him what has happened at the festival that made Caesar to look unhappy. Cassius explains that the shouting was caused by Caesar's refusal of the crown. Anthony offered him the crown three times but Caesar rejected it on each occasion realizing that the crowd did not wish him to accept the offer; and the crowd shouted because they like his refusal of the crown, the shout of the crowd had made Caesar fall flat in the market place foaming out of his mouth and becoming speechless. Brutus asked whether Caesar said anything at the moment, Caesar noted that he opened his throat, offered his throat to be cut and wished he would go to hell with the rogues. When he fell down and became himself again, Caesar's position transcended that of a governor, he is a president yet he apologized.

Marcus Antony "Caesar's my Lord"? Wordsworth edition (1999:583)

Hamlet tells Horatio how he turns the tables on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he now wants to make peace with Laertes, Laertes accepts Hamlet's gestures of friendship, but says he must through with the fight as a point of honor as Laertes reconciles with Hamlet, all African youth should go for reconciliation and live in peace and not in pieces for a greater Africa (Okoye 2005:125).

## **Conclusion**

The main points made in this segment are that:

- We study literature, especially, Drama, for several reasons which in a nutshell are for all round development, good conduct and behaviors, information, understanding of diverse cultures and human beings within other cultures, stimulations of constructive, opinion, critical and reflective thinking, linguistic and communicative competences, and enjoyment of leisure, to handle crisis peacefully etc.
- We take a number of things into consideration when recommending literature/drama texts, such that the texts should be capable of providing the students with illumination, must have national outlook, written in correct acceptable variety of English languages, and must not be culturally exclusive but rather should encompass both the classic (e.g Shakespeare's literature) and local cultures.
- Shakespearean studies are relevant to Nigeria culture and literature, the views which is supplied by reference to ten themes in Shakespeare, discussed above, which have universal application and appeal, and of course must be void of religious undertone and all forms of their secret inclination that are capable of causing crises in Nigeria.

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