
The Plays That Influenced Me: Hamlet, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, Lady Windermere's Fan, and Oedipus Rex

This semester we studied a lot of different types of writing. From studying genres, to studying poetry and plays, and even types of writers, like women authors. My personal favorite from the third phase of the class was the Plays and Dramas section. Granted, we only read one play in this class (Hamlet), but I have read many other plays and dramas throughout my time and I often tend to like them quite a bit. And while I was reading these works, I feel like they really taught me to see writing in a different light and not only as a story you read in a book.

Firstly, we must talk about Hamlet, as it was the play that we read this semester. Hamlet is about Prince Hamlet, who wants revenge on his Uncle Claudius who murdered his father in order to marry Hamlet's mother and gain the throne. The type of writing Shakespeare uses in the play is very interesting because he switches between using verse and prose. This is interesting to me because when you read a book or a magazine you notice we definitely don't write like they did in Shakespeare's time anymore, and therefore reading his plays showed me a different way of both reading and writing. The way Shakespeare switches between verse and prose is also interesting to me because most plays only use one or the other, so to see this in Shakespeare's plays was very unique and taught me a lot more about his style of writing.

Hamlet is also a very interesting play for the fact that it is both a tragedy and a comedy. The play is clearly supposed to be a tragedy and a revenge story, but it also includes a lot of comic scenes, definitely more than usual for a Shakespeare play. Because of all the comedic scenes, Shakespeare uses a lot more prose in his writing, which is why he switches from verse to prose a lot. I find the fact that this play is two different genres in one very interesting, because usually plays (or any type of writing for that matter) only encompass one genre, but Shakespeare was able to include both. When I read this play for the first time in high school, I really learned about the crossing of genres, and it was only engraved more in my brain with this phase.

Another poem I really like by Shakespeare is Macbeth. This play is about a man, Macbeth, who is a general in the army and defeats two invading armies and because of this is made a nobleman. Just before he is made nobleman, three witches appear and tell him his prophecy, that he will become nobleman and then king. Because of this prophecy he murders the king and frames it on two chamberlains and murders them to gain the crown. He then goes on to lead a very angry and horrible kingship and is ultimately murdered in battle.

This play really stood out to me because I like the way Shakespeare continuously changed his tone of writing. Overall, the tone of this play is very depressing, starting with battles and murder, and ending with the same. But throughout the play, Shakespeare sometimes slightly shifts the mood. There are times when the play is sinister and unnatural, times where guilt takes over as the overall tone and times when there is a little bit of humor (Vale). The constant change in tone in this play really taught me that writings don't always have to give off one feeling. If Macbeth had only given off the overall tone of being depressing, then we never would have felt the guilt Macbeth felt as a reader, and that would be very depressing indeed.

Romeo and Juliet is another play that has always stood out to me. This play is about two people

who come from rival families but fall in love anyways and end up killing themselves for each other in the end. This play has very many themes, but one of the biggest is the theme of fate. From the very beginning, Romeo and Juliet were labeled as “star crossed” which foreshadows from the very beginning that they will both die. But another part of the play having to do with fate is when Friar John was unable to deliver the letter to Romeo on time, which if he had, would have let him know Juliet was alive and neither one of them would have had to die (Themes in Romeo and Juliet with Examples and Analysis). This theme of fate really stuck out to me because I am a HUGE believer in fate. I don’t know if we all have set plans for our lives and every move we make, but I do believe that we are all going to die one set way and we all have big events in our lives that will for sure happen, and fate is pointing us to them with every decision and move we make. This play, even though it is just fiction, was one of the things that really helped solidify this thought process for me.

Oscar Wilde is another great playwright, and *Lady Windermere’s Fan* happens to be one of my favorites. This play is about a woman, Lady Windermere, who finds out her husband has been giving another woman money and assumes he is having an affair. Later in the play, it is revealed the woman is in fact Lady Windermere’s mother who left her years prior who is blackmailing her daughter’s husband. This play stands out to me because it has a small feminist tone, in the fact that a woman would walk out on her family and take care of herself, in a time when it was frowned upon heavily to do so. The fact that you can have a feministic tone, no matter how small or fleeting, in a time where feminism wasn’t even a thing yet is very absurd to think about. The play is also very interesting in its themes because it switches between absurd and serious (Dickson). The fact that a writer can go from scenes that are progressive for that time and that are very over the top, to scenes that are serious in nature taught me that writing can be out there and over the top in some aspects but can also be a real story that teaches you something serious.

One last play that has always really stood out to me is *Oedipus Rex*, written by Sophocles. This play is about a king’s land being invaded with a horrible plague that can only be ended if he can find the murderer of the king before him. When he goes to a seer for the answer, she tells him it was himself but Oedipus does not believe her and thinks it is an attempt from Creon, trying to steal the throne. Just before a fight breaks out between the two men, Oedipus’ wife appears and states seers are not always completely right. She tells a story of how she once received a prophecy that her son would kill her husband and have children by his mother and so she abandoned her son and her husband was killed by robbers. Upon hearing the story, Oedipus recalls having entered the city he is King of years prior and killing a man who matched her husband’s description. It is then realized he is the son, so Oedipus’ wife hangs herself and he blinds himself.

This play stands out to me because it has a theme of fate vs. free will (like in *Romeo and Juliet*) (LitCharts). Until the end of the play you don’t really know this story has a theme of fate, but once you reach that bombshell, you realize fate was intertwined the whole time. In my opinion, this is very much like life. People (including myself) don’t realize that every little thing we do or say is slowly building up to one event that we never knew was coming but makes sense once it’s finally there. Plays like these really helped shape my mindset of how important fate is in our lives

Another central theme that stands out to me in this play is the theme of shame and guilt (LitCharts). This theme stood out to me because I’ve learned a lot about guilt and shame in my

own life, but nothing compared to what the characters learned in this play. The central shame of this play comes from the fact that Oedipus and his mother had been married and were in love before realizing who the other truly was. The guilt comes from the fact that Oedipus killed his own father and never knew it. Now I have never been through either situation but I do know what it's like to feel both shame and guilt and I feel that this play (among other writings) helped me to navigate my guilt and shame in any situation as I got older.

All of the plays I mentioned in this essay have been central at teaching me certain mindsets throughout my life. From teaching me about love and fate, and guilt and shame, to even teaching me about different styles of writing and the intertwining of genres, these plays and their authors have changed the way my mind works for the better. Throughout this phase, especially the plays and dramas section, I really remembered where the shaping of everything I believe in started and how reading has really changed my world.

Works Cited

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