

3 shakespeare's works influencing english literature

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



For our essay, we have chosen to speak of Shakespeare's works that influenced modern English literature even to this day. We have decided to focus on three fundamental plays we think have had the most impact on the way we think about writing, settings and scenaristically, notably about Richard III, A Midsummer Night's Dream and Hamlet.

We will use the original plays as a basis for our essay, which will be complemented each by a particular mise-en-sc? ne that stood out for us specifically.

For each work, we will analyse one extract we noticed have had the most impact on today's culture: we will study the passage in itself, along with an analysis and the reason why it stood out in particular.. The first part will be about Richard III which is one of the first (with written evidence) plays that Shakespeare have made in his career, followed by A Midsummer Night's Dream that is one of his most famous comedies and we will finish with Hamlet which undoubtedly is the most influential tragedy ever written.

The extract chosen depicts the Duke Of Gloucester, Richard, the protagonist of the play of the same name. He opens the story with a monologue of his own, with the audience as the only witness of his machinations. The duke explains that, with peace finally back in the kingdom of England after the war, celebrations arose everywhere due to the crowning of his elder brother, King Edward IV. Unfortunately, his resentment towards him and the crown keeps Richard from fully enjoying the festivities, as he feels only he is worthy to sit on the throne. By justifying his resentfulness on his appearance, he makes it sounds like it is only right to serves back at everyone for the “

misery” he had to endure all his life, as if he was entitled of his past suffering. He reveals to the audience his plot of dethroning the king by putting his two brothers, George Duke of Clarence and King Edward IV, against each other through a series of fake prophecies and enhance the tension between the two of them. It is strongly implied that, by leading his two brothers to their downfall, he will take back what is rightfully his: the crown. Richard intends to attack Clarence first by creating rumors everywhere that his brother is most likely the one to attempt to kill the king.

It is obvious that Richard III is a villain, or an anti-hero at best. Both his appearance and motivations suggests it, as in a more traditional setting, villains are usually seen as wicked, with the villainy of their action reflecting through their outward aspect. Shakespeare only reinforce this idea by almost making this character a stereotype of a villain: he is repulsive (“[...]Cheated of feature by dissembling nature, Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time [...]” Act I scene 1) and at the very start of the play while showing of his appearance Richard III makes an allegiance to plot against his own family (“[...] To set my brother Clarence and the king; In deadly hate, the one against the other; [...]” Act I scene 1). Everything in his gesture, body language, choice of words to his interactions with the other points at this.

Usually, the revelation that one did hide their true nature is revealed at the end of the story near the climax. However, everything is laid out on the open for the audience to see. This is a surprising opening for them as they are warned about this character and that they shouldn't root for him: the constant knowledge that they've been part of a criminal conspiracy against

their will and they'll have to follow the very same plotter throughout the whole play is a bold but strong project for the playwright to do. The fascination one can have for this charismatic character is understandable as his long soliloquies ' forces' the audience to spend time knowing and getting attached to him. The parallels between the way the side characters relate and connect with him and the way the audience may change their mind towards him because of his sinister introduction throughout the whole play can almost be said to be deliberate. The audience can't help but see the events through his perspective, as it is undeniable that his charisma also play a significant role as well. His cunningness grows throughout the whole play, manipulating not only the other characters and the audience by using his deformity and gain their sympathy, to the point of pity, as demeaning as it is (“[·] And that so lamely and unfashionable; That dogs bark at me as I halt by them- [...]” Act I scene 1). They have to know, despite his horrendous appearance, that he is indeed a despicable man. There is no denying that he is the antagonist of the play. It is relevant to notice that right at the beginning he warns the audience of his true nature (“[·] And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover; To entertain these fair well-spoken days, I am determined to prove a villain [...]” Act I scene 1), going against once more of the conventional nature of storytelling.

For this extract, we have chosen David Morrissey's performance of the famous opening: it was presented as to celebrate Shakespeare's 400th anniversary of his death, an event where well-known actors and actresses performed some of his most important plays as tribute.

The video opens with ' a head and shoulder shot' (where in a cinematic setting means that the camera makes a medium close up of the person from the chest up to the top of his head) which is a framing essentially used for dialogues between two parties, for the most part a framing favored for interviews as it engages both the viewers and the interviewee. Starting from the moment where Richard III laments about his deformity, the camera stays ' eye-level' with the spectator: it brings a new level of intimacy and closeness between them. This same proximity becomes quickly uncomfortable knowing the content of the soliloquy Richard III delivers. It is unknown if David Morrissey is standing or sitting, as at no point the camera does cut away from his gaze; the actor is only lit on the side of his face which makes a great contrast with the black background. The ' low key' lightning only enhances Richard's shadows both physically and metaphorically: the darkness engulfs the scheming and deceitful man. At 0: 48 minutes of the video, David Morrissey leans over the camera, bringing himself closer to it, and emphasize on the " I" of this particular line (" But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks"); making himself the most important part of the room. As he establishes himself as the villain of his story (at 1: 53 minutes), the camera cuts away from his gaze and film the actor at a ? angle, detaching himself from the audience, and at the same time, of humanity entirely.

This is a particular mise-en-sc? ne that really stood out to us as the productor doesn't rely on anything beside the actor and only him, which enables the audience to only focus on the character and his soliloquy entirely.

It became obvious to us that by choosing Hamlet, which is one of the most influential pieces of literature of all time, that we wouldn't mention his most quoted and famous soliloquy in the history of theatre. Many scholars and intellectuals consider Hamlet to be the crowning achievement of tragic theatre: while it is Shakespeare's longest and most popular work at the time, many concede that this play has so greatly influenced the way modern writers think about tragedy that Hamlet undeniably set the standard for playwrights lastingly.

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, which is often abbreviated to Hamlet for easier convenience, is a revenge story. Before we start, we must be acknowledged with the context of this story as to gain a better understanding of the extract we have chosen. When summoned by the ghost of his father, King Hamlet, Prince Hamlet must exact his revenge on his uncle Claudius, who had murdered him and had taken over the kingdom of Denmark. In Act III Scene 1, Hamlet is torn between his duty to avenge his father and questions his sanity and the relevance of going on such a horrifying quest. He contemplates death and goes on a monologue, not knowing he is spied by Polonius and King Claudius.

For Hamlet's soliloquy, it has been difficult to only choose one performance as depending on the delivery and the mise-en-scène, the emotion of the extract can wildly change the meaning of the monologue. We have decided to show two different performances, that even though the soliloquy is the same, the subtle differences between the two of them makes them each as relevant as the other. Tennant's performance is less dramatized, more

subdued than Kenneth Branagh's. Like Richard III's soliloquy, the two performances are filmed directly with Hamlet's anguish in mind for the mise-en-scène.

Kenneth Branagh's interpretation is richer, even though Tennant's performance is more powerful emotionally, the actor does take advantage of his environment to perform his soliloquy.

The scene opens with a medium shot (which is filmed from the waist up to the top of his head) of the actor, with his back visible to us. The camera follows the prince, though there is a slight quaver from the camera (which means there hasn't been a steadycam to get rid of the footsteps of the cameraman), as if the spectator is following him as it does add to the impression of complicity between the audience and Hamlet in his journey, only involving the spectator further down Hamlet's machinations. As the prince looks over the empty room or so it seems, King Claudius and Polonius are hiding behind the tinted mirror which let only the two men able to watch through it, though it looks like a regular glass from Hamlet's side. The man is facing it, with a full body shot of Hamlet as he is staring at his own reflection, as if he was confronting himself and examining his being and his soul. It is only when he questions the possibility of which death to take ("Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles [...] " at 0:40 minutes) that he starts going towards the mirror, closer to his person (or rather his persona) and asks if this is truly the right choice to make. It is unknown if the persona who

is talking is either the actor or the character: if he ends his life, is it truly his life who is going to end, or rather the play he is acting in?

This moment is a rare moment of clear lucidity where he ponders whether or not he should give up on life, if the only moment where he can finally make a decision should be the act to end it all. His torment keeps him from deciding, how to be an actor as he makes his confession. This is one of the rare moment of fragility that does perspire through Hamlet's laments.

The prince is diving into the deepest part of his soul, only to find the promises of death and nihilism and it is only when he is alone that he allows such thoughts to be shared outloud. This soliloquy allowed him to retrospect on his possibilities, but unbeknown to him that he is not alone in his confession: the King and Polonius are an obvious reason, but the spectator is once more forced to witness the horror of the state of mind of Hamlet. So, when he brandishes his knife towards himself (" Who would fardels bear to grunt and sweat under a weary life but that the dread or something after death [...] 2: 18 minutes) he is menacing himself to finally decide once and for all whether to end or to continue his duty.

On the other hand, In Tennant's performance, the direction and mise-en-sc?ne of Gregory Doran is more minimalist, though an emphasis is clearly put on his performance rather than on the environment he is in.

The actor comes into view, enveloped in shadows with only a ray of light coming from the side, and leans on a wall. He won't move from it for the rest of the scene, the minimal movement and the limited setting keeps any

distraction away from the most important part of the video: Hamlet. This shot has been filmed with a “ Head and Shoulder” shot, which puts us again in a position of conversation between the character and the other person, in this case us. Even though Hamlet is in the darkness, the only lit object in the room is situated in the background and, while it is not the focus of the scene, it is framed along with his profile, the juxtaposition of the two light sources making it seem as if his head, or rather his mind, is basking in the light which can show the clarity of his mind. The camera slowly pans in and around the actor, and when he reconsiders on the actual meaning of death and what it imply in his future, the shot changes at his quote “[·] No more; and by a sleep to say we end; The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks; That flesh is heir to [·] (0: 47 minutes)”. The camera is now a close up which is focalized on his face, as we can now see in great detail the anguish and emotions Hamlet is feeling throughout the whole soliloquy. It is relevant to add that until this quote “ To sleep: perchance to dream [·]” (1: 19 minutes), Tennant has delivered his soliloquy with his eyes closed, as if he was refusing to face the reality of his situation and that only admitting that death is the easier and most fitting action to take that he opens them, ready to assimilate his sayings. He looks directly to the camera, which diverts us from the meaning of his soliloquy: it is now unclear if he is acknowledging his thoughts to himself or to the spectator, as if he was soliciting them concerning his suicidal thoughts.

But, despite everything that is leading us to think that he is conversing with the spectator (the close up and the eye contact for one instance) this is only

a one way conversation. He speaks into the void, it is a futile and vain dialogue, because even if the spectator answers back he will never be able to hear them; whether because he is too absorbed in his thoughts to truly hear them and because his hypothetical speaker's existence is unclear. When Hamlet performs his soliloquy, it is unknown if the spectator he performs it to are another fragment of his imagination or real, just like his father. This only adds to the belief that the prince may or may not be breaching the frontier of his sanity as the play goes on.