Reflecting on Shakespeare in the Everyday World

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I’ve never really been big into Shakespeare. Which is exactly why I took Shakespeare in the Everyday World in my fall semester of 2018. While this may seem silly or unusual, I think it makes perfect sense. I think a key thing to understanding things that we aren’t huge on is understanding their impact on your current life. After all, it isn’t really possible to relate to something if it has no relation to your life.

Throughout the course, I discovered the impacts Shakespeare has had on our lives. These range from simple phrases that we use in our everyday vocabulary, such as bated breath, full circle, and good riddance, to more elaborate ways. Romeo and Juliet, for example is a play that is ingrained in all of our memories. One we can’t forget, even if we wanted to. This is due to the ubiquity of the themes in many of Shakespeare’s plays. The theme of young love in Romeo and Juliet is one that anyone can relate to, especially when most people read it in early high school or middle school. Other themes, such as war and death in plays such as Julius Caesar and Macbeth are such a relatable concept that even people in entirely differing societies can relate to them.

One of the critical things that we did in class was read a book titled *Hamlet Globe to Globe*. This book was about the Globe Theatre’s quest to play Hamlet in every country around the world. The critical thing about this book is that it showed the reaction that many countries had to Hamlet and Shakespeare in general. To me, the most notable part of the book was when the company visited Cambodia. In recent history, there was a mass genocide of the Cambodian people by the Khmer Rouge in which upwards of one and a half million people were killed. When Hamlet was being put on, people thought that the play had something to do with the genocide, due to the symbol for hamlet being the skull and the symbol for the Cambodian Genocide being skulls. It really hit home for me just how different their lives are from our own, due to having only recently undergone a tragedy such as the genocide. They connect to death in a way both unlike and yet alike to our own connection. Death is a very real thing over there, where many are still impacted by the deaths of loved ones, while in the West, we are more sheltered from death and it is not at the forefront of our lives. At the same time, we all face the inevitability of death, and that is what makes Shakespeare’s plays so special.

It is worth understanding the impact Shakespeare has on our daily lives for only the reason that it helps us identify with other people, both those around us and those across the world from us. It is also important to read and watch Shakespeare’s plays, as they bring a unique perspective to the table by taking 16th century ideas and relating them to the modern world. As such I am very thankful that I had the opportunity to take this class and look forward to future opportunities to expand my horizons as this class did.