**Why Do We "Still" Teach Shakespeare?** By C. L. Washbrook

Whenever I read anything about Shakespeare I generally come across the question - Why is Shakespeare still taught in schools? I come across it every second line in forums where teenagers are allowed to post. "Tut tut".

I could take issue with the still but I think that scoffing at the moronic suggestion that periodic updating is preferable to genuine longevity should suffice.

So, ignoring the stupid, plebian, dolt-masking "still", why do we teach Shakespeare at all? Surely there have been other great plays? Didn't he build upon a tradition? Isn't there interesting new stuff? Isn't that a bit long ago to be relevant?

"What the dickens!" There are reasons why Shakespeare is considered the greatest. The universialism of his themes for a start - the cliché that he wrote every story already may not be true but what is true is that most of what he did write is universally constant. Universally constant means that no matter what happens to society, no matter how far we advance, that stuff still happens and we all recognise it, empathise, comprehend and can engage in the plots because of that.

There is another reason. One which is occasionally spewed out as a snippet-saying but is generally not really considered or comprehended (even by English teachers) -Shakespeare invented a lot of the English language.

How we use language has a hell of a lot to do with how Shakespeare used it - especially his and our fascination with constructing portmanteaus - compound words made up of two other words, which have more power together than separately. For example, he came up with bedroom.

Additional to playing with language above and beyond any normal national natural evolution (ie. we play with our words more than any other nation) is the actual creation of new words. Shakespeare created tonnes of new words that we now use commonly, in some cases creating them outright, in others crafting new portmanteaus or turning words that had been used as nouns into adjectives. Here are a few of those words:

academe accused addiction advertising alligator

amazement Arouse assassination backing bandit

bedroom Beached besmirch birthplace blanket

bloodstained Barefaced blushing bet bump

buzzer Caked cater champion circumstantial

cold-blooded Compromise courtship countless critic

dauntless Dawn deafening discontent dishearten

drugged Dwindle epileptic equivocal elbow

excitement Exposure eyeball fashionable fixture

flawed Frugal generous gloomy gossip

green-eyed Gust hint hob-nob hot-blooded

hurried impede impartial invulnerable jaded

label lackluster laughable lonely lower

luggage lustrous madcap majestic marketable

metamorphize mimic monumental moonbeam mountaineer

negotiate noiseless obscene obsequiously ode

Olympian outbreak panders pedant premeditated

puking radiance rant remorseless savagery

scuffle secure skim milk submerge summit

swagger torture tranquil undress unreal

varied vaulting wormhole worthless zany

So, "the game is afoot" with the "household words". Do I hear you crying that "It's Greek to me"? Well, the point, my point, is that it isn't - it is every sentence you speak, every thought you think. Stop acting "more sinned against than sinning" because in saying this I "act more in sorrow than in anger". I hope my "wish is father to the thought", because I really want you to understand just how much you owe to Shakespeare: every conversation you ever had, every argument, every explanation given, every film watched, every book read. This is why we STILL teach Shakespeare. I won't "budge an inch" on this. I may be "playing fast and loose" with his words but I am not yet "in a pickle" or "tongue-tied". I hope that I have caused you to "knit your brows" a little because I insist on "fair play". It is time we "danced attendance" on the Bard. I won't "stand on ceremony" any longer, so I am giving this "short shrift". We live in a "fool's paradise" where our education has "seen better days" and our understanding of our own language and history is like "lost property" which has "vanished into thin air". Those suffering from "green-eyed jealously" in the comprehension stakes make out that we have had "too much of a good thing" and have "hoodwinked" you into thinking that Shakespeare is obsolete.

So those of us who actually understand must now "make virtue of necessity" (for it is necessary) and although we will not worry to the point where we "sleep not one wink", we can be a literary "tower of strength". "As good luck would have it", this "obscene" "savagery" of thought is not a "foregone conclusion". The "pedant" has much to teach and on this point, we must be pedantic. It is "high time" that we clear out the "bag and baggage" of the subverted mind, even if it involves "your own flesh and blood". As I have said, I "suspect foul play" on the part of the minority who failed to comprehend but somehow found a voice. Well, "be that as it may", "the long and short of it" is that "the game is up", for surely "you have a tongue in your head". It is "early days" and if we share the reality of this situation with others then "the truth will out".

This has my "teeth set on edge" and it continues "without rhyme or reason". They can "lie low" until the "crack of doom" but we can rout them out and set them right "at one fell swoop".

With Shakespeare I have made friends, lost friends, educated my children, had drunken pub quarrels, ranted to "thin air", exclaimed during childbirth, expressed grief, expressed love, shove-shouldered my way into print, dreamt, thought, tripped and "laughed myself into stitches". If you don't get it - "the more fool you".

"If the truth were known" then the "stony-hearted villain" who "rants" "obsequiously" against Shakespeare with his "remorseless" "gossip" would be seen as the "blinking idiot" that he truly is. "For goodness sake", what will it take to rid ourselves of these literary "eyesores" inspired by "the devil incarnate"?

For now, even if you "send me packing" and bid me "good riddance", I am too "bloody-minded" to be made "a laughing stock" until I am "dead as a doornail". But if you do - "By Jove" will I "laugh myself into stitches" because in doing so you will still, as every other day of your life, be quoting Shakespeare....and it is long past time to doff your cap and raise a glass and toast the great Bard who filled your gob with every fabulous word used to "besmirch" his name and attempt to claim him pointless with "fashionable" "barefaced" cheek.

The man was a true Englishman and a great character - a drunkard, a brawler, a man who stole his own theatre in the middle of the night and moved it across a river, a rebel who fought against the anti-"advertising" laws for theatre by using a flag code to tell people when his plays were on and what they were. He was messy, he screwed up, he lost plays, he wrote for the common man and did it with a linguistic flair that rightfully set his place.

I'd apologise for any paraphrasing but I somehow don't think he'd mind, so long as I "have witchcraft in (my) lips".