

# **The Bard's Spirit:**

## **Shakespeare's Social Gospel**



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**By**

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# **The Bard's Spirit:**

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**Dedicated to**

My Mum & Dad,  
Whose love and support make this world a better place.



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## **Preface**

July 5-11, 2008 was a spiritual moment for me. The dates were specific, but specific was what was needed. I was in Saskatoon for a summer school week on Spiritual Direction at the College of Emmanuel & St. Chad, but that's not what touched my soul. What touched my soul was the annual festival on the banks of the Saskatchewan River, the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan 2008 Season of Revenge & Honour where I experienced a spiritual high taking in opening night of Henry IV Part One (July 5, 2008 at 8 p.m.) and a director chat night of The Tempest (July 8, 2008 starting at 7:30 p.m.).

Why were these two plays classed as a spiritual moment for me?

I know that live theatre has always spoken to me (I am a play write alumnus of Theatreblitz 1996 in Calgary), yet Shakespeare, even though I like his plays has never touched me as he did this summer. Could it have been the stories?

That is possible; Henry IV is the story of Hal, a struggling and unfocused prince yearning for his father's approval, finally discovering his true self. The Tempest tells the tale of redemption-the transformative life lived out, especially with the lead character of Prospero.

But it was in the pre-show talk with the director that the timeless adaptabilities of these stories, ancient wisdom stories that Shakespeare adapted for his time, and great directors, writers and actors have been adapting down through the centuries to speak to their contemporary existence.

But it is this ancient wisdom that can be used to create a much-needed bridge in our global village. For it is in the rush-rush of modern life that mostly we forget to breathe, but also to reflect on our relationship with creation... our own journey of transformation.

This is the core that I found in the season of Revenge and Honour, the spiritual journey that has been the bedrock of life since we first came out of the trees. Now this neutral ground of great literature can be used as a tool for discourse between faiths, in multi-faith and multi-cultural homes.

I hope this work touches your spirit and draws you closer to the Holy Mystery as an individual and a community as it has for me preparing it.

Shalom and Namaste;

Ty Ragan

Calgary, AB 2008



## Foreword

The Bard's Spirit is written for those who love Shakespeare, and yet, sense something familiar about his stories. Something that has existed in stories from a far earlier time, and by this I mean, biblical times.

Only Ty Ragan could weave together the stories of Shakespeare, and the Bible, to bring together their full weight and meaning. Then to have us delve deeply into the meanings of not only Shakespeare, or the bible, but our own lives. For mired in these tales of intrigue and human desire is our own story, and how we chose to live out our own lives while on this Earth.

Unfathomable spirit is what we all need to get through the tough times of each day, and we need to learn to do this with grace. Bringing out the best not only in ourselves, but our fellow human beings with whom we share this planet with, (regardless of whether or not we want to share our lives with them).

For the spiritual journey that Ty Ragan is taking us on is not just a study of the works of Shakespeare. Nor is it another cheap analysis, or interpretation, of the Holy Bible. This is a rare study of our-selves, and the human drama being played out in our own lives.

For why else would the works of Shakespeare and the Holy Bible have such a hold on us all?

Isn't it because we can relate to them?

The goings on of people in our world, the events that are going on throughout the world, are unfortunately like the dramas of Shakespeare, and the trials and tribulations found within the Holy Bible. It is the human story that we are attracted to. So Ty Ragan is not here to tell you anything. In fact...

This work before you is to help you understand yourself.

Enjoy!

Paul Vargis  
September 15, 2008

## **Introduction**

This book is a tool to be used for personal or corporate formation and dialogue. It will touch on a variety of mediums used to convey Shakespeare's wisdom and spirit to the reader/viewer whether it is audio compact disc, DVD, magna novels and graphic novels, plain contemporary English translations to original language editions. This shows the variety used in seeing the words, sensing my understanding of the play, characters, with questions for discussion.

I pray that as you read and hopefully work through this work that it will be an in to the world of the spiritual. Understanding that there is more at work within this world than the stark contrasts of black and white one usually finds comfortable...but an interconnectivity of the plausible, reconciliation, forgiveness and yes, transformation.

For many works scream this from the page, stage or screen, yet none as prolifically as Shakespeare's. For within these works that can scare most of us because of the archaic language beats the soul of a Biblical Prophet, a Hindu Guru, Aboriginal Shaman, Muslim Sufi or Buddhist Lama to use a few labels that may apply.



It is within our art, our story that passion, life and hope are rekindled in spite of dire circumstances or life choices even in the midst of tragedy like Romeo and Juliet hope is found.

This is why I have chosen these works for the journey, you will find some familiar from the school days, yet some one may never have touched upon. Here is a short list and brevity of description of what may or may not be discovered for the joy in the Bard's Hope is that each of us can take away something different, like a holy scripture, there is no written in stone eternal forever and ever understanding.

**The Tempest-** Magic, mystery, justice from injustice, the transformative journey propelled through love.

**Henry IV-** Hal, a troubled youth discovering friendship, approval and self.

**Julius Caesar-** Betrayal seems the obvious, but what eccentricities are wove in this story of the why of the assassination, hope and freedom and what they truly mean.

**Taming of the Shrew-** What does it mean to be a feminist?

**Othello-** Interracial love, transformation of taboos and the destructiveness of hate.

**Romeo and Juliet-** The archetypal star crossed love story of teenagers. Families at war, turf wars, gang wars, caste systems and many amazing film versions: Lion King II, West Side Story to name but a few.

**Hamlet-** Ancient story of political intrigue and the thirst for power, some revenge, and the abuse of power. Immortalized in Walt Disney's Lion King.

**King Lear-** Incestuous love, corrupting power and the discovery of true love regardless of label.

**The Twelfth Night-** A liturgical comedy that raises many questions about God.

**Macbeth-** The Scottish Play, haunting magic and mystery with intrigue.

**Merchant of Venice-** What is a scapegoat truly? How destructive can stereotypes be?

**A Midsummer's Night Dream-** What is it like to live a dream?

This is a warning to the reader to please not use this work as a written in stone list. When it comes to my personal reflections on the play, I am going to stipulate the version I used to reach my thoughts, but the questions will be applicable to whatever version you feel drawn to whether it is a text, graphic or magna novel, movie, local play house performance, or television show.

The beauty of Shakespeare is that he took wisdom stories before his time and placed them in the contemporary for his patrons, that is what is happening now. Feel free to discover that version which speaks to you and/or your group for the discovery of self does not stipulate the presentation.

Enjoy the journey...

## **Shakespeare Enigma: The Bard's Bits**

Shakespeare is an enigma of literary history. For most high school and college students his tombs are something to be feared due to archaic language and head scratching meaning. Yet this enigma discovered something in his writing...to make the great stories engage able for the masses and this feat he accomplished for his time. Why have his plays endured for centuries???

William Shakespeare re-told the greatest stories of any time. Tales that challenged the thought patterns of his time and the social norms (even some norms we hold to now) take for example Cordelia in King Lear, a woman acting as a man. In Shakespeare's time this would have been a male actor playing a woman playing a man. Gender bending at its best but also setting the stage for dialogue around transgender and two spirits in humanity.

Over time Shakespeare's work would bring out other topics of anti-Semitism (Merchant of Venice), which was a literary device of Shakespeare's time. The Jews were cast as villains, when they entered the stage the viewer knew what to expect, much akin to a Catholic

Priest entering a television storyline today. Was Shakespeare anti-Semitic? That is not the question to be explored but rather to touch down upon scapegoats and how easily hatred can be fuelled in the world. With his work on Othello Shakespeare explodes interracial relationships which can still be taboo in some religions and families today. He also raised the issues of self awareness and global vision (Prospero in *The Tempest*); Caste Systems (*Romeo and Juliet*); LGBT Rights (for what is Love? A query raised throughout many of his plays) and Feminism (once more to Cordelia in *King Lear*, *Taming of the Shrew* to name a few).

William raised the question of power corrupting and the influence of the “Bourgeoisie” emergent class over the “Proletariat” peasants, going as far as blasphemy in his times by challenging the Divine (God Anointed) monarchy belief cycle of his time.

William Shakespeare’s identity has many facets and exploring the mystery of who Shakespeare is, from Queen Elizabeth I to a pen name for a composite of writers (for a good exploration of this for the lay reader I refer you to “*The Everything Shakespeare Book Volume 2*”) is a debate and deduction best left to Shakespearean scholars.

Regardless of the true identity of Mr. Shakespeare or Ms/Mrs. Shakespeare, what we have in these plays is dramatic activism.

The type of activism that when reflected upon is a solid Liberation Theology if you are from the Northern Hemisphere, or if you are more North American you can touch on an out of vogue term from the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century: Social Gospel. Within Canada this theology was pushed forward by such activists as the Famous Five (Suffragists/temperance); J.S. Woodsworth (Labour/abolishment of war and capitalism); Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont (Human Rights); Tommy Douglas (Public Health Care); Agnes MacPhail (Equality); and Pierre Trudeau (Towards a Just Society). A quick Google search will bring up many books either written by or about any of these grand social gossellers of Canadian History. Two important works of note are by J.S. Woodsworth when he was at the Winnipeg Shelter: *My Neighbour* and *Stranger at the Gates*.

The soul of these Canadians resonates with the soul of Shakespeare's works. For when one reads, or better yet experiences the works of Shakespeare this idea of Justice, equality, redemption and global transformation comes through.

This is a collection of essays based on a selection of plays to help an individual or group renew the spirit of the Social Gospel across religious, ideology, philosophy and political lines. This is a good starting point to be able to actually share beliefs and passions in a diverse cultural setting.

Each section will provide thoughts on the play, the personal context of the writer and what I have dubbed “Soul Work” questions for further exploration by the participant(s). I would encourage the use of a variety of new editions not just the standard Oxford or Folgers editions of school. Spark publishers have put out a No Fear editions of most of the plays found here that have the original text side by side a contemporary English translation, as well as for text there is always the No Fear Graphic Novels or the Magna Editions of Macbeth, Romeo & Juliet, Hamlet and the harder to find, The Tempest.

But as with anything drama the best way to experience the play is live either through an audio recording, movie, stage performance or the television series *Slings and Arrows*. There is no set version to be used in the exploration as the stories are timeless and with being timeless they have been revised and reworked over the centuries to speak most clearly to the audience. There is also the discovery of the

storyline within modern stories: Hamlet in the Lion King, The Tempest in Forbidden Planet or Star Trek's "The Cat's Paw" or "Squire of Gothos" or Star Trek: The Next Generation's "Encounter at Farpoint" (or any episode featuring Q a modern day Prospero).

*The Philosophy of Shakespeare* by Colin McGinn enlightens many points of understanding for this course of exploration (there will be a source list found in the back of this book for some good resources to aid further understanding if one wishes). For McGinn Shakespeare is a natural psychologist who insists on the centrality of the imagination in the human mind (2006). For if we can enter deeply into our imagination to realize that each play reveals what truly makes a human's journey through this life we can discover our true nature and purpose.

Fairly heady topics, but now with these thoughts in mind we begin to unpack the world of Shakespeare, a writer that took the ancient and contemporary world of his time and using these stories challenged the unjust societal structures.

Enjoy the journey! My prayer is that through this journey one can feel empowered to change your own little corner of the world a little bit for the better.





## **A Note on Structure**

*The Bard's Spirit* is not a scholarly or academic work, rather it is a liturgical work...that being said the term “Liturgical” or “Liturgy” needs defining, this simply means the work of the people.

This is a work for an individual or group to work through to begin percolating the ideas for community and personal transformation that helped to shape many nations through such theologies as the social gospel, liberation, feminism etc.

Each exploration follows a simple pattern:

**The Play's Title-** how you can locate the play via the Table of Contents.

**Introduction-** The beginning to explain why this play was selected and included in this form of study.

**Characters** – This is not an exhaustive treatise on the characters from the play, but rather touching upon a few major characters of note that aided in forming the reflection.

**Synopsis -** A simple explanation of the plot.

**Contemplation-** This is my personal reflection on the underlying and apparent meanings of the Bard's works, one can

either agree or disagree as you move into the discussion within yourself or a group as to the play and how it speaks to your world.

**Soul Work** – This is the reflective work after working through the section and either reading or viewing the play (via live theatre or movie). This work lays the ground work for understanding the freedom that comes from personal and community transformation work.

**Onward-** Is simply the conclusion that gives you something to take for the week ahead.

# **The Tempest**

## **Introduction**

The Tempest is Shakespeare's biggest play, like a Star Warsian epic as I watched the actors on stage I could see the character of Prospero having been used as the template of Lucas' Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader. A man so consumed by hatred that he is blinded to the bigger picture in the world. It is through Prospero's attempt at revenge that his "daughter" Miranda falling in love with Prospero's nephew that Prospero's soul is healed and his eyes are opened. Each character in the play can be seen as a piece of Prospero's Jungian soul. This short reflection will feature a list of Characters with their part in the story and if fashionable what I believe their piece of Prospero is; a short synopsis of the story; a contemplation on the story and what it means for us today; Soul Work (reflective questions for group and/or individual); Onward (where next if you will).

## **Characters**

Prospero is the exiled sorcerer that runs the island when the ship wrecks. There is Caliban a mutated being; Ariel a sprite, Miranda

who is Prospero's daughter. Ferdinand the son and heir to Alonso. Alonso is the king of Naples, he aided Antonio in the coup that displaced Prospero and there are minor characters from the shipwreck, but these one's make up the core of the action.

### **Synopsis**

This play is based around an actual event of a shipwreck of a ship on its way to Virginia. The setting is the story of eternal transformation of Prospero who realizes the newly shipwrecked are those that led to his exile on the island and notably the loss of his throne.

Using his control over Caliban and Ariel, dangling the carrot of freedom in front of them, he plots the fall of Alonso and Antonio through many acts including Ferdinand falling in love with Miranda to seize back the throne and his own freedom.

It is within this plotting of "restoring right" or more truthfully, Prospero's revenge that the ultimate character transformation happens as Prospero's heart thaws his heart.

### **Contemplation**

Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan's 2008 Season was what I believed was my first contact with *The Tempest*, but as the play

unfolded before my eyes I remembered that it was a timeless story of the transformative journey.

To most, Prospero's hatred and seeking after revenge seems natural given that Antonio, his own brother, formulated the coupe that led to his dethronement and exile on this island. It is the touch of fate that brings these villains to the island and within the child of Alonso, a co-conspirator; Prospero sees the beginning of his vengeance unfold.

Prospero is an ancient "Q" or "Trelane" from Star Trek lore, with Ferdinand, the puppet in the play being played by Captain Picard, Commander Sisko or Captain Kirk. Within Star Trek: The Next Generation lore, the character of Vash became Q's Miranda.

Why digress like this? Because Miranda is Prospero's internal audience (McGinn 2006) this is the role Vash fulfills for Q in their travels to almost humanize Q. Just as Miranda's authentic falling in love with Ferdinand softens Prospero.

There are many stories like this one, it is seen as Pharaoh redemption from the Book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible. For unlike Pharaoh who finally has his heart unhardened to let the Israelites go but then changes his mind and sends out the army, Prospero lets the people go at plays end because of the transformative power of love.

This brings us to the core of Prospero, a fine example of why Shakespeare's tales are so enduring. It was not new work, but ancient tales retold for the modern ear, and are continually retold to this day, whether it is through Star Trek or any other form of redemptive tale that can come to your mind as you journey through the Tempest.

For Prospero the other characters in his circle break down his own psychology in the external world. Caliban is seen as a monster by the viewer, or as someone who struggles for his own life. Like the Israelites within the Hebrew Bible who were delivered from slavery or the Metis of Canada who fought for recognition as human beings until the Great Depression when it was finally noted, Caliban is an example, living and breathing on stage of the enslaved populations (McGinn 2006).

Shakespeare's character of Caliban endures as a reminder to the viewer/reader because each of us carries our own Caliban within. Jung called this aspect the Shadow Self; Caliban is the vengeance within Prospero made life.

For the ease with which Caliban switches sides to Trinculo and Stefano (sailors from the vessel) who sway Caliban to be their servant with the vice of alcohol. The struggle for freedom shows the

adaptability of humanity to any situation, seeing these two drunkards as a better existence hidden in the bottle than to continue enslavement with Prospero.

The struggle of slavery still exists within our world today. Whether it is individuals involved in the sex trade (both adults and children); or sweat shop labour or private jail prisoners forced to work for free labouring for western corporations, we all have a right like Caliban to live freely and healthy lives. The question is will we set Caliban free?

The other side of the coin of enslavement is divinity, Pharaoh in the book of Exodus was divine to his people, a god anointed individual who at death would be transfigured to godhood himself. The divine nature that exists within all of us, the core centre of our being that shows we were created very good. This is what the sprite, Prospero's other servant, Ariel, shows the viewer.

Forced through darkness to do a master's bidding, yet the power of good only able to act in creating safety through sleep and bringing two souls together that truly yearn for one another in Miranda and Ferdinand.



Like the story of the Prodigal Son in the Christian New Testament (Modern Retelling by Ty Ragan):

*The Lost Child*

*It had started like any other day at home, but an angry daughter, Chelsea, confronted Mary, the screaming match had caught her off guard while simply watching CSI on television.*

*Then it came out, “I wish you were fucking dead! My life would be better without you. All I want is what I am entitled to...my money.”*

*Mary was in shock. “Fine you think you can make it.” She whips out her chequebook and scribbles out a cheque for \$5,000. “Here’s your 1half” that you think you are entitled to.”*

*Chelsea snatches the cheque from her Mum’s hand and sprints out the door.*

*Months pass with neither speaking to the other. Mary has no idea what has happened to her daughter. Chelsea sits huddled in an alleyway, just inches from the small corner that is secluded enough she can use it as a toilet. The smells from the fast food restaurant waft into her nostrils. Her stomach grumbles loudly.*

*She tries to shush it quiet to no avail. Hunger, how long had it been since she last ate anything? The Crystal Meth was wearing off and she was staring blankly at the open sores she had picked this time.*

*It was a sick circle she was trapped in, needing the Meth to make it through the tricks to pay her pimp to protect her yet the Meth*

*making her look uglier so she had to do more depraved things with the johns in unprotected ways to make the same amount of money.*

*She quietly thinks of the wonderful meals, her warm bed, and her safe family with her older brother. How she missed it. Would her Mum take her back in as a maid? She wonders as she stumbles towards the c-train.*

*Mary's eyes fall on the street as she gets out of her SUV. "Chelsea!" She screams as she runs up and embraces her daughter. The door of the houseflies' open and Todd, her son steps out. "Todd! Chelsea's home! Order up the full meal deal!"*

*Todd harrumphs. "What the hell is this Mum she runs off and becomes a skank and you celebrate?! Well I work to help you and get nothing!"*

*Mary looks hurtfully at her son. "Honey you know everything is yours to use, but Chelsea has come back to us."*

At any point and time we can be the Mother, brother or sister, or in the case of the Tempest one of the aspects of Prospero's character: Caliban, Ariel or Miranda. But it is within bringing these three aspects together in harmony.

For the Tempest is the story of freedom... freedom from enslavement in all its forms and a call to us to be the voice to bring an end to slavery.

## **Soul Work**

- Reflect on how you are like Prospero? Which aspect speaks to your life now: Miranda, Ariel or Caliban? Why? This is a tough question to ask as we delve deeper, who were we in the past, what changed us? How close are we to unifying yourself?
- Watch prime time television being conscious of the story of the Tempest, how many modern examples can you find in the course of the week. With the modern retelling what new insights come to light on this journey to freedom?
- Create a Mandala (draw a circle on a piece of paper and keep your illustrations within the bounds of the circle, title your work) that symbolizes your beliefs around freedom, reflect and meditate on this image nightly for a week, where is your belief in freedom guiding you to act?

## **Onward**

There is a root question all of us have to ask that want to change the world, how as part of the oppressive and enslaving class

(that being the western world) can live out the freedom promised us in our spiritual practices?

How can we be agents of change when it is our very lifestyle regardless of where we fall in the socio-economic strata as Canadians, that leads to slavery and bondage, human suffering?

Take the steps you can to make this world better, live out what you truly believe.



## **Henry IV**

### **Introduction**

Paparazzi stalking the Royal Family of England are nothing new. Henry IV is actually the origin story of Henry V. His journey through troubled youth as a bully, crafting a bad boy image as he gallivants about like an ancient Prince Harry of Windsor. Trained as a warrior, but party animals at heart with his trusted mentor Sir John Falstaff. It is not until war that Harry's life is transformed as his father begins to see him as truly a man capable of carrying the crown.

This *Hello Magazine* style play illuminates many things. This short reflection will touch on the characters, plot, contemplation, and soul work and onward.

### **Characters**

Prince Hal (Harry, Henry) is the prince of the realm, someone trying to prove his manhood to his father, Henry IV. Sir John Falstaff, the best prophet created by Shakespeare and the mentor for Hal.

There are quite a few other characters that abound in the royal court, but it is the transformation of Prince Hal that this tale centres on as Henry IV, but is the story of the origin of Henry V (Prince Hal).

## **Synopsis**

The story of transformation from a prince behaving badly to a man who aids his father in defending the kingdom from coupe attempts to preserve the royal line. In the attempts to defend the kingdom Henry IV finally sees his son, Hal, as a true man and king to be, not just a ne'er do well to keep out of the gossip mills.

Sir John Falstaff who plays the coward, the one seeking glory and money and appears to be riding the coattails of Prince Hal to celebrity. Yet he brings truth out through his humour in the play.

## **Contemplation**

Whether or not we want to admit it, or how horrible our parents may have been we thrive to gain their approval. But before the approval is sought, we tend to rebel against what our parents hold dear. How in the act of rebellion we clarify our values and grow as a human being.

For when Hal is first met, one would see someone that is not worth much. Probably characters that if seen on a darkened city street with his friends one would cross over or possibly phone the police. It was these thugs that Hal plotted such crimes as mugging and vandalism.

Yet there is a heart beating there that lost in addiction to danger and alcohol, probably partying and the glory it brings... Hal is a true adrenaline junky who knows because of his status sadly he is untouchable, and uses his status to play games with the sheriff to protect his friends from the hangman's noose and keep his game afoot.

But the clouds of conspiracy do spread throughout Henry IV's nobles that draw the land into war. It is within this war Prince Hal begins to mature and grow as he is confronted with the disparity of what his choices can lead to. This idea of divorcing values from actions, whether or not the coupe believes what they are doing is just; it is a live action echoing of the interior torment of a growing soul.

For in rebellion chaos is created between taught values and what real values will emerge. Hal who had used his friends as nothing more than chess pieces for his own amusement throughout life is now confronted in the horror of war by what these actions can cause.

How? Simply by seeing the appearance of his friend and mentor, John Falstaff, dead. Yes Sir John was faking, but it is in the moment where Hal believes ill action had led to the death of a friend that he is confronted with the ultimate life changing point in life.



Hal who had suffered with what psychologists called cognitive dissonance (when actions and values do not match up) is healed and his actions become pure.

The story of war ends with Henry IV accepting his son, Hal, as a true equal. The transformed Hal goes on to work towards Falstaff's redemption as well.

Now you are probably scratching your head and wondering why this play is in the canon for Shakespeare's Social Gospel, see within the idea of social gospel is the power of transformation on this world. Nothing is more transformative than the power of good.

That is the key to this story. For it is Hal transformative redemption from misguided evil to good that echoes the possibility in each of our lives that our own personal transformation can have positive results forward in our communities as Hal did.

### **Soul Work**

- Take time to write out your own autobiography, spend special time on those who were your mentors, your friends, those who used you, and you have used. These are all disparate pieces of who we are now through birth to adolescence to adulthood. Life stage development

can be explored and this story, like Hal's on the way to the throne, needs to be understood. Embrace your journey and know that it is not over.

### **Onward**

We now know who we are. Where we have been, the question to ask yourself as the sun comes up tomorrow is this: Where are we going? Go forward to transform your community.



# **Julius Caesar**

## **Introduction**

The play opens amongst celebration and despair. For Julius Caesar is finally triumphant in his battle for supremacy, yet Brutus sees a man driven by ambition for his own power not for the good of the people. An opportunity opens up for political intrigue and plotting to dethrone the new would be emperor.

The finesses and intrigue that Shakespeare is known for and the very twisted ending as great issues such as loyalty and why one seeks to rule an empire.

## **Characters**

The characters on this play fall on two sides of a thirst for power.

There are the conspirators to execute Julius Caesar for the good of Rome, led by a tormented Brutus and including Cassius, who is Brutus' brother-in-law and possible lover. Marc Anthony who is Caesar's confidant and the next anointed one for rule, Julius' right hand man. Aiding Anthony is Octavius. These are the major players

in a shrewd game of chess with the prize of checkmate being the crown of Imperial Rome.

### **Synopsis**

Julius Caesar is emperor apparent after a long war of unification in which he is finally triumphant over Pompey's sons, he returns to the capitol at the Feast of Lupercal (the Romanization of the Greek God Pan, a trickster character, treachery foreshadowed). It is on this return that the famous line, a soothsayer to Caesar utters "beware the ides of March", which in English is March 15.

Cassius and others approach Brutus to look within himself for the greatness the empire needs. The internal struggle for Brutus is to decide whether a man he views as nothing more than personally ambitious is the anointed "messiah" to lead the Roman Empire, or if he is the anointed one because he is more concerned with his people than Julius is.

The plot is hatched, even though there is petitioning to kill Caesar and Marc Anthony on March 15, Brutus speaks out against the unnecessary shedding of blood to kill Marc Anthony for he is just Caesar's arm and without the head on the body the arm is useless.

March 15 ends in a bloody mess for Caesar is dead, and Marc Anthony requests to speak at the funeral. In the background Marc Anthony and Octavius hatch a plot with Lepidus to seize back the throne. But after the plot is joined, Octavius and Anthony make plans to eliminate Lepidus.

Brutus internal conflict over the assassination becomes external war between the forces. Slowly Anthony and Octavius re-seize power by assassinating the assassins. It is this touching close of the play where Anthony declares Brutus a man who acted with honour and is buried a hero despite his treachery.

### **Contemplation**

What price is power?

Who decides what is the moral good?

These are tough questions to answer even today, yet alone when the Bard penned this work. What price would one pay for power? Essentially Brutus paid with his life, and Marc Anthony his soul. For the conspiracy would not have moved forward to assassinate Julius Caesar if Brutus had not made a tough decision, a decision that was masked in the moral good.

For it is the moral good that the ancients used the pantheon's of gods to explain. Today we still cannot decide whose moral authority is right, yet here Brutus is asked to decide whether or not to seize power from an ambitious man who had just ended a bloody feud for the crown.

Cassius debates with Brutus what exactly the godhood of Julius Caesar means? This could be a veil for Shakespeare to have debated the deepest Christian conviction of 2000 years, the divinity and celibacy of Jesus Christ. For Jesus of Nazareth was a thirty-year-old Jewish carpenter who became a travelling Rabbi, and was closely intimate with many a female, yet to control power a pose of divinity and celibacy was placed on him. Does the fact he probably had a wife, and was human mean nothing? No it does not question the good he did, but rather creates a broader picture from the cult of holy personality used throughout history.

This is the cult of holy personality that Cassius and Brutus debate over Caesar, pointing out that he was just a mortal who had accomplished impossible feats and brought hope, but where Jesus did it for the people, Brutus admonishment is that Caesar, like the

religious authorities of Jesus' day and following, had done it for personal advancement, ambition and prestige.

The raised questions within the dialogue of Act One as the decision to assassinate is being made rings of back room political dealings, love orgies, gossip and plots all shrouded in the religious language, but Brutus keeps raising a central question important for the social gospel today:

*What is best for the commoner?*

This was the basis of a story Tommy Douglas would tell on the campaign trail, it was titled simply, *Mouseville*, it was the story of a village of mice who every four years would vote and elect either fat black cats or fat white cats to rule them. One election a little brown mouse finally spoke up and said, hey why are we electing cats to rule us when we are mice. The call of the cats was arrest that mouse, he's a Bolshevik (communist).

The point of the story is that the masses seem to elect those that do not experience what the masses experience and thus are governed poorly by corrupt forces. It is this basis that finally led Brutus to decide what was best for Rome was for Caesar to die and the plot was hatched.



At Caesar's assassination Cinna (a conspirator) calls out "Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead" (3.1:80). Cinna the conspirator stating that the death of this "tyrant" king would lead to liberty, freedom and democracy for Rome and its citizenry, while Cassius was more direct and skipped over the question of tyranny with "Liberty, freedom and enfranchisement" (3.1:83). Democracy would come to Rome through bloodshed and loss.

Cassius echoes the cry of the Twenty and Twenty-First Century capitalist war machines. That through violence all would be made right with the world...violence to answer violence. Sounds a lot like the current war on terror and the propaganda machine fuelling warmongers and fanning the flames of battle in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The only trip up in the plan was that Brutus let Marc Anthony speak at Caesar's funeral, so after Caesar was painted as a despot of Stalin or Hitler like proportions, Anthony shows some Pierre Trudeau eloquence and reminds the people of Caesar's kindness, compassion, mercy and love for Rome. This allows for the plot of three (Anthony, Octavius and Lepidus) to assassinate the assassins. Marc Anthony rises to power through eloquence, conviction and personal loss as part of the assassinations of conspirators is family members of his.

So it raises the questions, at what price power?

### **Soul Work**

- Reflect on your life experience, what role for better or worse has violence played?
- What role has vengeance, for better or worse, played in your life?
- Write a short narrative of a few of these situations where you have been a victim or victimizer, re-write with a new, healthy ending. What needs to change for this outcome to arise next time in your life journey?
- What role has gossip played in your life?
- Who are your Marc Anthony's and Brutus'? Honourable leaders who have made tough decisions you agree with. What makes them heroes for you?
- Create a Mandala of a tough decision you need to make. What does the image say to you?

### **Onward**

It is not always easy to follow our convictions or beliefs through. It is never easy to step out in faith to try and make our world

a better place, as you move forward in life whether it is voting or contact with leaders or peers always ask yourself a few key questions:

How do those without voice in my community experience the world?

What is best for the commoner?

# **Taming of the Shrew**

## **Introduction**

This play brings about another strong discussion around equality and gender roles. How does this happen? It happens using the convention of what makes for an “ideal woman” as seen in the reflections of Bianca and Katherine. This ideal is shown before and after wedded union and the transformations that happen depending on the choice made and the reason for the choice.

What on its surface is a misogynistic play that can be used to oppress women, much like the sacred texts of the Jerusalem Religions (Islam, Judaism and Christianity) is actually a text that can be used to bring about a dialogue creating true equality. This true equality is created through a union based on respect and love of who the person truly is.

This is the search for the Shrew to be tamed, is actually the story of finding contentment within one’s life and knowing that you are in a relationship whether it be with a soul mate or creator or both that brings you to fulfillment in the here and now.

## **Characters**

Petruchio is the suitor that sees the fire of Katherine as a positive thing and sets out to make her his wife. Bianca is Katherine's sister and is classed as the ideal woman for a man to wed. Katherine is the firecracker referred to as the Shrew in the title of the play. These are the three key characters for this play.

## **Synopsis**

On the surface the *Taming of the Shrew* is a play of misogyny where the woman that is her own autonomous person needs to be tamed to be compliant to a husband who rules the household much like a patriarchal reading of the Hebrew Bible, Qu'ran or Christian New Testament gives him the power to do.

But at its core it is a story of love, transformative love that brings two souls together as one. When it works harmony happens, when it does not chaos ensues (as mirrored in Bianca and Katherine's marriages).

## **Contemplation**

This is a play primarily about love and marriage as envisioned by Shakespeare, who was an absentee husband and father at best that spent most of his time travelling to have his works performed from

patron to patron, even with the death of his son Hamnet not slowing him up. Yet he gives us here a treatise on marriage using the societal norms of his time, and as most masters hiding the story within a comedy so as not to offend, Shakespeare as a George Carlin of his time if you will is what *Taming of the Shrew* brings to us.

In the essence of Bianca is a compliant daughter and woman. Described and viewed as the “ideal” for her time, this being meek, mild and obedient in her life and to the men in her life.

While her sister, Katherine is definitely not the ideal, a shrew (or bitch for today’s vernacular) if you will. One that has her own mind, is not compliant to the whims of the men in her life. Has dreams and passion that sets her up as an autonomous human being. A free thinker that others view as ill tempered.

When Petruchio enters one would see him as falling in love with the culture’s ideal of womanhood, that being Bianca. Yet this is not the person he sets his sights on. No, Petruchio is attracted to the passion and fire in Katherine, setting out with his friends that he will tame her. Yet the question arises as we delve deeper into what it means to be a man or a woman as we view the play that is actually tamed?

For when Bianca weds, it is not a union of harmony or joy, for she finds discontent in her soul over her choice of husband. This discontent opens up Bianca's soul to the complexities of being human as she rebels against what makes her the "ideal" spouse and wife.

Bianca through matrimony discovers that she too is capable of thought, expression and that her thoughts and beliefs are just as valid as her husband's. It takes a journey through matrimony, within the socio-cultural context of Shakespeare's time for Bianca to throw off the chains of patriarchy and escape the misogyny of her household... finally Bianca begins the journey of self-actualization as a truly complete human being.

For this is the purpose of life's journey in Shakespeare's writing to discover and embrace our true nature, to not let oppressors (or peer pressure in today's vernacular) fashion out our identity but to discover our own identity. For Bianca her marriage if her husband does not adapt and accept the emerging human that Bianca is would end in divorce for the twenty first century while in the time of Shakespeare would just descend into a show marriage of unhappiness where each pursued their own life.

This brings us to the part of the commentary on Katherine and Petruchio. A lay viewing of this play sees that Petruchio falls for Katherine because of the challenge, wanting to create within her the ideal that is her sister. By play's end with the monologue Katherine gives (Katherine's monologue retrieved from [www.clicknotes.com/shrew](http://www.clicknotes.com/shrew) 23 August 2008):

Fie, fie! unknit that threatening unkind brow,  
 And dart not scornful glances from those eyes,  
 To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor:  
 It blots thy beauty as frosts do bite the meads,  
 Confounds thy fame as whirlwinds shake fair buds,  
 And in no sense is meet or amiable.  
 A woman mov'd is like a fountain troubled,  
 Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty;  
 And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty  
 Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it.  
 Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,  
 Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,  
 And for thy maintenance commits his body  
 To painful labor both by sea and land,  
 To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,  
 Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe;  
 And craves no other tribute at thy hands  
 But love, fair looks and true obedience;  
 Too little payment for so great a debt.  
 Such duty as the subject owes the prince  
 Even such a woman oweth to her husband;  
 And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,  
 And not obedient to his honest will,  
 What is she but a foul contending rebel  
 And graceless traitor to her loving lord?  
 I am ashamed that women are so simple



To offer war where they should kneel for peace;  
 Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway,  
 When they are bound to serve, love and obey.  
 Why are our bodies soft and weak and smooth,  
 Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,  
 But that our soft conditions and our hearts  
 Should well agree with our external parts?  
 Come, come, you froward and unable worms!  
 My mind hath been as big as one of yours,  
 My heart as great, my reason haply more,  
 To bandy word for word and frown for frown;  
 But now I see our lances are but straws,  
 Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare,  
 That seeming to be most which we indeed least are.  
 Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot,  
 And place your hands below your husband's foot:  
 In token of which duty, if he please,  
 My hand is ready; may it do him ease.

(Act 5.2: 136-179)

These words spoken as the play enters its crescendo and to most viewers it appears as if Petruchio has accomplished his goal and tamed the “shrew” within Katherine. Yet a closer examination shows that there is a complimentary union that has been made and that the shrew that has been tamed within the course of the play is not Katherine, but rather the cultural norm of the ideal woman being this obedient slave, that is Petruchio’s own patriarchal misogyny has been tamed and creating a union of equality with Katherine.

## Soul Work

- Which character do you most identify with?
- When are your Bianca (pre-marriage) moments? Who brings this self-deprecating obedience out of you?
- When are your Petruchio moments when you think you know right because society says so?
- Are you ever like Katherine going against accepted norms because you know it is right? When does this happen? If not how can you create this in yourself?
- Create a Mandala for each of the three main characters filling each with symbols and images of how your soul relates to each one.
- When did you go through a time of transformation, felt fulfillment/contentment in your life's here and now? Create a Mandala of that moment and time.
- With all your reflections spend time nightly this week with them as you move towards someone who is more comfortable speaking out with your own voice

for what is just and right in your world.

## **Onward**

Katherine is one of the great prophetic characters that Shakespeare has blessed us with. She is not afraid of society, customs or norms of what is appropriate or not. Katherine is willing to speak out for her own beliefs and a more just world where all are accepted as equals.

This is the core step of any social gospel, creating a world where all are equals and have a voice in the dialogue for building a better world. What are steps this week you can take in your own community to build these bridges?

# **Othello**

## **Introduction**

This is a play of treachery based around jealousy of character, experience and ability. It centres on the vengeance plot of Iago to his commanding officer, Othello, a North African who has married a Caucasian Noble woman Desdemona.

The play on the surface appears as a racist perspective, so yes there is the aspect of social commentary that for a diverse nation can still ring true. Do we see each other for the beloved creations of the Holy Mystery? Or do we see ourselves as our humanistic labels: Chinese, African, Caucasian, Gay, Straight, Gender-confused... etc... the list of labels goes on. For it is through being lost in labels that we create walls that makes it easy to dehumanize one another to the point where the evil machinations of Iago become possible.

## **Characters**

Iago is the central villain as he attempts to gain prestige and he chooses Cassio as the young man to woo away Desdemona, the noble woman that Othello, a prestigious war hero had married. Through

skull drudgery Iago also sucks his unsuspecting wife, Emilia into the plot.

### **Synopsis**

Iago wracked with jealousy over Othello's accomplishments, with his sidekick Rodrigo plots Othello's downfall. This is done through orchestrating paranoia for Othello to believe his bride, Desdemona has cheated on him with Cassio. It drives Othello into a jealous rage and leads to him murdering his wife, and eventually committing suicide.

A tale of vengeance fuelled by jealousy.

### **Contemplation**

Ah in the old *Shazam* comic books Billy Batson was called by the old wizard Shazam to the rock of eternity to do battle with the seven deadly sins of the world as Captain Marvel, amongst them was jealousy. Why? Because this is the core of discontent in our world and has fuelled many a war or closer to home, murder, to try and have what another has.

This is at the core of the play of *Othello*, yet the masterful writing of the Bard has hidden it behind class and race issues, telling

tales of equality of women or women as property (a true suffragist argument before suffrage entered the vogue).

For it does Iago's jealousy that fuels him want to utterly destroy Othello, his commander? This jealousy of Iago raises the question of what creates loyalty. For Iago it is a thirst for power and prestige that sows dissident and disloyalty. For Othello, his loyalty and belief in Desdemona's loyalty to him is shattered through gossip.

Gossip the root of creating jealousy. Both of these "sins" that being that which has one miss the mark of the Creator's intention for creation (us, and what we should be doing) Othello's life was going well, he was royalty from North Africa, a war hero and married to the beauty of the realm.

It was an interracial and cross class wedding. Iago was enraged, and wanted Othello's life. So it began, first by convincing his wife, Emilia, to lift the gift Othello had given Desdemona, which was a handkerchief. This handkerchief Iago then brought back to Othello saying he found it on Cassio.

Cassio was a young Casanova who Iago had convinced to woo Desdemona from her aged husband (yet another cross in this relationship of many crosses, that being of generations), Othello.

Othello who admits to not being as sexually virile as he once was and had left his wife's sexual appetite unfilled so when confronted with Iago's "proof" flies into a rage.

The confrontation is brutal, as Desdemona who is completely innocent, yet Othello blinded by anger and jealousy of his own beats his wife to death.

Fulfilling Iago's promise from Act Two:

Oh you're happy now, but I'll ruin your  
happiness for all my supposed honest.

(2.1:203-04).

After the heinous crime of spousal murder, Emilia confesses the truth of Iago's crime. So lost in grief, Othello, sets himself outside the realm of those who are connected to the Holy Mystery as the beliefs of the times believed, by killing himself.

At this time and place such an act made one condemned to hell, yet there is more artistry here. For it is in rendering the covenant of marriage through disloyalty, in this case Othello casting aside the trust he had in Desdemona to believe lies and not accept his wife at face value.



A true bond made, was shattered due to gossip and petty jealousy. Many lives were lost (aside from Desdemona and Othello, Cassio would slay Rodrigo) due to the simple lie started through jealousy. A deadly sin, yes. Why? It destroys relationships grown in love and loyalty.

### **Soul Work**

- Create a Mandala of which character you are most like. Spend the week reflecting on the image and how it speaks to your subconscious.
- Consciously work on expelling your Iago, let go of all the petty jealousies you are holding on to. Name them in art, word or journal, and then give it to a bonfire. These are petty matters that are holding you back from personal and global transformation.
- Write or illustrate short pieces with the story from each perspective: Cassio, Othello, Desdemona, Emilia and Iago. **Onward**

At any one time in our lives we can be Iago, Emilia, Othello or Desdemona. A victim or victimizer through the emotion of jealousy or the hideous action of gossip. Take time of silence, move towards

being a gossip free being. Work hard a day at a time for a month to not participate in any form of gossip, each time you do, start over until you have truly gone thirty days. For our parents were wrong, sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will always shatter one...

# **Romeo and Juliet**

## **Introduction**

A tale of endearing and forbidden love that has many great movie and television renditions of this story from Dicaprio in Romeo + Juliet to Lion King II from Walt Disney Pictures to Westside Story to Robin Hood that tell the story of those that fall in love should not. Forbidden love is the backbone of endearing epics such as King Arthur, that saw Guinevere and Lancelot fall in love and Camelot fall. Robin Hood and Maid Marian, erstwhile nobles, outlaw and ward of the king or Norman and Saxon depending on the version you like, but still forbidden love.

This play is complex yet entirely simple, for it is Shakespeare's treaty on that which separates us from one another, a commentary on the caste system that exists within society whether it is overt or covert, whether we realize it is there or just live in it. This is the system that kept the Montague's and Capulet's separate and eventually led to the death of their children.

## **Characters**

There are three main characters to be concerned with on this story of love. The obvious is Romeo, the one who goes seeking one love only to have his soul moved by another. Juliet who loves Romeo back even after discovering that she cannot. Finally, the friar that aids them and guides them, the spiritual voice in the play and hatches the plan for the lovers to be together.

## **Synopsis**

The simple story of love forbidden is so simple, yet in its complexities what is realized is that which keeps us apart for this time and place it was simply family name. A plan to be together by faking death leads to real suicide, and another death as two innocents finally find piece and eternity together.

## **Contemplation**

The Montague's and Capulet's are part of the Bourgeoisie yet it is within this family vendetta dynamic that the eternal struggle Marx wrote of between the Bourgeoisie and Proletariat is played out.

In this thug like gang war echoes the coming revolution that people such as Lenin, Castro, Romero and Jesus talked of. This

striving for equality that Francis and Clare of Assisi and Buddha (to name a few) sought in life.

This is the equality that Romeo and Juliet wanted, from the famous balcony scene where Juliet cries out “wherefore art thou Romeo?” what she is really questioning is the nature of reality. Why Romeo must you be of my enemy’s family? Why must I love you? Why must you be human and not the demon I was raised to believe you were?

Their love challenges the hatred driven upbringing they were both raised in. To believe the other evil, many conflicts in the world has seen this dynamic played out where one party teaches their children that the other party does not deserve to exist.

It is this teaching that is finally echoed in the co-suicides of Romeo and Juliet, where hatred destroys not just those that bring hate, but their children for hatred spreads like an anthrax that kills everything it touches.

The realization at the end by the families to reconcile shows though that it is never too late to change and turn hatred into love, no matter how hard that journey may be.

## **Soul Work**

- Which character do you identify with the most and why?
- Create a heart shaped Mandala, this is to place images of all the stereotypes you hold of those “lesser” than yourself. Reflect on where these stereotypes came from and then release the hate from your soul. Today is a new day.

## **Onward**

Separation comes in many shapes and forms. It can just be a glance, a judgement call. We have all done it, and sadly due to being human we will all continue to do it. Yet this is a challenge of being conscious of that which drives us to create division and remove it not only from our own life, but be a voice to aid others in seeing the light.

What is one group you can support to make your community better?

# **Hamlet**

## **Introduction**

When I was seventeen years old I was a student play write in Calgary's Alberta Theatre Project's Theatreblitz '96. Part of this experience was to take in new plays and one of the new plays was one titled the *Mad Boy Chronicles* sent in ancient Nordic times as the basis for "Hamlet" as the story went. A story of intrigue, betrayal and power seizure using the Christianization of a nation or in Shakespeare's version the seizing of power by a brother through murder and marriage.

For Prince Hamlet there are many questions that arise as he feigns insanity to discover the truth, but did the madness become real???

## **Characters**

As with all of Shakespeare's plays there is quite a list of characters. Horatio begins the play by seeing the ghost of King Hamlet, whose brother; Claudius has seized the throne and married the queen, Gertrude.

This message is brought to Prince Hamlet and he begins to unravel the mystery of the coupe. Unfortunately his love Ophelia is the one that suffers. As with most Shakespearean plays wisdom comes from unique sources in this case a gravedigger.

### **Synopsis**

The famous line that “there is something rotten in the state of Denmark” is but one of the famous lines to emerge from this play, but sums up the plot nicely. As any writer knows you should be able to sum up your work in one sentence. Claudius wants power and has no problem with murdering his own brother to achieve it. After killing his brother he takes to the bed of his brother’s wife, Queen Gertrude.

Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, is informed by his friend Horatio, about the communication from King Hamlet’s ghost and begins to work towards revealing the treachery of the crown. His pretence of “insanity” one will question if Hamlet truly descends or not, but his love Ophelia is truly seized by it in ending her own life.

A theatre troupe brings the “Mouse Trap” to the court, a play of a coupe that reveals the truth and brings the players into a final confrontation over poison and swords. Queen Gertrude ingests the



poison meant for her son; Hamlet commits treason by killing the king, before succumbing to his own wounds.

### **Contemplation**

Power for power's sake can destroy. To be a king in this time meant ruling by "divine right", some cultures even embraced their monarchs as gods. Yet in the midst of Hamlet we have a commentary on all that is in regards to the quest for power fuelled through jealousy, and also the quest for truth. This story carries so much truth as eternal that Walt Disney Company used it for the basis of one of its most successful modern movies, *The Lion King*.

Shakespeare wove many truths throughout his plays, and some scholars believe that the early Hamlet was his first work (Bloom, 1998). This means that in the beginning Shakespeare was a master storyteller concerned with the eternal truths of the character of humanity.

Through the play prophecy plays a key role as seen in the ghost of King Hamlet, not in telling of the future, but rather, exploring the stream of thought of ancient Judeo-Christian Prophets found in the

Hebrew Bible and New Testament, that being justice and shining light into the darkness of evil actions.

It is this prophetic vision that drives Hamlet to uncover the truth of his father's demise. In the process in Act Two Hamlet plays at insanity, but also plots to use the drama "Mouse Trap" to reveal the truth of the Kingdom mirroring the ancients belief of story as wisdom. This ideal is why myth still holds such sway in our lives today for myth is not false, but rather fiction that holds eternal truths.

By Act Three Hamlet's journey to the heart of truth continues as he contemplates the eternal question "to be or not to be?" Why is that the question? Simply put Hamlet is asking himself if he should continue his quest to seek truth or continue to live in the false vanity of the court of his Uncle/step-father and mother have created. To choose the narrow road is a hard going but brings fruits of justice, while the wide road as illustrated by Claudius' life and choices leads to destruction.

Hamlet chooses the narrow road and confronts his mother with the truth, and discover's Ophelia's father listening in. A duel ensues and Ophelia's father is killed.

To hide the truth and live in the lie is Claudius' true calling, much reflected throughout the Bourgeoisie through eternity, this emergent class of wealthy that believe whatever they do is truly right and just (might and money make right), but Hamlet's goal is to reveal that justice is justice regardless of wealth. Claudius exiles Hamlet.

Ophelia who had been counselled in Act Two by her father that her playing hard to get had driven Hamlet mad, now facing that Hamlet's madness had led to his exile and her father's death. Ophelia lost in grief and feeling as many who choose this road feel, there is no other choice, takes her own life through drowning.

A viewer of this play will note that due to the suicide Ophelia is cast out, she is not permitted to be buried in the church yard because she has committed what is termed a "mortal sin" in taking her own life, self-murder... This belief still holds in many Christian circles it may not be because of suicide that individuals like Ophelia are deemed "unsanctified" or to be blunter unclean, but there are many things that keeps one out of community.

As one who lives with mental illness, I have felt the sting of the "if you had more faith you would be healed" junket and can tell you this is who I am, this is how God created me. Yet in some

communities I am outside, so are my friends who are part of the Lesbian-Gay-Transgender-Two Spirit community or the disabled community.

In times past in Canada it was Aboriginals, Metis or even women that were debated about their own humanity. To raise a few of many that have been separated from community.

The plot quickens in Act Five as the play illuminates (shines light into darkness for a story to come alive) the treachery of Claudius, and like those who have chosen the wide road of materialism and vanity all meaning is stripped away and destruction ensues. But you cry, Hamlet dies as well did he not choose the narrow path? Yes he has, yet in the process he has glimpsed power that Claudius holds and is corrupted. Gertrude redeems herself by acting like a true mother and sacrifices herself to save her child.

Yet Hamlet follows Claudius' path and commits as heinous an act as Claudius had to achieve power. It is in becoming Claudius and veering from his path of justice as prophesied by the ghost, King Hamlet, that Hamlet sows his own destruction.

## Soul Work

- At any time in our lives we can be Hamlet, Claudius or King Hamlet, write a short narrative reflection of each time you have been these characters in your own life.
- Ophelia was buried in “unsanctified” soil due to her choice. This means placed outside the community, whom do we place outside today?
- Craft a Mandala, this is an eastern and Jungian piece of art with deeper meaning, draw a circle with a white pastel on a black piece of paper. Now using the white and starting at the centre move outwards in different directions shading so the white fades into the black, while doing this monitor your breathing to a slow rhythm focusing on the white disappearing into the black. This is Hamlet’s journey throughout the play, and a journey we can also make. Spend some time reflecting on where your light needs to shine brighter to make your world a better place.

## **Onward**

The journey of Hamlet and Ophelia is one that anyone can slip into in life. We are called to make this world a better place, to live out the concepts of justice, mercy and charity. Yet all too often we choose the easy path of materialism as Claudius had, and Hamlet eventually did. What is one thing that you will do this week to bring about positive change?

What is your Random Act of Kindness?

# **King Lear**

## **Introduction**

King Lear is the typical power monger as he reaches a point where he still wants all the power that comes with being a king, but none of the responsibility. If it works he will be a brilliant King, if it fails he will be a laughingstock. Lear's challenge is for those who seek power and cedes responsibility. There will be a touching on the Lear family, a plot synopsis, contemplation and some soul work before your onward challenge.

## **Characters**

King Lear is an aged King that is struggling to hold onto his "authority" but cede all the power. Goneril and Regan are the daughters plotting for their own ascension to the throne even if it means confessing incestual fantasies about daddy. Cordelia truly loves her dad, but is cast out by not playing the game. The Fool is a great commentator on life, and then there is Burgundy and France who vie for Cordelia's hand. Albany is Goneril's husband; Edmund plays Regan and Goneril after each other.

## **Synopsis**

Classic tragedy as a family is torn apart for the quest of power. The power is raised because of Lear's foolishness in wanting to maintain the title and power of King but none of the responsibility. The destruction draws in the Gloucester family as Edmund, the bastard, plots the downfall of his father and Edgar.

## **Contemplation**

Lear is seeking love, as an aged widower he is lonely. Much like Lot's daughters who lay with their father to produce offspring after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sin of inhospitality, seeking security through incest so is the power hunger of Regan and Goneril. They confess their love in very sexualized terms to their father, Lear, while Cordelia confesses her love for him as a proper daughter should.

This propriety on Cordelia's part who is being courted by Burgundy and France—marriages of unity for the King to solidify treaties, Lear casting her out leads to Burgundy giving up the courtship only seeing what was lost by someone who could not play the game. Yet France sees the strength of character and conviction that Cordelia



has in standing up for her values and that money, power and status are not the most important things.

The fool in Act One Scene Four states what many are probably thinking in the court at this time of trauma and confusion, as the coupe gains momentum “may not an ass knows when the cart draws the horse?” Simply put, the King is no longer the leader but merely the figurehead of his daughters’ plotting now.

This leads Lear to explore a very Jungian topic of the Shadow self, for him the losses that his vanity have created, or blindness as he phrases it to the trueness of the world.

The Fool plays the guide for Lear at this time in his life as Lear’s daughter Cordelia is a live action Anima (feminine aspect of the human) and Kent the Animus (masculine aspect of the human), for Kent seeks truth and justice although banished by returning in disguise as the King’s servant to uncover the plot.

By Act Two Goneril and Regan pick up the pace on seizing power from dear old Daddy as this pursuit of power builds more conflict and indignation a rolling chaos that brings the symbolism of the storm in Act Three.

This echoes the chaos in the kingdom but the chaos caused by the pursuit of power in two families, Goneril and Regan connect with Edmund, and Lear's interior life becomes more of a struggle, a chaotic storm.

In the midst of the chaos the Fool emerges as a prophetic voice for what is right and justice. Yet there is more as the storm worsens Lear becomes more unhinged, his friend's Gloucester and Edgar help him escape to Dover.

Edmund has his own father; Gloucester arrested and brought up on charges of treason by Regan, which leads to his blinding proving the maxim that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Within Act Four, Edgar hiding out as a beggar meets his newly blinded father, Gloucester, who admits that without physical sight he can see better than he ever has before. While a piece of the family is reunited, another union takes place as Goneril commits adultery to cement power by beginning a sexual liaison with Edmund. This act reveals to Goneril's husband, Albany, the true monster he is married to. Yet Goneril, Edmund and Regan are classic villains in that they truly believe what their actions are doing are for the good, that they are truly heroes.

Meanwhile the King of France and Queen Cordelia plan to help her father Lear, being a true child and caring for a parent in hardship, Edgar brings Gloucester to Lear. It is Kent who brings Lear to Cordelia and a doctor for help.

While this is happening, Goneril decides her husband, Albany, is a commodity best rid of and convinces Edmund to kill him. Within a few spaces though Regan sees the power that Goneril and Edmund are building and in Act Five she attempts to woo Edmund to her own union.

These three are not the only ones plotting however as the forces of good are gathering Edgar meets covertly with Albany as tensions mount to the final battle.

It is at this point that you can see the families are actually pieces of Lear's own psyche. For these desperate pieces of his kingdom bringing together the yin-yang, angel-demon that exists within everyone's soul. Much like what Muslim mystics proclaim as the internal Jihad: the battle within between good and evil. This battle exists in Lear and is playing out within his kingdom.

This internal Jihad is seen in the final confrontation between Edmund and Edgar, two sides of the same person. Albany's arrest of

Goneril and Edmund reveal the belief by Goneril and Regan that they are both destined to be Edmund's wife and Queen. Through a murder suicide this polygamous union of the damned is consummated between Goneril-Edmund-Regan.

As the evil is vanquished, and good wins Lear's life force gives out after seeing what his vanity has done on the world. Like an alcoholic working through the life inventory, Lear's soul collapses and goes to be in peace.

### **Soul Work**

- This is art therapy for the soul. Using finger paint (or your choice of visual art) illustrates your Jungian three aspects as Lear had: Shadow, Anima and Animus. What symbols come to mind?
- Which characters do you most identify with and what moments do you feel closest to them in the story?
- As Cordelia, what are your key values? How do you live them in life? Finish this statement:

I Believe \_\_\_\_\_

Because I believe I will:

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Onward**

Lear realized too late the pain that his actions had caused. In all our lives there are times when we are the ones that spread injustice, let your soul rest in peace in the now and move more towards fulfillment, make a list of all those you have wronged, make amends where you can and where you cannot acknowledge peace there now. Forgive yourself then burn the list.



# **The Twelfth Night**

## **Introduction**

This play by Shakespeare takes place at the liturgical (Latin root word Liturgy meaning work of the people; a style of church service) time of year after Christmas on the western church calendar known as the Twelve Days of Christmas. This is one of Shakespeare's challenging works on gender identity; personal identity as he challenges the caste system as a writer. Letting one's own passions and drive determine your true identity, not socio-cultural norms. Within the play there is also commentary through characters by Shakespeare on the fallacy of the church (a form of blasphemy that if not so subtle would have led to his execution no doubt). In the end true love means more than true identity, for it tells the timeless tale of love regardless of gender there are two souls meant to be together, they will be together. As with all reflections in this book the format is simple, key characters in my opinion, the summation of plot, a contemplation, some soul work for yourself and/or your group, then a challenge to take forward.

## **Characters**

This could get confusing, and with the challenge of gender roles one has to keep in mind these are young men or boys playing the role of women, who are then playing the role of men. Keeping up? Good that makes one of us.

There is Olivia who due to the unrequited love of Orsino, swears off men and in this commentary on church and society becomes a Virgin Mary archetype that surrenders to passion in the end.

Viola who seeks to serve Orsino in the guise of Cesario, a male eunuch (those made gender neutral through castration).

Sir Toby a functioning alcoholic and practical jokester with his niece, Olivia's maid, Maria.

Sir Andrew, who is Maria's suitor and Sir Toby's foil.

The Fool, a key commentator within the play about the world.

Malvolio the head servant within Olivia's household.

Orsino-high ranking noble fop about.

## **Synopsis**

Shakespeare is truly a commentary on nobility and churchdom, but also on how we cannot choose those we love. Orsino



is self-centred and more in love with the concept of being in love than any bemoaning he does about Olivia.

Olivia has sworn off men in this Virgin Mary archetype searching for love that will eventually come to pass that makes one ponder whether Shakespeare is commenting on the “perpetual virginity” motif of the Virgin Mary within the church, stating that love of another will lead to the beauty of love making the ultimate gift from the creator where two souls become one.

Within Viola is a tortured soul pretending to be a male eunuch, Cesario, and yet falls in love and Orsino. For the guise is created through the help of a sea captain that rescues Viola from a shipwreck, this shipwreck that her brother Sebastian believed she died in.

Throughout the tale love is deconstructed and reconstructed until Olivia and Sebastian admit their love, and finally Viola and Orsino.

### **Contemplation**

Karl Marx is infamous for proclaiming religion as the opiates of the masses. This is the spirit that Shakespeare picks up, not saying that faith in the divine is a bad thing, but rather that those in power within religious institutions have used their power corruptly.

The Fool so aptly foreshadows this in Act Four as he portrays a lying priest, while the real priest in Act Five lies for Olivia who has fallen in love with Cesario/Viola and professes to Orsino that they are married and the priest confirms. Yet within the church at that time there is no way for a eunuch to have been married, but it also raises the issue of same-sex marriage, for unbeknownst to Olivia she has fallen in love with a woman.

Meanwhile the Bourgeoisie continues to play with the Proletariat as Maria, with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew set up a scheme to drive Malvolio insane. The scheme? Simple, to reveal to him that the secret love of Olivia is actually himself and Malvolio falls for it, hook line and sinker as the old saying goes.

Once again a snide aside to the common person from William here, showing that the wealthy would do anything for entertainment and that morality for them was one of their own creation. This Bourgeoisie mentality that is reinforced through corrupt clerical power used to continue oppression.

As the final act plays out it is the essence of Sebastian that Olivia loves about Cesario and through her love finds true love in Sebastian. While the gender bending continues as Orsino tries to hide

that he too had fallen in love with Cesario only admitting to it once the reveal is complete and Viola stands before him.

But has the love changed any that Orsino feels for Cesario discovering that he/she has a true Vagina and is not just a castrated male? No, for at the deepest meaning of this play is the idea that love is love and two souls coming together are two souls coming together regardless of anything else.

### **Soul Work**

- It is your turn to play “The Fool” and speak out about what you see as a hidden corruption in the world whether it is an exterior corruption of the world, or one within yourself you need to expose.
- Which Character are you closest too and why?
- Create a Mandala. Draw the circle and fill it with images from magazines and drawing that reflect your concept of love after having explored the Twelfth Night.

## **Onward**

There are many ways to speak out in the world to make it a better place; the Fool chose to do so playing a part. Pick a topic and write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper to raise awareness.

One Voice can make a difference.

# **Macbeth**

## **Introduction**

The Scottish play, so called because of the believed curse that comes with producing it, through legend true and urban of calamities that have befallen theatre troupes that have told that spins a tale Edgar Allan Poe would inherit.

Shakespeare has crafted an ancient tale of political intrigue, murder, magic, madness and revenge and the cost of it all on the human soul.

## **Characters**

Lady Macbeth plagued by the unseen bloodstains of her murder

and Macbeth, the husband who plots for power with his wife.

MacDuff a nobleman of Scotland, The Weird Sisters who tell the

story of the fates of the characters, Malcolm and Donalbain are the

king's sons. Finally there is Duncan, the king of Scotland.

## **Synopsis**

The Macbeth's seize power in what looks like the perfect coupe as they assassinate the king, and frame the princes. It is the

plague of guilt that destroys Lady Macbeth's resolve and eventually leads to Malcolm ascending the throne and things are set right once more with the kingdom.

### **Contemplation**

Macbeth is another play of Shakespeare's that shows what happens when human greed supercedes what is meant to be. The Weird Sisters play the role that is usually for the Fool, that of Prophet in Shakespeare's world.

It is through them that the actual truth of the pursuit of power is told. A pursuit that the Macbeth's buy into and good King Duncan is assassinated. But the Macbeth's are not stupid they execute the king and frame the princes, Donalbain and Malcolm. The political coupe is complete, despite Lord MacDuff trying to discover the truth.

The truth that proves allusive to MacDuff is what haunts the Macbeths as the ghosts that cannot rest come out. This ties into paranormal belief that a ghost is a soul that cannot rest after their death. It is the past catching up with one's present, the westernized idea of Karma being that what we do comes back onto us.

For these ghosts whether true ghosts, conjuring of the Weird Sisters or deep psychological constructs of the Macbeths themselves it leads to psychological damage that culminates in a public nervous breakdown that reveals the truth.

The truth that shows that the ends and means are interlinked whether we want to admit it or not to others or ourselves and that at any point and time in our lives we can be overwhelmed with guilt maybe not as big as Lady Macbeth's ("out damn spot") but enough to destroy us psychologically.

It leads to the kingdom being set right as Malcolm reclaims the throne. How do we set ourselves right? This is a question that leads to self-examination to keep our darker natures in check. If the Macbeth's had practiced this they may not have taken the step to assassinate the king. For in their actions the Macbeth's believed what they were doing was for the right.

What are our darkest secrets that keep us from living out fulfillment in our lives?

### **Soul Work**

- This is time to visit our shadow side. The Macbeth's represent our "Shadow", the dark side of our nature. What are our most

cherished values? Dreams? What happens if we twist these?

What would you be willing to do to achieve your dream?

- The big “D” dream is made up of many little “d” dreams accomplished. The healthy route to dream achievement is to lay out the small steps to achieve your ultimate dream. These little steps are to answer one question here and now, “how will my life be fulfilled now?”

### **Onward**

To be able to accomplish our dreams, to be able to make this world a better place, first we must spend a moment navel gazing to make ourselves healthier. What are those things that you do that re-centre yourself? Spend time this week creating a lifestyle of helping and healing for yourself and others.



## **Merchant of Venice**

### **Introduction**

Where at first blush, *Taming of the Shrew* is nothing more than a work of misogyny, so at first glance *Merchant of Venice* is nothing more than anti-Semitic crap and that is what led the Alberta Government to ban this work from schools in the province. Yet that is a cursory reading without understanding the time of Shakespeare. There of course is many rumours circulating on if the Bard was real, or someone else's pen name which is best left to the scholars. The interest in why the play wound up in this collection is what Shakespeare accomplishes through the use of metaphor and stereotype as a commentary on society.

Within the *Merchant of Venice* Shakespeare created a comedy for the masses with accepted norms, but for the intelligentsia and careful viewer he wove intricate political commentary undercurrents that were revolutionary in the metaphor of Shylock "The Evil Jew" actually being the corrupt institution of the church.

## **Characters**

The major character to focus on within the play is the stereotype that Shakespeare uses for a foil of all others, that being Shylock the corrupt merchant. Jessica is so disgusted by her father's (Shylock) character that she wants to convert to Christianity to get away from all vestiges of him. There is the father/son tandem of Gobbo and Launcelot that illuminate many things.

## **Synopsis**

This is a comedic commentary play on society and our institutions. The racist language can be quite offensive to the modern palate but within the core is this kernel of truth of what type of evils we sell our own souls out to, in this case, the all mighty dollar.

## **Contemplation**

We live in a world where capitalism has run rampant transforming everything and anything in creation (including ourselves) as a commodity to be bought and sold. Whether it is the slave like labour conditions for children in the clothing industry in developing nations or the sex trades or slave like labour in private jails to the simplicity of big oil and wars over oil... our world has made money

our green god, not mother earth or the creator (depending which term you prefer).

This is the heart of *Merchant of Venice* that Shakespeare was getting to. A work that used every available stereotype to hide the commentary on the oppressive institutions of his time as related through the character Shylock, who was quite wise as a prophetic Hebrew God to marry a sex trade worker as a living testimony of the people's unfaithfulness, so is Shylock a living embodiment of the capitalistic commodities of humanity, wealth is not the only thing that matters and the church needed to hear the message.

As Shylock himself proclaims:

O father Abraham, what kind of people  
are these Christians? Their own meanness  
teaches them to suspect other people.

(Act 1.3:155-56).

This is Shylock rationalizing his debt collection practice at the tip of a knife, for in forfeiture there is no value and message must be sent. Within this time period there is of course recent memory to the Spanish Inquisition, but also of King Henry VIII separation from Rome and all the persecutions that came through his founding of the Church of England (now known as the Anglican Communion) and the

Thomas Cranmer prayer book and use of the English Bible, that left successors vacillating between Protestantism and Catholicism.

Here Shylock makes a point about the value of a weapon in letting people see the light of truth, over a debt here yes, but for the viewer they would see the quick conversions in the country from one church to another, also a remembering of the crusades and conversions at the tip of a sword in the Holy Land and many inquisitions and witch hunts to prove piety and truth.

Shrewd in such a way to impart this bit of revolutionary texture to a comedy? Yes, but it is much how comedy and popular music can be used today as Shakespeare, like Bob Dylan or George Carlin or Jon Stewart percolate thought within the Twentieth and Twenty First Century so Shakespeare used Shylock as his foil to escape execution or imprisonment for blasphemy.

Within Act Two there is a touching seen between Gobo and his son, Launcelot that despite his son aspiring to prestige, Gobo still sees him as his son and as an equal to all others within their community. This is a unique commentary at a time in the West where within the church there was Pews assigned based upon wealth in the church, indulgences had been sold earlier to rescue your loved ones from

purgatory or eternal damnation in the fires of Hell. Where prestige and money was to show you were more loved by God, yet Gobo in this exchange of Act Two Scene Two shows how the creator God truly sees all of us as equals and loved, created very good despite our station in life in the hierarchal system of human creation.

Are we able to see as Gobo does that all are equal? Are we able to see how Gobo sees, with the eyes of our creator? These are good questions that arise out of this scene.

But it comes back to Shylock, for his daughter Jessica so wants to escape corruption that she seeks to leave behind everything that Shylock is apart of. This truly hits home the metaphor idea of Shylock as the church, the most oppressive structure of the time working in consort with the monarchy to keep the peasants down and take care of the wealthy.

In modern times the youth are like Jessica disengaging from our own corrupt institutions that they have seen misused by the elder generations. From economic matters of Big Oil that has left decimation throughout the world, whether it is civil wars, international conflicts, people in poverty or water taps that pour forth water you can ignite. The contamination of soil so that crops can no longer grow.

The strip mining of areas for valuable substances that leave many dying of hunger or the spreading of disease that can be cured or life prolonged by medications available in the west that because of lack of money of those suffering are not shared.

Within many western centres the after affects still being felt by the Catholic Church Pedophile rings, Aboriginal Residential Schools, Jehovah Witness Patriarchal protection of rapists and child pornography within Baptist and Missionary Alliance Circles to name but a few have shown that the religious institutions are corrupt and not safe havens as one was led to believe.

But like a phoenix from the ashes something is emerging that will lead to the true world transformation. Just like great Canadian Prophets brought about medicare, social assistance and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, so is there something new boiling under the surface.

It is this idea of choices that is echoed in Portia's search for a suitor as her father has set up a box selection system. In Act Two a suitor takes the test Portia's father (who is deceased) devised to ensure a person of virtue would wed his daughter (retrieved from:

2008):

## MOROCCO

Some god direct my judgment! Let me see;  
I will survey the inscriptions back again.  
What says this leaden casket?  
'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.'  
Must give: for what? for lead? hazard for lead?  
This casket threatens. Men that hazard all  
Do it in hope of fair advantages:  
A golden mind stoops not to shows of dross;  
I'll then nor give nor hazard aught for lead.  
What says the silver with her virgin hue?  
'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.'  
As much as he deserves! Pause there, Morocco,  
And weigh thy value with an even hand:  
If thou be'st rated by thy estimation,  
Thou dost deserve enough; and yet enough  
May not extend so far as to the lady:  
And yet to be afeard of my deserving  
Were but a weak disabling of myself.  
As much as I deserve! Why, that's the lady:  
I do in birth deserve her, and in fortunes,  
In graces and in qualities of breeding;  
But more than these, in love I do deserve.  
What if I stray'd no further, but chose here?  
Let's see once more this saying graved in gold  
'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.'  
Why, that's the lady; all the world desires her;  
From the four corners of the earth they come,  
To kiss this shrine, this mortal-breathing saint:  
The Hyrcanian deserts and the vasty wilds  
Of wide Arabia are as thoroughfares now  
For princes to come view fair Portia:  
The watery kingdom, whose ambitious head  
Spits in the face of heaven, is no bar

To stop the foreign spirits, but they come,  
 As o'er a brook, to see fair Portia.  
 One of these three contains her heavenly picture.  
 Is't like that lead contains her? 'Twere damnation  
 To think so base a thought: it were too gross  
 To rib her cerecloth in the obscure grave.  
 Or shall I think in silver she's immured,  
 Being ten times undervalued to tried gold?  
 O sinful thought! Never so rich a gem  
 Was set in worse than gold. They have in England  
 A coin that bears the figure of an angel  
 Stamped in gold, but that's insculp'd upon;  
 But here an angel in a golden bed  
 Lies all within. Deliver me the key:  
 Here do I choose, and thrive I as I may!

(Act2.7: 1-55).

Morocco chooses wrong as most do, he goes for power with the symbolism of Gold, another suitor chooses the silver box as showing true value in money and material things. Both are wrong and leave the suitors empty. The true box that contains Portia is the lead one, plain yet shows that one truly sees Portia as a human being who has value for not what she owns, but for her very own spirit and soul.

The final important image that arises is by a character named Gratiano and his short treatise (retrieved from:

<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/merchant/merchant.4.1.html> 23 August

2008):



## GRATIANO

Not on thy sole, but on thy soul, harsh Jew,  
Thou makest thy knife keen; but no metal can,  
No, not the hangman's axe, bear half the  
keenness  
Of thy sharp envy. Can no prayers pierce thee?

(Act 4.1:122-126)

Gratiano confronts Shylock for his oppressive ways pointing out that as a moneylender he uses quite violent methods—sword, dagger, axe, hanging to ensure that the straight and narrow is followed by his borrowers which is an allusion to the power within Protestantism of the time given to the state church as the monarchs having seized this power from Rome, wanted to ensure that it was kept.

Quite brilliant on the part of the Bard to be able to sew the seeds of revolutionary thought so long ago that just today the threads of true transformation and restoration are being seen in certain quarters. The challenge is are we going to allow our own corrupt “Shylock’s” to continue to poison our world or to stand up and challenge them?

## Soul Work

- Write a short narrative of your own Merchant of (fill in your city/town's name here). What would the character of Shylock look like in your modern setting?
- Take an affirmative step to try and cure this corruption, is it the form of a petition, a coffee house conversation café ([www.conversationcafe.org](http://www.conversationcafe.org) for more information), joining a group, writing a letter to the editor of your local paper, or possibly writing a letter for one of the injustice's Amnesty International tries to set right ([www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)).
- Reflect on your work this week in a creative way that speaks for your own spirit. How do you feel after acting?

## Onward

This week is challenging as it throws down a challenge that confronts our own comfort zone. What scapegoats do we use for our own communities corruption? In Shakespeare's time it was those of Jewish faith, today it could be the new immigrant, Muslim or teenager,

but are these scapegoats accurate or just easier than examining our own soul?

Take time to breathe and reflect on the state of your world and where truth actually lies in curing the ills of the world.

Self-Awareness creates global awareness.



## **A Midsummer's Night Dream**

### **Introduction**

William attempts to touch upon the grand mythology of classical Greece to explore the true meaning of love. Why does marriage happen? Why do marriages survive? This die is cast by the allusion to ancient Greece with the King Theseus, Hercules cousin, as the royalty set to marry Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons after besting her in combat.

Tie this in with marriage for power not love, but love overcoming the desire to bring two lovers into the woods... the woods where the fairies play and Shakespeare again brings commentary to the meddling of the upper class in the lives of the peasants and the unethical nature of such.

The fairies touch on the Greek Pantheon's involvement with humanity and the games they would play. This play is Shakespeare's most magical, and fun for the lovers of fantasy. It takes the viewer back to a time in childhood when fantasy seemed possible, a fantasy that one can see the experience of in Tolkien, Rowling and Lewis. This short exploration will touch on key characters, a synopsis, a

commentary, some soul work and finally an onward, what do we do with this in our life today?

### **Characters**

Oberon is the Fairy view the play his connection to Zeus/Jupiter of classical mythology and the games he plays with mortals. The redemption though for this Zeus archetype is that has a streak of good as he tries to bring about one true love.

Demetrius is the chosen bridegroom for Hermia, whose father Egeus wants this marriage but Hermia loves Lysander, and they want to be married. Helena loves Demetrius, who rejects her.

Then there is Robin Goodfellow, Oberon's fool and trickster. Titania the fairy queen, Hippolyta Queen of the Amazons and Theseus the King all set for a royal courtship.

### **Synopsis**

Theseus counselling Hermia to obey her father's wishes and marry Demetrius despite her love for causes the young lovers to run away. This is in the midst of Oberon knowing that Titania is unfaithful deciding to drug her. Robin Goodfellow uses a potion from a flower, he tests it first on supposedly Demetrius and Helena, but

accidentally uses it on Lysander who falls in love with Helena scorning Hermia.

The potion when used on Titania, she falls in love with an actor who has been transformed to have the head of a donkey. Oberon cannot believe the calamity before him, and uses the antidote to sort out the lovers, Titania returns to Oberon, as Lysander and Hermia fall in love, and Demetrius and Helena. The two young couples share the wedding day with the king and his “reluctant” bride Hippolyta.

### **Contemplation**

Where to begin on this journey of Shakespeare’s social commentary that most recently in the twentieth century has been reborn in the medium of comic books. From Neil Gaiman’s Sandman story reimagining of the tale as the Endless God like creature Morpheus acting as Shakespeare’s muse to the story of Hippolyta and the Amazons bondage to the patriarch’s world used as the origin of Wonder Woman, by her creator William Moulton Marsten where her bracelets were the reminder of the bondage the Amazons had been under after Hippolyta’s defeat as seen in All Star Comics Number 8 from December 1941-January 1942.

This is the challenge for the viewer as Hippolyta is supposed to be seen as a reluctant bride, yet Shakespeare's Hippolyta comes across as loving and submissive. Could this be an early comment on battered spouse syndrome? Survivor's guilt? Stockholm Syndrome? All of the above in my estimation as Hippolyta is defeated and held captive her heart aches for Hermia's forced marriage to Demetrius but is so lost in Patriarch's world she sides with her captor, Theseus, who she has come to identify with.

Shakespeare opens up a discussion here for the viewer on the equality of gender. How can one be superior to another? They cannot be, yet in the way the government had been structured based on might makes right, the only true leaders had to be men who had no compassion. For Egeus did not renege on wanting Hermia to marry Demetrius until Demetrius no longer wanted her at the end of the play.

Through viewing the play one begins to see the issue at hand if only one gender, one part of the self-rules, there will always be a system of dominance and oppression.

The other issue this raises within Shakespeare's works is what is marriage? It is a major theme through Shakespeare's comedies and romances, a question that has been raised within Canada as well. This



play sees Queen's subjugated from their personhood, a love affair with a beast, and lovers falling in and out of love at the drop of a hat. One would think that Shakespeare hated marriage, yet what arises is the ideal that we cannot be guided to whom to love and marry, despite what others would hope for. We are guided by our own soul to the other soul that completes us regardless of the stumbling blocks, trials or challenges that are set before us. This is yet another issue unravelled in the chase.

For the chase Helena sets out upon is a role reversal as well for Shakespeare's time in that she pursued Demetrius. This is a slight commentary on gender equality within life, as it is through Helena taking the usual masculine role that these are touched upon the chase deepens especially when Lysander is drugged and Helena believes her good friends and playing a trick on her, not willing to see her own worth.

Another issue of the self comes through with Helena-Lysander-Hermia potion induced triangle and that of self-esteem and worth. Helena could not believe that someone would authentically love her above Hermia. It is in this journey where Demetrius discovers his love

for Helena, and Helena works through the Fairies exploitation of love that she becomes a stronger person who believes in herself.

As the chase unfolds Robin seems a source of wisdom for Lysander who already valued his love for Hermia, Hermia's true love did not strongly emerge in an unshakeable bond beyond rebellion to authority than when she thought he had lost him.

Oberon seeing the carnage created by use of the potion, and his wife wanting the affections of a donkey-man, his heart opens and brings him back to what truly centres him and why he cannot understand both his and Titania's adultery, for they are each others counterpoint or soul mate to be more accurate.

The wedding at the end is one step closer to equality, but the viewer is left wondering if Hippolyta ever truly comes to her senses and brings about her freedom. For this tale I once again point to the great building work William Moulton Marsten did in his series (one of the three only continually published super heroes since creation-the other two being Batman and Superman) Wonder Woman, which told the story (and has been retold many times since by other series writers) of the Amazons freedom fight from Hercules and his hordes on their mythic island of Themyscira and its escape from Patriarch's world.

This is the core for my understanding of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that all are equal and we deserve the right to live out our dreams.

### **Soul Work**

- Create a collage mosaic of the family of humanity, intersperse pictures of your own loved ones within. We are all connected and our actions effect and affect others whether or not we realize it. Much like Oberon's did. Reflect on your effect on your community and loved ones.
- Which character in the play do you most relate to? Why?
- Which character in the play do you least relate to? Why?
- Re-write the scene of Theseus' decision on Hermia's marriage at the beginning through the eyes of Hippolyta.

### **Onward**

This play for a seeker of justice is about seeing the world through another's eyes. This week as you go forth, challenge yourself to experience the world through another's eyes. For those who have no voice within community, experience the world through their eyes as a meditative exercise.

Move forward to make your world a better place one step at a time.

## **Onward: A Fresh Social Gospel**

### **Introduction**

The term social gospel originated in the early days of the Twentieth Century for those trying to live Jesus' teachings on caring for the less fortunate. In Canada it went mainstream with such political movements as Women's Suffrage; Aboriginal Rights; Metis Human Declaration; Labour Party (and it's many other forms: Progressive Party, Co-operative Commonwealth Federation to name but a few) and birthed such notables as the declaration of human rights and universal health care.

This was the forerunner for the later twentieth century phenomenon in Latin America of Liberation Theology. That is Jesus being the freedom fighter for the oppressed, a take off on Marx-Engle's Bourgeoisie-Proletariat struggle.

The term Social Gospel has gone out of vogue due to the media's rampant fear mongering in the 1930-50's against socialism and communism within the west. It tied the Liberal Church to a "monster" of propagandic creation. Marx and many other socialists in Canada (Tommy Douglas, J.S. Woodsworth, Pierre Trudeau, Agnes

MacPhail) whose writings and ideas were closer to the Jesus red letters in the Christian New Testament.

It is a close reading of the Gospels<sup>1</sup> about Jesus of Nazareth, canonical or not, that illustrate Jesus' was most concerned with ending oppression and building a better world. In the Hebrew Bible, the Prophets of God came to bring the people back on track; it was not future prophecy, but rather correction for a people not living out the Creator's love, mercy, justice and compassion in society. A renewal of one simple word: hope.

This justice is what led the original Buddha to his awakening as he realized the caste system was wrong, and many other stories of new faiths birthing from old, why? Simply that people need HOPE.

This is the focus of this work to get people who all have their own path to a loving creator to discuss their beliefs and how to make a more just society and world. This short conclusion will touch on pieces needed for a fresh social gospel: In the Name of God; Pro-Life; Love; Justice and HOPE.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Roman World of old, Gospel was a political statement.

## **In the Name of God**

Regardless of which well you drink your eternal water from, whether it is Hindu, Universalist-Unitarian; Christian; Catholic; Muslim; Buddhist; B'hai, New Age (and the litany list continues), your drinking from the well that taps the ocean of love that is our creator.

Unfortunately far too much blood has been shed in the name of "God" to the point that those who want to connect with the creative life force (yes these are only human words that describe God, yet that is all we have) cannot because of the pain and trauma in the war of proving one's truth above another.

This is to be frank-BOLLOCKS! God is love, love is God. You can use whatever term or gender you wish to discuss that deep-seated core of your being that connects you to the Holy Mystery, and the Holy Mystery to you. But acknowledge the need for this centred core. Know that the horrors from inquisitions; genocides; racism; sexism; genderism; wars; crusades; heterosexualism; and many other forms of oppression perpetrated by "holy men and women" in the name of God is being done by humanity twisting the love and teachings of our Creator.

When one reads the Gospels closely this is exactly the oppression that Jesus spoke out against, bringing hope to the masses and thumbing his nose at Imperial Rome and Religious Leaders, by stating plainly the people who toil and suffer are not hell bound or slaves, but are the beloved children of God.

As you read these words know that you are God's beloved creation created very Good.

### **Pro-Life**

I personally find the fact the anti-abortion lobby has chosen the title "Pro-Life" to be offensive. A quick poll of many pro-lifers and one will find those who are against sacramental rites (ala marriage and even communion) for the LGBTT<sup>2</sup> Community and are in favour of capital punishment. Those who are in a fever pitch against certain segments of God's children; want to see criminals killed and the world to be at war in Iraq miss some simple truths.

The western economy which should be in a depression is being propped up simply by the war machine, any U.S. company that wants to move from red ink to black ink on the balance sheet just has to switch to munitions development. It was this high cost of war, that led

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<sup>2</sup> Lesbian-Gay-Bi-Sexual Transgendered and Two Spirited



J.S. Woodsworth to be the lone vote against World War Two, not because Hitler did not need to be stopped, but he did not agree with the profiteering of weapon developers on the backs and lives of the masses who would be bombed and shot into oblivion. How high a cost is a life worth????

This is the question in regards to the stance against abortion, against condoms and other forms of birth control, for abstinence only teachings in schools. By placing out collective heads in the sand the problems will go away. Yet in the dogmatic world of black and white much is missed, the first being that we have not followed through on Jesus' teachings or commission. That was that the Kingdom of God is near, it is near because if those who truly live in the love of the Holy Mystery acted on that belief, the world would be transformed for the better.

A transformed world would create the place where addictions from drugs, gambling, alcohol, (insert your addiction of choice here) to sex would not be needed to dull the pain of our world. It would be a world where abortion would not be necessary because every child conceived would be wanted and brought into a loving world.

Unfortunately we have failed in building this Utopia, as a result we need to be pragmatic and that entails being pragmatically pro-choice. Walking alongside the world, loving each and every person, being Jesus of Nazareth to the world by not condemning, but simply accepting, loving and helping.

For being pro-life is not about condemnation or a list of do nots, but rather about embracing the loving beloved child the Creator has made. Like the woman at the well, bringing the living water to the world.

Love the world into transformation.

All life is sacred.

## **LOVE**

Four letters but how easily we side step it. Make up excuses as to why this or that cannot happen. Simply to love the world as Jesus did means to see through the eyes of Jesus. Each of us carries this potential within us, all it requires is to see the world through the eyes of the people you meet. Love is lived out by realizing we are all part of one family, all pray to the same Creator.

## Justice

It still amazes me how many believe we will be judged by God in our death. Did you know there is no true concept of Hell in the Hebrew or Christian Bibles? There is an allusion to torment in a parable, but no real concept of the hellfire and brimstone we have today, these ideas were brought out in amazing detail by such fine poets as Dante and John Milton while for the Biblical Hell, is actually Hades, a place where the dead were gathered.

Justice is simply the process of arriving at the decision, the decision for the life of a believer, are we living out the Great Commandments: Love God, Neighbour and Self. This is what the “judge” will base your life on, do you get to remain in great communion with the creator or not.

Who judges? According to the Christian belief (which I am apart of) the judge is Jesus Christ, it is him that separates the sheep and the goats, an allegory for those that lived out love in the world and those that lived out greed. Basically your faith is shown in your actions, something as simple as donating clothes or a meal shows that you live in the love our Creator intended.

It is the actions of one's heart that shows their true faith. This is what justice is truly about, the process of arriving to judgement and the conclusion. A life well lived in love makes your own little pocket of the world a better place.

## **HOPE**

Bringing Justice and Love together in God, which by proxy brings it together in you and shines forward into your family and community. That simply makes things better, which is the kernel of light that hope grows outwards from.

Each of us can choose to be an agent of despair or hope, let your actions aid others. Through this you will be an agent of God.

## **Onward**

Heaven is near. It simply takes each of us to live what we believe. To act in the way that shows all are equal. To choose to live in the love of God and let God live in us. The Bard's words have shown this for centuries, like many before Shakespeare is a prophet of our time not talking of the future but challenging us to put right our present.

Be a true prophet. Speak out against injustice. Act in love. Spread hope. Embrace the name of God.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Shalom;

Tyler Richard Ragan

September 6, 2008

## Some Resources

A travel through a bookstore used or new or a movie store for that note will reveal a world of Shakespeare to access. This short list is print resources for in exploring I trust you reader to find the acted version that speaks to yourself or your community.

Acroyd, Peter (2007). *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare The Alexander Text*, Collins Publishing.

Bloom, Harold (1998). *Shakespeare. The Invention of the Human*, Riverhead Books.

Boyce, Charles (1990). *Shakespeare A to Z*, Dell.

Crowther, John editor (2003). *No Fear Shakespeare. The Tempest*, Spark Publishing.

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Gaiman, Neil with Kelley Jones, Charles Vess, Colleen Doran and Malcolm Jones III ( 1995). *The Sandman Volume III. Dream Country*, DC Comics Vertigo.

Maguire, Laurie (2006). *Where There's a Will There's a Way. or all I really needed to know I learned from Shakespeare*, Viking.

McGinn, Colin (2006). *Shakespeare's Philosophy*, Harper Perennial.

Milner, Cork (2008). *The Everything Shakespeare Book 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, Adams Media.

Mowat, Barbara A and Paul Webstine editors (1992). *The Folger Shakespeare Library. Taming of the Shrew*, Washington Square Press.

Sexton, Adam; Grandt, Eve and Candice Chow (2008). *Macbeth: The Magna Edition*, Wiley Publishers.

Sexton, Adam and Tintin Pantoja (2008). *Hamlet: The Magna Edition*, Wiley Publishers.

Sexton, Adam and Hyeonde Park (2008). *Julius Caesar: The Magna Edition*, Wiley Publishers.

Sexton, Adam and Yali Lin (2008). *Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet: The Magna Edition*, Wiley Publishers.

Spark Notes (2005). *No Fear Shakespeare: Henry IV Part One and Two*, Spark Publishing.

Spark Notes (2005). *No Fear Shakespeare: Julius Caesar*, Spark Publishing.

Spark Notes (2003). *No Fear Shakespeare: King Lear*, Spark Publishing.

Spark Notes (2003). *No Fear Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Spark Publishing.

Spark Notes (2005). *No Fear Shakespeare: Othello*, Spark Publishing.