

WRITING JOHNSON'S SHAKESPEARE BOOK – PART 2: THE PLAYS

(A Contribution by Reader B. Jonson - "No relation!")

Not to blow one's own trumpet, Gentle Reader, but you are fortunate in having as your guide to the Genius of Shakespeare someone who has too in his life been not only a successful writer, performer, bon vivant, and lover (perhaps too successful, some would say!), but also a World-Beating politician. Not some measly weaselly mealy-mouthed Academic who has "studied" Shakespeare, but a Man of the World with Fire in his Belly and Lust for Life. Someone who has *lived* Shakespeare the Man and his Genius and is Uniquely Qualified to present them to you.

So without more ado, or much ado, should I say, on to the Works. Let's first look at Shakespeare's greatest achievement, the Plays...

I have to say right away there is a lot of rubbish in Shakespeare's Plays.

Nonsensical padded language that witters and on and on and on and on. It jangles the brains and gets nowhere slowly. There is also too much feeble humour. *Oyez Oyez Oyez!* Or *'Oi 'Oi 'Oi!* as our Cockney friends would say. There are too many ridiculous events. Too many characters to distract us from the Hero we have paid to see and adore above all. And the Plays are blighted, it cannot be said too often, by too much pointless repetition. The accretions of the crud and the crunge of generations of vain actors and directors and meddling editors and the afore-abused Academics.

But, Gentle Reader...

These works CAN be rescued, restored and revived to their original glory. This I know to be true because I HAVE DONE IT MYSELF. And if my achievements have gone unrecognised it is due to the machinations of mediocrities motivated by a deathless malice turbot-charged by envious jealousy.

I will enlarge on this issue below. But first...

THE PLAYS

There are lots of these. Too many, in fact. Writing a cannon, like feeding a canon with gun powder, means getting the balance just right. And the Bard himself sadly got it wrong, even though he said himself in Sonnet 169:

*Talent like Marmite, thickly spread,
Goes straight up the nose, blows the top off your head.
But if you dare to spread it thin
The Punters won't never come near it again.*

Shakespeare's Plays are generally grouped in 3s. (Remember that 3 thing when I come to explain McBeth.)

Tragedies Good Ones.

The Less Good Ones.

The Rubbish Ones.

THE TRAGEDIES

HAMLET

Over the years many people – not just my au pairs or nannies - have told me that with my proud Nordic looks and manly blonde hair I was born to play Hamlet. And I believed them. Until I looked at the book itself. I didn't have to read it. I just saw how many pages there were. And all these other Characters. There is far too much for a chap to learn if he has ADHD. It just does not work. People who claim to admire this play are only doing it to pretend to be intellectuals. More fool them!

Better to cut out the middle section altogether and go straight from the Spooky Ghost Bit to the Blood-Bath at the end. (My good friend Quentin Tarantino could make quite a jolly fist of it, if only he would return my calls.) And of course Hamlet would have to be the Last Man Standing. Then he could sail back to England with the Pirates and marry the Virgin Queen.

MCBETH

I will spare you the story of how I came to join Lady Blissia Crumbleigh's Very Private Theatre Company and play McBeth myself. Her Ladyship gave me a free hand to produce and direct this crusty old text. So to quicken the pace and get closer to what the Bard intended I made a few judicious cuts.

The select audience watched open-mouthed as McBeth the Conquering Hero marches on, only to be ambushed by the Three Witches with their sorcery. But McBeth is forearmed against their wiles and before they can weave a circle round him thrice he throws his bag of of Woofle Dust over them! They are instantly transformed back into Beautiful Maidens and McBeth emits the immortal line: "Bankwoe, have these creatures washed and taken to my tent."

I am told the Final Scene brought tears to the eyes of all who saw it. McBeth (Me!) lies on a couch while the First Maiden feeds him grapes, the Second massages his feet, and the Third plays the Bagpipes.

KING LEAR

This boring rubbish is how a silly Old King turns Socialist and lets the French invade Britain. (Unfortunately Lord Crumbleigh himself proved to be a bit of a King Lear when he saw a performance of my McBeth and objected to his 3 daughters' appearing in the totally tasteful final scene. He disbanded the company on the spot. But let me hasten to add, His Lordship was never a Socialist. And would never have had truc with the French. Though he was a bit of a Remoaner .)

SOME OTHERS

JULIUS CAESAR – A Great Man is stabbed in the back by his so-called Friends. In my version Caesar would Kung Fu the lot of them in the Forum and stick their heads on Stakes for all to see on the Upper Deck of the National Theatre.

OTHELLO - A Great Man is betrayed by his so-called Friend.

ANTHONY & CLEOPATRA - A Great Man is betrayed by a Woman.

TROILUS & CRESSIDA - A Great Man is betrayed by a Woman.

CORIOLANUS - A Great Man is betrayed by his Mother, a Woman.

ROMEO AND JULIET – A Young Man is far too nice to his First Girlfriend and pays the price.

There are others but they are even more rubbish and a waste of space, breath and paper.

Why am I even writing this stuff? Oh yes. Of course.

With more space I could tell you how I came to be expelled from Lady Crumbleigh's Very Private Theatre Company and how I ultimately triumphed.