Cultural Daily

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Shakespeare on Despots, Power, and Finally… Transition

Jerry Kavanagh · Wednesday, January 27th, 2021

The timeless words of Shakespeare might have some application to our deposed demagogue.

“That every stride he makes upon my land is dangerous treason.”
— *King Lear*

“Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump.”
— *Othello*

“Think not on him till tomorrow. I’ll devise thee brave punishments for him. Strike up, pipers!”
— *Much Ado About Nothing*

“The mind growing once corrupt they turn to vicious forms.”
— *Henry VIII*

“Still in motion of raging waste! It cannot hold; it will not.”
— *Timon of Athens*

“Before him he carries noise, and behind him he leaves tears.”
— *Coriolanus*

“Proud man, drest in a little brief authority, most ignorant of what he’s most assured, his glassy essence, like an angry ape, plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven as makes the angels weep…”
— *Measure for Measure*

“Not so much brain as earwax.”
— *Troilus and Cressida*

“What simple thief brags of his own attaint?”
— *The Comedy of Error*s

“The most peaceable way for you, if you do take a thief, is to let him show himself what he is…”
— *Much Ado About Nothing*

“Striving to make an ugly deed look fair.”
— *Timon of Athens*

“Upon my tongues continual slanders ride, the which in every language I pronounce, stuffing the ears of men with false reports.”
— Henry IV, Part 2

“Let all untruths stand by thy stained name.”
— Troilus and Cressida

“I have seen the dumb men throng to see him and the blind to hear him speak.”
— Coriolanus

“What a wretched and peevish fellow is this…to mope with his fat-brain’d followers so far out of his knowledge!”
— Henry V

“My followers’ base and ignominious treasons makes me betake me to my heels.”
— Henry VI, Part 2

“Where are your mess of sons to back you now?”
— Henry VI, Part 3

“I pray, sir, can you read?”
— Romeo and Juliet

“O, do ye read, my lord?”
— Titus Andronicus

“Hast thou read truth?”
— The Winters Tale

“You will compel me, then, to read…?
— Julius Caesar

”Think’st thou that duty shall have dread to speak when power to flattery bows? To plainness honor’s bound when majesty falls to folly.”
–King Lear

“To ease ourselves of divers slanderous loads.”
— Julius Caesar

“Take heed, my lord; the welfare of us all hangs on the cutting short that fraudful man.”
— Henry VI, Part 2

“God grant that we may never have need of you!”
— Richard III

“Though those that are betray’d do feel the treason sharply, yet the traitor stands in worse case of woe.”
— Cymbeline

“Blush, blush, thou lump of foul deformity.”
— Richard III

“Thou art a boil, a plague-sore, an embossed carbuncle, in my corrupted blood.”
— *King Lear*

“Thou art as opposite to every good…”
— *Henry VI, Part 3*

“Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides, who covers faults at last with shame derides.”
— *King Lear*

“He is deformed, crooked, old and sere, ill-faced, worse-bodied, shapeless everywhere: vicious, ungentle, foolish, blunt, unkind, stigmatical in making, worse in mind.”
— *The Comedy of Errors*

“What tempest, threw this whale, with so many tuns of oil in his belly, ashore…?
— *The Merry Wives of Windso*r

“By this good light, this is a very shallow monster!…a very weak monster!”
— *The Tempest*

“Things base and vile, holding no quantity.”
— *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

“He jests at scars that never felt a wound.”
— *Romeo and Juliet*

“Mere prattle, without practice, is all his soldiership.”
— *Othello*

“A most devout coward, religious in it.”
— *Twelfth Night*

“The abuse of greatness is when it disjoins remorse from power.”
— *Julius Caesar*

“Your dishonour mangles true judgement.”
— *Coriolanus*

“The evil that thou causeth to be done, that is thy means to live. Do thou but think what ‘tis to cram a maw or clothe a back from such a filthy vice… Canst thou believe thy living is a life, so stinkingly depending!”
— *Measure for Measure*

“I am disgraced, impeach’d and baffled here, pierced to the soul.”
— *Richard II*

“I have forgot my part, and I am out, even to a full disgrace.”
— *Coriolanus*

“Should I stay longer, it would be my disgrace and your discomfort.”
— *Macbeth*

“I have lived in such dishonour, that the gods detest my baseness.”
— Antony and Cleopatra

“Pardon me, or strike me, if you please; I cannot be much lower.”
— Pericles

“Give not this rotten orange to your friend.”
— Much Ado About Nothing

“A beggar, that was used to come so smug upon the mart.”
— The Merchant of Venice

“So, there goes our Protector in a rage.”
— Henry VI, Part 2

“Get thee gone, thou false deluding slave.”
— The Taming of the Shrew

“Let him not ask our pardon; the nature of his great offence is dead.”
— All’s Well That Ends Well

“By the merit of vile gold, dross, dust, purchase corrupted pardon of a man, who in that sale sells pardon from himself.”
— King John

“I wonder that you will still be talking. Nobody marks you.”
— Much Ado About Nothing

“I take no pleasure in aught an eunuch has.”
— Antony and Cleopatra

“Dull unfeeling barren ignorance is made my gaoler.”
— Richard II

“His silence will sit drooping.”
— Hamlet

“I stand dishonour’d.”
— Much Ado About Nothing

“Let loose on me the justice of the state for thus deluding you.”
— Othello

“Thy ignominy sleep with thee in the grave.”
— Henry IV, Part 1

And, finally:

“A good riddance.”
— Troilus and Cressida

Image: Watercolor of Shakespeare by Johann Heinrich Ramberg, 1832

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