

Shakespeare's plays 400 years on have messages for us

400 years ago the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays was published. The well off could buy a copy of this most important and impressive volume for £1 from a bookshop in St Paul's Churchyard.

The First Folio published versions of 18 plays that had been published individually, and another 18 that had never been published. Two of his actor friends put this together, with patrons and the assistance of those who owned the copyrights. It is one of the great works of publishing, ranking alongside the bible in English for the influence it had on our language and history. In more modern editions it has become a worldwide fount of great stories, memorable characters and superb writing. So many of our common phrases can be traced back to Shakespeare's lines.

Shakespeare's work has been important in my life. One of the best things in my education was the first year of my English A level studies. We were told to read widely for that year, leaving the set texts for the second. We had to write an essay every week on a different Shakespeare play for a period. It was a revelation. The plays showed what literary genius could achieve as I struggled to improve my writing style. If you want to write well, read well.

I have been to see many productions of plays from his repertoire. Some have impressed and some have undermined the brilliance of the writing with crude impositions by the Director. One of the most extraordinary was a production of Henry VIII in the Church at Stratford. They acted in the spaces between the pews promenade style. The costumes were lifelike based on famous portraits of the characters. You felt you were so close to one of England's most fearsome Kings and his courtiers. Theatre can bring the past to life.

Shakespeare has a lot to say about the gaining and exercising of political power. The power crazed Macbeth murders his way to the crown egged on by his demonic wife. We are asked if the devil can speak true and reminded that false face must hide what false heart doth know. The fool in Lear is full of good advice. You should let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill lest it break your neck by continuing to follow it. Many MPs move away from powerful figures when they are on the downward slope. He tells Lear he should not have been old until he was wise, surveying the damage that the succession to his throne has brought on Lear himself.

Most cutting of all was John of Gaunt's criticism of Richard II. "That England that was wont to conquer others, hath made a shameful conquest of itself". How many Brexiteers with no wish to conquer others felt the second half of that shaft, that the UK had surrendered powers foolishly. Giving away his kingdom to daughters who were meant to be allies proved disastrous for Lear.

The history plays are so well written that they have had considerable

influence on how history sees the late medieval civil wars and the personalities of the Kings and their main rivals. What shines through it for me is the hero, England. "This scepter'd isle...this other Eden..this fortress made by Nature for herself...This happy breed of men.. This earth, this realm, this England". Whatever bad, weak and ill advised Kings might do to their country its underlying strengths, its rich landscape and farms, its freedom loving people, its sense of right somehow survive and carry it through to a better future.

Some of that future arrived in Shakespeare's day as London thrived and expanded and as English culture lived through a golden era of plays, poems, music and paintings. The way Henry V cast off the wayward pursuits of his youth gives us a shining example of great kingship, improved by having the common touch from his tavern experiences. The Merry Wives of Windsor is a wonderful romp which shows how the middle classes could puncture the unacceptable demands of a knight of the realm claiming to be close to the court , trying to exploit his status.

I will leave the last words to Puck who delighted audiences of Midsummer Night's Dream. Shakespeare's vision of a fairy that could travel round the world in 40 minutes was an exciting fancy. The fastest they could do their early circumnavigations was the pace of a sailing boat, remarkable though those new achievements were in a shrinking world. Puck had in mind the people as well as the politicians when he famously quipped "Lord what fools these mortals be." We need to prove him wrong.

Remembrance

Earlier this week I placed a small cross with a poppy for Wokingham in the Parliamentary garden of remembrance. Today I will lay wreaths at two local Memorial services. It is right that we remember all those who gave their lives in the two great world wars of the last century, and in other recent conflicts.

Born like most people alive today after the wars, I recall how they did shape the lives of every family in the land. My two grandfathers fought as very young men in the trenches of Northern France and Belgium in the first war. My mother and father met through their naval duties in the second war. Both generations had years dominated by death, injury and deprivation all around them. They lost friends and comrades, worried about the bombing of their family homes and accepted the obligations of rationing and black outs.

I felt very privileged to be born into a UK at last at peace, free of ration books and visibly getting more prosperous as the bomb damage was replaced with new shops and homes. I wished to work to keep it that way. I feel a great debt of gratitude that the lives of more recent generations including my own has been spared living under a foreign imposed tyranny of the kind

Hitler and Nazi Germany imposed on much of Europe at the peak of his powers.

It is right that we keep a silence and say a thank you to all those who gave their today that we might enjoy a better tomorrow.

Some of the ways to net zero will take us in the wrong direction

I know a few people who write in think it is wrong to be trying to get to net zero as they do not think manmade CO₂ is such a problem. They point to warming periods before man made CO₂ and to the role of sun cycles, water vapour and natural CO₂. More write in to say China and India are greatly increasing their CO₂ output each year this decade when they already account for 37 times as much as the UK. So they ask how can it make sense for the UK to stop more activities that generate CO₂ especially if we then import the goods that help create it?

What I have tried to do in recent years is to point out that some of the practical remedies the advocates of a rapid journey to net zero propose will not help reduce world CO₂. Indeed many of them will increase it. I have also argued that to work this has to be a journey the public willingly undertakes. It cannot all be done by making people buy things and do things they think are worse and dearer than what they do today. I am seeking maximum support for the need to change these damaging policies by arguing in this way. All western governments strongly back the net zero approach.

Today I do a stock take of some of the more obvious policies that can backfire.

1. Keep our own gas in the ground. If we do this we will be importing even more gas, often in liquified form. LNG generates several times the amount of CO₂ than our own gas piped direct to customers. It takes more energy to compress it, to keep it cool, to transport it long distances by sea and to convert it back to gas. It also means the big tax revenues largely pass to the foreign supplier state, not to the UK Treasury. Government has now accepted this advice to change this policy.
2. Get more people to buy electric vehicles by subsidies and rules. If someone does buy an electric vehicle on many days when they plug it in the grid will need to deliver more gas or coal based energy to recharge. Most of the time we are using all the wind and solar we can produce so the extra electricity needed for an electric car requires fossil fuels, delivered in an inefficient way. it is not sensible to regulate or subsidise people into EVs before there is enough renewable energy available to recharge them. The government has dropped its planned ban on new diesel and petrol car sales but more needs to change.
3. Get more people to buy electric cars. If someone buys an EV and scraps

an older diesel they will need to do many miles a year in the EV to bring about a fall in CO₂. The manufacture of the new EV generates a lot of CO₂ which would not be generated if you ran the older diesel for longer. We need to account accurately for the impact.

4. Promote more public transport. This does not work as well as they often suppose. Many trains and buses still run on diesel. Much of the electricity used by the electric ones is generated from fossil fuels for trains and buses. It only works well if the train or bus journey is by an electric vehicle that is supplied from additional renewable electricity and if the journey is one that would otherwise have required direct use of fossil fuel. It also needs a service which attracts sufficient people. Near empty buses increase CO₂ per passenger.
5. Remove your gas boiler and insert a heat pump. There will be a large CO₂ creation to make the heat pump, carry out the installation, add the extra insulation, bigger radiators and the rest. There could then be reliance on substantial amounts of fossil fuel generated electricity to run the system.
6. Close down fossil fuel using plant in steel, ceramics, paper, glass and other energy intensive activities to be replaced by imports. This will mean more CO₂, both from the CO₂ the exporting company creates in its overseas plants and for the transport of heavy and bulky items by sea.

So time to change many policies because they do not deliver net zero and depend on getting people to do things they do not want to do.

[The Prime Minister's options over the Home Secretary](#)

I have no wish to give interviews or to offer public advice to the Prime Minister over the Home Secretary. The BBC who never want to interview me on things I know about and talk about are suddenly very keen to hear my view on this.

The PM has three main options.

He can say that they agree about the policy and the Secretary of State continues in office to see it through, whilst choosing her own language to explain the common position which he does not have to endorse word for word.

He can say he disagrees with clearly identified comments she has made and ask her to step aside. He then would need to explain what was wrong with what she has said and have an alternative view.

He can say they are agreed about the policy but he does not agree with identified phrases in the article that is causing such a stir. He could get her to agree she will not repeat in future any offending phrases but will use

ones that are less contentious.

I put this out as doubtless many of you have views and want to express them.

My intervention in the King's Speech debate (2)

John Redwood (Wok, Con):

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it does not work in its own terms? If somebody gets an electric vehicle today and goes home and plugs it in, they will have to burn more gas in a gas power station, because there will not suddenly be more renewable power to recharge that car.

Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg:

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right but at least, thanks to this King's Speech, it may be a little bit more British gas that we will be getting out, and that of course should be pushed further. There has been some talk that the proposals have been watered down. Well, they should be watered back up again, so that we get as much out of the North sea as we possibly can. It is in our economic interests and our environmental interests because the emissions are lower when we use domestically produced resources. But, as I say, we have to go further.