

Dear Will

You wouldn't believe the trouble we have enabling young people to read your work, these days. There seems to be a belief around that you're too difficult, or something. In most schools, the kids don't even get a chance to read a whole play any more – just a scene or two. And even then they don't get all that many marks for answering questions about you in the exam.

It's a scandal, really. They spend all that time learning to read, and then, when they've finally cracked it, they don't get the chance to use their skills properly on the best writer we've ever had. It really worries me. If they don't start reading you in school, they'll never do it.

I know what you'll say. They should be going to *see* the plays, in a theatre. Well of course. But they need to read them as well, to get the most out of them. And when they do read them, they can let their own imaginations get to work on the words. And they can read aloud the poetry for themselves. And act out scenes – or even whole plays – for themselves. I saw a group of Japanese teenagers in Tokyo do one of the scenes from the *Dream*. They were fantastic. *And* they'd read the whole play.

Why your own country should lead the way in downsizing you is beyond me. I travel abroad quite a bit, and I've found that they read you much more in some other countries than they do in England. I met a group of schoolkids in India a couple of years ago who'd learned that nice Hamlet speech of yours off by heart – do you remember? the one you wrote when you were feeling really down? – and then they started to mess about with it. They were having a discussion about text-messaging and one said 'To text or not to text – that's the question?'. You'd have loved it. They were starting to be daring with the language, just like you were.

Oh, I forgot. You don't know about text-messaging. Kids use it with their mobile phones. (I'll tell you about them when I next write.) It's a bit like – well, when you had Holofernes talk about abbreviating *neigh* as *ne* – except the abbreviations affect pretty well everything. Somebody's done the whole of H's speech in that style. '2 B or not 2 B', it starts. They get quite fluent in it.

Anyway, to get back to the point, you'd be surprised to hear that some people are now saying you need translating. Somebody nobbled me the other day and said he couldn't understand a word of you. Absolute rubbish. As if the language had moved on that much in the past 400 years! Ninety-five per cent of your words are the same today as they were in your time. Admittedly, you do introduce some quite challenging notions sometimes, and people have to think hard to grasp what you're getting at. That's the best bit, to my mind.

Need translating? Why, you'd understand virtually every word of this letter. Well, perhaps not 'nobbled'. That word didn't arrive in English for another 300 years. It's a great word, don't you think? You could use it instead of 'mobbled', if you like. That'd save editors a problem or two. The nobbled queen. 'Nobbled queen' is good.

Sorry. Getting carried away. But I just had to write, to sympathize with what they're doing to you, and to say that some of us are doing our best to do something about it. We want you back where you belong, at the centre of the English curriculum.

Thanks for giving us so much that's wonderful to read.

All the best (we say these days – not quite as good as ‘With all my heart I do commend me to you’, but still...)

David

PS By the way, they've rebuilt your Globe again, just round the corner from where it used to be. Globe the Third. It's the fairest that ever was in England.

PPS You'll be pleased to learn that we have an acronym now which tries to sum up this new mood. RSC. It stands for Read Shakespeare Constantly.

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PLEASE FORWARD