

What's in a Name

Parents' can be cruel when they name their children as I can testify, it hasn't been easy, from the moment I started school I had put up with mirth as well as unattainable expectations. You see my family's name is Shakespeare. Just to add to my misery my parents had literary pretensions and thought it was a great idea to christen me William. My sister Juliet and brother Romeo are similarly cursed. You can imagine the cruel remarks they have to endure.

Primary school wasn't so bad though there was always a smirk on my teachers' face when they read out my name from the roll and I'm sure my siblings similarly suffered. But it was at secondary school that life became exceedingly worse. I had insisted on being called Billy, hoping that the other students wouldn't be that learned enough to make the complete association of Billy Shakespeare with the famous playwright.

I was under the radar for a while, my first English teacher looked at me knowingly but never said anything. I kept my head down and plodded along as did most students. I much preferred playing football and cricket to hitting the books. All was going well until I reached Year 9, on our reading list we had, you've guessed it, a Shakespeare play, *Romeo and Juliet*. This was the moment I feared.

My teacher, Mr Green began, "Now everyone, this term we're studying the play by..."

Just as he was going to say the author, all the class yelled, "Billy Shakespeare."

I just knew this year would end up being a misery for me, I slid under the desk hoping the teacher wouldn't notice, but that was not to be, in fact it seemed to make me more conspicuous than ever.

The other kids started to pepper me with stupid questions that made me dread each class.

'William Shakespeare, can you write us another play, not a sappy love story?'

'How about something with blood and guts and a lot of fighting?'

'Can't you make the language easier? Why does it have to be so incomprehensible?'

'We're not sure of the exact date of Shakespeare's birth, but he was born in the 1560s,' the teacher said as he continued to introduce the play.

'You don't look that old,' some smart arse said to gales of laughter.

These were but a few of the torments I had to contend with.

The teacher ignored the comment and continued, ‘Shakespeare used the poem written in 1562 by Arthur Brooke on which to base his play of Romeo and Juliet.’

I’d go home and tell my parents how they’ve managed to make my life a misery, how could they be so insensitive as to name me William considering our surname. As I had no middle name so I couldn’t just use that. I wanted my name to be changed. Anything would do. I just didn’t want to be William Shakespeare or anything literary. John Smith, Robert Jones any boring name would do. My parents were horrified how could I want to reject their name, one of such prestige. It was alright for my father he was Albert Shakespeare, not a name associated with the famous historical playwright. I bet he didn’t have to put up with the ridicule I have had to endure.

Shakespeare became my nemesis, I dreaded every English lesson. Mr Green didn’t help, he seemed to single me out for comment on the text. He expected me to have some of the quotes off pat and deep insight into the play. I must admit I skipped a number of the classes when we would be studying the play. I’d hide in the library reading or in the toilet having a smoke (don’t tell anyone) to calm my nerves or feign illness and spend time in sickbay.

When I turned up to the class after English my fellow class became suspicious.

‘Where the hell have you been?’

‘Oh, I was unwell and was in sickbay or the principal asked me to do such and such.’ I always had some excuse to explain my absence, but of course it couldn’t last. I was found out by chance. It was on a Friday and I had wandered into one of my other classes after I’d been hiding from during my English period, and there was the principal checking up on me. Mr. Green had become suspicious of my absences and had been checking up on my excuses. It hadn’t taken long to discover my deception. Boy, was I in trouble!

I couldn’t coherently explain why I had bunked off from my English class. Every time I opened my mouth to explain, nothing came out. How could it sound reasonable that it was because my name was causing me humiliation and ridicule that it had made me want to hide away. I just stood there with my mouth open, with no explanation coming forth.

What followed was almost as bad as sitting in class enduring all the snide remarks about William Shakespeare. My parents were called in to see the principal and were appalled with what they heard, not only did I get detention for a week, which wasn’t so bad (I felt I got off lightly at school) but at home any privileges I had disappeared, no T.V., no access to my

computer, no phone, no sport and completely grounded for a month. My every move was monitored. Now I had another reason to hate ‘William Shakespeare.’

When I arrived at school Monday, I sheepishly entered my English class, not a sound was made from my classmates, the unnatural silence gave me the shivers. I slipped into an empty desk which was thankfully near the back of the class, kept my head down staring assiduously at my books.

My heart pounded as I heard Mr Green enter the classroom, everyone stood up but I shrank further down on my seat hoping not to be seen.

‘Good morning everyone, sit down. Open *Romeo and Juliet* at Act 3 Scene 1.

I glance down at the text and there it is, ‘Oh I’m fortunes fool.’ That’s me I thought.

The rest of the lesson was a bit of a blur. I decided I had to think of a way to get my credibility at least back with my fellow students if not my teacher. I needed to keep my mind off sport and start to look at a literary comeback.

At school while in the library I started to troll the internet on Shakespeare I needed inspiration from my namesake. I had no idea how this could help until I stumbled on a site that had a list of Shakespearian insults. I couldn’t believe my luck as there were so many.

‘Mm mm’, I thought, ‘maybe this could work for me.’ I copied and learnt a few of the choice ones. I knew that it wouldn’t be long before I had an opportunity to use them.

Firstly, I went up to Mr. Green and innocently asked, ‘Is it possible to get into trouble if I quote Shakespeare any time I feel like?’

‘Why no of course not, how could it be.’ he answered.

This assured me I could use Shakespeare as a weapon.

It hadn’t been long after I was attending class again, when the student behind me started niggling me, ‘come on Shakespeare let’s see what you can tell us about this play’ and being annoying prodding me with his ruler.

I turned around, stood up, turned around and said in a loud voice ‘Thou mis-shapen dick.’

The class erupted in laughter, Mr Green was furious.

‘What do you think you’re doing Shakespeare?’

‘Shakespeare sir.’

‘What do you mean? That language is unacceptable. Apologise.’

‘No sir, we’re studying Shakespeare and I’ve just quoted him. Henry IV Part3. I thought that there was nothing wrong in quoting him, though it has been out of context.’

‘After all sir, you did say I couldn’t get in trouble quoting Shakespeare.’

‘Still young man that language in this classroom is not acceptable.’

‘But it’s Shakespeare sir.’

I could see Mr Green was ready to explode, (‘hoisted on his own petard’ Hamlet Act3 Scene4) but thought better of it as he could lose credibility with the other students.

It was a stalemate, Mr Green gave me a warning and left it at that.

After class finished another classmate called me a smart-aleck and who did think I was and he started to push me. I turned and said, ‘I’d beat thee but I should infect my hands.’ This made him furious and other students started to crowd around. I was determined not to get into a fight.

‘Away, you mouldy rogue.’ I said with a dramatic flourish with my arm. By now the crowd of students were enjoying the situation laughing and were on my side.

‘Hey Shakespeare where did you get all those insults from?’ they asked.

‘Well, there’s an internet site that lists insults that have appeared in Shakespeare’s plays. I think they turned out beneficial, almost makes Shakespeare interesting. I now had a cohort Shakespearean insulters who could hurl them around required. Safety in numbers.

I was starting to enjoy myself and though *Romeo and Juliet* wasn’t my favourite text I enjoyed having a list of interesting insults that I could hurl at my opponents and innocently state I was just quoting Shakespeare.

