



April 2020

**It is with considerable sadness I have to write this message to all
WARG members.**

Once again the WARG committee has had to make the difficult decision about whether to continue the 2020 programme of talks, and has concluded that the time to recommence is not yet here.

A Little something for those missing the monthly talks

'What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun'. Ecclesiastes 1:9

For lovers of the works of Shakespeare, you may know that he went through a similar period during the 'Black Plague', but also, during that time he wrote some of his greatest work. A little sun shines somewhere on the darkest day.

From Autumn 1592 to May 1594, London's theatres went dark, much like today. This happened again from April 1603 to April 1604. Although there was some touring possible, with no requirement for new plays, it is thought that Shakespeare turned to poetry and wrote *'Venus and Adonis'* and *'The Rape of Lucrece'* during this time.

Hints of the affects on society can be seen in *Romeo and Juliet*, in the famous line from Mercutio, *"A plague o' both your houses!"* Ironically, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre was to have staged this play in 2020. In *Timon of Athens* when he self isolates in a cave he curses all Athenians by *"Breath infect breath, / at their society, as their friendship, may / merely poison!"*

My favour play of all, *King Lear*, I have both laughed and cried during a Globe performance of this, is likely to have been written around 1605 and 1606, and could have been influenced by the outbreak of plague in 1606. If he wrote the play when quarantined, it certainly is reflected in Lear's desolation during the storm, *"Vengeance! plague! death! confusion!"*, Macbeth too shows his fear of retribution for Duncan, *"plague the inventor"* will the retribution be infection?

So as you read this and wonder when this will all come to an end, just remember it is very possible that some of the greatest theatre came from similar epidemics (and be grateful that, unlike in Shakespeare's day, no one is coming to board up your house with you in it to prevent the disease spreading!) Before we know it, the theatres will reopen stronger than ever. In the meantime, let the Bard end things on a cheerier note with this line from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*:

“Hope is a lover’s staff; walk hence with that / And manage it against despairing thoughts.”

Janet Backhouse – with thanks to the author of the article on the Rose at Kingston website online
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