



# **Shakespeare and the Law Exhibition**

## **Rare Books Precinct**

### **Monday, 17 July 2006, 5.30pm**

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#### **The Hon Paul de Jersey AC** **Chief Justice**

I am very pleased, ladies and gentlemen, to welcome you to the Supreme Court, for the Supreme Court Library's own contribution to the 8<sup>th</sup> World Shakespeare Congress, and for the launch of this excellent exhibition entitled: "Shakespeare and the law: obligation, vengeance and the abuse of power". An interesting title in this particular precinct: Judges always exhibit a sense of obligation; sometimes a regrettable aspect of vengeance flavours the approach of some unfortunate litigants; but never is there a trace of abuse of power in these hallowed halls – certainly not on the part of the judiciary.

The focus of the exhibition is, unsurprisingly, legal, and it draws on three of Shakespeare's plays – King Lear, The Merchant of Venice, and Measure for Measure. The exhibition addresses themes of considerable contemporary significance: executive government's intrusions into our daily lives; equality before the law; inheritance and family responsibility...

As you may know, the static exhibition is complemented by three or four sessions led daily by the talented, UQ based, Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble, culminating in the King Lear mock trial on Friday evening. It is a fascinating programme, and I urge you to participate in it.

Dr Pensalfini is on record as saying it is "sporting" of the judiciary to cooperate with the Ensemble in this way, with Judges involved in the presentations. That will be challenging for the Judges: there is absolutely no theatricality inherent in our work. And to say it is "sporting" disappoints me rather. I had thought this probably the only sphere of modern communication impervious to World Cup and State of Origin.



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Which brings me to the centrepiece of all these events, the “First Folio”, generously lent by the State Library of New South Wales which has held the work since 1885. The work dates from 1623, and is the only known copy in Australia. It contains 36 plays, and is undoubtedly a most marvellous literary treasure. The point about the First Folio is that while many of Shakespeare’s plays were performed while he was alive, a lot were not put down in print until seven years after his death, hence the First Folio of 1623. It is frankly breathtaking that we have it here, very securely I should add, for this short time. A Shakespeare First Folio has never previously been on public display in this State.

The Sotheby’s sale in London last Thursday at \$6.8 million probably means we are presently the custodians of just one book which is worth more than the depreciated value of this entire complex. As I say, breathtaking.

I congratulate the Library on another excellent exhibition, the last in what is now quite a long series spanning more than seven years, a very plain demonstration of our commitment to the preservation and display of Queensland’s extensive legal and judicial heritage.

This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Lloyd Benjamin Davis. I quote from the banner prepared by the Library:

‘Lloyd was an inspiring teacher, a widely respected scholar, and a loving husband, father and friend. He died shortly before his dreams and plans for hosting Australia’s first World Shakespeare Congress in Brisbane were realised. Lloyd’s devotion to all things Shakespearean, his true humanism, reflected in deep scholarship, love of literature, and learning, are commemorated here today.’

Finally, I thank the major sponsor of this exhibition, Konica Minolta, a long-standing sponsor of the Library. The cost associated with the movement of the First Folio from Sydney to Brisbane, and its display here, in the specially constructed, secure, humidified module, have been substantial – though plainly worth it. This would not have been possible but for the generous support of Konica Minolta, which should therefore be acknowledged with considerable gratitude.



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I am very pleased formally to launch this fascinating exhibition, which I am sure you will greatly enjoy.