

**"I suspect when people say, 'Oh, I don't understand Shakespeare,' it's because they've been exposed to an actor who wasn't very good. Or they tried to read it themselves. I don't think a child should any more read Shakespeare than they should read a Mozart opera. Leave it up to the professional musicians and professional actors."**

IAN McKELLEN

**McKELLEN, from page 10**

read a Mozart opera. Leave it up to the professional musicians and professional actors.

**ACT 2 SCENE 1**

**W.S.:** *"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."*

**I.M.:** Oh yes.

**W.S.:** *"They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts." As you go through life, does your attitude toward the plays and characters change?*

**I.M.:** It's true. The plays remain, the words remain, and your reaction to them may well change. But the idea that all the world's a stage – that we're all just acting – is an idea that goes right through Shakespeare. In "Macbeth," when his world is collapsing around him and his wife has died, he says: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage." That is Macbeth speaking, but it's also Shakespeare. If you want to understand human beings, what you have to understand is that we all act, we all play parts. Like ... when you got up this morning, you decided what you would wear; you decided not to put a suit on. But if you'd been going to an important reception, you would have changed your costume.

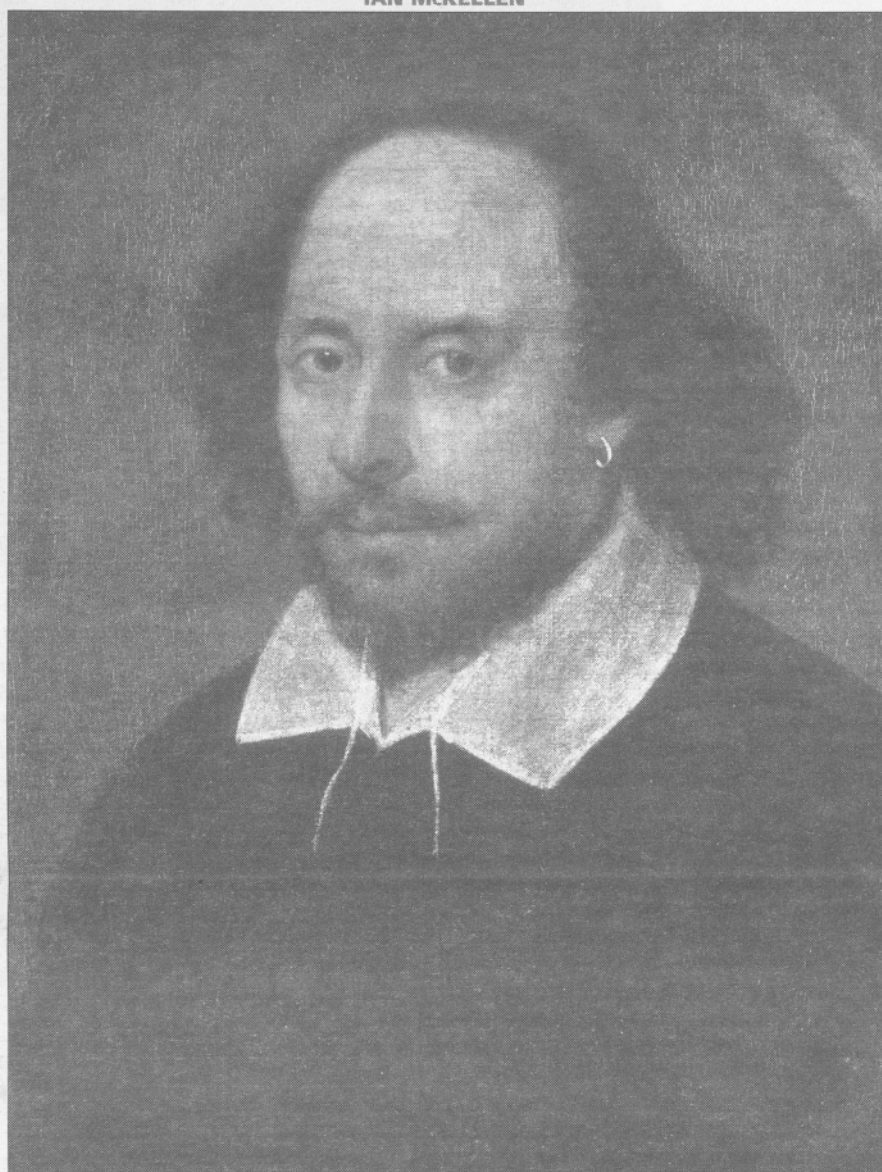
**W.S.:** *I was going to an important reception, but these are the best clothes I own.*

**I.M.:** OK, well all right. But if you were going to the gym, you would wear something different. We are used to the idea of changing our clothes according to what we are doing. And we change our language. You might swear in one situation but never in another. You're constantly presenting yourself in a way animals don't do. A dog is always a dog. That's why he's so funny when you put him in different situations; he's always himself. Human beings adapt, and I think that's at the heart of that speech, all the world's a stage. But he was making another point, that there are various stages in one's life and yes, I think your attitude to the stories will change. I played King Lear not that long ago, and being close to his age is quite helpful. It makes it very personal. ... Next quote!

**ACT 1 SCENE 2**

**W.S.:** *Is the play the thing wherein we "catch the conscience of the king"?*

**I.M.:** It's always very touching to me as an actor that Hamlet, a young man, so believe in theater that it's going to help him solve his problem, did my uncle kill my father? It's an extreme example of what I



*The Chandos Portrait of William Shakespeare.*

believe to be true. Human beings need stories to illuminate their own lives. And stories told in the theater have a particular impact.

**W.S.:** *Can art influence people in power?*

**I.M.:** I wish people in power would go and see Shakespeare perhaps more often than they do, and they might be a bit more humble about what they're up to.

**W.S.:** *Do you have any recommendations for British Prime Minister David Cameron?*

**I.M.:** Any of the plays would be illuminating. Shakespeare often writes about people in power. He's fascinated about what makes a good leader, a good monarch, and he finds most of them wanting. One of his messages is that they shouldn't let power go to their heads.

**ACT 3 SCENE 1**

**W.S.:** *"False face must hide what the false heart doth know."*

**I.M.:** That's Macbeth, isn't it? Whose tie I'm wearing. I put it on specially. Only the most observant will have worked that out.

**W.S.:** *Does that quote describe the acting process?*

**I.M.:** The actor has to identify with the part he's playing and discover it within himself by using his imagination. There's nothing special about an actor's imagination except he uses it. We've all got it, kids in particular. It's one of the exciting things about acting that I'm required to imagine what it would be like to be a mass murderer. It's fun and it's instructive too. You can get to the stage where you think, I can imagine myself doing that. And if you can imagine yourself doing terrible things to people, then you begin to understand the motives and the feelings of those who actually do terrible things to each other. Human beings are capable of anything – anything – good and bad, trivial and important. There's a choice. You can decide what you want to do, what you're going to do.

"False face must hide what the false heart doth know." Wonderful line, isn't it? False face is sort of opposite to false heart. "Hide"

and "know" are sort of opposites, aren't they? And it sums up exactly what he's feeling. Macbeth knows he's got a false heart, but he knows being human he can disguise it. All in one little line! Ten syllables!

**ACT 4 SCENE 1**

**W.S.:** *The next quote that I have here is: "All that is gold does not glitter."*

**I.M.:** Indeed. That's true. But I think it's "glisters": "All that glisters is not gold." Don't trust anybody by appearances. Delve down and discover the truth. I think that's a good motto.

**W.S.:** *I was trying to trick you with a line from "The Lord of the Rings."*

**I.M.:** Ah! Tolkien was borrowing phrasing from "The Merchant of Venice," but he was not a devoted fan of Shakespeare, especially his fantasies. He wrote, "Drama is hostile to fantasy," since he believed supernatural beings cannot be portrayed realistically except in the imagination. Do you think that's true? I took quite a lot of comfort from the fact that Tolkien had not only sold the film rights for "The Lord of the Rings" and "The Hobbit" but that he had recorded a little bit of "The Hobbit" – and his performance is very much a performance. It's rather theatricalized. I think he had imagined what it would be like if his characters were brought to life by actors so he was not a purist about his own work. I never thought of those Middle Earth movies as being fantasy. It just seemed to me to be far distant history. It had happened. And I think that's right because whatever Tolkien said, or whatever the critics say, the weight and pall of the war hangs over the story of the young man and his friend who go off to save the world and one of them never comes back. Not to say that Mordor is the Third Reich, but he's writing a story in which you should rightly take sides. There is good and there is evil, and that's what it felt like in the world wars. On we go.

**ACT 5 SCENE 1**

**W.S.:** *I'll finish with the most obvious question: "To be or not to be?"*

**I.M.:** Ha ha ha! It seems to me that line – or it did when I was playing the part – is this question: is it better to be, not just to exist but totally be, or not? The choice is between being absolutely fulfilled and being so unfulfilled that you might as well be dead. He's a bit of a philosopher. Well, he's a student. He's an intellectual, that's his problem. Stop thinking. Do! Act! Be!

**W.S.:** *Are you a "Be"-er?*

**I.M.:** Try to be, try to be. Not easy.

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