

Hello again, and welcome. This is As It Is, a daily magazine show from VOA Learning English. I'm June Simms.

In 2016, the world will celebrate the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. Today, Jim Tedder tells us about one project that hopes to make Shakespeare's poems more interesting for a 21st century audience.

But first, we hear about the winner of this year's Nobel Prize in Literature.

Canada's Alice Munro Wins 2013 Nobel Literature Prize

Canadian writer Alice Munro has been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. In announcing its decision, the Swedish Academy called the 82-year-old writer a "master of the contemporary short story."

Munro is the 13th woman to win the literature prize. She said she hoped the award "would make people see the short story as an important art; not just something you played around with until you get a novel written."

Alice Munro began writing in her youth. Her stories began appearing in magazines in the early 1950s. She published her first collections of short stories in 1968, called *Dance of the Happy Shades and Other Stories*. Many of her collections are about small town farming communities like her hometown of southwestern Ontario, Canada.

Her most recent collection, *Dear Life*, was published in 2012. It includes four short stories that Munro describes as “autobiographical in feeling, though not, sometimes, entirely so in fact.” In her words, “they are the closest things I have to say about my own life.” Earlier this year, the writer announced that she was “probably not going to write anymore.”

The Canadian writer will receive about \$1.2 million for her Nobel Prize award. The award ceremony will be held in Stockholm, Sweden on December 10. The Swedish Academy says Alice Munro has declined an invitation to attend the award ceremony because of poor health. No word on who will represent her at the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony.

You are listening to *As It Is* from VOA Learning English. I’m June Simms in Washington.

Filming Shakespeare's Poems for 21st Century Audience

Nothing like the Nobel Prize Award existed during the time of William Shakespeare. The first Nobel Prizes were not awarded until 1901, nearly 300 years after the death of the so-called “Bard of Avon.”

Next year marks the 450th anniversary of William Shakespeare’s birth. His plays are still widely performed all over the world. But, for many people, Shakespeare is something they study in school, not something they read or watch for pleasure.

One American theater company is trying to change that. Jim Tedder reports.

Ross Williams studied acting and directing in school. He launched a theater company called the New York Shakespeare Exchange. Ross Williams loves Shakespeare. But he knows that many people might not share that love. He says 400-year-old English is tough to understand. And, he says, many people think of Shakespeare as dusty and dull.

“So I started thinking about how I could deliver Shakespeare to people in small chunks, things that would be manageable and get people to experience Shakespeare in their day-to-day lives without having to make the commitment to go see a full show. And so we started with the sonnets because they’re contained.”

Sonnets are 14-line poems. Ross Williams and his partners launched the Sonnet Project as part of their theater company. The group hopes to film and release each of Shakespeare’s 154 sonnets before the great English writer’s birthday next April. Each piece is being filmed in a different location in New York City.

“Sound rolling ... wide, take two ... and action!”

On this day, a crew is shooting sonnet number three in a 150-year-old bar in Brooklyn. In this sonnet, an older man urges a good-looking young man to find someone to have his child.

The sonnet ends with the words “Die single, and thine image dies with thee.”

In the film, actor Ron Cohen plays a barman. He is trying to persuade a young customer to check out two girls at the end of the bar, lest he miss his chance to reproduce.

“For where is she so fair whose unear’d womb disdains the tillage of thy husbandry? Or who is he so fond will be the tomb of his self-love to stop posterity.”

Cohen has acted in several Shakespeare plays. He likes the idea of presenting Shakespeare in short films.

“Fantastic! Great idea, especially the idea of doing it in different locales in New York, tying in the contemporary feeling of Shakespeare.”

To complete a project this big requires the talents of many artists. Ross Williams put out a call to filmmakers on the Sonnet Project’s website and by word of mouth. Twenty-five-year-old Noemi Charlotte Thieves was one of many who answered the call. He directed sonnet 71 a few months ago. Yet he admits he had very little knowledge of Shakespeare when he came to the Sonnet Project.

“I thought sonnets were like monologues or soliloquies from his plays. I totally had no idea what they were, so I was completely naïve and ignorant to the whole thing.”

What he remembered when he started studying the sonnet was how visual Shakespeare’s language is. Thieves compares the playwright to a famous filmmaker today.

“When you’re talking about what makes his language so unique, he was in a lot of ways like [Quentin] Tarantino is today. I always say if Shakespeare was an artist living today, he wouldn’t be a playwright. He would be a screenwriter, he would be a filmmaker.”

Ross Williams agrees. He wants people to see Shakespeare as part of pop culture -- which, he says the playwright was back in his day.

“It is a little tricky sometimes but it’s still words, telling a story, and sharing emotion.”

He says that it is true even when the emotion is coming from a tiny screen on your phone, instead of from a stage.

“Thou art thy mother's glass and she in thee, calls back the lovely April of her prime; so thou through windows of thine age shalt see, despite of wrinkles this thy golden time.”



I'm Jim Tedder.

And that is As It Is, I'm June Simms in Washington. VOA world news is coming up at the beginning of the hour Universal Time. And, I will return next weekend with more As It Is.