

Editor's Note: Professor Don Les regularly gives a humorous presentation on exotic pest plants at various organizations including the Water Garden Society of Greater Kansas City, one of the largest in the United States with over 1,000 members. While usually geared toward his specialty, aquatic plants, the presentation works equally well with any exotic invasive species. Following is an abbreviated look at Don's presentation – he doesn't want to give away all of his secrets!

"Something wicked this way comes . . ."

A Shakespearean perspective on exotic pest plants

by Don H. Les, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Connecticut

Shakespeare's message: Human nature is incompetent in the eternal quest for romance.
My observation: This incompetence extends to relationships with exotic pest plants.

Act I: Infatuation (Person meets plant and falls in love, in spite of warnings.)

"My only love sprung from my only hate!
Too early seen unknown, and known too late
Prodigious birth of love it is to me,
That I must love a loathed enemy."

– Juliet (*Romeo & Juliet*)

Act II: Love is blind (Dazzled by beauty, invasive traits are overlooked.)

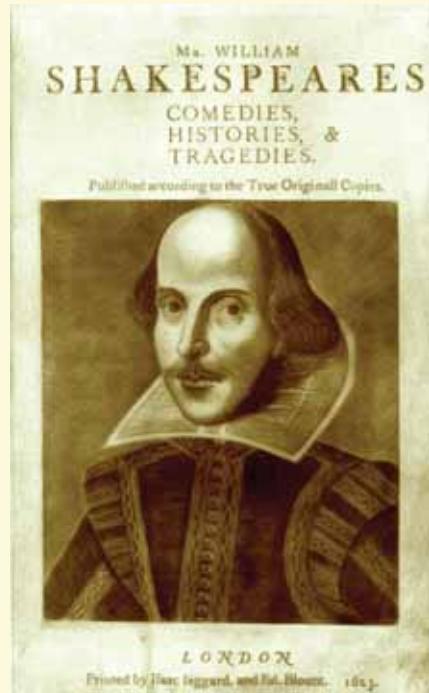
"But love is blind and lovers cannot see
The pretty follies that themselves commit"
– Jessica (*Merchant of Venice*)

Act III: Domination (Our attempt to control: we confine the plants to gardens.)

"I'll tame you; I'll bring you in subjection"
– Simonides (*Pericles, Prince of Tyre*)

Act IV: Infidelity (Free spirits are born to wander and the plants escape our confinement.)

"What a brood of traitors we have here"
– King Henry VI



Act V: Revenge (Former admiration changes abruptly to animosity – when their evil side is exposed, we try to poison, mutilate or otherwise eradicate exotic plants.)

"He's a rank weed, Sir Thomas,
And we must root him out."
– Gardiner (*King Henry VIII*)

Act VI: Despair (It is no use – our former suitors stalk us worldwide! We will pay ecological alimony forever.)

"O thou weed,
Who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet
That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst
ne'er been born!"
– Othello (*Othello*)

Act VII: Hope (We find fidelity in native species – not as exotic perhaps, but loyal and with natural beauty.)

"Upon a homely object Love can wink"
– Valentine (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*)

Conclusion: Love affairs with invasive species inevitably will lead to irreconcilable differences.

For more information, contact Dr. Les at donaldles@uconn.edu or 860/486-5703. Don currently studies the population and reproductive biology of rare and invasive plants, the origin of angiosperms, and the molecular systematics, evolution and ecology of aquatic angiosperms. He was inducted into The International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society Hall of Fame in 2002.