Freetown! Shakespeare and social flourishing

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Professor Ewan Fernie (/staff/profiles/shakespeare/fernie-ewan.aspx) delivered his inaugural lecture at the University of Birmingham on Monday 27 January 2014. A full video recording is available below.

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Ewan Fernie's inaugural took a fresh look at freedom in Shakespeare. In Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare slipped the idea of 'Freetown' into his great play about the struggle for free love. Prior to 1769's first ever big Shakespeare celebration, David Garrick was made Freeman of Stratford. Viva la libertà! James Boswell came to Garrick's Jubilee in solidarity with the international liberation movement dressed in the costume of a Corsican chief. According to Hegel, Shakespeare's characters are 'free artificers of themselves'. But Tolstoy thought Shakespeare too free. And in our time the former Poet Laureate, Ted Hughes, and the philosopher John Moriarty have presented Shakespeare as struggling to redeem the dark freedoms of a human creature whose hand is structurally homologous with the fin of a shark.

In his anniversary year of 2014 - with an even bigger one approaching - many will contend that Shakespeare is good for us. Maybe, says Fernie, but in a way that really ought to shake us to the core.

- **Freedom, Freetown and Fernie's Fiery Feast (http://bloggingshakespeare.com/freetown)** - review on Blogging Shakespeare

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