



The Classical Comics Story

February 2007

"Maybe, just maybe, we can change society for the better"

In October 2006 in a bar, somewhere in London, Clive Bryant was explaining a new business idea to a friend. On the train journey to the city, he'd been reading *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell, and was inspired by the notion of a zero tolerance to crime having a dramatically positive effect on the streets of New York.

On reading the book, the question came immediately to mind, "Would people behave in an antisocial way, if they appreciated fine literature?" It was a chicken-and-egg question; certainly some people would disregard such literature regardless of the circumstances. However, the thrust of *The Tipping Point* is that the balance changes once a critical point is reached; there is no need to "convert" everyone, only the need to convert enough people for the rest to follow.

So, how to create that appreciation? Surely it starts at school? Ask 100 teenagers their opinion on Shakespeare, Dickens and Bronte, and the vast majority will answer back with a number of variations on the word "boring"; and that is the major hurdle to overcome: turning "boring" into "cool".

Earlier that year, Clive had written a self-help book entitled *POP Success* (available soon from Providence Press). As an aid to readability and accessibility, he had introduced cartoon illustrations to the book. To do that, he researched the arena of cartooning, and as a by-product had become hooked on a style of comic-strip. This twist of fate provided the key to breaking down the 'cool' barrier. "If we can make Shakespeare look as exciting as Spiderman stories, then that would be cool".

And so the concept behind Classical Comics was born: to create exciting and engaging graphical novel versions of classical literature; to introduce new generations to the world of classic fiction; and to make the works of masters available and accessible to all.

Although at the time it was a wholly original thought, we quickly realised that it had been done before; at least in broad terms. In our opinion, and that of readers we questioned, all of these predecessors lacked appeal for the modern audience; principally, they were missing the vital ingredient: excitement. Classical literature has a reputation for being dull and staid. Unlike superhero comics, or indeed more modern literature, they weren't influenced by film structures or geared towards the 'instant' society in which we now live. Therefore we had to "turn up the excitement volume" to compensate for this and in order to draw today's reader into the story.

Think about it for a second. Wouldn't it have been great to study English Literature with gripping visual renditions of the stories running alongside the

original text? Wouldn't Shakespeare have been so much more accessible if there was an illustration with the text - or better still, pictures with a plain English version - such that they were actually fun to read? How much of a benefit would it have been when going through GCSE's to already know the stories because you'd tackled them in a simpler form years ago?

We, and the teachers we've consulted, can see huge benefits within the education process with the introduction of our book range.

To reach the audience at all ages and literacy levels, each Shakespeare play comes in three versions:

- **Original Text** - the full script
- **Plain Text** - a plain English version of the full script
- **Quick Text** - with shortened dialogue for young readers and for those people who want to understand the story quickly.

(Incidentally, non-Shakespeare comes in Original Text and Quick Text only, because the language is much easier to start with).

In our opinion, Classical Comics represent the very best way of appreciating these wonderful stories, with the reader being able to choose how they want to read them. One version should lead the reader to the next, fuller version - until one could quote Shakespeare in its original context!

But Classical Comics are not just for children; most adults would like to understand at least some of Shakespeare's plays. Unfortunately, as we all know, they are hard to appreciate in cold script form - hence the ongoing successes of film versions of the plays. our Graphical Novel formats go one step further. There is an extra level of enjoyment reached by reading rather than by simply watching. It is an active process and therefore more engaging for the reader who automatically becomes a participant in the storytelling.

Each of our titles represents a long development project - typically a 9-12 month lifecycle in which we create the script and commission the artists to produce these wonderful works. We carefully select the artist whose style is most appropriate for the book. For instance, Jane Eyre needed to have a very different treatment from Macbeth; and that treatment had to match the artist's natural style. Because of the project lengths, we usually have 4-6 book titles in production at any one time.

We have absolute belief in our approach to both Classical Literature and Graphical Novels and we think that we have successfully married these two very different ends of the literary spectrum to offer a truly unique and wonderful reading experience. We hope you agree!!

Classical Comics - bringing classics to life!

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