

A Mirror up to Nature

In grade seven my teacher's name was Miss Brown. She had a bee-hive hairdo and wore short, tight miniskirts. She had our class perform the play scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I vaguely remember a few spring afternoons filled with hilarity. In grade nine I had an English teacher, whose name and face I cannot remember, who took an uncompromisingly literate and historical approach to Richard II. I distinctly remember a few early mornings filled with nightmares. My mother had won the top English student for all of grade twelve in British Columbia in 1938. This woman also possessed a vicious and lethal sense of humor. If I failed a term on Shakespeare in grade nine, I was going to suffer... for life.

For the essays I plagiarized from scholars and padded with whatever I thought the teacher wanted to see. When I DIDN'T fail the final exam I was jubilant. I survived the rest of high school Shakespeare by stealing and pasting and praying. I never enjoyed Shakespeare again until I acted him in university. One can't grow to love the Bard by reading him silently in the library, and digesting the opinions of pontificators; you need your own voice and your ears to fully appreciate Shakespeare's craft. Shakespeare wrote characters to be heard in the theatre; he never even conceived of anyone reading his plays silently. Why would they do that?

By the way, all this stuff is my favorite Shakespeare stuff; it helps me play my characters and tell my stories. Some of my favorite Shakespeare books, my Bard scarf, my Sir Andrew wig, a miniature Globe, a bowl of wine, a flagon of beer, a candle, some medicinal herbs; I stole these two costume swords from a production of *Henry V* at Stratford (my kids destroyed the scabbards over the years dragging them around) and many a Halloween pumpkin suffered an appalling end, hacked to the smallest of bits; an old pair of grieves; oh yeah, this keen-eyed falcon has been trained to shriek at anyone she spots texting during my show, and my complete works of Shakespeare for 35 years - Penguin Edition - fourth or fifth duct taping. Just like Shakespeare, I dress my stage with my best stuff! With the help of my best stuff, I'm going to give you a peek into the real world of Shakespeare; the smelly world, the drunken world, the often violent and always horny world of Shakespeare.

But first, why did Shakespeare write all these plays? To become rich! That's the most important thing to remember! His family fortunes had sunk significantly during his teenage years and he was desperate to repair them. He worked his ass off in London for 25 years, and then retired back home to Stratford, rich and respected.

Secondly, he was smart! He wrote his plays about his audience - about Londoners. He wrote about their greed, their sex, their ambition, their patriotism - just like today's movies. He wrote the Sopranos and Simpsons of London. He was the Steven Spielberg of London.

London. A city of loud noises, hooves and raw coach wheels on the cobbles, the yells of traders, the brawling of apprentices, scuffles to keep the wall and not be shouldered into the stinking street. Everybody is shouting. Everybody is half cut. It's not a sober city.

By the way, booze (beer mainly) was THE Elizabethan drug. They had no pot, or ecstasy, or even TV, so they just drank...A LOT. They drank beer, they drank fermented juice, and the rich people drank wine. They drank it with their meals. They drank it between meals. They drank it because the water could kill you. They were very loud and almost always had a slight buzz-on! For the next 55 minutes I shall try to emulate Elizabethans. (*Burp, fart, how am I doing? biz.*)

The docks. There are manacled corpses in the Thames that the three tides have washed... a kite overhead drops a gobbet of human flesh...in a smoky tavern a rude song is flung at the foul air...pickpurses stroll among gawping country cousins...a limping child with a pig's head leers out from a alleyway...a couple of Paul's men swagger by, going haw haw haw...stale herring smell to heaven in a fishman's basket...a cart lurches, rounding a corner; wood splintering against stone...the sun, in sudden great glory, illuminates white towers...a thin girl in rags begs, whining...an old soldier with one eye munches bread in a dark passage...skulls on Temple Bar...a drayhorse farts...London.

London. Night. Peering out the window. The damp, most insidious of all enemies, swells the wood, furs the kettle, rusts the iron, and rots the stone. The stars reflect themselves in deep pits of stagnant water which lie in the middle of the streets. The dark shadow at the corner where the wine shop stands is likely as not the corpse of a murdered man. Cries of the wounded in night brawls, troops of ruffians, men and woman unspeakably interlaced, lurch down the streets, trolling out old songs, with jewels flashing in their ears, and knives gleaming in their fists. To the north, the outline of Hampstead Forest, contorted and writhing against the sky. Here and there on the hills above London, a stark gallows tree, with a parched or rotting corpse. Danger and insecurity, lust and violence, poetry and filth, roam the narrow pathways of the city, and buzz and stink.

Today, their reigns in this city a stench ... that defies description. The streets reek of manure, the courtyards of urine, the stairwells of moldering wood and rat droppings. The kitchens stink of spoiled cabbage and mutton fat; the un-aired parlors of pale dust. The bedrooms retain a funk of soiled sheets, damp featherbeds, and that pungently sweet aroma of chamber pots. The stench of sulphur rises from the chimneys, the stench of caustic lyes from the tanneries, and from the slaughterhouse wafts that sweet, sickly stench of congealed blood. The people stink of sweat and unwashed clothes; from their mouths comes the stench of rotting teeth, from their bellies that of onions, and from their bodies, if they were no longer very young, might come the stench of rancid cheese, sour milk and tumorous disease. The river stinks, the marketplace stink, even the churches stink. The peasant stinks as does the priest, the apprentice as does his

master's wife, the whole aristocracy stinks; the King himself is foul, foul like a rank lion, and the Queen like an old goat, summer and winter.

(While making and drinking a medicinal draught) Shakespeare had to be careful what he wrote, but he still managed to tell the truth about people. Today's targets would likely include a militaristic west and jihadist east, overpaid complaining athletes, a media that supports the idea that outward beauty will assure one of inwards happiness, and a baby-boomer population who worships money. Cheers! The environment would disturb him most. He would hate what we have done to it. He would reveal all our social evils and he would make good coin doing it. He knew how to play the game.

In 1603, Shakespeare's great patron, Elizabeth I, died. So, the last half of Shakespeare's writing-life was under his new "great" patron, King James I. Under James Shakespeare wrote the great tragedies Macbeth and King Lear.

(While partaking of an odiferous and soothing scent-ball) The King is a thickset man of little more than medium height. His skin is remarkably soft and white. His tongue is too large for his mouth making his speech thick and his drinking ungraceful, 'as if eating his drink.' His coordination is poor, his doublet ever encrusted with food, his walk a species of jerky shambles-circular in nature, often leaning on a favorite, his fingers ever fiddling about his codpiece. He is highly intellectual and learned and yet believes in witches; and indeed has been responsible for the torture, hanging and burning of many old women. He wears a padded vest, lives in constant fear of assassination and indeed is one of the most superstitious, complicated neurotics ever to come to the English throne.

So...as the world changed (new monarch, new religion, new bible, new world, new theatre, new printing press) so did the language. New words bubbled up to explain new phenomena. Shakespeare himself invented over 1300 words. Here is just 30 of them: accommodation, aerial, amazement, assassination, bloody, bump, critic, dislocate, dwindle, exposure, fitful, frugal, generous, hurry, impartial, lapse, laughable, lonely, majestic, monumental, multitudinous, obscene, pious, road, radiance, sanctimonious, seamy, sportive, submerge, and suspicious.

New words and new meanings for old words are being invented every day. Here is a list from urbandictionary.com: Apple, badonkadonk, cougar, doobie, erectile dysfunction, facebook, Google, Homer, internet, junk, k-mart, Lady Gaga, muffin-top, nerd, oscar, pig, quickie, rave, sick, Twitter, up-skirt, valley-girl, wedgie, x-box, yoda, and zamboni!

New phrases are also incredibly powerful. Cloud-computing is an excellent example: Internet-based computing with shared software, information and resources...on the internet...in the

sky...cloud-computing. Shakespeare was the master of creating phrases. Here are 52 of his, the number of years he lived.

If you cannot understand my argument and declare **it's Greek to me**,
you are quoting Shakespeare.

If you claim to be **more sinned against than sinning**,
you are quoting Shakespeare.

If you acted **more in sorrow than in anger**, even though your property has **vanished into thin air**, or if you suffer from **green-eyed jealousy**, you are quoting Shakespeare.

If you have been a **tower of strength**, and refused to **budge an inch**;
knitted your brows, and insisted on **fair play**;
made **virtue of necessity**, **stood on ceremony**,
danced attendance on your **lord and master**;

had **short shrift** or **cold comfort** or **slept not one wink**, you are quoting Shakespeare.

Even if you've **played fast and loose**, been **hoodwinked**, or **in a pickle**,
had **too much of a good thing**, or **laughed yourself into stitches**,
you are quoting Shakespeare.

If you know that **it is high time**, and that **that is the long and the short of it**;
if you believe **to give the devil his due**, **the game is up**, and **truth will out**,
even if it involves your own **flesh and blood**;

if you've **seen better days** while living in a **fool's paradise**,
or had to **lie low** till the **crack of doom**, because you suspected **foul play**,
well then it's a **foregone conclusion**, **if the truth were known**,
that not being **tongue-tied** but rather **having a tongue in your head**,
you are quoting Shakespeare.

Even if **without rhyme or reason** you bid me **good riddance** and **send me packing**;

if you wish I were **dead as a doornail**,

if you think I am an **eyesore**, a **laughing stock**, **the devil incarnate**,
a stony-hearted villain, **bloody-minded**, or a **blinking idiot**,

well then **by Jove, O lord, tut-tut, for goodness sake, but me no buts, it is all one to me**,
you are quoting Shakespeare.

Language is simply a vehicle for thought: new thoughts, new things; new words, new phrases! People who are best at translating their thoughts into words and phrases become leaders; many just get rich. Quite frankly, looking like a Jersey Shores wannabe only gets you to about 23. Then you need something to say and you need to say it well. So, while you are deciding what you want to do with your life - what you may want to say someday, you should prepare for your future by practicing the thoughts and words of smart people, out loud.

Practice bits from *Titus Andronicus* (Find Grieves.)

When I was 27 at Stratford, I played Chiron, a murderous Goth in *Titus Andronicus*. My older brother Demetrius, and I would always fight and this was how I carried my knife. He carried his behind his back - so cool. In the play we rape Titus' daughter cut out her tongue and hack off her hands so she can't say or write who did it to her. She scratches are names in the dirt with a stick. When Titus finally catches us, he slits our throats, bakes our heads in a blood-pie and feeds it to our mother. At the end of the play there is a huge pile of bodies onstage.

Hack up that play and practice it, or practice the tons of stuff on my website. Just practice new or old words out loud. Once you have spoken a word out loud, you are much more likely to remember and re-use the word. Then you'll be armed.

If the school bully corners you in a crowd, call him a groutnell or a natural Lob. Escape while bystanders snigger and he deciphers.

A well phrased compliment can get you almost anything.

For your girlfriend, "Babe, you are a celestial, heart-inflaming, water-cake.

For your boyfriend: "You sportful, sweet-suggesting gamester."

For your mother: "Mom, you are a cheek-rosey, well-graced, delight."

Your sister (remember lying is a big part of acting) "Sis, you are ever courteous; a tender-feeling, true-penny.

And for your teacher, "Miss Prism, you are a wholesome, best-tempered, nose-herb."

Another great thing about Shakespeare is that he always thinks in opposites. To be or not to be is everywhere in Shakespeare. The man was addicted to antithesis; it is what makes him so funny and profound. Color and gradate opposites using the notes of your voice.

Do thou amend thy face, and I'll amend my life.

He never broke any man's head but his own, and that was against a post when he was drunk.

Foul spoken coward, that thund'rest with thy tongue,
and with thy weapon nothing dares perform.

I did never know so full a voice issue from so empty a heart:
but the saying is true 'the empty vessel makes the greatest sound.'

And when Laertes tries to convince Ophelia not have sex with Hamlet, she replies with,
Do not, as some ungracious pastor do, show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
whiles, like a puffed and reckless libertine, himself the primrose path of dalliance treads.

And finally...I wasted time and now doth time waste me.

Opposites are at the very heart of Shakespeare's thinking - the human story - we are all born into this world filled with wonder yet someday, we all must die...AND... we only have so much time. Shakespeare's great art was accurately describing and debating the opposing choices of humans, on their inevitable path.

In *King Lear*, the world is changing. The lecherous and superstitious Gloucester warns his bastard son, Edmund, that the recent eclipses in the sun and moon foretell doom to come. As soon as the old man leaves, Edmund counters with:

This is the excellent foppery of the world,
that when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behavior,
we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars;
as if we were villains on necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion;
knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical predominance;
drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence;
and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on.
An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star.
My father compounded with my mother under the Dragon's Tail, and my nativity was under
Ursa Major, so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous.
Fut! I should have been that I am,
had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing.

Almost all the soliloquies in Shakespeare are characters voicing conflicting points of view, while seeking a clear path of action. After Macbeth has been told by the witches that he will be King, been given the thane of Cawdor, and urged by his wife to kill Duncan, he considers the possible opposite outcomes of such an act:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.
If the assassination could catch with his surcease success,
that but this blow might be the be-all and the end-all here, we'd risk the life to come.
But in these cases we still have judgment here,
that we but teach bloody instructions, which being taught, return to plague the inventor.
This even-handed justice commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice to our own lips.
He's here in double trust:
first, as I am his kinsman and his subject, strong both against the deed;

then as his host, who should against his murderer shut the door, not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been so clear in his great office, that his virtues will plead like angels, trumpet tongued, against the deep damnation of his taking-off.

And then there is Hamlet, brilliant, noble and courageous, yet he can't act, he can't kill the uncle who murdered his father, because he isn't sure whether the ghost is a good or evil spirit - a Catholic or Protestant Ghost. He is debating THE question of his times. His world is replete with opposites. Here he bemoans the opposite natures of himself and the leading actor.

Is it not monstrous that this player here, but in a fiction, in a dream of passion, could force his soul so to his own conceit that from her working all his visage wanned, tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect, a broken voice, and his whole function suiting with forms to his conceit? And all for nothing! For Hecuba! What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he should weep for her?

What would he do, had he the motive and the cue for passion that I have?

He would drown the stage with tears and cleave the general ear with horrid speech, make mad the guilty and appall the free, confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed the very faculties of eyes and ears.

Yet I, a dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak, like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause, and can say nothing;

no, not for a king, upon whose property and most dear life a damned defeat was made.

Am I a coward? Who calls me villain? Breaks my pate across?

Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face? Tweaks me by the nose?

Gives me the lie in the throat, as deep as to the lungs? Who does me this? Ha?

'Swounds, I should take it, for it cannot be but I am pigeon livered

and lack gall to make oppression bitter, or ere this

I should have fatted all the region kites with this slave's offal.

Bloody, bawdy villain! Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless* villain! O, vengeance!

Why, what an ass am I.

This is most brave, that I, the son of a dear father murdered,

prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,

must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words, and fall a cursing like a very drab, a scullion!

Fie upon it! Foh!

About, my brain.

Then he gets the idea for the play, which is, within the play: more comparison, metaphor and antithesis. I think that is why Obama likes Shakespeare's tragedies so much - they are so complex.

Here is an Elizabethan leader, a minister, with an opposite view of the theatre.

The common haunters of the theatres are the lewdest persons in the land, apt for pilfering, forgeries, or any rogueries, the very scum, rascality, and baggage of the people. Briefly an unclean generation, a spawn of vipers. A play is like a sink in a town, where all the filth doth run.

Nay, many poor, needy creatures, who have scarce cloth for their backs nor food for their bellies will do almost anything to see a play - let wife and children beg!

As for the Players, do they not maintain bawdry, insinuate foolery and renew the remembrance of heathen idolatry? Nay, are they rather not the plain devourers of maiden virginity and chastity? For proof whereof but mark the running and flocking to the Theatres, daily and hourly, time and tide, to see plays; where such wanton gestures, such bawdy speeches, such laughing and fleering, such kissing and bussing, such winking and glancing of wanton eyes is used, tis wonderful to behold. The cause of plagues is sin. The cause of sin is plays. Therefore, the cause of plagues are plays!

Here is another view of the theatre - a young man's first visit.

We come upon a crowd, a mass of people pressing as near the silken rope as they dare. We're shouldered by apprentices; tailors; fishwives; horse dealers; starving scholars; maid in their whimples; orange girls; bawdy tapsters; sober citizens; and a pack of little ragamuffins such as always haunt the outskirts of a crowd, screaming and scrambling among the people's feet-all the ruffraff of London are here, some with mouths gaping a yard wide; all rigged out as vigorously as their purse or stations allow; here in fur and broadcloth, there in tatters with their feet kept from the ice by a dishcloth bound about them. Once inside we witness a dramatic performance with a black man waving his arms and vociferating and a woman laid white on a bed. The main press standing opposite the stage, laughing when an actor trips, or when bored, tossing an orange peel upon the ice which a dog scrambles for. But oh, the astonishing, sinuous melody of the words, spoken with extreme speed and daring agility of tongue, like sailors singing in the beer gardens of Wapping. The passions, the tears, the Moor strangles the woman in her bed. The life of man ends in a grave.

The Paris Bear Gardens, about three good stone throws in that direction, and I likely within earshot - was serious competition for the Globe Theatre. Even Elizabeth I loved a good bear baiting.

The baited bear, tied to the stake. Its dirty coat needs brushing. Dried mud and spume. Pale dust. Big clumsy fists. Men bring dogs through the gate. Leather collars with spikes. Loose them and fight. The bear wanders around the stake. It knows it can't get away. Dogs on three

sides. Chains. Fur in the mouth. Flesh and blood. Strips of skin. Teeth scraping bone. The bear crushes one of the skulls. Big feet slithering in dog's brain. Round the stake. On and on. The key in the warder's pocket. Howls. Roars. Men baiting the beast. On and on and on.

And later, the bear raises its great arm. The paw with a broken razor. And it looks as if it is making a gesture -- it wasn't: only pain or weariness, or the sun, or brushing away the sweat - but it looks as if it's making a gesture to the crowd, asking for one sign of grace, one no. And the crowd roars, for more blood, more pain, more beasts huddled together, tearing flesh and treading in loving blood.

Next comes Harry Hunks, the blinded bear. The sport is to bait with whips. Slash, slash. It can't see but it can hear. It grabs the whips. Catches some of them. Brakes them. Slashes back at the men. Slash Slash. And finally, they send an ape round on a horse. It looks like a thin hairy man or a child. You can see the pale skin under its arm when it jumps. Its teeth. The dogs tear it to pieces. The crowd howls. London.

(While turning into "Sir Andrew") In such a free-for-all of a society, fortune hunters flocked to London. A lucky connection at court could get you rich quick. Being in the right places, wearing the right clothes and knowing the right people, was even more important then, than it is today.

Thomas Dekker, a contemporary of Shakespeare wrote a long satirical pamphlet about a vacuous social climber, that I hacked down to about 25%. Dekker called it *The Gull's Hornbook*; I would re-name it a *Fool's Instructional Manual*. It is advice on how to live one's life, given by an Elizabethan fool, a twit, a dunstical who believes that by wearing fashionable clothes and always being the centre of attention one should rise through society. You know the type: all image and no substance. Dekker wrote this pamphlet before Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night*. I can't help but think that Shakespeare discovered Sir Andrew Aguecheek here.

If your worm-eaten father be dead and hath left you 500 pound a year to keep you and an Irish horse-boy like a gentleman, listen to this...

First, have the softest largest down bed; and never rise till your belly grumbles. Midday slumbers are golden: they make the body fat, the skin fair, the flesh plump, delicate and tender. They make a russet colour on the cheeks of young maids and cause lusty courage to rise up in young men. Besides they save us the price of breakfast and preserve our clothes; for while we are warm in our beds, our clothes are not worn.

Next, walk up and down your chamber in a bare shirt or stark naked. If the morning thrust her frosty fingers into your bosom pinching you black and blue with her nails made of ice, creep into the chimney corner and toast yourself till the fat dew of your body trickles down your sides. For then you may say that "You live by the sweat of your brows!"

Then dress yourself. Good clothes are the embroidered trappings of pride. The Spanish slop, the skippers galligaskin, the Switzer's blistered cod piece, the Danish sleeve, the French standing collar, your stiff necked rebatoes, your stockings and your shoes.

For your hair, never allow a comb to fasten its teeth there, but let it grow bushy like a forest or some wilderness, lest those six footed creatures that breed in it are hunted to death, and that delicate pleasure of scratching be taken from you. Besides a head all hid in hair, gives to even the most wicked face, sweet proportion. And put feathers in your hair as do gallants in their hats, for then none can accuse you of lying in a field like a beggar, for your feathers prove you have lain on the softest down bed.

Next, to Paul's walk go. But be sure to pick an hour when the main shoal of Islanders are swimming up and down. Be sure to walk in the middle where you may publish your fine suit of clothes. If perchance you should meet a knight of your acquaintance, do not name him Sir such-and-such, but call out Ned or Jack, as this will mightily impress everyone. Before leaving Pauls set your watch by the clock, and if you are hungry you must off to the ordinary. Go in a coach, if possible, to hide from your creditors. Being arrived in the room, walk up and down as scornfully and carelessly as possible. Select some friend, dressed worse than you, to walk up and down with you. If you but make noise, and laugh in the fashion and have a sour face to promise quarrelling, you shall be much observed. Talk as loud as you can, no matter to what purpose. If you have languages, this is an excellent occasion to show them; if not get some fragments of French or small parcels of Italian, to fling about the table. Never be silent but say how often this lady hath sent her coach for you, or how often you have sweat in the tennis-court with that great lord. After manfully devouring your stewed mutton, goose, or woodcocks, you must ask some special friend of yours to talk with you in the withdrawing room, where you may enquire about which new poems or pamphlets a man might think best to wipe his tail with? In asking this, you may abuse the works of any man, deprave his writings, which you cannot equal, and purchase in time the terrible name of severe critic. Next to dice, and if you lose not your suit of clothes, you must to the theatre.

Once you have paid your pennies to enter, stay not with the groundlings with their garlic sausage and stink, nor go not to the balconies where much new satin is dammed by being smothered in darkness, but advance yourself to the throne of the stage, where like a feathered ostrich you may ignore the hoots and hisses of the scarecrows who spit at you, yea who throw dirt even in your teeth: for by sitting on the stage the essential parts of the gallant are perfectly revealed -good clothes, a proportional leg, a white hand, a tolerable beard.

On the stage you can so rail against the author that you can force him to know you. For doth not the fool, the Justice-of-the-Peace, the cuckold, the captain, the Lord Mayor's son, the stinkard, or the sweet smelling courtier, have equal voice in the play's life and death? Be sure

to laugh so high that all the house may hear it during the saddest scenes of the terriblest tragedy. If the writer perchance be a fellow that hath flirted with your mistress, or hath epigrammed you, or hath brought your red beard or your little legs on stage, you may disgrace him worse than stabbing him in the tavern, if during the middle of the play you rise with screwed and discontented face from your stool and be gone. And sneak not away, but draw what troop you can with you. The actors will thank you for allowing them elbow-room. And to conclude hoard up what play scraps you can for the ordinary, the tavern, or your mistress. Then to the tavern.

To choose a tavern enquire out whose masters are most drunk (for that confirms their wholesome wines.) Confine not yourself to any one particular liquor, but partake of all. It is not fitting a man should trouble his head with sucking at one grape, but that he may be able to drink any stranger drunk in his own element. Keep a boy in fee who underhand shall proclaim you in every room what a gallant fellow you are, how much you spend yearly in taverns, what a great gamester, what witty discourse you maintain at table, what gentlewomen or citizen's wives you can have sup with you at any time. Thus all will admire you and think it paradise to be merely in your acquaintance

When the spirit of wine and tobacco walks in your brain, the tavern-door being shut upon your back, hire that boy to be as a lantern to your feet to light you on your way home. On all the way, especially near some gate, talk of none but lords and ladies. Haply, it will be blown abroad that you swam through such an ocean of wine, that you danced so much money away, it will be known, and you will be held in great estimation. The only danger is if you owe money and your creditors hear of these tales, for they will be thundering at your chamber door the next morning. To counter this, send out your horse boy for your apothecary. He will contrive such tales of your sickness, that they will be driven into their holes like foxes. Well that is it. A day in my life!

This last 'Elizabethan' speech is my favourite. I found it 35 years ago in a short novel by Anthony Burgess called *Nothing Like the Sun* - an intriguing theory about Shakespeare's love life. Many people, including Anthony Burgess, believe that the true event in this speech caused Shakespeare to write the play *The Merchant of Venice*.

There were crowds scurrying west, roaring, chewing bread and bits of garlic sausage, some armed with bottles against the summer heat, the plebs, the commons, the mob.

The nobles in their carriages move with some difficulty over the cobbles of the narrow streets with its toppling shops and houses; they could hear the confusion of the horses' feet, feeling their coaches jostled by the jeering crowds. The footmen shout abuse at those who come near

enough to scare the horses or finger the gleaming brass and polished harness. The coachmen lash out! There are cries of pain and growls, but the underdog remains under.

At Tyburn they draw the curtains back to let light in, and a grim holiday vision appears; a whole clutter of noble's coaches, on some of which the gaily and richly dressed have climbed to the roof or ousted the footmen from their seat. The sober citizens sit, more soberly, inside their coaches. All wait.

There is the tree. Crouched on the platform the hangman's assistant is securing plank with busy hammer. The hangman himself, masked, with brawny arms folded, struts like an actor, but an actor who needs no glory of words.

From afar comes a roar. The hurdles are approaching, dragged over dry ground, raising a coughing dust. One of the draggers, with a toothless idiot's face, greets friends from a black and panting mouth. There are jeers. Men spit on the still figures roped to the hurdles. A young woman in front begins to jump, partly to see better, partly in a transport of expectancy. A child is lifted onto his father's shoulders.

Other of the hangman's assistants bring a great metal bowl with four steaming kettles. The crowd cheers as the near boiling water is splashed into the bowl. One kettle carrier makes as though he will pour a scalding stream over the spectators nearest the tree; they retreat in a scurry, screaming their laughter to his grin.

The hurdles have reached the end of their journey. And now, Tinoco. A foreign and heathen name...he is to be first. A dark, shivering man has his shirt stripped from him as he is roughly untied from the hurdle. Stumbling, falling in fear, and all to the crowd's laughter, he is made to mount the ladder, rung by slow trembling rung. Behind him, the hanger waits on a narrow crude podium. He is a young man, muscular; his mouth opens with some ribald pleasantry to his victim as he secures the hempen noose about his neck. The lips of the victim move as in prayer, the hands seek to join in prayer, but cannot, of a sudden the noose is tightened; over the momentary inbreathed silence of the crowd the choking desperation of the hanged can clearly be heard. The second assistant pulls the ladder away sharply. The legs dangle, and the bulging eyes blink. Here is art: the hangman approaches with his knife, fire in the sunlight, and before the neck can crack, rips downward from the heart to the groin in one slash, quickly changes the knife from right to left, then plunges a mottled fist inside the body. The first assistant takes the bloody knife from his master and wipes it with care on a clean cloth, all the while his eyes on the artistry of the drawing. The right hand withdraws, dripping, holding up for all to see, a heart in its fatty wrappings; then the left hand plunges to reappear all coiled and clotted with entrails. The crowd roars; the girl in front leaps and claps; the child on his father's shoulders thumbsucks, indifferent, understanding nothing of all this - the adult world.

The ruined body is hoisted as the noose is loosened, and then is plunked on the platform. The hangman throws the heart and the guts into the steaming bowl, freeing his arms from encrustations with quick fingers, drying them, unwashed on a towel. The crowd moans its pleasure, its excitement, for are there not two more victims to come? The hangman is handed a hatchet, squat and crude compared to that artist's instrument, but sharp as it cracks through the bone for quartering - the arms, the legs, the head. The gaping torso is upheld a moment, then all the pieces of the man are shoved into a basket.

Next comes Ferrara, gross and heavy, the flesh shaking on his hairy chest, his three chins wobbling to the crowd's pleasure, his eyes rolling like those of some insentient doll. Here is comedy, a sort of Kemp. Ferrara squeals like a pig, going, "No, no, no, no!", as he is thrust up the ladder, groaning dismally from his belly's depths as the noose goes about his no-neck. This time the hangman is a fraction too slow with his knife; Ferrara is dead already as the point pierces. But there is a great fat heart, crammed like a goose's liver, dripping treason, treason, treason; the entrails are endless, an eternity of pink sausage; the crowd is a-roar with delight at the fatness of the chopped limbs.

And finally, the crowning course of this rich dinner. Dr. Roderigo Lopez, Jew, Machiavel, small and black, and chattering like an ape. Let him not be granted the least dignity in his dying: strip all off. There's a fair sized thursday for thee; mark, he is like all foreigners for the appurtenances of lust. Lopez prays aloud in a high screaming voice, then in ridiculous foreigner's English: I love deKvin. Ass mosh ass I loff Zhessoss Krist-

The crowd splits their sides with laughter but are, at the same time, most indignant; this naked foreign monkey saying the Holy Name, screaming with that smart filthy rod, of his love for the Queen. Draw! Draw! Draw! The hangman's hands reek. Then he goes for the body with his hatchet as he would mince it fine.

The crowd is sated, spent, purged, cleansed, splitting up into decent family groups, proceeding to the quiet of their houses.

About a year after this event, Shylock speaks from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, about his need for revenge, his need for a pound of Antonio's flesh.

He hath disgraced me and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses,
mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends,
heated mine enemies and what's his reason? I am a Jew.
Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?—
fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases,
healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is?
If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?
And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?

If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.

If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge.

If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge.

The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.

Lastly, the first time I ever heard Barak Obama speak I knew he had been influenced by Shakespeare. His use of antithesis and metaphor and his comfort with grand rhetoric gave him away to my ear immediately. I became addicted to listening to him on the campaign trail. Later, when I found out that he admired the tragedies of Shakespeare I began imagining him and Michele playing at Mr. and Mrs. Macbeth late at night in their bedroom... and playing their first scene together in the play rather well.

The fact is speaking, like basketball (another Obama passion) gets better with practice. His oral practice has helped him become the most influential person in the world. I believe practicing Shakespeare Out Loud can help make us all more creative, more articulate, and ultimately, more successful.