

My addiction to Shakespeare began when I was 18. I had just played Demetrius in an amateur production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Aunt Bernice, my dad's spinster sister, and English teacher of forty years, invited me to lunch. Our rendezvous was her large apartment, overlooking Lost Lagoon, filled with antiques, doilies, books, photos and tea set. As I wolfed down crustless sandwiches, cookies and tepid tea, conversation turned to Shakespeare. Bernice was delighted to learn of my interest and ignorance. She began teaching me immediately; we started with the histories. From that day onwards, whenever we met, she would add to my burgeoning knowledge. She appreciated that I wanted to learn about Shakespeare, and find out where the good parts were. Eight years later she visited me at Stratford and when she passed, not long after, left me \$70,000. This completely unexpected, yet timely inheritance, changed my life: it allowed me to buy a Toronto home, start a family, even complete my Shakespearean series. Everything I do with Shakespeare deserves a nod to my tiny, but oh so knowledgeable, Aunt Bernice.

Now, before we begin, some of you may have noticed, that I, like my hanky, am old. I turned 72, three months ago. My main problem these days is my mouth muscles, my tongue! They are starting to atrophy, like Biden's. SO if you see me twisting my face about, during the show, understand that I am just trying to encourage my mouth to keep up with my brain, which for 72, is working ... well!

Also, this hole is awaiting an implant – good for a few characters, but not so good for unwanted thithing sounds. I also have a head bump, which is great casting for Henry Hastings good friend and dear neighbour. There are tons of other stitchings and a few spare parts. Just think of me as a big old bag of character.

So, without further ado, I bring onto you, Doris, Will and Me.

(*burps,*). I burp naturally, and often repeatedly, but I also have this electrical cliché (show fart button) Listen to this (*farts*). I can do duets. Such interludes are not in the script. I just use this if the show needs a little mindless boost. Let's hope it doesn't today. And, If you are a good audience, and promise to unwrap your candies quickly, I'll let you play with it later.

Doris, Will and Me!

My mother's maiden name was Manning. Her first given, Doris. Her father's name was Ernest Calloway Manning, Chief Forester of British Columbia, and he for whom the park was named. As the eldest of four, Doris was entitled, but she was also smart and funny. She could be lethal on scotch. My friends might visit me just to banter with her. So, while we did love her, us three

kids, we also found her to be mainly a bitch, but a bitch who could cook. Dear Gawd, how that woman could cook! I think it is while cooking that she concocted most of her plans for us.

So...while I did love her, I still blame her. I blame her for daubing me the troublesome middle-child; I blame her for making me so needy for attention; I blame her for this show; I even blame her for knowing RH Thompson's mother, which meant she was never quite satisfied with me. My younger brother represented Canada in figure skating at the Worlds and was friends with Toller Cranston: he had it way worse than me. If you are hovering tonight, Do (I mean, what else have you got to do?) cheers.

*(Clink of glasses from the ether. She's here)*

So, I had a comfy, upper, middle-class, West Vancouver, upbringing. High school over and my Uncle Rodger, gets me a job in a remote fly-in logging camp on the west coast of Vancouver Island - Mahatta River. It was 1969 so that's where I saw men walk on the moon. It was the first of seven consecutive summers, logging in BC. I was mostly a rigging slinger. It was my go-fund-me-scheme, for further education. In those days the math worked.

After two years of science and arts at UBC, dad died on the path to the clubhouse at the Capilano Golf Club. I was logging in Port MacNeil. Six weeks later, Doris, aka mom, aka Do, CHANGED MY LIFE. She spirited me down to the Ashland, Oregon Shakespearean Festival, where she and I saw four excellent productions, one being the best *A Midsummer Night's Dream* of my life. The Bottom was so funny, he gave me a 2-day stomach ache, and forced me to crawl over two elderly patrons to get to the aisle, where I could stretch out and get the oxygen my convulsions demanded. Laughing in the aisles is about survival! Six weeks later I am back at UBC auditioning for the advanced 3<sup>rd</sup> year acting course, I show the profs my new Bottom, and when they asked me, "What happened to you?" I tell them, "Dad died and I don't have to go into engineering anymore."

My final two years at UBC were fabulous. I got good parts, was in an extraordinary peer group, and we were all blessed with the great teaching talents of Dr. John Brockington and Stanley Weiss.

One more year, consisting of oil fields, mononucleosis – mom nursing me back to health - logging camp and travel, and I'm back in London, England about to fly home after 4 months of backpacking through Europe. I visit Rada, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, in London, and am told, "Perhaps send us a letter in two or three years." On a last-minute whim I phone the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, and Nat Brenner, the head of the school tells me to get the early

train in the morning and be at the school by 11. I show Nat my Bottom, we chat for about an hour, and right on the spot, he said I had a place. Back home, up to a camp in the Queen Charlottes, back to Bristol. Another two fabulous years and many pints of draft Guinness later, and we are showcasing our final productions, at the Bristol Old Vic Studio Theatre, one being *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Nat, with guess who as Bottom? In the spirit of Ashland, I will admit that my death scene did occasionally encourage odd audience members out of their chairs.

Anyway, one performance Peter O'Toole shows up, as a pal of Nat's, sees the show, and, on a bar-pad scrawls a note for me to John Neville, in Canada, praising my Bottom. Naturally, I photocopy it when I get home, send it about, get a bunch of auditions and land 3 roles. Then, Robin Phillips, artistic director of the Stratford Festival, and an alumnus of The Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, bites. I show Robin my Bottom, and when he says, "Rodger sing us a ditty," I belt out the filthiest verse of the filthiest rugby song I know, and, I got another place. For the next four years, I was in all of Robin Phillips world-class Shakespearean productions; Maggie Smith was in five of them. Another great school.

Although I was blessed with many great teachers, I hope you don't think me a twit for saying Shakespeare was the best, but here he is, disguised as Hamlet, coaching a troupe of actors.

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue.

But if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines.

Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently,  
for in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) whirlwind of your passion,  
you must acquire a smoothness.

O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig pated fellow tear a passion to tatters,  
to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings,

who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumbshows and noise.

Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor.

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance,  
that you overstep not the modesty of nature.

For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing,  
whose end, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature:

to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image,

and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

Now this overdone, or come tardy off,

though it make the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve,

the censure of the which one must in your allowance

overweigh a whole theatre of others.

O, there be players that I have seen play, and heard others praise, and that highly,  
 that neither having the accent of Christians,  
 nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor no man,  
 have so strutted and bellowed  
 that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men  
 and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.  
 Look to't, I pray thee.

A mirror up to nature.

So, perhaps the best actor is not he with the biggest voice or best English accent, but he who is most natural.

I'm sure many of you have experienced the *Seven Ages of Man*, spoken by Jacques' in *As You Like It*. It is usually dispensed as desiccated dogma. At Stratford, Brian Bedford managed to invent this speech, anew, every performance.

All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players:  
 they have their exits and their entrances;  
 and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages.  
 At first the infant, mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.  
 And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel and shining morning face,  
 creeping like snail unwillingly to school.  
 And then the lover, sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad made to his mistress' eyebrow.  
 Then a soldier, full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,  
 jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
 seeking the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth.  
 And then the justice, in fair round belly with good capon lined,  
 with eyes severe and beard of formal cut,  
 full of wise saws and modern instances; and so he plays his part.  
 The sixth age shifts into the lean and slippered pantaloon,  
 with spectacles on nose and pouch on side,  
 his youthful hose well saved, a world too wide for his shrunk shank,  
 and his big manly voice, turning again toward childish treble, pipes and whistles in his sound.  
 Last scene of all, that ends this strange eventful history,  
 is second childishness and mere oblivion,  
 sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

Oh, Will could be grim and entertaining at the same time.

But what he was most, however, was accurate. Will invented words to be accurate. Here are just 15 of the over 1500 words Shakespeare either invented or brought into common use.

Aligator, assassination, bloody, critic, fitful, frugal, generous, laughable, lonely, majestic, monumental, multitudinous, obscene, pious and road.

He also coined a lot of phrases. Here are just 52 - the number of years that 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.

He also wrote 154 sonnets, some for dark ladies and some for wealthy noblemen. You judge who I think this one is for.

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,  
 I all alone beweepe my outcast state,  
 And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
 And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
 Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
 Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,  
 Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,  
 With what I most enjoy contented least;  
 Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,  
 Haply I think on thee, and then my state,  
 (Like to the lark at break of day arising  
 From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;  
 For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings  
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

*I think he is going for the money with this one to a rich noble.*

So if Shakespeare was making up all sorts of language, perhaps we, as actors, should try to do the same. Here is Hotspur, one of Shakespeare's angriest characters, trying to explain to the King why he kept his prisoners. In this speech Hotspur both invents and vents.

My liege, I did deny no prisoners.  
 But I remember, when the fight was done, when I was dry with rage and extreme toil,  
 breathless and faint, leaning upon my sword,  
 there came a certain lord, neat, and trimly dress'd, fresh as a bridegroom;  
 and his chin new reap'd show'd like a stubble-land at harvest-home.  
 He was perfumed like a milliner;  
 and 'twixt his finger and his thumb he held a pouncet-box,  
 which ever and anon he gave his nose and took't away again.  
 He smiled and talk'd, and as the soldiers bore dead bodies by,  
 he call'd them untaught knaves, unmannerly,  
 to bring a slovenly unhandsome corse betwixt the wind and his nobility.  
 With many holiday and lady terms he question'd me;  
 amongst the rest, demanded my prisoners in your majesty's behalf.  
 I then, all smarting with my wounds being cold, to be so pester'd with a popinjay,  
 out of my grief and my impatience, answer'd neglectingly I know not what,  
 he should or he should not; for he made me mad to see him shine so brisk  
 and smell so sweet and talk so like a waiting-gentlewoman  
 of guns and drums and wounds,—

God save the mark!—  
 and telling me the sovereign'st thing on earth was parmaceti for an inward bruise;  
 and that it was great pity, so it was,  
 this villanous salt-petre should be digg'd out of the bowels of the harmless earth,  
 which many a good tall fellow had destroy'd so cowardly;  
 and but for these vile guns, he would himself have been a soldier.  
 This bald unjointed chat of his, my lord, I answer'd indirectly, as I said;  
 and I beseech you, let not his report come current for an accusation  
 betwixt my love and your high majesty.

So Shakespeare's language should not be chanted or recited, but as the great Michael Langham once expressed about playing Hamlet, "the text should be fresh-minted, white hot off the mind."

What follows is more Shakespearean inventiveness. Political correctness in Elizabethan times meant staying in the right side of the monarch. Fat-shaming, was fair game. Falstaff is called a trunk of humours, a bolting-hutch of beastliness, a huge bombard of sack, a roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly. As for the huge, amorous kitchen wench in *Comedy of Errors*, pursuing the wrong Dromio, he tells his master...

Marry, sir, she's the kitchen wench and all grease;  
 and I know not what use to put her to  
 but to make a lamp of her and run from her by her own light.  
 I warrant, her rags and the tallow in them will burn a Poland winter:  
 if she lives till doomsday, she'll burn a longer than the whole world.  
 Her complexion is swart, like my shoe, but her face nothing half so clean kept.  
 Nell is her name.  
 She bears some breadth sir, no longer from head to foot than from hip to hip:  
 she is spherical, like a globe; I could find out countries in her.  
 Where Ireland? Marry sir, in her buttocks, I found it out by the bogs.  
 Where Scotland? I found it by the bareness, hard in the palm of her hand.  
 Where France?  
 In her forehead; armed and reverted, making war against her heir.  
 Where England?  
 I looked for the chalky cliffs, but I could find no whiteness in them;  
 but I guess it stood in her chin, by the salt rheum that ran between France and it.  
 Where Spain?  
 Faith, I saw it not; but I felt it hot in her breath.

Where America, the Indies?

Oh, sir, upon her nose all o'er embellished with rubies, carbuncles, sapphires.

Where stood Belgia, the Netherlands?

Oh, sir, I did not look so low.

And to conclude, this drudge, or diviner, laid claim to me, call'd me Dromio;

swore I was assured to her; told me what privy marks I had about me,

as, the mark of my shoulder, the mole in my neck, the great wart on my left arm,

that I, amazed, ran from her as a witch:

and, I think, if my breast had not been made of faith and my heart of steel,

she had transform'd me to into a husband.

As the ailing actor, Edwin Gwenn, stated, on his deathbed "Dying is easy, comedy is hard."

Shakespeare excelled at writing low humour. He gave his audiences what they wanted and needed: laughs for their bellies, ideas for their imaginations – curatives for their spirits so abused by London.

The streets stank of manure, the courtyards of urine, the stairwells of moldering wood and rat droppings, the kitchens of spoiled cabbage and mutton fat; the un-aired parlors of pale dust. The bedrooms retained a funk of soiled sheets, damp featherbeds and that pungently sweet aroma of chamber pots. The stench of sulphur rose from the chimneys, the stench of caustic lyes from the tanneries, and from the slaughterhouse might waft that sweet, sickly stench of congealed blood. The people stink of sweat and unwashed clothes; from their mouths came the stench of rotting teeth, from their bellies that of onions, and from their personas, if they were no longer very young, might come the stench of rancid cheese, sour milk and tumorous disease. The river stinks, the marketplace stinks, 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, like a rank lion, and the Queen like an old goat, summer and winter.

After Elizabeth died in the horrible plague year of 1603, James 1 of Scotland took over. James was a strange little man who hunted almost continuously, he and his huge court ravaging the farmlands of his new kingdom.



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 co-ordination 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.

In such dangerous, unhealthy days, when people ate a huge variety of meat and drank beer almost continually, life-expectancy was about 42; Shakespeare did well making it to 52, writing many of his great tragedies during his last ten years.

London. Night. Peering out the window of my garret. 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. That 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.

*Thank God for the theatre! You could always go to the theatre to enliven your spirits! Of course, only at risk to your eternal soul. The clergy hated the theatre, and were not shy about sharing their opinions!*

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!

*The theatres were sometimes closed because of the plague, but normally they were packed.*

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 audience wouldn't have known that Desdemona was to die, that Othello would strangle her in her bed. They would have been devastated. As modern actors we must take care to experience these stories as for the first time.*

Maggie was good at that; she could make any old raggedy line sound fresh and new. She was just a normal company member, one of a hundred, highly professional, funny as hell. I do, however have a few special remembrances of working with her.

My first season at Stratford I moved a lot of furniture, wore tons of costumes, wigs, beards and hats, played many characters - a few even had names. One was William in *As You Like It* - one scene, 13 lines of pure country bumpkin. *Aye sir, I have a pretty wit.* First day of rehearsal, first

reading, Maggie playing Rosalind, and 50 people at tables in a huge circle. My one scene in Act V finally arrives and despite my racing heart I get through it...a short pause...and Maggie declares, "That's a print!" It was only three words but it was very kind and encouraging.

Same year, different play, Richard 111, and I am the Arch Bishop of York in a huge mitre and even more impressive cape. After the first public, dress rehearsal, the designer sidles up to me and suggests that I might take a slightly wider arc when exiting, so as to display his creation. Next performance I say our exit line, *Come, I'll conduct you to the sanctuary*, and begin to lead Maggie and Mary Savage off to the up-right arch. My slightly adjusted path holds up the two ladies, and from behind me I hear, and I swear it was this loud, "**Oh hurry up, for fuck's sake.**" From that performance on, that Archbishop hauled that cape over his arm, and was half-way up the stairs by the time the ladies were turning. In one performance he had become a sprightly and attentive cleric, one who treasured his modest rung on the great ladder of life. Another thing about Maggie, is that she wore generous splashes of tea-rose perfume. I think she did it to intoxicate and control the men on stage with her. It sure worked with me; I loved the stuff. Forty-four years ago, at 44, she was at the height of her powers, noble of bearing, delicate of feature, graceful of gesture, a true star! That 2200 seat Festival theatre was packed every performance, burbling with anticipation.

Whenever these great actors like Maggie Smith, Bill Hutt, or Brian Bedford had large swaths of text to deliver, they would invariably negotiate their way to just off of centre stage, where they would plant themselves and deliver. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as a hulking, bejewelled fairy, I stood about 3 feet from Maggie as she would deliver *The Forgeries of Jealousy*. She never moved her feet; all the movement came from her mind and those glorious hands.

These are the forgeries of jealousy:

and never, since the middle summer's spring, met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,  
by paved fountain or by rushy brook,  
or in the beached margent of the sea, to dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,  
but with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.

Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,  
as in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea Contagious fogs;  
which falling in the land have every pelting river made so proud  
that they have overborne their continents: the ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,  
the ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard;  
the fold stands empty in the drowned field, and crows are fatted with the murrion flock;  
the nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud,  
and the quaint mazes in the wanton green for lack of tread are undistinguishable:  
the human mortals want their winter cheer; no night is now with hymn or carol blest:  
therefore the moon, the governess of floods, pale in her anger, washes all the air,

that rheumatic diseases do abound: and thorough this distemperature we see the seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose, and on old Hiems' thin and icy crown an odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds is, as in mockery, set: the spring, the summer, the childing autumn, angry winter, change their wonted liveries, and the mazed world, by their increase, now knows not which is which: and this same progeny of evils comes from our debate, from our dissension; we are their parents and original.

We are the parents and originals of climate change. I've often thought that the world might profit from one new religion, based on the *Works of Will*.

And now a speech for *sitting* still.

During the last Stratford production, I saw of *Romeo and Juliet*, the director had Juliet start the vial speech centre stage on the bed. Juliet then, while doing the speech, raced down left, then up right, then up left, then down right then a few more circles, then landed back on the bed, where she finished the speech, drank the potion and fell asleep. I, who knew the speech, barely understood a word. I don't think Juliet is incapable of movement. I think her imagination pins her to her bed.

Farewell. God knows when we shall meet again.

I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins that almost freezes up the heat of life.

I'll call them back again to comfort me. Nurse!

What should she do here? My dismal scene I needs must act alone.

Come, vial.

What if this mixture do not work at all? Shall I be married then tomorrow morning?

No, no! This shall forbid it. Lie thou there. (*Laying down her dagger.*)

What if it be a poison, which the Friar subtly hath ministered to have me dead, lest in this marriage he should be dishonored, because he married me before to Romeo?

I fear it is!

And yet methinks it should not, for he hath still been tried a holy man.

How if, when I am laid into the tomb, I wake before the time that Romeo come to redeem me?

There's a fearful point!

Shall I not then be stifled in the vault, to whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in, and there die strangled ere my Romeo comes?

Or, if I live, is it not very like, the horrible conceit of death and night, together with the terror of the place, as in a vault, an ancient receptacle, where, for these many hundred years, the bones of all my buried ancestors are packed; where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth, lies festering in his shroud, where, as they say, at some hours in the night spirits resort; Alack, Alack!

Is it not like that I, so early waking,

what with loathsome smells

and shrieks like mandrakes, torn out of the earth, that living mortals, hearing them, run mad:

O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,  
 environed with all these hideous fears,  
 and madly play with my forefathers' joints,  
 and pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud,  
 and, in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone,  
 as with a club, dash out my desperate brains?

O, look! Methinks I see my cousin's ghost  
 seeking out Romeo, that did spit his body  
 upon a rapier's point.

Stay, Tybalt, stay!

Romeo, I come. This do I drink to thee.

I couldn't do this speech running around; I'd trip over the words and face-plant on the boards.

Table-talk with Robyn went on for weeks and never really stopped. Even when we were on our feet, he would love to take us back to the table. Acting wasn't just blocking and business, it was listening and understanding. When that extraordinary company of actors did it together, we moved the masses.

In my third year Peter Ustinov, the greatest raconteur in the world, came to play King Lear. Robin gave me Edgar so I was around Peter the whole summer. The man was hysterical and gave me several stomach aches. For the remount, the next summer, the cast was upgraded, including me. I don't remember the guy who took over Edgar, but he only lasted a week and I was back in rehearsal, a whole \$50/week richer. Robin was always hard on me, but I could take it; I mean he wasn't exactly some huge, drunk logger, looking for trouble in the bunkhouse.

Besides, I got Ustinov a lot of laughs with my Mad Tom antics; and his sniffing biz. He might have missed that. I laughed at all his jokes; perhaps my listening skills got me back my job. I am sure the 40 other young men in the company had their opinions about who should be playing Edgar – especially since the show was supposed to transfer to London England – but everyone just let me do my work, most of it with Bill Hutt, Douglas Rain and Peter Ustinov. That school made me a teacher.

Of course, I introduced Doris to Peter when she visited; he handled her brilliantly, sweeping from his dressing room chair, gathering her hand in his, using his trademark wit and exquisite manners to almost buckle her at the knees. I considered him repaying me for all the laughs we got together. I pitied her friends for the next few years, especially RH's mother.

A couple of years later, at the Shaw Festival, we ended the first act of *Cyrano De Bergerac*, by all running up through the theatre to watch Cyrano fight a "hundred men." Halfway up the aisle, sword raised over my head, I hear, over our shouting, Doris bellow, "RODGER!!!!" I didn't stop to acknowledge her; I would have been trampled or skewered by my fellow artists. I was, however astonished! Was I supposed to introduce her to the audience??? After the

show, I introduced her to the brilliant Heath Lamberts, and let her thrust her nose about backstage, even finger a few props. This pleased her well. Despite her infuriating behaviour, I always sought to please Doris.

The next two pieces should please her, both from *Henry V*. Doris won some kind of provincial award in English, in high school, and then was a nurse during the war. So, as much as she loved literature and drama, she hated Germans. The French are the bad guys in this one, outnumbering the English 60,000 to 12,000 - just the kind of scrap Doris might have relished.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Chorus, the night before, the Battle of Agincourt.

Now entertain conjecture of a time when creeping murmur and the poring dark  
fills the wide vessel of the universe.

From camp to camp, through the foul womb of night,  
the hum of either army stilly sounds,  
that the fixed sentinels almost receive the secret whispers of each other's watch.

Fire answers fire,

and through their paly flames each battle sees the other's umbered face.

Steed threatens steed, in high and boastful neighs piercing the night's dull ear;  
and from the tents the armorers, accomplishing the knights,  
with busy hammers closing rivets up, give dreadful note of preparation.

The country cocks do crow, the clocks do toll,  
and the third hour of drowsy morning name.

Proud of their numbers and secure in soul,  
the confident and over-lusty French do the low-rated English play at dice;  
and chide the cripple tardy-gaited night

who like a foul and ugly witch doth limp so tediously away.

The poor condemned English, like sacrifices, by their watchful fires sit patiently  
and inly ruminates the morning's danger.

O now, who will behold the royal captain of this ruined band  
walking from watch to watch, from tent to tent,

let him cry, 'Praise and glory on his head!'

For forth he goes and visits all his host, bids them good morrow with a modest smile  
and calls them brothers, friends and countrymen.

Upon his royal face there is no note how dread an army hath enrounded him;  
nor doth he dedicate one jot of color unto the weary and all-watched night,  
but freshly looks and over-bears attaint with cheerful semblance and sweet majesty;  
that every wretch, pining and pale before, beholding him,

plucks comfort from his looks.

A largess universal like the sun his liberal eye doth give to every one,  
thawing cold fear,  
that mean and gentle all behold, as may unworthiness define,  
a little touch of Harry in the night.

Next morning, before the battle of Agincourt, Henry hears someone wish they had more men from England.

What's he that wishes so? My cousin Westmoreland?

No, my fair cousin. If we are marked to die, we are enough to do our country loss;  
and if to live, the fewer men, the greater share of honour.

God's will! I pray thee wish not one man more.

By Jove, I am not covetous for gold, nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;  
it yearns me not if men my garments wear;  
such outward things dwell not in my desires:

but if it be a sin to covet honour, I am the most offending soul alive.

No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England.

Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host,  
that he which hath no stomach to this fight, let him depart;  
his passport shall be made and crowns for convoy put into his purse.

We would not die in that man's company that fears his fellowship to die with us.

This day is called the feast of Crispian.

He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,  
will stand a tip-toe when the day is named, and rouse him at the name of Crispian.

He that shall live this day, and see old age, will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors,  
and say, 'To-morrow is Saint Crispian.'

Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,  
and say, 'These wounds I had on Crispin's day.'

Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,  
but he'll remember with advantages what feats he did that day.

Then shall our names familiar in his mouth as household words—  
Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter, Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester—  
be in their flowing cups freshly remembered.

This story shall the good man teach his son; and Crispin's Crispian shall ne'er go by,  
from this day to the ending of the world,

but we in it shall be remembered—we few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
for he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother;

be he ne'er so vile, this day shall gentle his condition;  
 and gentlemen in England now a-bed shall think themselves accursed they were not here,  
 and hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks that fought with us  
 upon Saint Crispin's day.

As a very grateful Canadian owner of one pacemaker and three stents, I sometimes worry that  
 speech may someday kill me; but being a glass half-full kind of guy, I like to think it keeps me  
 heart-healthy.

Now, I daren't do a show on Shakespeare without at least one love scene. Here are Romeo and  
 Juliet at the window after their one night together.

Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day.  
 It was the nightingale, and not the lark, that pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear.  
 Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate-tree. Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

It was the lark, the herald of the morn, no nightingale.  
 Look, love, what envious streaks do lace the severing clouds in yonder east.  
 Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.  
 I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

Yon light is not day-light, I know it, I.  
 It is some meteor that the sun exhales,  
 to be to thee this night a torch-bearer, and light thee on thy way to Mantua.  
 Therefore stay yet; thou need'st not to be gone.

Let me be taken, let me be put to death. I am content, so thou wilt have it so.  
 I'll say yon grey is not the morning's eye,  
 nor that is not the lark, whose notes do beat the vaulty heaven so high above our heads.  
 I have more care to stay than will to go. Come, death, and welcome! Juliet wills it so.  
 How is it, my soul? Let's talk; it is not day.

It is, it is! Be gone, away! It is the lark that sings so out of tune.  
 Some say the lark makes sweet division; this doth not so, for she divideth us.  
 O, now be gone! More light and light it grows.

More light and light—more dark and dark our woes.

So sad.  
 I need to freshen up.  
 I will see you all after the intermission.



## Act 2

A Gull's Hornbook, or what we might re-name A Fool's Instructional Manual, was a long satirical pamphlet by Thomas Dekker, a contemporary playwright of Shakespeare's. Copies of popular pamphlets would be printed, purchased, passed hand to hand and perhaps performed aloud by a poseur in a parlour. They were public entertainment, one of the first profit-makers for the new printing presses. My version of this long, dense pamphlet is vacuumed of archaic language to about 25% of the original.

We now have a choice of hankies – this twenty-year survivor of schools all over Ontario, and this brand new one made by my Mennonite pal, Jeanette. I am also wearing her best shirt for my second act. The first one was her practice shirt. Mennonites make practice shirts! She made a few teeny alterations for this perfect one in white.

Are you ready for this Doris? (*A double is heard being poured*)

That sounds like a double; she has seen this silliness before.

A Gull's Hornbook:

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 sleeping 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 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 character could have been Shakespeare's in that his view of himself is the complete opposite of how the world views him. Shakespeare's three greatest comic characters, Bottom, Malvolio and Dogberry, all share this public ignominy.

Next comes Henry Hastings, my good neighbour and my dear friend! (*drink*) He was no fool, no gull. He knew exactly who he was!

His house was perfectly of the old fashion. It even had a large banquet hall built in a tree. It was in a large park well stocked with deer, rabbits near the kitchens, and fishponds. He had hounds that hunted deer, fox, hare, badger, otter; long and short-winged hawks; and many nets for fishing. When visiting one found beef pudding and small beer in plenty. The great hall was strewn with marrow bones, full of hawks' perches, hounds, spaniels and terriers. Often two of the great chairs near the old stone fireplace had litters of cats in them, which were not to be disturbed - he always having three or four of them attending him at dinner, and a little white stick of fourteen inches near his plate, that he might defend such meat as he didn't want to

lose. He had oysters supplied to him through all seasons which he never failed to eat before dinner and supper. He drank a glass or two of wine at meals and always had a pint of small beer near him which he often stirred with a great sprig of rosemary. On one side of the room was a door to a closet where the wine and strong beer came from, but only in single glasses, that being a rule of the house, exactly observed, for he never exceeded in drink or permitted it. On the other side was a door to an old chapel, not used for devotion, the pulpit being the safest place to hide venison pasty or great apple pie from the dogs. He was well natured, but soon angry, calling his servants knaves and bastards, which he often personally knew to be the truth. He lived to a hundred, never lost his eyesight, and got on his horse without help. Until eighty he rode to the death of a stag as well as any. Henry Hastings.

(another good drink and loud burp!)

The antithesis of that bucollic life being London, morning, the plague raging; downside a church near Eastcheap, a large hungry grave stands gaping and, as at a breakfast, hath already swallowed down ten or fifteen lifeless carcasses. Before lunch in another gulp are twice so many devoured. And before the sun takes his rest those numbers are doubled. Sixty, that not many hours before had each his own lodging very delicately furnished, are now thrust all together into one close room, a little, little noisome room not fully 80-foot square. **You who are so in love with yourself, think of this.** That selfsame body of yours which is so pampered, so perfumed, so gaily appareled, will one day be thrown like a stinking carrion into a rank and rotten grave where those goodly eyes that did shoot forth such amorous glances must be eaten out of your head. You will be fumbled into a muck-pit with thirty dead men lying slovenly upon you, and you the undermost of all-yea and perhaps half that number were your enemies, and see how they may be revenged, for the worms that breed out of their putrefying carcasses shall crawl in huge swarms from them and quite devour you.

One can imagine the ground heaving with the decaying dead. In London houses with plague victims in them were marked by a cross and boarded up so none of the inhabitants

could leave. Without the charity of neighbours or friends, people often died of thirst or starvation.

*Just like today however, there were some enterprising individuals who could turn a profit from other's misery. This vicious little thief, well known throughout London, was called Cutting Ball.*

You see the thing is, you get a doctor's coat and you act like a well-spoken smoothie, good social standing and you say you got a cure. I mean some of them rich foreigners, they don't know the form. And people want to do all they can, don't they? They'll try anything. Any cure. I mean, it'd be worth a go, wouldn't it? I mean, if it was you, you'd be willing to try, wouldn't you?

Well, I made a mistake! I thought the geezer was dead. Looked dead. No chest movement. That gone away look over his mug. And they didn't care-his nearest and dearest-huddled down in the kitchen: 'Don't touch us after you've touched him! Say your words, get the medicine down him and get out! You'll get paid if he makes it; if he don't you can come and take him for catsmeat!' I ask you: families! I mean they're fatal! Have you bound and buried before breakfast! Anyway, I was sure he'd snuffed it...and there it was, this gold chain, round his scrawny collar supporter. They hadn't noticed it, that's for sure. Probably forgotten it was there. I mean it was very thin, like a snail's trace, and sort of imbedded in the brown parchment of his skin. I mean if they had-noticed it-it wouldn't have been there, if you follow. No, ripped off and away! I mean, everything else was gone, rings and whatnot: 'You won't need these, will you dad? They'll only weigh you down and turn the sheets green!' Families! Jesus! Anyway, not to mince matters, I lifted it. Very gentle, mind you, very respectful of the dear departed...I saw it as a kind of gratuity, you see-you know: a tip from the torpid. Anyway, I was sure he wouldn't mind-the cadaver-except that he wasn't cadaverous...For, friends, as I dangled the thin glitter between my fingers, admiring

its fragility, I became aware that I was not the only one! Slowly I turned my peepers and there was another pair turned to mine-his! They dropped to the chain-and then back to mine-and his cakehole opened, all toothless, and vented forth a roar of anguish, the foul wind of which lifted my forelock. I mean: naked we come into this orb-and naked we should depart. At least that was the principle I was working on. Not him, though! Nor his poxy kin! Obviously, they recognized the cry of the dispossessed and, greed- mad, scorning fear of plague, came belting up the stairs as I disappeared through the window. 'Stop him! Stop thief!' Hue and cry. Me: gallop, gallop! Them-and others-in close pursuit, till, a veritable crowd trapped me up close. 'You can't touch me!' I said, 'I'm a medical man!' 'In that case,' they replied, 'you'll have a cure for this-' and kicked the living shit out of me.

*Cutting Ball, was eventually publicly hanged for stealing. Apparently, before that event, he made an even longer speech.*

*I'd now like to do a proper speech, from a proper character, in a proper play! A proper purple passage on the antithesis of, well, you know, suicide.*

To be, or not to be—that is the question:

whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them.

To die, to sleep—no more—

and by a sleep to say we end the heart ache  
and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to.

'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.

To die, to sleep—to sleep—perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,  
for in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal  
coil, must give us pause.

There's the respect that makes calamity of so long life.

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, the pangs of despised love,  
the law's delay, the insolence of office,  
and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes,

when he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin?  
 Who would fardels bear, to grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
 but that the dread of something after death,  
 the undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveller returns,  
 puzzles the will and makes us rather bear those ills we have  
 than fly to others that we know not of?  
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,  
 and thus the native hue of resolution is sicklied over with the pale cast of thought,  
 and enterprises of great pith and moment with this regard their currents turn awry,  
 and lose the name of action.

Okay, back to life; let's do sex! Will was addicted to the antithesis of sex – the desire and the revulsion; the pleasure and the pain. This addiction is surely verified by Will's large, lewd lexicon.

For female sexual parts we have baldrick, bird's nest, clack-dish, withered pear and nest of spicery. For men we have bauble, bugle, dart of love, lance, pike, root and stump. As for the deed of sex we have breach, broach, burden, ride, sluice and thrust to the wall. They even call it rogering! Will was too busy to get much actual sex, but I am pretty sure he thought about it a lot.

So, while searching for positive aspects of short, brutal Elizabethan lives, I stumble upon bear baiting. What are we to think? They were well attended; the queen enjoyed them; they were even staged on the frozen Thames River, one particularly frigid winter.

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. The chains. Dogs on three sides. Fur in the mouth. Deeper. 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 were making a gesture-it wasn't: only weariness, or pain, 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.

In London they blinded a bear called Harry Hunks. The sport was to bait with whips. Slash, slash. It couldn't see but it could hear. It grabbed the whips. Caught some of them. Broke them. Slashed back at the men. Slash, slash. Then they sent an ape round on a horse. It looked like a thin hairy man or a child. You could see the pale skin under its arm when it jumped. Its teeth. The dogs tore it to pieces. The crowd howled. London.

The Paris Bear Gardens were very close to the Globe Theatre on the south bank of the Thames River. One might imagine Romeo and Juliet wooing through the distant screams of dying animals.

There's some antithesis, for you!

Sometimes Shakespeare's use of antithesis appears contrapuntal - a piece of music with two or more interwoven, or competing, melodic lines. One great example seems to be Shakespeare's longest soliloquy Duke of Gloucester, (the future Richard III) speaking from Henry VI, part three. Gloucester wants to be king, but can't figure out how to get the crown. He plays tennis with this conundrum for 4 minutes and 40 seconds.

Aside from my great friend, Keith Knight and my son, Tyler, both who have passed, I have never heard another human being do this entire speech. After today, you likely never will again, either! Everybody had a pee? Here we go.

Ay, Edward will use women honourably. Would he  
 were wasted, marrow, bones and all,  
 that from his loins no hopeful branch may spring, to cross  
 me from the golden time I look for!

And yet, between my soul's desire and me-- the lustful Edward's title buried— is  
 Clarence, Henry, and his son young Edward,  
 and all the unlook'd for issue of their bodies, to take their rooms, ere I  
 can place myself: A cold premeditation for my purpose!



Why, then, I do but dream on sovereignty; like one that stands upon a promontory, and spies a far-off shore where he would tread, wishing his foot were equal with his eye, and chides the sea that sunders him from thence saying, he'll lade it dry to have his way: so do I wish the crown, being so far off;

and so I chide the means that keeps me from it; and so I say, I'll cut the causes off, flattering me with impossibilities.

My eye's too quick, my heart o'erweens too much, unless my hand and strength could equal them.

Well, say there is no kingdom then for Richard; what other pleasure can the world afford?

I'll make my heaven in a lady's lap, and deck my body in gay ornaments, and witch sweet ladies with my words and looks.

O miserable thought,

and more unlikely than to accomplish twenty golden crowns!

Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb:

and, for I should not deal in her soft laws, she did corrupt frail nature with some bribe, to shrink mine arm up like a wither'd shrub;

to make an envious mountain on my back, where sits deformity to mock my body;

to shape my legs of an unequal size; to disproportion me in every part,

like to a chaos, or an unlick'd bear-whelp that carries no impression like the dam.

And am I then a man to be beloved? O monstrous fault, to harbour such a thought!

Then, since this earth affords no joy to me, but to command, to cheque,

to o'erbear such as are of better person than myself,

I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,

and, whiles I live, to account this world but hell, until my mis-shaped trunk

that bears this head be round impaled with a glorious crown.

And yet I know not how to get the crown, for many lives stand between me and home:

and I,--like one lost in a thorny wood,

that rends the thorns and is rent with the thorns,

seeking a way and straying from the way;

not knowing how to find the open air, but toiling desperately to find it out,--

torment myself to catch the English crown:

and from that torment I will free myself, or hew my way out with a bloody axe.

Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,

and cry 'Content' to that which grieves my heart,

and wet my cheeks with artificial tears, and frame my face to all occasions.

I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;

I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk; I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,  
 deceive more slyly than Ulysses could, and, like a Sinon, take another Troy.  
 I can add colours to the chameleon,  
 change shapes with Proteus for advantages,  
 and set the murderous Machiavel to school.  
 Can I do this, and cannot get a crown? Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down.

I have “I survived Shakespeare’s longest monologue” stickers to be handed out after the show.

Before I finish I suppose I should show you my Bottom. He’s been using his ass attribute to make love to the fairy queen and now has been left alone, asleep.

When my cue comes, call me, and I will answer. My next is, 'Most fair Pyramus.' Heigh-ho Peter Quince? Flute, the bellows-mender? Snout, the tinker? Starveling? God's my life! Stolen hence, and left me asleep. I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was—and methought I had— but man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called Bottom's Dream, because it hath no bottom. And I will sing it in the latter end of our play, before the Duke. Peradventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her death.

So that was my Bottom speech. You are not getting the rugby verse; it is too rude!

Finally, Maggie Smith once said Bill Hutt, who acted for 39 seasons at Stratford, had the best stage voice in the world. In *Titus Andronicus*, his roar of revenge, before he slit my throat and baked my head in a pie, was truly thrilling, every performance. Happenstance put me at Bill’s final stage performance, Prospero, in *The Tempest*. If I could, upon your imaginary forces work, I would have you hear Bill’s voice do these lines for the last time, lines that many consider Shakespeare’s goodbye to the stage.

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves,  
 and ye that on the sands with printless foot do chase the ebbing Neptune  
 and do fly him when he comes back;  
 you demi-puppets that by moonshine do the green sour ringlets make,

whereof the ewe not bites,  
and you whose pastime is to make midnight mushrooms,  
that rejoice to hear the solemn curfew;  
by whose aid (weak masters though ye be) I have bedimmed the noontide sun,  
called forth the mutinous winds,  
and betwixt the green sea and the azured vault set roaring war;  
to the dread rattling thunder have I given fire  
and rifted Jove's stout oak with his own bolt;  
the strong-based promontory have I made shake  
and by the spurs plucked up the pine and cedar;  
graves at my command have waked their sleepers,  
oped, and let them forth by my so potent art.  
But this rough magic I here abjure;  
and when I have some heavenly music  
to work mine end upon their senses that this airy charm is for,  
I'll break my staff, bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
and deeper than did ever plummet sound I'll drown my book.