

Mapping the Heart of Shakespeare

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I'm lucky to say I've spent the last few years travelling the world, talking about Shakespeare, meeting folk interested in Shakespeare - and some not - acting the Bard's works, and writing about him.

Shakespeare truly is universal. I mean that partly in so far as his works are never about what it is to be from Stratford upon Avon, or to be British - he writes about what it is to be *human*; and so wherever I go, I hear, *Shakespeare is ours*.

The Germans say, *Shakespeare IS German*. The Kathkali actors in Kerala say, *Shakespeare is of India*. And over the last two month long trips to Japan, over 2017-18, I have realised, Shakespeare is Japanese.

The practice of *ma* (間), of peacefulness, of mindfulness, of dedication to one task at a time - of standing by the vending machine to drink your drink, rather than the Western walking and phoning and eating and drinking, and then (at least in Japan) spending a little while looking for *another* vending machine to deposit your empty bottle or can...

I adore the attention to detail in Japan, in the day to day way of life. The dedication and love of craft that permeates every level of society. I learnt the word *shokunin* (職人), in my newly beloved second home of Kochi, on this last trip, and I believe I understand the word deeply and profoundly.

My 2017 TEDx Bergen talk was called, *Shakespeare's Craft: Original Practices*. Shakespeare was a *playwright*, and the only other familiar use of the second half of that word is *shipwright*.

Consider the craft that goes into building a ship, that most important Elizabethan method of transportation, of carrying merchandise, of travel, of war. The science involved. The maths, physics, and team-manship. The bear brute strength and resourcefulness. The problem solving.

Shakespeare and his actors dismantled their theatre when their landlord wouldn't renew their ground lease; but some wily actor pointed out that while they didn't own the ground, *they owned the wooden structure on it*. So they physically moved their performing space to the south side of the River Thames, and rebuilt it as the Globe. Actors did this.

I'm an actor. I can't put up shelves. But I am a craftsman. I've dedicated my life to honing and refining crafts that move forward the acting, the performing, the producing, and the pedagogy and the teaching of Shakespeare's works.

When Will Shakespeare turned his hand away from acting to wrighting, it so befell he was really very good at it.

Not just very good, he was so fine at manipulating the favoured poetic form of the time that he was able to coax it, teasing it to reflect and refract the earthy pace of modern language - while with the very same sharpened feather ink-dipped quill, he reached up to soaring heights, painting end-of-the-day sky-scapes of the heart, the soul, and the human condition.

This is familiar territory. Less known, are that he folded into these thoughts, soliloquies, and conversations the most beautiful directions to his actors; detailed manuals to his friends and colleagues who made his (sometimes lunatic, often never-before-seen-on-stage, always proactive) ideas come to life.

They are as brilliantly complex, infuriatingly open, devastatingly simple stage directions as Miller, Beckett, and Pinter's can be - the problem is, you can't see them on the page, you have to lift up the hood. Or rather, the bonnet.

They are the motor underneath the words, the engine that runs it all, the mechanics of Shakespeare. By the time they had performed *Hamlet* his actors had been learning, playing and tinkering with this engine for over ten years.

He wrote so that they would have understood within the blink of an eye the kinds of things you and I need to analyse, break down, and tear apart.

They would have understood, it was their job. Not only that, they were working on parts tailor-made for them. Ever worn a bespoke suit? A dress made to your exact body measurements? Imagine

being the actor that gets handed the part of Lady Macbeth for the first time. Not only that, *having had it written, especially for you.*

There are great tools to break open Shakespeare's craft-works, to help us get to a similar place of familiarity, and the emotional map is one. I learnt it from the extremely talented actor Emma Pallant, and she learnt it from the amazing educational artery that is Globe Education at Shakespeare's Globe, London, and I take every opportunity I can to further disseminate their sharing of this beautiful tool.

I use this every time I work on a Shakespeare part as an actor, I teach it in as many workshops as will listen, and I spend idle hours on public transport applying this tool to Shakespeare speeches at random, partly because I'm a geek, but mostly because it's the best tool I know. It makes any part of Shakespeare accessible, and easy to analyse, and anyone can do it if they can count to ten.

Shakespeare, when he was writing in poetry, wrote in lines of ten syllables.

As you follow his twenty-year career, the number of syllables in his poetry alarmingly, increasingly wobbles. There are frequently lines of 4, 5, or 6 syllables, as well as lines of 11, 12, or 13 syllables.

The former allowing a pause, a second of thought; the latter indicating the thought being conveyed is flexing against the structure of the poetry, the ideas struggling to be contained by the form.

So a line of less than ten syllables provides a moment for reflection, for consideration, to allow the hurt to hurt, the audience to laugh. The beat stops. The heartbreak.

A line of more than ten syllables yields a flash of pain, a moment of ache, a sudden sweat amid feverish excitement, underneath the words being uttered. The pulse quickens. The heartbeat.

Take a speech, any one at random. I like to use the Folio version of the text, it's the edition edited by two of his actors in the years after he died, and tends to be easier for actors to understand; plus, the Folio version is freely available online.

Enter Hamlet.

Ham.

To be, or not to be, that is the Question:
Whether 'tis Nobler in the minde to suffer
The Slings and Arrowes of outragious Fortune,
Or to take Armes against a Sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them: to dye, to sleepe
No more; and by a sleepe, to say we end
The Heart-ake, and the thousand Naturall shockes
That Flesh is heyre too? 'Tis a consummation
Deuoutly to be wish'd. To dye to sleepe,
To sleepe, perchance to Dreame; I, there's the rub,
For in that sleepe of death, what dreames may come,
When we haue shuffle'd off this mortall coile,
Must giue vs pawse. There's the respect
That makes Calamity of so long life:
For who would beare the Whips and Scornes of time,
The Oppressors wrong, the poore mans Contumely,
The pangs of dispriz'd Loue, the Lawes delay,
The insolence of Office, and the Spurnes
That patient merit of the vnworthy takes,
When he himselfe might his Quietus make
With a bare Bodkin? Who would these Fardles beare
To grunt and sweat vnder a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The vndiscovered Countrey, from whose Borne
No Traueller returnes, Puzels the will,
And makes vs rather beare those illes we haue,
Then flye to others that we know not of.
Thus Conscience does make Cowards of vs all,
And thus the Natiue hew of Resolution
Is sicklied o're, with the pale cast of Thought,
And enterprizes of great pith and moment,
With this regard their Currants turne away,
And loose the name of Action. Soft you now,
The faire Ophelia? Nymph, in thy Orizons
Be all my sinnes remembred.

I've underlined the last three words of every thought. There are six thoughts before Hamlet turns his attention to Ophelia. Five of them end half way through the line of poetry (thoughts called mid-line endings, a sign that the character is changing tack, interrupting themselves to begin again in a different direction). Two of Hamlet's thoughts are questions, there are no exclamations, and no emotional words like *O, Alack, Wee, or Alas.*

It takes him thirty-three or so lines to say six things, keeps changing tack, doesn't exclaim (get excited), nor does he become obviously emotional: it has the structure of someone exploring a big idea for the first time.

But we want to know what he *feels* about it, and without an emotional word (compare his previous speech, *O what a rogue and peasant slave am I* which is filled with emotional words) it's hard to tell what piques him - so we have to lift up the hood, and here's one way of doing that.

Using the ruler in your word processor, justify the speech more to the centre of the page, and write the numbers 8 9 10 11 12 to the left of the speech, next to the character name, like this:

8	9	10	11	12	Enter Hamlet.
					Ham.
					To be, or not to be, that is the Question:
					Whether 'tis Nobler in the minde to suffer
					The Slings and Arrowes of outragious Fortune,
					Or to take Armes against a Sea of troubles,
					And by opposing end them: to dye, to sleepe
					No more; and by a sleepe, to say we end
					The Heart-ake, and the thousand Naturall shockes
					That Flesh <u>is heyre too?</u> 'Tis a consummation
					Deuoutly <u>to be wish'd.</u> To dye to sleepe,

Now, my favourite Sudoku-like game: count the syllables of each line on your fingers.

The first line has 11 syllables, so I'm going to put an X under 11, next to that line.

The second line has 11, so I'll put an X under 11.

The third has 11, so X under 11.

8	9	10	11	12	Enter Hamlet.
					Ham.
			X		To be, or not to be, that is the Question:
			X		Whether 'tis Nobler in the minde to suffer
			X		The Slings and Arrowes of outragious Fortune,

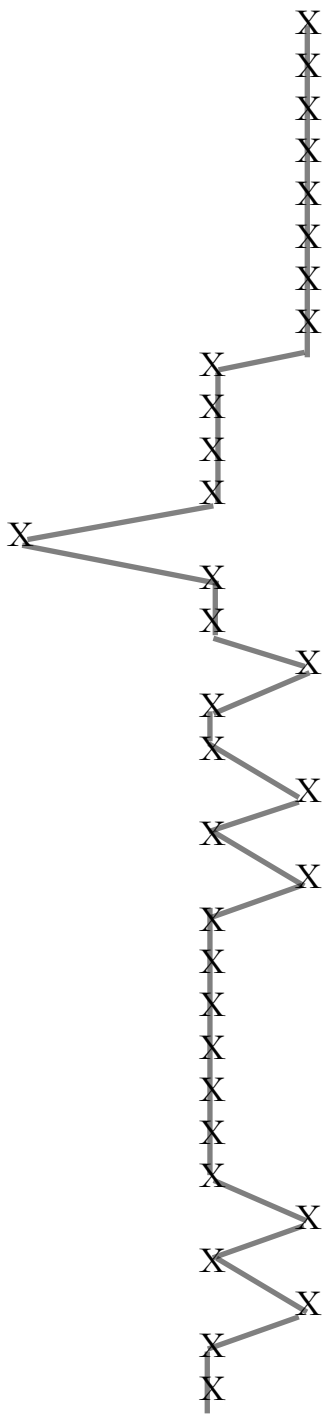
And so on, until you get something that looks like this:

8 9 10 11 12

Enter Hamlet.

Ham.

To be, or not to be, that is the Question:
 Whether 'tis Nobler in the minde to suffer
 The Slings and Arrowes of outragious Fortune,
 Or to take Armes against a Sea of troubles,
 And by opposing end them: to dye, to sleepe
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 Then flye to others that we know not of
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 And thus the Natiue hew of Resolution
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 And loose the name of Action. Soft you now,
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Remember: the line next to the speech should be straight - he's supposed to be writing in regular iambic pentameter. It does settle down towards the end, but evidently the ideas he's conveying in the speech keep trying to burst out of the poetic form. Well, what happens after we die *is* a big idea, so that makes sense. But how does Hamlet *feel* about it?

Turn the page through 45 degrees, and - these metrical irregularities become the character's heartbeat.

Just like a heart rate monitor in a hospital, spiking in moments of distress, lulling in moments of reflection.

This is the character's pulse, flickering, rising and falling, an indicator of their feelings towards their subject matter.

Was Shakespeare that good? Yes, it seems that he was.

Doesn't this make Shakespeare constrictive?

No, this is the framework, the scaffold tower to support your building of the speech. Then once you're in front of an audience you must trust your own instincts rather than have them watch you remember numbers on a scale.

This is the beginning, a suggestion, a nudge in the right direction from your kindly, helpful playwright.

How does he feel about the items in the list he makes: *the oppressor's wrong, the poor man's contumely; the pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay, the insolence of office and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes?*

Most folk would answer he might feel the most about *The pangs of dispriz'd love*, because of Ophelia. But it's a line of ten. His pulse flickers on *The oppressors wrong...* and *The spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes*, both lines of eleven; perhaps this a speech about killing Claudius than it is about suicide.

He sets up the discussion of what happens after we die, then says such a thought *must give us pause*. So Shakespeare breaks the metre, giving a line of eight syllables, allowing a pause after the word *pause*.

With no rehearsal time or space available to him, he wrote directions into his actors' speeches so he wouldn't need to see them rehearse through the whole thing twenty times over; they'd intuit so much that the first run-through would be pretty close to perfect.

The complicated bits, the dances, the fights and big group scenes might need a neatening and polish, but aside from that - would Shakespeare's actors have had to do an exercise like this? They were working on this type of poetry every day; they would've sensed the wrinkles in the verse as they would the time of the day from the sun in the sky.

When I'm not touring schools or emotional-mapping speeches I love, I have been researching and building new tools. The one: we relaunched our website, shakespeareswords.com in April 2018.

This third iteration rebuilt the base search engine that our 2002 book was built on, and over six months we made it 6-10 times faster, and made the search engine bullet proof like Google's (so no user is ever faced with a No Results page, but instead a friendly, Did you mean...?). We added Folio and Quarto texts, made our famed relationship Circles interactive, added the ability to look at a Character's Part in isolation, as well as a slew of other new features that will provide a couple of MA theses on ground breaking computational linguistics, thanks to my 75 year old genius Papa's ability to keep up with new-fangled ways.

In fact, there's a one-month free trial for your exploration associated with this piece. Simply send a message with your name and e-mail address to bard@shakespeareswords.com mentioning this article. This offer expires at the end of October.

The second is in original practices - exploring the ways Shakespeare's company rehearsed, performed, and generally produced his plays, each new work dropping every six months or so for twenty years, and adapting these methods for a modern Shakespeare ensemble, and their global audiences.

The handed-down-from-generation-to-generation-craft of Kabuki is for another time.

Elizabethan English law insisted on all-male casts; we raise our Ensembles unisex. We use Elizabethan-style cue-scripts (so our full play is in the hands of no one single actor), no set, minimal props, and hardly any costumes. We raise our shows in three days; they raised theirs even quicker than that.

We are reliant on a beautiful space (generally not an actual theatre), the words, and an audience's hungry, thirsty imagination.

We have been fortunate to break new ground in the well-trodden path of Shakespeare research. Only 15 of the 30 plays have been explored in original pronunciation, the reconstruction of the accent they spoke in.

How do we know what they sounded like? Three sources of data take us nearly all the way there. The rhymes tells us. Two thirds of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets don't rhyme in RP, the standard, expected accent of Shakespeare for the last 100 years. *Sonnet 116* ends

*If this be error and upon me
proved I never writ, nor no man
ever loved.*

Was it *prooved* and *looved* or *luvd* and *pruvd*? Analysing the rest of the sonnets, Shakespeare's rhyming plays like *Dreame* and *Richard II*, as well as his long poems, are the main source of data (so this reconstruction is the sound of Shakespeare's theatre, rather than Elizabethan London).

The second, is the spellings, thanks to the onomatopoeic Elizabethans, spelling a lot more closely to how they used to speak. So a word like *film* in Mercutio's Queen Mab speech, in the First Folio (1623) edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, is spelt *Philome*. Describing the lash of the whip Queen Mab wields, it is less the fantastical female, and more a two or three syllable pronunciation of *film*.

Indeed, *fil-um*, is a common enough pronunciation in Ireland still to this day, a hangover from Elizabethan times.

The third source I tend to say is less reliable, as history is written by the history makers, and it's likely things are included for preference rather than science. Still there were linguists - early orthoepists - who wrote books about the accents of the time. Ben Johnson, Shakespeare's play-wrighting contemporary wrote a pronouncing dictionary, and goes through the alphabet, letter by letter, describing the pronunciation of each. When he gets to the letter *r*, he makes it clear it's rhotic. Thank you Ben!

Each of my international actors speaks 90% the same as their fellow, but that last 10% is filled in with - well, what? The last missing 10% drives my Dad wild, but not only is it not bad for 400 years, it's actually a boon. Each learner of OP fills in that last 10% with their only natural speaking voice, their accent, the accent of their heart, their home, their life experiences to date. Whether from

Delhi, Canada, Britain or America they craft a truly individual yet universal sound, an acoustic expression of their life melded with Shakespeare's imagination.

Shakespeare's universality is ironically never more so than in his histories. The English histories have little to do with English history - one only has to consider the heroics of Talbot; the molehill speech, the word torture and killing of York; the devastating characters of the Son That Has Killed his Father, and the Father that has Killed the Son.

His characterisation of Richard III, some say, is a careful blend of fiction and history, making the protagonist villain far more interesting than his historical counterpart.

We performed *Richard 2* last year in OP in Prague, and, having cut the play as the Elizabethans did, removed the complicated English history bit, and the Czechs adored the fall of a foolish leader, and the rise of a pragmatist. Was the Original Pronunciation a barrier to second-language speakers of English? On the contrary, they said it was the clearest and most engaging Shakespeare they had ever seen.

Macbeth, now that's a play that does well from the rhymes of OP, and as Ninagawa Company proved recently in London and New York, has little to do with being Scottish, and quite a lot to do with being Japanese.

OP makes for a truly unique sound, and in Autumn 2019 I will bring my Ensemble together to tour Japan with a professional original practices production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, spoken in OP. It will be a first ever for Japan - unless Shakespeare toured further than we thought in his missing years of the 1580s, that is...

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