

“Speak the speech, I pray you...”



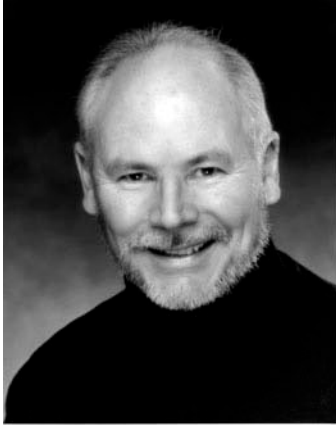
one speech in the series:

*MY SHAKESPEARE
PORTFOLIO*

By

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An enhanced eBook series, with embedded sound files – for classical actors



MY SHAKESPEARE PORTFOLIO

Introduction

When I was training as a classical actor in London in the 1960s, I listened to great performances of Shakespeare by Laurence Olivier, Judi Dench, Richard Burton, Helen Mirren, Derek Jacobi, John Gielgud and others, and marveled at what they did. They made the language so clear, so inevitable, so natural! I wanted to ask them, “How do you do it? What’s going through your head as you speak? Where can I get the keys to help me unlock this speech like you do?” I was yearning for something I hope to have provided in this series.

But what you read and hear in this eBook conveys one thing only: this particular actor’s approach to the speech. I let you in on what’s going through *my* mind, the values *I* bring to bear, and *my own* concept of good classical acting. It’s not a prescription for *your* performance, for there are a hundred “right” ways of performing these great works; but I hope it helps you find things in the speech you might not have noticed; make friends with its astonishing, heightened, but difficult language; to inhabit the words completely; and to make the speech wholly your own.

Voicing Shakespeare

Voicing Shakespeare, a downloadable eBook from the [Shakespeare page](#) of my Website, amplifies the teaching you find here in the *My Shakespeare Portfolio* series. In sixty-six short, easy-to-read chapters, I try to unlock the secrets you need to perform Shakespeare's great work with confidence, clarity, believability, and power. The eBook's six major sections thoroughly explore:

1. verse
2. prose
3. voice, speech & dialect
4. physical performance
5. musical dynamics
6. Shakespeare's rhetoric

Setting *Voicing Shakespeare* apart from similar publications are its seventy-six embedded audio and video performances of great Shakespeare speeches; they vividly illustrate the techniques under discussion at the click of your mouse. I and seventeen fellow professional actors from England, the United States, Canada, and Australia perform them, pointing the way to a truly international performance style.

With *Voicing Shakespeare* your classical acting work will take a giant step forward. In a special appendix, ten great Shakespeare audition speeches (some repeated as individual speeches in this series) are analyzed, scanned, scored, and performed by the skilled men and women of the company. A comprehensive glossary of terms will prove likewise invaluable.

With *Voicing Shakespeare* and *My Shakespeare Portfolio* I aim to help you build an unbeatable Shakespeare performance repertoire.

HAMLET, ACT 3, SCENE 2

SET-UP: Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, has met the ghost of his recently dead father, the king. The spirit has told him that Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, had murdered him to gain the throne. Hamlet, reluctant to believe the ghost (who might be the devil in disguise) decides to put on a play at court that will depict the circumstances of the alleged murder, hoping, if the story is true, that Claudius, a spectator at the performance, will betray his guilt. In this scene, as he instructs the players in their task, he gives them a lesson in good acting. This is the closest thing we have to what Shakespeare believed about the actor's craft.

Read at least the entire scene, better still, the whole play. My favorite foot-noted edition for actors is the Arden edition, available everywhere. Good used copies can be found for sale cheaply on [Amazon](#).

My favorite online resource is David Crystal's *Shakespeare's Words*. This scene, with Crystal's notes, can be found [here](#).

THE TEXT: I have used the text most commonly accepted by modern editors, though you will see from the facsimile image from the 1623 First Folio on page 4 that there are some interesting differences.

PRONUNCIATION: Actors are concerned to pronounce Shakespeare "correctly." "What's the right way to say it?" they ask me. I go into the question in greater depth in *Voicing Shakespeare*, but briefly, I believe that while there is still a case to be made for a conservative or elevated form of the standard accent of whatever country is home to the production (USA, Canada, UK, Australia, etc) at least for the noble characters, we are much more accepting these days of an eclectic mix of accents in Shakespearean productions than when I began my training. Back then Received Pronunciation was de rigueur for Shakespeare, and not only in England, but all over the English-speaking world. But values have shifted (although I still encounter beginning actors in the United States who believe a quasi-British sound is expected of them). Further increasing today's tolerance and even affection for dialectal diversity, certainly in my own case, has been the OP movement. What's OP? I have been privileged to be a part of the resurgence of interest in presenting Shakespeare in the Early Modern English of his own time – original pronunciation or simply OP as it has become known. I directed and coached *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in OP in 2010 and have dialect-coached several other OP productions since then. My

Shakespeare's Original Pronunciation eBook, as well as the *Dream* production script (phonetically transcribed with embedded sound files recorded by David Crystal) are free downloads from my [Shakespeare page](#); you will also find information on ordering a DVD copy of the stage production, and a download of the audio drama created by the same cast. I hope you enjoy these materials.

Fellowes as I do, crawling betweene Heauen and Earth.
We are arrant Knaues all, beleeue none of vs. Goe thy
wayes to a Nunnery. Where's your Father?

Oph. At home, my Lord.

Ham. Let the doores be shut vpon him, that he may
play the Foole no way, but in's owne house. Farewell.

Oph. O helpe him, you sweet Heauens.

Ham. If thou dost Marry, Ile giue thee this Plague
for thy Dowrie. Be thou as chaste as Ice, as pure as Snow,
thou shalt not escape Calumny. Get thee to a Nunnery.
Go, Farewell. Or if thou wilt needs Marry, marry a fool:
for Wife men know well enough, what monst'ers you
make of them. To a Nunnery go, and quickly too. Far-
well.

Oph. O heavenly Powers, restore him.

Ham. I haue heard of your pratlings too wel enough.
God has giuen you one pace, and you make your selfe an-
other: you gidge, you amble, and you lipe, and nickname
Gods creatures, and make your Wantonnesse, your Ig-
norance. Go too, Ile no more on't, it hath made me mad.
I say, we will haue no more Mariages. Those that are
married already, all but one shall liue, the rest shall keep
as they are. To a Nunnery, go. *Exit Hamlet.*

Oph. O what a Noble minde is heere o're-throwne?
The Courtiers, Soldiers, Schollers: Eye, tongue, sword,
Th'expectance and Rose of the faire State,
The glasse of Fashion, and the mould of Forme,
Th'obseru'd of all Obseruers, quite, quite downe,
Haue I of Ladies most deieft and wretched,
That suck'd the Honie of his Musicke Vowes:
Now see that Noble, and most Soueraigne Reason,
Like sweet Bets iangled out of tune, and harsh,
That vnmatch'd Forme and Feature of blowne youth,
Blasted with extasie. Oh woe is me,
Th'haue scene what I haue scene: see what I see.

Enter King, and Polonius.

King. Loue? His affections do not that way tend,
Nor what he spake, though it lack'd Forme a little,
Was not like Madnesse. There's something in his soule?
O're which his Melancholly fits on brood,
And I do doubt the hatch, and the disclose
Will be some danger, which to prevent
I haue in quicke determination
Thus set it downe. He shall with speed to England
For the demand of our neglected Tribute:
Haply the Seas and Countries different
With variable Objects, shall expell
This something fetled matter in his heart:
Whereon his Braines still beating, puts him thus
From fashion of himselfe. What thinke you on't?

Pol. It shall do well. But yet do I beleeue
The Origin and Commencement of this greese
Spring from neglected loue. How now *Ophelia*?
You neede not tell vs, what *Lord Hamlet* saide,
We heard it all. My Lord, do as you please,
But if you hold it fit after the Play,
Let his Queene Mother all alone intreat him
To shew his Greefes: let her be round with him,
And Ile be plac'd so, please you in the care
Of all their Conference. If she finde him not,
To England send him: Or confine him where
Your wisdome best shall thinke.

King. It shall be so:
Madnesse in great Ones, must not vnwatch'd go.

Exeunt.

Enter Hamlet, and two or three of the Players.

Ham. Speake the Speech I pray you, as I pronounc'd
it to you trippingly on the Tongue: But if you mouth it,
as many of your Players do, I had as liue the Town-Cryer
had spoke my Lines: Nor do not saw the Ayre too much
your hand thus, but vie all gently; for in the verie Tor-
rent, Tempest, and (as I may say) the Whirle-winde of
Passion, you must acquire and beget a Temperance that
may giue it Smoothnesse. O it offends mee to the Soule,
to see a robusious Pery-wig-pated Fellow, teare a Passi-
on to tatters, to verie ragges, to split the eares of the
Groundlings: who (for the most part) are capable of
nothing, but inexplicable dumbe shewes, & noised I could
haue such a Fellow whipt for o're-doing Termagant: it
out-*Herod's Herod*. Pray you auoid it.

Player. I warrant your Honor.

Ham. Be not too tame neyther: but let your owne
Discretion be your Tutor. Sute the Action to the Word,
the Word to the Action, with this speciall obseruance:
That you ore-stop not the modestie of Nature; for any
thing so ouer-done, is frō the purpose of Playing, whole
end both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as twer
the Mirrour vp to Nature; to shew Vertue her owne
Feature, Scorne her owne Image, and the verie Age and
Bodje of the Time, his forme and presture. Now, this
ouer-done, or come tardie off, though it make the vnkil-
full laugh, cannot but make the Iudicious grieue: The
censure of the which One, must in your allowance o're-
way a whole Theater of Others. Oh, there bee Players
that I haue scene Play, and heard others praise, and that
highly (not to speake it prophantly) that neyther hauing
the accent of Christians, nor the gate of Christian, Pagan,
or Norman, haue so strutted and bellowed, that I haue
thought some of Natures Iouerney-men had made men,
and not made them well, they imitated Humanity so ab-
hominably.

Play. I hope we haue reform'd that indifferently with
vs, Sir.

Ham. O reforme it altogether. And let those that
play your Clownes, speake no more then is set downe for
them. For there be of them, that will themselves laugh,
to set on some quantitie of barren Spectators to laugh
too, though in the meane time, some necessary Question
of the Play be then to be considered: that's Villanous, &
shewes a most pittifull Ambition in the Foole that vies
it. Go make you readie. *Exit Players.*

Enter Polonius, Rosinuerance, and Guildenstern.

How now my Lord,
Will the King heare this peece of Worke?

Pol. And the Queene too, and that presently.

Ham. Bid the Players make hast. *Exit Polonius.*

Will you two helpe to hasten them?

Both. We will my Lord. *Exeunt.*

Enter Horatio.

Ham. What hoa, *Horatio*?

Hora. Heere sweet Lord, at your Seruice.

Ham. *Horatio*, thou art eene as iust a man
As ere my Conuersation coap'd withall.

Hora. O my deere Lord.

Ham. Nay, do not thinke I flatter:
For what aduancement may I hope from thee,
That no Reuennew hast, but thy good spirits

To

SCORING KEY:

- **Antithesis**
- **Catalogue**
- Alliteration (Paul's purple prose)
- Assonance (Paul's awfully small)
- Footnotes provide further useful notes to assist in comprehension and performance
- **Key words** in bold

[Click here to play the accompanying sound file](#)

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 lief¹ the town-crier² 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, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. | O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious³ periwig-pated⁴ fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings⁵, | who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumbshows⁶ and noise: | I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing⁷ Termagant⁸; | it out-herods Herod⁹: pray you, avoid it... | Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor: | suit the action¹⁰ to the word, the word to the action; | with this special observance; | that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature¹¹: | for anything so overdone is from the purpose

¹ Just as soon, willingly

² the town crier's only necessary skill was a huge voice that could be heard all over town

³ Good word to "coin" reminding one of words like *robust*, *tempestuous*, *combustion*

⁴ Early term for *wig*

⁵ Rowdy spectators who stood in the yard, paid less, and were presumably less sophisticated in their tastes

⁶ pantomime

⁷ This and other elisions need not be thought of as anything more than an indication of swift, colloquial speech where such things naturally happen. Since this is prose, the elision is not for the sake of regularizing the meter.

⁸ Mythical Islamic god, represented in plays as very fierce [ˈtɜːməɡənt]

⁹ The biblical Herod who slew the innocents, also depicted as very fierce in the morality plays

¹⁰ gesture and the whole physical performance

¹¹ reality, the real nature of things

of **playing**¹², whose end¹³, both at the **first** and **now**, **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**¹⁴ **grieve**; | the **censure**¹⁵ of the which **one** must in your allowance **o'erweigh** a whole theatre of **others**. | O, there be **players**¹⁶ that I have seen **play**, and heard others **praise**, and that highly, | not to speak it **profanely**, that, neither having the **accent** of **Christians**¹⁷ nor the **gait** of **Christian**, **pagan**, nor **man**, | have so **strutted** and **bellowed** that I have thought some of nature's **journey**men¹⁸ had **made** men and not **made** them well, they **imitated** **humanity**¹⁹ so **abominably**... | And let those that play your **clowns**²⁰ speak no more than is **set down** for them; | for there be of them that will themselves **laugh**, to set on some quantity of **barren**²¹ **spectators** to laugh **too**; | though, in the mean time, some necessary question of the **play** be then to be considered: | that's **villainous**, and shows a most pitiful **ambition** in the **fool** that uses it. | Go, make you **ready**.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

- Since the piece is all about playing extreme emotion with restraint and judgment, the actor must demonstrate that paradox.
- As always, play the **antitheses** (*saw the air/use all gently, judicious/unskillful, laugh/grieve, trippingly on the tongue/mouth, torrent/temperance*) in a strongly contrastive way.
- Take ownership of the special words, make them seem specially chosen.
- It being prose, it can sound quite modern. Play it fast, going for speed and clarity as an admirable combination.
- Since Hamlet talks about good diction and is a prince with all the education and training that implies, give him some nobility and sophistication without making him pedantic or pompous. He needs impeccable speaking skills but must carry that off with ease.

¹² acting

¹³ purpose

¹⁴ those audience members with taste and judgment

¹⁵ condemnation, negative criticism

¹⁶ actors

¹⁷ civilized, cultivated, educated people

¹⁸ apprentices not yet skilled at their trade

¹⁹ human behavior

²⁰ the comedians of the company

²¹ devoid of discernment and sophistication

- While the speech has a very serious purpose (to urge the players to be so life-like in their performance that Claudius, when watching it, will somehow reveal his guilt in the murder of Hamlet's father) don't forget the humor. As a tactic, Hamlet might wish to avoid haranguing the players, choosing to imply that, of course, this particular company of players would never be guilty of the excesses that other, lesser companies might exhibit.
- Use plenty of range to more successfully reveal the architecture of the ideas in these long sentences.