Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

A Smidgen of Shakespeare

Written by Geoff Spiteri

Published by Portico Books

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

Published in the United Kingdom in 2016 by
Portico Books
1 Gower Street
London
WC1E 6HD

An imprint of Pavilion Books

Copyright © Geoff Spiteri 2008, 2016

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN 978-1-91023-299-6

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Reproduction by Mission Productions Ltd, Hong Kong
Printed and bound by 1010 Printing International Ltd, China

This book can be ordered direct from the publisher.
Contact the marketing department, but try your bookshop first.

www.pavilionbooks.com



DOES SHAKESPEARE MATTER?

In a survey commissioned for the National Year of Reading, teenagers were asked about their most and least favourite things to read. Top of the popular list were gossip magazines, with online computer game cheats and *Harry Potter* not far behind. Top of the most loathed reads was homework, with the runner-up spot taken by the collected works of one William Shakespeare.

However, it is not only teenagers who feel like this about the Great Bard. For many of us Shakespeare boils down to a few hazily remembered plots and one or two of the more famous lines that pretty much everyone can misquote. The mere mention of the author's name may revive memories of long, arduous – if not downright boring – lessons spent attempting to translate arcane, 400-year-old words and phrases into modern English. The experience will often have been frustrating – with only occasional flashes of the playwright's brilliance illuminating what felt like a long twilight of tedium.

If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
Twelfth Night

THE SHORTEST SCENE

Four lines, 28 words:

ANTONY
Set our squadrons on yon side o' the hill,
In eye of Caesar's battle; from which place
We may the number of the ships behold,
And so proceed accordingly.

Antony and Cleopatra, Act III, scene ix



THE LONGEST SCENE

920 lines, 7137 words:

Love's Labour's Lost, Act V, scene ii
(I won't reproduce it here!)

Worst Body Odour

Caliban in ***The Tempest*** and Cloten in ***Cymbeline*** vie for the honour of being the smelliest character in Shakespeare.

In ***Cymbeline*** Cloten exerts himself in a sword fight, making him 'reek like a sacrifice'.

In ***The Tempest*** Trinculo, finding Caliban, says he 'smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell; a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-john: a strange fish'.



Once Richard is left to himself, however, we see how utterly Machiavellian he is and how this eloquence is nothing more than camouflage for untrammelled ambition and double-dealing:

Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
Was ever woman in this humour won?
I'll have her; but I will not keep her long.
What! I, that kill'd her husband and his father–
To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
The bleeding witness of my hatred by;
Having God, her conscience, and these bars
against me,
And I no friends to back my suit at all,
But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!
Ha!

Swords as Sweethearts

Even as Wild West gunslingers might have developed an affection for their six-shooters, Shakespearean swashbucklers can display an unhealthy attachment to their weapons. In *Henry IV, Part II*, faux swaggerer Pistol gently lays down his sword with the words: 'And, sweetheart, lie thou there!'

THE POWER OF EXCLAMATIONS – 'O! O! O!'

Poignant and moving in context, some of the exclamations uttered by Shakespeare's characters can sound a bit melodramatic taken outside their setting within the play. Hence Othello's cries of 'O! O! O!' as he falls on to the bed next to the corpse of the wife he's just strangled may underline the intensity of his grief within the play; outside of the play's context, though, it just sounds a bit silly.

From tragedy to comedy: the Nurse's reaction on hearing of the supposed death of Juliet in Act IV, scene v of *Romeo and Juliet* is probably as heartfelt as Othello's 'O! O! O!' – only potentially much funnier given her voluble, gossipy character. It is also full of dramatic irony, given the eventual tragic outcome of events.

O woe! O woeful, woeful, woeful day!
Most lamentable day, most woeful day,
That ever, ever, I did yet behold!
O day! O day! O day! O hateful day!
Never was seen so black a day as this:
O woeful day, O woeful day!

MOST DIFFICULT TO STAGE, PART II

It is not just the comedies and the 'problem plays' that offer staging dilemmas; the tragedies also have their own stock of difficulties.

The foremost of these in *Macbeth*, for example, is the march of Birnam Wood in Act V, scene iv. Here Malcolm's army chops down the branches of trees to disguise their numbers – thus fulfilling the witches' prophecy of Macbeth's downfall: 'Fear not till Birnam Wood/Do come to Dunsinane'. The second staging dilemma occurs in the final scene in the play, when Macduff enters 'with Macbeth's head'. Papier-mâché historians relate that 'japanning', the art of producing solid objects from mashed-up paper, only reached England in the mid-seventeenth century – so we can only imagine how Shakespearean prop managers would have dealt with this particular stage direction.



Another interesting and supremely gory staging challenge involves the putting out of the Earl of Gloucester's eyes in *King Lear*, Act 3, scene vii. This challenge is made all the greater by the fact that the earl has three acts of the play after his eyes have been put out to wander, blinded and bloodied, as the tragedy unfolds.

However, Shakespeare's supreme gore-fest *Titus Andronicus* has to be the winner in the most-difficult-to-stage stakes. A single stage direction in Act II, scene iv causes all the problems:

> **'Enter the Empress's sons with Lavinia, her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out, and ravished.'**

For the remainder of the play a mute, blood-spattered, deranged Lavinia staggers across the stage, her suffering a silent witness to the cruelty of Aaron, the empress and her sons. Indeed so difficult is this scene to stage that modern directors have often attempted more stylised or abstract stagings, replacing the blood with ribbons, for example, or absenting Lavinia from the action altogether. Sometimes, it seems, even Shakespeare may go too far.

2 ELIZABETHANS BEHAVING BADLY

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

The anti-social behaviour of teenagers is hardly new, it seems. In *The Winter's Tale*, a shepherd has it about right when he observes in Act III, scene ii:

> **I would there were no age between ten and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting.**

Not much change there then.

BINGE DRINKING

Shakespeare's plays are full of drunks, and he has a lot to say on the subject of drinking to excess. In *Othello*, for example, Iago deliberately gets Cassio drunk, knowing that if he does so Cassio will be liable to get involved in a brawl and thus incur Othello's displeasure. In the event Cassio proves to be the worst kind of drunk: quarrelsome and obnoxious, he ends up striking Roderigo and wounding Montano. In the meantime Iago philosophises on the relative merits of the English, Danish, German and Dutch when they are drunk. He states the English are the 'most potent in potting' because an Englishman can 'drink with facility your Dane dead drunk; he sweats not to overthrow your Almaine; he gives your Hollander a vomit, 'ere the next pottle can be filled'.

In *Twelfth Night* the appropriately named Sir Toby Belch spends much of the play reeling across the stage in a joyously drunken stupor. Feste, the clown, comments that a drunken man is 'like a drown'd man, a fool, and a madman/One draught above heat makes him a fool, the second mads him, and a third drowns him'.

Other notable drunks are the porter in *Macbeth*, Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban in *The Tempest* – and, of course, Falstaff and his roguish companions in *Henry IV Parts I* and *II* and *Henry V*. But perhaps the luckiest drunk is Barnardine in *Measure for Measure*, whose execution is stayed because he is too drunk to provide consent for it.

‘YOUR MUM’

The best example of a ‘your mum’-type insult in Shakespeare is in Act IV, scene ii of *Titus Andronicus*, where Aaron exclaims:

‘I have done your mother.’

He means exactly what he says.

Good in Bed?

Is Cleopatra the best shag in Shakespeare? She might be if Enobarbus is to be believed. In Act 2, scene ii Maecenas points out the necessity of Antony leaving Cleopatra for Caesar’s sister Octavia. Enobarbus explains why it will simply not happen:

> **Never! He will not.**
> **Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale**
> **Her infinite variety. Other women cloy**
> **The appetites they feed: but she makes hungry**
> **Where most she satisfies.**

OBSCENE GESTURES

Much has been made of the thumb-biting scene at the start of *Romeo and Juliet* where Samson, spying two followers of the house of Montague, declares: ‘I will bite my thumb at them;/Which is a disgrace to them, if they bear it.’ Rude as the gesture was to an Elizabethan audience, there is at least one other very obscene gesture in Shakespeare with a history and explanation at least as interesting as thumb-biting: the Fig of Spain.

The following exchange in *Henry V*, Act III, scene iv is just one of a number of instances in which Pistol’s fiery temperament finds a physical expression in the Fig of Spain:

> **FLUELLEN**
> **It is well.**
>
> **PISTOL**
> **The fig of Spain!**

Here Pistol’s words would have been accompanied with the actor thrusting his thumb between his middle and index fingers, the symbolism being relatively easy to work out (try it yourself).

Shakespearean audiences may or may not have known that the gesture dates back at least to the time of ancient Rome, where it was known as the *mano fico*. Here *mano* translates as ‘hand’ and *fico* as ‘fig’ – which may possibly be a play on the Latin word *fica*, a slang term referring to the female vulva.

What's Eating Edmund?

Dashing but entirely lacking in moral scruples, Edmund in *King Lear* is the archetypal philanderer; his credentials in debauchery are unparalleled by any other character in Shakespeare. Not only does he seduce two high-born duchesses, daughters of the king himself, but the ladies themselves are sisters. On hearing about the suicide of Goneril and the poisoning of Regan, Edmund even appears to hint at the potential for a diabolical post-death *ménage à trois*: 'I was contracted to them both. All three/Now marry in an instant.'

In the play Edmund's wickedness seems to be driven firstly by the fact of his illegitimacy, but also by a lust for power. Even his deathbed repentance in the final scene goes against the grain of an innately evil character, as he himself admits:

> **I pant for life; some good I mean to do**
> **Despite of mine own nature.**
>
> *Act 5, scene iii*

DISGUISES

So many of Shakespeare's plots are constructed around the use of disguises to conceal identity that it is hard to know where to begin.

In ***Measure for Measure*** the Duke disguises himself as a friar so he can spy on Angelo. He only reveals his true identity after the full extent of Angelo's skulduggery has been revealed.

In ***Cymbeline*** Iachimo dresses up in Leonatus's clothes, making Imogen believe her husband has been killed when she finds his decapitated body. Later in the same play Leonatus disguises himself as a Roman soldier in the hope of dying on the battlefield.

In ***Henry IV, Part I*** Hal and Poins disguise themselves in suits of buckram (coarse linen) to rob Falstaff.





In ***The Merry Wives of Windsor*** it is Falstaff who turns up in disguise: in this instance Mistress Ford and Mistress Page gull him into dressing up first as a fat witch and then as Herne the Hunter. His reward in both cases is a sound beating.

In ***Henry V*** the king conceals his identity ahead of the Battle of Agincourt, fooling Pistol into thinking he is Harry Le Roy, an infantryman and 'a gentleman of a company'.

Perhaps the most interesting disguise of all, however, is that of Poor Tom in ***King Lear***. Here Edgar, who has been wrongly accused of plotting against his father, disguises himself to 'take the basest and most poorest shape/that ever penury.../Brought near to beast'. Transformed as 'Poor Tom' he spends much of Acts II, III and IV masquerading as a mad beggar, talking gibberish to imaginary demons. He takes his cue from the 'Bedlam beggars' he has seen who put 'pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary' in their 'numbed and mortified bare arms' with the object of eliciting sympathy and charity from passers-by. Actors playing Edgar have been known to take these stage directions literally – making for a painfully realistic interpretation of the Poor Tom character.

SHAKESPEAREAN FILTH – MORE EUPHEMISMS

'Dearest bodily part'

This comes from Act I, scene iv of *Cymbeline*, where the evil Iachimo lays a bet with Posthumus that he will 'enjoy ... the dearest bodily part of [his] mistress', Imogen.

'Flashing fire'

In Act II, scene i of *Henry V*, Pistol's fighting talk contains the following: 'Pistol's cock is up,/And flashing fire will follow.' This sort of euphemistic wordplay on Pistol's name occurs throughout Parts I and II of *Henry IV* and in *Henry V*.

'Hanging bugles in an invisible baldric'

To hang one's bugle in an invisible baldric is one of the more complicated of Shakespeare's innuendos and much scholarly ink has been spilled debating the meaning of this particular phrase as a result. It appears in Benedick's speech in Act I, scene i of *Much Ado About Nothing* in which he vows to remain a bachelor:

> **That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks: but that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me.**

Here a 'recheat' is a call from a hunting horn (horns of any kind had an indelible association with sex in the Elizabethan mindset). To have it 'winded' on your forehead would be to grow cuckold's horns,

i.e. to have an unfaithful wife or lover. The bugle could be a euphemism for the male member, while a baldric is a belt for hanging a bugle, which here can be taken to be that hardy perennial of Elizabethan fashion, the codpiece. One reading then is that Benedick refuses to be cowed into making his manhood (bugle) inconspicuous by hiding it in an unostentatious codpiece (baldric).

Feeling horny

The Forester's song in Act IV, scene ii of *As You Like It* contains the following lines:

> **Take thou no scorn to wear the horn...**
> **Thy father's father wore it; And thy father bore it.**
> **The horn, the horn, the lusty horn,**
> **Is not a thing to laugh to scorn.**

Here the reference is not only to the cuckold's horns, but also to male genitalia.

Three-inch fool

Size matters, at least if Grumio is to be believed in Act IV, scene i of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Here he responds to Curtis's 'Away, you three-inch fool!' with the following (note, yet again, the reference to cuckold's horns):

> **Am I but three inches? Why, thy horn is a foot, and so long am I at the least.**

4 THE FINAL FRONTIER

SHAKESPEARE IN SPACE

Twenty-four of Uranus's 27 moons are named after characters in Shakespeare's plays. The discoverer of Uranus, the eighteenth-century English astronomer William Herschel, proposed that the planet be named 'Georgium Sidus' ('George's Star') after King George III, since it was the first planet discovered by an Englishman. In the event, however, the scientific community opted to continue in the classical tradition of naming planets. They eventually plumped for Uranus, the ancient Greek deity of the sky, on the suggestion of German astronomer Johann Elert Bode.

In 1787, six years after announcing his discovery of Uranus, Herschel observed two moons in orbit around the planet. This time Herschel got his way, despite continued protests from outside England, and took his names from a play by England's acknowledged national poet. He decided to name the moons Titania and Oberon after the King and Queen of the Fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. When another English astronomer, William Lassell, discovered a further two large moons in Uranus's orbit in 1851 he decided to continue with Herschel's idea of using characters from English literary works, naming the two new bodies Ariel and Umbriel from Alexander Pope's celebrated poem *The Rape of the Lock*. Later discoveries reverted to Shakespearean characters, and now 13 of his plays are represented among Uranus's moons.

1. **Cordelia**
   The only virtuous daughter in *King Lear*
2. **Ophelia**
   The daughter of Polonius in *Hamlet*
3. **Bianca**
   Sister of Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*
4. **Cressida**
   The title character in *Troilus and Cressida*
5. **Desdemona**
   Othello's faithful wife in *Othello*

6 Juliet
Juliet Capulet, the title character in *Romeo and Juliet*

7 Portia
Shylock's daughter in *The Merchant of Venice*

8 Rosalind
Heroine of *As You Like It*, daughter of banished Duke Senior

9 Mab
Not actually a character in any play, but Queen Mab is referred to in *Romeo and Juliet* – when Mercutio mocks Romeo for his listlessness brought on by an unrequited love for Rosaline:

> **O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.**
> **She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes**
> **In shape no bigger than an agate stone**
> **On the fore-finger of an alderman,**
> **Drawn with a team of little atomies**
> **Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep.**
> *Act 1, scene iv*

'Queen Mab' is also the title of a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley, so Mab could be considered one of the moons not named after a Shakespearean character.

10 Belinda
Another non-Shakespearean character, Belinda is a character in Alexander Pope's mock-heroic epic poem *The Rape of the Lock*.

11 Perdita
The daughter cast away by Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*

12 Puck
The impish servant of Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

13 Cupid
Features in Sonnet 153 and in *Timon of Athens*

14 Miranda
Prospero's daughter in *The Tempest*

15 Francisco
One of the retinue of Alonso, King of Naples, in *The Tempest*

16 Ariel
The spirit servant of Prospero in *The Tempest*, but also a character in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. We know that Ariel, the moon, was discovered at the same time as Umbriel, so it is most probable that both are named after the characters in Pope's poem rather than just one after a Shakespearean character.

SHAKESPEARE ON TV

The BBC's 'Complete Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare', released between 1978 and 1985, is probably the most comprehensive small-screen rendering of the Bard's output. It includes a version of every single play from the established canon.

Notable performances included Helen Mirren as Rosalind in *As You Like It* (1979), Anthony Quayle as Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part II* (1979) and Anthony Hopkins as *Othello* (1980).

More out of the ordinary was the casting of Roger Daltrey as the Dromio twins in *The Comedy of Errors* (1983) and John Cleese as Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1980).



SHOOTING SHAKESPEARE – THE BARD AT THE MOVIES

So many different versions of Shakespeare have appeared on either the small screen or in the cinema that there is easily enough material for a book in itself.

King John, produced by Sir Herbert Beerbohm-Tree in 1899, is generally held to be the first film adaptation of a Shakespeare play. Since then there have been literally hundreds of Shakespeare movies – both faithful reproductions and versions loosely based on the original plays or using them as the starting point for new departures. Here are just a few of the acknowledged leviathans of Shakespeare on the silver screen:

Laurence Olivier

Quite aside from living and breathing Shakespeare in an infinite variety of stage productions, Olivier starred in and directed definitive versions of *Henry V* (1944), *Hamlet* (1948) and *Richard III* (1955). A true titan of Shakespeare at the movies.

Orson Welles

Directed a 1948 version of *Macbeth*; directed *Othello* and played the role in a 1952 version of the play. Directed and played Falstaff in *Chimes at Midnight* (1967), which featured scenes from *Richard II*, *Henry IV Part I*, *Henry IV Part II*, *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

CAPITALIZING ON THE BARD

Forget Hamlet Cigars: the commercialization of Shakespeare has scaled ever-greater heights since the advent of the internet.

The Poor Yorick Shakespeare Catalogue at bardcentral.com, for example, was until a few years ago accepting orders for a whole world of lovingly crafted Shakespeare 'Toys and Doohickeys'. Among them 'deliciously strong wintergreen mints in a Shakespearean tin (My Kingdom for a wintergreen mint!)', an 'Alas! Poor Yorick' Mug ('Our Yorick skull-in-hand logo on a hefty, 15oz ceramic mug with a large, easy-grip handle') and Shakespeare Stationery Cards ('Blank note cards with sticker quotes featuring more than two dozen quotations and celebratory greetings for all occasions').

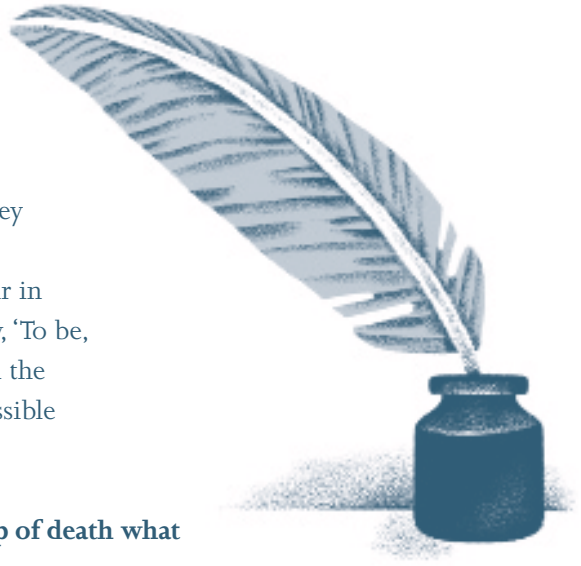
Other useful knick-knacks included a Bawdy Mug ('this mug is downright dirty, if you're in the know') and a Bawdy Pillow ('A true inspiration for your boudoir or Cheapside sitting room. 100% cotton and machine washable').



Or how about the Hamlet Finger Puppet Set ('Now you can be playwright, actor and director, putting on countless productions') or the Little Shakespeare Toy Figure ('Each of these posable figures comes with a collectable, twelve-page, mini colour comic book chronicling William's crazy adventures!')? Other options include the Shakespeare Action Figure ('Articulated 5in tall hard plastic William Shakespeare action figure, with removable book and quill') and the Shakespeare Nodder ('To nod or not to nod, that is the question').

However, pride of place in the gallery of Shakespearean 'merch' surely has to go to the Shakespeare Little Thinker Doll. The advertising spiel for this remarkable creature runs: 'Are you tired of all those cute but essentially brainless "beanie" dolls? We were, so to offset the trend we designed the "Little Thinkers". Let the Little Thinkers add a little culture and humour to your life. 11in tall and oh, so smart!'

Unfortunately the catalogue stopped accepting orders in December 2007, forcing devastated Bard enthusiasts the world over to shop elsewhere for their memorabilia.



Mortal Coils

The title of a collection of short stories by Aldous Huxley (1922) derives from *Hamlet*. The words occur in Hamlet's first soliloquy, 'To be, or not to be', in which the prince ponders the possible afterlife:

> **For in that sleep of death what dreams may come**
> **When we have shuffled off this mortal coil.**
>
> *Act III, scene i*

Time Out of Joint

Phillip K. Dick's novel of 1959 was the inspiration for the hit 1998 movie *The Truman Show*. The original lines are from Act I, scene v of *Hamlet*, after the prince has learned from the ghost of his father's murder. Here the film mirrors the play and Dick's 1959 novel – a superficially untroubled world conceals uncomfortable and only guessed-at truths that the protagonist has to uncover to regain his freedom. In Hamlet's words:

> **The time is out of joint. O cursed spite**
> **That ever I was born to set it right!**

Time Must Have a Stop

This Shakespearean quote, from *Henry IV, Part I*, is the title of another of Huxley's novels (1944). It appears in the haunting speech of the dying Hotspur, who has received a mortal wound from Prince Hal, restored to favour and fighting for his father against the rebels, on the battlefield of Shrewsbury:

> **O, Harry, thou hast robb'd me of my youth!**
> **I better brook the loss of brittle life**
> **Than those proud titles thou hast won of me;**
> **They wound my thoughts worse than sword my flesh:**
> **But thought's the slave of life, and life time's fool;**
> **And time, that takes survey of all the world,**
> **Must have a stop.**
>
> *Act 5, scene iv*

The Most Alcoholic Death

The award for the most alcoholic death in Shakespeare goes to George, Duke of Clarence. In *Richard III* he ends his days by drowning in a large barrel of malmsey wine.

POISONINGS, PART I

Hamlet is the grandfather of all Shakespeare's poison plays. No less than four characters are done away in the final scene through the combination of a poison-tipped sword and a poisoned chalice.

Gertrude
The queen drinks from the poisoned chalice. Her last words are: 'The drink, the drink! I am poison'd.'

Claudius
The evil king who has murdered his own brother for the crown is stabbed with the poisoned rapier by Hamlet. He then receives a taste of his own medicine when forced by his nephew to drink poison from the chalice. The king's last (ironic) words are: 'O, yet defend me, friends. I am but hurt.'

Laertes
Brother to drowned Ophelia and son to murdered Polonius, Laertes dies after being stabbed by Hamlet with his own poisoned rapier. He confesses his part in the poison plot and points the finger of blame at the king:

> **'…lo, here I lie,**
> **Never to rise again. Thy mother's poisoned.**
> **I can no more. The King, the King's to blame.'**
>
> *Act 5, scene ii*

Hamlet
The prince, having been stabbed by Laertes, dies from the poison on the rapier. His final, haunting words: 'The rest is silence.'

