



The Speech of the Vice Chancellor of Godfrey Okoye University, Rev. Fr. Prof Christian Anieke, on the Occasion of the Quartercentinnial Celebration of
400 Years of the Death of

William Shakespeare

(23 April 1564 - 23 April 1616)

On behalf of the staff and students of Godfrey Okoye University, I welcome you to the quartercentinnial celebration of William Shakespeare's death.

One fascinating thing in the world is the power humans have to determine who must die and who should not die. It sounds paradoxical that human beings whose life is shaped by the fear or consciousness of death should have any form of decision to make about who gets the bite of death and who remains untouchable. For four hundred years now, humans across generations and geographical space have taken an unscripted decision that one man should not die. We have passed a judgement of untouchability and incorruptibility on a man called William Shakespeare. This explains why 400 hundred years after his death red carpets are rolled out, glasses of champagne are raised before noses of all shapes, colors and sizes, drums and violin, guitar, flutes, piano, all competing in our mundane space to find expression as this man called William Shakespeare bestrides the literary space like a colossus. This explains why his physical body which should be resting in the Holy Trinity Church cemetery in Stratford-upon-Avon has to endure the last human assault with the disappearance of his head. (One can only say, as the Germans say "Schade". It is indeed a pity.)

How can we allow a man to die, who, with his vocabulary of 24 thousand words, fathered over one thousand words in the English language? Is it possible to let go of a man who gave us these beautiful expressions:

- All that glitters is not gold (*The Merchant of Venice*)("glisters")
- All's well that ends well (*title*)

- The better part of valor is *discretion* (*I Henry IV*; possibly already a known saying)
- Brevity is the soul of wit (*Hamlet*)
- Conscience does make cowards of us all (*Hamlet*)
- Dead as a doornail (*2 Henry VI*)
- Devil incarnate (*Titus Andronicus* / *Henry*)
- The game is up (*Cymbeline*)
- Give the devil his due (*I Henry IV*)
- Good riddance (*Troilus and Cressida*)
- Jealousy is the green-eyed monster (*Othello*)
- It was Greek to me (*Julius Caesar*)
- Heart of gold (*Henry V*)
- It smells to heaven (*Hamlet*)
- Itching palm (*Julius Caesar*)
- Kill with kindness (*Taming of the Shrew*)
- Laugh yourself into stitches (*Twelfth Night*)
- Love is blind (*Merchant of Venice*)
- Melted into thin air (*The Tempest*)
- Make a virtue of necessity (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*)
- Milk of human kindness (*Macbeth*)
- Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows (*The Tempest*)
- Much Ado About Nothing (*title*)
- Naked truth (*Love's Labours Lost*)
- Out of the jaws of death (*Twelfth Night*)
- Parting is such sweet sorrow (*Romeo and Juliet*)
- Pound of flesh (*The Merchant of Venice*)
- Sweet are the uses of adversity (*As You Like It*)
- Set my teeth on edge (*I Henry IV*)
- Tell truth and shame the devil (*1 Henry IV*)
- Wear my heart upon my sleeve (*Othello*)
- What's done is done (*Macbeth*)
- What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. (*Romeo and Juliet*)

It is inconceivable that a man who handed us the following delicious expressions should taste the horror of human physical annihilation:

Hamlet

- "To be, or not to be: that is the question". - (Act III, Scene I).
- "Neither a borrower nor a lender be; For loan oft loses both itself and friend, and borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry". - (Act I,
- "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so". - (Act II, Scene II).
- "What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! ". - (Act II, Scene II).

As You Like It

- "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" - (Act II, Scene VII).
- "How bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes!" - (Act V, Scene II).
- "The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool". - (Act V, Scene I).

The Merchant of Venice

- "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose". - (Act I, Scene III).

Measure for Measure

- "Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt". - (Act I, Scene IV).

Julius Caesar

- "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him". - (Act III, Scene II).

- "Et tu, Brute!" - (Act III, Scene I).
- "Men at some time are masters of their fates: The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings". - (Act I, Scene II).
- "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more". - (Act III, Scene II).
- "Cowards die many times before their deaths; The valiant never taste of death but once.
- Of all the wonders that I yet have heard, it seems to me most strange that men should fear;
- Seeing that death, a necessary end, will come when it will come". - (Act II, Scene II).

Macbeth

- "Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." - (Act V, Scene V).

Othello

- "'Tis neither here nor there." - (Act IV, Scene III).
- "I will wear my heart upon my sleeve for daws to peck at". - (Act I, Scene I).
- "To mourn a mischief that is past and gone is the next way to draw new mischief on". - (Act I, Scene III).

Twelfth Night

- "Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them". - (Act II, Scene V).

A Midsummer Night's Dream

- "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, and therefore is winged Cupid painted blind". - (Act I, Scene I).

We certainly cannot allow a man to die whose plays from 1590-92 (Henry VI Part I) to 1612-13 (The Two Noble Kinsmen) gave us such unforgettable plays as Romeo and Juliet (1594-1595), The Merchant of Venice (1596-97), Much Ado about Nothing (1598-99), Julius Caesar (1599-1600), As You Like It (1599-1600), Hamlet (1600-01), Othello (1604-05) and Macbeth (1605-06).

It is impossible to send such a man to the unsung graves of forgotten humans with his intimidating armory of 154 immortal sonnets, a man whom we have taken across seven rivers and seven streams to reach the stream of immortality where the fingers of death get frozen in the face of the magical cloak of imperishability. Will such a man be allowed to die whose famous sonnet 18 celebrated an undying gospel of love in an unimaginable fashion?

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? (Sonnet 18)

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee*

Sonnet 30

*When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,*

*And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanish'd sight.
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
Which I now pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee (dear friend)
All losses are restored and sorrows end.*

So when you hear of the discovery of an original copy of the First Folio (1623), which belonged to Jonny Dumfries shelved in the library of Mount Stuart House, about sixty miles west of Glasgow (a discovery which a Shakespeare expert at Oxford University Prof Emma Smith described as being comparable to finding a panda); when you hear the old, undying controversies about the authorship of his works dusted off again and again by hawk-eyed scholars, just know it is part of the human verdict that Shakespeare should not die. And today this universal resolution lives on somewhere in Africa in a place called Godfrey Okoye University.

And this university known for exploring new frontiers of research must continue to make William Shakespeare relevant by exploring such areas as the adaptation of his plays for Nigerians and the African background of such plays as **Othello**.

With these words I welcome you all to the quartercentinnial celebration of the greatest English poet William Shakespeare.

Rev. Fr. Prof. Christian Anieke
Vice Chancellor