ROGUE SHAKESPEARE®

ROGUE SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

TRUTH IN VERSE



The Path to Enlightenment in the BRAVE NEW WORLD

by

Ryan J-W Smith

BA Theatre Studies, MA Law*(Dist)*

FOREWORD

Shattering all previous records by an unfathomable margin, the critically acclaimed, multiple award-winning, and internationally renowned poet and verse playwright, Ryan J-W Smith, presents an unrivalled demonstration of a poet's absolute mastery of his craft: Rogue Shakespeare's Sonnets - Parts I, II & III contains 2,702 of Smith's original personal/spiritual/political/philosophical/educational sonnets, written as the spiritual verse diary of Smith's alter ego, 'Rogue Shakespeare', from November 2007 through to September 2024 - spanning life in England, Florida, Australia, New York, California, Denmark, France and Spain.

"Much like the historic diaries of Samuel Pepys, Smith's work captures a detailed picture of the contemporary world. However, this masterpiece goes beyond a standard historical record. Written in strict rhyming iambic pentameter, the collection is intensely political, unflinchingly personal, and eerily prophetic, challenging the modern global order while exposing the artist's inner soul."
– The Table Read Magazine

Bathing himself in the traditions of the Hellenic Empire, in particular the Stoic pursuit of happiness through virtue, Smith committed himself to an almost daily ritual of recording, with quasi-religious zeal, his thoughts, emotions, desires, fears, philosophy, politics, actions, relationships - everything - into his sonnets, with exquisite eloquence, even when describing the mundanity of the quotidian. And the entire enterprise, by his own words, was to force himself to become a better man by entreating the universe to school him in the ancient virtues of the Greeks and their peers. Thus, instead of 'chapters', we find Smith has divided his poems reflectively into 'lessons'. In Part One he received lessons in the virtues of 'Courage' (sonnets 1-500) and 'Humility' (sonnets 501-1000). His journey continues in Parts II and III in a similar fashion; e.g. in Part Two he is schooled in the virtues of 'Compassion' and 'Love'.

★★★★★

"What makes the project compelling is how Smith uses a centuries-old form to process modern anxieties. Politics, spirituality, relationships, ambition, mortality — it's all here, filtered through the rhythm and discipline of the Shakespearean sonnet. The clash between tradition and contemporary life gives the work its spark. The Bard would be proud."
– Voice Magazine

With every major and minor step of his life recorded in his unique verse, Smith demonstrates exactly how to negotiate and travel the immense and unpredictable path of discipline, self-control and inner peace, to the ultimate Hellenic goal: self-mastery. Deep down, this is the sacred journey we all wish to take in our lives. Follow Rogue's rhyming path to truth - and in time, you will surely make it your own. *Nosce te ipsum.*

ROGUE SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

TRUTH IN VERSE

PART ONE

The Path to Enlightenment in the BRAVE NEW WORLD

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Duckpaddle Publishing Ltd.

SAMPLE

THE 2012 INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST 500 SONNETS

(*The first 500 sonnets in this book were published in 2012 in a book entitled '500 Shakespearean sonnets - The Diary of a Poetic Quest for Truth'. For reference, here is the introduction to that book.)*

We all need self-improvement; some need it more than others - I've needed rather a lot.

For reasons I won't go into here, I came out of my childhood a troubled young man. Scared; over-sensitive; desperate for control - my behaviour could sometimes be selfish, hurtful and cruel, especially to those I was supposed to care for the most. Searching for a way to stop the broken record in my head, and the sad consequences before my eyes, I contemplated the easy 'painless' way out - but fate and an intuitive sense of purpose forced me to consider an alternative. Instead, I took the hard path: the one where you choose to stay alive; you pull your head out of the sand of denial and look honestly in the mirror; you admit to all your faults; you break down; in the darkness you find a path to love, compassion and forgiveness and, eventually, you perform a minor miracle – you change negative into positive: you let go of fear and hope.

After many failed attempts with therapists and self-help books, I suddenly found I made great strides by learning to meditate, reading Buddhist philosophy and working to integrate that philosophy into my daily life. I began to weave the lessons I was learning into my art - into my plays, my music, and the occasional sonnet. After a few years on this roller coaster, with wonderful highs - and lows that were certainly a vast improvement on the past, but still lows all the same - I began noticing a pattern: when I was knee-deep in writing a new play, or consumed in recording a new album, I was so much closer to the person I always wanted to be - so much kinder, more relaxed, easy-going and happy. Conversely, when I was in-between artistic projects (of a spiritual bent) and more concerned with ambition, some of the less attractive habits from my childish mindset would start to creep back in. I wondered, therefore, if it might be possible to find a daily artistic/spiritual ritual that would help to ground my mind positively in the here and now; a way to either get my grateful head on straight at the start of my day, and/or end my day with honest reflection, learning and affirmation.

At this point in my life, having written three plays in verse, as well as the occasional sonnet for BBC Radio Leeds, I knew I could easily scribe a sonnet in about half an hour. So, a sort of 'Sonnet Blog' seemed like the best and most effective idea to suit my needs. Late in 2007, I bought a website of the same name and began writing and posting a new reflective sonnet every day. Within a week I noticed a huge difference in how I was thinking, feeling and acting - as did the people around me and even those reading my sonnets online; after a few months I felt great (so great I stopped writing sonnets for a while - whoops!); now, after a few years and more than 500 sonnets later, I've never felt more at peace and

happy. That's not to say it was easy, or happened overnight - it's been more like travelling by taking two steps forward (when I write a sonnet regularly) and one step back (when I stop), over and over. But slowly, line-by-line, my sonnets have made an irreversible change in me for the better. For that I am eternally grateful to whatever gave me the idea to do it and the conviction to continue.

Developing the ability to truly see yourself as you really are (warts an' all), you start to see the world around you as it really is too. In tandem with my spiritual quest, my recent work as a filmmaker - and as a playwright beforehand - has given me unique opportunities to study areas of international politics and intrigue in-depth. With a good spiritual grounding, I have found it is much easier to deal with and accept as true some of the self-evident crimes of those we trust to take care of us: our governments; their agencies and representatives; familiar businesses, and a military that is supposed to defend, not invade. Having learnt the truth about the standard operating procedures of such organisations, I think it is important for artists to raise awareness, and I'm sure you'll notice some interesting political edges to a few of my sonnets (and plays, music, films - should you decide to investigate).

If you happen to read some of them, I hope you might bear in mind the circumstances in which my sonnets were written, as described above. Unlike my plays or albums, they were not written for any cumulative artistic or entertainment purpose at all - rather they were a (relatively) private medicinal means to spiritual ends. So, if (in a moment of madness) you decide to read them from start to finish, and bemoan that I'm repeating a theme over and over - please know that it's not because I'm lacking imagination to write about something new for you, my lovely audience - it's because I'm struggling to learn that particular lesson, and I have to repeat it over and over for myself, with no consideration (or expectation) for any potential future audience. Sorry.

With that in mind, I hope you find something of value here – a peek into the thoughts of a most imperfect man attempting to use his art to try to cure himself of some rather confused ideas of 'self' and 'others'. By revealing my failures and mistakes in this way, and the lessons I have learnt from them, I hope I can be of service to others.

For those who feel a little lost and alone in this world, I can highly recommend a couple of Buddhist books and a three or four-digit course of Shakespearean sonnets as a very effective medicine - I'm already well into my next 500.☺

Ryan J-W Smith, February 1st, 2012

ROGUE SHAKESPEARE'S INTRODUCTION

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SONNET 2526 - February 24, 2024

A bible I did not intend to write,
I merely wrote the truth in verse I glean,
But should you read this guidebook, day and night,
You'll see the blissful world that's kept unseen.
When you ingest this scripture, page by page,
Each sonnet, every line, from start to end,
Against the tyrants you will calmly rage,
And Nature - our true Goddess - you'll defend.
She chose me, just as much as I chose her:
I offered up my life for her to use,
To die for truth - the death that I prefer,
I offer here a way for you to choose.
This book, then, is not mine - I wrote for you:
Read every word - you'll know what you should do.

SAMPLE

TAKE THE INNER JOURNEY - DISCOVER THE PATH

WIELD THE ANCIENT VIRTUES - CONQUER THYSELF

HONOUR THE UNIVERSE - MASTER YOUR WORLD

Prologue

SONNET ZERO - June 7, 2006

Let him, who hath a learnéd mind, conceive
The number of a man that is the beast:
That shall, by great false prophecy, deceive,
Enslaving all mankind through church and priest.
Behind a global leader he shall hide
And bare the badge of honour, peace and love:
The impure heart shall 'splay his mark with pride,
And serve the one below as one above.
No man shall buy or sell without his name
Imprinted on their hands or in their head:
The world will bow, and worship at his fame,
Yet some may walk where angels fear to tread.
Devils beware! There's still one Rogue for heaven:
'Gainst 6-6-6, stands 7-7-7.

SAMPLE

Sonnets from

LESSON I

Courage

SAMPLE

SONNET 1 - November 20, 2007

The air wants nothing for itself, so blue,
The clouds unto the heavens never call;
The stars look to themselves for light - but you,
O you, who are beneath these things, want all!
The elements, though dying, do not cry,
Nor did they jump for joy at being born,
For they accept their fate, they live to die;
Though everything must change, they do not scorn.
But crazy mortals think themselves alive,
Believe that frozen light cannot be thawed!
To feed this lie, true knowledge they deprive:
Their mental faculties - so quick, so flawed.
The mind of air, of clouds and stars, is calm
No matter what delights or what may harm.

SONNET 3 - November 22, 2007

The children stare in wonder at the moon;
A wisp of cloud - imagination loves;
The colour-giving sun dissolves too soon;
The pushing adult mind contentment shoves.
Soft laughing ducks amuse an infant's ear,
The pattered rain delights his homely care;
The deepest sleep of music quells all fear,
As man puts poison to his future fare.
A passing lack of self - an ancient toy,
A distant memory of childhood dreams;
The rare and fleeting humbleness of joy,
Till money, sex and power drown his schemes.
The boy who would be king must tame his mind:
Humility becomes the good, the kind.

SONNET 7 - November 26, 2007

The seventh sonnet should be something sweet,
A week of mindful action, self-reflects;
We now can see how others we did treat:
The slower, calmer mind itself detects.
To those I hurt through ignorance and fear
I offer my apologies and love;
I knew not what I did, could not see clear:
I did not have the strength to look above.
Now, crazy as it seems, this daily rite -
My morning ritual, helps ground my mind;
Those thoughts still come and go, but now my sight
Can see with better eyes: I am more kind.
To err is human, that is what they say:
Then I have been most human - not today.

SONNET 8 - November 27, 2007

I wish that 'you' did not exist at all,
By that I mean the concept of your 'self'.
Remove the book of pride before you fall;
Let selfless heroes sit upon thy shelf.
For egoless, you've nothing left to fear;
No object to protect, how self defends;
No chains that bind to what you see and hear;
Ambitions vault no more as blindness ends.
What's left is all that's real, true and good:
A love for every second you exist!
How I would ease your mind, if I but could,
For you should not fear fate - let journeys twist.
The terrified, the arrogant will stray;
The man who lives for others, lives today.

SONNET 10 - November 29, 2007

I love the night, the quiet solitude,
When sweet distractions sleep, and time is mine;
When I against my selfish self may feud,
And add a gen'rous page to my design.
And yet, I love the day - when all is clear,
When sun and sky - all nature comes alive;
A chance fight against the death I fear:
A chance to really live, and not survive.
I wish that humans didn't have to sleep:
There's too much night and day I long to see!
But then, within the visions, I see deep,
And once asleep, where better else to be?
Good night, good day - sweet dreams to one and all;
Appreciate the high: respect the fall.

SONNET 11 - November 30, 2007

What is this place we're in, what have we done,
Where is the sacredness of life I seek;
Why does the father beat upon the son?
The painful voice of truth is all I speak.
I look at culture here, and I see lies:
They celebrate the peace that they destroy;
The vision that they cherish, I despise;
The selfish heart of fear beats not for joy.
I seek enlightenment, but who will aid;
I live for what is true, am I alone?
I've seen another world; I see it fade:
Survival of our species we postpone.
Some nights I feel infected by their hate;
Then something pulls me back: I know my fate.

SONNET 12 - December 1, 2007

The morning light shows darkness in your eyes;
Your perfect mind - one second - you exist,
Then you re-don your 'self' - your fool's disguise;
The point of life and death you gently twist.
"What must I do today? Chase money, right?
Make sure my checklist lists its cheques, for sure!
If I can help some other fool, I might,
But let me get what's mine first - that's my cure!"
How will you be when you're to meet your death;
Can you be sure of dignity and calm;
Will panic be the last word on your breath,
Or could you, with some wisdom, death disarm?
The ocean does not think itself the sky:
Why do you fear the light; why do you lie?

SONNET 14 - December 3, 2007

The beach, where water vies against the land,
And, counter to this war, men find their peace.
What is it of this stage - the sea and sand,
That grants so many people sweet release?
When nestled on the shore, we strip our mind
Of status, class and wealth; we simply be.
No house or car, nor suit to hide behind:
All men are equal faced unto the sea.
The awesome power of the world is clear:
The sun is king, the land and water queen;
Subordinate to them we feel no fear;
We sense the truth of that which can't be seen.
The wise will keep their lessons from the foam,
While fools rebirth their egos driving home.

SONNET 17 - December 6, 2007

I am at war; I know my enemy,
For he has been within me as my guide,
And as I grew, he told me how to see;
He claimed that he was righteous - how he lied!
I am at war, but herein I shall win,
I recognise his strategy, his moves;
For every wave my ego doth begin,
I have a counter, thus my state improves.
I am at war - a battle every day,
The weapons that I use are ancient tools;
Though he sports modern armour, I shall flay
The skin of my opponent, till he pules.
The greatest victory upon this earth,
Is turning negativity to mirth.

SONNET 21 - December 10, 2007

Your ruling class are governed by their fear:
They think that force and violence are key;
Their talk of peace is clearly insincere;
It's 'peace upon war terms', from what I see.
And even while the 'liberals' discuss
Concessions other governments have made,
The fatal flaw of all your foreign fuss
Reveals the sad hypocrisy displayed -
Who says that you are good and they are not;
Who pins the righteous badge upon your son;
Who wrote, within the grand atomic plot,
That you must have them all, and they have none!?
Assuming you are better is your curse,
But fools who scribe for power, speak no verse.

SAMPLE

To be continued...

SAMPLE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Born in England, in the 7th hour, of the 7th day, in the 7th month, in the rebellious 1970's, Ryan J-W Smith is primarily: a critically acclaimed poet; a multi award-winning verse playwright; a critically acclaimed actor/director/producer; a festival-winning filmmaker; a composer and musician; a legal scholar; and, a successful business entrepreneur working professionally in the entertainment industry for over thirty years.

From the age of five until fifteen, Smith trained to be a professional tennis player - beating Britain's future Men's Number 1 in straight sets at the age of thirteen. Wimbledon was in his sights… Injury at the age of fifteen may have subsequently set him on a different path, but Ryan never lost the champion's mindset: one of vision, dedication, positivity, iron-clad resilience and, above all else, an extraordinary work ethic.

Receiving a full scholarship from the E.U., Smith read Theatre Studies at Trinity College, Dublin. During his studies he was also awarded a scholarship from Trinity as the highest achieving student in his year.

After Trinity, Ryan quickly evolved to become a multi award-winning verse playwright/director/producer/actor via his own theatre company, Rogue Shakespeare®. His artistic accolades in this area include: OFFIES Award Winner 2025; two-time Hollywood Fringe International Award Winner (and four-time nominee); two-time Encore Producers' Award Winner; Hollywood Fringe Comedy Award Nomination; Amnesty International Freedom of Expression Award Nomination; Gandhi Foundation Award Recipient; three-time Arts Council England Award Recipient, and countless professional 4 and 5-star reviews.

Having now written over 3,400 Shakespearean sonnets, along with 7 verse plays, Smith has firmly established himself as a uniquely dedicated, internationally acclaimed, award-winning poet.

"Smith… the most prolific - and crucially, experienced verse-drama writer in the UK."
Fringe Review, June 2, 2024

Ryan is also a musician (primarily playing guitar, piano & singing) and a composer. His first two solo albums were originally released with Universal Music in 2006; now re-released in 2025 with Virgin Music under his pseudonym, 'Rogue Shakespeare', along with three more albums and an EP.

Smith is also a festival-winning filmmaker. His films have been shown, selected for, nominated or won their categories at over 25 international film festivals, including Cannes.

Ryan graduated from law school with a Master's Degree in Law, awarded with distinction. He has a particular focus and interest in Medical Law and Ethics; Contract Law; EU Law, and Criminal Law. Smith is a very strong advocate of civil liberties, freedom of speech, and bodily autonomy.

Alongside Yoga and Tai Chi, Ryan is a long-time practitioner of the Buddhist arts of Mindfulness Meditation and Wing Chun Kung-Fu. Smith considers Hellenic/Stoic and Buddhist/Taoist philosophy to be the foundation of all of his achievements and skills.

Ryan recently started podcasting - his show, 'The Rogue Shakespeare Experience' - *"where truth, politics and poetry collide"*, is available on all good podcast channels via www.rogueshakespeare.com



Smith's full biography can be found here:

www.rogueshakespeare.com/rogue

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The first 500 sonnets in this book were originally published by Duckpaddle Publishing in 2012 in a volume entitled:

500 SHAKESPEAREAN SONNETS

The Diary of a Poetic Quest for Truth

"Candid, spiritual, philosophical and sometimes boldly political... a landmark in literature"
Watkins Magazine

"Shakespeare managed to write 154 - Smith has penned more than three times that number. ...splendidly contemporary... a tour de force"
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"Impressively well-constructed... often startlingly expressive and insightful... a fascinating and richly detailed picture of the author"
Neon Literary Magazine

"Shakespeare's record of 154 sonnets in his lifetime was breathtaking. But what Ryan J-W Smith has achieved is simply awe-inspiring. Thought-provoking, political, even hard-hitting at times, this collection of sonnets, which took 4 years to write, is honest and very real. There is no layer to scrape through - the reader is honoured with a very truthful portrayal of life, which is beautifully crafted. Highly recommended"
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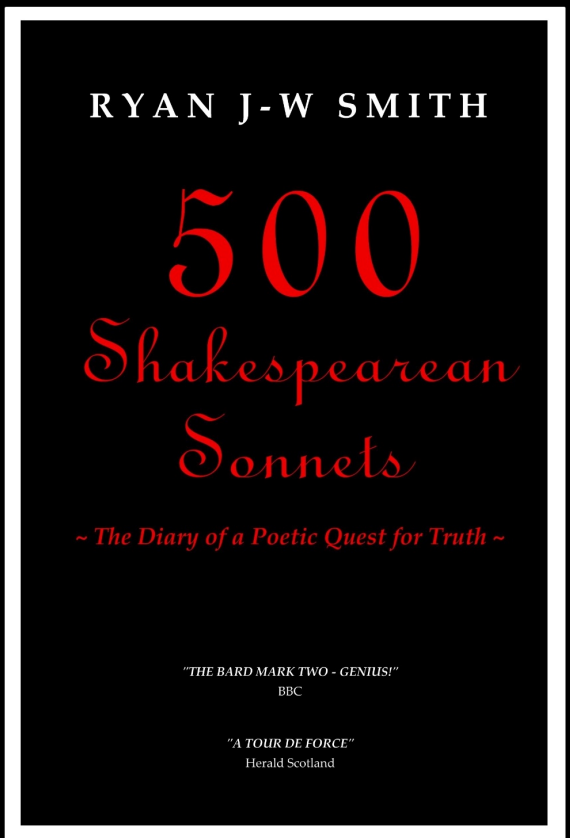


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