

ETYMOLOGICALLY YOURS,

A  
SHORT PLAY  
BY  
NICHOLAS DEKKER

Nicholas Dekker  
2595 Summit St.  
Columbus, OH 43202  
(614) 204-8625  
[nicholas.dekker@yahoo.com](mailto:nicholas.dekker@yahoo.com)

## ETYMOLOGICALLY YOURS,

(P.S. The word ‘etymology’ derives from the Greek ‘etymologia,’ out of etymon, meaning “true sense” and logos, meaning “word.” Etymology. The true sense of the word. Now, the history of the word.)

Production History: This play was first performed at the Wild Goose Creative New Year’s Festival on December 30, 2007. The role of WOMAN was played by Jacqui Hoke.

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### WOMAN

Here’s a thought... is there such a thing as an Antartican accent? Are there any native speakers in Antarctica?

But I digress.

Which means, by the way, to deviate or set apart. To step aside.

It comes from the Latin.

So...

Which is, actually, from the Old English, meaning – more or less – “in this way.” The use of ‘so’ at the beginning of a sentence is probably Yiddish.

You know, you can use ‘so’ as a term of dismissal.

“So?”

That’s from the late nineteenth century.

You can say a lot with that one word. For instance, if someone tells you something very personal about themselves. Or they explain why they care about a particular situation or person or idea. You can respond with “So?” And just like that, you’ve dismissed it all.

Children are known for continually asking “Why?” They ask and they ask, until adults don’t know how to answer anymore. So they counter with a final “Because!”

I think adults use ‘so’ the way children use ‘why.’

What else do you say to that, besides “Because!”?

I don’t know where to start.

I’m so distracted by words.

I'm writing you a letter. You can probably tell because you're reading this letter. I've used an entire page already just trying to start.

I'm writing you to fill in all the words we never spoke to each other. You never... you never asked me, so I never had a chance to say, "Yes." Yes. Old English. "So be it."

So be it. There's that 'so' again.

I think I need to be more angry with you. Anger is an old word. Old Norse. Enraged. Full of trouble. Vexatious.

Vexatious. That's an angry word. It sounds like a cross between being confused and being harassed.

That's it: I'm vexed.

So...

...let me make this plain and simple... which is the just the way you like things: this is the end of our relationship.

These are the last words I will ever address to you...

Unless, by chance, one day, you've become a cab driver in a big city and I'm visiting friends – not you – who live in that city and I've just arrived at the airport and have walked out front carrying my bags and I raise my arm and say loudly, "Taxi!" and you, in your bright yellow, dirty chariot pull to the curb and I open the back door – the back door – and throw my bag on the dirty, plastic-y seat and slide in behind it and pull the door shut and you ask, "Where to?" and I give you an address. Then, yes, I will have addressed those words to you, but they will mean nothing, the words will mean nothing, they will have been spoken as if I were speaking to a stranger and you will take no more meaning from them than their literal, dictionary denotations and if you try to address me as if you know me then, so help me, I will rip open that plastic divider, thrust my arm through it, and hope to all hope that my fist will find that perfect place to make your cheekbone sting for a week with such a big bruise that your friends will ask you how you survived that terrible, terrible car crash.

So.

That was brutal. Brute. Animalistic.

Sorry.

Maybe that was more brutal than I meant it to be. But I can't be afraid of saying it.

You never understood what you said to me. Or what you could have said. From time to time, throughout our relationship, you accused me of reading too much into what you say. I'll admit, I'm guilty to some degree. Like the time we were finishing a fight, and you told me that I was "stunning" and I asked, now do you mean stunning in the sense of 'to daze by powerful emotion' or stunning in the sense of 'strikingly beautiful or noteworthy,' because you could be insulting me one way or complimenting me the other.

Have you ever read any Chekhov? Russian novelist and playwright. (A *wright* is a craftsman, by the way.) Trained as a doctor. 1860 to 1904. He understood words. He studied medicine, so he knew what it meant to break something down and open it up and try to understand how every tiny, little piece of it affected the whole. He wrote a scene, in one of his plays... *Cherry Orchard*, I think. I cry every time I read it. Two people stand there... a man and a woman. They talk about absolutely nothing. Trains. Snow. Cities. Carriages. Luggage. But they're talking about getting married. She's asking him with every word, every pause, every comma, every space, she's asking, "Please, please marry me, make me your wife and take me away from here." And he's pleading with her, every word, every glance, "Come with me, marry me, be my wife, go with me where I go."

He never asks her. She never confesses to him. It's all trains and cities and snow and luggage and misplaced jewelry, until someone else calls you out of the room, and then you've missed your chance.

So here I am, speaking to you. Here are my words.

Trains.

Luggage.

Cities.

Snow.

Shoes.

Furniture.

Clothing.

Walls.

I don't love you anymore.

I'm no good at subtext.

I'm no longer mincing words. I don't love you anymore. It's taken me a long time to say that.

Do you know what love means?

Do you understand the true sense of the word?

Do you?

I don't think you do.

You know why?

Because I think you're a bastard.

And I don't mean "bastard" as in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century French meaning "child of a nobleman by a woman other than his wife." Not from the Old French *fils de bast*, as in "a child conceived on an improvised bed." I mean it – and I *mean* it – as the vulgar term of abuse first heaped on someone in the 1850's.

You're a bastard.

And you're a freak.

No, not from the 1563 "sudden turn of mind" or "capricious notion." I mean an anomaly, an aberration, a deviation from nature.

No one's supposed to act that way.

Is that too harsh? Is that what I mean to say?

Do you know what love means?

It's easy to break down.

It starts with an early Germanic language.

Romantic, isn't it?

No, it's not. It's Germanic.

Get it?

You don't.

It starts with an early Germanic language, as *lubo*.

Who knows where it leads from there?

Old English, as *lufu*.

Frisian, as *liaf*.

German, as *lieb*.

And then it leads... to two people. A man and a woman. Speaking love, *lubo*, *lufu*, *liaf*, *lieb* through the commonplace. A high concept boiled down to luggage, snow, houseplants, silverware.

Let me tell you a story. This is our story.

It starts in college. I'm taking a class in Linguistics, and the professor starts talking about language production and comprehension...

From the Latin *com*, meaning 'completely' and *prehendere*, 'to seize.' So to seize completely.

Sorry... and he starts telling us about aphasias... Broca's and Wernicke's... about people who have been in car accidents and received trauma to the head.

From the Greek *trauma*... wound. We still use the Greek word.

Sorry... but he tells us about people who can function just fine, but can't put words together, or they lose phrases and words, or they just struggle to form one sentence, or... or, they just can't

find the words anymore. They spend the rest of their lives exhausting themselves just to say, "I'm going outside" or "I'm hungry" or "I love you."

And I just started crying at my desk. I was so afraid everyone would see me. I looked down and let the tears fall into my notebook. I held my breath and watched how they stained the page until it rippled softly and the words smeared and slid.

Imagine not being able to say what you want. Imagine looking at the person you love and having to think and think and think just to tell them you love them. I cried because I'm not even diagnosed with aphasia and yet I know what it's like to look at someone and not know what to say. No wonder we resort to, "Luggage. Chairs. Hats. Snow. Rain. Cars." At least we're saying something, and usually the other person is so equally dumbfounded they know exactly what you mean...

1600's... 'dumb' plus the latter half of 'confound.'

And what about the other person? The one who stands there waiting to hear the words? To hear "I need you" and "I love you" or even just to hear their name on the lips of another person.

What happens to them? Can the person with the aphasia see their face? What's there? Disappointment, impatience, worry? Love?

What does my face say to you? How does it read? Most likely impatience, frustration, confusion. Vexation. All those words ending in '-ion' are Latin, by the way. But what else do you see? Most likely disappointment.

Probably love, too.

I shouldn't have called you a bastard.

I knew this wouldn't be easy.

You wrote me a letter. These are probably the last words you'll address to me. Or, at least, the last I'll hear. It's only a half page long, but I've read it about twenty times. It's mainly about minor things... your house and your piano and your fireplace and your dog.

I'm trying not to read too much into it, but you're talking about your home and the things in it and I keep picturing it and I want you to say that I'm there, too. I want you to say I'm part of it. Luggage. Furniture. Snow. Cities. Rain. Me.

But that's all you've ever said. I've waited for more.

And yet...

Yet is another funny word. Anglo-Frisian. "Till now, thus far, also, at last."

At last.

At last.

Have you been saying it all along? Am I the one with the aphasia? Looking and listening and struggling and not quite getting anywhere but knowing the meaning? What is it like between the person with aphasia and the other person? Does the other person complete the sentences? Does he or she fill in the words? Or do they wait for the person with aphasia? Do they wait and wait and wait even though they know the word, they know the answer and can see ahead, they can see where the person with aphasia is going and what they mean and that, even though the words, “I love you” aren’t there yet, they’re coming, they’re coming and the person with aphasia is struggling and struggling so hard because they want to say it, because they mean it and are so desperate to express it that they start stumbling and stumbling and stumbling over the words and phrases? Oh God, is that what you’ve been saying all along? Because I feel it’s coming, it’s coming, I can see the words forming in your mind even though all you can say is, “Luggage, carriages, candles, clothes, pianos, chairs, fireplaces, books, kitchens, cars, and paintings, suitcases, pencils, breakfast, magazines, counters, garages, and ceiling fans,” and if all we can say to each other are lists of objects and ideas or locations... If me climbing into your cab and saying, “The corner of Twelfth and Broadway, please” are the only words we have for each other, then yes, yes, yes, yes, I will marry you.

Yes. So be it. Let it be so.

I’m complicating things. I’m using too many words. We’ve been talking past each other. I think we’ll need to strike a deal.

“Strike a deal” is an idiom from Irish horse traders. They would slap hands to signify their transaction.

“So?” you ask. “Because,” say I.

You can be a man of few words, without knowing what most of your words mean. I can be a woman of many words, but I’ll know exactly what each word means.

Either way, I think we’ll be talking about the same thing.