
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

Shakespeare Speaks

Wear my heart upon my sleeve



Narrator

It was a sunny day. William Shakespeare's daughter and Bess the barmaid are at the fair.

Daughter

Lalalalala...

Bess

You're very happy today aren't you my duck?

Daughter

Oh Bess, I'm in love.

Bess

You're not still after that Robert Harley are you?

Daughter

Nooooo! It's Henry Bull. He's wonderful: handsome and brave... and he loves me too... but Bess, father mustn't find out. Henry hasn't got any money. Father wouldn't approve.

Bess

Well my duck, you need to hide your feelings better than! You're **wearing your heart upon your sleeve**; the whole world can see how you feel! Oh! Hello Mr Will...

Daughter

Father!

Will

Good afternoon Bess; Daughter... and what are you two gossiping about? Who's wearing their **heart upon their sleeve**?

Bess

We were ...err... discussing that evil Iago, in your play Othello. He **wears his heart upon his sleeve**, doesn't he Mr Will?

Will

Ah, yes, Othello, my tragedy. A very good topic for discussion. Iago says: I will wear my heart upon my sleeve...

Robert Harley as Iago

I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at. I am not what I am.

Will

But, even though Iago talks about wearing his heart on his sleeve he doesn't actually intend to do it. Iago never reveals his true feelings, except perhaps to the audience, and even they cannot fully trust him!

Bess

Well, showing your true feelings certainly can lead to trouble.

Daughter

What feelings does Iago hide, father? Is he in love?

Will

No: quite the opposite. Iago pretends to be loyal to Othello so that he can destroy him! That's why he says: I am not what I am.

Narrator

We'll leave them there for now. Many of Shakespeare's characters conceal their true feelings. Some hide their love, while Iago, Shakespeare's most hateful villain, hides his plans to destroy everyone around him. Nowadays, the phrase **to wear your heart upon - or on - your sleeve** still means: to make your feelings and emotions obvious, even if it makes you vulnerable. In a 2015 interview, US actress Kristen Stewart, star of the Twilight movies, said:

Clip 1

I wear my heart on my sleeve. If I'm in a mood, my mood shows.

Narrator

It's often used to talk about love and romance.

Clip 2

When I told him I loved him, he broke up with me. I'll never wear my heart on my sleeve again.

Will

Now, dear daughter, who is this young man who's made you so cheerful?

Daughter

Oh... errr... nobody...

Will

Nobody...?

Bess

Didn't I tell you not to wear your heart on your sleeve?!

Daughter

Oh dear. To wear, or not to wear: that is the question...