

What you inherit, what you receive from a world that you did not fashion but that will do its best to fashion you, is at once beautiful and repellent. You somehow have to come to terms with what is ugly as well as what is precious.

The task derives from the kind of creatures that we are. We arrive in the world only partially formed; a culture that has been in the making for hundreds of thousands of years will form the rest. And that culture will inevitably contain much that is noxious as well as beneficent. No one is exempt—not the Jew or the Muslim, of course, but also not the Cockney or the earl or the person whose ancestors came to America on the Mayflower or, for that matter, the person whose ancestors were Algonquins or Laplanders. Our species' cultural birthright is a mixed blessing. It is what makes us fully human, but being fully human is a difficult work in progress.

Though xenophobia is part of our complex inheritance—quickened, no doubt, by the same instinct that causes chimpanzees to try to destroy members of groups not their own—this inheritance is not our ineluctable fate. Even in the brief span of our recorded history, some five thousand years, we can watch societies and individuals ceaselessly playing with, reshuffling, and on occasion tossing out the cards that both nature and culture have dealt, and introducing new ones.

Stephen Greenblatt: *Shakespeare's Cure for Xenophobia—What "The Merchant of Venice" taught me about ethnic hatred and the literary imagination.* New Yorker: Annals of Culture, July 10 & 17, 2017 Issue.

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