As I sit before my computer with the task of putting the finishing touches on this letter, the notion of finishing touches takes on new and painful significance. Our nation and the world are reeling in the aftermath of senseless terrorism and horrific loss of life. The letter I had written for this newsletter last week has little meaning today. I hear exhortations to get back to the routines of normal life, but I am finding that quite difficult.

To all of you who have been directly affected by this tragedy I offer sincere sympathy. The entire human family has been assaulted, and healing, anything approaching healing, will take a long time. Those of us who have looked to New York City as an artistic Mecca will now have other, darker associations. As I listen to commentators and hear tape recordings of final farewells to loved ones made via cell phones, I am struck by our reliance on language as meaning in the face of chaos. As a teen-ager I came across the following quote of Christopher Morley's: If we discovered that we had only five minutes left to say all we wanted to say, every telephone booth would be occupied by people calling other people to stammer that they loved them. In my youth the quote rang true, and now I see how right Mr. Morley was. Even down to the pay phone reference, since cellular phone service broke down in the aftermath of disaster.

Eric Armstrong shared with readers of vastavox that he and his class read Shakespeare's sonnet 64 together and found it comforting and apt. Shakespeare and St. Thomas More are both men for all seasons.

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
The rich-proud cost of outworn buried age;
When sometime-lofty towers I see down-razed,
And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;
When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
And the firm soil win of the watery main,
Increasing store with loss and loss with store;
When I have seen such interchange of state,
Or state itself confounded to decay?
Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate,
That Time will come and take my love away.
This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

In a brief nod to normalcy I will take a moment here to thank all who made our recent VASTA conference in Chicago such a success, especially Eric Armstrong who steered it capably from start to finish. A heartfelt thank you also to our presenters: Catherine Fitzmaurice for her faultless perception of inflection and the many specific ways language is pointed to achieve nuance; Jan Gist for her extensive, detailed and impressive compilation of the workings of language; and Roger Gross for his devotion to Shakespeare's verse forms.

I commend you all to the love and care of a higher power, who does not will evil, but wills good out of evil. May loving, healing words bind up our nations wounds.

Kate Burke, President