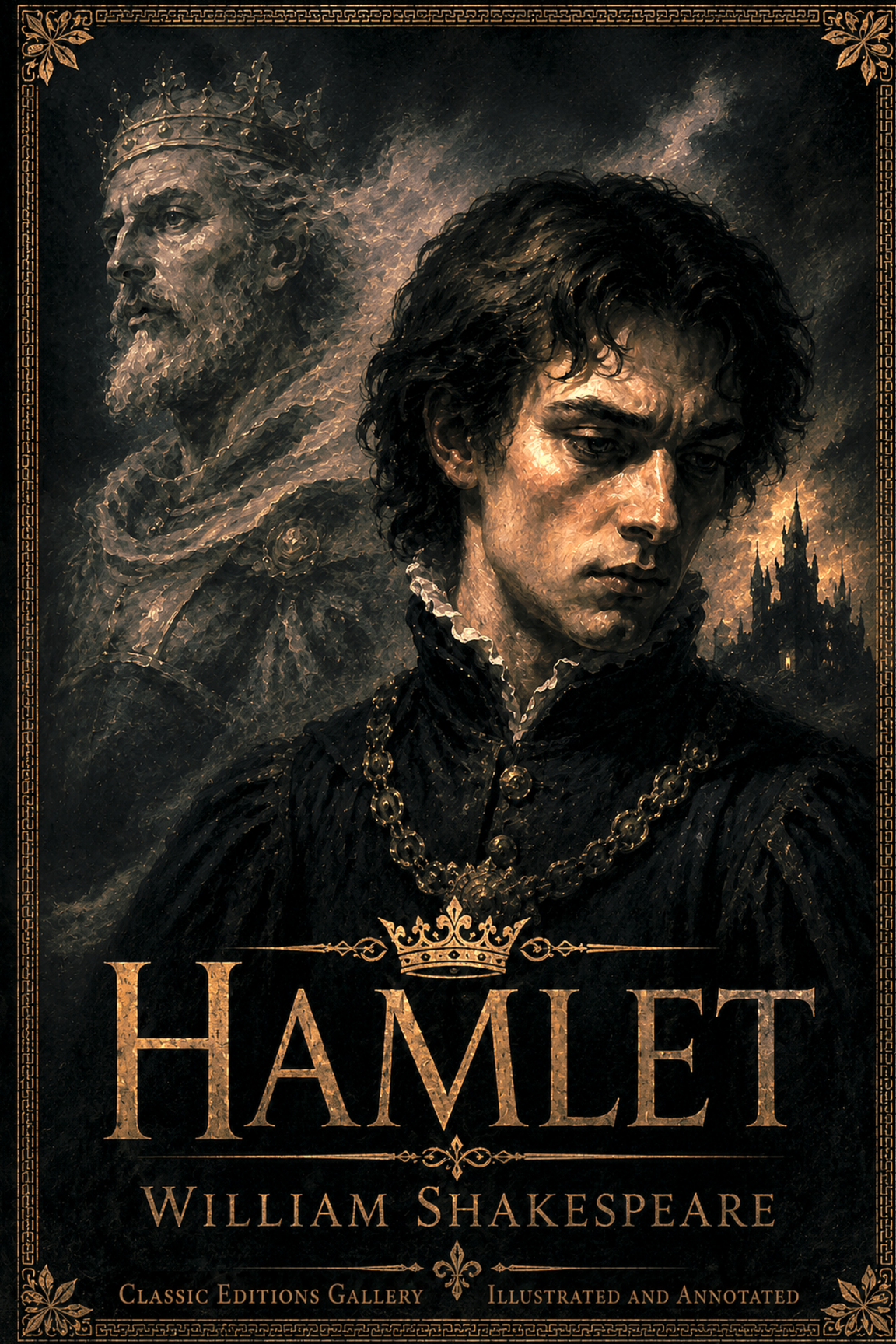


The book cover features a dramatic, painterly illustration. In the foreground, a young man with dark, curly hair and a somber expression is depicted from the chest up. He wears a dark, high-collared garment with a white ruffled neck and a heavy, ornate gold chain. In the background, a larger, more ethereal figure of an older man with a long white beard and a crown is visible, appearing to emerge from a misty, golden light. To the right, a dark, gothic castle with multiple spires is silhouetted against a hazy, orange-gold sky. The entire scene is framed by a decorative border with a repeating geometric pattern and floral motifs in the corners.

HAMLET

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

CLASSIC EDITIONS GALLERY

ILLUSTRATED AND ANNOTATED

Hamlet

William Shakespeare

CLASSIC EDITIONS GALLERY

Toronto, Ontario

<https://www.classiceditionsgallery.com/>



Hamlet

By William Shakespeare

First published 1603.

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Introduction

Few characters in the vast landscape of literature possess the haunting, introspective gravity of Prince Hamlet. To encounter him is to step into a psychological labyrinth where every shadow may harbor a secret and every word carries the crushing weight of unspoken intent. We meet him at a moment of profound fracture, standing on the precipice between grief and duty, between the sharp impulse of vengeance and the paralyzing fog of introspection. This is far more than a chronicle of a fractured Danish court; it is an intimate study of the human psyche under the pressure of impossible choices and the specter of loss.

Composed during the transition from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean era—likely between 1599 and 1601—Hamlet stands as the definitive achievement of the English revenge tragedy. While its structural foundations belong to a genre characterized by ghosts, intercepted letters, and retribution, Shakespeare transcends these tropes through unparalleled psychological complexity. The play emerged from a period of profound political flux in England, reflecting an era where old certainties were dissolving into more ambiguous realities. Although scholars continue to debate the influence of earlier, now-lost plays, its position as a cornerstone of the Renaissance canon remains unassailable.

The play's enduring resonance lies in its refusal to provide easy moral resolutions. At its core, Hamlet grapples with the fundamental tensions of existence: the struggle between contemplation and action, the ambiguity of morality, and the creeping corruption that can infect both a single soul and an entire state. Through his celebrated soliloquies, we witness a mind navigating the precarious boundary between madness and profound insight, exploring the agonizing gap between appearance and reality. The play examines how mortality haunts our every ambition and how the pursuit of justice can lead to an inescapable spiral of consequence, making it a timeless mirror held up to our deepest fears regarding identity, betrayal, and the unknown.

As you begin this journey through the shadowed halls of Elsinore, approach the text not as a static relic of the sixteenth century, but as a living interrogation of life itself. Shakespeare's language is dense, beautiful, and often visceral, demanding your full attention and emotional presence. Allow yourself to be caught in its intricate wordplay, sudden shifts in tone, and profound existential questions. Whether approaching this masterpiece for the first time or returning as an admirer, there is something waiting for you within these pages—a haunting recognition of the very complexities that define what it means to be human.

Character List

Hamlet - Prince of Denmark.

Claudius - King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle.

The Ghost of the late king - Hamlet's father.

Gertrude - The Queen, Hamlet's mother, now wife of Claudius.

Polonius - Lord Chamberlain.

Laertes - Son to Polonius.

Ophelia - Daughter to Polonius.

Horatio - Friend to Hamlet.

Fortinbras - Prince of Norway.

Voltemand - Courtier.

Cornelius - Courtier.

Rosencrantz - Courtier. Old friend of Hamlet.

Guildenstern - Courtier. Old friend of Hamlet.

Marcellus - Officer.

Barnardo - Officer.

Francisco - A Soldier.

Osric - Courtier.

Reynaldo - Servant to Polonius.

Players - Travelling actors.

Two Clowns - Grave-diggers.

Act I, Scene I

Elsinore. A platform before the Castle.

[Enter Francisco and Barnardo, two sentinels.]

BARNARDO

Who's there?

FRANCISCO

Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold¹ yourself.

BARNARDO

Long live the king!

FRANCISCO

Barnardo?

BARNARDO

He.

FRANCISCO

You come most carefully upon your hour.

BARNARDO

'Tis now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Francisco.

FRANCISCO

For this relief much thanks. 'Tis bitter cold, and I am sick at heart.

BARNARDO

Have you had quiet guard?

FRANCISCO

Not a mouse stirring.

BARNARDO

Well, good night. If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus, the rivals of my watch², bid them make haste.

[Enter Horatio and Marcellus.]

FRANCISCO

I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who is there?

HORATIO

Friends to this ground.

MARCELLUS

And liegemen ³to the Dane.

FRANCISCO

Give you good night.

MARCELLUS

O, farewell, honest soldier, who hath reliev'd you?

FRANCISCO

Barnardo has my place. Give you good-night.

[Exit.]

MARCELLUS

Holla, Barnardo!

BARNARDO

Say, what, is Horatio there?

HORATIO

A piece of him.

BARNARDO

Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, good Marcellus.

MARCELLUS

What, has this thing appear'd again tonight?

BARNARDO

I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS

Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy, and will not let belief take hold of him touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us. Therefore I have entreated him along with us to watch the minutes of this night, that if again this apparition come he may approve our eyes⁴ and speak to it.

HORATIO

Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.

BARNARDO

Sit down awhile, and let us once again assail your ears, that are so fortified against our story, what we two nights have seen.

HORATIO

Well, sit we down, and let us hear Barnardo speak of this.

BARNARDO

Last night of all, when yond same star that's westward from the pole, had made his course t'illumine that part of heaven where now it burns, Marcellus and myself, the bell then beating one-

MARCELLUS

Peace, break thee off. Look where it comes again.

[Enter Ghost.]

BARNARDO

In the same figure, like the king that's dead.

MARCELLUS

Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.

BARNARDO

Looks it not like the king? Mark it, Horatio.



HORATIO

Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.

BARNARDO

It would be spoke to.

MARCELLUS

Question it, Horatio.

HORATIO

What art thou that usurp'st this time of night, together with that fair and warlike form in which the majesty of buried Denmark did sometimes march? By heaven I charge thee speak.

MARCELLUS

It is offended.

BARNARDO

See, it stalks away.

HORATIO

Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee speak!

[Exit Ghost.]

MARCELLUS

'Tis gone, and will not answer.

BARNARDO

How now, Horatio! You tremble and look pale. Is not this something more than fantasy? What think you on't?

HORATIO

Before my God, I might not this believe without the sensible and true avouch of mine own eyes.

MARCELLUS

Is it not like the king?

HORATIO

As thou art to thyself: such was the very armour he had on when he th'ambitious Norway combated; so frown'd he once, when in an angry parle⁵ he smote the sledded Polacks⁶ on the ice. 'Tis strange.

MARCELLUS

Thus twice before, and jump at this dead hour, with martial stalk⁷ hath he gone by our watch.

HORATIO

In what particular thought to work I know not; but in the gross and scope of my opinion, this bodes some strange eruption to our state.

MARCELLUS

Good now, sit down, and tell me, he that knows, why this same strict and most observant watch so nightly toils the subject of the land, and why such daily cast of brazen cannon and foreign mart⁸ for implements of war; why such impress⁹ of shipwrights, whose sore task does not divide the Sunday from the week. What might be toward, that this sweaty haste doth make the night joint-labourer with the day: who is't that can inform me?¹⁰

HORATIO

That can I; at least, the whisper goes so. Our last king, whose image even but now appear'd to us, was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway, thereto prick'd on by a most emulate pride, dar'd to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet, for so this side of our known world esteem'd him, did slay this Fortinbras; who by a seal'd compact, well ratified by law and heraldry, did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands which he stood seiz'd of, to the conqueror; against the which, a moiety competent¹¹ was gaged by our king; which had return'd to the inheritance of Fortinbras, had he been vanquisher; as by the same cov'nant and carriage of the article design'd, his fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras, of unimproved mettle¹², hot and full, hath in the skirts of Norway, here and there, shark'd up a list of lawless resolute, for food and diet, to some enterprise that hath a stomach in't; which is no other, as it doth well appear unto our state, but to recover of us by strong hand and terms compulsory, those foresaid lands so by his father lost. And this, I take it, is the main motive of our preparations, the source of this our watch, and the chief head of this post-haste¹³ and rummage¹⁴ in the land.

BARNARDO

I think it be no other but e'en so: well may it sort that this portentous figure comes armed through our watch so like the king that was and is the question of these wars.

HORATIO

A mote¹⁵ it is to trouble the mind's eye. In the most high and palmy state of Rome, a little ere¹⁶ the mightiest Julius fell, the graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets; as stars with trains of fire and dews of blood, disasters in the sun; and the moist star, upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands, was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse. And even the like precursor of fierce events, as harbingers preceding still the fates and prologue to the omen coming on, have heaven and earth together demonstrated unto our climatures and countrymen.

[Re-enter Ghost.]

But, soft, behold! Lo, where it comes again! I'll cross it, though it blast me. Stay, illusion! If thou hast any sound, or use of voice, speak to me. If there be any good thing to be done, that may to thee do ease, and grace to me, speak to me. If thou art privy to thy country's fate, which, happily, foreknowing may avoid, O speak! Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life extorted treasure in the womb of earth, for which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death, speak of it. Stay, and speak!

[The cock crows.]

Stop it, Marcellus!

MARCELLUS

Shall I strike at it with my partisan¹⁷?

HORATIO

Do, if it will not stand.

BARNARDO

'Tis here!

HORATIO

'Tis here!

[Exit Ghost.]

MARCELLUS

'Tis gone! We do it wrong, being so majestical, to offer it the show of violence, for it is as the air, invulnerable, and our vain blows malicious mockery.

BARNARDO

It was about to speak, when the cock crew.

HORATIO

And then it started, like a guilty thing upon a fearful summons. I have heard the cock, that is the trumpet to the morn, doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat awake the god of day; and at his warning, whether in sea or fire, in earth or air, th'extravagant and erring spirit hies¹⁸ to his confine. And of the truth herein this present object made probation¹⁹.

MARCELLUS

It faded on the crowing of the cock. Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated, the bird of dawning singeth all night long; and then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad, the nights are wholesome, then no planets strike, no fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm; so hallow'd and so gracious is the time.

HORATIO

So have I heard, and do in part believe it. But look, the morn in russet mantle clad, walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill. Break we our watch up, and by my advice, let us impart what we have seen tonight unto young Hamlet; for upon my life, this spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him. Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it, as needful in our loves, fitting our duty?

MARCELLUS

Let's do't, I pray, and I this morning know where we shall find him most conveniently.

[Exeunt.]

Act I, Scene II

Elsinore. A room of state in the Castle.

[Enter Claudius King of Denmark, Gertrude the Queen, Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, Voltemand, Cornelius, Lords and Attendant.]

KING

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death the memory be green, and that it us befitted to bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom to be contracted in one brow of woe; yet so far hath discretion fought with nature that we with wisest sorrow think on him, together with remembrance of ourselves. Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen, th'imperial jointress¹ to this warlike state, have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy, with one auspicious and one dropping eye, with mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage, in equal scale weighing delight and dole², taken to wife; nor have we herein barr'd your better wisdoms, which have freely gone with this affair along. For all, our thanks. Now follows, that you know young Fortinbras, holding a weak supposal of our worth, or thinking by our late dear brother's death our state to be disjoint and out of frame, collegued with this dream of his advantage, he hath not fail'd to pester us with message, importing the surrender of those lands lost by his father, with all bonds of law, to our most valiant brother. So much for him. Now for ourself and for this time of meeting: thus much the business is: we have here writ to Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras, who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears of this his nephew's purpose, to suppress his further gait herein; in that the levies³, the lists⁴, and full proportions are all made out of his subject: and we here dispatch you, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand, for bearers of this greeting to old Norway, giving to you no further personal power to business with the king, more than the scope of these dilated⁵ articles allow. Farewell; and let your haste commend your duty.

CORNELIUS and VOLTEMAND

In that, and all things, will we show our duty.

KING

We doubt it nothing: heartily farewell.

[Exeunt Voltemand and Cornelius.]

And now, Laertes, what's the news with you? You told us of some suit⁶. What is't, Laertes? You cannot speak of reason to the Dane, and lose your

voice. What wouldst thou beg, Laertes, that shall not be my offer, not thy asking? The head is not more native to the heart, the hand more instrumental to the mouth, than is the throne of Denmark to thy father. What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

LAERTES

Dread my lord, your leave and favour to return to France, from whence though willingly I came to Denmark to show my duty in your coronation; yet now I must confess, that duty done, my thoughts and wishes bend again toward France, and bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.

KING

Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius?

POLONIUS

He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave by laboursome petition; and at last upon his will I seal'd my hard consent. I do beseech you give him leave to go.

KING

Take thy fair hour, Laertes; time be thine, and thy best graces spend it at thy will! But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son-

HAMLET

[Aside.] A little more than kin, and less than kind.

KING

How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET

Not so, my lord, I am too much i' the sun.

QUEEN

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted⁷ colour off, and let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark. Do not for ever with thy vailed lids seek for thy noble father in the dust. Thou know'st 'tis common, all that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity.

HAMLET

Ay, madam, it is common.

QUEEN

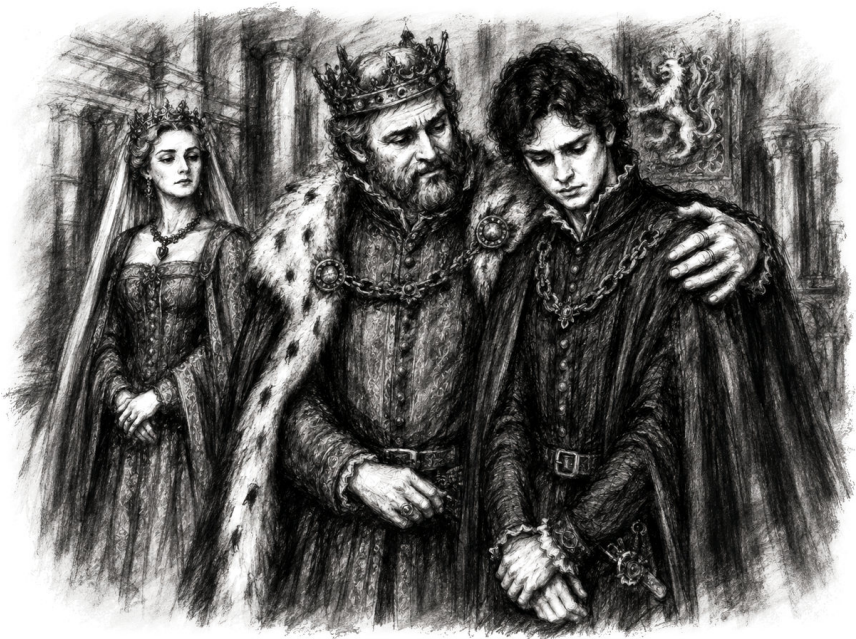
If it be, why seems it so particular with thee?

HAMLET

Seems, madam! Nay, it is; I know not seems. 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother, nor customary suits of solemn black, nor windy suspiration⁸ of forc'd breath, no, nor the fruitful river in the eye, nor the dejected haviour⁹ of the visage, together with all forms, moods, shows of grief, that can denote me truly. These indeed seem, for they are actions that a man might play; but I have that within which passeth show; these but the trappings and the suits of woe.

KING

'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet, to give these mourning duties to your father; but you must know, your father lost a father, that father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound in filial obligation, for some term to do obsequious¹⁰ sorrow. But to persevere in obstinate condolment is a course of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief, it shows a will most incorrect to heaven, a heart unfortified, a mind impatient, an understanding simple and unschool'd; for what we know must be, and is as common as any the most vulgar thing to sense, why should we in our peevish opposition take it to heart? Fie, 'tis a fault to heaven, a fault against the dead, a fault to nature, to reason most absurd, whose common theme is death of fathers, and who still hath cried, from the first corse¹¹ till he that died today, 'this must be so.' We pray you throw to earth this unprevailing woe, and think of us as of a father; for let the world take note you are the most immediate to our throne, and with no less nobility of love than that which dearest father bears his son do I impart toward you. For your intent in going back to school in Wittenberg, it is most retrograde to our desire: and we beseech you bend you to remain here in the cheer and comfort of our eye, our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.



QUEEN

Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet. I pray thee stay with us; go not to Wittenberg.

HAMLET

I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

KING

Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply. Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come; this gentle and unforc'd accord of Hamlet Sits smiling to my heart; in grace whereof, no jocund¹² health that Denmark drinks today but the great cannon to the clouds shall tell, and the king's rouse the heaven shall bruit¹³ again, re-speaking earthly thunder. Come away.

[Exeunt all but Hamlet.]

HAMLET

O that this too too solid flesh would melt, thaw, and resolve itself into a dew! Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd his canon¹⁴ 'gainst self-slaughter. O God! O God! How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world! Fie on't! Oh fie! 'tis an unweeded garden that grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature possess it merely. That it should come to this! But two months dead-nay, not so much, not two: so excellent a king; that was to this Hyperion¹⁵ to a satyr¹⁶; so loving to my mother, that he might not beteem¹⁷ the winds of heaven visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth! Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on; and yet, within a month- let me not think on't-Frailty, thy name is woman! A little month, or ere those shoes were old with which she followed my poor father's body like Niobe¹⁸, all tears.-why she, even she- O God! A beast that wants discourse¹⁹ of reason would have mourn'd longer,-married with mine uncle, my father's brother; but no more like my father than I to Hercules. Within a month, ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears had left the flushing in her galled eyes, she married. O most wicked speed, to post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets! It is not, nor it cannot come to good. But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

[Enter Horatio, Marcellus and Barnardo.]

HORATIO

Hail to your lordship!

HAMLET

I am glad to see you well: Horatio, or I do forget myself.

HORATIO

The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever.

HAMLET

Sir, my good friend; I'll change that name with you: and what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio?- Marcellus?

MARCELLUS

My good lord.

HAMLET

I am very glad to see you.-Good even, sir.- but what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg?

HORATIO

A truant disposition, good my lord.

HAMLET

I would not hear your enemy say so; nor shall you do my ear that violence, to make it truster of your own report against yourself. I know you are no truant. But what is your affair in Elsinore? We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart.

HORATIO

My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.

HAMLET

I prithee²⁰ do not mock me, fellow-student. I think it was to see my mother's wedding.

HORATIO

Indeed, my lord, it follow'd hard upon.

HAMLET

Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral bak'd meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables. Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven or ever I had seen that day, Horatio. My father, -methinks I see my father.

HORATIO

Where, my lord?

HAMLET

In my mind's eye, Horatio.

HORATIO

I saw him once; he was a goodly king.

HAMLET

He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again.

HORATIO

My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

HAMLET

Saw? Who?

HORATIO

My lord, the king your father.

HAMLET

The king my father!

HORATIO

Season your admiration for a while with an attent ear, till I may deliver upon the witness of these gentlemen this marvel to you.

HAMLET

For God's love let me hear.

HORATIO

Two nights together had these gentlemen, Marcellus and Barnardo, on their watch in the dead waste and middle of the night, been thus encounter'd. A figure like your father, armed at point exactly, cap-à-pie²¹, Appears before them, and with solemn march goes slow and stately by them: thrice he walk'd by their oppress'd and fear-surprised eyes, within his truncheon's length; whilst they, distill'd almost to jelly with the act of fear, stand dumb, and speak not to him. This to me in dreadful secrecy impart they did, and I with them the third night kept the watch, where, as they had deliver'd, both in time, form of the thing, each word made true and good, the apparition comes. I knew your father; these hands are not more like.

HAMLET

But where was this?

MARCELLUS

My lord, upon the platform where we watch.

HAMLET

Did you not speak to it?

HORATIO

My lord, I did; but answer made it none: yet once methought it lifted up it head, and did address itself to motion, like as it would speak. But even then the morning cock crew loud, and at the sound it shrunk in haste away, and vanish'd from our sight.

HAMLET

'Tis very strange.

HORATIO

As I do live, my honour'd lord, 'tis true; and we did think it writ down in our duty to let you know of it.

HAMLET

Indeed, indeed, sirs, but this troubles me. Hold you the watch tonight?

MARCELLUS and BARNARDO

We do, my lord.

HAMLET

Arm'd, say you?

BOTH

Arm'd, my lord.

HAMLET

From top to toe?

BOTH

My lord, from head to foot.

HAMLET

Then saw you not his face?

HORATIO

O yes, my lord, he wore his beaver²² up.

HAMLET

What, look'd he frowningly?

HORATIO

A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.

HAMLET

Pale, or red?

HORATIO

Nay, very pale.

HAMLET

And fix'd his eyes upon you?

HORATIO

Most constantly.

HAMLET

I would I had been there.

HORATIO

It would have much amaz'd you.

HAMLET

Very like²³, very like. Stay'd it long?

HORATIO

While one with moderate haste might tell a hundred.

MARCELLUS and BARNARDO

Longer, longer.

HORATIO

Not when I saw't.

HAMLET

His beard was grizzled²⁴, no?

HORATIO

It was, as I have seen it in his life, a sable²⁵ silver'd.

HAMLET

I will watch tonight; perchance²⁶ 'twill walk again.

HORATIO

I warrant you it will.

HAMLET

If it assume my noble father's person, I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape and bid me hold my peace. I pray you all, if you have hitherto conceal'd this sight, let it be tenable in your silence still; and whatsoever else shall hap tonight, give it an understanding, but no tongue. I will requite²⁷ your loves. So, fare ye well. Upon the platform 'twixt²⁸ eleven and twelve, I'll visit you.

ALL

Our duty to your honour.

HAMLET

Your loves, as mine to you: farewell.

[Exeunt Horatio, Marcellus and Barnardo.]

My father's spirit in arms! All is not well; I doubt some foul play: would the night were come! Till then sit still, my soul: foul deeds will rise, though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.

[Exit.]

Act I, Scene III

A room in Polonius's house.

[Enter Laertes and Ophelia.]

LAERTES

My necessities are embark'd. Farewell. And, sister, as the winds give benefit and convoy¹ is assistant, do not sleep, but let me hear from you.

OPHELIA

Do you doubt that?

LAERTES

For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favour, Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood; a violet in the youth of primy² nature, forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting; the perfume and suppliance of a minute; no more.

OPHELIA

No more but so?

LAERTES

Think it no more. For nature crescent³ does not grow alone in thews⁴ and bulk; but as this temple waxes, the inward service of the mind and soul grows wide withal. Perhaps he loves you now, and now no soil nor cautel⁵ doth besmirch the virtue of his will; but you must fear, his greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own; for he himself is subject to his birth: he may not, as unvalu'd persons do, carve for himself; for on his choice depends the sanctity and health of this whole state; and therefore must his choice be circumscrib'd unto the voice and yielding of that body whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you, it fits your wisdom so far to believe it as he in his particular act and place may give his saying deed; which is no further than the main voice of Denmark goes withal. Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain if with too credent⁶ ear you list⁷ his songs, or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open to his unmaster'd importunity⁸. Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister; and keep you in the rear of your affection, out of the shot and danger of desire. The chariest⁹ maid is prodigal¹⁰ enough if she unmask her beauty to the moon. Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes: the canker galls¹¹ the infants of the spring too oft before their buttons be disclos'd, and in the morn and liquid dew of youth contagious blastments¹² are most imminent. Be wary then, best safety lies in fear. Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

OPHELIA

I shall th'effect of this good lesson keep as watchman to my heart. But good my brother, do not as some ungracious pastors do, show me the steep and thorny way to heaven; Whilst like a puff'd and reckless libertine¹³ himself the primrose path of dalliance¹⁴ treads, and reck's not his own rede¹⁵.

LAERTES

O, fear me not. I stay too long. But here my father comes.

[Enter Polonius.]

A double blessing is a double grace; occasion smiles upon a second leave.

POLONIUS

Yet here, Laertes? Aboard, aboard, for shame. The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail, and you are stay'd for. There, my blessing with you.

[Laying his hand on Laertes's head.]

And these few precepts¹⁶ in thy memory look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue, nor any unproportion'd thought his act. Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar. Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel; but do not dull thy palm with entertainment of each new-hatch'd, unfledg'd¹⁷ comrade. Beware of entrance to a quarrel; but being in, bear't that th'opposed may beware of thee. Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice: take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgement. Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy¹⁸, but not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy: for the apparel oft proclaims the man; and they in France of the best rank and station are of a most select and generous chief in that. Neither a borrower nor a lender be: for loan oft loses both itself and friend; and borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry¹⁹. This above all: to thine own self be true; and it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man. Farewell: my blessing season this in thee.

LAERTES

Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

POLONIUS

The time invites you; go, your servants tend.

LAERTES

Farewell, Ophelia, and remember well what I have said to you.

OPHELIA

'Tis in my memory lock'd, and you yourself shall keep the key of it.

LAERTES

Farewell.

[Exit.]

POLONIUS

What is't, Ophelia, he hath said to you?

OPHELIA

So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

POLONIUS

Marry²⁰, well bethought²¹: 'Tis told me he hath very oft of late given private time to you; and you yourself have of your audience been most free and bounteous. If it be so,-as so 'tis put on me, and that in way of caution,-I must tell you you do not understand yourself so clearly as it behoves my daughter and your honour. What is between you? Give me up the truth.



OPHELIA

He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders²² of his affection to me.

POLONIUS

Affection! Pooh! You speak like a green girl, unsifted²³ in such perilous circumstance. Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?

OPHELIA

I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

POLONIUS

Marry, I'll teach you; think yourself a baby; that you have ta'en these tenders for true pay, which are not sterling²⁴. Tender yourself more dearly²⁵; or,-not to crack the wind of the poor phrase²⁶, running it thus,-you'll tender me a fool²⁷.

OPHELIA

My lord, he hath importun'd me with love in honourable fashion.

POLONIUS

Ay, fashion you may call it; go to²⁸, go to.

OPHELIA

And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord, with almost all the holy vows of heaven.

POLONIUS

Ay, springes²⁹ to catch woodcocks. I do know, when the blood burns, how prodigal the soul Lends the tongue vows: these blazes, daughter, giving more light than heat, extinct in both, even in their promise, as it is a-making, you must not take for fire. From this time be something scanter of your maiden presence; set your entreatments at a higher rate than a command to parley. For Lord Hamlet, believe so much in him that he is young; and with a larger tether may he walk than may be given you. In few, Ophelia, do not believe his vows; for they are brokers³⁰, not of that dye³¹ which their investments show, but mere implorators of unholy suits, Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds³², the better to beguile. This is for all: I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth have you so slander any moment leisure as to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet. Look to't, I charge you; come your ways.

OPHELIA

I shall obey, my lord.

[Exeunt.]

Act I, Scene IV

The platform.

[Enter Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus.]

HAMLET

The air bites shrewdly¹; it is very cold.

HORATIO

It is a nipping and an eager² air.

HAMLET

What hour now?

HORATIO

I think it lacks of twelve.

MARCELLUS

No, it is struck.

HORATIO

Indeed? I heard it not. It then draws near the season wherein the spirit held his wont³ to walk.

[A flourish of trumpets, and ordnance shot off within.]

What does this mean, my lord?

HAMLET

The king doth wake tonight and takes his rouse⁴, keeps wassail⁵, and the swaggering upspring⁶ reels; and as he drains his draughts of Rhenish⁷ down, the kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out the triumph of his pledge⁸.

HORATIO

Is it a custom?

HAMLET

Ay marry⁹ is't; and to my mind, though I am native here, and to the manner born, it is a custom more honour'd in the breach¹⁰ than the observance. This heavy-headed revel east and west makes us traduc'd¹¹ and tax'd of other nations: they clepe¹² us drunkards, and with swinish phrase soil our addition¹³; and indeed it takes from our achievements, though perform'd at height, the pith and marrow of our attribute¹⁴. So oft it chanceth in particular men that for some vicious mole¹⁵ of nature in them, as in their birth, wherein they are not guilty, since nature cannot choose his origin, by their o'ergrowth of some complexion, oft breaking down the pales¹⁶ and forts of reason; or by some habit, that too much o'erleavens¹⁷ the form of plausible¹⁸ manners;-that these men, carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect, being Nature's livery¹⁹ or Fortune's star,- his virtues else,-be they as pure as grace, as infinite as man may undergo, shall in the general censure take corruption from that particular fault. The dram²⁰ of evil doth all the noble substance of a doubt to his own scandal.

HORATIO

Look, my lord, it comes!

[Enter Ghost.]

HAMLET

Angels and ministers of grace defend us! Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd, bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell, be thy intents wicked or charitable, Thou com'st in such a questionable shape that I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet, king, father, royal Dane. O, answer me! Let me not burst in ignorance; but tell why thy canoniz'd bones, hearsed²¹ in death, have burst their cerements²²; why the sepulchre²³, wherein we saw thee quietly inurn'd²⁴, hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws to cast thee up again! What may this mean, that thou, dead corse²⁵, again in complete steel, revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon, making night hideous, and we fools of nature so horridly to shake our disposition with thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls? Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?

[Ghost beckons Hamlet.]

HORATIO

It beckons you to go away with it, as if it some impartment²⁶ did desire to you alone.

MARCELLUS

Look with what courteous action it waves you to a more removed ground. But do not go with it.

HORATIO

No, by no means.

HAMLET

It will not speak; then will I follow it.

HORATIO

Do not, my lord.

HAMLET

Why, what should be the fear? I do not set my life at a pin's fee²⁷; and for my soul, what can it do to that, being a thing immortal as itself? It waves me forth again. I'll follow it.

HORATIO

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord, or to the dreadful summit of the cliff that beetles²⁸ o'er his base into the sea, and there assume some other horrible form which might deprive your sovereignty of reason, and draw you into madness? Think of it. The very place puts toys²⁹ of desperation, without more motive, into every brain that looks so many fathoms to the sea and hears it roar beneath.

HAMLET

It waves me still. Go on, I'll follow thee.

MARCELLUS

You shall not go, my lord.

HAMLET

Hold off your hands.

HORATIO

Be rul'd; you shall not go.

HAMLET

My fate cries out, and makes each petty artery in this body as hardy as the Nemean lion's³⁰ nerve.

[Ghost beckons.]

Still am I call'd. Unhand me, gentlemen.

[Breaking free from them.]

By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me. I say, away!-go on, I'll follow thee.

[Exeunt Ghost and Hamlet.]



HORATIO

He waxes³¹ desperate with imagination.

MARCELLUS

Let's follow; 'tis not fit thus to obey him.

HORATIO

Have after. To what issue³² will this come?

MARCELLUS

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

HORATIO

Heaven will direct it.

MARCELLUS

Nay, let's follow him.

[Exeunt.]

Act I, Scene V

A more remote part of the Castle.

[Enter Ghost and Hamlet.]

HAMLET

Whither wilt thou lead me? Speak, I'll go no further.

GHOST

Mark me¹.

HAMLET

I will.

GHOST

My hour is almost come, when I to sulph'rous and tormenting flames must render up myself.

HAMLET

Alas, poor ghost!

GHOST

Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing to what I shall unfold.

HAMLET

Speak, I am bound to hear.

GHOST

So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.

HAMLET

What?

GHOST

I am thy father's spirit, doom'd for a certain term to walk the night, and for the day confin'd to fast in fires, till the foul crimes done in my days of nature are burnt and purg'd away. But that I am forbid to tell the secrets of my prison-house, I could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow² up thy soul; freeze thy young blood, make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres, thy knotted and combined locks to part, and each particular hair to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porpentine³. But this eternal blazon⁴ must not be to ears of flesh and blood. List⁵, list, O, list! If thou didst ever thy dear father love-

HAMLET

O God!

GHOST

Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

HAMLET

Murder!



GHOST

Murder most foul, as in the best it is; but this most foul, strange, and unnatural.

HAMLET

Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love may sweep to my revenge.

GHOST

I find thee apt⁶; and duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed that rots itself in ease on Lethe⁷ wharf, wouldst thou not stir in this. Now, Hamlet, hear. 'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard, a serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark is by a forged process of my death rankly abus'd; but know, thou noble youth, the serpent that did sting thy father's life now wears his crown.

HAMLET

O my prophetic soul! Mine uncle!

GHOST

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast, with witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts, - O wicked wit, and gifts, that have the power so to seduce! - won to his shameful lust the will of my most seeming-virtuous queen. O Hamlet, what a falling off was there, from me, whose love was of that dignity that it went hand in hand even with the vow I made to her in marriage; and to decline upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor to those of mine. But virtue, as it never will be mov'd, though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven; so lust, though to a radiant angel link'd, will sate⁸ itself in a celestial bed and prey on garbage. But soft! methinks I scent the morning air; brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard, my custom always of the afternoon, upon my secure hour thy uncle stole with juice of cursed hebenon⁹ in a vial, and in the porches of my ears did pour the leperous distilment, whose effect holds such an enmity with blood of man that swift as quicksilver it courses through the natural gates and alleys of the body; and with a sudden vigour it doth posset¹⁰ and curd, like eager droppings into milk, the thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine; and a most instant tetter¹¹ bark'd about, most lazar-like¹², with vile and loathsome crust all my smooth body. Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand, of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatch'd: cut off even in the blossoms of my sin, unhous'led¹³, disappointed, unanel'd¹⁴; no reckoning made, but sent to my account with all my imperfections on my head. O horrible! O horrible! most horrible! If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not; let not the royal bed of Denmark be a couch for luxury and damned incest. But howsoever thou pursu'st this act, taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive against thy mother aught¹⁵; leave her to heaven, and to those thorns that in her bosom lodge, to prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once! The glow-worm shows the matin¹⁶ to be near, and 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire. Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.

[Exit.]

HAMLET

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else? And shall I couple hell? O, fie!¹⁷ Hold, my heart; and you, my sinews, grow not instant old, but bear me stiffly up. Remember thee? Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat in this distracted globe. Remember thee? Yea, from the table of my memory I'll wipe away all trivial fond records, all saws¹⁸ of books, all forms, all pressures past, that youth and observation copied there; and thy commandment all alone shall live within the book and volume of my brain, unmix'd with baser matter. Yes, by heaven! O most pernicious¹⁹ woman! O villain, villain, smiling damned villain! My tables. Meet it is I set it down, that one may smile, and smile, and be a villain! At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark.

[Writing.]

So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word; it is 'Adieu, adieu, remember me.' I have sworn't.

HORATIO and MARCELLUS

[Within.] My lord, my lord.

MARCELLUS

[Within.] Lord Hamlet.

HORATIO

[Within.] Heaven secure him.

HAMLET

So be it!

MARCELLUS

[Within.] Illo, ho, ho, my lord!

HAMLET

Hillo, ho, ho, boy! Come, bird, come.

[Enter Horatio and Marcellus.]

MARCELLUS

How is't, my noble lord?

HORATIO

What news, my lord?

HAMLET

O, wonderful!

HORATIO

Good my lord, tell it.

HAMLET

No, you'll reveal it.

HORATIO

Not I, my lord, by heaven.

MARCELLUS

Nor I, my lord.

HAMLET

How say you then, would heart of man once think it?- but you'll be secret?

HORATIO and MARCELLUS

Ay, by heaven, my lord.

HAMLET

There's ne'er a villain dwelling in all Denmark but he's an arrant knave²⁰.

HORATIO

There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave to tell us this.

HAMLET

Why, right; you are i' the right; and so, without more circumstance at all, I hold it fit that we shake hands and part: you, as your business and desire shall point you,- for every man hath business and desire, such as it is;-and for my own poor part, look you, I'll go pray.

HORATIO

These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

HAMLET

I'm sorry they offend you, heartily; Yes faith, heartily.

HORATIO

There's no offence, my lord.

HAMLET

Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio, and much offence too. Touching this vision here, it is an honest ghost, that let me tell you. For your desire to know what is between us, O'ermaster't²¹ as you may. And now, good friends, as you are friends, scholars, and soldiers, give me one poor request.

HORATIO

What is't, my lord? We will.

HAMLET

Never make known what you have seen tonight.

HORATIO and MARCELLUS

My lord, we will not.

HAMLET

Nay, but swear't.

HORATIO

In faith, my lord, not I.

MARCELLUS

Nor I, my lord, in faith.

HAMLET

Upon my sword.

MARCELLUS

We have sworn, my lord, already.

HAMLET

Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

GHOST

[Cries under the stage.] Swear.

HAMLET

Ha, ha boy, sayst thou so? Art thou there, truepenny²²? Come on, you hear this fellow in the cellarage. Consent to swear.

HORATIO

Propose the oath, my lord.

HAMLET

Never to speak of this that you have seen. Swear by my sword.

GHOST

[Beneath.] Swear.

HAMLET

*Hic et ubique*²³? then we'll shift our ground. Come hither, gentlemen, and lay your hands again upon my sword. Never to speak of this that you have heard. Swear by my sword.

GHOST

[Beneath.] Swear.

HAMLET

Well said, old mole! Canst work i' th'earth so fast? A worthy pioner²⁴! Once more remove, good friends.

HORATIO

O day and night, but this is wondrous strange.

HAMLET

And therefore as a stranger give it welcome. There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. But come, here, as before, never, so help you mercy, how strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,- as I perchance hereafter shall think meet to put an antic²⁵ disposition on- that you, at such times seeing me, never shall, with arms encumber'd thus, or this head-shake, or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase, as 'well, we know', or 'we could and if we would', or 'if we list to speak'; or 'there be and if they might', or such ambiguous giving out, to note that you know aught of me:-this not to do. So grace and mercy at your most need help you, Swear.

GHOST

[Beneath.] Swear.

HAMLET

Rest, rest, perturbed spirit. So, gentlemen, with all my love I do commend me to you; and what so poor a man as Hamlet is may do t'express his love and friending to you, God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together, and still your fingers on your lips, I pray. The time is out of joint²⁶. O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right. Nay, come, let's go together.

[Exeunt.]

Act II, Scene I

A room in Polonius's house.

[Enter Polonius and Reynaldo.]

POLONIUS

Give him this money and these notes, Reynaldo.

REYNALDO

I will, my lord.

POLONIUS

You shall do marvellous wisely, good Reynaldo, before you visit him, to make inquiry of his behaviour.

REYNALDO

My lord, I did intend it.

POLONIUS

Marry¹, well said; very well said. Look you, sir, enquire me first what Danskers² are in Paris; and how, and who, what means, and where they keep, what company, at what expense; and finding by this encompassment³ and drift⁴ of question, that they do know my son, come you more nearer than your particular demands will touch it. Take you as 'twere some distant knowledge of him, as thus, 'I know his father and his friends, and in part him'-do you mark this, Reynaldo?

REYNALDO

Ay, very well, my lord.

POLONIUS

'and in part him, but,' you may say, 'not well; but if't be he I mean, he's very wild; addicted⁵ so and so;' and there put on him what forgeries you please; marry, none so rank⁶ as may dishonour him; take heed of that; but, sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips as are companions noted and most known to youth and liberty.

REYNALDO

As gaming, my lord?

POLONIUS

Ay, or drinking, fencing, swearing, quarrelling, drabbing⁷. You may go so far.

REYNALDO

My lord, that would dishonour him.

POLONIUS

Faith no, as you may season it in the charge. You must not put another scandal on him, that he is open to incontinency⁸; that's not my meaning; but breathe his faults so quaintly⁹ that they may seem the taints of liberty; the flash and outbreak of a fiery mind, a savageness in unreclaimed blood, of general assault.

REYNALDO

But my good lord-

POLONIUS

Wherefore should you do this?

REYNALDO

Ay, my lord, I would know that.

POLONIUS

Marry, sir, here's my drift, and I believe it is a fetch of warrant¹⁰. You laying these slight sullies on my son, as 'twere a thing a little soil'd i' th' working, Mark you, your party in converse, him you would sound, having ever seen in the prenominate¹¹ crimes the youth you breathe of guilty, be assur'd he closes with you in this consequence; 'Good sir,' or so; or 'friend,' or 'gentleman'- according to the phrase or the addition of man and country.

REYNALDO

Very good, my lord.

POLONIUS

And then, sir, does he this,- he does-what was I about to say? By the mass, I was about to say something. Where did I leave?

REYNALDO

At 'closes in the consequence.' at 'friend or so,' and 'gentleman.'

POLONIUS

At 'closes in the consequence' ay, marry! He closes with you thus: 'I know the gentleman, I saw him yesterday, or t'other day, or then, or then, with such and such; and, as you say, there was he gaming, there o'ertook in's rouse, there falling out at tennis': or perchance, 'I saw him enter such a house of sale' - *Videlicet*¹², a brothel, or so forth. See you now; your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth; and thus do we of wisdom and of reach, with windlasses¹³, and with assays¹⁴ of bias, by indirections find directions out. So by my former lecture and advice shall you my son. You have me, have you not?

REYNALDO

My lord, I have.

POLONIUS

God b' wi' you, fare you well.

REYNALDO

Good my lord.

POLONIUS

Observe his inclination in yourself.

REYNALDO

I shall, my lord.

POLONIUS

And let him ply his music.

REYNALDO

Well, my lord.

POLONIUS

Farewell.

[Exit Reynaldo.]

[Enter Ophelia.]

How now, Ophelia, what's the matter?

OPHELIA

Alas, my lord, I have been so affrighted.

POLONIUS

With what, in the name of God?

OPHELIA

My lord, as I was sewing in my chamber, Lord Hamlet, with his doublet¹⁵ all unbrac'd¹⁶, no hat upon his head, his stockings foul'd, ungart'ed, and down-gyved¹⁷ to his ankle, pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other, and with a look so piteous in purport as if he had been loosed out of hell to speak of horrors, he comes before me.



POLONIUS

Mad for thy love?

OPHELIA

My lord, I do not know, but truly I do fear it.

POLONIUS

What said he?

OPHELIA

He took me by the wrist and held me hard; then goes he to the length of all his arm; and with his other hand thus o'er his brow, he falls to such perusal of my face as he would draw it. Long stay'd he so, at last, - a little shaking of mine arm, and thrice his head thus waving up and down, he rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound as it did seem to shatter all his bulk and end his being. That done, he lets me go, and with his head over his shoulder turn'd he seem'd to find his way without his eyes, for out o' doors he went without their help, and to the last bended their light on me.

POLONIUS

Come, go with me. I will go seek the king. This is the very ecstasy¹⁸ of love, whose violent property fordoes¹⁹ itself, and leads the will to desperate undertakings, as oft as any passion under heaven that does afflict our natures. I am sorry, - what, have you given him any hard words of late?

OPHELIA

No, my good lord; but as you did command, I did repel his letters and denied his access to me.

POLONIUS

That hath made him mad. I am sorry that with better heed and judgement I had not quoted²⁰ him. I fear'd he did but trifle, and meant to wreck thee. But beshrew²¹ my jealousy! It seems it is as proper to our age to cast beyond ourselves in our opinions as it is common for the younger sort to lack discretion. Come, go we to the king. This must be known, which, being kept close, might move more grief to hide than hate to utter love.

[Exeunt.]

Act II, Scene II

A room in the Castle.

[Enter King, Queen, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Attendants.]

KING

Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Moreover that we much did long to see you, the need we have to use you did provoke our hasty sending. Something have you heard of Hamlet's transformation; so I call it, since nor th'exterior nor the inward man resembles that it was. What it should be, more than his father's death, that thus hath put him so much from th'understanding of himself, I cannot dream of. I entreat you both that, being of so young days brought up with him, and since so neighbour'd to his youth and humour, that you vouchsafe¹ your rest here in our court some little time, so by your companies to draw him on to pleasures and to gather, so much as from occasion you may glean, whether aught² to us unknown afflicts him thus that, open'd, lies within our remedy.

QUEEN

Good gentlemen, he hath much talk'd of you, and sure I am, two men there are not living to whom he more adheres³. If it will please you to show us so much gentry⁴ and good will as to expend your time with us awhile, for the supply and profit of our hope, your visitation shall receive such thanks as fits a king's remembrance.

ROSENCRANTZ

Both your majesties might, by the sovereign power you have of us, put your dread pleasures⁵ more into command than to entreaty.

GUILDENSTERN

We both obey, and here give up ourselves, in the full bent⁶, to lay our service freely at your feet to be commanded.

KING

Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

QUEEN

Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz. And I beseech you instantly to visit my too much changed son. Go, some of you, and bring these gentlemen where Hamlet is.

GUILDENSTERN

Heavens make our presence and our practices pleasant and helpful to him.

QUEEN

Ay, amen.

[Exeunt Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and some Attendants.]

[Enter Polonius.]

POLONIUS

Th'ambassadors from Norway, my good lord, are joyfully return'd.

KING

Thou still hast been the father of good news.

POLONIUS

Have I, my lord? Assure you, my good liege, I hold my duty, as I hold my soul, both to my God and to my gracious king: and I do think, -or else this brain of mine hunts not the trail of policy⁷ so sure as it hath us'd to do-that I have found the very cause of Hamlet's lunacy⁸.

KING

O speak of that, that do I long to hear.

POLONIUS

Give first admittance to th'ambassadors; my news shall be the fruit to that great feast.

KING

Thyself do grace to them, and bring them in.

[Exit Polonius.]

He tells me, my sweet queen, that he hath found the head and source of all your son's distemper⁹.

QUEEN

I doubt it is no other but the main, his father's death and our o'erhasty marriage.

KING

Well, we shall sift¹⁰ him.

[Enter Polonius with Voltemand and Cornelius.]

Welcome, my good friends! Say, Voltemand, what from our brother Norway?

VOLTEMAND

Most fair return of greetings and desires. Upon our first, he sent out to suppress his nephew's levies¹¹, which to him appear'd to be a preparation 'gainst the Polack; but better look'd into, he truly found it was against your Highness; whereat griev'd, that so his sickness, age, and impotence was falsely borne in hand¹², sends out arrests on Fortinbras; which he, in brief, obeys, receives rebuke from Norway; and in fine, makes vow before his uncle never more to give th'assay¹³ of arms against your Majesty. Whereon old Norway, overcome with joy, Gives him three thousand crowns in annual fee, and his commission to employ those soldiers so levied as before, against the Polack: with an entreaty, herein further shown,

[Gives a paper.] That it might please you to give quiet pass through your dominions for this enterprise, on such regards of safety and allowance as therein are set down.

KING

It likes us well; and at our more consider'd time we'll read, answer, and think upon this business. Meantime we thank you for your well-took labour. Go to your rest, at night we'll feast together. Most welcome home.

[Exeunt Voltemand and Cornelius.]

POLONIUS

This business is well ended. My liege and madam, to expostulate¹⁴ what majesty should be, what duty is, why day is day, night night, and time is time were nothing but to waste night, day and time. Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit, and tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes, I will be brief. Your noble son is mad. Mad call I it; for to define true madness, what is't but to be nothing else but mad? But let that go.

QUEEN

More matter, with less art.

POLONIUS

Madam, I swear I use no art at all. That he is mad, 'tis true: 'tis true 'tis pity; and pity 'tis 'tis true. A foolish figure, but farewell it, for I will use no art. Mad let us grant him then. And now remains that we find out the cause of this effect, or rather say, the cause of this defect, for this effect defective comes by cause. Thus it remains, and the remainder thus. Perpend¹⁵, I have a daughter-have whilst she is mine- who in her duty and obedience, mark, hath given me this. Now gather, and surmise.

[Reads.] To the celestial, and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia- that's an ill phrase, a vile phrase; 'beautified' is a vile phrase: but you shall hear.

[Reads.] These; in her excellent white bosom, these, &c.

QUEEN

Came this from Hamlet to her?

POLONIUS

Good madam, stay awhile; I will be faithful.

[Reads.] Doubt thou the stars are fire, Doubt that the sun doth move, Doubt truth to be a liar, but never doubt I love. O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art to reckon my groans. But that I love thee best, O most best, believe it. Adieu. Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him,

HAMLET

This, in obedience, hath my daughter show'd me; and more above, hath his solicitings, as they fell out by time, by means, and place, all given to mine ear.

KING

But how hath she receiv'd his love?

POLONIUS

What do you think of me?

KING

As of a man faithful and honourable.

POLONIUS

I would fain¹⁶ prove so. But what might you think, when I had seen this hot love on the wing, as I perceiv'd it, I must tell you that, before my daughter told me, what might you, or my dear Majesty your queen here, think, if I had play'd the desk or table-book, or given my heart a winking, mute and dumb, or look'd upon this love with idle sight, what might you think? No, I went round to work, and my young mistress thus I did bespeak: 'Lord Hamlet is a prince, out of thy star¹⁷. This must not be.' and then I precepts¹⁸ gave her, that she should lock herself from his resort¹⁹, admit no messengers, receive no tokens. Which done, she took the fruits of my advice, and he, repulsed,-a short tale to make- fell into a sadness, then into a fast, Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness, Thence to a lightness, and, by this declension, into the madness wherein now he raves, and all we wail for.

KING

Do you think 'tis this?

QUEEN

It may be, very likely.

POLONIUS

Hath there been such a time, I'd fain know that, that I have positively said
"Tis so,' when it prov'd otherwise?

KING

Not that I know.

POLONIUS

Take this from this, if this be otherwise.

[Points to his head and shoulder.] If circumstances lead me, I will find
where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed within the centre.

KING

How may we try it further?

POLONIUS

You know sometimes he walks four hours together here in the lobby.

QUEEN

So he does indeed.

POLONIUS

At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him. Be you and I behind an arras²⁰
then, Mark the encounter. If he love her not, and be not from his reason
fall'n thereon, let me be no assistant for a state, but keep a farm and carters.

KING

We will try it.

[Enter Hamlet, reading.]

QUEEN

But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

POLONIUS

Away, I do beseech you, both away I'll board²¹ him presently. O, give me
leave.

[Exeunt King, Queen and Attendants.]

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

HAMLET

Well, God-a-mercy.

POLONIUS

Do you know me, my lord?

HAMLET

Excellent well. You are a fishmonger.

POLONIUS

Not I, my lord.

HAMLET

Then I would you were so honest a man.

POLONIUS

Honest, my lord?

HAMLET

Ay sir, to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.

POLONIUS

That's very true, my lord.

HAMLET

For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion²², - have you a daughter?

POLONIUS

I have, my lord.

HAMLET

Let her not walk i' th' sun. Conception²³ is a blessing, but not as your daughter may conceive. Friend, look to't.

POLONIUS

How say you by that?

[Aside.] Still harping on my daughter. Yet he knew me not at first; he said I was a fishmonger. He is far gone, far gone. And truly in my youth I suffered much extremity for love; very near this. I'll speak to him again.-what do you read, my lord?

HAMLET

Words, words, words.

POLONIUS

What is the matter, my lord?

HAMLET

Between who?

POLONIUS

I mean the matter that you read, my lord.

HAMLET

Slanders, sir. For the satirical slave says here that old men have grey beards; that their faces are wrinkled; their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum; and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams. All which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down. For you yourself, sir, should be old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.

POLONIUS

[Aside.] Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.- will you walk out of the air, my lord?

HAMLET

Into my grave?

POLONIUS

Indeed, that is out o' the air.

[Aside.] How pregnant sometimes his replies are! A happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of. I will leave him and suddenly contrive the means of meeting between him and my daughter. My honourable lord, I will most humbly take my leave of you.

HAMLET

You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal, except my life, except my life, except my life.

POLONIUS

Fare you well, my lord.

HAMLET

These tedious old fools.

[Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

POLONIUS

You go to seek the Lord Hamlet; there he is.

ROSENCRANTZ

[To Polonius.] God save you, sir.

[Exit Polonius.]

GUILDENSTERN

My honoured lord!

ROSENCRANTZ

My most dear lord!

HAMLET

My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz. Good lads, how do ye both?

ROSENCRANTZ

As the indifferent children of the earth.

GUILDENSTERN

Happy in that we are not over-happy; on Fortune's cap we are not the very button.

HAMLET

Nor the soles of her shoe?

ROSENCRANTZ

Neither, my lord.

HAMLET

Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?

GUILDENSTERN

Faith, her privates we.

HAMLET

In the secret parts of Fortune? O, most true; she is a strumpet. What's the news?

ROSENCRANTZ

None, my lord, but that the world's grown honest.

HAMLET

Then is doomsday near. But your news is not true. Let me question more in particular. What have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune, that she sends you to prison hither?

GUILDENSTERN

Prison, my lord?

HAMLET

Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ

Then is the world one.

HAMLET

A goodly one; in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons,
Denmark being one o' th' worst.

ROSENCRANTZ

We think not so, my lord.

HAMLET

Why, then 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad but
thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ

Why, then your ambition makes it one; 'tis too narrow for your mind.

HAMLET

O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite
space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

GUILDENSTERN

Which dreams, indeed, are ambition; for the very substance of the
ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

HAMLET

A dream itself is but a shadow.

ROSENCRANTZ

Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a
shadow's shadow.

HAMLET

Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretch'd heroes the
beggars' shadows. Shall we to th' court? For, by my fay²⁴, I cannot reason.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

We'll wait upon you.

HAMLET

No such matter. I will not sort you with the rest of my servants; for, to speak
to you like an honest man, I am most dreadfully attended. But, in the beaten
way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore?

ROSENCRANTZ

To visit you, my lord, no other occasion.

HAMLET

Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks; but I thank you. And sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear a halfpenny. Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, deal justly with me. Come, come; nay, speak.

GUILDENSTERN

What should we say, my lord?

HAMLET

Why, anything. But to the purpose. You were sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your looks, which your modesties have not craft enough to colour. I know the good king and queen have sent for you.

ROSENCRANTZ

To what end, my lord?

HAMLET

That you must teach me. But let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy²⁵ of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, and by what more dear a better proposer could charge you withal, be even and direct with me, whether you were sent for or no.

ROSENCRANTZ

[To Guildenstern.] What say you?

HAMLET

[Aside.] Nay, then I have an eye of you. If you love me, hold not off.

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, we were sent for.

HAMLET

I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the king and queen moult no feather²⁶. I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted²⁷ with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable; in action how like an angel, in apprehension, how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals. And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me; no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts.

HAMLET

Why did you laugh then, when I said 'Man delights not me'?

ROSENCRANTZ

To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what lenten²⁸ entertainment the players shall receive from you. We coted²⁹ them on the way, and hither are they coming to offer you service.

HAMLET

He that plays the king shall be welcome, -his Majesty shall have tribute of me; the adventurous knight shall use his foil and target; the lover shall not sigh gratis, the humorous man shall end his part in peace; the clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickle o' th' sere³⁰; and the lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for't. What players are they?

ROSENCRANTZ

Even those you were wont³¹ to take such delight in-the tragedians of the city.

HAMLET

How chances it they travel? Their residence, both in reputation and profit, was better both ways.

ROSENCRANTZ

I think their inhibition comes by the means of the late innovation.

HAMLET

Do they hold the same estimation they did when I was in the city? Are they so followed?

ROSENCRANTZ

No, indeed, they are not.

HAMLET

How comes it? Do they grow rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ

Nay, their endeavour keeps in the wonted pace; but there is, sir, an aerie³² of children, little eyases³³, that cry out on the top of question, and are most tyrannically clapped for't. These are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages-so they call them-that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills and dare scarce come thither.

HAMLET

What, are they children? Who maintains 'em? How are they escoted? Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing? Will they not say afterwards, if they should grow themselves to common players-as it is most like, if their means are no better-their writers do them wrong to make them exclaim against their own succession?

ROSENCRANTZ

Faith, there has been much to do on both sides; and the nation holds it no sin to tarre³⁴ them to controversy. There was for a while, no money bid for argument unless the poet and the player went to cuffs³⁵ in the question.

HAMLET

Is't possible?

GUILDENSTERN

O, there has been much throwing about of brains³⁶.

HAMLET

Do the boys carry it away³⁷?

ROSENCRANTZ

Ay, that they do, my lord. Hercules and his load too.

HAMLET

It is not very strange; for my uncle is king of Denmark, and those that would make mouths³⁸ at him while my father lived, give twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred ducats³⁹ apiece for his picture in little. 'Sblood⁴⁰, there is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out.

[Flourish of trumpets within.]

GUILDENSTERN

There are the players.

HAMLET

Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore. Your hands, come. The appurtenance⁴¹ of welcome is fashion and ceremony. Let me comply with you in this garb, lest my extent⁴² to the players, which I tell you must show fairly outward, should more appear like entertainment than yours. You are welcome. But my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.

GUILDENSTERN

In what, my dear lord?

HAMLET

I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw.

[Enter Polonius.]

POLONIUS

Well be with you, gentlemen.

HAMLET

Hark you, Guildenstern, and you too, at each ear a hearer. That great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling clouts⁴³.

ROSENCRANTZ

Happily he's the second time come to them; for they say an old man is twice a child.

HAMLET

I will prophesy he comes to tell me of the players. Mark it.-you say right, sir: for a Monday morning 'twas so indeed.

POLONIUS

My lord, I have news to tell you.

HAMLET

My lord, I have news to tell you. When Roscius was an actor in Rome-

POLONIUS

The actors are come hither, my lord.

HAMLET

Buzz, buzz.

POLONIUS

Upon my honour.

HAMLET

Then came each actor on his ass-

POLONIUS

The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light, for the law of writ and the liberty. These are the only men.

HAMLET

O Jephthah⁴⁴, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!

POLONIUS

What treasure had he, my lord?

HAMLET

Why- 'One fair daughter, and no more, the which he loved passing well.'

POLONIUS

[Aside.] Still on my daughter.

HAMLET

Am I not i' th' right, old Jephthah?

POLONIUS

If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter that I love passing well.

HAMLET

Nay, that follows not.

POLONIUS

What follows then, my lord?

HAMLET

Why, as by lot, God wot, and then, you know, it came to pass, as most like it was. The first row of the pious chanson⁴⁵ will show you more. For look where my abridgement comes.

[Enter four or five Players.]

You are welcome, masters, welcome all. I am glad to see thee well. Welcome, good friends. O, my old friend! Thy face is valanc'd⁴⁶ since I saw thee last. Com'st thou to beard me⁴⁷ in Denmark? What, my young lady and mistress! By'r lady, your ladyship is nearer to heaven than when I saw you last, by the altitude of a chopine⁴⁸. Pray God your voice, like a piece of uncurrent⁴⁹ gold, be not cracked within the ring. Masters, you are all welcome. We'll e'en to't like French falconers, fly at anything we see. We'll have a speech straight. Come, give us a taste of your quality. Come, a passionate speech.

FIRST PLAYER

What speech, my lord?

HAMLET

I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted, or if it was, not above once, for the play, I remember, pleased not the million, 'twas caviare to the general⁵⁰. But it was-as I received it, and others, whose judgements in such matters cried in the top of mine-an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning. I remember one said there were no sallets⁵¹ in the lines to make the matter savoury, nor no matter in the phrase that might indite the author of affectation, but called it an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine. One speech in it, I chiefly loved. 'Twas Aeneas' tale to Dido, and thereabout of it especially where he speaks of Priam's slaughter. If it live in your memory, begin at this line, let me see, let me see: *the rugged Pyrrhus, like th' Hyrcanian beast*, - it is not so: it begins with Pyrrhus- *the rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms, black as his purpose, did the night resemble when he lay couched in the ominous horse, hath now this dread and black complexion smear'd with heraldry more dismal. Head to foot now is he total gules⁵², horridly trick'd with blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons, bak'd and impasted⁵³ with the parching streets, that lend a tyrannous and a damned light to their vile murders. Roasted in wrath and fire, and thus o'ersized with coagulate⁵⁴ gore, with eyes like carbuncles⁵⁵, the hellish Pyrrhus Old grandsire Priam seeks*. so, proceed you.

POLONIUS

'Fore God, my lord, well spoken, with good accent and good discretion.

FIRST PLAYER

Anon he finds him, striking too short at Greeks. His antique sword, rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls, repugnant to command. Unequal match'd, Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide; but with the whiff and wind of his fell sword Th'unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium, Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear. For lo, his sword, which was declining on the milky head of reverend Priam, seem'd i' th'air to stick. So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood, and like a neutral to his will and matter, did nothing. But as we often see against some storm, a silence in the heavens, the rack stand still, the bold winds speechless, and the orb below as hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder doth rend the region; so after Pyrrhus' pause, Aroused vengeance sets him new a-work, and never did the Cyclops' hammers fall on Mars's armour, forg'd for proof eterne, with less remorse than Pyrrhus' bleeding sword now falls on Priam. Out, out, thou strumpet Fortune! All you gods, in general synod⁵⁶, take away her power; Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel, and bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven, as low as to the fiends.



POLONIUS

This is too long.

HAMLET

It shall to the barber's, with your beard⁵⁷. -Prithee say on. He's for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps⁵⁸. Say on; come to Hecuba⁵⁹.

FIRST PLAYER

but who, O who, had seen the mobled⁶⁰ queen,-

HAMLET

'the mobled queen'?

POLONIUS

That's good! 'Mobled queen' is good.

FIRST PLAYER

Run barefoot up and down, threat'ning the flames with bisson rheum⁶¹. A clout⁶² upon that head where late the diadem stood, and for a robe, about her lank and all o'erteemed⁶³ loins, a blanket, in th'alarm of fear caught up- who this had seen, with tongue in venom steep'd, 'Gainst Fortune's state would treason have pronounc'd. But if the gods themselves did see her then, when she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport in mincing with his sword her husband's limbs, the instant burst of clamour that she made,- Unless things mortal move them not at all,- would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven, and passion in the gods.

POLONIUS

Look, where he has not turn'd his colour, and has tears in's eyes. Pray you, no more.

HAMLET

'Tis well. I'll have thee speak out the rest of this soon. -Good my lord, will you see the players well bestowed? Do you hear, let them be well used; for they are the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time. After your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live.

POLONIUS

My lord, I will use them according to their desert.

HAMLET

God's bodikin⁶⁴, man, much better. Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping? Use them after your own honour and dignity. The less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty. Take them in.

POLONIUS

Come, sirs.

HAMLET

Follow him, friends. We'll hear a play tomorrow.

[Exeunt Polonius with all the Players but the First.] Dost thou hear me, old friend? Can you play *the Murder of Gonzago*?

FIRST PLAYER

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

We'll ha't tomorrow night. You could for a need study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines, which I would set down and insert in't, could you not?

FIRST PLAYER

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

Very well. Follow that lord, and look you mock him not.

[Exit First Player.]

[To Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

my good friends, I'll leave you till night. You are welcome to Elsinore.

ROSENCRANTZ

Good my lord.

[Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

HAMLET

Ay, so, God b' wi' ye. Now I am alone. O what a rogue and peasant slave am I! Is it not monstrous that this player here, but in a fiction, in a dream of passion, could force his soul so to his own conceit that from her working all his visage wan'd; Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect, a broken voice, and his whole function suiting with forms to his conceit? And all for nothing! For Hecuba? What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he should weep for her? What would he do, had he the motive and the cue for passion that I have? He would drown the stage with tears and cleave the general ear with horrid speech; make mad the guilty, and appal the free, Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed, the very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I, a dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak like John-a-dreams⁶⁵, unpregnant of my cause, and can say nothing. No, not for a king upon whose property and most dear life a damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward? Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across⁶⁶? Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face? Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie i' th' throat as deep as to the lungs? Who does me this? Ha! 'Swounds, I should take it: for it cannot be but I am pigeon-liver'd⁶⁷, and lack gall to make oppression bitter, or ere this I should have fatted all the region kites with this slave's offal⁶⁸. Bloody, bawdy villain! Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain! Oh vengeance! Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave, that I, the son of a dear father murder'd, Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell, must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words and fall a-cursing like a very drab⁶⁹, a scullion⁷⁰! Fie upon't! Foh! About, my brain! I have heard that guilty creatures sitting at a play, have by the very cunning of the scene, been struck so to the soul that presently they have proclaim'd their malefactions. For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak with most miraculous organ. I'll have these players Play something like the murder of my father before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks; I'll tent him to the quick⁷¹. If he but blench⁷², I know my course. The spirit that I have seen may be the devil, and the devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps out of my weakness and my melancholy, as he is very potent with such spirits, abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds more relative than this. The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

[Exit.]

Act III, Scene I

A room in the Castle.

[Enter King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

KING

And can you by no drift of circumstance Get from him why he puts on this confusion, Grating so harshly all his days of quiet with turbulent and dangerous lunacy?

ROSENCRANTZ

He does confess he feels himself distracted, but from what cause he will by no means speak.

GUILDENSTERN

Nor do we find him forward to be sounded¹, but with a crafty madness keeps aloof when we would bring him on to some confession of his true state.

QUEEN

Did he receive you well?

ROSENCRANTZ

Most like a gentleman.

GUILDENSTERN

But with much forcing of his disposition.

ROSENCRANTZ

Niggard² of question, but of our demands, most free in his reply.

QUEEN

Did you assay him to any pastime³?

ROSENCRANTZ

Madam, it so fell out that certain players we o'er-raught⁴ on the way. Of these we told him, and there did seem in him a kind of joy to hear of it. They are about the court, and, as I think, they have already order this night to play before him.

POLONIUS

'Tis most true; and he beseech'd me to entreat your Majesties to hear and see the matter.

KING

With all my heart; and it doth much content me to hear him so inclin'd.
Good gentlemen, give him a further edge⁵, and drive his purpose on to these delights.

ROSENCRANTZ

We shall, my lord.

[Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

KING

Sweet Gertrude, leave us too, for we have closely sent for Hamlet hither, that he, as 'twere by accident, may here Affront Ophelia. Her father and myself, lawful espials⁶, will so bestow ourselves⁷ that, seeing unseen, we may of their encounter frankly judge, and gather by him, as he is behav'd, if't be th'affliction of his love or no that thus he suffers for.

QUEEN

I shall obey you. And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish that your good beauties be the happy cause of Hamlet's wildness: so shall I hope your virtues will bring him to his wonted⁸ way again, to both your honours.

OPHELIA

Madam, I wish it may.

[Exit Queen.]

POLONIUS

Ophelia, walk you here.-Gracious, so please you, we will bestow ourselves.-
[To Ophelia.] Read on this book, that show of such an exercise may colour⁹ your loneliness.-we are oft to blame in this, 'Tis too much prov'd, that with devotion's visage and pious action we do sugar o'er the devil himself.

KING

[Aside.] O 'tis too true! How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience! The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering¹⁰ art, is not more ugly to the thing that helps it than is my deed to my most painted word. O heavy burden!

POLONIUS

I hear him coming. Let's withdraw, my lord.

[Exeunt King and Polonius.]

[Enter Hamlet.]

HAMLET

To be, or not to be, that is the question: whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them? To die—to sleep, no more; and by a sleep to say we end the heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep. To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub, for in that sleep of death what dreams may come, when we have shuffled off this mortal coil¹¹, must give us pause. There's the respect that makes calamity of so long life. For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely¹², the pangs of dispriz'd¹³ love, the law's delay, the insolence of office, and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes, when he himself might his quietus¹⁴ make with a bare bodkin¹⁵? Who would these fardels¹⁶ bear, to grunt and sweat under a weary life, but that the dread of something after death, the undiscover'd country, from whose bourn¹⁷ no traveller returns, puzzles the will, and makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of? Thus conscience does make cowards of us all, and thus the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, and enterprises of great pith¹⁸ and moment, with this regard their currents turn awry and lose the name of action. Soft you now¹⁹, the fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons²⁰ be all my sins remember'd.

OPHELIA

Good my lord, how does your honour for this many a day²¹?

HAMLET

I humbly thank you; well, well, well.

OPHELIA

My lord, I have remembrances of yours that I have longed long to re-deliver. I pray you, now receive them.

HAMLET

No, not I. I never gave you aught²².

OPHELIA

My honour'd lord, you know right well you did, and with them words of so sweet breath compos'd as made the things more rich; their perfume lost, take these again; for to the noble mind Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind. There, my lord.

HAMLET

Ha, ha! Are you honest?

OPHELIA

My lord?

HAMLET

Are you fair?

OPHELIA

What means your lordship?

HAMLET

That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.

OPHELIA

Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?

HAMLET

Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd²³ than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.

OPHELIA

Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

HAMLET

You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.

OPHELIA

I was the more deceived.



HAMLET

Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent²⁴ honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck²⁵ than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves²⁶ all, believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?

OPHELIA

At home, my lord.

HAMLET

Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in's own house. Farewell.

OPHELIA

O help him, you sweet heavens!

HAMLET

If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry. Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny²⁷. Get thee to a nunnery, go: farewell. Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go; and quickly too. Farewell.

OPHELIA

O heavenly powers, restore him!

HAMLET

I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another. You jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness²⁸ your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't, it hath made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages. Those that are married already, all but one, shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go.

[Exit.]

OPHELIA

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown! The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword, Th'expectancy and rose of the fair state, the glass of fashion²⁹ and the mould of form, Th'observ'd of all observers, quite, quite down! And I, of ladies most deject and wretched, that suck'd the honey of his music vows³⁰, now see that noble and most sovereign reason, like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh, that unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth Blasted with ecstasy³¹. O woe is me, T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see.

[Enter king and Polonius.]

KING

Love? His affections do not that way tend, nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little, was not like madness. There's something in his soul O'er which his melancholy sits on brood, and I do doubt the hatch³² and the disclose will be some danger, which for to prevent, I have in quick determination thus set it down: he shall with speed to England for the demand of our neglected tribute: Haply³³ the seas and countries different, with variable objects, shall expel this something settled matter in his heart, Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus from fashion of himself. What think you on't?

POLONIUS

It shall do well. But yet do I believe the origin and commencement of his grief Sprung from neglected love. How now, Ophelia? You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said, we heard it all. My lord, do as you please, but if you hold it fit, after the play, let his queen mother all alone entreat him to show his grief, let her be round with him³⁴, and I'll be plac'd, so please you, in the ear of all their conference. If she find him not, to England send him; or confine him where your wisdom best shall think.

KING

It shall be so. Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go.

[Exeunt.]

Act III, Scene II

A hall in the Castle.

[Enter Hamlet and certain Players.]

HAMLET

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief¹ the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious² periwig-pated³ fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings⁴, who, for the most part, are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant⁵. It out-Herods Herod⁶. Pray you avoid it.

FIRST PLAYER

I warrant⁷ your honour.

HAMLET

Be not too tame neither; but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now, this overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others. O, there be players that I have seen play-and heard others praise, and that highly-not to speak it profanely, that, neither having the accent of Christians, nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of Nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

FIRST PLAYER

I hope we have reform'd that indifferently⁸ with us, sir.

HAMLET

O reform it altogether. And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them. For there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered. That's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. Go make you ready.

[Exeunt Players.]

[Enter Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

How now, my lord? Will the king hear this piece of work?

POLONIUS

And the queen too, and that presently.

HAMLET

Bid the players make haste.

[Exit Polonius.]

Will you two help to hasten them?

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

We will, my lord.

[Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

HAMLET

What ho, Horatio!

[Enter Horatio.]

HORATIO

Here, sweet lord, at your service.

HAMLET

Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man as e'er my conversation cop'd withal⁹.

HORATIO

O my dear lord.

HAMLET

Nay, do not think I flatter; for what advancement may I hope from thee, that no revenue¹⁰ hast, but thy good spirits to feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor be flatter'd? No, let the candied¹¹ tongue lick absurd pomp, and crook the pregnant hinges of the knee¹² where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear? Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice, and could of men distinguish, her election hath seal'd thee for herself. For thou hast been as one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing, a man that Fortune's buffets¹³ and rewards Hast ta'en with equal thanks. And blessed are those whose blood and judgement are so well co-mingled that they are not a pipe¹⁴ for Fortune's finger to sound what stop¹⁵ she please. Give me that man that is not passion's slave, and I will wear him in my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart, as I do thee. Something too much of this. There is a play tonight before the king. One scene of it comes near the circumstance which I have told thee, of my father's death. I prithee, when thou see'st that act a-foot, even with the very comment of thy soul Observe mine uncle. If his occulted¹⁶ guilt do not itself unkennel¹⁷ in one speech, it is a damned ghost that we have seen; and my imaginations are as foul as Vulcan's stithy¹⁸. Give him heedful note; for I mine eyes will rivet to his face; and after we will both our judgements join in censure of his seeming.

HORATIO

Well, my lord. If he steal aught the whilst¹⁹ this play is playing, and 'scape detecting, I will pay the theft.

HAMLET

They are coming to the play. I must be idle. Get you a place.

[Danish march.]

[A flourish.]

[Enter King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and others.]

KING

How fares our cousin Hamlet?

HAMLET

Excellent, i' faith²⁰; of the chameleon's dish²¹: I eat the air, promise-crammed: you cannot feed capons so.

KING

I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet²²; these words are not mine²³.

HAMLET

No, nor mine now.

[To Polonius.] My lord, you play'd once i' th'university, you say?

POLONIUS

That did I, my lord, and was accounted a good actor.

HAMLET

What did you enact?

POLONIUS

I did enact Julius Caesar. I was kill'd i' th' Capitol. Brutus killed me.

HAMLET

It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there. Be the players ready?

ROSENCRANTZ

Ay, my lord; they stay upon your patience.

QUEEN

Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

HAMLET

No, good mother, here's metal more attractive.

POLONIUS

[To the king.] O ho! do you mark that?

HAMLET

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

[Lying down at Ophelia's feet.]

OPHELIA

No, my lord.

HAMLET

I mean, my head upon your lap?

OPHELIA

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

Do you think I meant country matters²⁴?

OPHELIA

I think nothing, my lord.

HAMLET

That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs.

OPHELIA

What is, my lord?

HAMLET

Nothing.

OPHELIA

You are merry, my lord.

HAMLET

Who, I?

OPHELIA

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

O God, your only jig-maker²⁵! What should a man do but be merry? For look you how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within's two hours.

OPHELIA

Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.

HAMLET

So long? Nay then, let the devil wear black, for I'll have a suit of sables²⁶. O heavens! die two months ago, and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year. But by'r lady, he must build churches then; or else shall he suffer not thinking on, with the hobby-horse²⁷, whose epitaph is 'for, O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot!'

[Trumpets sound.]

The dumb show²⁸ enters.

[Enter a King and a Queen very lovingly; the Queen embracing him and he her. She kneels, and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up, and declines his head upon her neck. Lays him down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in a fellow, takes off his crown, kisses it, pours poison in the King's ears, and exits. The Queen returns, finds the King dead, and makes passionate action. The Poisoner with some three or four Mutes, comes in again, seeming to lament with her. The dead body is carried away. The Poisoner woos the Queen with gifts. She seems loth and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts his love.]

[Exeunt.]

OPHELIA

What means this, my lord?

HAMLET

Marry, this is miching mallecho²⁹; it means mischief.

OPHELIA

Belike³⁰ this show imports the argument of the play.

[Enter Prologue.]

HAMLET

We shall know by this fellow: the players cannot keep counsel; they'll tell all.

OPHELIA

Will they tell us what this show meant?

HAMLET

Ay, or any show that you'll show him. Be not you ashamed to show, he'll not shame to tell you what it means.

OPHELIA

You are naught, you are naught: I'll mark the play.

PROLOGUE

For us, and for our tragedy, here stooping to your clemency, we beg your hearing patiently.

HAMLET

Is this a prologue, or the posy³¹ of a ring?

OPHELIA

'Tis brief, my lord.

HAMLET

As woman's love.

[Enter a King and a Queen.]

PLAYER KING

Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orb'd ground, and thirty dozen moons with borrow'd sheen about the world have times twelve thirties been, since love our hearts, and Hymen³² did our hands Unite commutual in most sacred bands.

PLAYER QUEEN

So many journeys may the sun and moon make us again count o'er ere love be done. But, woe is me, you are so sick of late, so far from cheer and from your former state, that I distrust you. Yet, though I distrust, Discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must: for women's fear and love holds quantity, in neither aught, or in extremity. Now what my love is, proof hath made you know, and as my love is siz'd, my fear is so. Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear; where little fears grow great, great love grows there.

PLAYER KING

Faith, I must leave thee, love, and shortly too: my operant powers their functions leave to do: and thou shalt live in this fair world behind, Honour'd, belov'd, and haply one as kind for husband shalt thou-

PLAYER QUEEN

O confound the rest. Such love must needs be treason in my breast. In second husband let me be accurst! None wed the second but who kill'd the first.

HAMLET

[Aside.] Wormwood³³, wormwood.

PLAYER QUEEN

The instances that second marriage move are base respects of thrift, but none of love. A second time I kill my husband dead, when second husband kisses me in bed.

PLAYER KING

I do believe you think what now you speak; but what we do determine, oft we break. Purpose is but the slave to memory, of violent birth, but poor validity: which now, like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree, but fall unshaken when they mellow be. Most necessary 'tis that we forget to pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt. What to ourselves in passion we propose, the passion ending, doth the purpose lose. The violence of either grief or joy their own enactures with themselves destroy. Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament; Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident. This world is not for aye; nor 'tis not strange that even our loves should with our fortunes change, for 'tis a question left us yet to prove, whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love. The great man down, you mark his favourite flies, the poor advanc'd makes friends of enemies; and hitherto doth love on fortune tend: for who not needs shall never lack a friend, and who in want a hollow friend doth try, Directly seasons him his enemy. But orderly to end where I begun, our wills and fates do so contrary run that our devices still are overthrown. Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own. So think thou wilt no second husband wed, but die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

PLAYER QUEEN

Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light, Sport and repose lock from me day and night, to desperation turn my trust and hope, an anchor's cheer in prison be my scope, Each opposite that blanks the face of joy, Meet what I would have well, and it destroy! Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife, if, once a widow, ever I be wife.

HAMLET

[To Ophelia.] If she should break it now.

PLAYER KING

'Tis deeply sworn. Sweet, leave me here awhile. My spirits grow dull, and fain I would beguile the tedious day with sleep.

[Sleeps.]

PLAYER QUEEN

Sleep rock thy brain, and never come mischance between us twain.

[Exit.]

HAMLET

Madam, how like you this play?

QUEEN

The lady protests too much, methinks.

HAMLET

O, but she'll keep her word.

KING

Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in't?

HAMLET

No, no, they do but jest, poison in jest; no offence i' th' world.

KING

What do you call the play?

HAMLET

The Mousetrap. Marry, how? Tropically. This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is the Duke's name, his wife Baptista: you shall see anon; 'tis a knavish piece of work: but what o' that? Your majesty, and we that have free souls, it touches us not. Let the gall'd jade wince³⁴; our withers are unwrung.

[Enter Lucianus.]

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king.

OPHELIA

You are a good chorus, my lord.

HAMLET

I could interpret between you and your love, if I could see the puppets dallying.

OPHELIA

You are keen, my lord, you are keen.

HAMLET

It would cost you a groaning to take off my edge.

OPHELIA

Still better, and worse.

HAMLET

So you mistake your husbands. -Begin, murderer. Pox, leave thy damnable faces, and begin. Come, the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge.

LUCIANUS

Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing, Confederate season³⁵, else no creature seeing; Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected, with Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected, thy natural magic and dire property on wholesome life usurp immediately.

[Pours the poison into the sleeper's ears.]



HAMLET

He poisons him i' th' garden for's estate. His name's Gonzago. The story is extant, and written in very choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.

OPHELIA

The king rises.

HAMLET

What, frighted with false fire?

QUEEN

How fares my lord?

POLONIUS

Give o'er the play.

KING

Give me some light. Away.

All. Lights, lights, lights.

[Exeunt all but Hamlet and Horatio.]

HAMLET

Why, let the stricken deer go weep, the hart ungalled play³⁶; for some must watch, while some must sleep, so runs the world away. Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers, if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk³⁷ with me; with two Provincial roses on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of players, sir?

HORATIO

Half a share.

HAMLET

A whole one, I. For thou dost know, O Damon dear, this realm dismantled was of Jove himself, and now reigns here a very, very-pajock³⁸.

HORATIO

You might have rhymed.

HAMLET

O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound. Didst perceive?

HORATIO

Very well, my lord.

HAMLET

Upon the talk of the poisoning?

HORATIO

I did very well note him.

HAMLET

Ah, ha! Come, some music. Come, the recorders. For if the king like not the comedy, why then, belike he likes it not, perdie³⁹. Come, some music.

[Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

GUILDENSTERN

Good my lord, vouchsafe⁴⁰ me a word with you.

HAMLET

Sir, a whole history.

GUILDENSTERN

The king, sir-

HAMLET

Ay, sir, what of him?

GUILDENSTERN

Is in his retirement, marvellous distempered.

HAMLET

With drink, sir?

GUILDENSTERN

No, my lord; rather with choler⁴¹.

HAMLET

Your wisdom should show itself more richer to signify this to the doctor, for me to put him to his purgation⁴² would perhaps plunge him into far more choler.

GUILDENSTERN

Good my lord, put your discourse into some frame, and start not so wildly from my affair.

HAMLET

I am tame, sir, pronounce.

GUILDENSTERN

The queen your mother, in most great affliction of spirit, hath sent me to you.

HAMLET

You are welcome.

GUILDENSTERN

Nay, good my lord, this courtesy is not of the right breed. If it shall please you to make me a wholesome answer, I will do your mother's commandment; if not, your pardon and my return shall be the end of my business.

HAMLET

Sir, I cannot.

GUILDENSTERN

What, my lord?

HAMLET

Make you a wholesome answer. My wit's diseased. But, sir, such answer as I can make, you shall command; or rather, as you say, my mother. Therefore no more, but to the matter. My mother, you say,-

ROSENCRANTZ

Then thus she says: your behaviour hath struck her into amazement and admiration.

HAMLET

O wonderful son, that can so stonish a mother! But is there no sequel at the heels of this mother's admiration?

ROSENCRANTZ

She desires to speak with you in her closet ere you go to bed.

HAMLET

We shall obey, were she ten times our mother. Have you any further trade⁴³ with us?

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, you once did love me.

HAMLET

And so I do still, by these pickers and stealers⁴⁴.

ROSENCRANTZ

Good my lord, what is your cause of distemper? You do surely bar the door upon your own liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend.

HAMLET

Sir, I lack advancement.

ROSENCRANTZ

How can that be, when you have the voice of the king himself for your succession in Denmark?

HAMLET

Ay, sir, but while the grass grows-the proverb is something musty.

[Re-enter the Players with recorders.]

O, the recorders. Let me see one. To withdraw with you, why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil?

GUILDENSTERN

O my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly.

HAMLET

I do not well understand that. Will you play upon this pipe?

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, I cannot.

HAMLET

I pray you.

GUILDENSTERN

Believe me, I cannot.

HAMLET

I do beseech you.

GUILDENSTERN

I know no touch of it, my lord.

HAMLET

'Tis as easy as lying: govern these ventages⁴⁵ with your finger and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops.

GUILDENSTERN

But these cannot I command to any utterance of harmony. I have not the skill.

HAMLET

Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass⁴⁶; and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood⁴⁷, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret⁴⁸ me, you cannot play upon me.

[Enter Polonius.]

God bless you, sir.

POLONIUS

My lord, the queen would speak with you, and presently.

HAMLET

Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?

POLONIUS

By the mass, and 'tis like a camel indeed.

HAMLET

Methinks it is like a weasel.

POLONIUS

It is backed like a weasel.

HAMLET

Or like a whale.

POLONIUS

Very like a whale.

HAMLET

Then will I come to my mother by and by.-they fool me to the top of my bent.-I will come by and by.

POLONIUS

I will say so.

[Exit.]

HAMLET

By and by is easily said. Leave me, friends.

[Exeunt all but Hamlet.]

'Tis now the very witching time of night, when churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood, and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on. Soft now, to my mother. O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever the soul of Nero enter this firm bosom: let me be cruel, not unnatural. I will speak daggers to her, but use none; my tongue and soul in this be hypocrites. How in my words somever she be shent⁴⁹, to give them seals never, my soul, consent.

[Exit.]

Act III, Scene III

A room in the Castle.

[Enter King, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

KING

I like him not, nor stands it safe with us to let his madness range. Therefore prepare you, I your commission will forthwith dispatch, and he to England shall along with you. The terms of our estate may not endure Hazard so near us as doth hourly grow out of his lunacies.

GUILDENSTERN

We will ourselves provide. Most holy and religious fear it is to keep those many many bodies safe that live and feed upon your Majesty.

ROSENCRANTZ

The single and peculiar life is bound with all the strength and armour of the mind, to keep itself from 'noyance'¹; but much more that spirit upon whose weal² depend and rest the lives of many. The cease of majesty dies not alone; but like a gulf doth draw what's near it with it. It is a massy³ wheel Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount, to whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things are mortis'd⁴ and adjoin'd; which when it falls, Each small annexment⁵, petty consequence, Attends the boist'rous ruin. Never alone did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

KING

Arm you, I pray you, to this speedy voyage; for we will fetters put upon this fear, which now goes too free-footed.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

We will haste us.

[Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

[Enter Polonius.]

POLONIUS

My lord, he's going to his mother's closet⁶. Behind the arras⁷ I'll convey myself to hear the process. I'll warrant she'll tax him home⁸, and as you said, and wisely was it said, 'Tis meet⁹ that some more audience than a mother, since nature makes them partial, should o'erhear the speech of vantage¹⁰. Fare you well, my liege, I'll call upon you ere¹¹ you go to bed, and tell you what I know.

KING

Thanks, dear my lord.

[Exit Polonius.]

O, my offence is rank¹², it smells to heaven; it hath the primal eldest curse upon't,- a brother's murder! Pray can I not, though inclination be as sharp as will: my stronger guilt defeats my strong intent, and, like a man to double business bound, I stand in pause where I shall first begin, and both neglect. What if this cursed hand were thicker than itself with brother's blood, is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens to wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy but to confront the visage of offence? And what's in prayer but this twofold force, to be forestalled ere we come to fall, or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up. My fault is past. But O, what form of prayer can serve my turn? Forgive me my foul murder! That cannot be; since I am still possess'd of those effects for which I did the murder,- my crown, mine own ambition, and my queen. May one be pardon'd and retain th'offence? In the corrupted currents of this world Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice, and oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above; there is no shuffling, there the action lies in his true nature, and we ourselves compell'd even to the teeth and forehead of our faults, to give in evidence. What then? What rests? Try what repentance can. What can it not? Yet what can it, when one cannot repent? O wretched state! O bosom black as death! O limed soul¹³, that struggling to be free, Art more engag'd! Help, angels! Make assay¹⁴: Bow, stubborn knees; and heart with strings of steel, be soft as sinews of the new-born babe. All may be well.

[Retires and kneels.]

[Enter Hamlet.]



HAMLET

Now might I do it pat¹⁵, now he is praying. And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven; and so am I reveng'd. That would be scann'd¹⁶: a villain kills my father, and for that I, his sole son, do this same villain send to heaven. O, this is hire and salary, not revenge. He took my father grossly, full of bread, with all his crimes broad blown, as flush¹⁷ as may; and how his audit¹⁸ stands, who knows save heaven? But in our circumstance and course of thought, 'Tis heavy with him. And am I then reveng'd, to take him in the purging¹⁹ of his soul, when he is fit and season'd for his passage? No. Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent²⁰: when he is drunk asleep; or in his rage, or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed, at gaming, swearing; or about some act that has no relish of salvation in't, then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven, and that his soul may be as damn'd and black as hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays. This physic²¹ but prolongs thy sickly days.

[Exit.]

The king rises and advances.

KING

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

[Exit.]

Act III, Scene IV

Another room in the Castle.

[Enter Queen and Polonius.]

POLONIUS

He will come straight. Look you lay home to him¹, Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with, and that your Grace hath screen'd² and stood between Much heat and him. I'll silence me e'en here. Pray you be round with him³.

HAMLET

[Within.] Mother, mother, mother.

QUEEN

I'll warrant⁴ you, Fear me not. Withdraw, I hear him coming.

[Polonius goes behind the arras⁵.]

[Enter Hamlet.]

HAMLET

Now, mother, what's the matter?

QUEEN

Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET

Mother, you have my father much offended.

QUEEN

Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue⁶.

HAMLET

Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

QUEEN

Why, how now, Hamlet?

HAMLET

What's the matter now?

QUEEN

Have you forgot me?

HAMLET

No, by the rood⁷, not so. You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife, and, would it were not so. You are my mother.

QUEEN

Nay, then I'll set those to you that can speak.

HAMLET

Come, come, and sit you down, you shall not budge. You go not till I set you up a glass⁸ where you may see the inmost part of you.

QUEEN

What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me? Help, help, ho⁹!

POLONIUS

[Behind.] What, ho! help, help, help!

HAMLET

How now? A rat?

[Draws.] Dead for a ducat¹⁰, dead!

[Makes a pass through the arras.]



POLONIUS

[Behind.] O, I am slain!

[Falls and dies.]

QUEEN

O me, what hast thou done?

HAMLET

Nay, I know not. Is it the king?

[Draws forth Polonius.]

QUEEN

O what a rash and bloody deed is this!

HAMLET

A bloody deed. Almost as bad, good mother, as kill a king and marry with his brother.

QUEEN

As kill a king?

HAMLET

Ay, lady, 'twas my word.-

[To Polonius.] Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell! I took thee for thy better. Take thy fortune, Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger.- Leave wringing of your hands. Peace, sit you down, and let me wring your heart, for so I shall, if it be made of penetrable stuff; if damned custom have not braz'd¹¹ it so, that it is proof and bulwark against sense.

QUEEN

What have I done, that thou dar'st wag thy tongue in noise so rude against me?

HAMLET

Such an act that blurs the grace and blush of modesty, Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose from the fair forehead of an innocent love, and sets a blister there. Makes marriage vows as false as dicers'¹² oaths. O such a deed as from the body of contraction¹³ plucks the very soul, and sweet religion makes a rhapsody of words. Heaven's face doth glow, yea this solidity and compound mass, with tristful visage¹⁴, as against the doom, is thought-sick at the act.

QUEEN

Ay me, what act, that roars so loud, and thunders in the index?

HAMLET

Look here upon this picture, and on this, the counterfeit presentment of two brothers. See what a grace was seated on this brow, Hyperion¹⁵'s curls, the front of Jove himself, an eye like Mars, to threaten and command, a station like the herald Mercury New lighted on a heaven-kissing hill: a combination and a form indeed, where every god did seem to set his seal, to give the world assurance of a man. This was your husband. Look you now what follows. Here is your husband, like a mildew'd ear¹⁶ Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes? Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed, and batten¹⁷ on this moor¹⁸? Ha! have you eyes? You cannot call it love; for at your age the hey-day in the blood is tame, it's humble, and waits upon the judgement: and what judgement would step from this to this? Sense sure you have, Else could you not have motion; but sure that sense is apoplex'd¹⁹, for madness would not err nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd²⁰ but it reserv'd some quantity of choice to serve in such a difference. What devil was't that thus hath cozen'd²¹ you at hoodman-blind²²? Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight, Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans²³ all, or but a sickly part of one true sense could not so mope. O shame! where is thy blush? Rebellious hell, if thou canst mutine²⁴ in a matron's bones, to flaming youth let virtue be as wax, and melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame when the compulsive ardour gives the charge, since frost itself as actively doth burn, and reason panders²⁵ will.

QUEEN

O Hamlet, speak no more. Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul, and there I see such black and grained²⁶ spots as will not leave their tinct²⁷.

HAMLET

Nay, but to live in the rank sweat of an enseamed²⁸ bed, Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love over the nasty sty.

QUEEN

O speak to me no more; these words like daggers enter in mine ears; no more, sweet Hamlet.

HAMLET

A murderer and a villain; a slave that is not twentieth part the tithe²⁹ of your precedent lord. A vice of kings, a cutpurse of the empire and the rule, that from a shelf the precious diadem³⁰ stole and put it in his pocket!

QUEEN

No more.

HAMLET

A king of shreds and patches!-

[Enter Ghost.]

Save me and hover o'er me with your wings, you heavenly guards! What would your gracious figure?

QUEEN

Alas, he's mad.

HAMLET

Do you not come your tardy son to chide, that, laps'd in time and passion, lets go by the important acting of your dread command? O say!

GHOST

Do not forget. This visitation is but to whet³¹ thy almost blunted purpose. But look, amazement on thy mother sits. O step between her and her fighting soul. Conceit³² in weakest bodies strongest works. Speak to her, Hamlet.

HAMLET

How is it with you, lady?

QUEEN

Alas, how is't with you, that you do bend your eye on vacancy, and with the incorporal³³ air do hold discourse? Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep, and, as the sleeping soldiers in the alarm, your bedded hairs, like life in excrements, Start up and stand an end. O gentle son, upon the heat and flame of thy distemper Sprinkle cool patience. Whereon do you look?

HAMLET

On him, on him! Look you how pale he glares, his form and cause conjoin'd, preaching to stones, would make them capable.-do not look upon me, Lest with this piteous action you convert my stern effects. Then what I have to do will want true colour³⁴; tears perchance for blood.

QUEEN

To whom do you speak this?

HAMLET

Do you see nothing there?

QUEEN

Nothing at all; yet all that is I see.

HAMLET

Nor did you nothing hear?

QUEEN

No, nothing but ourselves.

HAMLET

Why, look you there! look how it steals away! My father, in his habit³⁵ as he liv'd! Look where he goes even now out at the portal.

[Exit Ghost.]

QUEEN

This is the very coinage³⁶ of your brain. This bodiless creation ecstasy³⁷ is very cunning in.

HAMLET

Ecstasy! My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time, and makes as healthful music. It is not madness that I have utter'd. Bring me to the test, and I the matter will re-word; which madness would gambol³⁸ from. Mother, for love of grace, Lay not that flattering unction³⁹ to your soul that not your trespass, but my madness speaks. It will but skin and film the ulcerous place, Whilst rank corruption, mining all within, Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven, Repent what's past, avoid what is to come; and do not spread the compost⁴⁰ on the weeds, to make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue; for in the fatness of these pursy⁴¹ times Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg, yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good.

QUEEN

O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain⁴².

HAMLET

O throw away the worser part of it, and live the purer with the other half. Good night. But go not to mine uncle's bed. Assume a virtue, if you have it not. That monster custom, who all sense doth eat, of habits evil, is angel yet in this, that to the use of actions fair and good he likewise gives a frock or livery⁴³ that aptly is put on. Refrain tonight, and that shall lend a kind of easiness to the next abstinence. The next more easy; for use almost can change the stamp of nature, and either curb the devil, or throw him out with wondrous potency. Once more, good night, and when you are desirous to be bles'd, I'll blessing beg of you. For this same lord

[Pointing to Polonius.] I do repent; but heaven hath pleas'd it so, to punish me with this, and this with me, that I must be their scourge and minister. I will bestow him, and will answer well the death I gave him. So again, good

night. I must be cruel, only to be kind: thus bad begins, and worse remains behind. One word more, good lady.

QUEEN

What shall I do?

HAMLET

Not this, by no means, that I bid you do: let the bloat king tempt you again to bed, Pinch wanton⁴⁴ on your cheek, call you his mouse, and let him, for a pair of reechy⁴⁵ kisses, or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers, make you to ravel⁴⁶ all this matter out, that I essentially am not in madness, but mad in craft⁴⁷. 'Twere good you let him know, for who that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise, would from a paddock⁴⁸, from a bat, a gib⁴⁹, such dear concernings hide? Who would do so? No, in despite of sense and secrecy, Unpeg the basket on the house's top, let the birds fly, and like the famous ape, to try conclusions, in the basket creep and break your own neck down.

QUEEN

Be thou assur'd, if words be made of breath, and breath of life, I have no life to breathe what thou hast said to me.

HAMLET

I must to England, you know that?

QUEEN

Alack⁵⁰, I had forgot. 'Tis so concluded on.

HAMLET

There's letters seal'd: and my two schoolfellows, whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd⁵¹, - they bear the mandate, they must sweep my way and marshal me to knavery⁵². Let it work; for 'tis the sport to have the engineer Hoist with his own petard⁵³, and 't shall go hard but I will delve⁵⁴ one yard below their mines and blow them at the moon. O, 'tis most sweet, when in one line two crafts directly meet. This man shall set me packing. I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room. Mother, good night. Indeed, this counsellor is now most still, most secret, and most grave, who was in life a foolish prating⁵⁵ knave. Come, sir, to draw toward an end with you. Good night, mother.

[Exit Hamlet dragging out Polonius.]

Act IV, Scene I

A room in the Castle.

[Enter King, Queen, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

KING

There's matter in these sighs. These profound heaves you must translate;
'tis fit we understand them. Where is your son?

QUEEN

Bestow this place on us a little while.

[To Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who go out.]

Ah, my good lord, what have I seen tonight!

KING

What, Gertrude? How does Hamlet?

QUEEN

Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend which is the mightier. In his lawless fit Behind the arras hearing something stir, Whips out his rapier, cries 'a rat, a rat!' and in this brainish¹ apprehension kills the unseen good old man.

KING

O heavy deed! It had been so with us, had we been there. His liberty is full of threats to all; to you yourself, to us, to everyone. Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answer'd? It will be laid to us, whose providence should have kept short, restrain'd, and out of haunt² this mad young man. But so much was our love we would not understand what was most fit, but like the owner of a foul disease, to keep it from divulging, let it feed even on the pith³ of life. Where is he gone?

QUEEN

To draw apart the body he hath kill'd, O'er whom his very madness, like some ore Among a mineral of metals base, Shows itself pure. He weeps for what is done.

KING

O Gertrude, come away! The sun no sooner shall the mountains touch but we will ship him hence, and this vile deed we must with all our majesty and skill both countenance and excuse.-Ho, Guildenstern!

[Re-enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

Friends both, go join you with some further aid: Hamlet in madness hath Polonius slain, and from his mother's closet hath he dragg'd him. Go seek him out, speak fair, and bring the body into the chapel. I pray you haste in this.



[Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

Come, Gertrude, we'll call up our wisest friends, and let them know both what we mean to do and what's untimely done, so haply⁴ slander, whose whisper o'er the world's diameter, as level as the cannon to his blank, Transports his poison'd shot, may miss our name, and hit the woundless air. O, come away! My soul is full of discord and dismay.

[Exeunt.]

Act IV, Scene II

Another room in the Castle.

[Enter Hamlet.]

HAMLET

Safely stowed.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

[Within.] Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET

What noise? Who calls on Hamlet? O, here they come.

[Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

ROSENCRANTZ

What have you done, my lord, with the dead body?

HAMLET

Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin.

ROSENCRANTZ

Tell us where 'tis, that we may take it thence, and bear it to the chapel.

HAMLET

Do not believe it.

ROSENCRANTZ

Believe what?

HAMLET

That I can keep your counsel, and not mine own. Besides, to be demanded of a sponge-what replication¹ should be made by the son of a king?

ROSENCRANTZ

Take you me for a sponge, my lord?

HAMLET

Ay, sir; that soaks up the king's countenance, his rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the king best service in the end: he keeps them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw; first mouthed, to be last swallowed: when he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again.

ROSENCRANTZ

I understand you not, my lord.

HAMLET

I am glad of it. A knavish² speech sleeps in a foolish ear.

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, you must tell us where the body is and go with us to the king.



HAMLET

The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body. The king is a thing-

GUILDENSTERN

A thing, my lord!

HAMLET

Of nothing. Bring me to him. Hide fox, and all after³.

[Exeunt.]

Act IV, Scene III

Another room in the Castle.

[Enter King, attended.]

KING

I have sent to seek him and to find the body. How dangerous is it that this man goes loose! Yet must not we put the strong law on him: he's lov'd of the distracted multitude, who like not in their judgement, but their eyes; and where 'tis so, th'offender's scourge¹ is weigh'd, but never the offence. To bear all smooth and even, this sudden sending him away must seem Deliberate pause. Diseases desperate grown by desperate appliance are reliev'd, or not at all.

[Enter Rosencrantz.]

How now? What hath befall'n?

ROSENCRANTZ

Where the dead body is bestow'd, my lord, we cannot get from him.

KING

But where is he?

ROSENCRANTZ

Without, my lord, guarded, to know your pleasure.

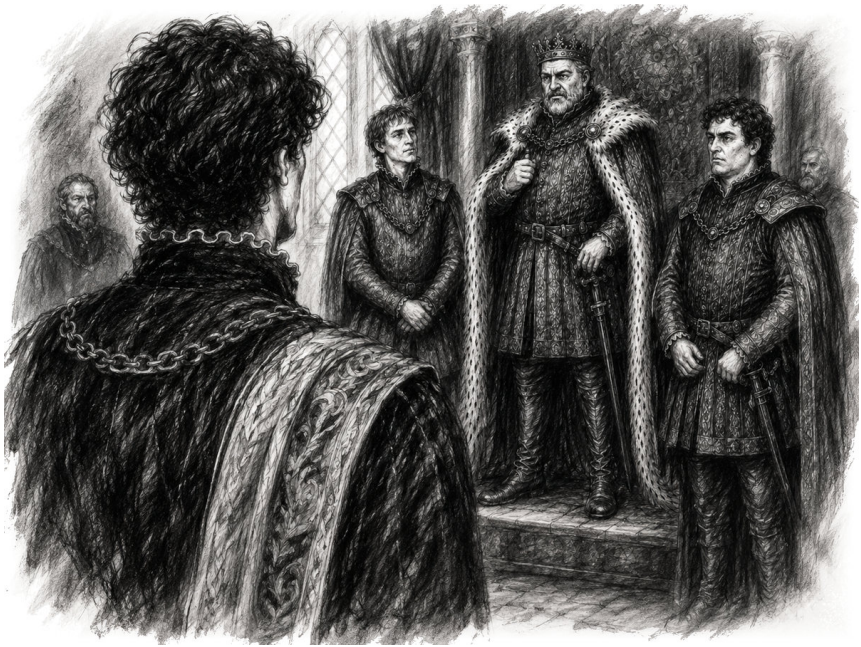
KING

Bring him before us.

ROSENCRANTZ

Ho, Guildenstern! Bring in my lord.

[Enter Hamlet and Guildenstern.]



KING

Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

HAMLET

At supper.

KING

At supper? Where?

HAMLET

Not where he eats, but where he is eaten. A certain convocation of politic² worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable³ service,-two dishes, but to one table. That's the end.

KING

Alas, alas!

HAMLET

A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

KING

What dost thou mean by this?

HAMLET

Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.

KING

Where is Polonius?

HAMLET

In heaven. Send thither⁴ to see. If your messenger find him not there, seek him i' th'other place yourself. But indeed, if you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby.

KING

[To some Attendants.] Go seek him there.

HAMLET

He will stay till you come.

[Exeunt Attendants.]

KING

Hamlet, this deed, for thine especial safety,- which we do tender, as we dearly grieve for that which thou hast done,-must send thee hence with fiery quickness. Therefore prepare thyself; the bark⁵ is ready, and the wind at help, Th'associates tend, and everything is bent for England.

HAMLET

For England?

KING

Ay, Hamlet.

HAMLET

Good.

KING

So is it, if thou knew'st our purposes.

HAMLET

I see a cherub that sees them. But, come; for England! Farewell, dear mother.

KING

Thy loving father, Hamlet.

HAMLET

My mother. Father and mother is man and wife; man and wife is one flesh; and so, my mother. Come, for England.

[Exit.]

KING

Follow him at foot⁶. Tempt him with speed aboard; Delay it not; I'll have him hence tonight. Away, for everything is seal'd and done that else leans on th'affair. Pray you make haste.

[Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

And England, if my love thou hold'st at aught⁷, - as my great power thereof may give thee sense, since yet thy cicatrice⁸ looks raw and red after the Danish sword, and thy free awe Pays homage to us, - thou mayst not coldly set our sovereign process⁹, which imports¹⁰ at full, by letters conjuring¹¹ to that effect, the present death of Hamlet. Do it, England; for like the hectic¹² in my blood he rages, and thou must cure me. Till I know 'tis done, Howe'er my haps¹³, my joys were ne'er begun.

[Exit.]

Act IV, Scene IV

A plain in Denmark.

[Enter Fortinbras and Forces marching.]

FORTINBRAS

Go, Captain, from me greet the Danish king. Tell him that by his license, Fortinbras Craves¹ the conveyance of a promis'd march over his kingdom. You know the rendezvous. If that his Majesty would aught² with us, we shall express our duty in his eye; and let him know so.



CAPTAIN

I will do't, my lord.

FORTINBRAS

Go softly on.

[Exeunt all but the Captain.]

[Enter Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern &c.]

HAMLET

Good sir, whose powers are these?

CAPTAIN

They are of Norway, sir.

HAMLET

How purpos'd, sir, I pray you?

CAPTAIN

Against some part of Poland.

HAMLET

Who commands them, sir?

CAPTAIN

The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

HAMLET

Goes it against the main of Poland, sir, or for some frontier?

CAPTAIN

Truly to speak, and with no addition, we go to gain a little patch of ground that hath in it no profit but the name. To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it; nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole a ranker³ rate, should it be sold in fee⁴.

HAMLET

Why, then the Polack never will defend it.

CAPTAIN

Yes, it is already garrison'd.

HAMLET

Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats will not debate the question of this straw! This is th'imposthume⁵ of much wealth and peace, that inward breaks, and shows no cause without why the man dies. I humbly thank you, sir.

CAPTAIN

God b' wi' you, sir.

[Exit.]

ROSENCRANTZ

Will't please you go, my lord?

HAMLET

I'll be with you straight. Go a little before.

[Exeunt all but Hamlet.]

How all occasions do inform against⁶ me, and spur my dull revenge. What is a man if his chief good and market of his time be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more. Sure he that made us with such large discourse, Looking before and after, gave us not that capability and godlike reason to fust⁷ in us unus'd. Now whether it be Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple of thinking too precisely on th'event,- a thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom and ever three parts coward,-I do not know why yet I live to say this thing's to do, sith⁸ I have cause, and will, and strength, and means to do't. Examples gross⁹ as earth exhort me, Witness this army of such mass and charge, Led by a delicate and tender prince, whose spirit, with divine ambition puff'd, makes mouths at the invisible event, Exposing what is mortal and unsure to all that fortune, death, and danger dare, even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great is not to stir without great argument, but greatly to find quarrel in a straw when honour's at the stake. How stand I then, that have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd, Excitements of my reason and my blood, and let all sleep, while to my shame I see the imminent death of twenty thousand men that, for a fantasy and trick of fame, go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause, which is not tomb enough and continent¹⁰ to hide the slain? O, from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth.

[Exit.]

Act IV, Scene V

Elsinore. A room in the Castle.

[Enter Queen, Horatio and a Gentleman.]

QUEEN

I will not speak with her.

GENTLEMAN

She is importunate¹, indeed distract². Her mood will needs be pitied.

QUEEN

What would she have?

GENTLEMAN

She speaks much of her father; says she hears there's tricks i' th' world, and hems³, and beats her heart, Spurns enviously at straws, speaks things in doubt, that carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing, yet the unshaped use of it doth move the hearers to collection⁴; they aim at it, and botch the words up fit to their own thoughts, which, as her winks, and nods, and gestures yield them, Indeed would make one think there might be thought, though nothing sure, yet much unhappily. 'Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.

QUEEN

Let her come in.

[Exit Gentleman.]

To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is, Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss⁵. So full of artless jealousy is guilt, it spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

[Enter Ophelia.]

OPHELIA

Where is the beauteous Majesty of Denmark?

QUEEN

How now, Ophelia?

OPHELIA

[Sings.] How should I your true love know from another one? By his cockle hat⁶ and staff and his sandal shoon⁷.

QUEEN

Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

OPHELIA

Say you? Nay, pray you mark.

[Sings.] He is dead and gone, lady, he is dead and gone, at his head a grass green turf, at his heels a stone.

QUEEN

Nay, but Ophelia-

OPHELIA

Pray you mark.

[Sings.] White his shroud as the mountain snow.

[Enter King.]

QUEEN

Alas, look here, my lord!

OPHELIA

[Sings.] Larded⁸ all with sweet flowers; which bewept⁹ to the grave did not go with true-love showers.

KING

How do you, pretty lady?

OPHELIA

Well, God dild¹⁰ you! They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be. God be at your table!

KING

Conceit¹¹ upon her father.

OPHELIA

Pray you, let's have no words of this; but when they ask you what it means, say you this:

[Sings.] Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day, all in the morning betime¹², and I a maid at your window, to be your Valentine.

Then up he rose and donn'd his clothes, and dupp'd¹³ the chamber door, let in the maid, that out a maid Never departed more.

KING

Pretty Ophelia!

OPHELIA

Indeed I, without an oath, I'll make an end on't.

[Sings.] By Gis¹⁴ and by Saint Charity, Alack¹⁵, and fie for shame! Young men will do't if they come to't; by Cock, they are to blame.

Quoth¹⁶ she, before you tumbled me, you promis'd me to wed. So would I ha' done, by yonder sun, an thou hadst not come to my bed.

KING

How long hath she been thus?

OPHELIA

I hope all will be well. We must be patient. But I cannot choose but weep, to think they would lay him i' th' cold ground. My brother shall know of it. And so I thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach! Good night, ladies; good night, sweet ladies; good night, good night.

[Exit.]

KING

Follow her close; give her good watch, I pray you.

[Exit Horatio.]

O, this is the poison of deep grief; it springs all from her father's death. O Gertrude, Gertrude, when sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions. First, her father slain; Next, your son gone; and he most violent author of his own just remove; the people muddied, Thick, and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers for good Polonius' death; and we have done but greenly in hugger-mugger¹⁷ to inter him. Poor Ophelia Divided from herself and her fair judgement, without the which we are pictures or mere beasts. Last, and as much containing as all these, her brother is in secret come from France, Feeds on his wonder, keeps himself in clouds, and wants not buzzers¹⁸ to infect his ear with pestilent speeches of his father's death, wherein necessity, of matter beggar'd, will nothing stick our person to arraign in ear and ear. O my dear Gertrude, this, like to a murdering piece, in many places Gives me superfluous death.

[A noise within.]

QUEEN

Alack, what noise is this?

KING

Where are my Switzers¹⁹? Let them guard the door.

[Enter a Gentleman.]

What is the matter?

GENTLEMAN

Save yourself, my lord. The ocean, overpeering of his list²⁰, Eats not the flats with more impetuous haste than young Laertes, in a riotous head, O'erbears your offices. The rabble call him lord, and, as the world were now but to begin, Antiquity forgot, custom not known, the ratifiers and props of every word, they cry 'Choose we! Laertes shall be king!' Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds, 'Laertes shall be king, Laertes king.'

QUEEN

How cheerfully on the false trail they cry. O, this is counter, you false Danish dogs.

[A noise within.]

KING

The doors are broke.

[Enter Laertes, armed; Danes following.]

LAERTES

Where is this king?-Sirs, stand you all without. Danes. No, let's come in.

LAERTES

I pray you, give me leave.

DANES

We will, we will.

[They retire without the door.]

LAERTES

I thank you. Keep the door. O thou vile king, give me my father.

QUEEN

Calmly, good Laertes.

LAERTES

That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard; Cries cuckold to my father, brands the harlot even here between the chaste unsmirched brow of my true mother.

KING

What is the cause, Laertes, that thy rebellion looks so giant-like?- let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear our person. There's such divinity doth hedge a king, that treason can but peep to what it would, Acts little of his will.-Tell me, Laertes, why thou art thus incens'd.-let him go, Gertrude:- speak, man.

LAERTES

Where is my father?

KING

Dead.

QUEEN

But not by him.

KING

Let him demand his fill.

LAERTES

How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with. To hell, allegiance! Vows, to the blackest devil! Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit! I dare damnation. To this point I stand, that both the worlds, I give to negligence, let come what comes; only I'll be reveng'd most thoroughly for my father.

KING

Who shall stay you?

LAERTES

My will, not all the world. And for my means, I'll husband them so well, they shall go far with little.

KING

Good Laertes, if you desire to know the certainty of your dear father's death, is't writ in your revenge that, sweepstake, you will draw both friend and foe, Winner and loser?

LAERTES

None but his enemies.

KING

Will you know them then?

LAERTES

To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms; and, like the kind life-rendering pelican²¹, Repast them with my blood.

KING

Why, now you speak like a good child and a true gentleman. That I am guiltless of your father's death, and am most sensibly in grief for it, it shall as level to your judgement 'pear as day does to your eye.

DANES

[Within.] Let her come in.

LAERTES

How now! What noise is that?

[Re-enter Ophelia, fantastically dressed with straws and flowers.]

O heat, dry up my brains. Tears seven times salt, Burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye. By heaven, thy madness shall be paid by weight, till our scale turn the beam. O rose of may! Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia! O heavens, is't possible a young maid's wits should be as mortal as an old man's life? Nature is fine in love, and where 'tis fine, it sends some precious instance of itself after the thing it loves.

OPHELIA

[Sings.] They bore him barefac'd on the bier²², Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny and on his grave rain'd many a tear.- Fare you well, my dove!

LAERTES

Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge, it could not move thus.

OPHELIA

You must sing 'Down a-down, and you call him a-down-a.' O, how the wheel becomes it! It is the false steward that stole his master's daughter.

LAERTES

This nothing's more than matter.

OPHELIA

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts.

LAERTES

A document in madness, thoughts and remembrance fitted.

OPHELIA

There's fennel for you, and columbines. There's rue for you; and here's some for me. We may call it herb of grace o' Sundays²³. O you must wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they wither'd all when my father died. They say he made a good end.

[Sings.] For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.

LAERTES

Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself she turns to favour and to prettiness.

OPHELIA

[Sings.] And will he not come again? And will he not come again? No, no, he is dead, go to thy death-bed, he never will come again.

His beard was as white as snow, all flaxen was his poll²⁴. He is gone, he is gone, and we cast away moan. God ha' mercy on his soul.

And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God b' wi' ye.

[Exit.]

LAERTES

Do you see this, O God?



KING

Laertes, I must commune with your grief, or you deny me right. Go but apart, make choice of whom your wisest friends you will, and they shall hear and judge 'twixt you and me. If by direct or by collateral hand they find us touch'd, we will our kingdom give, our crown, our life, and all that we call ours to you in satisfaction; but if not, be you content to lend your patience to us, and we shall jointly labour with your soul to give it due content.

LAERTES

Let this be so; his means of death, his obscure burial,- no trophy, sword, nor hatchment²⁵ o'er his bones, no noble rite, nor formal ostentation,- Cry to be heard, as 'twere from heaven to earth, that I must call't in question.

KING

So you shall. And where th'offence is let the great axe fall. I pray you go with me.

[Exeunt.]

Act IV, Scene VI

Another room in the Castle.

[Enter Horatio and a Servant.]

HORATIO

What are they that would speak with me?

SERVANT

Sailors, sir. They say they have letters for you.

HORATIO

Let them come in.

[Exit Servant.]

I do not know from what part of the world I should be greeted, if not from Lord Hamlet.

[Enter Sailors.]

FIRST SAILOR

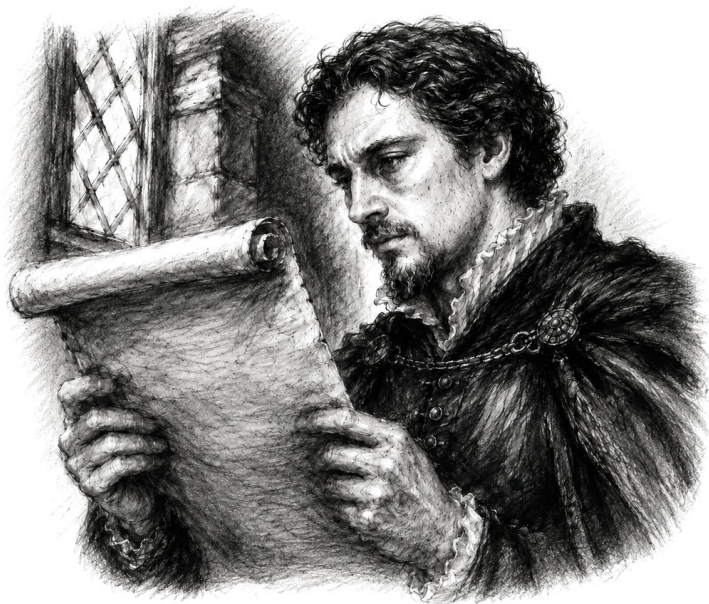
God bless you, sir.

HORATIO

Let him bless thee too.

FIRST SAILOR

He shall, sir, and't please him. There's a letter for you, sir. It comes from th'ambassador that was bound for England; if your name be Horatio, as I am let to know it is.



HORATIO

[Reads.] 'Horatio, when thou shalt have overlooked this, give these fellows some means to the king. They have letters for him. Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment¹ gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour, and in the grapple I boarded them. On the instant they got clear of our ship, so I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy. But they knew what they did; I am to do a good turn for them. Let the king have the letters I have sent, and repair² thou to me with as much haste as thou wouldst fly death. I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb; yet are they much too light for the bore of the matter³. These good fellows will bring thee where I am. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course for England: of them I have much to tell thee. Farewell. He that thou knowest thine, HAMLET.'

Come, I will give you way for these your letters, and do't the speedier, that you may direct me to him from whom you brought them.

[Exeunt.]

Act IV, Scene VII

Another room in the Castle.

[Enter King and Laertes.]

KING

Now must your conscience my acquittance seal¹, and you must put me in your heart for friend, sith you have heard, and with a knowing ear, that he which hath your noble father slain Pursu'd my life.

LAERTES

It well appears. But tell me why you proceeded not against these feats, so crimeful and so capital in nature, as by your safety, wisdom, all things else, you mainly were stirr'd up.

KING

O, for two special reasons, which may to you, perhaps, seem much unsinew'd², but yet to me they are strong. The queen his mother Lives almost by his looks; and for myself,- my virtue or my plague, be it either which,- she's so conjunctive to my life and soul, that, as the star moves not but in his sphere, I could not but by her. The other motive, why to a public count I might not go, is the great love the general gender³ bear him, who, dipping all his faults in their affection, would like the spring that turneth wood to stone, Convert his gyves⁴ to graces; so that my arrows, too slightly timber'd for so loud a wind, would have reverted to my bow again, and not where I had aim'd them.

LAERTES

And so have I a noble father lost, a sister driven into desperate terms, whose worth, if praises may go back again, Stood challenger on mount of all the age for her perfections. But my revenge will come.

KING

Break not your sleeps for that. You must not think that we are made of stuff so flat and dull that we can let our beard be shook with danger, and think it pastime. You shortly shall hear more. I lov'd your father, and we love ourself, and that, I hope, will teach you to imagine-

[Enter a Messenger.]

How now? What news?

MESSENGER

Letters, my lord, from Hamlet. This to your Majesty; this to the queen.

KING

From Hamlet! Who brought them?

MESSENGER

Sailors, my lord, they say; I saw them not. They were given me by Claudio. He receiv'd them of him that brought them.

KING

Laertes, you shall hear them. Leave us.

[Exit Messenger.]

[Reads.]

'High and mighty, you shall know I am set naked on your kingdom⁵. Tomorrow shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes. When I shall, first asking your pardon thereunto, recount the occasions of my sudden and more strange return. HAMLET.'

What should this mean? Are all the rest come back? Or is it some abuse, and no such thing?

LAERTES

Know you the hand?

KING

'Tis Hamlet's character. 'Naked!' and in a postscript here he says 'alone.' can you advise me?

LAERTES

I am lost in it, my lord. But let him come, it warms the very sickness in my heart that I shall live and tell him to his teeth, 'thus diest thou.'

KING

If it be so, Laertes, - as how should it be so? How otherwise? - will you be rul'd by me?

LAERTES

Ay, my lord; so you will not o'errule me to a peace.

KING

To thine own peace. If he be now return'd, as checking at his voyage, and that he means no more to undertake it, I will work him to an exploit, now ripe in my device, Under the which he shall not choose but fall; and for his death no wind shall breathe, but even his mother shall uncharge the practice and call it accident.

LAERTES

My lord, I will be rul'd; the rather if you could devise it so that I might be the organ.

KING

It falls right. You have been talk'd of since your travel much, and that in Hamlet's hearing, for a quality wherein they say you shine. Your sum of parts did not together pluck such envy from him as did that one, and that, in my regard, of the unworthiest siege.

LAERTES

What part is that, my lord?

KING

A very riband⁶ in the cap of youth, yet needful too, for youth no less becomes the light and careless livery⁷ that it wears than settled age his sables and his weeds⁸, importing health and graveness. Two months since here was a gentleman of Normandy, - I've seen myself, and serv'd against, the French, and they can well on horseback, but this gallant had witchcraft in't. He grew unto his seat, and to such wondrous doing brought his horse, as had he been incorps'd and demi-natur'd with the brave beast. So far he topp'd my thought that I in forgery of shapes and tricks, come short of what he did.

LAERTES

A Norman was't?

KING

A Norman.

LAERTES

Upon my life, Lamord⁹.

KING

The very same.

LAERTES

I know him well. He is the brooch indeed and gem of all the nation.

KING

He made confession of you, and gave you such a masterly report for art and exercise in your defence, and for your rapier most especially, that he cried out 'twould be a sight indeed if one could match you. The scrimers¹⁰ of their nation he swore had neither motion, guard, nor eye, if you oppos'd them. Sir, this report of his did Hamlet so envenom with his envy that he could nothing do but wish and beg your sudden coming o'er to play with him. Now, out of this,-

LAERTES

What out of this, my lord?

KING

Laertes, was your father dear to you? Or are you like the painting of a sorrow, a face without a heart?

LAERTES

Why ask you this?

KING

Not that I think you did not love your father, but that I know love is begun by time, and that I see, in passages of proof, Time qualifies the spark and fire of it. There lives within the very flame of love a kind of wick or snuff that will abate it; and nothing is at a like goodness still, for goodness, growing to a pleurisy¹¹, dies in his own too much. That we would do, we should do when we would; for this 'would' changes, and hath abatements and delays as many as there are tongues, are hands, are accidents; and then this 'should' is like a spendthrift sigh that hurts by easing. But to the quick o' th' ulcer¹²: Hamlet comes back: what would you undertake to show yourself your father's son in deed, more than in words?

LAERTES

To cut his throat i' th' church.

KING

No place, indeed, should murder sanctuarize¹³; Revenge should have no bounds. But good Laertes, will you do this, keep close within your chamber. Hamlet return'd shall know you are come home: we'll put on those shall praise your excellence, and set a double varnish on the fame the Frenchman gave you, bring you in fine together and wager on your heads. He, being remiss, most generous, and free from all contriving, will not peruse the foils¹⁴; so that with ease, or with a little shuffling, you may choose a sword unbated¹⁵, and in a pass of practice, Requite him for your father.

LAERTES

I will do't. And for that purpose I'll anoint my sword. I bought an unction¹⁶ of a mountebank¹⁷ so mortal that, but dip a knife in it, where it draws blood no cataplasme¹⁸ so rare, Collected from all simples¹⁹ that have virtue Under the moon, can save the thing from death this is but scratch'd withal. I'll touch my point with this contagion, that if I gall him slightly, it may be death.

KING

Let's further think of this, Weigh what convenience both of time and means may fit us to our shape. If this should fail, and that our drift²⁰ look through our bad performance. 'Twere better not assay'd. Therefore this project should have a back or second, that might hold if this did blast in proof. Soft, let me see. We'll make a solemn wager on your cunnings,- I ha't! When in your motion you are hot and dry, as make your bouts more violent to that end, and that he calls for drink, I'll have prepar'd him a chalice for the nonce²¹; whereon but sipping, if he by chance escape your venom'd stuck, our purpose may hold there.



[Enter Queen.]

How now, sweet queen?

QUEEN

One woe doth tread upon another's heel, so fast they follow. Your sister's drown'd, Laertes.

LAERTES

Drown'd! O, where?

QUEEN

There is a willow grows aslant a brook, that shows his hoary²² leaves in the glassy stream. There with fantastic garlands did she make of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples²³, that liberal shepherds give a grosser name, but our cold maids²⁴ do dead men's fingers call them. There on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke, when down her weedy trophies and herself fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide, and mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up, which time she chaunted snatches of old tunes, as one incapable of her own distress, or like a creature native and indued unto that element. But long it could not be till that her garments, heavy with their drink, Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay to muddy death.

LAERTES

Alas, then she is drown'd?

QUEEN

Drown'd, drown'd.

LAERTES

Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia, and therefore I forbid my tears. But yet it is our trick; nature her custom holds, let shame say what it will. When these are gone, the woman will be out. Adieu, my lord, I have a speech of fire, that fain would blaze, but that this folly douts²⁵ it.

[Exit.]

KING

Let's follow, Gertrude; how much I had to do to calm his rage! Now fear I this will give it start again; therefore let's follow.

[Exeunt.]

Act V, Scene I

A churchyard.

[Enter two Clowns with spades, &c.]

FIRST

CLOWN¹. Is she to be buried in Christian burial, when she wilfully seeks her own salvation?

SECOND CLOWN

I tell thee she is, and therefore make her grave straight. The crowner hath sat on her², and finds it Christian burial.

FIRST CLOWN

How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defence?

SECOND CLOWN

Why, 'tis found so.

FIRST CLOWN

It must be *se offendendo*³, it cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act: and an act hath three branches. It is to act, to do, and to perform: argal⁴, she drowned herself wittingly.

SECOND CLOWN

Nay, but hear you, goodman delver,-

FIRST CLOWN

Give me leave. Here lies the water; good. Here stands the man; good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he⁵, he goes,-mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

SECOND CLOWN

But is this law?

FIRST CLOWN

Ay, marry, is't, crowner's quest law.

SECOND CLOWN

Will you ha' the truth on't? If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o' Christian burial.

FIRST CLOWN

Why, there thou say'st. And the more pity that great folk should have countenance in this world to drown or hang themselves more than their even Christian. Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers: they hold up Adam's profession.

SECOND CLOWN

Was he a gentleman?

FIRST CLOWN

He was the first that ever bore arms.

SECOND CLOWN

Why, he had none.

FIRST CLOWN

What, art a heathen? How dost thou understand the Scripture? The Scripture says Adam digg'd. Could he dig without arms? I'll put another question to thee. If thou answerest me not to the purpose, confess thyself-

SECOND CLOWN

Go to.

FIRST CLOWN

What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

SECOND CLOWN

The gallows-maker; for that frame outlives a thousand tenants.

FIRST CLOWN

I like thy wit well in good faith, the gallows does well. But how does it well? It does well to those that do ill. Now, thou dost ill to say the gallows is built stronger than the church; argal, the gallows may do well to thee. To't again, come.

SECOND CLOWN

Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?

FIRST CLOWN

Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.

SECOND CLOWN

Marry, now I can tell.

FIRST CLOWN

To't.

SECOND CLOWN

Mass, I cannot tell.

[Enter Hamlet and Horatio, at a distance.]

FIRST CLOWN

Cudgel thy brains no more about it, for your dull ass will not mend his pace with beating; and when you are asked this question next, say 'a grave-maker'. The houses he makes last till doomsday. Go, get thee to Vaughan⁶; fetch me a stoup⁷ of liquor.

[Exit Second Clown.]

[Digs and sings.]

In youth when I did love, did love, Methought it was very sweet; to contract, O, the time for, a, my behave, O methought there was nothing meet⁸.

HAMLET

Has this fellow no feeling of his business, that he sings at grave-making?

HORATIO

Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness.

HAMLET

'Tis e'en so; the hand of little employment hath the daintier sense.

FIRST CLOWN

[Sings.] But age with his stealing steps hath claw'd me in his clutch, and hath shipp'd me into the land, as if I had never been such.

[Throws up a skull.]

HAMLET

That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once. How the knave jowls it to th' ground, as if 'twere Cain's jawbone, that did the first murder! This might be the pate⁹ of a politician which this ass now o'er-offices, one that would circumvent God, might it not?

HORATIO

It might, my lord.

HAMLET

Or of a courtier, which could say 'Good morrow, sweet lord! How dost thou, good lord?' this might be my lord such-a-one, that praised my lord such-a-one's horse when he meant to beg it, might it not?

HORATIO

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

Why, e'en so: and now my Lady Worm¹⁰'s; chapless¹¹, and knocked about the mazard¹² with a sexton¹³'s spade. Here's fine revolution, an we had the trick to see't. Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggets¹⁴ with 'em? Mine ache to think on't.

FIRST CLOWN

[Sings.] A pickaxe and a spade, a spade, for and a shrouding-sheet; O, a pit of clay for to be made for such a guest is meet.

[Throws up another skull.]

HAMLET

There's another. Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddits¹⁵ now, his quilllets¹⁶, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? Why does he suffer this rude knave now to knock him about the sconce¹⁷ with a dirty shovel, and will not tell him of his action of battery? Hum. This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries. Is this the fine of his fines, and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures¹⁸? The very conveyances of his lands will scarcely lie in this box; and must the inheritor himself have no more, ha?

HORATIO

Not a jot more, my lord.

HAMLET

Is not parchment made of sheep-skins?

HORATIO

Ay, my lord, and of calf-skins too.

HAMLET

They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance in that. I will speak to this fellow.-whose grave's this, sir?

FIRST CLOWN

Mine, sir.

[Sings.] O, a pit of clay for to be made for such a guest is meet.

HAMLET

I think it be thine indeed, for thou liest in't.

FIRST CLOWN

You lie out on't, sir, and therefore 'tis not yours. For my part, I do not lie in't, yet it is mine.

HAMLET

Thou dost lie in't, to be in't and say it is thine. 'Tis for the dead, not for the quick; therefore thou liest.

FIRST CLOWN

'Tis a quick lie, sir; 't will away again from me to you.

HAMLET

What man dost thou dig it for?

FIRST CLOWN

For no man, sir.

HAMLET

What woman then?

FIRST CLOWN

For none neither.

HAMLET

Who is to be buried in't?

FIRST CLOWN

One that was a woman, sir; but, rest her soul, she's dead.

HAMLET

How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the card¹⁹, or equivocation will undo us. By the Lord, Horatio, these three years I have taken note of it, the age is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe²⁰. -how long hast thou been a grave-maker?

FIRST CLOWN

Of all the days i' th' year, I came to't that day that our last king Hamlet o'ercame Fortinbras.

HAMLET

How long is that since?

FIRST CLOWN

Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that. It was the very day that young Hamlet was born,-he that is mad, and sent into England.

HAMLET

Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?

FIRST CLOWN

Why, because he was mad; he shall recover his wits there; or if he do not, it's no great matter there.

HAMLET

Why?

FIRST CLOWN

'Twill not be seen in him there; there the men are as mad as he.

HAMLET

How came he mad?

FIRST CLOWN

Very strangely, they say.

HAMLET

How strangely?

FIRST CLOWN

Faith, e'en with losing his wits.

HAMLET

Upon what ground?

FIRST CLOWN

Why, here in Denmark. I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years.

HAMLET

How long will a man lie i' th'earth ere he rot?

FIRST CLOWN

Faith, if he be not rotten before he die,-as we have many pocky²¹ corses nowadays that will scarce hold the laying in,-he will last you some eight year or nine year. A tanner will last you nine year.

HAMLET

Why he more than another?

FIRST CLOWN

Why, sir, his hide is so tann'd with his trade that he will keep out water a great while. And your water is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body. Here's a skull now; this skull hath lain in the earth three-and-twenty years.

HAMLET

Whose was it?

FIRST CLOWN

A whoreson, mad fellow's it was. Whose do you think it was?

HAMLET

Nay, I know not.

FIRST CLOWN

A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! A pour'd a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the king's jester.

HAMLET

This?

FIRST CLOWN

E'en that.

HAMLET

Let me see.

[Takes the skull.] Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kiss'd I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now, to mock your own grinning? Quite chop-fallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at that.-Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.



HORATIO

What's that, my lord?

HAMLET

Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' th'earth?

HORATIO

E'en so.

HAMLET

And smelt so? Pah!

[Throws down the skull.]

HORATIO

E'en so, my lord.

HAMLET

To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bung-hole²²?

HORATIO

'Twere to consider too curiously to consider so.

HAMLET

No, faith, not a jot. But to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it; as thus. Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth into dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam; and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel? Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay, might stop a hole to keep the wind away. O, that that earth which kept the world in awe should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw. But soft! but soft! aside! Here comes the king. Enter priests, &c, in procession; the corpse of Ophelia, Laertes and Mourners following; king, queen, their Trains, &c. The queen, the courtiers. Who is that they follow? And with such maimed rites? This doth betoken the corse they follow did with desperate hand Fordo it own life²³. 'Twas of some estate. Cough we awhile and mark.

[Retiring with Horatio.]

LAERTES

What ceremony else?

HAMLET

That is Laertes, a very noble youth. Mark.

LAERTES

What ceremony else?

PRIEST

Her obsequies²⁴ have been as far enlarg'd as we have warranties. Her death was doubtful; and but that great command o'ersways the order, she should in ground unsanctified have lodg'd till the last trumpet. For charitable prayers, Shards, flints, and pebbles should be thrown on her. Yet here she is allowed her virgin rites, her maiden strewments²⁵, and the bringing home of bell and burial.

LAERTES

Must there no more be done?

PRIEST

No more be done. We should profane the service of the dead to sing sage requiem and such rest to her as to peace-parted souls.

LAERTES

Lay her i' th'earth, and from her fair and unpolluted flesh may violets spring. I tell thee, churlish priest, a minist'ring angel shall my sister be when thou liest howling.

HAMLET

What, the fair Ophelia?

QUEEN

[Scattering flowers.] Sweets to the sweet. Farewell. I hop'd thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife; I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid, and not have strew'd thy grave.

LAERTES

O, treble woe Fall ten times treble on that cursed head whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense Depriv'd thee of. Hold off the earth a while, till I have caught her once more in mine arms.

[Leaps into the grave.] Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead²⁶, till of this flat a mountain you have made, to o'ertop old Pelion²⁷ or the skyish head of blue Olympus.

HAMLET

[Advancing.] What is he whose grief Bears such an emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow Conjures the wand'ring stars, and makes them stand like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I, Hamlet the Dane.

[Leaps into the grave.]

LAERTES

[Grappling with him.] The devil take thy soul!

HAMLET

Thou pray'st not well. I prithee take thy fingers from my throat; for though I am not splenative²⁸ and rash, yet have I in me something dangerous, which let thy wiseness fear. Away thy hand!

KING

Pluck them asunder²⁹.

QUEEN

Hamlet! Hamlet!

All. Gentlemen!

HORATIO

Good my lord, be quiet.

[The Attendants part them, and they come out of the grave.]

HAMLET

Why, I will fight with him upon this theme Until my eyelids will no longer wag.

QUEEN

O my son, what theme?

HAMLET

I lov'd Ophelia; forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?

KING

O, he is mad, Laertes.

QUEEN

For love of God forbear him!

HAMLET

'Swounds³⁰, show me what thou'lt do: Woul't weep? woul't fight? woul't fast? woul't tear thyself? Woul't drink up eisel³¹? eat a crocodile? I'll do't. Dost thou come here to whine? To outface me with leaping in her grave? Be buried quick with her, and so will I. And if thou prate of mountains, let them throw Millions of acres on us, till our ground, Singeing his pate against the burning zone, make Ossa like a wart. Nay, an thou'lt mouth, I'll rant as well as thou.

QUEEN

This is mere madness: and thus awhile the fit will work on him; Anon, as patient as the female dove, when that her golden couplets are disclos'd, his silence will sit drooping.

HAMLET

Hear you, sir; what is the reason that you use me thus? I lov'd you ever. But it is no matter. Let Hercules himself do what he may, the cat will mew, and dog will have his day.

[Exit.]

KING

I pray thee, good Horatio, wait upon him.

[Exit Horatio.]

[To Laertes.]

Strengthen your patience in our last night's speech; we'll put the matter to the present push.- Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son. This grave shall have a living monument. An hour of quiet shortly shall we see; till then in patience our proceeding be.

[Exeunt.]

Act V, Scene II

A hall in the Castle.

[Enter Hamlet and Horatio.]

HAMLET

So much for this, sir. Now let me see the other; you do remember all the circumstance?

HORATIO

Remember it, my lord!

HAMLET

Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting that would not let me sleep. Methought I lay Worse than the mutinies in the bilboes¹. Rashly, and prais'd be rashness for it,-let us know, our indiscretion sometime serves us well, when our deep plots do pall²; and that should teach us there's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew³ them how we will.

HORATIO

That is most certain.

HAMLET

Up from my cabin, my sea-gown scarf'd⁴ about me, in the dark Grop'd I to find out them; had my desire, Finger'd their packet⁵, and in fine⁶, withdrew to mine own room again, making so bold, my fears forgetting manners, to unseal their grand commission; where I found, Horatio, Oh royal knavery! an exact command, Larded⁷ with many several sorts of reasons, importing Denmark's health, and England's too, with ho! such bugs and goblins in my life, that on the supervise⁸, no leisure bated⁹, no, not to stay the grinding of the axe, my head should be struck off.

HORATIO

Is't possible?

HAMLET

Here's the commission, read it at more leisure. But wilt thou hear me how I did proceed?

HORATIO

I beseech you.

HAMLET

Being thus benetted round with villanies¹⁰, - or I could make a prologue to my brains, they had begun the play, - I sat me down, Devis'd a new commission, wrote it fair: I once did hold it, as our statist¹¹ do, a baseness to write fair, and labour'd much how to forget that learning; but, sir, now it did me yeoman's service. Wilt thou know the effect of what I wrote?

HORATIO

Ay, good my lord.

HAMLET

An earnest conjuration¹² from the king, as England was his faithful tributary, as love between them like the palm might flourish, as peace should still her wheaten garland wear and stand a comma 'tween their amities, and many such-like 'as'es of great charge, that on the view and know of these contents, without debatement further, more or less, he should the bearers put to sudden death, not shriving-time¹³ allow'd.

HORATIO

How was this seal'd?

HAMLET

Why, even in that was heaven ordinant. I had my father's signet in my purse, which was the model of that Danish seal: Folded the writ up in the form of the other, Subscrib'd it: gave't th'impression; plac'd it safely, the changeling never known. Now, the next day was our sea-fight, and what to this was sequent Thou know'st already.

HORATIO

So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't.

HAMLET

Why, man, they did make love to this employment. They are not near my conscience; their defeat does by their own insinuation grow. 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes between the pass and fell incensed points of mighty opposites.

HORATIO

Why, what a king is this!

HAMLET

Does it not, thinks't thee, stand me now upon,- he that hath kill'd my king,
and whor'd my mother, Popp'd in between th'election and my hopes¹⁴,
Thrown out his angle¹⁵ for my proper life, and with such cozenage¹⁶-is't not
perfect conscience to quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damn'd to let
this canker of our nature come in further evil?

HORATIO

It must be shortly known to him from England what is the issue of the
business there.

HAMLET

It will be short. The interim is mine; and a man's life's no more than to say
'One'. But I am very sorry, good Horatio, that to Laertes I forgot myself; for
by the image of my cause I see the portraiture of his. I'll court his favours.
But sure the bravery of his grief did put me into a tow'ring passion.

HORATIO

Peace, who comes here?

[Enter Osric.]

OSRIC

Your lordship is right welcome back to Denmark.

HAMLET

I humbly thank you, sir. Dost know this waterfly¹⁷?

HORATIO

No, my good lord.

HAMLET

Thy state is the more gracious; for 'tis a vice to know him. He hath much
land, and fertile; let a beast be lord of beasts, and his crib shall stand at the
king's mess; 'tis a chough¹⁸; but, as I say, spacious in the possession of dirt.

OSRIC

Sweet lord, if your lordship were at leisure, I should impart a thing to you
from his Majesty.

HAMLET

I will receive it with all diligence of spirit. Put your bonnet to his right use;
'tis for the head.

OSRIC

I thank your lordship, 'tis very hot.

HAMLET

No, believe me, 'tis very cold, the wind is northerly.

OSRIC

It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.

HAMLET

Methinks it is very sultry and hot for my complexion.

OSRIC

Exceedingly, my lord; it is very sultry, -as 'twere- I cannot tell how. But, my lord, his Majesty bade me signify to you that he has laid a great wager on your head. Sir, this is the matter, -

HAMLET

I beseech you, remember, -

[Hamlet moves him to put on his hat.]

OSRIC

Nay, in good faith; for mine ease, in good faith. Sir, here is newly come to court Laertes; believe me, an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences, of very soft society and great showing. Indeed, to speak feelingly of him, he is the card or calendar of gentry; for you shall find in him the continent of what part a gentleman would see.

HAMLET

Sir, his definement suffers no perdition¹⁹ in you, though I know, to divide him inventorially²⁰ would dizzy th'arithmetic of memory, and yet but yaw neither, in respect of his quick sail. But, in the verity of extolment, I take him to be a soul of great article and his infusion of such dearth and rareness as, to make true diction of him, his semblable is his mirror and who else would trace him his umbrage, nothing more.

OSRIC

Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him.

HAMLET

The concernancy²¹, sir? Why do we wrap the gentleman in our more rawer breath²²?

OSRIC

Sir?

HORATIO

Is't not possible to understand in another tongue? You will do't, sir, really.

HAMLET

What imports the nomination²³ of this gentleman?

OSRIC

Of Laertes?

HORATIO

His purse is empty already, all's golden words are spent.

HAMLET

Of him, sir.

OSRIC

I know you are not ignorant,-

HAMLET

I would you did, sir; yet in faith if you did, it would not much approve me.
Well, sir?

OSRIC

You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is,-

HAMLET

I dare not confess that, lest I should compare with him in excellence; but to know a man well were to know himself.

OSRIC

I mean, sir, for his weapon; but in the imputation²⁴ laid on him, by them in his meed he's unfellowed²⁵.

HAMLET

What's his weapon?

OSRIC

Rapier and dagger.

HAMLET

That's two of his weapons. But well.

OSRIC

The king, sir, hath wager'd with him six Barbary horses, against the which he has imponed²⁶, as I take it, six French rapiers and poniards, with their assigns, as girdle, hangers²⁷, and so. Three of the carriages²⁸, in faith, are very dear to fancy, very responsive to the hilts, most delicate carriages, and of very liberal conceit.

HAMLET

What call you the carriages?

HORATIO

I knew you must be edified by the margin²⁹ ere you had done.

OSRIC

The carriages, sir, are the hangers.

HAMLET

The phrase would be more german³⁰ to the matter if we could carry cannon by our sides. I would it might be hangers till then. But on. Six Barbary horses against six French swords, their assigns, and three liberal conceited carriages: that's the French bet against the Danish. Why is this all imponed, as you call it?

OSRIC

The king, sir, hath laid that in a dozen passes³¹ between you and him, he shall not exceed you three hits. He hath laid on twelve for nine. And it would come to immediate trial if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer.

HAMLET

How if I answer no?

OSRIC

I mean, my lord, the opposition of your person in trial³².

HAMLET

Sir, I will walk here in the hall. If it please his Majesty, it is the breathing time of day³³ with me. Let the foils³⁴ be brought, the gentleman willing, and the king hold his purpose, I will win for him if I can; if not, I will gain nothing but my shame and the odd hits.

OSRIC

Shall I re-deliver you e'en so?

HAMLET

To this effect, sir; after what flourish your nature will.

OSRIC

I commend my duty to your lordship.

HAMLET

Yours, yours.

[Exit Osric.]

He does well to commend it himself, there are no tongues else for's turn³⁵.

HORATIO

This lapwing³⁶ runs away with the shell on his head.

HAMLET

He did comply with his dug before he suck'd it³⁷. Thus has he, -and many more of the same bevy that I know the drossy age³⁸ dotes on, - only got the tune of the time and outward habit of encounter; a kind of yeasty collection, which carries them through and through the most fanned and winnowed opinions³⁹; and do but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out⁴⁰.

[Enter a Lord.]

LORD

My lord, his Majesty commended him to you by young Osric, who brings back to him that you attend him in the hall. He sends to know if your pleasure hold to play with Laertes or that you will take longer time.

HAMLET

I am constant to my purposes, they follow the king's pleasure. If his fitness speaks, mine is ready. Now or whensoever, provided I be so able as now.

LORD

The king and queen and all are coming down.

HAMLET

In happy time.

LORD

The queen desires you to use some gentle entertainment to Laertes before you fall to play.

HAMLET

She well instructs me.

[Exit Lord.]

HORATIO

You will lose this wager, my lord.

HAMLET

I do not think so. Since he went into France, I have been in continual practice. I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart: but it is no matter.

HORATIO

Nay, good my lord.

HAMLET

It is but foolery; but it is such a kind of gain-giving as would perhaps trouble a woman.

HORATIO

If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither⁴¹, and say you are not fit.

HAMLET

Not a whit, we defy augury⁴². There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes⁴³?

[Enter king, queen, Laertes, Lords, Osric and Attendants with foils &c.]

KING

Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand from me.

[The king puts Laertes's hand into Hamlet's.]

HAMLET

Give me your pardon, sir. I have done you wrong; but pardon't as you are a gentleman. This presence knows, and you must needs have heard, how I am punish'd with sore distraction⁴⁴. What I have done that might your nature, honour, and exception Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness. Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet. If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away, and when he's not himself does wrong Laertes, then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it. Who does it, then? His madness. If't be so, Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong'd; his madness is poor Hamlet's enemy. Sir, in this audience, let my disclaiming from a purpos'd evil Free me so far in your most generous thoughts that I have shot my arrow o'er the house and hurt my brother.

LAERTES

I am satisfied in nature⁴⁵, whose motive in this case should stir me most to my revenge. But in my terms of honour I stand aloof, and will no reconciliation till by some elder masters of known honour I have a voice and precedent of peace to keep my name ungor'd⁴⁶. But till that time I do receive your offer'd love like love, and will not wrong it.

HAMLET

I embrace it freely, and will this brother's wager frankly play.- give us the foils; come on.

LAERTES

Come, one for me.

HAMLET

I'll be your foil, Laertes; in mine ignorance your skill shall like a star i' th' darkest night, Stick fiery off indeed.

LAERTES

You mock me, sir.

HAMLET

No, by this hand.

KING

Give them the foils, young Osric. Cousin Hamlet, you know the wager?

HAMLET

Very well, my lord. Your Grace has laid the odds o' the weaker side.

KING

I do not fear it. I have seen you both; but since he is better'd⁴⁷, we have therefore odds.

LAERTES

This is too heavy. Let me see another.

HAMLET

This likes me well. These foils have all a length?

[They prepare to play.]

OSRIC

Ay, my good lord.

KING

Set me the stoups of wine upon that table. If Hamlet give the first or second hit, or quit in answer of the third exchange, let all the battlements their ordnance fire; the king shall drink to Hamlet's better breath, and in the cup an union shall he throw Richer than that which four successive kings in Denmark's crown have worn. Give me the cups; and let the kettle⁴⁸ to the trumpet speak, the trumpet to the cannoneer without, the cannons to the heavens, the heavens to earth, 'now the king drinks to Hamlet.' come, begin. And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.

HAMLET

Come on, sir.

LAERTES

Come, my lord.

[They play.]

HAMLET

One.

LAERTES

No.

HAMLET

Judgement.

OSRIC

A hit, a very palpable hit.

LAERTES

Well; again.

KING

Stay, give me drink. Hamlet, this pearl is thine; here's to thy health.

[Trumpets sound, and cannon shot off within.]

Give him the cup.

HAMLET

I'll play this bout first; set it by awhile.

[They play.]

Come. Another hit; what say you?

LAERTES

A touch, a touch, I do confess.

KING

Our son shall win.

QUEEN

He's fat, and scant of breath. Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows.
The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.

HAMLET

Good madam.

KING

Gertrude, do not drink.

QUEEN

I will, my lord; I pray you pardon me.

KING

[Aside.] It is the poison'd cup; it is too late.

HAMLET

I dare not drink yet, madam. By and by.

QUEEN

Come, let me wipe thy face.

LAERTES

My lord, I'll hit him now.

KING

I do not think't.

LAERTES

[Aside.] And yet 'tis almost 'gainst my conscience.

HAMLET

Come for the third, Laertes. You do but dally. I pray you pass with your best violence. I am afeard you make a wanton of me.

LAERTES

Say you so? Come on.

[They play.]

OSRIC

Nothing neither way.

LAERTES

Have at you now.

[Laertes wounds Hamlet; then, in scuffling, they change rapiers, and Hamlet wounds Laertes.]

KING

Part them; they are incens'd.

HAMLET

Nay, come again!

[The Queen falls.]

OSRIC

Look to the queen there, ho!

HORATIO

They bleed on both sides. How is it, my lord?

OSRIC

How is't, Laertes?

LAERTES

Why, as a woodcock to my own springe⁴⁹, Osric. I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery.

HAMLET

How does the queen?

KING

She swoons to see them bleed.

QUEEN

No, no, the drink, the drink! O my dear Hamlet! The drink, the drink! I am poison'd.

[Dies.]

HAMLET

O villainy! Ho! Let the door be lock'd: Treachery! Seek it out.

[Laertes falls.]

LAERTES

It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain. No medicine in the world can do thee good. In thee there is not half an hour of life; the treacherous instrument is in thy hand, Unbated⁵⁰ and envenom'd. The foul practice hath turn'd itself on me. Lo, here I lie, Never to rise again. Thy mother's poison'd. I can no more. The king, the king's to blame.

HAMLET

The point envenom'd too! Then, venom, to thy work.

[Stabs the king.]



OSRIC and LORDS

Treason! treason!

KING

O yet defend me, friends. I am but hurt.

HAMLET

Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, Drink off this potion. Is
thy union here? Follow my mother.

[King dies.]

LAERTES

He is justly serv'd. It is a poison temper'd by himself. Exchange forgiveness
with me, noble Hamlet. Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,
nor thine on me.

[Dies.]

HAMLET

Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee. I am dead, Horatio. Wretched
queen, adieu. You that look pale and tremble at this chance, that are but
mutes or audience to this act, had I but time,-as this fell sergeant, death⁵¹, is
strict in his arrest,-O, I could tell you,- but let it be. Horatio, I am dead,
Thou liv'st; report me and my cause aright to the unsatisfied⁵².

HORATIO

Never believe it. I am more an antique Roman than a Dane. Here's yet some liquor left.

HAMLET

As th'art a man, give me the cup. Let go; by Heaven, I'll have't. O good Horatio, what a wounded name, Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me. If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart, Absent thee from felicity awhile, and in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, to tell my story.

[March afar off, and shot within.]

What warlike noise is this?

OSRIC

Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland, to the ambassadors of England gives this warlike volley.

HAMLET

O, I die, Horatio. The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit: I cannot live to hear the news from England, but I do prophesy th'election lights on Fortinbras. He has my dying voice. So tell him, with the occurrents more and less, which have solicited. The rest is silence.

[Dies.]

HORATIO

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest. Why does the drum come hither?

[March within.]

[Enter Fortinbras, the English Ambassadors and others.]

FORTINBRAS

Where is this sight?

HORATIO

What is it you would see? If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search.

FORTINBRAS

This quarry cries on havoc⁵³. O proud death, what feast is toward in thine eternal cell⁵⁴, that thou so many princes at a shot so bloodily hast struck?

FIRST AMBASSADOR

The sight is dismal; and our affairs from England come too late. The ears are senseless that should give us hearing, to tell him his commandment is fulfill'd, that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Where should we have our thanks?

HORATIO

Not from his mouth, had it th'ability of life to thank you. He never gave commandment for their death. But since, so jump upon this bloody question, you from the Polack wars, and you from England are here arriv'd, give order that these bodies High on a stage be placed to the view, and let me speak to th' yet unknowing world how these things came about. So shall you hear of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts, of accidental judgements, casual slaughters, of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause, and, in this upshot, purposes mistook Fall'n on the inventors' heads. All this can I Truly deliver.

FORTINBRAS

Let us haste to hear it, and call the noblest to the audience. For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune. I have some rights of memory in this kingdom, which now to claim my vantage doth invite me.

HORATIO

Of that I shall have also cause to speak, and from his mouth whose voice will draw on more. But let this same be presently perform'd, even while men's minds are wild, lest more mischance on plots and errors happen.

FORTINBRAS

Let four captains bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage, for he was likely, had he been put on, to have prov'd most royally; and for his passage, the soldiers' music and the rites of war speak loudly for him. Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss. Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

[A dead march.]

[Exeunt, bearing off the bodies, after which a peal of ordnance is shot off.]



Summary Notes

Act I, Scene I

Summary

On a cold, desolate night at Elsinore, sentinels Barnardo and Marcellus, joined by the scholar Horatio, encounter a terrifying supernatural apparition. The Ghost bears a striking resemblance to the recently deceased King of Denmark, appearing in the same armor he wore during his battles against the Norwegians. Despite Horatio's scholarly attempts to command the spirit to speak, the figure remains silent and vanishes abruptly at the first crow of the cock.

The atmosphere of dread is compounded by the discussion of a brewing military threat. Horatio reveals that the Danish state is in a state of urgent mobilization because young Fortinbras of Norway is gathering a band of soldiers to reclaim lands lost by his father in a previous conflict with the late King. This political instability, characterized by heavy military spending and a state of constant preparation, provides a grounded, terrestrial counterpart to the supernatural unrest on the castle walls.

Horatio interprets the Ghost's appearance as a portent of significant disaster, drawing parallels to the celestial and terrestrial omens that preceded the assassination of Julius Caesar. The scene concludes with the decision among the guards to inform Prince Hamlet of the sighting, operating under the belief that the spirit may be more receptive to communication with the prince than the soldiers.

Context and Importance

This scene establishes the central theme of the 'unnatural' disrupting the 'natural order,' a hallmark of Elizabethan tragedy. The appearance of the Ghost serves as a macrocosmic sign; in the worldview of the time, a disturbance in the spirit realm—such as a dead king appearing in armor—was inextricably linked to political instability and upheaval within the kingdom. By framing the supernatural event alongside the very real threat of Norwegian invasion, Shakespeare intertwines the cosmic and the political, suggesting that the health of the state is tied to the stability of the supernatural world.

Act I, Scene II

Summary

King Claudius addresses the Danish court, attempting to balance the mourning of his brother's death with the celebration of his recent marriage to Queen Gertrude. He addresses the political pressure from young Fortinbras of Norway, who seeks to reclaim lands lost by his father, and dispatches ambassadors to negotiate with the Norwegian king. This establishes a court that is outwardly attempting to project stability and diplomacy despite recent upheaval.

The tension between the new monarchy and Prince Hamlet becomes evident as Claudius and Gertrude attempt to persuade Hamlet to abandon his mourning and remain in Denmark rather than returning to his studies in Wittenberg. While the court encourages him to cast off his 'nighted colour,' Hamlet remains deeply immersed in his grief, pointedly distinguishing his true internal agony from the mere outward 'shows' or 'trappings' of sorrow that his family expects him to perform.

In a moment of isolation, Hamlet expresses profound despair through a soliloquy, describing the world as an 'unweeded garden' that has grown rank and gross. He reveals intense bitterness regarding his mother's hasty and 'incestuous' remarriage to his uncle, Claudius. He compares his late father to the divine Hyperion and his uncle to a lustful satyr, expressing a sense of deep disillusionment with the morality of the world around him.

The scene concludes with the arrival of Horatio, Marcellus, and Barnardo, who inform Hamlet of the supernatural encounter on the castle walls. Horatio describes the appearance of a figure resembling the late King, dressed in armor. This revelation deeply unsettles Hamlet, prompting him to resolve to join the watch that night to confront the spirit and fueling his burgeoning suspicion that there may be 'foul play' involved in his father's death.

Context and Importance

This scene serves as a masterclass in the exploration of the dichotomy between appearance and reality. While Claudius uses polished rhetoric to mask the unsettling nature of his rapid ascension and marriage, Hamlet rejects the 'seeming' of courtly etiquette, insisting that his grief is an internal reality that cannot be performed. Furthermore, the metaphor of the 'unweeded garden' introduces the play's central motif of corruption and decay, suggesting that the political and moral health of Denmark has been fundamentally compromised by the recent shifts in power.

Act I, Scene III

Summary

As Laertes prepares to depart for France, he provides a cautionary warning to his sister, Ophelia, regarding her relationship with Prince Hamlet. He dismisses Hamlet's affections as a transient 'fashion' or 'toy,' suggesting that the Prince's capacity for romantic devotion is limited by his political responsibilities. Laertes argues that because Hamlet's marriage must ultimately serve the interests of the Danish state, his personal desires are secondary to his royal duty. He urges Ophelia to guard her virtue and reputation against the potential dangers of unrequited or manipulative passion.

Upon Laertes's departure, Polonius enters to offer his son a series of didactic precepts for navigating life abroad. His advice is a collection of pragmatic, social, and ethical instructions ranging from the importance of maintaining a careful reputation and choosing friends wisely to the necessity of financial prudence. His famous commands, 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be' and 'To thine own self be true,' serve as cornerstones of his philosophy, though his emphasis on outward appearance and social decorum suggests a preoccupation with the 'seeming' of character rather than inward integrity.

The scene concludes with a stern interrogation of Ophelia by her father. When she reveals that Hamlet has expressed romantic interest in her, Polonius reacts with deep cynicism, characterizing the Prince's vows as deceptive traps designed to ensnare her. He views her emotional openness as a lack of wisdom and a threat to her honor. Ultimately, Polonius's authority triumphs as he commands Ophelia to cease all private communication with Hamlet, a directive she submissively accepts.

Context and Importance

This scene explores the pervasive nature of surveillance and patriarchal control within the Elsinore court. Both Laertes and Polonius act as agents of social regulation, attempting to monitor and restrict Ophelia's autonomy to preserve the family's honor and social standing. The dialogue also highlights the tension between individual agency and political necessity; Laertes's assertion that Hamlet's choice is 'circumscribed' by the needs of the state reinforces the play's broader theme of the individual being a mere component of the political machine. Through Polonius's fragmented advice, Shakespeare also critiques the superficiality of courtly etiquette, where identity is often a performance of carefully managed appearances.

Act I, Scene IV

Summary

On a biting, cold night, Hamlet joins Horatio and Marcellus on the castle platform to await the Ghost's return. The atmosphere is interrupted by the sounds of trumpets and cannons, signaling King Claudius's nocturnal celebrations and heavy drinking. Hamlet expresses deep resentment toward this tradition, arguing that such excessive revelry brings international shame to Denmark, characterizing the nation as a land of drunkards.

Amidst his grievances, Hamlet offers a poignant meditation on human nature and reputation. He observes that a single 'vicious mole' or a minor defect in a person's character can corrupt their entire public image, causing their virtues to be overshadowed by a single fault. This reflection mirrors his growing disillusionment with the leadership and morality of the Danish court.

The Ghost suddenly appears, prompting a visceral reaction from Hamlet. Though terrified by the spirit's 'questionable shape,' Hamlet is driven by an intense need for answers. He questions why the spirit has risen from its grave in armor, demanding to know the meaning behind this supernatural disturbance and why the dead King has returned to haunt the living.

The Ghost silently beckons Hamlet to follow it into the darkness. Horatio and Marcellus desperately attempt to restrain the Prince, fearing that the spirit might lead him toward madness or a precipitous death. However, emboldened by a sense of destiny and comparing his courage to that of the Nemean lion, Hamlet breaks free from his companions and pursues the specter alone. The scene concludes with the chilling realization from Marcellus that 'something is rotten in the state of Denmark,' capturing the pervasive sense of decay and unease.

Context and Importance

This scene highlights the Renaissance concept of the microcosm and macrocosm, where the moral failings of an individual—specifically the King—are seen as direct catalysts for the corruption of the entire state. Hamlet's philosophical musing on how a 'dram of evil' can ruin a 'noble substance' serves as a linguistic precursor to the play's central tension: the struggle to maintain integrity in a landscape of pervasive deception. Furthermore, the physical struggle between Hamlet and his companions underscores the conflict between rational, cautious human agency and the irresistible, often self-destructive, pull of tragic destiny.

Act I, Scene V

Summary

Following the Ghost's command, the spirit leads Hamlet away from his companions to reveal a harrowing truth: the King did not die of a snake bite, but was murdered by Claudius. The Ghost describes its current state of existence, bound to undergo purification in 'sulph'rous and tormenting flames' to purge the foul crimes committed during its life. The spirit provides a detailed account of the assassination, explaining how Claudius poured a 'leperous distilment' of poison into the King's ear while he slept in his orchard, an act that effectively stole his life, his crown, and his queen.

The Ghost's command to Hamlet is specific and dualistic: the Prince must avenge his father's murder, yet he is strictly instructed not to direct his vengeance toward his mother, Gertrude, leaving her ultimate judgment to heaven. After the Ghost vanishes with the approach of dawn, Hamlet is left in a state of profound psychological upheaval. He vows to purge his memory of all 'trivial fond records' to ensure that his father's command remains the sole focus of his consciousness, while simultaneously grappling with the bitter realization that Claudius is a 'smiling damned villain.'

When Horatio and Marcellus return, they find Hamlet in an erratic and intense state. He compels his friends to swear a solemn oath upon his sword that they will never reveal the existence of the supernatural encounter. During this exchange, Hamlet hints at a burgeoning plan to adopt an 'antic disposition'—a calculated mask of madness—but pleads with his friends not to expose his true intentions when he begins to act strangely. The scene concludes with Hamlet expressing a heavy sense of cosmic burden, lamenting that the 'time is out of joint' and that he has been tasked with the agonizing duty of setting it right.

Context and Importance

The Ghost's description of being 'doomed for a certain term to walk the night' and needing to be 'burnt and purg'd away' presents a significant theological tension relevant to an Elizabethan audience. While the concept of Purgatory was a cornerstone of Catholic doctrine, the Protestant Reformation had largely rejected it. By placing the Ghost in a state of purgatorial suffering, Shakespeare taps into the religious anxieties of a period caught between the old Catholic traditions and the new Protestant reality, heightening the sense of spiritual unrest that mirrors the political corruption in Denmark.

Act II, Scene I

Summary

Polonius prepares his servant, Reynaldo, for a mission to Paris to monitor the behavior of his son, Laertes. Rather than suggesting direct inquiry, Polonius instructs Reynaldo to employ a strategy of subtle deception, spreading rumors of minor indiscretions—such as gambling or drinking—to see if others confirm such vices. This calculated use of 'indirections' to find 'directions' demonstrates Polonius's penchant for manipulation and his commitment to maintaining the family's social standing through espionage and the controlled dissemination of falsehoods.

The scene shifts to a deeply distressed Ophelia, who recounts a recent, unsettling encounter with Prince Hamlet. She describes him appearing in a state of physical and mental disarray: disheveled, pale, and behaving in a manner that seemed as though he were a specter released from hell. According to Ophelia, Hamlet approached her with an intense, haunting gaze and let out a profound, soul-crushing sigh, leaving her visibly shaken by his erratic and piteous behavior.

Upon hearing this account, Polonius immediately attributes Hamlet's strange behavior to the 'ecstasy of love,' concluding that the Prince has been driven to a state of madness by Ophelia's recent refusal to engage with him. Driven by the need to maintain political and social order, Polonius decides to report this development to King Claudius, reinforcing a court environment where even private, domestic struggles are subject to immediate surveillance and political scrutiny.

Context and Importance

This scene deepens the play's pervasive motif of surveillance and the erosion of privacy. Polonius's instructions to Reynaldo establish a world where truth is pursued through calculated falsehood, and familial loyalty is secondary to the preservation of outward reputation. Furthermore, the scene highlights the tension between the internal emotional state of the characters and their external presentation; Ophelia's description of Hamlet's disheveled and 'foul'd' appearance serves as a physical manifestation of the psychological and moral disintegration occurring within the Danish court.

Act II, Scene II

Summary

King Claudius and Queen Gertrude welcome Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, childhood friends of Hamlet, enlisting them to observe the Prince and report on the cause of his erratic behavior. Simultaneously, Polonius arrives with news of successful diplomacy with Norway but quickly pivots to his own theory: that Hamlet's 'madness' is the result of his unrequited love for Ophelia, a situation Polonius himself helped orchestrate by forbidding their contact. To test this, Polonius proposes a plan to spy on the pair from behind a tapestry.

When Hamlet enters, he engages Polonius in a series of biting, cryptic, and seemingly nonsensical exchanges. He mocks the older man's age and intellect, calling him a 'fishmonger,' and displays an erratic, intellectual volatility that keeps Polonius questioning whether the Prince is truly insane or merely performing a role. The tension escalates when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive; Hamlet quickly perceives that they have been summoned by the King, leading to a philosophical confrontation where he describes Denmark as a 'prison' and expresses his profound existential despair.

The arrival of a troupe of traveling players provides a stark contrast to the stifling atmosphere of the court. Hamlet, momentarily diverted from his melancholy, enthusiastically welcomes them and asks the First Player to perform a dramatic passage regarding the death of King Priam. The actor's visceral, emotional portrayal of grief for a fictional character deeply unsettles Hamlet, prompting him to reflect on his own inability to translate his intense personal grief into decisive action.

In a concluding soliloquy, Hamlet berates himself for his perceived cowardice and inaction, comparing his lack of 'motive' to the actor's 'passion.' Disturbed by the possibility that the Ghost might have been a demonic deception, he decides to use the upcoming performance of a play to observe Claudius's reaction. He resolves to stage a reenactment of his father's murder, famously declaring, 'The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.'

Context and Importance

This scene is a pivotal exploration of metatheatre and the breakdown of the boundary between performance and reality. Shakespeare uses the arrival of the players to introduce a 'play within a play,' a device that allows Hamlet to bridge the gap between his internal psychological state and the external political reality of Elsinore. The scene also highlights the pervasive culture of surveillance; every character—from Polonius to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—acts as an agent of the state, turning private interactions into opportunities for political intelligence. Hamlet's struggle to move from the 'words, words, words' of his madness to the 'action' of his revenge underscores the play's central tension between thought and deed.

Act III, Scene I

Summary

King Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, and Ophelia arrange a deceptive encounter to investigate the cause of Hamlet's erratic behavior. The King and Polonius plan to hide and observe a private interaction between Hamlet and Ophelia, hoping to confirm Polonius's theory that the Prince's madness stems from unrequited love. To facilitate this, Polonius instructs Ophelia to appear distracted by a book, while the King's conscience is momentarily unsettled by Polonius's remarks regarding the deceptive nature of outward appearances.

Upon entering the scene, Hamlet delivers his iconic "To be, or not to be" soliloquy, a profound meditation on existence, suffering, and the fear of death. He contemplates the choice between enduring the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" or ending one's life through suicide, only to find that the uncertainty of what follows death—the "undiscovered country"—renders the human will paralyzed. This introspective moment reveals Hamlet's deep existential dread and his struggle to find a reason for action amidst overwhelming despair.

The encounter between Hamlet and Ophelia is marked by intense volatility and cruelty. As Ophelia attempts to return tokens of his former affection, Hamlet responds with biting cynicism, denying his past love and berating her for her perceived lack of virtue. He commands her to "get thee to a nunnery," lashing out not only at her but at the broader institution of marriage and the perceived deceptive nature of women. The exchange leaves Ophelia devastated, mourning the apparent destruction of Hamlet's noble and scholarly mind.

Following the confrontation, the King and Polonius emerge to evaluate the results of their surveillance. While Polonius remains steadfast in his belief that

Hamlet's madness is a product of lost love, Claudius perceives a more profound and dangerous instability within the Prince. Convinced that Hamlet's melancholy poses a threat to the stability of his reign, the King decides to send Hamlet to England under the guise of a diplomatic mission to collect unpaid tributes, seeking to remove the source of unrest from the Danish court.

Context and Importance

This scene serves as a cornerstone of the play's exploration of the tension between the private self and the public persona. Hamlet's soliloquy is a landmark of Western literature, shifting the play's focus from external political intrigue to an internal, universal inquiry into the ethics of existence and the paralyzing effects of consciousness. Furthermore, the scene heightens the pervasive theme of surveillance; the use of Ophelia as a pawn in a state-sponsored sting operation illustrates the erosion of privacy and the way in which the political apparatus of Elsinore consumes individual agency and domestic intimacy.

Act III, Scene II

Summary

Before the performance begins, Hamlet provides the traveling players with detailed instructions on the art of acting. He urges them to avoid exaggerated, unnatural gestures and instead aim to "hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature," emphasizing that true drama should reflect reality rather than grotesque imitation. Having prepared this theatrical trap, Hamlet turns to Horatio, tasking him with a grave responsibility: to observe King Claudius closely during a specific scene of the play. Hamlet seeks to determine if the King's reaction to the depiction of a royal murder will reveal the hidden guilt of his own actions.

As the court arrives, the atmosphere is thick with tension and Hamlet's characteristic, biting wit. He engages in a series of cryptic, provocative exchanges with Polonius, Ophelia, and the King, using wordplay to mask his true intentions while simultaneously testing those around him. The centerpiece of the evening, the play itself—which Hamlet has dubbed "The Mousetrap"—unfolds with a disturbing accuracy to his father's death. When the actor playing the murderer pours poison into the sleeping king's ear, Claudius reacts with visible horror and agitation, eventually demanding that the lights be extinguished and the performance be halted.

Following the King's sudden departure, Hamlet reflects on the success of his experiment with Horatio, convinced that the King's distress confirms the Ghost's accusations. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive to summon him to his mother's chambers, Hamlet employs a sharp metaphor, mocking Guildenstern's

inability to play a recorder to illustrate how he himself is being manipulated by the court. The scene concludes with Hamlet alone, contemplating the "witching time of night" and preparing himself for a confrontation with Gertrude. He vows to use "daggers" in his speech to confront her, yet resolves to remain "not unnatural," promising that his words will be harsh but his actions will not descend into true monstrosity.

Context and Importance

This scene is a quintessential example of metatheatricality, utilizing a "play within a play" to explore the complex relationship between performance and reality. By instructing the actors to "hold the mirror up to nature," Shakespeare engages with the Aristotelian concept of mimesis, where art serves as a reflection of truth. The theatrical device of "The Mousetrap" serves a dual purpose: it functions as a psychological tool for Hamlet's investigation and as a narrative mechanism to expose the corruption of the Danish court. Furthermore, Hamlet's interaction with the recorder serves as a profound metaphor for the loss of agency, as he recognizes the attempt by his peers to "play" him like a musical instrument, highlighting the pervasive theme of manipulation and the struggle for autonomy within a surveillance-heavy state.

Act III, Scene III

Summary

King Claudius confirms his decision to dispatch Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to England, carrying Hamlet with them. He views the Prince's continuing madness as an intolerable risk to the stability of his reign, fearing that the 'hazard' of Hamlet's instability will eventually threaten the entire kingdom. The dialogue between the King and his attendants emphasizes the heavy burden of responsibility held by those serving the throne, noting that the fall of a monarch inevitably brings ruin to all those connected to the crown.

Polonius enters to inform the King of his intent to spy on the upcoming meeting between Hamlet and Gertrude. By planning to hide behind a tapestry to eavesdrop on their private conversation, Polonius reinforces the pervasive atmosphere of surveillance and the subversion of domestic privacy for political intelligence, continuing the pattern of using family members as tools of the state.

In a moment of profound isolation, Claudius delivers a soliloquy revealing the depth of his guilt. He confesses that his crime—the murder of his brother—is an offense that 'smells to heaven.' However, he finds himself trapped in a spiritual deadlock; he is unable to achieve true repentance because he is unwilling to relinquish the very prizes he gained through the murder: his crown, his

ambition, and his queen. He acknowledges the terrifying reality that while earthly justice may be bypassed through corruption, divine justice is inescapable and will eventually force a reckoning.

Hamlet enters and finds Claudius in the midst of prayer. Seizing what appears to be the ideal moment for vengeance, Hamlet abruptly stops himself. He realizes that killing Claudius while he is in a state of spiritual reflection might inadvertently grant him salvation, which would not constitute true revenge. Instead, Hamlet resolves to wait for a moment when Claudius is engaged in sin, ensuring that his enemy's soul is condemned to hell. The scene ends with Claudius rising, admitting that his words of prayer were hollow because his true thoughts remained mired in his crime.

Context and Importance

This scene is a masterclass in the exploration of psychological and theological paralysis. Claudius's struggle to repent illustrates a profound spiritual paradox: the impossibility of divine forgiveness when the sinner remains attached to the fruits of their sin. Simultaneously, Hamlet's rejection of the 'perfect' opportunity for vengeance introduces a new, more complex dimension to his delay. He is no longer merely hesitant due to uncertainty or fear, but is now actively calculating how to ensure the total spiritual destruction of his enemy. This shift elevates the conflict from a standard revenge tragedy to a complex study of the ethics of vengeance and the terrifying weight of eternal consequences.

Act III, Scene IV

Summary

Following the intense performance of the play-within-a-play, Polonius attempts to spy on a private conversation between Queen Gertrude and Hamlet by hiding behind a heavy curtain, or arras. During a volatile and emotionally charged confrontation, Hamlet aggressively rebukes his mother for her marriage to Claudius, accusing her of betraying the memory of his late father. In the midst of this heated exchange, Hamlet hears a noise behind the curtain and, believing he has finally caught the King in his treachery, stabs through the fabric. To his horror, he discovers he has instead killed Polonius, an accidental act of violence that marks a definitive shift toward the uncontrolled bloodshed that will define the play's conclusion.

After the death of Polonius, Hamlet continues a relentless and visceral verbal assault on Gertrude. Using grotesque and hyperbolic imagery, he compares the late King Hamlet to divine figures like Hyperion and mocks Claudius as a 'mildew'd ear' that has corrupted the throne. His accusations are so piercing that

Gertrude describes his words as 'daggers' entering her ears, admitting that his speech has forced her to see the 'black and grained spots' upon her very soul. This interaction highlights the profound psychological toll the court's corruption has taken on the characters, as Hamlet's moral outrage begins to manifest as a destructive force.

The scene is further complicated by the appearance of the Ghost, which only Hamlet can perceive, leaving Gertrude convinced that her son has finally succumbed to madness. The Ghost appears to remind Hamlet of his duty to seek revenge and urges him to speak to his mother to protect her conscience. As the scene concludes, Hamlet prepares for his impending journey to England, acknowledging the deceptive nature of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, while leaving Gertrude with a final, desperate plea to repent and resist the corrupting influence of Claudius.

Context and Importance

This scene serves as a critical study in the breakdown of boundaries—between life and death, between madness and reason, and between the private conscience and political duty. The accidental murder of Polonius is a pivotal narrative turning point, transforming Hamlet from a contemplative seeker of truth into a perpetrator of the very chaos he sought to expose. Furthermore, the discrepancy in the characters' perceptions of the Ghost intensifies the play's exploration of subjectivity and the reliability of the senses, forcing the audience to grapple with the question of whether Hamlet's 'madness' is a calculated performance or a genuine psychological fracture caused by the weight of his supernatural burden.

Act IV, Scene I

Summary

Following the violent confrontation in Gertrude's chambers, Queen Gertrude arrives before King Claudius in a state of visible distress. She recounts the horrific events of the previous night, describing how Hamlet, in a fit of perceived madness, fatally stabbed Polonius. Gertrude reveals that Hamlet, overcome by grief, has gone to attend to the body of the man he killed.

King Claudius responds to the news with a mixture of horror and intense political anxiety. While he acknowledges the tragedy of Polonius's death, his primary concern is the threat Hamlet's uncontrolled behavior poses to the stability of the throne and the safety of the court. He expresses a sense of failure, lamenting that his attempts to manage the Prince's erratic behavior have ultimately led to this 'bloody deed' which he fears will be blamed upon his own leadership.

To mitigate the political fallout, Claudius immediately begins formulating a strategy of containment and concealment. He commands Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to locate Hamlet and bring Polonius's body to the chapel for burial. Furthermore, the King resolves to exile Hamlet to England at the first light of dawn, intending to use his royal authority to 'countenance and excuse' the murder and suppress the 'poison' of spreading rumors and slander that could damage the reputation of the Danish monarchy.

Context and Importance

This scene illustrates the concept of the 'body politic,' where the actions of a single individual—especially a member of the royal family—are viewed as having the potential to infect and destabilize the entire state. Claudius's preoccupation with 'slander' and the 'poisoned shot' of rumors highlights a central Renaissance concern: the fragility of political legitimacy and the power of public perception. The scene transitions the play's conflict from the personal, psychological struggle of Hamlet to an urgent, large-scale political crisis, as the King moves from reactive horror to proactive, calculated damage control.

Act IV, Scene II

Summary

Hamlet is approached by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Acting on behalf of King Claudius, the two men press Hamlet for the specific location of Polonius's body, insisting that it must be recovered so it can be brought to the chapel for burial.

Hamlet responds to their inquiries with characteristic biting wit and cryptic evasion. He refuses to provide a direct answer, instead launching into a scathing critique of Rosencrantz. Using a vivid and degrading metaphor, Hamlet compares Rosencrantz to a 'sponge' that soaks up the King's rewards, honors, and authority, only to be 'squeezed dry' by the monarch once the King has extracted all necessary utility from him.

Through this metaphor, Hamlet highlights the parasitic and transactional nature of the Danish court, where individuals are used as mere instruments of royal power. Despite his verbal hostility and refusal to yield to their demands, Hamlet eventually agrees to be brought before King Claudius, signaling a direct encounter between the Prince and the King.

Context and Importance

In this scene, Shakespeare uses the metaphor of the 'sponge' to deepen the play's exploration of political parasitism and the expendability of those within the royal orbit. By characterizing Rosencrantz as a creature that merely 'soaks up' royal favor, Hamlet exposes the predatory nature of the court, where subjects are fattened on influence only to be discarded when they no longer serve the crown's interests. This reinforces the broader theme of the loss of individual agency within a surveillance-heavy state and underscores Hamlet's perception of the court as a landscape of moral and political decay.

Act IV, Scene III

Summary

King Claudius expresses his mounting anxiety regarding Hamlet's recent violent outburst and the potential for public unrest. He recognizes that the common people, though perhaps lacking in sound judgment, hold Hamlet in high regard, and he fears that a sudden or overly harsh punishment might provoke a revolt. The King is caught in a political tightrope, attempting to manage the Prince's removal without appearing to act with undue tyranny or suspicion.

When Hamlet is brought before the King, he avoids providing any direct information regarding the location of Polonius's body, instead employing a series of grotesque and nihilistic metaphors. He describes Polonius as being 'at supper,' consumed by a 'convocation of politic worms.' Through this macabre imagery, Hamlet suggests a grim biological equality, noting that both kings and beggars are ultimately destined to be processed through the same cycle of decay and consumption. This dark wit serves to further unsettle the court and underscores Hamlet's preoccupation with mortality and the physical reality of death.

The scene concludes with Claudius finalizing the decision to exile Hamlet to England with 'fiery quickness.' While Hamlet accepts the news with a biting, sarcastic comment regarding the union of his mother and stepfather, Claudius's true intentions are revealed in his private soliloquy. He views Hamlet as a 'hectic' or a disease in his blood that must be cured, and he prepares to use his diplomatic influence via letters to ensure that the English authorities carry out the Prince's death.

Context and Importance

This scene utilizes the 'memento mori' motif—a meditation on the inevitable reality of death—to strip away the pretensions of royal authority. By reducing the King and the beggar to mere 'dishes' for the same worms, Hamlet employs a radical form of egalitarianism that challenges the very foundations of the social hierarchy. Furthermore, the King's metaphor of Hamlet as a 'hectic' (a fever or disease) in his blood reinforces the play's overarching theme of political and moral contagion, positioning the Prince not merely as a political rival, but as a biological threat to the stability of the state itself.

Act IV, Scene IV

Summary

Fortinbras and his Norwegian army enter, marching toward Poland. The prince instructs a captain to notify the King of Denmark of his intention to move through Danish territory, as previously promised. This military movement introduces an external, large-scale conflict that runs parallel to the internal political decay within the Danish court.

Upon encountering the Captain, Hamlet learns that this massive force is mobilized to fight for a nearly worthless 'patch of ground' in Poland—a territory with no real profit or value. Hamlet is struck by the staggering disproportion between the human cost and the triviality of the cause, noting that twenty thousand men are prepared to die for something as insignificant as a 'straw.'

This encounter triggers a profound soliloquy in which Hamlet confronts his own characteristic inaction. He critiques the idea that a human being should merely exist to 'sleep and feed' like a beast, arguing that the 'godlike reason' bestowed upon humanity should not be wasted in a state of paralyzed over-analysis. Inspired by the sight of Fortinbras's army, which is willing to risk everything for the sake of honor, Hamlet resolves that from this moment forward, his thoughts must be 'bloody' or they are of no value at all.

Context and Importance

This scene introduces Fortinbras as a vital literary foil to Hamlet. While Hamlet embodies the struggle of the intellect—struggling with the 'cowardice' of thinking 'too precisely on the event'—Fortinbras represents the archetype of the man of action, driven by honor to risk immense loss for a mere 'eggshell.' The scene explores the tension between Renaissance humanism, which prizes human reason and the ability to look 'before and after,' and the primal, martial necessity of decisive action. By juxtaposing Hamlet's internal psychological deadlock with Fortinbras's external military momentum, Shakespeare highlights the tragic gap between contemplation and execution.

Act IV, Scene V

Summary

Ophelia enters the court in a state of profound psychological collapse, her mind fractured by the death of her father and the loss of Hamlet. She wanders through the court singing fragmented, nonsensical songs that touch upon themes of betrayal, death, and lost innocence. As she distributes various flowers—each carrying its own symbolic weight, such as rosemary for remembrance and rue for regret—her madness serves as a visceral, public manifestation of the grief and chaos currently consuming the Danish court.

King Claudius observes the unfolding tragedy with intense political apprehension. He recognizes that the deaths and disappearances within the royal family are not isolated incidents but part of a mounting 'battalion' of sorrows that threaten the stability of his reign. He reflects on the cumulative impact of Polonius's death, Hamlet's disappearance, and the growing unrest among the populace, viewing these events as a spreading poison that could destabilize the entire state.

The tension escalates sharply with the sudden, violent arrival of Laertes, who leads a group of angry citizens against the King. Driven by a singular, unbridled desire for vengeance for his father's death, Laertes openly defies Claudius's authority, even renouncing his religious and moral allegiances. His fury is not merely personal but political, as he challenges the legitimacy of the King's rule and demands immediate justice for the perceived injustice of Polonius's death and improper burial.

In response to Laertes's rebellion, Claudius employs his characteristic skill in political manipulation. Rather than meeting Laertes's rage with force, he adopts a conciliatory tone, promising a full and transparent investigation into Polonius's death. By offering to share the responsibility of finding the truth and even risking

his own throne, Claudius successfully redirects Laertes's destructive energy away from a direct coup and toward a more controlled, judicial process, temporarily containing the burgeoning insurrection.

Context and Importance

This scene provides a striking study in the contrast between two different forms of instability: the internal, fragmented disintegration of Ophelia's psyche and the external, focused volatility of Laertes's fury. While Ophelia's madness is characterized by a regression into symbolic, floral imagery and nonsensical verse, Laertes's rage is an extreme, albeit rational, reaction to perceived injustice. Furthermore, the scene reinforces the play's motif of 'contagion,' where private griefs—Polonius's death, Ophelia's breakdown, and Laertes's rebellion—interlock to create a systemic political crisis, illustrating how individual tragedies can rapidly escalate into a public threat to the monarchy.

Act IV, Scene VI

Summary

Horatio is approached by sailors who carry letters sent from Prince Hamlet. This encounter serves as a vital narrative bridge, reconnecting the events occurring in the Danish court with the unfolding drama of Hamlet's voyage.

The content of the letter reveals that Hamlet's journey to England was interrupted by a pirate attack. During the boarding of the ship, Hamlet was taken prisoner, though the letter implies he remains alive and is capable of communicating his situation.

Hamlet issues urgent commands to Horatio, instructing him to deliver certain letters to King Claudius and then to find him with the greatest possible speed. The Prince hints at the existence of profound and heavy information that he intends to share only in person, creating a sense of mounting suspense.

Context and Importance

The use of the epistolary device—the letter—is a significant narrative technique that allows the protagonist to influence the plot and maintain his presence in the play despite his physical absence from the stage. By introducing the pirate attack, Shakespeare injects an element of random, external volatility into the narrative, contrasting the calculated political maneuvers of Claudius with the unpredictable forces of the natural world. This reinforces the play's broader exploration of a universe in flux, where the agency of powerful individuals is constantly threatened by the chaotic and uncontrollable whims of fate.

Act IV, Scene VII

Summary

King Claudius attempts to reconcile with Laertes, who is consumed by rage following the death of Polonius. Claudius justifies his previous inaction against Hamlet by citing his devotion to Queen Gertrude and his fear of inciting a popular uprising. He seeks to redirect Laertes's destructive fury toward a more controlled, yet lethal, purpose, attempting to frame himself as a friend rather than an adversary.

The arrival of a messenger bearing letters from Hamlet disrupts the King's attempts at stabilization. Hamlet's message, which claims he has returned to Denmark unarmed and alone, creates immediate tension and uncertainty within the court. The news of Hamlet's sudden and unexpected return provides the necessary catalyst for Claudius to propose a dangerous and deceptive scheme.

Capitalizing on Laertes's skill and resentment, Claudius manipulates him into agreeing to a rigged fencing match. Through a combination of flattery regarding Laertes's prowess and the suggestion of a controlled 'accident,' Claudius proposes a duel where Hamlet will be at a significant disadvantage. Laertes, driven by a desire for vengeance, reveals he has already prepared a lethal poison on the tip of his blade, effectively turning a sport of skill into a murderous trap.

The scene concludes with the devastating announcement from Queen Gertrude that Ophelia has drowned. Her lyrical and haunting description of the tragic accident adds a layer of profound grief to the ongoing political maneuvering. As Laertes is overwhelmed by sorrow, Claudius and Gertrude depart to follow him, leaving the stage set for the final confrontation.

Context and Importance

This scene illustrates the climax of Claudius's political manipulation, where he successfully weaponizes Laertes's grief to serve his own survival. The dialogue highlights the theme of 'poison' in both its physical and metaphorical forms—moving from the political corruption of the court to the literal toxin on Laertes's sword. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the calculated, cold-blooded conspiracy of the King with the lyrical, tragic account of Ophelia's death emphasizes the play's movement from psychological introspection toward inevitable, violent catastrophe. The use of the 'fencing match' as a narrative device also serves to subvert the Renaissance ideal of honorable combat, replacing it with a deceptive, rigged spectacle that mirrors the total moral decay of the Danish monarchy.

Act V, Scene I

Summary

The scene opens in a graveyard where two gravediggers engage in a cynical, witty debate regarding the religious propriety of Ophelia's burial. Because her death appears to be a suicide, the gravediggers question whether she deserves a Christian interment. This banter, while providing a moment of grim, low-brow comedy, establishes an atmosphere of moral ambiguity and reflects the pervasive uncertainty and decay currently infecting the Danish state.

As Hamlet and Horatio arrive, they observe the gravediggers unearthing various remains, leading to one of the play's most iconic moments: Hamlet's discovery of the skull of Yorick, the former court jester. Holding the skull, Hamlet undergoes a profound existential shift. He moves from detached observation to a visceral realization of the physical reality of mortality, contemplating how the most powerful figures in history, such as Alexander the Great, are ultimately reduced to nothing more than organic matter and dust.

The tension reaches a breaking point with the arrival of Ophelia's funeral procession, led by a grieving Laertes and the royal court. The atmosphere is thick with religious tension and public mourning, as the characters grapple with the tragedy of Ophelia's death. In a sudden, manic burst of energy, Hamlet leaps into the grave to confront Laertes, physically grappling with him and passionately declaring the depth of his love for Ophelia. This violent outburst forces the King to intervene and attempt to restore order, heightening the volatility of the unfolding drama.

Context and Importance

This scene serves as a profound meditation on the 'memento mori' motif (reminder of the inevitability of death), utilizing the physical presence of human remains to strip away the illusions of social status and intellectual distinction. By juxtaposing the 'low' comedy of the gravediggers' puns with the 'high' tragedy of the funeral, Shakespeare emphasizes the indiscriminate, leveling nature of death. Hamlet's transition from the intellectualizing and paralyzed contemplation seen in previous acts to a state of raw, physical confrontation in the grave marks a significant shift in his character arc, signaling a movement toward a more visceral, albeit unstable, engagement with his grief and the inescapable reality of mortality.

Act V, Scene II

Summary

The scene begins with Hamlet recounting his recent experiences to Horatio, explaining how he intercepted the King's treacherous command to have him executed in England. Hamlet reveals that he used his wits to forge a new commission, effectively redirecting the death sentence to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. As he reflects on the event, he expresses a newfound fatalism, suggesting that while humans may attempt to 'rough-hew' their lives, a divine providence ultimately shapes their destinies.

The tension shifts from Hamlet's personal reflections to the immediate political atmosphere of the court with the arrival of Osric, a foppish courtier. Osric delivers a message from King Claudius, announcing a high-stakes fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes. The King has arranged a wager involving expensive horses and weapons, betting on the outcome of the duel. Despite the underlying danger, Hamlet accepts the challenge, setting the stage for a final, physical confrontation.

The duel quickly descends into a horrific bloodbath. During the scuffle, both Hamlet and Laertes are wounded by Laertes's poisoned blade. The tragedy intensifies as Queen Gertrude accidentally drinks from the poisoned cup intended for Hamlet and dies. In his final moments, Laertes confesses the King's treachery, prompting a dying Hamlet to strike down Claudius. After Laertes dies and Hamlet passes away, Horatio is left to bear the burden of telling Hamlet's true story to the world, even as Fortinbras arrives to claim the remains of the fallen Danish dynasty.

Context and Importance

The final scene of the play serves as the ultimate resolution of the play's central motifs, bringing the metaphor of 'poison'—which has permeated the Danish court politically and psychologically—to its literal and lethal conclusion. This scene is academically significant for its exploration of the transition from Hamlet's characteristic psychological paralysis to a state of fatalistic acceptance; his mantra, 'the readiness is all,' signals the completion of his character arc from a man undone by over-analysis to a man prepared to meet his destiny. Furthermore, the simultaneous deaths of the royal family and the subsequent arrival of Fortinbras illustrate the cyclical nature of political power, where the total decay of a corrupt dynasty necessitates the intervention of an outside force to restore order to the state.

Footnotes

Act I, Scene I

1. **unfold:** reveal
2. **rivals of my watch:** those who share my watch
3. **liegemen:** vassals or subjects bound to a lord by allegiance
4. **approve our eyes:** verify or confirm what we have seen
5. **parle:** a discussion or conference, often between enemies (a parley)
6. **sledded Polacks:** Polish soldiers (referring to the historical use of ice skates or combat on frozen terrain)
7. **martial stalk:** military gait
8. **mart:** trade, commerce, or a marketplace
9. **impress:** the conscription or forced recruitment of people or resources
10. **What might be toward, that this sweaty haste Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day: Who is't that can inform me?:** What is being prepared for that has caused such frantic, exhausting activity that work is now continuing through the night, and who can tell me why this is happening?
11. **moiety competent:** a significant or sufficient portion
12. **unimproved mettle:** unproven or raw courage/spirit
13. **post-haste:** with great speed
14. **rummage:** commotion or widespread activity
15. **mote:** a tiny speck or particle
16. **ere:** before
17. **partisan:** a type of long-handled polearm or spear
18. **hies:** hastens or moves quickly
19. **probation:** proof or evidence

Act I, Scene II

1. **jointress:** female owner
2. **dole:** grief
3. **levies:** troops
4. **lists:** array or lineup of troops
5. **dilated:** expanded
6. **suit:** petition or request
7. **nighted:** dark
8. **suspuration:** sighing
9. **haviour:** behavior or manner
10. **obsequious:** dutiful
11. **corse:** corpse
12. **jocund:** cheerful

- 13. **bruit:** announce
- 14. **canon:** law
- 15. **Hyperion:** A Greek Titan associated with the sun, representing divinity and radiance
- 16. **satyr:** A creature from Greek mythology, part man and part goat, often associated with lust and unruly behavior
- 17. **beteem:** to bestow or present
- 18. **Niobe:** a figure from Greek mythology who wept eternally for her children
- 19. **discourse:** the faculty of
- 20. **prithee:** please
- 21. **cap-à-pie:** head to toe
- 22. **beaver:** helmet visor
- 23. **Very like:** very likely
- 24. **grizzled:** grey-haired
- 25. **sable:** black
- 26. **perchance:** perhaps
- 27. **repay:** repay
- 28. **twixt:** between

Act I, Scene III

- 1. **convoy:** escort
- 2. **primy:** early
- 3. **nature crescent:** growing; increasing
- 4. **thews:** muscles
- 5. **cautel:** deceit
- 6. **credent:** believing
- 7. **list:** listen
- 8. **importunity:** persistent or urgent requests
- 9. **chariest:** most cautious
- 10. **prodigal:** wasteful
- 11. **canker galls:** a blight or worm that eats away at
- 12. **blastments:** destructive attacks
- 13. **libertine:** immoral person
- 14. **primrose path of dalliance:** an easy, tempting, but ultimately reckless or immoral course of life
- 15. **recks not his own rede:** does not heed his own advice
- 16. **precepts:** rules
- 17. **unfledg'd:** without feathers
- 18. **Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy:** Let your clothing be as expensive as you can afford
- 19. **husbandry:** careful management
- 20. **Marry:** an interjection used for emphasis (an archaic contraction of 'by the Virgin Mary')

- 21. bethought:** thought of; considered
- 22. tenders:** offers or expressions of affection
- 23. unsifted:** inexperienced
- 24. sterling:** genuine
- 25. Tender yourself more dearly:** In this context, "tender" is a verb meaning to treat or care for. He is telling Ophelia to value herself more highly and to be more cautious with her affection.
- 26. Not to crack the wind of the poor phrase:** This is a self-deprecating idiom. "To crack the wind" means to waste breath or speak unnecessarily. Polonius is saying, "Not to use too many unnecessary words to express this clumsy thought..." (He is calling his own way of speaking a "poor phrase").
- 27. Running it thus, you'll tender me a fool:** Here, "tender" is a verb meaning to offer or present. He is saying that if she continues to express herself (or act) in this way, she will essentially be presenting/offering him a fool (or leading to a foolish outcome).
- 28. go to:** an interjection used to express disbelief or dismissal
- 29. springes:** snares
- 30. brokers:** middlemen or dealers
- 31. dye:** color, type, or character
- 32. bawds:** immoral people

Act I, Scene IV

- 1. shrewdly:** sharply
- 2. eager:** intense
- 3. wont:** habit
- 4. rouse:** celebration
- 5. wassail:** drinking party
- 6. upspring:** offspring
- 7. draughts of Rhenish:** drinks of Rhine wine
- 8. pledge:** toast
- 9. marry:** an exclamation
- 10. breach:** violation
- 11. traduc'd:** slandered
- 12. clepe:** call
- 13. addition:** reputation
- 14. pith and marrow of our attribute:** the very essence of our character
- 15. mole:** defect
- 16. pales:** boundaries or fences
- 17. o'erleavens:** pervades
- 18. plausible:** praiseworthy
- 19. livery:** uniform
- 20. dram:** small amount
- 21. hearsed:** placed in a funeral procession

- 22. ceremonies:** burial cloths
- 23. sepulchre:** tomb
- 24. inurn'd:** buried
- 25. corse:** corpse
- 26. impartment:** message
- 27. pin's fee:** a very small value
- 28. beetles:** overhangs
- 29. toys:** trifles or trivial things
- 30. Nemean lion's:** a mythical lion slain by Hercules, whose skin was impenetrable to weapons
- 31. waxes:** becomes
- 32. issue:** outcome or result

Act I, Scene V

- 1. Mark me:** Listen to me
- 2. harrow:** distress
- 3. porpentine:** hedgehog
- 4. blazon:** display
- 5. list:** listen; to be inclined
- 6. apt:** ready
- 7. Lethe:** forgetfulness river
- 8. sate:** satisfy
- 9. hebenon:** poison
- 10. posset:** thickens
- 11. tetter:** skin rash
- 12. lazar-like:** like leper
- 13. unhous'led:** unprotected
- 14. unanel'd:** unshielded
- 15. aught:** anything
- 16. matin:** morning
- 17. fie:** an exclamation of disgust
- 18. saws:** proverbs
- 19. pernicious:** harmful
- 20. arrant knave:** notorious scoundrel
- 21. O'ermaster't:** overcome it
- 22. truepenny:** honest person
- 23. Hic et ubique:** here and everywhere
- 24. pioner:** a person who goes ahead to prepare the way
- 25. antic:** mad or foolish
- 26. time is out of joint:** the natural or political order is disrupted

Act II, Scene I

1. **Marry:** Indeed
2. **Danskers:** Danes
3. **encompassment:** Surrounding or covering
4. **drift:** Purpose or aim
5. **addicted:** devoted to
6. **rank:** Foul or bad
7. **drabbing:** Visiting prostitutes
8. **incontinency:** Lack of restraint
9. **quaintly:** Cleverly
10. **fetch of warrant:** justifiable
11. **prenominate:** Previously mentioned
12. **Videlicet:** Namely
13. **windlasses:** Machines or devices used for lifting or pulling
14. **assays:** Attempts or tests
15. **doublet:** a man's snug-fitting jacket
16. **unbrac'd:** Unfastened
17. **down-gyved:** Shackled at ankles
18. **ecstasy:** Intense passion or a state of being beside oneself
19. **fordoes:** Destroys
20. **quoted:** Addressed
21. **beshrew:** Curse

Act II, Scene II

1. **vouchsafe:** to grant or give something graciously
2. **aught:** anything
3. **adheres:** stays loyal to
4. **gentry:** people of high social class
5. **dread pleasures:** formidable or awe-inspiring commands or desires
6. **full bent:** complete intention or determination
7. **policy:** clever management or political strategy
8. **lunacy:** madness
9. **distemper:** an emotional or physical ailment
10. **sift:** to examine closely
11. **levies:** troops or soldiers raised for war
12. **falsely borne in hand:** presented as a false excuse or pretense
13. **assay:** an attempt or trial
14. **expostulate:** to argue or protest
15. **perpend:** to consider carefully

16. **fain:** gladly or happily
17. **out of thy star:** beyond your station or social orbit
18. **precepts:** rules or instructions
19. **resort:** frequent visits or access to
20. **arras:** a heavy hanging cloth or tapestry used as a screen
21. **board:** to approach or confront
22. **carrion:** decaying flesh
23. **conception:** the act of becoming pregnant
24. **fay:** faith or belief
25. **consonancy:** harmony or agreement
26. **moult no feather:** a metaphor suggesting that their secrecy cannot shed its true nature or hide the truth
27. **fretted:** decorated with a pattern or ornament
28. **Lenten:** meager, austere, or relating to the season of Lent (when meat is traditionally abstained from)
29. **coted:** accompanied
30. **tickle o' th' sere:** making even the withered or joyless laugh
31. **wont:** accustomed or used to
32. **aerie:** a nest of birds of prey
33. **eyases:** young hawks
34. **tarre:** to drag into a dispute
35. **cuffs:** fights or physical altercations
36. **throwing about of brains:** intense intellectual and verbal combat
37. **carry it away:** to win the audience's favor or achieve great success
38. **make mouths:** to mock or jeer
39. **ducats:** gold coins
40. **'Sblood:** an oath or exclamation
41. **appurtenance:** an accessory or extra feature
42. **extent:** an exaggeration or outward display
43. **swaddling clouts:** baby clothes
44. **Jephthah:** a biblical judge of Israel who, after making a rash vow, sacrificed his only daughter
45. **chanson:** a song
46. **valanc'd:** sagging or hanging loosely
47. **beard me:** confront me
48. **chopine:** a type of high platform shoe
49. **uncurrent:** not flowing or not in circulation
50. **caviare to the general:** too refined for the average person
51. **sallets:** salads
52. **gules:** the color red
53. **impasted:** covered or coated

- 54. coagulate:** thickened or clotted
- 55. carbuncles:** deep red gemstones
- 56. general synod:** a grand assembly or council
- 57. It shall to the barber's, with your beard:** Hamlet is essentially telling Polonius to take his long-windedness (or the current topic) elsewhere, suggesting it should be "trimmed" or removed like hair at a barber
- 58. He's for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps:** Hamlet is mocking the nature of the play's subject matter, suggesting it is either something light for a dance (a jig), something lewd (bawdry), or something so boring that it induces sleep
- 59. Hecuba:** the Queen of Troy, known for her great suffering during the Trojan War
- 60. mobled:** veiled or muffled, conveying a sense of grief or mourning
- 61. bisson rheum:** watery discharge from the eyes
- 62. clout:** a piece of cloth
- 63. o'erteemed:** overflowing
- 64. God's bodikin:** an oath or exclamation, meaning 'by God's small dagger'
- 65. John-a-dreams:** a daydreamer or one lost in idle reverie
- 66. breaks my pate across:** strikes my head
- 67. pigeon-liver'd:** cowardly; lacking spirit or courage
- 68. fatted all the region kites with this slave's offal:** to feed the entrails of this villain to scavenger birds
- 69. drab:** a woman of low morals
- 70. scullion:** a low-ranking kitchen servant
- 71. tent him to the quick:** to touch or test someone's most sensitive part
- 72. blench:** to flinch or recoil

Act III, Scene I

- 1. forward to be sounded:** ready or willing to be probed or tested
- 2. Niggard:** stingy or ungenerous
- 3. assay him to any pastime:** attempt to engage him in some diversion
- 4. o'er-raught:** reached or encountered
- 5. give him a further edge:** provide him with more incentive or encouragement
- 6. espials:** spies
- 7. bestow ourselves:** to position or place ourselves
- 8. wonted:** usual or habitual
- 9. colour:** disguise or mask
- 10. plastering:** cosmetic or makeup
- 11. mortal coil:** the troubles of daily life
- 12. contumely:** insulting or scornful language
- 13. dispriz'd:** unvalued or despised
- 14. quietus:** final settlement or death
- 15. bodkin:** small dagger

- 16. fardels:** burdens or heavy loads
- 17. bourn:** boundary or limit
- 18. pith:** importance or substance
- 19. Soft you now:** Wait or hold on
- 20. orisons:** prayers
- 21. how does your honour for this many a day:** how have you been faring these past several days
- 22. aught:** anything
- 23. bawd:** a person who manages prostitutes
- 24. indifferent:** completely or entirely
- 25. beck:** command or gesture
- 26. arrant knaves:** complete or utter dishonest men
- 27. calumny:** slander or false statements
- 28. wantonness:** lack of restraint or lustfulness
- 29. the glass of fashion:** the standard of elegance and style
- 30. music vows:** sweet or harmonious promises
- 31. ecstasy:** intense madness or frenzy
- 32. hatch:** result or outcome
- 33. haply:** perhaps
- 34. round with him:** persistent or closely attending

Act III, Scene II

- 1. had as lief:** would rather
- 2. robustious:** loud and boisterous
- 3. periwig-pated:** foolish or scatterbrained
- 4. groundlings:** lower-class audience members
- 5. Termagant:** a loud-mouthed or quarrelsome person
- 6. out-Herods Herod:** to surpass in excess or villainy; an allusion to the biblical King Herod
- 7. warrant:** guarantee
- 8. indifferently:** passably or adequately
- 9. conversation cop'd withal:** as ever my social dealings have encountered
- 10. revenue:** income
- 11. candied:** sweetened or flattering
- 12. pregnant hinges of the knee:** the act of bowing or bending the knee (in a gesture of subservience or to seek advantage)
- 13. buffets:** blows or strikes
- 14. pipe:** flute or small wind instrument
- 15. stop:** a hole or note on a musical instrument
- 16. occulted:** hidden
- 17. unkennel:** reveal or uncover

- 18. Vulcan's stithy:** the forge of the Roman god of fire; a blacksmith's anvil or workshop
- 19. aught the whilst:** anything during the time
- 20. i' faith:** in faith or truly
- 21. the chameleon's dish:** a metaphor for something insubstantial or ever-changing
- 22. I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet:** the King's dismissal of Hamlet's nonsense as unanswerable
- 23. these words are not mine:** I don't understand these words
- 24. country matters:** lewd or sexual matters
- 25. your only jig-maker:** one who provides amusement or lightheartedness; an entertainer
- 26. sables:** expensive black fur
- 27. hobby-horse:** a child's toy, a wooden stick with a horse's head
- 28. dumb show:** a silent performance or pantomime used in theater
- 29. miching mallecho:** sneaky trickery or stealthy deception
- 30. belike:** perhaps
- 31. posy:** short poem or verse
- 32. Hymen:** the god of marriage
- 33. Wormwood:** bitterness or sorrow
- 34. gall'd jade vince:** let the irritated or sore horse flinch (metaphorically: let those who are easily offended feel the sting of provocation)
- 35. Confederate season:** an opportune or allied time; a period when all elements work in concert
- 36. hart ungalled play:** an uninjured stag playing; one who remains unaffected by drama
- 37. turn Turk:** to change allegiance or to fail/go wrong
- 38. pajock:** fool or clown
- 39. perdie:** by God (an oath)
- 40. vouchsafe:** to grant or condescend to give
- 41. choler:** anger or irritability
- 42. purgation:** cleansing or purging
- 43. trade:** business or news
- 44. pickers and stealers:** low-life or dishonest people
- 45. ventages:** holes or openings (in a musical instrument)
- 46. compass:** range or scope
- 47. S'blood:** an oath (short for God's blood)
- 48. fret:** to play or move a string/note
- 49. shent:** reproached or scolded

Act III, Scene III

- 1. noyance:** harm or injury
- 2. weal:** well-being or prosperity
- 3. massy:** large and heavy
- 4. mortis'd:** attached or fixed

- 5. **annexment:** attachment
- 6. **closet:** a private room or study
- 7. **arras:** tapestry hanging on a wall
- 8. **tax him home:** reprimand him thoroughly
- 9. **meet:** appropriate or suitable
- 10. **vantage:** advantageous or important
- 11. **ere:** before
- 12. **rank:** foul or decaying
- 13. **limed soul:** a soul struggling to escape the sticky trap of its own sin
- 14. **assay:** attempt or trial
- 15. **pat:** easily or perfectly
- 16. **scann'd:** examined or investigated
- 17. **flush:** openly or clearly
- 18. **audit:** account or reckoning
- 19. **purging:** cleansing or confession
- 20. **hent:** opportunity
- 21. **physic:** medicine

Act III, Scene IV

- 1. **lay home to him:** attack him directly
- 2. **screen'd:** protected
- 3. **round with him:** vigilant or persistent with him
- 4. **warrant:** guarantee
- 5. **arras:** tapestry
- 6. **idle tongue:** careless or thoughtless speech
- 7. **rood:** cross
- 8. **glass:** mirror
- 9. **ho:** an exclamation to get attention
- 10. **Dead for a ducat:** an expression implying something is so trivial or easy to kill that it is worth only a single coin
- 11. **braz'd:** hardened or made like brass
- 12. **dicers':** gamblers
- 13. **contraction:** the bond of marriage
- 14. **tristful visage:** sad face
- 15. **Hyperion:** a Greek Titan associated with the sun, used here to denote majesty and radiance
- 16. **mildew'd ear:** an ear of grain (such as corn or wheat) covered in mildew; used here as a metaphor for corruption destroying something healthy
- 17. **batten:** to grow fat
- 18. **moor:** a barren wasteland
- 19. **apoplex'd:** paralyzed or stunned

- 20. thrall'd:** enslaved
- 21. cozen'd:** deceived
- 22. hoodman-blind:** blindfolded
- 23. sans:** without
- 24. mutine:** rebel
- 25. panders:** enables or facilitates
- 26. grained:** deeply stained or ingrained
- 27. tinct:** color or stain
- 28. enseamed:** fatty or thick
- 29. tithe:** tenth part
- 30. diadem:** crown
- 31. whet:** sharpen
- 32. conceit:** imagination or mental faculty
- 33. incorporeal:** bodiless
- 34. want true colour:** lack its full or genuine intensity
- 35. habit:** clothing
- 36. coinage:** creation or invention
- 37. ecstasy:** a trance-like state or a state of being beside oneself; a loss of self-control
- 38. gambol:** play or frolic
- 39. unction:** soothing ointment or flattery
- 40. compost:** manure
- 41. pursy:** short-winded or plump
- 42. cleft my heart in twain:** broke my heart in two
- 43. livery:** uniform
- 44. wanton:** lustful
- 45. reechy:** dirty or slimy
- 46. ravel:** unravel or complicate
- 47. mad in craft:** pretending to be mad
- 48. paddock:** a toad; a fool
- 49. gib:** a fool
- 50. alack:** an expression of sorrow
- 51. adders fang'd:** venomous snakes
- 52. knavery:** dishonest behavior
- 53. Hoist with his own petard:** The phrase refers to a ****petard****, which was a small explosive device used in siege warfare to blow open gates or walls. To be ****hoist**** (meaning lifted or blown up) by one's own petard means that the person setting the trap is caught in their own explosion.
- 54. delve:** dig
- 55. prating:** talking foolishly

Act IV, Scene I

1. **brainish:** unstable or mentally unsound
2. **haunt:** frequented place
3. **pith:** the essential or central part
4. **haply:** by chance or perhaps

Act IV, Scene II

1. **replication:** reply or response
2. **knaveish:** dishonest or deceitful
3. **Hide fox, and all after:** once the main thing is hidden, all else will follow

Act IV, Scene III

1. **scourge:** punishment
2. **politic:** shrewd or cunning
3. **variable:** changing
4. **thither:** to that place
5. **bark:** a small ship
6. **at foot:** close behind
7. **hold'st at aught:** hold at all
8. **cicatrice:** scar
9. **sovereign process:** royal or supreme official procedure
10. **imports:** means or signifies
11. **conjuring:** commanding or directing
12. **hectic:** a feverish flush or state
13. **haps:** luck or fortune

Act IV, Scene IV

1. **craves:** requests
2. **ought:** anything
3. **ranker:** more intense or higher
4. **fee:** ownership or land title
5. **imposthume:** an abscess or hidden swelling
6. **inform against:** serve as evidence against
7. **fust:** rot or decay
8. **sith:** since
9. **gross:** obvious or heavy
10. **continent:** enclosing or containing

Act IV, Scene V

1. **importunate:** persistent and demanding
2. **distract:** mentally unsettled or deranged
3. **hems:** hesitates or pauses
4. **collection:** attention or gathering of minds
5. **amiss:** wrong
6. **cockle hat:** a hat decorated with cockle shells, often associated with pilgrims
7. **sandal shoon:** sandals (shoon being an archaic plural for shoes)
8. **larded:** adorned or embellished with
9. **bewept:** wept over
10. **dild:** did
11. **conceit:** a whimsical thought or idea
12. **betime:** early
13. **dupp'd:** closed quickly
14. **Gis:** an obscure oath
15. **alack:** an exclamation of grief or regret
16. **quoth:** said
17. **hugger-mugger:** secretly or in confusion
18. **buzzers:** people who spread rumors
19. **switzers:** Swiss mercenaries
20. **overpeering of his list:** overflowing its boundaries or shores
21. **life-rendering pelican:** a symbol of self-sacrifice, referring to the legend that a pelican pierces its own breast to feed its young with its blood
22. **bier:** a stand for a coffin
23. **herb of grace o' Sundays:** rue, a shrub or plant used here to suggest its ritualistic or medicinal importance
24. **poll:** the top of the head
25. **hatchment:** a memorial painting

Act IV, Scene VI

1. **appointment:** nature or character
2. **repair:** to travel or go to a place
3. **too light for the bore of the matter:** the words are too insufficient or insignificant to convey the full gravity of the situation

Act IV, Scene VII

1. **your conscience my acquittance seal:** your conscience must confirm my release from guilt
2. **unsinew'd:** weakened or lacking support
3. **general gender:** the general public
4. **gyves:** shackles or fetters

5. **set naked on your kingdom:** arrived at your borders unprotected or unannounced
6. **riband:** ribbon
7. **livery:** attire or clothing
8. **weeds:** mourning clothes
9. **lamord:** the name of a Norman gentleman renowned for his fencing skill
10. **scrimers:** fencers or swordsmen
11. **pleurisy:** an inflammation of the membranes around the lungs; used here metaphorically to represent an excess that becomes destructive
12. **to the quick o' th'ulcer:** to get straight to the point; to the heart of the matter
13. **sanctuarize:** to provide sanctuary or asylum
14. **peruse the foils:** to carefully examine the fencing weapons
15. **unbated:** not blunted; sharp
16. **unction:** an ointment or salve
17. **mountebank:** a quack or charlatan
18. **cataplasm:** a soft, moist medicinal dressing or compress
19. **simples:** medicinal herbs
20. **drift:** intention, design, or underlying purpose
21. **nonce:** the present occasion; for the time being
22. **hoary:** grayish-white, especially with age; or covered with frost
23. **long purples:** an orchid
24. **cold maids:** chaste or virginal young women
25. **douts:** extinguishes or dampens

Act V, Scene I

1. **clown:** a rustic, peasant, or person of low social standing
2. **crowner hath sat on her:** the coroner has conducted an official inquiry
3. **se offendendo:** of his own fault
4. **argal:** in short; indeed
5. **will he nill he:** whether he wants to or not, the origin of the modern phrase "willy-nilly"
6. **Yaughan:** an alehouse or tavern
7. **stoup:** a drinking vessel or a small measure of liquid
8. **meet:** fitting, suitable, or appropriate
9. **pate:** the top of a person's head
10. **Lady Worm:** a personification of the worms of decay
11. **chapless:** lacking lips or edges
12. **mazard:** head
13. **sexton:** an officer of a church, responsible for the maintenance of the churchyard and graves
14. **loggets:** an archaic game played with knucklebones or small pieces
15. **quiddits:** subtle points or quibbles
16. **quilllets:** subtle, quibbling, or evasive arguments

- 17. **sconce:** the head or face (archaic)
- 18. **indentures:** legal contracts or deeds
- 19. **speak by the card:** to speak strictly according to the rules or the truth; to be direct
- 20. **kibe:** a sore or blister on the heel
- 21. **pocky:** covered with pocks or pustules; pock-marked
- 22. **bung-hole:** the hole in a cask or barrel through which the stopper (bung) is inserted
- 23. **Fordo it own life:** to destroy or end one's own life
- 24. **obsequies:** funeral rites or ceremonies
- 25. **strewments:** the act of scattering or things scattered (such as flowers) during a ceremony
- 26. **the quick and dead:** the living and the dead
- 27. **Pelion and Ossa:** mythological Greek mountains
- 28. **splenative:** irritable; prone to bad temper or sudden passion
- 29. **pluck them asunder:** pull them apart
- 30. **swounds:** an archaic oath, short for 'by God's wounds'
- 31. **eisel:** vinegar

Act V, Scene II

- 1. **bilboes:** iron shackles or leg irons, typically used on ships to restrain prisoners
- 2. **deep plots do pall:** when our complex, secret schemes fail or become ineffective
- 3. **rough-hew:** to shape or fashion crudely; to act without a precise plan
- 4. **sea-gown scarf'd:** wearing a heavy, loose sea-cloak wrapped around the body
- 5. **Finger'd their packet:** examined or handled the intercepted letters
- 6. **in fine:** finally; in short; in conclusion
- 7. **Larded:** Filled or padded with extra material; heavily laden with
- 8. **on the supervise:** under supervision; during the act of oversight
- 9. **leisure bated:** without even a moment's pause or respite
- 10. **benetted round with villainies:** ensnared or surrounded by wicked acts
- 11. **statists:** statesmen; men involved in the affairs of state
- 12. **conjuraction:** A solemn or binding appeal or command
- 13. **shriving-time:** The time allotted for confession and absolution.
- 14. **Popp'd in between th'election and my hopes:** intervened between the selection of the king and my expectations
- 15. **Thrown out his angle:** set a hook or trap to ensnare my life
- 16. **cozenage:** deception, trickery, or fraud
- 17. **waterfly:** an insignificant or flighty person
- 18. **chough:** A small, dark-colored bird of the crow family.
- 19. **definement suffers no perdition:** his description does not fall short of accuracy
- 20. **divide him inventorially:** to list or categorize his qualities in a detailed, itemized manner
- 21. **concernancy:** the subject or matter at hand; relevance
- 22. **rawer breath:** unrefined or unpolished speech

- 23. imports the nomination:** the meaning or significance of the naming or description of this gentleman
- 24. imputation:** an accusation or the attribution of a quality or fault
- 25. in his meed he's unfellowed:** according to his due, he is without a peer
- 26. imponed:** set against; placed as a stake in a wager
- 27. hangers:** Short swords or daggers worn at the belt.
- 28. carriages:** the ornamental fittings or the manner of carrying the swords
- 29. edified by the margin:** informed by the peripheral details or context
- 30. german:** akin, related, or fitting to
- 31. passes:** scoring maneuvers or exchanges of blows in the duel
- 32. the opposition of your person in trial:** your participation as the opposing party in the contest
- 33. the breathing time of day:** a convenient or suitable time; an opportune moment
- 34. foils:** Fencing swords, often used for practice.
- 35. there are no tongues else for's turn:** there are no other modes of speech or languages left for him to use
- 36. lapwing:** A species of plover; used here metaphorically to describe someone who uses trickery to steal, referring to the bird's perceived habit of carrying a shell on its head.
- 37. comply with his dug before he suck'd it:** having already been at the teat (nipple) before sucking it; a crude metaphor for being opportunistic or parasitic
- 38. drossy age:** An era characterized by worthlessness or lack of substance; full of impurities or scum
- 39. fanned and winnowed opinions:** ideas or trends that are spread widely and then sifted or separated, often exposing them as hollow or false
- 40. the bubbles are out:** their superficiality is exposed and they burst; referring to the hollow or inflated nature of the people described
- 41. forestall their repair hither:** prevent them from arriving here
- 42. augury:** an omen or sign of what will happen in the future; prophecy
- 43. Since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes:** because we do not truly "possess" or "own" the things we leave behind (our legacy or our very lives), there is no reason to hasten our departure or prepare for it prematurely
- 44. punish'd with sore distraction:** afflicted with severe mental anguish or madness
- 45. satisfied in nature:** convinced by his very essence; fundamentally justified
- 46. keep my name ungor'd:** to prevent one's reputation from being wounded or dishonored
- 47. since he is better'd:** because he is the more skilled fencer
- 48. kettle:** a kettle-drum or a loud, resounding signal/sound
- 49. springe:** A small trap, typically made of a noose, used for catching birds.
- 50. unbated:** Not blunted; sharp.
- 51. fell sergeant, death:** a fierce or deadly officer; death personified as a stern soldier
- 52. the unsatisfied:** the uninformed
- 53. This quarry cries on havoc:** This scene of carnage/slaughter calls for widespread destruction or chaos

54. eternal cell: the grave or tomb; a metaphorical place of death

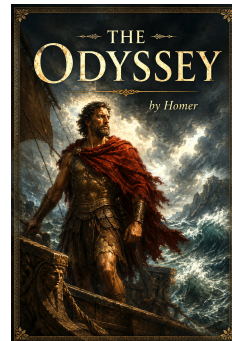
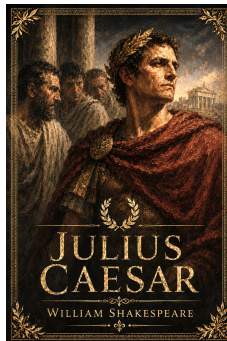
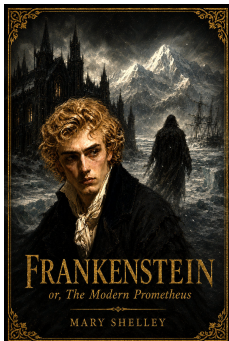
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Hamlet

In the brooding halls of Elsinore, the boundaries between appearance and reality are perpetually blurred. When the ghost of the late King of Denmark appears to his son, Prince Hamlet, it brings with it a terrifying omen of disaster and a demand for justice. As the young prince grapples with profound grief and the unsettling suspicion of foul play, he finds himself navigating a court thick with political instability, sudden marriages, and hidden motives.

Shakespeare's exploration of the human condition transcends its Elizabethan origins, offering a haunting meditation on the weight of existence and the paralyzing uncertainty of morality. Through rich verse and psychological complexity, the play examines the struggle between sanity and madness, caught in a landscape where every shadow holds a secret. This enduring tragedy continues to resonate through its profound inquiry into the nature of ambition and vengeance and their consequences.

