

Hamlet

2.2

[Flourish.] Enter King Claudius and Queen Gertrude, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, with others

KING CLAUDIUS

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, 5
Since not 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 deem of. I entreat you both 10
That, being of so young days brought up with him,
And since so neighboured to his youth and humour,
That you vouchsafe your rest here in our court
Some little time, so by your companies
To draw him on to pleasures, and to gather, 15
So much as from occasions you may glean,
Whether aught to us unknown afflicts him thus
That, opened, lies within our remedy.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Good gentlemen, he hath much talked of you,
And sure I am two men there is not living 20
To whom he more adheres. If it will please you
To show us so much gentry and good will
As to expend your time with us a while
For the supply and profit of our hope,
Your visitation shall receive such thanks 25
As fits a king's remembrance.

ROSENCRANTZ

Both your majesties

Might, by the sovereign power you have of us,
Put your dread pleasures more into command
Than to entreaty.

GUILDENSTERN But we both obey,

And here give up ourselves in the full bent 30
To lay our service freely at your feet
To be commanded.

KING CLAUDIUS

Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.
And I beseech you instantly to visit 35
My too-much changeÁd son.±±Go, some of ye,
And bring the gentlemen where Hamlet is.

GUILDENSTERN

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

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Ay, amen!

Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern [with others]

Enter Polonius

POLONIUS

Th'ambassadors from Norway, my good lord, 40
Are joyfully returned.

KING CLAUDIUS

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. 45
And I do think±±or else this brain of mine
Hunts not the trail of policy so sure
As it hath used to do±±that I have found
The very cause of Hamlet's lunacy.

KING CLAUDIUS

O speak of that, that I do long to hear! 50

POLONIUS

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

KING CLAUDIUS

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 distemper. 55

QUEEN GERTRUDE

I doubt it is no other but the main±±

His father's death and our o'er-hasty marriage.

KING CLAUDIUS

Well, we shall sift him.

Enter Polonius, Valtemand, and Cornelius

Welcome, my good

friends.

Say, Valtemand, what from our brother Norway?

VALTEMAND

Most fair return of greetings and desires. 60

Upon our first he sent out to suppress

His nephew's levies, which to him appeared

To be a preparation 'gainst the Polack;

But better looked into, he truly found

It was against your highness; whereat grieved 65

That so his sickness, age, and impotence

Was falsely borne in hand, sends out arrests

On Fortinbras, which he, in brief, obeys,

Receives rebuke from Norway, and, in fine,

Makes vow before his uncle never more 70

To give th'essay 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, 75

With an entreaty herein further shown,

He gives a letter to Claudius

That it might please you to give quiet pass

Through your dominions for his enterprise

On such regards of safety and allowance

As therein are set down.

KING CLAUDIUS It likes us well, 80

And at our more considered 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. 85

Exeunt Valtemand and Cornelius

POLONIUS

This business is very well ended.

My liege, and madam, to expostulate

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. 90
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? 95
But let that go.

QUEEN GERTRUDE 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. 100
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. 105
Perpend.

I have a daughter±±have whilst she is mine±±
Who in her duty and obedience, mark,
Hath given me this. Now gather and surmise.

He reads a letter

`To the celestial and my soul's idol, the most beautified 110
Ophelia'±±that's an ill phrase, a vile phrase, `beautified'
is a vile phrase. But you shall hear±±`these in her
excellent white bosom, these'.

QUEEN GERTRUDE Came this from Hamlet to her?

POLONIUS

Good madam, stay a while. I will be faithful. 115
`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 120
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.'

125

This in obedience hath my daughter showed me,
And more above hath his solicitings,
As they fell out by time, by means, and place,
All given to mine ear.

KING CLAUDIUS But how hath she
Received his love?

POLONIUS What do you think of me? 130

KING CLAUDIUS
As of a man faithful and honourable.

POLONIUS

I would fain prove so. But what might you think,
When I had seen this hot love on the wing,
As I perceived 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 played the desk or table-book,

135

Or given my heart a winking mute and dumb,
Or looked upon this love with idle sight±±
What might you think? No, I went round to work,
And my young mistress thus I did bespeak:

140

`Lord Hamlet is a prince out of thy star.
This must not be'. And then I precepts gave her,

That she should lock herself from his resort,
Admit no messengers, receive no tokens;

145

Which done, she took the fruits of my advice,
And he, repulseÁd±±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.

150

KING CLAUDIUS (to Gertrude) Do you think 'tis this?

QUEEN GERTRUDE It may be; very likely.

POLONIUS

Hath there been such a time±±I'd fain know that±± 155
That I have positively said ` 'Tis so'

When it proved otherwise?

KING CLAUDIUS Not that I know.

POLONIUS (*touching his head, then his shoulder*)

Take this from this if this be otherwise.

If circumstances lead me I will find

Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed

160

Within the centre.

KING CLAUDIUS How may we try it further?

POLONIUS

You know sometimes he walks four hours together

Here in the lobby.

QUEEN GERTRUDE So he does indeed.

POLONIUS

At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him.

(*To Claudius*) Be you and I behind an arras then. 165

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 CLAUDIUS We will try it.

Enter Prince Hamlet, madly attired, reading on a book

QUEEN GERTRUDE

But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

170

POLONIUS

Away, I do beseech you both, away.

I'll board him presently. O give me leave.

Exeunt Claudius and Gertrude

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

HAMLET Well, God-'a'-mercy.

POLONIUS Do you know me, my lord?

175

HAMLET Excellent, excellent well. You're 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 180

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 carrion±±have you a daughter?

POLONIUS I have, my lord.

185

HAMLET Let her not walk i'th' sun. Conception is a

blessing, but not as your daughter may conceive.

Friend, look to't.

POLONIUS (*aside*) How say you by that? Still harping on my daughter. Yet he knew me not at first±±a said I 190 was a fishmonger. A 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. 195

POLONIUS What is the matter, my lord?

HAMLET Between who?

POLONIUS I mean the matter you read, my lord.

HAMLET Slanders, sir; for the satirical slave says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, 200 their eyes purging thick amber or 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 205 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'th' air. (*Aside*) How preg- 210 nant 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 lord, I will take my leave of 215 you.

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

POLONIUS (*going*) Fare you well, my lord. 220

HAMLET These tedious old fools!

[*Enter Guildenstern and Rosencrantz*]

POLONIUS You go to seek the Lord Hamlet. There he is.

ROSENCRANTZ God save you, sir.

GUILDENSTERN [*to Polonius*] Mine honoured lord.

[*Exit Polonius*]

ROSENCRANTZ (*to Hamlet*) My most dear lord. 225

HAMLET My ex'llent 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, 230
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 favour? 235

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. 240

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? 245

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. 250

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. 255

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 260
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 265
and outstretched heroes the beggars' shadows. Shall
we to th' court? For, by my fay, 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 270
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 275
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 th' purpose. You were 280
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 285
by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy 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. 290

ROSENCRANTZ (*to Guildenstern*) What say you?

HAMLET 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 295
prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the King
and Queen moult no feather. I have of late±±but
wherefore I know not±±lost all my mirth, forgone all
custom of exercise; and indeed it goes so heavily with
my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems 300
to me a sterile promontory. This most excellent canopy
the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging, this majestical
roof fretted 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 a man! How noble 305 in reason, how infinite in faculty, 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, 310 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 315 delights not me'?

ROSENCRANTZ To think, my lord, if you delight not in man what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you. We coted them on the way, and hither are they coming to offer you service. 320

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 325 are tickled o'th' sear, 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 wont to take delight in, the tragedians of the city. 330

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 335 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 eyrie of children, little eyases, 340 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. 345

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 like most will, if their means are not better±± 350
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 tarre them to
controversy. There was for a while no money bid for 355
argument unless the poet and the player went to cuffs
in the question.

HAMLET Is't possible?

GUILDENSTERN O, there has been much throwing about of
brains. 360

HAMLET Do the boys carry it away?

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

HAMLET It is not strange; for mine uncle is King of
Denmark, and those that would make mows at him 365
while my father lived give twenty, forty, an hundred
ducats apiece for his picture in little. 'Sblood, there is
something in this more than natural, if philosophy
could find it out.

A flourish for the Players

GUILDENSTERN There are the players. 370

HAMLET Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore. Your
hands, come. Th'appurtenance of welcome is fashion
and ceremony. Let me comply with you in the garb,
lest my extent to the players±±which, I tell you, must
show fairly outward±±should more appear like 375
entertainment than yours.

[He shakes hands with them]

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 380
is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw.

Enter Polonius

POLONIUS Well be with you, gentlemen.

HAMLET (*aside*) Hark you, Guildenstern, and you too±±at
each ear a hearer±±that great baby you see there is
not yet out of his swathing-clouts. 385

ROSENCRANTZ (*aside*) Haply he's the second time come to
them, for they say an old man is twice a child.

HAMLET (*aside*) I will prophesy he comes to tell me of the
players. Mark it.±±You say right, sir, for o' Monday
morning, 'twas so indeed. 390

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. 395

POLONIUS Upon mine 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- 400
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 Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst
thou! 405

POLONIUS What a treasure had he, my lord?

HAMLET Why,
`One fair daughter and no more,
The which he loveÁd passing well'.

POLONIUS (*aside*) Still on my daughter. 410

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? 415

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 chanson will show you more,
for look where my abridgements come.

Enter four or five Players

You're welcome, masters, welcome all.±±I am glad to
see thee well.±±Welcome, good friends.±±O, my old 425
friend! Thy face is valanced since I saw thee last.
Com'st thou to beard me in Denmark?±±What, my
young lady and mistress. By'r Lady, your ladyship is
nearer heaven than when I saw you last by the altitude
of a chopine. Pray God your voice, like a piece of 430
uncurrent gold, be not cracked within the ring.±±
Masters, you are all welcome. We'll e'en to't like French
falc'ners, fly at anything we see. We'll have a speech
straight. Come, give us a taste of your quality. Come,
a passionate speech. 435

FIRST PLAYER What speech, my good 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 general. But it was±±as I received it, and others 440
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 was no sallets in the lines to make the
matter savoury, nor no matter in the phrase that might 445
indict 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 450
live in your memory, begin at this line±±let me see, let
me see:

`The rugged Pyrrhus, like th'Hyrceanian beast'±±
'tis not so. It begins with Pyrrhus±±

`The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms, 455
Black as his purpose, did the night resemble
When he lay coucheÁd in the ominous horse,
Hath now this dread and black complexion smeared
With heraldry more dismal. Head to foot

Now is he total gules, horridly tricked 460
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,
Baked and impasted with the parching streets,
That lend a tyrannous and damneÁd light
To their vile murders. Roasted in wrath and fire,
And thus o'er-sizeÁd with coagulate gore, 465
With eyes like carbuncles the hellish Pyrrhus
Old grandsire Priam seeks.'
So, proceed you.

POLONIUS Fore God, my lord, well spoken, with good
accent and good discretion. 470

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,
Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide; 475
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
Th'unnerveÁd father falls. Then senseless Ilium,
Seeming to feel his blow, with flaming top
Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear. For lo, his sword, 480
Which was declining on the milky head
Of reverend Priam, seemed i'th' air to stick.
So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,
And, like a neutral to his will and matter,
Did nothing. 485

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, 490
A rouseÁd vengeance sets him new a-work;
And never did the Cyclops' hammers fall
On Mars his armour, forged for proof eterne,
With less remorse than Pyrrhus' bleeding sword
Now falls on Priam. 495

Out, out, thou strumpet Fortune! All you gods,
In general synod, 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!

500

POLONIUS This is too long.

HAMLET It shall to the barber's, with your beard. (*To First Player*) Prithee, say on. He's for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps. Say on, come to Hecuba.

FIRST PLAYER

`But who, O who had seen the mobbled queen'±± 505

HAMLET `The mobbled queen'?

POLONIUS That's good; `mobbled queen' is good.

FIRST PLAYER

`Run barefoot up and down, threat'ning the flames
With bisson rheum; a clout upon that head
Where late the diadem stood, and for a robe, 510
About her lank and all o'er-teemeÁd loins,
A blanket in th'alarm of fear caught up±±
Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steeped,
'Gainst Fortune's state would treason have pronounced.
But if the gods themselves did see her then, 515
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, 520
And passion in the gods.'

POLONIUS Look whe'er he has not turned his colour, and has tears in 's eyes. (*To First Player*) Prithee, no more.

HAMLET (*to First Player*) 'Tis well. I'll have thee speak out the rest soon. (*To Polonius*) Good my lord, will you see 525 the players well bestowed? Do ye 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 530 desert.

HAMLET God's bodykins, 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 535 them in.

POLONIUS (*to Players*) Come, sirs.

Exit

HAMLET *(to Players)* Follow him, friends. We'll hear a play tomorrow. Dost thou hear me, old friend? Can you play the murder of Gonzago? 540

[PLAYERS] 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 ye not?

[PLAYERS] Ay, my lord. 545

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

[Exeunt Players]

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

ROSENCRANTZ Good my lord. 550

HAMLET

Ay, so. God b'wi' ye.

Exeunt all but Hamlet

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 whole conceit 555
That from her working all his visage wann'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! 560

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, 565
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculty of eyes and ears. Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause, 570
And can say nothing±±no, not for a king
Upon whose property and most dear life

A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?
 Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
 Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face, 575
 Tweaks me by th' 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-livered and lack gall
 To make oppression bitter, or ere this 580
 I should 'a' fatted all the region kites
 With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
 Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
 O, vengeance!±±
 Why, what an ass am I? Ay, sure, this is most brave, 585
 That I, the son of the dear murdered—
 Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
 Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words
 And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
 A scullion! Fie upon't, foh!±±About, my brain. 590
 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 proclaimed their malefactions;
 For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak 595
 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 quick. If a but blench,
 I know my course. The spirit that I have seen 600
 May be the devil, and the devil hath power
 T'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 605
 More relative than this. The play's the thing
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.

Exit