

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Hamlet

Excepting the Bible, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is perhaps the West's most famous literary work. Hardly a day passes without this play being acted, either on a commercial stage or in a school or college; and many versions of the play, on film and on tape, ensure its universal visibility. Hamlet's role is usually defined as the most difficult in the theater, and many actors, and a few actresses, often choose to play Hamlet as a crown to their careers. It is so well known that the world uses the term *Hamletlike* to describe people unable to make up their minds.

The hectic world in which *Hamlet* appeared gave no forecast of the play's future greatness. First staged in 1600, the play was one of a series that William Shakespeare (1564–1616) was turning out for the nearly insatiable demands of the commercial stage. He was fresh to London in 1590 from a middle-class youth in Stratford-upon-Avon. When Shakespeare retired to gentlemanly leisure in Stratford in 1610, he had written thirty-seven dramas—almost two plays a year.

The London audiences did not want masterpieces; instead, they craved violence, ghosts, and murders galore. They wanted revenge tragedies, the most popular dramatic form in the Age of Elizabeth (1558–1603), England's Golden Age. This taste for blood is not surprising, for Elizabethan England made national heroes of pirate patriots like Francis Drake and accepted as normal that Protestants and Catholics should burn heretics alive. It was for this violence-filled age that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, based on a bloody revenge tale that had already inspired one play during the 1580s.

Reading the Selection

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is set at the royal Danish court. Its revenge theme is activated by the murder of old King Hamlet. Prince Hamlet, depressed by his father's death, is plunged into a court seething with intrigue, carousing, ghosts, and spies. There are also wandering actors, an oath sworn on swords, a secret letter, a deadly duel, and a hasty funeral. Lest these devices be insufficiently entertaining, Hamlet himself veers from madman to scholar to prince to swordsman before he gets his revenge. At the end, the stage is littered with corpses, and the major characters are all dead.

What rescues *Hamlet* from mere melodrama and pushes it into the stratosphere of great art are Shakespeare's majestic language and complete mastery of psychology. The theater, reborn in medieval productions like *Everyman*, with its simple morals and even simpler psychology, now came to maturity in Shakespeare's hands.

Dramatis Personae

CLAUDIUS *King of Denmark*
 HAMLET *Son to the late, and nephew to the present king*
 POLONIUS *Lord Chamberlain*
 HORATIO *Friend to Hamlet*
 LAERTES *Son to Polonius*
 VOLTIMAND
 CORNELIUS
 ROSENCRANTZ
 GUILDENSTERN } *Courtiers*
 OSRIC
 A GENTLEMAN
 A PRIEST
 MARCELLUS }
 BERNARDO } *Officers*

FRANCISCO *A soldier*
 REYNALDO *Servant to Polonius*
 PLAYERS
 TWO CLOWNS *Grave-diggers*
 FORTINBRAS *Prince of Norway*
 A CAPTAIN
 ENGLISH AMBASSADORS
 GERTRUDE *Queen of Denmark, and mother to Hamlet*
 OPHELIA *Daughter to Polonius*
 LORDS, LADIES, OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, SAILORS,
 MESSENGERS, and OTHER ATTENDANTS
 GHOST *of Hamlet's father*
 SCENE—DENMARK



Act I

Scene I—Elsinore. A platform¹ before the castle

The two opening scenes put the spectator in full possession of the situation of affairs in Denmark. The death and character of the late king, his reappearance to denote some unknown evil, the threats of war, and the consequent need for strong men are emphasized in the first; the second adds the personal relations of HAMLET with the royal house, and depicts his state of mind at the beginning of the action.

HORATIO is carefully differentiated from MARCELLUS, BERNARDO, and FRANCISCO: they are unlettered soldiers; he is a scholar, and, as such, has his touches both of imagination and scepticism.

The scene opens amid nervous suspense; there is a tradition that it was written in a charnel-house. "Tis better cold," and silent, and the watcher is "sick at heart." On two previous nights the GHOST has appeared to BERNARDO and MARCELLUS. BERNARDO's agitation shows itself in the way he challenges the guard, instead of waiting to be challenged.

FRANCISCO at his post. Enter to him BERNARDO

BERNARDO: Who's there?

FRANCISCO: Nay, answer me:² stand, and unfold yourself.

BER.: Long live the king!³

FRAN.: Bernardo?

BER.: He.

FRAN.: You come most carefully upon your hour.

BER.: 'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.

FRAN.: For this relief much thanks: 'tis bitter cold,
And I am sick at heart.

BER.: Have you had quiet guard?

FRAN.: Not a mouse stirring.

BER.: Well, good night.

If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,

The rivals⁴ of my watch, bid them make haste.

FRAN.: I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who's there?

Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS

HORATIO: Friends to this ground.

MARCELLUS: And liegemen to the Dane.

FRAN.: Give you⁵ good night.

MAR.: O, farewell, honest soldier:

Who hath relieved you?

FRAN.: Bernardo has my place.

Give you good night.

MAR.: Holla! Bernardo!

BER.: Say,

What, is Horatio there?

HOR.: A piece of him.

BER.: Welcome, Horatio: welcome, good Marcellus.

HOR.: What, has this thing appear'd again tonight?

BER.: I have seen nothing.

MAR.: 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 approve⁶ our eyes and speak to it.

HOR.: Tush, tush, 't will not appear.

BER.: Sit down awhile;

And let us once again assail your ears,
That are so fortified against our story
What we have two nights seen.

HOR.: Well, sit we down,
And let us hear Bernardo speak of this.

BER.: Last night of all,
When yond same star that's westward from the pole⁷
Had made his course to illumine that part of heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
The bell then beating one—

Enter GHOST

MAR.: Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again!

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

MAR.: Thou art a scholar⁸; speak to it, Horatio.

BER.: Looks it not like the king? mark it, Horatio.

HOR.: Most like: it harrows⁹ me with fear and wonder.

BER.: It would be spoke to.¹⁰

MAR.: Question it, Horatio.

HOR.: What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form

In which the majesty of buried Denmark¹¹

Did sometimes march? by heaven I charge thee,
speak!

MAR.: It is offended.

BER.: See, it stalks away!

HOR.: Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!

[Exit Ghost.]

MAR.: 'Tis gone, and will not answer.

BER.: How now, Horatio! you tremble and look pale:
Is not this something more than fantasy?

1. i. ¹ platform A level space on the battlements of the royal castle at Elsinore, a Danish seaport; now Helsingör.

² me This is emphatic, since Francisco is the sentry.

³ Long live the king! Either a password or greeting; Horatio and Marcellus use a different one in line 15.

⁴ rivals Partners.

⁵ Give you God give you.

⁶ approve Corroborate.

⁷ pole Polestar.

⁸ scholar Exorcisms were performed in Latin, which Horatio as an educated man would be able to speak.

⁹ harrows Lacerates the feelings.

¹⁰ It . . . to. A ghost could not speak until spoken to.

¹¹ buried Denmark The buried king of Denmark.

What think you on 't?
 HOR.: Before my God, I might not this believe
 Without the sensible and true avouch
 Of mine own eyes.
 MAR.: Is it not like the king?
 HOR.: As thou art to thyself:
 Such was the very armour he had on
 When he the ambitious Norway combated;
 So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle,
 He smote¹² the sledded pole-axe¹³ on the ice.
 'Tis strange.
 MAR.: Thus twice before, and jump at this dead hour,
 With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch.
 HOR.: In what particular thought to work I know not;
 But in the gross and scope¹⁴ of my opinion,
 This bodes some strange eruption to our state.
 MAR.: Good now,¹⁵ sit down, and tell me, he that knows,
 Why this same strict and most observant watch
 So nightly toils¹⁶ the subject¹⁷ of the land,
 And why such daily cast¹⁸ of brazen cannon,
 And foreign mart¹⁹ for implements of war;
 Why such impress²⁰ 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?
 HOR.: 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 on²¹ by a most emulate²² pride,
 Dared 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,²³
 Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands
 Which he stood seized²⁴ of, to the conqueror:
 Against the which, a moiety competent²⁵
 Was gaged by our king; which had return'd
 To the inheritance of Fortinbras,
 Had he been vanquisher; as, by the same covenant,²⁶
 And carriage²⁷ of the article design'd,
 His fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,
 Of unapproved²⁸ mettle hot and full,²⁹

¹² smote Defeated.

¹³ sledded pole-axe Sometimes written as *Polacks*, meaning Polish warriors.

¹⁴ gross and scope General drift.

¹⁵ Good now An expression denoting entreaty or expostulation.

¹⁶ toils Causes or makes to toil.

¹⁷ subject People, subjects.

¹⁸ cast Casting, founding.

¹⁹ mart Buying and selling, traffic.

²⁰ impress Impressment.

²¹ prick'd on Incited.

²² emulate Rivaling.

²³ law and heraldry Heraldic law, governing combat.

²⁴ seized Possessed.

²⁵ moiety competent Adequate or sufficient portion.

²⁶ covenant Joint bargain.

²⁷ carriage Import, bearing.

²⁸ unapproved Not turned to account.

Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there
 Shark'd up³⁰ a list of lawless resolute³¹
 For food and diet,³² 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-haste and romage³³ in the land.
 BER.: I think it be no other but e'en so:
 Well may it sort³⁴ that this portentous figure
 Comes armed through our watch; so like the king
 That was and is the question of these wars.
 HOR.: A mote³⁵ it is to trouble the mind's eye.
 In the most high and palmy state³⁶ of Rome,
 A little ere 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 fire³⁷ and dews of blood,
 Disasters³⁸ in the sun; and the moist star³⁹
 Upon whose influence Neptune's empire⁴⁰ stands
 Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse:
 And even the like precurse⁴¹ 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.—
 But soft, behold! lo, where it comes again!

Re-enter GHOST

I'll cross⁴² it, though it blast me. Stay, illusion!
 If thou hast any sound, or use of voice

[*It*⁴³ *spreads its arms.*

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:
 If⁴⁴ thou art privy to thy country's fate,
 Which, happily, foreknowing may avoid,
 O, speak!
 Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life

²⁹ hot and full Full of fight.

³⁰ Shark'd up Got together in haphazard fashion.

³¹ resolute Desperadoes.

³² food and diet No pay but their keep.

³³ romage Bustle, commotion.

³⁴ sort Suit.

³⁵ mote Speck of dust.

³⁶ palmy state Triumphant sovereignty.

³⁷ stars . . . fire i.e., Comets.

³⁸ Disasters Unfavorable aspects.

³⁹ moist star The moon, governing tides.

⁴⁰ Neptune's empire The sea.

⁴¹ precurse Heralding.

⁴² cross Meet, face, thus bringing down the evil influence on the person who crosses it.

⁴³ It The Ghost, or perhaps Horatio.

⁴⁴ If . . . In the following seven lines, Horatio recites the traditional reasons why ghosts might walk.

Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,

[The cock crows.

Speak of it: stay, and speak! Stop it, Marcellus.
MAR.: Shall I strike at it with my partisan⁴⁵?

HOR.: Do, if it will not stand.

BER.: 'Tis here!

HOR.: 'Tis here!

MAR.: 'Tis gone! [Exit Ghost.

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.

BER.: It was about to speak, when the cock crew.⁴⁶

HOR.: 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,
The extravagant⁴⁷ and erring spirit hies
To his confine:⁴⁸ and of the truth herein
This present object made probation.⁴⁹

MAR.: It faded on the crowing of the cock.
Some say that ever 'gainst⁵⁰ 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,⁵¹
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious⁵² is the time.

HOR.: 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 to-night
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?

MAR.: Let's do 't, I pray; and I this morning know
Where we shall find him most conveniently. [Exeunt. 190

Scene II—A room of state in the castle

HAMLET's brief dialogue with the KING and QUEEN and his subsequent soliloquy sufficiently acquaint us with his mood. He has no

⁴⁵ partisan Long-handled spear with a blade having lateral projections.

⁴⁶ cock crew According to traditional ghost lore, spirits returned to their confines at cockcrow.

⁴⁷ extravagant and erring Wandering. Both words mean the same thing.

⁴⁸ confine Place of confinement.

⁴⁹ probation Proof, trial.

⁵⁰ gainst Just before.

⁵¹ planets strike It was thought that planets were malignant and might strike travelers by night.

⁵² gracious Full of goodness.

idea of his uncle's crime, though he detests his character; but his moral sense has received a severe shock from his mother's marriage. The whole world appears to him, in consequence, under the dominion of evil; he would gladly be quit of it. But that cannot be, and, moreover, he cannot do anything, nor even utter his feelings. He must take refuge in irony and sarcasm, or, when possible, in silence.

CLAUDIUS is a hypocrite, but his hypocrisy is that of a statesman; he plays his part with a dignity and a keen insight into what is needful for the welfare of the state, which explains how the council came to choose him king.

The scene opens with a bridal procession. It is the custom of the stage for HAMLET to come on last, slowly and reluctantly, and clad in black, among the glittering draperies of the court.

160 Enter CLAUDIUS, King of Denmark, GERTRUDE the Queen,
HAMLET, POLONIUS, LAERTES and his sister OPHELIA,
LORDS 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,
The imperial jointress¹ to this warlike state,
Have we, as 't were with a defeated joy,—
With an auspicious and a dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,—
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, that² you know, young Fortinbras,
Holding a weak³ supposal of our worth,
Or thinking by our late dear brother's death
Our state to be disjoint⁴ and out of frame,⁵
Colleagu'd⁶ with the dream of his advantage,⁷
He hath not fail'd to pester us with message,
Importing⁸ 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 gait⁹ herein; in that the levies,
The lists and full proportions, are all made
Out of his subject:¹⁰ and we here dispatch

Liii.¹ jointress Woman possessed of a jointure, or, joint tenancy of an estate.

² that That which.

³ weak supposal Low estimate.

⁴ disjoint Distracted, out of joint.

⁵ frame Order.

⁶ Colleagu'd Added to.

⁷ dream . . . advantage Visionary hope of success.

⁸ Importing Purporting, pertaining to.

⁹ gait Proceeding.

¹⁰ Out of his subject At the expense of Norway's subjects (collectively).

That from her working all his visage wann'd,¹⁵⁸
 Tears in his eyes, distraction in 's aspect,
 A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
 With forms to his conceit¹⁵⁹? 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-mettled¹⁶⁰ rascal, peak,¹⁶¹
 Like John-a-dreams,¹⁶² unpregnant of¹⁶³ my cause,
 And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
 Upon whose property¹⁶⁴ and most dear life
 A damn'd 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?
 Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the 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'd¹⁶⁵ and lack gall
 To make oppression bitter, or ere this
 I should have fatted all the region kites¹⁶⁶

570

580

590

With this slave's offal: bloody, bawdy villain!
 Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless¹⁶⁷
 villain!

O, 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 drab,¹⁶⁸

600

A scullion¹⁶⁹!

Fie upon 't! foh! About,¹⁷⁰ 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

610

Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;
 I'll tent¹⁷¹ him to the quick: if he but blench,¹⁷²

I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
 May be the devil:¹⁷³ 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,¹⁷⁴

Abuses me to damn me: I'll have grounds
 More relative¹⁷⁵ than this:¹⁷⁶ the play's the thing
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king. [Exit. 620

¹⁵⁸ wann'd Grew pale.

¹⁵⁹ his whole . . . conceit His whole being responded with forms to suit his thought.

¹⁶⁰ muddy-mettled Dull-spirited.

¹⁶¹ peak Mope, pine.

¹⁶² John-a-dreams An expression occurring elsewhere in Elizabethan literature to indicate a dreamer.

¹⁶³ unpregnant of Not quickened by.

¹⁶⁴ property Proprietorship (of crown and life).

¹⁶⁵ pigeon-liver'd The pigeon was supposed to secrete no gall; if Hamlet, so he says, had had gall, he would have felt the bitterness of oppression and avenged it.

¹⁶⁶ region kites Kites of the air.

¹⁶⁷ kindless Unnatural.

¹⁶⁸ drab Prostitute.

¹⁶⁹ scullion Prostitute.

¹⁷⁰ About About it, or turn thou right about.

¹⁷¹ tent Probe.

¹⁷² blench Quail, flinch.

¹⁷³ May be the devil Hamlet's suspicion is properly grounded in the belief of the time.

¹⁷⁴ spirits Humors.

¹⁷⁵ relative Closely related, definite.

¹⁷⁶ this i.e., The ghost's story.



Act III

Scene I—A room in the castle

This short scene sums up the precise situation of affairs at the moment when the crisis is coming on. There are three points to be noticed:

HAMLET has resolved to make the play the solution of all his doubts; if that test shows the KING guilty, he shall die. Even as he forms this determination, his heart fails him. He turns to an alternative that has dimly presented itself before (Act I, Scene II, Line 133), and deliberately considers the desirability of suicide. But such a way out of the difficulty is too simple, too easy for his over-speculative nature. He sees the future filled with countless possibil-

ities, which puzzle his will, and this enterprise also loses the name of action.

HAMLET has long known that no help is to be had from OPHELIA. Yet when she appears before him, his old tenderness revives. He speaks gently to her, and then—discovers that she is deceiving him, acting as a decoy for POLONIUS. This obliges him to play the madman again, and his paradoxes express a feeling of revulsion from the poor foolish girl. His mother's sin has already made him lose faith in womanhood, and now he sees OPHELIA, too, spotted with all the vileness of her sex. He assails her with reproaches so inappropriate to herself that she can only take them as the sign of a shattered mind.

With POLONIUS and the like HAMLET's acting is successful; but the KING is shrewder. His suspicions are awakened, and he at once plots to get his nephew out of the way. HAMLET has, therefore, gone too far on the path of delay, and though he does not know it, the opportunities of revenge are fast slipping away from him.

Enter KING, QUEEN, POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN

KING: And can you, by no drift of circumstance,¹

Get from him why he puts on this confusion,

Grating so harshly all his days of quiet

With turbulent and dangerous lunacy?

ROS.: He does confess he feels himself distracted;

But from what cause he will by no means speak.

GUIL.: Nor do we find him forward² to be sounded,

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?

ROS.: Most like a gentleman.

GUIL.: But with much forcing of his disposition,³

ROS.: Niggard of question,⁴ but, of our demands,

Most free in his reply.

QUEEN: Did you assay⁵ him

To any pastime?

ROS.: Madam, it so fell out, that certain players

We 'er-rough⁶ 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.

POL.: '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 inclined.

Good gentlemen, give him a further edge,⁷

And drive his purpose on to these delights.

ROS.: We shall, my lord.

[*Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.*]

Sweet Gertrude, leave us too;

For we have closely⁸ sent for Hamlet hither,

That he, as 't were by accident, may here

Affront⁹ Ophelia:

Her father and myself, lawful espials,¹⁰

Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing, unseen,

We may of their encounter frankly judge,

And gather by him, as he is behav'd,

If 't be the affliction of his love or no

That thus he suffers for.

III. 1 drift of circumstance Vice of conversation.

2 forward Willing.

3 forcing of his disposition i.e., Against his will.

4 Niggard of question Sparring of conversation.

5 assay Try to win.

6 'er-rough Overtook.

7 edge Incitement.

8 closely Secretly.

9 Affront Confront.

10 lawful espials Legitimate spies.

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:¹¹ so shall I hope your virtues

Will bring him to his wonted way again,

To both your honours.

OPH.: Madam, I wish it may. [*Exit Queen.*]

POL.: Ophelia, walk you here. Gracious,¹² so please you,

We will bestow ourselves. [*To Ophelia*] Read on this

book;

That show of such an exercise¹³ may colour¹⁴

Your loneliness. We are oft to blame in this,—

'Tis too much proved—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 plastering art,

Is not more ugly to¹⁵ the thing¹⁶ that helps it

Than is my deed to my most painted word:

O heavy burthen!

POL.: I hear him coming: let's withdraw, my lord.

[*Exeunt King and Polonius.*]

Enter HAMLET

HAM.: 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 sea¹⁷ 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 shuffled¹⁸ off this mortal coil,¹⁹

Must give us pause: there's the respect²⁰

That makes calamity of so long life²¹;

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,²²

The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's

contumely,

The pangs of despised²³ love, the law's delay,²⁵

The insolence of office²⁴ and the spurns²⁵

11 wildness Madness.

12 Gracious Your grace (addressed to the king).

13 exercise Act of devotion (the book she reads is one of devotion).

14 colour Give a plausible appearance to.

15 to Compared to.

16 thing i.e., The cosmetic.

17 sea The mixed metaphor of this speech has often been commented on; a later emendation *stage* has sometimes been spoken on the stage.

18 shuffled Sloughed, cast.

19 coil Usually means "turnout"; here, possibly "body" (conceived of as wound about the soul like rope); *clay, soil, veil*, have been suggested as emendations.

20 respect Consideration.

21 of . . . life So long-lived.

22 time The world.

23 despised Rejected.

24 office Office-holders.

25 spurns Insults.

That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
 When he himself might his quietus²⁶ make
 With a bare bodkin²⁷? who would fardels²⁸ bear,
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscover'd country from whose bourn²⁹
 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 conscience³⁰ does make cowards of us all;
 And thus the native hue³¹ of resolution
 Is sicklied o'er³² with the pale cast³³ of thought,
 And enterprises of great pitch³⁴ and moment³⁵
 With this regard³⁶ their currents³⁷ turn awry,
 And lose the name of action.—Soft you now!
 The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons³⁸
 Be all my sins remember'd.

OPH.: Good my lord,
 How does your honour for this many a day?

HAM.: I humbly thank you; well, well, well.

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

HAM.: No, not I;
 I never gave you aught.

OPH.: My honour'd lord, you know right well you did;
 And, with them, words of so sweet breath composed
 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.

HAM.: Ha, ha! are you honest?³⁹

OPH.: My lord?

HAM.: Are you fair?⁴⁰

OPH.: What means your lordship?

HAM.: That if you be honest and fair, your honesty⁴¹
 should admit no discourse to⁴² your beauty.

OPH.: Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce⁴³
 than with honesty?

HAM.: Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner
 transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the

force of honesty can translate beauty into his like-
 ness: this was sometime a paradox, but now the
 time⁴⁴ gives it proof. I did love you once.

OPH.: Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

HAM.: You should not have believed me; for virtue can-
 not so inoculate⁴⁵ our old stock but we shall relish of
 it:⁴⁶ I loved you not.

OPH.: I was the more deceived.

HAM.: Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a
 breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest⁴⁷;
 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 beck⁴⁸ than I have thoughts to put them in, imag-
 ination 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 knaves, all; believe
 none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your
 father?

OPH.: At home, my lord.

HAM.: Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play
 the fool no where but in 's own house. Farewell.

OPH.: O, help him, you sweet heavens!

HAM.: 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 calumny. Get thee to a nunnery,
 go: farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a
 fool; for wise men know well enough what
 monsters⁴⁹ you make of them. To a nunnery, go, and
 quickly too. Farewell.

OPH.: O heavenly powers, restore him!

HAM.: I have heard of your⁵⁰ paintings too, well enough;
 God has given you one face, and you make your-
 selves another: you jig,⁵¹ you amble, and you lisp,
 and nick-name God's creatures, and make your wan-
 tonness your ignorance.⁵² Go to, I'll no more on 't; it
 hath made me mad. I say, we will have no more mar-
 riages: those that are married already, all but one,⁵³
 shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nun-
 nery, go. [Exit.]

OPH.: O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
 The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue,
 sword;

The expectancy and rose⁵⁴ of the fair state,
 The glass of fashion and the mould of form,⁵⁵
 The observed of all observers,⁵⁶ quite, quite down!

²⁶ quietus Acquittance; here, death.

²⁷ bare bodkin Mere dagger; bare is sometimes understood as "unsheathed."

²⁸ fardels Burdens.

²⁹ bourn Boundary.

³⁰ conscience Probably, inhibition by the faculty of reason restraining the will from doing wrong.

³¹ native hue Natural color; metaphor derived from the color of the face.

³² sicklied o'er Given a sickly tinge.

³³ cast Shade of color.

³⁴ pitch Height (as of falcon's flight).

³⁵ moment Importance.

³⁶ regard Respect, consideration.

³⁷ currents Courses.

³⁸ orisons Prayers.

³⁹ are you honest? Honest meaning "truthful" and "chaste."

⁴⁰ fair Meaning "just, honorable, and beautiful." The speech has the irony of a double entendre.

⁴¹ your honesty Your chastity.

⁴² discourse to Familiar intercourse with.

⁴³ commerce Intercourse.

⁴⁴ the time The present age.

⁴⁵ inoculate Graft (metaphorical).

⁴⁶ but . . . it i.e., That we do not still have about us a taste of the old stock, i.e., retain our sinfulness.

⁴⁷ indifferent honest Moderately virtuous.

⁴⁸ beck Command.

⁴⁹ monsters An allusion to the horns of a cuckold.

⁵⁰ your Indefinite use.

⁵¹ jig Move with jerky motion; probably allusion to the jig, or song and dance, of the current stage.

⁵² make . . . ignorance i.e., Excuse your wantonness on the ground of your ignorance.

⁵³ one i.e., The king.

⁵⁴ expectancy and rose Source of hope.

⁵⁵ The glass . . . form The mirror of fashion and the pattern of courtly behavior.

⁵⁶ observed . . . observers i.e., The center of attention in the court.