

Act 3, Scene 2 A hall in the castle

(HAMLET and 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 lief* 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 your passion,
 you must acquire a smoothness.
 O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious* periwig pated* fellow tear a passion to tatters,
 to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings,
 who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumbshows and noise.
 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 overstep not the modesty of nature.
 For any thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing,
 whose end, 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 unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve,
 the censure* of the which one* must in your allowance overweigh a whole theatre of others.
 O, there be players that I have seen play, and heard others praise, and that highly,
 that neither having the accent of Christians, nor the gait* of Christian, pagan, nor no 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.
 Go, make you ready.

(Exeunt PLAYERS.)

(Enter POLONIUS, ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN.)

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

LORD POLONIUS

And the Queen too, and that presently.

HAMLET

Bid the players make haste.

(Exit POLONIUS.)

Will you two help to hasten them?

trippingly - easily, *as lief* - rather, *robustious* - noisy, *periwig-pated* - wig wearing,
very age and body of the time - the true state of things as they are now, *pressure* - likeness (literally, impression
 made in wax), *come tardy off* - inadequately or timidly carried out, *censure* - disapproval,
one - one individual, *gait* - walk, *journeymen* - workmen not yet masters of their trade (not God)

ROSENCRANTZ

We will, my lord.

(Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN.)

HAMLET

What ho, Horatio!

HORATIO

Here, sweet lord, at your service.

HAMLET

Horatio, thou art even as just a man as ever my conversation coped withal.*

HORATIO

O, my dear lord—

HAMLET

Nay, do not think I flatter.

For what advancement may I hope from thee that no revenue hast but thy good spirits to feed and clothe thee?

Why should the poor be flattered?

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.

There is a play to night 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 seest that act afoot, observe mine uncle.

If his occulted* guilt do not itself unkennel* in one speech, it is a damned ghost* that we have seen.

Give him heedful note, for I mine eyes will rivet to his face,

and after we will both our judgments join in censure* of his seeming.

HORATIO

Well, my lord.

HAMLET

They are coming to the play. I must be idle.

Get you a place.

(A flourish. Enter KING CLAUDIUS, QUEEN GERTRUDE, POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN and others.)

KING CLAUDIUS

How fares our cousin Hamlet?

Horatio...withal - Horatio, you are as honest a man as I have had dealings with,

occulted - supernaturally revealed, *unkennel* - reveal (as dogs let out of their kennel),

damned ghost - i.e. a Protestant demon, *censure* - judgment; criticizing

HAMLET

Excellent, in faith, of the chameleon's dish.* I eat the air, promise crammed.* You cannot feed capons* so.

KING CLAUDIUS

I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet. These words are not mine.*

HAMLET

No, nor mine now.

(*To POLONIUS.*) My lord, you played once in the university, you say?

LORD POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

What did you enact?

LORD POLONIUS

I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed in the 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 GERTRUDE

Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

HAMLET

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

LORD POLONIUS

(*To KING CLAUDIUS.*) O, ho! Do you mark that?

HAMLET

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

(*Lying down at OPHELIA'S feet.*)

OPHELIA

No, my lord.

chameleon's dish - chameleons could exist for a long time without eating and therefore were thought to live on air,
the air, promise crammed - the air is crammed with the promise of the unmasking of Claudius,
capons - castrated male chickens, *not mine* - not for me as the asker of the question,
metal more attractive - conventional Elizabethan love poetry often described women as magnets

HAMLET

I mean, my head upon your lap?

OPHELIA

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

Do you think I meant country matters?

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

What should a man do but be merry?

For look you how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within these two hours.

OPHELIA

Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.

HAMLET

So long? 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.

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. He lies down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in a fellow, takes off the King's crown, kisses it, and pours poison in the King's ears, and exits.

The Queen returns, finds the King dead, and makes passionate action. The Poisoner comes in again, seeming to lament with her. The dead body is carried away. The Poisoner woos the Queen with gifts; she seems loath and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts his love.

Exeunt players in dumb show.

OPHELIA

What means this, my lord?

HAMLET

Marry, it means mischief.*

OPHELIA

Belike this show imports the argument of the play.

(Enter PROLOGUE.)

HAMLET

We shall know by this fellow.

OPHELIA

Will he 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.

(Exit PROLOGUE.)

HAMLET

Is this a prologue?

OPHELIA

'Tis brief, my lord.

HAMLET

As woman's love.

(Enter PLAYER KING and PLAYER QUEEN.)

PLAYER KING

Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart* gone round Neptune's salt wash,*
since love our hearts and Hymen* did our hands unite commutual* in most sacred bands.

PLAYER QUEEN

So many journeys* may the sun make us again count over ere love be done!

mischief - wicked deeds, *naught* - indecent, *clemency* - mercy,

Phoebus' cart - the sun, *Neptune's salt wash* - the sea,

Hymen - God of marriage, *commutual* - mutually, *so many journeys* - i.e. thirty years

But, woe is me, you are so sick of late,
 so far from cheer and from your former state.
 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,
 honored, beloved; 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 killed the first.*

HAMLET

(*Aside.*) Wormwood,* 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.
 What to ourselves in passion we propose,
 the passion ending, doth the purpose lose.
 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,
 both here and hence pursue me lasting strife,
 if, once a widow, ever I be wife!

HAMLET

If she should break it now!

my...do - my vital bodily functions cease to work,
in...accurst - if I marry a second husband let him be a curse to me,
None...first - no woman should marry a second husband unless she has killed the first,
Wormwood - a bitter herb (used figuratively), *instances* - motives,
but die thy thoughts - but you may change your mind, *repose* - rest,

PLAYER KING

Sweet, leave me here awhile.

My spirits grow dull, and fain I would beguile* the tedious day with sleep.

PLAYER QUEEN

Sleep rock thy brain,

(He sleeps.) and never come mischance between us twain!

(Exit PLAYER QUEEN.)

HAMLET

Madam, how like you this play?

QUEEN GERTRUDE

The lady protests too much, methinks.

HAMLET

O, but she'll keep her word.

KING CLAUDIUS

Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in it?

HAMLET

No, no, they do but jest. No offence in the world.

KING CLAUDIUS

What do you call the play?

HAMLET

The Mouse trap.

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 of that? Your majesty and we that have free souls, it touches us not.

(Enter LUCIANUS.)

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the King.

LUCIANUS

Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing,

confederate season,* 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.

beguile - cheat, *confederate season* - the occasion being my ally, *else* - and,

Hecate - Goddess of witchcraft, *ban* - curse, *usurp* - take away

(He pours the poison into the sleeper's ears.)

HAMLET

He poisons him in the garden for his estate.
You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.

OPHELIA

The King rises.

HAMLET

What, frightened with false fire?*

QUEEN GERTRUDE

How fares my lord?

LORD POLONIUS

Give over the play.

KING CLAUDIUS

Give me some light. Away!

POLONIUS

Lights, lights, lights!

(Exeunt all but HAMLET and HORATIO.)

HAMLET

Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers* get me a fellowship* in a cry* of players?

HORATIO

Half a share.

HAMLET

A whole one, I.
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.

false fire - discharge of firearms with blank cartridges, *forest of feathers* - plumes for actors' costumes, *fellowship* - position, *cry* - pack, *take the ghost's word* - (and believe it is a Catholic ghost in purgatory)

HAMLET

Ah, ha! Come, some music! Come, the recorders!
Come, some music!

(Re enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN.)

GUILDENSTERN

Good my lord, vouchsafe 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 choler.*

HAMLET

Your wisdom should show itself more richer to signify this to his doctor,
for, for me to put him to his purgation* 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 says, your behavior hath struck her into amazement.

HAMLET

O wonderful son, that can so astonish a mother!

ROSENCRANTZ

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

distempered - out of temper, *choler* - anger,
purgation - the act of purging (Hamlet could mean medical (blood-letting), spiritual or legal)

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, you once did love me.

HAMLET

So I do still, by these pickers and stealers.*

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 players with recorders.)

O, the recorders! Let me see one.
To withdraw with you.*
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.

pickers and stealers - hands, *succession* - right to be the next king,
while the grass grows - the proverb ends with "the horse starves.", *To withdraw with you.* - Let's speak privately.

HAMLET

'Tis as easy as lying.

Govern these ventages* with your fingers 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,*
and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak.

'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?

Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret* me, yet you cannot play upon me.

(Enter POLONIUS.)

God bless you, sir!

LORD 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?

LORD POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Methinks it is like a weasel.

LORD POLONIUS

It is backed like a weasel.

HAMLET

Or like a whale?

LORD POLONIUS

Very like a whale.

HAMLET

Then I will come to my mother by and by.

They fool me to the top of my bent.*

I will come by and by.

ventages - holes, *mystery* - personal secret, *fret* - irritate; fret fingering of certain stringed musical instruments,
fool me to the top of my bent - play along with me to my limit (an archery metaphor where the bow can bend no further)

LORD POLONIUS

I will say so.

HAMLET

By and by is easily said.

(Exit POLONIUS.)

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.

(Exit HAMLET.)

Nero - (Nero had his mother murdered)