(Grahamlet Annotated Script) by Graham Arthur Mackenzie
based on "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark" by William Shakespeare
edited / curated by Graham Arthur Mackenzie
primary source: David Bevington's modern editor's version
secondary source: Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine's version for the Folger Library

(What follows is a combination of:
- all the things I feel and think about, or imagine, at this point, when I read Hamlet
- all the things I want people I'm working with on versions of Grahamlet to know or think about Hamlet
- all the things I think random people who are interested in Grahamlet might want to know or need explained to them about Hamlet

note that a lot of notes are repeated throughout – eg, the meaning of "ere" and "exeunt", or characters relation to each other – in order to allow readers to pop in to the text midway

( ) = explanation or expansion of adjacent passage
[ ] = replacement or substitution of adjacent passage*
{ } = personal opinion, reflection, reaction, aside

* the threshold between this category and the first one is that this choice was typically done when the words / language seemed to my mind likely so unfamiliar to modern ears that I deemed it quicker to restate the entire thought than expand on individual terms, or when I'm otherwise interested in giving a verbatim translation (the one exception being when I give several verbatim translations as a cloud of connotations); I obviously in no way consider these replacements/substitutions on my part an improvement on the original)

1.1

(Exterior shot atop the battlements of a castle. Nighttime. We see a calm, confident, attentive guard – Francisco – with a partisan (a kind of weapon with a blade at the end of a long pole) pacing up & down. A nervous wreck of a guard, Barnardo – also carrying a partisan – enters the scene from the opposite location, constantly looking around anxiously & scanning his environs. Barnardo is nervous because he has already been visited more than once on recent previous nights' watches by the Ghost of Hamlet's Father (somewhat confusingly also named Hamlet.))

Enter Barnardo and Francisco, two sentinels.

Barnardo
Who's there?

Francisco
Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.

Barnardo
Long live the King!

Francisco
Barnardo?

Barnardo
He.

Francisco

(Relieved that there is no real threat, but annoyed that it's his fellow guard:)

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

(With the renewed fear that Francisco's heart-sickness might be a portent of the ghost's presence:)

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 watch, bid them make haste.

Enter (Hamlet's good friend from college) Horatio and Marcellus (another guard).

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

Horatio
Friends to this ground.

Marcellus
And liegemen to the Dane (fellow Danish citizens, that is).

Francisco
Give you good night.

Marcellus
Oh, farewell, honest soldier. Who hath relieved you?

Francisco
Barnardo hath my place. Give you good night.

Exit Francisco.

Marcellus
Holla, Barnardo!

Barnardo
Say, what, is Horatio there?

Horatio
A piece of him.

Barnardo

(With evident relief, but also an edge of worry in his voice:)

Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, good Marcellus.

Horatio
What, has this thing (meaning the Ghost) appeared 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 eyes and speak to it.

Horatio

(Chidingly, or even mockingly:)

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, (pointing up at the sky)
When yond same star that's westward from the pole
Had made his course t'illume that part of heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
The bell then beating one –

Enter the Ghost.

Marcellus
Peace, break thee off! Look where it comes again!

Barnardo
In the same figure like the King that's dead.

Marcellus
Thou art a scholar. Speak to it, Horatio. (the guards are largely uneducated – unlike Horatio, who is a student at university – and so they defer to his book knowledge to guide them on how to properly converse with the Ghost)

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? (that is, in the armor and appearance of the recently dead & buried King Hamlet) By heaven, I charge thee speak!

Marcellus
It is offended.

Barnardo
See, it stalks away.

Horatio
Stay, speak, speak, I charge thee speak!

Exit the 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 armor he had on
When he the ambitious Norway combated.
So frowned he once, when in an angry parle
He smote the studded poleaxe on the ice. (lots of editors believe the line here to be “smote the sledded Pollacks on the ice”. This is, frankly, ludicrous and borderline indefensible. You’re telling me the Polish army, during a formal parley, came out onto a sheet of ice in sleds (which would not only be impractical and unwieldy – likely requiring horses! – but also dangerous) and then that the King of the opposing Danish army personally went up to some number of them and physically struck them during angry negotiations? To even envision such a scene, much less suspend one’s disbelief in regards to its plausibility, beggars the imagination. It is much easier to imagine Horatio witnissing King Hamlet frowning during an angry parley and banging his poleaxe on the ice, at which point we only need make sense of “sleaded” as describing the poleaxe – choose your preference between “steeled” and “studded” or some other option; I’ve made my choices clear)
'Tis strange.

Marcellus
Thus twice before, and jump [just] at this dead hour,
With martial (warlike) stalk hath he gone by our watch.

Horatio
In what particular thought to work I know not,
But in the gross and scope of mine opinion
This bodes some strange eruption to our state. (in other words, the presence of this Ghost is a bad omen for Denmark)

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, (that is, this nightwatch that Marcellus, Barnardo, and many others have recently been engaged in)
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon (on the part of Denmark's cannon makers)
And foreign mart for implements of war (on the part of Denmark's foreign arms buyers),
Why such impress (compelled military service) of shipwrights, whose sore (physically tiring) task
Does not divide the Sunday from the week: (that is, Why are Denmark's shipmakers pressed into working 7 days a week?)
What might be toward (going on), that this sweaty haste
Doth make the night joint-laborer with the day (compels them to work night & day)?
Who is't that can inform me?

Horatio
That can I.
At least the whisper goes so: our last King (Hamlet),
Whose image (in the form of a Ghost) even but now appeared to us,
Was as you know by Fortinbras of Norway (Denmark's – and, by extension – King Hamlet's chief regional rival),
Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride, (Norway's King Fortinbras, that is, was egged on by a prideful desire to emulate the success & majesty of King Hamlet)
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet --
For so this side of our known world esteemed him --
Did slay this Fortinbras, who by a sealed compact
Well ratified by law and heraldry
Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands
Which he stood seized of, to the conqueror;
Against the which a moiety competent
Was gagèd by our King, which had returned
To the inheritance of Fortinbras
Had he been vanquisher, as, by the same cov'nant
And carriage of the article designed
His fell to Hamlet. (Horatio is here explaining that – prior to King Hamlet killing King Fortinbras in battle – the two of them had worked out a legally-binding and heraldry-conforming agreement

that whoever killed the other would inherit all their lands)
Now, sir, young Fortinbras, (that is, Prince Fortinbras, the son of the late King Fortinbras – two Princes with the same names as their fathers in this play; very confusing, lol. But if you zoom out far enough, this is actually a play about the Prince of Norway getting revenge against the King of Denmark for killing his father by ultimately inheriting all his lands)
Of unimprovèd mettle hot and full,
Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there
Sharked up a list of landless resolutes (some editors have “lawless” here, but I prefer the plausibility of Prince Fortinbras seeking assistance from a cadre of his peers whose standings could be improved by owning lands, rather than trafficking with a criminal element)
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 compulsatory those foresaid lands
So by his father lost. (in other words, Prince Fortinbras – who is young & brash and out for revenge for his father’s death – has pulled together a group of hungry, landless aristocrats who are willing to join his illicit & dishonorable military action against Denmark / Prince Hamlet in the hopes of inhereting some property in the process) 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 rummage in the land.

Barnardo
I think it be no other but e'en so.
Well may it sort that this portentous figure
Comes armèd through our watch so like the King
That was and is the question of these wars.

Horatio
A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye.
In the most high and palmy state of Rome, (we see a panorama of ancient Rome)
A little ere [before] the mightiest Julius fell, (we see Julius Caesar conferring with his betrayors)
The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets, (we see empty graves, blown open by their inhabitants coming to life and fighting their way to the surface, then shuffling along the streets of ancient Rome like modern movie zombies, clothed in their winding sheets)
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. (we see stars with fiery trains, blood-red clouds, spots in the sun, and the moon going through a lengthy eclipse… then back to Horatio in real time:)
And even the like precurse [same precursor] of feared 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. (that is, signs & augurs similar to those Horatio have just been describing have been occurring in recent days in Denmark)

Enter Ghost again.

But soft [wait], behold [look], lo, where it comes again!
I'll cross it though it blast me. -- Stay, illusion!

It spreads his arms.

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,
Oh, 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 (causing the Ghost to begin to leave).

Stop it, Marcellus!

Marcellus
Shall I strike at it with my partisan? (again: a kind of weapon with a blade at the end of a long pole)

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 [threaten it with a] 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 [crowed].

Horatio
And then it started (moved suddenly) like a guilty thing (person or animal)
Upon a fearful summons (from some source of authority). 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, (we see a cock crowing at dawn)
and, at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
Th'extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine; (we see various extravagant and erring spirits hearing the cock and hastily, guiltily returning to their homes in sea or fire, in earth or air. Back to Horatio in real time:)
and of the truth herein
This present object (the cock, that is, exerting his effect on the Ghost) made probation (demonstrated to be the truth).

Marcellus
It faded on the crowing of the cock.
Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated, (we see a snowy town at Christmastime)
The bird of dawning singeth all night long, (we see a cock crowing in the middle of the night)
And then they say no spirit dare stir abroad; (we see a spirit hearing the cock and deciding to stay indoors)
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm, (we see a family enjoying each others' company around a sumptuous table near a roaring fire, pan out to show a fairy at bay outside the family house window looking in with consternation and fear, then a witch doing the same at a different location, then pan out further to show a peaceful night sky filled with twinkling stars. Back to Marcellus in real time:)
So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

Horatio
So have I heard and do in part believe it.
But look, the morn in russet (reddish brown in color) mantle (a loose sleeveless garment worn over other clothes; a cloak) clad
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill. (we see the first rays of dawn peeking above a dewey, eastern mountain ridge. Back to Horatio in real time:)
Break we our watch up, and by my advice

Let us impart what we have seen tonight
Unto young Hamlet, ("young" Hamlet here distinguishes him from his father, the late King of the same name) for, upon my life,
This spirit, dumb (unspeaking) 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.

[1.2]

Flourish. Enter Claudius, King of Denmark, Gertrude the Queen,
Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, and his sister Ophelia,
Lords attendant [including Voltemand and Cornelius].

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.
(turns to Queen Gertrude, Prince Hamlet's mom and the wife of the very recently deceased King Hamlet)
Therefore our sometime [previous] sister, now our queen,
Th'imperial jointress (a widow who holds a jointure, which is an estate settled on a wife for the period during which she survives her husband, in lien of a dower) of 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 dole (that is, with equal parts happiness & sadness),
Taken to wife. Nor have we herein barred
Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone
With this affair along. (the King is implying here that the attendant courtiers all approved of him marrying his dead brother's widow) For all (of this and to all of you), our thanks.
Now follows (the thing) that you know: young Fortinbras, (that is, Prince Fortinbras of Norway, and not his father the King, whom King Hamlet recently killed in battle)
Holding a weak supposal [valuation] of our worth,
Or thinking by our late dear brother's death
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,
Co-leaguèd [In league] with the dream of his advantage,
He hath not failed 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. (Prince Fortinbras has been sending King Claudius messages asking that the lands his father forfeited to King Hamlet in battle be returned to Norway, and Claudius is not amenable)
Now for ourself, and for this time of meeting,
Thus much the business is: we have here writ
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras, (Claudius here refers to Prince Fortinbras' uncle – the current king of Norway – simply by the name of their home country; a common device in this play)
Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears
Of this his nephew's purpose, to suppress
His further gait herein, in that the levies,
The lists, and full proportions are all made
Out of his subject; (that is, the King of Norway was too old & weak to successfully keep tabs on his nephew's threatening overtures to King Claudius, and so Claudius has written to the Norwegian king to ask him to tell his nephew to knock it off, considering that he's making threats with his uncle's citizens & treasure) and we here dispatch
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand,
For bearers of this greeting to old Norway (again, the Norwegian king),
Giving to you no further personal power
To business with the King more than the scope
Of these dilated articles [weighty letters] 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 (Latin plural form of "Exit") Voltemand and Cornelius.
(Turning to Laertes, the son of his closest confidant Polonius, and brother to Hamlet's love Ophelia:)

And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?
You told us of some suit. What is't, Laertes?
You cannot speak of reason to the Dane
(as above, "the Dane" is the King of Denmark; Claudius here refers to himself)
And lose your voice (meaning, you can't speak sense / bring up rational pursuits with the King and then become unwilling to discuss them). 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 favor 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 towards 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 laborsome petition, and at last
Upon his will I sealed 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. (The word “will” is used several times throughout this play to mean – as it does here – general horniness or male libido. In this case, it serves to allow the King to make a light and saucy pun / play on words: he is saying both “spend your graces at your discretion” and “spend your graces in pursuit of indiscreet activities”.)
But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son – (“cousin” in Shakespeare’s time was a generalized term for “family member”)

Hamlet
A little more than kin, and less than kind. (this is a play on words with kin and kind – he’s basically saying, “A little more familiar than family, yet totally unalike.”)

King
How is it that the clouds still hang on you? [Why do you seem depressed?]

Hamlet
Not so, my lord, I am too much i'th' sun. (another pun, playing on the words sun/son; the joke being that he has now been both his father’s son and his uncle’s – iow, too much in the role of “son”.)

Queen
Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark. (as before, Denmark here means “the king of Denmark”)
Do not forever with thy vailèd [lowered eye]lids
Seek for thy noble father (the dead king Hamlet) in the dust.

Thou know'st 'tis common: all that lives must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

Hamlet
Ay, madam, it is common. (this is a sly diss; Hamlet is basically calling her actions here ignoble, as commoners might engage in)

Queen
If it be,
Why seems it so particular with thee? (his mom is throwing his words back at him with a different meaning: particular being the opposite of common, but also saying that he's being persnickety)

Hamlet
"Seems," madam? Nay, it is, I know not "seems."
'Tis not alone my inky (dark like ink) cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black (in the sense that people customarily wear black during periods of mourning),
Nor windy suspiration (a long deep breath, sigh) of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful [flowing] river in the eye,
Nor the dejected (be)havior of the visage [face],
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief (some editors have "shows of grief" here, which I admit I prefer, but the scholarship I've seen in support of "shapes" seems authoritative)
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play. (the first of many references in the play to acting)
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 [a son's] obligation for some term
To do obsequious (conspicuous, public) sorrow; but to persever [persist]
In obstinate condolement [sadness] is a course
Of impious stubbornness ("impious" because to be so obstinately grief-stricken is, at a certain point, contrary to humbly accepting the will of God). 'Tis unmanly grief. {attacking his manhood! a tried & true rhetorical device}
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven (the point hinted at above is made explicit here),
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,
An understanding simple and unschooled; {brutally hitting Hamlet on all critical fronts}
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 corse (variation of the word “corpse”) 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 (“the world” here primarily meaning “the Danish world” of lords & courtiers in attendance, but also the larger world of international politics the state of Denmark exists within)
You are the most immediate to our throne [next in line to become King],
And with no less nobility of love
Than that which dearest father bears his son
Do I impart towards you. For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg (a university town in Germany, at which school he met Horatio),
It is most retrograde [moving in the opposite direction] to our desire,
And we beseech [implore] you, bend [exert our royal power upon] 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 (majestic plural version of “myself”) in Denmark. -- Madam, come.
This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet
Sits smiling to my heart, in grace whereof [in honor of which]
No jocund health that Denmark drinks today [Every drink that I, the King, drink today]
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell, [will be celebrated with a shot of the cannon]
And the King's rouse the heavens shall bruit again, [and the heavens will echo my revelry]
Respeaking earthly thunder [repeating earthly noisesomeness]. Come, away! (inviting / instructing his entourage to join him as he leaves)

Flourish. Exeunt (Latin plural form of “Exit”) all but Hamlet.

Hamlet
Oh, that this too too solid flesh would melt, (some editors have here “sullied flesh”, but the whole ensuing metaphor works better with “solid”)

Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! [Or, if only God had not outlawed suicide!] (Hamlet is saying he would just kill himself otherwise)
Oh, God, God,
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't, ah, 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 (compared) to this (wretch – or some such implied imprecation – meaning his uncle)
(like comparing) Hyperion (a Titan, in Greek mythology; father to the Sun, Moon, and Dawn) to a satyr (a lustful, drunken little goat-man, also from Greek mythology), (he was) so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem (permit) the winds of heaven
Visit [To blow upon] her face too roughly. (By) 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 [before] those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears (more Greek Mythology: Niobe was a queen of Thebes, daughter of Tantalus, who, weeping for her slain children, is turned into a stone from which tears continue to flow), why, she, even she --
Oh, God, a beast that wants [lacks] discourse of reason
Would have mourned longer! -- married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I (am) to Hercules (a hero of Greek myth). Within a month,
Ere [Before] yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing of her gallèd (sore from weeping) eyes,
She married. Oh, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not (good), 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. (that is, I'll change the name "poor servant" for you with that of "good friend")
And what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio? –

(To Marcellus:)

Marcellus.

Marcellus
My good lord.

Hamlet
I am very glad to see you.

[To Barnardo.]

Good even(ing), sir.

[To Horatio.]

But what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg?

Horatio
A truant disposition, good my lord. (Horatio is playfully pretending to be louche, as young men are wont to do)

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 (of alcohol, obvi) ere [before] you depart.

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

Hamlet
I prithee [I pray thee] (that is: Please) do not mock me, fellow student. I think it was to see my mother's wedding.

Horatio
Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon [immediately after].

Hamlet
(It was done for the sake of) Thrift, thrift, Horatio. The funeral baked meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables. {ice cold criticism; so dope}
Would (that) I had met my dearest foe in heaven
Ere [Before] ever I had seen that day, Horatio!
My father -- methinks I see my father.

Horatio
Oh, 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 [Temper your amazement] for a while
With an attent(ive) ear till I may deliver,
Upon the witness of these gentlemen,
This marvel to you.

Hamlet
For God's love, let me hear!

Horatio

(Cut away to seeing all of the action described below –
both the first & second night – with voiceover)

Two nights together had these gentlemen,
Marcellus and Barnardo, on their watch
In the dead waste and middle of the night
Been thus encountered: a figure like your father
Armed at all points, exactly, cap-à-pie [from head to toe] (from Middle French "(de) cap a pé"),
Appears before them, and with solemn march
Goes slow and stately by them. Thrice [Three times] he walked
By their oppressed (that is, heavily burdened) and fear-surprisèd eyes
Within his truncheon's (a large, wooden club) length, whilst they, distilled
Almost to jelly with the act [experience] of fear,
Stand dumb [voiceless] 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 delivered, both in time (of occurrence),
(and the) Form of the thing, each word (that they had said about the matter was) made true and good (that is, shown to be truthful),
The apparition comes. (Cut back to Horatio:) I knew your father.
These hands are not more like.

Hamlet
But where was this?

Marcellus
My lord, upon the platform (atop the castle) where we watched.

Hamlet
Did you not speak to it?

Horatio
My lord, I did,
But answer made it none. (Switch back to showing the action described:) Yet once methought
It lifted up its head and did address
Itself to motion, like as it would speak;
But even then the morning cock crew [crowed] loud,
And at the sound it shrunk in haste away
(Back to Horatio:) And vanished from our sight.

Hamlet
'Tis very strange.

Horatio
As I do live, my honored 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?

All
We do, my lord.

Hamlet
Armed, say you?

All
Armed, my lord.

Hamlet
From top to toe?

All
My lord, from head to foot.

Hamlet
Then saw you not his face?

Horatio
Oh, yes, my lord, he wore his beaver up. (the faceplate or visor of a helmet that can be moved up & out of the way is referred to as a beaver. This will be shown by having Horatio mime – with his hand – the action showing the beaver move up & away from his face)

Hamlet
What looked he, frowningly?

Horatio
A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.

Hamlet
Pale, or red? (in other words, “Bloodless or ruddy?” The color of the face was connected to the popular idea in Shakespeare’s time of “humors” in the body, and blood’s appearance or lack thereof in the face supposedly thereby tells the viewer more about the emotional / psychological state of the person being described)

Horatio
Nay, very pale.

Hamlet
And fixed his eyes upon you?

Horatio
Most constantly.

Hamlet
I would (have it that) I had been there.

Horatio
It would have much amazed you.

Hamlet
Very like(ly), very like(ly). Stayed it long?

Horatio
While one [The length of time a person] with moderate haste might tell [count to] a hundred.

Both (Marcellus & Barnardo)
Longer (than that), longer.

Horatio
Not when I saw't.

Hamlet
His beard was grizzled [partially gray], no?

Horatio
It was as I have seen it in his life,
A sable (typically a dark brown or black color) silvered.

Hamlet
I will watch tonight. Perchance 'twill walk again.

Horatio
I warr'nt it will.

Hamlet
If it assume my noble father's person [shape],
I'll speak to it, though [even if] hell itself should gape [open]
And bid me hold my peace. I pray you all,
If you have hitherto concealed this sight
Let it be tenable [continued to be defended] in your silence still,
And whatsomever else shall hap(pen) tonight,
Give it an understanding but no tongue (ie, if you've kept this a secret from any/everyone else thus far, please continue to do so);

I will requite (repay, return) your loves. So, fare you well.
Upon the (watch) platform 'twixt [between] eleven and twelve I'll visit you.

All
Our duty to your honor.

Hamlet
Your loves, as mine to you. (Hamlet here is invoking a mutual obligation between the four of them deeper & stronger than the just-mentioned duty: that of brotherly love) Farewell.

Exeunt (Latin plural form of “Exit”) [all but Hamlet].

My father's spirit -- in arms! All is not well.
I doubt [suspect] some foul play. Would [How I wish] the night were come! (meaning he is impatient for the opportunity to see and converse with the Ghost)
Till then, sit still, my soul. Foul deeds will rise,
Though all the earth o'erwhelm (cover, bury) them, to men's eyes.

[1.3]

Enter Laertes, and Ophelia his sister.

Laertes
My necessaries are embarked [My things are packed on the ship I’m sailing on]. Farewell.
And sister, as the winds (to ships’ sails) give benefit
And convoy (transport of letters) is assistant, do not sleep
But let me hear from you.

Ophelia
Do you doubt that?

Laertes
For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favor,
Hold it a fashion [temporary trend] and a toy in blood [unserious in passion],
A violet (short-lived flower) in the youth of primy nature [in the young age of (human) nature],
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance (appeal, entreaty, plea) of a minute,
No more.

Ophelia
No more but so?

Laertes
Think it no more.
For nature crescent [increasing] does not grow alone [only]
In thews (muscles and tendons perceived as generating physical strength) and bulk [mass], but

as this temple (of men's bodies; and, as stage direction: Laertes is here likely referring to his own body) waxes
The inward service of the mind and soul
Grows wide withal (in other words, as men's bodies grow strong, their minds also expand in scope and deepen in seriousness – the implication here being that, as this phenomenon takes hold of Hamlet, he will lose interest in his puerile for Ophelia). Perhaps he loves you now,
And now no soil [dirtiness] nor cautel [trick] doth besmirch (damage, discolor)
The virtue of his will (see note above on meaning / usage of this word); but you must fear,
His greatness (authority, power, station & trajectory) weighed, his will (meaning "ability to act", here, and thereby a repetition of the play on words above by King Claudius) is not his own,
For he himself is subject to his birth. (another of many Shakespearean plays on words herein: "subject" here means both that he is beholden to the circumstance of his (royal) birth, and that he is servilely so; that is – ironically, for a Prince – in the form of a subject, and not a royal personage)
He may not, as unvalued persons do, ("unvalued" meaning, in a technical sense, "commoners", but also a connotation that perhaps gives us some insight into a streak of classism or snobbishness on Laertes' part)
Carve (his path) for himself, for on his choice (of wife) depends
The sanity and health of this whole state (of Denmark),
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed [restricted with limits]
Unto the voice [stated preferences] and yielding [willingness to bend] of that body (politic)
Whereof he is the head. (although modern media like to depict arranged marriages made between members of the nobility primarily as antithetical to romanitic love, in fact a wise statesperson of this time would recognize how marrying a strategically advantageous person was, ideally, in the best interests of a sovereign's subjects, and therefore a very selfless move, rooted in a different, broader kind of love; the point that Laertes is making is that – having been born a royal – Hamlet's love for his subjects must trump his romantic love for Ophelia)
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 limits set by) the main voice of Denmark (the general voice of the Danish people) goes withal (overall).
Then weigh what loss your honor may sustain [how much of a hit your reputation could take]
If with too credent (believing, trusting) ear you list(en to) his songs [romantic overtures],
Or lose your heart (fall in love and give away your heart; or, worse, get it broken), or your chaste treasure (euphemism for vagina) open
To his unmastered importunity (euphemism for penis).
Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,
And keep within the rear of [stay behind] your affection,
Out of the (cannon-)shot and danger of desire.
The chariest maid (most careful & cautious young woman) is prodigal (recklessly exuberant) enough
If she unmask her beauty to the moon (a euphemism for getting naked at night (when the moon

is out), but also (probably) an allusion to women being literal lunatic Maenads).
(The God/dess) Virtue itself (e)scapes not calumnious (shit-talking) strokes (from the pens or brushes of others, or perhaps in the sense of striking blows).
The canker (a destructive fungal disease of apple and other trees that results in damage to the bark) galls (a gall is an abnormal growth formed on plants and trees, especially oaks, in response to the presence of insect larvae, mites, or fungi) the infants [young plants] of the spring
Too oft(en) before their buttons [buds] be disclosed,
And in the morn(ing) and liquid dew of youth
Contagious blastments (sudden strikes or injuries; pernicious things) are most imminent.
(in this metaphor, Ophelia is the youthful bloom of Spring, and cankers are the bad things that can all-too-easily happen to young people if they're not careful)
Be wary, then; best safety lies in fear.
Youth to itself rebels, though none else near. (meaning young people are all-too-often their own worst enemies in their impetuousness & spontaneity)

Ophelia
I shall the 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 puffed (up) and reckless libertine (a person devoid of most moral principles, a sense of responsibility, or sexual restraints),
Himself the primrose path (a road along which one follows the pursuit of pleasure, especially when it is seen to bring disastrous consequences) of dalliance treads,
And recks(ons or listens to) not his own rede (advice). (Ophelia here is calling out hypocritical pastors who do not practice what they literally preach)

Enter Polonius.

Laertes
Oh, fear me not.
I stay too long. But here my father comes.
A double blessing is a double grace;
Occasion smiles upon a second leave. (the import, to my mind, of Laertes espousing some rather clunky & longwinded bits of life advice both here and above (and elsewhere in the play) is that his & Ophelia's father, Polonius, is the exact same way: bloviating & tendentious. Many modern productions of Hamlet tend to turn this echo of persona into a self-knowing, inside joke that Laertes is here making to Ophelia about their father, which they then share a laugh over, but I do not like this interpretation. In my opinion, Laertes is too adoring of his father (and Ophelia too overawed) to make jokes at his expense, especially about a trait of his that Laertes has obviously emulated to the point of unconscious internalization. Furthermore, Hamlet refers to Laertes much later as "a very noble youth", which he wouldn't do if his bon mots were condescending rather than couched in attractive earnestness (in other words, if Laertes were as annoying and vapid as his father, he would similarly be a target of Hamlet's.) Rather, I take all of

this to be a study in character development: Shakespeare wants us to see that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, but that said apple has nonetheless evolved and softened one of its forebear's more irritating traits into a charmingly humanistic form of moralizing)

Polonius
Yet [Still] here, Laertes? Aboard, aboard (your ship), for shame!
The wind sits in the shoulder (the point of greatest leverage, the sweet spot) of your sail,
And you are stayed for. There, my blessing with thee, (Polonius here presumably makes some kind of gesture, like hugging or kissing Laertes on the cheek, or perhaps laying hands on his head)
And these few precepts (general rules intended to regulate behavior or thought) in thy memory
See (that) thou character [write down]. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportioned [disproportionate] thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried (meaning, their character plumbed for the sake of assessing their fitness as a friend),
Grapple (Seize or hold) them to thy soul with hoops of steel,
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment (that is, go broke by funding the revelrous activities – dull here meaning to lessen and the palm being the place where money is often put or held)
Of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel, but, being in,
Bear't [Make it such] that th'opposèd (party) may beware of thee.
Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice [Listen to everyone, but share your thoughts / opinions with few].
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment [Size everybody up but keep your conclusions to yourself].
Costly thy habit [Keep as expensive a wardrobe] as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy -- rich, not gaudy, (that is, buy the best clothes you can, but pay for quality not flash)
For the apparel oft proclaims the man [For people's clothes tell you a lot about them],
And they in France of the best rank and station
Are of all most select and generous, chief in that [And the French elite are famous dandies / Beau Brummells / clotheshorses].
Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft(en) loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry. (husbandry is literally the ability to raise crops & livestock, but here it means more generally "the ability to take care of and provide for oneself or others", the metaphorical edge of which the act of borrowing would obviously dull)
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. (one of many, many rightly famous, piercingly gorgeous & truthful lines in this play. I also think ascribing all of the above wisdom – sure a little long-winded and wordy, but still very good advice! and especially that last piece – to Polonius is Shakespeare's way of adding depth to his character: despite all his outward bluster &

pomposity, he in fact very smart, very astute, and gives good counsel. This also speaks to King Claudius's character. Because if Polonius was actually as incompetent as he seems bumbling, it would speak poorly of the King's judgement to use him as his closest advisor; by making Polonius smarter than he seems, WS is also making Claudius so, as well as similarly elevating / burnishing Laertes' adoration of him, mentioned above, not to mention sharpening Hamlet's hatred of him / adding dimension to his character flaw of misanthropy)
Farewell. My blessing season this in thee! (another hug or kiss goodbye is typically done here)

Laertes
Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

Polonius
The time invites you. Go. Your servants tend (on you – that is, wait upon you).

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

Ophelia
'Tis in my memory locked,
And you yourself shall keep the key of it.

Laertes
Farewell.

Exit Laertes.

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

Ophelia
So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

Polonius
Marry, well bethought.
'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 behooves my daughter and your honor.
What is between you? Give me up the truth.

Ophelia
He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders
Of his affection to me.

Polonius
Affection? Pooh, you speak like a green girl,
Unsifted 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 sterling. Tender yourself more dearly,
Or -- not to crack the wind of the poor phrase
Running it thus -- you'll tender me a fool.

Ophelia
My lord, he hath importuned me with love In honorable fashion.

Polonius
Ay, fashion you may call it. Go to, go to.

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

Polonius
Ay, springes 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. (iow, don't necessarily go to him just because he bids you come)
For Lord Hamlet,
Believe so much in him that he is young,
And (because he's a man and a Prince) with a larger tether (more slack in his leash) may he walk
Than may be given you. In few, Ophelia,
Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers
Not of that dye which their investments show,
But mere implorators of unholy suits,
Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds
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.

[1.4]

Enter Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus.
(Exterior, nighttime; Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus are on the watch platform. They are somewhat huddling together, and individually trying to keep warm; we can see their breath.)

Hamlet
The air bites shrewdly; it is very cold.

Horatio
It is a nipping and an eager air.

Hamlet
What hour (is it) now?

Horatio
I think it lacks of twelve [is shy of midnight].

Marcellus
No, it is struck (on the clock bell).

Horatio
Indeed? I heard it not. It then draws near the season (time)
Wherein the spirit held his wont (that is, has tended) to walk.

A flourish of trumpets, and two pieces goes off.
(That is, two small cannons are fired. In my mind, there is also the sound of general raucous revelry crescendoing in a group of men yelling “Hurrah!” in celebration of the King’s “triumph” of finishing his drink as the trumpets and then guns go off… I think we also hear the King’s dumbass voice / laugh as the loudest among the group. Then maybe the music kicks in to which they all start dancing the upspring.)

What does this mean, my lord?

Hamlet
The King doth wake tonight and takes his rouse (meaning drinks, presumably heavily – a "rouse" is a bumper drink, filled to the brim, or a large drink that is toasted to someone's health; it is often used in the context of celebrations or feasts),

Keeps wassail (another term for feasting & drinking), and the swagg'ring upspring reels; (the upspring was an old German dance)
And as he drains his draughts (swigs or sips) of Rhenish (a kind of German wine) down
The kettledrum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge. (that is, those instruments – and the cannons – are instructed to make noise every time the King finishes a drink. In my mind, this entire passage is dripping with acid & sarcasm so that Hamlet's disdain for the King and his drunkenness is apparent)

Horatio
Is it a custom?

Hamlet
Ay, marry, is't,
But to my mind, though I am native here
And to the manner born, (for the longest time, I thought the phrase was "to the manor born" meaning, born to nobility and growing up in the manor house as opposed to ruder accommodations – and it turns out that lots of sources do spell and mean it this way – but it's wrong: Hamlet is saying he was born to this manner of behavior as a Dane / a Prince) it is a custom
(That would be) More honored in the breach than the observance [in the not doing than the doing].
This heavy-headed revel [overboard partying] (to the) east and (to the) west
Makes us traduced (to traduce is to speak badly of or tell lies about someone so as to damage their reputation) and taxed (by the heavy burden of a peer's low opinion or underestimation) of other nations.
They clepe (call, name) us drunkards, and with swinish (rude, offensive) phrase
Soil our addition (reputation, especially in a heraldic context), and indeed it takes
From our achievements, though (the practice were) performed at (their) height,
The pith and marrow of our attribute.
So, oft(en) it chances [happens] in particular men,
That, (but) for some vicious mole [blemish] of nature in them,
As in their birth, wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin,
By the o'ergrowth of some complexion (meaning aspect of character or personality),
Oft(en) breaking down the pales (a wooden stake or post used as an upright along with others to form a fence) and forts (defended / defending structures) of reason,
Or by some habit that too much o'erleavens (leavens meaning permeates and modifies or transforms something for the better – so, to overleaven is to do harmfully too much of this)
The form of plausive (expressing praise or approval; applauding) manners, (just to put a fine point on this last point: what I think is being expressed is that being, of habit, overly praising or approving of other people, and especially to those of a higher social class – in other words, being a suck up / asskisser – is another way that otherwise good people can be flawed) that these men,
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
Being [Whether it be] Nature's livery (that is, the stamp of nature), or Fortune's star (bad luck),

His virtues else [Whatever his other virtues], be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo,
Shall in the general censure (in the final analysis, or with the benefit of the widest contextual lens) take corruption
From that particular fault. The dram (a small unit of volume) of evil
Doth all the noble substance often dout [extinguish]
To his own scandal. (to me, it is significant that this particular speech is Hamlet's final moment before he sees the Ghost of his Father and his life is forever changed. Although this speech is filled with a lot of truth and accurate observation, it is the classic kind of tedious philosophical digression that Hamlet is often criticized for by the critics. To that end – and to highlight the transition in character – I kind of play up the self-importance and academic pomposity of my delivery here)

Enter Ghost.

Horatio
Look, my lord, it comes!

Hamlet
Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'st in such a questionable (provocative, upsetting) shape
That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
King, father, royal Dane. Oh, answer me!
Let me not burst in ignorance, but tell
Why thy canonized bones, hearsèd in death,
Have burst their cerements? Why the sepulcher (a small room or monument, cut in rock or built of stone, in which a dead person is laid or buried)
Wherein we saw thee quietly interred (some editors prefer "inurned" here, but I find being interred a much more natural thing to envision happening in a sepulcher, although I'm sure many of them do house urns; also it seems diminishing to imagine King Hamlet's ashes being laid to rest instead of his body, not to mention: how does the Ghost reconstitute itself into corporeal form if he's been cremated? {this last point is mostly a joke})
Hath oped his ponderous (heavy) and marble jaws
To cast [vomit] thee up again? What may this mean
That thou, dead corse [corpse], again in complete steel [full armor]
Revisits thus the glimpses (partial, or temporary views) of the moon (in that it constantly waxes and wanes),
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 [Why]? What should we do?

[The] Ghost beckons Hamlet.

Horatio
It beckons you to go away with it,
As if it some impartment did desire
To you alone.

Marcellus
Look with what courteous action
It wafts you to a more removèd ground.
But do not go with it.

Horatio
No, by no means.

Hamlet
It will not speak. Then I will follow it.

Horatio
Do not, my lord.

Hamlet
Why, what should be the fear?
I do not set my life at a pin's fee,
And for my soul, what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself?

[The Ghost beckons Hamlet.]

It waves me forth again. I'll follow it.

Horatio
What if it tempt you toward the flood (running waters), my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles (of a rock or a person's eyebrows: be prominent or overhanging) o'er his base into the sea, (we see the Ghost beckoning, and in a series of jump cuts moving away from the castle and toward the cliffs and Hamlet following, chasing after it)
And there assume some other horrible form
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
And draw you into madness? (we see the Ghost turning from Hamlet's Father into his Mother, Ophelia, into himself, into a devil, and Hamlet losing his mind at the cliff's edge) Think of it:
The very place puts toys of desperation,
Without more motive, into every brain
That looks so many fathoms to the sea
And hears it roar beneath. (Horatio is here advising Hamlet: people who are of sound mind and not under immediate distress of the kind you are now facing regularly find themselves looking

down the face of cliffs to waves crashing against the rocks below and contemplate throwing themselves on them, even if they love life. We see this, perhaps by showing an older man looking wistfully over the cliff's edge with a look of resolve on his face, jump to a different time / daylight and show a young boy looking over and his eyes going wide with terror, jump to a different time / daylight again and at a group of women looking over and laughing, shrieking, playing with and teasing each other)

[The Ghost beckons Hamlet.]

Hamlet
It wafts me still. --
Go on, I'll follow thee.

[They attempt to restrain him.]

Marcellus
You shall not go, my lord.

Hamlet
Hold off your hands!

Horatio
Be ruled. You shall not go.

Hamlet
My fate cries out
And makes each petty arture in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.

[The Ghost beckons Hamlet.]

Still am I called. Unhand me, gentlemen!
By heav'n, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me (that is, I'll kill you if you don't let go of me).
I say, (go) away! –

(To the Ghost:)

Go on, I'll follow thee.

Exeunt (Latin plural form of "Exit") Ghost and Hamlet.

Horatio
He waxes desperate with imagination.

Marcellus
Let's follow. 'Tis not fit thus to obey him.

Horatio
Have after. To what issue will this come?

Marcellus
Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

Horatio
Heaven will direct it.

Marcellus
Nay, let's follow him. (one of the primary themes / subtexts of this play is the tension between Catholics & Protestants – which was raging during Shakespeare's time – and which of the two groups had the mandate of Heaven / access to the one true faith. This final exchange of the scene is considered by some scholars to be an allusion to that theme. I am not an expert in such matters, but I believe Horatio here is supposed to be reflecting putatively Catholic sensibilities of less emphasis on free will / more trust in Divine Providence, whereas Marcellus is taking the more proactive stance that comes with the Protestant approach of believing that God helps those who help themselves)

[1.5]

Enter Ghost and Hamlet.

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

Ghost
Mark me.

Hamlet
I will.

Ghost
My hour is almost come
When I to sulf'rous (sulfur was the material of which hellfire was (is?) believed to consist) and tormenting flames
Must render up myself. (the Ghost here and just below giving an account of his suffering "for a certain term" in Purgatory (in the flames of absolvement during the day and forced to walk at night) is a continuation of the above-mentioned theme / pronouncement on the correctness of Catholic orthodoxy, as such conceptions of the afterlife do not – so far as I know – exist in most all forms of Protestantism)

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 (bound) to revenge, when thou shalt hear (what I have to say).

Hamlet
What?

Ghost
I am thy father's spirit,
Doomed for a certain term to walk the night, (we see the Ghost stalking the castle grounds / nearby town at night, sometimes coming upon humans and frightening them)
And for the day confined to fast in fires, (we see the Ghost screaming, burning in flames in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the day)
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away. (we see the King as a younger man killing people in battle, feasting & carousing with wenches, setting crops on fire while his enemies wail)
But [Were it not] that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest [least consequential] word
Would harrow up (cause distress to) thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres, (stars, like all heavenly bodies, at the time of Shakespeare's writing were considered to follow their trajectories across the sky due to being embedded within crystalline spheres; so "to start from their spheres" means to divert suddently from their pre-ordained paths, which, in the case of one's eyes, would mean they bug out due to shock)
Thy knotted (kinky, technically, but more like curly, or even just mildly wavy – the point is: not straight, so as to be imagined to be straightened by fear) and combinèd (together into handfuls, rather than individually separated due to surprise) locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine (archaic spelling of porcupine).
But this eternal (due to being a feature of God's judgment) blazon (prominent or vivid display) must not be (described)
To ears of flesh and blood. List(en), list(en), oh, list(en):
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 (cases) it is,
But this (case) 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. (I'm pretty sure this passage is meant to be at least tinged with irony, considering how plodding and seemingly interminable his actual revenge proves to be; either Hamlet does not see himself clearly, or is overly-optimistic about his relish for his duty, or he *does* see himself clearly and likes to flatter himself in the eyes of others, or at least his Father. To play up the set up of the humor here, I like to deliver this line with an extra dash of earnestness & quaver in my voice of heroic bravado)

Ghost
I find thee apt (for the task),
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed
That roots itself in ease on Lethe (a river of forgetfulness in Hades) wharf
Wouldst thou not stir in this. Now, Hamlet, hear:
'Tis given out [told to people] that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark (that is, the ears at large of the Danish citizenry)
Is by a forgèd process [a false narrative] of my death
Rankly abused. But know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.

Hamlet
Oh, my prophetic soul! My uncle?

Ghost
Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate [adulterous] beast,
With witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts --
Oh, wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce! -- won to his shameful lust
The will (this word again; see note above) of my most seeming virtuous queen.
Oh, 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, (we see the young King Hamlet & Queen Gertrude on their wedding day looking into each other's eyes with adoration) and to decline
Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
To those of mine. (we jump to seeing the same young King & Queen watching a command performance of Shakespeare's Richard the III – despite it being achronistic and surreally outside of the current "universe" of this play – particularly the scene where Lady Anne finally submits to Richard's will and agrees to marry him) But virtue, as it never will be moved,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven, (we see a noble knight spurning a beautiful, amorous maid, jump cut to that same maid later that day leading a man by the hand up the stairs at an inn from the bar below)
So lust, though to a radiant angel linked, (we see a different young maid, out in the town with her noble husband, as her eyes alight on young man – maybe a busking musician – and widen with desire)
Will sate itself in a celestial bed (we see the maid in white dress in white bed holding her swaddled newborn, with her nurse standing nearby, her noble husband kisses her)
And prey on garbage. (we briefly see the maid getting railed by the musician in his rough abode, then lying with him smiling in afterglow, maybe smoking a cigarette)
But soft (Ghost inhales audibly through his nostrils), methinks I scent the morning's air. (we briefly see the first light of dawn peeking up over a mountain, then back to the Ghost)
Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon, (we see King Hamlet asleep on a lush patch of grass on a beautiful Summer's day under the shade of a tree heavy with green leaves, birds chirping)
Upon my secure hour, thy uncle stole (we see Claudius sneaking up on the sleeping King)
With juice of cursèd hebona in a vial, (we see Claudius opening vial of poison…)
And in the porches of mine ears did pour (...and pouring it in his sleeping brother's ear)
The leperous distillment, whose effect (the King wakes up clutching his ear, screams out in pain as Claudius looks on in terror)
Holds such an enmity with blood of man (here we see a "Dr. House style" CGI animation of biological processes in the bloodstream of the human body)
That swift as quicksilver it courses through (the poison spreads out from the ear)
The natural gates and alleys of the body, (courses through body's circulatory system)
And with a sudden vigor it doth posset (posset means to curdle or thicken – cut to King Hamlet shuddering, convulsing on the arboreal floor, frothing pink foam at the mouth as Claudius sobs uncontrolably, unable to look away from the effects of his deed)
And curd(le) like eager [acidic] droppings into milk (would do)
The thin and wholesome blood; so did it mine, (back to animation: show poison hitting King's blood and making it "posset and curd")
And a most instant tetter (a skin disease in humans or animals causing itchy or pustular patches, such as eczema or ringworm) barked about (that is, covered his body with a biological substance that resembled tree bark in texture – show King becoming immediately (but not instantly) covered with scabs, writhing in agony),
Most lazarlike (like Lazarus, the Biblical beggar, who was "full of sores") with vile and loathsome crust, (we see the King's treebark-like crust of illness weeping with pus at its broken edges as

the King moans in pain & discomfort)
All my smooth body. (visually crossfade from current, lamentable state of King's body to his previous, smooth body sleeping in the orchard)
Thus was I sleeping by a brother's hand
Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched,
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhousled, disappointed, unaneled, (show a priest giving the King communion in the royal apse and then the priest is digitally removed from / otherwise edited out of the scene, show a priest blessing the King and his troops before heading into battle and then the priest is digitally removed from / otherwise edited out of the scene, show a priest giving the King his final rites from his deathbed and then the priest is digitally removed from / otherwise edited out of the scene)
No reck'ning (with Heaven) made, but sent to my account(ing for)
With all my imperfections on my head.
Oh, horrible, oh, horrible, most horrible! (for these three: show King burning in fires, walking at night, back to present day)
If thou hast (human) nature in thee, bear it not.
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damnèd incest.
But howsomever thou pursues this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught [in any way]; leave her (fate, punishment) to heaven
And to those thorns (of guilt, regret) that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once.
The glow-worm shows the matin (French for "morning") to be near
And (be)'gins to pale his uneffectual fire. (that is, the growing intensity of the morning light begins to make the tiny light on the glow-worm pale in comparison – we see a glow-worm crawling along a thin branch of a tree, his glowy parts glowing, the beginning of dawn happening just behind him, which quickly outshines his glowy parts)
Adieu, adieu, adieu! Remember me.

Exit.

Hamlet
O all you host of heaven (cherubim & seraphim, et cetera)! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell? Oh, fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee?
Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe (brain, or skull). Remember thee?
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records (trifling things memorized for fun),
All saws of (trite proverbs or maxims found in) books, all forms (of letters, numbers, writing, argument, et cetera), all pressures past (that provoke feats of memorization, such as school)
That youth and observation copied there,

And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmixed with baser (less important) matter. Yes, yes, by heaven.
Oh, most pernicious woman!
Oh, villain, villain, smiling damnèd villain! (this last comment leads me to give Claudius an inappropriately toothy smile in as many scenes as possible – even when deep in fear & anger – only breaking down and leaving his face towards the end when he is too desperate to keep up appearances any longer)
My (writing) tables, my tables -- meet [appropriate] it is I set it down (in writing)
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.
At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark.
So, uncle, there you are. (by "tables" Hamlet here means a book like one would write in for school, so typically what happens here is some version of either writing or pretending to write down some information about how his uncle Claudius is a smiling villain)
Now to my word (vow, promise).
It is "Adieu, adieu, remember me."
I have sworn't.

Enter Horatio and Marcellus [calling first from within (meaning offstage)].

Horatio
My lord, my lord!

Marcellus
Lord Hamlet!

Horatio
Heavens secure him!

Hamlet
So be it. (canonically, this comment is typically taken to refer to the vow to remember his Father that Hamlet just made, although it is not – to my mind – out of the question that this is also a response to the thing Horatio just said… In any case, the comment is most likely made aside / to himself)

Marcellus
Illo, ho, ho, my lord!

Hamlet
Hillo, ho, ho, boy, come, bird, come! (the patent inanity of this comment is intended to be the obvious launching off point of Hamlet's first bout of feigned madness. The actor playing Hamlet here has to veer almost into vaudevillian slapstick levels of comedy, playing off every other actor as a straightman)

Marcellus
How is't, my noble lord?

Horatio
What news, my lord?

Hamlet
Oh, 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? (I'm not 100% clear on the meaning of "would heart of man once think it" but I take the thrust of this passage to mean something like… "All humans break their promises / are terrible at keeping secrets… but you guys think you won't / you aren't?")

Both
Ay, by heaven, my lord.

Hamlet
There's ne'er a villain
dwelling in all Denmark
But he's an arrant (complete & utter) knave (unscrupulous fabricator).

Horatio
There needs (be) no ghost, my lord, come from the grave
To tell us this.

Hamlet
Why, right, you are i'th' right.
And so, without more circumstance at all
I hold it fit that we shake hands and part:
You as your business and desires 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 am sorry they offend you -- heartily,
Yes, faith, heartily.

Horatio
There's no offense, my lord.

Hamlet
Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio, (Saint Patrick famously drove the snakes out of Ireland, and Claudius has just been referred to as “the serpent that did sting thy Father’s life” by the Ghost… On another note: most modern productions have Hamlet act out a burst of anger or irritation here, which I’m not sure I really get, as an artistic choice. It’s probably just a way of displaying Hamlet’s rage, and illuminating the meaning of “and much offense too”, but I guess I think there are subtler ways of getting this across, though I’m not yet sure what)
And much offense too. Touching this vision here,
It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you. (this is an interesting line, in light of the fact that Hamlet later convinces himself that the Ghost may be gaslighting him like a Cartesian demon)
For your desire to know what is between us,
O'ermaster it 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.

Both
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 (draws and) holds out his sword.]

Hamlet
Upon my sword.

Marcellus
We have sworn, my lord, already.

Hamlet
Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

(The stage directions, in what follows, have the Ghost speaking from “under the stage”, which is to say: out of view of the audience (but clearly audible to them, as well as the people on stage, obviously.) Different directors will handle this differently, but it is important for Hamlet’s lines in the following passages – because he makes reference to him being a “fellow in the cellarage”, a “mole”, and an “engineer” working in the earth – that the Ghost’s voice be emanating from below the other actors / under the ground.)

Ghost cries under the stage.

Ghost
Swear.

Hamlet
Ha, ha, boy, say'st thou so? Art thou there, truepenny? --
Come on, you hear this fellow in the cellarage (see note directly above for context of this remark).
Consent to swear.

Horatio
Propose the oath, my lord.

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

Ghost
Swear.

[They swear.]

Hamlet
Hic et ubique [Here and everywhere]? Then we'll shift our ground.

[He moves them to another spot.]

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
Swear by his sword.

[They swear.]

Hamlet
Well said, old mole. Canst work i'th' earth so fast?
A worthy pioneer! (more remarks connected to the note above about the Ghost being underground) -- Once more remove, good friends.

[They move once more.]

Horatio
Oh, 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. (yet another line that is taken by some scholars to be an allusion to differences in dogma between Catholics and Protestants, where Horatio is again the mouthpiece of the former and its supposedly more limited understanding of the ways of Earth, but especially Heaven) But come,
Here as before: never, so help you mercy,
How strange or odd some'er I bear myself
(As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on),
That you at such times seeing me never shall, (Hamlet presumably mimes out the following while speaking these lines)
With arms encumbered (that is, folded) thus, or this (kind of) headshake,
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase
(Such) As, "Well, well, we know (something)," or "We could (say some things) an if we would,"
Or "If we list [were inclined] to speak (we might reveal some interesting things)," or "There be (some wild things to report), an if they might (be known),"
Or such ambiguous giving out, to note
That you know aught [anything] of me. This not to do,
So grace and mercy at your most need help you,
Swear.

Ghost
Swear.

[They swear.]

Hamlet
Rest, rest, perturbèd 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 joint. Oh, cursèd spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!

[They wait (out of respect) for him to leave first.]

Nay, come, let's go together. (this not only shows that Hamlet is not the kind of Prince to stand on formality, but also symbolically indicates that Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus (and Barnardo, I suppose, though he's not in this scene) are in this together as co-conspirators in regards to the knowledge of the existence of the Ghost and Hamlet's interactions with it)

[2.1]

Enter old Polonius, with his man [Reynaldo] or two.

Polonius
Give him this money, and these notes, Reynaldo.

[He gives money and papers.]

Reynaldo
I will, my lord.

Polonius
You shall do marv'lous(ly) wisely, good Reynaldo,
Before you visit him, to make inquire
Of his behavior.

Reynaldo
My lord, I did intend it.

Polonius
Marry, well said, very well said. Look you, sir,
Inquire me first what Danskers [Danes] are in Paris,
And how, and who, what means, and where they keep,
What company, at what expense; and (in) finding
By this encompassment and drift of question
That they do know my son, come you more nearer
Than your particular demands [specific questions] 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,
Addicted so and so," and there put on him
What forgeries (lies, inventions) you please -- marry, none so rank
As may dishonor him, take heed of that,
But, sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips
As are companions noted and most known
To youth and liberty. (in other words, You can feel free to sully his reputation lightly, with the kinds of behaviors that rich, high status, young bachelors are known to engage in)

Reynaldo
As gaming [gambling], my lord?

Polonius
Ay, or drinking, fencing, swearing,
Quarreling, drabbing [whoring] -- you may go so far.

Reynaldo
My lord, that would dishonor him.

Polonius
Faith, no, as you may season it in the charge (that is, moderate it in the pronouncing).
You must not put another scandal on him
That he is (for example) open to incontinency (plagued by an inability to control sexual desire);
That's not my meaning. But breathe [speak] his faults so quaintly (softly, without vitriol)
That they may seem the taints of liberty [the inherent downsides of license],
The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind,
A savageness in unreclaimèd blood, (I believe this has to do with blood as a humor of the body, and the idea that when it is unreclaimed – however that happens (un-reabsorbed into the body?) – it continues to exert its savage influence on a person)
Of general assault (meaning the kinds of things that affect young men generally).

Reynaldo
But, my good lord --

Polonius
Wherefore [Why] 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 warrant. (“a fetch” is a contrivance, dodge, or trick and “of warrant” means “based on sound reasoning or with a likelihood of success”, so “a fetch of warrant” is “a plausible or justified scheme or plan”)
You laying these slight sullies (small smirches, white lies) on my son
As (though) 'twere a thing a little soiled i'th' working, (that is, as if it were the normal amount of wear and tear the average sinner inflicts on themselves in being human)
Mark you, your party in converse, him you would sound (interrogate, plumb the depths of),
Having ever seen in (connection with) the prenominate [previously-named] crimes
The youth you breathe of guilty (that is, having witnessed Laertes engaging in the kinds of behaviors you’ve just mentioned), (he will) be assured
He closes [agrees] with you in this consequence [matter]:
"Good sir" (or so), or "friend," or "gentleman,"
According to the phrase and the addition
Of man and country. (Polonius is here ineptly attempting to account for the potential variance of the converse party’s response, dependent on their place of upbringing and comparative social status to Reynaldo)

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." (this can be played many ways. Many, if not most, modern productions I’ve seen have it spoken as a question, to indicate Polonius’ confusion. (Oliver Ford Davies, the actor playing Polonius in the 2009 David Tennant version of Hamlet from the BBC, delivers this line with a sharp incredulity that is quite hilarious.) Others have him trail off feebly as if to indicate that he is past forgetful and possibly moving into having dementia) 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 'a [he] gaming, there (he was) o'ertook in's rouse (in his drink – that is, visibly inebriated),
There falling out (arguing, fighting) at tennis," or perchance
"I saw him enter such a house of sale,"
Videlicet (Latin for “Namely”), 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 (that is, those of us who are wise and exert authority),
With windlasses (drum winches used on ships to, among other things, raise & lower anchors)
and with assays of bias (investigations of a person's leanings – or, to follow with the nautical theme, which way the wind is blowing),
By indirections find directions out (that is, discover via misdirection of obfuscation which way a person is tending – or, once more with the nautical theme: arrive at our destination indirectly, as sailors sometimes do when they tack against the wind);
So by (following) my former lecture and advice
Shall you (find out the biases / directions of) 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.

Exit Reynaldo. Enter Ophelia (looking positively shaken).

Polonius
Farewell. -- How now, Ophelia, what's the matter?

Ophelia
Alas, my lord, I have been so affrighted!

Polonius
With what, i'th' name of God?

Ophelia
My lord, as I was sewing in my chamber,
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet (shirt) all unbraced (untied at the neck),

No hat upon his head (it was a sign of madness to not be wearing a hat, I guess), his stockings fouled (messy),
Ungartered (without garters, which are bands worn around the leg to hold up a sock or stocking), and down-gyvèd to his ankle, (this is somewhat obscure – because gyves are a kind of shackle typically worn on the ankle – but the idea apparently being that his stockings rolled down to his ankles looked somewhat like shackles)
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other (out of fear),
And with a look so piteous in purport (meaning, conveyance)
As if he had been loosèd (let loose) out of hell
To speak of horrors, he comes before me.

Polonius
Mad for thy love? (we can see from this line that Polonius is already convinced of the truth of this theory, which adumbrates his admission later on to the King that "I perceived this hot love… before my daughter told me". To this end, I think this line should be delivered with the sharpness of presumption potentially being verified)

Ophelia
My lord, I do not know, But truly I do fear it.

Polonius
What said he?

Ophelia
(we see everything below acted out with Ophelia's words as a voiceover)
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 (though) he would draw it. Long stayed he so.
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
That 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 turned
He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
For out o' doors he went without their help,
And to the last (moment) bended their light (focused their gaze) on me.

Polonius
Come, go with me. I will go seek the King.
This is the very ecstasy [madness] of love,
Whose violent [energetically passionate] property fordoes (undoes, destroys) itself
And leads the will to desperate undertakings

As oft(en) as any passion under heaven
That does afflict our natures. I am sorry.
What, have you given him any hard words of late? (this line is typically – after a longish pause in the wake of "I am sorry" – played drily and with feigned innocence for laughs, since the audience knows with what vehemence Polonius had recently instructed his daughter to cut off all communication with Hamlet)

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 judgment
I had not quoted (noted, observed) him. I feared he did but trifle
And meant to wrack (punish, torment) thee; but beshrew [curse] my jealousy!
By heaven, 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. (this is another line that can be subtly played for laughs off of Polonius' pomposity – the humor here being the irony of him casting beyond himself in his opinions of the younger set lacking discretion as a means of critiquing this tendency in his age) Come, go we to the King.
This must be (made) known, which, being kept close (to the chest), might move
More grief to hide than hate to utter love. (although the dramatic import of this statement is clear, the actual language is less so, to me anyway… I think "More" here should be read more like "Moreso"; in other words, Polonius is not comparing the amount of grief that hides with the amount of hate that utters love, but is saying instead that keeping the knowledge close might moreso motivate grief to hide than it would motivate hate to utter love. I guess the idea of grief hiding is clear – he seems to be saying it would only cause the resultant grief the news would bring to be hidden, not abated – but I'm really unclear on what "hate to utter love" is about. Who here is hating, and who or what are they hating and why? (I assume it's the King potentially hating Polonius and/or Ophelia for the bad news, but it's obscure.) And even more obscure: why might this news cause that hate to potentially utter love? Anyway, again, the point is clear: This is bad news, that will have worse effects if we don't share it with the King.)
Come.

[2.2]

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

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 sith [since] so neighbored to his youth and humor,
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
So much as from occasion you may glean,
Whether aught [anything] to us unknown afflicts him thus
That, opened, lies within our remedy. (I've seen productions with versions of this passage wherein Rosencrantz & Guildenstern react to this ask on the King's part with nervousness – presumably to point up the fact that they start out faithful to their childhood friend, Hamlet, and so are cagey about being asked to potentially betray or mislead him, in order to make their eventual break of faith all that more jarring. However, I don't think the supposed benefit in character development from making their starting place unmistakable is really all that necessary or helpful. And, moreover, it undermines the inexorable efficacy of Claudius' rhetorical skill, not to mention the fact that what he's asking of them at this point is eminently reasonable, and could just as easily be considered a sign of care & affection on the King's part)

Queen
Good gentlemen, he hath much talked of you,
And sure I am two men there is not living
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 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 pleasures more into command
Than to entreaty.

Guildenstern
But we both obey,
And here give up ourselves in the full bent

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-changèd son. -- Go, some of you (courtiers),
And bring these gentlemen where Hamlet is.

Guildenstern
Heavens make our presence and our practices
Pleasant and helpful to him! {oh, the dramatic irony of how this is so not what ends up happening…lol}

Queen
Ay, amen.

Exeunt (Latin plural form of "Exit") Rosencrantz and Guildenstern [and other Courtiers]. Enter Polonius.

Polonius
Th'ambassadors from Norway, my good lord,
Are joyfully returned (that is, they're back and in an obviously good mood, which is a good sign for the success of their / our / Claudius' entreaty to the King of Norway).

King
Thou still hast been the father of [You've yet again brought me] good news.

Polonius
Have I, my lord? I assure 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 policy [Finds out not the cause of things] so sure(ly)
As it hath used to do -- that I have found
The very cause of Hamlet's lunacy.

King
Oh, speak of that! That do I long to hear.

Polonius
Give first admittance to th'ambassadors (to hear their report).
My news shall be the fruit (that is, the dessert) to that great feast.

King
Thyself do grace to them, and bring them in.

[Polonius goes to bring in the ambassadors.]

He tells me, my sweet Queen, that he hath found
The head and source of all your son's distemper. {one of my favorite little details of this play is how Polonius just referred to Hamlet's madness as "lunacy" but Claudius very soon thereafter uses the much more politic term of "distemper" when discussing it with his Mom; this device does a great job of showing how careful & calculating the King is}

Queen
I doubt it is no other but the main (things):
His father's death, and our o'erhasty marriage.

Enter Polonius, Voltemand, and Cornelius.

King
Well, we shall sift [interrogate] him. -- Welcome, my good friends.
Say, Voltemand, what from our brother Norway? (again following the practice of referring to the head of a country by the country's name, which would make Fortinbras' uncle a brother in regality to King Claudius)

Voltemand
Most fair return of greetings and desires.
Upon our first (contact / discussion with him), he sent out (messengers or commands) to suppress
His nephew's levies (intended to raise an army), which to him (the Norweigan King) appeared
To be a preparation 'gainst the Polack,
But, better looked into, he truly found
It was against your highness; whereat grieved
That so his sickness, age, and impotence
Was falsely borne in hand, sends out arrests
On (his nephew, Prince) Fortinbras, which he (the Prince) in brief obeys,
Receives rebuke from (the King of) Norway, and, in fine [put briefly],
Makes vow before his uncle never more
To give th'assay of [to muster or raise] arms against your majesty.
Whereon old Norway, overcome with joy,
Gives him three thousand crowns (a large amount of a large denomination of currency) in annual fee [allowance] (these last couple of lines are often delivered with an ironic or wry edge to the voice, as if Voltemand is marveling at how the King could be moved to reward his disobedient nephew so richly, an interpretation I agree with and borrow)
And his commission [royal permission] to employ those soldiers
So levied (as before) against the Polack,
With an entreaty (to Claudius) herein further shown

[Giving a letter to the King]

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. (in other words, if Claudius is willing to let the apparently treacherous Fortinbras to nonetheless lead the army he has raised through Denmark in order to attack a part of Poland, the Norwegian King promises he won't present any kind of threat)

King
It likes us well [This news pleases me],
And at our more considered (a less busy) time (when we can consider these things more deeply) we'll read,
Answer, and think upon this business.
(In the) Meantime, we thank you for your well-took labor.
Go to your rest. At night we'll feast together.
Most welcome home!

Exeunt (Latin plural form of "Exit") Ambassadors.

Polonius
This business is well ended.
My liege and madam, to expostulate (demand how or why something is so)
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. (the joke here being that Polonius is being cluelessly tedious / not at all brief in his present speech)
Your noble son is mad.
Mad call I it, for to define true madness,
What is't but to be nothing else but mad? (this is a play on words: the definition of madness is literally "to be mad", but also, attempting to define madness in its particulars would itself be an act of madness. Presumably Polonius is visibly tickled by this bit of wit, and he either checks himself or sees that the King & Queen are not similarly amused, which is why he then says:)
But let that go.

Queen
(the above is also the reason the Queen says:)
More matter with less art.
(in other words: Give us more information, and less embellishment)

Polonius
Madam, I swear I use no art at all. (another example of Polonius being accidentally funny

through his supposed obtuseness – he unintentionally here refers to his report as artless)
That he is mad, 'tis true. 'Tis true 'tis pity,
And pity 'tis 'tis true – (presumably Polonius here notices that he is further irritating the Queen / perhaps the King and tries to hurry on) 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. Perpend [Consider].
I have a daughter -- have whilst she is mine (until she is married, at which point she becomes her husband's, that is) --
Who in her duty and obedience, mark,
Hath given me this (letter). Now gather and surmise.

[He reads from] the letter.

"To the celestial [heavenly] and my soul's idol [locus of worship], the most beautified Ophelia."
That's an ill phrase, a vile phrase; "beautified" is a vile phrase. But you shall hear. Thus: "In her excellent white bosom, these..." etc.

Queen
Came this from Hamlet to her?

Polonius
Good madam, stay awhile, I will be faithful [be patient, I will explain all eventually].

[He reads the] letter.

"Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move, (in Shakespeare's time, it was not clear what the stars were made of, nor whether the Sun moved in relation to the Earth or vice versa, thus it was possible to reasonably doubt either of these things)
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love."
"O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers (bad at counting). I have not
art to reckon (again: the capacity to enumerate) my (lovesick) groans. But that I love thee best, oh,
most best, believe it. Adieu. Thine evermore, most dear lady,
whilst this machine is to him (that is, while my body obeys me / while I'm alive), Hamlet."

This in obedience hath my daughter shown me,
And, more above, hath his solicitings (romantic overtures),
As they fell out [happened], by time, by means, and place,

All given to mine ear. (in other words, she told her father Polonius about all of Hamlet's amorous gestures in all their particulars)

King
But how hath she received his love?

Polonius
What do you think of me? (the wording here indicates that Polonius is presumably mildly offended by this question of the King's)

King
As of a man faithful and honorable. (the King is presumably taken aback by Polonius' offense and tries in earnest to reassure him)

Polonius
I would fain (happily, hopefully) prove so. But what might you think,
When I had seen this hot love (between Hamlet & Ophelia) on the wing (that is, in flight / in process) --
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, (stood by passively like a piece of furniture, that is; especially ones which either support the act of writing or contain words yet say nothing)
Or given my heart a winking (as a co-conspirator might do), mute (unspeaking) and dumb (unable to speak),
Or looked upon this love with idle (casual, unmotivated) 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 star. (meaning his royalty puts him outside of your range of eligible bachelors; for more on why this is, see the above discussion regarding how marriage among royals during this era was a tool of statecraft. "Out of thy star" in particular means "outside of the range of possibilities that Fate will afford you via the mechanism of your star")
This must not be." And then I precepts (again: general rules intended to regulate behavior or thought, the same as he gave to Laertes) gave her
That she should lock herself from his resort [frequent visitation],
Admit no messengers, receive no tokens (of affection).
Which (lecture) done, she took the fruits of my advice,
And he (Hamlet), repulsèd (having been turned away by her), a short tale to make,
Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,
Thence to a watch (meaning the kind of sleeplessness that comes from keeping watch all night), thence into a weakness,
Thence to a lightness (being faint and/or lacking in heft or groundedness), and by this declension (some scholars see another play on words here: Hamlet is declining in mental & physical health, but Polonius is also outlining these terms in the way one might demonstrate declension of a verb)

Into the madness wherein now he raves,
And all we wail for.

King

[To Queen.]

Do you think 'tis this?

Queen
It may be, very like.

Polonius
Hath there been such a time -- I'd fain [gladly] know that --
That I have positively [definitively] said "'Tis so"
When it proved otherwise?

King
Not that I know (of).

Polonius
Take this from this, if this (situation) be otherwise. (I don't believe there are any stage directions in any of the versions of this play on what Polonius is or should be doing here, but most directors have him pointing to his head, then to his neck or shoulders – he's, iow, saying "cut my head off if I'm wrong here")
If circumstances lead me, I will find
Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed
Within the center (of the Earth).

King
How may we try it [investigate the matter] further?

Polonius
You know sometimes he walks four hours together
Here in the lobby. (a castle lobby is presumably somewhat analogous to a hotel lobby, or any building with a grand entrance. Also, "walks four hours together" has always disturbed me; I get that the point is to say that he walks for a long time, or for several hours at a time, but why four? It's especially bothersome because this could easily be a mishearing / error in transcribing "walks for hours together")

Queen
So he does indeed.

Polonius
At such a time, I'll (let) loose my daughter to him.
Be you and I behind an arras (a rich tapestry, typically hung on the walls of a room or used to

conceal an alcove) then;
(We'll) 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 (that is, Denmark – or its sovereign)
But keep [take care of] a farm and carters (people who drive carts – as might commonly be found on a farm – as employees or serfs).

King
We will try it.

Enter Hamlet reading on a book.

Queen
But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

Polonius
Away, I do beseech you both, (go) away.
I'll board [speak to] him presently. Oh, give me leave. –

Exit King and Queen.

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

Hamlet
Well, God-a-mercy [God have mercy].

Polonius
Do you know me, my lord?

Hamlet
Excellent(ly) well. You are a fishmonger. (some scholars opine that this is a dig against the way that Polonius is using his daughter to get at Hamlet – essentially that "fishmonger" is a euphemism for pimp – but I find that a bit of a stretch, even considering Hamlet's righteous anger and acid tongue)

Polonius
Not I, my lord.

Hamlet
Then I would (it were) 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 carrion -- (though the basic idea here is clear-ish, the exact meaning of this line is obscure and has engendered much debate among scholars. Some say that the line should read "God kissing carrion" or "God-kissing carrion" – where the Sun is a god in the Greco-Roman sense and has conceived maggots in the dead dog after it kissed him, or via such kissing. The only way I see to play it is to use it as a means of displaying ostentatious madness with a threatening veneer overlaid it – especially considering the caesura that splits this and his next sentence:) Have you a daughter?

Polonius
I have, my lord.

Hamlet
Let her not walk i'th' sun. Conception is a blessing,
but not as your daughter may conceive, friend, look to't. (connecting to the idea above on the conceit that the Sun is the thing responsible for creating the maggots in a dead dog, Hamlet's point is that it may similarly create child in your unwed daughter, which would be a thing worth avoiding)

Polonius

[Aside.]

How say you by that? 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 rogue says here that old men have gray beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plumtree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams – (the obvious comedic play here is to have Hamlet be staring pointedly at Polonius' beard, face, eyes, legs while speechifying thusly)
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, shall grow old as I am, if, like a crab, you could go backward.

Polonius

[Aside.]

Though this be madness, yet there is method in't. – {in case you were wondering where that well-known saying came from : }
Will you walk out of the air, my lord? (meaning indoors – so, presumably the lobby that Polonius implied just above that they were all in at present is partially or fully outdoors?.. I'm unclear)

Hamlet
Into my grave. (the ultimate indoors / never to be outside again, hahaha)

Polonius

[Aside]
(some editors / directors have the aside here start after Polonius' first line below – there are upsides to both choices that I can see)

Indeed, that's out of the air. (this is typically said with a note of shock or horror at Hamlet's macabre humor) How pregnant sometimes
his replies are! A happiness that often madness hits on,
which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be
delivered of. (Polonius is here noting that Hamlet with surprising regularity makes more sense in his madness than many people do in their sanity. This observation on his part is pointing up a common Shakespearean device: having fools / insane people / other low status characters speak the most incisive truths)
I will leave him, and suddenly contrive
the means of meeting between him and my daughter.
-- My honorable 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 [overall] -- except my life, except my life, except my life. (if we take Hamlet's words at face value here, he is not saying that his life is an exception to this rule, but rather that

it follows the rule but Polonius can nonetheless take it – this is presumably (again) a macabre way of joking that he doesn't care if he lives or dies)

Enter Guildenstern and Rosencrantz.

Polonius
Fare you well, my lord.

Hamlet
These tedious old fools!

Polonius

[To Rosencrantz and Guildenstern]

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

Rosencrantz

[To Polonius]

God save you, sir.

[Exit Polonius.]

Guildenstern
My honored lord!

Rosencrantz
My most dear lord!

Hamlet
My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern?
Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do ye both? (the difficulty of playing this extended passage is that – as is soon revealed, and is (in my opinion) the case throughout this entire play – Hamlet is 10 steps ahead of everybody else, so he – like a good cop or prosecutor – only asks questions to which he already knows the answers, which here catches his "excellent good friends" in a lie, which obviously disappoints & angers Hamlet. Yet, at the same time, he is quite fond of them and so at several points along the way of his interrogation he can't help but enjoy their company and also wants to give them opportunities to amend themselves and come correct; this latter energy has to puncture the former at several points)

Rosencrantz
As the indifferent children of the earth. (meaning either "Like carefree people: unbothered", or possibly (to my mind) an allusion to Adam & Eve before Eve ate the apple; the implication being that they are indifferent because they are not burdened with knowledge, as louche young men are wont to claim)

Guildenstern
Happy in that we are not over-happy. (this statement interweaves with the one above in the shared wisdom of recognizing that moderation is the key to real happiness)
On (the God/dess) Fortune's cap we are not the very button (that is, the pinnacle or most favored).

Hamlet
Nor the soles of her shoe?

Rosencrantz
Neither, my lord.

Hamlet
Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favors. (Hamlet is here making a saucy joke, saying that Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Fortune's pussy – "in the middle of her favors" is both a way of saying "receiving a moderate amount of luck" (which, as the two stated before in their jokes above, is the wisest amount of favor one can receive) and "favors" being her womanly charms, the vagina is in the middle of them)

Guildenstern
(In) Faith, her privates we. (an excellent follow-on to the joke just made – "privates" here meaning both "lowest level of soldier or servant", and also, obviously, her private parts. From a character-building standpoint, this joke also shows a glimpse of why Hamlet likes these guys so much / they have historically been such good friends)

Hamlet
In the secret parts of Fortune? Oh, most true, she is a strumpet (a woman who sleeps around, a prostitute). (this is one more play on R&G being, or being inside, Fortune's sex organs (but also a misogynistic slur – calling Fortune a whore because they dislike the fate she doles out.) The other great thing about this writing is that this is exactly the way that young men talk & joke with each other. Then Hamlet gets right down to business:)
What news?

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

Hamlet
Then is doomsday near. (because something so unusual as people becoming honest could only mean that the end of the world is at hand)
But your news is not true. (he tries to immediately give them another chance to be more forthcoming, but still with an edge of anger:)
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 (large, capacious) 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. (not only is this line a very true thing brilliantly said, but it again connects directly back to the theme Rosencrantz & Guildenstern started with: true happiness lies in moderation of action & thought; Hamlet is being a bit of a dick in turning their own theme back on them)
To me it is a prison.

Rosencrantz
Why, then your ambition makes it one. 'Tis too narrow for your mind. (this, and the next few lines that follow, is a brilliant bit of character development: Hamlet made a throwaway line about Denmark being a prison but Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are running with it and taking the opportunity to lecture Hamlet about the nature of ambition and how he should behave, so much so that they end up making nonsense comments regarding their thesis; this shows that they have a tendentious nature and are not as smart as they think they are – exactly the kind of qualities one would expect to find in hangers-on to a person such as Hamlet who are not, ultimately, true friends)

Hamlet
Oh, 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 outstretched heroes the beggars'

shadows. (Hamlet is here mocking the logical conclusion of the nonsense claim that a shadow could have a shadow, and that ambition is such a thing: in that case, unambitious people such as beggars are corporeal, and their shadows are ambitious people such as monarchs and heroes)
Shall we (go) to th'court? For, by my fay [faith], I cannot reason (think straight / reason your meaning). (this is a wry admission, because in fact Hamlet is saying that Rosencrantz & Guildenstern can't reason and he is over it)

Both
We'll wait upon (attend, go with) you.

Hamlet
No such matter. I will not sort you with the rest of my
servants, (in yet another bit of humor that depends on divergent interpretations of words with multiple connotations, Hamlet is here pretending like Rosencrantz & Guildenstern have offered to actually wait upon him, like servants) for, to speak to you like an honest man, I am
most dreadfully attended. (this is presumably a dig at them, and reveals a flash of anger on Hamlet's part, as they are attending him presently)
But, in the beaten way of
friendship, (yet another dig, using the word beaten – which is presumably delivered sharply – to mean the well-trod or usual way but implying violence) what make you at Elsinore? (the name of the royal family's castle / stronghold)

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. (meaning he's overpaid for them, because they are undeserved) Were you not sent for?
Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation?
Come, come, deal justly with me.
Come, come; nay, speak.

Guildenstern
What should we say, my lord?

Hamlet
Why, anything -- but to th' purpose. (depending on how the punctuation is dictated here, this could be taken to mean either "Say anything, but connect it to the matter at hand" or "You'll say anything not connected to the matter at hand" – the former is imploring them to be honest and the latter is accusing them of being unable to be honest) You were sent for,
and there is a kind of confession in your looks which

your modesties have not craft enough to color.
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 [the things one friend has the right to ask of another], by the consonancy
of our youth [the good times we shared together when we were young], by the obligation of our ever-preserved
love [the responsibilities we owe each other due to the love we still feel for each other], and by what more dear a better proposer could
charge you withal [by what someone more eloquent could persuade you to be moved by], be even and direct with me whether
you were sent for or no.

Rosencrantz

[Aside to Guildenstern]

What say you?

Hamlet

[Aside]

Nay, then, I have an eye of you (I see who, or how, you truly are). --
If you love me, hold not off (from telling me the truth).

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 molt no feather. (in other words, because I am now guessing as to the reason you were sent for, rather than you telling me why, you will not have to feel as though you have divulged information, nor that you need to inform the King & Queen of such, so that your secretly working for them can remain intact)
I have of late [recently], but wherefore [why]
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
to me a sterile promontory. This most excellent

canopy the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging
firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden
fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a
foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a
piece of work is a 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? (ancient philosophy held that the four essences were air, water, earth, and fire; the fifth – or quint – essence was that of spirit or life, which animates the dust we're created from) 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
lenten (being during the time of Lent; in other words, parsimonious, spartan) entertainment
(such as a host provides) the players [actors] shall receive from
you. We coted (outstripped, surpassed) them on the way, and hither are they
coming to offer you service (of putting on a play).

Hamlet
He that plays the King shall be welcome; his majesty
shall have tribute of me. (to me, this line needs to be delivered in a very pointed way – and with particular emphasis on the word "his" – so as to provide contrast with the actual King, who is not welcome and who does not have tribute of Hamlet) The Adventurous Knight shall
use his foil and target, the Lover shall not sigh gratis,
the Humorous Man shall end his part in peace, ("Humorous" here means "of the humors" such as bile, phlegm, etc. Hamlet is saying the dispeptic character shall come, via the play, to some resolution which allows them to arrive at a more peaceful temperament) the
Clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickled
o'th' sear, (the phrase "tickled o'th' sear" means here "easily excited to laughter." It is a metaphor from the world of firearms: The sear is a part of the trigger mechanism that releases the firing hammer. When a gun is tickled o'the sear, it means that the trigger is so sensitive that the slightest touch will cause the gun to fire.) and the Lady shall say her mind freely, or the
blank verse (verse without rhyme, especially that which uses iambic pentameter, such as Shakespeare uses, notably within this very play) shall halt for't. What players are they?

Rosencrantz
Even those you were wont [prone] to take such delight in, the
tragedians of the city (tragedians here being actors who specialize in performing tragedies, as opposed to the other main type of actors: comedians).

Hamlet
How chances it they travel? Their residence (back in the city, where they're from) both in reputation and profit was better both ways. (that is, they made more money and were more highly regarded in the city, so why are they on the road?)

Rosencrantz
I think their inhibition (at staying where they were) comes by the means of [is due to] the late [recent] innovation. (Rosencrantz says more about this innovation shortly)

Hamlet
Do they hold the same estimation [positive public opinion] 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 (acting) endeavor keeps in the wonted pace. (that is, at the customary level of skill)
But there is, sir, an aerie [nest] of children, little eyases (young hawks or falcons),
that cry out on the top of question (make proclamations on political issues of the day), and are most
tyrannically clapped for't [loudly applauded for it]. These are now the fashion,
and so berattle the common (public) stages -- so they call them --
that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose quills
and dare scarce come thither. ("many wearing rapiers" are those of high enough wealth or social status as to be carrying swords, and they are afraid of goose quills because that's the implement the authors writing these political opinions that the children are giving voice to are using to do so. Political satire of the kind being described here was an actual phenomenon that was trending during Shakespeare's lifetime)

Hamlet
What, are they children? Who maintains 'em?
How are they escoted [supported]? Will they pursue the quality
no longer than they can sing [Will they pursue acting careers only until their voices change]?
Will they not say
afterwards, if they should grow themselves to
common players -- as it is most like if their means

are not better -- their writers do them wrong to make
them exclaim against their own succession? (the point Hamlet is making here is that: assuming, as we reasonably can – unless they have or find some other greater source of income – that these youthful mouthpieces grow up to be actors on the public stages, won't they resent the playwrights presently putting words in their mouths for making them speak out against the powerful people who might otherwise become their patrons? Or, perhaps, speak against their succession simply into the world of adults writ large. There's also a clever pun here with "their writers (righters)... do them wrong")

Rosencrantz
Faith, there has been much to-do on both sides [Indeed, both sides of this issue have been going to great lengths to argue their position on it],
and the (citizens of our) nation holds it no sin to tarre them to controversy [thinks there's nothing wrong with slandering them with scandal]. There was for a while no money bid for argument unless
the poet and the player went to cuffs in the question. (that is, recently and for awhile now, no theatre owners would pay to have a play produced unless the playright and the actors had a fistfight over the issue)

Hamlet
Is't possible?

Guildenstern
Oh, there has been much throwing about of brains (fights with people getting their brains beaten in).

Hamlet
Do the boys (meaning the child actors) carry it away (succesfully portray the action behind the words they're voicing)?

Rosencrantz
Ay, that they do, my lord, Hercules and his load too. (Hercules performed 12 labors, each of which would have had to have had elaborate props and characters to convincingly portray on stage)

Hamlet
It is not very strange, for my uncle is King of Denmark,
and those that would make mouths at [make fun of] him while my
father lived give twenty, forty, fifty, an hundred ducats
apiece for his picture in little (that is, for a small souvenir image of him, like a cameo. Hamlet is pretty obviously here making fun of Rosencrantz & Guildenstern, but also sycophants more generally. Considering that they were all three just recently jovially joking about the new trend in the common stages, this line is a sudden return to upset & disappointment with them on his part). 'Sblood (short for "Christ's blood", a mild oath), there is something
in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out. (when the science of Physics was a

nascent practice, it was referred to as “natural philosophy”; this is basically Hamlet’s way of saying “There is something unnatural in this [change of opinion on my uncle on people’s part], if only science could explain it”)

Flourish (of trumpets) for (the arrival of) the players.

Guildenstern
There are the players. (not only is this a cue to the audience cluing them in to who is coming onstage, but it can also be seen or portrayed as a move on Guildenstern’s part to forestall Hamlet from going any further down the line of inquiry he had just begun on. To that end, I tend to perform this line with an edge of guilty urgency in my voice)

Hamlet
Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore. Your hands,
come. Th'appurtenance (an accessory or other item associated with a particular activity or style of living) of welcome is fashion and
ceremony. Let me comply with you in this garb, lest
my extent (of hospitality) to the players, which, I tell you, must show
fairly outward (that is, be remarkably explicit and noticeable), should more appear like entertainment
than yours (meaning, let me make a good show of welcoming you heartily, otherwise it will pale in comparison to the grand welcome I’m about to perform for the actors – this is another sudden change of tone on Hamlet’s part back to comity & friendship).
You are welcome. But my uncle-father
and aunt-mother are deceived. {referring to Claudius & Gertrude as uncle-father and aunt-mother is fricking hilarious}

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. (many editors propose that this last word was a misprint or copyist’s error for “heronshaw”, which is a type of heron. If this is so, this comparison perhaps makes more sense, but it is evocative & amusing (as an indicator of the depths of his act of madness) as is if not)

Enter Polonius.

Polonius
Well be with you, gentlemen.

Hamlet
Hark you, Guildenstern, and you too, (Rosencrantz) at each (of my) ear(s be) a hearer:
that great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling clouts (the kind of blanket a baby is wrapped in).

Rosencrantz
Haply he is the second time come to them, for they say an old man is twice a child. (this game rejoinder shows that they are fully back to being jovial with each other)

Hamlet
I will prophesy he comes to tell me of the
players. Mark it. -- (pretending to be mid-conversation with R&G:) You say right, sir, a Monday morning, 'twas then indeed.

Polonius
My lord, I have news to tell you.

Hamlet
My lord, I have news to tell you. When Roscius (a famous actor of the pre-Christian era) was an actor in Rome –

Polonius
The actors are come hither, my lord.

Hamlet
Buzz, buzz. (the equivalent of “Yeah, right” or “I’m sure”, in modern speech)

Polonius
Upon my honor --

Hamlet
Then came each actor on his ass. (comedic play on words: Hamlet is ostensibly saying the actors arrived riding donkeys, but connected to the line Polonius just said, its second meaning is that Polonius has the honor of an ass / is an ass)

Polonius
(note that by blithely proceeding, Polonius ignores Hamlet’s diss, either because he didn’t get the joke, or because he is too cowardly to stand up for himself – both of which speak to his character)
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. (this comedic line is again another demonstration of how tedious and long-winded Polonius can be) Seneca (the Younger, a Roman dramatist) cannot
be too heavy nor Plautus (a Roman comedic playwright) too light. For the law of writ
and the liberty, these are the only men (“the law of writ” being serious plays depicting historical events or classical mythology, and “the liberty” being improvised, bawdy pieces performed often by amateurs in street theater).

Hamlet

O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou? (Jephthah was a judge who presided over Israel for six years, and unwittingly vowed to God to kill his own daughter)

Polonius
What a treasure had he, my lord?

Hamlet
Why,
One fair daughter and no more,
The which he lovèd passing well. (considering that Jephthah accidentally killed his own daughter, this line is piercingly mordant)

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 [chance],
God wot (Old English for “to know”),
and then you know,
It came to pass,
As most like it was.
The first row of the pious chanson (chanson is French for “song”, so a pious chanson would be something like a hymn) will show you more,
for look where my abridgment (shortening, or interruption) comes.

Enter four or five Players.

Hamlet
You are welcome, masters, welcome all. -- I am glad

to see thee well. Welcome, good friends. -- Oh, my
old friend! Thy face is valanced [bearded] since I saw thee last.
Com'st thou to beard me in Denmark? -- What, my
young lady and mistress! By'r Lady (By Our Lady; that is, Mother Mary), your ladyship (this actor is not actually a lady but instead a boy playing a woman's role – it was in fact illegal during Shakespeare's time for women to be actors) is
nearer to heaven than when I saw you last (that is, has grown an inch or more), by the
altitude of a chopine (a woman's platform shoe of the 15th-17th centuries that had a very high heel). Pray God your voice, like a
piece of uncurrent (not passing in common payment, not receivable at par or full value) gold, be not cracked within the
ring. (yet another punning play on words: if a gold coin had a crack within the ring that was its perimeter, it would be considered not legal tender. But also, if the boy has hit puberty such that his voice is cracking, he can no longer play women's parts) -- Masters, you are all welcome.
We'll e'en to't,
like French falconers: fly at anything we see. (in other words, engage in amusements indiscriminately. Because of their centuries of mutual antagonism, the French were a regular target for mockery on the part of the English (and vice versa) because, obviously, a falconer that would send his bird at anything is an idiot) We'll
have a speech straight. Come, give us a taste of
your quality. Come, a passionate speech.

First (meaning Lead) Player
What speech, my good lord?

Hamlet
(an important point to keep in mind for the passage that follows: The speech that Hamlet is asking the Player to speak is – as far as I know – not from another author. In other words, all of the compliments that Hamlet is about to give this speech / its author are basically Shakespeare praising his own skill as a playwright from within a play that he has written, lol… In case you were wondering why people consider him a genius!)
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 (pearls before swine, so to speak). But it was, as I received it,
and others whose judgments in such matters
cried in the top of mine, (that is, whose opinions on such matters that were better-informed or more authoritative than mine) an excellent play, well
digested in the scenes, set down with as much
modesty as cunning. I remember one said there
were no sallets in the lines to make the matter
savory, nor no matter in the phrase that might
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't I chiefly loved: 'twas Aeneas' (mythical hero of Troy and Rome) tale to Dido (legendary founder and first queen of the Phoenician city-state of Carthage), and
thereabout of it especially where he speaks of
Priam's (last king of Troy during the Trojan war) slaughter. If it live in your memory, begin
at this line -- let me see, let me see –

The rugged Pyrrhus (another name for Neoptolemus, son of the hero Achilles and the princess Deïdamia; Pyrrhus means “Red-haired”), like th'Hyrcanian beast (a fierce lion, like those said to inhabit the Hyrcanian region on the Caspian Sea in ancient times) --
'Tis not so (Hamlet is here checking himself at his erroneous beginning), it begins with Pyrrhus.
(then remarks aloud that he is confident that the passage does begin with Pyrrhus, before starting again:)

(we see all of the below shown on screen / what follows is largely voiceover)
The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable (as mentioned above, typically a dark brown or black color) arms,
Black as his purpose (which was to kill Trojans), did the night resemble
When he lay couchèd [seated] in the ominous horse (the Trojan one, that is),
Hath now this dread and black complexion (of his) smeared
With heraldry (coat of arms, or just generally: representation) more dismal. Head to foot
Now is he total [completely covered with] gules (a red-colored heraldic tincture), horridly tricked
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,
Baked and empasted with the parching streets (that is, the fires that have engulfed the streets of conquered Troy have baked the blood of the Trojans that Pyrrhus has killed and is covered in, turning it into the consistency of a paste) {such a badass passage / mental image, lol}
That lend a tyrannous and damnèd light
To their vile murders. Roasted in wrath and fire, (this first roasting is a metaphorical one, provoked by Pyrrhus’ anger at his father Achilles’ death at the hands of the Trojans)
And thus o'ersizèd with coagulate gore (doubling down on the “baked and empasted” imagery from above, Pyrrhus is here described as being caked with so much cooked blood and guts that he is oversized – larger than his regular stature) {incredible stuff},
With eyes like carbuncles (an abscess or boil, but also a red gem, such as a garnet, which is the likely connotation here), the hellish Pyrrhus
Old grandsire Priam seeks.
(asking the Player to take over the speech from here:) So proceed you.

Polonius
(I would swear be)'Fore God, my Lord, well spoken, with good
accent and good discretion. (Polonius later reveals that he “played once in the University… and was accounted a good actor”, so this praise on his part must ring as genuine)

First Player
(as directly above: we see all of the below shown on screen / what follows is largely voiceover)
Anon [Presently] he finds him (Pyrrhus finds Priam),
Striking too short at (meaning trying but failing to hit) Greeks (the foes of the Trojans). His

antique (old, out of fashion, long-unused) sword,
Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls,
Repugnant to command. Unequal(ly) matched (because Priam is old & weak),
Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide (misses him),
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
Th'unnervèd father (Priam) falls (meaning the draft created by Pyrrhus' sword missing was enough to knock over the unsettled, elderly Priam). Then senseless (inanimate) Ilium (another name for the city of Troy),
Seeming to feel this blow (to the father of the city), with flaming top
Stoops to his base (that is, the burning structures of conquered Troy collapse), and with a hideous crash
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear (meaning the noise distracts him from striking Priam); for lo! his sword,
Which was declining on the milky (white-haired) head
Of reverend (revered, and elderly) Priam, seemed i'th' air to stick (that is, Pyrrhus' sword stopped in mid-air).
So as a painted (picture of a) tyrant Pyrrhus stood,
And, like a neutral (immune) 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 (the speech here is describing the calm that often appears at the center of a storm), anon (suddenly) the dreadful thunder
Doth rend the region (shatters the peaceful space), so (similarly), after Pyrrhus' pause,
A rousèd vengeance sets him new a-work,
And never did the Cyclops' hammers fall
On Mars his armor forged for proof eterne (eternal strength and integrity)
With less remorse than Pyrrhus' bleeding sword
Now falls on Priam. (the analogy here is to the Cyclopses who were the mythical metalsmiths of the armor of the god of war, Mars – the speech is saying that their hammerfalls were less forceful than the blows that Pyrrhus rained down on the elderly Priam with his sword) {lmao}
Out, out, thou strumpet (Goddess) Fortune! All you gods
In general synod (assembly, council) take away her power (over humans' fates),
Break all the spokes and fellies (the outer rims of a wheel, to which the spokes are fixed) from her wheel,
And bowl the round nave (hub of her wheel of Fortune) down the hill of heaven (Mount Olympus)
As low as to the fiends! (in Hell)

Polonius
This is too long. (to have this reaction to such a beautiful and – presumably – powerfully delivered speech demonstrates that for all his purported love of the theater, Polonius is in fact a Philistine and a boor)

Hamlet
It shall (go) to the barber's with your beard. -- (this angry retort meaning, basically, “Your *beard* is too long!”)

(To the First Player.)

Prithee, say on. He's for a jig, or a tale of
bawdry, or he sleeps. (meaning Polonius is so uncultured / has such poor taste he’ll fall asleep to anything less basely entertaining than a dancy song or a dirty story) Say on. Come to Hecuba (King Priam’s wife).

First Player
But who, ah, woe, had seen the moblèd (being wrapped or muffled in, or as if in a hood) queen
--

Hamlet
The moblèd queen!

Polonius
That's good. "Moblèd queen" is good.

First Player
(as directly above: we see all of the below shown on screen / what follows is largely voiceover)
Run barefoot up and down, threat'ning the flames
With bisson rheum [blinding tears], a clout (a piece of cloth, a rag) upon that head
Where late [recently] the diadem [crown] stood, and, for a robe,
About her lank and all-o'erteemèd loins (that is, wrapped about her lanky body, which showed obvious signs of having borne many children)
A blanket in th'alarm of fear caught up --
Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steeped
'Gainst (Goddess) Fortune's state (of affairs / being) would treason have pronounced;
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 clamor [sudden cry] that she made,
Unless things mortal move them not at all,
Would have made milch [milk-yielding] the burning eyes of heaven
And passion (of the kind that Christ felt; that is, suffering, anguish) in the gods.

Polonius
Look where he has not turned his color, and has
tears in's eyes.(Polonius is here marveling at how the actor is able to bring tears to his eyes without showing the (typically) attendant flush of emotion which would normally bring color to the face) -- Prithee (I pray thee), no more.

Hamlet
'Tis well. I'll have thee speak out the rest of this soon.

[To Polonius]

Good my lord, will you see the players well bestowed (in the accommodations afforded them)?
Do ye hear, let them be well used [taken care of], for they are the
abstracts and brief chronicles of the time (impression-recorders of our age). After your
death you were better have [better off having] a bad epitaph (on your gravestone) than their
ill report while you live.

Polonius
My lord, I will use them according to their desert (show them the level of accommodation their station in life dictates).

Hamlet
God's bodykins (diminutive form of “body”, a mild oath), man, much better. Use every man
after his desert [Treat every man according to the things he deserves] and who (among us) shall
(e)scape (receiving a) whipping? {Preach.}
Use them after your own honor and dignity; the
less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.
Take them in.

Polonius
Come, sirs.

Exit Polonius.

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

[Aside to the First Player]

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 [write] down and insert in't, could you not? (considering that the passage of “The Murder of Gonzago” that we are soon treated to by the players is considerably longer than 12 - 16 lines, it’s interesting to imagine which ones are those that Hamlet is supposed to have written down and inserted into it – I’m guessing it would be mostly the full-throated responses of

the Queen objecting to the idea of marrying a second husband – if true, this would be Hamlet putting the words he wishes his Mom would utter in real life into the mouth of her fictional analogue)

[First] Player
Ay, my lord.

Hamlet
Very well. Follow that lord (Polonius), and look you mock him not.

Exeunt (Latin plural form of "Exit") Players.
(To Rosencrantz & Guildenstern:)

My good friends, I'll leave you till night. {perhaps this is a bit of an interpretive stretch, but this saying of Hamlet's has always struck me as a sort of foreshadowing, in the sense that when next he sees them (in a substantive scene, anyway), everyone's fortunes are / the world they're inhabiting is much darker}
You are welcome to Elsinore.

Rosencrantz
Good my lord.

Hamlet
Ay, so, God b'wi' you. {again, probably stretching overly far on this one, but the way that Hamlet rejoins Rosencrantz's "Good" with "God" – both making a play on words, but also improving upon R's choice of them (in the sense that God is better than Good) – seems to me an implicit judgment on Hamlet's part that R&G could and probably should do better or make better choices, and kind of wishing them luck. Especially when one looks to see how many times they've used the phrase "Good my lord" with Hamlet over the previous passages, it's easy to imagine the latter starting to be annoyed with them over it, and so having a double motivation to deliver this line in a cutting way that will nonetheless go over their heads in its full import… but I'm probably just overthinking this, ha}

Exeunt (Latin plural form of "Exit") [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern].

Now I am alone.
Oh, 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 (as opposed to actual suffering),
Could force his soul so to his whole conceit (that is, make his very essence embody the conceit of the script he is enacting)
That from her (that is, his soul's) working all his visage wanned (his face became unnaturally pale, as from sickness or grief),
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken (cracking) voice, and his whole (bodily) function suiting
With (that is, creating) forms to his (actorly) 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 (of the theatergoers) with horrid speech,
Make mad [insane] the guilty, and appal the free (innocent),
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak (to wander aimlessly, to be indecisive or hesitant, or to be slow and sluggish)
Like John-a-dreams (a nickname for an unproductive daydreamer), unpregnant of my cause (barren of his aims of revenge),
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 [head] across?
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by th' nose? Gives me the lie i'th' throat
As deep as to the lungs? (the precise meaning of this passage is perhaps obscure – what does it mean to lie to someone in their lungs? – but it paints such a vivid image that it feels clear: There's lying to someone in their face, and then there's lying to them past their face, through their throat, and into their very lungs.) {Beautiful stuff.} Who does me this,
Ha? 'Swounds (short for Christ's wounds – videlicet, the puncture wounds in his palms and side, or the stigmata – another mild oath), I should take it; for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-livered (chicken shit, in modern speak), and lack gall (the bodily humor gall – or yellow bile – was, under the ancient physiognomic theory of humors, associated with the element of fire and the characteristics of heat, dryness, and bitterness. It was also associated with the choleric temperament, which is characterized by ambition, decisiveness, aggression, and short-temperedness. To say that he is lacking it, Hamlet is basically calling himself – again, in modern language – a wimp or a pussy)
To make oppression bitter (that is, to make the oppression being imposed by Claudius bitter to him), or ere [before] this
I should ha'(ve) fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal (that is, well-fed the local birds of prey on his uncle's viscera).
Bloody, bawdy villain! Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless [one-of-a-kind] villain!
Oh, vengeance!
Why, what an ass am I! Ay, sure, this is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a whore {this flash of sex-shaming misogyny, along with the way he abuses Ophelia, and disdains his Mother, are Hamlet's biggest character flaw, to me, but one must commit to embracing it and playing it faithfully, as it makes him human, complex, and multi-dimensional} unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing like a very drab (a slovenly woman, or prostitute),

A scullion (a servant assigned the most menial kitchen tasks). Fie upon't, foh! About, my brain! (Hamlet is here experiencing the shock of a flash of insight which interrupts his woman-hating rant)
Hum, 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
With most miraculous (bodily) 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 (pay attention to him) to the quick (the sensitive and vulnerable part of a person, especially the soul or conscience; although it is not insignificant that this word also means the animating life force). If he but blench (a sudden flinching movement out of fear or pain, or to become pale)
I know my course [what I have to do]. The spirit that I have seen (meaning the Ghost of his Father)
May be the devil, and the devil hath power
T'assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps,
Out of my weakness and my melancholy (Hamlet here notably recognizes some of his own flaws, similar to how he does in the “nunnery” speech),
As he is very potent with such spirits (meaning the Devil has powerful influence over people who tend to such traits),
Abuses me to damn me (misleads or otherwise tortures him in the hopes of getting him to falter and end up in Hell). I'll have grounds
More relative than this. (this is a somewhat odd passage for us, because the modern connotation of “relative” means something more like “open to interpretation” or “up for debate”, which would presumably not be the kinds of grounds Hamlet would prefer for deciding upon his course of action; in fact, it obviously means something here more like “related to the true facts of the matter at hand”, rather than just upon the thoughts and fears that the (perhaps) ill-intentioned or even devilish Ghost has put in his head) The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.

[3.1]

Enter King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Lords.

King
And can you by no drift of conference (tending of topic of conversation)
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 sounded,
But with a crafty madness keeps aloof
When we would bring him on to some confession
Of his true state. (the above lines, and Claudius' "nor what he spake… was not like madness" are some of my favorite pieces in the play because they lend a wonderful realism to the proceedings; Hamlet is not such a good actor as to fully convince them he's mad, and they're not so stupid as to believe his bad acting)

Queen
Did he receive you well (with good manners)?

Rosencrantz
Most like a gentleman.

Guildenstern
But with much forcing of his disposition.

Rosencrantz
Niggard (stingy, ungenerous) of (asking) question, but of our demands
Most free in his reply.

Queen
Did you assay him to any pastime [ask him to join you in any light entertainment]?

Rosencrantz
Madam, it so fell out that certain players [actors]
We o'erraught 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 beseeched [begged] me to entreat [ask] 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, and drive his purpose on
To these delights.

Rosencrantz
We shall, my lord.

Exeunt (Latin plural form of "Exit") Rosencrantz and Guildenstern [and Lords].

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 espials [law-abiding spies] (because he is the King, and so the source of law, but moreover because they are ostensibly seeking to discover the cause of his madness so that they can help him),
Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing (Hamlet while) unseen (by him),
We may of their encounter frankly judge,
And gather by him, as he is behaved,
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 wonted way again,
To both your honors.

Ophelia
Madam, I wish it may.

[Exit Queen.]

Polonius
Ophelia, walk you here. -- Gracious (King), so please you,
We will bestow ourselves.

[To Ophelia, as he gives her a book]

Read on this book,
That show of such an exercise may color
Your loneliness. We are oft(en) to blame in this,
'Tis too much proved (because it so commonly occurs), that with devotion's visage (that is, the face or appearance of acting with devotion)
And pious action we do sugar o'er

The devil himself.

King

[Aside]

(Some editors prefer to have the King say this first line audibly in response to Polonius and then do the rest of this passage aside… I see positives to both approaches.)

Oh, 'tis too true!
How smart [painful] a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
The harlot's [prostitute's] cheek, beautied with plast'ring art (makeup),
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
Than is my deed to my most painted word.
Oh, heavy burden!

Enter Hamlet.

Polonius

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

[The King and Polonius conceal themselves.]

Hamlet

To be, or not to be, that is the question,
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind (upon consideration) to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them (by dying). To die, to sleep --
No more (both in the sense of "death is no more than this; simply sleeping" and "after death, to thereafter be no more") -- and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to [that the human body has inherited the ability of experiencing]; 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. (that is, insofar as end of life means end of life's suffering, it is something we may all wish for) To die, to sleep;
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub (the complicating detail, the crux of the matter),
For in that sleep of death what dreams {love that Shakespeare reduces all theories on the afterlife down to "dreams"} may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil (a confusion or turmoil)
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life. ("so long" because life doesn't feel short, or nearly short enough, when it is filled with misfortune & malady)
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely (insolent or insulting language or treatment),
The pangs of disprized (unvalued, disdained, with the attendant implication that the love is unrequited – some editors here have "despised") love, the law's delay (either in catching wrongdoers or in prosecuting justice),
The insolence of office (officials), and the spurns

That patient merit of th'unworthy takes (those who have / that which has merit must patiently accept spurns from those who don't / that which doesn't),
When he himself might his quietus [death] make
With a bare bodkin (a small pointed instrument, like a dagger)? Who would fardels [bundles] bear (on their backs),
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But [Were it not] that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn (a limit or boundary, as of a field)
No traveler returns, puzzles the will (confounds one's intentions),
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of.
Thus conscience {I often do "air quotes" while pronouncing this word, because I think Shakespeare's intent here is for Hamlet to be dubious of this euphemism} doth make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution (the natural tint that colors being resolved to do a thing)
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought (similar derision as for "conscience" is expressed for "thought" here),
And enterprises of great pith (the essence or core of a thing) and moment (in the sense of being momentous, or – like the term from physics – having inertia due to being massy)
With this regard [In this way] their currents (meaning their flow of actions or thoughts) turn awry
And lose the name of action. Soft you now (a common Shakespearean exclamation, which means something like "Hold up!" or "Wait a minute!"),
The fair [beautiful] Ophelia! -- Nymph, in thy orisons [prayers]
Be all my sins remembered (a fanciful way of saying "Please remember me in your prayers").

Ophelia
Good my lord,
How does your honor for this many a day? (meaning, "How have you been recently?" where "your honor" is a term of respect)

Hamlet
I humbly thank you, well, well, well.

Ophelia
My lord, I have remembrances [tokens of affection] of yours
That I have longèd long to redeliver [long desired to give back to you].
I pray you now receive them.

Hamlet
No, not I. I never gave you aught. (not only is this knowingly untrue denial on Hamlet's part rather cold-hearted – inspired, one presumes, by his hurt feelings at Ophelia's action here – but it must also provoke a shock of fear in her that her eavesdropping Father and/or the King might wrongly conclude that she has lied about his affections for her / said tokens, which can shade her delivery of the next line)

Ophelia
My honored 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.

[She offers Hamlet the remembrances.]

Hamlet
Ha, ha! Are you honest?

Ophelia
My lord?

Hamlet
Are you fair (meaning beautiful)?

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 (interplay, conversation)
than with honesty?

Hamlet
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 likeness. This was sometime [previously] 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 (born sinners that we Humans are) but we shall relish of it (that is, enjoy lying or being otherwise sinful).

I loved you not. {oof… Hamlet really is a complete asshole to Ophelia throughout this play, his hurt feelings at her disloyalty notwithstanding… I'm convinced that it's all intentional dramatic tension so that his "I loved Ophelia" speech at her graveside can be all the more explosive & raw}

Ophelia
I was the more deceived.

Hamlet
Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a
breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent(ly) honest,
but yet I could accuse me of such things that it
were better my mother had not borne (given birth to) me: I am
very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more
offenses at my beck than I have thoughts to
put them in, imagination to give them shape,
or time to act them in. (another nice display of how in touch with his downsides Hamlet is. Also interesting to note that one of the negatives cataloged is "revengeful". Considering how not full of revenge he often seems throughout this long play, not sure if this is meant to be ironic, but I presume it is)
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. (although there's no stage direction to this effect, in most of the productions I've seen, there is some sort of noise made offstage here, meant to indicate that one of the hidden interlopers has inadvertently done something to give away their presence. This is naturally followed with a look of realization on Hamlet's part of what or who provoked the noise, followed (typically) by deep disappointment in Ophelia for her willingness to be used as bait in this spying ploy. Hamlet's sudden change of subject is hard to reconcile without such a device.)
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. (though I find it overdone / prefer something a bit subtler, this line is typically delivered with exaggerated volume, so that it's unmistakably clear that Hamlet wants Polonius to hear him)
Farewell.

Ophelia
Oh, 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 calumny (false or defamatory statements). 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 (via makeup). You jig, you amble, and you lisp, (I keep vacillating on whether or not it's sharper to say this last word with an affected lisp. I've seen the device used in several versions, and it doesn't always work...)
you nickname God's creatures (I want to say this is something Eve was known to do in Eden, but can only find a reference to such from Mark Twain's "Extracts from Adam's Diary" lol), and make your
wantonness your ignorance (the phrasing here is a bit tricky, but the thrust seems to be that women either play dumb in regards to their lustfulness or that they play dumb in order to effect such). Go to [Go away, or Knock it off], 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 (meaning Claudius, obvi – lol),
shall live; the rest shall keep as they are [be left alone]. To a nunnery, go.

Exit.

Ophelia
Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword, (I'm convinced this last word is an allusion – however subtle – to penis on Shakespeare's part, and thereupon add a hint of rapture in Ophelia's voice when delivering it)
Th'expectancy [future hopes] and rose of the fair state,
The glass [mirror] of fashion and the mold of (bodily) form, (that is, the mold that men's bodies are formed from)
Th'observed of all observers (meaning, the thing that all observers – from commoners to nobles – are observing), quite, quite down,
And I, of (all) ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his musicked vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason
Like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh,
That unmatched form and feature of blown (blooming, blossoming) youth

Blasted with ecstasy [Destroyed by madness]. Oh, woe is me
T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see! (the somewhat clumsy implication here is that Ophelia has in this very moment tipped into madness, such that she is now visually hallucinating)

Enter King and Polonius [stepping forward from concealment].

King

Love? His affections do not that way tend,
Nor what he spake [spoke], though it lacked 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 [suspect] the hatch(ing) and the disclose (of the “something”)
Will be (a source of) some danger; which for to prevent,
I have in quick determination
Thus set it down: he shall (go) with speed to England
For the demand of our neglected tribute. (England is, in this play, a subject or tributary of Denmark due to – it is later alluded to by Claudius, when he speaks of the “raw and red” “cicatrice” – military conquest, and the vassal subjects are apparently late on their regular payments, so Claudius is seizing on collecting such as an excuse to send Hamlet there)
Haply [With any luck] 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. (because this was his pet theory as to why Hamlet was mad, and he staked his reputation as a king’s counselor on being correct about it) -- 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 (unrestrained, direct) with him,
And I'll be placed (so please you) in the ear
Of all their conference (that is, within earshot of their conversation). If she find him not [can’t get him to disclose the reason for his sadness / madness],
To England send him, or confine him where
Your wisdom best shall think.

King

It shall be so;

Madness in great (powerful, authoritative, rich) ones must not unwatched go. (the irony / comedy here being that Claudius is a great one whose madness currently goes unwatched by those in his orbit)

[3.2]

Enter Hamlet, and two or three of the Players.

Hamlet

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to
you, trippingly on the tongue; {Hamlet is here obviously a fan of his own diction or elocution – it's not clear whether or not, or to what degree, this self-praise is supposed to be perhaps ironic self-deprecation – by which I mean, comedically self-aggrandizing for the purpose of forestalling criticism on the part of the professional actors… In fact, this entire passage, where a Prince deigns to instruct professionals on how to do their jobs, would be much more grating as a piece of character development, if the advice he gave weren't so apt and intelligent. As it is, I take it to be a charming demonstration of how earnestly he loves the theater and the art of acting, while also highlighting one of his character flaws: being kind of full of himself (or "very proud" as he put it above in the "nunnery" speech)) but if you mouth (over-enunciate or over-articulate) it,
as many of our players [actors] do, I had as lief (happily, gladly) the town
crier (a person whose job it is to shout out the news / events / formal decrees in the center of town) had spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air
too much with your hand, (like) thus (Hamlet is here presumably miming an actor sawing the air too much with their hand), but use all gently;
for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say,
whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and
beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.
Oh, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious
periwig-pated (that is, wearing a periwig on his head; a periwig was a highly styled wig worn formerly as a fashionable headdress, apparently especially by certain kinds of actors) fellow tear
a passion(ate speech) to tatters, to
very rags (often referred to, in acting circles, as "chewing the scenery"), to split the ears of the groundlings (spectators who stood in the part of a theater in Shakespeare's time where there were no seats, the central ground), who
for the most part are capable of (appreciating) nothing but
inexplicable dumb-shows (dumb here meaning "voiceless"; dumb-shows were short pieces of dramatic mime – popular in Shakespeare's time – embedded within plays that were meant to summarize, supplement, or comment on the main action; in fact, there is a dumb-show contained within the performance of "The Murder of Gonzago" that happens later in this play – in that sense, it is a play within a play within a play. It is notable that Hamlet talks down about the dumb-show then, too) {which I take to be an indication of Shakespeare's feelings on the device} and noise. I would have
such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. (in the Middle Ages, Termagant or Tervagant was the name given to a god which European Christians believed Muslims worshipped. The word is also used in modern English to mean a violent, overbearing, turbulent, brawling,

quarrelsome woman; a virago, shrew, vixen. In the past, the word could be applied to any person or thing personified, not just a woman)
It out-Herods Herod. (Herod the Great, King of the Roman client state of Judea. He is remembered for his massive public works projects, and his violence – supposedly (probably apocryphally) ordering the massacre of all boys in Judea under the age of two in order to prevent Jesus, who was referred to in prophecy as "the King of the Jews", from growing up to dethrone him. The point being made here that such scenery-chewing actors are more over-the-top than this famously large-scale persona)
(I) Pray you avoid it.

Player
I warrant your honor (that we will endeavor to do so).

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 [don't overdo your performance to the point of unnaturalness]. For anything so
overdone is from [contrary to] the purpose of playing [acting], whose end [aim],
both at the first [beginning of it] 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 (meaning, the force it exerts on individuals living through it). Now this overdone,
or come tardy off, though it make the unskillful (in art production, art appreciation, or just life in general) laugh,
cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of
the which one (of the grieving judicious) must in your allowance o'erweigh a
whole theater of others [of the laughing unskillful]. Oh, there be players (actors) that I
have seen play, and heard others praise, and that
highly, not to speak it profanely (such caveat being issued because he is about to speak plainly on unchristian things), that, neither having
th'accent of Christians (this term could basically be a stand-in for Europeans) nor the gait of Christian, pagan,
nor no man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have
thought some of nature's journeymen (that is, the understudies to Nature – journeymen being above the level of apprentice, but far from being a master) had made men,
and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably. {the mental image of periwig-pated actors strutting around a stage and bellowing as being the off-brand products of the journeymen understudies to the master Nature are so delightfully risible}

Player

I hope we have reformed that (bad habit) indifferently (well) with us, sir.
(I've seen a lot of versions where the Players seem to love this exchange of ideas with the Prince, but to my mind, they're barely tolerating this lecture from their patron while all smiles on the surface)

Hamlet
Oh, 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 (in intelligence or taste, one presumes) spectators to laugh too,
though in the meantime some necessary question [crucial plot point]
of the play be then to be considered [goes unadressed]. That's villainous,
and shows a most pitiful ambition (namely, to make idiots laugh, especially for one's own aggrandizement) in the fool (this is a pun / play on words, meaning "idiot", but fool also being another term for clown) that uses it.
Go make you ready.

Exeunt (Latin plural form of "Exit") Players.
Enter Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern.
[To Polonius]

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.
(To Rosencrantz & Guildenstern)

Will you two help to hasten them?

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
We will, my lord.

Exeunt (Latin plural form of "Exit") [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern].

Hamlet
What ho, Horatio!

Enter Horatio.

Horatio
Here, sweet lord, at your service.

Hamlet
Horatio, thou art e'en as just [honest] a man
As e'er my conversation coped withal. (to say “You’re as honest a man as ever I’ve conversed with” is another way of saying “You’re one of the most honest men I’ve ever met” and touches a little bit the idea that Hamlet’s conversation has, thus far, had to cope with lots of less honest men)

Horatio
Oh, 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?
No, let the candied tongue (of flattery) lick absurd pomp (of the kind displayed at court, for example)
And crook the pregnant [ready capable] hinges of the knee (in the act of bowing)
Where thrift (in the sense of thriving) may follow fawning. Dost thou hear?
Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
And could of men distinguish, her election
Hath sealed thee for herself, for thou hast been
As one in suff'ring all that suffers nothing,
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
Hast ta'en [taken\ with equal thanks; and blest are those
Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
To sound what stop 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 are so many wonderful ways this recognition of Hamlet’s that he’s gone too far in his praise of Horatio could be played; he embarrasses himself at the depths of his expression of affection, or he sees that it is embarrassing Horatio or otherwise making him uncomfortable, or he could cooly play it off smirkingly with zero trace of chagrin, etc)
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 afoot,
Even with the very comment [critical analysis] of thy soul
Observe mine uncle. If his occulted (hidden) guilt
Do not itself unkennel (set free) in one speech (the one including the 12-16 lines Hamlet inserted in the play, presumably),

It is a damnèd ghost that we have seen,
And my imaginations are as foul
As Vulcan's (Roman god of fire, volcanoes, metalworking) stithy (forge). Give him heedful note (notice),
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,
And after(wards) we will both our judgments join
In censure of his seeming [in analysis of his comportment].

Horatio
(Very) Well, my lord,
If he steal aught [anything] the whilst this play is playing
And (e)scape detecting, I will pay the theft.

Enter King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern,
and other lord attendant with his Guard carrying torches.
Danish march. Sound a flourish

Hamlet
They are coming to the play. I must be idle (meaning either at leisure, or pretending to be mad).
Get you a place.

King
How fares our cousin Hamlet? (the King here is asking how Hamlet is doing…)

Hamlet
(...but Hamlet, pretending to be crazy, interprets the word “fares” to mean “eats”)
Excellent, i'faith, of the chameleon's dish; I eat the air,
promise-crammed (there was apparently a biological theory in Shakespeare’s time that chameleons subsisted on air). You cannot feed capons (a castrated male chicken fattened for eating) so.

King
I have nothing with [to say to] this answer, Hamlet.
These words are not mine (meaning, intended for me or pertinent to my question).

Hamlet
No, nor mine now. (another joking play on words, he means they’re no longer his because he spoke them, at which point they left him)

[To Polonius]

My lord, you played [acted] once i'th' university, you say?

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

Hamlet

And what did you enact?

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

Hamlet
It was a brute (play on Brutus) part (play on acting role) of him to kill so capital (play on Capitol) a calf (calling Polonius inexperienced, weak, or gullible) there. --
Be the players ready?

Rosencrantz
Ay, my lord, they stay upon your patience [wait upon your readiness].

Queen
Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

Hamlet
No, good mother, here's mettle more attractive.

Polonius

[To the King]

Oh ho! Do you mark that?

Hamlet

[To Ophelia, as he lies at her feet]

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

Ophelia
No, my lord.

Hamlet
I mean, my head upon your lap.

Ophelia
Ay, my lord.

Hamlet
Do you think I meant country matters? ("country" here meaning "rough" or "uncultured" as compared to denizens of the city, or even more so of courtiers, but is also a saucy play on "cunt"; some actors love to emphasize this joke by noticably stressing the first syllable of "country", and some others revile this choice as being heavy-handed)

Ophelia

I think nothing, my lord.

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

Ophelia
What is, my lord?

Hamlet
Nothing. (another saucy joke: he means the vaginal cavity, such negative space lying between maids' legs being nothing)

Ophelia
(Said with, to my mind, thinly veiled anger or irritation:)
You are merry, my lord.

Hamlet
Who, I?

Ophelia
Ay, my lord.

Hamlet
Oh, God, your only jig-maker (one who plays jigs: lively, and usually bawdy, song and dance routines). 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. (I imagine Ophelia says this with true concern in her voice, that Hamlet might actually be that out of touch with time / timelines)

Hamlet
So long? Nay, then, let the devil wear black, for I'll
have a suit of sables (a sable is a marten (chiefly arboreal weasel-like mammal) with a short tail and dark brown fur (hence the definition of the word "sable" above as being of that color) native to Japan and Siberia and valued for its fur. When Hamlet says "Let the devil wear black," he's mockingly saying he himself can stop wearing mourning vetements, since his Dad has been dead four months already). Oh, 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-horse,

whose epitaph is, "For oh, for oh, the hobby-horse is forgot." (the hobby-horse was a figure of a horse fastened about the waist in the Morris dance, which was an English folk dance that was waning in popularity in Shakespeare's time due to pressure from Puritans, who found it to be a pagan ritual harmful to public morals)

Hautboys (another name for "oboes", borrowed from the French compound term "haut" (high) and "bois" (woods)) play. The dumb-show enters.
Enter [Players as] a King and Queen very lovingly; the Queen embracing him. 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 (of excalamation / lamentation). The Poisoner, with some two or three mutes [unspeaking actors], 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 (Latin plural form of "Exit") [Players].

Ophelia
What means this, my lord?

Hamlet
Marry, this is miching (skulking, cowardly, freeloading) mallecho (misdeed). It means mischief. (on the part of The Poisoner Claudius, obviously)

Ophelia
Belike this show imports the argument [outlines or explains the plot & point of view] of the play.

Enter [a Player as] Prologue.

Hamlet
We shall know by this fellow (if so).
The players [actors] cannot keep (quiet, as one would expect of skillful) counsel; they'll tell all.

Ophelia
Will he tell us what this show meant?

Hamlet
Ay, or any show that you will show him. Be not
you ashamed to show (your naked body, it is implied, or perhaps some sexual act), he'll not shame to tell you
what it means.

Ophelia
You are naught, you are naught (wicked, naughty). I'll mark [pay attention to] the play.

Prologue
(Prologue is both a separate introductory section of a literary or musical work, as well as the name for an actor who – as in this case – delivers such a section)
For us and for our tragedy,
Here stooping to your clemency,
We beg your hearing patiently.

[Exit.]

Hamlet
Is this a prologue, or the posy (short motto or line of verse on the inside) of a ring?

Ophelia
'Tis brief, my lord.

Hamlet
As woman's love. {oof… brutal}

Enter [two Players as] King and his Queen.

(Note: the language in this play within a play – and even the rhyming words, which were, I presume, at an earlier point in The Great Vowel Shift https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Vowel_Shift – is markedly old-fashioned compared to that spoken by the characters within Hamlet. An analogy would be like watching a movie set in present times where the characters watched a black & white movie from the 30's where everyone was speaking in a Mid-Atlantic accent and using outdated slang)

King
Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round (Phoebus is an epithet – meaning "Bright" – for Apollo, the Greek god of light, and the ancient Gods were supposed to be riding vehicles – primarily chariots – across the heavens, thus "Phoebus' cart" is a way of saying "the Sun")
Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orbèd ground, (Neptune's salt wash is the Ocean, and Tellus is another word for Earth, which is its orbèd ground. Therefore, these first two lines are a fanciful way of saying "The Sun has gone around the Earth – which is what many people in Shakespeare's time believed – 30 times"; also known as the geocentric (as opposed to heliocentric) model of the Universe (see above, in Hamlet's letter, wherein he says "Doubt that the Sun doth move".) Of course, whether you think the Sun goes around the Earth or the Earth around the Sun, you'd count each completed circuit as a year, so this is all just a way of saying "Thirty years have passed…")
And thirty dozen moons with borrowed sheen (the moon's light is borrowed from the Sun, that is)
About the world have times twelve thirties been (in the geocentric model, the moon – like the Sun and all other heavenly bodies – goes "about the world", along with yet more poetic elaboration on the passage of 30 years: 1 new moon per month * 12 months * 30 years = thirty dozen moons have gone about the world in 12 * 30 = 360 times)
Since love our hearts and Hymen (Greek god of marriage ceremonies) did our hands
Unite commutual (reciprocal) in most sacred (wedding) bands (meaning rings).

Queen

So many journeys may the sun and moon
Make us again count o'er [over] ere [before] love be done! (that is, “Let 30 more years pass before our love be done!”)
But woe is me, you are so sick of late,
So far from cheer and from your former (healthy) state,
That I distrust you. Yet though I distrust,
Discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must.
For women's fear and love hold quantity:
In neither aught [anything], or (both) in extremity.
Now what my love is, proof (via actions over 30 years time) hath made you know,
And as my love is sized, my fear is so.
Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear;
Where little fears grow great, great love grows there. (these last six lines are all focused on one thesis: women fear losing things only so much as they love them; therefore, don’t let my great fear at losing you discomfort you)

King
Faith, I must leave thee, love, and shortly too;
My operant (bodily) powers their functions leave to do [can no longer perform].
And thou shalt live (on) in this fair world behind,
Honored, beloved; and haply [with any luck] one as kind (as me, the King is saying)
For husband shalt thou --

Queen
Oh, confound the rest (of what you were about to say)!
Such love must needs be treason in my breast.
In second husband let me be accurst [accursed]!
None wed the second but who killed the first. {of course many members of the audience would be shocked by this line – most of all the King – and many of them would make noises about it, as is often depicted in versions of this play I’ve seen, but my favorite thing to imagine here – for its comedic effects / purpose – is the actors being surprised at the audience’s reaction. Perhaps they were until now only vaguely aware of the change of guard at the palace, or the fact that the King’s wife used to be his sister-in-law, and so it is slowly dawning on them over the course of their performance that there are lines they’re being made to recite here which could very well put their livelihoods, freedom, and even lives in danger… Yet it would also be a very bad idea for them to stop acting / refuse the Prince who has asked them to perform the lines he personally wrote… Fucking hilarious stuff, if handled correctly}

Hamlet
Wormwood, wormwood. (wormwood is a bitter plant (and the basis of the putatively hallucinogenic alcohol absinthe, coincidentally) – Hamlet is remarking that that was a bitter line to have to hear on the part of both the player King and (we assume he hopes) the real King)

Queen

The instances [motivations] that second marriage move (to happen)
Are base respects of thrift (that is, either saving or gaining money), but none of love.
A second time I kill my husband dead
When second husband kisses me in bed. {again: easy to imagine the audible gasps and concerned murmurs that would ripple through the audience at hearing this line, and hilarious to imagine the actors breaking character to nervously check in with each other in fear for their lives / livelihoods due to unexpectedly causing a scandal}

King
I do believe you think what now you speak,
But what we do determine (to do), oft we break (our promise).
(Stated) Purpose is but the slave to (the) memory (of the feelings that give rise to such statements),
Of violent birth, but poor validity, (that is, borne out of violent passions, but on shaky verification / justification)
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. (meaning, as soon as the act motivated by strong feelings is completed, the strong feelings and the act are no more)
Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament; (that is, the thing that makes one person the happiest can make another person the saddest)
Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident. (tiny accidents have the power to turn a great joy into a great sadness, and vice versa)
This world is not for aye (forever, eternal), 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 (in status or fortune), you mark [notice] his favorite flies;
The poor advanced (in status or fortune) makes friends of enemies;
And hitherto doth love on fortune tend,
For who not needs (money) shall never lack a friend,
And who in want (of money) a hollow (that is, unfaithful, untrue) friend doth try [probe or attempt to depend upon]
Directly seasons (makes) him his enemy.
But orderly to end where I begun,
Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices (our little plots & plans) still are overthrown;
Our thoughts are ours, their ends (results) none of our own.
So, think thou wilt no second husband wed,

But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead. (this is such a rhetorically solid & well-constructed argument delivered so eloquently, we can easily envision the Player King delivering it with much relish and ending with a self-satisfied smile at the power of his inexorable logic compellingly delivered – exactly in the same way Claudius acts. Which makes the fire-breathing rejoinder the Queen comes back with all the more hilarious – and poignant, insofar as how sharply it contrasts with the meek mewling the real Queen has so far come out with)

Queen
Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light,
Sport and repose [rest] lock from me day and night,
To desperation turn my trust and hope,
An anchor's cheer in prison be my scope (of living)!
Each opposite (from happy thing) that blanks the face of joy
Meet what I would have well, and it destroy! (that is: whatever things in life make joy disappear I ask that they destroy whatever I would prefer be doing well)
Both here (on Earth) and hence (in the afterlife) pursue me lasting strife,
If once (I am) a widow, ever (again) I be wife!

Hamlet
If she should break it [her word] now!

King
'Tis deeply sworn.
Sweet, leave me here awhile.
My spirits grow dull, and fain [gladly] I would beguile
The tedious [tiresome] day with sleep.

Queen
Sleep rock thy brain (like a cradle),
And never come mischance between us twain!

[The Player King] sleeps. Exit [Player Queen].

Hamlet
Madam, how like you this play?

Queen
The lady doth protest too much, methinks. (this is most clearly understood to be droll commentary on the vehemence of the Player Queen's latest objections)

Hamlet
Oh, but she'll keep her word. (absolutely brutal intimation of the Queen his Mother being unfaithful to her wedding vows)

King
Have you heard the argument (plot / point of view)? Is there no offense in't?

Hamlet
No, no, they do but jest, poison in jest. No offense i'th' world.

King
What do you call the play?

Hamlet
The Mousetrap. Marry (variant of Mary, short for By Mary, meaning Jesus' Mother, naturally; expressing surprise, indignation, or emphatic assertion), how? Tropically (of or involving a trope, figurative). This play is
the image [representation] of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is
the Duke's name, his wife Baptista. You shall see anon [shortly].
'Tis a knavish (facile, unserious) piece of work, but what of that? Your
majesty and we that have free souls, it touches us not.
Let the galled (made sore by rubbing) jade (an inferior or worn-out horse) wince, our withers (the highest part of a horse's back, lying at the base of the neck above the shoulders) are unwrung.

Enter Lucianus.

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the King.

Ophelia
You are as good as a chorus, my lord. (in ancient Greek tragedy, the chorus was a group of performers who comment on the main action, typically speaking and moving together)

Hamlet
I could interpret between you and your love
if I could see the puppets dallying (meaning both "lazing about, moving slowly", which literal puppets might do, and also "having a casual sexual or romantic liason with", which is the mental image of the puppets that Hamlet intends to provoke in Ophelia – to put a fine point on it: the puppets represent Ophelia and some supposed lover of hers who is not Hamlet).

Ophelia
You are keen, my lord, you are keen (sharp, as in the edge of a blade, applying to either his wit and/or his words).

Hamlet
It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge. (a groaning was a small amount of money, but the dirty double entendre here is that taking the edge off of his "sword" (euphemism for dick, so namely via fucking) would involve Ophelia groaning – see my note above on "eye, tongue, sword")

Ophelia
Still better (of a joke) and worse (of an allusion). (hahaha, our girl gets in some good rejoinders here – one can see why Hamlet loved her and considered her his match)

Hamlet
So you mis-take your husbands. – (nonetheless, our boy always gets the last laugh in this play; one of his most staggering takedowns: women are supposed, in marriage, to take their husbands "for better or worse" but do a shitty job of it – like he feels his Mom did with his Dad – so they, as the woman-hating Hamlet would have it, "mis-take" them – namely, only for better)

(Snapping at the actor playing Lucianus:)
Begin, murderer.
Pox (as in, "A pox on you!"), leave thy damnable faces (stop fucking with your makeup) and begin. Come,
the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge.

Lucianus
Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing,
Confederate season (helpful time of day), else (otherwise) no creature seeing,
Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds (baleful plants) collected,
With Hecate's (Greek goddess of the moon, earth, and underground realm of the dead; later regarded as the goddess of sorcery and witchcraft) ban [curse] thrice [three times] blasted,
thrice [three times] infected,
Thy natural magic and dire property
On wholesome life (of the sleeping King) usurp immediately.

Pours the poison in his ears. Exit.

Hamlet
He poisons him i'th' garden for his estate. His name's
Gonzago. The story is extant (especially of a document: still in existence; surviving), and written in very
choice [quality] Italian. You shall see anon [shortly] how the murderer
gets the love of Gonzago's wife. {a lot of the versions of this play I've seen have Hamlet at this passage work himself up into a crescendo of emotion, so as to – presumably – set the stage for the King's reaction or otherwise indicate to the audience that this is pinnacle of Hamlet's accusation. However, I think it is much more fitting (in not giving away his suspicions / otherwise blowing the effect of the accusatory play) and in-character for Hamlet to keep his cool here, and throw these lines out almost casually}

Ophelia
The King rises.

Hamlet

What, frighted with false fire? (a combustible carried by vessels of war, chiefly for signalling, but sometimes burned for the purpose of deceiving an enemy)

Queen
How fares my lord?

Polonius
Give o'er [Stop] the play.

King
Give me some light. (the King is commanding his servants to light his path away from where the play is taking place, but the secondary meaning is obvious: his soul is toiling in darkness) Away!

The Courtiers
Lights, lights, lights!

Exeunt (Latin plural form of “Exit”) all but Hamlet and Horatio.

Hamlet
"Why, let the strucken deer go weep,
The heart ungallèd play,
For some must watch while some must sleep;
So runs the world away." (although this couplet is in quotation marks, I am unable to find the source of the quote, but the meaning is clear: life is unfair, wounded animals cry while the uninjured play; some get to sleep while others have to stay up and keep watch – I’m not exactly sure, though, how this connects to the action that just happened… perhaps it’s just meant to sound fanciful and mad… or maybe it’s as on the surface as “Claudius is the strucken deer who went away to weep”)
Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers --
if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me --
with two provincial roses on my razed shoes,
get me a fellowship [membership] in a cry (meaning a pack, typically said of hounds, but here meaning a professional troupe) of players [actors], sir? (Turk (short for Turkey/Turkish) was a general term in Shakespeare’s time for any Muslim person, and was most often used in a derogatory way to mean someone deceitful, barbarous, uncivilized. Thus for one’s fortunes to turn Turk means for one’s good luck to run out. So, what Hamlet is saying is “Even if everything else in my life goes to shit, my excellent playwriting / acting skills – along with a ridiculous actorly costume – will allow me to join a troupe of professional players.” “Forest of feathers” is an allusion to the fact that a great many feathers were oftentimes worn by actors in Shakespeare's time; “provincial roses” in this case meant rosettes worn on the shoe (the roses of Provence were noted for their beauty); razed meaning slashed, inlaid with different colored silks, or stitched and embroidered, perhaps.)

Horatio
Half a share (of equity that comes along with being a member of a troupe of actors).

Hamlet
A whole one, I (will get).
For thou dost know, O Damon dear, (Damon was a character in Greek mythology who was known for his loyalty and friendship to Pythias. The two men were so close that they were willing to die for each other. In one story, Damon was sentenced to death by the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse, but Pythias offered to take his place so that Damon could say goodbye to his family. The king was so impressed by Damon and Pythias's friendship that he pardoned them both. All this is to say, Hamlet is calling Horatio his very good, dear friend)
This realm dismantled was
Of Jove himself, and now reigns here
A very, very pajock (archaic term for peacock).

Horatio
You might have rhymed. (Horatio is cheekily critiquing Hamlet here for ending his couplet on "pajock" instead of choosing a word that rhymes with "was")

Hamlet
O good Horatio, I'll take the Ghost's word
for a thousand pound (that is, 1000 pounds – a denomination of British currency – and even now a large sum of money, so back then a fortune). Didst (you) perceive (what just happened)?

Horatio
Very well, my lord.

Hamlet
Upon the talk of the poisoning?

Horatio
I did very well note him.

Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Hamlet
Aha, come, some music! (the sudden idea of having music be played was obviously inspired by Horatio's use of the word "note" just above)
Come, the recorders. (Hamlet is here calling for some recorders – the woodwind flutes – to be brought to him. According to the stage directions above, everyone but Horatio and Hamlet just exited. Then Rosencrantz & Guildenstern entered, but they're too busy interrogating him to heed his call. The play soon says the Players bring the recorders. So, I guess we have to presume he shouts the command offstage here for some unseen Players to have heard and respond to?) For if the King like not the comedy,
Why, then belike he likes it not, perdie (corrupted borrowing of French "per dieu", "by God").
Come, some music.

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 (for the evening) marvelous distempered [spectacularly upset].

Hamlet
With drink, sir? (this is a joke; Hamlet of course knew what Guildenstern meant)

Guildenstern
No, my lord, rather with choler [anger].

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. ("purgation" from the Latin for "purify" was something doctors did in Shakespeare's time – typically evacuation of the bowels induced by laxatives – but the double meaning / implication here is: Hamlet's purgation of the King would more likely be exsanguination by means of a sword, which would presumably greatly increase the King's anger)

Guildenstern
Good my lord, put your discourse into some frame,
and start not so wildly from my affair. (Guildenstern is asking Hamlet to stop talking crazy and off-topic)

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. (yet more jokes based on intentional misunderstandings)

Guildenstern
Nay, good my lord, this courtesy (of yours) is not of the right
breed [kind]. If it shall please you to make me a wholesome (that is, non-crazy)
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 answers 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 behavior hath struck her into
amazement and admiration.

Hamlet
Oh, wonderful son, that can so (a)'stonish a mother! {lol, he's such a witty dick}
But is there no sequel at the heels of this mother's
admiration? Impart.

Rosencrantz
She desires to speak with you in her closet [rooms] ere [before] you go to bed.

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. (meaning his fingers, which Hamlet is presumably showing at this line)

Rosencrantz
Good my lord, what is your cause of distemper?
You do surely bar the door upon your own liberty

if you deny [won't talk about] your griefs to your friend.

Hamlet
Sir, I lack advancement. (in life, he means; upward mobility)

Rosencrantz
How can that be, when you have the voice [explicit nomination] of the
King himself for your succession (to the throne) in Denmark?

Enter the Players, with recorders.

Hamlet
Ay, sir, but "while the grass grows" -- the proverb is
something musty. -- (the entire proverb Hamlet is referencing is "While the grass grows, the horse starves")
Oh, the recorders. Let me see one.

[He takes a recorder.]

(every phrase in the next sentence is a reference to the theme of making music / playing wind instruments)
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
Oh, 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

It is as easy as lying. {sick burn} Govern these ventages [Control via covering these holes] with your
fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth,
and it will discourse most eloquent music.
Look you, these are the stops (the subsets of holes needed to be covered to play a particular note).

Guildenstern
But these cannot I command to any utt'rance
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 compass,
and there is much music, excellent voice in this
little organ, yet cannot you make it speak.
'Sblood (again, short for “Christ’s blood”; a mild oath), do you think that I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument
you will, though you can fret (meaning agitate or irritate, but also obviously a play on the feature of some musical instruments) me, you cannot play upon me.

Enter Polonius.
[To Polonius, as he enters]

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 th' 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 I will come to my mother by and by.

[Aside]

They fool me to the top of my bent. (meaning no matter the extremes of acting the fool that Hamlet goes to, the conspirators surrounding him will match him in earnestly playing along)

[Aloud]

I will come by and by.

Polonius
I will say so.

Exit.

Hamlet
"By and by" is easily said. -- Leave me, friends. (I don't see any way to not have this last word be delivered with extreme & bitter sarcasm)

Exeunt (Latin plural form of "Exit") Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn (that is, the graves and crypts and sepulchres in a churchyard open up), 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, [Wait,] now to my mother.
O heart, lose not thy (loving) nature! Let not ever
The soul of Nero (the apocryphal "fiddling while Rome burned" emporer had his own mother, Agrippina the Younger, executed for starting a failed rebellion against him) 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 (to each other – that is, pursue differing ends):
How in my words somever she be shent [put to shame],
To give them seals (meaning approval – as the kinds of seals affixed to official documents in Shakespeare's time were – to indicate their authenticity, which in this case would be demonstrated via actual use of a dagger, if his tongue and soul weren't being hypocrites; but, insofar as such seals were often made of blood red wax, the mental image of dagger wounds also comes to mind) never my soul consent!

[3.3]

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 (sail) along with you.
The terms of our estate may not endure
Hazard so dangerous as doth hourly grow
Out of his lunacies.

Guildenstern
We will ourselves provide (for this purpose).
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 armor of the mind
To keep itself from (an)noyance, but much more (so)
That spirit upon whose weal [well-being] depends and rests
The lives of many. The cess (recess, cessation) of majesty
Dies not alone, but like a gulf (or any body of water experiencing tides) doth draw
What's near it with it; or it is a massy wheel
Fixed on the summit of the highest mount(ain),
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
Are mortised and adjoined, (a mortise is a hole or recess cut into a part which is designed to receive a corresponding projection (a tenon) on another part so as to join or lock the parts together) which, when it falls,
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boist'rous ruin. Never alone
Did the king sigh, but with a general groan (from his subjects who are negatively impacted whenever he is).

King
(I love to imagine the King kind of inwardly rolling his eyes at how expertly servile R&G have made themselves by this point)
Arm you, I pray you, to this speedy voyage,
For we will fetters (a chain or manacle used to restrain a prisoner, typically placed around the ankles) put upon this fear
Which now goes too free-footed.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
We will haste(n) us.

Exeunt (Latin plural form of “Exit”) gentlemen [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern].

Enter Polonius.

Polonius
My lord, he's going to his mother's closet.
Behind the arras (a rich tapestry, typically hung on the walls of a room or used to conceal an alcove) I'll convey myself
To hear the process. I'll warrant she'll tax him home (compel him to divulge the truth of his circumstances with the force of her interrogation).
And, as you said -- and wisely was it said --
'Tis meet (good, proper) that some more [other] audience than a mother,
Since nature makes them partial (to their children), should o'erhear
The speech of (the position of) vantage (that is, from behind the arras). Fare you well, my liege.
I'll call upon you ere [before] you go to bed,
And tell you what I know.

King
Thanks, dear my lord.

Exit [Polonius].

Oh, my offense is rank! It smells to heaven.
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder. (that is, when Cain killed his brother Abel – this curse is primal and eldest because Cain and Abel were the children of Adam and Eve, so there was nobody prior to them to commit such an act) Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will (see above notes on this word);
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And like a man to double business bound (that is, with two equally-important things to do, and perhaps at cross purposes)
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect. What if this cursèd hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? {this is such a disgusting image and despicable form of refusing to take accountability for one's actions, and in many ways the most chillingly villainous thing that Claudius says – amazing writing} Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offense?
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
To be forestallèd ere [before] we come to fall,
Or pardoned being down? Then I'll look up.
My fault is past. But, oh, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder"? {lol}
That cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder:
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardoned and retain th'offense?
In the corrupted currents of this world,
Offense's gilded hand may shove by [push aside] justice,

And oft(en) 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. (eg, a person steals money and then pays off the cops to evade consequence)
But 'tis not so above (in Heaven):
There is no shuffling (dissembling, distracting, obfuscating), there the action lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence. (that is, when Humans meet God, or at least St. Peter, in Heaven they are compelled to testify against themselves for the sins they committed on Earth "to the teeth and forehead" meaning something like, "up close and in much detail") What then? What rests [remains to be considered]?
Try what repentance can [Attempt repentance – test its limits]. What can it not?
Yet what can it, when one cannot repent?
O wretched state, O bosom black as death,
O limèd soul, that, struggling to be free,
Art more engaged! (limed refers to birdlime, a sticky substance – made from a variety of natural materials, such as the bark of the holly tree or the fruits of the mistletoe plant – spread onto twigs to trap small birds; it is easy to imagine a bird struggling to free itself from such a substance and only succeeding in getting more trapped)
Help, angels! Make assay [attempt] (so, "Make an attempt to help me, angels!").
Bow, stubborn knees, and heart with strings [tendons] of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe! (babies have sinews that haven't hardened yet)
All may be well.

[He kneels.]
Enter Hamlet.

Hamlet
(in the passage that follows, Hamlet is arguing with himself to determine what course of action to take here: one half of him wants to kill the King because it would be simple to do while they're alone and he's distracted by praying, while the other half fears that Claudius will definitely go to Heaven if he is killed mid-prayer. His first five phrases below (separated by commas) flip from one side of the argument to the other before finally coming down (starting in the 3rd sentence) on the side of waiting to strike when the King is mid-sinning, rather than mid-absolution)
Now might I do it pat (simply kill the King), now he is a-praying,
And now I'll do't.

[He draws his sword.]

And so he goes to heaven,
And so am I revenged. That would be scanned (meaning checked for propriety, soundness, or fitness):
A villain kills my father, and for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly (that is, unpurified by confession), full of bread (meaning not in the midst of any religious practice, such as fasting),
With all his crimes broad blown [bloomed], as flush as May (out in the open and unrepented for),

And how his audit (by the terms of God's law) stands, who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought
'Tis heavy with him (iow, Hamlet opines that it's not looking great for his Dad so far, in regards to the weight and severity of his penance / purgation). And am I then revenged
To take him (meaning Claudius) in the purging (see note on this word above) of his soul,
When he is fit and seasoned [prepared] for his passage (to the afterlife – presumably Heaven)?
No.

[He sheathes his sword.]

Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent [to seize, grasp] (so to "know a more horrid hent" would be to grasp or apprehend a more terrible plan of action).
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 damned and black
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays [waits for me].
This physic [medicine] (namely, Hamlet's temporary reprieval) but prolongs thy sickly days.

Exit.

King
My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go. (Claudius is basically saying that his words of prayer ring hollow – and are therefore unlikely to provoke God's forgiveness – because he doesn't mean them with sufficient earnestness. Not only is this a demonstration of the King's duplicitous character – even when in conversation with God! – but it is also ironic / comedic, because it means Hamlet could have killed the King right now and successfully sent his soul to hell after all)

[3.4]

Enter Queen [Gertrude] and Polonius.

Polonius
He will come straight (away). Look you lay home to [chide and correct] him.
Tell him his pranks have been too broad (outrageous) to bear with,
And that your grace hath screened and stood between
Much heat and him. I'll silence me e'en here.
Pray you, be round with him.

Hamlet

(From) Within [offstage].

Mother, mother, mother!

Queen
I'll warrant you. Fear me not.
Withdraw; I hear him coming.

[Polonius conceals himself behind the arras.]
Enter Hamlet.

Hamlet
Now mother, what's the matter?

Queen
Hamlet, thou hast thy father (meaning Claudius) much offended.

Hamlet
Mother, you have my father much offended. (meaning King Hamlet, hahaha – I don't really see a way to not emphasize his "you" in that sentence)

Queen
Come, come, you answer with an idle (unproductive, lazy) tongue.

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 (forgotten who I am / who you're speaking to)?

Hamlet
No, by the rood, not so. (a rood is a crucifix, especially one positioned above the rood screen of a church or on a beam over the entrance to the chancel)
You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife, {lmfao}
And -- would it were not so! -- you are my mother. {such a knife-twisting asshole}

Queen
Nay, then, I'll set those to you that can speak (to you such that you'll listen).

Hamlet
Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge.
You go not till I set you up a glass [mirror]
Where you may see the inmost part of you. (either Hamlet needs to say this line with a tremendous amount of menace, or his Mom has to be considered to be very easily frightened to hear this line and think he means "I'm gonna cut you open / spill your guts", but that's apparently what happens here)

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

Polonius

[Behind the arras]

What ho! Help, help, help!

Hamlet
How now, a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!
[Hamlet thrusts through the arras (a rich tapestry, typically hung on the walls of a room or used to conceal an alcove) with his sword.]

Polonius

[Behind the arras]

Oh, I am slain!

[Polonius falls onto the stage floor, dead.]

Queen
Oh, me, what hast thou done?

Hamlet
Nay I know not. Is it the King? (I prefer to do this line with a note of insouciantly optimistic expectation in the voice)

Queen
Oh, 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, it was my word.
[He parts the arras (a rich tapestry, typically hung on the walls of a room or used to conceal an alcove) and discovers the dead Polonius.]
Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!
I took thee for thy better (meaning the King). Take thy fortune.
Thou find'st to be too busy [a busybody] is some danger.

[To the Queen]

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 damnèd custom have not brassed it so [turned it to brass]
(Such) 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 (namely, marrying her brother-in-law, and disrespectfully quickly)
That blurs (erases or disfigures) the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose (the bloom of health)
From the fair forehead of an innocent love (between two people)
And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
As false as dicers' (gamblers who throw dice) oaths -- oh, such a deed
As from the body of contraction (marriage, or partnership generally) plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words (that is, Gertrude's deed makes a rhapsody of words out of sweet religion, where rhapsody means a nonsensical, stitched-together song or text, which would be a dishonorable thing to be done to religion). Heaven's face doth glow (with shame, sadness, disgust)
O'er this solidity and compound mass (meaning Earth)
With tristful visage [sorrowful face], as against the doom (Armageddon; God's judgment),
Is thought-sick at the act.

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

Hamlet
[Showing her two likenesses, of Hamlet senior and Claudius]
Look here upon this picture, and on this,
The counterfeit presentment (because they are pictures or paintings, instead of the real things) of two brothers.
(Talking about his Dad first:) See what a grace was seated on this brow:
Hyperion's (one of the twelve Titans) curls (hair), the front (face) of Jove himself,
An eye like Mars (the God of war) to threaten or command,
A station (stance) like the herald Mercury (messenger to the Greek gods)
New lighted [Newly arrived] on a heaven-kissing (meaning very tall) hill,
A combination and a form indeed
Where every god did seem to set his seal (of approval, or at least of handiwork)
To give the world assurance of a man.
This was your husband. Look you now what follows (switching to Claudius):
Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear (of a plant like wheat or maize),

Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain (have) leave to feed
And batten (improve in condition, become fat) on this moor? Ha, have you eyes?
You cannot call it love, for at your age
The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgment, and what judgment
Would stoop from this to this? (indicating Hamlet then Claudius) Sense, sure, you have,
Else could you not have motion (meaning, she wouldn't even be able to move her body if she completely lacked mental function), but sure(ly) that sense
Is apoplexed (apoplexy is a condition of unconsciousness or incapacity resulting from a cerebral hemorrhage or stroke), for madness would not err (meaning even a crazy person wouldn't take such a decision – especially ironic considering the act that Hamlet has been / is putting on),
Nor sense to ecstasy (an emotional or religious frenzy or trance-like state) was ne'er so thralled (under its power)
But it (meaning sense) reserved some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference. What devil was't
That thus hath cozened (tricked, deceived) you at hoodman-blind? (a hoodman is a person who is blindfolded. The term "hoodman's blind" is a synonym for "blind man's bluff", a children's game in which one player is blindfolded and tries to catch the other players)
Eyes without (the sense of) feeling, feeling without sight,
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans (French for "without") all,
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope [act like a fool or simpleton] (this is yet again another amazing roast on Hamlet's part: he's saying that a sighted person who has no sense of touch, a blind person who can only feel things, a handless and eyeless person with working ears, or even a person whose only functioning faculty was a sense of smell – *or anyone with even a heavily mitigated capacity in any of the body's senses!* – could see that moving from Hamlet to Claudius was a bad move).
O shame, where is thy blush? (he's asking his Mom why her cheeks have no blush of shame from her actions)
Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine [revolt] in a matron's [old woman's] bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
And melt in her own fire. (rebellious hell is Lucifer, the ultimate rebel. Hamlet here is saying "If the devil has power to make an old lady like my Mom overthrow her own reason, then virtue in young people (who are even more under the sway of lust and general bad judgment) may as well not exist" – or, as he poetically put it: "melt in her own fire", like candlewax does) Proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardor gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
And reason panders will. (a reiteration of the above argument; basically "No young person should feel shame for feeling horny / being ruled by a desire for sex, since old people like my Mom (frost itself) clearly feel lust just as strongly, and our reason assists the baser urges or evil designs of our libidos."

Queen
Oh, Hamlet speak no more!
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grainèd (roughly textured) spots
As will not leave their tinct(ure).

Hamlet
Nay, but to live
In the rank (foul-smelling) sweat of an enseamèd (greasy, slimy) bed
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty!

Queen
Oh, speak to me no more!
These words like daggers enter in my ears.
No more, sweet Hamlet.

Hamlet
A murderer and a villain,
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe (a tithe is the money that one contributes to their church, typically 1/10th of one's earnings, so Hamlet is saying that Claudius is not 1/20th of this figure. 1/20 * 1/10 = 1/200, thus Hamlet is saying that Claudius < 1/200 * the value of his brother Hamlet)
Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
A cutpurse (that is, thief) of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem [crown] stole
And put it in his pocket--

Queen
No more!

Enter Ghost [in his nightgown].

Hamlet
A king of shreds and patches--

[Seeing the Ghost]

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

Queen
Alas, he's mad! (some of the best productions of Hamlet I've seen / heard have the Queen deliver this line with a note of recognition in her voice along the lines of "He isn't faking it! / He's actually crazy!")

Hamlet
Do you not come your tardy son to chide,

That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by
Th'important acting of your dread command?
Oh, say!

Ghost
Do not forget. This visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
But look, amazement on thy mother sits.
Oh, step between her and her fighting soul!
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works. (women being “the weaker sex”, King Hamlet’s Ghost is saying, mental fabrications arise in them more readily)
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 th'incorporal (bodiless, massless) air do hold discourse?
Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
And, as the sleeping soldiers in th'alarm (do),
Your bedded hair, like life in excrements,
Start up and stand on end. (excrements having the broad meaning of “inanimate matter produced by the body”, Gertrude is saying its as though the lifeforce had entered his hair and made it start up and stand on end wildly and hither-thither, like sleeping soldiers awoken by an alarm) 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 conjoined, preaching to stones,
Would make them capable.

[To the Ghost]

Do not look upon me,
Lest with this piteous action you convert
My stern effects. Then what I have to do
Will want true color, tears perchance for blood. (Hamlet is saying that he should be causing his uncle to bleed, but that if the Ghost keeps looking at him, it might cause him to lose his nerve and start crying, like drops of blood with the “true color” removed)

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 habit as he lived.
Look where he goes, even now out at the portal [door]!

Exit Ghost.

Queen
This is the very coinage [creation] of your brain.
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in. (madness skillfully creates such visual hallucinations, she means)

Hamlet
Ecstasy?
My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time,
And makes as healthful music. It is not madness
That I have uttered. Bring me to the test,
And I the matter will reword, which madness
Would gambol (run or jump playfully away) from. Mother, for love of grace,
Lay not that flattering unction (medicinal oil or ointment) to your soul
That not your trespass [transgressions] but my madness speaks.
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
Whilst rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseen {such a wonderfully vivid mental image; just perfect}. Confess yourself to heaven,
Repent what's past, avoid what is to come,
And do not spread the compost o'er the weeds
To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue,
For in the fatness of these pursy times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good. (Hamlet is presumably asking his Mom's forgiveness sarcastically / ironically here, the ostensible need for which he blames on their

permissive, corpulent, corrupted times, saying that even the God/dess Virtue has to bow & scrape to gain Vice's permission and blessing to be its good self)

Queen
Oh, Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain (cut it in two).

Hamlet
Oh, throw away the worser part of it,
And live the purer with the other half. {lol; good advice}
Good night. But go not to my uncle's bed;
Assume [Pretend to have] a virtue if you have it not. (iow, fake it 'til you make it)
That monster custom (of practice), who all sense doth eat,
Of habits devil (because they are senseless, it having all been eaten), is angel yet in this (way:),
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery
That aptly is put on (that is, makes the frock of good habits as easy to put on as the bad ones).
Refrain (from hooking up with my uncle) 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 (that is, habit can almost overcome our inborn traits & characteristics),
And either rein the devil (in), or throw him out
With wondrous potency. Once more good night,
And when you are desirous to be blest,
I'll blessing beg of you. For this same lord (Polonius),
I do repent; but heaven hath pleased it so
To punish me with this, and this with me,
That I must be their (that is, God's / the angels') scourge and minister.
I will bestow him [place the body somewhere safe], and will answer well
The death I gave him (that is, be accountable for this act of manslaughter). So, again, good night.
I must be cruel only to be kind.
Thus bad begins, and worse remains behind. (meaning, his cruel words feel bad to hear now, but they are necessary to provoke her to leave behind the worse situation of being in thrall to his despicable uncle, and so are actually kind)
One word more, good lady.

Queen
What shall I do?

Hamlet
Not this, by no means, that I (sardonically) bid you do:
Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed,
Pinch wanton(ly) on your cheek, call you his mouse,

And let him, for a pair of reechy (rancid, having a strong odor) kisses,
Or paddling [pawing] in your neck with his damned fingers,
Make you to (un)ravel all this matter out(:)
That I essentially am not in madness,
But mad in craft. 'Twere good you let him know,
For who that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise,
Would from a paddock (toad, frog), from a bat, a gib (castrated male cat),
Such dear concernings [important matters] hide? Who would do so?
No, in dispite (archaic form of "despite" – we would say "in spite") 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. (Hamlet here analogizes his Mother's theoretical divulging of Hamlet's sanity to Claudius to some apparently famous story from his time – since lost to us – about a curious ape opening a basket of birds on the top of a house, climbing inside the empty basket, and falling to his death)

Queen
Be thou assured, 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 (sail) to England. You know that?

Queen
Alack (an expression of regret or dismay), I had forgot.
'Tis so concluded on.

Hamlet
There's (official) letters sealed, and my two schoolfellows (Rosencrantz & Guildenstern),
Whom I will trust as I will adders (a type of snake) fanged,
They bear the (royal) mandate; they must sweep (clear) my way
And marshal (bring, escort) me to knavery. Let it work,
For 'tis the sport [amusing challenge] to have the (explosives) engine(e)r
Hoist(ed aloft) with his own petard (bomb), and't shall go hard
But I will delve one yard below their mines,
And blow them at the moon. Oh 'tis most sweet
When in one line two crafts directly meet (meaning "When two birds can be killed with one stone", but also a (probably intentional) allusion on Shakespeare's part to Hamlet's near-term fate when he escapes Rosencrantz & Guildenstern via a pirate's ship).
This man (Polonius) shall set me packing.
I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room. {incredible character development here to have Hamlet be at once so freely shouldering of his duty in this case – as far as safely stowing the body and

turning himself in – while also having him be mercilessly irreverent in his dissing of Polonius, even with his body still warm & bleeding, having just accidentally killed him}
Mother, good night indeed. This counselor
Is now most still, most secret(ive), and most grave, (all three adjectives here are plays on words between Polonius' new personality and his deadness)
Who was in life a foolish prating knave. --
Come, sir, to draw (an allusion to drawn & quartered?) toward an end with you. --
Good night, mother.

Exit Hamlet, tugging in Polonius.

[4.1]

Enter King, with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

King
There's matter [import] in these sighs (of yours),
these profound heaves.
You must translate; 'tis fit we understand them.
Where is your son?

Queen

[To Rosencrantz and Guildenstern]

Bestow this place on us a little while.

[Exeunt (Latin plural form of "Exit") Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]

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 (a rich tapestry, typically hung on the walls of a room or used to conceal an alcove) hearing something stir,
Whips out his rapier, cries, "A rat, a rat!"
And in this brainish apprehension [mistaken understanding of his mind] kills
The unseen good old man.

King
Oh, heavy deed!
It had been so with us had we been there.
His liberty [Hamlet's freedom] is full of threats to all --
To you yourself, to us, to everyone.
Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answered?
It will be laid to us, whose providence [protective care]

Should have kept short [on a short leash], restrained, and out of haunt (not frequenting other places or people)
This mad young man. But so much was our love (for him),
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 pith (heart, marrow) of life. Where is he gone?

Queen
To draw apart (the Queen using this same word would seem to decrease the likelihood that it is – per my theory above – being used as a play on words with "drawn & quartered"... or, perhaps, she means it in the straight way and Hamlet means it in the playful way) the body he hath killed,
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
Oh, Gertrude, come away! (kind of in the sense of "come off of it!" or "snap out of it!")
The sun no sooner shall the mountains touch (tomorrow at dawn)
But we will ship him hence, and this vile deed
We must with all our majesty and skill
Both countenance (admit as acceptable or possible) and excuse (the implication here being: publicly, to the court). -- Ho, Guildenstern!

Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Friends both (of you), go join you with some further aid (meaning others; some more people).
Hamlet in madness hath Polonius slain,
And from his mother's closet hath he dragged him.
Go seek him out, speak fair, and bring the body
Into the chapel. I pray you haste in this.

Exit Gentlemen [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern].

Come, Gertrude, we'll call up our wisest friends
To let them know both what we mean to do (about the murder)
And what's untimely done (the murder itself, that is). So, haply, slander,
Whose whisper o'er the world's diameter,
As level as the cannon to his blank,
Transports his poisoned shot, may miss our name
And hit the woundless air. (there are a few things to unpack here: First is the metaphor that Claudius is positing of slander being as damaging as a cannon. Then the embellishment that slander is so powerfully far-reaching that it touches the literal farthest point on Earth from its origination (which would be at the opposite end of Earth's diameter.) Next is the specific comparison between the whisper of slander and the report of a cannon (which is contained within its blank – the cartridge that contains gunpowder.) Further, Shakespeare has Claudius say that slander's whisper transports his poisoned shot (which is damage to a person's

reputation) “as level as” (in other words, as effectively and forcefully as) the cannon does to his poisoned shot (shot being a cannonball, grapeshot, or some other form of artillery projectile.) Lastly, Claudius is hoping that – by calling up their wisest friends and explaining what has happened and what they plan to do about it – they will cause slander’s poisoned shot to miss their name (meaning their reputation), and hit the woundless air (the air, being bodiless, would of course also be woundless if hit) Oh, come away!
My soul is full of discord and dismay.

[4.2]

Enter Hamlet.

Hamlet
Safely stowed. {lmao, what an absolute prick}

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

(From) Within (meaning offstage).

Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!

Hamlet
But soft, what noise? Who calls on Hamlet?
Oh, here they come. (in my mind / performance, he says all of this in a jokingly earnest way, as if this is all a game to him)

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 (that I provide information) of (by) a sponge, what replication [reply] 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 (literally face, but the meaning here is more like "presence, approval, imprimatur"),
his rewards (meaning both those the King receives from his subjects via his office as perquisites, and those that the King bestows upon his subjects generally and accomplices in particular), his authorities (the King's authority rubs off on those in his inner circle, and Hamlet is accusing R&G of using and abusing such). But such officers
do the King best service in the end: he keeps
them, like an ape an apple in the corner of his
jaw, first mouthed to be last swallowed. {such a great visual image, and the phrase "an ape an apple" is just the best} When
he needs what you have gleaned (picked up, learned – gleaning originally referred to the practice of farmers walking their rows of crops after the initial harvesting in order to pick up any seed / fruit / grain that had fallen to the ground in the first pass), 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 knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear. {lol, it's just knives out from here on in}

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 (meaning the actual King – his father – is a corpse), but the King is not
with the body (meaning the body of Polonius is not yet under Claudius' control). The King is a thing --

Guildenstern
A thing, my lord?

Hamlet
Of nothing. (just like "a fair thought to lie between maids' legs") Bring me to him. Hide fox, and all after! (from hunting – a cry used to rally the hunters to follow the fox into hiding; the phrase is also used in some games, such as tag and hide-and-seek, to signal that the "seeker" is about to start searching for the other players)

[4.3]

Enter King, and two or three (courtiers).

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 [punish him too severely];
He's loved of the (easily-)distracted multitude (meaning the public, the masses),
Who like not in their judgment but their eyes, (they prefer or support the things that are visually appealing to them instead of the things their wisdom should prefer)
And where 'tis so, th'offender's scourge is weighed, (that is, the thing that scourges the offender is judged)
But never the offense. To bear all smooth and even (amongst the King's subjects),
This sudden sending him away (on the King's part) must seem (to them to be)
Deliberate pause (as opposed to rash reaction). Diseases desperate grown
By desperate appliance are relieved,
Or not at all.

Enter Rosencrantz.

King
How (is it going) now, what hath befall'n [has happened]?

Rosencrantz
Where the dead body is bestowed, my lord,
We cannot get from him.

King
But where is he?

Rosencrantz
Without [Just outside this room], my lord, guarded, to know your pleasure.

King
Bring him before us (again with the majestic plural).

Rosencrantz

[Calling]

Ho, Guildenstern! Bring in the lord.

Enter Hamlet and Guildenstern [with Guards].

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 politic 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 {obviously openly dissing Claudius here; incredible} and your lean beggar is but
variable service: two dishes but to one table. That's the end. (the one table, which is also the end, being death, naturally. This famous passage is so brilliant, it should be more famous than "To be or not to be")

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. {the mic droppiest mic drop ever}

King
Where is Polonius?

Hamlet
In heaven. Send thither to see. If your messenger
find him not there, seek him i'th' other place (that is, Hell) yourself.
But if indeed you find him not within this month, you
shall nose him (in the sense of "detect by diligent searching", but also a distasteful play on smelling his rotting corpse) as you go up the stairs into the lobby.

King

[To some attendants]

Go seek him there.

Hamlet

He will stay till you come. {this might be the funniest play ever written}

[Exeunt (Latin plural form of “Exit”) attendants.]

King
Hamlet, this (deadly) deed of thine, for (the sake of ensuring) thine especial safety --
Which we do tender [value], as we dearly grieve
For that which thou hast done -- must send thee hence
With fiery quickness. Therefore prepare thyself.
The bark (variant of Old French “barque”: a sailing ship) is ready, and the wind at help,
Th'associates (Rosencrantz & Guildenstern, and ship’s crew) 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. (this is such an incredible line in so many ways: it’s just a beautiful image to imagine angels amongst us; Hamlet is threatening Claudius with the all-seeing judgment of Heaven – basically calling him out as a villain; Hamlet is saying one of the host of Heaven – his guardian angel? – sees Claudius’ sinful purposes, and Hamlet sees the cherub, making for a triangle between the three entities, with an implied geometrical / spatial sense that Claudius and Heaven are separate / not in the same grouping) But come, for England!
Farewell, dear mother. (I cribbed it from some actor, but I do like to have Hamlet kiss Claudius on the cheek here)

King
Thy loving father, Hamlet. (and have Claudius here furiously rubbing the kiss off of his cheek)

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 foot. Tempt him with speed aboard (the ship that will take him to England).
Delay it not. I'll have him hence tonight.
Away! For everything is sealed (with wax, like official missives) and done
That else [otherwise] leans on th'affair. Pray you, make haste.
Exeunt (Latin plural form of “Exit”) all but the King.
And England, if my love thou hold'st at aught [value at all],
As my great power thereof may give thee sense,
Since yet thy cicatrice (the scar of a healed wound) looks raw and red
After the Danish sword (cut you), and thy free awe [willing obedience]
Pays homage to us, thou mayst not coldly set (aside)
Our sovereign process (royal machination), which imports at full [implies, in the end]
By letters (from the King) congruing to that effect
The present death of Hamlet. Do it, England,
For like the hectic (an archaic term for a regularly recurrent fever that typically accompanies tuberculosis) in my blood he rages,
And thou must cure me. Till I know 'tis done,
Howe'er my haps [Whatever else happens to me], my joys were ne'er begun.

[4.4]

Enter Fortinbras [and a Captain] with his army over the stage.

{the Prince that we’re about to hear from is referred to by Hamlet as “delicate & tender” later in this scene; I take this as my cue to play him as genteel bordering on effete – this is especially macabrely funny when contrasted with his bloodthirsty ambition to reclaim his father’s lost lands}

Fortinbras
Go, captain, from me greet the Danish King.
Tell him that by his license Fortinbras
Craves the conveyance of a promised march
Over his kingdom. You know the rendezvous [meeting place].
If that his majesty would aught with [ask anything of] us,
We shall express our duty in his eye;
And let him know so. {see?.. exquisitely mannered, but threatening}

Captain
I will do't, my lord.

Fortinbras

[To his soldiers]

Go softly on.

[Exeunt (Latin plural form of “Exit”) all but the Captain.]
Enter Hamlet, Rosencrantz, [Guildenstern,] etc.

(to me, the comedic payoff of the Captain's eventual brutally honest explanation of the situation below is best set up by having him attempt to walk away immediately after each of the first three answers he politely but tersely makes to Hamlet)

Hamlet

[To the Captain]

Good sir, whose powers are these?

Captain
They are of Norway, sir.

Hamlet
How purposed, 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 [exaggeration],
We go to gain a little patch of ground
That hath in it no profit but the name (that is, the ability to say "we own X").
To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it, (the Captain means that the little patch of ground his comrades are going to war over is so small and shitty that he would not accept five ducats – which is presumably, by context, a healthy sum of money for such a job – as payment to farm it)
Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole
A ranker rate [higher price] (than five ducats), should it be sold in fee (short for fee simple, meaning sold in total transfer of ownership, with no rights reserved; in other words, sold at its highest price).

Hamlet
Why then the Polack never will defend it.

Captain

Yes, it is already garrisoned [stationed with troops].
Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats
Will not debate the question of [settle the argument over] this straw (worthless thing). (some editors put these last two lines at the front of Hamlet's next passage instead of at the end of this one, but I think it's much more powerful coming from the Captain, for a few reasons: putting both the "two thousand souls" lines and the point about "th'impostume of much wealth" in the mouth of the same character lacks balance, both poetically and in characterization – it goes from making the both of them sound worldly and world-weary to just one person (namely, Hamlet) being a bit of a bore in his overwrought observations. Giving the Captain one of these lines also burnishes the development of his character (established in the speech he gave just before) as being keen of eye and free of tongue)

Hamlet
This is th'impostume (abscess, putrid swelling) of much wealth and peace (similarly to gout),
That inward breaks [ruptures internally], and (thereby) shows no cause without
Why the man dies. I humbly thank you, sir. (Hamlet's point here is that these little low stakes skirmishes such as Norway is engaged in are the grievously harmful self-inflicted wounds of a society that has too much money & time on its hands, such that it goes out looking for trouble as a form of distraction or diversion, even entertainment; there is dramatic irony in the fact that, as apt as Hamlet's criticism here may be, Fortinbras is successful in Poland, and ultimately successful in taking over Denmark almost accidentally, on his way back home)

Captain
God b'wi' you, sir.

[Exit.]

Rosencrantz
Will't please you go, my lord?

Hamlet
I'll be with you straight (away). Go a little before (me).

[Exeunt (Latin plural form of "Exit") all but Hamlet.]

How all (of life's) occasions do inform against me (that is, call him out),
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(ly) he that made us (that is, God) with such large discourse [with such a wide and wide-ranging zone and mechanism of interrogation],
Looking before and after (that is, to the past and the future), gave us not
That capability and godlike reason (see "in apprehension, how like a god" above)
To fust (become moldy through neglect) in us unused. Now, whether it be (due to)
Bestial oblivion (the forgetfulness such as is seen in non-human animals, that is), or some craven (contemptibly lacking in courage) scruple
Of thinking too precisely on th'event (eg, sophists academizing in the face of real-world problems, or lawmakers holding hearings instead of passing laws) --

A thought which, quartered [split into four pieces], hath but one part wisdom
And ever three parts coward -- I do not know
Why yet I live to say this thing's (yet) to do, (where “this thing” is revenging his father)
Sith [Since] I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
To do't. Examples (as) gross (large, prominent) as earth exhort me.
(Bear) Witness (to) this (recently departed) army of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed (out)
Makes mouths at (mocks, derides) the invisible event (the hidden hand of Fate, that is, many iterations of which it would behoove one not to deride or mock),
Exposing what is mortal and unsure (meaning killable and fragile; namely their bodies & lives)
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an eggshell (meaning this worthless patch of land the Captain mentioned). Rightly [Truthfully] to be great
Is not to stir without great argument, (although the rhetorical thrust of this set up is clear in the context of what comes next, it is somewhat obscure in itself and has at least the two following meanings:
- to be great is to not be roused to (likely violent) action without having very good reasons
- to be great is not, as many people seem to think, to be roused to (likely violent) action without needing very good reasons
in other words:
- is “not to stir without great argument”
- is not “to stir without great argument”)
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honor's at the stake. (but rather being able to find a just cause to fight for, even in the smallest of matters, so long as a person’s honor is on the line; this line bolsters the secondary definition above of the prior line)
How stand I, then,
That have a father killed, a mother stained (in reputation, and by association with low acts),
Excitements [Compelling inducements] of my reason and my blood (that is, of my mind and heart, my thoughts & feelings),
And let all sleep (that is, don’t raise an alarm or otherwise create trouble), while to my shame I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men (both the Norweigan and Polish soldiers)
That for a fantasy and trick of fame (on the part of Prince Fortinbras)
Go to their graves like [as easily as to their] beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause (a plot too small to hold both fighting armies, that is),
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain (the plot of land is so small, in other words, that it doesn’t even have enough space to serve as graveyard for all the people that will soon be fighting to the death over it)? Oh, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

[4.5]

Enter Queen and Horatio.

Queen
I will not speak with her.

Horatio
She is importunate (persistent, especially to the point of annoyance or intrusion),
Indeed, distract(ing and distracted, by madness). Her mood
will needs be pitied.

Queen
What would she have?

Horatio
She speaks much of her father, says she hears
There's tricks i'th' world, and hems, and beats her heart,
Spurns enviously at straws (non-issues, or non-existent issues), speaks things in doubt
That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshapèd use of it doth move
The hearers to collection (that is, her insane ranting draws crowds); they yawn (gape) at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts (make their own sense of / come to their own conclusions regarding her words),
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them (which conclusions she – intentionally or otherwise – encourages within the hearers via winks, nods, and gestures pregnant with import),
Indeed would make one think there might be thought (that lead people to conclude there is perhaps rational thought behind her words),
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily (all of it obscure, but predominantly unhappy).
'Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew
Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds (you should talk with her, lest she start to give rumormongers, or those who otherwise wish our kingdom ill, the wrong ideas to run with). (it's important to recognize that Shakespeare is here preparing his audience not only to expect to very soon see Ophelia acting mad, but – more importantly – that the people who listen to her oftentimes find themselves thinking she speaks sense. In other words, he wants to prep the audience to expect there to be much accuracy and truth behind her otherwise seemingly nonsensical words – a favorite device of Shakespeare's, to put the most brilliant and incisive truths in the mouths of the marginalized, underestimated, derided, etc)

Queen
Let her come in.

[Horatio withdraws to admit Ophelia.]

[Aside]

To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is, (that is, sin's true nature is a manifestation of a sick soul)
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss (thing or event).

So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

Enter Ophelia distracted (acting irregularly, due to madness), playing on a lute, and her hair down, singing.
(one fun & cool thing about Ophelia's speech / behavior here: it is incredibly ribald (when it's not deeply mourning her dead father.) Her entire thesis is basically: life is hellish 'cause straight dudes are horndogs who think with their dicks.) {My man Shakes knows what the people want; incredible stuff.}

Ophelia
Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?

Queen
How now, Ophelia?

Ophelia

She sings.

How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat (a felt or straw hat with a flat top, adorned with a single cockleshell, symbolizing the wearer's dedication to their faith, worn by European pilgrims, notably those traveling to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, but in this context probably just a dick joke) and staff (another accessory of religious pilgrims, but again here most likely a dick joke),
And his sandal shoon (archaic plural of "shoe", so these last two words are a poetic way of saying "sandals"... no dick joke here, that I can see).

Queen
Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

Ophelia
Say you? Nay, pray you, mark.

Song.

He (implying her Dad, obviously) is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone.
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a (grave)stone. (I was not aware that people would sometimes be laid to rest with their heads not at the headstone… Unless, of course, the author of the song Ophelia is singing, or she herself, made this change on purpose for whatever artistic reason)

Oho!

Queen
Nay, but Ophelia--

Ophelia
(I) Pray you, mark (what I say; iow, listen to me).

Song.

White his (burial) shroud as the mountain snow --

Enter King.

Queen
Alas, look here, my lord.

Ophelia

[Song.]

Larded with sweet flowers,
Which bewept to the grave did not (lolsob at this unexpected negation) go
With true-love showers. (I think Ophelia is here lamenting the fact that she wasn't able or allowed to attend to Polonius' burial, for some reason – likely because the King & Queen had it done hastily and "hugger-mugger")

King
How do you (do), pretty lady?

Ophelia
Well God'ield [God yield] 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
Conceit [Obsessing] upon her father. (the fact that this isn't said aside is telling…namely either that the King thinks he need not be sensitive to how saying this might upset Ophelia, perhaps because she is mad, or due to him not caring)

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

Song.

"Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's Day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window
To be your Valentine."
Then up he rose, and donned [put on] his clothes
And dupped [opened] the chamber door,
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more (because only virgins can be maids; the implication being that she has had sex with the "he" here).

King
Pretty Ophelia--

Ophelia
Indeed, la? (has the feeling of “Oh, really?”) Without an oath I'll make an end on't [No need to curse or make me promise, I’ll come to the end presently].

[Song.]

By Gis (a slangy nickname for Jesus) and by Saint Charity (a nine-year-old girl and 3rd century Roman Catholic martyr whose mother was Saint Sofiia),
Alack, and fie for shame!
Young men will do't (quote unquote, haha) if they come (cum) to't;
By Cock (eyeroll – get it??!!), they are to blame.
Quoth she, "Before you tumbled me (fucked me, but also the sense of “caused me to fall in status”),
You promised me to wed."
"So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed." (these last two lines are the disgustingly usorious dude’s response, obviously) {it’s so nice to see Ophelia get her licks in}

King
How long hath she been thus [like this]?

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

Exit.

King

[To Horatio.]

Follow her close. Give her good watch, I pray you.

[Exit Horatio.]

Oh, this is the poison of deep grief! It springs
All from her father's death, and now behold!
Oh, Gertrude, Gertrude,
When sorrows come, they come not single (one at a time, like) spies
But (rather) in battalions (a bunch all at once). First, her father slain;
Next, your son gone, and he most violent author
Of his own just remove (meaning he got himself justly removed from Denmark by his violent act of killing Polonius); the people muddied (confused, stirred up),
Thick (opaque, dense) and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers

For good Polonius' death, and we have done but greenly (that is, with seemingly little maturity or experience in the matter)
In hugger-mugger (in a disorderly or confused way) to inter (properly bury) him; poor Ophelia
Divided from herself and her fair judgment,
Without the which we are pictures (of humans, without sense or reason) or mere beasts;
Last, and as much containing as all these,
Her brother is in secret come from France,
Feeds on this wonder (that is, obsesses over the misfortune that has befallen his father, and ingests the gossip that it has inspired amongst the populace), keeps himself in clouds (is unable to see things clearly, from Claudius' perspective),
And wants not [is not lacking] buzzers (buzzing insects, but meaning gossiping humans) to infect his ear
With pestilent speeches of his father's death, (that is, Laertes is surrounded by plenty of people who would love to dribble their rumors and suppositions in his ear regarding Polonius' death & burial)
Wherein necessity, of matter beggared,
Will nothing stick our person to arraign
In ear and ear. (meaning the urgency of the subject will cause those discussing the matter – in the absence of actual information to go on – to not hesitate to blame the King for everything)
O my dear Gertrude, this,
Like to a murd'ring piece (a special kind of cannon that shoots collections of projectiles, like grapeshot, instead of single piece cannonballs), in many places
Gives me superfluous death. (iow, many of the pieces of shot which are killing him are technically wasted effort, because he was already killed in other parts of his body by other pieces of shot from the same blast – the deadly action of shot being here a metaphor for how all of the overlapping bad news he has just laid out (or, plausibly, just that last bit of news on its own) is completely destroying his life)

A noise within [offstage]. Enter a Messenger.

Queen
Alack, what noise is this?

King
Where is my Switzers [are my Swiss Guards]? (the Swiss Guards are an elite force who protect the King) Let them guard the door.
What is the matter?

Messenger
Save yourself, my lord!
The ocean, overpeering of his list [surpassing its normal limit],
Eats not the flats with more impiteous haste (overtakes the lowlands just prior to the beach with less merciless speed…)
Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,
O'erbears your officers. (...than Laertes rebelliously overwhelms the King's guards) The rabble (peasants & other unimportant people) call him (their) lord (instead of Claudius, the point being),

And, as (though) the world were now but to begin,
Antiquity (that is, the old way of doing things, was) forgot(ten), custom(s) not known,
The ratifiers and props of every word, (the things we depend on to uphold society, iow)
They cry, "Choose we! Laertes shall be king!"
Caps (thrown to the sky in celebration), hands (literally applauding), and tongues (exclaiming)
applaud it to the clouds:
"Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!"

Queen
How cheerfully on the false trail they cry!

A noise within [offstage].

Oh, this is counter [not right], you false (contrary to propriety) Danish dogs!

King
The doors are broke(n open).

Enter Laertes with others.

Laertes
Where is this king? – (in order to make sense of the fact that Laertes could not have gotten to the King in a murderous rage without the help of a small mob – yet without wanting to have to cast & costume a giant crowd to actually come onstage – Shakespeare had to have Laertes have this short conversation with his supporters just offstage, awkwardly needing to convince them to please close the door behind him and let him talk with the King alone; I will be cutting it from my versions, jumping directly to “O, thou vile king”)
Sirs, stand you all without.

All (the Sirs)
No, let's come in.

Laertes
I pray you, give me leave.

All
We will, we will.

Laertes
I thank you. Keep the door.

[Exeunt (Latin plural form of “Exit”) followers.]

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!" (a man / husband who is being cheated on, oftentimes with their knowledge – origin of the modern slang for such a person: “cuck”) to my father, brands the harlot (easy woman, whore)
Even here between the chaste unsmirchèd (spotless, innocent) brow
Of my true mother. (there have unfortunately been times in history when prostitutes were marked with branding, but it’s not clear that it ever happened on their foreheads / between their brows, so Laertes is here probably just speaking metaphorically or poetically)

King
What is the cause, Laertes,
That thy rebellion looks so giant-like (that you’re so pissed off, enough so to threaten a treasonous coup)? --
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. (having a person who has committed regicide explain to his wife that God’s favor protects kings from harm is one of the most brilliant bits of villainous character development ever. It indicates how Claudius thinks he’s an exception to the rule; or perhaps it shows how dissociated he is from his murderous acts; or perhaps he rationalizes it away as God wanting him to be King; or perhaps he’s enough of a terrible person that he can knowingly be an exception to a rule that he still feels he should quote to people without experiencing the pain of being so ironically evil) -- Tell me, Laertes,
Why thou art thus incensed [angry]? -- 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 [played] with (but also in the sense of “I’ll not allow you to get away with tricks, distraction, misdirection in my pursuit of the truth”).
To hell (with), allegiance (to the King)! (Send my) Vows (to serve and protect him), to the blackest devil!

(Send) Conscience (which advises against hurting the King) and grace [mercy], to the profoundest pit!
I dare damnation. (Laertes is, in other words, willing to risk eternal damnation in pursuit of his vengeance) To this point I stand (firm:),
That both the worlds (meaning both this world, and the afterlife) I give to negligence [am done caring about],
Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged
Most throughly [thoroughly] for my father.

King
Who shall stay (stop, prevent) you?

Laertes
(By) My will, not all the world.
And for my means, I'll husband (nurture, attempt to grow) them so well
They shall go far with little.

King
Good Laertes,
If you desire to know the certainty
Of [the truth about] your dear father's death, is't writ(ten) in your revenge
That, swoopstake (all at once, indiscriminately), you will draw (into your revenge) both friend and foe,
Winner and loser?

Laertes
None but his enemies,

King
Will you [Would you like to] know them, then?

Laertes
To his good friends thus wide I'll ope(n) my arms, (Laertes is here presumably spreading his arms wide)
And, like the kind life-rend'ring pelican,
Repast them with my blood. (just like the passage above suggesting that chameleons feed off of the air, this is another completely incorrect Elizabethan-era theory about animal behavior: in this case, the idea is that pelican parents fed their children with their own blood (instead of what they really do: regurgitate partially pre-chewed / pre-digested morsels for their offspring to ingest more easily))

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 [understandably] in grief for it,
It shall as level to your judgment (ap)'pear
As day does to your eye.

A noise within [offstage].

Voices within [offstage]
Let her come in!

Laertes
How now, what noise is that?

Enter Ophelia, as before.

O heat, dry up my brains! Tears seven times (as) salt(y as usual)
Burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye!
By heaven, thy madness shall be paid by weight
Till our scale turns 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 (true, genuine?) in love, and where 'tis fine
It sends some precious instance (worthy re-creation / representation?) of itself
After the thing it loves. (I must admit, although the general drift here is seemingly clear – Laertes loves his sister a lot and greatly laments her fall into insanity – this passage is still obscure to me in its particulars. On its face, I read something like: Nature is true/genuine in love, and where it truly/genuinely loves [a person or thing] it sends some beautiful aspect of itself after the object of its love – eg, things like rainbows, sunsets, waterfalls… However, how that message maps to Laertes and Ophelia's circumstances is to me unclear, which leads me to believe I've got it wrong. I think what's really being said is something like "Nature loved its perfect creation Ophelia so much that it sent after her a facsimile of her perfection, in the form of her beauty, but without her beautiful mind" or perhaps "Nature loved its perfect creation Ophelia so much that it sent after her a microcosm of its awesome power, thereby overwhelming her finite mind" but I have almost zero faith in my understanding here)

Ophelia

Song.

They bore him bare-faced on the bier (a movable frame on which a coffin or a corpse is placed before burial or cremation, or on which it is carried to the grave),
Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny, (a popular phrase from many songs of Shakespeare's time, we presume; like "Sha-na-na" was in rock & roll of the 1950's. We presume because the alternative – in lieu of outside confirmation of the existence of such songs – is that we perceive them to be such due to Shakespeare himself)
And on his grave rained many a tear.

Fare you well, my dove.

Laertes
Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade [attempt to persuade me to] revenge,
It could not move (me to act, or move me emotionally) thus.

Ophelia
(Ophelia attempts to lead the people present in singing a round:)
You must sing "a-down, a-down,"
an you call him "a-down-a." (again, these are – we believe – very common phrases one would find in the popular music of Shakespeare's time) Oh, how the wheel (singing in a round, or perhaps the wheel of Fate)
becomes it! It is the false steward that stole his
master's daughter. (this is an obvious dig at Hamlet, even though he's not a steward and Polonius is not technically his master)

Laertes
This nothing's more than matter [This nonsense is more sensible than sense].

(For the following section, Ophelia is passing flowers out to the assembled persons, and her feelings about the people she is handing each flower(s) to are embedded within the Language of Flowers https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_of_flowers. Each of the flowers mentioned in these passages, along with their typical connotation within the Language of Flowers, is contained in the table just below (produced by Google's Bard LLM, October 2023):

Flower	Positive Adjectives	Negative Adjectives
Rosemary	Remembrance, Fidelity, Healing	Regret, Mistrust, Sadness
Pansies	Thoughtfulness, Modesty, Tenderness	Melancholy, Indifference, Fickleness
Fennel	Strength, Courage, Perseverance	Deception, Flattery, Ingratitude
Columbines	Grace, Delicacy, Innocence	Infidelity, Ungratefulness, Levity
Rue	Protection, Regret, Wistfulness	Bitterness, Jealousy, Distrust
Daisy	Innocence, Simplicity, Purity	Naivety, Insignificance, Mediocrity
Violets	Faithfulness, Modesty, Sweetness	Timidity, Weakness, Jealousy

Interestingly, it's not clearly specified exactly to whom she is giving each flower, but some theories are more compelling than others. Bard's take is:

- she gives Claudius fennel and columbines, which are symbols of flattery, deception, infidelity, and ingratitude.
- she gives Gertrude rosemary and rue, which are symbols of remembrance, fidelity, repentance, and regret.

- she gives Laertes pansies and violets, which are symbols of thoughtfulness, modesty, faithfulness, and love

I'm still deciding which assignment regime I prefer, but the above distribution is plausible)

Ophelia
There's rosemary; that's for remembrance.
Pray you, 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; (Ophelia regrets things too, iow)
we may call it herb of grace o'Sundays. (on Sundays rue can be known by one of its different names, she means – videlicet: herb of grace – presumably to emphasize the connection between God's grace and the choices in our lives that we rue)
Oh, you must wear your rue with a difference (in the sense of two women who happen to have the same item in their closets needing to wear the thing differently from each other – which, if accurate, certainly corroborates the guess that she gives this flower to Gertrude).
There's a daisy. I would give you some violets,
but they withered all when my father died.
They say he made a good end.

[She sings.]

For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy. (one more common line likely from pop songs of the time which has allusions that are probably too subtle for anyone but the most learned in this area to be sensitive to – however, I've read that some consider "bonny sweet Robin" to be another ribald euphemism)

Laertes
Thought and afflictions, passion, hell itself
She turns to favor and to prettiness.

Ophelia

Song.

And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy deathbed,
He never will come again.
His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen (a kind of pale yellowish-gray, like flax) was his poll (the hair on his head).
He is gone, he is gone,

And we cast away moan.
God 'a' mercy on his soul!

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

Exeunt (Latin plural form of “Exit”) Ophelia [and the Queen, following her.]

Laertes
Do you see this, O God? {such a sick line – Laertes is so far-gone in grief, he’s ready to indict God like a philosopher}

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, (Go fetch your wisest friends)
And they shall hear and judge 'twixt you and me. (and they will judge between the two of us)
If by direct or by collateral hand (if either directly or indirectly)
They find us touched, we will our kingdom give, (they determine me to have responsibility for the bad things that have happened to your sister & Dad)
Our crown, our life, and all that we call ours (I’ll give you my crown, my life, everything I own)
To you in satisfaction; but if not, (to satisfy you; but if they don’t find me guilty)
Be you content to lend your patience to us, (I ask you to show me some patience)
And we shall jointly labor with your soul (and I will join forces with your soul)
To give it due content. (to provide it with satisfaction)

Laertes
Let this be so.
His means of death [The way he died], his obscure burial (Polonius was of a high enough station in Danish society of the time that his son could have a reasonable expectation that his burial would be conducted with an appropriate level of pomp & honor; so what the King & Co instead did “greenly and hugger-mugger to inter him” is a point of offense for Laertes) --
No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones,
No noble rite, nor formal ostentation – (these are all examples of the kind of ritual or ceremony Laertes was expecting would have been granted his father’s burial)
Cry to be heard as 'twere from heaven to earth,
That I must call't in(to) question.

King
So you shall,
And where th'offense is (found to have originated), let the great ax (that is, the King’s doom) fall.
I pray you go with me. (meaning not just go with the King away from the present location, but also to join with him in effecting his revenge on Hamlet)

[4.6]

Enter Horatio, with an Attendant [i.e., Servingman].

Horatio
What are they [What is the nature of those] that would speak with me?

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

Horatio
Let them come in.

[Exit Servingman.]

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

Enter Sailors.

Sailor
God bless you, sir.

Horatio
Let him bless thee too.

Sailor
'A shall, sir, an't please him. (the apostrophed single letter ‘A / ‘a is often used in place of He / he by Shakespeare – a common practice of his time, and one of the main / few ways I differed with the editor of my primary text was the numerous places where I reverted to “he” – however, I did not do so here, instead letting the practice reflect a kind of unlettered earthiness on the part of the sailor, even though Hamlet himself and others who are obviously literate and worldly use the practice too) 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.

[He gives a letter.]

Horatio

Reads the letter

Horatio, when thou shalt have overlooked this,
give these fellows some means to the King;
they have letters for him. Ere [Before] we were two days
old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment (that is, armed & dangerous)
gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, (meaning Hamlet’s ship was slower than the chasing pirates)
we put on a compelled valor [were forced to do our best to defend ourselves], and in the grapple
I boarded them (Hamlet jumped on the pirate ship in the fight). On the [At that] instant they got clear of
our ship (the pirates disengaged from the ship Hamlet had been on), so I alone became their prisoner. They
have dealt with me like thieves of mercy (merciful criminals), but they

knew what they did (knew what they were doing; or knew they had a Prince on their hands and how to leverage his safe return to their advantage; or knew how unwise it would be of them to let Hamlet come to harm, etc): I am to do a good turn for them [they've demanded of me a favor for their good deeds].
Let the King have the letters I have sent, and repair
thou [come back] to me with as much haste as thou wouldest fly
death. I have words to speak in thine ear will make
thee dumb [unable to speak], yet are they much too light for the bore (the size, or caliber)
of the matter. These good fellows (meaning the sailors/pirates) 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.

[4.7]

Enter King and Laertes.

King
Now must your conscience my acquittance (judgement of not guilty) seal,
And you must put me in your heart for friend,
Sith [Since] you have heard, and with a knowing ear (that is, an ear that "knows" what the King says is true),
That he which hath your noble father slain (viz, Hamlet)
Pursued my life.

Laertes
It well appears (so). But tell me
Why you proceeded not (in legal proceeding or royal punishment) against these feats
So crimeful and so capital (of the highest offense; a crime that typically provokes the death penalty) in nature,
As by your safety, greatness, wisdom, all things else,
You mainly were stirred up.

King
Oh for two special reasons,
Which may to you perhaps seem much unsinewed [weak],
And yet to me they're 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 (joined, important, beneficial) to my life and soul
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere, (it was a common astronomical theory at the time that each heavenly body made its way across the night sky by virtue of being embedded in a

crystalline sphere that encircled the Earth – see the Ghost's comment above "make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres" and elsewhere)
I could not but by her. The other motive
Why to a public count (charge of Hamlet's supposed crimes) I might not go
Is the great love the general gender (populace, people) bear him,
Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,
Would, like the spring that turneth wood to stone [waters that have the power to petrify wood],
Convert his gyves to graces, (gyves is a somewhat obscure connotation here; it means shackles or fetters, so they appear to be a symbol of, again, the King's posited criminality of Hamlet's. Nonetheless, the meaning is clear: the people's love of Hamlet will convert his cons to pros in their eyes in the same way that certain waters transform regular wood into petrified wood) so that my arrows,
Too slightly timbered (too small, made of too weak wood) for so loud [strong] a wind,
Would have reverted to [turned back on] my bow again,
And not where I had aimed them. (that is, the strong wind of the people's love for Hamlet would send the King's comparatively weak argument arrows back at him rather than towards their target)

Laertes
And so have I a noble father lost,
A sister driven into desp'rate 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 [Don't lose any sleep over] 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 (feel danger physically, up close)
And think it pastime (sport, fun). You shortly shall hear more.
I loved your father, and we love ourself,
And that, I hope, will teach you to imagine --

Enter a Messenger with letters.

King
How now? What news?

Messenger
Letters, my lord, from Hamlet.
This to your majesty, this to the Queen.

[He gives letters.]

King
From Hamlet! Who brought them?

Messenger

Sailors, my lord, they say. I saw them not.
They were given me by Claudio. (apparently King Claudius has a servant named Claudio – not the most improbable thing in the world – and in fact the mundane likelihood of such a thing, to me, gives the scene more plausability / weighty specificity. It's also fun / interesting to note that Horatio apparently chose to / had to pass off the letters to (at least) one other person before it could make it to the King's messenger. Alternatively, many editors – quite understandably – consider it more likely here that an editor's / copyist's error accidentally transposed the first two syllables of Claudius onto Horatio, but "hypotheses non fingo") He received them.

King
Laertes, you shall hear them.

[To the Messenger]

Leave us.

Exit Messenger.
[He reads.]

High and mighty, you shall know I am set
naked on your kingdom. Tomorrow shall I
beg leave to see your kingly eyes, when I shall
(first asking your pardon thereunto) recount the
occasion 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(writing)?

King
'Tis Hamlet's (way of writing) character(s). "Naked" --
And in a postscript here he says "alone." {lol… this letter, and especially the ps, is wonderfully menacing}
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 diddest thou."

King
If it be so, Laertes --
As how should it be so, how otherwise? --
Will you be ruled by me?

Laertes
Ay, my lord,
If so you'll not o'errule me to a peace [command that I not pursue my revenge].

King
To thine own peace (the peace that comes with successfully completing revenge, that is). If he be now returned
As checking at (the status of) his voyage, and that (it truly is the case that) he means
No more to undertake it, I will work him
To an exploit, now ripe in my device,
Under the (influence of) which he shall not choose but fall;
And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe,
But even his mother shall uncharge the practice
And call it accident.

Laertes
My lord, I will be ruled,
The rather if you could devise it so
That I might be the organ [instrument of this exploit].

King
It falls right.
You have been talked 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 (seat of distinction, throne).

Laertes
What part is that, my lord?

King
A very ribbon in the cap of youth,
Yet needful [important] too, for youth no less becomes
The light and careless livery [clothing] that it wears
Than settled age (becomes) his sables [furs] and his weeds [garments]
Importing [Communicating] health and graveness. Some two months since [ago]
Here was a gentleman of Normandy.
I have seen myself, and served against, the French,
And they can (do, ride) well on horseback, but this gallant [gentleman]
Had witchcraft in't (his horseriding); he grew into his seat,
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse

As (if) he had been encorpsed [become one body] and demi-natured (that is, become half-man / half-horse)
With the brave beast. So far he (sur)passed my (power of) thought
That I in forgery of shapes and tricks
Come short of what he did. (meaning the King couldn't match with all his equestrian imagination the feats the rider was accomplishing in real life)

Laertes
A Norman was't? (an inhabitant of Normandy; one of the mixed Scandinavian-Frankish people who conquered England in 1066, or in this case a euphemism for "Frenchman")

King
A Norman.

Laertes
Upon my life, (I'll bet the rider you saw was) Lamord.

King
The very same.

Laertes
I know him well. He is the brooch (an ornament or piece of jewelry typically worn on the lapel of a coat) indeed
And gem of all the nation (he hails from).

King
He made confession of (knowing) you,
And gave you such a masterly report
For art and exercise in your defense,
And for your rapier most especially,
That he cried out 'twould be a sight indeed
If one could match you. Th'escrimers [swordsmen] of their nation,
He swore, had neither motion, guard, nor eye
If you opposed them. (that is, his fellow Frenchmen wouldn't have speed, good defense, or a sharp eye in a swordfight with Laertes – but the jocular implication of this last term is that Laertes would poke their eyes out) Sir, this report of his (Lamord's)
Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy {I swoon at this double "env" in "envenom with his envy"}
That he could nothing do but wish and beg
Your sudden coming o'er to play [fence] 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, (this echoes the Player Queen's words above "What my love is, proof hath made you know")
Time qualifies (weakens, moderates) the spark and fire of it.
There lives within the very flame of love
A kind of wick (meaning a thing that draws off fuel, and not the modern meaning of a thing through which the fuel is burnt, eg, in candles & lamps) or snuff that will abate it,
And nothing is at a like goodness still,
For goodness, growing to a pleurisy,
Dies in his own too-much. {this is such a wild argument: too much love kills love – but it sounds plausible coming from this smooth-talker!} That [Those things] we would do
We should do when we would, for this "would" changes (I sometimes wonder if this is a punning allusion to "the spring that turneth wood to stone" from above, but it feels like too much of a stretch)
And hath abatements and delays as many
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents,
And then this "should" is like a spendthrift's sigh,
That hurts by easing. (that is, when a person who is bad with saving blows a bunch of money, the sigh that comes along with easing their immediate condition (in the form of retail therapy) hurts their more general state) But to the quick [living source] of th'ulcer (meaning the malady that afflicts us):
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. {yikes}

King
(in my mind / presentation, this threat of Laertes' is so cold-blooded that even Claudius is momentarily taken aback by it, although he very quickly recovers)
No place, indeed, should murder sanctuarize.
Revenge should have no bounds. {amazing rhetorician, old Claude} But, good Laertes,
Will you do this: keep close within your chamber [largely stay put inside your rooms].

Hamlet (having) returned shall (soon) know you are come home.
We'll put on (plant within earshot) those (some who) shall praise your excellence (at fencing)
And set a double varnish on the fame (that is, reiterate the high praise)
The Frenchman gave you, bring you in fine together, ("in fine" here should be thought of in the sense of "bring you, in short, together")
And wager on your heads. He being remiss (not on guard),
Most generous (of spirit), and free from all contriving (against Laertes and/or the King),
Will not peruse the foils [swords], so that with ease,
Or with a little shuffling (misdirection, sleight of hand), you may choose
A sword unbated (to be bated means to have dull points / edges, so unbated means unblunted, iow, sharp – like how swords normally come), and in a pass of practice (in the sense that fencing is practicing swordplay, or in the sense of "the practice of swordfighting")
Requite him [Pay him back] for your father.

Laertes
I will do't,
And for that purpose I'll anoint (in the sense of "apply oil to") my sword.
I bought an unction (oil or ointment) of [from] a mountebank (a person who sells patent medicines in public places; snakeoil salesman)
So mortal [deadly] that, but dip a knife in it,
Where it draws blood (on a victim) no cataplasm [poultice] so rare (refined, exoticly powerful),
Collected from all simples [medicinal herbs] that have virtue (in the realm of healing)
Under the moon, can save the thing from death
That is but scratched withal. I'll touch my point
With this contagion, that if I gall (poke, injure) him slightly,
It may be [mean] death.

King
Let's further think of [through] this,
Weigh what convenience both of time and means
May fit us to our shape. (that is, determine what ready aids can help us achieve our purpose) If this should fail,
And that our drift (our murderous intentions, that is) look [show] through our bad performance [inept execution],
'Twere better not assayed (investigated, looked into). Therefore this project
Should have a back(stop) or second(ary plan), that might hold (strong)
If this should blast in proof [be destroyed by proof]. Soft, [Hold on,] let me see.
We'll make a solemn wager on your cunnings (sword skills) --
I ha't! [I have it!]
When in your motion you are hot and dry – (that is, when your fencing activities have you feeling hot and dry)
As make your bouts more violent to that end (and really throw yourself around out there for that purpose) --
And [Such] that he (Hamlet) calls for drink, I'll have prepared him

A chalice [cup] for the nonce [moment], whereon but sipping,
If he by chance escape your venomed stuck [poisoned sword],
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 drowned, Laertes.

Laertes
Drowned! Oh, where?

Queen
There is a willow grows aslant a brook
That shows his hoar [grayish white] leaves in the glassy stream.
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crowflowers (historically identified by scholars as likely being either “white water crowfoot” or “ragged robin”), nettles, daisies, and long purples (historically identified by scholars as likely being either “early purple orchid” or “purple loosestrife”),
That liberal (licentious, ribald) shepherds give a grosser [more risqué] name,
But our cold (conservative, frigid, prim) maids do dead men's fingers call them.
There on the pendant [downward-hanging] boughs her coronet (a small or simple crown) weeds [flowers]
Clamb'ring to hang (Ophelia was clambering up the downward-hanging boughs of the trees in order to hang on them her crown of flowers, that is), an envious sliver (poetically saying that a piece of the bough that Ophelia was climbing on was jealous of her, and therefore) broke,
When down her weedy trophies (again, her crown of flowers) and herself
Fell in the weeping brook (flowing river, put poetically). Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up, (one can easily envision how, if a woman’s clothes were spread wide across a body of water, they might momentarily prevent her from drowning)
(During) Which time she chanted snatches [sang pieces] of old lauds [songs],
As one [Like someone] incapable of (acknowleding, addressing, or relieving) her own distress,
Or like a creature native and endued (endowed or provided with a quality or ability)
Unto that element (namely, water). But (for) long it could not be
Till (it happened) that her garments, heavy with their drink (that is, weighed down by the water they absorbed),
Pulled the poor wretch (Ophelia) from her melodious lay (this is a play on words, as she is singing melodies while laying on the surface of the body of water, but lay also means “song”)
To muddy death (muddy because her death lies at the bottom of the stream or brook).

Laertes
Alas, then she is drowned.

Queen
Drowned, drowned.

Laertes
Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. (Laertes is forbidding himself to cry because his poor sister, having drowned, has too much of water already) But yet [Nevertheless]
It is our trick (idiosyncratic proclivity); (human) nature her custom holds (that is, to cry when sad),
Let shame (of seeming to be unmanly) say what it will.

[He weeps.]

When these (tears) are gone,
The woman will be out (of my body – men crying is, to Laertes, womanly). Adieu, my lord.
I have a speech of fire [anger] that fain [gladly] would blaze,
But that [Were it not that] this folly (of weeping) douts [douses] it.

Exit.

King
Let's follow (him), Gertrude.
How much I had to do to calm his rage!
Now fear I this (Laertes' anger at learning of his sister's madness) will give it start again;
Therefore let's follow.

[5.1]

Enter two Clowns [with spades and mattocks].

(in many versions of this play, the Clown is identified as Gravedigger (Other is typically still called Other, but to me he's more like a municipal liaison for the services of the Gravedigger.) Vocationally, this role's job within the world of Hamlet is Gravedigger, but on the page he is called Clown to highlight his dramatic role as comedic relief; iow, the role must be played for laughs, in spite of the character's macabre job)

Clown
Is she to be buried in Christian burial, that
willfully seeks her own salvation? (the Clown is asking if Ophelia – whose grave he's in the process of digging – is to be given all the pomp & perquisites that come along with a burial that conforms to the Christian practice of following rite & ritual, despite the fact that she took her own life, which goes directly against the tenets of the faith)

Other
I tell thee she is, and therefore make her grave straight. (meaning not only with square angles, but right away, and to the level of quality expected for a Christian person of high standing)
The crowner (this is a bastardization of "coroner" – the official who investigates the causes of death – meant to connote the speaker to be of low education / a user of colloquial jargon) hath sat on her (meaning hath sat in judgment of her case of suicide, but – again – intended to be coarse / of poor grammar so as to highlight the low station and/or register of the Clown and

Other, and thereby humorous – that is, to create the unintentional double entendre that he actually sat on Ophelia's corpse), and finds it (able to be considered a) Christian burial.

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

Other
Why, 'tis found (to be) so.

Clown
It must be se offendendo, (this is a play on the Latin phrase *se defendendo* "defending himself" which, in a legal context, means "in self-defense"; the Clown is literally saying here that he thinks Ophelia drowned herself "in self-offense", lol. Although the Clown eventually shows himself to be a wise & crafty personage, it is unlikely that he is here propounding an actual legal theory based on twisting the concept of self-defense, but rather is only meant to show that the Clown is just educated enough to be dangerous, having presumably previously overheard learned counsel use the term "se defendendo" but misremembering it, thereby giving those in the audience in the know a laugh)
it cannot be else [otherwise], 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. (the humor here being that act is one of the branches of itself, and that all three branches of acting are different terms for the same thing; this is a version of taxonomizing per characteristic that rhetoricians molded in the Aristotelian tradition engage in which the Clown is – as with the legal jargon just above – mangling in his delivery) Argal (bastardized version of "Ergo", Latin for "Thus"; iow, another common device of rhetoric that Shakespeare has the Clown mangling for humor's sake, and to demonstrate his low birth / lack of education. This latter device is deployed, in part, to prime the audience to underestimate the intelligence and wisdom of the Clown, an expectation which has rich payoff in the near term, both dramatically and comedically), she
drowned herself wittingly.

Other
Nay, but hear you, Goodman Delver.

Clown
Give me leave (to present my case). 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 he (literally "will he, won't he"; an early version of the phrase "willy-nilly"), he goes.
Mark you that. But if the water come to him and
drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal (bastardized Ergo, again; see note above), he that

is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life. (uttering a tautology in the form of a conclusive logical argument is once more wringing humor from the Clown's misapplication of philosophy / logic / rhetoric)

Other
But is this law?

Clown
Ay, marry (by Mary; see note above), is't -- crowner's (bastardization of "coroner" again; see note above) quest (humorous bastardization of "inquest" – investigation) law.

Other
Will you ha'(ve) the truth on't? If this had not been a
gentlewoman (of station & wealth), she should have been buried
out o'Christian burial. (meaning lacking in all the ritual & ceremony that comes with being interred per the Christian dogma; the Other is here criticising the hypocritical perquisites of the privileged)

Clown
Why, there thou say'st. (the Clown agrees) And the more pity that
great (rich, powerful) folk should have countenance [approval] in this world
to drown or hang themselves more than their even-Christian [fellow, or equal, Christian].
Come, (hand me) my spade. There is no (more) ancient gentlemen
but [than] gardeners, ditchers, and gravemakers.
They hold up Adam's (the first man's) profession.

Other
Was he a gentleman?

Clown
He was the first that ever bore (a coat of) arms (the literal sign of a gentleman).

Other
Why, he had none.

Clown
What, art a heathen? How dost thou understand the
Scripture? The Scripture says Adam digged. Could
he dig without arms? (haha, rim shot – the punchline here turns on the more common connotation of "arms" as "limbs") I'll put another question to thee.
If thou answerest me not to the purpose, confess thyself (as being so not otherwise doing) --

Other
Go to. (Go ahead / I so pledge.)

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

Other
The gallows-maker, for that frame outlives a thousand tenants. {not only is this a hilarious and clever answer, but I love the character development of allowing the Other to have a bit of wit himself. It also serves a dramatic purpose of setting up the yet superior wit of the Gravemaker, who is presumably piqued here – as most funny, witty people would be – by someone else being funny and witty in their presence}

Clown
I like thy wit well, in good faith, the gallows does well.
But how does it (do) well? It does well to those that do ill (that is, criminals).
Now, thou dost ill to say the gallows is built stronger
than the church. Argal (Ergo; see above), the gallows may do well to thee.
To't [Try and answer it] again, come.

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

Clown
Ay, tell me that, and unyoke (from your arduous labor).

Other
Marry (By Mary; see above), now I can tell.

Clown
To't.

Other
(By the) Mass, I cannot tell.

Enter Hamlet and Horatio afar off.

Clown
Cudgel (a short, thick stick used as a weapon, here in verb form; essentially: beat up) thy brains
no more about it, for your dull ass
will not mend his pace with beating (iow, a dumb donkey won't work faster if its beaten, but this is also a way for the Gravedigger to literally call the Other a dumbass); and when you
are asked this question next [again], say "a grave-maker."
The houses that he makes lasts till doomsday.
Go get thee to Johan (some editors have this not as any name, but as "yon", meaning "over yonder"). Fetch me a stoup (flagon, beaker) of liquor.

[Exit Second Clown.]
[The First Clown digs.]
Sings.

In youth when I did love, did love,
Methought it was very sweet
To contract--oh--the time for—a--my behove,
Oh, methought there--a--was nothing--a--meet.

Hamlet
Has this fellow no feeling of [sensitivity towards] his (delicate, somber) business,
(such) that he sings (while) at grave-making?

Horatio
Custom [Exposure to the work] hath made it in him a property of easiness.

Hamlet
'Tis e'en so. The hand of little employment hath the daintier sense. (that is, a person with much less experience would be much more squeamish about the practice)

Clown

Clown sings.

But age with his stealing steps
Hath clawed me in his clutch,
And hath shipped me into the land,
As if I had never been such.

[The Clown throws up a skull.]

Hamlet
That skull had a tongue in it and could sing once. (it took me way too long to realize that Hamlet is here directly mocking the Gravedigger specifically for their disrespectful singing, protesting that the skull he's tossing about once had the same capability)
How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if 'twere
Cain's jawbone, that did the first murder! (some sources have Cain killing his brother Abel with the jawbone of an ass) This might
be the pate [head] of a politician, which this ass now o'er-offices (to domineer over by virtue of office),
one (politician) that would circumvent (presume to outsmart or outmaneuver) God, might it not? (the idea here being that the dead politician might have at one point felt more powerful or capable than God, yet now he lacks power or influence enough to prevent his skull from being thrown around by this presumptuous & idiotic Gravedigger)

Horatio
It might, my lord.

Hamlet

Or of a courtier, which (the skull, that is) 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 (to borrow) it,
might it not?

Horatio
Ay, my lord.

Hamlet
Why, e'en so. And now (belonging to) my Lady Worm's (a way of saying the dead belong to "your only emperor for diet" (worms) while also making a joke connecting to the "Lord Such-a-one" references above), chapless (having no lower jaw),
and knocked about the mazard [skull] with a sexton's spade. (a sexton is a person who looks after a church, including its graveyard)
Here's (a) fine revolution [turning of tables], an (if) we had the trick [capability] to see't.
Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to [Were these bones worth no more their creation than to]
play at loggets with 'em? (loggets was a game – most popular in the 17th & 18th centuries – played in England in which participants throw pieces of wood at a stake) Mine (bones) ache to think on't.

Clown

Sings.

A pickax and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding sheet;
Oh, a pit of clay (that is, a grave) for to be made
For such a guest (namely, the corpse) is meet (suitable, fit, proper).

[He throws up another skull.]

Hamlet
There's another. Why might not that be the skull
of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities (subtle or minor points of distinction, especially in logic or philosophy) now, his
quillets (legal loopholes or technicalities that are used to evade the spirit of the law), his cases,
his tenures (prestigious periods of office or employment), and his tricks?
Why does he suffer this rude knave [idiot] now to knock
him about the sconce (head, skull) with a dirty shovel, and will
not tell him of his action of battery (in other words, not inform him of the crime he's committing by its legalistic name)? Hum! This (dead) fellow
might be in's [might have been in his] time a great buyer of land, with his
statutes [laws], his recognizances (formal agreements undertaken by an individual to appear in court or to fulfill a specific legal obligation), his fines, his double

vouchers (legal documents that provide evidence of the purchase of land or property), his recoveries (legal processes that seek to restore an individual's possession of land or property that has been wrongfully taken from them). Is this the fine of his fines,
and the recovery of his recoveries (at the hands of Death), to have his fine
pate full of fine dirt? (the first “fine” meaning “good” and the second one meaning “not coarse; comprised of small particles”) Will his vouchers vouch him
no more of his purchases, and double ones too,
than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures? (indentures were two copies of a legal contract – commonly used in land sales, leases, and agreements between businesses – that were originally written on a single sheet of paper. The sheet was then cut or torn along a serrated line, creating two identical copies of the contract. This process was used to ensure the authenticity of the contract and to provide evidence of its terms. The term "indentures" is derived from the Latin word "indentum," which means "toothed." This refers to the serrated line where the contract was cut in half. The indentations on the two copies of the contract matched up, providing a visual verification of their authenticity)
The very conveyances of his lands (that is, all the paperwork that serves as instruments to document and verify his ownership of his lands) will hardly lie in
this box (coffin), and must th'inheritor himself have no more, ha? (Hamlet here notes the eternal truism that we can’t take it with us)

Horatio
Not a jot more, my lord.

Hamlet
Is not parchment (the material that contracts are written on, that is) made of sheepskins?

Horatio
Ay, my lord, and of calves' skins too.

Hamlet
They are sheep and calves (tame, mindless followers) which seek out assurance in that.
I will speak to this fellow. -- Whose grave's this, sirrah? (a term of address for a man or boy, especially one younger or of lower status than the speaker)

Clown
Mine, sir.

[Sings.]

Oh, 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. (as with most of the jokes in Hamlet, this one turns on a word – “lie”, in this case – with multiple meanings. We must suppose Hamlet here to be rather

self-satisfied with his own joke, but the Gravedigger soon gets the last laugh – the only person in this entire play with a quicker wit than the title character)

Clown
You lie out on't [stand out of it], sir, and therefore 'tis not yours.
For my part, I do not lie in't [fabricate in it], and yet it is mine. (the Gravedigger is here both making a double-meaning joke – which is the currency of the realm in Shakespearean plays – while also defending his truthfulness & accuracy)

Hamlet
Thou dost lie in't, to be in't and say 'tis thine.
'Tis (meant) for the dead, not for the quick ("quick" is the pulse or lifeforce, so "the quick" is another way of saying "the living"); therefore thou liest. {you know you're in trouble when you have to explain your own joke}

Clown
'Tis a quick lie, sir; 'twill (go) away again from me to you. (in leveraging another primary connotation of "quick", the Gravedigger is here demonstrating that Hamlet isn't the only one who can make such jokes)

Hamlet
What man dost thou dig it for?

Clown
For no man, sir.

Hamlet
What woman, then?

Clown
For none, neither.

Hamlet
Who is to be buried in't?

Clown
One that was a woman, sir, but, rest her soul, she's dead. (the Gravedigger's wily and evasive speech – in addition to adding some levity and providing opportunity to flesh out his character – serves a further dramatic purpose of not plainly revealing to Hamlet that the grave they are digging is meant for Ophelia, thereby allowing him to be shocked by the revelation coming up)

Hamlet

[To Horatio]

How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the

card (script, map, or perhaps compass card), or equivocation (at the hands of the Gravedigger) will undo us. By the Lord,
Horatio, these three years I have taken note of it,
the age is grown so picked (overly refined & fastidious, or perhaps full of flaws & imperfections) that the toe of the
peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier
he galls his kibe (an archaic term that refers to a chilblain, which is a painful inflammation of the skin, typically on the feet or hands, caused by exposure to cold and damp conditions. And this courtier's kibe is galled by the peasant because the latter is walking too closely to the former, in an overly familiar manner that serves to indicate how picked the age has grown). -- How long hast thou been grave-maker?

Clown
Of all the days i'th' year, I came to't that day
that our last King Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

Hamlet
How long is that since?

Clown
Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that. (typical device of Shakespeare's: the Fool is obliged the opportunity to call a powerful person a fool)
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?

Clown
Why, because he was mad. 'A shall recover his wits there, (see note above about use of 'A for He)
or if he do not, 'tis no great matter there.

Hamlet
Why?

Clown
'Twill not be seen in him there. There the men are as mad as he. (a nice joke at the expense of the people of England for Shakespeare's English audience)

Hamlet
How came he mad?

Clown

Very strangely, they say.

Hamlet
How strangely?

Clown
Faith, e'en with losing his wits.

Hamlet
Upon what ground?

Clown
Why, here in Denmark. (three jokes in a row predicated on misconstruing the meaning intended among several options – Hamlet is being beaten at his own game) I have been sexton here, (both as a) man and (as a) boy, (for) thirty years. (Shakespeare here gives us the necessary information to determine Hamlet's age: the Gravedigger started his profession the day that Prince Hamlet was born, and has been at it for 30 years)

Hamlet
How long will a man lie i'th' earth ere [before] he rot? {I love Hamlet's willingness to ask about things he's curious about, even if they're macabre}

Clown
I'faith [In faith], if he be not rotten before he die {lol}
-- as we have many pocky corses nowadays
that will scarce hold [scarcely withstand] the (process of) laying in(to the earth or perhaps the coffin) {lmao} --
he will last you some eight year, or nine year.
A tanner will last you nine year.

Hamlet
Why he more than another?

Clown
Why, sir, his hide is so tanned with his trade that
he will keep out water a great while; and your water
is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body.

[He picks up a skull.]

Here's a skull now hath lain you i'th' earth three-and-twenty years. (in the context of the above information about Hamlet's age, this tidbit tells us that Yorick, the King's jester, died when Hamlet was seven years old)

Hamlet
Whose was it?

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

Hamlet
Nay, I know not.

Clown
A pestilence on him for (being) a mad rogue! {I love that the Gravedigger kinda hates Yorick / that they have history, ha}
'A [He] poured a flagon of Rhenish (wine) on my head once.
This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the King's jester.

Hamlet
This?

Clown
E'en that.

Hamlet
Let me see.

[taking 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 [that thought] is! My gorge rises at it. (it provokes the desire to vomit in him, that is)
Here (on the upper jaw of the skull) hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft(en).
-- Where be your gibes (insults, taunts) now? Your gambols (playful jumping & running about), your songs,
your flashes of merriment that were wont [liable] to set the table
on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning? (the sentiment here is basically something jokingly snide like “Not so able to make fun of your own situation now, are you funny man?” but is also a comedic play on words because Yorick – currently not in possession of his lower jaw – cannot create a facsimile of his own grin, at present)
Quite chopfall'n? ("chopfall'n" is an old-fashioned way of saying "with a fallen jaw," implying surprise or astonishment – the word "chop" in this context refers to the lower jaw or chin – so, Hamlet’s joke is that Yorick is so shocked that his lower jaw has fallen clean off) Now get you to my lady's chamber
and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor
she must come. Make her laugh at that. (Hamlet is – with most bitter irony – exhorting Yorick to go to a woman in her rooms – most likely his Mom, but perhaps Ophelia, or perhaps just an unidentified woman meant to signify women generally – and tell them that, no matter how much

makeup they put on, their faces will look like skulls in the end) {brutal stuff, and yet another unsubtly misogynistic dig}
Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

Horatio
What's that, my lord?

Hamlet
Dost thou think Alexander looked o'this fashion (that is, mouldering & decomposed) i'th' [in the] earth?

Horatio
E'en so.

Hamlet
And smelt so? Puh!

[He throws the skull down.]

Horatio
E'en so, my lord.

Hamlet
To what base (low, undignified) uses we may return, Horatio!
Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of
Alexander till 'a find it stopping a bunghole (an aperture through which a cask can be filled or emptied)?

Horatio
'Twere to consider too curiously to consider so. (meaning, you would be giving your imagination too free a reign to let it follow this macabre & distasteful line of thinking)

Hamlet
No, (in) faith, not a jot [bit]. But to follow him thither (that is, from corpse to bunghole-stopper) with modesty (of imagination & purpose) enough, and likelihood [plausibility] to lead it [the train of thought],
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 [to which] he was converted might they not (use to) stop a beer-barrel?
Imperial Caesar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole (in a wall) to keep the wind away.
Oh, that that earth (because Caesar has been converted into earth via the process described above, but also setting up a play with “world” coming next) which kept the world in awe (of his authority, greatness, majesty)

Should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw! (namely, coldness, or – more particularly – cold wind)

Enter King, Queen, Laertes, and a coffin
[containing the corpse of Ophelia, in funeral procession,
with the "Doctor" or Priest], with Lords attendant.

But soft, but soft [Woah, woah, wait a minute]; (stand) aside! Here comes the King,
The Queen, the courtiers. Who is this they follow?
And with such maimèd rites? (Hamlet here is noticing that the funeral rites provided to this body being transported are not as refulgent as they could otherwise be…) This doth betoken
The corse [corpse] they follow did with desp'rate hand
Fordo its own life. (...and infers that the reason is because the dead person likely committed suicide) 'Twas of some estate. (yet, the trappings are of a richness that the person was obviously of high social station)
Couch we awhile and mark [Let's park ourselves a moment and observe].

[Hamlet and Horatio conceal themselves.
Ophelia's body is taken to the grave.]

Laertes
What ceremony else (shall be performed)?

Hamlet

[Aside to Horatio]

That is Laertes, a very noble youth. Mark.

Laertes
What ceremony else?

Priest
Her obsequies [funeral rites] have been as far enlarged (made grand)
As we have warrantise (approval from the higher ups in the church). Her death was (of) doubtful (provenance – meaning was possibly an unchristian suicide),
And, but [were it not that] that great command (that is, King Claudius) o'ersways [overrules] the [clerical] order (in their objections),
She should in ground unsanctified (not made holy) have lodged
Till the last trumpet (that of the angel Gabriel, that is, which is supposed to raise the dead and signal eschatalogical events). For [Instead of] charitable prayers,
Shards, flints, and pebbles (that is, handfuls of rocks) should be thrown on her;
Yet here (in this case) she is allowed her virgin crants (garlands or wreaths carried in front of a maiden's bier),
Her maiden strewments (flowers, ribbons, and other decorations that were traditionally strewn on a young unmarried woman's grave during her funeral), and the bringing home
Of bell and burial. (the ringing of a bell and the ceremonial burial process were essential elements of a Christian funeral; the bell signified the passing of a soul, and the burial marked

the physical separation of the body from the world – and are being brought home either literally or in the sense of Ophelia's returning to God her father in his home in Heaven)

Laertes
Must there no more be done (in her honor)?

Priest
No more be done.
We should [would] profane the service of the dead
To sing sage requiem (religious ceremony performed for the dead) and (give or wish) such rest to her
As to peace-parted souls (so called because they died due to natural causes, rather than taking their own lives and thereby parting this Earth not in peace).

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 (in your grave) {such a wonderfully savage rejoinder to the painfully rude churchman}.

Hamlet

[To Horatio]

What, the fair Ophelia!

Queen

[Scattering flowers]

Sweets (flowers) to the sweet (girl)! Farewell.
I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife.
I thought thy bride-bed to have decked (with such flowers), sweet maid,
And not t'have strewed (them over) thy grave.

Laertes
Oh, treble (three times as much) woe
Fall ten times treble (10 times x 3 times = 30 times) on that cursèd head (of Hamlet's)
Whose wicked deed (killing their father) thy most ingenious sense (your brilliant & functioning rationality)
Deprived thee of! --
(To the people about to throw shovelsful of dirt on her lowered coffin:)
Hold off the earth awhile,
Till I have caught her once more in mine arms.
[He] leaps in the grave.
Now pile your dust upon the quick [the living] and dead (meaning him & his sister),

Till of this flat (ground) a mountain you have made
T'o'ertop [To overtop] (that is reach higher than) old Pelion (a mountain in Greece), or the skyish head
Of blue Olympus (the highest mountain in Greece, and the mythological home of the Greek gods. And Laertes calls it “skyish” likely because it is – as he mentioned – blue, but it could also be because it’s high up in the sky).

Hamlet

[Coming forward]

What [Who] is he whose grief
Bears such an emphasis (as this), whose phrase [expression] of sorrow
Conjures [Grabs the attention of] the wand'ring stars, and makes them stand (still)
Like wonder-wounded hearers (that is, like people who are so amazed at something they’ve heard that they stop in their tracks)? This is I,
Hamlet the Dane.

Laertes

[Grappling with Hamlet]

The devil take thy soul!

Hamlet
Thou pray'st not well.
I prithee take thy fingers from my throat, (although “Thou pray’st not well” is obviously a direct rejoinder to what Laertes just said, in my mind it’s also an allusion to Laertes’ fingers being joined together, not in prayer but in strangling Hamlet, lol)
For, though I am not splenative (bad-tempered, spiteful; again from the medical theory of bodily humors and its beliefs about the spleen) and rash (hasty in decision-making),
Yet [Nonetheless] have I something in me (some element in my character or personality that is) dangerous,
Which let thy wiseness fear. Away thy hand!

King
Pluck them asunder.

Queen
Hamlet, Hamlet!

All
Gentlemen!

Horatio
Good my lord, be quiet.

[Hamlet and Laertes are parted.]

Hamlet

Why, I will fight with him upon this theme
Until my eyelids will no longer wag (that is, blink – and blinking being an autonomic response which only stops working when the mind & body does, this is a fanciful way of saying “until I die”).

Queen
Oh, my son, what theme?

Hamlet
I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up my sum. {woof, this is a hell of a claim} -- What wilt thou do for her?

King
Oh, he is mad, Laertes.

Queen
For love of God, forbear him.

Hamlet
'Swounds [Christ’s wounds], show me what thou'lt do.
Woo't [Wouldst thou] weep? Woo't fight? Woo't fast? Woo't tear thyself (either one’s clothes or even one’s flesh, as in a display of lamentation)?
Woo't drink up eisil [vinegar]? Eat a crocodile?
I'll do't (too). Dost thou come here to whine?
To outface (boldly confront, upstage) me with leaping in her grave?
Be buried quick [alive] with her, and so will I.
And if thou prate (speak foolishly) of mountains, let them throw
Millions of acres on us, till our (present) ground,
Singeing his pate [Charring his head] against the burning zone (of the Sun),
Make [Causes] Ossa (- yet another Greek mountain - to look) like a wart (in comparison). Nay, an thou'lt [and if you] mouth (off),
I'll rant as well (capably, voluminously) as thou.

Queen
This is mere madness,
And thus awhile the fit (of madness) will work on him;
Anon [Soon], as patient as the female dove
When that her golden couplets (eggs – doves typically lay eggs two at a time) are disclosed (exposed to the world),
His silence will sit drooping.

Hamlet

[To Laertes]

Hear you, sir,
What is the reason that you (mis)use me thus?
I loved you ever [I always liked you]. But it is no matter.
Let Hercules (a divine Greco-Roman hero of tremendous strength & ability) himself do what he may [will],
The cat will mew, and dog will have his day (that is, the natural state or order of things will be effected).

Exit Hamlet.

King
I pray you, good Horatio, wait upon him.

And Horatio [exits too].
[Aside to Laertes]

Strengthen your patience in our last night's speech (discussion of revenge);
We'll put the matter to the present push (that is, we'll force the issue presently). --
Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son. –

(Back to Laertes:)

This grave shall have a living monument (meaning a lasting monument, but also a sly allusion to the fact that the planned sacrificial death of Hamlet – who lives at present – will be a monument to tragic death of Ophelia).
An hour of quiet thereby shall we see (another double allusion: to Hamlet's quietus, and Claudius refers to the peace that Laertes can experience in revenging his sister & father, and to his own peace because, remember, til then "howe'er [his] haps, [his] joys were ne'er begun");
Till then, in patience our (murderous) proceeding be.

[5.2]

Enter Hamlet and Horatio.
(The scene starts mid-conversation right as Hamlet changes topics)

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 mutine(er)s in the bilboes (an iron bar with sliding shackles, used for confining a prisoner's ankles. Imagine a sailor who has attempted mutiny & failed, and is now locked up with such a device on their ship; they would sleep pretty poorly. Hamlet is saying he had a worse night of sleep than a person in such a situation). Rashly,
And praised be rashness for it: let us know [be aware that],
Our indiscretion sometime serves us well

When our deep plots (that is, our deeply considered and prepared plans) do pall (falter, become unappealing), and that should learn [teach] us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will. {love the metaphor of God finishing the work we roughly shape} (I'm not a fan of the punctuation here – either that, or I'm not understanding this passage as well as I think I am. To my mind, Hamlet seems to be setting up the story he is about to tell below about swapping out the King's order for his imitation, and he is beginning by saying he was acting rashly before he briefly sidebars on the surprising upsides to the divine assistance we can come to expect even when we act thusly. And to that end, I feel like the punctuation should be something like "Rashly – and praised be rashness for it: let us know…" and then another em dash before "Up from my cabin…" to indicate that everything he had said between "Rashly" and "up from my cabin" was an aside. But, whatever – the meaning is clear)

Horatio
That is most certain.

Hamlet
Up from my (ship's) cabin,
My sea-gown (a heavy, robe-like garment intended to be worn while at sea) scarfed (wrapped about the neck and hanging over the shoulders like a scarf) about me, in the dark
Groped I to find out them (Rosencrantz & Guildenstern's room), had my desire (that is, found the room),
Fingered their packet (pinched the King's deadly command), and in fine [short] withdrew
To mine own room again, making [being] so bold,
My fears forgetting manners, (as) to unseal
Their grand commission; where I found, Horatio --
Oh, royal knavery! (bad behavior on the part of royal King Claudius, that is) -- an exact (explicit, unambiguous) command,
Larded [Stuffed] with many several sorts of reasons
Importing Denmark's health, and England's too,
With, ho! such bugs and goblins in my life (that is, the consequences of the missive contained many things inimical to Hamlet's life),
That on the supervise (of the letters by the King of England), no leisure bated (no moment's leisure should be wasted),
No, not to stay the grinding of the ax [– No, not even to wait for the ax to be sharpened –],
My head should be struck off.

Horatio
Is't possible?

Hamlet
[Showing a document]

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 villainies (some editors have this as “villains”, but for me it is easier to imagine a collection of villainies creating a net than a collection of villains, especially since the only villains (and rather marginally complicit in this particular act, at that) about Hamlet in this moment are Rosencrantz & Guildenstern, hardly enough to benet someone) --
Ere I could make a prologue to my brains [Before I could organize my thoughts],
They had begun the play [My brains set me in motion] -- I sat me down,
Devised a new commission, wrote it fair. (Hamlet here engages in a short disquisition on some members of the political organ of the state who apparently consider it base to write in a florid manner, such as was contained in the King’s letter, and mentions that he tried to undo that learning in himself)
I once did hold it, as our statists do,
A baseness to write fair, and labored much
How to forget that learning; but, sir, now
It did me yeoman's service (one definition of “yeoman” is “one who owns and cultivates land” so “yeoman’s service” signifies hard labor that is very beneficial). Wilt thou know
Th'effect of what I wrote?

Horatio
Ay, good my lord.

Hamlet
An earnest conjuration from the King,
As England was his faithful tributary (again, the ostensible reason for Hamlet’s visit was to collect the delayed tribute England owed to Denmark),
As love between them like the palm (tree) should flourish,
As peace should still her wheaten garland wear (that is, the goddess Peace should continue to wear a wreath or braid of wheat in honor of the peace that exists between the two nations)
And stand a comma 'tween their amities, (there should be so many good feelings / words / acts between Denmark and England that commas need to be stood up between them)
And many suchlike "as"es of great charge, (Hamlet is here again mocking the florid manner of speech used in official correspondence between heads of state of the time, which started many officious pronouncements with the word “As…” a vestige of which (I presume) is the way official pronouncements from governments these days will often begin with a series of sentences which start with “Whereas…”)
That on the view and knowing of these contents (this is the analogue to the “on the supervise” from Claudius’ letter),
Without debatement further, more or less (and this is the analogue to the “no leisure bated”),
He should the bearers (who are Rosencrantz & Guildenstern) put to sudden death,

Not shriving time allowed (and this is the analogue to the “no, not to stay the grinding of the ax”. Shriving is the confession of one's sins to a priest in order to receive absolution, and Hamlet is saying that the time needed to perform this courtesy should not be afforded to R&G before the English King puts them to death, thereby denying them – in the terms of their theology – access to a preferable afterlife: a wonderfully spiteful rejoinder in its righteous anger).

Horatio
How was this sealed? (the seal on a letter – which was most often affixed by pressing a signet ring into hot wax – was the way its authenticity was established in Hamlet’s day. Horatio is assuming that Hamlet didn’t bring such accoutrement with him on his embassage)

Hamlet
Why, even in that was heaven ordinant (intervening, helpful).
I had my father's signet (ring) in my purse,
Which was the model of that Danish seal (that Claudius used – that is, Hamlet’s Dad’s signet looked enough like the official seal that it passed for the real thing);
Folded the writ [letter] up in the form of th'other (meaning in the same way Claudius’s had been),
Subscribed [Signed] it (as the King), gave't th'impression (of the signet in the wax), placed it safely (in the same place he had found the original order),
The changeling (counterfeit, which had been exchanged for the original) never known (discovered). Now the next day
Was our sea fight (with the pirate), and what to this was sequent [what happened after that point]
Thou know'st already.

Horatio
So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't. (Horatio is noting, probably with some chagrin, that G&R presently unknowingly go to their deaths in their voyage to England, which they would of course have continued on with despite the loss of Hamlet to the pirates in order to deliver the King’s orders, as they were unaware that the object of the mission was Hamlet’s death)

Hamlet
(I read the following as starting with a mild rebuke – another sign of the righteousness of Hamlet’s anger in his own mind)
Why, man, they did make love to this employment. (meaning, they undertook being the King’s toadies – in which service they happened to betray their friendship to Hamlet – with relish & enthusiasm)
They are not near [not weighing on] my conscience. Their defeat
Doth by their own insinuation grow. (that is, they met defeat because they insinuated themselves into business between the King & Hamlet)
'Tis dangerous when the baser nature (meaning commoners) comes
Between the pass(age separating the) and fell (deadly) incensèd (angry sword)points
Of mighty opposites (such as, in this case, a Prince & a King).

Horatio
Why, what a (terrible, awful, evil) King is this!

Hamlet
Does it not, think'st thee, stand [behoove] me now upon (what has befallen) --
He that hath killed my King and whored my mother,
Popped in between th'election (for King) and my hopes (to become King),
Thrown out his angle [fish-hook] for my proper life,
And with such coz'nage (artful coaxing and wheedling, or shrewd trickery) -- is't not perfect conscience [perfectly moral]
To quit [kill] him with this arm (Hamlet is presumably here holding up his own arm)? And is't not to be damned
To let this canker [ruiner] of our (good human) nature come
In further [commit more acts of] 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's 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 (thing being drawn) of my cause I see
The portraiture (drawing) of his (that is, Laerte’s cause of revenge bears – to Hamlet – a strong resemblance to his own). I'll court his favors.
But sure(ly) the bravery (audacity, shamelessness) of his grief (displays at Ophelia’s grave) did put me
Into a tow'ring passion [rage].

Horatio
Peace, who comes here?

Enter young Osric, a courtier.

Osric
Your lordship is right welcome back to Denmark.

Hamlet
I humbly thank you, sir.

[Aside to Horatio]

Dost know this water-fly?

Horatio

[Aside to Hamlet]

No, my good lord.

Hamlet

[Aside to Horatio]

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. (Hamlet is noting sardonically that even a beastly person can find his way into the orbit of a King, or at least this King, if he has enough power or money to be considered a lord) 'Tis a chough (choughs are a kind of Corvid, like a crow or raven, which were often seen as symbols of misfortune or ill omen, but in this context it likely means something like a chatterbox or gossip, or perhaps – a less common connotation – someone full of dirt or rubbish, which connects to Hamlet's larger point here about the key to Osric's prominence being his family's possession of lands), 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 (the King).

Hamlet

I will receive it, sir, with all diligence of spirit.
Put your bonnet [hat] to his right [proper] use. 'Tis for the head. (although it's not specified explicitly in the script, the implication here is that Osric is using his hat to fan himself while they are talking, which would be the perfect activity for a gratingly supercilious yet obsequious fop to be engaged in – and the perfect target for Hamlet to lance)

Osric

I thank your lordship, it is very hot.

Hamlet

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

Osric

It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.

(We can imagine here that Osric has given in to Hamlet's power trip and has started to put his hat on his head)

Hamlet

But yet methinks it is very sultry and hot for my complexion. (Hamlet is obviously here toying with Osric by surfacing his servile willingness to agree with whatever opinion his betters express, even in contravention to his own experience)

Osric

(and now Osric quickly removes the hat again)

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 (evoking the language of putting a price or bounty on one's head). Sir, this is the
matter --

Hamlet

[Reminding Osric once more about his hat]
(which, in my version, consists of Hamlet miming putting the hat on his head)
I beseech you, remember.

Osric

Nay, good my lord, for mine ease (physical comfort), in good faith.
Sir, here is newly (recently again) come to court Laertes -- believe me,
an absolute gentlemen, full of most excellent differences [characteristics],
of very soft society (such as gentle men and women inhabit) and great showing (in dress,
comportment, manners). Indeed, to speak
feelingly of him, he is the card (map) or calendar of gentry (the class of people next below the
nobility in position and birth), for
you shall find in him the continent (this is a play on the word content fitted to Osric's
map/calendar metaphor) of what part a gentleman
would (prefer to) see.

Hamlet

(Hamlet, in this passage, makes fun of Osric by mocking his purple, courtly speech)
Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you,
though I know to divide him inventorially would
dazzle 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.
[Sir, Laertes' description by you suffers no weaknesses,
though I know to attempt to inventory his good parts would
confuse the mind's ability to count, and yet but yaw (rotate about its vertical axis, like a ship)
neither, in respect of his quick sail*. But in the truth
of praise, I take him to be a soul of great value,
and his nature of such uncommon rareness as,
to speak truly of him, his only equal exists in his mirror,
and who else would trace him? Only his shadow.]

*although I understand the use of the nautical/navigational term yaw in connection with the idea of Laertes being quick of sail, I must admit I don't fully grok what is meant by "and yet but yaw neither"; specifically, I'm not sure to which two things are being referenced by "neither"

Osric
Your lordship speaks most infallibly [perfectly] of him. (part of the brilliance of the writing / development of Osric is that directors / actors can decide how aware to make him of the fact that Hamlet treats him like dirt – talking smack about him to Horatio while he stood and waited, mocking how he uses his hat while exposing his servility, making fun of how he speaks – as well as how good of a job he does of hiding it or holding his tongue / how deeply he respects the dictates of life at court, and then determine whether or not that might be a motivating animus for Osric's later involvement in the fatal fencing match soon to come; in other words, Osric might be in on the plot and a willing participant because Hamlet is an incorrigible prick, and to him in particular)

Hamlet
(continuing to fuck with Osric via unnecessarily obscure language)
The concernancy [What issue does this concern], sir?
Why do we wrap the gentleman in our more rawer (rarer, more refined) breath [words]?

Osric
Sir?

Horatio

[To Hamlet]

Is't not possible to understand [be understood] in another tongue (with words that are more plainly intelligible / less obscure)?
You will to't, sir, really. ("You will take it too far", basically)

Hamlet

[To Osric]

What imports the nomination of [What is the reason for naming] this gentleman (that is, discussing him)?

Osric
Of Laertes?

Horatio

[To Hamlet]

His (verbal) purse is empty already; all's [all his] golden words are spent.

Hamlet

[To Osric]

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. (that is, Hamlet would consider it faint praise if Osric esteemed him to be “not ignorant”, the implication being that he’s too stupid for that estimation to mean much)
Well, sir?

Osric
Sir, you are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is --

Hamlet
I dare not confess that, lest I should compare with
him in excellence. (that is, to admit that he thinks Laertes is excellent would be to invite the hearer to weigh him in comparison) But to know a man well were to
know himself. (as knowing oneself well is a necessary precondition to knowing another man well / successfully comparing oneself with him in excellence. But the real point here was, of course, to again interrupt Osric prematurely, thereby reasserting his power, frustrating Osric, and mocking him by pretending his unfinished sentence was his intended message)

Osric
I mean, sir, for his weapon. But in the imputation (of skill)
laid on him by them (who know so or do so), in his meed (deserved share or reward) he's unfellowed (he stands alone – that is, those who know swordfighting praise his talent and skill as one of a kind).

Hamlet
What's his weapon?

Osric
Rapier and dagger.

Hamlet
That's two of his weapons -- but well. {rimshot}

Osric
The King, sir, hath wagered with him six Barbary
horses (a North African breed of riding horse with great hardiness and stamina), against the which he has impawned (put in pawn, pledged), as I
take it, six French rapiers (thin, light sharp-pointed swords) and poniards (small, slim daggers), with their

assigns [accoutrements], (such) as girdle (wide belts that wrapped around the swordsman's waist, securing the scabbard – the sheath that holds the sword – to the body), hangers (devices from which to hang the weapons, I presume), or so. Three of the
carriages, in faith, are very dear [expensive] to fancy [opulent], very
responsive (up) to the hilts, most delicate(ly wrought) carriages,
and of very liberal conceit (that is, of very imaginative design).

Hamlet
What call you the [What are the things that you refer to as] carriages?

Horatio

[To Hamlet]

I knew you must be edified (improved in knowledge, taught something) by the margin (unintentionally; on the margins of the main discussion) ere [before] you had done (finished with this interaction / conversation).

Osric
The carriages, sir, are (another word for) the hangers.

Hamlet
The phrase would be more germane [salient] to the matter (at hand)
if we could carry cannon(s) by our sides (because cannons require actual carriages to be deployed); I would it
might be [I would prefer that they be called] "hangers" till then. But (go) on. Six Barbary
horses against six French swords, their assigns,
and three liberal-conceited carriages: that's the French
bet (because that's where the rapiers & poniards are from – unless Laertes is somehow French in some way I'm unaware of, or financially backed by Frenchmen) against the Danish (in light of "French" being the descriptor for the other side of the bet, this really should be Berber, then).
Why is this all "impawned,"
as you call it?

Osric
The King, sir, hath laid (a bet), sir, that in a dozen passes
between yourself and him, he shall not exceed
you three hits. (lots of editors apparently find this passage obscure, but (I believe) it makes sense to me: the King has bet that, in the course of their fencing match, Laertes will never have more than three hits more on Hamlet than Hamlet has on him; over the course of 12 points, if Laertes ever outpaces Hamlet by more than three hits, the King will have lost the bet. It's a way of handicapping Hamlet because – as the King soon admits – he judges Laertes to be the better swordsman, but to such a degree as to not be insulting to Hamlet)
He hath laid on't twelve for nine, (meaning that Laertes gets to have, at most, 12 hits while Hamlet gets at most 9, because as soon as Hamlet achieves 9 points, it would no longer be

possible for Laertes to surpass him by greater than 3 points within a dozen passes, at which point the King has won his bet)
and it would come to immediate trial [prosecution], if your lordship
would vouchsafe the answer.

Hamlet
How [What] if I answer no?

Osric
(By "answer") I mean, my lord, (agreeing to) the opposition of your person in trial.

Hamlet
Sir, I will walk here in the hall. If it please his majesty,
it is the breathing time of day with me. (not only is this a funny way of being flippant on Hamlet's part, it ironically foreshadows his dark destiny, as it won't be the breathing time of day with him for much longer, heh…) Let the foils [fencing swords]
be brought, the gentleman (meaning Laertes) willing, and the King hold
his purpose (that is, to hold this wagered-upon contest), (and) I will win for him an [if] I can; if not, I will gain
nothing but my shame (at losing) and the odd (collection of fencing sword) hits.

Osric
Shall I re-deliver you e'en so [Shall I report you back to the King as agreeing to play this wager]?

Hamlet
To this effect, sir, after what flourish your nature will. {lmao}

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 turn (meaning, there is no one else with florid enough language to effect his manner of speaking).

Horatio
This lapwing (a type of small bird, like a plover, several of which have prominent crests) runs away (from the nest) with the shell on his head. (this diss doesn't seem to be about anything in particular Osric did or does, but is more just mocking him for being an overenthusiastic or otherwise clueless baby bird, lol)

Hamlet

He did comply with his dug [engage in formal discourse with his mother's teat] before he sucked it. {lolll}
(what follows is an extended metaphor on the theme of brewing beer)
Thus has he, and many more of the same bevy (beverage)
that I know the drossy (dross is dregs or surface scum) age dotes on, only got the
tune of the time (as opposed to the words, or content, of it) and outward habit (garments or appearance) of encounter (or presentation, as opposed to its inner substance or essence – in other words: his ilk are shallow & superficial),
a kind of yeasty (frothy, weightless) collection (either of people or words, fashions, and other affectations), which carries them
through and through the most fanned and winnowed (fanning & winnowing are processes used to separate grains from chaff, which is a prerequisite for making beer out of them)
opinions; and do but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out (just like how bubbles on a beer are out – or popped – when one blows on them – the bubbles here are the yeasty collection which are burst by any actual trials or difficulties in life or deep investigation of character).

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? (a sign of the King's hasty desperation: literally two minutes after Osric convinced Hamlet to fence with Laertes, the King sends another Lord to ask him "Just checking: are you ready now, or?..")

Hamlet
I am constant to my purposes; they follow the King's
pleasure. If his fitness speaks (makes itself known), 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. (that is, the Queen recommends that you engage in some polite pleasantries & small kindnesses with Laertes before you start your fencing bouts)

Hamlet
She well instructs me.

[Exit Lord.]

Horatio
You will lose this wager, my lord. {gentle honesty such as this is the sign of a true friend}

Hamlet
I do not think so. Since he went into France,
I have been in continual practice; I shall win
at the odds (meaning, with the assistance of the handicap the King has instated). But thou
wouldst not think (so considering) how
ill all's here about (that is, how much foreboding plagues) my heart, but it is no matter.

Horatio
Nay, good my lord --

Hamlet
It is but foolery, but it is such a kind of gaingiving (misgiving; an internal feeling or prognostication of evil)
as would perhaps trouble a woman. {one more slight against the female sex on Hamlet's part, just for good measure}

Horatio
If your mind dislike anything, obey it.
I will forestall their repair [coming] hither and say you are not fit.

Hamlet
Not a whit, we defy augury (interpretation of omens). There's a special
providence (manifestation of God's will) in the fall (death) of a sparrow (meaning, even something as minor as a bird falling from the sky is an example of divine providence). If it be (that a thing happens) 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 (some editors have this as "knows") aught (any piece or part) of what he leaves (behind – either material things or circumstances), what is't to leave betimes (before the usual or expected time; early)?
Let be.

Trumpets, drums, and officers with cushions.
Enter King, Queen, and Lords [including Laertes and Osric,
and all the state], with other Attendants
with foils and gauntlets, a table, and flagons of wine on it.

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

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

Hamlet

[To Laertes]

Give me your pardon, sir. I've done you wrong,
But pardon't as you are a gentleman.
This (assembled) presence knows,
And you must needs have heard, how I am punished
With a sore distraction [painful madness]. What I have done
That might your nature, honor, and exception (to such treatment)
Roughly awake, I hear proclaim was madness.
Was't Hamlet wronged 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 wronged;
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.
Sir, in this audience
Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil [disavowing an intentional harmfulness]
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts
(such that you can be assured rather) That I have shot my arrow o'er the house
And hurt my brother.

Laertes
I am satisfied in (human) nature,
Whose motive in this case should stir me most
To my revenge (that is, the animal desire for familial revenge should be implacable). But in my terms of honor (the thing which underpins the culture of gentlepersons of his time)
I stand aloof, and will (make or accept) no reconcilement (with you over this matter),
Till by some elder masters of known honor [Until from some elders of our community who are known to be honorable]
I have a voice and precedent of peace [I have their word that there exist previous examples of people in a situation similar to mine who have made peace with their offenders]
To keep my name ungored [To keep my reputation undamaged] (which it would otherwise be if Laertes was known to have rolled over after his honor had been impugned). But till that time
I do receive your offered love like love,
And will not wrong it. (this is a very interesting passage, because Laertes could be said here to be obviously lying – he is still plotting in this very moment to secretly murder Hamlet; he hasn't received any offered love like love and he definitely will wrong it – but he seems too honorable a character to engage in such brazen mistruths (and his conscience does seem to emerge and reassert itself as the match goes on, as will be seen) especially since he could just as easily have made some conciliatory noises which were not so definitive or forceful. So, maybe he does mean these things in earnest? Perhaps he sees his willingness to extend forgiveness in purely academic terms: a grace he can effect without contradiction to his true motives. Or maybe he's so committed to his revenge that he feels entitled to say whatever he needs to to Hamlet in this moment to get them both to the point of swordfighting… I presume that – like most of the mild mysteries in this play – Shakespeare's true motivation was simply to heighten the drama. And

so he has Laertes indulge in behavior that is antithetical to his thus-far-established nature of nobility (even if it confuses the audience or rings somewhat false) in order to make his eventual reconciliation all the more poignant. And setting up & balancing such momentary, intemperate jags away from established character in a believable way is a lot of the skill of a playwright)

Hamlet
I do embrace it freely,
And will this brother's wager [friendly competition]
frankly play. --
Give us the foils [fencing swords]. Come on.

Laertes
Come, one for me.

Hamlet
I'll be your foil, Laertes. (Hamlet is making yet another joke playing on the multiple meanings of words. “Foil” has two other senses, both of which apply here:
- a person or thing that contrasts with and so emphasizes and enhances the qualities of another
- a thin leaf of metal placed under a precious stone to increase its brilliance) 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.

[Foils are handed to Hamlet and Laertes.]

Cousin Hamlet,
You know the wager.

Hamlet
Very well, my lord.
Your grace hath laid the odds o'th'weaker side. (this claim belies Hamlet’s earlier admission that he “will win at the odds”; he is presumably being playful with the King in pretending that he is more skillfull than Laertes)

King
I do not fear it;
I have seen you both.
But since he is bettered [considered to be better than you], we have therefore odds.

Laertes
This is too heavy. Let me see another.

[He exchanges his foil for another.]

(If Osric is a knowing conspirator of the King & Laertes (see the argument made above that he arguably could be motivated to be so, considering how he fawns over power and how poorly he's treated by Hamlet) this would be the time for him to play a crucial role: he hears the pre-arranged codewords "This is too heavy. Let me see another." and hands Laertes the previously-set-aside unbated, envenomed sword.)

Hamlet
This likes me well.
These foils have all a [are all of a similar] length?

Osric
Ay, my good lord.

[They] prepare to play.

King
Set me the stoups (flagons or beakers for drink) of wine upon that table.
If Hamlet give the first or second hit,
Or quit in answer of the third exchange, (that is, pay Laertes' back for his first two hits by hitting him in the third round)
Let all the battlements their ordnance fire. (taken together, the King is here ordering the battlement cannons to be fired if Hamlet hits Laertes in any of the first three rounds)
The King shall drink to Hamlet's better breath,
And in the cup an union (a pearl of large size, good quality, and great value, especially one that is supposed to occur singly) shall he throw
Richer then that which four successive kings
In Denmark's crown have worn. (a quite provocative thing to say, considering that Hamlet's Dad is included in that outshone group) Give me the cups,
And let (in successive order) the kettle(drum) to the trumpet speak,
The trumpet (speak) to the cannoneer without [outside],
The cannons (speak) to the heavens, the heaven (back) to earth (reminiscent of the King's speech at the top of the play about letting the "heavens… bruit again, respeaking earthly thunder"),
"Now the King drinks to Hamlet." Come, begin.

Trumpets (play) the [for a short] while.

And you, the judges, bear a wary eye. (this is ostensibly directed at Osric, et alia, but tends to be delivered towards the audience in many productions, as the ultimate judges)

Hamlet
Come on, sir.

Laertes
Come, my lord.

They play.
[Hamlet scores a hit.]

Hamlet
One.

Laertes
No.

Hamlet
[To Osric]

Judgment.

Osric
A hit, a very palpable hit.

Laertes
Well, again.

King
Stay. Give me drink.
Hamlet this pearl is thine.
[He drinks, and throws a pearl in Hamlet's cup.]

Here's to thy health. -- Give him the cup.
Trumpets sound, and shot goes off.

Hamlet
I'll play this bout first. Set it by awhile.
Come.
[They fence.]

Another hit. What say you?

Laertes
A touch, a touch, I do confess.

King
[To the Queen]

Our son shall win.

Queen
He's fat and scant of breath. – {it's so painfully funny to me that this roast is one of the last things Hamlet's Mom says to him while alive & happy… and gives a great insight and shading to the nature of their relationship}
Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows.
[The Queen takes a cup of wine to offer a toast to Hamlet.]
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.

[She drinks.]

(Some modern productions have part of Gertrude's character development be to recognize too late that the second man she has married is evil & in the midst of effecting a plot to poison her son and she thereby drinks the poisoned cup herself to save her son. It is a very satisfying redemption arc, and gives her much more agency on a certain level, but I don't personally need her to be a hero; it is sufficiently just to me that she dies simply for some of the weak-willed choices she has made earlier (starting with marrying her brother-in-law.))

King

[Aside]

It is the poisoned cup. It is too late.

Hamlet
I dare not drink yet, madam; by and by.

Queen
Come, let me wipe thy face.

Laertes

[Aside to the King]

My lord, I'll hit him now.

King

[Aside to Laertes]

(I agree with the above editor that this comment is aside,
but I struggle to understand why the King would direct this at Laertes,
whom he presumably would still like to have the confidence
to complete his immediate task)

I do not think't.

Laertes

[Aside]

And yet 'tis almost 'gainst my conscience.

Hamlet

Come for the third (round),
Laertes, you do but dally.
I pray you, pass with your best violence (swordsmanship);
I am afeard you make a wanton of me. (a wanton is a sexually unrestrained woman – guess there was one more gender-based diss in Hamlet after all)

Laertes
(this slight seems to provoke Laertes back into incensed action, just as his conscience was getting the better of him – so Hamlet's saucy tongue really is a literally fatal flaw of his)
Say you so? Come on.

[They] play.

Osric
Nothing neither way.

Laertes
Have at you now!

[Laertes wounds Hamlet with his unbated rapier.]
In scuffling they (ex)change rapiers.
[Hamlet wounds Laertes.]

King
Part them! They are incensed.

Hamlet
Nay, come again.

[Laertes falls down. The Queen falls down.]

Osric
Look to the Queen there, ho!

Horatio
They bleed on both sides.

[To Hamlet]

How is it, my lord?

Osric
How is't, Laertes?

Laertes
Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe (a noose or snare for catching small game), Osric;
I am justly killed with mine own treachery. (Although there is no stage direction indicating that this exchange is done aside, it seems obvious that that is the nature of it, as there is no indication otherwise as of yet that Laertes is ready to publicly proclaim his guilt. And the fact that Laertes so readily discusses his treachery with Osric indicates that the latter was aware of it already, which strongly supports my contention, made above, that Osric is patently in on the

murderous plan, which further adds more nuance to his first appearance in the play / initial interaction with Hamlet.)

Hamlet
How does the Queen?

King
She swoons to see them bleed. {he's a crafty dissembler to the end…}

Queen
No, no, the drink, the drink, O my dear Hamlet,
The drink, the drink! I am poisoned.

[She dies.]

Hamlet
Oh, villainy! Ho! Let the door be locked.
Treachery! Seek it out.

[Exit Osric.]

Laertes
It is here, Hamlet.
Hamlet, thou art slain.
No med'cine in the world can do thee good;
In thee there is not half an hour of life.
The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,
Unbated and envenomed. The foul practice
Hath turned itself on me. Lo, here I lie
Never to rise again. Thy mother's poisoned.
I can (lie, or abet this treachery) no more. The King, the King's to blame. (thus, Laertes forcefully breaks with the King at last and – in outing him for his evil deed – reclaims his nobility & goodness)

Hamlet
The point envenomed too?
Then, venom, to thy work.

[He] hurts the King (with the poisoned sword).

All
Treason, treason!

King
Oh, yet defend me, friends, I am but hurt.

Hamlet

[Forcing the King to drink]

Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damnèd Dane,
Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?

Follow my mother. (one final play on words for Hamlet here – he's saying "Is your pearl here? Follow in death the person with whom you've unioned.")

The King dies.

Laertes
He is justly served.
It is a poison tempered by himself.
Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.
Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,
Nor thine on me!

[He] 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, (again, just as the King did above, ostensibly speaking here to the audience members onstage but actually speaking to the ones offstage, which allusion the next line confirms)
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time, as this fell sergeant Death
Is strict in his arrest, oh, I could tell you --
But let it be. Horatio, I am dead,
Thou liv'st. Report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.

Horatio
Never believe it.
I am more an antique Roman (who would sometimes do heroic or noble things like kill themselves when their lords or good friends died) than a Dane.
Here's yet some liquor left.

[He attempts to drink from the poisoned cup,
but is prevented by Hamlet.]

Hamlet
As thou'rt a man,
Give me the cup! Let go! By heaven I'll ha't.
Oh, God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart (reminiscent of the Ghost's "If thou didst ever thy dear Father love"),
Absent thee from felicity [Avoid happiness for] awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.
(The sound of soldiers) March(ing from) afar off, and shout(ing) within [offstage].
What warlike noise is this?

Enter Osric.

Osric

Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland,
To th'ambassadors of England (who came from the King of England having executed Hamlet's substitute order) gives this warlike volley (weapons discharge).

Hamlet
Oh, I die, Horatio.
The potent poison quite o'ercrows (to triumph over, overbear, overpower) 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 (this fact), (along) with th'occurrents more and less
Which have solicited [taken place]. The rest is silence.
(I end my versions of the play here, not only because I see no need to engage in the stodgy exposition that follows, nor strictly because it makes sense to let the eponymous character have the last word in the play, but because letting silence be the last word of the play is dramatically apt… And I definitely don't do the melodramatic "Oh, oh, oh, oh!"s which were a later addition from a time when actors engaging in such – I'm sure – crowd-pleasing exclamations was common)
Oh, oh, oh, oh!

[He] dies.

Horatio
Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!

[March within.]

Why does the drum come hither?

Enter Fortinbras and the English Ambassadors, with Drum,
Colors, and Attendants.

Fortinbras
Where is this sight?

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

Fortinbras
This quarry cries on havoc. O proud Death,
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,
That thou so many princes at a shot
So bloodily hast struck?

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 fulfilled,
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 arrived, give order that these bodies
High on a stage be placèd 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 judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on th'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 performed,
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 proved most royal; and for his passage,
The soldiers' music and the rites of war
Speak loudly for him.
Take up the body. Such a sight as this
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.
Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

Exeunt marching, after the which a peal of
ordnance are shot off.

FINIS