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_Hamlet_

Philip Edwards aims to bring the reader, playgoer and director of _Hamlet_ into the closest possible contact with Shakespeare's most famous and most perplexing play. He concentrates on essentials, dealing succinctly with the huge volume of commentary and controversy which the play has provoked and offering a way forward which enables us once again to recognise its full tragic energy.

'The introduction and commentary reveal an author with a lively awareness of the importance of perceiving the play as a theatrical document, one which comes to life, which is completed only in performance.' _Review of English Studies_

For this updated edition, Robert Hapgood has added a new section on prevailing critical and performance approaches to _Hamlet_. He discusses recent film and stage performances, actors of the Hamlet role as well as directors of the play; his account of new scholarship stresses the role of remembering and forgetting in the play, and the impact of feminist and performance studies.
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HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

Updated edition

Edited by

PHILIP EDWARDS

King Alfred Professor of English Literature
University of Liverpool
The New Cambridge Shakespeare succeeds The New Shakespeare which began publication in 1921 under the general editorship of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson, and was completed in the 1960s, with the assistance of G. I. Duthie, Alice Walker, Peter Ure and J. C. Maxwell. The New Shakespeare itself followed upon The Cambridge Shakespeare, 1863–6, edited by W. G. Clark, J. Glover and W. A. Wright.

The New Shakespeare won high esteem both for its scholarship and for its design, but shifts of critical taste and insight, recent Shakespearean research, and a changing sense of what is important in our understanding of the plays, have made it necessary to re-edit and redesign, not merely to revise, the series.

The New Cambridge Shakespeare aims to be of value to a new generation of playgoers and readers who wish to enjoy fuller access to Shakespeare’s poetic and dramatic art. While offering ample academic guidance, it reflects current critical interests and is more attentive than some earlier editions have been to the realisation of the plays on the stage, and to their social and cultural settings. The text of each play has been freshly edited, with textual data made available to those users who wish to know why and how one published text differs from another. Although modernised, the edition conserves forms that appear to be expressive and characteristically Shakespearean, and it does not attempt to disguise the fact that the plays were written in a language other than that of our own time.

Illustrations are usually integrated into the critical and historical discussion of the play and include some reconstructions of early performances by C. Walter Hodges. Some editors have also made use of the advice and experience of Maurice Daniels, for many years a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Each volume is addressed to the needs and problems of a particular text, and each therefore differs in style and emphasis from others in the series.

PHILIP BROCKBANK
Founding General Editor
What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

To the memory of my great-grandfather

ROBERT EDWARDS
1829–1908

Sexton of St John's Church, Rhydymwyn, Flintshire
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PREFACE

The vastness of the commentary on *Hamlet* gives an editor of the play a rather special freedom. Even if he could read them all, he could not accommodate within the covers of a book an account of the multitude of theories and ideas generated by the play; and to attempt to sum up even the enduring contributions would so overload the work that it would defeat the main purpose of an edition, which is to make an author's work more accessible. This edition of *Hamlet* is selective in its account of what has gone before, and the view of the play presented in the Introduction, the Commentary — and the text — is personal without I hope being idiosyncratic. Everything that I consider essential to the meaning of the play I have endeavoured to discuss; where I consider problems insoluble, or not central, I have avoided prolonged debate.

The text of *Hamlet* presents great difficulties, and any discussion of it affects and is affected by our understanding of the play. I have not therefore been able to separate my account of the text from the main part of the introduction, as is the custom in this series. In trying to offer help towards the understanding of this great and perplexing play, it is essential to make clear at the outset that there is more than one *Hamlet* we might be talking about.

Most of the work for this edition was completed before the appearance of Harold Jenkins's masterly edition in the New Arden series in the spring of 1982. It has nevertheless been of immense benefit to have his work before me since that time, as my commentary frequently acknowledges. All students of *Hamlet* are in debt to Harold Jenkins for the results of his patient and exacting research.

Some of the material in the critical account of the play in the Introduction appears also in an essay, 'Tragic balance in *Hamlet*', in *Shakespeare Survey* 36 (1983); I am grateful to the editor of *Shakespeare Survey* for accepting this overlap.

In acknowledging assistance in this edition of *Hamlet*, I ought to start with John Waterhouse in 1942 and Allardyce Nicoll in 1945, from whom I learned so much about the play. In recent times, my greatest debt is to Kenneth Muir, an untiring lender of books, a patient listener, and a generous adviser. John Jowett gave me great help in checking parts of my typescript, and in sifting through recent writings on the play. I am grateful to Joan Welford for typing the Commentary.

This edition was prepared during a period of rather heavy administrative duties in the University of Liverpool. I am most grateful to the University for two periods of leave, and to the University of Otago, the British Academy and the Huntington Library for enabling me to make the most of them.

P.E.

University of Liverpool, 1984
ABBREVIATIONS AND SHORT TITLES

All quotations and line references to plays other than Hamlet are to G. Blakemore Evans (ed.), The Riverside Shakespeare, 1974.

Adams  Hamlet, ed. Joseph Quincy Adams, 1929
Bullough  Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, 8 vols., 1957–75
Capell  Mr William Shakespeare, His Comedies, Histories and Tragedies, ed. Edward Capell, 1767–8, x
Clark and Wright  Hamlet Prince of Denmark, ed. William George Clark and William Aldis Wright, 1872 (Clarendon Press Shakespeare)
conj. conjectured
Dowden  The Tragedy of Hamlet, ed. Edward Dowden, 1899 (Arden Shakespeare)
Duthie  George Ian Duthie, The ‘Bad’ Quarto of ‘Hamlet’: A Critical Study, 1941
F  Mr William Shakespeare’s Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies, 1623 (First Folio) [see Introduction, p. 9]
Hanmer  The Works of Shakespear, ed. Sir Thomas Hanmer, 1743–4, vi
Jenkins  Hamlet, ed. Harold Jenkins, 1982 (Arden Shakespeare)
Johnson  The Plays of William Shakespeare, ed. Samuel Johnson, 1765, viii
Kittredge  Hamlet, ed. George Lyman Kittredge, 1939
MacDonald  The Tragédie of Hamlet, ed. George MacDonald, 1885
MLN  Modern Language Notes
MSH  J. Dover Wilson, The Manuscript of Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’, 2 vols., 1934; reprinted 1963
N & Q  Notes and Queries
OED  The Oxford English Dictionary, 1884–1928, reprinted 1933
PMLA  Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
Pope  The Works of Shakespeare, ed. Alexander Pope, 1723–5, vi
Q1  The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Densmarke, by William Shakespeare, 1603 (first quarto)
X
Abbreviations and short titles

Q2  The Tragical Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke, by William Shakespeare, 1604, 1605 (second quarto)

Q 1611, Q 1676  Quarto editions of those dates

RES  Review of English Studies


Rowe  The Works of Mr William Shakespear, ed. Nicholas Rowe, 1709, v

Schmidt  Alexander Schmidt, Shakespeare-Lexicon, 2 vols., 1874–5; 2nd edn, 1886

sd  stage direction

SH  speech heading

Spencer  Hamlet, ed. T. J. B. Spencer, 1980 (New Penguin Shakespeare)

SQ  Shakespeare Quarterly

Staunton  The Plays of Shakespeare, ed. Howard Staunton, 1858–60, reissued 1866, III

Steevens  The Plays of William Shakespeare, ed. Samuel Johnson and George Steevens, 1773, x

Steevens²  The Plays of William Shakespeare, ed. Samuel Johnson and George Steevens, 2nd edn, 1778, x

Steevens³  The Plays of William Shakespeare, ed. Samuel Johnson and George Steevens, 4th edn, 1793, xv

Sternfeld  F. W. Sternfeld, Music in Shakespearean Tragedy, 1963

Theobald  Lewis Theobald, Shakespeare Restored, 1726

Theobald²  The Works of Shakespeare, ed. Lewis Theobald, 1733, vii

Theobald³  The Works of Shakespeare, ed. Lewis Theobald, 1740, viii

Tilley  Morris Palmer Tilley, A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, 1950 [references are to numbered proverbs]

TLS  The Times Literary Supplement

Verity  The Tragedy of Hamlet, ed. A. W. Verity, 1904

Walker  William Sydney Walker, A Critical Examination of the Text of Shakespeare, 3 vols., 1860

Warburton  The Works of Shakespear, ed. William Warburton, 1747, viii


INTRODUCTION

Source and date

The basic though not the immediate source of *Hamlet* is a twelfth-century story of Amleth in Saxo Grammaticus's *Historiae Danicae*, which was first put into print in 1514. It is remarkable how much of the primitive legend survives through the successive redactions into Shakespeare's masterpiece. Amleth's father, who has defeated the king of Norway in a duel, is murdered by his brother Feng, who takes his brother's widow, Gerutha, to wife. The murder is not secret. To protect himself and avert suspicion from his plans, Amleth starts acting as an idiot, but his speeches are such a perplexing mixture of shrewdness and craziness that tests are devised for him. One test is to see if he will react normally to a 'fair woman' who is put in his way. He does, but he swears her to secrecy. Then a friend of Feng suggests they should get Amleth and his mother together while he conceals himself in the chamber to listen to them. Amleth discovers the eavesdropper, kills him, dismembers the body and feeds it to the pigs. He returns to the lamenting mother and bitterly attacks her for forgetting her first husband and marrying Feng. Feng now sends Amleth to Britain with two retainers who carry a secret letter to the king requesting the death of Amleth. Amleth gets the letter, substitutes his companions' name for his own — and adds the suggestion that the king should give his daughter in marriage to Amleth. After a time in Britain, Amleth returns home and finds his own obsequies being carried out. He overcomes the courtiers, sets fire to the palace, and kills Feng in his bed, thus exacting 'the vengeance, now long overdue, for his father's murder'. 'O valiant Amleth, and worthy of immortal fame!' says Saxo. Amleth now lies low, uncertain how the populace will take what he has done, but boldly emerges to make a fine speech of justification. 'It is I who have wiped off my country's shame; I who have quenched my mother's dishonour; I who have beaten back oppression... It is I who have stripped you of slavery, and clothed you with freedom... I who have deposed the despot and triumphed over the butcher.' Amleth is made king, and has other adventures before meeting his death in battle.

Here is a success story and no tragedy, but here also is the story of old Fortinbras and old Hamlet, of fratricide and the queen's remarriage, of Hamlet's assumed madness and his riddling talk, of Ophelia being used to test him, of Polonius's eavesdropping and death and the contemptuous treatment of his corpse, of Hamlet's objurgation of Gertrude, of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern accompanying Hamlet to England with a secret commission to have him killed, and the cunning alteration of the commission. Even the germ of the exchange of weapons in the final affray is there.

1 Oliver Elton's translation of the Latin text is given in Bullough, vii (1973), 60–79.
Between Saxo Grammaticus and *Hamlet* lies a French version of Saxo’s story by François de Belleforest, published in his *Histoires Tragiques* in 1570 (followed by many later editions). It does not appear that the Hamlet story was translated into English until 1608. Belleforest is most conscious of the unchristian savagery of the tale and pointedly remarks that it all happened in pre-Christian times. His account is long, wordy and sententious, but in the incidents of the story he follows the stark version of Saxo closely except in two important respects relating to the queen. She and Feng, or Fengon as he now is, have an adulterous liaison before the king is murdered; Fengon ‘used her as his concubine’. Secondly, after Hamlet has convinced his mother of the error of her ways (following the death of the eavesdropper), the queen encourages Hamlet in his vengeance, promises to keep his secret, and hopes to see him enjoy his right as king of Denmark. None of this collaboration between Gertrude and Hamlet is in Shakespeare’s play, but it does feature in the first quarto, which we shall be looking at shortly.

As for Hamlet’s revenge, Belleforest does not acclaim it as enthusiastically as Saxo does, and clearly recognises that some justification is needed. Hamlet argues that his vengeance is neither felony nor treason, but the punishment of a disloyal subject by a sovereign prince (Bullough, vii, 100). And on the death of Fengon, Belleforest states that this is an occasion when vengeance becomes justice, an act of piety and affection, a punishment of treason and murder.

The most important changes which appear in *Hamlet* are as follows:

1. The murder becomes secret;
2. A ghost tells Hamlet of the murder and urges revenge;
3. Laertes and young Fortinbras are introduced;
4. Ophelia’s role is extended and elevated;
5. The players and their play are introduced;
6. Hamlet dies as he kills the king.

To be added to this list is a more general change of great significance. The setting of the story is moved from the pre-Christian times where Belleforest deliberately placed it to a courtly, modern-seeming period, in which, though England still pays tribute to Denmark, renaissance young men travel to and fro to complete their education in universities or in Paris.

How many of these changes did Shakespeare himself originate? It is impossible to say, because of our ignorance about the Elizabethan *Hamlet* which preceded Shakespeare’s. The earliest reference to this play is in a scornful attack by Thomas Nashe on the Senecan dramatists of the day in 1589. ‘English Seneca read by candlelight yields many good sentences, as *Blood is a beggar* and so forth, and if you entreat him fair in a frosty morning he will afford you whole Hamlets, I should say handfuls, of tragical speeches.’¹ Five years later, at the end of the disastrous plague period of 1592–4, Philip Henslowe recorded a short season of plays at Newington Butts (south of the Thames) shared by the Lord Admiral’s men and the emerging company of the Lord Chamberlain’s men, Shakespeare’s company, during which, on 9 June

1594, a play of Hamlet was performed. In 1596, Thomas Lodge wrote of one who ‘walks for the most part in black under cover of gravity, and looks as pale as the vizard of the ghost who cried so miserably at the Theatre like an oyster-wife, Hamlet, revenge!’

It may be that this old play was not immediately supplanted and driven from the stage when Shakespeare wrote his version. One of the characters in Dekker’s Satiromastix (written late in the year 1601) says ‘My name’s Hamlet revenge; thou hast been at Paris Garden, hast not?’ (4.1.121–2); the reference is probably to the older play. The authorship of the earlier play (often called the Ur-Hamlet) is not known. Nashe’s attack of 1589 on the ‘sort of shifting companions’ who bleed the English translations of Seneca dry in order to create their dismal tragedies seems to include three glancing references to Thomas Kyd, the author of The Spanish Tragedy. These men ‘leave the trade of Noverint, whereto they were born’, which fits Kyd because his father was a ‘noverint’ or scrivener; Nashe speaks of ‘the Kid in Aesop’; and the phrase ‘those that thrust Elysium into hell’ may well refer to The Spanish Tragedy. But even if Kyd was one of the Senecans whom Nashe was abusing it does not necessarily follow that Nashe meant he was the author of the early Hamlet. He may have been. The relationship between Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Kyd’s Spanish Tragedy is close and profoundly important. How far that relationship developed through Shakespeare reworking a Kydean Hamlet is impossible to say. The Spanish Tragedy is about the revenge of a father for his murdered son, and includes the presence on stage of the ghost of a dead man, the hero’s madness, and a crucial play-within-the-play. The Ur-Hamlet, which was about the revenge of a son for his murdered father, had a ghost urging Hamlet to take revenge, and must have included the assumed madness of the hero, which is among the irreducible constituents of the old story. It seems more likely that the old Hamlet would have preceded The Spanish Tragedy than vice versa. They were probably companion plays, the successor very conscious of the predecessor, whether Kyd wrote both plays or not. For the Hamlet story there is a quite definite literary source, as we have seen; for The Spanish Tragedy there is no known source. If one play copies another, and one is based on a known source and the other isn’t, there is a strong argument that the play with a source is the earlier. On this argument, the ‘madness’ of Hamlet in the old play, being part of the traditional story, would be the original, and the madness of Hieronimo in The Spanish Tragedy would be the copy. So we may say that Kyd or one of his fellow-dramatists wrote an early version of Hamlet, that Kyd capitalised on its success in The Spanish Tragedy, which borrowed many of its features, and that Shakespeare, writing a new version of Hamlet which seems very attentive to Kyd’s handling of revenge, is influenced by the two similar earlier plays.

Returning then to our question of what changes in the traditional Hamlet story were Shakespeare’s, we see that he did not introduce the Ghost. A ghost urging Hamlet to take revenge was an elemental part of the old play; it was what everyone

2 Wits Miserie, 1596, signature H4 (text reads ‘miserally’).
remembered. (This one hard fact we have about the contents of the old play may have been, I shall argue, the feature which attracted Shakespeare to it.) Apart from this, if it is the case that *The Spanish Tragedy* cashed in on the success of the old *Hamlet* and imitated it, then there is a strong possibility not only that the old *Hamlet* had its play-within-the-play, but that it had its Laertes too; for the generation of a second revenge action in the middle of the play is the way *The Spanish Tragedy* works. (In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo's vengeance for Horatio is a second motif within the prior revenge scheme of Andrea against Balthasar, which it completes. In *Hamlet*, Laertes' vengeance for Polonius is a second motif within the prior revenge of Hamlet against Claudius; it is only through the completion of Laertes' revenge that Hamlet is brought to the completion of his.)

As for the setting of the play within a renaissance court, one certainly cannot assume that it was Shakespeare who made the transformation. The contrast between the modernity of the characters and the archaic cry of a ghost for revenge is of supreme importance in *Hamlet*, but *The Spanish Tragedy* also accommodates a primitive blood-feud within the setting of a renaissance court and here also it may indicate the nature of the old *Hamlet*.

When did Shakespeare write his *Hamlet?* 'The Revenge of Hamlet Prince [of] Denmark as it was lately acted by the Lord Chamberlain his men' was entered for publication in July 1602 (see p. 9). A very faulty unauthorised text of the play, 'by William Shake-speare', which was published in 1603 (the first quarto), suggests that by then the play had been on the stage for quite some time. Within the play itself, the reference to the great popularity of the children's acting companies as against the adult players (2.2.313-33) is always accepted as a direct reference by Shakespeare to the 'war of the theatres' in London around 1601 and the success of the revived children's companies. The details of this 'war of the theatres' are very vague and shadowy.¹ There is a slanging match with Jonson on one side and Marston and Dekker on the other. Jonson's *Poetaster*, performed by the Chapel boys in 1601, probably in the spring, contains a well-known remark about the professional men-actors. They think of hiring Demetrius (Dekker) and say:

O, it will get us a huge deal of money, Captain, and we have need on't; for this winter has made us all poorer than so many starved snakes. Nobody comes at us, not a gentleman nor a – (3.4.327–30)

It may well be that a crisis for the men's companies in 1600–1 is what the *Hamlet* passage refers to. This passage is found only in the Folio text; it is one of the most striking omissions from the text of the 'good' quarto of 1604/5. It is my view that Shakespeare added this passage to his original draft as a kind of afterthought before he submitted his manuscript to his colleagues (see p. 19).² I think that as he was


² Not quite the same thing as the 'later insertion' suggested by E. A. J. Honigmann, 'The date of *Hamlet*', *Shakespeare Survey* 9 (1956), 27–9.
finishing his play the success of the children and the plight of his own company suggested to Shakespeare an amplification of what he had already written about the Players turning up in Elsinore because of the troubled times in Denmark and a decline in their reputation (see the notes to 2.2.308–9 and following). If we could be sure of dating the height of the stage-quarrel in mid 1601 we should have a fairly precise date for Shakespeare finishing his play.

A reference which has been much discussed in dating Hamlet is in the marginal note made by Gabriel Harvey in his copy of Speght’s Chaucer, which runs:

The younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeares Venus, & Adonis, but his Lucrece, & his tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke, have it in them, to please the wiser sort.¹

The Chaucer was published in 1598 and Harvey signed his name in his copy with the date ‘1598’. His very long note, which is a kind of assessment of English literature in his time, refers to Spenser (died 1599) and Watson (died 1592) as with Shakespeare among ‘our flourishing metricians’, but mentions ‘Owen’s new epigrams’ published in 1607. It also contains the statement, ‘The Earl of Essex much commendes Albions England’—which certainly suggests that the Earl was alive; he was executed in February 1601. The sense of time is so confused in Harvey’s note that it is really of little use in trying to date Hamlet.

E. A. J. Honigmann (see note on p. 4) rightly argued that there is very strong evidence that Hamlet was written later than Julius Caesar, which was being acted in the summer of 1599. Just before the play-within-the-play there is this exchange between Hamlet and Polonius:

HAMLET . . . My lord, you played 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 part of him to kill so capital a calf there. (3.2.87-93)

Honigmann points out that it is usually assumed that John Heminges acted both the old-man parts, Caesar in the first play and Polonius in the second, and that Richard Burbage acted both Brutus and Hamlet. ‘Polonius would then be speaking on the extra-dramatic level in proclaiming his murder in the part of Caesar, since Hamlet (Burbage) will soon be killing him (Heminges) once more in Hamlet.’ There does indeed seem to be a kind of private joke here, with Heminges saying to Burbage ‘Here we go again!’ But there is also something much deeper—the identification of the two killers, Brutus and Hamlet. Once again, Burbage plays the part of the intellectual as well-intentioned assassin. In both Julius Caesar and Hamlet, a bookish, reflective man, honoured by his friends and associates, is summoned to a major political task requiring complete personal involvement and a violent physical assault. The assassination that is to purify Rome is quickly decided on and quickly carried out. The greater part of the play is devoted to the disastrous consequences of killing Caesar. In Hamlet,

the deed which is to purify Denmark is extraordinarily delayed; most of the play is devoted to disasters in the course of doing the deed. But both plays end in political failure. In neither Rome nor Denmark does the political future turn out as it was desired and planned by the hero. What spiritual triumph there is in both plays is muted. That *Hamlet* is a reworking of the basic underlying theme of *Julius Caesar*, namely the commitment of the philosopher-hero to violent action in order to remove an intruder from the government of the state and restore an ideal condition belonging to former times, seems to me undeniable. The unlocking of the beautifully controlled and articulated Roman play to produce the perturbed and bewildering tangle which is *Hamlet Prince of Denmark* may well seem a strange progression. It is a progression which shows up Shakespeare’s sense of the increasing complexity and difficulty of the problems as he continued to think about them. Again, to move from the moral and constitutional problems of high Roman civilisation to the barbarities of Nordic myth and the crudities of the Elizabethan revenge play may seem curious. Yet the resources of these less civilised traditions were perhaps what Shakespeare needed in order to take one step further the problem of commitment which both *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* present. In particular, the questioning of what relationship there may be between the divine will, retaliatory violence, and the achieving of justice is a constant factor in the revenge tradition as represented by Pickering’s *Horestes* (1567) and *The Spanish Tragedy*. Although the supernatural has its place in *Julius Caesar*, and includes a ghost, it does not go near to suggesting an eternal world surrounding, enclosing and explaining the world of man. The figure of the summoning ghost in the old *Hamlet* (the one that cried like an oyster-wife) is what transforms the problem of *Julius Caesar* into the new guise of *Hamlet*. Because of this ghost, the decisions of men about killing are placed as Pickering and Kyd had placed them, within a vast transcendent world of shadowy figures and mysterious commands. The setting of *Hamlet* is not Elsinore but heaven, earth and hell. In the middle of *Hamlet* the actors remind us that they recently acted in the play *Julius Caesar*; they are now in a much more barbaric and untidy play which takes the problems of the earlier work into the perplexities of a spiritual dimension.

If *Hamlet* is in some sense ‘inspired’ by *Julius Caesar*, it also shares its period of composition with one of Shakespeare’s greatest comedies, *Twelfth Night*. T. W. Craik argues that Shakespeare started writing the latter in the middle of 1601 and completed it before the end of the year (New Arden edition, 1975, pp. xxxiv–xxxv). This would fit well with the view that Shakespeare had just finished *Hamlet* when the ‘war of the theatres’ had come to a head, taking the production of Jonson’s *Poetaster* in the spring of 1601 to represent the high point of the quarrel.

We must now look at the curious relationship between Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge*. This blood-bespattered and overcharged revenge-play was a main target for Jonson’s ridicule in *Poetaster*, and it was probably staged in the winter of 1600–1.¹ It has many parallels with *Hamlet*. The ghost of a poisoned father appears, to tell his son of the concealed murder and urge him to take revenge.

Later the ghost appears in the bedroom of his errant widow, who is being wooed by the murderer. The avenging son masks his intentions by taking on the role of an idiot. The closest verbal parallel is:

The other ghost assumed my father's shape;
Both cried 'Revenge!' (1.3.45–6)

Compare *Hamlet*, 'If it assume my noble father's person' (1.2.243) and 'the devil hath power / T'assume a pleasing shape' (2.2.552–3).

Marston's curious play – at what level of seriousness such an able and intelligent writer undertook this strained and absurd work is impossible to say – is steeped in reminiscences of *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*. The play is so receptive of other men's work that in a debate about indebtedness as between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Antonio's Revenge*, Marston starts at a disadvantage; and in an extended discussion Jenkins names him as the borrower (New Arden edition, pp. 7–13). But the two most recent editors of Marston's play, G. K. Hunter (Regents Renaissance series, 1966) and Reavley Gair (Revels Plays, 1978) both accept as the greater likelihood that the *Hamlet* echoes in *Antonio's Revenge* echo not Shakespeare but the old play of *Hamlet*. I am sure this is right. What has influenced Marston is old-fashioned drama, ten years or so old. A Senecan *Hamlet* of the late '80s is the more likely to have helped him to his 'burly words' and melodramatic situations. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* would have manifested its influence in quite different ways. If this view is correct, we do not have to struggle for a timetable which will place *Hamlet* before *Antonio's Revenge*, while the timetable which we have been moving towards suggests the fascinating possibility that Shakespeare was actually at work on his *Hamlet* when Marston's play was staged. There is no need to think that there was much or anything that he wanted to borrow from it – unless he carried in his head the phrase 'assumed my father's shape'. The parallels between the two plays will be accounted for by both dramatists independently making use of a common source, the old play of *Hamlet*. It is not at all unlikely, however, that Shakespeare in his play was reacting strongly against the facile attitudes towards revenge found in Marston's play. In particular, Antonio's idea of an avenger's obligation to evince extreme emotion could well be the source of Hamlet's acceptance and immediate rejection of such an obligation in the 'rogue and peasant slave' soliloquy at the end of Act 2.

G. K. Hunter rightly warns us (p. xx) to resist the temptation to try to re-create the Ur-*Hamlet* from the evidence of *Antonio's Revenge*. All the same, the ghost urging the widow, in her chamber, to co-operate with their son in revenge reminds us of that element in Belleforest which as I have mentioned occurs again in the bad quarto of *Hamlet*, when the queen promises her assistance to Hamlet at the close of the closet scene. Further, the presence of the ghost on stage quietly and contentedly watching the climactic carnage that avenges him might well be an indication of an element in the old play which Shakespeare pointedly and purposefully removed (see pp. 58–9).

Any dating of *Hamlet* must be tentative. It is later than mid 1599, the date of *Julius*

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1 References are to Gair's edition (see preceding note).
Caesar, and it is earlier than July 1602, when it was registered for publication. The strongest internal evidence is the allusion in 2.2 to the war of the theatres. This suggests a possible date of mid 1601 for the completion of the play.

The play's shape

Shakespeare's Hamlet appears to be a rewriting or a reworking of a well-known earlier play of unknown authorship. But what do we mean when we speak of 'Shakespeare's Hamlet'? The textual problem of the play is of great complexity. It may seem an exasperating coincidence that a play which is as perplexing and problematic for the critic as Hamlet should also have unusually severe textual difficulties, but in fact the ambiguities in the meaning of the play are closely connected with its lack of a clear and settled text. Both the prince and his play come down to us in more shapes than one. If the prince were not so mercurial the text would be more stable. It is Shakespeare's difficulty in containing Hamlet within the bounds of a play, and the theatre's difficulty in comprehending the working of Shakespeare's mind, that have led to the multiple and scarcely reconcilable variations in the play's language and structure.

Everyone who wants to understand Hamlet, as reader, as actor, or director, needs to understand the nature of the play's textual problems, and needs to have his or her own view of them, however tentative. Ideally, every theatre-goer should be aware of the issues, so that he or she can appreciate whose Hamlet is being presented; there will be much evidence in this section of the Introduction and in the section on stage history of how radically the significance of the play changes in the varying theatrical versions of the play.

In searching for a solution to the play's textual problems, we should not imagine that we are likely ever to find ourselves with a single definitive text. The study of the early texts of Hamlet is the study of a play in motion. Earlier editors of Hamlet may have thought that 'a complete and final version' of the play was the object of their search, but nowadays we are more ready to accept what centuries of theatrical history tell us – that what is written for the theatre often undergoes considerable modification as it moves from the writer's desk towards performance on the stage and also during performance. We must be prepared for the possibility that the variations in the text of Hamlet are not alternative versions of a single original text but representations of different stages in the play's development. Then our task becomes to choose the moment at which we would try to arrest the movement of the play and say 'This is the Hamlet we want'; or even, if we dare, 'This is the Hamlet that Shakespeare most wanted.' Do we have enough evidence to describe the history of Shakespeare's Hamlet in its early days and put together a version of it as it existed at a given point in time, a version that we can call not a definitive text but in our view the best text?

It is this question which the rest of this section of the Introduction tries to answer. While it will be necessary to consider material evidence about printing and publishing...
and playhouse procedures, the reader will see that the important decisions about the text of *Hamlet* are in the end literary decisions: not a matter of technical demonstration but of literary and linguistic judgement. Just as no one can argue about *Hamlet* who is not aware of the problems of its text, so no one can argue about the text who does not have a watchful eye for the value of words and for the possible meanings of the play.

We possess three basic printed texts of *Hamlet*, and no manuscript. The first published text is dated 1603, ‘The Tragicall Historie of HAMLET Prince of Denmarke. By William Shake-speare’. The title page claims this to be the play ‘as it hath beene diuerse times acted’ by Shakespeare’s company ‘in the Cittie of London: as also in the two Vniuersities of Cambridge and Oxford, and else-where’. The publishers were Nicholas Ling and John Trundell, the printer Valentine Simmes.¹ This publication, known as the first quarto (Q1), is generally recognised as a ‘bad’ quarto: a corrupt, unauthorised version of an abridged version of Shakespeare’s play. It runs to 2,154 lines.² Only two copies of this publication survive.

The second publication is dated 1604 in some copies and 1605 in others. It has the same title, but carries the legend, ‘Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect COPPIE’. This publication, the second quarto (Q2), is not well printed, but is generally held to be based on Shakespeare’s own manuscript, his ‘foul-papers’; that is, the completed draft, as opposed to a fair copy, which he submitted to his company. This is the fullest of the three versions, 3,674 lines. It was printed by James Roberts for Nicholas Ling.³ Roberts had entered the play in the Stationers’ Register, as if intending to publish, as early as 26 July 1602. (‘The Revenge of Hamlett Prince Denmarke as yt was latelie Acted by the Lo: Chamberleyn his servants’.)⁴ A. W. Pollard believed that this was a ‘blocking’ entry organised by the acting company to prevent unauthorised publication.⁵ If this was the case, the move was clearly a failure. Roberts may well have been securing his own right, with the company’s consent, for publication at some later date. But again, it did not prevent Ling’s 1603 publication, and, whatever the source of Ling’s text, publication gave him rights in the play, so he shared with Roberts the venture of the authorised text in 1604.

The third basic text is that published in the posthumous *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies* of Shakespeare in 1623, the First Folio (F). A number of passages found in the second quarto, amounting to 222 lines, are omitted, but five new passages, totalling 83 lines, are added, giving a total for the play of 3,535 lines. There are a great many variant readings, some of them trifling and some of them very important. There is no general agreement about the source of this text except that it shows the influence of the theatre.

¹ W. W. Greg, *Bibliography of the English Printed Drama*, vol. 1, 1939, no. 197a. There are numerous reprints. A facsimile was published by the Scolar Press in 1969.
² For the length of the various texts I use the figures given by Alfred Hart in *Shakespeare and the Homilies*, 1934, pp. 124–5, 148–9.
⁴ Greg, *Bibliography*, 1, 18.
⁵ *Shakespeare Folios and Quartos*, 1909, p. 73.
These three texts are not wholly independent of each other. James Roberts's compositors, while they were setting the second quarto, had in front of them not only a manuscript but a copy of the bad quarto of 1603 and they frequently copied its readings in the first act and possibly elsewhere. The Folio compositors may likewise have made use of a copy of the second quarto, though the extent of this use is extremely uncertain. There is always a problem when our texts disagree, but the agreement of two texts on a particular reading can be the result of mere copying.

There can hardly be dispute about the view, orthodox since the publication of Dover Wilson's The Manuscript of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' in 1934, that the manuscript used by the printer for the second quarto (Q2) was Shakespeare's own 'foul-papers'. The sheets must have been in a rough condition and must have presented considerable difficulties to the compositors in the way of bad handwriting, deletions and insertions. There are many quite extraordinary readings, as can be seen by looking at the collation in the present edition, for example 1.2.77, 2.2.391, 3.2.325, 4.7.22, 4.7.61. I shall argue also that by the time the MS. reached the printing house, several years after Shakespeare completed it, it must have become illegible in a number of places through wear and damage.

It is evident that on half-a-dozen occasions there is a muddle in the second quarto which was caused by Shakespeare having changed his mind as he wrote but not making his erasures or deletion marks so positive or clear that the compositors understood them. Here are two small examples.

2.2.73 Q2: Giues him threescore thousand crownes in anuall fee
   F: Giues him three thousand Crownes in Annuall Fee

2.2.493 Q2: a speech of some dosen lines, or sixteen lines
   F: a speech of some dosen or sixteene lines

In the first example, Shakespeare may have started to write 'three score crowns', changed it to 'three thousand crowns' but failed to delete 'score' positively enough for the Q2 compositor to take notice of it. With 'score' retained, the line is metrically overloaded. Similarly, the casual phrase 'some dozen or sixteen lines' seems to have come after the false start of 'some dozen lines', but the first 'lines' has not been properly deleted.

It looks as though Shakespeare hesitated a good deal over the Player Queen's speeches in 3.2, perhaps not finding it easy to get exactly the right kind of prosy sententiousness without becoming positively tedious. Two of the couplets found in the second quarto are omitted in the Folio (3.2.152-3 and 199-200) and I think

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1 For the division of the texts between two compositors, see J. R. Brown, Studies in Bibliography 7 (1955), 17–40.
3 C. Hinman, Printing... of the First Folio, 1963, 11, 208–75; updated in Jenkins, pp. 53–4.
4 Jenkins summarises the previous debate in his discussion, pp. 65–73.
5 Several Shakespearean texts contain material which clearly was meant to be deleted, e.g. Love's Labour's Lost and Romeo and Juliet. See Greg, Shakespeare's First Folio, pp. 110, 220.
Shakespeare had marked them for excision. Concerning two more of the prosy couplets there is definite evidence of Shakespeare's hesitation.¹

3.2.148 Q2: For women feare too much, even as they loue,
   And womens feare and loue hold quantitie,
   Ekyther none, in neither ought, or in extremitie,

   F: For womens Feare and Loue, holds quantitie,
   In neither ought, or in extremity:

Evidently the first line in Q2 was given up; it is the first line of an uncompleted rhyming couplet. And evidently 'Ekyther none' was meant to be deleted also; in the Folio version both sense and metre are completed. A little further on, the variants between Q2 and F again suggest that Shakespeare's corrections were not understood by the Q2 compositor.

3.2.203-4 Q2: Both heere and hence pursue me lasting strife,
   If once I be a widdow, ever I be a wife.

   F: Both heere, and hence, pursue me lasting strife,
   If once a Widdow, ever I be Wife.

It looks as though Shakespeare cancelled the first 'I be' in the second line and the Q2 compositor nevertheless set it. All these false starts in the Player Queen's speeches suggest that Shakespeare did not find it easy to write stilted verse.²

The presence of unobserved deletion marks in the copy for Q2 has been widely accepted, though their possible extent has never been fully investigated.³ The most ingenious argument that these marks existed and were ignored by the Q2 compositors was provided by Dover Wilson himself (MSH, p. 30) in discussing the following speech by Claudius, 4.1.39-45, which I give as it appears in the quarto, adding square brackets to indicate that part of the speech which is omitted in the Folio.

   And let them know both what we meane to doe
   And whats untimely doone,
   [Whose whisper ore the worlds dyameter,
   As leuell as the Cannon to his blanck,
   Transports his poysned shot, may misse our Name
   And hit the woundlesse ayre,] ô come away,
   My soule is full of discord and dismay.

The passage as it stands in Q2 is clearly incomplete, since there is a grammatical as well as a metrical gap after 'whats untimely doone' in the second line. The passage will make sense if we fill the gap with such words as those suggested by Theobald and Capell, 'so haply slander'. As one of his 'three alternative explanations' of the puzzle, Dover Wilson suggested

that the lines in question were marked for omission in the original manuscript not by transverse lines... but by some kind of brackets or rectangular enclosure, an arm of which appeared to delete the first half-line of the passage, so that the Q2 compositor set up all but that half-line.

¹ Compare Greg, Shakespeare's First Folio, p. 314.
² Other possible examples in Q2 of false starts are mentioned in the notes to 3.2.335, 4.5.74-6 and 4.7.8.
It may well be that the section of the speech omitted in F, including the lost half line, was one of the passages in the play which Shakespeare 'surrendered in the actual process of composition', to use J. M. Nosworthy's phrase. If Shakespeare, having got as far as 'woundlesse ayre', begins to feel (as well he might) that he is meandering, and strikes out all after 'vntimely doone', he will need to pick up the metre and complete the imperfect line he is now left with. The line as given in the Folio provides a perfect seam:

And what's vntimely done. Oh come away,

A number of cuts made in the Folio version of Hamlet's speeches to Gertrude in Act 3, Scene 4 (53–88, 158–81) may all reflect Shakespeare's own tightening of his dialogue as he wrote. With the Player Queen, Shakespeare's problem had been to strike a balance between sententiousness and vapidity; in the closet scene, we have to be made to feel that Hamlet goes on too much, and here the danger is that he will merely seem prolix. Here is the passage 3.4.68–88 (modernised), first as it appears in the Folio, and secondly as it appears in the second quarto (with brackets round the additional material).

F: You cannot call it love, for at your age
The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgement; and what judgement
Would step from this to this? What devil was't
That thus hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?
O shame, where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
And reason panders will.

Q2: You cannot call it love, for at your age
The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgement; and what judgement
Would step from this to this? [Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion, but sure that sense
Is apoplexed, for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thralled,
But it reserved some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference.] What devil was't
That thus hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?
[Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope.] O shame, where is thy blush?
Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,

1 Nosworthy, Shakespeare's Occasional Plays, p. 140.
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
And reason panders will.¹

If we put the two versions together in this order, our familiarity with the fuller version is less likely to obstruct our perceiving that the speech is much more effective when the cuts have been made. Each of the two passages cut from the Folio has an uncertainty of control about it which suggests a tentative exploration from which Shakespeare pulled back. It will be noticed that if Shakespeare, as he was composing the speech, stopped at ‘Could not so mope’ and decided to abandon the three-and-a-half lines he had just written, he must obviously continue with a new full line, which is what we have in the Folio:

O shame, where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,

But the second quarto, by printing the excised half line and the new full line, is left with half a line too much.

Could not so mope, O shame, where is thy blush?
Rebellious hell,

There are very many short lines in *Hamlet*, and they are not in themselves evidence that the text has been altered. But when these short lines appear in the quarto only, in association with passages omitted from the Folio, they suggest revision. Here is the second quarto’s version (modernised) of 1.4.69–79, with brackets round that part of it omitted from the Folio.

**HORATIO** What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o’er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason,
And draw you into madness? Think of it.
[The very place puts toys of desperation
Without more motive, into every brain
That looks so many fathoms to the sea
And hears it roar beneath.]

**HAMLET** It waves me still. Go on, I’ll follow thee.

Here again we can imagine Shakespeare stopping himself after running on too far. The impressiveness of this speech as it appears in the Folio is the emphasis laid on Horatio’s fear that the Ghost may draw Hamlet into madness. This ominous introduction of the theme of the tainted mind is much weakened by the continuation of the speech as it appears above, in which Horatio says that the place, not the Ghost, puts the idea of suicide into people’s minds. Hamlet doesn’t need a cliff to put thoughts of suicide into his head. If Shakespeare marked the passage within square brackets

¹ For ‘panders’ Q2 reads ‘pardons’.
for deletion, he would need to continue with a full line, which is what we have in Hamlet’s reply. But once again, by printing both the excised half line and the new full line, the second quarto leaves us with the tell-tale half line ‘And hears it roar beneath’. This stitching to retain the verse pattern is not always so neat; in the other much-altered speech in 3.4, lines 158–81, one of the cuts leaves the very short line ‘Refrain tonight’ (166); but in the following cut, the half line which is left hanging, ‘To the next abstinence’ (168), is completed by ‘Once more good night’ (171).

Is it possible that other passages which appear only in the second quarto had been cancelled by Shakespeare himself and were never meant to form part of his play? In Shakespeare’s Occasional Plays, J. M. Nosworthy argued that two major Folio cuts, usually taken to be unintelligent theatre-cuts, were in fact ‘composition cuts’. They are both reflective passages preceding an entry of the Ghost, and neither of them makes full sense as it stands. The first passage, 1.1.107–25, is largely Horatio’s discussion of the portents before the death of Caesar. It is not a strong or necessary speech, and few would find the play worse for its absence. The second passage (1.4.17–38) is not so easily written off, being the speech in which Hamlet after being indignant that Danish drinking habits besmirch the whole nation reflects on ‘the vicious mole of nature’ which ruins the reputation of otherwise worthy men. The speech ends with the notorious ‘dram of eale’ crux. Nosworthy writes (p. 141), ‘The simplest explanation of this crux is that the sentence is unfinished, the implication being that Shakespeare lapsed into incoherence and gave up the struggle.’ Nosworthy found the whole ‘lengthy meditation’ sententious. Dover Wilson’s defence of the speech, that it was needed ‘to lull the minds of his audience to rest and so startle them the more with his apparition’ (MSH, p. 25), is not much of a compliment. Though it is often maintained that the speech has an important choric value, as regards Hamlet himself, and affords a glimpse of Shakespeare’s view of tragedy, both these contentions are disputable, and I doubt whether removing the speech decreases the effectiveness of the scene or diminishes our understanding of the play. It is quite possible that these two cuts are theatre-cuts, but there is in my opinion much to be said for the view that Shakespeare was dissatisfied with them as he wrote.

Jonson said of Shakespeare, ‘He flowed with that facility, that sometime it was necessary he should be stopped. Sufflaminandus erat.’ The evidence of the second quarto of Hamlet shows both Shakespeare’s facility and his awareness of the need to curb it. It is ironic that compositors may have unwittingly preserved a good deal of material which Shakespeare decided to dispense with. If that is in fact the case, they will have provided us with immensely valuable information about Shakespeare’s methods of composition, but presented an editor with the formidable problem of whether he should put back into a play what Shakespeare had decided to leave out. Although there is at least one more passage found in the second quarto only which may have been a ‘composition cut’ (4.7.99–101), I want now to consider two major passages which do not appear in the Folio text but which have none of those deficiencies, structural, thematic or linguistic, which may suggest Shakespeare’s
discontent with them as he wrote. These are Hamlet’s speech to Gertrude at the end of the closet scene, 3.4.203–11, about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (hoisting the engineer with his own petar), and the long fourth soliloquy (4.4), ‘How all occasions do inform against me’, after Hamlet has seen Fortinbras’s army. These are generally held to be playhouse cuts, but there are reasons for thinking that Shakespeare himself may have removed both speeches.

Here is the first passage, in modernised form, first as in the Folio and then in the fuller quarto version.

F: HAMLET I must to England, you know that?
GERTRUDE Alack,
I had forgot. ’Tis so concluded on.
HAMLET This man shall set me packing.

Q2: HAMLET I must to England, you know that?
GERTRUDE Alack,
I had forgot. ’Tis so concluded on.
HAMLET There's letters sealed, and my two schoolfellows,
Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged,
They bear the mandate. They must sweep my way
And marshall me to knavery. Let it work,
For ’tis the sport to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petar, an'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.
This man shall set me packing.

Hamlet's speech in the fuller quarto version creates many problems. In the first place, though the audience has just seen Claudius instructing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to accompany Hamlet to England, Hamlet has been given no means of learning that they are to go with him. And the audience has still to be told (it comes at 4.3.54) that Claudius is using the voyage to England to liquidate Hamlet. There are problems graver than these, however. One is the surprise of this new conviction in Hamlet that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are accomplices in a plot to destroy him. The second is the definiteness of Hamlet’s plans. In spite of the recent re-appearance of the Ghost urging him to his main task of revenge, he here renounces the immediate prosecution of his mission, accepts the journey to England, and with cool pleasure undertakes to countermine Claudius’s plots in his own good time, and to destroy Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

The explicitness of this speech is surely remarkable. What Hamlet here outlines is what actually happens. Can Shakespeare have wanted Hamlet at this point to be so buoyantly in charge of his own destiny? It is a major factor in Hamlet’s actions on board ship, as he narrates them to Horatio in 5.2, that the idea of entering the cabin of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern was a sudden inspiration, a wild rashness, in which he saw the hand of Providence. It was by means of that unplanned move that Hamlet learned of Claudius’s treachery, and it was as a consequence of that knowledge
that Hamlet sent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths. George MacDonald, in his 1885 edition of the play (p. 181), suggested that it was Shakespeare's original plan that Hamlet should board the vessel looking for an opportunity to outwit his companions, but that he altered the plan 'and represents his escape as more plainly providential'. The change in Hamlet's relationship with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, now sent to their deaths on a sudden impulse, is surely reflected in a line which is found in the Folio but not in the second quarto, and which may therefore be an addition or an insertion into the original script. In reply to Horatio's pensive words, 'So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't', Hamlet (in the second quarto) impatiently replies 'They are not near my conscience', as indeed he might have some justification in saying if they were accomplices of Claudius whom Hamlet had long decided must be got out of the way. But if they are no more than repulsive sneaks, royal toadies, who are unwitting agents in the king's plot, their grim punishment is a more sensitive affair. 'Why man, they did make love to this employment', says Hamlet in the Folio, 'They are not near my conscience.' In view of other important lines in Hamlet's communication to Horatio which are also found only in the Folio (and which I shall shortly discuss), it seems very likely that Shakespeare revised this passage. If so the new line, 'Why man, they did make love to this employment', etches in Hamlet's awareness of the unspoken accusation in Horatio's remark, and his wish to exculpate himself in the new moral context for the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

To return to the 'engineer' speech, we may feel that the value of the curt ending given to the closet scene in the Folio, no more than a sardonic recognition of the king's plan to get him out of Denmark and a consciousness that he, Hamlet, has now given Claudius the pretext which he wanted ('This man shall set me packing'), lies not only in avoiding a commitment to a delayed revenge but also in its complete silence about any plans whatsoever. The play is not the less eloquent for this silence (see below p. 55). A great many possibilities are going through our minds about what may be going through Hamlet's. The Hamlet whose experiences and thoughts have been with us for three acts is lessened and limited by the plan and the threat which he issues in the quarto version of his speech. If it's bluster, of course, or the old 'procrastination', it would have a place in a credible total view of Hamlet, but a view I could not share. Shakespeare may have thought it best not to provide Hamlet with arguments for his acceptance of being sent off to England.

This question of his willingness to leave is at the forefront in the fourth soliloquy in 4.4, which is not given in the Folio at all. The core of the speech is self-reproach for not having done a deed which ought to have been done, and which could easily have been done. Hamlet finds his inactivity inexplicable.

Q2: Now whether it be
   Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
   Of thinking too precisely on th'event –
   A thought which quartered hath but one part wisdom
   And ever three parts coward – I do not know
   Why yet I live to say this thing's to do,
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
To do't.

(4.4.39–46)

This looks very much like an alternative to the ‘engineer’ speech we have been discussing. As Hamlet faces being sent to England, we are given first a demonstration of defiance and determination; then we are to see him in a state of nerveless drifting, bafflement, indecision and inactivity. Again, a credible Hamlet can be made out, if we postulate a violent swing of mood, from blustering threats to guilt and self-questioning. But it is also possible to see the fourth soliloquy as a second attempt, a contradictory attempt, and a weaker attempt to provide a psychological bridge for this very difficult stage of the plot, Hamlet’s departure for England.

Although entire theories of the prince have been built on this speech, it is not one of the great soliloquies; much less intricate, subtle, mobile and suggestive than the two great central soliloquies, ‘O what a rogue and peasant slave’ and ‘To be or not to be’. But, more important, it is a speech which does not know all that has gone before it. Hamlet’s thoughts and emotions have become far too complicated and deep for this simple self-accusation to make any sense—

Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
To do't.

No, it is insufficient and inappropriate for Act 4 of Hamlet. We may agree with Ernst Honigmann1 that when Shakespeare was writing a play he would not necessarily have begun with Act 1 and gone on to the end, but might have tried out speeches or scenes which would eventually find their place in the later parts of the play. Perhaps the fourth soliloquy was such a speech. But by the time we have reached the point at which it has been placed, Hamlet has become so immense in his mystery, so unfathomable, that the speech is scarcely adequate for the speaker.2

It seems to me the likeliest thing in the world that in creating a hero who is a tangle of conflicting tendencies Shakespeare would have written a lot of tentative material – passages relating to aspects of Hamlet and his mission which needed saying but whose final placing was uncertain – and that in the end some of this material would seem redundant or wrong, and not to belong anywhere. If ‘How all occasions do inform against me’ comes into this category, its removal at rather a late stage in the preparation of the play was a much bigger wrench than the removal of the ‘engineer’ speech, because we are left with an awkward fragment of a scene, just about enough to remind us of the existence of Fortinbras.

By omitting the engineer speech and the fourth soliloquy, the Folio version leaves Hamlet silent about being sent to England, except for his taunt about Claudius’s purposes – ‘I see a cherub that sees them’ (4.3.45). This silence throws a great deal of weight on to the explanations of his thoughts and actions which Hamlet gives to Horatio on his unlooked-for return, in 5.2, particularly about his loss of confidence in his ‘deep plots’ and his submission to the guidance of heaven. The heart of his

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1 The Stability of Shakespeare’s Text, 1965, ch. 4.
explanation is a short passage which is for me the pivot of the entire play (as I explain more fully on pp. 56–8).

And is't not to be damned
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?

These lines are found only in the Folio, and I find it hard to resist the conclusion that Shakespeare wrote them in at the time he cut out the two earlier speeches in 3.4 and 4.4. It is the destination to which a 'revised' Hamlet has come, and is all the evidence we need of the 'kind of fighting' in his heart between the re-appearance of the Ghost in Gertrude's room and the return to Denmark.

This vital area of the play appears in the two texts as follows (modernised and corrected):

Q2: HORATI0 So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't.
HAMLET They are not near my conscience. Their defeat
Does by their own insinuation grow.
'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
Between the pass and fell incensed points
Of mighty opposites.

HORATI0 Why, what a king is this!
HAMLET Does it not, think'st thee, stand me now upon –
He that hath killed my king, and whored my mother,
Popped in between th'election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
And with such cosenage – 'is't not perfect conscience?

Enter a courtier

F: HORATI0 So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't.
HAMLET Why man, they did make love to this employment.
They are not near my conscience. Their defeat
Doth by their own insinuation grow.
'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
Between the pass and fell incensed points
Of mighty opposites.

HORATI0 Why, what a king is this!
HAMLET Does it not, think'st thee, stand me now upon –
He that hath killed my king, and whored my mother,
Popped in between th'election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
And with such cosenage – 'is't not perfect conscience
To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damned
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?

HORATI0 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 no more then to say 'one'.
But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
That to Laertes I forgot myself,
For by the image of my cause, I see
The portraiture of his. I'll court his favours.
But sure the bravery of his grief did put me
Into a towering passion.

Horatio Peace, who comes here?

Enter young Osric

In the second quarto version there is obviously something missing at the end, after 'conscience'. It could be that Shakespeare has struck out some words similar to the Folio's 'To quit him with this arm' and inserted the all-important longer passage which appears only in the Folio, either in the margin where they were overlooked by the q2 compositor, or on a separate sheet or slip which, in the four years or more elapsing between the completion of the manuscript and its use in Roberts's printing house, had somehow gone astray.

This matter of a separate slip or interleaved sheet is of course the purest speculation, but it might help to explain the existence in the Folio of another passage not found in the second quarto, the 'war of the theatres' passage, 2.2.313-33 (see above, pp. 4-5). If when he was completing his play in 1601 Shakespeare had indeed added this new material to an already written Act 2, Scene 2, and written it on an additional separate sheet, it may well have become separated or lost by 1604.

I have been suggesting that Shakespeare's 'foul-papers', which were used by Roberts in setting up the 1604/5 quarto, contained a certain amount of material which Shakespeare had decided he didn't want. Whatever cancellation marks he used were not observed or not understood by Roberts's compositors. The manuscript may also have contained insertions which again were either not seen or not understood by the compositors. As a result, the second quarto supplies us with some of Shakespeare's rejected first thoughts and fails to provide us with some of Shakespeare's second thoughts.

In addition, I have suggested that some major changes affecting the part of Hamlet in the last half of the play, reflected in the omission of two major speeches in the Folio, were possibly the result of a revision by Shakespeare. When might such a revision have taken place? Perhaps at the time when it became necessary to make a fair copy of the 'foul-papers'. We can only guess what happened when Shakespeare had a new play ready for his own company. Even Shakespeare, one assumes, had to have his play accepted. It must have been read and discussed. Perhaps it was given to Shakespeare to read out an untidy and unpunctuated manuscript. For all we know, alterations may have been talked about at this stage, and the revision may have taken place then. What looks certain is that at an early stage there would be the need to prepare a fair copy. There was an important discussion of this question of fair copies by Fredson Bowers in On Editing Shakespeare in 1955. Theatres normally required fair copies from their playwrights. Bowers suggested that Shakespeare's privileged position may have freed him from the labour of making his own transcript, but, since
a fair copy would be essential for the preparation of the actors' parts and the promptbook, we have to think it possible that the playhouse scrivener would 'make an intermediate transcript of them [the foul-papers] for consideration, revision, submission to the censor, copying of the parts, or sometimes for marking and cutting in preparation for the final prompt-book' (pp. 20–1). Again, 'A temporary manuscript to serve as a basis for the copying of the parts and for guiding rehearsal would be a practical necessity before the book-keeper was ready to engage himself to the preparation of the final prompt-book' (p. 113).

It is evident that the hypothesis of an intermediate scribal transcript of foul-papers will serve to explain the source of the text of a number of Shakespeare's plays, which exhibit the tell-tale features of neither foul-papers nor promptbooks. It seems very probable that the Folio text of *Hamlet* began its life as such a transcript, a fair copy of Shakespeare's foul-papers, containing his latest revisions, before the play went into production. This was the view argued by J. M. Nosworthy in *Shakespeare's Occasional Plays.* It runs counter to the view advanced with such brio by John Dover Wilson in *The Manuscript of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'* that the Folio text was based ultimately on the theatre's promptbook. The promptbook theory never received more than cautious acceptance. Nosworthy points out that Greg was always uneasy about it. Only his respect for Dover Wilson seems to have kept him loyal to the theory. A strong argument against the Folio text being based on the promptbook is its length. At 3,535 lines it is only 140 lines or so shorter than the second quarto, and as Greg said it cannot 'suggest any serious attempt to shorten the play' (*Shakespeare's First Folio*, p. 317). The average length of plays at the time was under 2,500 lines. Plays varied in length, of course, and it is clear that both Shakespeare and Jonson were given to writing very long plays. Even so, there is no chance of a play of over 3,500 lines being acted in full. If it is an acting version we are looking for, it will be something nearer the length of *Macbeth*, or the first quarto of *Hamlet*.

In the next place, a text so deficient in its stage directions could never have served in the theatre. The Folio follows the second quarto in omitting very many exits, and some entrances too, and it actually leaves out some important exits which are present in the quarto. It omits some of the quarto's directions for music, for properties, for off-stage noises and on-stage actions. (The parallel lists of stage directions in Dover Wilson's *Manuscript of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'* make a comparison of the two texts a simple matter.) It is of course true that the Folio adds to and changes the stage directions as found in the second quarto, but, essentially, the Folio's attention to staging is fitful and patchy, and its concerns for properties almost nil. A working promptbook would have regularised and filled out the mechanics of staging in a consistent manner, and this would certainly be reflected in any printed version based on it.

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2 In his 1982 edition, Jenkins supports the idea of a ‘pre-prompt’ transcription; see pp. 59, 64.
3 'On the whole it seems to be a rather queer prompt-book, if prompt-book it is, that lies behind F.' (*Shakespeare's First Folio*, p. 323; see also p. 316.)
5 The failure in F to carry out the act and scene division beyond the beginning of Act 2 is a further argument against prompt-copy. See Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, 3rd edn, 1954, pp. 35–6.
If the Folio text is not based ultimately on the promptbook of the play, it is also abundantly clear that its ultimate source is not a strict fair copy of Shakespeare's manuscript. The departures from the text of the second quarto, quite apart from the cuts already discussed, and making every allowance for the inaccuracy of the Q2 compositors, are too extensive for the phrase 'fair copy' to be allowable. Bowers's phrase 'intermediate transcript' is very helpful. A scrutiny of the differences between the stage directions in Q2 and F points us towards the special quality of the transcript that lies behind the Folio text, neither a straightforward copy of Shakespeare's manuscript nor yet a full production script developed from it.¹

It will be quickly noticed that the variants in the stage directions and the staging which they imply are not spread evenly through the play. In the first act, though there are two alterations which I shall comment on, F tends to omit Q2's directions. Indications for 'Flourish' are generally omitted; the sound of the cannon at 1.4.6 is not mentioned; 'It spreads his arms' and 'The cock crows' are eliminated. Half way through the second act a change of attitude towards stage-business is discernible. Q2's directions are observed, altered and added to. Hamlet enters 'reading on a book' (2.2.165). At 2.2.338, Q2's 'Flourish' is recorded and expanded: 'Flourish for the Players'. By the middle of Act 3, F's attention to music is such that all Q2's directions are noticed (some of them altered), and new directions are being inserted.

By far the greater number of revisions to the stage directions occur in the last three acts. Of the 52 which are of special significance, only 19 occur up to the crucial moment of the king's exit from the play-scene (3.2), which is just slightly beyond the actual half-way point of the play. As concern with matters of staging develops in the Folio text, there is an increasing boldness in intervening and interfering with the text itself in connection with the changes. Nothing previous to 4.5.0 shows the temerity of cutting out the Gentleman who tells Gertrude about Ophelia's madness, and giving his lines (so inappropriately) to Horatio and Horatio's to Gertrude. Innovations of this kind begin a little earlier, at 4.3.0, where, by depriving Claudius of the 'two or three' who enter with him, a prepared public utterance is turned into an unsuitable worried self-communion.

It looks as though a scribe's conception of his task changed during the course of making a transcript. At the outset, he is providing a plain text on which the promptbook may be based. Flourishes are left out because the musical effects are to be decided later. But as the work of transcribing these untidy papers continues — and for all we know discussion about the staging of the play grows more detailed — the transcript begins to include proposals or decisions about the details of the staging and the size of the cast. We can suppose that the scribe is the book-keeper himself, the man responsible for preparing the promptbook and supervising the production.² His concern with practicalities of the theatre (including paying and costuming men and boys for walk-on parts) will become clearer if we now look at the character of the changes made in the Folio's stage directions.

¹ This was the conclusion reached by T. M. Parrott and Hardin Craig in their 'critical edition' of the second quarto, 1938, p. 50: 'not the prompt-book, but, probably, the manuscript on which the final prompt-book... was based'.
² For the book-keeper's duties, see Greg, Shakespeare's First Folio, p. 100.
In the first place, on a number of occasions the scribe was visualising what has to happen on stage more clearly than Shakespeare seems to have done. At 1.5.113, for example, Horatio and Marcellus, in pursuit of Hamlet, will need to cry 'My lord, my lord!' before and not after their entry on stage. At 2.2.489–97, Polonius cannot be left awkwardly on stage while Hamlet discusses the ‘dozen or sixteen lines’ with the First Player. In the graveyard scene (5.1), Hamlet and Horatio need to enter earlier, ‘a farre off’, in order to listen to the Clown before they comment on what he is doing.

Secondly, the scribe was intolerant of Shakespeare’s vagueness about the names and functions of characters and how many there were in group entries. (It is interesting that the permissive entry of the ‘two or three’ kind must have had a definiteness for him.) So ‘Enter the Players’ becomes ‘Enter foure or fiue Players’ (2.2.384). ‘Enter Horatio and others’ becomes ‘Enter Horatio with an Attendant’ (4.6). ‘Enter old Polonius, with his man or two’ becomes ‘Enter Polonius, with Reynaldo’ (2.1). The scribe’s need to identify and to number is very interestingly shown in the directions for the dumb-show in 3.2, with provision for ‘Mutes’ and ‘a Fellow’. At 5.2.340, ‘the Embassadors’ becomes ‘English Ambassador’.

The scribe’s constant concern to reduce the number of minor characters throws into relief the strange lavishness, for a practical man of the theatre, with which Shakespeare produced additional characters, especially late in the play, who have little or nothing to say or do. Sometimes the reduction is quite deft, as at 4.5.111 where Laertes’ militant followers, instead of entering as ‘others’, are made to remain shouting outside the doors. But sometimes the attempt to stanch the unending stream of supernumeraries is more damaging to the texture of the play. The Lord who invites Hamlet to the fencing match at 5.2.170 is cut out along with twelve lines of text. I have already mentioned the disfigurement caused by the removal of the ‘two or three’ who enter with Claudius at 4.3.0, and the removal of the Gentleman at 4.5.0. At 3.2.312 it would appear from the quarto that Shakespeare’s idea was that the players should come on as a consort to play music. ‘Enter the Players with Recorders’ is reduced to ‘Enter one with a Recorder’, and the text has to be changed.

The three major entries of the full court at 1.2.0, 3.2.81 and 5.2.196 show considerable changes, with the Folio versions showing a special concern for the management of these important stage occasions, filling out the bare entries of the quarto with elaborate detail. The many alterations for the grand entry to witness the fencing contest in the final scene give an impression of being tentative and provisional (see Commentary).

If it is accepted that the changes in the stage directions in the Folio text are notes towards a production made while transcribing Shakespeare’s foul-papers, and that the book-keeper included signals to the actors, and was ready to alter the text to accommodate his more frugal standards of numbers in the cast, then some other variants which have been taken to be ‘actors’ interpolations’ or accretions to the text sanctioned by stage custom may also be seen as the work of the scribe.¹ At 5.1.152

¹ See MSH, p. 79, and Jenkins in Studies in Bibliography 13 (1960), 31–47.
the Gravedigger produces another skull, which he says was Yorick's. 'This?' asks Hamlet. 'E'en that', replies the Gravedigger. In Q2 Hamlet continues 'Alas poore Yorick'. But in F he says 'Let me see. Alas poore Yorick'. Hamlet's 'Let me see' provides for the transferring of the skull from one actor to the other.

It is not in the least surprising that an experienced playhouse scrivener, accustomed to Shakespeare's script, should be able to give a more intelligent rendering of the foul-papers than the compositors in James Roberts's printing house, especially in following Shakespeare's marks for deletion and insertion. He has on many occasions preserved the true reading of the text when the second quarto has blundered. Yet he would alter Shakespeare's text, as we have seen, and he too could blunder. There is at 5.1.252-6 a very bad misascription of a speech by Gertrude to Claudius. It is quintessentially a Gertrude speech, anxious, protective, sentimental, flowery, and there can be no reason except carelessness for giving it to Claudius. How do we know that this misascription in the Folio was the error of a scribe at an early date in the play's history and not the error of the Folio compositors? Because the 'bad' first quarto of 1603 also contains the erroneous ascription.

The first quarto gives us some of the strongest and clearest evidence of the nature of the manuscript which is the source of the Folio text, and helps to distinguish its various archaeological layers. Corrupt and adulterated though its text is, it demonstrates that an acting-text of Hamlet, based on the playhouse transcription of Shakespeare's foul-papers which we have been discussing, had become established in performance by 1603. When the Folio and the first quarto agree on readings which differ from the second quarto and are manifestly or arguably inferior to the second quarto, we may consider we have evidence of changes which the book-keeper made when copying out Shakespeare's manuscript, which changes were then transmitted to the promptbook and into performance, and so were established in the theatre-text corruptly 'reported' in the first quarto.

The invaluable tables of common and divergent readings given by Dover Wilson in The Manuscript of Shakespeare's Hamlet show us on pp. 336-40 a number of occasions when the first quarto confirms an early weakening of Shakespeare's text. The second quarto's 'But who, a woe, had seene' (i.e. 'But who - ah woe! - had seen') was weakened to 'But who, O who, had seen' found in both the first quarto and the Folio (2.2.460). 'The Lady doth protest too much' was weakened to 'The Lady protests too much.' An interesting change is at 4.7.177 where in the description of the death of Ophelia the first quarto confirms that Shakespeare's 'snatches of old laudes' (Q2) had been altered to 'snatches of old tunes' (F). Presumably the book-keeper thought 'lauds' altogether too outlandish or unfamiliar.

Once the fair copy of Shakespeare's manuscript had been made, it would be necessary to prepare from it a shorter version for acting, the promptbook, from which in turn the actors' parts would be taken. Unfortunately we have no idea what the form of this acting version was, nor whether Shakespeare was involved in creating it. If he

1 E.g. the fretful, not the fearful porpentine (1.5.20), and scullion, not stallion (2.2.540).
knew of some of the changes already made involving some of the minor characters in the later part of the play (which have just been discussed) he cannot have approved of them. Things already seem to be going forward without his co-operation; and it seems to me very unlikely that he was closely engaged in what to some extent must have been a mutilation of his work. Macbeth, of which we have only a single text of about 2,500 lines, is alone among the Histories and Tragedies in giving us what looks like an acting-text. What Shakespearean riches have been lost in achieving that brevity is beyond conjecture. With Hamlet it is the other way round. We have two texts, one authorial of great amplitude, and one which seems to contain authorial deletions and changes and also bears signs of the play being got ready for the stage. But we have no evidence of the shape of the play as it was eventually acted on Shakespeare’s stage. Why in the first place Shakespeare should on this occasion as on many others have written a play manifestly too long for theatrical presentation is a far-reaching and unsettling question.

The one link we have with Hamlet as acted at the Globe Theatre is the first quarto of 1603, deriving as it must from a stage version based upon the transcript which we have postulated as lying behind the Folio text. The verbal links between the transcript and the first quarto have been noted, and there is further evidence of dependence in the fact that the passages deleted by the Folio (which appear in the second quarto) are all missing from the first quarto. In trying to fill the great gap in our knowledge of the history of Hamlet, the shape of the play as given on Shakespeare’s stage, we need to look closely at the first quarto.

The first quarto is a much-abbreviated as well as a much-debased version of Shakespeare’s play as we know it from the second quarto and the Folio. The standard example of its quality is the opening of the ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy (here modernised):

To be or not to be, ay there’s the point;
To die, to sleep, is that all? Ay, all.
No, to sleep, to dream; ay marry, there it goes,
For in that dream of death, when we awake
And borne before an everlasting judge,
From whence no passenger ever returned,
The undiscovered country, at whose sight
The happy smile, and the accursed damned...

The quality varies greatly, however, and in some parts of the play, especially near the beginning, there is an approximation to the standard text. There is little dispute that the first quarto is a ‘reported’ text, an attempt to put together the text of a play from memory without recourse or access to an authoritative manuscript. It is generally thought, in view of the superiority of the text whenever he is on stage, that the actor playing Marcellus, perhaps doubling as Lucianus in the play-within-the-play, was responsible for the piracy.

1 One or two phrases in Q1 seem to echo passages cut from F. It is not at all unlikely that in preparing the promptbook for the Globe some extra material from the foul-papers was added for clarification. See Chambers, William Shakespeare, 1930, 1, 416, and Duthie, p. 273.

2 This view was advanced by H. D. Gray in 1915 and accepted by Duthie.
While in the main the first quarto follows, to the best of its ability, an abbreviated version of the standard play, there are four substantial and interesting departures. The first is that Polonius has become Corambis. Secondly, the ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy and the subsequent nunnery scene are placed earlier than in the standard text. Third, at the end of the closet scene Hamlet asks Gertrude to assist him in revenge, and she vows that

I will conceal, consent, and do my best,
What stratagem soc’er thou shalt devise.

The fourth change is a drastic reworking of Hamlet’s return from the voyage to England. Horatio is given a new scene with the queen, in which he tells her the news that in the standard text Hamlet tells him of the king’s plot on his life and the exchange of the commission which sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their doom. There is no mention of the fight with the pirates.

Is it possible that these alterations represent a recognised version of Shakespeare’s play as it was acted in London before 1603 when the first quarto was published? Some evidence that the shape of the first quarto was the conventional and accepted shape is provided by a curious German manuscript of 1710, now lost, which was printed in 1781: *Der bestrafte Brudermord oder Prinz Hamlet aus Dannemark* (sometimes known as *Fratricide Punished*).¹ This play may well be the descendant of a *Hamlet* taken by a travelling English company to Germany in the early seventeenth century. Details of such companies are given by E. K. Chambers in *The Elizabethan Stage* (ii, 272–92), and *Hamlet* is one of the plays acted. But, writes Bullough, ‘generations of actors played havoc with the original text and doubtless changed incidents as well as dialogue’ (Narrative and Dramatic Sources, vii, 21). However, it is possible to discern that the original text, while not dependent on the first quarto of *Hamlet*, shared many of its features. In particular, Polonius is Corambus, and the nunnery scene occupies the same early position as in the first quarto. But the first quarto scene between Horatio and the queen telling of Hamlet’s escape is not repeated. Instead Hamlet gives the information to Horatio himself, as in the second quarto (though the circumstances of the escape have become altered out of recognition). So it seems possible that the change of name from Polonius to Corambis or Corambus, and the earlier placing of the nunnery scene, were established features of *Hamlet* as it was being acted before 1603; but that the other features of the first quarto – the complicity of the queen with Hamlet and the reworking of the news of Hamlet’s escape – are peculiar to that text. It is a plausible suggestion that the new role for the queen is not new at all, but is a recollection of the old play of *Hamlet*.²

The transposition of the nunnery scene in the first quarto and in *Bestrafte Brudermord* invites further discussion for the light it may be able to shed on the matter of the fluidity of the text of *Hamlet*, with which we began this section of the Introduction.

In the first quarto, when Corambis has heard Ophelia’s story of Hamlet bursting

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¹ See Duthie, pp. 238–70. There is a translation in Bullough, vii, 128–58.
² Duthie, pp. 196–206.
into her room and has decided that this is love-madness, he says ‘Let’s to the King’, and in the following scene Ophelia enters with Corambis, though she has nothing to say while Hamlet’s letter to her is read out and the ‘Ophelia trap’ is planned. Then Hamlet enters, with the king saying ‘See where he comes, poring upon a book.’ Corambis asks the queen to leave, gives Ophelia a book, and we launch into the ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy and the nunnery scene. At the end of this, Hamlet goes out, Ophelia voices her distress, and the king and Corambis make their comments, all – very roughly – as in the standard text. But then Hamlet must enter again, and Corambis greets him to initiate the fishmonger scene. This runs on as usual to the ‘rogue and peasant slave’ soliloquy with Hamlet’s resolve to test the king in a play. The ‘mousetrap’ play follows almost at once, after the interposition of the equivalent of only the first 35 lines of 3.1.

It has often been noted¹ that in the standard text of Hamlet, Polonius like Corambis tells Ophelia to accompany him to the king.

Come, go with me, I will go see the king.  

Come, go we to the king.  

This must be known.  

But when he enters in 2.2 he is alone. Did Shakespeare once toy with – even try out – the idea of bringing Hamlet on after the long lapse of time that is supposed to follow the end of the first act, to show him meditating suicide? And of following that with the attack on Ophelia, which gives continuity with the earlier attack which we have just heard about from Ophelia herself? It is curious not only that we have the signs of an intention to bring on Ophelia in 2.2 but also that there is a noticeable ‘join’ in 3.1 to initiate the nunnery scene. At 2.2.158, in planning the Ophelia trap, Polonius says

You know sometimes he walks four hours together
Here in the lobby...
At such a time I’ll loose my daughter to him.
Be you and I behind an arras then.

At 2.2.205, however, at the end of the fishmonger scene, Polonius says

I will leave him, and suddenly contrive the means of meeting between him and my daughter.

(This is the Folio reading: the second quarto omits most of this, and gives the obviously defective sentence: ‘I will leave him and my daughter.’) At 3.1.28, Claudius says

Sweet Gertrude, leave us too,
For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,
That he, as ’twere by accident, may here
Affront Ophelia.

¹ Especially by Harley Granville Barker in his Preface, 1937, an important contribution to which this discussion is indebted.
In the word ‘closely’, the normal sense of secrecy applies to Claudius’s purpose and not to sending the message; he has sent for Hamlet under pretence of something other than the real reason. When Hamlet enters, however, he is deep in meditation, communing with himself, giving no indication whatsoever that he has been sent for. This is his usual lobby walk, and he is surprised when he sees Ophelia. We can see that his entry belongs to the original scheme prepared for by Polonius’s words at 2.2.158, ‘sometimes he walks four hours together / Here in the lobby . . . / At such a time I’ll loose my daughter to him.’ Claudius’s words are inconsistent with Hamlet’s entry, and Polonius’s words at 2.2.205 are inconsistent with Claudius’s words. It is arguable that postponing ‘To be or not to be’ and the nunnery scene has led to a little gluing and patching; the defectiveness of the second quarto at 2.2.205 suggests problems with the manuscript arising from deletions or additions.

The positioning of ‘To be or not to be’ where it now finds itself is of profound importance for the ultimate meaning of the play (see pp. 47–8 below). Yet it is easy to see that 3.1 is not the only place it could have gone. Shakespeare may well have hesitated about what Chambers calls ‘the order of the tests by which the court endeavours to ascertain the reason of Hamlet’s strangeness’ (William Shakespeare, 1, 416). Once it finds its final placing, it invites incomprehension. Hamlet has been given his mission, has cursed himself for his delay, has planned to test the Ghost’s veracity with a play and – now what? Back to the beginning and the strain of the very first soliloquy, wishing he were dead and cursing the conscience that stops him from doing anything. A great many critics try to rescue Shakespeare from his decision to place ‘To be or not to be’ where it is by denying the plain truth of what the soliloquy says, that is, that death is better than life but that we haven’t the courage to kill ourselves. From Dr Johnson onwards there has always been someone who tries to pull Hamlet out of the deep pit of pessimism he is in. Here at least we might agree with Rebecca West that critics misinterpret Hamlet because they cannot face its bleakness. Would it therefore be surprising if actors of Shakespeare’s day, with perhaps a Hamlet among them, had argued that the play would go with a greater swing if, when he has decided on his plan to test both the Ghost and Claudius, Hamlet were allowed to get on with it? The leap into Ophelia’s grave shows us that Hamlet was allowed to do things on the stage that Shakespeare hadn’t wanted him to do (see the note to 5.1.225SD). Possibly the players, possibly Shakespeare’s own fellows, pushed ‘To be or not to be’ and the nunnery scene back to an earlier position which Shakespeare had originally tried out but later rejected. The whole history of the development of the playing text of Hamlet in the theatre (which is discussed at p. 61) shows not merely abbreviation of the play but an ironing out of its complexities. The refusal of the stage to meet the challenge of the personality that Shakespeare created may have begun very early.

Our postulated fair copy of Shakespeare’s manuscript, having been used to create the promptbook and the actors’ parts, would be carefully preserved in case a new promptbook were ever needed. When it became desirable to supplant the inferior first quarto with its outrageous claim to be the play that Shakespeare wrote, it was

1 The Court and the Castle, 1958.
Shakespeare's own manuscript, now no doubt in a very messed-up condition, that was given to the printer. Little wonder that the compositors tried to get help from a copy of the first quarto. It seems very plausible that in the three years and more since Shakespeare completed his play wear and tear had made the manuscript less legible than it was when the book-keeper took it over to make his transcript. There is one particular area of the second quarto, from 5.2.145 to 170, where omissions and errors (by comparison with the Folio) are unusually deep and extensive. For example:

5.2.146 Q2: why is this all you call it?
   F: why is this impon’d as you call it?

158 Q2: Shall I deliuer you so?
   F: Shall I redeliuer you e’en so?

161–2 Q2: Yours doo’s well to commend it himselfe
   F: Yours, yours; hee does well to commend it himselfe

165 Q2: A did so sir with his dugge [corrected from ‘A did sir’]
   F: He did Complie with his Dugge

166 Q2: more of the same breede
   F: more of the same Beauy

167 Q2: and out of an habit
   F: and outward habite

168 Q2: a kind of histy collection
   F: a kinde of yesty collection

169 Q2: prophane and trennowed opinions
   F: fond and winnowed opinions

An interesting feature of this series of misreadings is the uncharacteristic attempt to invent and supply words, like 'breede' and 'prophane'. This last is a less wild guess than it seems. The Folio's 'fond' is itself a misreading of 'fand' (= 'fanned'). If a tattered manuscript had what seemed to be (with the common mistake of final e for final d) 'fane', the compositor may have thought he had the tail-end of 'profane'. At any rate, it very much looks as though this page of Shakespeare's manuscript had become very difficult to decipher since it had been used for the theatre transcript some years before. It seems to me unlikely that Roberts's compositors would on their own initiative supply words like 'prophane'; they would have turned to a superior for help.

There are three other places in the second quarto where I think the extraordinary distance of the variant from the much stronger Folio reading indicates that the manuscript was no longer legible and that a guess was made in the printing house to remedy the deficiency. (The variant readings are discussed in the Commentary as they occur.)

1.3.26 Q2: As he in his particuler act and place
   F: As he in his peculiar Sect and force

3.3.79 Q2: Why, this is base and silly, not reuenge
   F: Oh this is hyre and Sallery, not Reuenge
I have already suggested that two passages which appear in the Folio but are not found in the second quarto, namely the passage in 2.2 about the war of the theatres and the words of Hamlet in 5.2, 'Is't not to be damned . . .', were late additions which either became detached or were overlooked. A third omission from the second quarto is the passage 2.2.229–56 which contains the reference to Denmark being a prison. It has often been suggested that by 1604 with Anne of Denmark as the king's consort this might have seemed a sensitive passage and so was cut out. This is the best explanation; possibly the printing house was where this self-censorship took place.

If we could leave the text of *Hamlet* at this point, with only Roberts's compositors between us and Shakespeare's manuscript, and Jaggard's compositors (who set up the Folio text) between us and the book-keeper's transcript of the same manuscript, we should be fortunate indeed. It is certain, however, that the manuscript used by Jaggard for printing the Folio text was not the book-keeper's transcript itself but a careless and rather free copy of it. The copy was made sometime after 1606, and conceivably was made specially for the printing of the Folio (1623). The existence of a second scribe was argued by Dover Wilson in *The Manuscript of Shakespeare's* 'Hamlet', and though I do not think we can accept the colourful rogue whom Dover Wilson believed he had driven into a corner (p. 56), an old actor and a fan of Burbage, who would write down what he had heard the actors say instead of relying on his copy, there can be no doubt of this agent of transmission. His existence is proved by the first quarto. When Q2 and Qi agree in what appears to be the true reading, and they differ from F, then since Qi has no access to the true reading except through the stage version which emanated from the book-keeper's transcript, that transcript must once have contained the true reading, and it must have been obliterated at a later stage. That 'later stage' in hundreds of minor cases must have been the setting up of the Folio text itself, but often the extent of the variation takes it far beyond a compositor's error. The tendency to substitute a word of similar sense often makes the Folio text a sort of paraphrase. Examples are 'just' for 'jump' at 1.1.65; 'day' for 'morn' at 1.1.150; 'gives' for 'lends' at 1.3.117; 'two' for 'ten' at 2.2.177; 'swathing' for 'swaddling' at 2.2.351; 'that' for 'yonder' at 3.2.339; 'claims' for 'craves' at 4.4.3; 'imperial' for 'imperious' at 5.1.180 (all these examples in modernised form). The concurrence of Q2 and Qi in a good reading when the variant in F is also a good reading cannot prove that the F reading is a substitution by the second scribe, because the use by the Q2 compositors of a copy of Qi, particularly in the first act, can mean that the reading common to Q2 and Qi is an error deriving from the latter. So the famous doublets in Act 1, where Q2 and Qi agree against F, become no easier to solve. (E.g. lawless / landless, 1.1.98; sallied / solid, 1.2.129; interred / enurned, 1.4.49; waves / wafts 1.4.61; roots / rots, 1.5.33.)

A convincing demonstration can be made, by the use of the first quarto, of how
Shakespeare's language was progressively weakened during the course of the two transcriptions lying between his foul-papers and the printing of the Folio.

The inference here is that the first scribe, the book-keeper, has made the no doubt unconscious substitution of 'walk' for 'stir' and this has found its way to the stage and thence eventually into the first quarto. The second scribe has weakened 'dare' to 'can'.

The Act to Restrain Abuses of Players of 1606 (see Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, iv, 338–9) forbade the use of the name of God, Jesus, the Holy Ghost or the Trinity in any play. It is clear that the second scribe made appropriate changes in his text when he remembered, but that he sometimes forgot. 'God' becomes 'Heaven' at 1.5.24 and elsewhere; 'By the mass' (2.1.50), 'Sblood' (2.2.337) and 'swounds' (2.2.528) are removed, but 'Gods bodkin' actually becomes 'Gods bodykins' (2.2.485). 'God a mercy' is smoothed to 'Gramercy' (4.5.194).

To summarise the foregoing discussion about a possible relationship between the three texts of *Hamlet*: the second quarto of 1604/5 was printed from Shakespeare's own manuscript, his 'foul-papers', as submitted to his company in 1601. This manuscript contained quite a number of passages which Shakespeare had marked for deletion. These deletion-marks were ignored or overlooked by the compositors, so that the second quarto - and consequently the received text of *Hamlet* - preserves much that Shakespeare had himself discarded. In the playhouse, an official fair copy was made of Shakespeare's no doubt untidy manuscript as a first stage towards preparing a text for the theatre. This fair copy did not include those false starts and unwanted passages which Shakespeare had marked for deletion. It also cut out two passages and added a third; these three changes can be considered as a multiple change of fundamental importance for the meaning of the play, and it is possible that the responsibility for these late changes was Shakespeare's. As the preparation of the fair copy went forward, the scribe made an increasing number of changes to his text, many of which stem from a determined effort to reduce the large number of minor and walk-on characters.

This conjectural fair copy eventually became the Folio text of 1623, but not directly. A transcript of the fair copy must have been made at some point after 1606 by a scribe with a cavalier indifference to the ethic of fidelity to one's copy. This second scribe did untold damage by casualness and rash improvement, and this damage is compounded by the usual carelessness and liberties of the Folio's compositors.

The first quarto of 1603, an abbreviated and adapted version in language which severely corrupts the original, inherits the cuts and changes made in the early playhouse transcript, and demonstrates that the transcript was in progress towards the Globe's official promptbook. It is not inconceivable that in spite of all its corruption it reflects the shortened acting version of Shakespeare's own theatre. The first quarto was used by the compositors of the second quarto, especially during the
first act. It is also likely that the Folio compositors had available a copy of the second quarto.

This hypothesis of the relation between the texts may be represented by the following diagram.

The text of *Hamlet*

I now return to the question with which I began. What do we mean by 'Shakespeare's *Hamlet*'? I believe there was a point when Shakespeare had made many alterations to his play, mostly reflected in cutting rather than adding material, some of which he may have made after preliminary discussions with his colleagues among the
Chamberlain's men. The play then became the property of these colleagues who began to prepare it for the stage. At this point what one can only call degeneration began, and it is at this point that we should arrest and freeze the play, for it is sadly true that the nearer we get to the stage, the further we are getting from Shakespeare. This ideal version of the play does not exist in either of the two main authoritative texts, the second quarto and the Folio, but somewhere between them.

However convinced one may be that the true history of the text of *Hamlet* is of the kind that has been described in this Introduction, it is not always possible (as Hamlet found in the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy) to have the courage of one's convictions. To present readers with a lean and spare *Hamlet* lacking the 'dram of eale' speech and the soliloquy 'How all occasions do inform against me' might seem arrogance and eccentricity, even if the missing passages were supplied at the foot of the page. I have however wished to keep the different shapes of the second quarto and the Folio in front of the reader as much as possible. I have therefore marked all the second quarto passages which are cut in the Folio within square brackets. As for the main body of the text where the two early versions run parallel, the text of this edition will necessarily be an eclectic text, because neither version, in the case of any single variant, has a guaranteed superiority over the other. In some cases I have judged the Folio to be correct and in some cases the quarto.

With the stage directions, I have pursued a policy of compromise between the two texts. It is obvious (from the second quarto) that Shakespeare had not fully thought out the movements on stage and that the Folio provides necessary improvements. I have blended the two, to preserve an intimacy with Shakespeare's own pen, and also the greater clarity of the Folio's staging.

**The play and the critics**

It is probably safe to say that in the world's literature no single work has been so extensively written about as *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*. There are numerous histories, summaries and analyses of this great body of criticism, or parts of it, and numerous anthologies give selections from it. A brief guide to these guides will be found in the Reading List. What follows here is not an attempt to provide, even in the most summary form, a history of *Hamlet* criticism. It is a personal graph, linking together some moments in the history of the interpretation of *Hamlet* which I find important. It provides a starting point for the critical essay which follows on p. 40.

The eighteenth century was not disposed to sentimentalise Hamlet. Dr Johnson (1765) spoke of the 'useless and wanton cruelty' of his treatment of Ophelia, and of the speech in the prayer scene, when Hamlet refrains from killing Claudius for fear he will go to heaven, he said it was 'too horrible to be read or to be uttered'. The reader or the audience has a right to expect the 'poetical justice' of the punishment of Claudius, but this expectation is thwarted by the death of Ophelia, and the death of Hamlet as the price of killing the king. Hamlet indeed is 'rather an instrument than an agent', and 'makes no attempt to punish' Claudius after he has confirmation of his guilt.
Johnson's brief remarks convey his strong sense of Hamlet's failure (and the weakness seems to him as much the author's as the prince's). 'The apparition left the regions of the dead to little purpose' (NV II, 145–6).

George Steevens (1778) was strongly and unfavourably impressed by Hamlet's violence and callousness; he said it was the more necessary 'to point out the immoral tendency of his character' 'because Hamlet seems to have been hitherto regarded as a hero not undeserving the pity of the audience' (NV II, 147). But for Henry Mackenzie (1780) Hamlet was a man of exquisite sensibility and virtue 'placed in a situation in which even the amiable qualities of his mind serve but to aggravate his distress and to perplex his conduct'. Hamlet was not perfect, but from our compassion and anxiety concerning him arises that 'indescribable charm... which attracts every reader and every spectator' (NV II, 148). This is very much the tone of Goethe's famous comments in Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1795–6; translated into English by Carlyle, 1812). Hamlet essentially is a story of the inadequacy and impotence of sensitivity in the face of the stern demands of action. An oak tree has been planted in a precious vase fitted to receive beautiful flowers; as the tree's roots spread out the vase is shattered in pieces. 'A beautiful, pure, noble, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which makes the hero, sinks beneath a burden which it can neither bear nor throw off; every duty is holy to him, – this too hard.' Much less often quoted are some later remarks which show how completely off the mark Rebecca West was in The Court and the Castle (1958, pp. 64–5) in supposing that Goethe was impatient with Hamlet for not saving himself by effort and action, and in associating Goethe with the 'pelagianism' of believing that the world offers its rewards to those who really try. Quite the reverse; Goethe says that poets and historians flatter us by pretending that man's proud lot may be the single-minded accomplishment of great purposes. 'In Hamlet we are taught otherwise.' Purgatory is shown to have no power to bring about what it wishes and nor has man. Inscrutable Fate has its way, toppling the bad with the good, mowing down one race as the next springs up. Hamlet's impotence, therefore, is only an extreme form of a powerlessness general to mankind (NV II, 273–4).

The impotence of Hamlet as understood by Coleridge (1808–12) is quite different. His Hamlet is not a man broken under the weight of too demanding an obligation, but a man incapable of acting. 'Shakespeare wished to impress upon us the truth, that action is the chief end of existence.' Hamlet knows perfectly well what he ought to do, and he is always promising to do it, but he is constitutionally averse to action, and his energy evaporates in self-reproach. The world of the mind was more real than the external world; his passion was for the indefinite. 'Hence great, enormous, intellectual activity, and a consequent proportionate aversion to real action.' Coleridge confessed that 'I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so.' The habit of identifying oneself with Hamlet, which is far from being as widespread as is sometimes supposed, is enshrined in the remark of Hazlitt (1817) that the speeches and sayings of Hamlet are 'as real as our own thoughts... It is we who are Hamlet' (NV II, 155).

1 NV II, 152–5; but see more fully Shakespearean Criticism, ed. T. M. Rayson, 1930; 2nd edn, 1960.
Hamlet

To return to Germany, where so much was contributed to the study of Hamlet, we reach a landmark with A. W. Schlegel's Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, delivered in 1808. Hamlet is a 'tragedy of thought' (Gedankentrauerspiel). This 'thought' is not Coleridge's habit-of-contemplation, inevitably inhibiting action, but a profound scepticism which questions the value of action. Here, powerfully, is Hamlet the doubter, and not the amiable dreamer: a restless sceptic of uncertain principles.

Hamlet has no firm belief either in himself or in anything else: from expressions of religious confidence he passes over to skeptical doubt... The stars themselves, from the course of events, afford no answer to the questions so urgently proposed to them. A voice, commissioned as it would appear by Heaven from another world, demands vengeance for a monstrous enormity, and the demand remains without effect. The criminals are at last punished, but, as it were, by an accidental blow... The less guilty or the innocent are equally involved in the general destruction. (NV 11, 279–80)

It was left for Herman Ulrici (1839) to focus Hamlet’s doubts on an area which had attracted little discussion, the morality of revenge. Ulrici’s work has been neglected because Bradley was so dismissive of the ‘conscience theory’. ‘Even though the King were trebly a fratricide,’ wrote Ulrici, ‘in a Christian sense it would still be a sin to put him to death with one’s own hand, without a trial and without justice.’ Of the Ghost he says, ‘it cannot be a pure and heavenly spirit that wanders on earth to stimulate his son to avenge his murder’. In Hamlet, therefore, the Christian struggles with the natural man. It is his task to make the action imposed on him one that he can undertake freely and by conviction as a moral action. His ‘regard for the eternal salvation of his soul...forces him to halt and consider’. However, he is betrayed less by his vindictive impulses than by his own creative energy in trying to ‘shape at pleasure the general course of things’. He thus rejects the guiding hand of God, and his aspiration to be a kind of god himself is a sinful overestimate of human power. Here, I think for the first time, is the view that Hamlet errs in trying to act as Providence, a view which has been considerably developed in the twentieth century.¹

Almost every writer and thinker of the later nineteenth century had his say about Hamlet. Friedrich Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy (1872) found that Hamlet ‘speaks more superficially than he acts’; there is something deeper going on in the play than finds appropriate expression in the speeches. It is with Hamlet as with Greek tragedy – ‘the myth...never finds an adequate objective correlative in the spoken word’.² At this level deeper than speech, Nietzsche saw Hamlet as an example of Dionysiac man who has pierced through the illusions by which we live and sustain ourselves and who, if forced back into ‘quotidian reality’, views it with detestation.

Dionysiac man might be said to resemble Hamlet; both have looked into the true nature of things; they have understood and are now loth to act. They realise that no action of theirs can work any change in the eternal condition of things, and they regard the imputation as ludicrous.

¹ NV 11, 292–3 gives brief selections from Morrison’s 1846 translation of Shakespeare’s Dramatische Kunst; see further L. D. Schmitz’s 1876 translation of Ulrici’s third edition.

² Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, section 17; translated by F. Golffing, Anchor Books, 1956, p. 103. The word translated as ‘objective correlative’ is Objektivation.
or debasing that they should set right the time which is now out of joint. Understanding kills action, for in order to act we require the veil of illusion; such is Hamlet's doctrine, not to be confounded with the cheap wisdom of John-a-Dreams, who through too much reflection, as it were a surplus of possibilities, never arrives at action. (section 7; p. 51)

In this last sentence Nietzsche dismisses the Coleridgean contemplator. It is not reflection but understanding which debars action: 'the apprehension of truth and its terror'. 'The truth once seen, man is aware everywhere of the ghastly absurdity of existence, comprehends the symbolism of Ophelia's fate and the wisdom of the wood sprite Silenus: nausea invades him' (pp. 51–2). (Silenus thought it was better not to be born at all or, failing that, to die as soon as possible.) Hamlet is not fixed enough in his nature for Nietzsche's portrait to have general applicability, but, as I shall argue (see p. 48), Nietzsche's words are a profound comment on the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy.

The observations of Stéphane Mallarmé on Hamlet first became widely known from Joyce's use of them in Ulysses (1922). In 1886, Mallarmé wrote of the tentativeness of Hamlet as a person (le seigneur latent qui ne peut devenir), and of his failure to translate potentiality into achievement, as being the very stuff of drama, which primarily concerns itself with the quarrel between men's dreams and the calamities of fortune. Mallarmé stressed Hamlet's solitariness, as an alien wherever he appeared. This emphasis was resumed in some remarkable lines in an article 'Hamlet et Fortinbras' in La Revue blanche in 1896. 'He walks about, and the book he reads is himself (// se promène... lisant au livre de lui-même). He denies others with his look. But it's not just the solitude of the contemplative man which is expressed. He is a killer. He kills without concern, and even if he does not do the killing – people die. 'The black presence of this doubter causes this poison.' (// tue indifféremment ou, du moins, on meurt. La noire présence du douteur cause ce poison, que tous les personnages trépassent: sans même que lui prenne toujours la peine de les percer, dans la tapisserie.)

Mallarmé saw Hamlet by flashes, and the sinister figure whom he glimpsed seems as far removed as possible from the prince as he appears in A. C. Bradley's Shakespearean Tragedy of 1904. Bradley's masterly work on Hamlet was the most considered and extended examination which the play had up to that time received. It stands as a kind of pillar at the end of the nineteenth century, reviewing and assessing what had gone before, the last and greatest statement of a prevailing view of Hamlet (though the preceding review indicates that it had already been undermined). It is a view of Hamlet as a noble and generous youth who for reasons inexplicable to himself is unable to carry out a deed of punishment enjoined on him by divine authority. What causes this paralysis? It is not conscience, it is not the immorality of revenge, it is not the frailty of his nature nor the fatal habit of contemplation. Hamlet procrastinates, Bradley argues, because his true nature is blanketed by the melancholy ensuing from the death of his father and his mother's

1 Mallarmé, Crayonné au théâtre; Oeuvres complètes, Gallimard, 1945, pp. 300–2.
2 Oeuvres complètes, p. 1564.
remarriage. It is this affliction which inhibits the fulfilment of his purposes and makes him seek any excuse for delay.

Bradley’s book as a whole was dismissive of the religious element in Shakespearean tragedy and Elizabethan drama as a whole (it was ‘almost wholly secular’, p. 25), but he saw Hamlet as something of an exception.

While Hamlet certainly cannot be called in the specific sense a ‘religious drama’, there is in it nevertheless both a freer use of popular religious ideas, and a more decided, though always imaginative, intimation of a supreme power concerned in human evil and good, than can be found in any other of Shakespeare’s tragedies. (p. 174)

It is because of the sense of Providence in the play that ‘the apparent failure of Hamlet’s life is not the ultimate truth concerning him’. The figure of the Ghost is ‘a reminder or a symbol of the connexion of the limited world of ordinary experience with the vaster life of which it is but a partial appearance’. He ‘affects imagination’ not only as ‘the apparition of a dead king who desires the accomplishment of his purposes’ but as ‘the messenger of divine justice’.

A. C. Bradley, like Edward Dowden (who contributed a notable edition of Hamlet to the old Arden series in 1899), was a professor in one of the departments of English Literature which were being created in universities new and old throughout the English-speaking world towards the end of the nineteenth century. The number of studies of Hamlet increased enormously as the academic study of English literature burgeoned. A great deal of attention was now given to the difficult problem of the text of the play; to its sources, to the relationship of the play with its predecessor; to its date; to the status of the first quarto; to the theatrical conventions of the revenge play; to theatre conditions and audience response; to contemporary history; to contemporary thinking about spirits, second marriages, melancholy, incest, elective monarchies, purgatory and punctuation. Yet it has to be said that with some notable exceptions like Bradley the academics have not always been the leaders of opinion on Hamlet, and the understanding of the play owes as much to writers and thinkers who were not professional scholars as to the scholars themselves. A good example of this is the influence of Freud, whose mere footnote on Hamlet’s Oedipus complex in The Interpretation of Dreams in 1900 has had gigantic influence. Ernest Jones built on this in 1910 for the first of his several psychoanalytic studies of Hamlet, arguing that Hamlet’s problems were caused by his unconscious wish to supplant his father and lie with his mother. Psychoanalytic explanations of Hamlet’s delay lurk behind T. S. Eliot’s lofty and capricious essay of 1919. ‘The play is most certainly an artistic failure’, because Shakespeare was unable to transform the intractable material he inherited from the old play and the sources into a vehicle or ‘objective correlative’ capable of conveying the issues and emotions which it strives to express. ‘Nothing that Shakespeare can do with the plot can express Hamlet for him.’ Hamlet’s emotions are ‘in excess of the facts as they appear’. Shakespeare’s failure lay in trying to convert a father-and-son play about revenge into a mother-and-son play about – something else. The reason he couldn’t get it into shape was the extent of his own hang-ups.
‘Hamlet, like the sonnets, is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art.’

Eliot was a greater poet than John Masefield, but the essay on Hamlet which Masefield wrote as an introduction to the play in 1911 is more interesting and valuable than Eliot’s better-known pages. Masefield saw Hamlet as the embodiment of a very special human wisdom caught between two opposing forces which were trying to complete themselves. The one force is seen in a murderous take-over of the kingdom; the other in a cry for revenge. A bloody purpose from outside life matches a bloody purpose within. Life has been wrenched from its course and an attempt has to be made to wrench it back, or it is to be allowed to continue on its new course. Hamlet’s wisdom baffles both alternatives. The Ghost, representing ‘something from outside life trying to get into life’, presents Hamlet with a simple task — ‘All tasks are simple to the simple-minded.’ The translation of this act into practical terms is ‘a defilement’ which it is ‘difficult for a wise mind to justify’. But if Hamlet in a sense defeats both the principles which are presented to him, he is himself defeated by life. ‘She destroys the man who wrenched her from her course, and the man who would neither wrench her back nor let her stay.’

There is something in Masefield of Ulrici’s theory that Hamlet could not take revenge unless he were able to metamorphose the barbaric act by coming to it with a voluntary inward motivation and equate it with Christian moral law. Masefield stressed the superiority of Hamlet’s ethical principles to those of the Ghost, and the defilement that Hamlet is in danger of by an incautious obedience. This looks not only back to Ulrici but forward to what one might call the ‘contamination theory’ much in evidence in the mid twentieth century. This holds that Hamlet’s chief perplexity is one of translation: of finding a way to convert the Ghost’s injunction into action without being stained by the corruption of Denmark or becoming like the murderer whom he is to punish. Versions of this view can be found, for example, in Maynard Mack’s well-known essay, ‘The World of Hamlet’ (1952), H. F. D. Kitto’s Form and Meaning in Drama (1956), Harry Levin’s The Question of ‘Hamlet’ (1959), G. K. Hunter’s ‘The Heroism of Hamlet’ (1963), and Nigel Alexander’s Poison, Play, and Duel (1967). Mack writes: ‘The act required of him, though retributive justice, is one that necessarily involves the doer in the general guilt’ (p. 103). Alexander writes: ‘The certain proof supplied by the inner play does not solve the problem of Hamlet. The question remains, how does one deal with such a man without becoming like him?’ (p. 125).

One of the most striking and important contributions during the first half of the twentieth century was George Wilson Knight’s essay, ‘The Embassy of Death’ in

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2 Masefield’s Introduction is reprinted in his William Shakespeare in the Home University Library, n.d. [1911].
The Wheel of Fire (1930). Although few people have expressed agreement with it, and though the author later retreated and modified his position, the essay swiftly and silently infused itself into the consciousness of literary criticism. Knight refused to accept Hamlet's jaundiced view of the Danish court. Denmark is a healthy and contented community with Claudius as its efficient and kindly administrator, sensibly not wishing to let memories of the past impede the promise of the future. By contrast, Hamlet is a figure of nihilism and death. He has been poisoned by his grief, and he has communed with the dead. He has been instructed never to let the past be forgotten.

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Neither side can understand the other. Claudius is a murderer and Hamlet of course has right on his side. But which of the two, he asked, 'is the embodiment of spiritual good, which of evil? The question of the relative morality of Hamlet and Claudius reflects the ultimate problem of this play.'

A balanced judgement [he continued] is forced to pronounce ultimately in favour of life as contrasted with death, for optimism and the healthily second-rate, rather than the nihilism of the superman: for he is not, as the plot shows, safe; and he is not safe, primarily because he is right.

Prompt vengeance might have saved the day, but, in view of the disasters that Hamlet brings about, Knight's judgement was that 'Had Hamlet forgotten both the Ghost's commands [to remember the past and avenge the dead], it would have been well, since Claudius is a good king, and the Ghost but a minor spirit.' Claudius a good king, and the Ghost but a minor spirit – this is a deeply significant opposition for later criticism to digest. Having quoted Hamlet's words, 'The spirit that I have seen / May be the devil...', Knight added 'It was.' Or at least, 'The Ghost may or may not have been a "goblin damned"; it certainly was no "spirit of health".'

Knight's essay seems to me brilliant and wrong. I have treated it at some length because a mass of criticism of the fifty years following can in some ways be considered as footnotes and codicils to it. Moreover, in setting up an opposition of an alienated, inhuman prophet and a smoothly running, kindly society, and opting for the latter, the essay vividly shows the alteration of the play's tragic balance which is so striking a feature of contemporary criticism. Although for a long time the orthodox interpretation of Hamlet as taught in schools and universities (in Britain at any rate) remained predominantly Bradleyan, it becomes harder to find critics who to any extent 'believe in' Hamlet and his mission. Extreme forms of distaste for the hero are to be seen in Salvador de Madariaga's On Hamlet (1948) and L. C. Knights's An

As late as 1981 we can find John Bayley repeating Knight's view that Claudius's advice to Hamlet to forget his father's death shows a mature understanding of 'how life must be lived' (Shakespeare and Tragedy, p. 179). See note to 1.2.102.


Except in those advanced places which followed Lascelles Abercrombie and E. E. Stoll in denying that there was any problem of delay to be solved. See Abercrombie, The Idea of Great Poetry, 1925, and Stoll, Art and Artifice in Shakespeare, 1933 (using Hamlet material from 1919).
Approach to 'Hamlet' (1960). Madariaga stressed Hamlet's cruelty, egocentricity and aristocratic disdain. Knights stressed Hamlet's immaturity and his lack of 'a ready responsiveness to life'.

Wilson Knight's essay presented the identity and the authority of the Ghost as a major point of debate. What the Elizabethans were likely to think on this matter became a primary issue for scholarship. John Dover Wilson, whose pioneering and indispensable research into the text of Hamlet had been published in 1934, included in his What Happens in 'Hamlet' of 1935 an early study of Elizabethan attitudes to ghosts. His conclusion that there were three degrees of scepticism, with Catholics being less sceptical than Protestants, has proved too much of a simplification. Later research is reviewed, and the investigation carried further, in Eleanor Prosser's Hamlet and Revenge (1967). It is impossible to ignore, in considering Hamlet, the deep caution and scepticism with which Shakespeare's contemporaries, whether Catholic or Protestant, viewed ghosts and reports of ghosts. They might be hallucinations, or angels, or demons out to ensnare one's soul. That a ghost might be the soul of a dead person revisiting earth was a very remote possibility. Hamlet's early affirmation of the Ghost's genuineness has come to look more questionable than his later doubts, and the confidence of generations of critics, and hence of schoolchildren, that Hamlet's profession of scepticism in 2.2, with his plan to test the Ghost, is mere procrastination now seems insecurely founded. Not many would go as far as Eleanor Prosser in holding that the Ghost was a demon. But one of the important achievements of modern scholarship is to have unsettled the Ghost and made it impossible to accept his credentials and authority as a matter of course and without question. The ambiguity of the Ghost is not just Hamlet's problem. Much is to be built on Nigel Alexander's perception that Shakespeare's guardedness about the Ghost is an essential feature of the play: 'the nature of the Ghost is intended to be an open question'.

Associated with the issue of the origin of the Ghost is the question of the morality of what he enjoins on Hamlet, revenge for murder. As we have seen, this question has been asked for a long time, since Ulrici at least. Scholarship has concerned itself for many years with what would have been the Elizabethan answer to the question. Massive evidence has been assembled that private vengeance was abhorrent to Elizabethans as anti-Christian and anti-social – and also that the Elizabethans were a pretty vindictive lot. Once again, Eleanor Prosser's book can be cited for its review of the debate. And once again her own position is at the extreme edge of the spectrum, namely that the donnée of the play is the conviction that revenge was evil in the extreme. It is best not to be too keen on certainties in this matter. The Elizabethan revenge-play, and Hamlet in particular, is concerned with exploration, not preachment. It devotes itself to the whole issue of the legitimacy of violence and the responsibility of the individual in pursuing justice, finding in the revenge convention an extraordinarily rich source of conflicts to exhibit and illuminate the many faces of violence and redress. To prejudge the plays by saying that for the Elizabethans revenge was of course evil or was of course acceptable is to defeat them completely – as completely

1 Prosser, Hamlet and Revenge, pp. 102–6. 2 Alexander, Poison, Play, and Duel, pp. 32–3.
as does the superior view that the whole revenge convention is barbarous and silly. Some of the best pages of the mid century on Hamlet arose from a sharp reaction against simplistic conclusions about Elizabethan attitudes to revenge. In The Business of Criticism, 1959, Helen Gardner wrote excellently of the division of mind that must exist for every thinking person in every age who tries to achieve justice without outrage to conscience.

I conclude this ‘personal graph’ of criticism with a look at the very small group of twentieth-century critics who have seen Hamlet as a religious play. Middleton Murry (Shakespeare, 1936) believed that Hamlet's fear of damnation was an immensely important factor in the play, overlooked by us because we provide Shakespeare's tragic heroes ‘with every modern convenience’ including our indifference to an after-life. E. M. W. Tillyard (Shakespeare's Problem Plays, 1950) wrote: ‘In Hamlet if anywhere in Shakespeare we notice the genealogy from the Miracle Plays with their setting of Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell...Hamlet is one of the most medieval as well as one of the most acutely modern of Shakespeare’s plays’ (p. 30). C. S. Lewis’s British Academy Shakespeare Lecture of 1942, ‘Hamlet: the prince or the poem?’, was a curiously directed piece with a lot of shadow-boxing which seems quite unnecessary for the main argument. The particularity of Hamlet as a character was for him as unimportant as the particularity of revenge. Hamlet is ‘not “a man who has to avenge his father” but “a man who has been given a task by a ghost”’. The appearance of the Ghost ‘means a breaking down of the walls of the world’. Chaos supervenes: ‘doubt, uncertainty, bewilderment to almost any degree is what the ghost creates’. Hamlet goes through a spiritual region, traversed by most of us. Hamlet’s phrase, ‘such fellows as I’ (3.1.124) ‘means men’ – ‘and the vast empty vision of them “crawling between earth and heaven” is what really counts and really carries the burden of the play’. ‘Its true hero is man – haunted man – man with his mind on the frontier of two worlds, man unable either quite to reject or quite to admit the supernatural.’

The action of the play

THE PLATFORM
Hamlet opens with soldiers on guard at night in a scene full of perturbation and anxiety. It is nervousness about the apparition which predominates, of course, ‘this thing’, ‘this dreaded sight’, looking exactly like the late king in full armour. It is an ominous thing, and the sceptic Horatio, who is quickly converted, fears that it ‘bodes some strange eruption to our state’. The state is already in turmoil, being hastily put on a war footing. Fortinbras of Norway is threatening to invade Denmark to recover lands which his father lost to the late King Hamlet a generation ago. Recollection of that old combat coming on top of the apparition focuses all attention on the dead king. The practice of calling the king by the name of his country enforces an identity between king and kingdom, the health of the one reflecting the health of the other, so that the old king’s death seems to mark the end of an era. ‘The king that’s dead’
is referred to as ‘the majesty of buried Denmark’. Much later, the first words of the
mad Ophelia are ‘Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?’ Even a routine cry
like Bernardo’s ‘Long live the king!’ in the third line of the play takes an additional
meaning as we sense the apprehension of the watch for what may be the consequences
for Denmark of the loss of their hero-king.

Hamlet is about Denmark as well as its prince. How Denmark fares as a society
is in our minds all the time. But of course it’s not just Hamlet and Denmark. Though
Hamlet is at the centre of the play, he exists in his relationships, familial, social, sexual,
political, divine; and even Hamlet, the most famous ‘individual’ in drama, is not so
exclusively the centre that he diminishes the importance of what he is related to:
family, society, God.

Since it is his threat to the kingdom which is the cause of the watch being set, young
Fortinbras may be said to start the play off. In fact he encircles it, seeing that he
enters at the very end to take over the kingdom without having to fight for it. Having
so satisfactorily concluded his business, he will be able to give his ‘landless resolutes’
whatever they would like to have. Fortinbras succeeds where Hamlet fails, though
Hamlet has been trying to right a great wrong and Fortinbras has been interested
only in reversing the lawful outcome of his father’s reckless challenge.

‘I KNOW NOT SEEMS’
Prince Hamlet in black carries into the court (in 1.2) that memory of the dead king
which Claudius and Gertrude are anxious to erase. His grief, he says, is real not
assumed, unlike (he implies) the emotions being expressed around him. But the most
determined candour could scarcely reveal in public what he pours out when he is alone:
his feeling of total despair, of *taedium vitae*, of the weary meaninglessness of ‘all the
uses of this world’. He has no wish to continue living, but divine law forbids suicide. Why is all this? Because his father has suddenly died and his mother has speedily
taken a new husband. Too slight a ground for despair? Hamlet’s protestations are
extreme. To call Claudius a satyr — a lecherous goat-like creature — does not make
much sense to an audience who has just seen the new king efficiently managing his
courtiers and the affairs of the nation. His mother’s remarriage makes him call in
question the constancy of all women. ‘Hyperion to a satyr!’ ‘Frailty, thy name is
woman!’ Such passionate attachment to his father, such contempt for his uncle, such
disgust with his mother, may seem pathological, what Eliot would call ‘in excess of
the facts’. Hamlet’s indignation does indeed go deeper than the ‘facts’ but its source
is not morbid.

The story of Cain and Abel is brought into the play during this scene (105) and
appears again twice (3.3.38 and 5.1.65). That first murder shattered the human
family; it resulted from and betokened man’s falling away from God. The identification
of Claudius with Cain — which he himself makes — gives us the context in which we
should put the ‘unreasonable’ bitterness of Hamlet, though as yet he knows nothing
about any murder. In his book *Violence and the Sacred*, René Girard argued that

cultural breakdown in early society, what he terms the 'sacrificial crisis', involves the failure to recognise acknowledged distinctions and differences. The erasure of difference shows itself in myth in the mortal rivalry of two brothers for what cannot be shared, a throne, a woman. Girard quotes the 'degree' speech in Shakespeare's Trolus and Cressida as an inspired perception of the chaos and violence which flow from the weakening of accepted distinctions. If, instead of the reading 'each thing meets in mere oppugnancy', he had followed the quarto text with 'each thing melts in mere oppugnancy', he would have shown how even more forcefully the passage conveys the rooted fear of the loss of category, of identity, of distinctiveness.

The obliteration of distinction, before Hamlet knows anything about fratricide or adultery, lies in Claudius taking his brother's place as king and husband and in Gertrude tranquilly accepting him as substitute. Their acts may offend against taste and ethics but the deeper offence is the undermining of an ideal of the person enshrined in antiquity and law. Hamlet's expressions, 'Hyperion to a satyr' and 'no more like my father / Than I to Hercules', show a mythographic ordering of the human differences. So in the closet scene Hamlet tries to force the distinction of the two men on to his mother by means of the two pictures. 'Have you eyes?' he shouts at her –

See what a grace was seated on this brow;
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;
A station like the herald Mercury...

This matter of the blurring of distinctions in a man claiming to be his brother helps to explain Hamlet's passion against Claudius as a usurper –

A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule...

Denmark is an elective monarchy as Hamlet knows quite well (see 1.2.109, 5.2.65, 335). But Shakespeare plays off this elective monarchy against his Elizabethan audience's deep emotional commitment to primogeniture and the right of a son to inherit. The Danish system condemns itself; a country which chooses its kings ends up with the rabble-cry of 'Choose we! Laertes shall be king!' (4.5.106). It has chosen for its king one who, did they but know, organised the vacancy by murder. For the audience, the system is a legalism which runs counter to their instinctive sense of rightness. There is a higher court than the court of Denmark, and in that court Hamlet is the dispossessed prince. Hamlet himself is both a Dane and an Elizabethan; whatever Danish law says, Claudius has usurped his brother, and violently appropriated a kingship he has no right to.

Gertrude's offence in confusing the two brothers is much deepened in the audience's eyes later in the first act when they learn that she committed adultery

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with Claudius while her husband was alive. (There is no mistaking the plain sense of the Ghost’s words; see Commentary at 1.5.46.) The willingness of this complaisant woman to sleep with either of two brothers is a forceful image of the failure of discrimination which is central to the tragedy of Hamlet.

In this second scene Hamlet is unaware of adultery or murder. But he has repudiated with contempt the appropriation of that vital distinction of fatherhood which Claudius grandly tries to add to his other appropriations. ‘But now my cousin Hamlet, and my son...’ Hamlet will not accept the relationship; it is ‘more than kin’. He knows he is not Claudius’s son, and the same knowledge tells him that Claudius is not Gertrude’s husband, nor Denmark’s king. It is this knowledge, as well as grief for a father’s death and the shallowness of a mother’s love, which makes the whole world an unweeded garden.

THE GHOST
Hamlet is galvanised into activity by the news of the appearance of a ghost that resembles his dead father. On the platform that night he sees it and is determined to speak to it whatever happens. It is explanation he wants; explanation and a course of action. ‘Let me not burst in ignorance’, he cries. ‘What should we do?’ Though it is specific explanation – why the Ghost has come – and a specific course of action – what the Ghost wants him to do – that he seeks, his words have a wider perspective. The Ghost may have some secret, some unimaginable truth to bring relief from those ‘thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls’, an explanation why things are as they are and a directive for meaningful action. To his demands in both their specific and their general senses he receives, or thinks he receives, a more than sufficient response.

The Ghost declares that he is his father’s spirit, gives him the extraordinary tidings of murder and adultery, and asks him to take revenge. His injunctions are summed up in the three imperatives, ‘Bear it not’, ‘Taint not thy mind’, ‘Leave her to heaven.’ These interconnect. ‘Bear it not’ looks both backwards and forwards. The idea of retribution is implied by the Ghost’s appeal to Hamlet’s ‘nature’, that is, his filial piety. ‘Bear it not’ means that as a son he is not to acquiesce in and accept what has been done to his father. But it looks also to the future. The abuse of Denmark by the very continuation of this pair in sovereignty and in marriage is not to be endured: ‘Bear it not.’ The second imperative is very strange: ‘howsomewer thou pursues this act, / Taint not thy mind’. Whatever the exact meaning of ‘taint’ (see Commentary), the tone of the remark is that the Ghost does not consider this matter of revenge too difficult an act, and is anxious that Hamlet should not become too disturbed about it. No doubt for the Ghost the challenge is like that which he accepted all those years ago when he agreed to face old Fortinbras in a single combat: a matter of honour, determination, courage and skill. The final injunction, ‘Leave her to heaven’, must temper our feeling of the Ghost’s personal vindictiveness. It is more important, however, in giving a religious context to the punishment of Claudius and Gertrude. Gertrude’s earthly punishment is to be her conscience: ‘those thorns that in her bosom lodge / To prick and sting her’. Whatever further punishment or exoneration is hers
Suggested Elizabethan staging of the Ghost scenes (1.4 and 1.5) by C. Walter Hodges. It is here supposed (as also in 1.1) that the Ghost enters each time by the same door, and makes the same circuit of the stage, until his final exit by a trap at 1.5.91
to receive belongs to an after-life. With Claudius it is different. By his words ‘Leave her to heaven’, the Ghost must imply that a higher justice requires the exemplary punishment of Claudius on earth, by the hand of an appointed human being. The Ghost's commands indicate not the pursuit of personal satisfaction but the existence of a world beyond the human world responsible for justice in the human world. Whether the Ghost has the authority to convey this the play never makes clear.

Awful though it is, Hamlet now has his explanation. What had seemed the degeneration of the world turns out to be a condition which is clearly and starkly the consequence of a double crime. He now also has his directive, a commission that is also a mission. His reaction to the Ghost is like a religious conversion. He wipes away all previous knowledge, all previous values, and baptises himself as a new man (1.5.95–104).

And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmixed with baser matter.

The commandment is summed up by the Ghost as ‘Remember!’ ‘Remember me’, says the Ghost, and Hamlet repeats the word three times in his dedication. The Ghost is to be remembered ‘whiles memory holds a seat / In this distracted globe’, that is to say so long as this now-disordered world attributes any value to the past and its traditions, to the established standards of virtue and justice. (See the Commentary on this vital speech.) In this speech, to remember means more than to keep in mind; it means to maintain and to restore. In the section ‘Of Redemption’ in Thus Spake Zarathustra, Nietzsche deplored those who could not accept the ‘It was’ of time. He saw vengeance and punishment as an imprisonment of the will in concentrating on the past in an effort to undo what could not be undone. ‘This, yea, this is very vengeance! – Will’s abhorrence of time and its “It was”.’ It is quite clear that Hamlet is not prepared to accept the ‘It was’ of time, and that he regards revenge as a task of creative remembrance, that is, the restoration of a society that has fallen to pieces. The act ends with

The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right.

This is a terrible moment as, all exhilaration gone, he faces the burden of his responsibilities. But who has told him that it is his responsibility to put the world to rights? to restore the disjointed frame of things to its true shape? No one but himself. It is the entirely self-imposed burden of cleansing the world that he now groans under.

THE ANTIC DISPOSITION
‘As a stranger give it welcome’, says Hamlet to Horatio about the supernatural visitation.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

1 ‘Des Willens Widerwille gegen die Zeit und ihr “Es war”.’
He identifies himself with the world of the stranger, and shows his alienation from Denmark and its values by adopting the garb of madness. The 'antic disposition' (an essential element in the old Amleth story) puzzles and worries the man who is now his enemy and sworn victim; it also has symbolic significance in denoting that Hamlet, like Bunyan's Christian, having received his call, considers himself a pilgrim and a stranger in his own city of Vanity Fair. Madness is conduct which does not conform to society's standards. Very well, says Hamlet, I am a madman.¹

Shakespeare carefully marks a considerable lapse of time between Acts 1 and 2 (see the Commentary, 2.1). The first event in Hamlet's mission that we hear about is his silent ritual of divorce from Ophelia. Ophelia's tragedy, like Hamlet's, is the tragedy of obedience to a father. Only she really goes mad. And then - always going one step further than the prince - she doesn't stop at thinking about ending her life. At this stage in the play, she has obeyed her father and refused to see Hamlet. She now tells Polonius of the very peculiar encounter she has had with him. Hamlet, in a set piece of antic theatre, went dishevelled to her room and in total silence carried out what we might interpret as a ceremony of questioning, denunciation and separation. By this, he cuts the closest tie that binds him to the court of Denmark, and takes his school-fellow Horatio as his only confidant.

What are the values of 'Denmark' as we are shown them? The court party, Claudius, Polonius, Laertes, are much given to expressing their beliefs in resonant platitudes. Claudius knows the proper response to death, Laertes to sex, Polonius to everything. With each person, we see the insufficiency of their moralising. What Claudius is hiding we learn in 1.5 (though it is not confirmed until 3.1.50), and he is hiding it even from his new wife, who in turn tried to hide her double-life from her husband. Laertes is suspected by both his sister and his father of an inclination towards the primrose path of dalliance. Polonius advocates reticence, truth and straightforwardness, but is loquacious and devious. It is the ever-ready platitudes, betrayed both by their rhetoric and by the conduct of those who utter them, that Hamlet discards as mere 'saws of books' as he enters his new life. It is interesting that the heavy moralising of the court party accompanies a low view of human nature. Polonius and Laertes both expect Hamlet to be the insouciant seducer that is their stereotype of an aristocrat. (Hamlet, on the other hand, is an 'idealist', expecting mothers to be above sexual desire.) Polonius's proclivity for spying - which leads to his own violent death - is shown in the grotesque commission to Reynaldo to keep an eye on Laertes in Paris and then in his schemes to find out what's wrong with Hamlet. Claudius has much greater need than Polonius to find out what lies behind Hamlet's strange behaviour; his elaborate plot to use Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as decoys is quickly uncovered by Hamlet.

What Hamlet is really thinking about during the long scene 2.2 is impossible to say. Everything he says to Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern has its irony, and if his hearers do not know when he is being sane and serious, nor do we. When he tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he is 'most dreadfully attended' (255) he is not really talking about his servants. He may have the Ghost in mind, but chiefly he must

mean his own thoughts. We are sure enough of him when he says he finds Denmark a prison. And with that extraordinary end to his joke about Polonius taking his leave – ‘except my life, except my life, except my life’ – we must feel the warning note that the *taedium vitae* which lifted from him when the Ghost spoke is descending again and that the ultimate dilemma of ‘To be or not to be’ is at hand.

What we should discount as an index of Hamlet’s feelings is the famous speech ‘What a piece of work is a man’ (286–91). So often pointed to as a brilliant perception of the anguish of Renaissance man in general and of Hamlet in particular, it is a glorious blind, a flight of rhetoric by which a divided and distressed soul conceals the true nature of his distress and substitutes a formal and conventional state of *Weltschmerz*. At the end of it he punctures the rhetoric himself.

**ROGUE AND PEASANT SLAVE**

We are often reminded that Pyrrhus is, with Hamlet, Laertes and Fortinbras, another son avenging the slaying of his father (Achilles). But Hamlet swings into the rant of his second soliloquy not in any desire to emulate the cruel fury of Pyrrhus but out of shame that an actor’s emotion for Pyrrhus’s victim, Hecuba, should outdo his own emotion for Claudius’s victim, his father. He has done nothing – it is true enough. But the effect of the eloquence of the old play and the actor’s moving performance is to make him confuse doing with exhibition. His outburst is violent but essentially comic. His guilt runs away with him. Feeling that if he were a proper avenger he would exhibit a huge amount of passion he lets go a mammoth display of self-accusation and rage, culminating in a great stage-cry, *O vengeance!*

With this, he becomes ashamed of his hysterical attitudinising and rebukes himself for unpacking his heart with words. He turns from rant to action. What has to be done? The idea of using the players to test the Ghost’s veracity was in his mind before he fell ‘a-cursing like a very drab’ (see 2.2.493–5). Hamlet had approached the Ghost knowing it might be either a demon from hell or a spirit from heaven. Perhaps he accepted it as an ‘honest ghost’ with too little question. That he should test the Ghost’s account before he proceeds to take the king’s life is the most obvious precaution. He says all that needs to be said on this subject (551–5). The Ghost could be a spirit from hell taking advantage of his distress to lure him into an act that will damn his soul.

That Hamlet in deciding to use the test of a play is guilty of procrastination is scarcely tenable (see above, p. 39). Procrastination means putting off until tomorrow what you know ought to be done today. *Hamlet* is indeed a tragedy of delay, but procrastination is only one special form of delay. At least part of the reason for his delay so far must be Hamlet’s fear that he is being deluded by the devil into imperilling the life of Claudius and the fate of his own soul.

**‘TO BE OR NOT TO BE’**

Act 3 begins next day, the day that the court play is to be given. But even if we are aware of this lapse of time since Hamlet decided to use a play to test the king, it is a shock to us to find Hamlet speaking as he does, for the ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy throws everything back into debate.
What is the question, 'to be or not to be'? All sorts of answers have been given. I can't doubt that Hamlet is asking whether one should go on living or whether one should take one's life. He is back in the depression of the first soliloquy, longing for the oblivion of death. But now the question whether life is worthwhile has much more knowledge and experience to take account of and brood over, and it assumes an entirely new significance. It is extraordinary that, at this moment in the play, the soliloquy should seem so indifferent to the immediate problem of killing the king. Implicitly the issue is there all the time, but never explicitly. The reason for that is that killing the king has become part of a much wider debate.

To be or not to be, that is the question –
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep –
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to – 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished.

The question is which of two courses is the nobler. The first alternative is 'to be', to go on living, and this is a matter of endurance, of contriving to accept the continuous punishing hostility of life. The second alternative is 'not to be', to take one's life, and this is described as ending a sea of troubles by taking arms against it. There is only the one opposition to be made against the sea of troubles (which is the definition of our life) and that is the constructive act of suicide. Suicide is the one way in which fighting against the ungovernable tide — that mythical symbol of hopeless endeavour — can succeed.

If we accept that Hamlet's alternative in these opening lines is the course of enduring or the course of evading life's onslaught, there is an important consequence. The life that has to be suffered or evaded is described as a continuous, permanent condition of misfortune, and must therefore include the state of the world even after vengeance has been taken and Claudius killed — supposing that to happen. The whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong — there is no indication that these can ever disappear from the world, except by disappearing from the world oneself. By his stark alternative in these opening lines Hamlet implicitly rejects the possibility that any act of his could improve the condition of the world or the condition of its victims. Revenge is of no avail. Whether Hamlet kills the king or not, Denmark will continue to be a prison, a place of suffering ruled by fortune. The only nobleness which is available if one goes on living is not the cleansing of the world by some great holy deed, but endurance, suffering in the mind.

But, as the soliloquy proceeds, the one positive act available to man, suicide, has to be ruled out. The sleep of death becomes a nightmare, because of the dread of damnation. What began as a question which was more noble ends as a contest in cowardliness. What is one the more afraid of, the possibility of damnation or the certainty of suffering on earth?
Henry Irving as Hamlet and Ellen Terry as Ophelia in the 'nunnery' scene (3.1), as painted by Edward H. Bell, 1879.
And so we do nothing, frightened to take the one route out of our misery. 'Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all.' 'Conscience' means what it normally means, what it means when Claudius uses it just before this (50) and when Hamlet uses it in the previous scene (2.2.558); that is to say, it has its religious meaning of an implanted sense of right and wrong. It is with this reflection that Hamlet moves away from suicide; it is with this 'regard' – this examination of the consequences of things and worrying about how they look in the eye of eternity – that other 'enterprises of great pitch and moment' lose the name of action. Hamlet must be thinking about killing Claudius. So, although only by inference and indirectly, Hamlet twice refers to his revenge in this soliloquy. On the first occasion we gather that he no longer has any faith that killing the king would be a cleansing act setting the world to rights; on the second, we gather that his resolution to exact revenge has been 'sicklied o'er' by respects of conscience. His conscience cannot convince him that the act is good; and, whether good or bad, it cannot change the world. We are condemned to unhappiness and to inactivity. Although this speech represents a trough of despair into which we don't see Hamlet fall again, the whole of the rest of the play is coloured by the extreme pessimism of this soliloquy.

It certainly affects his behaviour to Ophelia in the painful, cruel interview which now follows. All he says is backed by a loathing of the world, a loathing of himself, and a loathing of sex. It is hard for Ophelia that she should be in his way just at this moment, to trigger off an eruption of anger and disgust. At the same time, we realise that Hamlet sees his victim as life's victim. Her innocence cannot survive; she is unavoidably subject to the contagion of living; she will be corrupted by men as inevitably as, being a woman, she will corrupt them. When he says she should go to a nunnery, he means a nunnery. Only if she is locked up in perpetual virginity can she be saved. And there will be no more marriage. Hamlet begins to work at a new way of saving mankind – sexual abstinence.

Although I believe that *Hamlet* is primarily a religious play, and that Hamlet perpetually sees himself in a relationship with heaven and hell, yet it is noticeable that Hamlet voices very few really Christian sentiments – as contrasted with both Claudius and Ophelia. Only once, and then in his usual ironic manner, does he talk of praying (1.5.132). It is in this scene of cruelty to Ophelia, if anywhere, that behind the restless, unending teasing and taunting we might feel Hamlet's strong sense of his personal unworthiness and need of assistance. 'What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?'

*PLAY, PRAYER, MURDER*

Hamlet is not content to let his 'mousetrap' play on the murder of Gonzago take its toll of Claudius's conscience without assistance. He forces its significance at Claudius as he later forces the poisoned cup at him (3.2.237–9). His insistent commentary gives Claudius the opportunity to cover his departure with righteous indignation against his nephew's impossible behaviour. At any rate, Hamlet has achieved his purpose. He is convinced of Claudius's guilt and he has made Claudius know that he knows. Hamlet does not lack courage. But what to do with this knowledge now? There is
Suggested Elizabethan staging of the play-within-the-play (3.2) by C. Walter Hodges
no way of avoiding the fact that at this critical juncture, with the Ghost's story confirmed, he chooses to do precisely what the Ghost forbade, take action against his mother.

First there is the difficult problem of how to take his extraordinary speech about drinking hot blood.

'Tis now the very witching time of night,  
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out  
Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood,  
And do such bitter business as the day  
Would quake to look on. Soft, now to my mother.  
O heart, lose not thy nature...

Some say that this speech is a sign that Hamlet has committed himself to hell; some say that he is rather awkwardly trying out the traditional role of the avenger of fiction. There is a grain of truth in both these theories, but neither can of itself explain the speech. We have just seen Hamlet, who has been at a peak of emotional intensity during and immediately after the play scene, in a keen and fierce verbal attack on Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Polonius. That he should at this point in all seriousness bellow out like some Herod of the stage 'Now could I drink hot blood' is to me incredible. The rant of the 'rogue and peasant slave' soliloquy, induced by the emotion of the Pyrrhus speech, was understandable, but this seems quite out of keeping with character and situation. But that Hamlet should fear his declension into hellish activity, should fear himself slipping into the role of the stage-avenger, I could well imagine. The contagion of hell is what he wishes to avoid, and the last thing he wants to do is 'drink hot blood'. He says the words with a shiver of apprehension and disgust. Then, 'Soft, now to my mother.' As so often in this play, 'soft!' is a word of warning to oneself to turn away from some undesirable train of thought and attend to an immediate problem (see the note to 3.1.88). 'O heart, lose not thy nature.' He really does fear he may do something terrible.

Action is now hedged about with all sorts of warnings and limitations concerning the good it can do to the world or the harm it can do to him. But there is one task of primary urgency, whatever the Ghost said: to shame and reclaim his mother. On the way to see her, he comes across Claudius at prayer. He goes over to kill him then pauses as he had paused over suicide, to reflect on the consequences. Again it is the after-life that is uppermost in his mind, but the fear about damnation now is that Claudius may not be damned. He wants Claudius damned, and he is not prepared to take the risk that if he kills him while he is praying he will go to heaven. He will wait for an opportunity that will make revenge more complete and damnation more certain.

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.

Savagery of this order is familiar to students of Elizabethan revenge fiction.1 Perhaps

1 See Prosser, Hamlet and Revenge, pp. 261–75.
4. 'Now might I do it pat' (3.3.73). One of a series of lithographs of the play published by Eugène Delacroix in 1844. Although Delacroix had seen *Hamlet* performed in Paris by the Smithson–Kemble company in 1827, this is purely imaginative, as the prayer scene was cut in performance.
the contagion of hell has touched Hamlet. But, repellent though it is that Hamlet so passionately wants the eternal perdition of his victim, it is perhaps more striking that he should think that it is in his power to control the fate of Claudius's soul. It is surely a monstrously inflated conception of his authority that is governing him, distorting still further the scope of the Ghost's injunctions. In this scene the arrogance of the man who is trying to effect justice is strongly contrasted with the Christian humility of the man who has done murder.

Hamlet means what he says in the prayer scene. The procrastination theory held that once again Hamlet was finding some excuse for not acting. This cannot be right, for a minute or two later, thinking he has found Claudius in the ignominious and dishonourable position of eavesdropping behind the arras in Gertrude's chamber, he kills him—only to find that it is Polonius. The killing of Polonius is a major climax. In spite of whatever doubts and mental stress about the authority of the Ghost and the meaning of its message, about the need to do the deed or the good it would do, here deliberately and violently he keeps his word and carries out his revenge; and he kills the wrong man. This terrible irony is the direct result of his decisions since the end of the play scene, which imply his belief in his power to control the destinies in this life and in the after-life of both Gertrude and Claudius, his assumption of the role of Providence itself.

From the killing of Polonius the catastrophe of the play stems. This false completion of Hamlet's revenge initiates the second cycle of revenge for a murdered father, that of Laertes for Polonius. That revenge is successful and ends in the death of Hamlet. By unwittingly killing Polonius, Hamlet brings about his own death.

**THE CLOSET SCENE**

Nothing in the play is more bizarre than that Hamlet, having committed the terrible error of killing Polonius, should be so consumed with the desire to purge and rescue his mother that he goes right on with his castigation even with the dead body of Polonius at his feet. No wonder the Ghost enters again to whet his 'almost blunted purpose'. Hamlet well knows that in this present heat ('time and passion') he should be obedient to his vow and apply himself to a grimmer task. But he does nothing. It is remarkable that he fears the presence of the Ghost will actually weaken his resolve to kill Claudius: that his response to this shape of his dead father will be pity not retribution. The Ghost could 'convert / My stern effects' and there would be 'tears perchance for blood' (3.4.126–29). This fear for the strength of his resolution should be compared with the heavy-heartedness at the prospect of carrying out the execution as he looks at Polonius's corpse: 'Thus bad begins and worse remains behind' (180).

There seems no deep compunction for Polonius's death, however, and no lessening of the sense of his privilege to ordain for others.

For this same lord,
I do repent; but heaven hath pleased it so,
To punish me with this, and this with me,
That I must be their scourge and minister.

(3.4.173–6)

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Poor Polonius! Hamlet is at his worst in these scenes. His self-righteousness expands in his violent rebukes of his mother and his eagerness to order her sex-life. ‘Forgive me this my virtue’, he says, going on to explain that in these upside-down times ‘virtue itself of vice must pardon beg’. Yet the force of his words, and what appears to be the first intimation that her husband was murdered, instil into her that sense of difference which he has fought to re-establish. At the beginning she asks in indignation and bewilderment, ‘What have I done?’ But later she says, ‘O Hamlet, speak no more’, and ‘What shall I do?’

TO ENGLAND

From this point onwards there are two plays of Hamlet, that of the second quarto and that of the Folio. I have argued (pp. 14–19) that the Folio version with its omissions and additions has much to be said for it, knowing what its hero has become by the end of the closet scene in a way that the seemingly more tentative and exploratory version in the second quarto does not. The changes in the Folio substitute for a rather contradictory talkativeness in Hamlet about being sent to England with his revenge unaccomplished a silence as mysterious and suggestive as the silence that lies between Acts 1 and 2. They also add a central passage in 5.2 in which the problem of damnation which has occupied Hamlet throughout is given an answer.

There is a real want of resolution concerning his revenge in Hamlet’s going away to England, though it is concealed in the exciting scenes in which he courageously and scornfully spars with Claudius, who is now absolutely determined to destroy the man who knows his secret. It may be that he is biding his time, or is baffled and mortified by his own inability to act, as the two main passages omitted from the Folio suggest, but we feel that there are deeper things restraining him, hinted at in what he says to Horatio when he comes back.

Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep. (5.2.4–5)

While Hamlet is away, we see the effects of what he has so far achieved, in the madness of Ophelia and the furious return of Laertes. To avenge his father is for Laertes an inalienable duty, whatever may be its status in the eternal world.

Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit!
I dare damnation. To this point I stand,
That both the worlds I give to negligence,
Let come what comes, only I’ll be revenged
Most thoroughly for my father. (4.5.132–6)

For Hamlet it is quite the contrary. Revenge in itself is uninteresting and foreign. It is only the question of its place as a creative and restorative ‘remembering’ deed within the values of the eternal world that is important to him.

THE RETURN

The news of Hamlet’s return astounds the king, and he hastens to employ Laertes in a scheme to destroy him finally. Act 5 opens with the two clowns digging a grave for Ophelia. The joke of the senior of these, the sexton, that of all men he who builds
strongest is the gravedigger, is something to ponder on at the end of the play. The sexton is the only person in the play who is a match for Hamlet in the combat of words. He manages to avoid answering Hamlet’s question, ‘Whose grave’s this?’ Not until the funeral procession arrives does Hamlet learn that the grave is for Ophelia, and it does not appear from the play that he was aware of her madness. Many people feel that in Hamlet’s reflections over the empty grave on the vanity of life and the inevitability of death there is a mature and sober wisdom. But the presentation of this wisdom is entirely ironic. His truths are based on a chasm of ignorance. He speaks his words over a grave which he does not know is intended for a woman whose madness and death he is responsible for. The fact of the dead girl punctures his philosophy. For us, at any rate. He never speaks of his regret for the suffering he caused her even before Polonius’s death. On the contrary, when Laertes leaps into the grave and expresses, too clamantly perhaps, an affection for Ophelia which he genuinely feels, Hamlet will not accept it, and chooses this moment to advance and declare himself, with a challenge to Laertes’ sincerity. He claims ‘I loved Ophelia’ – with a love forty thousand brothers could not match. It is hard to know what right Hamlet has to say that when we think of how we have seen him treat her. The dispute over Ophelia’s grave seems very important. Laertes is more than a foil to Hamlet; he is a main antagonist, diametrically opposed to him in every way of thought and action, who is scheming to kill him by a dreadful trick. But Shakespeare refuses to belittle him or let us despise him. And he refuses to sentimentalise his opponent or whitewash his failings. For those of us who to any extent ‘believe in’ Hamlet, Shakespeare makes things difficult in this scene. It is tragedy not sentimental drama that he is writing, and our division of mind about Hamlet is partly why the play is a tragedy.

In the all-important colloquy with Horatio at the beginning of the final scene, Hamlet tells him of the strong sense he has that his impulsive actions on board ship were guided by a divinity which takes over from us ‘when our deep plots do pall’ and redirects us. This is a critical juncture of the play, implying Hamlet’s surrender of his grandiose belief in his power to ordain and control, and his release from the alternating belief in the meaningless and mindless drift of things. His recognition, vital though it is, is his own, and we do not necessarily have to share it.

The sense of heaven guiding him reinforces rather than diminishes his sense of personal responsibility for completing his mission. The discovery of the king’s treachery in the commission to have him murdered in England has fortified Hamlet’s determination. Yet it is with a demand for assurance that he puts the matter to Horatio.

Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon –
He that hath killed my king, and whored my mother,
Popped in between th’election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
And with such cozenage – is’t not perfect conscience
To quit him with this arm? And is’t not to be damned
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil? (5.2.63–70)

1 See the excellent comment by Dover Wilson, What Happens in ‘Hamlet’, 1935; 3rd edn, 1951, p. 268.
"But soft! Aside.... Who is this they follow?"

"This is I, Hamlet the Dane."

"I prithee take thy fingers from my throat..... Hold off thy hand..."

5 The staging of the scene at Ophelia's grave (5.1), drawn by C. Walter Hodges. It is assumed (as argued in the Commentary at 5.1.225) that Hamlet does not leap into the grave after Laertes, but that Laertes scrambles out to attack him.
It is difficult to see how we can take this speech except as the conclusion of a long and deep perplexity. But if it is a conclusion, that question mark—conveying so much more than indignation—makes it an appeal by this loneliest of heroes for support and agreement, which he pointedly does not get from the cautious Horatio, who simply says,

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

Horatio won't accept the responsibility of answering, and only gives him the exasperating response that he hasn't much time.

Once again Hamlet has raised the question of conscience and damnation. Conscience is no longer an obstacle to action, but encourages it. As for damnation, Hamlet had felt the threat of it if he contemplated suicide, felt the threat of it if he were to kill at the behest of a devil-ghost; now he feels the threat of it if he should fail to remove from the world a cancer which is spreading. This new image for Claudius, a 'canker of our nature', is important. All the vituperation which Hamlet has previously thrown at Claudius seems mere rhetoric by this. Hamlet now sees himself undertaking a surgical operation to remove a cancer from human society. Whether the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune continue or not is immaterial. To neglect, ignore or encourage the evil is to imperil one's soul.

THE SILENCE OF THE GHOST
When in reply to Hamlet's unanswerable question Horatio tells him that if he is going to act he had better move quickly, because as soon as Claudius learns the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Hamlet won't have another hour to live, Hamlet exclains 'The interim's mine.' But of course it isn't, because the plot against his life has already been primed and is about to go off. Hamlet has no time left to act upon his new conviction that it is a religious duty to strike down Claudius. He accepts the fake challenge of the fencing match in the awareness that something may be afoot, and he faces it without any exhilaration: 'Thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart.' When he says 'If it be now, 'tis not to come...the readiness is all', we assume he has some kind of prevision of what actually happens, the coming together of his revenge and his own death. Laertes wounds him fatally before he is able to make his second attempt to kill the king. The first time, he killed the wrong man; the second time, he kills the king indeed, but not until he is within moments of his own death.

There is no doubt of the extent of Hamlet's failure. In trying to restore 'the beauteous majesty of Denmark' he has brought the country into an even worse state, in the hands of a foreigner. He is responsible, directly or indirectly, for the deaths of Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. With more justification, he has killed Laertes and Claudius. But if his uncle is dead, so is his mother.

What does the Ghost think of it all? He has disappeared. There is no word of approval, or sorrow, or anger. He neither praises his dead son nor blames him. Nor,
if he was a devil, does he come back to gloat over the devastation he has caused. The rest is silence indeed.¹

In Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy*, the ghost of the dead Andrea and his escort from the infernal world of spirits, named Revenge, were on stage during the whole of the play. It was absolutely clear that the ultimate direction of things was entirely in the hands of the gods of the underworld. At the end of the play Andrea rejoiced in the fulfilment of his revenge and happily surveyed the carnage on the stage. ‘Ay, these were spectacles to please my soul!’ He helped to apportion eternal sentences, whose ‘justice’ makes our blood run cold.

In spite of the seeming crudity of *The Spanish Tragedy*, it is a subtle and sinister view of the relation of gods and men that the play conveys. Kyd’s gods are dark gods. Men and women plot and scheme to fulfil their desires and satisfy their hatreds, they appeal to heaven for guidance, help and approval, but the dark gods are in charge of everything, and they use every morsel of human striving in order to achieve their predestined purposes. Hieronimo’s heroic efforts to obtain justice, which drive him into madness and his wife to suicide, are nothing to the gods except as they may be used to fulfil their promise to Andrea.

*Hamlet* resists the grim certainties of Kyd’s theology and the certainties of any other.² Hamlet’s own belief towards the end of the play that a benign divinity works through our spontaneous impulses and even our mistakes is neither clearly endorsed by the play nor repudiated in ironic Kydean laughter. Hamlet is a tragic hero who at a time of complete despair hears a mysterious voice uttering a directive which he interprets as a mission to renovate the world by an act of purifying violence. But this voice is indeed a questionable voice. How far it is the voice of heaven, how its words are to be translated into human deeds, how far the will of man can change the course of the world – these are questions that torment the idealist as he continues to plague the decadent inhabitants, as he sees them, of the Danish court.³

His doubts, at one edge of his nature, are as extreme as his confidence at the other. His sense of his freedom to create his own priorities and decisions, and indeed his sense of being heaven’s scourge and minister privileged to destroy at will, bring him to the disaster of killing Polonius, from which point all changes, and he becomes the hunted as well as the hunter. Eventually, in a new humility as his ‘deep plots’ pall, Hamlet becomes convinced that heaven is guiding him and that the removal of Claudius is a task that he is to perform at the peril of his immortal soul. He does indeed kill Claudius, but the cost is dreadful. What has he achieved, as he dies with Claudius?

¹ The absence of the Ghost at the end, in contrast with *The Spanish Tragedy*, is noted by H. Levin, *The Question of ‘Hamlet’*, 1959, p. 98. A view of the reason for the Ghost’s disappearance which is very different from mine is given in two adjoining articles in *Shakespeare Survey* 30 (1977), by Philip Brockbank (p. 107) and Barbara Everett (p. 118).

² The view that Shakespeare is making a positive comment on Kyd is developed in Edwards, ‘Shakespeare and Kyd’, in *Shakespeare, Man of the Theatre*, ed. K. Muir, J. L. Halio and D. J. Palmer, 1983.

It is very hard for us in the twentieth century to sympathise with Hamlet and his mission. Hearing voices from a higher world belongs mainly in the realm of abnormal psychology. Revenge may be common but is hardly supportable. The idea of purifying violence belongs to terrorist groups. Gertrude's sexual behaviour and remarriage do not seem out of the ordinary. Yet if we feel that twentieth-century doubt hampers our understanding of the seventeenth-century *Hamlet*, we must remember that *Hamlet* was actually written in our own age of doubt and revaluation — only a little nearer its beginning. *Hamlet* takes for granted that the ethics of revenge are questionable, that ghosts are questionable, that the distinctions of society are questionable, and that the will of heaven is terribly obscure. The higher truth which Hamlet tries to make active in a fallen world belongs to a past which he sees slipping away from him. Shakespeare movingly presents the beauty of a past in which kingship, marriage and the order of society had or was believed to have a heavenly sanction. A brutal Cain-like murder destroys the order of the past. Hamlet struggles to restore the past, and as he does so we feel that the desirability is delicately and perilously balanced against the futility. Shakespeare was by no means eager to share Nietzsche's acquiescence in time's *es war*. This matter of balance is an essential part of our answer about the ending of the play. It is a precarious balance, and perhaps impossible to maintain.

The Elizabethans too doubted ghosts. Shakespeare used the concern of his time about voices and visions to suggest the treacherousness of communication with the transcendent world. We come in the end to accept the Ghost not as a devil but as a spirit who speaks truth yet who cannot with any sufficiency or adequacy provide the answer to Hamlet's cry, 'What should we do?' Everything depends on interpretation and translation. A terrible weight of responsibility is thrown on to the human judgement and will. Kierkegaard, in *Fear and Trembling*, spoke of Abraham hearing a voice from heaven and trusting it to the extent of being willing to kill his own son; and he wrote brilliantly of the knife-edge which divides an act of faith from a demoniacal impulse. In Shakespeare's age, William Tyndale also used Abraham as an example of where faith might go outside the boundaries of ethics, but he warned against 'holy works' which had their source in what he contemptuously called 'man's imaginations'. These distinctions between acts of faith and the demoniacal, between holy works and works of man's imagination, seem fundamental to *Hamlet*. We know that Hamlet made a mess of what he was trying to do. The vital question is whether what he was trying to do was a holy work or a work of man's imagination. Shakespeare refuses to tell us.

Hamlet's attempt to make a higher truth operative in the world of Denmark, which is where all of us live, is a social and political disaster, and it pushes him into inhumanity and cruelty. But the unanswerable question, 'Is't not to be damned / To let this canker of our nature come / In further evil?', if it could be answered 'Yes!' would make us see the chance-medley of the play's ending in a light so different that it would abolish our merely moral judgement. Bradley's final remark on the play was that 'the apparent failure of Hamlet's life is not the ultimate truth concerning him'.

2 Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 174.
But it might be. That is where the tragic balance lies. The play of *Hamlet* takes place within the possibility that there is a higher court of values than those which operate around us, within the possibility of having some imperfect communication with that court, within the possibility that an act of violence can purify, within the possibility that the words ‘salvation’ and ‘damnation’ have meaning. To say that these possibilities are certainties is to wreck the play as surely as to say they are impossibilities.

So the silence of the Ghost at the end of the play leaves the extent of Hamlet’s victory or triumph an open question. To answer it needs a knowledge that Horatio didn’t have, that Shakespeare didn’t have, that we don’t have. The mortal havoc is plain to our eyes on the stage; the rest is silence.

*Hamlet and the actors*

The stage history of *Hamlet* is richly documented. A great deal of information is available on scenery and settings, on costume, on stage-business, on how the great actors of the past handled individual scenes. In this section I shall concentrate on one aspect of stage history alone, and continue with the theme of the shape of this Protean play by looking at the tradition of cutting and its effect on the *Hamlet* that was presented to audiences until the end of the nineteenth century.

Our first evidence of the shape of the play on the stage is provided by the bad quarto of 1603. Here is *Hamlet*, within a year or two of its first production on Shakespeare’s stage, in a severely truncated form, with the order of scenes changed, with new material written in to make up for scenes cut out, and stage-business introduced (like Hamlet’s leap into the grave). This acting text, corruptly rendered in the quarto, was based on the version prepared by Shakespeare’s company, and it has to be accepted that some of its cuts and changes may derive from the original promptbook (see above, p. 25). Whatever its underlying authority, the first quarto well illustrates the desire to speed up the action after the death of Polonius, a desire which will manifest itself for another two hundred years.

How far what one might call the promptbook tradition of the acting-text of *Hamlet* (shown however eccentrically in the bad quarto) was affected by the literary version available from 1604 in the good quarto and its reprints is impossible to say, but there is some evidence that the two traditions interwined.

What John Downes said (in his *Roscius Anglicanus* of 1708) about the unbroken tradition in the acting of *Hamlet* from the time of Shakespeare to the end of the century cannot be accepted literally. But as Downes was ‘Book keeper and prompter’ at the Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre from 1662 to 1706, his testimony must be attended to. He claimed that Sir William Davenant, the theatre’s licensee, had seen Joseph Taylor act Hamlet in the old Blackfriars theatre; that Taylor had been instructed by Shakespeare himself; that Davenant had ‘taught Mr Betterton in every particle of it’.

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Now Taylor joined the King's men only after the death of Shakespeare; he replaced Burbage as chief actor when the latter died in 1619. Nevertheless, as the man who took over Burbage's roles, Taylor presumably took over in Hamlet a part that in text and general conduct was the one played by Burbage and familiar to his colleagues. To that extent Taylor's Hamlet goes back to Shakespeare's time, though it is far from certain that Shakespeare took a controlling hand in creating the final acting version of his Hamlet or in coaching Burbage in his part.

Our evidence for the Restoration shape of the play is what is known as the Players' Quarto of 1676 'as it is now acted at his Highness the Duke of York's Theatre'. This is a reprint of the last pre-Civil War quarto of 1637 with such passages as are 'left out upon the Stage' enclosed within inverted commas. This is done, says the note to the reader, 'according to the original copy'. It is not at all clear how the printed text of 1637 was collated with the stage version. The line that now appears in the received text at 1.2.77, following the Folio reading, as

'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother
had appeared in the good quarto as

Tis not alone my inky cloake could mother
and is now transformed into

'Tis not alone this mourning cloke could smother

Could this possibly have been spoken by Betterton on the stage? What could anyone think it meant? Hazelton Spencer made a detailed study of the 1676 quarto and concluded from the style of the numerous verbal refinements that Davenant was the person responsible for this adaptation. But he did not explain why such nonsense as the line quoted above was allowed to stand, nor why the smoothing and regularising of Shakespeare's diction extended to passages marked as having been 'left out upon the Stage'.

Spencer insisted that the 1676 quarto does not derive in any way from the Folio version of 1623. But one wonders if the 'original copy' used in the playhouse was so innocent of Folio influence. The way in which Davenant's cuts agree with the Folio cuts is uncanny if they were made independently. Here at least the tradition of playing in Shakespeare's day may be felt. The cuts which appear in the Folio text were made, I have argued (p. 19), just before and during the preparation of the fair copy when the play had still to receive its first stage performance. By whatever route these cuts were transmitted, their general pattern was preserved in the Restoration theatre, and hence in the Players' Quarto of 1676 which otherwise has a purely non-Folio provenance. These same cuts, probably made in 1601, endured in the theatre for nearly 300 years. The Folio additions, however, did not come through; if any of them were

1 The very interesting Restoration promptbook of Hamlet for Smock Alley, Dublin, preserved in Edinburgh University Library, clearly shows an attempt to bring its Third Folio text into line with the cutting of the 1676 quarto. See G. Blakemore Evans (ed.), Shakespearean Prompt-Books of the Seventeenth Century, iv, 1966. A single leaf (from the First Folio) of an unrecorded seventeenth-century promptbook was sold at Sotheby's in July 1983.
spoken on the Restoration stage they were not inserted in the Players’ Quarto, and were lost to the stage version of Hamlet. Even though later acting editions show knowledge of the Folio text, it would appear that, after Shakespeare’s time, those key lines, ‘Is’t not to be damned / To let this canker of our nature come / In further evil?’, were not heard again in the theatre until Booth’s performance around 1870 – they are not often heard now.

The additional cuts which were made in the Davenant–Betterton Hamlet did not establish a definitive pattern for the acted play, but many of them became standard. (So did many rephrasings. Hamlet’s words as he sees the kneeling Claudius should be ‘Now might I do it pat, now he is a-praying’, but they became ‘Where is this murderer, he kneels and prays’. This version lasted until the whole scene was ditched in the mid eighteenth century by Garrick.) The Norwegian element is much reduced. The account of Fortinbras’s ‘revenge’ in 1.1 is truncated, and the whole business of Claudius sending ambassadors to Norway (1.2 and 2.1) is omitted. In 1.3 a ‘permanent’ cut is established with the omission of Polonius’s advice to Laertes, and another with the omission of his instructions to Reynaldo in 2.1. (By ‘permanent’ I mean until the initiation at the very end of the nineteenth century of theatrical versions based upon the full standard editions.)

A bad cut, not repeated, is that most of Hamlet’s speech on being confronted by the Ghost disappears – ‘Angels and ministers of grace defend us...’ The ‘rogue and peasant slave’ soliloquy at the end of 2.2 is gutted. This was never popular, though it was later cut in different ways. The nature of Hamlet is quite changed by the abbreviation of this soliloquy. Like the revenger in some much simpler tragedy, Hamlet just blames himself for delay and then gets on with a plan of action. Claudius is also simplified by the omission of his guilty aside in 3.1, ‘How smart a lash...’ This remains a permanent cut. The advice to the players in 3.2 goes out (restored in later versions), while the dumb-show, always cut in later versions, stays in. There is a good deal of abbreviation in the latter part of the third act, including Hamlet’s hope to damn Claudius’s soul, and the beginning of the fourth. The scene with Fortinbras’s army in 4.4 is omitted entirely, though at the end of the play Fortinbras’s entry is retained in full.

Thomas Betterton had first played Hamlet in 1663 and he appeared for the last time in the part in 1709, when he was in his seventies. The main Hamlets of the early eighteenth century, up to the London debut of Garrick in the part in 1742, were Robert Wilks, who acted it from 1707 to his death in 1732, Lacy Ryan, who played the part for thirty-one years from 1719, and Henry Giffard, who took the role for seventeen years from 1730. To Robert Wilks goes the credit of establishing the standard Hamlet of the theatre; for his version of the Davenant–Betterton text held sway, with comparatively minor alteration, for well over a hundred years. His version ‘as it is now acted by his Majesty’s servants’ was first published in 1718 and was reprinted many times up to 1761. It was prepared by John Hughes, who had helped Rowe with his edition of Shakespeare,1 and derives both from Rowe’s edition and from the old Players’ Quarto. Some Folio readings are included, for example Hamlet’s passionate

1 See H. N. Paul, MLN 49 (1934), 438–43.
line, ‘Why man, they did make love to this employment’ (5.2.57), only to be marked
with the tell-tale inverted commas to indicate it was not spoken on the stage!

The Davenant-Betterton thinning of the Fortinbras—Old Hamlet duel and its
consequence in 1.1, and the omission of all the Norwegian material in 1.2 and 2.1,
are accepted. In 1.4/5, most of Hamlet’s lines on seeing the Ghost are restored, but
the Ghost’s self-praise, ‘what a falling off was there’, is cut by ten lines. The advice
to the players is restored, but the dumb-show is cut.

The chief innovation of the Hughes–Wilks version is the removal of Fortinbras from
the end of the play. Fortinbras and the ambassadors are announced. Hamlet dies,
giving Fortinbras his voice in the election, as in the received text. But the play now
ends with Horatio, annexing the last lines of Fortinbras.

Now cracks the cordage of a noble heart: good night, sweet prince,
And choirs of angels sing thee to thy rest.
Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,
For he was likely...[etc.]

Fortinbras does not reappear in the play’s ending until Forbes Robertson’s production
in 1897.

For many years, David Garrick acted a Hamlet based upon the Hughes–Wilks text,
with one or two important changes. His acting version, put out in 1763 by George
Colman, who thought that Garrick, then abroad because of ill health, would never
return to the stage,¹ restores a good deal of the ‘rogue and peasant slave’ soliloquy,
but astonishingly removes the whole of Hamlet’s entry and speech in 3.3 with
Claudius at prayer, ‘Now might I do it pat.’ The closet scene is further curtailed,
with no mention of Hamlet going to England. In 5.2, Hamlet’s relation to Horatio
of what happened on shipboard is entirely cut. So no one knows of the fate of
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

In 1772 Garrick was moved to do ‘the most imprudent thing I ever did in my life’.
‘I have played the devil this winter’, he wrote to Morellet, ‘I have dared to alter
Hamlet, I have thrown away the gravediggers, and all the fifth act...’ ‘A bold deed,’
hesaid to another French correspondent, ‘but the event has answered my most
sanguine expectation.’² Garrick brought Hamlet back after Ophelia’s final ‘mad’ exit
in 4.5. He and Laertes fight, and, as Claudius tries to stop them, Hamlet kills him.
Gertrude rushes off, to an indeterminate fate. Hamlet ‘runs upon Laertes’s sword
and falls’. He and Laertes exchange forgiveness, and the play ends. This collapsing
of the fifth act has the very interesting consequence that in order to fill out the play
a good deal of material found only in the 1604 quarto is brought back into the play.
This includes lines in 1.1 which are omitted in the Folio text and Hamlet’s soliloquy
in 4.4, ‘How all occasions do inform against me’. Probably this was the first time
this soliloquy was performed and once Garrick’s alteration ceased to be played it
vanished again for more than a hundred years. Other restorations were Voltimand
and Cornelius, and Polonius’s advice to Laertes (in part).³

¹ See G. W. Stone, Jr, PMLA 49 (1934), 896.
³ See G. W. Stone’s helpful table comparing cuts, PMLA 49 (1934), 903.
6 'Do you not come your tardy son to chide?' (3.4.106). Redrawn by Du Guernier for the 1714 edition of Rowe's Shakespeare, appearing also in Pope's second edition (1728) from which this is taken. The earlier engraving showed Hamlet's overturned chair, but not the large double bed. For the portraits on the wall, see the Commentary at 3.4.53. This engraving and its predecessor have no specific theatrical authority.
Garrick’s version was well received in France – Voltaire approved – and it managed to hold its own on the English stage for some years. But new Hamlets went back to the earlier acting version of Garrick’s, and that is basically what we find in the printed acting-text of 1779, with its frontispiece of ‘Mr Henderson in the Character of Hamlet’. Garrick refused to publish his altered version; it was lost to view after his death, but is now in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington.

With the Hamlet of John Philip Kemble (who acted in it from 1783 to 1817), the play reached its leanest version. Well under 3,000 lines in length, the text reads very well; it is a play, fast-moving, exciting. But the audience could have found little depth or mystery in this disembowelled Hamlet. The ‘rogue and peasant slave’ soliloquy is devastated, so that Hamlet, quite unaffected by the Hecuba speech, moves straight on to plan the ‘mousetrap’. Again the speech in which Hamlet refrains from killing the praying Claudius is absent. One strange innovation was to put into the prose of Hamlet’s letter to Horatio the later verse account (from 5.2) of the exchange of the commission on board ship and the doom of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet in the theatre has become a series of famous scenes taken from a libretto that is never acted in full: meeting the Ghost, ‘To be or not to be’, the nunnery scene, the closet scene, Ophelia mad, the graveyard scene, and so on. It was in comparing Kemble’s Hamlet with Kean’s that Hazlitt – who so passionately loved the theatre – was led to say: ‘We do not like to see our author’s plays acted, and least of all, Hamlet. There is no play that suffers so much in being transferred to the stage.’ It is an important truth about Hamlet that it always has to be ‘transferred to the stage’; it never was, as we have seen, a work that the theatre could accommodate without severe alteration. One can’t really complain that the stage debases Hamlet: it has to. One can complain about degrees of debasement, however.

Kean’s Hamlet made no important innovations in the text. Macready is supposed to have been the first to bring the curtain down on ‘The rest is silence.’ The version of Charles Kean – he started acting Hamlet in 1838 – restored Polonius’s precepts to Laertes and the whole of the ‘rogue and peasant slave’ soliloquy. The erosion of the latter part of the play continues; it had been going on since 1601. Claudius’s prayer and Hamlet’s ‘Now might I do it pat’ are out. Hamlet’s letter to Horatio is cut entirely – so the king’s puzzlement about Hamlet’s return is shared by the audience. Neither Gertrude nor Claudius dies on stage. Gertrude is ‘conveyed off...in a dying state’, and Claudius ‘is borne away...mortaly wounded’.

The Hamlet of the American actor, Edwin Booth, is very fully documented, with an entire book devoted to it by C. H. Shattuck (The Hamlet of Edwin Booth, 1969). Booth’s version varied a good deal in the thirty-eight years he played the part, 1853–91. Though he ‘only tinkered with the acting version which he had received from tradition’, he had the courage to bring back the prayer scene, including ‘Now might I do it pat’, and the full version of Hamlet’s account to Horatio of his adventures at sea in 5.2. Whether the New York audience realised it or not, they were being

1 The Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays, 1817, in Complete Works, ed. P. P. Howe, 1930–4, iv, 237.
3 There is a facsimile reprint of Kean’s 1859 acting version in the Cornmarket series, 1971.
allowed to witness essential parts of the play that had scarcely ever been staged in an unmutilated form. Booth was perhaps the first actor since the days of Burbage and Taylor to speak the crucial lines, 'Is't not to be damned...' (5.2.68–70). Charles Clarke, who recorded Booth's 1870 performance in the greatest detail, thought that this narration of Hamlet to Horatio was 'of little interest save to the literary people' and believed that Booth included it only to give the stage-hands time to clear away the graveyard scene and prepare for the final court scene.† Be that as it may, Booth found that his 2,750-line version of 1870 was too long for his audience. Both 'Now might I do it pat' and the narration in 5.2 were dropped in the performances of later years.

Henry Irving's stage version for the Lyceum, which he published in 1879, was the conventional abbreviated version without Fortinbras, the ambassadors, the dumb-show, the prayer scene, 'How all occasions', the narration in 5.2 etc. Yet it lasted four hours, according to the introduction. An unfamiliar figure in the theatre, Reynaldo, made a brief appearance in 2.1. At the Lyceum in the next decade, Forbes Robertson was much more adventurous. Although to someone coming fresh from a knowledge of the full text his published version of 1897 would seem scandalously curtailed and bowdlerised, it was in fact boldly innovative. Some account of the duel between the Fortinbras and Hamlet of the older generation is included in 1.1. 'Now might I do it pat' is given – including the hope to have Claudius damned. At the end, after an absence of nearly two hundred years, Fortinbras appears to take over the Danish throne. The material is truncated but Fortinbras is there. Bernard Shaw had encouraged Forbes Robertson to resurrect Fortinbras, and he was delighted with the result.‡

With the re-appearance of Fortinbras we are at the end of an acting tradition going back to Betterton. In 1881 William Poel had produced the first quarto version of 1603 at St George's Hall, and in 1899 at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon F. R. Benson produced a complete Hamlet – the whole play as it appears in standard editions, in the composite good quarto plus First Folio version. It took six hours to play. The complete version continued to be staged from time to time. Martin Browne, who acted in it in 1936, says it was known as the 'Entirety'; it was a regular feature at the Old Vic for several years, and always sold out.¶

The text of Hamlet in the twentieth-century theatre does not have a single story to tell. Pressures of very different kinds have pushed the play into all sorts of shapes. The film, modern dress, Elizabethan staging, Freudian interpretations, director's theatre, have all required a Hamlet with a particular emphasis, and the play has been tailored accordingly. The laudable wish to be faithful to Shakespeare's text has had some odd consequences. The 'Entirety' is a monster, an assemblage which was never seen on Shakespeare's stage and was never meant to be. A well-known director, asked in public if he would explain the policy he had adopted in what had seemed to the audience a bizarre cutting of the play, replied that he had wished to give some

† Shattuck, Hamlet of Edwin Booth, pp. 265–7.
¶ Shakespeare Survey 9 (1956), 19.
7. J. P. Kemble as Hamlet, by Sir Thomas Lawrence (Royal Academy, 1801). This was bought by W. A. Madocks, who intended it as an altar-piece in the church of his model town of Tremadoc in North Wales. But the bishop of the diocese refused to allow this, and it was eventually sold to George IV.
representation of every speech in the full composite version and that this had necessitated scooping out the middle of the lengthier speeches.

One cannot help thinking that the panjandrums of ‘director’s theatre’ have done greater damage to the integrity of Hamlet than the old actor-managers ever did. Perhaps more of the lines which Shakespeare wrote are included, but since the import of those lines is squeezed and contorted to fit the mould of the director’s idea of the play, the gain is not worth having. The excitement of witnessing Hamlet in the theatre used to be in seeing how a great actor like Kean or Irving would handle the meeting with the Ghost or treat Ophelia in the nunnery scene. Good acting can always quicken one’s understanding of individual moments of the text, whatever happens to the play as a whole. My personal experience of the ‘director’s theatre’ of the last few decades is that the servile business of conforming to the director’s idea of the play as a whole positively discourages great acting, and that the true interpretive value of Shakespeare on stage has sadly declined in productions that are all ‘interpretation’.
The names in *Hamlet* are a motley collection. Hamlet and Gertrude derive from the original names in Saxo Grammaticus, and an attempt to provide further Danish names can be seen in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in Voltemand (Valdemar), and also in Yvaughan and Yorick (both mentioned in Act 5), and Osric (though as Jenkins points out this latter is also a good Anglo-Saxon name).

Laertes and Ophelia are from Greek, Laertes being the name of Ulysses’ father. Claudius is very Roman, like Marcellus and Cornelius. Horatio, Francisco, Barnardo are run-of-the-mill playhouse names. (Horatio was the name of the murdered son in *The Spanish Tragedy.* ) Fortinbras, with its Frenchness (‘Strong-arm’), is an odd name for a Norwegian king and his son. Polonius is even more perplexing; Polonia was a regular name for Poland.

The forms of the names, like almost everything to do with the play, are very unstable. Gertrude, the established spelling of the queen’s name, comes from the Folio, and is almost certainly not the way Shakespeare wrote it, for it appears in the second quarto as Gertrard (and once as Gertrad). The spelling Rosencrantz was not established until the eighteenth century. It looks as though the second quarto spelling Rosencraus is this time not Shakespeare’s but a continued misreading of ‘Rosencrans’;
the regular form in the Folio is Rosincrance. It has been thought best to retain the established forms of Gertrude and Rosencrantz in this edition. Barnardo is a different matter; this is the spelling of both quarto and Folio, and there is no reason to follow the editorial form Bernardo.

The most striking change in naming takes place outside the two main texts. Polonius becomes Corambis in the bad quarto, and his man becomes Montano. I have argued earlier (p. 25) that the change may well have been official; that is, the bad quarto may register a change made for performance by the Chamberlain's men at the Globe. If so, it is impossible now to say what led to the change. Perhaps there was the danger of some offence in the earlier name; perhaps someone thought it was odd to suggest that the Danish counsellor was a Pole. Whether the change was made by Shakespeare's company or not, it is interesting that the new name was certainly in Shakespeare's mind around the year 1603, for he included 'Corambus' in the rag-bag list of names of officers produced by Parolles in All's Well That Ends Well 4.3.161-5. But it looks as though Corambis was coined to suit the role of the Danish counsellor. Gollancz made the excellent suggestion that the name comes from 'crambe' or 'crambo', which, deriving from 'crambe repetita' (cabbage served up again), referred to silly verbal repetition. Apparently the form 'corambe' is occasionally found. (See Duthie, p. 223, and OED under 'crambe'.)

There are many minor variants in the spelling of names, and these are not usually taken account of in the collation. Reynaldo, for example, is the second quarto form; in the Folio he is Reynoldo. Elsinore appears regularly in the second quarto as Elsonoure, and in the Folio as Elsenour and Elsonower. Osric is called Ostrick once in the quarto and on all other occasions Ostrick or Ostricke; in the Folio he is always Osricle.
Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

Recent stage, film, and critical interpretations, by Robert Hapgood

Hamlet's interpreters over the past century or so have progressively enlarged the mirror they have held up to the play and thus encompassed an ever more inclusive understanding of its unity. The earlier focus on the title role and the star actor who played it has widened to include as well the rest of the characters and their players, recurring features of language, prominent philosophical themes, and the enveloping 'world' of Elsinore.' During the period covered in this survey (1985–2001), a number of interpreters have continued the process of enlargement and inclusion.

Others, however, have moved in a contrary direction, one that may well signal a fundamental turning point. These interpreters have focused more on parts or aspects of the play than on the whole. Some, indeed, have questioned whether the parts add up to an integrated whole. Hugh Grady sees the 'end of the assumption of the artwork's organic unity' as a general hallmark of post-modernist aesthetics. Even the coherence of the leading role, hitherto a prime unifying factor, has now come under stress. Stephen Dillane, who played the role in 1994, observes that Hamlet is 'more like a series of sketches' than 'a coherent, consistent character'; yet somehow the actor must make his audience 'believe in these enormous character shifts'. His director, Peter Hall, prized the fact that in his performance Dillane asked question after question yet without 'seeking the answers, and still less consistency'.

Paradoxically, the impulse toward expansiveness can undermine the very sense of unity it enlarges. This is nowhere more evident than in the text of Hamlet. As Philip Edwards explains in his introduction to this edition, editors until recently looked upon the three quite different editions printed in Shakespeare's time as 'alternative versions of a single original text' and sought to conflate them in such a way as to recover this original in a form that was complete and final. Currently, however, textual scholars have come to recognise that each of the earliest editions has its own integrity and to attribute many of the differences among them to revisions by Shakespeare and his company, thus precluding the possibility of one definitive text. Edwards, for example, sees the variations among the early texts as the record of 'a play in motion' and charts in detail its stages of development, each of which has distinctive features. This enlarged perspective in effect yields multiple Hamlets (among which Edwards prints the one he judges best), but it makes no pretence of offering to interpreting readers and performers the kind of master-text that editors once aspired to provide.

Film and stage interpretations

Kenneth Branagh's four-hour motion picture of Hamlet (1996) is in many ways a culmination of the impulse toward inclusiveness. Using a conflated text, uncut, it is by

1. See the 'Introduction' to my 'Shakespeare in Production' edition of Hamlet, 1999.
far the fullest account of the play on film. Especially praiseworthy is its treatment of the supporting roles, played by an all-star cast with sensitive respect for their individual tragedies. Derek Jacobi as Claudius is particularly outstanding, portraying a Macbeth-like ruler whose fearfulness, under duress, turns ruthless. In Branagh's concept, Hamlet is both a hero and an anti-hero, increasingly stained with blood as the action proceeds.

Yet, as many commentators have felt, Branagh's approach often goes 'over the top'. Reaching for grandeur, his film can become merely grandiose. Not only does he leave the text uncut, but he also includes interpolated flashbacks and memories (as of Claudius courting Gertrude and of Hamlet bedding Ophelia) that make a long story longer, straining the audience's attention. Not only does he commendably attend to Denmark's political relations with Norway and England and depict Laertes' return as a full-scale rebellion, but he also seeks – very questionably – to portray as well the fall of a dynasty, embodied in the statue of King Hamlet, which is toppled at the end. In general Branagh's attempts to stretch Shakespeare's tragedy into a sweeping movie epic seem forced. And by complicating the audience's sympathy for the Prince and diffusing its sympathies among the other characters, he diminishes the impact of Hamlet's personal tragedy. Lugubrious as Olivier's 1948 film portrayal can be, his Prince's death is much more moving than Branagh's.

calls his own film version 'not so much a sketch but a collage, a patchwork of intuitions, images, and ideas'.

Speeches are relocated and broken up. Words and screen images often go their own ways: we hear most of Hamlet’s soliloquies in voice-overs; at times we see a free association of images playing riffs on the words. Although Almereyda, who is well versed in past Hamlet interpretations, is remarkably traditional in his conception of the characters and their interrelations, he has radically fractured Shakespeare’s text.

What holds the film together is not as in Branagh a stretched comprehensiveness but an extreme selectivity. The low-budget film is dominated by two related motifs, each elaborated with skill and resource: in it Shakespeare’s Elsinore has much in common with late capitalist New York City in 2000; and what in Shakespeare is expressed through spoken words may be communicated visually and electronically, by camera and telephone and through such high-tech means as cam-corders, fax machines, word-processors, and surveillance cameras. By these bold and direct shortcuts Almereyda seeks to drive home the play’s appeal for contemporary spectators, giving a present-day edge to its statement about ‘the frailty of spiritual values in a material world’ (p. 11).

On stage there have been many estimable Hamlets lately, but few outstanding Hamlets. It was the star actors that reviewers praised, more than whole productions. Of these stars the most distinguished was Simon Russell Beale in 2001. One of the strengths of his performance was the freshness of his address to his lines. At the same time, his performance also resonated much more than most within the great Hamlet tradition. Stocky and bearded, thirty-nine years old, he did not look the part in a conventional way yet bore considerable resemblance to the first Hamlet, Richard Burbage, himself thirty-four when he first played the part. Beale’s conception of the role was reminiscent of that of W. C. Macready (1835), who saw the prince as an idealist whose speech ‘What a piece of work is a man’ (2.2.286–90) was a defining moment. However, in the course of the play Macready’s prince became a disillusioned misogynist, whereas Beale’s remained boyishly good natured to the end. To his surprise – Beale has confessed that he had expected to be ‘more savage, more grotesque’ – he found ‘something very innocent about Hamlet’. His prince is genuinely surprised at the perfidy of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and of Ophelia. After the death of Polonius, when Claudius – arms sacrificially spread – offers himself to Hamlet’s sword, Beale cannot bring himself to use it; even at the end, when Claudius makes the same gesture, the most his prince can do is slash the king’s arm. Indeed, he was very much a ‘sweet prince’, the sweetest natured since Johnston Forbes Robertson (1897).

At the emotional centre of Beale’s interpretation was the desire to return to the times before his father’s death when the royal nuclear family was intact. A key moment came in 3.4 when, blissfully, he felt the touch of Gertrude and the Ghost at the same time, a momentary tableau of the family ties Hamlet longed to restore.

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Charlotte Jones’ *Humble Boy*, a contemporary companion-piece to this production—also directed by John Caird and featuring Beale and several other members of the *Hamlet* cast—such a family reunion was the climax of the play.

Unfortunately, the rest of Caird’s *Hamlet* production was not at all the equal of Beale’s performance. Other directors during this period have also found it hard to define encompassing worlds that were memorable in themselves. In the last few years this has been due in part to the refusal by many of them to engage the political dimensions of the play. For his version in 2000, Peter Brook significantly cut ‘Prince of Denmark’ from the title, and like many others of late he reverted to the earlier practice of cutting Fortinbras. On the stage today, *Hamlet* has become simply a personal/family tragedy.

Nor have directors of *Hamlet* often managed to create milieux that were especially suited to their Princes. Caird’s emphasis on travel (scene changes were indicated by rearranging steamer trunks) and religion (sacred music often sounded) had little to do with Beale’s interpretation. Brook’s *Hamlet*, Adrian Lester, wore dreadlocks, yet the production Brook mounted was in his standard-issue minimalist, primitivist style. For Kenneth Branagh’s realistically depicted straight-arrow Edwardian prince in 1992, Bob Crowley contributed sets that grew more and more impressionistic as the play proceeded. In Peter Hall’s 1994 production, it was the costumes that were incongruous:
whereas Stephen Dillane’s style of acting was distinctly of the present moment, he was surrounded by a court tricked out in red coats and top hats that set reviewers thinking of Lewis Carroll. In 1997 Alex Jennings’ tellingly nuanced performance of the title role contrasted with the heavily cut and simplified staging by director Matthew Warchus, who himself acknowledged that Hamlet is ‘a bigger and better play in its printed version’.

The 1989 Royal Shakespeare Company touring production, directed by Ron Daniels with Mark Rylance as Hamlet, was exceptional in creating a coherent world that suited its Prince. Designer Antony McDonald’s set focused boldly on its two thematic emphases. The dizzyingly out-of-kilter window and walls suggested a world that was dangerously ‘disjoint and out of frame’. In particular, it expressionistically projected the Prince’s deranged sense of surroundings that were radically ‘out of joint’; reviewers felt strongly the atmosphere of a mental institution, an effect heightened when Rylance appeared in stained, striped pyjamas and stockings to deliver the ‘to be or not to be’ soliloquy. He was clearly not simply assuming an ‘antic disposition’ (1.5.172). At ‘It hath made me mad’ (3.1.140–1), he sometimes banged his head on the wall or clutched his head with terrifying self-awareness. As Daniels explained to interviewers, the other thematic emphasis looked upon the play as ‘an interpersonal set of reactions within the family’. Hence the prominence of a large bed, not only in the closet scene but in the whole play-within-the-play sequence. The two themes of course intertwine. King Hamlet is depicted as a loving husband, but as a father he is stern and remote. When the Prince seeks to comfort the grieving Ghost, he pulls away, then takes his son by the collar to demand his allegiance (1.5. 5–8). Clearly, it is with his mother that Hamlet has had a loving relationship – the closet scene will climax in an oedipal kiss that takes them both by surprise. But at first her affections are mostly directed toward her new husband, who dotes on her.

This family situation leaves Rylance lonely and suffering. Desperate to escape, he is first seen, isolated and small, slumped, wearing a black overcoat, looking out the askew window, shabby suitcase packed, and ready for departure. At ‘what an ass am I’ (2.2.535), he weeps in hopeless bitterness, having cried out ‘O vengeance’ from a fetal position, ‘as if conscious of his own impotence’. The play’s progressions are graphically underlined. Rylance’s costumes reflect his situation, almost as if cartooned. Having worn an overcoat, then his pyjamas, he dresses up for the playlet, sporting a white dinner-jacket and scarf but soon strips them off and plays the closet scene in an undershirt. Hamlet’s departure from Elsinore and sea adventure decisively mark his return to sanity and growth to maturity. For the fencing match, the court is in black (still in mourning for Polonius and Ophelia). When Hamlet has put on his fencing jacket, he is all in white. Rylance explained his final view of Hamlet thus: ‘He’s actually reached the state of a prince at the time that he dies, and you should feel he would make a wonderful king.’

1 Times Educational Supplement, 2 May 1997.
4 ‘South Bank Show’, televised 2 April 1989, available on video from Iambic Productions.
As with Almereyda's film, the coherence of the Rylance/Daniels production came from a selectiveness so tight as to make its unified effect seem more imposed than discovered. The same can be said of the adaptations by Robert Wilson (Hamlet Monologue) and Robert LePage (Elsinore). In them the recent tendency to concentrate on the performance of a single actor was accentuated by the fact that in both the director/adapter played all the parts. Both works also featured a free dismembering and reworking of the original. Likening Shakespeare's text to 'an indestructible rock' that could be run over by a steamroller without being destroyed, Wilson restructured the play to take the audience into Hamlet's mind in the split second before he dies, reliving in highly stylised episodes various events in his life, particularly his encounters with Ophelia and Gertrude. In the latter, for example, Hamlet says 'mother' four times, rising to a scream followed by silence, 'signalling primal horror and, simultaneously, the ironic presentation of that horror by the hyper-cool artist'.

LePage looked on his 1996 Elsinore as 'a sketch-pad', a work-in-progress toward a later full-blown production. He too sought to evoke the psychodrama in Hamlet's mind. With regard to the liberties he took in doing so (his Prince's first line is 'to be or not to be'), he joked in his programme note, 'you can't make a Hamlet without breaking a few eggs'. His high-tech, multimedia set consisted of an elaborate system of flats controlled by a computerized hydraulic system that could produce spectacular visual effects: 'I tell stories with machines', he has said. Like that of Almereyda in his film, LePage's art is very much of the present electronic moment; he has argued that because of their conditioning by television, 'kids who would never read Hamlet for pleasure can come to Elsinore and immediately feel at home with the visual vocabulary it uses'.

Critical interpretations

Recent scholar-critics have continued the century-long effort to place Hamlet in ever-larger contexts, some of them extending their surveys far beyond the play's own time, both before and after, and in genres in addition to drama. Yet within the play itself they have limited their focus to particular parts or aspects. Typically, they devote one chapter to this aspect in Hamlet within a book devoted to a more general survey of that aspect. It is remarkable how many major studies of this sort in recent years have independently converged on the play's treatment of revenge, death, mourning, and (less predictably) memory. Many emphasise the distinctive anxieties about death that characterised the early modern period in England, a time when increasing Renaissance individualism was challenged by levelling epidemics of the plague. As several of these studies emphasise, a special cause for concern was the official Protestant abolition of the Roman Catholic belief in Purgatory and with it the communication between the living and the dead – by which dead saints might intercede

3 Lavender, 'Hamlet in Pieces', p. 108.
5 Lavender, 'Hamlet in Pieces', p. 146.
for the living and the living intercede for dead loved ones. For Shakespeare, these
general anxieties may well have been sharpened by the loss of his son Hamnet in 1596
and especially of his father in 1601. The fact that Shakespeare by a credible tradition
himself played the Ghost adds a further personal dimension.

These scholarly studies converge from a variety of directions – psychoanalysis,
thology, audience response, theatre and cultural history. All, however, emphasise the
significance of remembering and forgetting as a central if hitherto neglected theme in
Hamlet. For the most part, they see the Ghost’s injunction to ‘Remember me’ not as
reinforcing the Prince’s will to revenge but ultimately undercutting it. Taken
together, they in effect provide a new reason for Hamlet’s delay: denied normal out-
lets for mourning his father, he is so preoccupied with looking to the past that he neg-
lects his duty to act in the present. Not until this preoccupation has lessened toward
the end of the play does he kill the king.

The theme of remembering and forgetting is by no means confined to the Prince.
To a unique degree, words connected with that theme resound throughout the play, and
umerous characters are linked with remembering and misremembering. As the
play unfolds, we in the audience are also constantly engaged in memory-work as we
see parallels and hear echoes until at the end ‘we become Hamlet’s memory, as Hamlet
had been the ghost’s’.

All the same, Hamlet’s relationship with the Ghost is at the centre of it all. Like the
Ghost, the Prince straddles the boundary between life and death. His strange silent
visit to Ophelia has a ghostly quality, ‘[a]s if he had been looséd out of hell’ (2.1.81).

In the graveyard, he imaginatively enters the world of death the annihilator, a place of
skulls and rotting corpses, and, in the First Quarto version he actually leaps into
Ophelia’s grave. In his very last speech, he repeatedly declares ‘I am dead’, as if he
has already departed life and now resembles less his father than his father’s spirit.

Hamlet’s relation with his father’s ghost also has much to do with the maturing of
his own identity and assumption of his father’s role as ruler. As these studies show,
the Ghost’s presence is on the wane in the latter part of the play. In 3.4, for instance,
the Ghost is visible only to his son and at the end fails to make the gloating manifest-
tation expected in a revenge tragedy. At the same time, there are many indications that
Hamlet is taking up the mantle of rule he has inherited. He uses his father’s signet as
warrant for the killing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (5.2.49); he announces, ‘This
is I, Hamlet the Dane’ (5.1. 224); he protests against Claudius’ usurpation (5.2.65) and
gives his dying voice to the election of Fortinbras (5.2.335), who declares that Hamlet
‘was likely, had he been put on,/To have proved most royal’ (5.2.377).

2 J. Kerrigan, Revenge Tragedy, 1996, p. 182.
5 M. Garber, Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers, 1987, p. 162.
6 R. Watson, The Rest is Silence, 1994, p. 92.
9 Cartwright, Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 133.
Of these studies, the most broadly based is that by John Kerrigan. The context he supplies is nothing less than the treatment of revenge in the whole of western literature. By doing so he shows that when Shakespeare chose to write a revenge tragedy he was not merely reviving a once-fashionable sub-genre of Elizabethan drama but making connection with a 'central preoccupation of European literature' in general and especially its drama. His introductory survey of the 'compelling mix of ingredients' that revenge offers any writer has much to say, directly and by implication, about the perennial power of *Hamlet*, especially its concern not only with the nature of action but also with its self-consciously theatrical imitation. As he points out, the Prince repeatedly imagines himself a stage murderer—a rugged Pyrrhus, a lethal Lucianus (p. 15).

Kerrigan also throws light on the play's present-day appeal, suggesting that in a time when the state has taken so much of the initiative in punishing criminals away from wronged individuals, the popularity of American vigilante movies, and in England the revival of Jacobean tragedies, reflect the appeal of revengers who exact full retribution independently (p. 25). Kerrigan goes on to draw parallels between the detective aspect of Hamlet's 'mousetrap' and crime fiction (including mid-twentieth-century novels by Michael Innes and Nicholas Blake that involve *Hamlet* itself) and furthermore finds something similar in the investigative impulses of scholar-sleuths W. W. Greg and J. Dover Wilson (pp. 79–87). Kerrigan makes it clear, however, that the pat decoding of clues in detective stories falls short of the true business of tragedy, whose defining concern, as in *Hamlet*, is with 'educing complexes of value and meaning from a protagonist's life at a moment of immense loss (usually loss of that life)' (p. 86).

Of the many other single aspects of *Hamlet* discussed by recent interpreters, the most notable studies have come from feminist critics commenting on Gertrude and Ophelia. The most ambitious of these is by Janet Adelman. Surveying the whole of Shakespeare's career, she sees Gertrude as pivotal. She observes that apart from Shakespeare's very earliest plays, mothers are virtually absent from the plays that preceded *Hamlet*. For during this period 'mothers and sons cannot coexist in his psychic and dramatic world: and his solution is to split his world in two, isolating its elements—heterosexual bonds in the comedies and *Romeo and Juliet*, father-son bonds in the histories and *Julius Caesar*. With the figure of Gertrude in *Hamlet*, this solution collapses, and in this collapse, Adelman finds the starting point of the period of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies and beyond: 'from *Hamlet* on', she finds, 'all sexual relationships will be tinged by the threat of the mother, all masculine identity problematically formed in relationship to her' (pp. 11, 35). Not until the finale of *The Winter's Tale* is Shakespeare able to imagine a family in which 'mother and father stand together, themselves a gracious couple, begetting wonder' (p. 237).

Adelman explores in detail how profoundly Hamlet is affected by his mother's frailties. Gertrude's failure to mourn her first husband fully and her 'o'er hasty marriage'...
to his brother leave her son feeling personally ‘sullied’, and her failure to discriminate between the two brothers leads him to see the world as a place ‘where boundaries cannot hold . . . where mother-aunts and uncle-fathers become indistinguishably one flesh’ (4.3.48–9) and ‘where even camels become weasels become whales’ (3.2.339–44) (p. 29). Only after regaining his trust in his mother in 3.4 can Hamlet start to trust himself, ‘rebuild the masculine identity spoiled by her contamination’ (p. 34), and move toward a mature assumption of adult responsibility as his father’s successor. At the end, she goes so far as to hold, he ‘manages to achieve his revenge only when he can avenge his mother’s death, not his father’s’ (p. 31).

All this is placed by Adelman in a pre-oedipal psychoanalytical context that often prompts distortions. For example, she sees the sexual revulsion Hamlet expresses in 3.4 as applying to his mother’s sexuality in general whereas his disgust is explicitly directed toward her relations with the ‘bloat king’ Claudius. Again, Adelman claims that Hamlet wishes his mother to be a virgin, indeed the Virgin Mother (p. 31), whereas in his first soliloquy he has no problem with the sexual relations of his parents; he recalls with nostalgia that Gertrude clung to her tender husband as if increase of appetite grew with what it fed on (1.2.140–5). Still, Adelman provides yet another persuasive answer to the question of why Hamlet delays: his concern with reclaiming his mother’s purity distracts him from pursuing his father’s revenge.

Adelman is primarily concerned with Hamlet’s attitude toward his mother. In his prequel novel, Gertrude and Claudius (2000), John Updike is more concerned with Gertrude’s own attitudes. The daughter of a Viking warrior, his Queen is high-spirited and independent-minded; when in the novel she finally takes Claudius as her lover it is by her own command. Yet ultimately she is compliant to her father and husbands. In an aperçu that rings true in Shakespeare’s play as well, Updike observes that ‘she found it difficult to think of one man while another was upon her’ (pp. 14, 125). Updike also takes a fresh look at her other relationships. His Gertrude and Polonius are especially close (following the suggestion by Shakespeare in 3.2 and 4 if not previously) while she (with less warrant from Shakespeare) has always felt estranged from her son, whom she sees as cold, sullen, egotistical, self-dramatising, and ‘tormented by the half of him that belongs to his mother’ (p. 53). It is only at the urging of Claudius (who genuinely wishes to become a father to his nephew) that she reaches out to him. Updike’s Gertrude knows nothing of King Hamlet’s murder, unlike Margaret Atwood’s assertive Gertrude, who boasts to her son: ‘It wasn’t Claudius, darling. It was me.’

The most influential study of Ophelia is the concise, much anthologised essay by Elaine Showalter, ‘Representing Ophelia’. She advocates, and furthermore practises, a ‘maximum interdisciplinary contextualism’, tracing through the centuries ‘the iconography of Ophelia in English and French painting, photography, psychiatry, and literature, as well as in theatrical production’ (p. 80), stressing the great variety of rep-

presentations that Ophelia has received, whether strong or weak on the stage, virginal or seductive in art, inadequate or oppressed in criticism (p. 91). These differences, Showalter emphasises, derive from changing attitudes towards women and madness in society at large. Since in her view there is no single true Ophelia for feminists to champion, they should show some historically self-conscious humility, recognise that their own formulations may be culturally determined, and acknowledge that Ophelia is best understood from multiple perspectives (p. 92).

As sound as these conclusions may be, they risk flaccid pluralism if they are not balanced with the realisation that some perspectives are less rewarding than others. In practice, Showalter draws such distinctions, particularly concerning the shortcomings of certain recent interpretations. She resists R. D. Laing’s schizophrenic Ophelia, in whose madness ‘there is no one there’, because it reduces her to silence, just as she resists Jonathan Miller’s productions, which only make Ophelia a ‘graphic study of mental pathology’ (p. 91).

In the past, such enlargements of interpretative scope have typically been placed within a generally understood ‘reading’ of the play or have introduced a more complex definition of Hamlet’s general unity. In so short an essay as Showalter’s, it was not to be expected that she would attempt such placement. But the much longer studies I have been surveying also emphasise analysis far more than synthesis, doing little to put the part they examine in the context of the play as a whole.

The interest, and difficulty, of undertaking a wide-ranging synthesis may be seen in Marvin Rosenberg’s Masks of Hamlet (1992). In its thousand pages it offers the most extensive single reading of the play yet attempted. In a scene-by-scene, almost line-by-line, commentary, Rosenberg not only presents his own views of the many facets of all the characters but also includes a rich sampling of the various interpretations of the lines and roles by critics as well as performers through the ages. In effect, he seeks to accomplish for the whole play the ‘maximum intertextual contextualism’ that Showalter seeks for Ophelia. His study represents the ultimate enlargement of the mirror that interpreters have thus far held up to Hamlet.

In small quantities the wealth of alternatives Rosenberg presents can be highly stimulating, resembling a free rehearsal in which all sorts of options are explored. But taken together and in larger quantities these alternatives can soon lead a reader past the point at which profusion gives way to confusion. Here again the flood of possibilities tends to dissolve the very unity it is meant to enlarge. Rosenberg himself seems to sense the problem and, by way of strengthening the coherence of his study, offers patterns of what he calls the ‘power Hamlet’ and the ‘sweet Hamlet’. At the same time, however, he is quick to acknowledge that when these patterns are applied to particular Hamlets they prove oversimplified: there are many exceptions to them; and the traits of the two are emphasised to varying degrees and often combined.

The challenge that future Hamlet interpreters will confront is real. The play is so many-faceted and its afterlife has been so richly varied that it is becoming more and more difficult for interpreters to take it all in and make sense of it. Does the current turn toward extreme simplification and fragmentation reflect a lasting paradigm-shift away from the Coleridgean ideal of organic unity? Or is it a passing trend? Can
attempts at comprehensiveness like those of Rosenberg and Branagh be modified to more readily comprehensible proportions? Will the current emphasis upon the differences among the earliest printed editions of the play continue? Or will the numerous points of resemblance among the three versions prompt a counterbalancing emphasis on what they have in common? Can ways be found – as I hope – to take fully into account the inconsistencies and indeterminacies in Shakespeare's play without losing sight of the features that together distinguish it from all other plays – its revelation of the hero's complex inner life, its phrase-making articulateness, its distinctive constellation of themes, its extraordinary openness to interpretation, its unmatched responsiveness to changing times, its unique sequence of unforgettable tableaux (the ghost on the ramparts, the playlet, mad Ophelia, the graveyard, the fencing match)? These issues currently hang in the balance.
NOTE ON THE TEXT

The basis of the modernised text given in this edition is fully discussed in the Introduction, pp. 8–32. The section concludes with a summary of the argument and an explanation of some features and principles of the present text (see pp. 30–2).

The collation confines itself almost entirely to recording the significant variations between Q2 and F, and to giving the source of all readings which do not derive from Q2 or F. In every case the reading of the present text is given first, followed by its source. Readings from the 'bad' Q1 are given when their agreement (or disagreement) with Q2 or F is of importance. The readings of seventeenth-century texts other than Q1, Q2, and F, and later editorial emendations not accepted in the present edition, are not normally recorded.
Hamlet
Prince of Denmark
LIST OF CHARACTERS

HAMLET, Prince of Denmark
CLAUDIUS, King of Denmark, Hamlet’s uncle
GERTRUDE, Queen of Denmark, Hamlet’s mother
GHOST of Hamlet’s father, the former King of Denmark
POLONIUS, counsellor to the king
LAERTES, his son
OPHELIA, his daughter
REYNALDO, his servant
HORATIO, Hamlet’s friend and fellow-student

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO, FRANCISCO, VOLTEMAND, CORNELIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN

} officers of the watch

} ambassadors to Norway

} former schoolfellows of Hamlet

FORTINBRAS, Prince of Norway
CAPTAIN in the Norwegian army

First player
Other players
OSRIC, LORD, GENTLEMAN

} courtiers

First clown, a gravedigger and sexton
Second clown, his assistant

SAILOR
MESSENGER
PRIEST

English AMBASSADOR
LORDS, ATTENDANTS, SAILORS, SOLDIERS, GUARDS

SCENE: The Danish royal palace at Elsinore

Notes
A list of ‘The Persons Represented’ (omitting the First Player) first appeared in the Players’ Quarto of 1676.

GERTRUDE So spelt in F. Normally Gertrard in Q2. See Introduction, p. 70.

POLONIUS Concerning the change to Corambis or Corambus in stage performance, see Introduction, pp. 25 and 71.

OFFICERS OF THE WATCH Barnardo and Francisco are introduced as ‘sentinels’ (1.1.0 SD), and Francisco is called ‘honest soldier’ (1.1.16). But, although Hamlet seems on friendlier terms with Marcellus than Barnardo (1.2.165–7), Horatio calls them both ‘gentlemen’ (1.2.196).

PLAYERS A minimum of four players in all is required, or three if ‘Lucianus’ also speaks the prologue (3.2.133).

86
I.1 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 You come most carefully upon your hour.
BARNARDO 'Tis now struck twelve, get thee to bed Francisco.
FRANCISCO For this relief much thanks, 'tis bitter cold
And I am sick at heart.
BARNARDO Have you had quiet guard?
FRANCISCO Not a mouse stirring.
BARNARDO Well, good night.
If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,
The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.
FRANCISCO I think I hear them.

Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS

Stand ho! Who is there?

HORATIO Friends to this ground.
MARCELLUS And liegemen to the Dane.
FRANCISCO Give you good night.
MARCELLUS Who hath relieved you?

Act 1, Scene 1

0 sd The sentinels enter from opposite sides of the stage. Barnardo is relieving Francisco. The action is to be seen taking place on the 'platform' (1.2.213; 1.2.251), a high terrace for mounting guns and keeping watch, in the Castle of Elsinore.

2 Nay answer me It is Francisco, the sentinel on duty, who should be giving the challenge, not the newcomer.
Barnardo hath my place.

Give you good night.  

Exit Francisco

Holla, Barnardo!

Say,

What, is Horatio there?

A piece of him.

Welcome Horatio, welcome good Marcellus.

What, has this thing appeared again tonight?

I have seen nothing.

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.

Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.

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

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

Last night of all,
When yond same star that's westward from the pole

In the second scene of The Tempest, 'a thing most brutish' refers to Caliban and 'a thing divine' to Ferdinand.

Fantasy imagination.

Dreaded awful, fearsome. Compare Coriolanus 3.3.98 'in the presence/Of dreaded justice'.

Along to come along.

Watch...night keep watch for the period of this night. Compare Shrew 5.2.150: 'to watch the night in storms, the day in cold'. For 'watch' in this sense, see 1.2.213 below.

Approve our eyes confirm that we saw correctly.

What With what (following 'assail').

Pole pole star.
Had made his course t’illume that part of heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
The bell then beating one –

Enter 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.

Barnardo Looks a not like the king? Mark it Horatio.

Horatio Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.

Barnardo It would be spoke to.

Marcellus Question it Horatio.

Horatio What art thou that usurp’st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march? By heaven I charge thee speak.

Marcellus It is offended.

Barnardo See, it stalks away.

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

Exit Ghost

Marcellus ’Tis gone and will not answer.

Barnardo How now Horatio? you tremble and look pale.
Is not this something more than fantasy?
What think you on’t?

Horatio Before my God, I might not this believe
Without the sensible and true avouch
Of mine own eyes.

37 illume illuminate. Shakespeare seems to have coined this word, and he does not use it elsewhere. Compare ‘relume’ (re-light) in Othello 5.2.13, for which, again, OED quotes no parallel.

39 beating striking (‘tolling’ Q1).

41 figure shape, form.

42 scholar Horatio is learned enough to know how to address a spirit.

43 a he. This representation of an informal slurred pronunciation (ə) of the pronoun, presumed to derive from Shakespeare’s MS., is retained in this text, in spite of occasional difficulties for the modern reader (see note to 3.3.73). F normally sophisticates ‘a’ to ‘he’, but here reads ‘it’ – with a gain in consistency, since everyone refers to the apparition as ‘it’.

44 harrows deeply disturbs (breaks up with a harrow).

46 usurp’st wrongfully takes over.

47 Together with The spirit is also appropriating the form of the old king.

48 buried Denmark the dead king of Denmark. This customary figure of speech (synecdoche) is very common in the play, emphasising the interdependence of king and kingdom.

49 sometimes formerly.

50 stalks moves with a stately stride. Compare 66 below. OED v1 c notes that ‘stalk’ is often used in connection with ghosts.

57 sensible sensory.
MARCELLUS Is it not like the king?

HORATIO As thou art to thyself.

Such was the very armour he had on
When he th'ambitious Norway combated;
So frowned he once, when in an angry parle
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.
'Tis strange.

MARCELLUS Thus twice before, and jump at this dead hour,
With martial 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.

MARCELLUS Good now sit down, and tell me he that knows,
Why this same strict and most observant watch
So nightly toils the subject of the land,
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,
And foreign mart for implements of war,
Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task
Does not divide the Sunday from the week.
What might be toward, that this sweaty haste
Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day?
Who is't that can inform me?

HORATIO That can I—

At least the whisper goes so. Our last king,
Whose image even but now appeared to us,

61 he] q2; not in F 61 th'] F; the q2 63 sledded] F; sleaded q2, q1 63 Polacks] Malone; pollax q2, q1; Pollax F; Poleaxe F4 65 jump] q2, q1; joust F 68 mine] q2; my F, q1 73 why] F; with q2 73 cast] F; cost q2, q1

61 Norway King of Norway.

62 parle parley. Properly a conference during a truce, but here seemingly used to mean an altercation leading to violence.

63 sledded Polacks Both q1 and q2 read 'sleaded pollax'; F reads 'sledded Pollax'. It is a celebrated question whether we are speaking of a poleaxe (often spelt 'pollax') or Polacks (= Poles). If the word is poleaxe, then the passage means that King Hamlet, during a heated exchange (with Norwegians?), struck his fighting axe on the ice. But it is then very dubious what 'sleaded' or 'sledded' can mean. It seems more likely that Horatio is talking of two encounters, one with Norwegians and one with Poles. In the second, in a confrontation, or after an angry exchange, he routed the Poles in their sledges.

65 jump precisely.

66 martial stalk See 50 above. The actor has to achieve a solemnity of movement that is both military and spectral.

67-8 In what particular...opinion i.e. I don't know in which particular area to concentrate my thoughts (in order to explain this) but, taking a wide view, so far as I can judge...

70 Good now Please you. Dowden compares Winter's Tale 5.1.19: 'Now, good now, / Say so but seldom.'

72 toils wearies with toil.

74 foreign mart bargaining abroad.

75 impress conscription.

77 toward in preparation, afoot.
Was as you know by Fortinbras of Norway,
Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride,
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 heraldy,
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 comart
And carriage of the article design,
His fell to Hamlet. Now sir, young Fortinbras,
Of unimprovèd mettle hot and full,
Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there
Sharked up a list of landless resolûtes
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. 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 romage in the land.

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

HORATIO A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye.
In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets;
As stars with trains of fire, and dews of blood,
Disasters in the sun; and the moist star,
Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands,
Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.
And even the like precurse of feared events,
As harbingers preceding still the fates
And prologue to the omen coming on,
Have heaven and earth together demonstrated

101 our state the Danish government.
103 compulsatory Pronounce 'compulsat'ry': there is not much to choose between this reading (Q2) and F's 'compulsative'. Neither word is recorded in OED before this.
107 romage commotion and bustle, especially with relation to loading a ship's cargo (usually spelt 'rummage').
108-25 It is argued in the Introduction (p. 14) that this passage, found only in Q2, had been marked by Shakespeare for deletion.
110 sort be accordant with (Horatio's explanation).
111 question cause of dispute.
112 A mote...eye Like an irritant in the eye, it disturbs and perplexes the mind, which cannot see ahead clearly.
113-20 The portents preceding the death of Caesar had been extensively used by Shakespeare in the early acts of Julius Caesar.

113 palmy triumphant. No previous occurrence recorded in OED.
116 gibber utter inarticulate sounds (compare 'gibberish', and 'gibbering idiot'). The word is another form of 'jabber'.
117-18 As stars...sun Either the beginning or the end of this is missing, a further sign that the speech was never finished off.
118 Disasters Portents of disaster. (Etymologically, the word implies evil astral influence.)
118 the moist star the moon. She is 'the watery star' in Winter's Tale 1.2.1, and 'governess of floods' in Midsummer Night's Dream 2.1.103.
120 almost to doomsday almost as if it were the day of judgement.
121 precurse advance warning (that which runs ahead). OED has no other example of this word.
122 harbingers Officials who went ahead of the king to announce his approach.
123 omen Used here for the calamity itself.
Unto our climatures and countrymen.

Enter GHOST

But soft, behold, 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! Stop it Marcellus.

MARCELLUS Shall I strike at it with my partisan?

HORATIO Do if it will not stand.

BARNARDO 'Tis here.

HORATIO 'Tis here.

MARCELLUS 'Tis gone.

*Exit Ghost*

We do it wrong being so majestical

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125 climatures regions (an unusual variant of 'climates').
126 soft enough! See note on 3.1.88.
127 cross it cross its path.
127 SD It spreads his arms 'his' for 'its' is normal in Shakespeare (compare 5.2.90-1, 'put your bonnet to his right use'). It is tempting to follow the quarto of 1676, Rowe, and many succeeding editors in thinking 'It' (= the Ghost) is wrong, and that it is Horatio who spreads his arms, 'crossing' the Ghost in the double sense of barring its way and making the sign of the cross. While it is true that in Elizabethan writing 'he' might have been misread as 'yt', there is no reason to suppose that Q2 is wrong. This dumb gesture by the Ghost, preluding the speech he never makes, could be extremely effective.

128-38 'Horatio shows a scholar's knowledge in his enumeration of the causes that send ghosts back to earth' (Kittredge).
134 happily haply, perhaps.
136 uphoarded hoarded up.
137 Extorted Obtained by unfair means. Compare 2 Henry VI 4.7.99: 'Are my chests filled up with extorted gold?'
140 partisan A long-handled weapon combining spear and axe.
143 being so majestical since it has such majesty (?). This is the accepted sense, and editors therefore normally put commas round the phrase. They thus make Marcellus give two separate reasons why they are wrong to offer violence; (1) the majesty of the Ghost; (2) its invulnerability. It may however be *they* who are being 'majestical'
To offer it the show of violence, 
For it is as the air invulnerable, 
And our vain blows malicious mockery.

BARNARDO It was about to speak when the cock crew.

HORATIO And then it started like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons. I have heard,
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day; and at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
Th’extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine. And of the truth herein
This present object made probation.

MARCELLUS It faded on the crowing of the cock.

Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
This bird of dawning singeth all night long,
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallowed and so gracious is that time.

HORATIO So have I heard, and do in part believe it.

But look, the morn in russet mantle clad
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.
Break we our watch up, and by my advice
Let us impart what we have seen tonight
Unto young Hamlet, for upon my life
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.

150 morn] Q2; day F; morning Q1 158 say] Q2; sayses F 160 This] Q2; The F, Q1 161 dare stir] dare sturre Q2; can walke F; dare walke Q1 163 takes] Q2; talkes F 164 that] Q2; the F 167 eastward] Q2; Eastern F

150 morn] (= imperious) in offering violence: 'We do wrong to a ghost to be so overbearing as to offer it violence, because it is immaterial.'
146 malicious mockery a mockery of the malice we intend.
150 trumpet trumpeteter.
152 the god of day Phoebus Apollo.
154 extravagant and erring wandering beyond bounds (the original meanings of these words).
155 confine (i) one's own special territory, (2) a place of confinement. Both meanings are present here. See also 2.2.236.
156 probation proof.
158 'gainst just before.
162 strike i.e. affect with their malign influence.
163 takes attacks, lays hold (OED v 7).
164 gracious full of grace.
166 the morn In a few minutes of acting time we have moved from deepest midnight to the dawn.
166 russet The name of a coarse cloth worn by country people, and also its colour, a neutral reddish-brown. Cotgrave translates 'Rousset' as 'Russet, brown, ruddy, inclining to dark red'.
Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it,
As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?

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

Exeunt

1.2 Flourish. Enter CLAUDIUS King of Denmark, GERTRUDE the Queen, HAMLET, POLONIUS, LAERTES, OPHELIA, [VOLTEMAND, CORNELIUS.] LORDS attendant

CLAUDIUS Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe,
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him,
Together with remembrance of ourselves.
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
Th'imperial jointress to this warlike state,
Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,
With one auspicious and one dropping eye,

former husband or with himself. If he means the former, it sounds as though he sees himself inheriting her. It is more likely that the whole phrase is in apposition to 'now our queen'; i.e. 'and to rule this state with me'. The word is in any case used metaphorically, not in a proper legal sense. See Clarkson and Warren, The Law of Property in Shakespeare, 1942, pp. 81-4.

With one auspicious and one dropping eye 'auspicious': looking happily to the future; 'dropping': cast down with grief, or possibly dropping tears. Steevens noted the similar sentence, in a semi-jocular context, in Winter's Tale 5.2.74-6, 'She had one eye declined for the loss of her husband, another elevated that the oracle was fulfilled.' Beatrice White found the genesis of this 'contradictory facial expression' in descriptions of the false and fickle goddess Fortune, and argued that the saying 'to cry with one eye and laugh with the other' became a standard phrase for hypocrisy and
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,
Taken to wife; nor have we herein barred
Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone
With this affair along — for all, our thanks.
Now follows that you know: young Fortinbras,
Holding a weak supposal of our worth,
Or thinking by our late dear brother’s death
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,
Colleagued with this 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 bands of law,
To our most valiant brother. So much for him.
Now for ourself and for this time of meeting
Thus much the business is: we have here writ
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras,
Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears
Of this his nephew’s purpose, to suppress
His further gait herein, in that the levies,
The lists, and full proportions, are all made
Out of his subject; and we here dispatch
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand,
For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,
Giving to you no further personal power
To business with the king, more than the scope
Of these dilated articles allow.
Farewell, and let your haste commend your duty.

In that and all things will we show our duty.

We doubt it nothing, heartily farewell.

Exeunt Voltemand and Cornelius

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

My dread lord,
Your leave and favour to return to France,
From whence though willingly I came to Denmark
To show my duty in your coronation,
Yet now I must confess, that duty done,
My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France,
And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.

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

He hath my lord wrung from me my slow leave
By laboursome petition, and at last
Upon his will I sealed my hard consent.
I do beseech you give him leave to go.

Take thy fair hour Laertes, time be thine,
And thy best graces spend it at thy will.

But now my cousin Hamlet, and my son —
HAMLET (Aside) A little more than kin, and less than kind.

CLAUDIUS How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET Not so my lord, I am too much i’th’sun.

GERTRUDE Good Hamlet cast thy nighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not forever with thy vailèd lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
Thou know’st ’tis common, all that lives must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

HAMLET Ay madam, it is common.

GERTRUDE If it be,
Why seems it so particular with thee?

HAMLET Seems madam? nay it is, I know not seems.
’Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play,
But I have that within which passes show –
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

CLAUDIUS ’Tis sweet and commendable in your nature Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father;
But you must know, your father lost a father,
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound
In filial obligation for some term
To do obsequious sorrow; but to persever
In obstinate conolement is a course
Of impious stubbornness, 'tis unmanly grief,
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,
An understanding simple and unschooled.
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,
'This must be so.' We pray you throw to earth
This unprevailing woe, and think of us
As of a father, for let the world take note
You are the most immediate to our throne,
And with no less nobility of love no
Than that which dearest father bears his son,
Do I impart toward you. For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg,
It is most retrograde to our desire,

99 As...sense As the most ordinary thing that affects our senses.
101-2 fault wrongdoing, transgression (a stronger sense than in modern English).
102 a fault to nature Concerning G. W. Knight's extravagant praise of Claudius's good sense, Nigel Alexander wrote, 'The critic has forgotten what Claudius wants him to forget—that death is not always “natural”' (Poison, Play, and Duel, 1971, p. 51).
105 the first corse Unfortunately for Claudius, this was Abel, murdered by his brother Cain.
107 unprevailing that can gain nothing.

109 the most immediate to our throne i.e. the next in succession. The monarchy being elective, not hereditary, Claudius, the most important member of an electoral college, here gives his 'voice' to Hamlet as his heir. Compare Hamlet's own words at 5.2.335.
112 impart toward you convey (this gift of my vote) to you. This is admittedly an unusual intransitive usage of 'impart', but I think it agrees with Johnson's not very clear gloss: 'I believe impart is, impart myself, communicate whatever I can bestow.' Kittredge glossed the word as 'express myself'.
113 to school i.e. his studies.
113 Wittenberg The University of Wittenberg, founded in 1502. Famous in Elizabethan England as the university of Luther—and of Dr Faustus.
114 retrograde contrary.
And we beseech you bend you to remain
Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiepest courtier, cousin, and our son.

GERTRUDE 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.

CLAUDIUS Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply.
    Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come.
    This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet
    Sits smiling to my heart, in grace whereof,
    No jocund health that Denmark drinks today
    But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
    And the king's rouse the heaven shall bruit again,
    Re-speaking earthly thunder. Come away.

_FLOURISH. EXEUNT ALL BUT HAMLET_

HAMLET O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
    Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
    Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
    His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O 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 to this
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly — heaven and earth,
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on, and yet within a month —
Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman —
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body
Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she —
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourned longer — married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules — within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. Oh most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets.

133 weary [F; wary Q2] 134 Seem [Q2; Seemes F] 135 ah fie] Q2: Oh fie, fie F 137 to this] F; thus Q2 140 would]
F: should Q2 149 she, even she] F; she Q2 150 God] Q2; Heauen F 151 my] Q2; mine F 155 in] Q2, Q1;
of

133 flat lifeless, spiritless. Compare 4.7.31.
134 uses customary doings.
137 merely absolutely.
140 Hyperion One of the Titans; frequently identified, as here, as the sun-god.
140 satyr Grotesque creature, half-human but with the legs of a goat, attendant on Dionysus, and
synonymous with lechery.
141 beteem allow. (The context insists on this meaning, but it is a strained usage of a rare word; see OED.)
147 or ere even before. Both words mean 'before', so the phrase 'or ere', 'or e'er', 'or ever'
(see 1.2.183) is just an intensification.
147 those shoes were old An extraordinarily homely touch among these references to Hyperion
and Niobe. His mother had worn new shoes for her
husband's funeral, and they were still as good as new
for her marriage to Claudius.
149 Niobe The mythical mother whose fourteen
children were slain by the gods because she boasted
about them. She wept until she was turned to
stone — and still the tears flowed.
150 discourse of reason faculty of reasoning.
155 left. . . . . . eyes (1) gone from the redness of her
sore eyes, (2) ceased flowing in her sore eyes. The
meaning of 'flushing' is uncertain here, and it is
therefore difficult to choose between 'flushing in'
(Q2, Q1) and 'flushing of' (F).
157 incestuous Marriage to a brother's wife was
explicitly forbidden by the Church. See the 'Table
of Kindred and Affinity' in the Book of Common
Prayer. Henry VIII had been given special
dispensation by the Pope to marry his brother's
It is not, nor it cannot come to good.
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

Enter HORATIO, MARCELLUS and BARNARDO

HORATIO Hail to your lordship.

HAMLET I am glad to see you well.

Horatio – or I do forget myself.

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

HAMLET Sir, my good friend, I'll change that name with you.
And what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio?

MARCELLUS My good lord.

HAMLET I am very glad to see you. (To Barnardo) Good even sir.

But what in faith make you from Wittenberg.

HORATIO A truant disposition, good my lord.

HAMLET I would not hear your enemy say so,
Nor shall you do my ear that violence
To make it truster of your own report
Against yourself. I know you are no truant.
But what is your affair in Elsinore?

HORATIO We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart.

HAMLET I pray thee do not mock me fellow student,
I think it was to see my mother's wedding.

HORATIO Indeed my lord, it followed hard upon.

widow, Catherine of Aragon. His later inability to obtain from the Pope a dissolution of his marriage precipitated the English Reformation and the succession of Queen Elizabeth. W. F. Trench thought that Shakespeare and the audience of Hamlet would share the national view that such a marriage was sinful. See his Shakespeare's 'Hamlet', 1913, pp. 55, 257-60.

159 break, my heart i.e. with unuttered grief. The heart was thought to be kept in place by ligaments or tendons (the heart-strings) which might snap under the pressure of great emotion.

160 I... well He has not yet recognised Horatio.

163 change exchange.

165 that name i.e. 'good friend'.

176 came...funeral How have Hamlet and Horatio contrived to avoid meeting each other in a small court during the last few weeks? Horatio's part is full of inconsistencies: he serves the role which the moment demands. Though he has been absent at Wittenberg, he is able to inform the Danish soldiers about what is happening in their own country in the first scene. Yet in 5.1.191 he has to be told who Laertes is! See note to 186 below.

177 pray thee Q2's 'pre thee' (corrected to 'prethee') is obviously copied from Q1's 'pre thee', and we must prefer F's form as more likely to be Shakespeare's, especially in view of F's shorter form at 119 above. The pronunciation of all forms is probably 'prithee'.

179 upon Used here adverbially, as elsewhere in Shakespeare, with another adverb, to denote a nearness in time. Clark and Wright compare Measure for Measure 4.6.14, 'And very near upon/The duke is entering', and Schmidt adds Troilus and Cressida 4.3.3, 'the hour prefixed... Comes fast upon'.
HAMLET Thrift, thrift, Horatio. The funeral baked meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.
Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven
Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio.
My father, methinks I see my father –

HORATIO Where my lord?

HAMLET In my mind’s eye, Horatio.

HORATIO I saw him once, a was a goodly king.

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

HORATIO My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

HAMLET Saw? Who?

HORATIO My lord, the king your father.

HAMLET The king my father!

HORATIO Season your admiration for a while
With an attent ear, till I may deliver
Upon the witness of these gentlemen
This marvel to you.

HAMLET For God’s love let me hear.

HORATIO Two nights together had these gentlemen,
Marcellus and Barnardo, on their watch
In the dead waste and middle of the night,
Been thus encountered. A figure like your father,
Armèd at point exactly, cap-a-pe,

180 Or ever I had] Q2; Ere I had euer F; Ere euer I had Q1 185 Where] Q2, Q1; Oh where F 186 a] Q2; he F 187 A] Q2; He F 190 Saw? Who?] f; saw, who? Q2 195 God’s] Q2; Heauens F 198 waste] wast Q2, F; vast Q1; waist Malone 200 at point exactly,] at poynct, exactly Q2; at all points exactly, f; to poynct, exactly Q1

181 coldly The remains of the pies baked for the funeral were economically served cold for the wedding feast.

182 dearest closest. That the worst thing you can imagine is meeting your greatest enemy in heaven seems very strange. Kittredge suspected a proverbial saying. It is nevertheless characteristic of Hamlet to wish his opponents to go to hell (see 3.3.93-5 and 5.2.47); it is an aspect of his fierce conviction that moral discriminations ought to have a timeless value. See Introduction, p. 42.

183 or ever See note to 147.

186 I saw him once Greater knowledge of him is implied in 1.1.59-64, and in 211 below.

190 Saw? Who? All three texts give some kind of a pause between ‘saw’ and ‘who’. The Davenant–Betterton quarto of 1676 treats the phrase as a single question, ‘Saw who?’. But the Hughes–Wilks promptbook of 1718 has ‘Saw! Who?’ and this is found in J. P. Kemble’s version of 1800. Charles Kean’s version (1859) has ‘Saw who?’. Both treated it as a single question, and so did Kean and Macready, according to Dyce (NV). Irving, however, restored ‘Saw? – Who?’ (see Winter, Shakespeare on the Stage, 1911, p. 357).

192 Season Make more temperate, restrain.

192 admiration wonder.

193 attent attentive.

198 waste Q2 and F read ‘wast’; Q1 has ‘vast’ and in view of The Tempest’s ‘vast of night’ some editors (e.g. Dowden, Kittredge, Cambridge) adopt it. Malone reads ‘waist’. The desolation of ‘dead waste’ is surely what is required here, though the latent pun ‘waist’ no doubt suggested ‘middle’.

200 at point exactly, cap-a-pe properly and correctly, from head to foot.
Appears before them, and with solemn march
Goes slow and stately by them. Thrice he walked
By their oppressed and fear-surprised eyes
Within his truncheon’s length, whilst they, distilled
Almost to jelly with the act of fear,
Stand dumb and speak not to him. This to me
In dreadful secrecy impart they did,
And I with them the third night kept the watch,
Where, as they had delivered, both in time,
Form of the thing, each word made true and good,
The apparition comes. I knew your father,
These hands are not more like.

HAMLET

But where was this?

MARCELLUS My lord, upon the platform where we watched.

HAMLET Did you not speak to it?

HORATIO

But answer made it none. Yet once methought
It lifted up it head and did address
Itself to motion like as it would speak;
But even then the morning cock crew loud,
And at the sound it shrunk in haste away
And vanished from our sight.

HAMLET

'Tis very strange.

HORATIO As I do live my honoured lord 'tis true,
And we did think it writ down in our duty
To let you know of it.

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

MARCELLUS

We do, my lord.

HORATIO

But where was this?

MARCELLUS My lord, upon the platform where we watched.

HAMLET Did you not speak to it?

HORATIO

But answer made it none. Yet once methought
It lifted up it head and did address
Itself to motion like as it would speak;
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And we did think it writ down in our duty
To let you know of it.

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

MARCELLUS

We do, my lord.
HAMLET Armed say you?

MARCELLUS) Armed my lord.

BARNARDO From top to toe?

MARCELLUS) My lord, from head to foot.

HAMLET Then saw you not his face?

HORATIO Oh yes my lord, he wore his beaver up.

HAMLET What, looked he frowningly?

HORATIO A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.

HAMLET Pale, or red?

HORATIO Nay very pale.

HAMLET And fixed his eyes upon you?

HORATIO Most constantly.

HAMLET I would I had been there.

HORATIO It would have much amazed you.

HAMLET Very like, very like. Stayed it long?

HORATIO While one with moderate haste might tell a hundred.

MARCELLUS Longer, longer.

HORATIO Not when I saw 't.

HAMLET His beard was grizzled, no?

HORATIO It was as I have seen it in his life, A sable silvered.

HAMLET I will watch tonight, Perchance 'twill walk again.

HORATIO I warrant it will.

HAMLET If it assume my noble father's person, I'll speak to it though hell itself should gape And bid me hold my peace. I pray you all,
If you have hitherto concealed this sight, 
Let it be tenable in your silence still, 
And whatsoever else shall hap tonight, 
Give it an understanding but no tongue. 
I will requite your loves. So fare you well: 
Upon the platform 'twixt eleven and twelve 
I'll visit you. 

ALL Our duty to your honour. 

HAMLET Your loves, as mine to you. Farewell. 

Exeunt all but Hamlet 

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

Exit 

I.3 Enter LAERTES and OPHELIA his sister 

LAERTES My necessaries are embarked, farewell. 
And sister, as the winds give benefit 
And convoy is assistant, do not sleep 
But let me hear from you. 

OPHELIA Do you doubt that? 

LAERTES For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favour, 
Hold it a fashion, and a toy in blood, 
A violet in the youth of primy nature, 
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting, 
The perfume and suppliance of a minute, 
No more. 

OPHELIA No more but so? 

247 tenable] q2; treble F 248 whatsoever] what someuer q2; whatsoever F, q1 250 fare] F; farre q2 250 you] q2; ye F 251 eleven] F; a leauen q2 253 loves] q2, q1; loue F 253 SD] Cambridge; Exeunt. (252) q2, F; Exeunt. Manet Hamlet. q 1676 254 spirit, in arms] spirit (in armes) q2; Spirit in Armes? F 256 Foul] foule F; fonde q2 Act 1, Scene 3 1,3] Scena Tertia F o SD his sister] q2; not in V 1 embarked] inbarkt F; inbarckt q2; in barkt q1 3 convoy is] F; conuay, in q2 5 favour] q2; fauours F 8 Forward] q2; Froward F 9 perfume and] q2; not in F 

247 tenable something that can be held. 
248 whatsoever A quite regular form, eventually ousted by 'whatsoever'. 
255 doubt suspect. 
6 a fashion just a way of behaving. 
6 a toy in blood a whim of passion. 
7 the youth...nature the spring-time of life ('primy' seems to be a Shakespearean coinage). 
9 suppliance supply (i.e. the violet serves for a minute only).
LAERTES

Think it no more.

For nature crescent does not grow alone
In thews and bulk, but as this temple waxes
The inward service of the mind and soul
Grows wide withal. Perhaps he loves you now,
And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch
The virtue of his will; but you must fear,
His greatness weighed, his will is not his own,
For he himself is subject to his birth.

He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself, for on his choice depends
The sanctity and health of this whole state,
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you,
It fits your wisdom so far to believe it
As he in his peculiar sect and force
May give his saying deed, which is no further
Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.

Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain

11–14 For nature... withal Growing up is not a matter of physical size only: while the body grows, the inner life of mind and soul develops also. (‘thews’ = sinews.)

15 soil stain.

17 His greatness weighed If you consider his greatness.

20 Carve for himself i.e. serve his own interests.

21 sanctity So F. Q2 reads ‘safty’ and most editions read ‘safety’. Theobald conjectured ‘sanity’ (= soundness of condition), which Wilson and others accept. ‘Safety’ is altogether the feeblest reading, and no scribe or compositor could have substituted ‘sanctity’ in its stead. I believe N. Alexander is alone among modern editors in accepting ‘sanctity’, glossing it ‘holiness, sacred quality’. It seems to me, most powerfully, the correct reading. It fits admirably the rather fervent and excessive way in which Laertes speaks of everything. More than that, it illustrates how everyone in the play contributes, in his or her own marked manner of speaking, to the central meanings of the play. The health of the kingdom is a spiritual health, and it is indeed true, though Laertes cannot know it, that the present spiritual sickness of the kingdom arises from Gertrude’s infidelity to the king.

23 voice and yielding vote and consent.

26 his peculiar sect and force the special circumstances of his class and power. So F. Q2 reads ‘particular act and place’, and it is hard to see how this eroded phrase has won almost universal acceptance. (J. Q. Adams, 1929, is a notable exception in following F). While ‘act’ can mean little in this context, ‘sect’ has the well-established meaning of a class or kind of person, as in Measure for Measure 2.2.5: ‘All sects, all ages, smack of this vice.’ ‘force’ refers to the limited freedom of Hamlet’s social class as Laertes has just described it. Q2 gives a misreading of such unusual length that one may ascribe it to the decreasing legibility of Shakespeare’s MS. between the transcription which lies behind F and the printing of Q2 in 1604. (See Introduction, pp. 27–9.)
If with too credent ear you list his songs,
Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
To his unmastered importunity.
Fear it Ophelia, fear my dear sister,
And keep you in the rear of your affection,
Out of the shot and danger of desire.
The chariest maid is prodigal enough
If she unmask her beauty to the moon.
Virtue itself scapes not calumnious strokes.
The canker galls the infants of the spring
Too oft before their buttons be disclosed,
And in the morn and liquid dew of youth
Contagious blastments are most imminent.
Be wary then, best safety lies in fear:
Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

OPHELIA
I shall th'effect of this good lesson keep
As watchman to my heart. But good my brother,
Do not as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
Whiles like a puffed and reckless libertine
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede.

LAERTES
Oh fear me not.

30 credent believing.
30 list listen to.
31 your chaste treasure the treasure of your chastity. Compare with this florid language the words of the song Ophelia sings in her madness: 'Let in the maid, that out a maid/Never departed 42 blastments blightings. OED records no other more' (4-5:54-5).
34 keep...affection A military metaphor; Ophelia is not to go so far forward as her affection might lead her.
35 shot range, shooting distance.
36–7 The chariest...moon The most cautious maid goes almost too far, if she does no more than reveal her beauty to the chaste moon.
36, 38, 39 Q2 marks these lines with inverted commas, the signs of 'sentences', or improving moral generalities - the 'saws of books' which Hamlet later disavows. Laertes no doubt learned the trick of coining these sententious observations from his father. The tables are turned on him when, after these preachments to Ophelia, he is forced to listen to a battery of moral sentences from his father.
39 canker insect pest feeding on plants. (For the more general, figurative use, see 5.2.69.)
40 buttons be disclosed i.e. buds open out.
42 blastments blightings. OED records no other usages of this word, except late ones deriving from this.
44 to itself rebels 'acts contrary to its better nature' (Kittredge).
48, 50 thorny way / primrose path The image of two contrasting roads was one of the commonest ways of distinguishing a life of virtue from one of vice. It was frequently pictured as 'the choice of Hercules', showing the hero making up his mind which path to follow. See E. Panofsky, Hercules am Scheideweg, 1930.
51 recks...rede pays no attention to his own counsel.
Enter Polonius

I stay too long – But here my father comes.
A double blessing is a double grace;
Occasion smiles upon a second leave.

Polonius Yet here Laertes? Aboard, aboard for shame!
The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail,
And you are stayed for. There, my blessing with thee,
And these few precepts in thy memory
Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel,
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatched, unfledged courage. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,
Bear't that th'opposèd may beware of thee.
Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice;

54 Occasion…leave A second leave-taking is a fortunate occurrence. As with Ophelia’s two paths (above) this is an emblem or moral picture; Occasion or Opportunity is shown as a goddess. See H. Green, Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers, 1870, pp. 261–5.
55 aboard for shame! ‘for shame’ attached to an imperative (or a word of injunction) creates an admonition. Compare ‘Doff it for shame!’ King John 3.1.128. Most editors put a comma after ‘aboard’ as though ‘for shame’ were a separate exclamation and reproof.
58 these few precepts In the previous scene, the present scene and the next, parents are busy advising and instructing children, and attempting to regulate their lives. The tables are turned in the second half of the play, when Hamlet admonishes his mother and the dutiful Laertes rebels against his king.
59 character inscribe. Accent on second syllable.
60 Nor…act Once again (see note to 1.3.21) a speech in an entirely separate context seems to refer directly to a central problem of the play – the proper relation between ‘thought’ and ‘act’. Compare the rather different advice given to Laertes by Claudius at 4.7.117–18.

61 but…vulgar i.e. but don’t be familiar with everybody.
62 and…tried whose worthiness to be adopted you have tested.
64 dull thy palm make your hand insensitive. The handshake is seen as a sensitive means of registering true friendship. ‘Palm to palm is holy palmers’ kiss’, said Juliet.
65 courage So q2 and q1. F reads ‘comrade’, a much easier reading. Kittredge suggested ‘com-rague’, or fellow-rogue, and this, or ‘comrouge’ has won some support. OED (ib), giving the main meaning of ‘courage’ as heart, spirit, disposition, says it can be used of a person (as we use both ‘heart’ and ‘spirit’) and cites Hoby’s translation of Castiglione’s The Courtier, Book 4. Certain buildings erected by various great men are ‘a great witness of the prowess of those divine courages’. If we consult the trilingual edition of 1588, we find (sig. L1 3 recto) that the last three words are the equivalent of the Italian quegli animi divini and the French ces esprits divins. So the word means a man of spirit, and no doubt could be used in a derogatory way: a dashing fellow. The accent must fall on the second syllable.
67 Bear’t that Manage it so that, so carry it that.
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgement.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy: rich, not gaudy.
For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
And they in France of the best rank and station
Are of a most select and generous chief in that.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all, to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell, my blessing season this in thee.

LAERTES Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.
POLONIUS The time invites you. Go, your servants tend.
LAERTES Farewell Ophelia, and remember well
What I have said to you.

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

LAERTES Farewell.

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
Given private time to you, and you yourself

69 censure judgement (not necessarily adverse).
70 habit apparel, clothes.
74 Are...that i.e. have an exquisite and noble gift in choosing the right clothes. The main problem in this much-discussed line is 'chief', which appears in F as 'cheff'. With some strain, we can take it as a noun meaning 'excellence'. But I think it possible that a somewhat unusual word appeared in Shakespeare's MS., which eventually turns up as 'cheff' in F, and which defeated the Q compositor so that, as so often, he had recourse to Q1 and borrowed 'chiefe' from it (having earlier in the line misread 'And' as 'Or'). It is tempting to think that Polonius had his own idea of what French chef meant.
77 husbandry thrift.
78 to...true There are higher aims in life than to be true to such a limited self as Polonius. Again, these words rise from their immediate context and radiate over the whole play. Such an injunction, of dubious value for Polonius and Laertes, touches the centre of Hamlet's predicament. 'To thine own self be true!' But to which self? He cannot reach the self to which he must be true.
81 season bring to due season, ripen.
83 invites A number of editors, from Theobald on, have felt that Q's 'invites' could be justified (= lays siege to). It is certainly an odd word to come up as a misreading, and it ought to be preferred on the principle of 'the more difficult reading', but F's 'invites' seems obviously correct.
83 tend attend.
90 Marry By the Virgin Mary.
90 well bethought he did well to think of that.
Compare Pericles 5.1.44.
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 honour.
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? Puh! 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 tane these tenders for true pay,
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly,
Or - not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
Roaming it thus - you'll tender me a fool.

OPHELIA
My lord, he hath importuned me with love
In honourable 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
94 put on me given to me.
97 behooves becomes, befits.
102 Unsifted inexperienced (literally, not strained through a sieve).
106 tane taken: the common shortened form of the past participle. Modern editions usually give the awkward and unhistorical spelling ‘ta’en’, which wrongly suggests a two-syllable pronunciation.
107 Tender yourself Look after yourself.
109 Roaming Polonius means he doesn’t want to tire the phrase out by too much verbal roaming. The use of ‘it’ as the indefinite object of a more-or-less intransitive verb is fully exemplified in Franz, Die Sprache Shakespeares, 1939, p. 272. Most examples are of noun-verbs; e.g. ‘my true lip / Hath virgined it e’er since’ (Coriolanus 5.3.48), or ‘I will queen it no inch farther’ (Winter’s Tale 4.4.449). But compare ‘I come to wive it wealthily in Padua’ (Shrew 1.2.73); ‘And revel it as bravely as the best’ (Shrew 4.3.54); ‘Nor should that nation boast it so with us’ (1 Henry VI 3.3.23); ‘She sweeps it through the court with troops of ladies’ (2 Henry VI 1.3.77). See further in OED §9.

As for q2’s ‘Wrong’, w and r are easily mistaken in Elizabethan handwriting, or Shakespeare’s ‘romìg’ might have been read as ‘rong’ (compare Wilson, MSH, pp. 315-16).

109 tender me a fool present me as a fool. (Other interpretations include ‘present yourself as a fool to me’ and Dowden’s ingenious idea, ‘present me with an illegitimate baby’.) Polonius’s concern here is for himself. He is thinking what a fool he will look at court if Ophelia is involved in a scandal.

110 importuned Accent on second syllable.
112 fashion See line 6 above.
115 springes snares.
116-17 how... lends i.e. how prodigal (lavish) the soul is in lending.
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 scantier of your maiden presence.
Set your entreatments at a higher rate
Than a command to parley. For Lord Hamlet,
Believe so much in him, that he is young
And with a larger tedder 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 bonds,
The better to beguile. This is for all:
I would not in plain terms from this time forth
Have you so slander any moment leisure
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.
Look to't I charge you. Come your ways.

Ophelia I shall obey, my lord.

Exeunt
[1.4] Enter HAMLET, HORATIO and MARCELLUS

HAMLET  The air bites shrewdly, it is very cold.
HORATIO  It is a nipping and an eager air.
HAMLET  What hour now?
HORATIO  I think it lacks of twelve.
MARCELLUS  No, it is struck.
HORATIO  Indeed? I heard it not. It then draws near the season
Wherein the spirit held his wont to walk.

A flourish of trumpets and two pieces goes off
What does this mean, my lord?

HAMLET  The king doth wake tonight and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail, and the swaggering up-spring reels,
And as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge.

HORATIO  Is it a custom?

HAMLET  Ay marry is't,
But to my mind, though I am native here
And to the manner born, it is a custom
More honoured in the breach than the observance.

[This heavy-headed revel east and west

Act 1, Scene 4
In this and the next scene we return to the 'platform' of the first scene.

1 shrewdly keenly, injuriously. Compare Richard II 3.2.59, 'To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown'. (The original meaning of 'shrewd' is 'malicious', 'ill-disposed'.)

2 eager sharp, biting. Compare 1.5.69.

3 lacks of i.e. is just short of.

6 held his wont had its custom.

6 SD two pieces goes off i.e. a salvo from two cannons is fired.

8 wake make a night-time celebration.

8-9 takes his rouse, / Keeps wassail More or less synonymous phrases for ceremonious carousal and wine-drinking.

9 swaggering up-spring reels The meaning is uncertain. 'up-spring' may be a German dance, in which case Jenkins's solution is best. He argues that

' reel ' means to dance riotously, and that the subject of the verb is Claudius, who dances the up-spring.

10 Rhenish Rhine wine.

10-12 And as...pledge As the king had promised. See 1.2.124-8.

12 triumph Properly, a public celebration of an important event. Used ironically here.

12 pledge toast.

15 to the manner born i.e. accustomed to this way of behaving since birth.

16 More honoured... observance i.e. it shows more honour in a man to break the custom than to observe it.

17-38 It is argued in the Introduction (p. 14) that this passage, which is found in q2 but not in f, was in fact discarded by Shakespeare during the composition of the play.

17 east and west everywhere (i.e. by other nations everywhere).
Makes us traduced and taxed of other nations.
They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase
Soil our addition; and indeed it takes
From our achievements, though performed at height,
The pith and marrow of our attribute.
So, oft it chances in particular men,
That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
As in their birth, wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin,
By their o’ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
Or by some habit that too much o’erleavens
The form of pleasive manners – that these men,
Carrying I say the stamp of one defect,
Being nature’s livery or fortune’s star,
His virtues else be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo,
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault. The dram of eale
Doth all the noble substance of a doubt
To his own scandal.]

Enter GHOST

HORATIO

Look my lord, it comes!

18 traduced and taxed of slandered and censured by.
19 clepe call.
19–20 with swinish...addition pollute our proper title or description ('addition') by calling us pigs.
20–2 it takes...attribute our fondness for drink robs the best of our achievements of the very essence of the reputation due to us.
24 mole of nature natural mark.
26 his its.
27 their o’ergrowth of some complexion the excessive growth of some natural tendency. The allusion is to the doctrine of the four humours, blood, phlegm, choler and melancholy, whose proper balance was necessary for a stable temperament.
28 pales palisades.
29 habit (here) a bad habit.
29 too much o’erleavens Too much leaven in the dough will ruin the bread. So too great an admixture of 'some habit' will ruin the form of pleasing manners.
32 nature’s livery a dress marking one’s servitude to nature.
32 fortune’s star a destiny falling to one by chance. For ‘star’ in this transferred sense (cause for effect), see OED sv sb1 3c which cites Hamlet 2.2.141, ‘a prince out of thy star’.
34 undergo support.
36–8 dram of eale...scandal It is impossible to recover the correct reading of these lines. Nosworthy argued that the sentence is unfinished; that Shakespeare had lost faith in the speech, and 'gave up the struggle' (Shakespeare’s Occasional Plays, p. 141). 'eale' is clearly a misreading; there have been many conjectures to replace it. It is obvious that the general significance is that a mere 'dram' of bad matter ruins an entire 'noble substance'.

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 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 canonised bones, hearsed in death,  
Have burst their cerements; why the sepulchre,  
Wherein we saw thee quietly enurned,  
Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws  
To cast thee up again. What may this mean,  
That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel  
Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,  
Making night hideous, and we fools of nature  
So horridly to shake our disposition  
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?  
Say, why is this? wherefore? What should we do?  

Ghost beckons Hamlet

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

MARCELLUS Look with what courteous action

40 spirit of health an uncorrupted spirit, bringing 'airs from heaven' (41) and 'charitable' intents (42).
40 goblin damned a demon, bringing 'blasts from hell' and 'wicked' intents.
43 questionable shape 'shape' means the external dress or guise (see Glossary to Massinger, ed. Edwards and Gibson, vol. v). Whatever the ghost may be essentially, its external appearance is of a being who can be questioned.
47 canonised consecrated. Accent on second syllable.
47 hearsed coffined. Accent on first syllable. The line as a whole gets a strong rhythmic effect from disputing the underlying iambic structure; viz. 'Why thy canonis'd bones, hearsed in death.'
48 cerements grave-clothes. Pronounced seer-ments.
49 enurned So F ('enurn'd'). Some modern editions prefer Q2's 'inter'd', which also appears in Q1. No one but Shakespeare could have created so strong a reading as 'enurned'. 'urn' was often used loosely by Shakespeare and others to mean a grave, but the word is here not literal but metaphorical: the sepulchre envelops and encloses the body as though it were a funerary urn. It has been suggested that Shakespeare wrote 'enurned' during revision. It is much more probable that it was the original word, and that the Q2 compositor, faced with a coinage that was not in his vocabulary, turned to the safety of Q1's familiar but weakened reading.
52 complete steel full armour ('complete').
53 glimpses pale gleams.
54 fools of nature natural creatures, too ignorant to understand what lies beyond.
55 horridly...disposition to upset ourselves so violently.
59 impartment communication.
It wafts you to a more removed 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?
It waves me forth again. I’ll follow it.

HORATIO What if it tempt you toward the flood my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o’er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason,
And draw you into madness? Think of it.
[The very place puts toys of desperation,
Without more motive, into every brain
That looks so many fathoms to the sea
And hears it roar beneath.]
HAMLET It wafts me still. Go on, I’ll follow thee.

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

61 wafts F; waues Q2, Q1 63 I will] Q2; will I F, Q1 70 summit] Rome; somnet Q2; Sonnet F 70 cliff] F: cleefe Q2 71 beetles] F; bettles Q2 72 assume] Q2, Q1; assumes F 75-8 The very...beneath] Q2; not in F 79 wafts] F; waues Q2 80 off] F; of Q2 80 hands] Q2; hand F 82 arture] Q2; Artire F

61 wafts F’s reading; it means the same as Q2’s ‘waves’, which is probably derived from Q1. Compare Timon 1.1.70, ‘Whom Fortune with her ivory hand wafts to her’, ‘wafts’ for Q2’s ‘waves’ occurs again at 79, but both texts agree on ‘waves’ at 68.

65 fee payment; hence ‘worth’.

69 flood sea.

71 beetles o’er overhangs like bushy eyebrows. As OED notes, Shakespeare coined the verb ‘beettle’ from a recollection of a passage in Sidney’s Arcadia, Book 1, ch. 10, ‘they past in a pleasant valley, (of either side of which high hills lifted up their beetle-brows, as if they would over looke the pleasantness of their under-prospect).’

73 deprive...reason take away the sovereignty (supremacy) of your reason.
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.  
Still am I called. Unhand me gentlemen!  
By heaven I'll make a ghost of him that lets me.  
I say away! – Go on, I'll follow thee.  

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.

Exeunt

[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 sulph'rous and tormenting flames  
Must render up myself.
HAMLET Alas poor ghost!
GHOST Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing  
To what I shall unfold.
HAMLET Speak, I am bound to hear.
GHOST So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.
HAMLET What?
GHOST I am thy father's spirit,  
Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part
And each particular hair to stand an end
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, oh list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love—

HAMLET O God!

GHOST Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

HAMLET Murder?

GHOST Murder most foul, as in the best it is,
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.

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

GHOST I find thee apt,
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed
That rots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,
Wouldst thou not stir in this. Now Hamlet, hear.
'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forged process of my death
Rankly abused; but know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.

**HAMLET**

O my prophetic soul!

**GHOST** Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts –
O wicked wit and gifts that have the power
So to seduce – won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming virtuous queen.
O Hamlet, what a falling off was there,
From me whose love was of that dignity
That it went hand in hand even with the vow
I made to her in marriage, and to decline
Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
To those of mine.
But virtue as it never will be moved,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed,
And prey on garbage.
But soft, methinks I scent the morning air;
Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of my ears did pour
The leperous distilment, whose effect
Holds such an enmity with blood of man
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body,
And with a sudden vigour it doth posset
And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine,
And a most instant tetter barked about,
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust,
All my smooth body.
Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother’s hand,
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatched;
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhouseled, disappointed, unanelled;

55 lust] F; but Q2
55 angel] F; Angle Q2
56 sate] F; sort Q2
58 morning] Q2; Mornings F
59 my] Q2, Q1
60 of] Q2; in F, Q1
62 hebenon] Hebenon F; Hebona Q2, Q1
63 my] Q2, Q1
68 posset] F;
possesse Q2
69 eager] Q2, Q1; Aygre F
71 barked] barckt Q2; bak’d F
75 of queen] Q2; and Queene F

56 sate itself become satiated; cease to find satisfaction.
61 Upon my secure hour (secure) at a time when I felt free from all danger. (secure’ implied an absence of precaution, almost the opposite of its modern meaning.)
62 hebenon Both the true reading and the meaning are uncertain. Q2’s ‘Hebona’ seems to derive from q1. Marlowe has ‘the juice of hebon’ as a poison in Jew of Malta 3.4.101. Hebenus is Latin for ebony, but was applied to other trees, and the resin of the guaiacum tree has been suggested as the drug in question. Possibly there is confusion with henbane, which is a poison. See R. R. Simpson in The Listener, 17 April 1947.
63 the porches of my ears i.e. the ears as porches of the body. It was widely believed that drugs, therapeutic or toxic, could be administered via the ear. The auditory or eustachian tube which might allow a liquid in the ear to find its way to the pharynx and be swallowed, was known to the Greeks but not fully described until 1564, by Bartolommeo Eustachio. See New England Journal of Medicine 307 (1982), 259-61, 1531.
64 leperous causing leprosy.
64 distilment distillation (in a general sense; a liquid preparation).
68 posset curdle.
69 eager sour, acid. French aigre.
71 tetter skin disease.
71 barked about surrounded like bark.
75 dispatched bereft by being put to death.
76 in the blossoms of my sin i.e. in a state of sinfulness. Compare the similar image in 3.3.81, ‘his crimes broad blown, as flush as May’.
77 Unhouseled... unanelled Without the sacrament, not appointed or prepared for death, without extreme unction.
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head –
Oh horrible, oh horrible, most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee bear it not;
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.
But howsoever thou pursues this act
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once.
The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
And gins to pale his uneffectual fire.
Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.

HAMLET
O all you host of heaven! 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?

Exit

he's somewhat tainted’ refers to mental disturbance.

93 And shall I couple hell? The enormity of
what he has heard makes Hamlet appeal first to
heaven to witness, then turn to earth as the scene
of these crimes, and finally to hell as their source.
95 bear me stiffly up keep me from collapsing.
97 this distracted globe It is the world that
Hamlet is talking about, not his head. Editors
suggest he should ‘put his hand upon his head’. But
the power and importance of this sentence is that
it refers to a disordered world, and preludes
Hamlet's conviction that he is called upon, not to
right a personal wrong, but to repair a distracted
world (189–90 below). The Ghost and his terrible
news are to be remembered as long as memory
continues to exist among mankind, so long as they
value the past as a guide to future conduct, and
remember order, morality, justice. Then, with his
second ‘Remember thee?’, Hamlet turns to
himself, to ‘my memory’. For his part, he will erase
all inessential and misleading memory, and preserve
only what is truly valuable. It only dilutes the
strength of this passage to find a triple pun here:
world, head and theatre.
Yea, from the table of my memory
I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there,
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmixed with baser matter: yes, by heaven!
O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling damned villain!
My tables – meet it is I set it down
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;
At least I’m sure it may be so in Denmark. [Writing]
So uncle, there you are. Now to my word:
It is ‘Adieu, adieu, remember me.’
I have sworn’t.

**HORATIO (Within)** My lord, my lord!

**MARCELLUS (Within)** Lord Hamlet!

**Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS**

**HORATIO** So be it.

**MARCELLUS** Illo, ho, ho, my lord!

**HAMLET** Heavens secure him!

**MARCELLUS** Illo, ho, ho, my lord!

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98 table tablet, slate.
99 fond foolish.
99 records Things written down worthy to be remembered. Accent on second syllable.
100 saws common sayings or maxims.
100 forms set phrases, formulistic thoughts.
100 pressures imprints or impressions (continues the image of clichés and stereotyped thoughts).
101 observation dutiful attention. Hamlet is not talking of what he had noted from a personal and independent viewpoint – even a youthful one. ‘observation’ more often than not meant in Shakespeare’s time a deferential, even obsequious, attention to one’s superiors, and imitation of them or obedience to them. So Faulconbridge in *John 1.1.207–8* says ‘he is but a bastard to the time ‘/That doth not smack of observation’. Jonson, in *Poetaster 4.3.104–7* has ‘Alas, sir, Horace! he is a mere sponge; nothing but humours and observation; he goes up and down sucking from every society, and when he comes home again, squeezes himself dry again.’
107 tables memorandum book (see 98 above)
108 smile...villain Compare Chaucer, ‘The smiler with the knife under the cloak’ (*Knight’s Tale* 1999). Coleridge remarks that Hamlet, having vowed ‘to make his memory a blank of all maxims and generalised truths’, immediately notes down this ‘generalised fact’. Hamlet’s point, I take it, is that *this* truth is one he has discovered for himself; it’s the first of the new entries. The general truth is immediately qualified by the certificate of personal experience: ‘At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark.’ The grim humour of this little piece of theatre, in a speech commencing in shock and horror, is extraordinary.
110 Now to my word Hamlet has not yet vowed to obey the Ghost’s command. He now gives his word – very solemnly, perhaps kneeling as Wilson suggests, and rising with ‘I have sworn’t’ (112) or ‘So be it’ (114).
HAMLET Hillo, ho, ho, boy! Come bird, come.
MARCELLUS How is't, my noble lord?

HAMLET Oh, wonderful!
MARCELLUS How is't, my noble lord?
HAMLET 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?

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 desire shall point you,
For every man hath business and desire,
Such as it is, and for my own poor part,
Look you, I'll go pray.

HORATIO These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.
HAMLET I'm sorry they offend you, heartily,
Yes faith, heartily.

HORATIO There's no offence my lord.
HAMLET Yes by Saint Patrick but there is Horatio,
And much offence too. Touching this vision here,
It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you.
For your desire to know what is between us,
O’ermaster’t as you may. And now good friends,
As you are friends, scholars, and soldiers,
Give me one poor request.

**HORATIO** What is’t my lord? we will.

**HAMLET** Never make known what you have seen tonight.

**HORATIO** My lord we will not.

**HAMLET** Nay but swear’t.

**HORATIO** My lord not I.

**MARCELLUS** Nor I my lord in faith.

**HAMLET** Upon my sword.

**MARCELLUS** We have sworn my lord already.

**HAMLET** Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

**GHOST** Swear.

*Ghost cries under the stage*

**HAMLET** Ha, ha, boy, sayst thou so? art thou there truepenny?
Come on, you hear this fellow in the cellarage,
Consent to swear.

**HORATIO** Propose the oath my lord.

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

**GHOST** Swear.

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

**GHOST** Swear.

**HAMLET** Well said old mole, canst work i’th’earth so fast?
A worthy pioneer. Once more remove, good friends.

HORATIO O day and night, but this is wondrous strange.

HAMLET And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

But come—

Here as before, never so help you mercy,

How strange or odd 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,

With arms encumbered thus, or this head-shake,

Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,

As ‘Well, well, we know,’ or ‘We could and if we would,’

Or ‘If we list to speak,’ or ‘There be and if they might,’

Or such ambiguous giving out, to note

That you know aught of me: this not to do,

So grace and mercy at your most need help you,

Swear.

GHOST Swear.

HAMLET Rest, rest, perturbed spirit. So gentlemen,

With all my love I do commend me to you,

163 pioneer soldier responsible for excavations and tunnelling.

165 as a stranger...welcome i.e. it has a special call on your hospitality. For the particular importance of this remark, see the Introduction, pp. 45-6.

167 your philosophy So Q2 and Q1. F’s ‘our’ is probably a compositor’s error. ‘your’ is less likely to blame Horatio for his scepticism than to indicate slight contempt for philosophy itself (meaning intellectual investigation, science). Compare 5.1.145, ‘a score decayer of your whoreson dead body’.

170 How strange...myself Hamlet will ally himself with the ‘stranger’ by estranging himself from accepted norms of behaviour.

172 an antic disposition fantastic and foolish manner.

174 encumbered entangled. An unusual word in this context, but see Johnson’s Dictionary.

176, 177 and if if.

177 list wished.

179–81 this not to do...Swear So F and Q1. This must be what was said on the stage before 1603. Q2 puts it quite differently (see collation). Shakespeare had got Hamlet into an impossible grammatical tangle. It looks as if the different readings of F and Q2 represent different views of a perplexed MS. (possibly containing interleaved revision) showing Shakespeare trying to save a grammatical lost cause.

183 Perhaps at this point Horatio and Marcellus silently swear on the hilt of Hamlet’s sword. Wilson, Spencer and Jenkins think they swear silently three separate times. There is no indication in the text when, if ever, the formal oath is taken. It seems best not to impose a decision by means of a stage direction.

184 I do commend me to you I entrust myself to you. This routine way of expressing devotion has here something of the force of the phrase’s proper meaning.
And what so poor a man as Hamlet is
May do t'express his love and friend ing 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: O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right. –
Nay come, let's go together.

Exeunt

2.1 Enter Polonius and Reynaldo

Polonius Give him this money, and these notes, Reynaldo.
Reynaldo I will my lord.
Polonius You shall do marvellous wisely, good Reynaldo,
Before you visit him, to make inquire
Of his behaviour.
Reynaldo My lord, I did intend it.
Polonius Marry well said, very well said. Look you sir,
Inquire me first what Danskers are in Paris,
And how, and who, what means, and where they keep,
What company, at what expense; and finding
By this encompassment and drift of question
That they do know my son, come you more nearer
Than your particular demands will touch it.
Take you as 'twere some distant knowledge of him,
As thus, 'I know his father and his friends,
And in part him' – do you mark this Reynaldo?

REYNALDO Ay, very well, my lord.

POLONIUS 'And in part him, but' – you may say – ‘not well, But if't be he I mean, he's very wild, Addicted so and so’ – and there put on him What forgeries you please; marry, none so rank As may dishonour him, take heed of that, But sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips As are companions noted and most known To youth and liberty.

REYNALDO As gaming my lord?

POLONIUS Ay, or drinking, fencing, swearing, Quarrelling, drabbing – you may go so far.

REYNALDO My lord, that would dishonour him.

POLONIUS Faith no, as you may season it in the charge. You must not put another scandal on him, That he is open to incontinency, That's not my meaning. But breathe his faults so quaintly That they may seem the taints of liberty, The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind, A savageness in unreclaimed blood, Of general assault.

REYNALDO But my good lord –

POLONIUS Wherefore should you do this?

REYNALDO Ay my lord, I would know that.

POLONIUS Marry sir, here's my drift, And I believe it is a fetch of warrant. You laying these slight sullies on my son,
As 'twere a thing a little soiled i'th'working,
Mark you,
Your party in converse, him you would sound,
Having ever seen in the prenominate crimes
The youth you breathe of guilty, be assured
He closes with you in this consequence,
'Good sir', or so, or 'friend', or 'gentleman',
According to the phrase and the addition
Of man and country.

REYNALDO

Very good my lord.

POLONIUS

And then sir does a this—a does—what was I about to say?

By the mass I was about to say something. Where did I leave?

REYNALDO

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

POLONIUS

At 'closes in the consequence'—ay marry,
He closes with you thus: 'I know the gentleman,
I saw him yesterday, or the other day,
Or then, or then, with such or such, and as you say,
There was a gaming, there o'ertook in's rouse,
There falling out at tennis', or perchance,
'I saw him enter such a house of sale'—
Videlicet, a brothel—so forth. See you now,
Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth,
And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,
With windlasses and with assays of bias,
By indirections find directions out.
So, by my former lecture and advice,
Shall you my son. You have me, have you not?

REYNALDO My lord, I have.

POLONIUS God buy ye, fare ye well.

REYNALDO Good my lord.

POLONIUS Observe his inclination in yourself.

REYNALDO I shall my lord.

POLONIUS And let him ply his music.

REYNALDO Well my lord.

POLONIUS Farewell.

Exit Reynaldo

Enter OPHELIA

How now Ophelia, what's the matter?

OPHELIA Oh my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted.

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

OPHELIA My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
Lord Hamlet with his doublet all unbraced,
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors – he comes before me.

POLONIUS Mad for thy love?

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

POLONIUS What said he?

OPHELIA He took me by the wrist, and held me hard;
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,

64 directions the way things are going.
67 God buy ye One of the many ways of writing the shortened 'God be with ye' = goodbye.
69 in yourself personally.
75 closet private room.
76 doublet the Elizabethan jacket.
76 unbraced unfastened.
78 down-gyved fallen down and resembling fetters.
80 in purport in what it expressed.
83 Mad for thy love? Totally beside himself, for love of thee? This idea of 'the ecstasy of love' (100 below), a distraction making the lover oblivious of customary forms, merges easily in the Elizabethan mind with actual insanity. Compare All's Well 5.3.260-1, 'he was mad for her, and talked of Satan and Limbo and of furies'. (Compare US slang 'mad about someone'.)


And with his other hand thus o'er his brow
He falls to such perusal of my face
As a 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
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And with his head over his shoulder turned
He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
For out-a-doors he went without their helps
And to the last bended their light on me.

POLONIUS Come, go with me, I will go seek the king.
This is the very ecstasy of love,
Whose violent property fordoes itself,
And leads the will to desperate undertakings
As oft as any passion under heaven
That does afflict our natures. I am sorry.
What, have you given him any hard words of late?

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

POLONIUS That hath made him mad.
I am sorry that with better heed and judgement
I had not quoted him. I feared he did but trifle,
And meant to wrack thee, but beshrew 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

93-4 shatter...being Ophelia discerns rightly.
This sigh is Hamlet's expulsion of his past life.
99, 115 Come, go with me...Come, go we
99 to the king But Polonius goes alone to the king
(2.2.40). In Q1, however, Ophelia does accompany
him. These phrases are clear signs of a possible
alternative ordering of the scenes in Shakespeare's

100 ecstasy madness.
101 Whose...itself Which has violence enough
to cause self-destruction.
To lack discretion. Come, go we to the king.
This must be known, which being kept close, might move
More grief to hide than hate to utter love.
Come.

Exeunt

2.2 Flourish. Enter King and Queen, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, with others

Claudius Welcome dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern!
Moreover that we much did long to see you,
The need we have to use you did provoke
Our hasty sending. Something have you heard
Of Hamlet's transformation – so call it,
Sith 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 so neighboured to his youth and haviour,
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 to us unknown afflicts him thus,
GERTRUDE 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 a while, 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.

CLAUDIUS Thanks Rosencrantz, and gentle Guildenstern.

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

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

GERTRUDE Ay, amen.

Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern [and some Attendants]

Enter POLONIUS

POLONIUS Th'ambassadors from Norway, my good lord, Are joyfully returned.
CLAUDIUS Thou still hast been the father of good news.

POLONIUS Have I my lord? Assure you, my good liege,
    I hold my duty, as I hold my soul,
Both to my God and to my gracious king;
And I do think, or else this brain of mine
Hunts not the trail of policy so sure
As it hath used to do, that I have found
The very cause of Hamlet's lunacy.

CLAUDIUS Oh speak of that, that do I long to hear.

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

CLAUDIUS Thyself do grace to them and bring them in.

[Exit Polonius]

He tells me, my dear Gertrude, he hath found
The head and source of all your son's distemper.

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

CLAUDIUS Well, we shall sift him.

Enter POLONIUS, VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS

Welcome my good friends.

Say Voltemand, what from our brother Norway?

VOLTEMAND Most fair return of greetings and desires.

Upon our first, he sent out to suppress
His nephew's levies, which to him appeared
To be a preparation 'gainst the Polack;
But better looked into, he truly found
It was against your highness; whereat grieved
That so his sickness, age and impotence
Was falsely borne in hand, sends out arrests
On Fortinbras, which he in brief obeys,
Receives rebuke from Norway, and in fine
Makes vow before his uncle never more
To give th’assay of arms against your majesty.
Whereon old Norway, overcome with joy,
Gives him three thousand crowns in annual fee,
And his commission to employ those soldiers,
So levied as before, against the Polack;
With an entreaty, herein further shown,
That it might please you to give quiet pass
Through your dominions for this enterprise,
On such regards of safety and allowance
As therein are set down.

[Gives a document]

CLAUDIUS

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

Exeunt Ambassadors

POLONIUS

This business is well ended.

My liege, and madam, to expostulate
What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,
I will be brief. Your noble son is mad.

67 borne in hand imposed on, abused with false pretences.
69 in fine in conclusion.
71 give th’assay make the trial.
73 three thousand So F and Q1. Q2 reads ‘threescore thousand’, which bedevils the metre. Probably Q2 failed to observe the intended deletion of ‘score’. See Introduction, p. 10.
73 fee payment.
79 regards considerations.
79 allowance permission.
80 likes pleases.
81 more considered time time more suitable for consideration.
82 Answer, and think Either this is the wrong way round, or Claudius means by ‘think’ that he will reflect upon what this affair implies for the future.
86 expostulate argue about, discuss.
90 wit intellectual keenness.
91 tediousness prolixity, long-windedness.
91 flourishes embellishments.
Mad call I it, for to define true madness,
What is't but to be nothing else but mad?
But let that go.

Gertrude  More matter with less art.

Polonius Madam, I swear I use no art at all.
That he is mad, 'tis true; 'tis true 'tis pity,
And pity 'tis 'tis true - a foolish figure,
But farewell it, for I will use no art.
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.
I have a daughter - have while she is mine -
Who in her duty and obedience, mark,
Hath given me this. Now gather and surmise.

Reads the letter
'To the celestial, and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia,' -
That's an ill phrase, a vile phrase, 'beautified' is a vile phrase - but
you shall hear. Thus:
'In her excellent white bosom, these, et cetera.'

Gertrude Came this from Hamlet to her?

Polonius Good madam stay awhile, I will be faithful.

'Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love.
'O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers, I have not art to reckon my groans; but that I love thee best, O most best, believe it. Adieu.
'Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him, Hamlet.'
This in obedience hath my daughter shown me,
And, more above, hath his solicitings,
As they fell out, by time, by means, and place,
All given to mine ear.

CLAUDIUS
But how hath she
Received his love?

POLONIUS
What do you think of me?

CLAUDIUS
As of a man faithful and honourable.

POLONIUS
I would fain prove so. But what might you think,
When I had seen this hot love on the wing—
As I perceived it, I must tell you that,
Before my daughter told me—what might you,
Or my dear majesty your queen here, think,
If I had played the desk, or table-book,
Or given my heart a winking, mute and dumb,
Or looked upon this love with idle sight—
What might you think? No, I went round to work,
And my young mistress thus I did bespeak:
'Lord Hamlet is a prince out of thy star.
This must not be.' And then I prescripts gave her,
That she should lock herself from his resort,

117 Doubt truth 'doubt' changes meaning here to 'suspect', but each of the first three lines means the same, 'you may challenge the unchallengeable, but...'
119 ill at these numbers no good at making verses.
120 reckon enumerate in metrical form, or 'numbers'.
121 this machine his body.
124 more above furthermore, moreover.
124-6 hath his...mine ear She has given Polonius information about all his overtures to her, in their order of occurrence, with details of the time, the means of communication and the place.
129 fain gladly. Always used by Shakespeare in the construction 'would fain'.
130 played...or table-book i.e. taken note and said nothing.
135 given...winking closed the eyes of his heart; i.e. connived at the affair.
137 round (= roundly) without prevarication.
138 bespeak speak to.
139 out of thy star outside your destiny. See note to 1.4.32.
140 prescripts orders.
141 his resort his visiting.
Admit no messengers, receive no tokens.
Which done, she took the fruits of my advice,
And he, repulsed - a short tale to make -
Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,
Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness,
Thence to a lightness, and by this declension
Into the madness wherein now he raves,
And all we mourn for.

CLAUDIUS

Do you think 'tis this?

GERTRUDE

It may be, very like.

POLONIUS

Hath there been such a time, I'd fain know that,
That I have positively said, 'tis so,
When it proved otherwise?

CLAUDIUS

Not that I know.

POLONIUS

Take this from this, if this be otherwise.
If circumstances lead me, I will find
Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed
Within the centre.

CLAUDIUS

How may we try it further?

POLONIUS

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

GERTRUDE

So he does indeed.

POLONIUS

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

144 repulsed] F; repeli'd Q2 146 watch] F; wath Q2 147 a] F; not in Q2 148 wherein] Q2; whereon F 149 mourn] Q2; waile F 149 'tis] F; not in Q2 150 like] Q2; likely F 151 I'd] I'de F; I would Q2 159 does] Q2; ha's F

143 took the fruits received the benefit; reaped the harvest. The absurdity of Polonius's self-satisfaction is made clear in the ensuing lines: the only fruit of his advice was Hamlet's madness.

144 repulsed So F. Q2 reads 'repell'd'. F is the stronger and rarer reading, more likely to be reduced in transcription or composition to 'repelled' than vice versa. Ophelia 'repels' Hamlet's letters (2.1.107), but Hamlet himself is 'repulsed'.

146 watch wakefulness.

147 lightness lightheadedness. The word is not otherwise recorded in this sense, but editors point to Othello 4.1.269, 'Is he not light of brain?'

147 declension decline.

149 mourn So Q2. F reads 'wail', a strong reading which could be the true one; the word did not have its present exclusive meaning of loud crying, but signified 'lament' in any form. Compare Macbeth 3.1.121.

Polonius pointed to his head and shoulders. Dowden suggested he meant taking his wand of office from his hand.

157 centre (of the earth).

157 try test.

159 lobby ante-room, vestibule. It is on an upper floor of the palace (4.3.34).

Dover Wilson believed that Hamlet began to enter at this point and overheard the plot (What Happens in 'Hamlet', p. 106). Beerbohm Tree had already tried this out on the stage (Sprague, Shakespeare and the Actors, pp. 146-7). Hamlet's foreknowledge of the eavesdropping would put a totally different complexion on his behaviour in the nunnery scene; but there is no authority whatever for the early entry, and the theory should be strongly resisted. See also note to 3.1.126.

160 loose An unpleasant word to use, more suitable to animals than a daughter.
Be you and I behind an arras then.  
Mark the encounter: if he love her not,  
And be not from his reason fallen thereon,  
Let me be no assistant for a state,  
But keep a farm and carters.

CLAUDIUS  
We will try it.

Enter HAMLET reading on a book

GERTRUDE But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

POLONIUS Away, I do beseech you both, away.  
I'll board him presently.

Exeunt Claudius and Gertrude [and Attendants]  
Oh give me leave.

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

HAMLET Well, God-a-mercy.

POLONIUS Do you know me, my lord?

HAMLET Excellent well, y'are a fishmonger.

POLONIUS Not I my lord.

HAMLET Then I would you were so honest a man.

POLONIUS Honest my lord?

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

POLONIUS That's very true my lord.

HAMLET For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good  
kissing carrion – Have you a daughter?

165 But[ Q2: And v 165 SD reading on a book] v: not in Q2 168 SD Exeunt...Gertrude] Exit King & Queen v:  
at 167 in Q2 168 SD and Attendants] Malone: and Train/Capell: not in Q2, v 172 Excellent well] Q2:  
Excellent, excellent well v 172 y'are] v, Q2: you are Q2 177 ten] tenne Q2, Q1: two v 179 good] Q2, v: god  
Warburton

161 arras tapestry or hangings covering a wall.

165 At this point in Q1, the plan to use Ophelia as decoy is put into immediate effect (Ophelia has entered with Polonius). Gertrude exits, Claudius and Polonius withdraw, Hamlet enters with 'To be or not to be'. After the confrontation, Polonius remains on stage, and the fishmonger scene follows. See Introduction, pp. 25-7.

172 fishmonger When Hamlet calls Polonius a fishmonger, he means fishmonger and not something else. It is the zany inappropriateness of supposing this dignified and self-important councillor an unsavoury low-class seller of fish that makes the joke. Since Malone's time it has been commonly thought that Hamlet uses the term to mean wencher, bawd or fleshmonger. It seems true that fishmongers were thought of as a disreputable class (see Wilson's note) but it is important not to let secondary meanings and connotations – which are far from certainly established – invade and overwhelm primary meanings and diminish the main point of a passage. Compare the very similar case of 'nunnery', in the next scene.

179-80 a good kissing carrion The sun breeds maggots in a dead dog because it's a good bit of flesh to kiss – and talking of kissing and breeding, 'have you a daughter?' Hamlet has in mind the sun/son pun of 1.2. He feeds his victim with his victim's own fears: you can't keep me away any more than you can forbid the sun. If the sun can make a dead dog breed, a son can make your daughter breed.
POLONIUS I have my lord.

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

POLONIUS (Aside) How say you by that? Still harping on my daughter. Yet he knew me not at first, a said I was a fishmonger – a is far gone, far gone. And truly, in my youth I suffered much extremity for love, very near this. I'll speak to him again. – What do you read my lord?

HAMLET Words, words, words.

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 grey 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. All which sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down. For 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. – Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

HAMLET Into my grave?

POLONIUS Indeed that’s out of the air. (Aside) How pregnant sometimes his replies are! a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of. I will leave

182 but as] Q2; but not as F  
184 SD Aside] Malone; not in Q2, F  
185 a said] Q2; he said F  
185 a is] Q2; he is F  
185-6 far gone, far gone] F; farre gone Q2  
187 matter that you] Q2; matter you F, Q1  
192 read] Q2; meane F  
193 rogue] Q2; slaue F  
195 amber and] Amber, & Q2; Amber, or F  
195 lack] Q2; Locke F  
196 most weak] Q2; weake F  
198 yourself] Q2, Q1; you yourselfe Q2  
198 shall grow] Q2; should be F; shalbe Q1  
202 grave?] F; grave.  
203 that's out of the] Q2; that is out o' th' F  
205 sanity] F; sanctity Q2

184 harping on To harp on one string was a proverbial phrase for sticking to a single subject.  
185 a is This is presumably what stood in Shakespeare's MS. to represent the slurred pronunciation of 'he is'; something like 'uz'? Compare 3.3.73.  
190 matter subject-matter (but Hamlet pretends to understand it as the subject of contention or dispute).  
194 purging discharging.  
195 amber and plumtree gum Whereas the latter is a very familiar resin, 'amber' was used very vaguely and could mean half-a-dozen substances, from the Baltic fossil-resin to ambergris. Here it presumably means liquidamber, a tree resin. See OED Amber sb7, with quotation from 1569, 'The gumme called Amber, growth out of a tree'.  
195 wit understanding.  
197 honesty i.e. honourable.  
201 out of the air The open air, presumably; but this scene is supposed to be taking place in the lobby. Compare 3.2.339 and note.  
203 pregnant quick-witted (OED sv a2 3).  
204 happiness successful aptness (OED 3).

205–8 Q2 omits eleven words, reading 'I will leave him and my daughter. My Lord, I will take my leave of you.' It is interesting that this omission has to do with what seems to have been a vexed area of the plot—the organisation of the meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia, which is to be spied
him, and suddenly contrive the means of meeting between him and my daughter. – My honourable lord, I will most humbly take my leave of you.

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

POLONIUS Fare you well my lord.

HAMELT These tedious old fools!

Enter GUILDENSTERN and ROSENCRANTZ

POLONIUS You go to seek the Lord Hamlet, there he is.

ROSENCRANTZ God save you sir.

GUILDENSTERN My honoured lord!

ROSENCRANTZ My most dear lord!

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

ROSENCRANTZ As the indifferent children of the earth.

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

HAMELT Nor the soles of her shoe?

ROSENCRANTZ Neither, my lord.

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

GUILDENSTERN Faith, her privates we.

HAMELT In the secret parts of Fortune? Oh most true, she is a strumpet. What news?

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

HAMELT Then is doomsday near – but your news is not true. Let me...

on (see Introduction, p. 26). It may be that some indication for rewriting has been misunderstood by the Q2 compositor. Jenkins's note on this passage, concentrating on the spread-out typography in F, does not mention the Q2 omission. It seems highly likely that the imperfections of both Q2 and F at this point are related.

206 suddenly immediately.

219 indifferent i.e. in-between, at neither extreme.

221-2 very button...her shoe i.e. neither on the top nor trodden down.

224 favours Fortune's favours are compared with the sexual favours of a woman. (The word is not much used in this sense now, but was important in less free-spoken ages. See OED favour sb 2d.)

225 her privates we 'we are very intimate with her'.

229-56 This whole passage is not found in Q2 (see collation). It is much more likely that this is a cut than that F provides a later addition. By the time Q2 was printed in 1604, the position of Anne of Denmark as King James's consort might have made the printer cautious about setting up material naming Denmark as one of the worst prisons in the world.
question more in particular. What have you, my good friends, desired at the hands of Fortune, that she sends you to prison hither?

GUILDENSTERN Prison, my lord?

HAMLET Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ Then is the world one.

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

ROSENCRANTZ We think not so my lord.

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

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

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

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

HAMLET A dream itself is but a shadow.

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

HAMLET Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and out-stretched heroes the beggars' shadows. Shall we to th'court? for by my fay I cannot reason.

BOTH We'll wait upon you.

HAMLET No such matter. I will not sort you with the rest of my servants; for to speak to you like an honest man, I am most

236 confines, wards Terms for places of confinement.

239-40 nothing ... makes it so While this phrase voices an uncertainty about absolutes which reverberates throughout the play, Jenkins makes clear that at this point Hamlet is not directly maintaining 'that there are no ethical absolutes'. The relativism is about happiness: whether a place is good or bad to be in depends on one's mental attitude.

245, 248 Rosencrantz and Guildenstern make strenuous attempts to keep the conversation on the subject of ambition.

246 substance of the ambitious material which ambitious people live on.

250-1 Hamlet seems to mean that if the substance of the ambitious is a shadow, only the lowest in society will have real bodies - monarchs and great men are all ambitious, and are therefore shadows. But why are monarchs etc. 'the beggars' shadows'? ('outstretched' indicates those who have aspired or reached out, also applicable to a long shadow.)

252 fay faith.

252 I cannot reason Hamlet is wearing his antic disposition very lightly in this first encounter with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. His teasing, ironic stance is little removed from an acceptable banter between friends. But the cloak of feigned madness is never far away.

254 sort you class you.

255-6 I am ... attended I have such a rotten lot of servants. But the phrase has private meanings for Hamlet. He must mean the pressure of his own thoughts; Hudson points to the 'bad dreams' (NV). J. Q. Adams thinks Hamlet is already aware of Claudius's surveillance. D. R. C. Marsh, noting that the modern colloquial use of 'dreadfully' is not established as early as this by OED, suggests that the phrase must bring the Ghost to mind (SQ 33 (1982), 181–2).
2.2.256  Hamlet
dreadfully attended. But in the beaten way of friendship, what make
you at Elsinore?
ROSENCRANTZ  To visit you my lord, no other occasion.
HAMLET  Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks, but I thank
you — and sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear a halfpenny.
Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free
GUILDENSTERN  What should we say my lord?
HAMLET  Why, anything but to the purpose. You were sent for — and
there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties
have not craft enough to colour. I know the good king and queen
have sent for you.
ROSENCRANTZ  To what end my lord?
HAMLET  That you must teach me. But let me conjure you, by the rights
of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation
of our ever-preserved love, and by what more dear a better proposer
can charge you withal, be even and direct with me, whether you
were sent for or no.
ROSENCRANTZ (To Guildenstern) What say you?
HAMLET (Aside) Nay then I have an eye of you. — If you love me, hold
not off.
GUILDENSTERN  My lord, we were sent for.
HAMLET  I will tell you why. So shall my anticipation prevent your
discovery, and your secrecy to the king and queen moult no feather.
I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone
...friendship He means he has neglected the ordinary politeness of greeting. He
thus makes an offhand introduction of his own cross-examination.
259 Beggar that I am A beggar, in the terms of the preceding conversation, as he is not
ambitious; but a beggar in his own eyes as a dispossessed prince in prison.
260 too dear a halfpenny (i.e. at a halfpenny) not worth anything; certainly not like a king's
remembrance (see 26 above).
263 modesties sense of shame.
264 conjure solemnly entreat.
265 consonancy accord, agreement. He means the harmony between them in their younger days
(see 11 above).
all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire — why, it appeareth no other thing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. 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? 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.

HAMELT Why did ye laugh then, when I said man delights not me?

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

HAMELT He that plays the king shall be welcome, his majesty shall have tribute of me; the adventurous knight shall use his foil and target, the lover shall not sigh gratis, the humorous man shall end his part in peace, the clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickle

281 exercises] Q2; exercise F 281 heavily] Q2; heauenly F 284 firmament] Q2; not in F 285 appeareth] Q2; appeares F 285 no other thing] F; nothing Q2 285 but] Q2; than F 286 What a] F; What Q2 287 faculties] Q2; faculty F 287 moving how] F; moouing, how Q2 288 admirable, in] admirable in Q2 288 angel, in] Angel? in F; Angell in Q2 290 no, nor] F; nor Q2 291 woman] Q2; women Q2 294 ye] Q2; you F 294 then] Q2, Q1; not in F 299 of] F; on Q2 301-2 the clown...sere] F; not in Q2 301 tickle] Clark and Wright, conj. Staunton; tickled F

281 custom of exercises i.e. pursuing the activities of a gentleman, as fencing, riding, hawking, dancing. F reads 'custom of exercise', a very different matter, meaning 'exercise' as we would use it - what you do to keep your body fit.

282-3 sterile promontory 'a barren rocky point jutting out into the sea of eternity' (Kittredge).

284 fretted interlaced, patterned (as in a decorated ceiling).

286 What a piece of work Jenkins defends the reading of Q2, 'What piece of work', pointing out that the indefinite article could be omitted in an exclamation, e.g. 'What night is this', Julius Caesar 1.3.42. But compare 5.2.323, 'What a wounded name'.

287-9 in form...god Punctuation follows F; the punctuation in Q2 gives a quite different meaning. Wilson was a strong advocate of Q2's punctuation.

287 express It is not clear what this means. The gloss 'well fitted to its purpose' has been suggested. I think it has something to do with 'clearly stamped', or 'expressive'.

289 paragon pattern of excellence.

296 lenten i.e. austerere.

296 entertainment reception.

296-7 coted them passed them by.

298-9 his majesty...tribute of me as we pay money and offer adulation to real kings, so the Player King will get payment and praise. But there are no real kings in Elsinore at the moment; the implication is that Hamlet is prepared to honour one pseudo-king with as much seriousness as another.

299 foil and target sword and shield.

300 gratis for nothing.

300 humorous man Man with a humour in the Elizabethan sense, the eccentric.

301-2 tickle o'th'sere easily triggered (the 'sere' is a catch affecting the trigger-mechanism of a gun; 'tickle' means lightly set — and, of course, 'ticklish').
o’th’sere, and the lady shall say her mind freely – or the blank verse shall halt for’t. What players are they?

ROSENCRANTZ Even those you were wont to take such delight in, the tragedians of the city.

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

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ No indeed are they not.

HAMLET How comes it? Do they grow rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ Nay, their endeavour keeps in the wonted pace, but there is sir an eyrie of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question and are most tyrannically clapped for’t. These are

302 blank] F; black Q2 304 such delight] Q2; delight F, Q1 306 travel] trauaile Q2, F 311 are they] Q2; they are F 313–33 HAMLET How...load too] F; not in Q2

302–3 the lady...halt for’t The many ingenious explanations of this sentence seem to miss the obvious point – if the lady can’t say all she has to say – which will be the part that is written down for her – then clearly there will be some holes in the blank verse.

303 halt limp.

305 tragedians Properly, tragic actors; here, actors generally.

306–7 their residence...ways they did better in reputation and profit when they stayed at home.

308–9 their inhibition...innovation i.e. they are forbidden to play in the city because of the recent political disturbance. Although it is certain that this conversation is more about English than Danish theatrical conditions, it may be a mistake to try to locate this too precisely in the England of c. 1601. ‘the late innovation’ is sometimes taken to refer to the fashion for the children’s companies, shortly to be discussed. But that can hardly be: Hamlet shows no interest, and the subject is introduced quite independently four lines later. ‘Inhibition’ implies a closing of the theatres in the capital (which was a constant threat to the players’ livelihood in England). ‘Innovation’ at this time usually meant a political upheaval (OED 1b, 2b) but it could mean a major change of any sort. If it is a Danish ‘innovation’, we must suppose that the upheavals of the king’s death, the succession and the preparations for war with Fortinbras are meant. If it is an English ‘innovation’, then it is impossible to guess what is meant. Some have thought that the reference is to Essex’s rebellion of February 1601.

313–33 This whole passage on the child-actors and the ‘war of the theatres’ is missing from Q2. Although it is quite possible that by 1604 this excursus on the theatre troubles of 1600–1 seemed too out-of-date and uninteresting to print, it is also quite possible that the passage had in some way become detached from the main MS. This bravura on contemporary theatre problems is unique in Shakespeare. Perhaps he inserted it in the heat of the moment to replace a much briefer remark about fashion in the theatre, which would carry us from Rosencrantz at 312 to Hamlet at 334. This passage was available to the transcriber in the playhouse but the insertion was either overlooked by or not available to the Q2 compositors. See further in the Introduction, pp. 4–5, 19.

315 eyrie...eyases nest of children, little unfledged hawks. This is a reference to the revival of the boys’ acting companies about 1600 (Paul’s and the Chapel). Their new organisation, more professional and commercial, made them, for a brief time, formidable rivals to the adult companies (see E. K. Chambers, Elizabethan Stage, 1923, 1, 378–80).

315–16 cry...question ‘question’ frequently means ‘dispute’ or ‘controversy’. Perhaps this means that the boys enthusiastically carry on the theatre war in their treble voices.

316 tyrannically inordinately, outrageously.
now the fashion, and so be-rattle the common stages (so they call
them) that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills, and dare
scarce come thither.

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

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

HAMLET Is’t possible?

GULDENSTERN Oh there has been much throwing about of brains.

HAMLET Do the boys carry it away?

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

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

A flourish

GULDENSTERN There are the players.

317 be-rattle] F2: be-ratled v 323 most like] Pope: like most F
mine v 335 mouths] Q2: mows F 336 fifty] Q2: not in F
SD A flourish] Q2: Flourish for the Players v

317 be-rattle] rattle, shake.
318 common stages] The usual term for the public theatres.
318 many...rapiers] the men-about-town, the gallants.
318 afraid of goose-quills] The satire of the children’s dramatists has so discredited the public theatres that fashionable gallants don’t like being seen there (Dowden’s suggestion).
321 escoted] maintained financially. (From the French escotter; very rare in English.)
321 quality profession.
323 common players] professional actors.
323 if their means...better] if they do not acquire a better means of supporting themselves. Compare the ‘public means’ of Sonnet 111.
325 succession] that which they will succeed to.
327 tar incite, provoke. (Editors often preserve the old spelling ‘tarre’.)
328 no money...argument] i.e. no company wanted to hear about a new play.
329 cuffs blows, punches.
332 Do the boys carry it away?] Jonson claimed they did in Poetaster (acted by a boys’ company). See Introduction, p. 4.
333 Hercules and his load] The emblem of the Globe Theatre is supposed to have been Hercules carrying the celestial globe on his shoulders.
335 mouths] grimaces. So Q2. F reads ‘mows’, which means the same thing, but in view of 4.4.50 ‘mouths’ looks like Shakespeare’s word.
336 ducats] coins of gold or silver, used in many European countries. The value might be two or three to the English pound.
337–8 more than natural...find it out] i.e. there is something abnormal about it as scientific investigation would show.
HAMLET Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore. Your hands, come then. Th'appurtenance of welcome is fashion and ceremony. Let me comply with you in this garb, lest my extent to the players, which I tell you must show fairly outwards, should more appear like entertainment than yours. You are welcome — but my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.

GUILDENSTERN In what my dear lord?

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

Enter POLONIUS

POLONIUS Well be with you gentlemen.

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

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

HAMLET I will prophesy: he comes to tell me of the players, mark it. — You say right sir, 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 was an actor in Rome —

POLONIUS The actors are come hither my lord.

HAMLET Buzz, buzz!

POLONIUS Upon my honour.

HAMLET Then came each actor on his ass —

POLONIUS The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-

340-1 come then. Th' come then, th' Q2; come: The F Q2 343 outwards] Q2; outward F 351 swaddling] swading Q2, Q1; swathing F 352 he's] F; he is Q2 355 a Q2; for a F 357 was] Q2; not in F 361 my] Q2; mine F 362 came] Q2; can F 364-5 tragical-...pastoral] F; not in Q2

342 comply with you pay you the usual courtesies. Compare 5.2.170, 'comply with his dug'.

342 garb manner of doing things.

342 my extent what I extend, how I behave.

344 entertainment welcome.

347 but mad north-north-west He means (1) that he is only a little away from the true north of sanity, and (2) that he is not mad at all points of the compass, i.e. at all times.

348 a hawk from a handsaw Those who are determined to rub the fine edge off the wit of Hamlet's 'madness' have supposed that these two terms must belong to the same family, so 'handsaw' has been thought to be 'hernshaw', a kind of heron, and 'hawk' has been thought to be the plasterer's tool so named. But it is the utter dissimilarity of a hawk and a saw which makes Hamlet's point, i.e. 'I am mad only at certain times, at other times I can discriminate as well as a madman.' Even as he pretends confidentially to impart the secret that he is not mad, he confirms that he is raving.

352 Happily Perhaps.

357 Roscius A great Roman comic actor (d. 62 BC).

360 Buzz, buzz! A 'buzz' is a rumour. Hamlet is making a stock response to a story which is not believed.
historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene indivisible or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. 
For the law of writ and the liberty, these are the only men. 

**HAMLET** O Jephtha judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!

**POLONIUS** What a treasure had he my lord?

**HAMLET** Why –

'O one fair daughter and no more, 
The which he loved passing well.'

**POLONIUS** Still on my daughter.

**HAMLET** Am I not i'th'right, old Jephtha?

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

**HAMLET** Nay, that follows not.

**POLONIUS** What follows then my lord?

**HAMLET** Why –

'As by lot God wot,' 
And then you know –

'It came to pass, as most like it was,' –

the first row of the pious chanson will show you more, for look where my abridgement comes. 

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365 indivisible| indevidible q2; indiuible f 371-2 more, / The] f; not divided in q2 383 pious chanson| q2; Pons Chanson f 384 abridgement comes| q2, q1; Abridgements come f

365 tragical-comical-historical-pastoral Shakespeare illustrates the inadequacy of categorising the modern drama of his day by the old genres. It has been pointed out that his own *Cymbeline* might require this last super-category. 

365-6 scene...unlimited The traditional interpretation is that this contrasts plays which observe the unities of time, place and action with those that don't. But Jenkins interestingly suggests that 'indivisible' and 'unlimited' are the terms to use when there can be no further refinement or subdivision in this absurd progress of categorisation.

366 Seneca...Plautus These Roman dramatists, one tragic and one comic, were the classical dramatists who were best known to the Elizabethans, and who most influenced their drama.

367 the law of writ and the liberty Obscure: possibly Polonius means plays which obey prescribed rules ('writ' = authoritative guidance), and those which are free from such rules. (Wilson thought that the two acting areas of London were in question, that where the Sheriff's writ ran within the City, and the liberty outside.)

368-72 Jephtha...passing well Jephtha vowed to sacrifice the first living thing he met if he returned successfully from war. It turned out to be his own daughter and he sacrificed her after she had gone into the mountains to 'bewail her virginity' – so she died and 'knew no man'(Judges 11.30-40). The ballad Hamlet quotes is known in an early-seventeenth-century version: 'Had one faire daughter and no moe,/Whom he beloved passing well,/And as by lot God wot,/It came to passe, most like it was...' (The single surviving copy of this print, in the Manchester Central Library, differs in its readings from the reprints quoted by Jenkins and others.)

383 first row...chanson A 'row' is properly a line, but, as this does not make much sense, some editors suggest, without much authority, 'stanz' – i.e. 'you'll have to read the first stanza of this pious ballad if you want more...' Q1 says 'the first verse of the godly Ballet'.

384 abridgement that which shortens my recitation. It is frequently suggested, because of the use of the word in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.39, in a context suggesting the meaning 'entertainment', that Hamlet is here punning on two senses, 'abbreviation', and 'entertainment'. But this secondary meaning is not well attested.
Enter the Players

Y'are welcome masters, welcome all. I am glad to see thee well. Welcome good friends. Oh, my old friend! why, thy face is valanced since I saw thee last; com'st thou to beard me in Denmark? What, my young lady and mistress — byrlady, your ladyship is nearer to heaven than when I saw you last by the altitude of a chopine. Pray God your voice like a piece of uncurrent gold be not cracked within the ring. Masters, you are all welcome. We'll e'en to't like French falconers, fly at anything we see: we'll have a speech straight. Come give us a taste of your quality: come, a passionate speech.

Player What speech, my good lord?

Hamlet I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted, or if it was, not above once, for the play I remember pleased not the million: 'twas caviary to the general. But it was, as I received it, and others whose judgements in such matters cried in the top of mine, an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning. I remember one said there were no sallets in the lines to make the matter savoury, nor no matter in the phrase that might indictment the author of affectation, but called it

384 SD So Q2. *Enter four or five Players* F. 385 Y'are F; You are Q2. 386 my old] F. Q1: old Q2. 386 why] Q2: not
386 valanced] valanct Q2; valiant F 388 byrlady] Byrlady F; by lady Q2 388 nearer to] Q2: neerer F 391-2
400 were] Q2: was F 402 affectation] F; affection Q2

384 SD So Q2. F's 'four or five players' is a characteristic example of the book-keeper's preliminary efforts to put limits on the permissiveness of Shakespeare's MS. See Introduction, p. 22.

385-91 Compare the entry of the players in Shrew, Induction, 1.79, where also the lord of the house welcomes them, and speaks warmly of his recollection of one of them playing a certain part years ago (and requests them to assist his plans by means of their play).

386 valanced fringed, curtained round.

387 beard challenge, defy.

388 my young lady A boy actor who takes female roles; presumably the Player Queen of 3.2.

388 byrlady by our Lady. Pronounced berâdy. See note to 3.2.118.

389 chopine Additional base to a lady's shoe to increase height.

390-1 cracked...ring 'There was a ring on the coin, within which the sovereign's head was placed; if the crack extended from the edge beyond this ring, the coin was rendered unfit for currency' (Douce, in NV). But there is also a bawdy quibble on losing virginity here; see Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (1947, revised 1955), under 'crack/crackt'. Hamlet means 'I hope you haven't lost your virginity as a player of female parts, and ceased to be acceptable (current), by the breaking of your voice.'

393 quality professional skill.

397 caviary A common early form of 'caviare'. Pronounced caviâry.

397 the general people in general, the multitude.

398-9 cried...mine An unusual phrase. It must mean 'counted more than mine'.

400 digested arranged, disposed.

400-1 sallats salads. Generally thought to mean 'spicy bits' — indecencies.
an honest method, as wholesome as sweet and by very much more handsome than fine. One speech in't I chiefly loved, 'twas Aeneas' tale to Dido, and thereabout of it especially where he speaks of Priam's slaughter. If it live in your memory, begin at this line, let me see, let me see –

'The rugged Pyrrhus, like th'Hyrcanian beast' –

'Tis not so, it begins with Pyrrhus –

'The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,
Black as his purpose, did the night resemble
When he lay couched in the ominous horse,
Hath now this dread and black complexion smeared
With heraldy more dismal. Head to foot
Now is he total gules, horridly tricked
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,
Baked and impasted with the parching streets,
That lend a tyrannous and a damned light
To their lord's murder. Roasted in wrath and fire,
And thus o'er-sized with coagulate gore,
With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus
Old grandsire Priam seeks –'

So, proceed you.

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

403-4 as wholesome...fine [Q2: not in F]
404 speech] Q2: cheefe Speech F 404 in't] Q2: in it F
405 tale] F:
talke Q2
take Q2

405 where] F: when Q2
408 th'Hyrcanian] F: Th'ircanian Q2
409 'Tis] Q2: It is F
412 the] F:
th'Q2
414 heraldy] Q2: Heraldry F
415 total] Q2: to take F
418 a damned] Q2: damned F
419 lord's murder]

408 Pyrrhus Pyrrhus, or Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, was summoned to the Trojan war to avenge his father. With Hamlet, Fortinbras and Laertes, he makes a fourth son avenging a father. He was renowned for his savagery and barbarity.

408 Hyrcanian beast Tiger from Hyrcania, near the Caspian sea. Virgil spoke of them in Aeneid iv, 368.

412 couched concealed.

414 heraldy See note to 1.1.87.

414 dismal sinister.

415 gules The heraldic name for red.

415 tricked decorated.

417 Baked...streets The blood is dried into a paste on Pyrrhus by the heat of the burning street.

418 tyrannous ferocious.

420 o'er-sized To oversize is to cover over with size, the sticky wash used as a preparative by painters.

421 carbuncles large and supposedly luminous precious stones.
‘Anon he finds him,
Striking too short at Greeks; his antique sword,
Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls,
Repugnant to command. Unequal matched,
Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide,
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
Th’unnervèd father falls. Then senseless Ilium,
Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top
Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus’ ear; for lo, his sword,
Which was declining on the milky head
Of reverend Priam, seemed i’th’air to stick.
So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,
And like a neutral to his will and matter,
Did nothing.

But as we often see against some storm,
A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still,
The bold winds speechless, and the orb below
As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder
Doth rend the region; so after Pyrrhus’ pause,
A roused vengeance sets him new a-work,
And never did the Cyclops’ hammers fall
On Mars’s armour, forged for proof eterne,
With less remorse than Pyrrhus’ bleeding sword
Now falls on Priam.

Out, out, thou strumpet Fortune! All you gods,
In general synod take away her power,
Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel,

426 Anon Presently.
429 Repugnant to Resisting.
431-2 But with the whiff...falls This sadly
comic episode is at the expense of Marlowe and
Nashe, who, in writing of the same scene in
Queen of Carthage (2.1.253-4), said, ‘Which he
disdaining whisked his sword about,/And with the
wound thereof the King fell down.’
432 senseless insensible.
432 Ilium Troy. Used here, Kittredge points
out, for the citadel and not the whole city.
436 milky i.e. white-haired.
438 painted tyrant tyrant in a painting.
439 like a neutral...matter ‘As a neutral
stands idle between two parties, so Pyrrhus paused
midway between his purpose and its fulfilment’
(Kittredge).
440 against before.
442 rack cloud-formation.
443 orb globe, hence earth.
445 region sky.
447 Cyclops The one-eyed giants worked in
Vulcan’s smithy.
448 proof eterne everlasting resistance.
449 remorse pity.
453 fellies wooden pieces forming the rim of a
wheel.
And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven
As low as to the fiends.'

POLONIUS: This is too long.

HAMLET: It shall to th' barber's with your beard. Prithee say on.

He's for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps. Say on, come to Hecuba.

I PLAYER: 'But who - ah woe! - had seen the mobled queen -'

HAMLET: The mobled queen?

POLONIUS: That's good, 'mobled queen' is good.

I PLAYER: 'Run barefoot up and down, threat'ning the flames
With bisson rheum, a clout upon that head
Where late the diadem stood, and, for a robe,
About her lank and all o'er-teemèd loins
A blanket, in th'alarm of fear caught up -
Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steeped
'Gainst Fortune's state would treason have pronounced.

But if the gods themselves did see her then,
When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport
In mincing with his sword her husband's limbs,
The instant burst of clamour that she made,
Unless things mortal move them not at all,
Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven,
And passion in the gods.

POLONIUS: Look where he has not turned his colour, and has tears in's eyes. Prithee no more.

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

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

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

**Polonius** Come sirs. 

**Hamlet** Follow him friends, we'll hear a play tomorrow. - Dost thou hear me old friend, can you play The Murder of Gonzago?

**I Player** Ay my lord.

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

**I Player** Ay my lord.

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

**Exeunt Players**

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

**Rosenkrantz** Good my lord.

**Exeunt Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern**

**Hamlet** Ay so, God bye to you. Now I am alone. O what a rogue and peasant slave am I! Is it not monstrous that this player here, But in a fiction, in a dream of passion, Could force his soul so to his own conceit

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**481** abstract] Q2; Abstracts F 483 live] Q2; liued F 485 bodkin] Q2; bodykins F 485 much better] Q2; better F 486 shall] Q2; should F 489 SD] F; not in Q2; Exit Polonius with all the Players except the First / Dyce (490)493 a need] F; neede Q2 494 dozen...lines] F; dosen lines, or sixtene lines Q2 495 you] Q2; ye F 497 SD] This edn; Exeunt Pol. and Players. Q2 (after Elsinore, 499); not in F 498 till] F; tell Q2 500 SD] Capell; Exeunt. Q2; Exeunt./Manet Hamlet. F 501 God bye to you] Q2 (buy); God buy 'ye F 505 own] Q2; whole F

**483** bodkin] Euphemism for the sacrilegious 'God's bodykins', which is the reading of F - a surprising survivor of the post-1606 removal of profanities (see Introduction, p. 30).

**489 SD** Exit Polonius So F. Q2 gives a general exeunt for Polonius and the players at 535. This seems a clear case of the book-keeper beginning to visualize the staging as he transcribed Shakespeare's MS. Polonius cannot be kept back, hanging about awkwardly for the actors. As they begin to follow him off-stage, Hamlet detains the First player. See Introduction, p. 22.

**494 dozen or sixteen lines** The identification of these in the play as acted is a famous but insoluble problem. For Shakespeare's hesitation over this phrase, see Introduction, p. 10.

**497 mock him not** Strange words from the crown prince to a common player about the chief councillor of the state! Perhaps Hamlet is embarrassed at the thought that his own rudeness to Polonius might be taken as a pattern by others.

**505** conceit imaginings.
That from her working all his visage wanned,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in’s aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suitting
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing?
For Hecuba!

What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appall the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
Like John-a-dreams, unregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing—no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,
Tweaks me by th’nose, gives me the lie i’th’throat
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?

506 from her working by reason of her (the soul’s) activity.
506 wanned grew pale.
508–9 his whole function...conceit all his bodily powers producing the expressions proper to his imaginings. Coleridge unfairly spoke of a ‘factitious and artificial display of feeling by the player’ (Shakespeare Criticism 2nd edn, 1960, 11, 152). The player, by imagining himself in the situation, in ‘a dream of passion’, becomes so affected that he weeps. He doesn’t pretend to cry; he pretends until he cries.
517 Confound Astonish and confuse.
517 appal A much stronger word than than now; ‘paralyse’. See 1.2.235.
518 Yet I Hypermetrical; some editors give it a separate line.
519 muddy-mettled muddy-spirited.
519 peak A word of uncertain meaning. Because of Shakespeare’s own ‘dwindle, peak, and pine’ in Macbeth, it is usually taken to mean ‘go into a decline’, ‘droop’. But the dominant meaning seems to be ‘sneak or slink about’, or ‘to make a mean figure’, as Johnson puts it in his Dictionary.
520 John-a-dreams Apparently a nickname for a dreamy person.
520 unregnant of my cause ‘pregnant’ means quick, prompt, ready, apt—so to be ‘unpregnant’ of something means not reacting quickly to it. Compare Measure for Measure 4.4.20, ‘makes me unregnant/And dull to all proceedings’.’pregnant’ is not used by Shakespeare to mean ‘with child’.
522 property i.e. the kingdom (rather than his material possessions). It is just possible that it means what belonged to Hamlet senior exclusively as a person, his identity as king.
523 defeat destruction.
526 gives me the lie accuses me of lying.
526–7 i’th’throat...lungs i.e. deep-rooted and not superficial or casual lies.
Ha, 'swounds, I should take it, for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-livered, and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should ha' fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
Oh, vengeance!
Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of the dear murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A scullion!
Fie upon't, foh! About, my brains. 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;

528 'swounds] Q2: Why f 531 ha'] a Q2: haue f 532 Bloody, bawdy villain] Q2: bloody: a Bawdy villaine f 534 Oh, vengeance!] F: not in q2 535 Why] Q2: Who f 535 This] Q2: I sure, this f 536 the dear murdered] the Deere murthred f: a deere murthred q2: my deare father q1: a deere father murthred q 1611 540 scullion] f: stallyon q2 541 brains] braues q2 (corrected); braues q2 (uncorrected); Braine r 541 Hum] q2: not in f

529 pigeon-livered The liver is seen as the seat of courage. Compare 'lily-livered' and 'milk-livered' in King Lear. The pigeon has no gall.
530 To make oppression bitter i.e. to make Claudius's oppression bitter to himself.
531 region kites hawks, or birds of prey, circling in the sky.
533 Remorseless Pitiless.
533 kindless without natural feeling.
534 Oh, vengeance! This cry, the great climax of the rant with which Hamlet emulates the Player, exhausts his futile self-recrimination, and he turns, in proper disgust, from a display of verbal histrionics to more practical things. Q2 omits the phrase altogether, and many editors unfortunately follow suit. This short line and the silence after it are the pivot of the speech.
536 the son...murdered the son of the loved victim. So F. Q2 reads 'a dear murdered', strong confirmation that Shakespeare did not write (what almost every edition gives) 'the son of a dear father murdered'. 'Father' stems from the very weak Q1 reading, 'the son of my dear father', and was inserted into the received text in the 1611 quarto. 'Father' is tautological, and actually dissipates Hamlet's stress on his filial duty.
537 by heaven and hell Hamlet means that the whole supernatural world of good and evil lies behind his revenge, not that both heaven and hell are urging him at the same time. His revenge is instigated by heaven in its war against the workings of hell, visible in Claudius's achievements. The terrible alternative, that he may have become one of hell's victims, he goes on to consider in 551-8.
538 unpack unload, relieve.
540 A scullion 'a domestic servant of the lowest rank...a person of the lowest order, esp. as an abusive epithet' (OED). Q2 reads 'stallyon', and a number of recent editions give 'stallion', supposing that Hamlet means it in the cant sense of 'male whore'. This sense is not at all well established for Shakespeare's time, and 'scullion' is obviously the correct reading. Hamlet is looking for foul-mouthed, low-living people and (in his patrician way) finds them in 'drab', here a slatternly kitchen wench of low morals, and her companion, a 'scullion'.
541 About go about it!
543 cunning skill.
543 scene dramatic presentation.
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks,
I'll tent him to the quick. If a do blench,
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
May be a devil – and the devil hath power
T'assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps,
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
More relative than this. The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

[3.1] Enter KING, QUEEN, POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ,
GUILDENSTERN, LORDS

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

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

GUILDENSTERN Nor do we find him forward to be sounded,

550 a do] Q2; he but F
552 a devil] Q 1611; a deale Q2; the Diuell F Act 3, Scene 1 3.1]
And] F; An Q2 1 circumstance] F; conference Q2 6 a] Q2; he F

550 tent probe.
550 to the quick i.e. to where it hurts.
550 blench flinch and turn aside.
553 assume Compare 1.2.243 and 1.4.72.
555 very potent with such spirits It was a commonplace of ghost-lore that melancholics were specially prone to visitation by demons. See Prosser, Hamlet and Revenge, p. 110.
556 to damn me It is the fate of Hamlet's immortal soul that is at stake in his decision whether the ghost was genuine or not. See Introduction, pp. 47, 58.
556-7 grounds...relative reasons for acting which are nearer at hand, more tangible.

Act 3, Scene 1
1 drift of circumstance steering of roundabout enquiry. Compare Polonius's 'encompassment and drift of question', 2.1.10. For 'circumstance' (which means circuitous talk, as in 1.5.127), Q2 reads 'conference', a much weaker word, presumably the composer's misreading, jarring with 'confusion' at the end of the next line.
2 puts on As the scene opens, Claudius is in the middle of a discussion with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He has already learned that the madness is 'put on' (Guildenstern speaks of 'crafty madness' in 8). At the beginning of 2.1, the question was what was wrong with Hamlet. Now the question is why is he assuming the guise of madness.
3 Grating The physical action of roughening by scraping and rasping.
7 forward disposed, inclined.
But with a crafty madness keeps aloof
When we would bring him on to some confession
Of his true state.

GERTRUDE Did he receive you well?

ROSENCRANTZ Most like a gentleman.

GUILDENSTERN But with much forcing of his disposition.

ROSENCRANTZ Niggard of question, but of our demands
Most free in his reply.

GERTRUDE Did you assay him
To any pastime?

ROSENCRANTZ Madam, it so fell out that certain players
We o'er-raught 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 me to entreat your majesties
To hear and see the matter.

CLAUDIUS 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 Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

CLAUDIUS For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,

8 crafty madness This clearly does not mean,
as some commentators suggest, the cunning of
madness, but an affecting of madness, for in the next
line Guildenstern talks of 'his true state'. Hamlet
talks to Gertrude of being 'mad in craft' at 3.4.189.
13-14 Niggard...reply Rosencrantz is anxious
to cover up the cross-examination which led to the
disclosure that they were being employed by
Claudius. Unfortunately, this leads him into con­
tradicting Guildenstern about Hamlet's readiness
with the suggestion of...assay...To i.e. try him with the
suggestion of.
17 o'er-raught (over-reached) came up to and
passed, overhauled.
That he, as 'twere by accident, may here
Affront Ophelia. Her father and myself,
Lawful espials,
Will so bestow ourselves, that seeing unseen,
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.

GERTRUDE
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 honours.

OPHELIA
Madam, I wish it may.

[Exit Gertrude with Lords]

POLONIUS
Ophelia walk you here. – Gracious, so please you,
We will bestow ourselves. – Read on this book,
That show of such an exercise may colour
Your loneliness. – We are oft to blame in this:
'Tis too much proved, that with devotion’s visage,
And pious action, we do sugar o'er
The devil himself.

CLAUDIUS (Aside)
Oh, 'tis too true.
How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!

30 here] q2: there f
32 Lawful espials] f: not in q2
33 Will] f: Wee’le q2
43 please you] q2: please ye f
44 this book] This is obviously a prayer-book (see
47, 89).
45 colour] provide a pretext for.
46 loneliness] being alone.
47 devotion’s visage] a face expressing devotion.
50 How smart... conscience] It is at this point, not earlier and not later, that Shakespeare wants to assure the audience of Claudius's guilt and the credibility of the Ghost. We are not asked to share Hamlet's concern as he tests that credibility. Shakespeare seems careful in the line to echo Hamlet's 'catch the conscience of the king' at the end of the last scene.
The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
Than is my deed to my most painted word.
O heavy burden!

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

Enter HAMLET

HAMLET To be, or not to be, that is the question —
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep —
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to — 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep —
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life,
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,

52 to the thing that helps it as compared with the cosmetic adornment.
56 To be or not to be Concerning the placing of this soliloquy and the nunnery scene which follows, see the Introduction, pp. 25-7. For a discussion of the soliloquy itself, see pp. 47-50.
56 that is the question But there are many opinions on what the question really is. I assume that Hamlet is debating whether to take his own life or not.
57 in the mind to suffer The stoical endurance which is Hamlet's first alternative is a matter of mental effort and strain.
58 slings missiles (by metonymy: that-which-throws standing for that-which-is-thrown; Latin funda could similarly mean either sling or sling-shot). A sling may be a hand-sling, a ballista or even a cannon.
60 by opposing end them The alternative to patient endurance is to use the only weapon which can overcome a sea of troubles — suicide. Such a death is the sleep by which we 'say we end' the woes of life (61). Hamlet no longer talks of setting right a world that is out of joint.
63 consummation completion.
65 rub impediment (from the game of bowls).
67 shuffled...coil got rid of the turmoil of living. 'shuffled off' is difficult. 'shuffled' is used twice more in the play, 3.3.61 and 4.7.136, in a derogatory sense deriving from cards, to mean 'manipulate with intent to deceive'. 'shuffle off' is found in Twelfth Night 3.3.16, and means 'get rid of in an unfair or fraudulent way'. There must be some slight sense of malpractice here: evasion, slipping out of things.
68 respect consideration.
69 of so long life so long-lived.
70 time the times; compare 1.5.189.
The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,  
The insolence of office, and the spurns  
That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,  
When he himself might his quietus make  
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscovered country from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of?  
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pitch and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action. Soft you now, 
The fair Ophelia. – Nymph, in thy orisons 
Be all my sins remembered.

OPHELIA Good my lord, 
How does your honour for this many a day?

HAMLET I humbly thank you, well, well, well.

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

HAMLET No, not I, 
I never gave you aught.

OPHELIA My honoured 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.

HAMLET Ha, ha, are you honest?

OPHELIA My lord?

HAMLET Are you fair?

OPHELIA What means your lordship?

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

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

---

88 soft you As usual, ‘soft’ as a verb in the 
imperative means ‘restrain yourself, leave off, be 
cautious’. Compare 1.1.126, 1.5.58, 3.2.353, 4.2.3, 4.4.8, 4.7.153, 5.1.184.

89 Nymph This is a curious way to address 
Ophelia, and it is probably correct to suggest that 
Hamlet is ironic in his stilted formality with both 
this word and ‘orisons’ for prayers. If so, then he 
cannot be genuinely humble in asking her to 
remember his sins. Rather, it is sarcasm – ‘Don’t 
forget all those sins of mine which have forced you 
to reject me.’

91 for this many a day It is often pointed out 
that Ophelia had met Hamlet yesterday. But that 
was an eerily silent interview. In any case, Ophelia 
is no doubt extremely nervous in the very 
embarrassing position she is in, knowing Claudius 
and Polonius are watching and listening, and is 
hardly in command of herself.

93 remembrances keepsakes, gifts. 
98 of so sweet breath composed ‘breath’ can 
here mean ‘utterance’ or ‘language’; Ophelia may 
refer to words either spoken or written. 
99 Their perfume lost The sweetness of both 
the words and the gifts has disappeared, because of 
the unkindness of the giver.

103 honest chaste. But this sudden and violent 
change of topic is caused by Ophelia’s palpable lack 
of honesty in the more general sense, in not 
mentioning her own part in the breach between 
them.

107–8 your honesty...your beauty your 
virtue should not allow your beauty to 
be conversed with it. (An alternative gloss is ‘your virtue ought 
to keep away those who want to chat with your 
beauty’; if that is correct, then Ophelia misun- 
derstands him.)
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 a paradox, but 
now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.

OPHELIA Indeed my lord you made me believe so.

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

OPHELIA I was the more deceived.

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

OPHELIA At home my lord.

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

OPHELIA Oh help him you sweet heavens!

HAMLET If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry:

117 inoculate| innoculatc F ; euocutat Q2 119 thee to a] F ; thee a Q2 125 earth and heaven] Q2 ; Heauen and Earth F 125 all] F ; not in Q2 129 nowhere] Q2 ; no way F

117 inoculate our old stock The image is from grafting fruit trees or bushes. We cannot so engraft a new stem of virtue onto the old sinful trunk as to eradicate all trace of our previous nature.

119 relish have a touch or tinge. Much of the power and meaning of this scene is lost if we accept the suggestion of J. Q. Adams and Dover Wilson that 'nunnery' is here used in its slang sense of 'brothel'. Hamlet is accusing men and women, including himself and Ophelia, of unremitting moral frailty, which they show most in their sexual relations. Only in a convent will Ophelia be able to resist the inclinations of her own nature, and by desisting from sex and propagation she will the sooner put an end to sinful mankind. As with Lear and Timon, Hamlet's disgust with mankind makes him think it were better if generation ceased.

120 indifferent honest moderately virtuous.

122 proud, revengeful, ambitious Hamlet is all these things: he considers himself better than other people, he wants revenge for his father, he desires the throne. These desires and feelings may be sinful or they may in their circumstances be justified and honourable. Hamlet speaks of his sinfulness with a mocking, teasing exaggeration, as he spoke of his world-weariness to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. We mustn't take him at his word, or suppose that Shakespeare here definitively says that revenge is sinful. Yet here, as in the world-weary speech in 2.2, there lies beneath the rodomontade suggestion of J. Q. Adams and Dover Wilson that a nugget of truth. There is a self-loathing here which is more constructive than in 'O what a rogue and peasant slave', a perception of his own unworthiness which is a good deal more sanctifying than most of Hamlet's moods.

126 Where's your father? Some commentators think that Hamlet knew all the time he was being watched; some think he guessed it early in the interview; some think he learns it here. It is my view that Hamlet never knows about the watchers. We do not need his awareness of the spies to explain what he says. Stage-tradition varies a good deal on this, but it was common practice in the eighteenth century for Hamlet to catch sight of the eavesdroppers during the scene (Sprague, Shakespeare and the Actors, pp. 152-4).
be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go. Farewell. Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery go, and quickly too. Farewell.

OPHELIA O heavenly powers, restore him!

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

Exit OPHELIA

Oh what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,
Th'expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
Th'observed of all observers, quite, quite down,

[Notes and analysis]

1.32-3 thou shalt not escape calumny Hamlet is the chief calumniator of Ophelia, and one hopes he includes himself. There is a flicker of an admission here of what Hamlet knows perfectly well - that Ophelia, however weak in character, is not 'frail' morally, and that it is sheer misrepresentation to claim she is. But Hamlet cancels out this admission quickly and thoroughly as he steps up his 'madness'.

134 monsters i.e. horned cuckold.

138 jig This may refer more to singing than dancing. Compare Love's Labour's Lost 3.1.11-12, 'to jig off a tune at the tongue's end'.

139 amble walk affectedly.

139-40 make your wantonness your ignorance pretend your licence is just simplicity and innocence.

140-1 it hath made me mad Hamlet is sufficiently in control of himself to maintain the teasing mystification of his role. An actor might well decide to make lunatic grimaces here.

141 mo more.

142 all but one shall live 'live' here means 'remain' or 'continue', as in Sonnet 5: 'flowers distilled...Leese but their show, their substance still lives sweet.' There are to be no more marriages. All married couples, bar one, may stay married, but all single people are to stay single ('the rest shall keep as they are'). Hamlet intends to dissolve the marriage of his mother with Claudius violently, with the king's death; so that 'all but one shall live' takes a sharp ambiguity. But his mind is more on sexual misdemeanour than revenge at this moment.

145 The courtier's...sword Some editors understandably wish to interchange 'soldier's' and 'scholar's' to give the scholar the tongue and the soldier the sword. However, as my student Bernadette Connolly points out, this misalignment does throw light on the fact that Hamlet's sword is his intellect and that he fights with his tongue.

147 glass...form 'glass' is the mirror which gives an ideal image and so provides an example (compare 3.2.18). The word 'mould' is a strong indication that by 'fashion' Shakespeare means shaping or fashioning something, rather than good manners (OED 1 and 2), hence 'glass of fashion' = image teaching how to fashion oneself. 'form' is here probably 'behave', 'conduct'. People shaped themselves and their behaviour after his pattern.
And I of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of time and harsh;
That unmatched form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy. Oh woe is me
T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see.

Enter King and Polonius

Claudius Love? His affections do not that way tend;
Nor what he spake, 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 the hatch and the disclose
Will be some danger; which for to prevent,
I have in quick determination
Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England
For the demand of our neglected tribute.
Haply the seas, and countries different,
With variable objects, shall expel
This something-settled matter in his heart,
Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus
From fashion of himself. What think you on't?

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

CLAUDIUS

It shall be so.

Madness in great ones must not unwatched go.

Exeunt

[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; but if you mouth it as many of our players
do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the
air too much with your hand thus; but use all gently; for in the
very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion,
you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it
smoothness. Oh, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious
periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to totters, to very rags, to split
the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of

177 round direct and outspoken.
178-9 I'll be placed...conference This little
scheme leads to Polonius's death, Laertes' revenge,
and the final slaughter, including the deaths of
Hamlet and Claudius.
179 find him not fails to discover his secret.
Compare Lear 4.6.103, 'There I found 'em, there
I smelt 'em out.'

Act 3, Scene 2
0 sd two or three So F. Q2 gives 'three'; for
Shakespeare's MS. to be so specific against a MS.
with theatre-influence is remarkable, especially as
there is no need for three players. Probably a
composer's omission.
1 The time is the evening of the same day. Even
if, notionally, several hours have passed since the
end of the last scene, the swift re-entry of Hamlet,
totally sane and utterly intent on the acting of his
play, must leave an impression of insensitivity when
we think of the distress he left Ophelia in. His attack
on her was considered and deliberate; as soon as she
re-enters he starts up again (97).

It is notable that both to the players here and to
Horatio at 59-65 Hamlet is much concerned about
the temperance, self-control and moderation which
is so much wanting in his own behaviour.
3 I had as lief It would be as agreeable to me
that.
6 acquire and beget If the actors obtain this
balance and control in themselves, they will be able
to produce it in their speeches.
7 robustious rough and rude.
8 periwig-pated wearing a wig.
8 totters So Q2 (and Q1); an alternative form of
'totters', which F gives. Compare 1 Henry IV 4.2.34,
'fifty tottered prodigals'.
9 groundlings Those who stood in the open
yard directly in front of the stage, the cheapest part
of the theatre.
9 are capable of have a capacity for, can
understand.
nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant — it out-Herods Herod. Pray you avoid it.

I PLAYER I warrant your honour.

HAMLET Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone, or come tardy off, though it makes the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others. Oh, there be players that I have seen play, and heard others praise and that highly, not to speak it profanely, that neither having would | Q2 ; could F 10 o'erstep| ore-steppe Q2 ; ore-stop F 16 o'erdone| ore-doone Q2 ; ouer-done F 19 own feature| F ; feature Q2 21 makes| Q2 ; make F 22-3 the which| F ; which Q2 25 praise| F ; praysd Q2

10 inexplicable Shakespeare does not use this word elsewhere. The context suggests ‘meaningless’.

11 Termagant An imaginary deity supposed to be worshipped by Mohammedans (sometimes spelt Tervagant); but no medieval English play with him as a character is known. Ritson (NV) quoted Bale (1550), ‘grinning upon her like termagants in a play’, but there the word may be used in its general sense of ‘violent person’ as in i Henry IV 5.4.114, ‘that hot termagant Scot’. Marston, in ‘A Cynicke Satyre’ (1598), has ‘let western Termagant / Shake heaven’s vault’ (referring to Jove).

11 Herod Familiar as a ranting tyrant in the medieval biblical cycles.

15 Suit...action ‘action’ is used here in two different senses, both belonging to the theatre. First, it means acting — in its fullest sense of an actor’s management of himself on the stage, and not just gesture (see Glossary to Massinger, Plays and Poems, and OED 6). In the second phrase, it means the action of the play. ‘word’ also has two meanings; first, the language of the play, and, in the second phrase, the actor’s speech. Hamlet instructs the Player to let his acting be governed by what he is given to speak, and to let his speech be governed by what he is given to act.

As with his advice on temperance, Hamlet finds it easier to order things in the theatre than in his own life. He has the greatest difficulty in acting in accordance with the ‘word’ he has been given (1.5.110), and in suitting his words to what he has to act (e.g. 2.2.535-40).

16 modesty restraints, limitations, measure. Compare 2.2.400.

17 from away from.

18 mirror As in the glass of fashion’ (3.1.147), this is a mirror which sets standards; here by revealing things not as they seem, but as they really are.

19 scorn i.e. that which is to be scorned.

20 the very...pressure i.e. gives an impression of the shape of our times in the clearest detail. ‘form and pressure’ imply as at 1.5.100 a shape stamped from a mould. Many commentators think that ‘very age’ and ‘body of the time’ are separate and parallel phrases, but the run of the sentence clearly puts ‘age and body’ together. I take the phrase to be a hendiadys for ‘aged body’; i.e. the stage will provide an image of this ageing world as faithful as a statue or an effigy of an old person ‘wrinkled deep in time’.

21 come tardy off done inadequately or imperfectly.

22 unskilful ignorant and undiscerning.

23 your allowance i.e. what you will permit or sanction, hence ‘your scale of values’. Kittredge’s gloss seems strained: ‘winning approval of your acting’.
th’accent of Christians, nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of nature’s journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

**I PLAYER** I hope we have reformed that indifferently with us, sir.

**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 spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered. That’s villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. Go make you ready.

_Exit Players_

**Enter Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern**

_How now my lord, will the king hear this piece of work?_  
**POLONIUS** And the queen too, and that presently.  
**HAMLET** Bid the players make haste.

_Will you two help to hasten them?_  
**ROSENCRANTZ** Ay my lord.

_Exit Polonius_

**HAMLET** What ho, Horatio!

_Enter Horatio_

**HORATIO** Here sweet lord, at your service.

**HAMLET** Horatio, thou art e’en as just a man  
As e’er my conversation coped withal.

**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 lick absurd pomp  
And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee  
Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear?  
Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,  
And could of men distinguish her election,  
Sh'ath sealed thee for herself, for thou hast been  
As one in suffering all that suffers nothing,  
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards  
Hast tane with equal thanks. And blest are those  
Whose blood and judgement are so well commeddled  
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 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 seest that act afoot,  
Even with the very comment of thy soul  
Observe my uncle. If his occulted guilt  
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,

The source of these lines seems to be Jonson's *The Case is Altered* (1597-82), i.6.31-2, 'one whom my election hath designed,/As the true proper object of my soul'.

55 sealed...herself Literally, put a legal seal on you as her property; hence, 'solemnly attested that you are hers'.

59 blood and judgement passion and reason.

60 commeddled mixed together. 'meddle' is common, but 'commeddle' is rare, and F changes to 'commingled'.

66 circumstance circumstances, details.

69-70 Even with...uncle i.e. use your most intense powers of observation in watching my uncle. 'comment' stands for the power to comment.
It is a damned ghost that we have seen,  
And my imaginations are as foul  
As Vulcan's stithy. Give him heedful note,  
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,  
And after we will both our judgements join  
In censure of his seeming.

HORATIO Well my lord.  
If a steal aught the whilst this play is playing  
And scape detecting, I will pay the theft.  
Sound a flourish

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

Danish march (trumpets and kettle-drums). Enter KING, QUEEN,  
POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN and other  
LORDS attendant, with his guard carrying torches

CLAUDIUS How fares our cousin Hamlet?  
HAMLET Excellent i'faith, of the chameleon's dish: I eat the air,  
promise-crammed. You cannot feed capons so.

72 a damned ghost... seen the ghost which we have seen came from hell (and was an impostor and a liar).

73 my imaginations what my mind has suggested to me (about the Ghost). To have given credence to the Ghost, and built on its tale, shows a disease of his mind. See the note to 1.4.87. The power of the imagination to delude people about the supernatural was much discussed. See Introduction, p. 60. Reginald Scot, in his Discovery of Witchcraft (1584), spoke of a woman who was cured of her belief that she was bewitched as being 'ashamed of her imaginations, which she perceiveth to have grown through melancholy' (Bk 3, ch. 10).

74 Vulcan's stithy Vulcan's forge—generally regarded as a hellish sort of place.

77 in censure of his seeming in weighing up his appearance. They will have to infer from his outward expression what he is actually feeling.

77 Well Expresses Horatio's concurrence and approval.

78 If a steal aught i.e. if he conceals anything.

80 idle Not 'unoccupied', but 'idle-headed' = crazy.
CLAUDIUS I have nothing with this answer Hamlet, these words are not mine.

HAMLET No, nor mine now. – My lord, you played 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 part of him to kill so capital a calf there. – Be the players ready?

ROSENCRANTZ Ay my lord, they stay upon your patience.

GERTRUDE Come hither my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

HAMLET No good mother, here’s metal more attractive.

OPHELIA Oh ho, do you mark that?

HAMLET 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?

OPHELIA I think nothing my lord.

HAMLET That’s a fair thought to lie between maids’ legs.

OPHELIA What is, my lord?

HAMLET Nothing.

OPHELIA You are merry my lord.

HAMLET Who, I?

OPHELIA Ay my lord.

HAMLET O God, your only jig-maker. What should a man do but be merry? for look you how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within his two hours.

85 have nothing with gain nothing from.
85–6 are not mine do not belong to my question.
91–2 I did enact... killed me For this as an allusion to Shakespeare’s own Julius Caesar, see Introduction, pp. 5–6.
93 part action (compare 2 Henry IV 4.5.63) – but also, continuing the theatre-language, ‘part to play’.
93 calf Commonly used for a dolt or stupid person.
97 metal more attractive a substance more magnetic. But ‘mettle’ (the spelling in both Q2 and F) means also ‘disposition’, ‘spirit’.
103 country matters the sort of thing that goes on among rustics in the country; coarse or indecent things. The sexual pun in ‘country’ is found also in the fifteenth-century Castle of Perseverance, when Humanum Genus says to Luxuria: ‘Lechery... Few men will forsake thee / In any country that I know.’ (See M. Collins, N & Q April 1981, p. 131.)
107 Nothing ‘thing’ was commonly used to refer to the sexual organ of either men or women. Compare King Lear 1.5.53 and Othello 3.3.302.
111 your only jig-maker i.e. ‘there’s no one like me for providing farcical entertainments’.
OPHELIA Nay, 'tis twice two months my lord.

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

Hoboes play. The dumb-show enters

Enter a KING and a QUEEN, very lovingly, the Queen embracing him. She

114 twice two months Compare 1.2.138 – it was then less than two months since the former king's death: a further indication of the gap in time between Acts 1 and 2.

115-16 let the devil...sables 'sables' means the fur of a northern animal, the sable, which is brown. But 'sable' is also the heraldic word for 'black'. So this is a typical riddling remark of Hamlet's. Since his father has been dead so long, the devil can have his mourning garments and he will start wearing rich furs – but, by the pun, he will actually continue mourning.

118 byrlady Compare 2.2.388. This is F's spelling. Q2's 'ber Lady' may represent Shakespeare's spelling and pronunciation.

119 not thinking on being forgotten.

119-20 hobby-horse...forgot The hobby-horse was one of the additional characters in the morris-dance in the traditional English summer festivities, and has survived until modern times in Padstow and Minehead in the West Country. A man wore a huge hooped skirt in the likeness of a horse. The phrase 'the hobby horse is forgot' is very common (see OED); compare Love's Labour's Lost 3.1.29. It has been suggested that because of its lewdness, the hobby-horse had been suppressed through Puritan pressure, but A. Brissenden (RES xxx (1979), 1-11) shows it was as lively as ever in the early seventeenth century. He points out that 'hobby-horse' nearly always has a sexual connotation (see Othello 4.1.154; Winter's Tale 1.2.276). Brissenden describes how the horse used to sink to the ground as though dead, then come to energetic life again. This feature is singled out by C. Hole in Dictionary of British Folk Customs, 1976: 'He chase the girls, and sometimes corners one of them against a wall and covers her with his huge tarpaulin skirt... Every now and then, the Oss dies a magical death... The Mayers, and most of the onlookers, singing: "O, where is St George? O where is he, O?"... The Oss sinks to the ground as though he were dying... And then, suddenly, the music changes once more, the Oss leaps up high in the air, and off he goes again, as full of life as ever.'

So the hobby-horse does not die to be forgotten, but comes back with a vengeance, like Hamlet's father.

120 SD The versions of the dumb-show in Q2 and F differ in three ways. (1) Q2 accidentally omits what is almost certainly part of the original sd (chiefly 'She kneels...unto him 2–3'); (2) F firms up for stage presentation, altering the music, identifying characters ('Fellow', 'King', 'Mutes'), and inserting exits; (3) F substitutes more familiar and descriptive words like 'loath and unwilling' for 'harsh'.

What is printed here is an eclectic version, accepting some changes from F, but preserving Q2's language.

There are three problems about the dumb-show. (1) It is most unusual for a dumb-show to mime the action of the entire play to follow; (2) Did Hamlet know the dumb-show was going to be presented? (3) Why does Claudius not react? As regards (1), the show clearly puzzles Ophelia, and is therefore probably meant to seem rather peculiar. As regards (2), although Hamlet's ensuing remarks can be interpreted as showing anger against the players, they do not in the least demand that interpretation, and it is safer to assume that the sponsor of the play knew what was going to take place. (3) Claudius's silence has been explained on the grounds that he was not watching, or that the Ghost's story of a poisoning through the ear was a fabrication. But an impassive, or nearly impassive, Claudius is theatrically very effective, providing an enigma for Hamlet and Horatio, as well as the audience.

120.1 Hoboys Oboes.
kneels and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up, and declines his head upon her neck. He lies him down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in another man, takes off his crown, kisses it, pours poison in the sleeper's ears, and leaves him. The Queen returns, finds the King dead, and makes passionate action. The poisoner, with some two or three mutes, comes in again, seeming to condole with her. The dead body is carried away. The poisoner woos the Queen with gifts. She seems harsh awhile, but in the end accepts his love.

Exeunt

OPHELIA What means this my lord?

HAMLET Marry this is miching mallecho, it means mischief.

OPHELIA Belike this show imports the argument of the play?

Enter PROLOGUE

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

OPHELIA Will a tell us what this show meant?

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

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

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

HAMLET Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?

OPHELIA 'Tis brief my lord.

HAMLET As woman's love.
Enter the Player King and Queen

Player King Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round
Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orbèd ground,
And thirty dozen moons with borrowed sheen
About the world have times twelve thirties been,
Since love our hearts, and Hymen did our hands,
Unite commutual in most sacred bands.

Player Queen So many journeys may the sun and moon
Make us again count o'er ere love be done.
But woe is me, you are so sick of late,
So far from cheer and from your former state,
That I distrust you. Yet though I distrust,
Discomfort you my lord it nothing must.
For women's fear and love hold quantity,
In neither aught, or in extremity.
Now what my love is, proof 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.]

Player King Faith, I must leave thee love, and shortly too:
My operant powers their functions leave to do;
And thou shalt live in this fair world behind,
Honoured, beloved; and haply one as kind
For husband shalt thou –

Player Queen Oh confound the rest!
Such love must needs be treason in my breast.
In second husband let me be accurst:
None wed the second but who killed the first.

HAMELT That's wormwood, wormwood.

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

PLAYER KING I do believe you think what now you speak,
But what we do determine oft we break.
Purpose is but the slave to memory,
Of violent birth but poor validity,
Which now like fruit unripe sticks on the tree,
But fall unshaken when they mellow be.
Most necessary 'tis that we forget
To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt.
What to ourselves in passion we propose,
The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.
The violence of either grief or joy
Their own enactures with themselves destroy.
Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament;
Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident.
This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange
That even our loves should with our fortunes change,
For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,
Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love.

162 That's wormwood, wormwood] Wilson; That's wormwood Q2 (margin); Wormwood, Wormwood f
163 SH PLAYER QUEEN] Steevens; not in Q2; Bapt. f
167 you think] Q2; you. Think f 171 like] f; the q2 177 either] q2; other
180 joys] f; joy q2 180 griefes] f; griefes q2

161 None wed...first Hamlet has no reason to believe that Gertrude had any hand in killing Claudius, but his words at 3.4.30 indicate that he assumed she was an accessory before the fact, and that her involvement was tantamount to murder.

162 Wormwood Artemisia absinthium, a bitter herb.

163 instances motives.

164 thrift profit, advancement.

166 slave to memory Purpose has no autonomous existence, but is completely dependent on memory — and on passion (176). These are words for Hamlet. See 1.5.96-7 and the note on 179-80 below.

170 Of violent birth Very strong at the beginning.

173 Most necessary 'tis A moment of sarcasm. A resolution to do something is a debt which we owe to ourselves — and of course we don't pay those!

177-8 The violence...destroy Repeats the preceding couplet. Violent grief and joy, when they cease, destroy the 'enactures' or actions which are associated with them.

179-80 Where joy...accident Those who have most capacity for joy have most capacity for grief, and the one changes into the other on the slightest occasion. The whole of this speech makes gnomic comments on Hamlet's own predicament. It is a fine irony that the play designed to catch the king's conscience should also probe his own problems.

181 for aye for ever.
The great man down, you mark his favourite flies; 185
The poor advanced makes friends of enemies,
And hitherto doth love on fortune tend;
For who not needs shall never lack a friend,
And who in want a hollow friend doth try
Directly seasons him his enemy.
But orderly to end where I begun,
Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown;
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.
So think thou wilt no second husband wed,
But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

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

HAMLET If she should break it now!

PLAYER KING ’Tis deeply sworn. Sweet, leave me here awhile;
My spirits grow dull, and fain I would beguile
The tedious day with sleep.

Sleeps

PLAYER QUEEN Sleep rock thy brain,
And never come mischance between us twain. 210

Exit

HAMLET Madam, how like you this play?

185 favourite] q2; favourites F 197 to me give] q2; to give me F 199–200] q2; not in F 200 An; Theobald:
And q2 204 once a] v; once I be a q2 204 wife] v; a wife q2 208 SD] v (after brain); not in q2 209 SD] v;
Exeunt q2

187 hitherto to this extent.
189 try make trial of.
190 seasons As in 1.3.81, ‘to season’ means ‘to
cause change by the passage of time’, usually ‘to
ripen’, but here simply ‘changes (him into)’.
193 devices schemes, plans.
199–200 F omits these two lines. Again, probably
Shakespeare’s own deletion, not noted by the q2
compositor, making the Player Queen’s adjuration
less flabby and more vehement.

200 anchor’s cheer the fare of an anchorite or
religious hermit.
201 scope limit.
201 opposite opposing force.
201 blanks blanches, makes pale. Not used
elsewhere by Shakespeare.
204 If once... wife So v. Q2’s expanded version
again seems to reveal a confused MS. with a number
of imperfectly deleted false starts.
207 spirits vital spirits.
GERTRUDE. The lady doth protest too much methinks.

HAMLET Oh but she'll keep her word.

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

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

CLAUDIUS What do you call the play?

HAMLET The Mousetrap. Marry how? Tropically. This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is the duke's name, his wife Baptista. You shall see anon. 'Tis a knavish piece of work, but what o' that? Your majesty, and we that have free souls, it touches us not. Let the galled jade winch, our withers are unwrung.

Enter LUCIANUS

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king.

OPHELIA You are as good as a chorus my lord.

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

OPHELIA You are keen my lord, you are keen.

HAMLET It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge.

OPHELIA Still better and worse.

HAMLET So you mistake your husbands. Begin, murderer. Pox, leave

211 doth protest] Q2: protests F 219 o'that] F, of that Q2 220 SD] F; after 222 in Q2 222 as good as a] Q2, Q1; a good F 226 mine] Q2; my F 228 your] Q2; not in F 228 Pox] F; not in Q2

211 doth protest makes protestation or promises. F's 'protests', followed by Q1, is a clear case of the original scribe's tendency to 'improve' his copy.

214 poison...i'th'world Hamlet pretends to think Claudius is asking if there is any 'offence' = 'crime' in the play, and he assures him it is only a mock-crime. This is the first verbal mention of poison. Later (263) Hamlet talks of Claudius reacting to 'talk of the poisoning', but he is probably referring to the moment when he lets the cat entirely out of the bag (237-9).

216 Tropically As a trope, a figure of speech. Q1's 'tropically' shows the Joycean pun.

219 free innocent. See 2.2.516.

220 Let...winch 'galled jade' is a poor horse with saddle-sores. 'winch' = 'wince'. It was a common saying that it was the galled horse that would soonest wince (Tilley H700).

220 withers The high part of a horse's back, between the shoulder-blades.

220 unwrung not pressed tight, pinched or chafed. See OED wring v 4.

221 nephew to the king In identifying Lucianus thus, Hamlet brings together past and future: Claudius's killing of his brother, and his own projected killing of his uncle.

223-4 I could...dallying I could act as a chorus in explaining what goes on between you and your lover if I could see the dalliance or flirting in the form of a puppet show. Many commentators, surely correctly, suspect some indecent secondary meaning in 'puppets'. The explanation may well lie in Q1's 'poopies'. It has been shown by H. Hulme that 'poop' meant the female genitals (Explorations in Shakespeare's Language, p. 114; see also Massinger, Parliament of Love 4.5.73). That the word could mean 'rump' (from 'poop' = stern of a ship) is clear from OED, and the obscene use is probably only an extension of that meaning, probably to the genital organs of either sex, as I think is intended by Hamlet.

225 keen sharp and bitter.

226 groaning i.e. of childbirth.

227 Still better and worse Ophelia refers to Hamlet's continual 'bettering' of her meaning, i.e. 'Always a "better" meaning with a more offensive slant'.

228 mistake i.e. mis-take: 'with such false vows (for better or for worse) you take your husbands'.
thy damnable faces and begin. Come, the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge.

**LUCIANUS** Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing, Confederate season, else no creature seeing.
Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected, With Hecat's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected, Thy natural magic and dire property
On wholesome life usurp immediately.

*Pours the poison in his ears*

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

**OPHELIA** The king rises.

**HAMLET** What, frightened with false fire?

**GERTRUDE** How fares my lord?

**POLONIUS** Give o'er the play.

**CLAUDIUS** Give me some light. Away!

**LORDS** Lights, lights, lights!

*Exeunt all but Hamlet and Horatio*

**HAMLET** Why, let the stricken deer go weep,  
The hart ungallèd play,  
For some must watch while some must sleep,  
Thus runs the world away.

---

229-30 the croaking ... revenge Simpson noted in 1874 that this was a 'satirical condensation' of two lines from *The True Tragedy of Richard III* (printed 1594): 'The screeking raven sits croaking for revenge, / Whole herds of beasts come bellowing for revenge' (Malone Society Reprint, 1892-3).

231 apt ready.

232 Confederate season i.e. this moment of time is his ally, and his only witness.

233 of midnight weeds collected put together from weeds gathered at midnight. 'collected' refers to the mixing of the weeds, the concoction, and not the picking. Compare 4.7.143.

234 Hecat Hecate, goddess of witchcraft.

235 dire property baleful quality.
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 in a cry of players, sir?

HORATIO Half a share.

HAMLET A whole one I.

For thou dost know, O Damon dear,

This realm dismantled was

Of Jove himself, and now reigns here

A very, very - pajock.

HORATIO You might have rhymed.

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

HORATIO Very well my lord.

HAMLET Upon the talk of the poisoning?

HORATIO I did very well note him.

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

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

For if the king like not the comedy,

*Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN*

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

For if the king like not the comedy,

250 this The success of the performance?

250 forest of feathers The plumes which were a derided feature of the gallant's outfit were a notable feature of theatre costume. Dekker talks of a gallant who is furious at finding the forty-shilling 'felt and feather', which he has bought for his mistress as a new creation, being worn on the stage (Gall's Hornbook, end of ch. 6).

251 turn Turk with me To 'turn Turk' is to renounce one's religion, apostasise or become a renegade. 'with' has here the sense of 'against' (as we still use it in 'fight' or 'compete' with someone). So the phrase means 'renge on me', or 'renge and desert me'.

251 provincial roses Roses originating either from Provins in northern France or from Provence. (Jenkins in a long note strongly defends the latter origin.) Hamlet is speaking of rosettes and not the real flowers.

251 razed shoes Shoes which were 'razed', 'rased' or 'raced' were ornamented by cuts or slits in the leather.

252 fellowship partnership; the technical term was a 'share'.

252 cry pack (of hounds).

256 dismantled stripped, divested; i.e. the realm lost Jove himself as king.

258 pajock There seems no doubt that Shakespeare wrote 'paiock' and it is surely straining things too far to say he meant 'peacock', which is the reading of many editions. T. McGrath, in 1871 (cited in NV), cleverly suggested that 'pajock' is the 'patchcock' used by Spenser in A View of the Present State of Ireland (ed. Renwick, p. 64) in a context suggesting a despicable person: 'as very patchocks as the wild Irish'. This is supported by OED sv Patchcock. It is usually said that Hamlet was about to finish with 'ass', but it seems to me he couldn't think of a word that would complete the rhyme.

263 Upon the talk of the poisoning Does this refer to Lucianus's words (231-6) or to Hamlet's outburst (237-9)? Or (much less likely) to 'poison in jest' (214)?

264 SD So placed by F. Q2 places it later, after 268. It is obvious that F is correct. Hamlet pointedly ignores Rosencrantz and Guildenstern by calling for music and singing a little song.

266-7 For if...perdy It has been suggested that this is an echo of the lines in The Spanish Tragedy (4.1.197-8), also referring to a revenger's playlet, 'And if the world like not this tragedy, / Hard is the hap of old Hieronimo'. ('Perdy' = by God.)
Why then — belike he likes it not, perdy.

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 marvellous distempered.

**HAMLET** With drink sir?

**GUILDENSTERN** No my lord, rather with choler.

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

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

**HAMLET** I am tame sir, pronounce.

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

**HAMLET** You are welcome.

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

**HAMLET** Sir, I cannot.

**ROSENCRANTZ** What, my lord?

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

**ROSENCRANTZ** Then thus she says. Your behaviour hath struck her into amazement and admiration.
HAMLET O wonderful son that can so stonish a mother! But is there no sequel at the heels of this mother’s admiration? Impart.

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ My lord, you once did love me.

HAMLET And do still, by these pickers and stealers.

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

HAMLET Sir, I lack advancement.

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

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

Enter the PLAYERS with recorders

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

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

HAMLET I do not well understand that. Will you play upon this pipe?
GUILDENSTERN My lord, I cannot.
HAMLET I pray you.
GUILDENSTERN Believe me I cannot.
HAMLET I do beseech you.
GUILDENSTERN I know no touch of it my lord.
HAMLET 'Tis as easy as lying. Govern these ventages with your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops.
GUILDENSTERN But these cannot I command to any utterance of harmony. I have not the skill.
HAMLET Why look you now how unworthy a thing you make of me. You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, 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, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.

Enter POLONIUS

God bless you sir.
POLONIUS My lord, the queen would speak with you, and presently.
HAMLET Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?
POLONIUS By th'mass, and 'tis like a camel indeed.
HAMLET Methinks it is like a weasel.

324 'Tis] f; It is Q2 324 fingers] Q2; finger F 325 thumb] thumbe Q2; the vmber Q2 326 eloquent] Q2; excellent F 327 the top of] F; not in Q2 333 speak] Q2; not in F 334 'Sblood] Q2; Why F 334 think I] Q2, Q1: thinke, that I F 335 can fret me] F; fret me not Q2 339 yonder] Q2, Q1; that F 339 in shape of] Q2; in shape like F 340 mass] masse Q2; Misse F 340 'tis] Q2; it's F

324 ventages vents, i.e. holes.
331 mystery the skills of a particular craft, i.e. you would learn the innermost secret of my working, as a musician would learn the secret of playing the recorder.
333 this little organ the recorder.
335 fret 'frets' are the raised bars for fingering on a lute, providing a pun with 'irritate'. Q2's 'fret me not' seems to reflect some confusion in Shakespeare's MS.
338 presently immediately.
339 see yonder cloud Such is the freedom of the Elizabethan stage! This scene is supposed to be taking place indoors at night. Booth used to make Polonius look out of a window.
339-44 Hamlet's teasing of Polonius, playing the madman to make him humour him, and at the same time showing up his timid sycophancy, inevitably recalls the intensely serious use Shakespeare was to make in Antony and Cleopatra (4.14) of the changing shape of clouds: 'Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish... That which is now a horse, even with a thought/The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct/As water is in water.' In the later play, the evanescence of the cloud is used as an image of changes in one's identity, and the transience of things. But underlying Hamlet's mockery is his sense not of transience but of indeterminacy. 'There is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so.' A cloud is whatever you think it to be, and, like the authenticity of the Ghost, one's view of it changes all the time.
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. — They fool me to the top of my bent. — I will come by and by.

POLONIUS  I will say so.

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

Exeunt all but Hamlet

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

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

GUILDENSTERN We will ourselves provide.
Most holy and religious fear it is
To keep those many many bodies safe
That live and feed upon your majesty.

ROSENCRANTZ The single and peculiar life is bound
With all the strength and armour of the mind
To keep itself from noyance; but much more
That spirit upon whose weal depends and rests
The lives of many. The cess of majesty
Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw
What's near it with it. It is a massy wheel
Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
Are mortised and joined, which when it falls,
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone
Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

Act 3, Scene 3

1 I like him not i.e. I do not like the way he is behaving.
2 us i.e. the person of the king.
3 dispatch make ready.
5 The terms of our estate The conditions of my position as king.
6 near us] Q 1676; neer's Q2; dangerous F 7 brows] brows Q2; Lunacies F 14 weal] Q2; spirit F 15 cess] cesse Q2; cease F 17 it is] F; or it is Q2 18 summit] Rowe; somnet Q2; Somnet F 19 huge] F; hough Q2 22 ruin] F; raine Q2 23 but with] F; but Q2

Act 3, Scene 3

11 The single and peculiar life The life that belongs to the individual only.
12 noyance harm.
13 weal well-being.
14 cess cessation. So Q2. F gives the now more familiar 'cease'. We find 'cesse' (= cease) as a verb in All's Well 5.3.73.
15 gulf whirlpool (OED 3).
16 massy massive.
21 annexment This word seems to be Rosencrantz's gift to the English language.
CLAUDIUS Arm you I pray you to this speedy voyage,
   For we will fetters put about this fear
Which now goes too free-footed.

ROSENCRantz We will haste us.
Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Enter POLONIUS

POLONIUS My lord, he's going to his mother's closet.
   Behind the arras I'll convey myself
   To hear the process. I'll warrant she'll tax him home,
And as you said, and wisely was it said,
'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother,
Since nature makes them partial, should o'erhear
The speech of vantage. Fare you well my liege,
I'll call upon you ere you go to bed
And tell you what I know.

CLAUDIUS Thanks, dear my lord.
Exit Polonius

Oh my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder. Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will.
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect. What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy

24 voyage] F; viage Q2 25 about] Q2; vpon F 26 SH ROSENCRantz] Ros. Q2; Both. F 26 SD Exeunt...Guildenstern]
Hammer; Exeunt Gent. Q2, F 33 Fare] F; farre Q2 35 SD Capell; Exit. Q2; not in F

24 Arm you Prepare yourselves.
28 convey myself secretly move myself.
29 the process what goes on.
29 tax him home censure him severely.
31 meet suitable.
32 Since...partial Polonius does not trust Gertrude to report accurately on her interview with her son. He is spying on her as well as on Hamlet. His transfer of responsibility for the scheme, in 'as you said' (30), is a matter of prudence as well as deference (see 3.1.175–9). 'nature' is 'natural feelings'.
33 of vantage from a good position.
37 primal eldest i.e. going back to Cain's murder of Abel.
39 Though inclination...will Though my desire to pray is as great as my determination.
41 bound Probably this means 'directed towards' (as in 'bound for England', 4.6.9) rather than 'obliged' or 'sworn'.
46–7 Whereo...offence? What is mercy for, except to meet crime face to face?
But to confront the visage of offence?
And what's in prayer but this two-fold force,
To be forestalled ere 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'?
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'offence?
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above;
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults
To give in evidence. What then? What rests?
Try what repentance can. What can it not?
Yet what can it when one cannot repent?
Oh wretched state! Oh bosom black as death!
Oh limed soul that struggling to be free
Art more engaged! Help, angels! – Make assay:
Bow stubborn knees, and heart with strings of steel
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe.
All may be well.

[He kneels]

50 pardoned] pardon'd F; pardon Q2 58 shove] shove Q2 72 SD He kneels] He kneels Q1; not in Q2, F

54 effects things acquired or achieved.
55 mine own ambition i.e. those things I was ambitious for.
56 th'offence i.e. the fruits of the offence.
58-60 Offence's gilded hand . . . law Compare King Lear 4.6.165-6. 'Plate sin with gold, / And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks.'
58 shove by thrust aside.
61 shuffling trickery, sharp practice, deception. See 3.1.67 note.
61 the action lies A legal phrase, meaning that a case is admitted to exist. But of course it also means that every deed lies exposed to God's scrutiny.

63-4 Even to . . . evidence To give evidence even about the worst of our sins. We are witnesses for the prosecution of ourselves. 'teeth' is for savagery and 'forehead' for effrontery (compare 'brows' above, 7).
64 rests remains.
68 limed The image is of a bird caught by the smearing of a very sticky substance, called birdlime, on twigs and branches.
69 Make assay I think it is more likely that Claudius is addressing himself than the angels. After his appeal, 'Help, angels!' there is a silence, and then in a quieter tone he turns to himself, knowing that it is he who must make the effort.
Enter HAMLET

HAMLET Now might I do it pat, now a is a-praying, And now I’ll do’t — and so a goes to heaven, And so am I revenged. That would be scanned. 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. A took my father grossly, full of bread, With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May, And how his audit stands who knows save heaven? But in our circumstance and course of thought ’Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged To take him in the purging of his soul, When he is fit and seasoned for his passage? No. Up sword, and know thou a more horrid hent, When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage, Or in th’incestuous pleasure of his bed, At game a-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.
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

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

Exit

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

Exit

[3.4] Enter GERTRUDE and POLONIUS

POLONIUS A will come straight. Look you lay home to him.
Tell him his pranks have been too broad 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 (Within) Mother, mother, mother!

GERTRUDE I'll warrant you, fear me not. Withdraw, I hear him coming.

[Polonius hides himself behind the arras]

Enter HAMLET

HAMLET Now mother, what's the matter?

GERTRUDE Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET Mother, you have my father much offended.

GERTRUDE Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.
HAMLET Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.
GERTRUDE Why, how now Hamlet?
HAMLET What’s the matter now?
GERTRUDE Have you forgot me?
HAMLET No by the rood, not so.
You are the queen, your husband’s brother’s wife,
And, would it were not so, you are my mother.
GERTRUDE Nay, then I’ll set those to you that can speak.
HAMLET Come, come and sit you down, you shall not budge.
You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you.
GERTRUDE What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murder me?
Help, help, ho!
POLONIUS (Behind) What ho! Help, help, help!
HAMLET (Draws) How now, a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead.
Kills Polonius
POLONIUS (Behind) Oh, I am slain!
GERTRUDE Oh me, what hast thou done?
HAMLET Nay I know not, is it the king?
GERTRUDE 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.
GERTRUDE As kill a king?
HAMLET Ay lady, ’twas my word.
[ Lifts up the arras and reveals the body of Polonius ]
Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell.
I took thee for thy better. Take thy fortune.
Thou find’st to be too busy is some danger.

12 a wicked] Q2, an idle F 16 And, would it] And would it Q2; But would you F 20 inmost] f; most Q2 22 Help, help, ho! F; Help, help Q2 23, 25 SD Behind] Capell; not in Q2, F 23 Help, help, help! F; helpe. Q2 24 SD Draws] Malone (after nt) ; not in Q2, F 24 SD Kills Polonius] V; not in Q2 30 ’twas] F; it was Q2 30 SD following Capell (26) and Cambridge; not in Q2, F 32 better] Q2; Betters V

14 forgot me forgotten who I am.
17 can speak Is this the understatement ‘will have something to say to you’?
18 Come, come This is much more than the ‘now then!’ of Gertrude’s ‘Come, come’ (12). I punctuate to indicate that Hamlet is forcing her to sit down.
18 budge move away (to fetch the others).
19 glass Once again, this is the mirror which reveals the truth and sets standards. See notes to 3.2.20 and 3.1.153.

24 Dead for a ducat Possibly, as Kittredge suggests, a wager, i.e. ‘I’ll bet a ducat I kill it.’
30 As kill a king?...word It is extraordinary that neither of them takes up this all-important matter again. Gertrude does not press for an explanation; Hamlet does not question further the queen’s involvement. It is clear that this silence was thought to be a fault in the theatre. In Q1, Hamlet reiterates the fact that his father was murdered (‘damnably murdred’), and the queen says ‘I never knew of this most horrid murder.’
Leave wringing of your hands. Peace! Sit you down
And let me wring your heart, for so I shall
If it be made of penetrable stuff,
If damned custom have not brazed it so,
That it be proof and bulwark against sense.

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

**HAMLET**

Such an act

That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love
And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
As false as dicers’ oaths. Oh such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words. Heaven’s face doth glow;
Yea, this solidity and compound mass,
With tristful visage as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at the act.

**GERTRUDE**

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

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37 brazed made brazen, hardened like brass.
38 proof armour.
38 sense feeling.
40 Such an act In the speech which follows, Hamlet quite certainly implies the breaking of marriage vows (see note to 1.5.46). But when Gertrude directly asks him ‘what act?’ (51), he does not directly answer ‘adultery’, but charges her with inconstancy, immoderate sexual desire, and a lack of any sense of value, in exchanging King Hamlet for Claudius. He does not pursue the charge of adultery, but nothing he says shows him forgetting it. Gertrude’s collapse in 88–91 – which Hamlet scarcely notices – shows contrition for a worse sin than a hasty second marriage. She must recognise her son’s unstated accusation.
42 rose A figurative rose, symbol of true love.
44 sets a blister there Assumed to mean the branding of a harlot on the forehead, with the backing of Laertes’ speech at 4.5.119–20, ‘brands the harlot / Even here, between the chaste unsmirched brow’. But I think Shakespeare in the latter place is speaking figuratively, and in both places is thinking of the forehead as the place which declares innocence or boldness (compare 3.3.7). Compare the proverbial ‘honest as the skin between his brows’ (Much Ado 3.5.12). The ‘blister’ I take to indicate disease. It was not the custom in Elizabethan times to brand prostitutes in the face, though this dire punishment was threatened by Henry VIII in 1513 and by the Commonwealth in 1650.
46 contraction pledging, making vows or contracts.
48 rhapsody a medley, a miscellaneous or confused collection.
48–51 Heaven’s face...at the act i.e. the skies are red with shame, and the huge earth itself, with a countenance as sad as if it were doomsday, is distressed in mind by your act.
I follow F. Q2 misunderstands and garbles the passage. The compositor, substituting ‘O’er’ (‘Ore’) for ‘Yea’, thought the visage belonged to the glowing sun, and, unable to read or to understand ‘tristful’, supplied ‘heated’. Possibly the MS. had become defective here; compare note to 1.3.26.
52 index table of contents (prefixed to a book).
HAMLET

Look here upon this picture, and on this,
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
See what a grace was seated on this brow;
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;
A station like the herald Mercury,
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;
A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal
To give the world assurance of a man.
This was your husband. Look you now what follows.
Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed
And batten 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 judgement; and what judgement
Would step from this to this? [Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion, but sure that sense
Is apoplexed, for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thralled,
But it reserved some quantity of choice

to do on moorland. The 'fair mountain' is faintly biblical: Wilson suggests an undertone of 'blackamoor' in 'moor'.)

53 this picture, and...this There have been several ways of producing this in the theatre. The illustration in early editions (see illus. 6) suggests that in the Restoration portraits were hung on the wall. But the practice of using miniatures goes back a long way. Sometimes Hamlet drew miniatures of both kings from his pocket. A favourite practice is for Hamlet to have a locket of his father as a pendant, and to seize a similar locket, of Claudius, which hangs round Gertrude's neck.

54 counterfeit presentment i.e. portraits, representations in art.

56 Hyperion See 1.2.140.
57 front forehead.
58 station stance, way of standing.
59 New-lighted Newly alighted.
60 combination i.e. of divine qualities.
61 set his seal place his confirming mark.
62 ear of corn.
65 Blasting Blighting.
67 batten feed and grow fat. (Not an easy thing
To serve in such a difference.\] What devil was’t
That thus hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?
[\[Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight, 
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all, 
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope.\]
O shame, where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron’s bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
And reason panders will.

GERTRUDE
O Hamlet, speak no more.
Thou turn’st my eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.

HAMLET
Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamèd bed,
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty.

76 serve... difference i.e. to assist in differentiating between the two men.
77 cozened... hoodman-blind deceived you in a game of blindman’s buff. (The devil substituted Claudius for King Hamlet when the blindfold Gertrude chose him.)
81 mope move around aimlessly, in a daze or trance. Compare The Tempest 5.1.240, ‘Even in a dream were we divided from them, / And were brought moping hither.’
82 Rebellious hell i.e. The devil encourages our worser nature to rebel against our better judgement.
83 mutine incite mutiny (OED v 2).
84-5 To flaming youth... fire The argument runs that it is no good insisting on virtue as a rigid and unbending guide of conduct in the young, when age gives such a bad example. Virtue, in these circumstances, becomes a soft wax melting in the fire of youthful ardour.
86 gives the charge signals the attack.
88 reason panders will reason assists the passions to obtain their ends.
91 leave their tinct surrender their colour.
92 enseamèd The word has to do with ‘grease’. Its commonest context in Shakespeare’s time was scouring or purging animals, especially hawks and horses, of (it was thought) superfluous internal grease or fat. But ‘ensam’ could also mean not to remove but to apply grease, especially to cloth. The least disgusting meaning here would therefore be ‘greasy’. It is more than likely, however, that what is uppermost in Hamlet’s mind is the idea of evacuated foulness. The echo ‘semen’ is surely present. The bed is greasy with offensive semen. Beaumont and Fletcher probably had this passage in mind when writing ‘dead-drunk... his lechery enseam’d upon him’ in Four Plays (‘Triumph of Death’, scene vi).
93 Stewed In this word, Shakespeare combines the heat, sweat and greasiness with the odium of the brothels, widely known as ‘the stews’.
93 honeying... sty i.e. covering over foulness with sweet words and endearments. ‘making love’ has its usual pre-1950 sense of courtship, love-talk.
GERTRUDE
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
Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole
And put it in his pocket.

GERTRUDE
No more!

Enter GHOST

HAMLET
A king of shreds and patches –
Save me and hover o’er me with your wings,
You heavenly guards! – What would your gracious figure?

GERTRUDE
Alas he’s mad!

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.
Speak to her, Hamlet.

HAMLET
How is it with you lady?

GERTRUDE
Alas, how is’t with you,
That you do bend your eye on vacancy,
forbidden – punishing his mother – and neglecting
the revenge he was ordered to carry out.

108 important Neither ‘momentous’ nor
‘urgent’; compare All’s Well 3.7.21, ‘his important
blood will not deny’. We have no adjective which
has the same sense of demanding or insisting. ‘The
acting – so urged on me and required of me – of
your dread command.’

110 blunted purpose Compare Sonnet 95: ‘the
hardest knife, ill-used, doth lose his edge’. The
Ghost is accusing Hamlet not of forgetting his
revenge, but of misusing the energies which should
be directed towards revenge.

111 amazement utter bewilderment. Compare
3.2.296.

113 Conceit Imagination.
And with th’incorporal air do hold discourse?
Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
And, as the sleeping soldiers in th’alarm,
Your bedded hair, like life in excrements,
Start up and stand an end. O gentle son,
Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper
Sprinkle cool patience. Whereon do you look?

HAMLET
On him, on him! Look you how pale he glares.
His form and cause conjoined, preaching to stones,
Would make them capable. — Do not look upon me,
Lest with this piteous action you convert
My stern effects. Then what I have to do
Will want true colour: tears perchance for blood.

GERTRUDE
To whom do you speak this?

HAMLET
Do you see nothing there?

GERTRUDE
Nothing at all, yet all that is I see.

HAMLET
Nor did you nothing hear?

GERTRUDE
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.

Exit Ghost

GERTRUDE
This is the very coinage of your brain.
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in.

117 th’incorporal] Q2: their corporall F
120 th’incorporal] Q2: their corporall F
130 whom] Q2: who F
137 SD] Q2; Exit F
139-40 This...in] as one line Q2, F

118 spirits wildly peep 'In moments of excitement the spirits or "vital forces" were thought to come, as it were, to the surface, and to cause various symptoms of agitation' (Kittredge).
119 as the sleeping...alarm like soldiers startled out of sleep by a call to arms.
120 like hair (considered plural).
120 life in excrements 'excrement' can be either what is voided from, or what, like hair and nails, grows out of the body. Probably 'as though there were independent life in such outgrowths'.
121 an end A common form of 'on end'.
124 how pale he glares He is gazing fixedly with a ghastly expression. 'glares' is not necessarily an angry stare. 'pale' is several times used by Shakespeare in connection with a dying or lack-lustre look of the eyes. Schmidt (who is unusual in seeing that this phrase needs explanation) compares Troilus 5.3.81, 'Look how thou diest, look how thy eye turns pale.' See also 'their pale-dead eyes' (of horses) in Henry V 4.2.48.
126 capable receptive, susceptible.
127 piteous action behaviour which excites pity.
128 effects deeds (seen as issuing from anger and indignation). At their first meeting, the Ghost warned Hamlet not to pity him (1.5.5), presumably taking the same view that pity is not a state of mind likely to generate violent action.
129 true colour 'The 'effects' of pity would be colourless tears instead of blood. (The Ghost's reappearance seems to be weakening Hamlet's resolve instead of strengthening it.)
136 in his habit as he lived in the clothes he wore when alive.
138 very mere.
139 ecstasy madness.
140 cunning skilful.
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 from. Mother, for love of grace,
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,
That not your trespass but my madness speaks;
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
While rank corruption, mining all within,
Infests unseen. Confess yourself to heaven,
Repent what’s past, avoid what is to come,
And do not spread the compost on 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.

GERTRUDE
Oh Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.

HAMLET
Oh throw away the worser part of it
And live the purer with the other half.
Good night – but go not to my uncle’s bed;
Assume a virtue if you have it not.
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery
That aptly is put on.] Refrain tonight,
And that shall lend a kind of easiness
To the next abstinence, [the next more easy,
For use almost can change the stamp of nature,
And either... the devil, or throw him out,
With wondrous potency.] Once more good night,
And when you are desirous to be blessed,
I'll blessing beg of you. For this same lord,
I do repent; but heaven hath pleased it so,
To punish me with this, and this with me,
That I must be their scourge and minister.
I will bestow him, and will answer well
The death I gave him. So again, good night.
I must be cruel only to be kind;
Thus bad begins, and worse remains behind.
One word more good lady.

GERTRUDE  What shall I do?

HAMLET  Not this by no means that I bid you do:
Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,
Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,
And let him for a pair of reechy kisses,
Or paddling in your neck with his damned fingers,
Make you to ravel all this matter out,

166 Refrain tonight] F; to refraine night Q2 168-71 the next... potency] Q2: not in F 180 Thus] F; This Q2

170 either... the devil A verb is missing. Many editions supply ‘master’ from the 1611 quarto. It may well be that this omission is not the compositor’s fault; that Shakespeare had not found the word he wanted before he gave up the passage.

172-3 when you are...beg of you when you are contrite enough to ask God’s blessing, I’ll seek your blessing (i.e. resume my duty as your son).

174-6 heaven...minister it is the will of heaven, in making me the agent of their chastisement, that I myself should be punished by being the cause of Polonius’s death, and that Polonius should be punished in his death at my hands. (See Introduction, pp. 54–5.) ‘Scourge and minister’ is a single concept (scourging officer), split by the familiar Shakespearean hendiadys. Compare ‘Who made thee then a bloody minister?’ asked of Clarence in Richard III 1.4.220, concerning the death of Plantagenet, after Clarence has said that private men must not carry out the vengeance which is the responsibility of God.

177 answer well i.e. give good reasons for.

179–80 I must be cruel...behind The remarkable change of tone in this couplet led one editor to suggest they were spoken aside. They do indeed have a meditative quality, and, in this recognition of the heaviness of his task, they resemble the couplet at the end of Act 2 – ‘The time is out of joint...’ His own cruelty repels him; he sees the death of Polonius as the bad beginning of a vengeance that will yet be ‘worse’.

183 bloat bloated, swollen (with drink).

184 wanton wantonly, lasciviously.

185 reechy soiled and nauseating.

187 ravel...out unravel.
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, from a bat, a gib,
Such dear concernings hide? Who would do so?
No, in despite of sense and secrecy,
Unpeg the basket on the house's top,
Let the birds fly, and like the famous ape,
To try conclusions, in the basket creep
And break your own neck down.

**GERTRUDE.** 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 to England, you know that?

**GERTRUDE** Alack,
I had forgot. 'Tis so concluded on.

**HAMLET** [There's letters sealed, and my two schoolfellows,
Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged,
They bear the mandate. They must sweep my way
And marshal me to knavery. Let it work,
For 'tis the sport to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petar, an't shall go hard
But I will delve one yard below their mines

---

189 in craft by design.
189–92 'Twere good... concernings hide Sar- castic. A respectable queen, as you consider yourself to be, has of course no reason to keep a secret from her loathsome husband.
191 paddock frog or toad.
191 gib tom-cat (an abbreviation of 'Gilbert'; the 'g' is hard).
192 secrecy discretion.
194–7 Unpeg... neck down Oddly enough, there is no record of this fable. It more or less explains itself, however. An ape takes a birdcage onto a roof; he opens the door and the birds fly out. In order to imitate them, he gets into the basket, jumps out and, instead of flying, falls to the ground. It does not seem a very appropriate way of telling the queen that she will get hurt if she releases the news of Hamlet's sanity.
196 To try conclusions To test results.
197 down An intensifier - 'utterly' or 'completely'.

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198–200 In the 'bad' quarto of 1603, the queen promises also to assist Hamlet in his revenge.
203–11 There's letters... meet These nine lines are not found in F. It is argued in the Introduction (pp. 14–19) that their removal is part of a revision by Shakespeare of the later part of the play. (1) Hamlet's plan to postpone his revenge, it is suggested, seemed too definite; (2) Hamlet has had no way of learning of the king's plan to send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with him to England; (3) the determination to kill Rosencrantz and Guildenstern does not accord with 5.2.6–11.
205 sweep my way clear a path for me.
207 engineer one who constructs or designs military machines or contrivances, especially for use in sieges. Q2 gives it the normal spelling for the time, 'engineer'.
208 Hoist i.e. blown up.
208 petar bomb. Also 'petard'.
And blow them at the moon. Oh 'tis most sweet
When in one line two crafts directly meet.]

This man shall set me packing.
I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room.
Mother, good night. Indeed, this counsellor
Is now most still, most secret, and most grave,
Who was in life a foolish prating knave.
Come sir, to draw toward an end with you.
Good night mother.

Exit Hamlet tugging in Polonius; [Gertrude remains]

[4.1] Enter CLAUDIUS with ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS There's matter in these sighs, these profound heaves.
You must translate, 'tis fit we understand them.
Where is your son?

GERTRUDE [Bestow this place on us a little while.]

[Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern]

Ah mine own lord, what have I seen tonight!

CLAUDIUS What, Gertrude? How does Hamlet?

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

CLAUDIUS Oh heavy deed!
It had been so with us had we been there.
His liberty is full of threats to all,
To you yourself, to us, to everyone.
Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answered?
It will be laid to us, whose providence
Should have kept short, restrained, and out of haunt,
This mad young man. But so much was our love,
We would not understand what was most fit,
But like the owner of a foul disease,
To keep it from divulging, let it feed
Even on the pith of life. Where is he gone?

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

**CLAUDIUS** Oh Gertrude, come away!
The sun no sooner shall the mountains touch
But we will ship him hence, and this vile deed
We must with all our majesty and skill
Both countenance and excuse. Ho, Guildenstern!

**Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern**

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

**Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern**

Come Gertrude, we'll call up our wisest friends
And let them know both what we mean to do
And what's untimely done. . . .

[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.] Oh come away,
My soul is full of discord and dismay.

Exeunt

[4.2] Enter Hamlet

Hamlet Safely stowed.

Gentlemen (Within) Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!

Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Rosencrantz What have you done my lord with the dead body?
Hamlet Compounded it with dust whereto 'tis kin.
Rosencrantz Tell us where 'tis, that we may take it thence and bear it to the chapel.
Hamlet Do not believe it.
Rosencrantz Believe what?
Hamlet That I can keep your counsel and not mine own. Besides, to be demanded of a sponge, what replication should be made by the son of a king?
Rosencrantz Take you me for a sponge my lord?
Hamlet Ay sir, that soaks up the king's countenance, his rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the king best service in the end: he keeps them like an ape in the corner of his jaw, first mouthe
d

Wilson’s suggestion (MSH, p. 30) that the upper arm of Shakespeare’s deletion mark (a large square bracket in the margin) has scored through the last half of 40. See Introduction, pp. 11–12.

level directly aimed.

42 blank target.

44 woundless invulnerable.

Act 4, Scene 2

3 soft be cautious. See 3.1.88.

6 Compounded Mixed. Compare Sonnet 71, ‘When I...compounded am with clay’. All Hamlet has done is put the body in a dusty place.

11 keep...mine own To keep counsel is to maintain silence about one’s judgements and intentions. Hamlet’s riddling remark hints that he knows the secrets of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern but is not revealing his own.

11–12 to be demanded of if one is interrogated by.

12 replication formal response.

15 countenance favour.

17 like an ape as an ape does. Q1 reads ‘as an Ape doth nuttes’. Q2’s ‘apple’ is a misreading based on a misunderstanding.
to be last swallowed. When he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again.

ROSENCRANTZ I understand you not my lord.

HAMLET I am glad of it, a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear.

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

HAMLET The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body.

The king is a thing –

GUILDENSTERN A thing my lord?

HAMLET Of nothing. Bring me to him. Hide fox, and all after!

Exeunt

[4.3] Enter CLAUDIUS, and two or three

CLAUDIUS I have sent to seek him, and to find the body.

How dangerous is it that this man goes loose,

Yet must not we put the strong law on him;

He's loved of the distracted multitude,

Who like not in their judgement, but their eyes;

And where 'tis so, th'offender's scourge is weighed,

But never the offence. To bear all smooth and even,

This sudden sending him away must seem Deliberate pause. Diseases desperate grown

27 Hide...after] f ; not in q2  Act 4, Scene 3 4.3] Pope 7 never] q2 ; neerer f

24 The body...with the body As J. Johnson and N. Alexander have argued (see the latter's Poison, Play and Duel, p. 177) this is a riddling reference to the much-debated theory of the king's two bodies, natural and politic, made famous in Kantorowicz's book (The King's Two Bodies, 1957). Claudius has a body, but the kingship of Denmark is not inherent in that body. Hamlet does not believe in kingship as an abstraction, as did those like Plowden, who stressed the importance of the Body Politic. He believes fiercely in kings as rightful kings, true royal persons. This king is 'a thing of nothing'.

27 Hide fox...after q2 omits. Hamlet runs out followed by the others. The reference is presumably to a children's game of chase or hide-and-seek.

Act 4, Scene 3

0 sd] Enter King, and two or three q2 ; Enter King f
By desperate appliance are relieved,  
Or not at all.

*Enter* ROSENCRANTZ

How now, what hath befallen?

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

CLAUDIUS But where is he?

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

CLAUDIUS Bring him before us.

ROSENCRANTZ Ho! bring in my lord.

*Enter* HAMLET and GUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS Now Hamlet, where's Polonius?

HAMLET At supper.

CLAUDIUS At supper? Where?

HAMLET Not where he eats, but where a 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 and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table; that's the end.

CLAUDIUS 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.

CLAUDIUS 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.

CLAUDIUS Where is Polonius?

HAMLET In heaven, send thither to see. If your messenger find him not

---

11 SD F: *Enter Rosencrantz and all the rest* Q2 15 Ho! bring| How, bring Q2; Hoa, Guildenstern? Bring F 15 my| F; the Q2 15 SD| F; They enter Q2 19 a is| Q2; he is F 20 politic| Q2; not in F 21 ourselves| Q2; our selve F 23 two| Q2; to F 24-6 CLAUDIUS Alas... that worm] Q2; not in F 27 SH CLAUDIUS| King. F; King. King. Q2

11 SD *Enter ROSENCRANTZ* Q2's addition 'and all the rest' must have struck the playhouse scribe as contradicting 'They enter' at 15. As usual, he reduced the crowd, and he made Rosencrantz call for Guildenstern at 15. I accept F's view that Guildenstern remains guarding Hamlet.

19 where a is eaten Compare 3.3.73. Presumably Shakespeare intended the syncope which nowadays we would write as 'he's'.

19–21 convocation...diet Hamlet is punning on the Diet (or assembly) of Worms (the city on the Rhine). The most famous meeting of the Diet was that called by the emperor, Charles V, in 1521, before which Luther appeared to justify his doctrines.

20 politic worms 'such worms as might breed in a politician's corpse' (Dowden). As the worm insinuates itself into the privacy of the body, it resembles Polonius's politic espionage.

22 variable interchangeable, i.e. they may be different dishes, but they are both served to the one table.

28 progress journey of state by the sovereign through his dominions.
there, seek him i'th’other place yourself. But if indeed you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby.

**CLAUDIUS** Go seek him there.

**HAMLET** A will stay till you come.

[Exeunt Attendants]

**CLAUDIUS** Hamlet, this deed, for thine especial safety,
Which we do tender, as we dearly grieve
For that which thou hast done, must send thee hence
With fiery quickness. Therefore prepare thyself.
The bark is ready and the wind at help,
Th’associates tend, and everything is bent
For England.

**HAMLET** For England?

**CLAUDIUS** Ay Hamlet.

**HAMLET** Good.

**CLAUDIUS** So is it if thou knew’st our purposes.

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

**CLAUDIUS** Thy loving father, Hamlet.

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

**CLAUDIUS** Follow him at foot, tempt him with speed aboard.
Delay it not, I’ll have him hence tonight.
Away, for everything is sealed and done
That else leans on th’affair. Pray you make haste.

[Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern]

And England, if my love thou hold’st at aught,
As my great power thereof may give thee sense,
Since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red

---

32 if indeed] Q2; indeed, if F 33 within this month] Q2; this moneth F 36 A will] Q2; He will F 36 you] Q2; ye F 36 SD] Capell; not in Q2, F 37 for thine] Q2; of thine, for thine F 40 With...quickness] F; not in Q2 42 is] Q2; at F 45 them] Q2; him F 49 and so] F; so Q2 50 foot, tempt] Rowe; foote, / Tempt Q2, F 53 SD] Theobald 2:

not in Q2, F

34 the lobby A main corridor or ante-room.
Compare ‘here in the lobby’ in 2.2.159.
38 tender have regard for.
42 tend attend.
42 bent in a state of readiness.
45 I see a cherub...them A mischievous ‘antic’ speech in which Hamlet both hints his own knowledge and warns Claudius that heaven is watching him.

46 at foot close at heel.
53 leans on appertains to.
54 England the king of England.
54 at aught at any value.
55 thereof...sense may give you a feeling of the importance of valuing my love.
56 cicatrice scar.
After the Danish sword, and thy free awe
Pays homage to us – thou mayst not coldly set
Our sovereign process, which imports at full,
By letters congruening to that effect,
The present death of Hamlet. Do it England,
For like the hectic in my blood he rages,
And thou must cure me. Till I know 'tis done,
Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun. Exit

[4.4] Enter fortinbras with his army over the stage

Fortinbras Go captain, from me greet the Danish king.
Tell him that by his licence, Fortinbras
Craves the conveyance of a promised march
Over his kingdom. You know the rendezvous.
If that his majesty would aught with us,
We shall express our duty in his eye,
And let him know so.

Captain I will do't, my lord.
Fortinbras Go softly on.

[Exit Fortinbras, with the army]

[Enter Hamlet, rosencrantz, etc.

Hamlet 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.

60 congruing] Q2; conjuring F 64 were ne'er begun] F; will ne'er begin Q2 Act 4, Scene 4 4.4] Pope 0 SD] Q2; Enter Fortinbras with an Armie v 3 Craves] Q2, Q1; Claines F 8 softly] Q2; safely v 8 SD] Theobald; not in Q2; Exit F 8, 1 SD-66 Enter Hamlet... worth. Exit] Q2; not in F

57 free uncompelled.
58 coldly set regard with indifference.
60 congruing agreeing. So Q2. 'congrue' is a word unique to Shakespeare, occurring only here and in the bad quarto of Henry V. The F scribe was understandably shy of it.
61 present immediate.
62 hectic chronic fever.
64 haps fortunes.

Act 4, Scene 4
3 conveyance grant. See 2.2.76–80. Fortinbras asks for the formal execution of a previous promise. Many editors think he is asking for an escort.
6 duty humble respect.
6 in his eye in his presence.
8 softly circumspectly (being careful not to give offence). Compare Bacon's essay on Dissimulation, 'like the going softly, by one that cannot well see'.
8 SD-66 Enter Hamlet... The whole of the remainder of this scene is omitted in the Folio. This is the most extensive of the 'cuts'. See Introduction, pp. 16–19.
9 powers forces, troops.
HAMLET Who commands them sir?
CAPTAIN The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

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

CAPTAIN Truly to speak, and with no addition, We go to gain a little patch of ground That hath in it no profit but the name. To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it, Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole A ranker rate, should it be sold in fee.

HAMLET Why then the Polack never will defend it.
CAPTAIN Yes, it is already garrisoned.
HAMLET Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats Will not debate the question of this straw. This is th'impostume of much wealth and peace, That inward breaks, and shows no cause without Why the man dies. I humbly thank you sir.

CAPTAIN God buy you sir. [Exit]
ROSENCRANTZ Will't please you go my lord?

HAMLET I'll be with you straight; go a little before. [Exeunt all but Hamlet]

How all occasions do inform against me, And spur my dull revenge! What is a man If his chief good and market of his time Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more. Sure he that made us with such large discourse, Looking before and after, gave us not That capability and god-like reason To fust in us unused. Now whether it be Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple Of thinking too precisely on th'event — A thought which quartered hath but one part wisdom And ever three parts coward — I do not know Why yet I live to say this thing's to do,
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me.
Witness this army of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death and danger dare,
Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father killed, a mother stained,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep, while to my shame I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for a fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain. Oh from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth.  
Exit}
[4.5] Enter HORATIO, GERTRUDE and a GENTLEMAN

GERTRUDE I will not speak with her.
GENTLEMAN She is importunate, indeed distract;
       Her mood will needs be pitied.
GERTRUDE What would she have?
GENTLEMAN 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, 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. They yawn at it,
       And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts,
       Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
       Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
       Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.

HORATIO 'Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew
       Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.

GERTRUDE Let her come in.

(Aside) To my sick soul, as sin’s true nature is,
       Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.
       So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
       It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

Enter OPHELIA distracted

Act 4, Scene 5

1–15 In order to save on characters, F gives the Gentleman’s speeches to Horatio, and Horatio’s to Gertrude. This greatly coarsens the way Ophelia’s madness is introduced.

3 Her mood... pitied Her state of mind must necessarily cause pity.
5 hems makes the noise ‘H’m’.
6 Spurns... straws ‘takes offence angrily at trifles’ (Kittredge).
6 in doubt of uncertain meaning.
9 to collection to infer a meaning.
9 yawn gape with surprise. Compare Coriolanus 3.2.11, ‘to yawn, be still, and wonder’.
10 botch... thoughts patch the words up into patterns conforming to their own ideas. Compare the ‘dangerous conjectures’ feared by Horatio in 15 below.
13 unhappily clumsily.
15 ill-breeding intent on making mischief.
19 artless unskilled, hence blundering, foolish.
19 jealousy suspicion.
20 It spills... spilt i.e. fear of detection leads to the very exposure one is trying to avert. ‘spilF means ‘destroy’, but here has an obvious double sense with ‘reveal’.
20 SD Q1 gives the famous direction: ‘Enter Ofelia playing on a Lute, and her hair downe singing.’
OPHELIA Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?

GERTRUDE How now Ophelia?

OPHELIA She sings

How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff
And his sandal shoon.

GERTRUDE Alas sweet lady, what imports this song?

OPHELIA Say you? Nay, pray you mark.

He is dead and gone lady,
He is dead and gone;
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.

Oho!

GERTRUDE Nay but Ophelia –

OPHELIA Pray you mark.

White his shrowd as the mountain snow –

Enter CLAUDIUS

GERTRUDE Alas, look here my lord.

OPHELIA Larded all with sweet flowers,
Which bewept to the grave did not go
With true-love showers.

CLAUDIUS How do you, pretty lady?

OPHELIA Well good dild you. They say the owl was a baker’s daughter.

23 SD. She sings Q2; not in F 23–4 How... one Q as one line Q2, F 25–6 By... shoon Q as one line Q2, F 26 sandal] F; Sendall Q2 29 SD Song] Q2; not in F 29–30 He... gone] as one line Q2, F 31–2 At... stone] as one line Q2, F 33 Oho!] O ho, Q2; not in F 36 SD Song] Q2 (at Q8); not in F 38 Larded all] Q2; Larded, F, Q1 39 grave] F; ground Q2 41 you] Q2; ye F 42 good dild] Q2; God dild’d F

23–6 Obviously a recollection of the famous Walsingham ballad, which brings together a lonely pilgrim and a deserted lover. See the version attributed to Sir Walter Ralegh in Poems, ed. Latham, 1951, pp. 22–3. For the music, see Sternfeld, pp. 59–62.

25 cockle hat The pilgrim’s emblem was a scallop shell, originally a sign that he had been to the shrine of St James of Compostella in Spain.

26 shoon shoes.

28 Say you?... mark i.e. ‘Is that your question? Just pay attention.’ Then she proceeds with the ballad, the dead father taking the place of the absent lover.

38 Larded all Decorated. F omits the extra-metrical ‘all’.

39 did not go It seems very likely that Ophelia inserts the ‘not’ into the original song, to suit the fate of Polonius.

42 good dild you God yield, or reward you. The phrase means only ‘thank you’.

42 owl... baker’s daughter This was recognised in the eighteenth century as a reference to a folktale in which a baker’s daughter was parsimonious with the dough when a beggar asked her for bread. The beggar was Jesus, and he turned her into an owl. K. M. Briggs gives two English versions (Dictionary of British Folk Tales, 1970, 1, 124, 443). It is indexed as A 1958.0.1 in Stith Thompson, Motif Index of Folk Literature, rev. edn 1955, 1, 258. The tale is in Ophelia’s mind as a story of transformation.
Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be. God be at your table.

CLAUDIUS Conceit upon her father.

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

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 his clothes 
And dupped the chamber door; 
Let in the maid that out a maid
Never departed more.

CLAUDIUS Pretty Ophelia!

OPHELIA Indeed la! Without an oath I'll make an end on't.

By Gis and by Saint Charity, 
Alack and fie for shame, 
Young men will do't if they come to't—

By Cock, they are to blame.

Quoth she, 'Before you tumbled me, 
You promised me to wed.'

43–4 God be at your table—and bless you in your transformation.

45 Conceit upon her father Fanciful thoughts connected with her father.

46–7 ask you...say you this There is constant reference to a hidden meaning in Ophelia’s utterances, introduced first by the Gentleman’s speech, 4.13. Ophelia’s ‘explanations’ go from one of her sadnesses to the other—from Hamlet to Polonius and back again.

48 Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s day The words of this are not known elsewhere. For Chappell’s rendering of the tune traditionally given in the theatre, see the NV, and Sternfeld, pp. 62–4.

53 dupped ‘dup’ = do up = undo.

54–5 Let in...departed more A number of critics (including Madariaga) have supposed that Hamlet and Ophelia had had sexual relations, and some of them (including Allardyce Nicoll) thought that Ophelia was actually pregnant (and for that reason drowned herself). For most of us, Ophelia’s words are intensely moving because they show her deranged mind wandering over the sexual relations which she has not had.

57 Indeed la! Scornful assent to Claudius’s ‘Pretty Ophelia!’ ‘la’ intensifies an asseveration, as in Coriolanus 1.3.67. Q2 omits ‘la’. F’s punctuation, ‘la?’, indicates either a question or an exclamation.

57 Without an oath N. Alexander points to Ophelia’s substitution of ‘Gis’ and ‘Cock’ for Jesus and God.

61 Cock A common ‘mincing’ of God. See Stow’s Survey of London, ‘Yea by cock, nay by cock, for greater oaths were spared’ (Everyman edn, p. 105). Used here with an obvious double meaning.

62 tumbled had sexual intercourse with. Compare ‘lie tumbling in the hay’ (Winter’s Tale 4.3.12) and ‘to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy’ (Antony and Cleopatra 1.4.17).
He answers—

So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,
And thou hadst not come to my bed.

CLAUDIUS How long hath she been thus?

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

CLAUDIUS 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 spies,
But in battalions. First, her father slain;
Next, your son gone, and he most violent author
Of his own just remove; the people muddied,
Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers
For good Polonius' death – and we have done but greenly
In hugger-mugger to inter him; poor Ophelia
Divided from herself and her fair judgement,
Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts;
Last, and as much containing as all these,
Her brother is in secret come from France,
Feeds on his wonder, keeps himself in clouds,

64 He answers] Q2: not in F 65 ha'] V: a Q2 67 thus] Q2: this F 69 would] Q2: should F 71-2 Good... good... good... good God... god... god... god Q2 72 SD] V: not in Q2 73 SD] Theobald 4: not in Q2, F 74-6 springs / All... behold – / Oh... Gertrude,] Stevens 3: two lines of prose Q2: springs / All... Gertrude, F 75 and now behold] Q2: not in F 78 battalions] battalians Q2; Battalies v 81 their] V: not in Q2 88 Feeds on] Q2: Keepes on F 88 his] v: this Q2

66 And ff.

74-6 Oh this... Gertrude, Gertrude Q2 prints all of this as two lines of prose, which suggests a confused MS. F omits 'and now behold', creating two lines of regular verse. It seems very likely that 'and now behold' was a false start, that 'Oh, Gertrude, Gertrude' was substituted, and that once again the Q2 compositor has failed to register Shakespeare's deletion-marks.

80 muddied stirred up like muddy water.

82 greenly foolishly, as though from inexperience.

83 In hugger-mugger With secrecy. Shakespeare does not use this phrase elsewhere. He must have had at the back of his mind a passage from North's translation of Plutarch's Life of Brutus (the source of Julius Caesar) which had become associated with Polonius because of 3.2.91–2. Plutarch said that Antony, fearing that people might be further incensed, was anxious that Caesar's body 'should be honourably buried, and not in hugger-mugger'.

86 as much containing... these i.e. as serious as all the others together.

88 Feeds... clouds i.e. instead of finding out what has actually happened, he keeps himself in the
And wants not buzzers to infect his ear
With pestilent speeches of his father's death,
Wherein necessity, of matter beggared,
Will nothing stick our person to arraign
In ear and ear. O my dear Gertrude, this,
Like to a murdering piece, in many places
Gives me superfluous death.

_A noise within_

**GERTRUDE** Alack, what noise is this?
**CLAUDIUS** Attend! Where are my Swissers? Let them guard the door.

*Enter a messenger*

**MESSNER** What is the matter?

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

**GERTRUDE** How cheerfully on the false trail they cry!

---

92 person [Q2; persons F]
96 GERTRUDE...this? [F; not in Q2]
97 Attend [Q2; not in F]
97 are [F; is Q2]
97 Swissers [Q2; Swissers F; 97 sd] after 95 in Q2, F
97 They [F; The Q2]

clouds of suspicion, and finds food for anger in his
own uncertainty, or in what he guesses ('wonder').
This use of the noun 'wonder' is unusual in
Shakespeare, though the verb is used to indicate
doubt, as well as surprise and admiration.

89 buzzers rumour-mongers.

91-2 necessity...nothing stick i.e. having no
evidence, they are obliged to invent and have no
scruples in doing so.
93 ear and ear i.e. whispering to person after
person.

94 murdering piece The name of a small
cannon which was used to fire charges of small shot
against infantry.

95 superfluous death i.e. kills him over and over
again.

97 Swissers Swiss guards. F calls them
'Switzers'.

99 overpeering of his list rising above (literally,
looking over) its boundary.

100 impitious Some think this a form of
'impetuous' but it is more likely a Shakespearean
coinage = 'pitiless'.

105 ratifiers...word Tradition ('Antiquity')
and custom should ratify and support everything we
say.

106 'Choose we!...' The emphasis is on 'we'.
The 'distracted multitude', who were supposed to
'love' Hamlet (4.3.4), have given their allegiance to
Laertes, and are demanding to take over the
prerogative of the electoral body which made
Claudius king.
Oh this is counter, you false Danish dogs!

*Enter Laertes with others*

CLAUDIUS The doors are broke.

LAERTES Where is this king?—Sirs, stand you all without.

ALL No, let's come in.

LAERTES I pray you give me leave.

ALL We will, we will.

LAERTES I thank you. Keep the door.

CLAUDIUS What is the cause, Laertes, That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?—Let him go, Gertrude, do not fear our person. There's such divinity doth hedge a king That treason can but peep to what it would, Acts little of his will.—Tell me Laertes, Why thou art thus incensed.—Let him go Gertrude.—Speak man.

LAERTES Where is my father?

CLAUDIUS Dead.

GERTRUDE But not by him.

LAERTES O thou vile king, Give me my father.

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

GERTRUDE Calmly, good Laertes.

LAERTES Where is this king?—Sirs, stand you all without.

CLAUDIUS That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?—Let him go, Gertrude, do not fear our person. There's such divinity doth hedge a king That treason can but peep to what it would, Acts little of his will.—Tell me Laertes, Why thou art thus incensed.—Let him go Gertrude.—Speak man.

LAERTES Where is my father?

CLAUDIUS Dead.

GERTRUDE But not by him.

See *Comedy of Errors* 2.2.136, 'tear the stained skin off my harlot brow'.
CLAUDIUS Let him demand his fill.

LAERTES How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with.
   To hell allegiance, vows to the blackest devil,
   Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit!
   I dare damnation. To this point I stand,
   That both the worlds I give to negligence,
   Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged
   Most throughly for my father.

CLAUDIUS Who shall stay you?

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

CLAUDIUS Good Laertes,
   If you desire to know the certainty
   Of your dear father, is't writ in your revenge
   That, swoopstake, you will draw both friend and foe,
   Winner and loser?

LAERTES None but his enemies.

CLAUDIUS Will you know them then?

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

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

_A noise within: 'Let her come in'_

LAERTES How now, what noise is that?

Enter OPHelia

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

**OPHELIA** They bore him bare-faced on the bier

Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny,
And in his grave rained many a tear—
Fare you well my dove.

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

**OPHELIA** You must sing a-down a-down, and you call him a-down-a.
Oh how the wheel becomes it. It is the false steward that stole his master’s daughter.

---

_152 SD_ A noise within. Let her come in _v_: A noyse within _q2_ (giving let her come in to Laertes) _153 SD Enter Ophelia_  
_156 with weight _q2_: by weight _f_  
_157 Tell _q2_: Tell _q2_; turnes _f_ an old]  
_161–3 Nature ... loves _f_: not in _q2_  
_164 SD Song _q2_: not in _v_  
_165 Hey ... nonny _f_: not in _q2_  
_166 in _q2_; on _v_ 166 rained) rain'd _q2_; raines _f_  
_169–70 Hadst ... thus] _q2_; as prose _v_ 170 a-down a-down] a downe _q2_; downe a-downe _v_  

Communication to the senses, as in the Epilogue to _The Tempest_ (‘prayer, / Which pierces so...’). Claudius’s meaning is ‘My innocence will come as sharply home to your judgement as daylight strikes the eye.’ I assume Shakespeare wrote ‘pearce’, and that _q2_’s ‘pearce’ is a misprint.

**155 sense and virtue** sensitivity and efficacy.

_161–3 Nature ... loves_ Love refines our nature, and this refined nature sends part of itself after the loved one. That is, Ophelia has parted with some of her wits to send to Polonius. This conceit, too absurd even for Laertes, is not in _q2_, and is found only in _f_. Is it possible that for once the _q2_ compositor noted a deletion mark overlooked by the playhouse scribe?

_164–5 They bore him... hey nonny_ Ophelia sings a lament, but gives as burden the ‘hey nonny no’ of a love ditty. Perhaps that is why she then says ‘You must sing a-down a-down.’

_170 a-down a-down_ A popular refrain. Two songs, printed in _1600_, which use it, have associations suitable for Ophelia’s plight. The song at the end of _Dekker’s Shoemakers’ Holiday_ begins ‘cold’s the wind, and wet’s the rain’. ‘Let’s sing a dirge for St Hugh’s soul, / And down it merrily. / Down a down, hey down a down...’ In _England’s Helicon_ (Q2r) is a song about the miseries of love, which maidens are better to avoid; it begins ‘Hey down a down did Dian sing.’

_171 wheel_ Unexplained; ‘refrain’, ‘spinning-wheel’ and ‘the wheel of Fortune’ have been suggested.

_171–2 It is the false steward..._ daughter In view of Laertes’ next remark, indicating that
LAERTES This nothing's more than matter.

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; we may call it herb of grace a Sundays. Oh you must wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died. They say a made a good end.

[Sings]

For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.

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

OPHELIA And will a not come again?
And will a not come again?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy death-bed,
He never will come again.

Ophelia's disconnected remarks have a special significance, it is embarrassing that no one has been able to throw light on the false steward.

174 pray you | Q2: Pray F 175 pansies | Pancies F 178 herb of grace | Q2: Herbe-Grace F 179 Oh you must | F: you may Q2 181 a made | Q2: he made F 183 Sings | Capell; not in Q2, F 185 will a not | Q2: will he not F 185 Herb of grace | Q2: not in F 185–8 No...death-bed | as one line Q2, F

174–5 pray...remember Ophelia obviously gives the rosemary and pansies to Laertes, though (obviously again) Laertes merges in her mind with Hamlet. To whom, Claudius or Gertrude, she gives the fennel and columbines and to whom the rue is much debated. See the long discussion in Jenkins, pp. 536–42.

175 pansies...thoughts The name comes from the French, pensées. As elsewhere in this scene, ‘thoughts’ has the special meaning of sad thoughts, melancholy.

176 A document...fitted ‘document’, not used elsewhere by Shakespeare, means ‘instruction’. Ophelia finds a lesson in flowers, and in her interpretation of them Laertes finds a lesson in madness, for a mad person’s ‘thoughts’ are continually ‘fitted’ (connected) with the ‘remembrance’ of dark happenings.

177 fennel Widely associated with flattery (see Robert Nares’s Glossary (1822)). But E. Le Comte points out (TLS 22 Oct. 1982) that as a gift to Claudius fennel is appropriate because it was a food much liked by serpents (see Paradise Lost, ix, 581).

177 columbines For ingratitude and infidelity (see Nares, Glossary, and Jenkins, p. 539).

177 rue For sorrow and repentance.

178 herb of grace Another name for rue (also herb-grace, herby-grass).

179 with a difference A term in heraldry; a mark to distinguish a coat of arms from that of another member or branch of the family.

179 daisy No special symbolism, but, as N. Alexander says, daisies and violets are flowers of springtime and love.

182 bonny sweet Robin Sternfeld gives the music (pp. 68–78) and says ‘Bonny Robin songs deal with lovers, unfaithfulness and extra-marital affairs’ (58); ‘the popularity of this simple ditty excelled by far that of “Greensleeves”’. ‘Bonny Robin’ is one of the songs which the mad Gaoler’s Daughter in Two Noble Kinsmen says she can sing (4.1.108). Harry Morris (PMLA 73 (1958), 601–3) believes Robin to be a name for the male sex-organ. His best evidence is that one of the common names for arum maculatum (lords-and-ladies, cuckoo-pint) is wake-robin.

183 Thought Melancholy.

184 favour beauty.

185 And will a not come again? The words of this song are not otherwise known. The tune traditional in the theatre is given in NV and in Sternfeld, pp. 67–9.
His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll,
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 buy you.

Exit

LAERTES Do you see this, O God?

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

LAERTES Let this be so.

His means of death, his obscure funeral,
No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones,
No noble rite, nor formal ostentation,
Cry to be heard, as 'twere from heaven to earth,
That I must call't in question.

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

Exeunt
Enter HORATIO with an ATTENDANT

HORATIO What are they that would speak with me?
ATTENDANT Seafaring men sir, they say they have letters for you.
HORATIO Let them come in.

[Exit Attendant]

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

Enter SAILORS

I SAILOR God bless you sir.
HORATIO Let him bless thee too.
I SAILOR A shall sir, and please him. There’s a letter for you sir, it came from th’ambassador that was bound for England, if your name be Horatio, as I am let to know it is.

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 we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour, and in the grapple I boarded them. On the instant they got clear of our ship, so I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy, but they knew what they did: I am to do a good turn for them. Let the king have the letters I have sent, and repair thou to me with as much speed as thou wouldst fly death. I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb, yet are they much too light for the bore of the matter. These good fellows will bring thee where I am. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course for England. Of them I have much to tell thee. Farewell.

He that thou knowest thine,
Hamlet.'
Come, I will give you way for these your letters,  
And do’t the speedier that you may direct me  
To him from whom you brought them.

Exeunt

[4.7] Enter CLAUDIUS and LAERTES

CLAUDIUS Now must your conscience my acquittance seal,  
And you must put me in your heart for friend,  
Sith you have heard, and with a knowing ear,  
That he which hath your noble father slain  
Pursued my life.

LAERTES It well appears. But tell me  
Why you proceeded not against these feats,  
So crimeful and so capital in nature,  
As by your safety, wisdom, all things else,  
You mainly were stirred up.

CLAUDIUS Oh for two special reasons,  
Which may to you perhaps seem much unsinewed,  
But 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 to my life and soul,  
That as the star moves not but in his sphere,  
I could not but by her.

Act 4, Scene 7

1 my acquittance seal confirm my discharge;  
i.e. acknowledge my innocence.
3 knowing understanding, intelligent.
6 feats exploits. For this pejorative meaning,  
Schmidt cites also Macbeth 1.7.80 and Henry V  
3.3.17.
8 safety, wisdom So F. Q2 inserts ‘greatnes’  
between these words, making the line too long. I  
assume that once again Q2 preserves a Shakespearean  
false start. Claudius is ‘stirred up’ to take action  
on account of his safety and by persuasion of his  
wisdom. ‘greatness’ seems irrelevant.
13–16 My virtue...but by her Claudius’s  
profession of his total attachment to Gertrude is  
deeply important, and suggests something of his  
motive for murder. But if we are impressed by his  
candour, we notice that Claudius is concealing from  
Laertes his real difficulty in proceeding against  
Hamlet – namely his fear of being exposed – and  
also the fact that he has (as he supposes) already sent  
Hamlet to his death.
14 conjunctive closely joined.
15 sphere one of the series of hollow, transparent  
globes supposed to encircle the earth and carry the  
heavenly bodies.
Why to a public count I might not go,
Is the great love the general gender bear him,
Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,
Work like the spring that turneth wood to stone,
Convert his gyves to graces, so that my arrows,
Too slightly timbered for so loud a wind,
Would have reverted to my bow again,
And not where I had aimed them.

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

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

*Enter a messenger with letters*

**MESSER**

*How now? What news?*

**MESSER** Letters my lord from Hamlet.

*This to your majesty, this to the queen.*

**CLAUDIUS** From Hamlet? Who brought them?

**MESSER** Sailors my lord they say, I saw them not;
They were given me by Claudio – he received them
Of him that brought them.
CLAUDIUS

Laertes, you shall hear them. –

Exit Messenger

[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 th’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?

CLAUDIUS ’Tis Hamlet’s character. Naked?

And in a postscript here he says alone.
Can you devise me?

LAERTES I’m 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 didest thou!’

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

LAERTES Ay my lord,
So you will not o’errule me to a peace.

CLAUDIUS To thine own peace. If he be now returned, As checking at his voyage, and that he means No more to undertake it, I will work him To an exploit, now ripe in my device,
Under the which he shall not choose but fall,  
And for his death no wind 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.

CLAUDIUS 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.

LAERTES What part is that my lord?

CLAUDIUS A very riband in the cap of youth,  
Yet needful too, for youth no less becomes  
The light and careless livery that it wears  
Than settled age his sables and his weeds  
Importing health and graveness.] Two months since  
Here was a gentleman of Normandy.  
I've seen myself, and served against, the French,  
And they can well on horseback, but this gallant  
Had witchcraft in't. He grew unto his seat,  
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse  
As had he been incorpored and demi-natured

66 uncharge the practice i.e. not press the accusation that it was a criminal contrivance.  
67-80 LAERTES My lord...graveness] q2: not in F  
76 riband] q 1611; ribaud q2  
80 Two months] q2: Some two Monthes F  
82 one] q2; hence F  
83-4 I've] q; I have q2

68 devise contrive.  
69 organ instrument.  
75 Of the unworthiest siege Of the least account. Claudius flatters Laertes by saying that the great skill in arms which Hamlet so envied is the least of his virtues.  
76 very riband mere ribbon.  
77 becomes is in accord with, suits. Really, the subject and object are transposed. The clothes suit the age rather than vice versa.

80 Importing...graveness Which indicates a concern for health and dignity.  
82-3 This enthusiastic comment on Lamord's superb horsemanship - even in the midst of plotting Hamlet's death - is an interesting insight into Claudius, perhaps to be compared with Hamlet's enthusiasm for the players, in a scene which has already deepened our perspective on him by his confession of his total love for Gertrude.  
83 can well are very skilful.  
86 incorpored of one body. Seemingly a Shakespearean coinage.  
86 demi-natured i.e. he, as man, was half of the total nature of a united man–horse creature.
With the brave beast. So far he topped my thought,
That I in forgery of shapes and tricks
Come short of what he did.

LAERTES  A Norman wasn’t?
CLAUDIUS  A Norman.
LAERTES  Upon my life Lamord.
CLAUDIUS  The very same.
LAERTES  I know him well, he is the brooch indeed
And gem of all the nation.
CLAUDIUS  He made confession of you,
And gave you such a masterly report
For art and exercise in your defence,
And for your rapier most especial,
That he cried out ’twould be a sight indeed
If one could match you. [Th’escrimers of their nation
He swore had neither motion, guard, nor eye,
If you opposed them.] Sir, this report of his
Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy
That he could nothing do but wish and beg
Your sudden coming o’er to play with you.
Now out of this—

LAERTES  What out of this, my lord?
CLAUDIUS  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?
CLAUDIUS  Not that I think you did not love your father,

87 topped] topt Q2; past F 87 my] f; me Q2 91 Lamord] Q2; Lamound F 93 the] Q2; our F 94 made] Q2; mad F 97 especial] Q2; especially F 99–101 Th’escrimers...opposed him] Q2; not in F 99 Th’escrimers] th’escrimeurs White; the Scrimures Q2 104 you] Q2; him F 105 What] Q2; Why F

87 topped my thought surpassed what I could imagine.
88 in forgery... tricks in imagining displays of horsemanship.
92–3 brooch...gem Dowden compares Jonson, Staple of News (1626), 3.2.265, ‘The very brooch o’the bench, gem o’the City’.
94 made confession of you revealed the truth about you. Dowden (followed by others) unnecessarily saw this as a grudging acknowledgement by a Norman of a Dane’s qualities.
96 art and exercise skilful accomplishments. (A hendiadys.)
99–101 F cuts two lines which interrupt the sweep of Claudius’s argument.
100 motion the skilled movements of the trained fencer.
102 envenom embitter (literally, poison).
But that I know love is begun by time,
And that I see, in passages of proof,
Time qualifies the spark and fire of it.
[There lives within the very flame of love
A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it,
And nothing is at a like goodness still,
For goodness, growing to a plurisy,
Dies in his own too much. That we would do,
We should do when we would, for this ‘would’ changes,
And hath abatements and delays as many
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents;
And then this ‘should’ is like a spendthrift sigh,
That hurts by easing. But to the quick of th’ulcer –
Hamlet comes back; what would you undertake
To show yourself in deed your father’s son
More than in words?

LAERTES
To cut his throat i’th’church.

CLAUDIUS
No place indeed should murder sanctuarize;
Revenge should have no bounds. But, good Laertes,
Will you do this, keep close within your chamber;
Hamlet, returned, shall know you are come home;
We’ll put on those shall praise your excellence,

110 by time by suitable time, by the proper occasion. Love is a creature of time and belongs to time, in that a suitable moment brings it to birth, and the succession of moments, less auspicious, will dull it.

111 passages of proof things that have happened which bear me out.

112 qualifies reduces, weakens.

113-22 F omits the whole passage. The unkindest cut of all, since the passage is of such great interest thematically, and so illuminating of Claudius’s philosophy of life. We cannot think that Shakespeare would delete it unless he were under considerable pressure to shorten the play – which he may have been. Compare the cut at 5.2.100.

114 wick] Rowe; weeke Q2 115 spendthrift] Q 1676; spend thirfts Q2 116 plurisy (1) excess; (2) the inflammation of the chest (pleurisy) thought to be caused by ‘excess’ of humours.

117 spendthrift sigh The quarto reading (i.e. ‘spendthrift’s’) may possibly be right, but it is really the sigh itself that is a spendthrift – it does harm in the pleasure of indulging itself. Painful breathing is the main feature of pleurisy. Claudius says that if we don’t act in due time, our duty becomes painful and difficult.

122 to the quick of th’ulcer to the heart of the matter. Claudius moves from one disease-image to another. This one is horrible; no one would ever use it in life.

126 should murder sanctuarize should offer sanctuary to murder. Claudius’s remark runs in two directions at once. (1) No church should offer sanctuary and protection to a man who like Hamlet has committed murder; (2) no church should be regarded as a sanctuary where the throat-cutting you mention cannot be carried out.

128 Will you do this If you are to do this.

128 keep close remain confined.

130 put on those shall praise arrange for some to praise.
And set a double varnish on the fame
The Frenchman gave you; bring you in fine together,
And wager on your heads. He being remiss,
Most generous, and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils, so that with ease,
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
A sword unbated, and in a pass of practice
Requite him for your father.

LAERTES

I will do't,
And for that purpose I'll anoint my sword.
I bought an unction of a mountebank,
So mortal that but dip a knife in it,
Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,
Collected from all simples that have virtue
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 him slightly,
It may be death.

CLAUDIUS

Let's further think of this,
Weigh what convenience both of time and means
May fit us to our shape. If this should fail,
And that our drift look through our bad performance,
'Twere better not assayed. Therefore this project
Should have a back or second, that might hold
If this did blast in proof. Soft, let me see.
We'll make a solemn wager on your cunnings –
I ha't!

133 in fine in conclusion.
133 remiss 'not vigilant or cautious' (Johnson).
136 shuffling deceit (rather than physically shuffling the foils). See notes to 3.3.61 and 3.1.67.
137 unbated unblunted. (Short for 'unabated'.)
137 a pass of practice 'practice' means a deliberate and malicious stratagem – as in 66 above and 5.2.297. Claudius is speaking of a thrust which is intended to kill. (The other possible meaning is 'a bout intended for exercise'.)
140 unction ointment.
140 mountebank one who travels about selling medicines and cures.
142 cataplasm poultice, medicated dressing.
143 simples medicinal plants.
144 Under the moon Probably 'anywhere in the world' rather than a reference to night-gathering.
146 gall injure, wound.
149 fit us to our shape suit us for our design.
150 drift aim, purpose.
153 blast in proof explode in being tested (like a faulty cannon).
When in your motion you are hot and dry,
As make your bouts more violent to that end,
And that he calls for drink, I'll have preferred him
A chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping,
If he by chance escape your venomed stuck,
Our purpose may hold there. But stay, what noise?

Enter GERTRUDE

How, sweet queen!

GERTRUDE One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow. Your sister's drowned, Laertes.

LAERTES Drowned! Oh where?

GERTRUDE There is a willow grows askant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make,
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
There on the pendant boughs her cronet weeds

157 that [Q2; the F 158 preferred] prefard Q2; prepa'rd F 159 But... noise] Q2; not in F 160 How... queen] F; not in Q2 161 they ] Q2; they'F 164 askant] ascaunt Q2; aslant F 166 a brook [F; the Brooke Q2 167 hoar] hore F; horry Q2 168 Therewith] Q2; There with F 168 make] Q2; come F 170 cold] F; cull-cold Q2 172 cronet] Q2, Ridley: Coronet F; crownet Wilson

158 preferred presented to, offered. The choice between the readings of Q2 and F is very difficult. Q2's spelling is not a problem: 'prefar' is recorded in OED for 'prefer' in the sixteenth century. But the 'f' may be a misprint for 'p'. It is impossible to decide whether Claudius thinks of having a chalice made ready ('prepared') for Hamlet when occasion demands, or offered to him ('preferred').

159 for the nonce for that particular purpose or occasion.

160 stuck thrust.

161-2 But stay... queen! See collation. It seems necessary to conflate Q2 and F at this point.

165 Drowned! Oh where? This much-ridiculed response, looking so much like a clumsy cue for Gertrude's aria, presents an almost impossible task to the actor. Perhaps Laertes is meant to express not so much shock and grief as incredulity and amazement. He has just seen her alive. 'Drowned? Where could she be drowned? ' Such disbelief invites us to approve F's 'a brook' rather than Q2's 'the brook'. The queen explains that even in an unconsidered brook a girl who didn't want to live might drown.

166 askant F's 'aslant' gives yet another Q2/F doublet. Both words are normally adverbs meaning 'obliquely' and neither was used, as here, as a preposition.

167 hoar grey.

168 Therewith... make She made garlands from the willow, interwoven with wildflowers and weeds. The playhouse scribe quite misunderstood this, and F reads 'There with fantastic garlands did she come.'

169 crow-flowers 'The crown-flowers is called wild williams, marshy gilly-flowers and cuckoo gilly-flowers' (Gerard's Herbal). Jenkins supports the view that this is Lychnis flos-cuculi, or ragged robin.

169-71 long-purples... call them Generally identified as the wild orchis, Orchis mascula, which has a tall flower stem with a spike of purple flowers. The 'grosser name' - something to do with testicles - and 'dead men's fingers' apply to the shape of the roots. (See NV and OED s.v Dead men's fingers.)

170 liberal free-spoken.

171 cold So F. Q2's 'cull-cold' looks like the remnant of a Shakespearean false start.

172 cronet So Q2. 'cronet', 'crownet' and 'cronet' (which F gives) were all variant forms. Ridley properly restored Q2's form, since the metre
Hamlet

4.7.173

Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

LAERTES

Alas, then she is drowned?

GERTRUDE

Drowned, drowned.

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

Let's follow, Gertrude.

Exit

requires two syllables. 'crotet weeds' means the
garland of willow and weeds which Ophelia had
made.

173 envious malicious.

173 sliver a small branch or twig (though it is
not a sliver until it has broken off). Compare Lear
4.2.34-5, 'She that will sliver and disbranch / From
her material sap'.

177 lauds hymns. So Q2; F gives 'tunes', as does
Q1, probably an intentional simplification by the
playhouse scribe. 'laud' is an unusual word, not
frequently used outside its technical reference to the
second of the canonical hours in the Catholic
breviary. C. J. Sisson objected to 'the picture of
Ophelia dying in songs of praise to God' after the
improper songs we have heard (New Readings in
Shakespeare, 1956, 11. 226). Perhaps Gertrude is
covering up. But crazy hymn-singing might well
have marked Ophelia's death.

178 incapable uncomprehending.

179 indued adapted, conditioned.

180 But long it could not be The modern
reader cannot suppress his astonishment that
Gertrude should have watched Ophelia die without
lifting a finger to help her. Shakespeare wrote for
a theatre audience before the realistic novel had
come into existence: this speech is an impersonal
account of Ophelia's death. It has been suggested
that the queen's story is something of a 'cover up'
of a deliberate act of suicide; the priest (in
5.1.194-7) says there had been such a cover-up. In
that case, the queen's narrative becomes implausible
at this point. In view of Shakespeare's total
inconsistency about Horatio's awareness of life in
Elsinore (see note to 1.2.176) it is better to say that
Gertrude steps out of her role to serve the purpose
of the play.

182 the poor wretch Gertrude used this phrase
for Hamlet at 2.2.166.

187 our trick a way we have.

188 these i.e. his tears.

189 The woman... out The woman in me will
have finished.

191 doubts extinguishes ('folly' being his
weeping).
How much I had to do to calm his rage!
Now fear I this will give it start again.
Therefore let's follow.

Exeunt

[5.1] Enter two CLOWNS

CLOWN Is she to be buried in Christian burial, when she wilfully seeks her own salvation?
OTHER I tell thee she is, therefore make her grave straight. The crowner hath sat on her, and finds it Christian burial.
CLOWN How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defence?
OTHER Why, 'tis found so.
CLOWN It must be se offendendo, it cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act, and an act hath three branches – it is to act, to do, to perform. Argal, she drowned herself wittingly.
OTHER Nay, but hear you goodman delver –
CLOWN Give me leave. Here lies the water – good. Here stands the man – good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is
5.1.15 Hamlet

will he, nil he, he goes – mark you that. But if the water come to him, and drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

OTHER But is this law?

CLOWN Ay marry is’t, crowner’s quest law.

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

CLOWN Why, there thou sayst – and the more pity that great folk should have countenance in this world to drown or hang themselves more than their even-Christen. Come, my spade; there is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners, ditchers, and gravemakers; they hold up Adam’s profession.

OTHER Was he a gentleman?

CLOWN A was the first that ever bore arms.

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? I’ll put another question to thee. If thou answerest me not to the purpose, confess thyself –

OTHER Go to!

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.

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

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

CLOWN Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.

OTHER Marry, now I can tell.

CLOWN To’t.
OTHER Mass, I cannot tell.

Enter Hamlet and Horatio afar off

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

[Exit Second Clown]

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

HAMLET Has this fellow no feeling of his business? A sings in grave-making.

HORATIO Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness.

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

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

[Throws up a skull]

HAMLET That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once. How the knave jowls it to th' ground, as if 'twere Cain's jawbone, that did

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46 SD] F; Enter Hamlet and Horatio Q2 (after 54) 49 he makes] Q2; that he makes F 50 get thee ... fetch] F; get thee in, and fetch Q2 50 stoup] stoipe F; soope Q2 50 SD) Rowe; not in Q2, F 51 SD Song] Q2; Sings. F 53 contract-o] contract o F; contract O F 53 for-a] for a Q2, F 54 there-a] there a Q2; there F 54 nothing-a] nothing a Q2; nothing F 55 A sings] a sings Q2; that he sings F 55 in] Q2; at F 58 daintier] F; dintier Q2 60 SD Song] Q2; Clowne sings 61 clawed] Q2; caught v 62 intil] F; into Q2 63 SD] Capell; not in Q2, F; he throws up a shouel Q1 65 th'ground] F; the ground Q2 65 'twere] twere Q2; it were F

46 SD So F. Q2 provides the entry at 54, which is clearly wrong, since Hamlet's first remark indicates that they have been watching and listening.

50 Yaughan An eccentric spelling of 'Johann'. Ben Jonson has a 'Yohan' in Every Man Out of His Humour 5.6.48, a London Jew. Q2 could make nothing of this name, it would seem.

50 stoup a large jar or pitcher.

51-54, 60-4, 79-82 In youth when I did love The Clown sings a very free version of a popular song printed, as by Thomas Vaux, in Tottel's Miscellany, 1557, 'I loathe that I did love.' See a full discussion, with the music, in Sternfeld, esp. pp. 130-1, 151-5.

53-4 contract-o... for-a... there-a... nothing -a The Clown is decorating his lyric. For an accommodation to the music, see Sternfeld, p. 155.

53 To contract... behave i.e. to pass away the time to my own advantage.

57 a property of easiness 'a matter of indifference' (N. Alexander). For 'easiness' in this sense, compare current colloquial 'I'm easy.'

62 intil into (F's reading, hardly likely to be scribal).

63 SD Throws up a skull Capell's SD reflects Q1, 'he throws up a shouel', where 'shouel' is presumably a compositor's misreading of 'skull'.

65 jowls bangs (with a pun on 'jowl' = 'jaw').

65 Cain's jawbone, that did the jawbone of Cain, who did... A further reminder of the story of Cain and Abel (see Introduction, p. 41). There
the first murder. This might be the pate of a politician which this
ass now o'erreaches, one that would circumvent God, might it not?

HORATIO It might my lord.

HAMLET Or of a courtier, which could say 'Good morrow sweet lord,
how dost thou sweet lord?' This might be my Lord Such-a-one,
that praised my Lord Such-a-one's horse when a meant to beg it,
might it not?

HORATIO Ay my lord.

HAMLET Why, e'en so, and now my Lady Worm's, chopless, and
knocked about the mazard with a sexton's spade. Here's fine
revolution, and we had the trick to see't. Did these bones cost no
more the breeding but to play at loggets with 'em? Mine ache to
think on't.

CLOWN A pickaxe and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrowing sheet,
Oh a pit of clay for to be made,
For such a guest is meet.

[Throws up another skull]

HAMLET There's another. Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer?
Where be his quiddities now, his quillets, his cases, his tenures, and
his tricks? Why does he suffer this rude knave now to knock him
about the sconce with a dirty shovel, and will not tell him of his

is a curious English medieval tradition that Cain
killed Abel with the jawbone of an ass (see the Old English
Solomon and Saturn, ed. J. E. Cross and
T. D. Hill, 1982, pp. 101-3). Since Skeat referred to
this tradition in 1880 (N & Q, 21 Aug.) it has
often been supposed that the ass's jawbone is meant
here, but of course it is Cain's skull — so
contemptuously dropped — that Hamlet means. In
view of the widespread appearance of the legend in
medieval drama and iconography (see J. K. Bonnell,
PMLA 39 (1924), 140-6) it seems certain that it was
in Shakespeare's mind as he wrote, because of the
'ass' in 67. Both Samson and (it was thought) Cain
wielded an ass's jawbone; now an ass wields a
human jawbone.

67 o'erreaches A politician was a man who
o'erreached, in the sense of duped, his pawns and
enemies. Now the tables are turned as the
gravedigger o'erreaches (i.e. handles) his skull.
Jenkins defends f's reading, 'o'er-offices'.

74 chopless The chops or chaps are the lower
jaw and the flesh about it.
75 mazard a drinking-bowl; here used
facetiously for the skull or head.
76 trick knock.
76-7 Did these bones...loggets with 'em?
Was the value of bringing up these people so slight
that we may justifiably play skittles with their
bones?
77 loggets A country game in which wooden
truncheons about two feet long, bulbous at one end
and tapering off to the handle (like the old 'Indian
clubs'), were thrown at a fixed stake.
84 quiddities...quillets subtle distinctions,
quibbles. One would expect a like-sounding pair,
either quiddits/quillets, or quiddities/quiplettes. F's
quiddits could be the true reading.
84 tenures suits connected with the holding of
land.
86 sconce A slang term for 'head'.
action of battery? Hum, this fellow might be in’s time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries. Is this the fine of his fines and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures? The very conveyances of his lands will scarcely lie in this box, and must th’inheritor himself have no more, ha?

HORATIO Not a jot more my lord.

HAMLET Is not parchment made of sheepskins?

HORATIO Ay my lord, and of calves’ skins too.

HAMLET They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance in that.

I will speak to this fellow. Whose grave’s this sirrah?

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.

CLOWN You lie out on’t sir, and therefore ’tis not yours. For my part,

I do not lie in’t, yet it is mine.

HAMLET Thou dost lie in’t, to be in’t and say ’tis thine. ’Tis for the

87 action of battery lawsuit dealing with physical violence.

88 statutes securities for debts, mortgages.

88–9 double vouchers...recoveries Like fines, recoveries were fictitious suits to obtain the authority of a court judgement for the holding of land. A voucher, or vocatio, calls in one of the parties necessary in this action - a double voucher rendering the tortuous process even more secure (see the full account in Clarkson and Warren, The Law of Property in Shakespeare, pp. 128–30).

88 recognizances bonds undertaking to repay debts or fulfil other legal obligations.

89 fine conclusion.

90 fine pate subtle head.

91 purchases Technically this refers to the transfer of property by other means than inheritance. But the word was widely used in Shakespeare’s time to indicate, in a pejorative sense, acquisitions and enrichments of any kind. See note to 93 below.

92 pair of indentures Two copies of a legal agreement would be made on the same sheet of parchment which was then cut in half by means of an indented or zig-zag line, as a precaution against forgery.

93 conveyances of his lands deeds relating to purchases of land for himself. This lawyer has feathered his own nest. See note to ‘purchases’ above (91).

94 inheritor He who has come to own all these lands has in the end only the space of his coffin, which is not big enough even for the deeds of his canny dealings. A subtle joke because this lawyer is not technically an ‘inheritor’. Like so many Elizabethan lawyers, he has come to his estates by ‘purchase’.

98 assurance Parchment documents provide legal proof (‘assurance’) of material gains, but only fools would seek in them assurance, or security, against mortality.

103–4 ‘Hamlet uses the familiar thee and thou to the Sexton, but the Sexton uses the respectful you in reply’ (Kittredge).
dead, not for the quick, therefore thou liest.

HAMLET  'Tis a quick lie sir, 'twill away again from me to you.

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.

HAMLET  How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us. By the lord, Horatio, this three years I have took note of it: the age is grown so picked, that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier, he galls his kibe. 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 o'ercame Fortinbras.

HAMLET How long is that since?

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

HAMLET  Ay marry, why was he sent into England?

CLOWN  Why, because he was mad. A shall recover his wits there, or if a 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.

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. I have been sexton here man and boy thirty years.

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

CLOWN Faith, if a be not rotten before a die, as we have many pocky corpses nowadays that will scarce hold the laying in, a 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 a will keep out water a great while, and your water is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body. Here's a skull now: this skull hath lien you i'th'earth three and twenty years.

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 a mad rogue, a poured a flagon of Rhenish 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. [Takes the skull.] Alas poor Yorick! I knew him Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy, he hath borne me on his back a thousand times - and now how abhorred

137 sexton] Sexten Q2; sixeteene F 140 Faith] Q2; 1faith F 140 a...a] Q2; he...he F 141 nowadays] now adaies r; not in q2 141 a] Q2; he F 144 a] Q2; he F 146 this skull] F; not in Q2 146-7 hath...earth] Q2; has laine in the earth F 147 three and twenty years] F; 23. yeeres Q2 152 This same...Yorick's skull] Pope (substantially); This same skull sir, was sir Yoricks skull q2; This same Scull Sir, this same Scull sir, was Yoricks Scull F 156 Let me see] F; not in q2 156 SD Takes the skull] Capell (at 154); not in Q2, F 158 borne] F; bore Q2 158 now how] Q2; how r

136 ground cause.

140-1 pocky corpses nowadays Reflects the frightening spread of syphilis through sixteenth-century Europe.

141 hold the laying in last through the interment. (Compare OED Lay z; 186.)

152 Rhenish Rhine wine.

152 This same...skull This is an eclectic reading put together from Q2 and F, both of which seem to have their own mistakes.

152 Yorick The name is so famous that we may forget that this is where it was born. If Yaughan stands for Johann, possibly Yorick is Shakespeare's version of Jörg.

156 Let me see So f. Q2 omits, and it is likely that the phrase was not in Shakespeare's 'foul-papers' but added during the transcription of his MS. in preparation for stage-performance. The phrase ranks with the earlier entry of Hamlet and Horatio at 46 above (see note) as a necessary tidying of the stage-action, and is for that reason included here. The phrase is also in Q1.

158-9 abhorred...it is i.e. to think of riding on the back of one who is now a mouldy skeleton.
in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your giber now? your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now, to mock your own grinning? Quite chop-fallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at that. - Prithee Horatio, tell me one thing.

**HORATIO** What's that my lord?

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

**HORATIO** E'en so.

**HAMLET** And smelt so? Pah! [Puts down the skull]

**HORATIO** E'en so my lord.

**HAMLET** To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander, till a find it stopping a bunghole?

**HORATIO** 'Twere to consider too curiously to consider so.

**HAMLET** No faith, not a jot, but to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it, as thus: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?

    Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,
    Might stop a hole, to keep the wind away. 
    Oh that that earth which kept the world in awe
    Should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw!

    But soft, but soft! Aside - here comes the king,
    The queen, the courtiers.

159 in my imagination it is] Q2; my imagination is F 162 Not one] Q2; No one F 163 consider too] Q2; consider: to F 164 favour appearance. 165 chamber] F; table Q2 167 o'] F; a Q2 169 Pah] Q2; Puh F 169 SD Collier: not in Q2, F 172 a] Q2; be F 173 to dust] Q2, into dust F 180 Imperious] Q2, Q1; Imperial F 183 winter's] F; waters Q2 184 Aside] F; awhile Q2

159 gorge contents of the stomach; i.e. he retches with disgust.

160 gambols Perhaps jests, practical jokes, rather than anything physical.

162 to mock... grinning i.e. to laugh at the face you're making. 'grinning' is not a smile but a facial distortion, generally of anger (a snarl) or pain, but sometimes of a forced laugh.

163 chop-fallen chap-fallen, with the chops or chaps (the lower jaw) hanging down - figuratively, dismayed or dejected.

164 favour appearance.

165 to mock curiously with excessive care, over- elaborately.

166 modesty moderation.

167 loam a mortar or plaster made of clay and straw etc.

168 Imperious So Q2 and Q1. F has 'Imperial'. Shakespeare uses both words interchangeably.

169 flaw squall.

170 but soft! Aside Q2 has 'but soft awhile'. Hamlet has obvious reasons for moving aside and choosing his own time to confront the king. 'soft!' urges caution; see note to 3.1.88.
Enter CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, LAERTES, and a coffin, [with PRIEST] and LORDS attendant

Who is this they follow? 185
And with such maimed rites? This doth betoken The corse they follow did with desperate hand Fordo it own life. 'Twas of some estate.
Couch we awhile and mark. [Retiring with Horatio]

LAERTES What ceremony else? 190

HAMLET That is Laertes, a very noble youth. Mark.

LAERTES What ceremony else?

PRIEST Her obsequies have been as far enlarged As we have warranty. Her death was doubtful, And but that great command o'ersways the order, She should in ground unsanctified have lodged Till the last trumpet. For charitable prayers, Shards, flints, and pebbles should be thrown on her. Yet here she is allowed her virgin crants, Her maiden strewments, and the bringing home Of bell and burial.

LAERTES Must there no more be done? 200

PRIEST No more be done. We should profane the service of the dead

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185 SD] Enter K. Q. Laertes and the corse Q2 {margin}; Enter King, Queene, Laertes, and a Coffin, with Lords attendant v (after king 184) 185 this] q2; that F 188 Fordo Destroy. 188 it its. See note to 1.2.216. 188 some estate considerable social importance. 189 Couch we Let us conceal ourselves ('couch' suggests stooping or crouching to take cover).
191 That is Laertes On this surely unnecessary observation, see note to 1.2.176. Wilson points out, however, that Horatio and Laertes have not met on stage.
194 warranty authorisation.
194 Her death i.e. the manner of her death.
195 great command the commands of great ones.
195 the order the regular proceeding.
197 For Instead of.
198 Shards Broken pottery.
199 crants garlands hung up at funerals, especially those of young girls. An unfamiliar word, too remote for the playhouse scribe, who substituted 'rites'.
200 strewments Another most unusual word, meaning, presumably, flowers strewn on a coffin. See 213 below.
200-1 bringing home / Of bell and burial bringing her to her last home with bell-ringing and proper burial. Verity compares Titus Andronicus 1.1.83-4, 'These that I bring unto their latest home, / With burial amongst their ancestors'.
To sing sage requiem and such rest to her
As to peace-parted souls.

LAERTES

Lay her i’th’earth,
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring. I tell thee, churlish priest,
A ministering angel shall my sister be
When thou liest howling.

HAMLET

What, the fair Ophelia!

GERTRUDE

Sweets to the sweet, farewell. [Scattering flowers]

I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet’s wife.
I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid,
And not t’have strewed thy grave.

LAERTES

Oh treble woe
Fall ten times treble on that cursed head
Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense
Deprived thee of. Hold off the earth awhile
Till I have caught her once more in mine arms.

Leaps in the grave
Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead
Till of this flat a mountain you have made
To’ertop old Pelion or the skyish head
Of blue Olympus.

HAMLET [Advancing]

What is he whose grief
Bears such an emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow
Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,
Hamlet the Dane.

[Laertes climbs out of the grave]

LAERTES The devil take thy soul. [Grappling with him] 225-

HAMLET Thou pray'st not well.

I prithee take thy fingers from my throat,

For though I am not splenitive and rash,

Yet have I in me something dangerous

Which let thy wisdom fear. Hold off thy hand. 230

CLAUDIUS Pluck them asunder.

GERTRUDE Hamlet, Hamlet!

ALL Gentlemen!

HORATIO Good my lord, be quiet.

[The Attendants part them].

HAMLET Why, I will fight with him upon this theme

Until my eyelids will no longer wag.

GERTRUDE O my son, what theme?

HAMLET I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers

Could not with all their quantity of love

Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?

225 SD Laertes...grave] This edn.; not in Q2, F; Hamlet leaps in after Leartes Q1

225 SD Grappling with him] Rowe; not in Q2, F

228 For though] Q2; Sir though F

228 splenitive] spleenatiue Q2, F

228 and] F; not in Q2

229 in me something] Q2; something in me F, Q1

230 wisdom] wisedome Q2, Q1; wisenesse F (uncorrected); wisenesse F (corrected)

230 Hold off] Q2, Q1; Away F

231 ALL Gentlemen] Q2; not in F

232 SD] Rowe; not in Q2, F

234 wag Simply 'move' or 'open and close'; the word now in such a context would be absurd.

Hamlet means he will fight while he has any muscular strength left, even if only to blink.

235 I loved Ophelia...my sum Laertes' brotherly love may have expressed itself (in 1.3) priggishly and pompously and now his grief emerges in extravagant language, but he never behaved as cruelly to her as Hamlet did. Has Hamlet any right to be angry with Laertes for expressing his love for Ophelia? MacDonald says 'Perhaps this is the speech in all the play of which it is most difficult to get into a sympathetic comprehension.'
CLAUDIUS Oh he is mad Laertes.
GERTRUDE For love of God forbear him.

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

GERTRUDE This is mere madness,
And thus awhile the fit will work on him;
Anon, as patient as the female dove
When that her golden couplets are disclosed,
His silence will sit drooping.

HAMLET Hear you sir,
What is the reason that you use me thus?
I loved you ever — but it is no matter.
Let Hercules himself do what he may,
The cat will mew, and dog will have his day.

CLAUDIUS I pray thee good Horatio wait upon him.

Exit Horatio

241 'Swounds] Q2; Come F 241 thou'lt] th'owt Q2; thou'lt F 242 woo't fast] Q2; not in F 243 eisel] Theobald2; Esill Q2; Esile F 244 Dost thou'] t; doost Q2 251 sh GERTRUDE] Quee, Q2; Kin. v 252 thus] t; this Q2 255-60 SD Exit / Exit Horatio] Pope; Exit Hamlet / and Horatio Q2; Exit v (259) 260 pray thee] Q2; pray you F

242 Woo't Colloquial for 'wilt thou'.
243 eisel vinegar (to increase his bitterness).
243 eat a crocodile i.e. to increase the flow of hypocritical tears. 
249 the burning zone the sun's orbit between the tropics.
250 Ossa See note to 220 above.
250 and if.
251-5 This is mere madness...drooping F gives this speech to Claudius, most inappropriately, and is supported by Q1. It looks as though this was an error on the part of the playhouse scribe which was carried over into performance.
254 her golden couplets are disclosed 'The pigeon lays two eggs, and the young, when disclosed or hatched...are covered with yellow down' (Dowden). 

255 silence...drooping i.e. his quietness resembles that of the patient dove not moving from her young and 'drooping' with lack of food for herself.
256 What is the reason...thus? It is hard to believe that Hamlet would have the audacity to ask this if he had in fact given the provocation of leaping in the grave after Laertes. See note to 225 above.

258-9 Let Hercules...day Hamlet recovers his poise sufficiently to depart with one of his riddles. Does Hamlet mean, contemptuously, that even Hercules couldn't stop Laertes having his petty triumph? Or does the contempt go into calling Laertes not a dog but a Hercules? i.e. 'Let this little Hercules carry on, but my turn will come.'
(To Laertes) Strengthen your patience in our last night's speech;
We'll put the matter to the present push. —
Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son. —
This grave shall have a living monument.
An hour of quiet shortly shall we see,
Till then in patience our proceeding be.

Exeunt

[5.2] Enter Hamlet and Horatio

Hamlet So much for this sir, now shall you 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 mutines in the bilboes. Rashly,
And praised be rashness for it — let us know,
Our indiscretion sometime serves us well
When our deep plots do pall, and that should learn us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,

261 in our last night's speech i.e. by remembering what we planned last night.
262 present push immediate operation.
264 living enduring — with a grim secondary meaning that Hamlet's death will be the memorial for Ophelia.

Act 5, Scene 2
1 So much... other A mid-conversation entry, 'this' referring presumably to the first part of the story and 'the other' to the rest of it.
2 circumstance details.
6 the mutines in the bilboes mutineers in their shackles.
6-7 Rashly... rashness 'rash' (etc.) in Shakespeare means as often 'hasty', 'sudden' as it does 'unconsidered' or 'ill-advised'. The sense here is of a sudden, impulsive act without forethought.
7 let us know let us recognise, acknowledge.
8 indiscretion want of prudence and forethought (rather than a misguided act).
9 pall grow flat and stale, like wine that has gone off.
9 learn teach.
10-11 a divinity... we will i.e. there is a higher power in control of us, directing us towards our destination, however much we have blundered in the past and impeded our own progress. This recognition drastically modifies Hamlet's earlier assessment of his freedom and power to direct his own course. 'Rough-hew' is given by Florio in a definition of Abbozzare: 'to rough-hew or cast any first draught, to bungle up ill-favouredly'. (See NV.) Shakespeare here uses it to mean a crude botching. Hamlet feels the guiding hand of heaven in his own impulsive and unpremeditated actions, after the failure of his own willed efforts. Compare the tenth of the 39 Articles, 'Of Free-Will', which argues that 'we have no power to do good works' until we have the 'good will' given by 'the grace of God by Christ', after which that grace will be 'working with us'.
Rough-hew them how we will –

That is most certain.

HAMLET Up from my cabin,
My sea-gown scarfed about me, in the dark
Groped I to find out them, had my desire,
Fingered their packet, and in fine withdrew
To mine own room again, making so bold,
My fears forgetting manners, to unseal
Their grand commission; where I found, Horatio –
O royal knavery! – an exact command,
Larded with many several sorts of reasons,
Importing Denmark's health, and England's too,
With ho! such bugs and goblins in my life,
That on the supervise, no leisure bated,
No, not to stay the grinding of the axe,
My head should be struck off.

HORATIO Is't possible?

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

HORATIO I beseech you.

HAMLET Being thus benetted round with villainies,
Or I could make a prologue to my brains,
They had begun the play. I sat me down,
Devised a new commission, wrote it fair.
I once did hold it, as our statists do,
A baseness to write fair, and laboured much
How to forget that learning; but sir, now

13 sea-gown seaman's coat of coarse cloth, a duffle-coat.
13 scarfed wrapped loosely.
15 Fingered Filched, stole.
15 in fine in conclusion.
17 forgetting neglecting; i.e. causing him to forget.
20 Larded See 4.5.37.
21 Importing Appertaining to.
22 bugs...life monstrosities to be feared from my continued existence.
23 supervise viewing (of the commission).
23 no leisure bated i.e. no free time was to abate, or soften, the rigour of the execution.
29 benetted round i.e. trapped.
29 villainies Both F and Q2 agree in reading 'villains' and that is presumably what stood in Shakespeare's MS. But this leaves the line metrically lame, and the abstract is so much more apt here than the concrete that it is usually assumed that 'villainies' was what Shakespeare meant to write.
30 Or before, ere. See note to 1.2.147.
30-1 Or I could...begun the play i.e. his brains had put things in motion before he had set them to work.
33 statists statesmen.
34 baseness something befitting people of low rank.
It did me yeoman's service. 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,
As love between them like the palm might flourish,
As peace should still her wheaten garland wear,
And stand a comma 'tween their amities,
And many suchlike as-es of great charge,
That on the view and knowing of these contents,
Without debatement further, more, or less,
He should those bearers put to sudden death,
Not shriving time allowed.

How was this sealed?

**HORATIO**

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

So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't.

**HAMLET**

Why man, they did make love to this employment.

They are not near my conscience. Their defeat

36 yeoman's service the service of a faithful attendant ('yeoman' in its earlier sense of a servant in a royal household).

38 conjuration solemn entreaty.

42 a comma 'tween their amities An odd phrase, but the language is meant to be affected. *OED* points to the definition of a comma given by Puttenham (*Art of English Poesy*, 1589, ii.4v) as 'the shortest pause or intermission' between sections of speech. So the kingdoms are meant to be as near together as separate institutions can be, and what is between them is peace, not discord.

43 charge burden (punning on 'as-es' = asses).

45 debatement further, more, or less Continued ridicule of official verbiage.

47 shriving time time for confession and absolution. Compare Hamlet's attitude to the death of Claudius, 3.3.73-95.

48 ordiant directing.

49 signet seal.

50 model copy.

50 that Danish seal The official seal of Denmark on the commission which Hamlet has handed to Horatio (26 above).

52 Subscribed it Signed it (with Claudius's name).

57 Why man...employment This line is found only in F. I argue in the Introduction that this, with a passage in Hamlet's next speech, was part of a crucial Shakespearean revision. See pp. 1.4-10.

58 defeat destruction. Compare 2.2.523.
5.2.59 Hamlet

Does by their own insinuation grow.
'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
Between the pass and fell incensed points
Of mighty opposites.

HORATIO Why, what a king is this!

HAMLET Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon—
He that hath killed my king, and whored my mother,
Popped in between th'election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
And with such cozenage—'tis not perfect conscience
To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damned
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?

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

HAMLET It will be short. The interim'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,

59 Does] Q2: Doth F 63 think thee] Q2; thinkst thee F 68-80 'To quit...comes here]' F: not in Q2 73-5
60 baser inferior in rank. See note to 34 above.
61 pass thrust. Compare 4.7.137.
61-2 pass... opposites Hendiadys and transferred epithet. The fell (deadly) pass of the sword-points of incensed opposites (opponents).
63 Does it not... stand me now upon Is it not now incumbent upon me.
63 think thee bethink thee, please consider. F's 'thinkst thee' is a difficult impersonal construction, meaning 'does it appear to thee'.
65 Popped in This is meant to be contemptuous, but probably not as comic as we now feel it to be. 'pushed in' might be our equivalent. For Hamlet's accusation, compare 3.4.99-101.
66 angle fishing-line.
66 my proper life my very life.
67 cozenage cheating, fraud.
67 is't not perfect conscience is it not absolutely in accord with what is right.
68-80 This whole passage is not found in Q2. See Introduction, pp. 17-19.
68 quit requite, punish.
68 is't not to be damned See Introduction, pp. 56-8. Hamlet sees a prospect of damnation not, as before, in obeying a possibly fraudulent ghost (2.2.556) nor in opting out by suicide (3.1.78), but in failing to rid the world of the evil represented by Claudius.
69 canker of our nature a cancerous growth in humankind.
69-70 come In enter into.
71-2 Horatio, whose replies are guarded in this scene, does not answer Hamlet directly, but warns him that if he is going to act he hasn't much time, because Claudius will soon hear of the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and is then bound to act swiftly and decisively against Hamlet.
73 The interim's mine Deeply ironic, in view of the plot against his life which has been prepared by Claudius and Laertes, and which is now about to be sprung.

The line is a syllable short. Editions universally mend it by printing 'The interim is mine', but there is no authority for this.

74 And a man's life... one And in any case one's whole life is only a short space of time. One's death is never very far away. It is in this spirit that he turns to regret his outburst to Laertes.
For by the image of my cause, I see
The portraiture of his. I'll court his favours.
But sure the bravery of his grief did put me
Into a towering passion.

HORATIO  Peace, who comes here?

Enter young OSRIC

OSRIC  Your lordship is right welcome back to Denmark.

HAMLET  I humbly thank you sir. — Dost know this water-fly?

HORATIO  No my good lord.

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

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

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

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.

HAMLET  But yet methinks it is very sultry and hot for my complexion.

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

78 court[ Rowe; count F  80 SD Enter young OSRIC] F; Enter a Courtier Q2  81 SH OSRIC] Osr. F; Cour. Q2 ( & so throughout)  82 humbly] F; humble q2  86 say] q2; saw F  88 lordship] q2; friendship F  90 sir] q2; not in F  92 it is] q2; 'tis F  95 But yet] q2; not in F  95 sultry] soultry F; sully q2  95 for] F; or q2  97 But] F; not in q2 97 a has] q2; he ha's F

77—8 by the image...of his i.e. I recognise in
my situation the essential features of his. (As a
bereaved son, I should have remembered that grief
makes one act strangely.) 'my cause' cannot mean
his vengeance, because it is clear that (as Jenkins
points out) he simply does not recognise himself as
a proposed victim of Laertes' revenge. Presumably
he cannot equate his accidental killing of Polonius
with the premeditated murder of his father.

79 bravery extravagant display.

80 SD young OSRIC 'young Ostricke' (F) is only
'a Courtier' in Q2. F brings forward his name from
171 and 231 below (where q2 gives it as 'young
Ostricke').

82 water-fly 'the proper emblem of a busy
trifler' (Johnson).

85–6 let a beast...mess i.e. if you own a lot of
livestock, even though you are an animal yourself
you'll have a place at the king's table.
't crib' = manger.

86 chough Pronounced 'chuff'. A big black cliff
bird, but the name seems to have been used for the
jackdaw as well, and that is probably what is meant
here. Jenkins has revived the old arguments of
Caldecott and Furness (see NV) that the word
should be 'chuff', a country bumpkin, a coarse,
rough fellow.

91 his its.

94 indifferent moderately.

95 complexion temperament.
HAMLET I beseech you remember.

[Hamlet moves him to put on his hat]

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

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

OSRIC Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him.

HAMLET The concernancy, sir? Why do we wrap the gentleman in our more rawer breath?

OSRIC Sir?

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

99 remember OED (1d) cleverly associates this with the rather odd use of 'remember your courtesy' or 'be remembered' to request someone to put on his hat or cover his head. Perhaps this is right; but perhaps Hamlet just asks him to remember what he has said.

100-25 F here imposes a swingeing cut. Like the cutting out of the Lord's part, 171-82 below, this is clearly an attempt to shorten this very long build-up to the final scene by cutting out material not essential to the plot. These lines are almost entirely fun at the expense of Osric's diction.

102 excellent differences i.e. he excels in a variety of different accomplishments. Delius suggested the ingenious gloss 'different excellences' (NV).

102 soft society easy sociability.

102 great showing excellent appearance.

103 card or calendar map or guide.

104 gentry gentility.

104-5 the continent...would see he contains whatever quality a gentleman would wish to find.

106 perdition loss.

107 inventorially by means of an inventory of his qualities.

107 dozy make dizzy. Kittredge restored this quite common variant of 'dizzy' in 1939.

108 yaw swing off course.

108 neither after all.

108 in respect of in comparison with.

108-9 in the verity of extolment to praise him truthfully.

109 of great article i.e. there would be many articles to list in his inventory.

109 his infusion what is poured into him, his nature.

110 dearth dearness, high price.

111 trace him follow him closely.

111 umbrage shadow.

114 The concernancy sir? What's all this about? The word seems to be Hamlet's invention.

114-15 wrap...breath i.e. attempt to dress him in the crudity of language.

117-18 Is't not possible...really Paradoxically, Horatio's interjection is more obscure than the
HAMLET What imports the nomination of this gentleman?

OSRIC Of Laertes?

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

HAMLET Of him sir.

OSRIC I know you are not ignorant –

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

OSRIC You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is.

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

OSRIC I mean sir for his weapon; but in the imputation laid on him by them, in his meed he’s unfellowed.]

HAMLET What’s his weapon?

OSRIC Rapier and dagger.

HAMLET That’s two of his weapons, but well.

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

HAMLET What call you the carriages?

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

ridiculous colloquy which he interrupts. Some think he asks Osric if he can’t understand his own jargon when another person speaks it. Perhaps it is an appeal to start again in a simpler language. ‘You will to’t’ may mean (to Osric) ‘You will get there eventually.’

126 Laertes is.] Q2; Laertes is at his weapon. F 127–30 HAMLET I dare... unfellowed] Q2; not in F 129 his weapon] Q 1676; this weapon Q2 134 king... wagered] Q2; sir King ha’s wag’d F 135 he has impawned] hee has impaund Q2; he impon’d F 136 hangers] F; hanger Q2 136 and so] Q2; or so F 140 HORATIO I knew... done] Q2; not in F

119 What imports... gentleman? What is the purpose of naming this gentleman?

124–5 not much approve me i.e. it would be little to my credit to have such a testimony from you.

127–8 I dare... know himself This is not meant to have much meaning. The tenor is that for Hamlet to admit Laertes’ excellence would be to claim that excellence for himself, since to know such excellence you would need to be able to perform such excellence.

129–30 in the imputation... by them in what people attribute to him.
OSRIC The carriages sir are the hangers.

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

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

HAMLET How if I answer no?

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

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

OSRIC Shall I redeliver you e'en so?

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

OSRIC I commend my duty to your lordship.

HAMLET Yours, yours.

[Exit Osric]

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

HORATIO This lapwing runs away with the shell on his head.

HAMLET A did comply with his dug before a sucked it. Thus has he,
and many more of the same bevy that I know the drossy age dotes on, only got the tune of the time and outward habit of encounter, a kind of yesty collection, which carries them through and through the most fanned and winnowed opinions; and do but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out.

[Enter a Lord]

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

Hamlet I am constant to my purposes, they follow the king's pleasure.

If his fitness speaks, mine is ready; now or whenever, provided I be so able as now.

Lord The king and queen, and all, are coming down.

Hamlet In happy time.

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

Hamlet She well instructs me.]

[Exit Lord]

Horatio You will lose, my lord.

Hamlet I do not think so. Since he went into France, I have been in

166 the drossy age the people of these rubbishy times.

167 got the tune of the time The sense is of listening attentively to what other people sing and learning to copy them.

168 yesty yeasty, frothy. A regular form of the word. Compare Macbeth 4.1.53, 'the yesty waves'.

169 collection mixture, brew (see notes to 3.2.233, 4.7.143).

170 fanned and winnowed Synonyms for blowing the chaff off the grain. 'fanned' is Warburton's emendation for F's 'fond'. Probably Shakespeare wrote 'fand'. The Q2 compositor saw this as 'fane'. The MS. must have been dirty or tattered; he thought he had the end of the word 'profane'. He could not read 'winnowed' either, and came out wildly with 'prophane and trennowed'.

The image is of a frothy mass working its way through refined material to the top, where it appears as mere bubbles which can be blown away. The superficial qualities of people like Osric take them through the society of superior people, but they cannot last, and when they are tested, their hollowness reveals itself.

171 commended him to you sent his compliments to you (see note to 1.5.184).

175 I am constant to my purposes A grim double meaning here: Hamlet must also be thinking of his deeper resolve.

176 If his fitness speaks When his convenience names a time.

179 In happy time It is an opportune time.

180 use...entertainment give a courteous reception.
continual practice; I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart - but it is no matter.

HORATIO Nay good my lord -
HAMLET It is but foolery, but it is such a kind of gaingiving as would perhaps trouble a woman.

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

HAMLET Not a whit, we defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come - the readiness is all. Since no man of aught he leaves knows, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.

A table prepared, with flagons of wine on it. Trumpets, Drums and Officers with cushions. Enter CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, LAERTES and LORDS, with other Attendants with foils, daggers and gauntlets

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

[Hamlet takes Laertes by the hand]

HAMLET Give me your pardon sir, I've done you wrong; But pardon't as you are a gentleman.

This presence knows, And you must needs have heard, how I am punished

185 at the odds given these particular odds.

188 gaingiving foreboding, presentment of evil. Perhaps stronger than 'misgiving': Shakespeare thinks of 'gain' as in 'gainsay' - indicating opposition. This is a singular use of an uncommon word.

192-3 we defy...sparrow Hamlet rejects 'augury', the attempt to read signs of future events and to take steps accordingly. All occurrences show God's immediate concern and control, and he will therefore accept the circumstances which present themselves and not try to avoid them. 'special providence' is a theological term for a particular act of divine intervention. 'the fall of a sparrow' alludes to Matthew 10.29.

193 If it be now i.e. his own death. He knows the king will be making a second attempt to murder him. He must also have in mind the final confrontation when he will 'quit' Claudius, even if it costs him his life.

195-6 Since no man...betimes? I follow Q2 fairly closely, regarding F as a deliberate simplification (you can't take it with you). 'Since no one has any knowledge of the life he leaves behind him, what does it matter if one dies early?' An early death may be a blessing.

196 Let be Do not try to alter the course of things.

198 SD This is a conflation of Q2 and F. F does not provide for trumpets and drums (i.e. trumpeters and drummers), nor the cushions, nor the daggers. Q2, on the other hand, does not have gauntlets. It is quite possible that the book-keeper had ideas different from Shakespeare about staging the fight, but Wilson's view that F represents later developments in fencing customs cannot be maintained if this edition's view of the provenance of F is correct.

200 presence assembly (suggesting a formal court occasion).
With a sore distraction. What I have done,
That might your nature, honour and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.
If Hamlet from himself be tane 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
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts,
That I have shot my arrow o'er the house
And hurt my brother.

LAERTES
I am satisfied in nature,
Whose motive in this case should stir me most
To my revenge; but in my terms of honour
I stand aloof, and will no reconcilement
Till by some elder masters of known honour
I have a voice and precedent of peace
To keep my name ungored. But till that time
I do receive your offered love like love,
And will not wrong it.

HAMLET
I embrace it freely,
And will this brother's wager frankly play.
Give us the foils, come on.

LAERTES I'll be your foil Laertes. In mine ignorance
Your skill shall like a star i'th'darkest night
Stick fiery off indeed.

LAERTES You mock me sir.

HAMLET No, by this hand.

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

HAMLET Very well my lord.

CLAUDIUS Your grace has laid the odds a'th'weaker side.

HAMLET I do not fear it, I have seen you both.
But since he is bettered, we have therefore odds.

LAERTES This is too heavy, let me see another.

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

CLAUDIUS Set me the stoups of wine upon that table.

If Hamlet give the first or second hit,
Or quit in answer of the third exchange,
Let all the battlements their ordnance fire.
The king shall drink to Hamlet's better breath,
And in the cup an union shall he throw
Richer than that which four successive kings
In Denmark's crown have worn. Give me the cups,

CLAUDIUS Please me.

CLAUDIUS F The flacons mentioned in 196SD.

CLAUDIUS Or quit...exchange Or, having lost the
first two bouts, gets his revenge in fighting the third
bout.

CLAUDIUS better breath i.e. he will drink to the
increase of Hamlet's energy or power.

CLAUDIUS union a pearl of special quality and high
value. F's reading. Q2 printed first 'Vnice', which
could be a misreading of 'Vniô'; the press-corrector,
using his wits rather than the MS., changed this to
'Onixe'. When F again has 'Vnice', at 305, Q2 again
prints 'Onixe'.

CLAUDIUS Give me the cups The cups, or goblets, are
not mentioned in 196SD. At the beginning of the
speech (239), Claudius has the wine brought before
him. He now asks for the goblets. (There is a good
deal of ceremonial fetching and carrying in this
And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,
The cannons to the heavens, the heaven to earth,
‘Now the king drinks to Hamlet!’ Come, begin,
And you the judges bear a wary eye.

_Hamlet_ 5.2.267

_HAMLET_ Come on sir.
_Laertes_ Come my lord.

_They play_

_Hamlet_ One.
_Laertes_ No.
_Hamlet_ Judgement.

_They play_

_Osric_ A hit, a very palpable hit.
_Laertes_ Well, again.

_Claudius_ Stay, give me drink. Hamlet, this pearl is thine.
Here’s to thy health.

_Drum, trumpets sound, and shot goes off_
Give him the cup.

_Hamlet_ I’ll play this bout first, set it by awhile.
Come.

_They play_

_Another hit. What say you?_
_Laertes_ A touch, a touch, I do confess’t.
_Claudius_ Our son shall win.

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

_Hamlet_ Good madam.

247 [Trumpet] Q2; [Trumpets F 250 [‘Now...Hamlet.’] as reported speech in Capell; not differentiated in Q2, F 251 SD] Q2; not in F 253 (Come my lord] Q2; Come on sir F 260 SD] This edn; Drum, trumpets and shot. Florish, a piece goes off Q2 (257): Trumpets sound, and shot goes off F 261 set it by] Q2; set by F 262 SD They play] They play again / Rowe; not in Q2, F 263 A touch, a touch] F; not in Q2 263 confess’t] Q2; confesse F 265 Here...brows] Q2; Here’s a Napkin, rub thy brows F

scene.) Claudius then explains just how his toast will be given. He does not drink until after the first bout (259).

247 kettle kettle-drum.

259-60 give me drink...health The king drinks to Hamlet’s health while holding the ‘pearl’ aloft. He then deposits the poisoned pellet in the goblet while the drum, trumpet and shot are sounding off.

264 fat...breath It is hard indeed to think of Hamlet as a fat man—and if Burbage was corpulent, all the less reason for calling attention to it. ‘sweaty’ has been suggested as the meaning of ‘fat’ but it is not properly attested. Probably the queen means that he is soft, out of condition, in poor trim. It is interesting that the word ‘fat’ is associated with shortness of breath at 3.4.154, in the phrase, ‘the fatness of these pursy times’ (see the note).

265 napkin handkerchief.

266 carouses drinks a health.
CLAUDIUS Gertrude, do not drink!
GERTRUDE I will my lord, I pray you pardon me.

[Drinks]

CLAUDIUS [Aside] It is the poisoned cup. It is too late.

HAMLET I dare not drink yet madam, by and by.
GERTRUDE Come, let me wipe thy face.
LAERTES My lord, I'll hit him now.

CLAUDIUS I do not think't.
LAERTES And yet it is almost against my conscience.
HAMLET Come, for the third, Laertes. You do but dally.
I pray you pass with your best violence.
I am afeard you make a wanton of me.

LAERTES Say you so? Come on.

Play

OSRIC Nothing neither way.
LAERTES Have at you now!

[Wounds Hamlet]

In scuffling they change rapiers

CLAUDIUS Part them. They are incensed.

HAMLET Nay, come again.

[Wounds Laertes]

OSRIC Look to the queen there, ho!
HORATIO They bleed on both sides. How is it my lord?
OSRIC How is't Laertes?
LAERTES Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric.
I am justly killed with mine own treachery.
HAMLET  How does the queen?

CLAUDIUS  She sounds to see them bleed.

GERTRUDE  No, no, the drink, the drink – O my dear Hamlet –

The drink, the drink – I am poisoned.  [Dies]  290

HAMLET  Oh villainy! – Ho, let the door be locked!

Treachery! Seek it out!

[Laertes falls]

LAERTES  It is here Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain,

No medicine in the world can do thee good,

In thee there is not half an hour of life –

The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,

Unbated and envenomed. The soul practice

Hath turned itself on me; lo, here I lie,

Never to rise again. Thy mother’s poisoned –

I can no more – the king, the king’s to blame.

HAMLET  The point envenomed too! Then, venom, to thy work!

Hurts the king

ALL  Treason, treason!

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

HAMLET  Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,

Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?

Follow my mother.  King dies  305

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.  Dies  310

HAMLET  Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee.

290 SD Dies] Queen dies / Rowe; not in Q2, V  292 SD Laertes falls] Capell; not in Q2, V  293 Hamlet. Hamlet, thou]

V; Hamlet, thou Q2  295 hour of life] v; hours life Q2  296 thy hand] v; my hand Q2

Here] Heere v; Heare Q2  304 murderous] v; not in Q2  305 thy union] v; the Onixe Q2

He... himself] v; as one line Q2  310 SD] v; not in Q2  311 make thee free absolve thee.

288 sounds swoons.

297 envenomed poisoned.

297 practice plot.

302 Treason, treason! This reaction is some indication of what Hamlet has all along had to face in planning to kill the king for a crime unknown to the people. Notice also his concern (323-4) at not having been able to explain the reasons for his action.

305 Drink off this potion Some commentators (including Capell and Kittredge) think this is figurative, and that ‘this potion’ is a second sword-stab. Kittredge doesn’t like the savagery of forcing the drink down the dying man’s throat. Like it or not, that, it seems, is what we are given.

306-7 tempered mixed, prepared.

309 come not upon thee This is a wish or prayer, not a statement: ‘Let not these deaths be visited upon, or charged to thee!’
I am dead, Horatio. Wretched queen adieu.
You that look pale, and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time, as this fell sergeant death
Is strict in his arrest, oh I could tell you –
But let it be. Horatio, I am dead,
Thou livest; report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

As th'art a man,
Give me the cup. Let go, by heaven I'll ha't.
O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

_March afar off, and shot within_

What warlike noise is this?

**OSRIC** Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland,
To the ambassadors of England gives
This warlike volley.

**HAMLET** Oh I die, Horatio,
The potent poison quite o'ercrows my spirit.
I cannot live to hear the news from England.
But I do prophesy th’election lights
On Fortinbras; he has my dying voice.
So tell him, with th’occurrences more and less
Which have solicited – the rest is silence.

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

Enter Fortinbras and English Ambassadors, with drum, colours
and Attendants

Fortinbras Where is this sight?

Horatio What is it you would see?

If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search.

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

I 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 placed to the view,
And let me speak to th’yet unknowing world
How these things came about. So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgements, casual slauters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fallen 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,

358 to th’yet [F; to yet Q2]
360 forced cause [F; for no cause Q2]
364 th’inventors [Q2; the Inventors F]
368 rights]
371 on more [F; no more Q2]
373 while [Q2; whiles
377 royal] royall Q2, Q1; royally F

360 carnal...acts Claudius’s deeds.
361 accidental judgements punishments brought about fortuitously. Horatio no doubt
has Laertes in mind.
362 put on arranged, set up.
362 forced cause A cause where the truth has
been wrested and constrained into falsehood (compare Winter’s Tale 3.3.79, the ‘forced baseness’
which Leontes has put upon Perdita). Horatio probably means the lies to the English king by which
Hamlet would have been executed. Some editors wrongly suppose ‘forced’ = ‘compelled’.
363 this upshot the final issue, visible here.
(‘upshot’ is the deciding shot in an archery
contest.)
368 rights of memory ancient rights (?). We do
not know what these are. What we do know is that
the throne of Denmark now goes to a foreigner who
at the beginning of the play was preparing to gain
that throne by force of arms.
369 my vantage my present advantageous
situation.
371 whose voice...more i.e. whose vote is
likely to influence other electors.
372 presently immediately.
373 wild lacking order, bewildered.
374 On Arising from.
376 put on put to the test.
377 royal Nosworthy argues that F gives the true
reading and that Q2 followed Q1 (Shakespeare’s
Occasional Plays, p. 137). F’s reading (‘royally’) is
metrically better, but it gives the phrase a different
meaning, and I think the wrong one. Q2 means that
Hamlet, if he had become king, would have turned
The soldier's music and the rite of war
Speak loudly for him.
Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.
Go bid the soldiers shoot.

*Exeunt marching, after the which a peal of ordnance are shot off*
READING LIST

Among the voluminous writings on *Hamlet* there is so much that is good and im­portant that any manageable list of recommended titles is bound to appear capricious and invidious. There are however many guides which can help readers to find the studies they need. In the selection which follows, the order of entry in each section is chrono­logical.

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