

## ACT II

### SCENE I. A room in POLONIUS' house.

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 behavior.

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 wit:  
You laying these slight sullies on my son,  
As 'twere a thing a little soil'd i' the 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 or the addition  
Of man and country.

Reynaldo  
Very good, my lord.

Polonius  
And then, sir, does he this—he does—what was I  
about to say? By the mass, I was about to say  
something: where did I leave?

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

Polonius  
At 'closes in the consequence,' ay, marry;  
He closes thus: 'I know the gentleman;  
I saw him yesterday, or t' 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, or 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 be wi' you; fare you well.

Reynaldo  
Good my lord!

Polonius  
Observe his inclination in yourself.

Reynaldo  
I shall, my lord.

Polonius  
And let him ply his music.

Reynaldo  
Well, my lord.

Polonius

Farewell!

Exit REYNALDO

Enter OPHELIA

How now, Ophelia! what's the matter?

Ophelia

O, my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted!

Polonius

With what, i' the 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 foul'd,  
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ancle;  
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;  
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,  
He falls to such perusal of my face  
As he would draw it. Long stay'd 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 turn'd,  
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;  
For out o' 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 fetters and denied  
His access to me.

Polonius

That hath made him mad.  
I am sorry that with better heed and judgment  
I had not quoted him: I fear'd he did but trifle,  
And meant to wreck 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  
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.  
Exeunt

## **SCENE II. A room in the castle.**

Enter KING CLAUDIUS, QUEEN GERTRUDE, ROSENCRANTZ,  
GUILDENSTERN, and Attendants

King Claudius

Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern!  
Moreover that we much did long to see you,  
The need we have to use you did provoke



Our hasty sending. Something have you heard  
Of Hamlet's transformation; so call it,  
Sith nor the 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 the understanding of himself,  
I cannot dream of: I entreat you both,  
That, being of so young days brought up with him,  
And sith so neighbour'd to his youth and havior,  
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,  
That, open'd, lies within our remedy.

Queen Gertrude

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

Rosencrantz

Both your majesties  
Might, by the sovereign power you have of us,

Put your dread pleasures more into command  
Than to entreaty.

Guildenstern  
But we both obey,  
And here give up ourselves, in the full bent  
To lay our service freely at your feet,  
To be commanded.

King Claudius  
Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

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

Guildenstern  
Heavens make our presence and our practises  
Pleasant and helpful to him!

Queen Gertrude  
Ay, amen!  
Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and some Attendants  
Enter POLONIUS

Polonius

The ambassadors from Norway, my good lord,  
Are joyfully return'd.

King Claudius

Thou still hast been the father of good news.

Polonius

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

King Claudius

O, speak of that; that do I long to hear.

Polonius

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

King Claudius

Thyself do grace to them, and bring them in.

Exit POLONIUS

He tells me, my dear Gertrude, he hath found

The head and source of all your son's distemper.

Queen Gertrude

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

King Claudius

Well, we shall sift him.  
Re-enter POLONIUS, with VOLTIMAND and CORNELIUS  
Welcome, my good friends!  
Say, Voltimand, what from our brother Norway?

Voltimand

Most fair return of greetings and desires.  
Upon our first, he sent out to suppress  
His nephew's levies; which to him appear'd  
To be a preparation 'gainst the Polack;  
But, better look'd 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 the 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,  
Giving a paper  
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.

King Claudius  
It likes us well;  
And at our more consider'd time well 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 VOLTIMAND and CORNELIUS

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:  
Mad call I it; for, to define true madness,  
What is't but to be nothing else but mad?  
But let that go.

Queen Gertrude

More matter, with less art.

Polonius

Madam, I swear I use no art at all.

That he is mad, 'tis true: 'tis true 'tis pity;

And pity 'tis 'tis true: a foolish figure;

But farewell it, for I will use no art.

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*] '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:

[*Reads*] 'In her excellent white bosom, these, &c.'

Queen Gertrude

Came this from Hamlet to her?

Polonius

Good madam, stay awhile; I will be faithful.

[*Reads*] '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.

King Claudius  
But how hath she  
Received his love?

Polonius  
What do you think of me?

King Claudius  
As of a man faithful and honourable.

Polonius  
I would fain prove so. But what might you think,  
When I had seen this hot love on the wing—  
As I perceived it, I must tell you that,  
Before my daughter told me—what might you,  
Or my dear majesty your queen here, think,

If I had play'd the desk or table-book,  
Or given my heart a winking, mute and dumb,  
Or look'd 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 precepts gave her,  
That she should lock herself from his resort,  
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.

King Claudius  
Do you think 'tis this?

Queen Gertrude  
It may be, very likely.

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



King Claudius

Not that I know.

Polonius

*[Pointing to his head and shoulder]*

Take this from this, if this be otherwise:

If circumstances lead me, I will find

Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed

Within the centre.

King Claudius

How may we try it further?

Polonius

You know, sometimes he walks four hours together

Here in the lobby.

Queen Gertrude

So he does indeed.

Polonius

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

Be you and I behind an arras then;

Mark the encounter: if he love her not

And be not from his reason fall'n thereon,

Let me be no assistant for a state,

But keep a farm and carters.

King Claudius

We will try it.

Queen Gertrude

But, look, where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

Polonius

Away, I do beseech you, both away:

I'll board him presently.

Exeunt KING CLAUDIUS, QUEEN GERTRUDE, and Attendants

Enter HAMLET, reading

O, give me leave:

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

Hamlet

Well, God-a-mercy.

Polonius

Do you know me, my lord?

Hamlet

Excellent well; you 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  
god kissing carrion,—Have you a daughter?

Polonius

I have, my lord.

Hamlet

Let her not walk i' the sun: conception is a  
blessing: but not as your daughter may conceive.  
Friend, look to 't.

Polonius

[*Aside*] How say you by that? Still harping on my daughter: yet he knew me not at first; he said I was a fishmonger: he is far gone, far gone: and truly in my youth I suffered much extremity for love; very near this. I'll speak to him again.  
What do you read, my lord?

Hamlet

Words, words, words.

Polonius

What is the matter, my lord?

Hamlet

Between who?

Polonius

I mean, the matter that you read, my lord.

Hamlet

Slanders, sir: for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams: all which, sir,

though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet  
I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down, for  
yourself, sir, should be old as I am, if like a crab  
you could go backward.

Polonius

[*Aside*] Though this be madness, yet there is method  
in 't. Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

Hamlet

Into my grave.

Polonius

Indeed, that is out o' 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 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.

Hamlet

You cannot, sir, take from me any thing that I will  
more willingly part withal: except my life, except  
my life, except my life.

Polonius

Fare you well, my lord.

Hamlet

These tedious old fools!

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

Polonius

You go to seek the Lord Hamlet; there he is.

Rosencrantz

[*To POLONIUS*] God save you, sir!

Exit POLONIUS

Guildenstern

My honoured lord!

Rosencrantz

My most dear lord!

Hamlet

My excellent good friends! How dost thou,

Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do ye both?

Rosencrantz

As the indifferent children of the earth.

Guildenstern

Happy, in that we are not over-happy;  
On fortune's cap we are not the very button.

Hamlet

Nor the soles of her shoe?

Rosencrantz

Neither, my lord.

Hamlet

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

Guildenstern

'Faith, her privates we.

Hamlet

In the secret parts of fortune? O, most true; she  
is a strumpet. What's the news?

Rosencrantz

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

Hamlet

Then is doomsday near: but your news is not true.

Let me question more in particular: what have you,  
my good friends, deserved at the hands of fortune,  
that she sends you to prison hither?

Guildenstern

Prison, my lord!

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' the 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 nut shell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

Guildenstern

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

Hamlet

A dream itself is but a shadow.

Rosencrantz

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

Hamlet

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

Rosencrantz & Guildenstern

We'll wait upon you.

Hamlet

No such matter: I will not sort you with the rest  
of my servants, for, to speak to you like an honest  
man, I am most dreadfully attended. But, in the  
beaten way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore?

Rosencrantz

To visit you, my lord; no other occasion.

Hamlet

Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks; but I  
thank you: and sure, dear friends, my thanks are  
too dear a halfpenny. Were you not sent for? Is it  
your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come,  
deal justly with me: come, come; nay, speak.

Guildenstern

What should we say, my lord?

Hamlet

Why, any thing, 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 could charge you withal, be even and direct with me, whether you were sent for, or no?

Rosencrantz

[*Aside to GUILDENSTERN*] What say you?

Hamlet

[*Aside*] Nay, then, I have an eye of you.—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 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 appears no other thing to  
me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.  
What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason!  
how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how  
express and admirable! in action how like an angel!  
in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the  
world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me,  
what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not  
me: no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling  
you seem to say so.

Rosencrantz

My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts.

Hamlet

Why did you laugh then, when I said 'man delights not me'?

Rosencrantz

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

Hamlet

He that plays the king shall be welcome; his majesty shall have tribute of me; the adventurous knight shall use his foil and target; the lover shall not sigh gratis; the humourous man shall end his part in peace; the clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickled o' the 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 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 aery of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question, and are most tyrannically clapped for't: these are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages—so they call them—that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills and dare scarce come thither.

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 tarre 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?

Guildenstern

O, 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 mine uncle is king of  
Denmark, and those that would make mows at him while  
my father lived, give twenty, forty, fifty, an  
hundred ducats a-piece for his picture in little.  
'Sblood, there is something in this more than  
natural, if philosophy could find it out.  
Flourish of trumpets within

Guildenstern

There are the players.

Hamlet

Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore. Your hands,  
come then: the 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 outward, 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: o' Monday morning;  
'twas so 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

Buz, buz!

Polonius

Upon mine honour,—

Hamlet

Then came each actor on his ass,—

Polonius

The best actors in the world, either for tragedy,  
comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical,  
historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-  
comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or  
poem unlimited: Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor  
Plautus too light. For the law of writ and the  
liberty, these are the only men.

Hamlet

O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!

Polonius

What a treasure had he, my lord?

Hamlet

Why,

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

Polonius

[*Aside*] Still on my daughter.

Hamlet

Am I not i' the right, old Jephthah?

Polonius

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

Hamlet

Nay, that follows not.

Polonius

What follows, then, my lord?

Hamlet

Why,

'As by lot, 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.

Enter four or five Players

You are welcome, masters; welcome, all. I am glad  
to see thee well. Welcome, good friends. O, my old  
friend! thy face is valenced since I saw thee last:  
comest thou to beard me in Denmark? What, my young  
lady and mistress! By'r lady, your ladyship is  
nearer to heaven than when I saw you last, by the  
altitude of a chopine. Pray God, your voice, like  
apiece 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 any thing we see:  
we'll have a speech straight: come, give us a taste  
of your quality; come, a passionate speech.

1st Player

What speech, my lord?

Hamlet

I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was  
never acted; or, if it was, not above once; for the  
play, I remember, pleased not the million; 'twas  
caviare to the general: but it was—as I received  
it, and others, whose judgments 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  
indict the author of affectation; but called it an  
honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very  
much more handsome than fine. One speech in it I  
chiefly loved: 'twas Aeneas' tale to Dido; and  
thereabout of it especially, where he speaks of  
Priam's slaughter: if it live in your memory, begin  
at this line: let me see, let me see—  
'The rugged Pyrrhus, like the Hyrcanian beast,'—  
it is 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 smear'd  
With heraldry more dismal; head to foot  
Now is he total gules; horridly trick'd  
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,  
Baked and impasted with the parching streets,  
That lend a tyrannous and 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.

1st Player

'Anon he finds him  
Striking too short at Greeks; his antique sword,  
Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls,  
Repugnant to command: unequal match'd,  
Pyrrhus at Priam drives; in rage strikes wide;  
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword  
The unnerved 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, seem'd i' the 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,  
Aroused 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,  
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 the 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.

1st Player

'But who, O, who had seen the mobled queen—'

Hamlet

'The mobled queen?'

Polonius

That's good; 'mobled queen' is good.

1st Player

'Run barefoot up and down, threatening 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-teemed loins,

A blanket, in the alarm of fear caught up;

Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steep'd,

'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, whether he has not turned his colour and has

tears in's eyes. Pray you, no more.

Hamlet

'Tis well: I'll have thee speak out the rest 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 bodykins, man, much better: use every man  
after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping?  
Use them after your own honour and dignity: the less  
they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.  
Take them in.

Polonius

Come, sirs.

Hamlet

Follow him, friends: we'll hear a play to-morrow.  
Exit POLONIUS with all the Players but the First  
Dost thou hear me, old friend; can you play the  
Murder of Gonzago?



1st Player

Ay, my lord.

Hamlet

We'll ha't to-morrow 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?

1st Player

Ay, my lord.

Hamlet

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

Exit First Player

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

Rosencrantz

Good my lord!

Hamlet

Ay, so, God be wi' ye;

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

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  
 That from her working all his visage wann'd,  
 Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,  
 A broken voice, and his whole function suiting  
 With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!  
 For Hecuba!  
 What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,  
 That he should weep for her? What would he do,  
 Had he the motive and the cue for passion  
 That I have? He would drown the stage with tears  
 And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,  
 Make mad the guilty and appal the free,  
 Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed  
 The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,  
 A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,  
 Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,  
 And can say nothing; no, not for a king,  
 Upon whose property and most dear life  
 A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?  
 Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?  
 Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face?  
 Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the throat,  
 As deep as to the lungs? who does me this?  
 Ha!  
 'Swounds, I should take it: for it cannot be  
 But I am pigeon-liver'd and lack gall  
 To make oppression bitter, or ere this  
 I should have fatted all the region kites  
 With this slave's offal: bloody, bawdy villain!  
 Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

O, vengeance!

Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,  
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,  
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,  
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,  
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,  
A scullion!

Fie upon't! foh! About, my brain! I have heard  
That guilty creatures sitting at a play  
Have by the very cunning of the scene  
Been struck so to the soul that presently  
They have proclaim'd their malefactions;  
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak  
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players  
Play something like the murder of my father  
Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;  
I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench,  
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen  
May be the devil: and the devil hath power  
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps  
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
As he is very potent with such spirits,  
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.  
Exit