

*Ghost.* [*Beneath.*] Swear.

[*They kiss the hilt of HAMLET's sword.*]

*Ham.* Rest, rest, perturbèd spirit!—So, gentlemen,  
With all my love I do commend me to you;  
And what so poor a man as Hamlet is  
May do t' express his love and friending to you,  
God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together;  
And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.  
The time is out of joint:—O cursèd spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right!—  
Nay, come; let's go together.

[*Exeunt*]

## ACT II.

### SCENE I.—*A Room in Polonius's House.*

*Enter* POLONIUS and REYNALDO.

*Polo.* Give him this money and these notes, Reynaldo.

*Reyn.* I will, my lord.

*Polo.* You shall do marvellous wisely, good Reynaldo,  
Before you visit him, to make inquiry  
Of his behaviour.

*Reyn.* My lord, I did intend it.

*Polo.* Marry, well said, very well said. Look you, sir,  
Inquire me first what Danskers<sup>1</sup> are in Paris,  
And how, and who; what means, and where they keep;<sup>2</sup>  
What company, at what expense; and finding,  
By this encompassment and drift of question,

<sup>1</sup> *Dansker* is *Dane*; *Dansk* being the ancient name of Denmark.—Here *me* is used very much as *your* in the preceding scene. See page 89, note 3a.

<sup>2</sup> The Poet repeatedly uses *keep* in the sense of *lodge* or *dwell*.

That they do know my son, come you more nearer  
Than your particular demands will touch it:<sup>3</sup>  
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?

*Reyn.* Ay, very well, my lord.

*Polo.* *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.

*Reyn.* As gaming, my lord?

*Polo.* Ay, or drinking, fencing, swearing,  
Quarrelling, drabbing; you may go so far.

*Reyn.* My lord, that would dishonour him.

*Polo.* Faith, no; as you may season it in the charge.  
You must not put another<sup>4</sup> scandal on him  
Than he is open to incontinency;  
That's not my meaning: but breathe his faults so quaintly,<sup>5</sup>  
That they may seem the taints of liberty;  
The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind;

<sup>3</sup> This seems illogical, and would be so in any mouth but a politician's, as implying that general inquiries would come to the point faster than particular ones. But here, again, *your* is used as explained in note 3a, page 89. The scheme here laid down is, to *steal* upon the truth by roundabout statements and questions; or, as it is afterwards said, "By indirections find directions out."

<sup>4</sup> Another must here be taken as equivalent to *a further*.

<sup>5</sup> *Quaintly*, from the Latin *comptus*, properly means *elegantly*, but is here used in the sense of *adroitly* or *ingeniously*.



A savageness in unreclaimèd blood,  
Of general assault.<sup>6</sup>

Reyn. But, my good lord, —

Polo. Wherefore should you do this?

Reyn. Ay, my lord,

I would know that.

Polo. Marry, sir, here's my drift;  
And, I believe, it is a fetch of warrant:<sup>7</sup>  
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,<sup>8</sup> 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; —

Reyn. Very good, my lord.

Polo. And then, sir, does he this, — he does — what was  
I about to say? — By the Mass,<sup>9</sup> I was about to say some-  
thing: — where did I leave?

Reyn. At *closes in the consequence*; at *friend* or *so*, and  
*gentleman*.

Polo. At *closes in the consequence*, — ay, marry;  
He closes with you thus: *I know the gentleman*;

<sup>6</sup> A wildness of untamed blood, such as youth is generally assailed by.

<sup>7</sup> "A fetch of warrant" is an allowable stratagem or artifice.

<sup>8</sup> Having at any time seen the youth you *speak* of guilty in the *forenamed* *vices*. — "Closes with you in this consequence" means, apparently, *agrees* with you in this *conclusion*. — *Addition* again for *title*.

<sup>9</sup> *Mass* is the old name of the Lord's Supper, and is still used by the Roman Catholics. It was often sworn by, as in this instance.

*I saw him yesterday*, or *'tother day*,  
Or then, or then; *with* such or such; *and*, as you say,  
*There was he gaming*, *there o'ertook in's rouse*,  
*There falling out at tennis*: or, perchance,  
*I saw him enter such a house of sale*.

See you now,

Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth;<sup>10</sup>

And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,

With windlances and with assays of bias,<sup>11</sup>

By indirections find directions out:

So, by my former lecture and advice,

Shall you my son. You have me, have you not?<sup>12</sup>

Reyn. My lord, I have.

Polo. God b' wi' you!<sup>13</sup> fare you well.

Reyn. Good my lord!

Polo. Observe his inclination in yourself.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The shrewd old wire-puller is fond of angling arts. The *carp* is a species of fish.

<sup>11</sup> "Of wisdom and of reach" is here equivalent to *by cunning and over-reaching*. — *Windlances* is here used in the sense of taking a winding, circuitous, or roundabout course to a thing, instead of going *directly* to it; or, as we sometimes say, "beating about the bush," instead of coming straight to the point. This is shown by a late writer in the *Edinburgh Review*, who quotes two passages in illustration of it from Golding's translation of Ovid, which is known to have been one of the Poet's books. Here is one of the quotations: —

The winged god, beholding them returning in a troupe,  
Continu'd not directly forth, but gan me down to stoupe,  
And fetch'd a *windlass* round about.

"Assays of bias" are *trials of inclination*. A bias is a weight in one side of a bowl, which keeps it from rolling straight to the mark, as in ninepins.

<sup>12</sup> "You *understand* me, do you not?"

<sup>13</sup> The old phrase, "God be with you," is here in the process of abbreviation to what we now use, — "Good by."

<sup>14</sup> "Use your own eyes upon him, as well as learn from others." Or the meaning may be, "comply with his inclinations in order to draw him out." *Observe* sometimes has this sense of *yielding to*, and so *flattering*.



*Reyn.* I shall, my lord.

*Polo.* And let him ply his music.<sup>15</sup>

*Reyn.*

Well, my lord.

*Polo.* Farewell! —

[*Exit REYNALDO.*]

*Enter OPHELIA.*

How now, Ophelia! what's the matter?

*Ophe.* O, my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted!

*Polo.* With what, i' the name of God?

*Ophe.* My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,  
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;<sup>16</sup>  
No hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd,  
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ankle;<sup>17</sup>  
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;  
And with a look so piteous in purp'rt  
As if he had been loosèd out of Hell  
To speak of horrors, — he comes before me.

*Polo.* Mad for thy love?

*Ophe.*

My lord, I do not know;

But, truly, I do fear it.

*Polo.*

What said he?

*Ophe.* 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.<sup>18</sup> Long time stay'd he so;  
At last, — a little shaking of mine arm,  
And thrice his head thus waving up and down, —

<sup>15</sup> "Eye him sharply, but *shyly*, and let him fiddle his secrets all out."

<sup>16</sup> *Unbraced* is the same as our *unbuttoned*.

<sup>17</sup> Hanging down like the loose cincture that confines the fetters or gyves round the ankles.

<sup>18</sup> "To such a *study* of my face as *if* he would *make a picture* of it."

He raised a sigh so piteous and profound,  
That it did seem to shatter all his bulk,<sup>19</sup>  
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 help,  
And, to the last, bended their light on me.

*Polo.* Come, go with me: I will go seek the King.

This is the very ecstasy<sup>20</sup> of love,  
Whose violent property fordoes<sup>21</sup> 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?

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

*Polo.*

That hath made him mad.

I'm sorry that with better heed and judgment  
I had not quoted him.<sup>22</sup> I fear'd he did but trifle,  
And meant to wreck thee; but beshrew<sup>23</sup> my jealousy!  
By Heaven, it is as proper to our age  
To cast beyond ourselves in our opinions,<sup>24</sup>  
As it is common for the younger sort

<sup>19</sup> Here *bulk* is put for *breast*. The usage was common.

<sup>20</sup> All through this play, *ecstasy* is *madness*. It was used for any violent perturbation of mind.

<sup>21</sup> *Fordo* was the same as *undo* or *destroy*.

<sup>22</sup> To *quote* is to *note*, to *mark*, or *observe*.

<sup>23</sup> *Beshrew* was much used as a mild form of imprecation; about the same as *confound it!* or, a *plague upon it!*

<sup>24</sup> In this admirable scene, Polonius, who is throughout the skeleton of his former skill in state-craft, hunts the trail of policy at a dead scent, supplied by the weak fever-smell in his own nostrils. — COLERIDGE.



To lack discretion.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> [*Exeunt*

SCENE II. — *A Room in the Castle.*

*Enter the KING, the QUEEN, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN,  
and Attendants.*

*King.* Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern !  
Moreover that<sup>1</sup> we much did long to see you,  
The need we have to use you did provoke  
Our hasty sending. Something have you heard  
Of Hamlet's transformation ; so I call it,  
Since nor th' exterior nor the inward man  
Resembles that it was. What it should be,  
More than his father's death, that thus hath put him  
So much from th' understanding of himself,  
I cannot dream of. I entreat you both,  
That, being of so young days brought up with him,  
And since so neighbour'd to his youth and humour,<sup>2</sup>  
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,

<sup>25</sup> We old men are as apt to overreach ourselves with our own policy, as the young are to miscarry through inconsideration.

<sup>26</sup> The sense is rather obscure, but appears to be, " By keeping Hamlet's love secret, we may cause more of grief to others, than of hatred on his part by disclosing it." The Poet sometimes strains language pretty hard in order to close a scene with a rhyme.

<sup>1</sup> *Moreover that for besides that.* Not so elsewhere, I think.

<sup>2</sup> And having since had so near an opportunity of studying his inclination and character during his youth.

Whether aught to us unknown afflicts him thus,  
That, open'd, lies within our remedy.

*Queen.* 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<sup>3</sup> and good will  
As to expend your time with us awhile,  
For the supply and profit of our hope,<sup>4</sup>  
Your visitation shall receive such thanks  
As fits a king's remembrance.

*Rosen.* Both your Majesties  
Might, by the sovereign power you have of us,  
Put your dread pleasures more into command  
Than to entreaty.

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

*King.* Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

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

*Guild.* Heavens make our presence and our practices  
Pleasant and helpful to him !

*Queen.* Ay, amen !

[*Exeunt ROSEN., GUILDEN., and some Attendants*

*Enter POLONIUS.*

*Polo.* Th' ambassadors from Norway, my good lord,  
Are joyfully return'd.

<sup>3</sup> *Gentry* for *courtesy, gentleness, or good-breeding.*

<sup>4</sup> " The supply and profit " is the *feeding and realizing*



*King.* Thou still hast been the father of good news.

*Polo.* 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 :<sup>5</sup>  
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.* O, speak of that ; that do I long to hear.

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

*King.* 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.* I doubt<sup>6</sup> it is no other but the main, —  
His father's death, and our o'erhasty marriage.

*King.* Well, we shall sift him. —

*Re-enter* POLONIUS, with VOLTIMAND and CORNELIUS.

Welcome, my good friends !

Say, Voltimand, what from our brother Norway ?

*Volt.* 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,<sup>7</sup> — sends out arrests

<sup>5</sup> I hold my duty both to my God and to my King, as I do my soul.

<sup>6</sup> Doubt, again, for *suspect* or *fear*. See page 68, note 46.

<sup>7</sup> To *bear in hand* is to delude by false assurances or expectations.

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 ;<sup>8</sup>  
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<sup>9</sup>  
As therein are set down.

*King.* It likes us<sup>10</sup> well ;  
And at our more consider'd time<sup>11</sup> 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* VOLTIMAND and CORNELIUS.

*Polo.* This business is well ended. —  
My liege, and madam, to expostulate<sup>12</sup>  
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,

<sup>8</sup> *Fee* was often used for *fee-simple*, which is the strongest tenure in English law, and means an estate held in absolute right.

<sup>9</sup> That is, on such *pledges* of safety to the country, and on such *terms* of permission. The passage of an army through a country is apt to cause great trouble and damage to the people.

<sup>10</sup> "It likes us" for "it pleases us," or "we like it." Often so.

<sup>11</sup> That is, "when we have had time for *further consideration*." The Poet has several like expressions in this play.

<sup>12</sup> *Expostulate* in the Latin sense of *argue* or *discuss*.



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.* More matter, with less art.

*Polo.* 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:<sup>13</sup>

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 beauti-  
fied 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,<sup>14</sup> &c.*

*Queen.* Came this from Hamlet to her?

*Polo.* Good madam, stay awhile; I will be faithful.

[Reads.] *Doubt thou the stars are fire;  
Doubt that the Sun doth move;*

<sup>13</sup> *Perpend* is weigh or consider.

<sup>14</sup> The word *these* was usually added at the end of the superscription of letters. Hamlet's letter is somewhat in the euphuistic style which was fashionable in the Poet's time.

*Doubt<sup>15</sup> 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<sup>16</sup> 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,<sup>17</sup> 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.* But how hath she  
Received his love?

*Polo.* What do you think of me?

*King.* As of a man faithful and honourable.

*Polo.* 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;<sup>18</sup>  
Or given my heart a winking, mute and dumb;<sup>19</sup>  
Or look'd upon this love with idle sight; —

<sup>15</sup> *Doubt*, again, as note 6. In the two preceding lines the word has its ordinary sense.

<sup>16</sup> Hamlet is *tacitly* quibbling: he first uses *numbers* in the sense of *verses*, and here *implies* the other sense.

<sup>17</sup> That is, "while he is living." *Machine* for *body*.

<sup>18</sup> By keeping dark about the matter. A desk or table-book does not prate of what it contains. A table-book is a case or set of tablets, to carry in the pocket, and write memoranda upon. See page 85, note 21.

<sup>19</sup> "If I had given my heart a *hint* to be mute about their passion."  
"Connivencia, a winking at; a sufferance; a feigning not to see or know."



What might you think? No, I went round<sup>20</sup> to work;  
 And my young mistress thus I did bespeak:  
*Lord Hamlet is a prince, out of thy star;*<sup>21</sup>  
*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, repulsèd, — 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.* Do you think 'tis this?

*Queen.* It may be, very likely.

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

*King.* Not that I know.

*Polo.* [*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.<sup>22</sup>

*King.* How may we try it further?

*Polo.* You know, sometimes he walks for hours together  
 Here in the lobby.

<sup>20</sup> To be *round* is to be *plain, downright, outspoken.*

<sup>21</sup> Not within thy *destiny*; alluding to the supposed influence of the stars on the fortune of life.

<sup>22</sup> *Centre* here means, no doubt, the Earth, which, in the old astronomy, was held to be literally the centre of the solar system. The Poet has the word repeatedly in that sense.

*Queen.* So he does indeed.

*Polo.* At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him:  
 Be you and I behind an arras<sup>23</sup> 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.* We will try it.

*Queen.* But look where sadly the poor wretch<sup>24</sup> comes  
 reading.

*Polo.* Away, I do beseech you, both away:  
 I'll board<sup>25</sup> him presently. —

[*Exeunt KING, QUEEN, and Attendants.*]

*Enter HAMLET, reading.*

O, give me leave:

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

*Ham.* Well, God-'a-mercy.

*Polo.* Do you know me, my lord?

*Ham.* Excellent well; you're a fishmonger.<sup>26</sup>

*Polo.* Not I, my lord.

*Ham.* Then I would you were so honest a man.

*Polo.* Honest, my lord!

<sup>23</sup> In Shakespeare's time the chief rooms of houses were lined with tapestry hangings, which were suspended on frames, some distance from the walls, to keep them from being rotted by the damp. These tapestries were called *arras* from the town *Arras*, in France, where they were made.

<sup>24</sup> *Wretch* was the strongest term of endearment in the language; generally implying, however, a dash of pity. So in *Othello*, iii. 3, the hero, speaking of Desdemona, exclaims in a rapture of tenderness, "Excellent *wretch*, perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee!"

<sup>25</sup> To *board* him is to *accost* or *address* him.

<sup>26</sup> *Fishmonger* meant an angler as well as a dealer in fish. Hamlet probably means that Polonius has come to *fish out* his secret.



*Ham.* Ay, sir; to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man pick'd out of ten thousand.

*Polo.* That's very true, my lord.

*Ham.* For if the Sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion,<sup>27</sup> — Have you a daughter?

*Polo.* I have, my lord.

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

*Polo.* How say you by that?<sup>28</sup> — [*Aside.*] 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?

*Ham.* Words, words, words.

*Polo.* What is the matter, my lord?

*Ham.* Between who?

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

*Ham.* Slanders, sir: for the satirical rogue says here that old men have gray beards; that their faces are wrinkled; their eyes purging thick amber and 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

<sup>27</sup> "A good *kissing* carrion" is, no doubt, a carrion good *for kissing*, or good *to kiss*. So in *The Merry Wives*, v. 5, we have the compound "*kissing-comfits*," which were candies flavoured so as to perfume the breath, and thus render the lips sweet for kissing, or to kiss. And so we often say "good hay-making weather," meaning, of course, weather good for hay-making, or good to make hay. In my first edition of *Shakespeare*, 1856, I so explained the passage; but afterwards, in my School edition of *Hamlet*, 1870, I receded from that explanation, out of deference to the judgment of others. I am now obliged to Professor Hiram Corson for recalling me to it.

<sup>28</sup> "How say you by that?" is "*What mean you by that?*"

potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty<sup>29</sup> to have it thus set down; for you yourself, sir, should be old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.<sup>30</sup>

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

*Ham.* Into my grave?

*Polo.* Indeed, that is out o' the air. — [*Aside.*] How pregnant<sup>31</sup> sometimes his replies are! a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be deliver'd 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.

*Ham.* You cannot, sir, take from me any thing that I will more willingly part withal; — [*Aside.*] except my life, except my life, except my life.

*Polo.* Fare you well, my lord.

*Ham.* These tedious old fools!

*Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN.*

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

*Rosen.* [*To POLO.*] God save you, sir! [*Exit POLONIUS*]

*Guild.* My honour'd lord!

*Rosen.* My most dear lord!

*Ham.* My excellent-good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern? — Ah, Rosencrantz! — Good lads, how do ye both?

*Rosen.* As the indifferent<sup>32</sup> children of the Earth.

<sup>29</sup> Shakespeare sometimes uses *honesty* with the sense of the adjective *right*, or *honourable*.

<sup>30</sup> That is, "if you could *turn your life* backward, and grow young."

<sup>31</sup> *Pregnant*, here, is pithy, full of meaning, or of pertinency.

<sup>32</sup> *Indifferent*, here, has the sense of *middling*, — tolerably well off.



*Guild.* Happy, in that we are not over-happy ;  
On Fortune's cap we're not the very button.

*Ham.* Nor the soles of her shoe ?

*Rosen.* Neither, my lord.

*Ham.* Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of  
her favours ? What's the news ?

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

*Ham.* 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 ?

*Guild.* Prison, my lord !

*Ham.* Denmark's a prison.

*Rosen.* Then is the world one.

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

*Rosen.* We think not so, my lord.

*Ham.* 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.

*Rosen.* Why, then your ambition makes it one ; 'tis too  
narrow for your mind.

*Ham.* 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.

*Guild.* Which dreams indeed are ambition ; for the very  
substance of the ambitious<sup>33</sup> is merely the shadow of a  
dream.

<sup>33</sup> This is obscure : but "the very substance of the ambitious" probably means the substance of *that which* the ambitious *pursue*, not that of which they *are made*. The obscurity grows from an uncommon use of the objective genitive.

*Ham.* A dream itself is but a shadow.

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

*Ham.* 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.<sup>34</sup>

*Rosen.* } We'll wait upon you.  
*Guild.* }

*Ham.* 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.<sup>35</sup> But, in the beaten way of  
friendship, what make you at Elsinore ?<sup>36</sup>

*Rosen.* To visit you, my lord ; no other occasion.

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

*Guild.* What should we say, my lord ?

*Ham.* 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.<sup>37</sup> I  
know the good King and Queen have sent for you.

<sup>34</sup> Hamlet is here playing or fencing with words, and seems to lose himself in the riddles he is making. The meaning is any thing but clear ; perhaps was not meant to be understood. But *bodies* is no doubt put for *substance* or *substances*. And perhaps the sense will come thus : *Substance* and *shadow* are antithetic and correlative terms, and Hamlet assumes *beggar* and *king* to be so too. As a shadow must be cast by some substance ; so our beggars are the substances antithetic and correlative to the shadows cast by them. All which infers that our kings and heroes are but the shadows of our beggars. — *Fay* is merely a diminutive of *faith*.

<sup>35</sup> Referring, perhaps, to the "bad dreams" spoken of a little before.

<sup>36</sup> "What is your business at Elsinore ?" See page 63, note 36.

<sup>37</sup> To colour is to disguise to conceal.



*Rosen.* To what end, my lord?

*Ham.* 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.

*Rosen.* [*Aside to GUILDEN.*] What say you?

*Ham.* [*Aside.*] Nay, then I have an eye of you.<sup>38</sup> — If you love me, hold not off.

*Guild.* My lord, we were sent for.

*Ham.* I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the King and Queen moults no feather.<sup>39</sup> 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<sup>40</sup> 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 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

<sup>38</sup> "I will watch you sharply." *Of for on*; a common usage.

<sup>39</sup> Hamlet's fine sense of honour is well shown in this. He will not tempt them to any breach of confidence; and he means that, by telling them the reason, he will forestall and prevent their disclosure of it. — *Moult* is an old word for *change*; used especially of birds when casting their feathers. So in Bacon's *Natural History*: "Some birds there be, that upon their *moulting* do turn colour; as robin-redbreasts, after their moulting, grow red again by degrees."

<sup>40</sup> Here, as often, *brave* is *grand, splendid*.

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.

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

*Ham.* Why did you laugh then, when I said *man delights not me*?

*Rosen.* To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what *lenten* entertainment<sup>41</sup> the players shall receive from you: we coted<sup>42</sup> them on the way, and hither are they coming to offer you service.

*Ham.* 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<sup>43</sup> shall end his part in peace; the Clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickle o' the sear;<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> "*Lenten* entertainment" is entertainment for the season of *Lent*, when players were not allowed to perform in public, in London.

<sup>42</sup> To *cote* is, properly, to *overpass*, to *outstrip*. So Scott, in *Old Mortality*, note J.: "This horse was so fleet, and its rider so expert, that they are said to have outstripped and *coted*, or turned, a hare upon the Bran-Law."

<sup>43</sup> *Humorous man* here means a man made unhappy by his own crotchets. *Humour* was used for any wayward, eccentric impulse causing a man to be full of ups and downs, or of flats and sharps. Such characters were favourites on the stage. The melancholy Jaques in *As You Like It* is an instance.

<sup>44</sup> *Tickle* is *delicate, sensitive, easily moved*. *Sear*, also spelt *sere* and *serre*, is the catch of a gun-lock, that holds the hammer cocked or half-cocked. Here, as often, *o'*, that is, *of*, is equivalent to *in respect of*. The image is of a gunlock with the hammer held so lightly by the catch as to go off at the slightest pressure on the trigger; and the general idea is of persons so prone to laughter, that the least touch or gleam of wit is enough to make them explode. The same thought occurs in *The Tempest*, ii. 1: "I did it to minister occasion to these gentlemen, who are of such *sensible* and nimble lungs, that they always use to laugh at nothing." Here, as in many other places, *sensible* is *sensitive*. In the text, Hamlet is slurring the extem-