

SCENE III.—*Another Room in the Castle.**Enter* HORATIO and a Servant.*Hora.* What are they that would speak with me?*Serv.* Sailors, sir: they say they have letters for you.*Hora.* Let them come in. — [*Exit* Servant.]*I* do not know from what part of the world
I should be greeted, if not from Lord Hamlet.*Enter* Sailors.*1 Sail.* God bless you, sir.*Hora.* Let Him bless thee too.*1 Sail.* He shall, sir, an't please Him. There's a letter
for you, sir, — it comes from the ambassador that was bound
for England, — if your name be Horatio, as I am let to know
it is.*Hora.* [*Reads.*] *Horatio, when thou shalt have over-
look'd 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 appointment¹ gave us chase. Finding
ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour; 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*

¹ *Appointment*, here, is *armament*, or *equipment*. Still used thus in mili-
tary language. Also in "a well-appointed house"; meaning, of course
well-furnished, or *well-ordered*.

*the bore² 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 make you way for these your letters;

And do't the speedier, that you may direct me

To him from whom you brought them.

[*Exeunt*]SCENE IV.—*Another Room in the Castle.**Enter* the KING and LAERTES.*King.* 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.*Laer.* It well appears: but tell meWhy you proceeded not against these feats,
So crimeful and so capital in nature,
As by your safety, wisdom, all things else,
You mainly¹ were stirr'd up.*King.* O, for two special reasons;Which may to you perhaps seem much unsinew'd,
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't either-which, —
She's so conjunctive to my life and soul,

² The *bore* is the *caliber* or *capacity* of a gun; as a ten-pounder, or a
seventy-four pounder.

¹ The Poet sometimes uses *mainly* for *greatly* or *strongly*. So in *Troilus
and Cressida*, iv. 4: "I do not call your faith in question so *mainly* as my
merit."

That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,
I could not but by her. The other motive,
Why to a public count I might not go,
Is the great love the general gender² bear him;
Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,
Would, like the spring that turneth wood to stone,
Convert his gyves to graces:³ so that my arrows,
Too slightly timber'd for so loud a wind,⁴
Would have reverted to my bow again,
And not where I had aim'd them.⁵

Laer. And so have I a noble father lost;
A sister driven into desperate terms,
Whose worth, if praises may go back again,⁶
Stood challenger on mount of all the age⁷
For her perfections. But my revenge will come.

King. 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.

How now! what news?

² "The general gender" is the common race or sort of people; the multitude. Shakespeare has the like phrase, "one gender of herbs."

³ Punishment would invest him with more grace in the people's eye; his fetters would make him appear the lovelier to them.

⁴ So in Roger Ascham's *Toxophilus*: "Weake bowes and lyghte shaftes cannot stande in a rough wynde."

⁵ Elliptical. "And would not have gone where I had aim'd them," is the meaning.

⁶ The meaning probably is, "If I may praise her for what she was, but has now ceased to be."

⁷ That is, "stood challenger of all the age."

Mess. Letters, my lord, from Hamlet:
This to your Majesty; this to the Queen.

King. From Hamlet! who brought them?

Mess. Sailors, my lord, they say; I saw them not:
They were given me by Claudio; he received them
Of him that brought them.

King. Laertes, you shall hear them. —
Leave us. [*Exit Messenger.*]

[*Reads.*] *High and mighty: You shall know I am set naked⁸ on your kingdom. To-morrow shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes; when I shall, first asking your pardon thereunto, recount the occasion of my sudden and more strange return.*

HAMLET.

What should this mean? Are all the rest come back?
Or is it some abuse,⁹ and no such thing?

Laer. Know you the hand?

King. 'Tis Hamlet's character. *Naked!*
And in a postscript here, he says *alone*.
Can you advise me?

Laer. 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 diddest thou.

King. If it be so, Laertes, —
As how should it be so, how otherwise?¹⁰ —
Will you be ruled by me?

⁸ *Naked*, here, means destitute of attendants; *alone*.

⁹ *Abuse* for *cheat*, *deception*, or *delusion*.

¹⁰ That is, "how should it be either true or not true?" The thing seems incredible either way; incredible that Hamlet should have returned; incredible that the letter should not be in Hamlet's *character*, or *hand-writing*.

Laer. I will, my lord,
So you will not o'errule me to a peace.

King. To thine own peace. If he be now return'd,
As checking¹¹ 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,¹²
And call it accident.

Laer. My lord, I will be ruled;
The rather, if you could devise it so,
That I might be the organ.

King. It falls right.
You have been talk'd 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.¹³

Laer. What part is that, my lord?

King. A very¹⁴ riband in the cap of youth,
Yet needful too; for youth no less becomes
The light and careless livery that it wears

¹¹ To *check at* is a term in falconry, meaning to start away or fly off from the lure. So in Hinde's *Eliosto Libidinoso*, 1606: "For who knows not, quoth she, that this hawk, which comes now so fair to the fist, may to-morrow *check at* the lure?"

¹² *Acquit* the proceeding or the *contrivance* of all *design*.

¹³ The Poet again uses *siege* for *seat*, that is, *place or rank*, in *Othello*, i. 2: "I fetch my life and being from men of royal *siege*." The usage was not uncommon.

¹⁴ The Poet repeatedly has *very* in the sense of *mere*.

Than settled age his sables and his weeds,
Importing health and graveness.¹⁵ Two months since,
Here was a gentleman of Normandy:
I've seen, myself, and served against, the French,
And they can¹⁶ well on horseback: but this gallant
Had witchcraft in't; he grew unto his seat;
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse,
As he had been incorpsed and demi-natured
With the brave beast. So far he topp'd my thought,
That I, in forgery of shapes and tricks,¹⁷
Come short of what he did.

Laer. A Norman was't?

King. A Norman.

Laer. Upon my life, Lamond.

King. The very same.

Laer. I know him well: he is the brooch,¹⁸ indeed,
And gem of all the nation.

King. He made confession of you;
And gave you such a masterly report
For art and exercise in your defence,¹⁹
And for your rapier most especially,

¹⁵ The sense of *health* goes with the preceding clause; the "light and careless livery" denoting health, as the black dress denotes gravity. Shakespeare has many instances of like construction. — *Weeds* was often used for *clothes* or *dress* in general. Here the sense of *settled* continues over *weeds*: *staid* or *sober* dress.

¹⁶ *Can* is here used in its original sense of *ability* or *skill*.

¹⁷ That is, in the *imagination* of shapes and tricks, or *feats*. This use of *forge* and *forgery* was not unfrequent. — To *top* is to *surpass*.

¹⁸ *Brooch* was used for any conspicuous ornament in general. So in *The World runnes on Wheelles*, 1630: "These sonnes of Mars, who in their times were the glorious *Brooches* of our nation, and admirable terrour to our enemies."

¹⁹ *Defence* here means *fencing* or *sword-practice*.

That he cried out, 'twould be a sight indeed,
 If one could match you : the scrimers²⁰ 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 your envy,²¹
 That he could nothing do but wish and beg
 Your sudden coming o'er, to play with him.
 Now, out of this, —

Laer. What out of this, my lord?

King. Laertes, was your father dear to you?
 Or are you like the painting of a sorrow,
 A face without a heart?

Laer. Why ask you this?

King. Not that I think you did not love your father ;
 But that I know love is begun by time,²²
 And that I see, in passages of proof,²³
 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,²⁴
 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

²⁰ *Scrimers* is from the French *escrimeur*, which means *fencer*.

²¹ "With envy of you." The objective genitive, as it is called. Shakespeare often has both the objective and the subjective genitive in cases where present usage does not admit them.

²² As love is begun by *time*, and has its gradual increase, so *time* qualifies and abates it.

²³ *Passages of proof* means *instances of trial*, or *experience*.

²⁴ *Plurisy* is from the Latin *plus*, *pluris*, and must not be confounded with *pleurisy*. It means *excess*, much the same as Burns's "*unco guid*." So in Massinger's *Unnatural Combat*: "*Plurisy of goodness is thy ill*."

As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents ;
 And then this *should* is like a spendthrift sigh,
 That hurts by easing.²⁵ But, to th' quick o' the ulcer :
 Hamlet comes back : what would you undertake,
 To show yourself your father's son in deed
 More than in words?

Laer. To cut his throat i' the church.

King. No place, indeed, should murder sanctuarize ;²⁶
 Revenge should have no bounds. But, good Laertes,
 Will you do this,²⁷ keep close within your chamber.
 Hamlet return'd shall know you are come home :
 We'll put on²⁸ those shall praise your excellence,
 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 peruse²⁹ the foils ; so that, with ease
 Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
 A sword unbated,³⁰ and in a pass of practice
 Requite him for your father.

²⁵ It was anciently believed that sighing consumed the blood. The Poet has several allusions to this, as in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, iii. 2: "Sighs of love that cost the fresh blood dear." There is also a fine moral meaning in the figure. Jeremy Taylor speaks of certain people who take to a sentimental penitence, as "cozening themselves with their own tears," as if these would absolve them from "doing works meet for repentance." Such tears may be fitly said to "hurt by easing."

²⁶ Murder should not have the protection or privilege of sanctuary in any place. The allusion is to the rights of sanctuary with which certain religious places were formerly invested, so that criminals resorting to them were shielded not only from private revenge, but from the arm of the law.

²⁷ That is, "*If you will do this*"; or, "*If you would do this*."

²⁸ *Put on*, here, is *stir up*, *incite*, or, as we say, *set on*.

²⁹ *Peruse*, for *observe closely* or *scrutinize*.

³⁰ *Unbated* is *unblunted*: a foil without the cap, or button, which was

Laer. I will do't ;
And, for that purpose, I'll annoint my sword.
I bought an unction of a mountebank,³¹
So mortal that, but dip a knife in it,
Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,
Collected from all simples³² that have virtue
Under the Moon, can save the thing from death
That is but scratch'd withal : I'll touch my point
With this contagion, that, if I gall him slightly,
It may be death.

King. 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,³³
'Twere better not assay'd : therefore this project
Should have a back or second, that might hold,
If this should blast in proof.³⁴ Soft ! — let me see : —
We'll make a solemn wager on your cunnings, —
I ha't :
When in your motion you are hot and dry, —

put upon the point, when fencers were to play or practise their art. — *A pass of practice* is a *thrust* made as in exercise of skill, and without any purpose of harm ; the thruster pretending to be ignorant of the button's being off the foil.

³¹ *Mountebank* commonly meant a *quack*, but is here put, apparently, for *druggist* or *apothecary*. The word seems to have been used originally of a pedlar or pretender who mounted a bench, or a bank by the wayside, and hawked off his wares or his skill. — Here, as generally in Shakespeare, *mortal* is *deadly* ; that which *kills*.

³² *Cataplasm* is a *soft plaster*, or a *poultice*. — *Simples* is, properly, *herbs* ; but was used of any *medicine*. See page 144, note 39.

³³ "If our purpose should expose or betray itself through lack of skill in the execution."

³⁴ Should break down in the trial. The image is of proving guns, which of course sometimes burst in the testing.

As make your bouts more violent to that end, —
And that he calls for drink, I'll have prepar'd him
A chalice for the nonce ;³⁵ whereon but sipping,
If he by chance escape your venom'd stuck,³⁶
Our purpose may hold there. —

Enter the QUEEN.

How now, sweet Queen !

Queen. One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow. — Your sister's drown'd, Laertes.

Laer. Drown'd ! O, where ?³⁷

Queen. There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream :
There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal³⁸ shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead-men's fingers call them :
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering 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 ;

³⁵ "For the *nonce*" is for the *occasion* ; literally, for the *once*. — In the line before, instead of "And *that*," we should say "And *when*." See page 55, note 1.

³⁶ *Stuck*, a fencing-term, is *thrust* ; the same as the Italian and Spanish *stoccata* and *staccado*. So in *Twelfth Night*, iii. 4 : "He gives me the *stuck-in* with such mortal motion, that it is inevitable."

³⁷ That Laertes might be excused in some degree for not cooling, the Act concludes with the affecting death of Ophelia ; who in the beginning lay like a little projection of land into a lake or stream, covered with spray-flowers, quietly reflected in the quiet waters ; but at length is undermined or loosened, and becomes a fairy isle, and after a brief vagrancy sinks almost without an eddy. — COLERIDGE.

³⁸ *Liberal* is repeatedly used by Shakespeare for *loose-tongued*.

Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
As one incapable³⁹ 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,
Pull'd the poor wretch⁴⁰ from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

Laer. Alas, then is she drown'd!

Queen. Drown'd, drown'd.

Laer. 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.⁴¹—Adieu, my lord;
I have a speech of fire, that fain would blaze,
But that this folly drowns it.

[*Exit.*

King. Let's follow, Gertrude:

How much I had to do to calm his rage!

Now fear I this will give it start again;

Therefore let's follow.

[*Exeunt.*

³⁹ *Incapable* for *insensible* or *unconscious*. The Poet has it so in one or two other places. So in *As You Like It*, iii. 5, we have *capable* in the opposite sense: "Lean but upon a rush, the cicatrice and *capable* impressure thy palm some moment keeps."

⁴⁰ *Wretch*, again, as a strong term of endearment. See page 103, note 24.

⁴¹ "I shall have wept the woman's tenderness all out of me, and shall be again ready for a man's work."

ACT V.

SCENE I. — *A Churchyard.*

Enter two Clowns, with spades, &c.

1 Clown. Is she to be buried in Christian burial that willfully seeks her own salvation?

2 Clown. I tell thee she is; and therefore make her grave straight:¹ the crowner hath sat on her, and finds it Christian burial.

1 Clown. How can that be, unless she drown'd herself in her own defence?

2 Clown. Why, 'tis found so.

1 Clown. It must be *se offendendo*;² 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, and to perform: argal³ she drown'd herself wittingly.

2 Clown. Nay, but hear you, goodman delver,—

1 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, will he, nill he,⁴ 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.

2 Clown. But is this law?

¹ *Straight* for *straightway*; a common usage.

² The Clown, in undertaking to show off his legal learning, blunders *offendendo* for *defendendo*.

³ *Argal* is an old vulgar corruption of the Latin *ergo*, *therefore*.

⁴ "Will he, nill he," is will he, or will he not.