

Look you, I'll go pray.

HORATIO: These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

HAMLET: I am sorry they offend you, heartily;
Yes, faith, heartily.

HORATIO: There's no 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.

135

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,

140

Give me one poor request.

HORATIO: What is't, my lord? We will.

HAMLET: Never make known what you have seen tonight.

BOTH: My lord, we will not.

HAMLET: Nay, but swear't.

HORATIO: In faith,

145

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 *cries under the stage.*]

GHOST: Swear.

HAMLET: Ha, ha, boy, say'st thou so? Art thou there, truepenny?²

Come on. You hear this fellow in the cellarage.³

150

Consent to swear.

HORATIO: Propose the oath, my lord.

HAMLET: Never to speak of this that you have seen,

Swear by my sword.

GHOST: [*Beneath.*] Swear.

155

HAMLET: Hic et ubique?⁴ Then we'll shift our ground.

Come hither, gentlemen,

And lay your hands again upon my sword.

Swear by my sword

Never to speak of this that you have heard.

160

GHOST: [*Beneath.*] Swear by his sword.

HAMLET: Well said, old mole! Canst work i' th' earth so fast?

A worthy pioneer!⁵ Once more remove, good friends.

2. Trusty old fellow. 3. Below. 4. Here and everywhere? (Latin). 5. Soldier who digs trenches.

HORATIO: O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!

HAMLET: And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.

165 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
170 (As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic⁶ disposition on),
That you, at such times, seeing me, never shall,
With arms encumbered⁷ thus, or this head-shake,
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,
175 As "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 do swear,
So grace and mercy at your most need help you.

180 GHOST: [*Beneath.*] Swear.

[*They swear.*]

HAMLET: Rest, rest, perturbèd spirit! So, gentlemen,
With all my love I do commend me to you,
And what so poor a man as Hamlet is
May do t'express his love and friending⁸ to you,
185 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 1

The dwelling of POLONIUS. 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 inquire⁹
Of his behavior.

5 REYNALDO: My lord, I did intend it.

POLONIUS: Marry, well said, very well said. Look you, sir.

6. Mad. 7. Folded. 8. Friendship. 9. Inquiry.

Enquire me first what Danskers¹ are in Paris,
 And how, and who, what means, and where they keep,²
 What company, at what expense; and finding
 By this encompassment³ and drift of question
 That they do know my son, come you more nearer 10
 Than your particular demands⁴ 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. 15

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 rank⁵ 20
 As may dishonor him. Take heed of that.
 But, sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips
 As are companions noted and most known
 To youth and liberty.

REYNALDO: As gaming, my lord.

POLONIUS: Ay, or drinking, fencing, swearing, 25

Quarrelling, drabbing⁶—you may go so far.

REYNALDO: My lord, that would dishonor him.

POLONIUS: Faith, no, as you may season it in the charge.⁷

You must not put another scandal on him,

That he is open to incontinency.⁸ 30

That's not my meaning. But breathe his faults so quaintly⁹

That they may seem the taints of liberty,¹

The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind,

A savageness in unreclaimèd² blood,

Of general assault.³ 35

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.⁴

You laying these slight sullies on my son,

As 'twere a thing a little soiled wi' th' working, 40

Mark you,

1. Danes. 2. Live. 3. Indirect means. 4. Direct questions. 5. Foul. Forgeries: lies.
 6. Whoring. 7. Soften the accusation. 8. Sexual excess. 9. With delicacy.
 1. Faults of freedom. 2. Untamed. 3. Touching everyone. 4. Permissible trick.

[They swear.]

[Exeunt.]

Your party in converse,⁵ him you would sound,
 Having ever seen in the prenominate⁶ crimes
 The youth you breathe⁷ of guilty, be assured
 45 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 'a this—'a does—What was I about to say?
 50 By the mass, I was about to say something.
 Where did I leave?

REYNALDO: At "closes in the consequence."

POLONIUS: At "closes in the consequence"—ay, marry,
 He closes thus: "I know the gentleman.
 55 I saw him yesterday, or th' 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,"
 60 Videlicet,⁸ 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,⁹
 With windlasses and with assays of bias,¹
 65 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 b'wi' ye; fare ye well.

REYNALDO: Good my lord.

70 POLONIUS: Observe his inclination in yourself.

REYNALDO: I shall, my lord.

POLONIUS: And let him ply² his music.

REYNALDO:

POLONIUS: Farewell. Well, my lord.

[Enter OPHELIA.]

[Exit REYNALDO.]

How now, Ophelia, what's the matter?
 OPHELIA: O my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted!

5. Conversation. 6. Already named. 7. Speak. 8. Namely. 9. Ability. 1. Indirect tests.
 2. Practice. 3. C. 8. D.

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

OPHELIA: My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,³ 75

Lord Hamlet with his doublet all unbraced,⁴
 No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
 Ungartered and down-gyvèd⁵ to his ankle,
 Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
 And with a look so piteous in purport 80
 As if he had been loosèd 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? 85

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 'a would draw it. Long stayed he so. 90

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,⁶ 95

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 adooors he went without their helps,
 And to the last bended⁷ their light on me. 100

POLONIUS: Come, go with me. I will go seek the king.

This is the very ecstasy of love,
 Whose violent property fordoes⁸ itself,
 And leads the will to desperate undertakings
 As oft as any passion under heaven 105
 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 repel⁹ his letters, and denied
 His access to me. 110

POLONIUS: That hath made him mad.
 I am sorry that with better heed and judgment

3. Chamber. 4. Unlaced. *Doublet*: jacket. 5. Fallen down like fetters. 6. Body. 7. Directed.
 8. Destroys. *Property*: character. 9. Refuse.

I had not quoted¹ him. I feared he did but trifle,
 And meant to wrack² thee; but beshrew my jealousy.
 By heaven, it is as proper to our age
 To cast beyond ourselves in our opinions
 115 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.
 Come. [Exeunt.]

Scene 2

A public room. Enter KING, QUEEN, ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN.

KING: Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
 Moreover that³ we much did long to see you,
 The need we have to use you did provoke
 Our hasty sending. Something have you heard
 5 Of Hamlet's transformation—so call it,
 Sith⁴ 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,
 10 I cannot deem of. I entreat you both
 That, being of so young days⁵ brought up with him,
 And sith so neighbored⁶ to his youth and havior,
 That you vouchsafe your rest here in our court
 Some little time, so by your companies
 15 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 opened lies within our remedy.

QUEEN: Good gentlemen, he hath much talked of you,
 20 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 gentry⁷ and good will
 As to expend your time with us awhile
 For the supply and profit of our hope,
 25 Your visitation shall receive such thanks
 As fits a king's remembrance.

1. Observed. 2. Harm. 3. In addition to the fact that. 4. Since. 5. From childhood.
 6. Closely allied. 7. Courtesy.

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 bent⁸
To lay our service freely at your feet, 30
To be commanded.

KING: Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

QUEEN: Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.
And I beseech you instantly to visit 35
My too much changed 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!

QUEEN: Ay, amen!
[*Exeunt* ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN.]

[*Enter* POLONIUS.]

POLONIUS: Th' ambassadors from Norway, my good lord, 40
Are joyfully returned.

KING: Thou still⁹ hast been the father of good news.

POLONIUS: Have I, my lord? I assure you, my good liege,
I hold my duty as I hold my soul, 45
Both to my God and to my gracious king;
And I do think—or else this brain of mine
Hunts not the trail of policy¹ so sure
As it hath used to do—that I have found 50
The very cause of Hamlet's lunacy.

KING: O, speak of that, that do I long to hear.

POLONIUS: Give first admittance to th' ambassadors.
My news shall be the fruit² to that great feast.

KING: Thyself do grace to them, and bring them in. 55
He tells me, my dear Gertrude, he hath found
The head and source of all your son's distemper.

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

KING: Well, we shall sift³ him.

[*Enter Ambassadors* (VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS) with POLONIUS.]

8. Completely. 9. Ever. 1. Statecraft. 2. Dessert. 3. Examine.

- Welcome, my good friends,
Say, Voltemand, what from our brother Norway?
- 60 VOLTEMAND: Most fair return of greetings and desires.
Upon our first,⁴ 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
65 It was against your highness, whereat grieved,
That so his sickness, age, and impotence
Was falsely borne in hand, sends out arrests⁵
On Fortinbras, which he in brief obeys,
Receives rebuke from Norway, and in fine,
70 Makes vow before his uncle never more
To give th' assay⁶ 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,
75 So levied as before, against the Polack,
With an entreaty, herein further shown, [*Gives CLAUDIUS a paper.*]
That it might please you to give quiet pass⁷
Through your dominions for this enterprise,
On such regards of safety and allowance
As therein are set down.
- 80 KING: It likes⁸ us well,
And at our more considered time⁹ we'll read,
Answer, and think upon this business.
Meantime we thank you for your well-took¹ labor.
Go to your rest; at night we'll feast together.
Most welcome home! [*Exeunt AMBASSADORS.*]
- 85 POLONIUS: This business is well ended.
My liege and madam, to expostulate²
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.
90 Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit,
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,³
I will be brief. Your noble son is mad.
Mad call I it, for to define true madness,

4. That is, first appearance. 5. Orders to stop. *Falsely borne in hand*: deceived. 6. Trial.
7. Safe conduct. 8. Pleases. 9. Time for more consideration. 1. Successful. 2. Discuss.
3. Adornments.

What is't but to be nothing else but mad?
But let that go.

QUEEN:

More matter with less art.

POLONIUS: Madam, I swear I use no art at all. 95

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, 100

Or rather say the cause of this defect,

For this effect defective comes by cause.

Thus it remains, and the remainder thus.

Perpend.⁴ 105

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 110
shall hear. Thus:

"In her excellent white bosom, these, etc."

QUEEN: Came this from Hamlet to her?

POLONIUS: Good madam, stay awhile. I will be faithful. 115

"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.⁵ I have not art to reckon
my groans, but that I love thee best, O most best, believe it. Adieu. 120

Thine evermore, most dear lady,
whilst this machine⁶ is to him, Hamlet."
This in obedience hath my daughter shown me,
And more above, hath his solicitings, 125
As they fell out by time, by means, and place,
All given to mine ear.

KING:

Received his love? But how hath she

POLONIUS:

What do you think of me?

KING: As of a man faithful and honorable.

POLONIUS: I would fain prove so. But what might you think,

130 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,
 135 Or given my heart a winking, mute and dumb,
 Or looked upon this love with idle sight,⁷
 What might you think? No, I went round⁸ to work,
 And my young mistress thus I did bespeak:
 "Lord Hamlet is a prince out of thy star."⁹
 140 This must not be." And then I prescripts¹ gave her,
 That she should lock herself from his resort,
 Admit no messengers, receive no tokens.
 Which done, she took² the fruits of my advice;
 And he repelled, a short tale to make,
 145 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?

150 QUEEN: It may be, very like.

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

KING: Not that I know.

POLONIUS: [*Pointing to his head and shoulder.*] Take this from this, if this
 be otherwise.
 155 If circumstances lead me, I will find
 Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed
 Within the centre.³

KING: How may we try it further?

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

QUEEN: So he does, indeed.

160 POLONIUS: At such a time I'll loose⁴ my daughter to him.
 Be you and I behind an arras⁵ then.

7. Polonius means that he would have been at fault if, having seen Hamlet's attention to Ophelia, he had winked at it or not paid attention, an "idle sight," and if he had remained silent and kept the information to himself, as if it were written in a "desk" or "table-book." 8. Directly.
 9. Beyond your sphere. 1. Orders. 2. Followed. 3. Of the earth. 4. Let loose. 5. Tapestry.

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.

[Enter HAMLET reading a book.]

165

QUEEN: But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

POLONIUS: Away, I do beseech you both away,
I'll board⁶ him presently.

[Exeunt KING and QUEEN.]

O, give me leave.

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

HAMLET: Well, God-a-mercy.

POLONIUS: Do you know me, my lord?

170

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?

175

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
carrion⁷—Have you a daughter?

180

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: How say you by that? [Aside.] Still harping on my daughter. Yet
he knew me not at first. 'A said I was a fishmonger. 'A is 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?

185

HAMLET: Words, words, words.

POLONIUS: What is the matter, my lord?

190

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 hams⁸—all which, sir, though I most powerfully and

195

6. Accost.

7. Reference to the belief that maggots were produced spontaneously by the action of sunshine
on carrion.

8. Limbs.

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?

200 HAMLET: Into my grave?

POLONIUS: [*Aside.*] Indeed, that's out of the air. How pregnant sometime 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

205 honorable lord. I will most humbly take my leave of you.

HAMLET: You cannot take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal—except my life, except my life; except my life.

[*Enter GUILDENSTERN and ROSENCRANTZ.*]

POLONIUS: Fare you well, my lord.

HAMLET: These tedious old fools!

210 POLONIUS: You go to seek the Lord Hamlet. There he is.

ROSENCRANTZ: [*To POLONIUS.*] God save you, sir! [*Exit POLONIUS.*]

GUILDENSTERN: My honored lord!

ROSENCRANTZ: My most dear lord!

HAMLET: My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern?

215 Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do you both?

ROSENCRANTZ: As the indifferent⁹ children of the earth.

GUILDENSTERN: Happy in that we are not over-happy; On Fortune's cap we are not the very button.¹

HAMLET: Nor the soles of her shoe?

220 ROSENCRANTZ: Neither, my lord.

HAMLET: Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favors?

GUILDENSTERN: Faith, her privates we.

HAMLET: In the secret parts of Fortune? O, most true, she is a strumpet.² What news?

225 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?

230 HAMLET: Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ: Then is the world one.

9. Ordinary. 1. That is, on top.

2. Prostitute. Hamlet is indulging in characteristic ribaldry. Guildenstern means that they are "privates" = ordinary citizens, but Hamlet takes him to mean "privates" = sexual organs and "middle of her favors" = waist = sexual organs.

HAMLET: A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards³ 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. 235

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. 240

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. 245

HAMLET: Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars' shadows. Shall we to th' court? for, by my fay,⁴ I cannot reason.

BOTH: We'll wait upon you.

HAMLET: No such matter. I will not sort⁵ 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? 250

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.⁶ Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, come, deal justly with me. Come, come, nay speak. 255

GUILDENSTERN: What should we say, my lord?

HAMLET: Anything but to th' purpose. You were sent for, and there is a kind of confession in your looks, which your modesties have not craft enough to color. I know the good king and queen have sent for you. 260

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 direct⁷ with me whether you were sent for or no. 265

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.

3. Cells. 4. Faith. 5. Include. 6. Not worth a halfpenny. 7. Straightforward.

HAMLET: I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation prevent your discovery,⁸ and your secrecy to the king and queen moult no feather. I have
 270 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'er-hanging firmament, this
 majestic roof fretted⁹ with golden fire, why it appeareth nothing to me
 275 but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is a
 man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving,
 how express¹ 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, nor
 280 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 ye laugh, then, when I said "Man delights not me"?

ROSENCRANTZ: To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what lenten
 285 entertainment the players shall receive from you. We coted² 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 humorous³ man shall end his part in peace;
 290 the clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickle o' th' sere;⁴
 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 tra-
 gediands of the city.

HAMLET: How chances it they travel? Their residence, both in reputation
 295 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?

300 ROSENCRANTZ: No, indeed, are they not.

HAMLET: How comes it? Do they grow rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ: Nay, their endeavor keeps in the wonted pace; but there is,
 305 sir, an eyrie of children, little eyases,⁵ that cry out on the top of question,⁶
 and are most tyrannically clapped for't. These are now the fashion, and so

8. Disclosure. 9. Ornamented with fretwork.

3. Eccentric. *Foil and target*: sword and shield.

6. With a loud, high delivery.

1. Well built. 2. Passed. *Lenten*: scanty.

4. Easily set off. 5. Little hawks.

berattle the common stages (so they call them) that many wearing rapiers
are afraid of goose quills⁷ and dare scarce come thither.⁸
HAMLET: What, are they children? Who maintains 'em? How are they
escoted?⁹ 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?¹ 310
ROSENCRANTZ: Faith, there has been much todo on both sides; and the
nation holds it no sin to tarre² them to controversy. There was for a
while no money bid for argument,³ unless the poet and the player went
to cuffs⁴ in the question.

HAMLET: Is't possible? 315

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.⁵

HAMLET: It is not very strange, for my uncle is King of Denmark, and those 320
that would make mouths⁶ at him while my father lived give twenty, forty,
fifty, a hundred ducats apiece for his picture in little.⁷ 'Sblood, there is
something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out.

[*A flourish.*]

GUILDENSTERN: There are the players.

HAMLET: Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore. Your hands. Come then, 325
th' appurtenance of welcome is fashion and ceremony. Let me comply
with you in this garb, lest my extent⁸ to the players, which I tell you must
show fairly outwards should more appear like entertainment⁹ than yours.
You are welcome. But my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived. 330

GUILDENSTERN: In what, my dear lord? 330

HAMLET: I am but mad north-north-west; when the wind is southerly I
know a hawk from a handsaw.¹

[*Enter* POLONIUS.]

POLONIUS: Well be with you, gentlemen.

7. Pens of satirical writers.

8. The passage refers to the emergence at the time of the play of theatrical companies made up
of children from London choir schools. Their performances became fashionable and hurt the
business of the established companies. Hamlet says that if they continue to act ("pursue the
quality") when they are grown, they will find that they have been damaging their own future
careers. 9. Supported. 1. Future careers. 2. Urge. 3. Paid for a play plot. 4. Blows.

5. During one of his labors Hercules assumed for a time the burden of the Titan Atlas, who sup-
ported the heavens on his shoulders. Also a reference to the effect on business at Shakespeare's
theater, the Globe. 6. Sneer. 7. Miniature. 8. Fashion. *Comply with*: welcome. 9. Cordiality.

1. A "hawk" is a plasterer's tool; Hamlet may also be using "handsaw" = hernshaw = heron.

HAMLET: Hark you, Guildenstern—and you too—at each ear a hearer.
 335 That great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling clouts.²

ROSENCRANTZ: Happily he is 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.

340 POLONIUS: My lord, I have news to tell you.

HAMLET: My lord, I have news to tell you. When Roscius was an actor in
 Rome³—

POLONIUS: The actors are come hither, my lord.

HAMLET: Buzz, buzz.

345 POLONIUS: Upon my honor—

HAMLET: Then came each actor on his ass—

POLONIUS: The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, his-
 tory, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical,
 350 tragical-comical historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlim-
 ited. Seneca cannot be too heavy nor Plautus too light. For the law of
 writ and the liberty, these are the only men.⁴

HAMLET: O Jephtha, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!⁵

POLONIUS: What a treasure had he, my lord?

HAMLET: Why—

355 “One fair daughter, and no more,
 The which he loved passing well.”

POLONIUS: [*Aside.*] 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
 360 passing well.

HAMLET: Nay, that follows not.

POLONIUS: What follows then, my lord?

HAMLET: Why—

“As by lot, God wot”

365 and then, you know,

“It came to pass, as most like it was.”

2. Wrappings for an infant.

3. Roscius was the most famous actor of classical Rome.
 4. Seneca and Plautus were Roman writers of tragedy and comedy, respectively. The “law of writ” refers to plays written according to such rules as the classical unities, the “liberty” to those written otherwise.

5. To ensure victory, Jephtha promised to sacrifice the first creature to meet him on his return. Unfortunately, his only daughter outstripped his dog and was the victim of his vow. The biblical story is told in Judges 11.