

For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak  
 With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players  
 Play something like the murder of my father  
 Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks,  
 I'll tent him to the quick. If a do blench, 550  
 I know my course. The spirit that I have seen  
 May be a devil – and the devil hath power  
 T'assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps,  
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
 As he is very potent with such spirits, 555  
 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*

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

CLAUDIUS And can you by no drift of circumstance  
 Get from him why he puts on this confusion,  
 Grating so harshly all his days of quiet  
 With turbulent and dangerous lunacy?  
 ROSENCRANTZ He does confess he feels himself distracted, 5  
 But from what cause a will by no means speak.  
 GUILDENSTERN Nor do we find him forward to be sounded,

550 a do] Q2; he but F 552 a devil] Q 1611; a deale Q2; the Diuell F Act 3, Scene 1 3.1] Act III. Scene I.  
 Q 1676 1 And] F; An Q2 1 circumstance] F; conference Q2 6 a] Q2; he F

550 tent probe.

550 to the quick i.e. to where it hurts.

550 blench flinch and turn aside.

553 assume Compare 1.2.243 and 1.4.72.

555 very potent with such spirits It was a commonplace of ghost-lore that melancholics were specially prone to visitation by demons. See Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*, 110

556–7 grounds ... relative reasons for acting which are nearer at hand, more tangible.

#### Act 3, Scene 1

1 drift of circumstance steering of round-about enquiry. Compare Polonius's 'encompassment and drift of question', 2.1.10. For 'circumstance' (which means circuitous talk, as in 1.5.127), Q2 reads 'conference'.

2 puts on Claudius may intuit that Hamlet is assuming a guise of madness.

3 Grating The physical action of roughening by scraping and rasping.

7 forward disposed, inclined.

But with a crafty madness keeps aloof  
 When we would bring him on to some confession  
 Of his true state.

GERTRUDE Did he receive you well? 10

ROSENCRANTZ Most like a gentleman.

GUILDENSTERN But with much forcing of his disposition.

ROSENCRANTZ Niggard of question, but of our demands  
 Most free in his reply.

GERTRUDE Did you assay him  
 To any pastime? 15

ROSENCRANTZ Madam, it so fell out that certain players  
 We o'er-raught on the way; of these we told him,  
 And there did seem in him a kind of joy  
 To hear of it. They are about the court,  
 And as I think, they have already order 20  
 This night to play before him.

POLONIUS 'Tis most true,  
 And he beseeched me to entreat your majesties  
 To hear and see the matter.

CLAUDIUS With all my heart, and it doth much content me  
 To hear him so inclined. 25  
 Good gentlemen, give him a further edge,  
 And drive his purpose on to these delights.

ROSENCRANTZ We shall my lord.

*Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*

CLAUDIUS Sweet Gertrude, leave us too,  
 For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,

14–15 Did ... pastime] *as one line* Q2, F 19 are about] F; are heere about Q2 24 heart, and] F; hart, / And Q2 27 on to] F; into Q2 28 SD ] Q2; *Exeunt* F 28 too] F; two Q2

8 **crafty madness** an affected madness (see 'mad in craft' at 3.4.189). This affected madness is also cunning, in that it protects Hamlet from revealing more than he wishes.

13–14 **Niggard ... reply** Rosencrantz is anxious to cover up the cross-examination which led to the disclosure that they were being employed by Claudius. Unfortunately, this leads him into contradicting Guildenstern about Hamlet's readiness to answer questions.

14–15 **assay ... To** i.e. try him with the suggestion of.

17 **o'er-raught** (over-reached) came up to

and passed, overhauled.

21 **This night** This conversation is taking place on the day after the events of the previous scene. See 2.2.493.

26 **edge** keenness (of appetite).

27 **on to** So F. Q2 reads 'into', but the sense of 'drive ... on' is 'urge on', as contrasted with 'drive me into a toil' at 3.2.314–15, where the image is of penning in a hunted animal.

29 **closely** secretly, applying to Claudius's purpose. But when Hamlet arrives he shows no knowledge of having been 'sent for'.

That he, as 'twere by accident, may here 30  
 Affront Ophelia. Her father and myself,  
 Lawful espials,  
 Will so bestow ourselves, that seeing unseen,  
 We may of their encounter frankly judge,  
 And gather by him, as he is behaved, 35  
 If't be th'affliction of his love or no  
 That thus he suffers for.

GERTRUDE I shall obey you.  
 And for your part Ophelia, I do wish  
 That your good beauties be the happy cause  
 Of Hamlet's wildness. So shall I hope your virtues 40  
 Will bring him to his wonted way again,  
 To both your honours.

OPHELIA Madam, I wish it may.  
 [Exit GERTRUDE with LORDS]

POLONIUS Ophelia walk you here. – Gracious, so please you,  
 We will bestow ourselves. – Read on this book,  
 That show of such an exercise may colour 45  
 Your loneliness. – We are oft to blame in this:  
 'Tis too much proved, that with devotion's visage,  
 And pious action, we do sugar o'er  
 The devil himself.

CLAUDIUS (*Aside*) Oh, 'tis too true.  
 How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience! 50

30 here] Q2; there F 32 Lawful espials] F; not in Q2 33 Will] F; Wee'le Q2 42 SD ] Exit Queen / Theobald<sup>f</sup>; not in Q2, F 43 please you] Q2; please ye F 46 loneliness] F; lowlines Q2 48 sugar] Q2; surge F 49 too] Q2; not in F

31 **Affront** come face-to-face with.

32 **Lawful espials** This extra-metrical phrase occurs only in F, where it appears in a parenthesis at the end of 31. An 'espial' is a spy.

33, 44 **bestow ourselves** station or position ourselves.

34 **frankly** freely, without obstacle.

43 **Gracious** i.e. your grace (to the king) – not a usual form of address.

44 **this book** a prayer-book (see 47, 89).

45 **colour** provide a pretext for.

46 **loneliness** being alone.

47 **devotion's visage** a face expressing devoutness.

50 **How smart ... conscience** Claudius confirms for the audience that he is guilty and, for the moment, conscience-stricken. He does not, however, identify his crime or sin.

The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,  
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it  
Than is my deed to my most painted word.  
O heavy burden!

POLONIUS I hear him coming. Let's withdraw, my lord. 55

*Exeunt Claudius and Polonius*

*Enter HAMLET*

HAMLET To be, or not to be, that is the question –  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep – 60  
No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to – 'tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep –  
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub, 65  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause. There's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life,  
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, 70  
Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,

55 Let's] F; *not in* Q2 55 SD *Exeunt ... Polonius*] Capell; *not in* Q2; *Exeunt.* F 55 SD *Enter HAMLET*] F; *after* 54 *in* Q2 71 proud] Q2; *poore* F

52 **to the thing that helps it** as compared with the cosmetic adornment.

56 **To be, or not to be** Concerning the placing of this soliloquy and the nunnery scene which follows, see the Textual Analysis, 270. For a discussion of the soliloquy itself, see Introduction, 41–2.

56 **that is the question** There are many opinions on the precise question posed by 'to be ...' They tend to fall into two categories: (1) Hamlet is debating whether or not to take his own life; and (2) Hamlet is considering the value or advantages of human existence.

57 **in the mind to suffer** 'to endure mentally'. The phrasing sets pain suffered in the mind against bodily action.

58 **slings** missiles (by metonymy: that-which-throws standing for that-which-is-thrown; Latin *finda* could similarly mean either sling or

slingshot). A sling may be a hand-sling, a ballista, or even a cannon.

59–60 **take arms ... by opposing end them** The alternative to patient endurance of earthly woes is to fight against them and to be destroyed in the process. The result is 'self-slaughter', whether direct or indirect.

63 **consummation** completion, fitting end, or conclusion.

65 **rub** impediment (from the game of bowls).

67 **shuffled ... coil** got rid of the turmoil of living. There is a sense of malpractice or fraudulence here, as there is in the use of 'shuffled' at 3.3.61 and 4.7.136, where it implies 'manipulat[ion] with intent to deceive'.

68 **respect** consideration.

69 **of so long life** so long-lived.

70 **time** the times; compare 1.5.189.

The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,  
 The insolence of office, and the spurns  
 That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,  
 When he himself might his quietus make 75  
 With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,  
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
 But that the dread of something after death,  
 The undiscovered country from whose bourn  
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will, 80  
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
 Than fly to others that we know not of?  
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,  
 And thus the native hue of resolution  
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, 85  
 And enterprises of great pitch and moment  
 With this regard their currents turn awry

72 disprized] dispriz'd F; despiz'd Q2 76 fardels] Q2; these Fardles F 83 of us all] F; not in Q2 85 sicklied] F; sickled Q2 86 pitch] Q2; pith F 87 awry] Q2; away F

72 **disprized** unvalued. So F; Q2 is 'despiz'd'.

74 **of th'unworthy takes** receives from unworthy people.

75 **quietus** discharge or acquittance of accounts (from the law phrase *quietus est*); frequently used in connection with death, probably because of the original Latin sense of repose and peace.

76 **a bare bodkin** a mere dagger. ('bodkin' was the name for sharp pointed instruments with various different uses; probably Hamlet is not being very specific.)

76 **fardels** burdens.

79 **ourn** boundary, frontier.

80 **No traveller returns** For many commentators, the Ghost's appearance in Elsinore contradicts this portrayal of the afterlife. But, as Jenkins points out, the Ghost's confinement to 'fast in fires' hardly counts as a return. Hamlet's phrasing echoes biblical, classical, and humanist treatments of the after-life.

80 **puzzles the will** i.e. brings it to a halt in confusion; 'puzzle' was a stronger word than it is now.

83 **conscience** the inner knowledge of right and wrong (though many commentators claim it means 'introspection' or fear of punishment).

83-8 It is in these lines that, for the first time in the soliloquy, Hamlet turns, if indirectly, to the question of killing Claudius, and, as in the second soliloquy, he upbraids himself for being tardy. Thinking too much about the rights and wrongs of suicide stultifies the impulse to do away with oneself: thinking too much about rights and wrongs stultifies *all* action, including the one he's supposed to be engaged in.

84 **native hue** natural colour or complexion.

85 **sicklied o'er** unhealthily covered.

85 **cast** tinge, tint. Though Hamlet has in mind the pallor of a sick man, the nearness of 'o'er' and 'cast' suggests also the pallor of clouds staining the face of the sun, as in Sonnet 33.

85 **thought** contemplation. Thinking causes the sickness of inaction.

86 **pitch** height, scope.

87 **With this regard** On this account.

- And lose the name of action. Soft you now,  
The fair Ophelia. – Nymph, in thy orisons  
Be all my sins remembered.
- OPHELIA Good my lord, 90  
How does your honour for this many a day?
- HAMLET I humbly thank you, well, well, well.
- OPHELIA My lord, I have remembrances of yours  
That I have longèd long to re-deliver.  
I pray you now receive them.
- HAMLET No, not I, 95  
I never gave you aught.
- OPHELIA My honoured lord, you know right well you did,  
And with them words of so sweet breath composed  
As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost,  
Take these again, for to the noble mind 100  
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.  
There my lord.
- HAMLET Ha, ha, are you honest?
- OPHELIA My lord?
- HAMLET Are you fair? 105
- OPHELIA What means your lordship?
- HAMLET That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no  
discourse to your beauty.
- OPHELIA Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with  
honesty? 110

92 well, well, well] F; well Q2 95 No, not I] Q2; No, no F 97 you know] Q2; I know F 99 the] F; these Q2 99 Their] Q2; then F 99 lost] Q2; left F 107 your honesty] F; you Q2 109 with] Q2; your F

88 **soft you** As usual, 'soft' as a verb in the imperative means 'restrain yourself, leave off, be cautious'. Compare 1.1.126, 1.5.58, 3.2.353, 4.2.3, 4.4.8, 4.7.153, 5.1.184.

89 **Nymph** Perhaps a sarcastic, perhaps a tender, way to address Ophelia.

91 **for this many a day** It is often pointed out that Ophelia had met Hamlet yesterday as she reported in 2.1. But that was an unsettling interview, and the line registers Ophelia's nervousness about being placed in front of Hamlet on behalf of Claudius and Polonius.

93 **remembrances** keepsakes, gifts.

98 **of so sweet breath composed** 'breath' can here mean 'utterance' or 'language'; Ophelia may refer to words either spoken or written.

99 **Their perfume lost** The sweetness of both the words and the gifts has disappeared, because of the unkindness of the giver.

103 **honest** chaste. Hamlet's sudden, violent change of topic and tone may indicate that he suspects her in a more general sense, perhaps for not mentioning her own part in the breach between them. Some editors suggest that Hamlet recognizes that she has become Claudius and Polonius's 'decoy' (Wilson).

107–8 **your honesty ... your beauty** your virtue should not allow your beauty to converse with it. (An alternative gloss is 'your virtue ought to keep away those who want to chat with your beauty'; if that is correct, then Ophelia misunderstands him.)

HAMLET Ay truly, for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd, than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.

OPHELIA Indeed my lord you made me believe so. 115

HAMLET You should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.

OPHELIA I was the more deceived.

HAMLET Get thee to a nunnery – why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me 120 of such things, that it were better my mother had not borne me.

I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all, 125 believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?

OPHELIA At home my lord.

HAMLET Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in's own house. Farewell.

OPHELIA Oh help him you sweet heavens! 130

HAMLET If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry:

117 inoculate] innoculate F; euocutat Q2 119 thee to a] F; thee a Q2 125 earth and heaven] Q2; Heauen and Earth F 125 all] F; not in Q2 129 nowhere] Q2; no way F

117 **inoculate our old stock** The image is from grafting fruit trees or bushes. We cannot so engraft a new stem of virtue onto the old sinful trunk as to eradicate all trace of our previous nature.

117 **relish** have a touch or tinge.

119 **Get thee to a nunnery** Some commentators hear the 'fairly common Elizabethan slang sense "brothel"' (*Shakespeare's Bawdy*). This sense does not erase from the passage the word's standard meaning (convent). It gives focus to Hamlet's attack on both men and women, including himself and Ophelia, for the kinds of moral frailty exemplified

in sex and reproduction. Only in a convent will Ophelia be able to resist the inclinations of her own nature – or be protected from the desires of men such as Hamlet.

120 **indifferent honest** moderately virtuous.

122 **proud, revengeful, ambitious** Hamlet's depiction of his own sinfulness may be part of his antic display, but it contains a nugget of truth.

126 **Where's your father?** Some commentators think that Hamlet knew all the time he was being watched; some think he guessed it early in the interview; some think he learns it here.

be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go. Farewell. Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery go, and quickly too. Farewell. 135

OPHELIA O heavenly powers, restore him!

HAMLET I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another. You jig, you amble, and you lisp, you nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't, it hath made me mad. I say we will have no mo marriages. Those that are married already, all but one shall live, the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go. *Exit* 140

OPHELIA Oh what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!

The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword, 145  
Th'expectancy and rose of the fair state,  
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,  
Th'observed of all observers, quite, quite down,

133 go] F; *not in* Q2 136 O] F; *not in* Q2 137 paintings] Q2, Q1; pratings F 137 too] F; *not in* Q2 137 hath] Q2; has F 138 face] Q2; pace F 138 yourselves] your selves Q2; your selfe F 138-9 you amble] F; & amble Q2 139 lisp] F; list Q2 139 you nickname] Q2; and nickname F 140 your ignorance] F; ignorance Q2 141 mo] Q2; more F 141 marriages] F; marriage Q2 143 SD ] Q2; *Exit Hamlet* F 146 expectancy] expectansie F; expectation Q2

132-3 **be thou ... thou shalt not escape calumny** Regardless of her actual behaviour, Ophelia will be slandered for unchasteness.

134 **monsters** i.e. horned cuckolds, husbands with cheating wives.

138 **jig** This may refer more to singing than dancing. Compare *Love's Labour's Lost* 3.1.11-12, 'to jig off a tune at the tongue's end'.

138-9 **you amble, and you lisp** you walk and talk affectedly.

139-40 **make your wantonness your ignorance** pretend your licence is just simplicity and innocence.

140-1 **it hath made me mad** Hamlet calls attention to his emotional extremity.

141 **mo** more.

141-2 **Those ... all but one shall live** All

married couples, except one, may remain married, but all single people are to stay single ('the rest shall keep as they are'). The exception is the marriage of Gertrude and Claudius, which Hamlet will end with the king's death.

146 **Th'expectancy** The hope.

147 **glass ... form** the ideal image of self-construction (self-fashioning) and the model of behaviour by which others shape themselves and their actions.

148 **Th'observed of all observers** Looked up to respectfully by all who turn to others for guidance. 'Observe' is a difficult word: see note to 1.5.101. Although it is possible that this could mean 'one who is watched attentively by all who note men carefully', the context of the previous line suggests the older meaning of 'observe'.



And I of ladies most deject and wretched,  
 That sucked the honey of his music vows, 150  
 Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,  
 Like sweet bells jangled, out of time and harsh;  
 That unmatched form and feature of blown youth  
 Blasted with ecstasy. Oh woe is me  
 T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see. 155

*Enter KING and POLONIUS*

CLAUDIUS Love? His affections do not that way tend;  
 Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little,  
 Was not like madness. There's something in his soul  
 O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,  
 And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose 160  
 Will be some danger; which for to prevent,  
 I have in quick determination  
 Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England  
 For the demand of our neglected tribute.  
 Haply the seas, and countries different, 165  
 With variable objects, shall expel  
 This something-settled matter in his heart,  
 Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus  
 From fashion of himself. What think you on't?  
 POLONIUS It shall do well. But yet do I believe 170  
 The origin and commencement of his grief  
 Sprung from neglected love. How now Ophelia?  
 You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said,  
 We heard it all. My lord, do as you please,  
 But if you hold it fit, after the play, 175

149 And] Q2; Haue F 150 music] Musicke F; musickt Q2 151 that] F; what Q2 152 time] Q2; tune F 153 fea-  
 ture] F; stature Q2 161 for to] Q2; to F 168-71 ... thus / ... on't? / ... believe / ... grief] F; ... beating / ...  
 himselfe. / ... on't? / ... well. / ... greefe, Q2 171 his] Q2; this F

153 **blown youth** youth in full bloom.

154 **Blasted with ecstasy** Destroyed by  
 madness.

155 At the end of this line some copies of Q2  
 print *'Exit'*. Q1 also has Ophelia leave at this point.

156 **affections** emotions.

159 **sits on brood** Like a bird sitting on eggs –

see 'hatch' in the next line.

164 **tribute** A historically imperfect reference to  
 payment supplied by the English to save land from  
 Viking attacks.

169 **fashion of himself** his own proper way of  
 behaving.

Let his queen mother all alone entreat him  
 To show his grief. Let her be round with him,  
 And I'll be placed, so please you, in the ear  
 Of all their conference. If she find him not,  
 To England send him; or confine him where  
 Your wisdom best shall think.

180

CLAUDIUS

It shall be so.

Madness in great ones must not unwatched go.

*Exeunt*3.2 *Enter HAMLET and two or three of the PLAYERS*

HAMLET Speak the speech I pray you as I pronounced it to you,  
 trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it as many of our players  
 do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the  
 air too much with your hand thus, but use all gently; for in the  
 very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion,  
 you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it  
 smoothness. Oh, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious  
 periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to totters, to very rags, to split  
 the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of

5

177 grief] Q2; Greefes F 182 unwatched] F; vnmatch Q2 Act 3, Scene 2 3.2] Scene II *Capell* o SD *two or three*] F;  
*three* Q2 1 pronounced] pronounc'd F; pronoun'd Q2 2 our] Q2; your F 3 lief] liue Q2, F 3 spoke] Q2; had spoke  
 F 4 with] Q2; *not in* F 5 whirlwind] Q2; the Whirle-winde F 5 your passion] Q2; Passion F 7 hear] Q2; see  
 F 8 periwig] Pery-wig F; perwig Q2 8 totters] Q2, Q1; tatters F 8 split] F; spliet Q2

177 **round** direct and outspoken.179 **find him not** fails to discover his secret.182 **Madness** ... Though Claudius has just doubted the sincerity of Hamlet's madness (158).**Act 3, Scene 2**

o SD **two or three** So F. Q2 gives 'three'; for Shakespeare's MS to be so specific against an MS with theatre influence is remarkable, especially as there is no need for three players. Probably a compositor's omission.

1 The time is the evening of the same day. Hamlet now appears sane and utterly intent on the acting of his play.

3 **I had as lief** It would be as agreeable to me that.

4 **thus** Hamlet makes the exaggerated gestures he criticizes.

4–6 **in the very torrent ... acquire and beget a temperance** Hamlet describes an acting process by which the actors should obtain, even as they generate intense emotion, a balance and control that they should then convey in their performance.

7 **robustious** rough and rude.8 **periwig-pated** wearing a wig.8 **totters** So Q2 (and Q1); an alternative form of 'tatters', which F gives.9 **groundlings** Audience members who stood in the open yard of the amphitheatre, admission to which was the least expensive option.9 **are capable of** have a capacity for, can understand.