

## [3.3] Enter CLAUDIUS, ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS I like him not, nor stands it safe with us  
 To let his madness range. Therefore prepare you:  
 I your commission will forthwith dispatch,  
 And he to England shall along with you.  
 The terms of our estate may not endure  
 Hazard so near us as doth hourly grow  
 Out of his brows. 5

GUILDENSTERN We will ourselves provide.  
 Most holy and religious fear it is  
 To keep those many many bodies safe  
 That live and feed upon your majesty. 10

ROSENCRANTZ The single and peculiar life is bound  
 With all the strength and armour of the mind  
 To keep itself from noyance; but much more  
 That spirit upon whose weal depends and rests  
 The lives of many. The cess of majesty 15  
 Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw  
 What's near it with it. It is a massy wheel  
 Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,  
 To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things  
 Are mortised and adjoined, which when it falls, 20  
 Each small annexment, petty consequence,  
 Attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone  
 Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

Act 3, Scene 3 3.3] *Capell* 6 near us] Q 1676; neer's Q2; dangerous F 7 brows] browes Q2; Lunacies F 14 weal] Q2; spirit F 15 cess] cesse Q2; cease F 17 It is] F; or it is Q2 18 summit] *Rome*; somnet Q2; Somnet F 19 huge] F; hough Q2 22 ruin] F; raine Q2 23 but with] F; but Q2

## Act 3, Scene 3

1 I like him not i.e. I do not like the way he is behaving.

1 us i.e. the person of the king.

3 dispatch make ready.

4 along go along. Compare I.I.26.

5 The terms of our estate The conditions of my position as king.

7 Out of his brows So Q2. '[B]rows' means 'effrontery' (which derives from Latin *frons* = brow). Though 'effrontery' is not recorded in the language of Shakespeare's day in *OED*, 'effronted' (= barefaced, shameless) does exist.

7 ourselves provide make provision for

ourselves (to travel to England).

11 The single and peculiar life The life that belongs to the individual only.

13 noyance harm.

14 weal well-being.

15 cess cessation. So Q2. F gives the now more familiar 'cease'.

16 gulf whirlpool (*OED* 3).

17 massy massive.

21 annexment adjunct, supplement. A rare word – Shakespeare's is the first example, and one of only two, in *OED*.

21 consequence attachment. Again a curious usage.

CLAUDIUS Arm you I pray you to this speedy voyage,  
 For we will fetters put about this fear 25  
 Which now goes too free-footed.

ROSENCRANTZ We will haste us.  
*Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*

*Enter* POLONIUS

POLONIUS My lord, he's going to his mother's closet.  
 Behind the arras I'll convey myself  
 To hear the process. I'll warrant she'll tax him home,  
 And as you said, and wisely was it said, 30  
 'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother,  
 Since nature makes them partial, should o'erhear  
 The speech of vantage. Fare you well my liege,  
 I'll call upon you ere you go to bed  
 And tell you what I know.

CLAUDIUS Thanks, dear my lord. 35  
*Exit Polonius*

Oh my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;  
 It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,  
 A brother's murder. Pray can I not,  
 Though inclination be as sharp as will.  
 My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent, 40  
 And like a man to double business bound,  
 I stand in pause where I shall first begin,  
 And both neglect. What if this cursèd hand  
 Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,  
 Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens 45  
 To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy

24 voyage] F; viage Q2 25 about] Q2; vpon F 26 SH ROSENCRANTZ] Ros. Q2; Both. F 26 SD Exeunt ...  
 Guildenstern] Hammer; Exeunt Gent. Q2, F 33 Fare] F; farre Q2 35 SD] Capell; Exit. Q2; not in F

24 Arm you Prepare yourselves.

28 convey myself secretly move myself.

29 the process what goes on.

29 tax him home censure him severely.

30 as you said Polonius's transfer of responsibility for the scheme is a matter of prudence as well as deference (see 3.1.175–9).

31 meet suitable.

33 of vantage from a good position.

37 primal eldest curse Cain's murder of his brother Abel in Genesis 4.10–11.

39 Though inclination ... will Claudius

cannot pray although his desire to do so is as great as his determination. Thompson and Taylor point out that he may mean that he cannot pray because his desire to do so is matched by his will to sin, as indicated in the next line.

41 double business two incompatible purposes.

41 bound Probably this means 'directed towards' (as in 'bound for England', 4.6.9), rather than 'obliged' or 'sworn'.

46–7 Whereto ... offence? What is mercy for, except to meet crime face to face?

But to confront the visage of offence?  
 And what's in prayer but this two-fold force,  
 To be forestallèd ere we come to fall,  
 Or pardoned being down? Then I'll look up, 50  
 My fault is past. But oh, what form of prayer  
 Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?  
 That cannot be, since I am still possessed  
 Of those effects for which I did the murder,  
 My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen. 55  
 May one be pardoned and retain th'offence?  
 In the corrupted currents of this world  
 Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,  
 And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself  
 Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above; 60  
 There is no shuffling, there the action lies  
 In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled  
 Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults  
 To give in evidence. What then? What rests?  
 Try what repentance can. What can it not? 65  
 Yet what can it when one cannot repent?  
 Oh wretched state! Oh bosom black as death!  
 Oh limèd soul that struggling to be free  
 Art more engaged! Help, angels! – Make assay:  
 Bow stubborn knees, and heart with strings of steel 70  
 Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe.  
 All may be well.

[*He kneels*]

50 pardoned] pardon'd F; pardon Q2 58 shove] F; showe Q2 72 SD *He kneels*] Q1; not in Q2, F

54 effects things acquired or achieved.

55 mine own ambition i.e. those things I was ambitious for.

56 th'offence i.e. the fruits of the offence.

58 shove by thrust aside.

59 wicked prize reward achieved by wicked means.

61 shuffling trickery, sharp practice, deception. See 3.1.67 note.

61 the action lies A legal phrase, meaning that a case is admitted to exist. But it also means that every deed lies exposed to God's scrutiny.

63–4 Even to ... evidence to give evidence even about the worst of our sins. We are witnesses for the prosecution of ourselves; 'teeth' is for savagery and 'forehead' for effrontery (compare 'brows' above, 7).

64 rests remains.

68 limèd The image is of a bird caught by the smearing of a very sticky substance, called birdlime, on twigs and branches.

69 Make assay Claudius is probably addressing himself rather than the angels, since he knows that it is he who must make the effort.

*Enter HAMLET*

HAMLET Now might I do it pat, now a is a-praying,  
 And now I'll do't – and so a goes to heaven,  
 And so am I revenged. That would be scanned. 75  
 A villain kills my father, and for that,  
 I his sole son do this same villain send  
 To heaven.  
 Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.  
 A took my father grossly, full of bread, 80  
 With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May,  
 And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?  
 But in our circumstance and course of thought  
 'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged  
 To take him in the purging of his soul, 85  
 When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?  
 No.  
 Up sword, and know thou a more horrid hent,  
 When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,  
 Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed, 90  
 At game a-swearing, or about some act  
 That has no relish of salvation in't –  
 Then trip him that his heels may kick at heaven,

73 do it pat] F; do it, but Q2 73 a is a-praying] Q2; he is praying F 74 a] Q2; he F 75 revenged] reueng'd F; reuenge Q2 76 A] Q2; He F 77 sole] Q2; foule F 79 Why] Q2; Oh F 79 hire and salary] F; base and silly Q2 81 flush] Q2; fresh F 89 drunk asleep] F; drunke, a sleep Q2 91 At game a-swearing] At game a swearing Q2; at game swaring Q1; at gaming, swearing F

73 **pat** neatly, aptly.

73 **a is** Represents a slurred pronunciation of 'he is'; compare 2.2.185. We would write 'he's', but perhaps the pronunciation was nearer 'uz'.

75 **would be scanned** needs to be examined.

79 **hire and salary** So F. Q2's 'base and silly' is suspect, though it too emphasizes that killing Claudius at this moment would be beneath Hamlet and the demands of revenge.

80 **grossly** i.e. without consideration or decency.

80 **full of bread** Malone noted that this was a biblical echo, quoting Ezekiel 16.49: 'the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness'.

81 **broad blown** in full blossom.

81 **flush** vigorous.

83 **circumstance ... thought** 'circumstance', as at 1.5.127 and 3.1.1, has the sense of circuitous or circling discourse. The construction here is the

familiar Shakespearean use of two nouns for an adjective and a noun, i.e. 'circumstantial course of thought' = our course of thought which is necessarily indirect.

88 **hent** grasp (a rare word). He puts his sword up in its scabbard, promising to lay hold of it at a 'more horrid' opportunity.

89 **drunk asleep** i.e. in a drunken sleep.

91 **At game a-swearing** Gambling, and cursing the dice or cards as he plays. Although 'at game' is not elsewhere used by Shakespeare, there can be little doubt about the correctness of Q2 (followed here) which is supported by Q1, as against F's paraphrase, 'At gaming, swearing'.

92 **relish** touch, trace.

93–5 **trip him ... it goes** This ambition to bring Claudius to eternal damnation – a speech, said Dr Johnson, 'too terrible to be read or to be uttered' – is discussed in the Introduction, 19.

And that his soul may be as damned and black  
 As hell whereto it goes. My mother stays. 95  
 This physic but prolongs thy sickly day. *Exit*  
 CLAUDIUS My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.  
 Words without thoughts never to heaven go. *Exit*

[3.4] *Enter GERTRUDE and POLONIUS*

POLONIUS A will come straight. Look you lay home to him.  
 Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with,  
 And that your grace hath screened and stood between  
 Much heat and him. I'll silence me e'en here.  
 Pray you be round with him. 5

HAMLET (*Within*) Mother, mother, mother!

GERTRUDE I'll warrant you, fear me not. Withdraw, I hear him coming.  
 [*Polonius hides himself behind the arras*]

*Enter HAMLET*

HAMLET Now mother, what's the matter?

GERTRUDE Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET Mother, you have my father much offended. 10

GERTRUDE Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

Act 3, Scene 4 3.4] Capell 1 A] Q2; He F 4 e'en] e'ene F; euen Q2 5 with him] F; not in Q2 6 HAMLET ... mother!] F; not in Q2; Mother, mother Q1 7 warrant] F; wait Q2 7 SD *Polonius ... arras*] Rowe; not in Q2, F

96 This physic Hamlet sees his decision as a medicine temporarily preserving Claudius's life. Some commentators think the physic is Claudius's prayer.

#### Act 3, Scene 4

3.4 'This is generally known as the 'closet scene' (see 3.2.299), a closet being a private apartment. See Introduction, 45.

1 lay home to him charge him to the full.

3 screened acted as a fire-screen – as the sentence goes on to illustrate.

4 I'll silence me Dowden thought this ironical, since it is Polonius's shout (24) that causes his death. Q1's reading is gruesomely apt, 'I'll shrowd myself behind the arras.'

5 round See 3.1.177.

6 Mother, mother, mother! Not in Q2, though in keeping with Hamlet's behaviour.