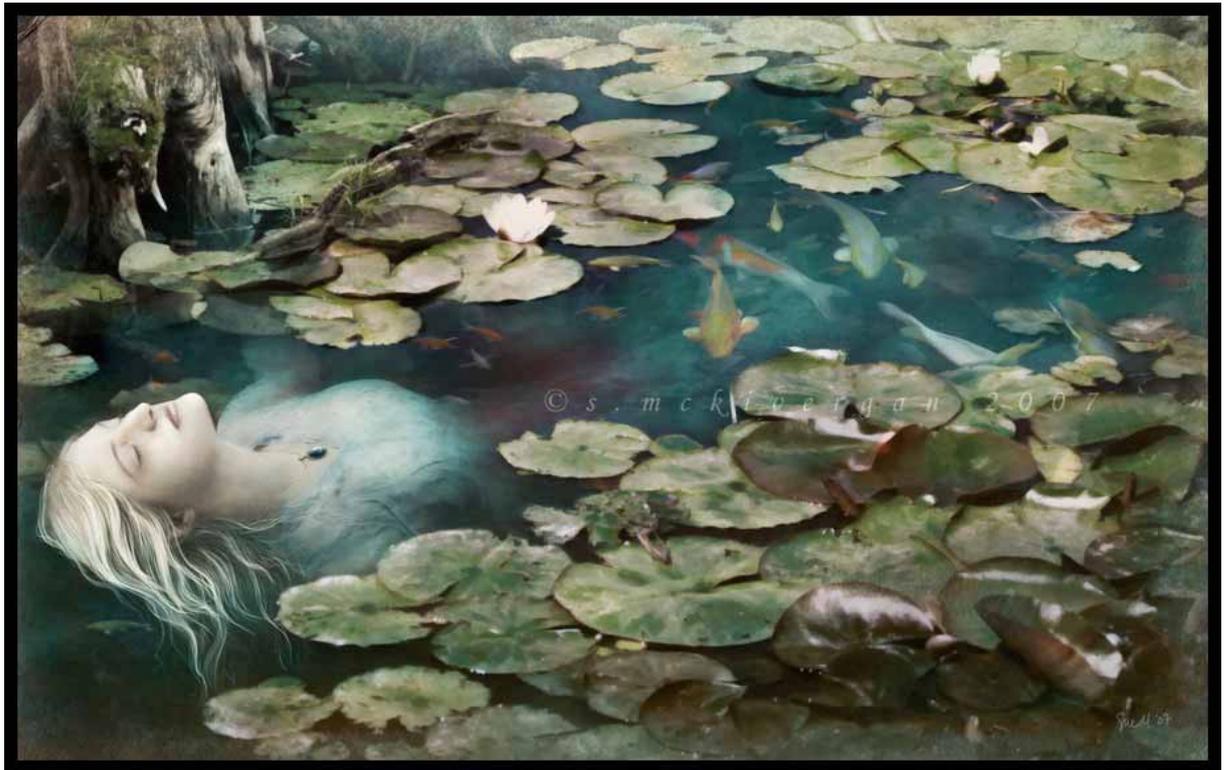


# *The Corruption*

*(with scenes from John Bede's Hamlet)*



## *Introduction*

This became my 250th play, and it was not planned at all. About ten years ago I embarked in a fit of inspiration on a new translation of “Hamlet” more by fancy than with any serious intentions, but by the loss of a love relationship the inspiration was lost, and the project was discarded and forgotten. By a new production of “Hamlet” in a radically modern version, with Hamlet in necktie and blazer and with the gentlemen Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in T-shirts, I got the impulse to retrieve the old project from its hiding-place and complete it. Among the oldest parts is act III scene 4, a downright operatic scene and rather controversial – deletions have been made.

I can’t appreciate modernizations of classic plays and operas, simply because I think it ruins their realism. The best of all Hamlet movies remains the one with Laurence Olivier, since he without doubt succeeded best in reaching the Elizabethan realism, that must have dominated the original play. The story of Hamlet is found in the Danish medieval chronicles of Saxo

Grammaticus in good Latin, while the classic Hamlet play is an Elizabethan renaissance drama, that clearly reflects life at court and its intrigues during the Renaissance. It should then hardly be presented in any other form, unless you wish to depart from the original and its realism, but in all stagings, whether on theatre or on opera scenes, the chief ambition should be to stage it as realistically convincing as possible, or else the audience will not be convinced.

My version follows the form of the original play most conscientiously – all scenes are included in the same order as in the original play, the only difference being that some scenes have been unified. The text though is completely different the whole way. This is no translation of the play presented under the name of Shakespeare, the authorship of which constantly has been more and more questioned for good reasons, but a completely different edition. Certain scenes have been shortened, especially those with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the weakest of the play, while others have been extenuated. The versification is generally replaced by plain prose. All persons are included with a few names altered, but no one has been excluded, while some to a certain extent have been developed, especially the king.

No translation or edition can surpass the beauty of the original when it comes to poetry and literary art, why we haven't even tried to approach any such ambition. Instead this play should rather be seen as a complement, concentrating on the theme given by the new title, and has the prime ambition to analyze this phenomenon psychologically, how it affects those responsible and those they are responsible for. So please view it as a totally independent play from the original, although the entire original is principally included.

Gothenburg, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011

*Dramatis Personae:*

King Rurik of Upsala  
King Horvendel of Denmark  
Gertrude, his queen  
Hamlet, their son  
Fingal, younger brother of Rurik and Horvendel  
Bernardo  
Francisco  
Marcellus  
Horatio  
Polonius, prime minister  
Laertes, his son  
Ofelia, his daughter

Reynaldo  
Rosencrantz  
Guildenstern  
Voltemand  
actors  
(in the play: a king, queen and Lucianus)  
a soldier  
Fortinbras, prince of Norway  
2 sailors  
2 gravediggers  
a priest  
courtiers, attendants, and others on duty.

The action is mainly in Denmark at Elsinore.

Act I scene 1. Rurik's court at Upsala.

*Rurik* O Horvendel, you should have been king here at Upsala and not I. That was father's only mistake. – No, don't blush! Your unpretentiousness is just faked modesty, while you have nothing at all to be modest about, not even to your queen, the best one you could have found.

*Horvendel* My brother, you are too good, generous and noble for this our wicked world, and no one has better deserved the royal title than you, who alone is mature enough for the responsibility.

*Rurik* Still I have reason to envy you, for you have a son. I have only daughters. Your son will inherit the throne of our sacred Upsala after me, and no one else.

*Horvendel* But no one could have had better and more beautiful daughters than you.

*Rurik* They will only be perfect when they are married, as mothers and as queens of their homes. No, only men can govern politically, and you have the same qualification as I if not even more so, and your son has inherited it.

*Horvendel* You can still have sons of your own.

*Rurik* Don't try it. My wife only desires power, that's her only passion, and there is nothing worse for a state than the ambition for power. But what do you think about our brother Fingal?

*Horvendel* He is eager at helping me and does no harm. He is able and commendable. Yes, I find nothing else to say about our repulsive brother than only positive things.

*Rurik* I am glad that he is proving himself a better man than what everybody thinks. Still I have bad forebodings about things to come. I ask you, dear brother, don't go back to Denmark. I am not well in my soul. Yes, I fear that we

never shall meet again after this imminent divorce. I am full of uneasy feelings. Please don't go yet back to Denmark!

*Horvoendel* My brother, never shall it be said about me that there ever was anything I feared, nor that I ever was a coward. If I followed your wish, which only has been inspired by dark fears, then I would be a coward, contaminated by that unreasonable fear. That must never be. No, my brother, let's attend to our duties and let them have priority to our feelings. Duty recalls me to Denmark. Farewell.

*Rurik* O my brother, I shouldn't say it, but something tells me that next time you see Denmark you will not see any more after that, that your return to your own home will be your swift destruction to great misfortune for the entire North. Don't go home.

*Horvoendel* I must go home. There is also my son there waiting for me. Don't persist in holding on to me here, Rurik. – Come, Gertrude. We have no choice. Duty calls, and all our duty is in Denmark. (*leaves with his queen*)

*Rurik* I am too limited in my wretched mortality to be able to see any hint of what is threatening our future, but there is something. If I only could understand this threat, which I instinctively and distinctively feel so very latent, as a hanging fatally sharpened sword of Damocles, which heavily could strike us all!

## Scene 2. Elsinore.

*Gertrude* Don't be hard on our son. He is in his most difficult age of puberty, when a young man can't see any way out of the darkness that fathoms and overwhelms him by an all too sudden and shockingly surprising maturity.

*Horvoendel* He is our son and heir, and nothing can then excuse a bad behaviour. – Hamlet, I presume that your insolent attitude against your uncle is founded on suspicion. Alas, my son, I never thought you could be that mean that you could judge a man from his looks more than from his work and deserts and obvious practical competence and usefulness!

*Hamlet* Father, I haven't done uncle Fingal any wrong. I always left that man alone.

*Horvoendel* But you don't associate with him but avoid him, and he complains himself to me about your arrogant attitude.

*Hamlet (is silent)*

*Horvoendel* If I only knew what separates you from the rest of us! We can all easily be with Fingal and enjoy his company. Only you don't love the most profitable man of the country.

*Hamlet* Next to you.

*Horvoendel* Dear Hamlet, I don't want to bother you with hard demands and reprimands, for I love you above all, and you know that we all do, for you are our future hope and the only rightful heir to your uncle Rurik and his realm in Upsala. We are all hoping for the best and most of you. Don't disappoint us, and don't force me to treat you under your dignity. (*leaves*)

*Hamlet* My father, you are all too good. You only think the best of all and can't see that one close to you intends to use your goodness against you and profit greatly by it, to great damage to yourself and the country. But if I told you this you would refuse to believe me and shut me up for wicked slander, and you would not keep silent about it but instead make the world believe that I was mad. For that sad reason I will keep silent about what I know, until I am forced to speak and act by the inevitable interference of the relentlessly arbitrary destiny.

### Scene 3. Upsala.

*Rurik* How did it happen?

*Messenger* He was found one warm and sunny morning in his garden obviously asleep, but when we tried to wake him up there was no life left in his body. His sudden and most inconvenient death was felt to the entire country as a most unwelcome disaster and unfathomable mystery. There could be found no trace of any violence or poisoning or other aids to an unnatural death, and therefore it was assumed that the most loved and competent of kings had had a stroke or died of some other unknown but natural reason.

*Rurik* Alas, my brother, wasn't this the very thing I feared and suspected and even warned you of! You didn't want to listen and believe me! Now you are dead almost forty years too early. And the blame is mine, for if you had been king of Upsasla this would not have happened! You were better than I and more noble and competent. Alas, woe to me, who grabbed the crown instead of giving it over to my far more deserving brother Horvendel! And something tells me insistently that it didn't happen quite naturally and honestly. But you say, that no trace or explanation to his untimely, unnatural and mysterious death could be found?

*Messenger* He was perfectly well, and he had just had a pleasant evening with the queen at a banquet, he was happy and cheerful and therefore decided in the sweet summer evening to stay in the garden for the night to enjoy the perfumes and the peace of all nature.

*Rurik* It seems most queer. My friend, I am sorry, but this will go so deep into my heart and mind, that I will never be able to recover. Now I must mourn and brood for the rest of my life, for such an evil sudden death without any natural explanation I will never in any way be able to accept. – Get lost now, and let me mourn and brood myself to death in incurable melancholy of loss and sorrow!

*(alone)* Alas, how difficult it is to live when sorrow has possessed the world and taken over its domination and government, oppressing and trampling life down in the all smothering swamp of death! I don't feel like anything any more, I no longer have any desire for my wife even, no urge to work and live and serve the world, no appetite, no lust for anything and not even for the easiest trifles! I just want to give up in total and fatal, all annihilating tiredness, morally wrecked and shattered by the unacceptable grotesquely revolting injustice of misfortune!

Scene 4. Elsinore.

*Fingal* Be comforted, my nephew. No one can anyway be king after me than you.

*Hamlet* Do you imagine then that the royal power and crown could in any way interest me, after my father, the most competent of all, lost it?

*Fingal* Don't be disappointed with life prematurely. You are after all in that age now when life starts to become interesting and rewarding.

*Hamlet* Disappointed? With you or mother, who married in a hurry in record time, as if she didn't even have any time for decent mourning? Don't try, uncle, to encourage me or cheer me up, for it will not work, when all I want to do is not to give a damn about anything. (*leaves*)

*Fingal* It is dangerous to brood, and if you brood in that age and are the crown prince of the country, you could turn a liability to state. Could he know something? How much? Could he know everything? No, he could only suspect and at worst speculate, but then he could come off the track and turn into my conscience, and I must not have a conscience! Do I then have to dispose of him? No, my terror fancies are just risking to get the better of me. No one can know the least, and all must understand that speculations could only be sickly and confusing vanity nightmares.

Scene 5. Elsinore. The terrace of the watch tower.

Francisco on guard. Enter Bernardo.

*Bernardo* Who's there?

*Francisco* No, answer! Stop and give the password!

*Bernardo* Long live the king!

*Francisco* Bernardo?

*Bernardo* The same.

*Francisco* You come right on time to relieve me.

*Bernardo* It has already struck twelve. Go to bed, Francisco.

*Francisco* Many thanks for this relief. It is bitter cold, and I am sick at heart.

*Bernardo* Has everything been quiet?

*Francisco* Not a rat has stirred.

*Bernardo* Very well, good night. If you meet Horatio and Marcellus, who are to keep the watch with me, make them hurry on.

(*enter Horatio and Marcellus*)

*Francisco* I think I hear them coming. Halt over there! Who is there?

*Horatio* Friends to our country.

*Marcellus* And good Danes.

*Francisco* Then I wish you a good night.

*Marcellus* Farewell, my good watchman! Who has relieved you?  
*Francisco* Bernardo took my place. Good night to you. (*leaves*)  
*Marcellus* Hallo, Bernardo!  
*Bernardo* Is Horatio there?  
*Horatio* A part of him.  
*Bernardo* Welcome then, Horatio, and welcome, my good friend Marcellus!  
*Horatio* Has that phantom been seen again tonight?  
*Bernardo* I haven't seen anything.  
*Marcellus* Horatio claims it's just our imagination and will not be convinced by our testimony of this horrible sight. So I took him along to keep watch with us, so that he would see with his own eyes this phantom, if it would appear, and then handle it himself by some proper measure.  
*Horatio* Don't worry. It will not appear again. Such hallucinations are like dreams that appear but once and never return.  
*Bernardo* Sit down in the meantime, and let us once more tell our story to convince you that what we have seen for two consecutive nights, we have actually seen.  
*Horatio* So let's sit down and take it easy and listen to Bernardo and his tale.  
*Bernardo* Last night, when the western star was shining just where it is now, and I was keeping watch here with Marcellus, and the clock had just struck one...  
(*enter ghost*)  
*Marcellus* Be quiet, my friend. Here he is again.  
*Bernardo* Exactly the same, and in the same shape as our late king...  
*Marcellus* Horatio, you are educated. You know how to accost such figures...  
*Bernardo* Isn't it the old king? Do you see him well enough, Horatio?  
*Horatio (impressed)* It certainly looks like him. It fills me with surprise, worry and fear.  
*Bernardo* It's obvious that he wishes to convey something.  
*Marcellus* Ask what he wants, Horatio!  
*Horatio* Who are you, who in the old king's form and armour appear at this late hour, as if you still were king of Denmark? We demand an explanation!  
*Marcellus* He is offended.  
*Bernardo* He is leaving.  
*Horatio* No, stop! Speak to us! Wait!  
*Marcellus* He is gone, he didn't feel like replying.  
*Bernardo* But Horatio, you are pale and tremble! Isn't this more than just imagination? What do you think about it?  
*Horatio* If I hadn't seen it myself, I would not have believed it, but now I have seen it.  
*Marcellus* Isn't the likeness with the old king almost palpable?  
*Horatio* As you are like yourself. Exactly that kind of armour he wore when he was fighting in Norway, and exactly sinister like that he was when he defeated the Poles on the ice. It is indeed wondrous strange.

*Marcellus* Exactly like that and twice before by this precise hour he passed us here with warlike stride in the middle of our watch.

*Horatio* You can't understand the intention, but it feels like as if it would bode some major change in Denmark.

*Marcellus* So tell me, anyone who knows, why there is so much armament today with war ships and cannons, so that sundays no more separate any working week from another?

*Horatio* Yes, I know. The old king defeated Fortinbras in battle in Norway with a vengeance, and that was very much due to prince Hamlet's efforts and victories. But now when the old king no more is in armour, Fortinbras gathers new forces to retake what he has lost. That might be the reason why we are now preparing so urgently for war.

*Bernardo* Perhaps that's why the old king is driven forth by worries as the central protagonist in the Norwegian war.

*Horatio* It so happened in ancient Rome, just before Julius Caesar was murdered, that the ghosts deserted their empty graves and roamed around with screechings, clatters and wails, while the sun was obscured by darkness, the earth trembled and rumbled in quaking unrest and the sky was dripping with dews of blood. When great tidings are about to happen, there are usually wondrous signs of it before both in heaven and on earth and from the underworld.

*(The ghost reappears.)*

But keep still, he is here again. Now I will get at him, even if he would smother me! *(advances on the ghost)*

If you have anything to say, speak to me! If there is anything we can do for you, let us know! If you wish to warn us, if you wish to convey some secret information about something we don't know, please communicate! Whatever you wish, please speak! Let us know! *(The cock crows.)*

Stay and speak with us! Stop him, Marcellus!

*Marcellus* Shall I stop him with my partisan?

*Horatio* Stop him if he will not stay!

*Bernardo* Here he is!

*Horatio* No, here!

*Marcellus* He is getting away! We cannot honour his majesty by demonstrating violence against him. If he is as invulnerable as the air, our weapons against him will only be ridiculous gestures in vain.

*Bernardo* He opened his mouth like as if he wished to speak, when the cursed cock crowed.

*Horatio* And then he got into a terrible hurry, as if called to battle. I have heard that the cock's crow drives all unblest spirits down into their graves ahead of the coming of the day. What we now have seen proves that what I've heard was right.

*Marcellus* He grew quite pale as the cock was heard.

*Horatio* And now the morning slowly begins to wake up. Let us break this watch now, and let us reveal to young Hamlet what we have seen, for I believe, that

if this spirit would speak with anyone, it would be with him. Are you agreed, that that's now what our duty directs us to do?

*Marcellus* It sounds all right, and I know where best to find him this morning.

*(They leave.)*

#### Scene 6. The court.

*Fingal* We are still in grief for our brother Horvendel, Denmark is still immersed in the paralysing sordine of mourning and will remain so for long, for we shall never forget our noblest king, who as long as he enlightened our country with his brilliant government only gave us victories, welfare and perfect security. To carry on his leading politics and success we have in the name of continuity taken care of Gertrude, the widow of our late king, brought her to the altar in the ambition to almost become as good a man as her first late husband, in the intention to determinedly continue Horvendel's politics with success. For the country is now threatened by the aggressive Fortinbras, whom my brother successfully defeated, cutting off considerable provinces from the Norwegian kingdom, which young Fortinbras now sees his chance to retrieve, since he has no high notions of our government. To avoid a crisis and if possible to avert the war we will send our diplomats Voltemand and Cornelius to come to terms with Fortinbras and start negotiations. We believe, that any trouble can be avoided, and especially war, by only open dialogue. No one can at length win anything by war, since all must have losses and be losers, while peace is something everyone could only profit by. I ask you, good courtiers and trusted diplomats, to immediately go up to Norway and the young angry king's court, that we as soon as possible could have a peace treaty confirmed.

*Cornelius* We will do all that we can.

*Voltemand* A good will as more than half the victory.

*Fingal* I don't doubt your capacity for one moment. To you, Laertes, I now direct myself, my prime minister's only son and our foremost promise for our future in the government. I heard the news, which made me worried and upset, that you intend to leave us again. Is that really necessary?

*Laertes* My king, I only came here to do my duty by attending the king's funeral and your coronation. My studies and my heart are in France, where I would fain return at once without losing any more time, for I am not needed here.

*Fingal* But your family? Is your father agreed on this?

*Polonius* Your majesty, I tried indeed to persuade him to stay, but since he doesn't want to, I can't force him. Therefore I must concur in his appeal that he may go.

*Fingal* Then we can't hold him back. Do with your life what you find best, Laertes, no one can know better what you are good for and what you had best devote yourself to concerning obligations than yourself. You have our royal blessing to do what you want, but on one condition: that you will be back.

*Laertes* I have no other intention, my liege, than to come home with a good education in my luggage with which to serve the state better than what I am able to now.

*Fingal* Good! Thus speaks a responsible citizen! – Then we finally turn to the one most severely stricken by our sorrow, which almost has burdened him to make him irrecognizable. My nephew Hamlet, you have all our royal respect for your retirement and solemn mood, but it is contaminating. You make no one happy by constantly going brooding and grieving. All share your grief, but you seem to indulge in exaggerating it like in some sort of obsessive self-torment. It is not proper, since you are closest to the throne. Although I as your mother's wedded husband now am your stepfather you don't seem to have accepted that we are now so close of kin.

*Hamlet* I can never become your son.

*Fingal* That is not the issue. It is as if you intentionally have decided to stay detached from us. We are still your family and royal at that and the only family you have. It's not good for the country that the crown prince is anti-social.

*Gertrude* You are importuning, Fingal. You can't enforce his love. My loved son, I beg of you for our sake and the country to remove these gloomy veils from your face and instead allow the sun to light up with some warmth and cheerfulness, as befits Horvendel's son and crown prince.

*Hamlet* Mother, I am too much out in the sun and get burned. That is not the problem.

*Gertrude* What is the problem then? As your uncle says, you torture yourself by persisting in stubbornly refusing to accept that your father is dead, and still he is dead and can no more come alive, since everything must die. Even you have to understand and accept that.

*Hamlet* Will you then forbid me to dress as I feel in black and wear out my sorrow until it has worked out? Do you wish to bereave me of it before it has ached out of my heart? Do you want to operate my illness by force? No, mother, illnesses cannot be removed by force but have to ache out naturally according to the biological rhythm of the body, so that they definitely waste away to eliminate any chance of relapse. Give me time to grieve and all the time that mourning demands, or else we will only run the risk of having it exacerbated.

*Fingal* Very well, we will have patience with you as long as you wish, Hamlet, trusting that you once will be one of us again. It is unmanly though to grieve in absurdum, like you are doing continuously in demonstratively black clothes without ever showing us any smile in your still so agreeable young face. It's not reasonable.

*Hamlet* Let me go away then, if you can't stand my perpetual grieving.

*Gertrude* We ask you, Hamlet, stay on. Wittenberg doesn't need you, we need you, and Denmark needs you, as their loved son to be able to behold and keep with security as their future king.

*Hamlet* I must obey you, mother.

*Fingal* It pleases us that you will cooperate. Everything depends on that, since there is nothing more important than cooperation for the welfare of the people, state and society. To celebrate that you are staying on, I will order a cannon salute every time we fill our cups this evening at the banquet, to let our people and the whole country know that everything is well in Denmark. Come now, my queen. Let's summon our court to prepare them for the banquet.

*(flourish. All out except Hamlet)*

*Hamlet* Alas, that such a weak flesh with such flippant shame would melt to such meanness of a brutal desire! Is weakness then the ruler and governor of this entire world? Must all suffer under the simple law of lewdness and give in to anything, that just imposes the cheapest pressure? How could I possibly ever again look up to my mother with respect after her fall to a base shadow of the man who was my father? My father's death was not all the world, but my mother's fall was a worse disaster for me than my father's death was for Denmark. I can never look up to or respect any woman and can therefore no longer see any meaning with humanity. They are just flesh and filthy lust and weak desires made to fall, like my mother fell for the first man who came after her husband. She doesn't even mourn him any more, since she is too busy with the wedding and her new husband's self-indulgences in parties, wealth and reckless displays of vanity, as if he had waited to take over. Not even a month passed before she went to bed with the next man. And they demand of me to stop grieving, when my natural right of sorrow thereby only can be doubled. I may be gloomy and moody, but I can naught else, since all nature demands it, and I can only be true to that nature, especially since she and her husband don't care a damn. No, burst, my heart, but keep quiet about it, for the more you dwell on it and go over it, the worse it will grow and ache like a cancer. Wear it like a mask but let it not be seen, since the sorrow it conceals is so much deeper and worse to be of any good for Denmark. – But here are my friends. Can I show even them anything of what I feel?

*Horatio* Greetings, my dear prince!

*Hamlet* Greetings yourself, my good friend Horatio, and welcome home from Wittenberg! I am surprised though that you have returned home.

*Horatio* I didn't want to miss your father's last journey.

*Hamlet* So you didn't come for my mother's wedding?

*Horatio* It raised some attention that it followed so quickly.

*Hamlet* Economy, Horatio. It was important not to let the ovens get cold after the cakes of the funeral party, which were needed directly for the wedding. I wish I had never seen that day, Horatio. It was worse than my father's death. I almost felt as if he had come alive again but in the wrong way.

*Horatio* That's precisely why we have come to you.

*Hamlet* What do you mean?

*Horatio* Hamlet, your father is walking around. We have seen him.

*Hamlet* Alive?

*Horatio* That is the question.

*Hamlet* Just don't give me any ridiculous superstition yarns just because some old hag has imagined seeing something. What have you seen?

*Horatio* These are my witnesses.

*Bernardo* We've seen it as true as we are alive.

*Francesco* For several nights.

*Bernardo* He comes at midnight and wanders about the castle in worried unrest to disappear at first sight of the dawn.

*Hamlet* This bodes no good. A phantom from hell can only bring bad news, and if you show up after death it's only to reveal hell to earth. Any sign? Has he revealed anything?

*Horatio* We got the impression that he was looking for you.

*Hamlet* All my presentiments are coming true. And it was he for certain? You recognized him? It was not just any unblest spirit?

*Bernardo* We all three recognized him all too well, exactly as he was laid on the sepulchre, with sword and crown and armoured to meet with death.

*Horatio* These two saw him for two nights in a row. The third night they called on me for a third witness. We all three got the idea that we should tell you all about it.

*Hamlet* Then there is some meaning about it all. Are you serving tonight in the same way?

*Horatio* That's why we are here, to ask you to share our watch.

*Hamlet* I will come. You can rely on me. If a dead man calls me I cannot let him down, least of all if it is a matter of my father's unblest state. – Have you told this to anyone else?

*Horatio* Certainly not.

*Hamlet* Good. Don't. We must be sure. Perhaps it is an illusion. Concerning revelations from the other side of the grave, nothing can be more uncertain. I will speak with him, if he is on speaking terms. If not, we can discard him as no more than a bad dream.

*Bernardo* Dreams never come back. This one appears every night.

*Hamlet* I believe you, until someone proves the opposite. We'll meet tonight, my friends. I will come before midnight. Be sure to carry your weapons. And not a word about it to anybody!

*Horatio* We promise!

*Hamlet* Good. Take care and warm up. The night could be cold and long.

*(The friends leave.)*

Something is amiss. An unblest spirit haunting us? That's unusual. Either it's nothing to bother about, or it's really serious. We'll see. It could be some untold truth insisting on coming out, which cannot be made known in any other way. The unblest only stay on between life and death if they have left some unfinished business behind. My father, what are you asking of me?

Scene 7.

*Laertes* Everything is prepared, and nothing can go wrong. I am ready to go. All I ask of you, dear sister, is that you keep in touch, so that I need not worry about you but can be sure, that you are all right.

*Ofelia* I will, my dear brother. Have no doubts and worries about me.

*Laertes* You are not the cause and reason for my doubts and worries, but it's that Hamlet, whom I find incalculable and liable. He broods too much, and I fear that his unsound blood may some day affect you.

*Ofelia* He is young and moody and unhappy. That's all, the only crime of his innocence. I am not afraid of him, and he never gave me any reason to.

*Laertes* Still I beg of you not to take him seriously. We all need to mature but he especially, since he still holds a perilous position as a crown prince with a power that always can be abused, especially if its administrator is not quite in his right mind.

*Ofelia* You exaggerate the danger. He is wise and maybe all too wise. The new king though is but a mere shadow to the old one. He if anyone could raise concern, the way he indulges in wild parties and wastes the treasury on extravagant building projects while the Danish army badly needs restructuring.

*Laertes* He trusts his peaceful diplomacy to keep Norway at peace.

*Ofelia* Fortinbras is aggressive and dangerous, since he wants revenge. Father always warned the king against that peril, but king Fingal ignores it. Alas, I wish you would not go away! It will be difficult here without you. (*embraces him*)

*Laertes* I will be back, you know.

*Ofelia* Yes, but when?

*Laertes* Here is father.

*Polonius (enters)* Ready to go already, my son? Have you bid your sister properly farewell?

*Laertes* With tenderness and promises to be back as soon as possible.

*Polonius* Most appropriate. But you can never know what invidious dangers might be lurking there waiting to grab hold of you, as you could fall to any temptation of the world. I must warn you. Whatever you do, never take part in any duels or gambling, for they are the accursed traps of insidiousness, which have taken the lives of many innocent young men on the continent, although they were absolutely innocent. Refrain from any kind of strife and quarrel, for they can never lead to anything good. Let the fools quarrel, and let hoodlums fight, so that they kill each other and leave us more peaceful and responsible in peace. Be open and welcome many to your bosom as a friend, but don't get too intimate with anyone, don't even let your best friend in your perfect confidence, for at home you have a family to trust, but abroad you don't have anyone, since most people will only see their possibility to use you. Be open to everyone, but keep your distance, and you will avoid getting into trouble and making a fool of yourself. And whatever you do, never take a loan and do not lend any penny either. Never get into debt

with anyone, and let no one be indebted to you. That's the smoothest way to eliminate enemies before you have made them, and thus you will avoid making them.

*Laertes* Father, you have warned me against all this over and over again. I cannot forget it.

*Polonius* I certainly hope you won't.

*Laertes* It's impossible.

*Ofelia* Father, let Laertes finally depart. You see for yourself how impatient he is to at last get away.

*Polonius* You are right, my daughter. I will not detain him by force. Farewell, my son, and have a good and happy journey, and come back home in perfect shape. That's the most important thing. (*embraces him*)

*Laertes* I promise, father. Thanks for your blessing.

*Polonius* You will have it for nothing and keep it, until you come back home again.

*Laertes* Don't forget my warnings, Ofelia.

*Ofelia* They are well kept and concealed in my heart. (*They separate.*)

*Polonius* What warnings? Against what?

*Ofelia* Against Hamlet, father.

*Polonius* Is he regularly courting you?

*Ofelia* You should know, who watches over me all the time.

*Polonius* What is going on between you? Don't be afraid, my daughter, to tell me the whole truth.

*Ofelia* He has just given me proofs of his affection by pretty gifts. That is all.

*Polonius* So far the limits of decency are not violated. But could he be serious?

*Ofelia* Who knows? He is so moody and, as my brother said, incalculable by his unhappy temper. He is out of joint and has been so ever since the king died and his mother almost at once remarried his brother.

*Polonius* Yes, we all know about that. No wonder. But it must not affect you.

*Ofelia* It doesn't yet. But I wish to help him.

*Polonius* With his bad temper? That's not possible. He is royal.

*Ofelia* Alas, I know. And in the meantime, I'll have to guess at what he thinks and what the cloud over his brow might signify.

*Polonius* Broodings. It's not wholesome and never was. To think too much is dangerous as it might affect your mental health. Let him brood alone by himself until he gets over it.

*Ofelia* That's just the point. He is not getting over it.

*Polonius* The more reason to leave him alone. Don't accept any more gifts from him, and above all, don't encourage him. That's the most dangerous thing you could do.

*Ofelia* I will try not to.

*Polonius* Then you will be safe. May he himself take the responsibility for his sore mind and temper, but I am sure it will pass over soon. He is after all just very young and sensitive.

*Ofelia* Like me.

*Polonius* His position is more exposed by the responsibility it carries, which must not be abused.  
*Ofelia* I would like to lighten the burden of his gloom and grief.  
*Polonius* You can't. Leave the brooder alone, so that you might be left alone in peace from him.  
*Ofelia* I can but obey you, father.  
*Polonius* That's the right thing to do. Now, let's have some dinner. *(They leave.)*

Scene 8. Like scene 5.

*Hamlet* It's really very cold, as if there was more than just chill in the air.  
*Horatio* The rawness affects the joints.  
*Hamlet* That's what I mean. This chill is not just cold, but the wind makes it spookily intolerable. Is the hour getting nigh?  
*Horatio* I think it's still before midnight.  
*Marcellus* No, the clock has struck twelve.  
*Horatio* I missed it. Then we have reached the hour when the unblessed prefer to show themselves unblessed, if they dare to show at all.

*(Flourish and cannon salutes behind the stage.)*

What does it mean?

*Hamlet* The king wallows in orgies with his wife, who used to be my mother. That's all there is to it, nothing remarkable at all. He has been going on like that ever since my father died and he took the widow for his wife.

*Horatio* Is it normal procedure?

*Hamlet* So it is unfortunately, at least with us in Denmark, and on the continent they regard us as professional drunkards, who only live for their booze. And the king leads the way for the nation as a paragon example for every Dane to follow, as if drinking was a virtue to celebrate with cannon shots and royal flourish.

*Horatio* Look, he comes. *(The ghost starts appearing.)*

*Hamlet* So it was no dream and no fantasy and no hallucination but really a ghost as evident as any living being if not more. No one can doubt this who sees it with his eyes wide open that never can lie, if the owner is human and in his senses. The only thing I can doubt in this moment is that I am not. – O terrible spirit, colder than any winter in your horribly transparent figure, I don't care if you are evil and coming directly from hell with abominable damnations for us as your message, or whether you are an innocent unblessed spirit from heaven who tries to get in touch with what was lost. The only important thing is that I recognize you and can bear witness of who you are and that you can be no other than my father Horvendel, king of Denmark until just a bit more than a month ago. Speak, father, for I am only hear to hark and listen to what you might have to say.

*Horatio* He is calling you. He will probably speak alone with you, as if what he might have to say could be of concern only to you.

*Marcellus* Don't follow him. He might trick you into some hellish trap of the devil.

*Horatio* I would also never follow him.

*Hamlet* If he doesn't want to speak openly but might speak silently with me, then he has the right to do so. I will follow him. I have no choice. I am his only son.

*Horatio* But you are alive, while he is dead!

*Hamlet* It all comes to the same thing in the end. We are both equally alive as souls. He has the right to make himself heard. That's the least thing I could do for my father. I'll take the risk.

*Horatio* The night has reached its darkest point now. What if he tempts you to sharp rocks leading you straight down into the raging foam of the sea, where the cold immediately paralyses and takes the life of anyone falling into its black darkness?

*Hamlet* You can't hold me back.

*Marcellus* Yes, we must!

*Hamlet* Take your hands off me!

*Horatio* He is mad to wish to follow an unblessed spirit out in an unknown madness!

*Hamlet* I must go! (*tears himself out of their grasp*) Show me the way, spirit! I am all yours!

*Marcellus* He is lost!

*Horatio* We can't save him. He is now in the hands of the ghost. May he just come back alive without having lost his senses on the way.

*Marcellus* We did what we could.

*Horatio* Come, Marcellus. Let's wait for the next coming horrors with terrible fears but also with infinite patience.

*Marcellus* That is all we can do. (*They sit down, blow in their hands, makes a small fire, and wait.*)

Scene 9. In the dunes below the castle by the sea.

*Hamlet* How far will you lead me? Aren't we safe enough here? I wish to find my way back home again.

*Ghost (stops)* My son, I am here to bear witness of the truth. For when the living are not aware of it, the dead must inform them of it. For truth must live and prevail. It is unavoidable, like any irresistible force of nature. You can't escape it. When truth dies, humanity will die out in an hour. They cannot survive without the truth, since it's the very essence of their spiritual backbone, and without the essential spirit of life, all flesh is dead. So listen, my son! Mark well what I have to tell you!

*Hamlet* That is why I am here.

*Ghost* My time is short, it was only with the utmost effort of despair that I managed to obtain it, and I can tell you no more than just the truth. Then I have to immediately return to my eternal doom.

*Hamlet* Father, speak! I am ready for any trial!

*Ghost* Even for revenge and retaliation? For that will be your obligation, when you learn about it. That's why I am here and lost and in despair as bottomless as the abyssal darkness of the supreme volcanic eruption of eternal despair.

*Hamlet* Revenge? So you were murdered? And you are being punished for having been unjustly murdered?

*Ghost* My life as a king was a course of violence, and all crimes of war must be atoned for. That is why I am being punished, but I have also my right to demand retribution for injustices committed against my person as a king.

*Hamlet* Tell me, and I rush to make justice! How did it happen?

*Ghost* Perhaps you remember how I used to enjoy finding some rest in my garden with its sweet scents and flowers, especially during summer, when the night never grew quite dark, and you could enjoy a wholesome temperature outside until the midnight hour without a star being lit. That kind of pleasant sleep I felt as especially beneficial one clear starry summer night, when the worm stole into my garden and saw his opportunity, used the enjoyment of my sleep to pour poison in my ears, that reached my brain and immediately paralysed me, so that I was dead before I even had had time to wake up.

*Hamlet* It is true. You were found dead asleep in the garden, but no one could trace any reason for your death.

*Ghost* You have now heard the kind of cause of death that left no trace. It was calculated, methodic and intentional, and it was an essential part of the intrigue that it was incapable of being traced.

*Hamlet* But who did this and why? Who in the country could be so mean and base, that he took it on his own responsibility and initiative to take the life of the best king our country ever had?

*Ghost* Who do you think? Who could profit most of it? Where could there be any motive?

*Hamlet* My uncle!

*Ghost* Who else? Didn't he immediately secure not just the crown after my death but also my wife?

*Hamlet* My mother! But she couldn't have known! Tell me at least that she was innocent!

*Ghost* Of course she was innocent, except of allowing herself to be seduced and duped by my mean and jealous brother.

*Hamlet* She is only a woman. Women cannot see through men until it is too late.

*Ghost* Therefore she is absolutely innocent. No one can be allotted any guilt or responsibility except my poor despicable brother. There. Now you know. I have fulfilled my mission. I must not linger when the cock wakes up to the day.

*Hamlet* Stay, father! Alas, you come here on an infernal mission, which lays upon my back a burden and responsibility and obligation, which immediately turns me too old to have any desire and strength left to live!

*Ghost* I have only communicated the truth that couldn't stay hidden or be buried alive. It is now up to you if you wish to do something about it or let it be. I

have only revisited this living world to bear witness of the truth. If you wish to avenge my death, it will be your own business entirely, and I will have nothing more to do with whatever happens in consequence of what I just told you. Now perhaps I can roam on and find a new life after the failed one and leave the wreck behind. But I will carefully watch how your case will develop. You are my only son. If you don't do anything about it, neither will anyone else.

*Hamlet* Be sure, that I will not let the matter rest. This must be settled, justice must be done, and if I am compelled to stand alone against my entire state and society and its establishment, I will not rest until I have reached the bottom of a necessary settlement with my uncle's crime.

*Horatio (outside)* Hamlet! Hamlet!

*Marcellus (outside)* I saw him vanish here among the dunes.

*Ghost* Your friends are searching for you, and the cock could rise at any moment. I must get on. I now leave my case with you. You were my only chance of an appeal. Now it is done. Honour your family and its royal blood by trying to do the contrary of what your uncle did, namely what is right. Farewell, o my son, king of the world! (*vanishes*)

*Hamlet* O father! Give me back my father, o world, that took him away from me, to greater damage to yourself than to me! Let the harrowing autumn wind run wild and tousle my hair, and let hails and foaming reeking sea by stormy heaven lash my face with sharpness of the gale, but give me back my father, o accursed world!

And my mother, who didn't wish to mourn her husband and king even for a month until she gave way to the murderer! Woe to you, o women, you eternal evil prophets of the arbitrary caprices of wantonness! All evil in the world has its origin in you! Your true name is Passion, Rotting Flesh, Weakening Lust, Ugly Desire, Egoism and Fatal Godless Vanity! O mother, why did you marry the man who... but restrain yourself, o my heart! Don't confess that you are as mad and sick as the entire world in its seduction by woman to eternal hopelessness and darkness. Whoever is deranged enough to touch that fire of carnal lust will perish like my own father in his goodness, without having any idea that his trusted and closest brother and associate had the intention not just to take his life but also to ravage his wife! And she in her weakness and blind folly agreed to it! Could there be any deeper unworthiness than a female traitor against all decency, honour and nobility!

*Marcellus (shows up)* There he is!

*Horatio* Hamlet! (*rushes down and up to him*) How are you? Could you speak with the phantom?

*Hamlet* There you are, my friends. No danger. I have spoken with him, but his mission was important.

*Horatio* Can you tell us anything about it?

*Hamlet* I could publish volumes of a matter of justice that now has cried up to heaven about the most heinous and terrible crime committed in our time – but I must heed the obligation of silence.

*Marcellus* What is it about?

*Hamlet* My friends, it's a matter of absolute discretion. Don't tell anyone anything about what you have seen this night, and I will also keep my silence, until I have assembled some more material and useful evidence, for I cannot act only on the immaterial instigation by an unblessed spirit.

*Horatio* That much I know, that it is far wiser to keep silent than to speak even one word too much.

*Hamlet* You have understood the matter correctly, Horatio. Can I trust your silence? Even yours, Marcellus?

*Marcellus* Yes, you might well do that, for I have heard, that all who bore witness about experiences of ghosts have been accused of lying and belittled and scorned for not being enough convincing.

*Hamlet* Swear to silence! I must be certain that nothing is to be suspected, for I have an investigation to manage, and to conduct it properly I have to keep clear of suspicion and even continue acting my part as sick of brooding, mentally unstable, unreliable and of incalculable liability.

*Horatio* As privy to your case, we shall take your role play fully seriously.

*Hamlet* Good. Then we are agreed. Marcellus? Now swear on my sword.

*Horatio (lays his hand on his sword)* I swear.

*Marcellus* Me too. *(adds his hand)*

*Ghost (far away)* Swear!

*Hamlet* You hear? The oath is confirmed even from no man's land next to death, and you are now sworn to silence. So let's proceed from here.

*Horatio* We follow you, my prince. You can trust us implicitly.

*Hamlet* Thanks, Horatio, for your confidence.

*Marcellus* I have never seen that ghost that you alone have spoken with. I have completely forgotten everything.

*Hamlet* Even better. Come now, my friends. Let's go inside and warm ourselves. *(takes care of them)* Alas, the time is out of joint! Woe me that I was born to set it right, and that only I can do it! *(enters the castle with them)*

## Act II scene 1. At home at Polonius'.

*Polonius* Tell me now, Reynaldo, how does my boy behave among the libertines in the capital of looseness Paris?

*Reynaldo* I have not been able to trace any irregularities in his way of life. He behaves like a decent cultivated gentleman and takes no part in the orgies.

*Polonius* How well have you then been able to inform yourself? No gamble or late nights, no wild games and duels, no easy women and no serious self-indulgencies?

*Reynaldo* He is seriously pursuing his studies and has no time for other things, least of all fleeting women.

*Polonius* That gives me pleasure to hear. And he is neither extravagant with a weakness for banquets?

*Reynaldo* Least of all. He only cares about his education and to learn from the great world of fashion.

*Polonius* That's my son all right. Then I can feel completely safe and don't have to worry about him. It's worse then about Ofelia.

*Reynaldo* I think she is coming here.

*Polonius* You are quite right. She seems upset. Something has happened now again. How is it, my dearest daughter? Doesn't Hamlet leave you in peace?

*Ofelia* Alas, my father, his grief and broodings don't seem to diminish but only to grow unto despair. I have followed your command, asked him not to give me any more presents and returned all his letters, but his crisis goes much deeper than that it is only related with his grief.

*Polonius* What are the symptoms of his crisis?

*Ofelia* He came to me all worked up with his breast laid bare, as if he had been erring around in the forest and there been tousled by branches and not cared about arranging his outfit afterwards, as if he was completely gone in the broodings of despair in another world of nightmares and hells. He didn't say anything but just looked at me and tenderly kissed my hand with such an infinite melancholy in his eye, that I almost took it for a farewell forever.

*Polonius* He is in love, and it is only getting worse. He resented that you returned his presents.

*Ofelia* No, I think the cause of his unbalance goes a lot deeper than that.

*Polonius* I must have a thorough talk with the king about this. It can't go on like this. It's not getting any better, only worse.

*Ofelia* I think it will pass, but I think it might take some time.

*Polonius* At worst the king will have to send him abroad, so that he calms down. Has he ever spoken hard to you or ever used any violence?

*Ofelia* No, never. I don't think he is capable of that.

*Polonius* The king will decide what is best for him. Take it easy, Ofelia. Avoid him, and whatever you do, don't encourage him.

*Ofelia* That's the last thing I do.

*Polonius* Good. I am sure we will get him in order, if only we could understand the reason for the disturbance of his mind. It's not natural to go to such extremes in sorrow and melancholy for months and more after you have lost a parent. He does still have his mother, and the king is like a new father to him. He hasn't actually lost anyone.

*Ofelia* I am sorry, father, that I have not been able to search the reason for his unbalance.

*Polonius* I am sure we will get it sorted out. I will immediately go to the king.

Scene 2.

*Fingal* Most welcome, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern! We are very happy that you have arrived here in the capacity of two of Hamlet's oldest friends, since he has been immersed in such a bog of melancholy, that we are greatly concerned about his health.

*Rosencrantz* Is it the shock of the king's sudden and premature death that has put him out of balance?

*Fingal* We don't quite know, we only know that he no longer is the same, as if he had been struck by fate of a drastic change of character, which has turned him almost unrecognizable.

*Guildenstern* And what are the signs of his illness?

*Gertrude* He is not ill. He is only brooding.

*Fingal* But so much, that it leads to such an incalculability, that we fear that he is losing his mind.

*Rosencrantz* Is it that bad?

*Gertrude* No, it isn't that bad. It's just the shock from his father's sudden death and our perhaps too hasty wedding shortly afterwards that has turned him more difficult than what befits a prince of Denmark.

*Guildenstern* We understand.

*Fingal* Do you? I hope so. Here is now my prime minister, the good and sage Polonius, who rightly understands everything.

*Polonius* Your majesty, now I know where the shoe is hurting.

*Fingal* Have you found any good recipe?

*Polonius* It's my poor daughter, that he is in love with. I was imprudent enough to advise her to reject all the prince's advances, she did so, and that has now afflicted heart and mind so deeply, that he has been attacked by fits of acute melancholy. My daughter is a close witness thereof.

*Fingal* In other words, Polonius, you suggest only heart aches?

*Polonius* Only heart aches, nothing else. And who could possibly suspect anything else when he sees Ofelia, my so charming and adorable daughter, who must appeal to a romantic mind such as Hamlet's more than to anyone else's.

*Fingal* Here are now my ambassadors from Norway. Let's leave Hamlet's malaise for a moment to attend to our affairs of state. Well, what does Norway say, gentlemen?

*Voltmand* Peace is concluded, Sire. Fortinbras found your terms and suggestions and promises fair enough and accept them for the time being. He wants no more war with Denmark but will instead concentrate on other more troublesome neighbours.

*Fingal* This is music to my ears – peace at any cost! Then we can calm down and instead worry about our family relationships at risk and the unfathomable complications that research into the mysteries of the soul might lead to. So you mean, my dear Polonius, that Hamlet is only unhappily in love?

*Polonius* As unhappily in love as a young romantic man could be, and the pain from unrequited love must thereby of course get worse and lead to nervousness and difficult moods the more his love will only meet with resistance and volatile refusal, which he must interpret as indifference, and nothing can turn a true lover more out of his mind.

*Gertrude* Still he is not violent or furious.

*Polonius* Not yet, but that danger is not at all eliminated.

*Fingal* What expressions does his love of Ofelia take?

*Polonius* He overwhelms her with presents, writes love letters, acts queerly and finds it difficult if not impossible to conceal his melancholy and frustration.

*Gertrude* I think Polonius flatters himself by so insisting on Hamlet's melancholy having so simple a cause.

*Rosencrantz* Methinks it is himself now appearing deeply immersed in the reading of some book.

*Polonius* Indeed, my friend, I think you are right! It is himself seriously absorbed in deep reading. Let me try him. Withdraw behind the tapistery and mark well our conversation. I will tempt his moodiness and have it diagnosticised by you as witnesses.

*Gingal* Fine, my good man. We shall quietly withdraw behind the tapestry not to miss one word of your conversation. Come, my good friends, Gertrude and you other courtiers. Let our good prime minister investigate Hamlet's mind. *(They all prudently withdraw behind the tapestry when Hamlet comes, who pretends he hasn't seen them.)*

*Polonius* My prince, how do you do?

*Hamlet* Polonius, I cannot complain.

*Polonius* What are you reading?

*Hamlet* A book.

*Polonius* That much I see, but what kind of a book? You are so deeply engaged and lost in its contents, that it should be very interesting.

*Hamlet* It's contents are nought but words, words and more words.

*Polonius* That's usually the case with books.

*Hamlet* Do you mean that?

*Polonius* What would books contain if not words?

*Hamlet* What do you think?

*Polonius* I don't think anything.

*Hamlet* Don't you believe then in the contents of very serious books?

*Polonius* I didn't say that.

*Hamlet* But you said just now that you don't believe in anything.

*Polonius* I didn't say that at all. I said that I didn't think anything about books.

*Hamlet* Isn't that about the same thing?

*Polonius* What's the difference?

*Hamlet* That's what I asked you.

*Polonius* No, I was the one who put the question.

*Hamlet*           What question?

*Polonius*         What you were reading.

*Hamlet*           And I answered, that I only read words.

*Polonius*         That's not an answer to the question. I was curious about the contents.

*Hamlet*           Don't you read books yourself?

*Polonius*         Not every day, I must confess, and only when I have to, so very little is being read by me at length.

*Hamlet*           If you are so disinterested in reading, why then does it interest you what I read?

*Polonius*         Because you are the very prince you are.

*Hamlet*           No, I am just a human being.

*Polonius*         Yes, you are that as well.

*Hamlet*           I think you are watching me.

*Polonius*         And why should I be watching you?

*Hamlet*           Because I am the very prince I am, but also because you are concerned about my liable state of mind.

*Polonius*         To state the truth, my prince, your mental health is worrying not only your entire family but even the entire country, since you are the only crown prince we have.

*Hamlet*           What do you think is the reason for my melancholy and moody temper?

*Polonius*         That's what we are wondering.

*Hamlet*           Well, what do you think?

*Polonius*         I think you are too attached to my daughter.

*Hamlet*           Only that?

*Polonius*         Yes, at first.

*Hamlet*           I leave your daughter in peace. She is only second hand. I was fond of her, that is true, and I gave her presents, but my father's death came in between with all its consequences.

*Polonius*         Your mother's wedding?

*Hamlet*           Don't speak of her.

*Polonius*         But your uncle is like your second father.

*Hamlet*           Don't speak about him.

*Polonius*         Can't you forgive him that he married your mother so close upon the funeral?

*Hamlet*           That's not what's ailing me. I suffer from far deeper concerns.

*Polonius*         Shouldn't you discuss them, to get rid of them?

*Hamlet*           They cannot be discussed with mortals.

*Polonius*         Is it then perhaps concerns of more metaphysical nature?

*Hamlet*           That could be, but moral most of all. There are no trickier issues than imminent responsibility issues.

*Polonius*         You are not yet burdened by responsibility issues, since your uncle runs the responsibility and government of the country.

*Hamlet*           That's what I mean.

*Polonius*        What do you mean?

*Hamlet*         That my chief issue of responsibility is that I carry no responsibility.  
(walks on with his reading.)

*Polonius*        He is not distracted, that is evident, but he is afflicted by melancholy brooding, while something is troubling him that we cannot reach. He is quite clear though in his method and logics, and you can't get any further than that from mental disturbances. (*The king, queen and the others come out.*) Well, ladies and gentlemen, you heard it all I trust?

*Fingal*          Your conversation with him was admirably without any significance.

*Polonius*        He spoke quite frankly though with an open heart.

*Gertrude*        Polonius, all you got out of him was general answers to general nonsense.

*Polonius*        I don't think, though, it is as serious as we feared.

*Fingal*          He is not suffering from lovesickness. No, something deeper than that is gnawing at him, but as you say, we can't reach it. We will leave him to his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whom he might trust more than us, since they are childhood friends.

*Rosencrantz*    We will gladly conjure out his innermost troubles.

*Fingal*          Do so, my friends. You have my mandate and full authority. Search out his secret, whatever it is, and I don't think it's just Ofelia.

*Polonius*        She could also lure out a thing or two of him.

*Fingal*          Good. Set her also at the poor boy. We will stand behind the curtains and watch.

*Gertrude*        Perhaps we exaggerate our concern for his liability.

*Fingal*          He is hiding something from us. I want to know what it is. I have a right to as accountable for the security of Denmark.

*Gertrude*        He didn't seem to keep any secrets from Polonius.

*Fingal*          Still there's something there that troubles him which therefore also disturbs his closest of kin. We must go to the bottom with what ails him.

*Gertrude*        I can't call it an ailment. Gloom and melancholy by all means but no ailment.

*Fingal*          No, he is disturbed. Perhaps he isn't aware of it himself, but it is obvious.

*Guildenstern*    I just heard that a company of actors are coming and intend to give a performance here. That could provide us with some change to Hamlet's gloom – and maybe cure him of it.

*Fingal*          Splendid, Guildenstern. That might save the situation – and help Hamlet out of his depression. He likes the theatre, so I will give him free hands to take care of the actors himself and take part in the direction and staging. That should cheer us all up. An ingenious idea!

*Gertrude*        I am sure we will soon have our lost son Hamlet well and home again.

*Fingal*          I think so too. Come, my queen. We still have our life to celebrate.  
(offers the queen his arm, and they leave. The court follows.)

Scene 3.

*Hamlet* Welcome to Elsinore, dearest actors! If there is any profession indispensable to our society it is yours, that deals with anything but reality, whereby you get closer to reality than any other trade desperately trying to reach and deal with it. Most alien of all to reality are those who imagine themselves in control of it and who are accountable for it, the politicians and rulers, who vaunt in their vanity of controlling the state, which always bring people where there was no intention of going. But you present the real reality by displaying dramas on stage that we in the prison of reality never dare to dream or even whisper about. Welcome all, and you will be well taken care of!

*Polonius* A speech! A speech!

*Hamlet* Do you want a speech, old courtier? You should know, that you could get it.

*Rosencrantz* A speech is always most befitting, so that the actors may learn to feel at home at once in their new surroundings.

*Hamlet* Well, lets' hear then some pathetic declamation from one of your most excruciating tragedies!

*An old actor* And am I doomed to live today, when earth and heavens break to shatter this superior masterpiece erected behind walls, that were constructed never to break down? And must I witness then the work of generations perish and go up in smoke and fire and this lovely city be reduced to ruins and my people turned to slaves and prostitutes for villains and barbarians of blind conquerors, who only learned about destruction, violation, violence and plunder? No, I lived one day too long, if I must witness this. I have been forced to see too many die and far too many of my dearest children being sacrificed to this enforced and meaningless machinery of cruelty and death to bear surviving this outrageous hell and nightmare summary of my forfeited life. My queen, my daughters, my poor worn out Hecuba and outcast and despised Cassandra, doomed for always being right, will you then end up concubines in enslaved humiliation for the murderers that now are ravaging all Asia? No, if this be all the summary and final truth of our reality, I must refuse to linger even for an hour more in this hell of a nightmare which they turned our world into. Son of Achilles, I await your judgement of injustice, like your father brought my best son down by foul play for the heinous desecration of his corpse – I have nothing better to expect of his son than fulfilment of the outrage in his final slaughter of the old wreck of a burnt out and exhausted unto death tormented king, who once was fool enough to call himself the happy fortunate king Priam.

*Polonius (applauds)* Splendid! Well delivered with fine articulation!

*Hamlet* Look, he is crying. The old actor cries, moved to tears by his own engagement in the most miserable possible life of an old king who had to see his world go to cinders. This is theatre. Cry and laugh your hearts out perpetually, but never let the performance end.

*Rosencrantz* They know their craft. They act convincingly and could probably stage just about anything.

*Hamlet* You said something there, *Rosencrantz*. – Do you think you could stage the gloomy ‘Murder of Gonzago’?

*An actor* We always kept it in our back pocket to present on any occasion, for it always strikes home.

*Hamlet* And could you then change a few lines to some new ones, that I will offer you?

*Actor* No problem. We can act anything. Our profession is to memorize and keep everything in our heads, even when there is constantly new material.

*Hamlet* Good. Then we’ll have an excellent performance ahead of us. Let me share the direction and the instructions, and I warrant, that your performance will go down in history.

*Actor* That sounds promising.

*Another* We love new variations and innovations.

*Hamlet* I am looking forward to our collaboration. – *Polonius*, entertain these entertainers well, who only live for entertaining us with great pleasure.

*Polonius* That shall be well provided for.

*Hamlet* They will thank us by giving a performance that we never shall be able to forget.

*Polonius* That sounds fair enough. If we provide them with good food and drink, they will only act the better, as it will provide them with both physical and moral energy.

*Rosencrantz* Come, my friends. I will show you your lodgings. (*Rosencrantz and Polonius and the others take care of the actors.*)

*Hamlet* Now I have my chance. Who could trust a ghost? I have seen too much of the other world to be able to take it the least seriously. This ghost which I saw quite well could very well have been a deceptive hallucination and mirage, a phantom that wished me to hell by deceiving me with a treacherous bag of tricks, but now I can put the truth to trial and see if it was true. A play can be a test and a trial, which the spectator could experience as a humiliation and shock and a reminder and reprimand, and that’s how I will use this company and their play, to see if the king’s conscience could be awakened to reaction to prove that my father’s spirit was correct. I will carefully watch every shade of any movement in his face to try to read his soul and mind and find out what he thinks. If he doesn’t react I will fairly absolve and acquit him, but if he reacts at all I can no longer have any doubts concerning the testimony of the other side. So a rather shabby play will become the trap of a king’s conscience, which only will be trapped if there is any truth in it.

Ackt III scene 1.

*Fingal* Have you found out any of his secret thoughts? Have you come any closer to his secret?

*Guildenstern* He is only playing jokes with us, as if he understood that we were engaged to spy on him.

*Rosencrantz* He mocks us and will not let himself be defined or pinned down for anything material.

*Guildenstern* He is either too clever for us, or he is happily unaware of how we try to figure him out.

*Fingal* The question is, does he have anything to hide, or doesn't he?

*Guildenstern* If he does, he does it too well for anyone to be able to find him out.

*Fingal* But what do you think?

*Rosencrantz* What do you suspect that he suspects?

*Gertrude* You are getting nowhere with him. That's obvious. Leave the matter to us women. No one knows him better than Ofelia, who is the only one he has given his confidence and love.

*Fingal* Yes, we must use the fair Ofelia to examine his unfathomable mind.

*Polonius* There is no one else you could trust any better. She is so young and pure and absolutely virgin, and in her purity she is as you say right about the only person Hamlet in his crisis could trust. The question is whether he is wiser than we can understand, or if he really is all confused. This is the difficult thing to settle, but Ofelia if anyone could settle it by bringing out the best or the worst of him.

*Gertrude* Are you ready, Ofelia? He could pass here at any moment.

*Fingal* We must hide before he comes, so that he will not get the least suspicious.

*Polonius* I think I see him over there.

*Fingal* Come, my dear. We shall hear every word he speaks to Ofelia, and if he offends her in any way, she can be sure of our intervention.

*Polonius* He is never offensive. I know him well enough to be able to warrant that.

*Fingal* Who knows him? None of us. That's for certain. Perhaps Ofelia, but none of his closer kin, and least of all his mother.

*Gertrude* I have the feeling that he has disdained me after I remarried.

*Rosencrantz* I am afraid that is common among true and faithful sons.

*Gertrude* There could be something to it.

*Fingal* Quiet. He comes. Let's take cover. (*retires with Gertrude and Polonius behind the tapestry. The other courtiers scatter.*) The stage is yours, Ofelia. Handle the play with care.

*Ofelia* I will let him play as he pleases. I will myself only listen and try to understand, if it be possible.

*Polonius* He comes. Quiet now.

*Hamlet* (*enters with his little open book, seems entirely unaware of Ofelia*)

To be or not to be, that is the question. How easy it would be to just escape that more than human responsibility which I never asked for but which an inhuman destiny burdened my shoulders with for me to bring everything in order which all the others made a bloody mess of. I never wanted that responsibility. I only wanted to live, but living with such a burden is impossible. And is death then any certain refuge? We don't know what it means, it's an easy way to just disappear and thus abscond life's responsibility in a perfectly natural way, while suicide smells of cowardice. No one knows what awaits us on the other side of darkness, the transcendence and the black hole of an abyss of total personal relinquishment, but all believe there is something there. Probably it's simply just another dimension of existence but hardly any hell or purgatory or paradise, perhaps a limbo, until you travel on to the next station. Well, I will not cowardly take my life but try to suffer this responsibility and see what it might lead to, but I know already for sure, that it can't lead to anything good. There is the fair Ofelia. Why has she been stationed here? To tempt me to reveal some secret, to enable the spies of court to provide a diagnosis on my case? Ofelia, what are you doing here?

*Ofelia* My lord, nothing in particular, but since you are here I am only here to be of service to you by any usefulness.

*Hamlet* You would do best in going to a nunnery.

*Ofelia* I beg your pardon?

*Hamlet* Humanity is doomed, and children are only made by lechery and violence and violation. There is no coition without violence and humiliation, pain and damnation. The church is well aware of that, and that is why the church exists as an offer of a better alternative than just childbirth and the hell of common life.

*Ofelia* Alas, my prince, you brood too much.

*Hamlet* No, the others brood too little, for they do not brood at all if they even think at all. And that is why our lousy world only has a general hellish aspect of wars and slaughter and cruelty, rape, kidnapping and suffering for no use at all. If you are wise you will go to a nunnery, for no rapists go there to bring evil children to the world.

*Ofelia* You are too obsessed with the sexual.

*Hamlet* Aren't all men? Aren't all ladies? Who isn't? That's why our world is just a regular massive damnation and nothing more, a snakepit of pestilence and plots, treachery and crimes with only innocent victims, for the innocents are the first to be sacrificed since they as virgins unfortunately are the only ones to let themselves be victimised by their simplicity. Don't get sacrificed, sweet girl, but spare yourself and take your refuge in the security of a nunnery.

*Ofelia* You used to be so nice and intimate, like a really good and close friend, a reliable companion and my only childhood friend, but your broodings have turned you into a different person who to my dismay I can no longer recognize.

*Hamlet* Loneliness leads to wisdom, unless it burns you to a fool and maniac. I don't know what it has turned me into, but you are right: I was far happier before when I didn't know anything.

*Ofelia* What knowledge might then have changed you so radically to such a difficult and complicated, disharmonic and poor fallen angel?

*Hamlet* The knowledge of the world and its incurable corruption, which only constantly increases, spreading cruelty about and multiplying with injustice and inhumanity, until one day this miserable humanity will have succeeded in ruining all the world and defile it to irrecognizability, for man was not created to the image of God but to damnation as a monster in constant self-abuse and self-destruction, like Cain, who survived the better alternative, whom he murdered, corrupt as he was, which all humanity has remained ever since.

*Ofelia* My prince, you are brooding yourself to perdition.

*Hamlet* Am I then not right? Am I giving you some bad advice, that you should enter a nunnery before it is too late, before you like everyone else get depraved by the general disease of corruption, and before you like me are driven mad by the meanness of the world?

*Ofelia* Alas, you drive me to despair.

*Hamlet* I have loved you, I regret it now, for I never wished to harm you. I have sullied you by my innocent worship of the higher humanity of the weaker sex compared with the coarse vulgarity of manliness, and I have reasons to wish that I had left you in peace, for I know too much, and that knowledge is not good for anyone and least of all for women.

*Ofelia* All you need is some good friend to talk with. What you need is to be able to open your heart and free yourself from the gloomy secrets of your broodings.

*Hamlet* Should I then spread the corrupt illness that I suffer from, my knowledge, which I wish that I never had been born to?

*Ofelia* Do you then reproach your mother that she gave birth to you?

*Hamlet* It was not her fault. She fell like all the others but at least for the right man, the first time. That she fell a second time and then for the wrong man is another miserable story. Perhaps she fell in innocence, but I regret to have seen that women, when they fall, do it gladly.

*Ofelia* You just keep striking, insulting, blaspheming and fighting blindly to hurt your enemy, whom you cannot even see, since he does not exist.

*Hamlet* Yes, he exists.

*Ofelia* Who is he then, the very evil one, since you are so angry with reality?

*Hamlet* No, his name is reality, and I have every right to be angry with him. I don't want it to cause you harm, dearest Ofelia. That is why I ask you to join a nunnery.

*Ofelia* You used to be tender and loving, but this sweet friendship has deteriorated into a kind of false and twisted concern, in which you wish to exclude me from your confidence instead of promoting it. This is rather unjust.

*Hamlet* If only you knew how justified this twisted concern for you were, but it is enough. I must say no more. If I offended you I apologise, but unfortunately our friendship and love is over and can never be renewed.

*Ofelia* But what then has caused such a complete and sudden change of personality?

*Hamlet* You don't want to know, for I didn't want to know it myself. That I learned it became perhaps the doom and destruction both of me and the state, but it is still too early to know anything about that. I ask you, purest Ofelia, take cover to protect yourself against the evil reality, leave our court and find yourself a nunnery instead. I will henceforth leave you alone, which your father wishes more than anything else. (*leaves*)

*Ifelia* Alas, how this noble spirit has been lost! All his clarity and intelligence and splendid enlightenment has been transformed to the contrary, to only abysses of dark and gloomy broodings, which has altered an ideal enlightened prince into a misanthropist of only bitterness and grievous introspection and negative self-destructiveness in one way only!

*Fingal (comes forth with the others)* That's good, Ofelia. We heard every word. You managed quite perfectly without raising any suspicion in him.

*Gertrude* I knew that he would never offend you.

*Fingal* What do you say? What do you think about his distraction?

*Polonius* I don't think any more that it is just about my daughter.

*Rosencrantz* He suffers from brooding sickness. That's a fact beyond any doubt.

*Guildestern* Unfortunately, as you see, gentlemen, his problems are impossible to search out.

*Fingal* That's what troubles me. We can't reach him and can't understand him. I must therefore consider him a latent security risk. I will send him to England on some political mission to let him collect his senses there, if it be possible.

*Rosencrantz* He has been very active at his theatre, and we have a new performance to look forward to this evening.

*Gertrude* We must not neglect that. Perhaps it could stimulate us all, as it has stimulated Hamlet.

*Fingal* We will attend to it with joy and great expectations, but then I must let England take care of him. It's probably also best for Ofelia, or what do you think, Polonius?

*Polonius* Without doubt. He needs to get away from an environment that has poisoned his mind.

*Gertrude* Now I think you presented a very appropriate diagnosis.

*Polonius* All who get dark in their mind by staying too much at home will sober up when they go abroad, and all who happen to misadventures abroad and there indulge themselves in undisciplined vices until they get dark in their mind will sober up when they return back home.

*Fingal* That's how it is, Polonius. Therefore England might be the cure and salvation for both me and Hamlet. Let's now get ready for Hamlet's last performance before we send him away. (*exeunt*)

Scene 2.

*Hamlet* I beg of you, speak out clearly, it's important that everyone in the audience understands every word you say, so it's no good mumbling in your beard or to neglect the articulation, but by all means, I beg of you, yet speak naturally. Everything in an actor's aspiration should aim at acting as natural as possible. Realism is everything, nothing is convincing without realism, and therefore the rule is to be as true to nature as possible, so whatever you do, don't exaggerate! Control your gestures, don't shout and don't appear hysterical whatever happens on stage, all such manners only give the impression of crudeness and lack of taste and control. You engage thoroughly in your role and become the person you enact, but that's the frame to keep within. If you take liberties with the part and indulge in exaggerations you violate the truth, and all theatre should aim at visualizing the truth of the drama you are acting as thoroughly as possible.

*Actor* One could think you've been a theatre director all your life, my prince.

*Hamlet* What is the life of a prince if not a neverending role play, to have to perform like in a theatre all the time, to always have to think of disguising yourself and conceal your actual thoughts, to just make believe? I have been playing theatre all my life in the capacity of crown prince of Denmark, dear colleague, but unfortunately never been able to direct my own life.

*(enter Polonius with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern)*

*Polonius* I see that everything is ready for the evening show.

*Hamlet* I hope the king will allow himself to enjoy this performance?

*Polonius* Not only the king but also the queen and the entire court. We are all interested and curious about what kind of play Hamlet will entertain us with. It appears to be some bloody tragedy?

*Hamlet* Directly from reality. It comes from Italy, where political murders constantly are committed. It is so common there, that you don't have time to close your eyes to a funeral until the next duke or prince lies assassinated to wait for his turn. Therefore all the best plays come from Italy, where there is no subject more gratifying to put on stage than the eternal corruption of the rulers with the ever recurring outbreaks of dramatic murders and family feuds, that never end, for the Italians can't have enough of blood and shows.

*Polonius* I thought the rule was bread and shows.

*Hamlet* That was in ancient Rome. Much has happened since then. Bread is too dry to stuff the audience with, while blood is something that never will feed it up.

*Polonius* How dreadfully you speak.

*Hamlet* It's just the truth, Polonius. All things positive and harmless and innocent are boring, while nothing is more fun than the excitement of a destruction that never ends, and that is what all the world is about.

*Polonius* One could think that you were an unsafe politician.

*Hamlet* You should be glad that you are a safe politician. Only for that reason you are allowed to stay on and continue, while all the rest is murdered. But there I see at last my friend Horatio.

*Horatio* Always at your service, my prince.

*Hamlet* You were always a man that one at least could speak with, Horatio, who understood what you said without just agreeing and pretend to understand and try to seem not to be an idiot, which unfortunately most of them are.

*Horatio* I happen to know what it is all about.

*Hamlet* Exactly. You don't fawn, and I don't flatter, but we are like brothers on the same level who know what it is all about. You are the only one I can trust. You know, that we are about to perform a play tonight to the king?

*Horatio* Yes, a well known Italian tragedy.

*Hamlet* One scene in it will be very remindful of the way in which the king poisoned my father. You are informed about what strange information I was initiated in by my unblest father in his despair after the macabre injustice of the outrage of his death. I would ask you during the performance to carefully observe my uncle. Perhaps the ghost was but a dream, a bluff, a false message from the other side to mislead me, a twisted hallucination that temporarily bereft me of a true sense of reality, what do I know, but if the king in the least way reacts to the plot we know what we are talking about, and then the testimony of the ghost was a clearer evidence than that of any mortal. I will also watch him carefully to mark how he reacts, if he reacts at all. Only if he keeps his stiff upper lip and isn't moved at all we can draw the conclusion that the ghost was a fake.

*Horatio* I will carefully watch him. His life and honour is at stake, and he doesn't know it. So it could be a more exciting show than even that on stage.

*Hamlet* That's what I am hoping for.

*(Flourish and salute to the king's and queen's entrance with Ofelia and other lords and courtiers, while guards carry torches.)*

Here is now the audience. Let's find ourselves some seats. I am impatient to see some result of my life's first effort as a theatre director.

*Fingal* How are you, Hamlet?

*Hamlet* I can't be much better, as well founded I am for this our entertainment.

*Fingal* Polonius, you appear to have acted in a theatre company yourself as a young man?

*Polonius* I did indeed, my king.

*Hamlet* What was it you were acting?

*Polonius* It was Julius Caesar, and I was the very emperor, who was murdered by Brutus inside the Capitol.

*Hamlet* How did it feel?

*Polonius* What?

*Hamlet* To be murdered by Brutus.

*Polonius* Oh yes, it was capital. It was vitally important not to stir at all afterwards, for if anyone would notice that you were still breathing, everything would have seemed rather ridiculous.

*Hamlet* All who are murdered on stage must face that problem: They must not breathe afterwards.

*Polonius* An insoluble problem.

*Hamlet* How did you resolve it?

*Polonius* I tried to act as a corpse as well as I could. Even playing an unmoving corpse, I found, demands great effort and deep concentration. You can't just relax.

*Hamlet* It's easier then perhaps to carry through a murder in reality, for such corpses don't move afterwards, do they, uncle?

*Fingal* What do you mean?

*Hamlet* Only what I say. If someone murdered afterwards wishes to do something about it, he must communicate from the other side of the grave, which could be rather difficult.

*Polonius* My prince is joking.

*Fingal* Yes, you are just pulling our legs in an improper and tasteless joke.

*Hamlet* I am just trying to be funny and cheer you up before the terrible macabre tragedy you are about to see.

*Fingal* And there is nothing offensive about the play?

*Hamlet* It has been performed all over Europe hundreds of times, and no one has had anything against it, since it is only about reality.

*Gertrude* Come, Hamlet, sit by me.

*Hamlet* No, mother, there are younger ladies that attract me more. (*goes to Ofelia*)

*Polonius* Oho! Did you mark that?

*Hamlet* May I sit by you, Ofelia?

*Ofelia* If you so please.

*Hamlet* I would like to find rest by your bosom if the terrible drama we are about to see would prove too strong for my taste.

*Ofelia* Are you worried? Are you not familiar with the play?

*Hamlet* Too well, but well performed it will appear even worse than when you only read it.

*Ofelia* Do you think I might be shocked as well?

*Hamlet* No, because you are innocent. Only those could be affected you feel guilt.

*Ofelia* You are in a good mood tonight. I see no longer any traits of gloom and melancholy in your features.

*Hamlet* It's perhaps because I now can relax. We have worked well and hard with the actors these days, and now we'll see the result.

*Ofelia* It will be interesting to see what you have accomplished.

*Hamlet* I can hardly wait, for it is something of an exciting experiment.

*Ofelia* Without doubt, since it is your first play.

*Fingal* Quiet now, children. The play begins.

*(The pantomime is performed:*

*A king and his queen appear very much in love and tender with each other,  
she kneels to him, he rests his head on her shoulder,  
and lies down on a bench to sleep, while she leaves.*

*Another enters, finds the king asleep, removes his crown, kisses it,  
puts it back on him and pours poison in his ears, and then vanishes.*

*Enter the queen again, finds the king dead and is distraught.*

*The other one enters again, comforts the queen and ingratiates himself with her  
and brings her to the altar after the dead king's body has been carried out.*

*Now it's the other one who offers the queen his love, and she buys it.*

*End of the pantomime.)*

*Ofelia*           What does this mean, my lord?

*Hamlet*           The murder of the duke Gonzago. It happened in reality, and the murderer was never caught, because he became duke after the duke he had killed. Such things happen all the time in Italy. That's why we have so many excellent Italian plays.

*Ofelia*           Here is now a prologue. Perhaps we shall know more by this.

*Hamlet*           Without doubt he will now reveal everything. Actors can never keep anything secret.

*Prologue*       For us and our tragedy  
we now humbly ask for your grace,  
forbearance, tolerance and patience  
with what now will follow.

*Hamlet*           Was this the prologue? It said nothing.

*Ofelia*           Yes, it was brief.

*Hamlet*           Like women's love.

*Ofelia*           No, women are faithful. It's the men that fail.

*Hamlet*       Do you think so, Ofelia? Has then never a woman deceived her husband?

*Ofelia*           Men do it more often. It's in woman's nature to remain faithful as long as she can.

*Hamlet*       In brief, if one does not betray the other, the other one betrays the first, and whoever is the deceiver it will be short, but someone always does or just lets go.

*Ofelia*           Are you thinking of anyone in particular?

*Hamlet*           Who would that be?

*Ofelia*           Don't ask me. Only you could know.

*Hamlet*           You don't ask. You know without asking.

*Ofelia*           So you know something.

*Hamlet*           I know as much, that my mother is no longer married to my father.

*Ofelia*           Since he is dead.

*Hamlet*           But not her husband. – My queen and mother, what do you think of the play?

*Gertrude*       The king is perplexed.

*Hamlet* Has he any reason to be?

*Fingal* You know the play well, Hamlet? There is nothing offensive in it?

*Hamlet* Do you wish to censor it? It's too late now. It depicts reality, and that reality is already gone.

*Fingal* It seems like something of a challenge against authority.

*Hamlet* What authority? It's only about a duke in Italy and how he was murdered and how his brother took over his dukedom and duchess after having murdered him. Everything is no more than true to reality.

*Fingal* It seems rather unpleasant.

*Hamlet* It *is* unpleasant, uncle. Reality *is* unpleasant. Don't you know, who are a king of it?

*Fingal* That's why we go to the theatre to get away from it and get something better to think about.

*Hamlet* But the theatre informs people better about reality than what the king and government do. That's why the theatre exists.

*Gertrude* Let them go on playing now, so that we may see how it all ends.

*Hamlet* You already saw the pantomime. The play only repeats it but with words, to make the whole thing clearer.

*Fingal* I don't like it.

*Polonius* You don't have to watch it till the end, your majesty, if it doesn't please you.

*Fingal* It would not look good if I broke the performance.

*Hamlet* Why?

*Gertrude* Now they recommence. Sit down and keep quiet and suffer or enjoy and wallow.

*The king (in the play)* So long we have now been happily married, that there is hardly any parallel to our rare harmony as a royal couple of this ideal welfare country.

*The queen (in the play)* My husband, we have long been happily married, and our family happiness seems to be so thoroughly well founded, that hardly anything could ever threaten it.

*King* I feel though the stings of age in my body, which no longer has the strength of youth, I often fall asleep for nothing and find it constantly more arduous to get up in the mornings, since sleep appears an increasingly more longed for sweet liberation from life's pains and worries.

*Queen* No, don't speak like that, for we still have many years ahead of us.

*King* Do you think so? In that case you are not realistic. Believe me, when hardly I am buried, you will find yourself a new and better man, who will take over my part. I know too well that I no longer am good enough for you in bed.

*Queen* You are the only one I love, and there never could be any other man for me, not even if you would leave us prematurely. In death like in life I will only belong to you, and no one else would ever even enter my thoughts. Hardly would anyone remarry unless she first took the life of the first one.

*Hamlet (aside)* That is wormwood, that should smart.

*King* Yes, so you say and believe now, but nothing is more fickle than man. She makes promises only to break them and change her mind, and today's situation could tomorrow be the contrary and compel everyone to change his mind and embrace the opposite of what they earlier promised and confirmed with sacred vows.

*Queen* Do you know me so little after all these years? I would rather die than allow the thought of betraying you to enter my mind.

*King* Say that again when I am dead. Now I am tired and must have some rest. Let me have a moment's nap here in our lovely garden, so that the fragrant perfumes of the flowers and the trees might provide some soothing comfort for my aching bones and limbs. Then we can resume our conversation.

*Queen* Yes, my beloved, you will have all the solace you need and ask for, and I will tenderly lull you to sleep in sweetest dreams, so that they may comfort you and give you peace, so that you after your beauty sleep may rise again refreshed as a new man ready for the troublesome duties of the government.

*King* Yes, my dear, just a short sleep, and all will be restored. (*lies down comfortably on a bench to rest. The queen kisses a finger which she lays on his brow and then departs prudently and quietly.*)

*Hamlet* What if she now would break her word!

*Ofelia* Surely that's the last thing she can do.

*Gertrude* I think she protests a little too much.

*Fingal* Are you sure the play is not controversial?

*Hamlet* Does my uncle wish to have it censored?

*Fingal* It's too late, but I am not quite happy with its contents so far.

*Hamlet* Just wait. It hasn't even started yet.

*Gertrude* Is it a deplorable tragedy?

*Hamlet* It's a trifle and actually only a morality. You'll see.

*Gertrude (to Fingal)* I think we could stay on until the end.

*Fingal* If you say so. I will just have to endure it.

*Hamlet* Here is now the peripeteia. Mark well! There is about to be some action now!

*Fingal* Peripeteia? What does he say?

*Hamlet* The turning point of the drama, uncle, the crisis, the releasing event, that sets the course of the ship towards inevitable shipwreck.

*Fingal* I would have preferred something lighter with a happy end.

*Hamlet* You are a comedian.

*Gertrude* Fingal never liked pretentiousness.

*Hamlet* Why then did he make himself king?

*Polonius* Attention, dear friends! You disturb the play with your chatting, and we don't want to miss anything of it.

*Hamlet* You are just the right audience that every theatre company most desires: only eager about how it will end, completely forgetful of the illusions, the curtains, the mistakes and all criticism.

*Gertrude* Be quiet now. Polonius is right.

*Hamlet* Here he comes, our hero.

*Lucianus (in the play)* Now is the right occasion. Now I can unnoticeably realize all my wishes. Our good king has finished sweeping, he is old and only wants to quit, so I only do him a favour by giving him leave and hastening his departure. (*takes out a small bottle and pours poison in the sleeping king's ears*) So much younger as I am I have every right in the world to take over what he no longer has strength to bear and only wishes to be relieved of.

*Hamlet* He poisons him. It appears to have happened in reality. It was in Vienna, the family was Gonzago. Now you will see how he seduces the merry widow and brings her willingly into her next marriage.

*Ofelia* The king has risen. He is upset.

*Hamlet* What might have upset him?

*Gertrude* How is it, darling?

*Fingal (wipes his front from some cold sweat)* I can't bear it! Lights! I must get out of here! (*rushes out*)

*Polonius* Break the performance! Bring on all the lights!

(*All get upset, and the entire court breaks up after the king. Only Hamlet and Horatio remain.*)

*Hamlet* What do you say about that?

*Horatio* The effect was somewhat stronger than anyone could have guessed.

*Hamlet* He could not conceal it. The ghost was right. We can no longer doubt the faintest trait of any matter that the spiritual world may dare to remind us of their existence with.

*Horatio* But now the king knows that you know.

*Hamlet* I know. And it feels very good. Now he is no longer alone with his secret. And do you think the queen understands something?

*Horatio* Women can never quite understand what they understand.

*Hamlet* Alas, how right you are. They think in a different way but could that way understand more than men can understand.

*Horatio* Here is Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

*Hamlet* The loyal instruments of my uncle the king. What will they try to trick me to now? Perhaps they will only ask me to apologise to the king, since the king no longer can apologise to the one he murdered.

*Rosencrantz* Prince Hamlet, a word with you, I pray.

*Hamlet* You come from the king? Is he not feeling well?

*Guildenstern* My prince, he suffers badly from being greatly upset in his mind, the cause of which was your very improperly chosen play.

*Hamlet* So he is ill?

*Rosencrantz* Mildly speaking, yes.

*Hamlet* And what can I do about it? If he doesn't feel well, then what he needs is a doctor.

*Guildenstern* He is not the one who sent us to you but your mother.

*Hamlet* Is she also feeling unwell?

*Rosencrantz* Hamlet, by your play tonight you have caused a great scandal for the entire court. Deepest afflicted by your lack of propriety is your mother.

*Hamlet* I could always stick to propriety. It is others who sometimes lost their heads, forgetting their decency and running wild in marital and political intrigues.

*Guildenstern* That's what your mother wishes to discuss with you.

*Hamlet* Tell her that I will come. Is she angry with me?

*Rosencrantz* No, only surprised but also somewhat struck with admiration.

*Hamlet* Imagine that! I have made an impression on my mother! And I believed her to be completely brainwashed by the one who bereft her of her widowhood.

*Guildenstern* She is your mother, and never forget, prince Hamlet, that by the king's own proclamation you are the only possible heir to the throne of Denmark.

*Hamlet* You constantly keep reminding me of that. How could I then ever forget it? But here are the actors with their host Polonius. I must conclude my play with them. Tell mother that I will come at once.

*Rosencrantz* We thereby hope that all misunderstandings and tensions between you and the court will vanish.

*Hamlet* There is still much to work on. – Polonius, thank you for having taken so well care of our priceless actors.

*Polonius* Prince Hamlet, your mother is expecting you with great concern.

*Hamlet* Thank you, I know that already. Any other news?

*Polonius* The performance tonight took a somewhat surprising turn.

*Hamlet* In what way?

*Polonius* As the play was changed from the stage to the audience. I have never seen anything like it before. It was a most striking theatrical effect.

*Hamlet* I am glad that someone could appreciate it. Unfortunately the king was not equally pleased.

*Polonius* No one was pleased. Everyone was shocked and disturbed.

*Hamlet* Indeed! You really mean that?

*Polonius* Yes, I mean it to the highest degree.

*Hamlet* It wasn't intentional. You must know that.

*Polonius* I sincerely hope so.

*Hamlet* I only intended to frighten the king.

*Polonius* Well, you succeeded with that all right. But what was it that frightened him?

*Hamlet* You don't understand it?

*Polonius* I hardly think he understood it himself.

*Hamlet* Oh yes, he understood it all too well.

*Polonius* In that case no one could understand what he understood.

*Hamlet* Except we who understood.

*Polonius* I don't understand it at all.

*Hamlet* Just as well. Carry on like that, Polonius, and you will keep happy. Now go to my mother and calm her down and tell her, that I am not quite as mad as I appear.

*Polonius* That will hardly calm her down.

*Hamlet* Just wait until I shake her up. Then she will be moved forever.

*Polonius* Your subtleties go beyond everyone's comprehension and maybe even your own.

*Hamlet* I know too much, Polonius. That's the only thing wrong with me. Now go to my mother and make her prepared, so that she knows that she will only have the worst to expect from me.

*Polonius* I will do my best to warn her. (*leaves*)

*Hamlet* Now is the hour, when the worst spirits appear to torment the world by their superiority to all things mortal, that helplessly fight the unfathomable intrigues of destiny, which never any mortal could fathom anything of, until it is too late, and she herself crosses over to the mystical immortality of obscurity. Perhaps my father is still lurking in the shadows, when his spirit was so conjured by a scream of despair from a tortured conscience by anguish for crimes that never could be atoned for but that still remain an open case in flagrantia! It feels as if it is his hour now, his moment of truth, when even his son now at last has been convinced of the reality of the great crime and the case gradually could reach the unbearably slow but unstoppable mills of justice. Father, what shall I say to my mother, how shall I relate to her? As a son or as a fair judge? I am afraid that I can't evade the one nor the other, and in combination it could be terrible for her. (*leaves*)

### Scene 3.

*Fingal* We are not safe for him. He can't go on like this any more. At any moment his moody unreliability could break out for serious into even worse scandals than what we tonight so ruthlessly were exposed to. He must be gone. You will follow him to England. I will send a letter with you with instructions. We have no choice. Something has to be done.

*Guildestern* The security of the realm is more important than anything else.

*Fingal* That's what counts. People like him, but after a public show like this, the message of which must reach common people by means of evil rumours, this might carry unheard of and unforeseeable consequences.

*Rosencrantz* You can trust us completely, your majesty. We are the servants of the king and the realm, and the government always knows what is best for the general order.

*Fingal* Then the matter is settled, and I could calm down somewhat. That danger to the nation which now unchecked walks about spreading unrest and causing harmful slander will be sent away from the country, so that the nation may

live, breathe and prosper in the peace and quiet of regular welfare. Prepare the transition. You have our royal mandate.

*Guildestern* We bow.

*Rosencrantz* Here is Polonius.

*Polonius* My king, he is on his way to the queen. He is in a risky mood and temper, and he has himself asked me to warn her. I will hide myself behind the tapestry and watch their conversation, in case anything should happen and he would go too far.

*Fingal* He already did. He will from now on constantly go even further.

*Polonius* Therefore I will carefully keep watch on her.

*Fingal* Thank you, my good man. And report to me afterwards everything that was said.

*Polonius* I am not the first secretary of state for nothing – my accuracy has never failed so far.

*Fingal* For which we are grateful. Without your trustworthiness the state would wobble and founder. Now leave me alone. I must at last have a moment for myself and my meditation. An evening like this could give nightmares for a long time to come, if they are not worked out and analysed. Or else you could start seeing things that mortals shouldn't see.

*Polonius* We leave you alone with your prayers.

*Fingal* Thank you. (*All the others leave.*)

I have left the shore too far behind me to be able to swim back. I have cursed myself and cannot remove the curse, since I chained myself to the result of it, the kingdom, power, richness and my queen, whom I robbed from someone else, but the worst of it is that I am not alone any more about knowing what I have done, for now my too clever and talented but ruthless nephew has found out my crime, I cannot understand how, but it is too obvious that he of all people knows too much. Neither can I regret anything, what is done is done and cannot be undone, I must stand for my deed, and I cannot atone for anything without losing all including my life, which no man could have accepted. It's just to walk the whole way and fall or survive, but destiny will now always call on me by this terribly surprising introduction to reminders of my crime, which never can be silent any more. What does Gertrude think and guess, the one I after all loved and not just married for her status? She must suspect more than she wants to, for she is Hamlet's mother and cannot take a position against her son whatever he may do. No, this new intrinsic mess of complications cannot easily be solved. I could send Hamlet across the sea to England and have him disposed of there, but never could the complications of a crime be resolved by new crimes. And least of all do I have any higher instance to appeal to, religion is but superstition and escape from reality and self deceit, which women mostly devote themselves to in order to shield and bandage their weakness, I cannot be fooled by such empty dreams, so I have nothing but myself to turn to without any solution to the problem. I could have Hamlet killed, but how could I then ever look his mother in her eyes again? Whatever I do, it will only make

matters worse. (*goes down on his knees by an altar to meditate and seems to be praying. Hamlet passes by, sees him and pulls his sword.*)

*Hamlet* Now I could do it, and no one would see it or miss him. Soon the whole country will discuss the theatrical performance that woke up the king's unblest conscience to screaming blatancy and complete loss of all hypocrisy and his face, and all would see his murder as a decisive imposition by destiny. No one would resist me or justice, and he has himself almost screamed out his guilt in public. But can I really kill him so piteously unarmed on his knees perhaps in ardent prayers of remorse and pain? Would I then send him into blessedness when he shows signs of atonement, repentance and sympathetic awareness of his crime? No, let me choose a more fitting moment, when he is drunk and out of balance, swears and makes a fool of himself, when he pukes and demonstrates himself again as a creep, which he is and surely will prove himself anew as soon as he has forgotten all about his repentance and his fear of his conscience. I cannot murder the king when I am summoned to my mother. Let me hear first what she might have to say to me, and perhaps I can convince her to take a position against him. Perhaps we together could accomplish an end to his wickedness and his downfall by more legal methods. That would be the best for the country. Wait with patience, my blade, don't thirst for blood, but be defensive only, for we are soon to be sent over to England. (*exit*)

*Fingal* No, not even meditation is of any help. I only get brooding sick like Hamlet. No prayers, no therapy and no brooding meditation could help me. I just have to continue on the course of crime to the bitter end, as I have started. A politician can never alter his course, that's why he is a politician and can only manage until he is done for, and then all political careers are interrupted without exception. They wander voluntarily into a trap of the soul that robs them of their very soul and that so painfully, that all they have to look forward to afterwards is total mortality. Die then, Fingal, when your criminal record is complete, and remain until then as a politician an indefatigably active criminal.

#### Scene 4. The Queen's bedchamber.

*Polonius* He is on his way, don't be afraid, my Queen, you have nothing to fear, for I will hide behind the tapestry and from there watch everything that happens and hear every word.

*Gertrude* And will you then report everything to the king?

*Polonius* Of course. It's not just to the interest of the king but also to the state security.

*Gertrude* I have heard that he is sending Hamlet off for a vacation.

*Polonius* Yes, to England, on a diplomatic mission. That way he can have some wholesome detachment both to Denmark, his family and his melancholy. It's most certainly the most benefactory cure and medicine that the crown prince could obtain.

*Gertrude* He is not ill.

*Polonius* No, but he is moody and liable and somewhat unbalanced, as the over-sensitive and too richly endowed romantic nature he is.

*Gertrude* And would England help against such cases?

*Polonius* We shall see.

*Gertrude* I would rather believe it could worsen his temperament and emotional exaggerations, for in England people are more eccentric and liable to lunacy than here.

*Polonius* I also heard rumours of that nature, but it has now been settled.

*Gertrude* I don't think the king really knows what he wants.

*Polonius* He is the state, and what the state does is always right.

*Gertrude* Until the consequence is revolution, and then it's too late for repentance and to change the politics.

*Polonius* Then I am no longer part of it.

*Gertrude* Don't be too sure.

*Hamlet (outside)* Mother! I am coming!

*Polonius* He comes.

*Gertrude* Hide at once. He must not on any condition suspect that you are in the room.

*Polonius* I will keep more quiet than the smallest mouse.

*Gertrude* That's the only safe thing for yourself, for now everyone is upset and he probably most of all, if I know him right. (*Polonius has just enough time to hide before Hamlet enters.*)

*Hamlet* What do you want, mother?

*Gertrude* My son, you have greatly upset your father and king.

*Hamlet* My mother, you have upset my father and king.

*Gertrude* O Hamlet, I can't stand any nonsense now. Tell me: why do you behave so utterly foolishly?

*Hamlet* And why do you behave so utterly disgracefully?

*Gertrude* Is that the way to speak to your mother?

*Hamlet* And is that the way to act against your husband and king?

*Gertrude* You attack me like an adder!

*Hamlet* But I have no poison. The one who stings with poison is yourself.

*Gertrude* Have you forgotten who I am?

*Hamlet* No, unfortunately I have not managed to forget that you are not the wife of your own husband but of another husband in his stead. Unfortunately I have not been able to forget that you are the woman who gave birth to me.

*Gertrude* Tell me, why are you so obsessed with bitterness and so fierce in your anger? And why do you so speak to your own mother so offensively?

*Hamlet* Because she doesn't understand why Hamlet speaks to his mother so offensively. Because she doesn't know what she is doing. Because she doesn't know the man she is married to. Because she is a poor deluded and foolish little thing, who doesn't even see what is happening around her! Has she not seen the snake's fangs,

the scorpion's prickle and the poisonous sting of the wasp? Hasn't she seen into the eyes of the false worm monster whom she allowed to devour her husband and seen his slimy scorpion tail, that only stings to murder and bring to ruin? Is she so deaf and dumb and blind in her manipulated brain that she can't see the damned murderer, human wrecker and royal assassin, with whom she has now for months been lying in the same bed?

*Gertrude (grows pale)* Dearest son, I don't understand at all what you are talking about.

*Polonius (behind the drapery)* If this raging prince may freely rave at large he will bring death to everyone in the castle, the king, me and his own mother. Shall I call for help? No, he hasn't caused any harm as yet. He has only sinned in words. He may continue speaking, and I will continue listening.

*Hamlet* You are even ignorant and unaware of your own condition as a cursed slut of a woman. No, I cannot spare you any longer. By being polite and considerate and showing woman almost superstitious respect, man mistreats her more than by any abuse, for in not being frank and sincere with a woman, man spoils her into a lie and faked vanity, obscuring her to the truth and thereby deceiving her more than by any other woman. The worst deception is hypocrisy, and that is what man through all ages has been teaching woman to shame herself with.

*Gertrude* O my son, have mercy upon me! I did after all in pain and atrocious labour and in neverending love give you life!

*Hamlet* You gave me my life, but you bypassed the loss of my father's life.

*Gertrude* Spare me, my beloved son! Do you want to kill me? I am after all just a weak, unhappy and defenceless woman!

*Hamlet* I cannot spare you until you have seen yourself in the full glare of your desperately tragic situation! Not until you have seen the whole truth I will cease torturing you with my poisonous daggers of truth, which like the surgeon's instruments only will do you good for their cutting deep to remove the cancer!

*Gertrude* Alas, kill me, but have done with it then at once rather than prolonging the torture! Behold! Here is your mother's breast that gave you life! (*opens her bosom and shows her breast*) Bereave it of the life that gave you life!

*Hamlet* Don't be silly, poor accursed woman, and don't show your naked shameless lechery unveiled in all its abomination! For then I will only show you what is worse: God's own curse of the entire female tribe! There is no mother who hasn't taught her sons to hate all womanhood by their own miserable example! There is no mother, and no by women sadly ruined and corrupted fathers who can bring up children. Only the children can bring up their fathers. For every year that a human being gets older, the more she needs to be brought up and chastized, spanked and bound, since she gets more unruly for every year. Only he that never associates with any rot of womanhood will always be reliable, for he will be sensible and wise enough to all his life remain a child.

You haven't realized yet what you have done. You don't know yet with whom you are married. You don't know what worm you turned yourself into by

your sleazy intimacy with the most venomous of all cobras! But I will extract your fangs! I will have them out by force and all of you out of that paradise which you contaminated and ruined. I will forever dismantle the dirty bottomless abyss of pestilence that woman has been forever to man! Sit down and lie still when I execute your hideous character! Don't make any resistance! It is useless and foolishly vain, for every man that ever resisted anything is cursed by his own vain folly!

*Polonius (behind the drapery)* By all the devil's feathers, now I lost my water! This is only getting worse and worse!

*Gertrude* Kill me, Hamlet, yes, kill me at once! Don't prolong your execution of me!

*Polonius* Help! Help! He intends to kill his mother! Help! Help!

*Hamlet (hearkens)* The help is here! Go to hell, you king of scoundrels, you gadfly, you spying drivelling rotting flesh of shit, you living carcass of a drunkard! Now you called out in the right moment, for now your nephew is in the right mood to cast you down where you already threw down my father, into the eternal death of nothingness! (*thrusts his sword through the drapery again and again, Polonius has no chance against a perfect hit every time. When he falls out Hamlet realizes his mistake and is devastated, shaken and appalled.*) Alas, innocent fool, was it you? I was so sure it was the king! There you are. There is nothing you can be quite certain of in this life. You must constantly make more mistakes to learn something about it. Involuntarily you constantly happen to new mistakes and most fatal unintended disasters, to the greatest grief and loss and inconceivable remorse for yourself! Is he dead? Yes, his heart has stopped working. The father of my beloved! Forgive me! I didn't know what I was doing! I ran amuck with my own ire and zealous passion! Evidently I finally really turned into maniac and dangerous madman, although I never desired more than to seem like one to some! Noble grey old man, you beautiful silverhead of an old faithful lackey! Forgive the confusion and tremendous error of some derailment of uncontrolled youth running wild, although it is hopelessly unforgivable!

*Gertrude (terrorstruck)* What have you done?

*Hamlet* What I least of all wished to do, and what I most wished to do I have left undone. When I did what I wanted I only did what I never wanted. A man is dead. Well, so what? Uncountable people die every day, and there is nothing we can do about it. We can only let them die and try to conceal the terror of the fact by hiding the ugly corpses in the earth to never let them show. I killed the fool in the belief that it was the king.

*Gertrude* You wanted to kill your uncle and king!

*Hamlet* Indeed! What is a scorpion doing in your bosom? What right does an adder have to live in my father's house? He has killed your husband, my father and the world's most brilliant and noble king! He is constantly poisoning our blessed Denmark with his sting, and Denmark just lets him go on, allowing herself to be stung to death, and isn't even aware of it!

*Gertrude* You don't know what you are saying.

*Hamlet* No, mother, you don't know what you are saying, for you are poisoned and brainwashed by that stealthy cobra who has stolen the power and glory of the country away from us and is ardently trying to destroy everything good about our country! Dear mother, can't you understand what kind of a husband you have allowed yourself to get mixed up with? Can't you see through the most blatantly evident deceit that has stolen all the light of our world? Can't you understand from the play you have just seen, and from the way the king reacted to it, what a perfect villain he is? Can you close your eyes to the naked truth and keep them closed?

*Gertrude* Alas, my son! You bereave me of all light in my life!

*Hamlet* I am innocent of the naked truth. Only he, your husband Fingal, is guilty.

*Gertrude* I can't bear the truth, for I am a woman!

*Hamlet* You have to. Being a woman is no excuse.

*Gertrude* Woe me, for I am a woman, the worst of creatures! Woman is fair and lovely, but all female beauty is only conceit and deceit and the devil's delusion. Woman is but death, dirt and filth. Woman is the curse of the world and humankind. All evil comes from her love. Everything dirty, ugly and corrupt comes from her fortunately doomed and mortal penchant for carnal intercourse. Yes, Hamlet, I have loved your uncle recklessly. The same destructive love that I gave your father which became his death I also gave to Fingal. In dirt and shit and stinking slimy discharged flux have we wallowed every night like pigs and poisonous toads. Curse me, Hamlet, and kill me at once, for I have deserved it. If only you men could extirpate the degrading and degenerating decay of the female tribe! For all evil on earth is there only because of woman. Reject and banish every woman on earth, and the world shall be restored and return to be that paradise it was from the beginning. Dispose of me, Hamlet, and I promise you and solemnly swear that your uncle then will recant from evil and piously abdicate in favour of you. And he will be a father to you, as good as your own, and atone for his crime isolated in a cell for the rest of his life. For only I am guilty of all his crimes. It is I who bewitched and cruelly corrupted his mind and made him evil. Mine is the blame for everything you have suffered. Take my life and give woman the punishment she eternally deserves!

Yes, my dear son Hamlet, you see here in front of you the cause of everything rotten in Denmark. Your uncle Fingal has no power at all, and he has no say, for he is a dummy and puppet tied to my fingers. Only I am guilty of all the evil he has done, for I am the one to hold the power of the realm. I was the worm that seduced his heart and made it turn against your father his brother with hatred. It was I who took the life of your father by marrying him and thereby giving him power. For all the power in the world belongs to woman, and man is hopelessly powerless as long as he isn't married, if though he also remains innocent in that condition. For guilt comes with power. That guilt and power is my name and every married woman's name, which took the life of your father by the black desire of me which possessed your dark uncle. I am alone the criminal, for mine is all the power

and guilt and all the sins of the world. Liberate me, my darling son, from my terribly shameless and criminal life! (*Hamlet hesitates in sad bewilderment.*) Cursed son! Why do you come here to visit me in my misery to bereave me of the small peace I have? Why don't you leave me in peace? If you can't take my life, then take at least that of Fingal, so that someone may pay for the corruption of the realm! Go now and get lost! I want to be alone with my monstrous shame! I don't want to know of any man, for all men are cruel and utterly ruthless against me, poor violated woman, and cruellest of all are you, accursed worm that I nourished by my bosom, who so relentlessly reveals to me the utmost terror and abomination of the eternally damned truth! I want to live and die isolated and alone with my shame and dishonour, for there is no God for us women. To me there is only a god of suffering, which the atrocious men do everything to torment and abuse and make an end of. There is no strong, good, powerful and righteous God for us women. There is only a suffering, powerless and weak despicable God without legal rights and protection, walking in rags and barefoot as a beggar condemned to death by the mad authorities of power for loafing. I curse every man of our world, for there is no man who is more good than evil. And the greater effort man makes to try to be good, the more evil he becomes, for that is how every single accursed man is made.

*Hamlet*        Damned woman, you can't shield your guilt and shame by your sorrow and sin. You can't hide darkness in darkness, for you can't put out your darkness. Only the light can be put out, and woman is the sin that quenches it, and this base and mean accursed woman you are, who tries to evade and cowardly explain away your female weakness and dark damnation! You try to overlook that you are a woman, but that is impossible. No one can evade death, and no woman can avoid her own damned womanliness. I owe you but one thing, and that is my by destiny devastated life, which I will give up before you will manage to find any cure for your womanliness. You named yourself as the guilty one of every crime committed lately here in Denmark, and you righteously took on the guilt yourself. You are the only guilty one indeed! Only woman is to blame for all the evil in the world! Your carnal life with two glorious men has ruined them both and Denmark and the world and murdered the best of men! May you forever atone for your eternally damned unblessed outrageous stinking crime!

*(pulls his sword again and advances threateningly against his mother, who without flinching faces him unperturbed, meeting him straight eye to eye. Suddenly Hamlet is totally put off, drops his sword and draws back at the sight of his father's ghost, who suddenly has reappeared.)*

Alas, father, are you here agin? Are you here to admonish me, punish me and chastize me for my only righteous way of settling with my blinded mother? Will you take me with you now to your realm of death, which I already since so long desired and have longed for?

*Gertrude*        My son, you are mad, alas, mad indeed for certain! (*gets tears in her eyes*)

*Ghost*            My son! I am only here to prevent you from going mad for real and make a mistake. Get back to your senses and your calm and presence of mind and

stop your meaningless harassment of your guiltless mother, for she is just an innocent woman like all innocent women. There are no guilty women, for the harmless tribe of fleeting fickleness are never quite aware of what they are doing. They are innocent like animals, like deer, badgers and ladybirds. Show yourself now properly as a good son to your real mother. Be fully aware that you are her meat and blood and property and her all for as long as she lives, no matter how little she means to you.

*Gertrude* Alas, my Hamlet, what are you staring at so frightfully scared out of your wits? What makes your eyes widen and tremble and shake of terror? Alas, what are they staring at in the empty air, as blind as of glass but at the same time staring so intensely out of their sockets!

*Hamlet* Can't you see the phantom, mother, who stands there so protective by your bed at your side? Can't you see the man, your murdered deserted discarded husband, my father in the flesh and only true father? Can't you see his armour, shining like of pure polished gold? Can't you see his mighty heavy sword, which only he could swing, and the helmet with its wings which was his favourite helmet and buried with him? He stands there more brilliant than alive in front of you, but you poor blind woman don't see him! Can't you even hear his voice, the soft blessed warm and deeply comforting booming voice, more fatherly than anyone's? Oh you senseless soulless blindborn woman freak with only sawdust and emptiness as substance for your brains! Look! Now the spectre passes through the room towards the window! Now he climbs out and disappears among the stars! Mother, I am not mad, I am not hallucinating! It's only you who are mad since you are not mad and can't use any second sight! My mother! What shall the men do with heartless stupid dummies like you who can't understand anything out of the ordinary, trivial and material? *(falls down at her side on her dress hanging out of her bed and wipes his tears on its soft cloth, while she is more convinced than ever that he is out of his senses and only increasingly so.)*

Alas, dear mother, forgive your lost son's hard cruel and inhuman wrath and despair and words of godlessness! No matter how inhuman a mother may be, no son has any right to blaspheme by cursing his mother. O mother, you have every right in the world to reject and subject your son to sinister punishment, but that son is condemned to damnation who is so far gone from God that he in the least way violates his own origin and abuses the love that gave him his life! Forgive your son his unpardonable harsh and devilish words and his deranged anger! Never has any human being the right to become angry and let out his anger, for anger is madness and the only existing madness at that for being only evil. Forgive me, o mother. No, mother, you must not forgive me. Listen! I forbid you strongly to forgive me, for what I said not even God himself could forgive. But just hear my sincerest word and understand with your gracious ear that your son asks your forgiveness. He is not worth forgiving and must not be forgiven. He only asks you to understand that he is repentant. I wish you no harm. It's only the villain and murderer, my uncle Cain, whose screaming rottenness I most humbly on my knees beg of you to abstain

from and no longer befoul yourself with. For his name is king Dirt, and by his namn he has dirtied all Denmark. O mother, from the depths of the abyss your son cries to the heart that blacklisted him as insane. If in spite of all there is still a son existing for you, then hear his only prayer: don't go to bed any more with your devil of a husband!

O mother, how hopeless and sad, dark and gloomy isn't this black life! How filled with despair that never finds an outlet and never ends, and how loaded with eternal and meaningless suffering! Do you think Hamlet ever will find a wife and have any children?

*Gertrude* Yes, I do think so, my beloved Hamlet. I believe so and prophesy so, for all women are witches, which all sensible men are well aware of, and whatever women prophesy always comes true in the future. Listen to my prophecy! There is no more good-looking, lovable and amiable, more infinitely attractive youth in the North than you. No woman could ever turn you down, if you would ask her to be your wife. And the happily conceived son, who your wife shall bear and who will be king when you yourself are gone, shall grow to become the richest and most fortunate king that the world has ever known. That's my womanly prophecy, which in God's name will come true.

*Hamlet* No, my mother, I don't believe in such a prophecy. To me there is no happiness and love in life, and I shall never have a wife, for as long as you live I will never be unfaithful to you and never look at any frivolous hussey who doesn't care about who marries her as long as she gets married, and who pretends to the noblest only to share the high position they hold in the hope of being able to use the power of that position only for themselves and turn the stolid husband, who married such a wench, into a slave and ornamental but lifeless drum major. No, only to you, my mother, I shall be faithful as long as you live and never jilt you for any slut, like all virgins are nowadays.

No, mother, I will never get a wife and children and a family and thus add to the misfortunes of the world. No, I will never create a home and so cultivate a hot bed for only demented satanic evil and mischief. No, dear mother, I curse every home in this world! From my heart I curse every family who indulges in this world and only cultivates and breeds dirt, shit and vermin! I have after all seen in my own family how a home, its family life and its prosperity only brought forth devilry, devilry and more devilry! Never shall I make myself guilty of a rotten family life. Retract your prophecy, mother!

*Gertrude* Now you are raving again, Hamlet, who just a moment ago were so personal and true! I don't recognize you. Alas, leave me, my son. I am tired and can't bear the sharpness any more of your deep cutting words. Poor maniac, leave me alone, and take with you the horrible witness to the crime you so furiously committed in your own mother's bedchamber. You are reasonable sometimes. Yes, I recognize in your being the son I conceived and brought up and loved, but only at times and that rarely and more rarely for every year. Alas, leave your mother alone, you outrageous son!

*Hamlet* Do you know, mother, that I at any moment will leave my country and go far away to England?

*Gertrude* Yes, I know about it.

*Hamlet* So farewell then, my mother, until Denmark may see me again. I might leave already tomorrow.

*Gertrude* So go then, my boy.

*Hamlet* Goodbye then. I take the corpse with me. God knows my heart is innocent of this crime. The hands are guilty though, and therefore Hamlet's criminal body shall soon rot in the grave. Goodbye, poor mother. I now relieve you of your son's unbearable presence, so that you at last may cry out all your shame and guilt in even more unbearable loneliness, which you, as the woman you are, like all women in their morbid urge to indulge in disgust, more sincerely long for than anything else in life. I wish you a better night than what you will have. (*quietens and retires, dragging the bloody corpse carefully but with some pains with him.*)

*Gertrude* So is he gone, out of my chamber and out of my life. I will not see him any more, my only son, before he goes to England, where the king's men Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will put his life out by cunning, treason and baseness, by holy order of the king. The two noble courtiers are childhood friends of Hamlet's, and still they willingly and without pressure accepted the heinous and sacrilegious task. That's how the power is: it has no right, no law, no sense, no conscience. God's word is only a book which the selfish power easily and willingly without any second thoughts burns. Only one thing could master and check the reckless ruthlessness of power, and that is the all overpowering love, to which even power can do nothing else than fall silent. I could have warned my son against the snares that have been set to end his life and bereave our world of its most flourishing blossom, but he didn't give me any chance. The way he talked I forgot all the important matters that I felt it necessary to inform him of. But now after all that he told me I find myself indifferent to everything. What is my son more than my hopelessly stillborn life's greatest pain? I don't have any son any more, for I don't have any self left. May he go to England, and may what happens there just calmly occur as it will. The intrigue play of Fingal and all the world's monstrous men we poor women have nothing to do with. We can only wash our hands to all the men's atrocious sins. We have enough of our own personal women's sufferings, and the men voluntarily add to them without any extra support from us. Perish or live, dear Hamlet. You will live anyway when you die, and you will die all the same although you live.

Act IV scene 1.

*Fingal (rising from the altar)* No, it doesn't help. I will only get sick of brooding like Hamlet, sinking down into the bog of my own crimes and their reflections. Which only pulls me down into purposeless mire. It's just to go on as if nothing has happened and leave all behind, go on to leave new crimes behind, that also have to be performed. Here is now the queen and more upset than usual. What has Hamlet told her? – Gertrude, you seem all washed up.

*Gertrude* Alas, my dear, it is Hamlet who is all torn awry and can no longer govern his own actions. Polonius hid behind the tapestry to overhear all we said and to protect me if necessary, but the things Hamlet told me were absolutely abhorrent, Polonius panicked and cried for help, whereupon Hamlet without even seeing him pierces him with his sword through the curtain!

*Fingal* He really then passes from one beatitude to another but the contrary. Is he then completely insane?

*Gertrude* It's worse than that. He is desperate and can't control himself.

*Fingal* And Polonius is dead?

*Gertrude* And Hamlet cries over him, it was not intentional, and now he regrets it bitterly like a naughty and irresponsible child.

*Fingal* We must immediately send him away to England. It can't wait any longer. Or else who will be next? You or me?

*Gertrude* Yes, he must get some distance to what he is mixed up with. Or else he will drag us all down in the hell of his despair.

*Fingal* Here is Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Gentlemen, Hamlet has in mental confusion murdered Polonius, my prime minister. This will not do any longer. You have to bring him to England already tomorrow.

*Rosencrantz* We are always ready.

*Fingal* The letters are written, so it's just to go on board.

*Gertrude* What letters?

*Fingal* The letters of recommendation. Hamlet is sent to England, as you well know, to be of use to us.

*Gertrude* Only use?

*Fingal* Yes, what else?

*Gertrude* With the intention, I suppose, to then let him stay there.

*Fingal* Only if it's necessary.

*Gertrude* So I may never see him again.

*Fingal* Gertrude, it's necessary for the security of ourselves and the country.

*Guildenstern* I hear him coming.

*Gertrude* I have seen too much of him. I can't bear to see any more of him now.  
*(retires hastily)*

*Fingal* I understand that very well.

*Hamlet (enters)* I can gather from your looks that mother has already been here and told the story. She naturally got in a hurry to get away from here when she saw me coming.

*Fingal* Hamlet, where is Polonius?

*Hamlet* Gone.

*Fingal* We know that well enough. Where have you hidden him?

*Hamlet* I haven't hidden him. He is just lying there.

*Fingal* Where?

*Hamlet* Up in an alcove of the corridor. I couldn't just leave him in mother's room, could I?

*Fingal* Your rash action is indefensible. In uncontrolled bolting impulsiveness you have murdered the prime minister of the country by mistake.

*Hamlet* Yes, I wish it had been someone else.

*Fingal* Who?

*Hamlet* The one I intended to kill when I killed him.

*Fingal (to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern)* Go and fetch the body, but discreetly, and lay it in the chapel. This must not come out.

*Rosencrantz* You can trust us.

*Fingal* Hamlet, in order to avoid any further scandals I have decided for you to go to England immediately. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will accompany you and escort you safely up to London, where certain obligations are awaiting you, which I hope will be carried through successfully for your own sake, to make you enter better thoughts and become a better man. You need to get detached from your problems.

*Hamlet* Who doesn't? You are so touchingly concerned about my security.

*Fingal* I am your uncle and stepfather, and you are the next king of the country. The entire nation is concerned about your absolute security. That's the only reason why I send you away, so that we in peace and quiet can bury the clouds and worries of concerns here.

*Hamlet* You mean our memories. Can they be buried alive? Can you get rid of me that easily? Allow me to have reservations.

*Fingal* What do you mean?

*Hamlet* It doesn't matter. Just send me away. I need to cool off for a while, you are right so far.

*Fingal* I wish you a happy journey and all the best in England.

*Hamlet* As I said, your concern is touching. Then I had better start packing my things at once. Good night, my mother.

*Fingal* Father.

*Hamlet* Are you not married to my mother? And are not a truly married couple one flesh? Thus you are my mother. Good night. *(leaves)*

*Fingal* He is only pulling our legs, but it is impossible to figure out if he is serious, if he knows too much or what his intentions are at length. Therefore he is dangerous. England, save me from my nightmare! Only you can do it, and I have

written orders for that matter. If only that intrigue succeeds, I might then start living and get some peace before I die. (*retires*)

## Scene 2.

*Hamlet* What is this army passing here?

*Soldier* It is young Fortinbras on his way to Poland.

*Hamlet* Has the king given him permission to march through Denmark?

*Soldier* Yes, for the sake of peace.

*Hamlet* For Fortinbras to be able to make war in Poland?

*Soldier* So it seems.

*Hamlet* Let me speak with him.

*Rosencrantz* My prince, we must go on.

*Hamlet* Go ahead. I will follow.

*Fortinbras (enters)* Hamlet, prince of Denmark, son of the one I respected most in life as a warrior, what an honour to meet with you.

*Hamlet* I understand you made peace with Denmark to make easier the war with Poland, although you really have a greater quarrel with Denmark than with Poland.

*Fortinbras* Your father's death reconciled me with his memory. You are the one who should be king as his son. I found his strange departure somewhat suspect, something giving a bad political smell, and I would never trust your uncle, neither as relative nor king. Something tells me you have been wronged. Therefore I did not wish to start new wars with Denmark, since your position made me respect you like your father.

*Hamlet* You seem to have a sharp political scent. It is called intuition.

*Fortinbras* I think we understand each other. Where are you heading?

*Hamlet* I am escorted by my uncle's assistants to some errand in England, but I think my uncle desires me to remain there, preferably as a corpse.

*Fortinbras* I think so too. Don't be passive but alert, and find out if your courtiers possibly might have some warrant from the king. In that case, find out what it says and act accordingly.

*Hamlet* We will meet again like brothers.

*Fortinbras* I do hope so and look forward to it. It pleases me that we have met, go with caution and take no risks. I want you to be alive next time we meet.

*Hamlet* I wish the same to you. Good luck with the war. (*Fortinbras leaves.*)

War and politics, intrigues and manoeuvres, what a lousy world of only mischief, egoism and ruthlessness! Only I am passive who hasn't acted yet although the case of my father's murder is beyond any shadow of a doubt, but instead of having brought the royal murderer to trial, he attempts to get rid of me and probably by the foulest play. Well, Fortinbras is my witness and has seen the situation. We will

face it as it comes and act accordingly and then, when we get home to Denmark, at last get some order in the world concerning the exclusion of justice. (*leaves*)

### Scene 3.

*Gertrude* No, I can't bear to see her.

*Courtier* But she insists.

*Gertrude* Why?

*Courtier* I am afraid she is not quite all right.

*Gertrude* No wonder, the way Hamlet has been raving and then just left us, and then the brother, going on the spree in France with no desire to come home or even keep in touch, and then the father, ignominiously murdered, whisked away, the murder classified, only hush hush, whisperings and wicked rumours, spreading like a plague among the people, while the poor girl is all alone without anyone left to care for her. Well, I will have to see her then. I just hope she will not upset me.

*Ofelia* (*enters, dressed in white with her long hair let loose and fantastic garlands of flowers in her hair*) I am looking for her most noble majesty, the queen lady of Denmark.

*Gertrude* Yes, my dearest, that's me.

*Ofelia* I just wanted to bring her my humble compliment and homage. (*kneels and presents her with a flower*)

*Gertrude* How is it with you?

*Ofelia* Thank you, I am all right but cry almost constantly, for there are only such left in my life for someone to cry for.

*Gertrude* I am sure your brother will be home soon.

*Ofelia* Alas, he gives no communication!

*Gertrude* That's negligent of him.

*Ofelia* And my father I was not even allowed to bury!

*Gertrude* He had a worthy funeral of state.

*Ofelia* No, he was left to rot in the attic, he was abandoned all alone as a cold corpse, no one wanted him, no one wanted to tell me why he had to die, but I know indeed how it was. The state is an illness the morbid power of which afflicts everyone who has anything to do with it, so that the prince that I loved went mad, so that father had to be stowed away although he was harmless and dead and smuggled out of the way in secret, as if he was a criminal, while my brother just enjoys himself in France. Does he even know that father has been butchered, forgotten and dug down, as if his memory and life's work were sentenced to the fate of being buried alive?

*Gertrude* You look worn out and exhausted.

*Ofelia* Someone has to wake by my father's coffin and unblestness. I haven't slept since he vanished underground.

*Gertrude* Sleep, my child. You have to sleep.

*Ofelia* Do you think I might? Do you think the world will let me? Do you think the sorrow will grant me peace? No one else is grieving, so I have to grieve alone then and the more since no one else does.

*Gertrude (to the courtier)* She is not well.

*Courtier* That's what I mean.

*Fingal (enters)* What is this?

*Gertrude* My husband, it is actually our *Ofelia*.

*Fingal* What has happened to her? Has she gone mad?

*Ofelia* No, my king, I have only been afflicted by the guilt of this regime. Who murdered my father if not the regime? Who sent away my only friend and warrior prince Hamlet if not the power and regime? Will I get any of them back? No, and therefore I grieve until I have grieved myself to death, for I have nothing else to do.

*Fingal* Alas, she is mad!

*Gertrude* Hopefully only temporarily so. It might pass.

*Ofelia* Shall I sing to you? Will that make you happy? Singing is my only comfort, for when I do not sing I only go mad. Only music can keep madness at a distance in this world, but it is only a temporary solution and relief. The madmen cannot be extirpated, and the madness is always there latent and lurking and returning forever. *(covers her face with her hands)* No, I cannot stand you people any more, for I can only see you as you are! *(cries convulsively – and leaves)*

*Gertrude* It's Hamlet's departure, her father's death and her brother's silent absence that went to deep for her mind.

*Fingal* This is most inconvenient. She couldn't have chosen a worse moment.

*Gertrude* Why so?

*Fingal* Laertes is back.

*Gertrude* Has he arrived?

*Fingal* He got wind of Polonius' death and immediately travelled here like a whirlwind and is now blowing up sentiments of storm and harm among the people.

*Gertrude* Doesn't he know that it was Hamlet who committed the unfortunate deed?

*Fingal* No one knows it besides us. It is a state secret classified as top secret for security reasons.

*Gertrude* He must be informed. He must learn about it.

*Fingal* Of course, but we need time.

*Gertrude* For what?

*Fingal* To have the problems sorted out and to have the people pacified. We can't have any more crises now.

*Laertes (storming in with followers)* Royal knave and crook and scoundrel! Where is my father?

*Gertrude* Nothing can stop him.

*Fingal* Take it easy, *Laertes*, and don't stir up random people at large for nothing who don't know and who don't have anything to do with us.

*Laertes* His life was taken here in your corrupt court!

*Fingal* You should have acquired education enough to learn not to jump to prejudiced conclusions.

*Laertes* Do you mean to say that his murder was not brought about by a murderer?

*Fingal* You will learn everything, if you just calm down. And I warrant, that when you have learned the truth you will understand, that we are on the same side, that your problem is my own, and that we are of the same inclination. No one is more sorry for your father's demission than I, he was indispensable for the government, for me and for the nation as a prime minister.

*Gertrude* Laertes, you have been abroad and don't know anything of what has happened here in the meantime. You will be completely briefed about the situation with all its complexities in time, but we must all have patience. (*Ofelia sadly singing outside.*)

*Laertes (shaken)* Who is that?

*Fingal* Let her in. (*A courtier opens the door to Ofelia.*)

*Ofelia* He is dead and gone, buried alive, and it doesn't help no matter how much we grieve, if we even cry out the colour of our eyes and insist on grieving to death.

*Laertes* Ofelia!

*Ofelia* Who are you, my brother? Where were you when innocence needed protection and defence? It's dead now and can never be resurrected.

*Fingal* Brace yourself, my friend.

*Laertes* She doesn't recognize me, and I don't recognize her! What has happened? How long has she been like this?

*Fingal* Her cup of sorrows flowed over and led to a reaction, which to our dismay seems to be permanent.

*Gertrude* This is the latest of our sorrows, that lately has befallen us in Denmark.

*Laertes* This is too much. Have I then lost both father and sister at the same time?

*Fingal* We must take it easy and not panic in this crisis, and I can promise you, that the case is already being handled.

*Ofelia* There is no return from the land of shadows, where everything is only sorrow and where all life is only shadows. I am already gone, and it's probably best that way, for the reality that failed me I don't want to know any more.

*Laertes* Ofelia, don't you recognize me?

*Ofelia* You were my brother. I don't know who you are now. I only know that I myself no longer am and least of all the one I used to be, for she has left her mind completely and can never again recognize herself. Not even you can recognize me any more, for I have been taken care of by the higher powers who are my only possibility for any appeal, although I know, that my case is lost, for he is dead, and he who took his life is already condemned to death.

*Laertes* What is she talking about?

*Fingal* Mind yourself, my friend. She does not know what she is talking about.

*Laertes* Still she knows more than what you are talking about.

*Fingal* She is lost and way beyond all reason, and it is nobody's fault.

*Laertes* But tell me then how my father was murdered! Confess the crime that was committed!

*Gertrude* It was an accident. It was an unintentional assassination, a regrettable homicide committed impulsively in the uncontrolled crazy heat of anger, which immediately was bitterly regretted. Ofelia can't cry any more, for her grief has outgrown her head, but Hamlet also cried indeed.

*Laertes* Hamlet! Was he the perpetrator? Has he been punished?

*Fingal* He has been sent away to England. He has also been mad lately. That's how the crisis started.

*Laertes* And is he the one who has driven her crazy?

*Ofelia* No, it wasn't. He was driven by an evil spirit to melancholy and madness. I was only hit by the surge caused by his divine obsession. Who the spirit was that drove him thus I don't know, but perhaps the king knows.

*Laertes* What is it that no one here wants to talk about? What ghost is everyone afraid of?

*Fingal* Come to your senses, my friend.

*Ofelia* No, never again can anyone here come to his senses, for I am the wisest of all of you and the only one who knows what it is all about, for I can see the spirits and will soon be one of them myself. (*sings sadly again and goes out.*)

*Fingal* She is mad. She knows nothing.

*Laertes* And still there seems to be a method in her madness.

*Gertrude* We shall keep watch of her. Her welfare is the most important thing for all of us, just because she is the most severely hit.

*Laertes* I came straight home to hell, then.

*Fingal* Still we can extricate ourselves from it.

*Laertes* Can you cure her then, doubtful monarch? Is the highest power in Denmark capable of such a human ambition? I doubt it. (*goes out after Ofelia*)

*Gertrude* Give him time. He is shocked and needs time to settle down.

*Fingal* I am sure it will be arranged. When he is fully informed of the details he will understand, that we are on his side, his cause is our own, and he is our man.

*Gertrude* He is not someone to be duped.

*Fingal* Gertrude, this concerns our survival. No one will oppose his own survival. Thus we have common interests with Laertes.

*Gertrude* And Hamlet?

*Fingal* Hamlet is out of the game until further.

Scene 4. Horatio by the sea.

*Horatio* Where is he, my friend, my royal friend, who has landed so deep into trouble, hanging between two worlds or more, between the world of the dead and the living, between reality and the other reality beyond and above, between the human earthal world and the self-destructive rottenness of the political corruption? Perhaps they already executed him in England, for the king must have sent him there only to be disposed of. That's the normal procedure in the autocratic world, where egoism is the only god who runs all politics, which therefore consistently leads all the world to hell. But what strangers are approaching there? They don't exactly look very picturesque...

*Sailor 1* Horatio?

*Horatio* The same. What can I do for you?

*Sailor 2* We have a message to you from a close friend.

*Horatio* Who could that be? I don't know you, so how could we have friends in common?

*Sailor 1* It's the prince of Denmark.

*Horatio* How on earth do you happen to know him?

*Sailor 2* Perhaps it shows that we are pirates, Sir.

*Horatio* Have you taken him prisoner?

*Sailor 1* In brief, Sir, it went like this. We boarded a Danish ship on her way west. We didn't capture her, for she made good resistance, and leading the fight was the prince of Denmark, who fought so bravely, that he boarded our ship, on which he was trapped as our only prisoner.

*Sailor 2* We hoped to get some ransom for him from the king of Denmark, but he told us so strange stories about the court and proved so agreeable a companion, that he became more valuable as our friend.

*Horatio* So he never arrived in England?

*Sailor 1* No, he never reached England.

*Sailor 2* We bring both you and the king letters from him, and we have orders to bring you to him. (*delivers a letter, which Horatio immediately opens and avidly reads.*)

*Sailor 1* But he wishes for some discretion, since he doesn't want to shock the court by returning so suddenly.

*Sailor 2* He appears to have shocked the court before.

*Horatio* Bring me to him at once. Although he never reached his destination, he must without doubt have quite a story to tell.

Scene 5. The court.

*Laertes* It surprises me, my king, that you haven't taken measures against Hamlet after his having both threatened your life and without reason or cause in raving madness having killed my father. He is quite simply a disaster to the national security.

*Fingal* He has a mother though whom I must take into consideration who lives only for him. He is after all her only son. He is also popular among the people. I couldn't change his position or touch him while he was here, but he is now in England, and I think we are safe from him as long as he stays there.

*Laertes* How long will he stay?

*Fingal* I hope he will not come back again.

*Laertes* So you have taken measures to have him secured over there?

*Fingal* I expect some news of some development there at any moment.

*Laertes* I sincerely hope he will not come back any more, for that would spare me the trouble of exacting double revenge for murdered father and my sister's violated mind.

*Fingal* I think we can be at ease. *(Enter a messenger.)*

What is on?

*Messenger* Your majesty, there has just arrived some letters for you and the queen from Hamlet.

*Fingal* Hamlet?

*Messenger* Yes.

*Fingal* But he is in England, isn't he?

*Messenger* No, for the letters were delivered here. He is back.

*Fingal* It's not possible. *(rips his letter open and reads it)*

*Laertes* What does the scoundrel write?

*Fingal* 'My good uncle, you'll know that I have been set ashore here on Denmark's earth naked and alone, and that I tomorrow ask your majesty's permission to present myself, so that I may account for my sudden return. By this I just wished to prepare you for what you did not expect. Your humble loyal nephew Hamlet.' It must not be true!

*Laertes* What does this mean?

*Fingal* You may wonder that indeed! Naked and alone! Something most unexpected must have happened!

*Laertes* Then I may take my revenge on him after all and with a vengeance.

*Fingal* This new situation demands new plans. Hem! We must arrange something.

*Laertes* Arrange a duel, so that I may pierce him honestly with all reasonable motivation in the world!

*Fingal* That we can arrange, and we can make sure of an infallible outcome.

*Laertes* How?

*Fingal* For the last months Hamlet has been practising fencing to some mastership under the expert tutorship of master Lamord. No matter how skilful you are yourself, he will be just as skilful, but we can take measures to guard ourselves. (*enter the Queen upset*) What's wrong now? What is it, Gertrude?

*Gertrude* Alas, when sorrow makes an imposing entrance with no inclination to leave but rather demonstrating its remaining impact, its following is worse than the first shocking impact.

*Fingal* But what has happened?

*Laertes* It can't be Hamlet's return that has upset her.

*Gertrude* Laertes, I am more sorry than any words can express, but your sister has been found drowned.

*Laertes* How? How is it possible?

*Gertrude* Alas, she must have climbed a tree to adorn it with her garlands of the prettiest flowers of her sorrow, one branch must have broken under her weight, whereupon she fell into the river and probably resigned to sinking down to perish in its waters. She could very well have risen and saved herself if she had wanted, but she was too confused to have considered any suicide.

*Laertes* My sister!

*Fingal* That adds her life to your reasonable vengeance.

*Laertes* This is too much!

*Gertrude* It is a horrendous tragedy, as if we hadn't already had enough.

*Fingal* She will have a decent funeral.

*Laertes* More than that! She was a virgin and my sister!

*Fingal* We will do everything for her.

*Laertes* Perfidious king, it is too late! (*rushes off in despair*)

*Fingal* He is desperate.

*Gertrude* First his father, and now his sister. You can understand him.

*Fingal* I had almost succeeded in making him get over with his sorrow for his father and cure the son's righteous ire, when an even worse calamity occurs. It is not fair.

*Gertrude* Nothing in life seems to be fair.

*Fingal* Hamlet is back. Did you know?

*Gertrude* Yes, I had his letter. It's my only joy left in life.

*Fingal* He never reached England.

*Gertrude* That might have been just as well.

*Fingal* That means, Gertrude, that we are back where we started in the thick of all our problems.

*Gertrude* I see our sorrow as our only weight.

*Fingal* Yes, we'll have to take on one problem and grief at a time. Perhaps we can that way manage them all.

*Gertrude* Hamlet is back and will surely stand us by.

*Fingal* He would have been a better support for us in England.

*Gertrude* Do you think so?

*Fingal* I know it. (*They leave.*)

Act V scene 1.

*Gravedigger 1* How could she have a Christian burial when she took her own life?

*Gravedigger 2* And you are asking me?

1 Who else would I ask?

2 And how could I answer? I am no bloody theologian, am I?

1 There is something fishy in this state of Denmark.

2 Something? You are kidding! Everything is down the drain! Ever since the old king died, and the gods know that he can't have died for any natural reason, when he overslept in the garden and woke up dead and even more unblessed than while he lived, the order of the country has been bolting to chaos, since the new king never gave an order without countermanding it. And then people start dying mysteriously at random and other strange things start to happen, like this, first the prime minister and then his only innocent daughter, who even takes her own life, while prince Hamlet is sent abroad in the hope that he would never return.

1 How do you know?

2 Don't you think I hear what people are saying?

1 The court thought he was mad and wanted to silence all rumours about his madness. That's reasonable enough. In a family no one wants anyone to be mad enough to make others talk about it.

2 But was he really mad? On the contrary, they say he was wiser than all the others who were not supposed to be mad, and that (*lowers his voice*) he found out a thing or two.

1 Like what?

2 Haven't you heard that the old king never found peace in his grave? That he refused to die and give in until there was some order about his death?

1 Now you are talking about ghosts.

2 Yes, I am.

1 I certainly will not. Dig your grave instead. Stick to business and the earth. That's the only safe thing in life.

2 If you can get me some beer.

1 Then I'll get some for myself as well.

2 Yes, do that, and I will stay here and dig myself down. (*1 leaves*)

(*sings*) When I was young and free from worries, I was broke and free from sorrows, since I knew nothing then about the world, which was far better than what I know now.

(*enter Hamlet and Horatio*)

*Hamlet* See how disrespectfully he heaves the skulls out of the earth while at the same time singing, as if he was drinking at the tavern. Isn't he aware of being a gravedigger?

*Horatio* At least he has some detachment to his activity.

2 (*sings*) So therefore I give a damn to what I know and go on digging while I sing as if it didn't matter, for that's all that life is all about, that nothing really matters. (*tosses up a skull*).

*Hamlet (takes it up)* That skull once had a tongue and could sing. Look how the knave tosses it down to earth as if it was no more than a stone. How can life be so disrespectful against the life that once was? He must after all once become like that himself.

*Horatio* He evidently doesn't try to bother about that.

*Hamlet* He will indeed one day no longer bother. – Whose grave is this, my good man?

2 My own, until someone else is laid therein.

*Hamlet* So you claim it?

2 Yes, for I am working on it. Or else it wouldn't be a grave for others to be laid in. So I am more responsible for it than even death.

*Hamlet* I call that some responsibility indeed. But you are lying, for you are not lying in it, which you should do in a real grave, but you are only trampling on it.

2 Be happy that it isn't your own, which it very well might be.

*Hamlet* I don't care if I am laid in a grave or not. I will anyway be dead at that moment, so I leave it to others to bother about that problem. But for whom are you digging it?

2 Someone dead who is dead already and can't be more dead.

*Hamlet* That's usually the case with someone dead. If once you are dead, you are quite dead. But who is the dead man?

2 No man, Sir.

*Hamlet* A woman then?

2 Exactly, and she is, as I already said, quite dead.

*Hamlet* So you really know what death is all about. How long have you been at it digging graves?

2 Since the day king Horvendel beat prince Fortinbras.

*Hamlet* How many years since is that?

2 Everybody knows that except you, it seems who doesn't seem to know anything. Have you just come down from the moon? Everybody knows, that that was the day when young prince Hamlet was born, who has now gone mad and been sent to England.

*Hamlet* Why was he sent to England?

2 Why, if not because he was mad? You are really a greenhorn then who doesn't know anything. They probably thought he would recover over there, but it's a hopeless case, because over there everyone is madder than he.

*Hamlet* How was he mad?

2 They say he was visited by his father's unblessed soul, who cursed him for doing nothing about it.

*Hamlet* About what?

2           The disorder of Denmark. Nothing has been normal here since the old king died. Everybody just keep talking about rot and corruption on the highest levels, but no one can identify the illness which the state is suffering from.

*Hamlet*       That's usually the case with corruptions, but in the state the process is slower than in the grave for an afflicted person to have done with his corruption. How long does it take for a corpse to disintegrate?

2           Eight or nine years. For a tanner it takes nine years.

*Hamlet*       Why does it take longer for a tanner?

2           It's obvious. He is already tanned. But here is a skull for you thicker and more tanned than most, for he kept tanning people all his life. He has been lying here for twenty-three years, and he is still laughing. *(takes up a skull)*

*Hamlet*       Who was he?

2           He was a merry knave who was hard on women as well. Who do you think it was?

*Hamlet*       I can't guess. Death makes us all look the same.

2           Once he poured a whole bottle of Rhenish over me, that bastard! He was the king's own jester. Yorick was his name.

*Hamlet*       Yorick? The very Yorick?

2           Yes, what's left of him. As you see, there's actually nothing except the grin.

*Hamlet (receives the skull with care)* Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a nice and amiable man. No one could jest like him, and he carried me on his back at least a hundred times, always merry and full of fun. And this is what his happy life has amounted to. You are almost upset. All his practical jokes and hilarious whims, all his good humour and flashes of genius, everything is commuted to dead silence with just a grin for eternity which turns it cold in bitter stiffness, while the grinning irony never ceases in its scorn of all life. This is terrible. And that's how we shall all end up, like Charlemagne, Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great. We shall all be put to eternalized sarcastic scorn and stinking corruption and never be able to stop coldly and cynically grinning in a petrified eternalization of ruthlessly static terrifying scorn. – But there is a company approaching, a whole ceremony of some solemn process. It almost looks like the king himself and the queen.

1           Alas, they are already here with the forlorn body! I had better leave, but the grave is ready for them. It's just for them to relieve themselves from their unpleasant awkwardness. *(leaves peremptorily)*

*Hamlet*       Awkwardness?

*Horatio*       He has left, without giving notice, almost stealthily, to avoid any possible painful unpleasantness, it seems.

*Hamlet*       What is all this about? It's not the old fool Polonius they bring to his burial, who must have rotted away since long? No, this is someone fresh who has turned in.

*Horatio*       She must be of some noble status, though.

*Hamlet* Let's conceal ourselves and not disturb the ceremony, until we know what kind of a new mystery this might be. *(They hide aside while the funeral procession enters with the king, queen, Laertes, other following and a coffin.)*

The king and queen! This is sensational. That one is Laertes, Polonius' son, a noble fellow. I never wished him any harm, like I neither wanted to harm Polonius, the poor devil. But what is this? This is a sad sight indeed! The muted but solemn procession with so few but highly important persons would indicate that someone has committed suicide, which also our merry man in the grave hinted at. This is depressing.

*Laertes (interrupts the procession)* Is this all? Is this all the ceremony you honour her with for her burial just to get rid of her?

*Fingal* We understand you, Laertes, but we must avoid any more emotional stirs than necessary. We want no more talk about the scandals at court. The state demands restrained calm and order.

*Priest* We have offered her all we could give. It was with the utmost effort we at all could achieve her to be laid in sacred ground. She was still crowned by the virgin laurel, church bells and a decent farewell.

*Fingal* Be content with that, Laertes. We could do no more.

*Laertes* It seems like some suppression of an inconvenient state secret that has to be locked up to avoid the stench of those responsible.

*Priest* I am sorry. I understand your grief, but it was impossible to do anything more about it. As your king said himself, it is too sensitive.

*Laertes* Shut up, you coward hypocrite of a vulture! She will serve the heavens as an angel while you for all your fawning will wail from the most despicable gutter of the dirtiest abyss!

*Hamlet (discovers to his horror)* Ofelia! It is Ofelia!

*Horatio (wants to hold him back)* My prince, stay here.

*Gertrude (spreads flowers over the coffin)* You sweet and lovely beautiful virgin, farewell! I would have wished and looked forward to spreading flowers over your and Hamlet's bridal bed, but an unkind destiny has turned and twisted our history into a sick and bitter cancrus development, which now only claims innocent victims. I am with you in your transcendence to the angelic world and endorse Laertes' prophecy.

*Laertes* No, if you will not offer her any more, I must at least be allowed one last time to embrace my sister in her coffin. No politics could be so inhuman so as to keep a mourner from what is no more than just a human farewell. *(jumps into the grave)*

*Fingal* Laertes, it is not proper. Don't exaggerate the calamity.

*Hamlet (enters)* Would Laertes then grieve alone and not allow her lover to share his universal sorrow at this disastrous accident, which is more and greater than all the pettiness that governments try to control? I am Hamlet, the Dane, who has a greater right to grieve than anyone else! *(jumps down into the grave)*

*Laertes (immediately grabs him by the throat in blind fury)* You devil who is to blame for all this evil! How dare you continue violating the one whose misfortune you brought about, whom you already ravished to death!

*Fingal* Separate them! This is a scandal!

*Hamlet* Laertes, I was not alerted about this. I don't know what has happened. I just returned from a journey and is met by the shock of Ofelia's death and your accusation of murder against me. I never touched her, I assure you. No one respected her virginity more than I.

*Gertrude* Hamlet! Hamlet!

*Laertes* My father's death drove her insane! Who was guilty of our father's death if not you? Don't try to exonerate yourself from any guilt! You have destroyed an entire family, and my desperation is justified and demands some kind of retribution, and by whom if not by you?

*Hamlet* So let us fight honourably about the right of grieving until we both are spent, for we both have the same right to grieve, you as her brother but I as her lover in sincerity to the degree of forty thousand brothers!

*Fingal* He is mad, madder than ever!

*Gertrude* No, he is only honest!

*Hamlet* We are rivals, brother, nothing else, since we can't tolerate that the other grieves more for the deceased than we do ourselves. So let's then grieve to death together and make a settlement about her and our guilt, for you are as innocent as I am. I wanted her father's death as little as I wanted hers.

*Laertes* Wasn't you the one who assassinated the old man without he unarmed even being able to defend himself?

*Hamlet* An accident, which no one has regretted more bitterly than I and grieved for it, for he was my beloved Ofelia's father, whom no one wished any harm. My attack was directed against a corruption but missed and instead hit the innocence, which I never stopped regretting. Will you therefore let the corruption live and continue flourishing?

*Laertes* I don't know what corruption you are talking about. There was no man more honest and honourable in Denmark than my father.

*Hamlet* I confirm it.

*Laertes* His death and your whims drove my sister to death by confusion. That accusation stands.

*Hamlet* I know nothing about that, for I wasn't here and therefore cannot be held responsible.

*Fingal* Come to your senses, both of you! The chain of tragedies that has befallen us cannot be fathomed. Laertes' anger is justified, and to some extent Hamlet must be held accountable. Still I must ask you to settle the matter in private, and not here by an already tarnished grave.

*Laertes* My sister's grave is the most untarnished in the world!

*Hamlet* I endorse that. The tarnishment is elsewhere to be found.

*Fingal* Enough! Horatio, take care of him! It's bad enough that he returned so early, but that he immediately would prove himself even more impossible and raving than ever is more than what our court at present can tolerate.

*Horatio* Come, my prince. Let the feelings and emotions cool down before impulsiveness makes them start bolting. No one wants any more regrets than the calamities that already have occurred. (*leaves with Hamlet*)

*Fingal* Calm down, Laertes. You will have your justice, I promise you. Now he is returned, so we can more carefully handle the case. This grave will have a proper monument for an eternal reminder of her beauty and decency, I warrant you. Come, Gertrude. Don't worry about your son not being watched enough. He will no more be harmful to anyone and never be able to harm us in the least.

*Gertrude* What do you mean?

*Fingal* Only that we will no longer take any risks. Come, Laertes. Be patient until the settlement comes. (*They leave.*)

## Scene 2.

*Horatio* Whatever happened to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? They are lost without a trace in England.

*Hamlet* No wonder. They didn't know what they were doing and therefore ended up in limbo without understanding themselves how it happened. I regret their fate. They were absolutely innocent. They were just obeisant instruments in the hands of higher powers, and unfortunately for them, that higher power was destructive, which they perhaps not even realized until it was too late.

*Horatio* But what happened?

*Hamlet* They did really carry letters from the king to the British vassal. I found them when they were asleep and was naturally interested in their contents, since Denmark concerned me. I had guessed at our king's desperation but not how far it went. In the letters he gave a straight order to make me disappear at once without circumstances.

*Horatio* A request of murder?

*Hamlet* By prompt decapitation.

*Horatio* Incredible!

*Hamlet* But true. Not even I could have guessed that his paranoia had gone that far. More than any monarch on earth he is guilty of his own corruption, which smells more and more of self-destruction.

*Horatio* Did you destroy the letters?

*Hamlet* No, I still have them as evidence against him. I wrote new letters, that requested the vassal to immediately execute those entrusted with the mission. I could seal the letter with my own royal seal to make it impeccable. Then followed the adventure with the pirates, I got away, while the two poor fools in happy

ignorance reached England. There they vanished. The king of England is a good vassal.

*Horatio* Does the king know about it?

*Hamlet* Not yet. The meantime gives me time enough to at last be able to settle with him. I have been so unendurably angry ever since the visit by the ghost and I learned how the king insidiously had murdered my father and prostituted my mother by high treason against the state. This fury can no longer be confined. No natural force can be withheld forever, and my wrath, no matter how mad it is, is only natural. I only regret that I have made the noble Laertes my enemy. That was never my intention, and Ophelia's death consumes my heart with a pain that no justice can cure.

*Horatio* Someone is coming.

*Hamlet* It's Osric, another court jester who tries to be a courtier.

*Osric* Your princely highness is most cordially greeted back to Denmark by the entire court.

*Hamlet* Don't put on affected manners, my friend. Your duplicity is grotesquely screaming in falsely garish colours.

*Osric* It pleases my prince to joke.

*Hamlet* I am not joking at all, but you are impossible to take seriously.

*Osric* I am here to execute a mission by order of his majesty the king.

*Hamlet* And what might his majesty the king want a madman like me?

*Osric* Ha-ha-ha! You are joking again!

*Hamlet* Not at all. I was sent to England to be cured of my madness, although it was the king who wanted to get rid of his. Unfortunately he hasn't, because I came back. The king is now painfully aware that his madness is back to torture him again. What will he do about it?

*Osric* Joking aside, the king has waged a bet for you against Laertes.

*Hamlet* So, he is now also a gambler?

*Osric* He has arranged a fake duel between you two, well aware of your disagreement. He thought he would give you the opportunity to settle the matter in a friendly way.

*Hamlet* How? With a sword?

*Osric* Exactly.

*Hamlet* I am well trained. Does Laertes know?

*Osric* That's just the thing. Also Laertes is well trained, and he is challenging you.

*Hamlet (to Horatio)* It sounds reasonable, like an honest duel between friends to lay all quarrels aside. And the king has waged on me?

*Osric* Exactly. The first one to make three hits is the winner, and that concludes the duel.

*Hamlet* Fair enough, isn't it, Horatio? Here I get the chance to make it up with Laertes by a friendly settlement, and I have no higher wish. Time and place?

*Osric* Here and now.

*Hamlet* Suits me fine. This hall is like made for it. Tell them that I am ready at any moment.

*Osric* Then they will all come. (*bows deep and vanishes*)

*Hamlet* For once something good from the king. Apparently he also wants to make it up to Laertes. What does this mean? Will he make atonement and repent and make it up to me as well?

*Horatio* I wouldn't trust him.

*Hamlet* Still I can trace no harm or covert intent in the suggested wage and duel. Here they are now already.

(*Flourish. Enter the court with the king and queen leading, followed by Laertes, Osric and other courtiers and guards.*)

*Fingal (solemnly)* My dear son Hamlet, to celebrate your homecoming we want nothing more than your friendship with us all. Only one has born a grudge against you, and therefore we have arranged this friendship duel to have you reconciled.

*Hamlet* That's all right with me.

*Gertrude* My son, I am the one who insisted on your reconciliation with Laertes. I have managed to convince him of your innocence in Ofelia's tragic fate, and he is also prepared to forgive you the death of Polonius as the accident it really was, if he only once may fight with you.

*Hamlet* He is welcome, and I welcome his reconciliation initiative and yours.

*Gertrude* So shall we all again be a happy harmonious family in peace and unity without any hard feelings.

*Hamlet* I will gladly welcome Laertes in the family, as I loved Ofelia.

*Fingal* Let me make the link binding you together as brothers once again in ineffaceable harmony. (*joins Hamlet's and Laertes' hands*) This is my highest ambition – all quarrels forgotten and deleted, replaced by eternal friendship.

*Hamlet* Laertes, I sincerely apologise to you for everything that has happened. God knows that I was entirely without blame and intention in everything that struck you and your own. I loved Ofelia, and I respected your father, if though like everyone else I could laugh at him at times. I ask your forgiveness. My mother knows, that I didn't know what I was doing when it happened.

*Laertes* Hamlet, I accept your apology and your request of forgiveness and confirm it by this handshake. But first we have to settle in good sport between men to achieve the exoneration that must needs take place.

*Hamlet* My friend, I fully accept your conditions in the hope of afterwards being able to embrace you like a brother.

*Laertes* First the formalities, the work and the battle. Then a new life may begin.

*Fingal* Let them choose swords! Let the duel begin! We all want this over with.

*Hamlet* Are they all of the same length?

*Osric* Exactly, my lord Hamlet.

*Hamlet* Then I am satisfied. (*takes a sword*)

*Fingal (rising solemnly)* Bring in the wine! (*It is brought in.*) To add to the solemnity of the occasion and celebrate your happy return, my son, we shall have wine ready at

your disposal at the first hit you make, and to honour that we shall also fire the cannons in salute!

*Hamlet* You make too much show of it, uncle. This is not the theatre. Don't exaggerate.

*Fingal* And to honour you even more, I here add a pearl in your cup, which will be yours with the wine, if you get the first or second hit.

*Hamlet* Affectation, vanity and idle manners. Come, Laertes, let's get it done with!

*Laertes* En garde! (*They fight.*)

*Gertrude* You never wasted pearls in your wine before.

*Fingal* It has to be a first time sometime.

*Gertrude* What is your game?

*Fingal* It's only a play. Let them enjoy their sport, and all will be well.

*Gertrude* I fear some stealthy scheme.

*Fingal* Why? Don't be suspicious.

*Gertrude* No one is more suspicious than you, but for the first time you aren't that at all.

*Fingal* And that makes you suspicious?

*Gertrude* Indeed.

*Fingal* Take it easy, and enjoy the performance. Hamlet is better than I thought.

*Osric* A hit, a very palpable hit!

*Fingal* Hamlet got the first hit!

*Laertes* He is very apt.

*Hamlet* So are you. We are as good as equals.

*Fingal* Have some wine, Hamlet, served for your honour.

*Hamlet* Not now. Come on, my brother of destiny! (*They fight.*)

*Gertrude* I am thirsty. (*takes Hamlet's cup and drinks*)

*Fingal (to his horror, gets no time to interfere)* Don't drink, Gertrude!

*Gertrude* Why not? I already had it. Drink you too, if you dare. (*offers him the cup*)

*Osric* Another hit!

*Laertes* I am hit. You have great skill, Hamlet. I admit it.

*Hamlet* Another hit, and we are brothers, I hope.

*Gertrude* My son, come and let me wipe the sweat off your brow.

*Hamlet* Are you well, mother?

*Gertrude* I was just a little thirsty. Collect your breath. You are not used to fighting.

*Hamlet* I am trained but only for sport. Fortunately this is also only for sport. I don't take it very seriously.

*Fingal (to Laertes)* Can't you get at him?

*Laertes* He is too clever.

*Fingal* We can't let him live. Could you let him get away with your memory of your father's death?

*Laertes* You taunt me, my king. This is turning more and more against my heart and conscience, though. It was fair play so far.

Fingal            Nothing in politics is fair play. You must carry on your case.

Laertes           You are urging me on.

Fingal            He must not get away! Think of your father's murder and Ofelia!

Laertes        So let's throw the dice. (*wounds Hamlet from behind*) We are not finished yet!

Hamlet (*surprised, when he finds himself wounded*) What is this? Cheating? A sword without a ball? Laertes? No fair play any more, but bloody serious? Is that what you want? Very well! You force me! (*attacks him furiously. Suddenly it's serious indeed.*)

Fingal            Force them apart! They have lost control!  
(*Hamlet unhands Laertes of his sword, picks it up, examines it, finds it without protective ball, throws his own sword to Laertes after first having removed the ball*) Now we are equals again! (*attacks him anew*)

Gertrude        Hamlet!

Hamlet (*fighting*) What is it?

Fingal            She is not well.

Hamlet           Mind the queen!

Gertrude        Hamlet! I am poisoned! The pearl in your wine! It was poisoned!

Hamlet (*wounds Laertes severely, breaks off the fight*) The third hit. Now we are settled. How fares the queen?

Fingal            It's nothing. She is just slightly drunk.

Gertrude        Not at all. My husband, you have gone too far, tried to poison Hamlet but instead killed me.

Laertes           What have I done!

Hamlet           Laertes!

Laertes           It's my fault, Hamlet! I was duped by the villain your uncle! You are also dead, for the point of the sword that pricked you was poisoned!

Hamlet           Villainy! High treason! Royal murderer! Have you murdered the queen by mistake and also murdered both me and Laertes?

Laertes           It's my fault! I should never have agreed to his infernal intrigues!

Fingal            Hamlet, we can still make it up. All I wanted was peace and order...

Hamlet           Liar and murderer! Let's finally have an end to your universal corruption! (*rushes up to Fingal and pierces him*) Take care of the Queen, for God's sake!

Gertrude        It's too late. I die for you, my beloved son. Live on. Try! You might make it... (*passes out*)

Horatio           She is dead, and the king also.

Laertes           I die, my noble prince and brother, but I can't die before you give me your forgiveness, and I fear that you are dead also.

Hamlet           Yes, I feel it. I am lost. Shall the king then win and drag everyone with him into his grave of rotten criminality!

Laertes           It's too late now to do something about it. (*dies*)

Hamlet           Thus have I arrived too late to the critical moment of truth. I was too dull. This is unforgivable. Horatio, this is terrible. We failed in everything.

*Horatio* Live, my prince, fight and resist, perhaps you might survive the effect of the poison.

*Hamlet* No, I am lost. The poison has reached my soul. The king's corruption has won. He has taken all of us with him for his ride. The sentence came too late to avert the crime.

*(flourish and drums outside)*

Who is coming now? Could it be Fortinbras on his way back to Norway?

*Osric (from a higher point)* Yes, it's the Norwegian prince with a part of his army.

*Hamlet* Then he is too late as well. I die, Horatio. There is nothing doing. The power of destiny was ahead of us all the way. We just followed and reached too late when everything was over and it had won. We can only resign to the facts. Tell Fortinbras everything. Thus we'll end at least as something of a good story.

*Horatio* No, my prince, you have to live! You must not die now in the moment of victory!

*Hamlet* Alas, my friend, what happened has happened, and we may not appeal. Methinks though that we in spite of all did what we could and as well as we could. It's the irony of life that outwitted us, we must submit to it and accept death. Better luck in next life, if we ever get such a chance. Farewell, my friend. From now on I must remain silent. *(dies)*

*Horatio* Thus broke a noble heart in the very moment that should have been his triumph. Alas, how can life be so outrageously unfair?

*Fortinbras (marches in with some following)* What is this? Dead bodies everywhere? This is worse than a battlefield. Have you had domestic massacres on your program?

*Horatio* Alas, prince Fortinbras, you come too late. Everything is over, and only death is left.

*Fortinbras* You must give some account of this absurd situation.

*Horatio* It's a long story of an extensive corruption, which now finally though has reached an end.

*Fortinbras* I was hoping to be able to pay homage to Hamlet as my brother and king. I never wished to see him dead. I did warn him in good time though.

*Horatio* You arrived just in time for his funeral.

*Fortinbras* The more dignified we must make it then.

*Horatio* Let's first bury all the dead. Then we shall carefully examine everything, for there is still much left to sort out in this mess.

*Fortinbras* I should think so. I will remain here to help you sort it out. Bring in the guards! Clear away the bodies! There will be an extensive state funeral here, since here a corrupt state seems to have corrupted itself to death with many innocent casualties.

*Horatio* Too many, but the hardest thing will be to survive them, and the most difficult to live on.

*Fortinbras* There will always be some left. My friend, support yourself on my arm. We shall bury them and mourn, but together.

*Horatio*      Thank you, my friend.

*(Fortinbras helps Horatio out. The bodies are carried out before them in procession,  
and that is the end of the play.)*

*The End.*

*(Gothenburg 22.2-12.3.2011,  
translated 4-13.7.2020)*