

408 HAMLET [ACT V

King. Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand from me.
[*Puts Laertes's hand into Hamlet's.*]
Ham. Give me your pardon, sir. I have done you wrong;
But pardon't as you are a gentleman.
This presence knows, and you must needs have heard,
How I am punish'd with a sore distraction. 225
What I have done
That might your nature, honour, and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet.
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away, 230
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it then? His madness. If't be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong'd;
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy. 235
Sir, in this audience,
Let my disclaiming from a purpos'd evil
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts
That I have shot my arrow o'er the house
And hurt my brother.
Laer. I am satisfied in nature, 240

221 S.D.] *Johnson subst., after Hanmer.* 222. I have] *Q2*; I've *F.*
223-6.] *As Rowe*; lines ending knowes, / punnisht / done *Q2*; ending Gentleman. /
knowes, / punisht / done *F.* 225. a] *Q2*; not in *F.* 236.] *F*; not in *Q2*.
239. my] *Q2*; mine *F, Q1.* 240. brother] *Q2, Q1*; Mother *F.*

222-48.] LN.
224. *presence*] august and royal assembly.
225. *distraction*] Cf. *distracted*, III.i.5.
227. *nature*] natural feeling, filial regard. Cf. I.v.81, III.ii.384 and nn. Hamlet recognizes for Laertes promptings similar to his own.
exception] disapproval, sense of grievance (cf. 'take exception to'). Cf. *All's W.* I.ii.38-40, 'his honour . . . knew . . . when Exception bid him speak'.
230. *If Hamlet . . . ta'en away*] Cf. 'Ophelia divided from herself and her fair judgment' (IV.v.84-5).
236. *Sir, in this audience,*] Cairncross

(SQ, IX, 587-8) supposes this part-line misplaced and would transfer it to l. 224, reading 'This presence knows, sir, and this audience'.
239. *shot my arrow*] The figure of the arrow that, once released, may go farther than one meant is common. Cf. Nashe (i.355), 'As an arrow is shot out of a bow . . . with such force, that it flieth far beyond the mark wherecat it was aimed'.
240. *my brother*] Cf. l. 249, 'this brothers' wager'. The ambivalence in Hamlet's relation with Laertes, who is both his foe and his second self, is fundamental to our understanding of the play.

SC. II] HAMLET 409

Whose motive in this case should stir me most
To my revenge; but in my terms of honour
I stand aloof, and will no reconcilment
Till by some elder masters of known honour
I have a voice and precedent of peace 245
To keep my name ungor'd. But till that time
I do receive your offer'd love like love
And will not wrong it.
Ham. I embrace it freely,
And will this brothers' wager frankly play.—
Give us the foils. 250
Laer. Come, one for me.
Ham. I'll be your foil, Laertes. In mine ignorance
Your skill shall like a star i'th' darkest night
Stick fiery off indeed.
Laer. You mock me, sir.
Ham. No, by this hand. 255
King. Give them the foils, young Osric. Cousin Hamlet,
You know the wager?
Ham. Very well, my lord.
Your Grace has laid the odds o'th' weaker side.
King. I do not fear it. I have seen you both,

245. precedent] president *Q2, F*, precedent *Johnson.* 246. keep] *F*; not in *Q2*.
ungor'd] *Q2*; vngorg'd *F.* till] *F*; all *Q2.* 248-9. I . . . play.] *As F*;
one line *Q2.* 248. I] *Q2*; I do *F.* 250. foils.] *Q2*; Foyles: Come on. *F.*
256-7.] *As Q2*; divided *Osricke*, / Cousen *F.* 258. has] *Q2*; hath *F, Q1.*

245. *voice and precedent*] 'authoritative pronouncement, justified by precedent' (Dowden).
246. *ungor'd*] unwounded (rather than 'unstained'), from the verb to *gor*, pierce. Cf. Hamlet's fear of 'a wounded name' (l. 349); and *Troil.* III.iii.228, 'My fame is shrewdly gor'd'.
252. *foil*] background against which a jewel shows more brightly.
254. *Stick . . . off*] stand out conspicuously. Cf. *Cor.* v.iii.73, 'stick . . . Like a great sea-mark'.
256. *Osric*] Dover Wilson's assumption that Osric is an accomplice in the plot is unsupported by text or plausibility; and it is not a play in which the guilty go unpunished. (Yet, transformed into Phantasma, he has become an accomplice in *BB.*)
258. *laid the odds o'*] backed. Commentators, assuming *odds* to imply inequality, have supposed it to refer either (as in l. 260) to the advantage of hits given to Hamlet (which makes nonsense of the King's reply) or to the unequal stakes. But that *lay odds* need mean no more than 'make a bet' appears from *2H4* v.v.106-8, 'I will lay odds that . . . We bear our civil swords . . . As far as France'. Cf. *Q1*, l. 164, 'on your side the King hath laide'.

But since he is better'd, we have therefore odds. 260
Laer. This is too heavy. Let me see another.
Ham. This likes me well. These foils have all a length?
Osr. Ay, my good lord. *They prepare to play.*

[*Enter Servants with*] *flagons of wine.*

King. Set me the stoups of wine upon that table.
 If Hamlet give the first or second hit, 265
 Or quit in answer of the third exchange,
 Let all the battlements their ordnance fire:
 The King shall drink to Hamlet's better breath,
 And in the cup an union shall he throw
 Richer than that which four successive kings 270
 In Denmark's crown have worn—give me the cups—
 And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,
 The trumpet to the cannoneer without,

260. better'd] *F*; better *Q2*. 263 *S.D.* *They prepare to play.*] *F* subst. (after 262; not in *Q2*. Enter . . . wine.] *Wilson* subst. (cf. 220 *S.D.* *flagons of Wine F*). 269. union] *F*; *Vnice Q2 uncorr.*; *Onixe Q2 corr.* 271. worn—give . . . cups—] *This edn*; *worne: giue . . . cups, Q2*; *worne.* | *Giue . . . Cups, F*. 272. trumpet] *Q2*; *Trumpets F*.

260. *better'd*] pronounced (by public opinion) to be the better. The meaning, though it has escaped the dictionaries, is plain, and the inept traditional explanation that Laertes has improved (through his stay in Paris) must be firmly contradicted. The comparison is not between Laertes as he is and was but between Laertes and Hamlet.

odds] Referring to Hamlet's advantage of three hits (l. 164). Cf. l. 207.

266. *quit in answer . . . exchange*] draw level in the third bout (presuming Laertes to have scored in one of the first two). Less satisfactorily (though perhaps more strictly interpreting *in answer of*), equalize in a later bout a score made by Laertes in the third. A mere draw in the third bout, which is what Dover Wilson understands, would not be matter for celebration. The idea that a third hit by Hamlet would finish off the match

belongs to the critic's imagination (see Sprinchorn in LN on ll. 162–4).

268. *better breath*] enhanced vigour.

269. *an union*] a pearl (cf. l. 284). Apparently so called from the uniqueness of each one. The term is normally reserved for pearls of finest quality – such as might be in a royal crown (l. 271). LN.

271. *give me the cups*] An order in parenthesis (as the usual punctuation does not make clear) for the cups to be placed by him in readiness. Cf. next note.

272–5. *let the kettle . . . to Hamlet*] Cf. l. ii. 125–8, l. iv. 8–12. This resumes and expands l. 267. Notwithstanding 'give me the cups', the King does not drink yet but announces how he will celebrate *if* (as in ll. 265–6), and as he accordingly does at ll. 284–5. *Q2's S.D.* opp. ll. 275–6 calling for trumpets now may be a book-keeper's misunderstanding.

The cannons to the heavens, the heaven to earth,
 'Now the King drinks to Hamlet.' Come, begin. 275
 And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.
Ham. Come on, sir.
Laer. Come, my lord. *They play.*
Ham. One.
Laer. No. 280
Ham. Judgment.
Osr. A hit, a very palpable hit.
Laer. Well, again.
King. Stay, give me drink. Hamlet this pearl is thine.
 Here's to thy health. *Drums; trumpets; and shot goes off.*
 Give him the cup. 285
Ham. I'll play this bout first. Set it by awhile.
 Come. *They play again.*
 Another hit. What say you?

274. heaven] *Q2, F*; heavens *Q3*. 275. begin.] *F*; beginne. *Trumpets | the while. Q2*. 278. Come, my lord] *Q2*; Come on sir *F*. 278 *S.D.*] *F, Q1* (after 280); not in *Q2*. 285 *S.D.*] *Trumpets sound, and shot goes off. F* (after cup); opp. 282–3 *Drum, trumpets and shot.* | *Florish, a peece goes off. Q2*. 286. it] *Q2, Q1*; not in *F*. 287–8. Come. *They play again.* Another] come againe. *They play againe.* Another. *Q1*; Come. [*play.*] Another *Capell*; Come, another *Q2*; Come: Another *F*; *They play.* Come—another *Pope*.

274. *heaven*] Possibly an error. Later *Q1* and some eds. regularize to *heavens*, but 17th-century usage permits either and the singular occurs in the corresponding i. ii. 127.

284. *give me drink*] to celebrate Hamlet's 'hit'. Cf. ll. 265–8.

this pearl] It is generally supposed (notwithstanding iv. vii. 158–61) that the 'pearl' is the poison, as seems indeed to follow from l. 331, and this may be its *raison d'être*. Cf. *Antonio's Rev.* i. i. 68–9. In *BB* the King's proposal is to put a powdered diamond into the wine. But the matter is not without difficulty. The reasonable inference from the dialogue both here and at ll. 268–9 is that the King drops the union into the cup from which he then drinks himself. A 19th-century

tradition made Claudius 'pretend to drink' and then offer the same cup to Hamlet (*Sprague, Sh. and the Actors*, p. 179). W. J. Lawrence, however, maintained that as the King prepares to drink from one cup, he puts the poison in another (*Lond. Mercury*, xxxvii, 526–31). Spencer supposes that he drinks before the 'pearl' has time to dissolve. Dover Wilson concludes that how the poison got into the cup 'we are not told' (*WHH*, p. 283).

285 *S.D.* *Drums . . . goes off.*] In obedience to ll. 265–7, 272–5.

288. *Another hit*] There is no need for the second hit to be celebrated like the first, and the opportunity afforded by 'the first or second' (l. 265) has been taken already.

Laer. I do confess't.
King. Our son shall win.
Queen. He's fat and scant of breath. 290
 Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows.
 The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.
Ham. Good madam.
King. Gertrude, do not drink.
Queen. I will, my lord, I pray you pardon me. 295
She drinks [and offers the cup to Hamlet].
King. [*aside*] It is the poison'd cup. It is too late.
Ham. I dare not drink yet, madam—by and by.
Queen. Come, let me wipe thy face.
Laer. My lord, I'll hit him now.
King. I do not think't.
Laer. [*aside*] And yet it is almost against my conscience. 300
Ham. Come for the third, Laertes. You do but dally.
 I pray you pass with your best violence.
 I am afeard you make a wanton of me.
Laer. Say you so? Come on. *They play.*
Osr. Nothing neither way. 305
Laer. Have at you now. [*Laertes wounds Hamlet; then, in scuffling, they change rapiers.*]
King. Part them; they are incensed.
Ham. Nay, come again. [*He wounds Laertes.*] *The Queen falls.*

289.] *Q2*; A touch, a touch, I do confesse. *F*; I, I grant, a tuch, a tuch. *Q1*.
 291. Here, Hamlet, take my] *Q2* (*subst.*), *Q1* (*subst.*); Heere's a *F*.
 295 S.D.] *Wilson, after Capell; Shee drinks. Q1; not in Q2, F.* 296. *aside*] *Rowe*.
 300. *aside*] *Rowe.* it is] *Q2*; 'tis *F*. against] *Q2*; 'gainst *F*. 301. third,
 Laertes.] *Johnson*; third *Laertes, Q2*; third. *Laertes, F.* do] *Q2*; not in *F*.
 303. afeard] *F*; sure *Q2*. 304 S.D.] *Play F*; not in *Q2*. 306 S.D.] *Sisson*;
Laertes . . . rapiers, and Hamlet wounds Laertes. Rowe; In scuffling they change
Rapiers. F; They catch one anothers Rapiers, and both are wounded, Leartes falls downe,
the Queene falls downe and dies. Q1; not in Q2. 308. come again.] *Q2, F2*;
 come, againe. *F*; come! again! *Kittredge.* 308 S.D.] *Sisson (cf. 306 S.D.*
Rowe, Q1); Queen falls. Capell; not in Q2, F.

289. *I do confess't.*] *A touch, a touch*
 in *F* and *Q1*, though more felicitous
 than most such additions, may be
 actors' embroidery.
 290. *fat*] sweaty; alternatively, out
 of condition. *LN*.
 291. *napkin*] handkerchief.
 302. *pass*] thrust.

303. *make a wanton of*] toy with. *A*
wanton, a spoilt child.
 305. *Nothing neither way.*] *Commenta-*
tors conjecture a lock of weapons or
a simultaneous hit; but, no reason
being given for this adjudication, the
producer has a free hand.
 306 S.D. *they change rapiers*] *LN*.

Osr. Look to the Queen there, ho!
Hor. They bleed on both sides. How is it, my lord? 310
Osr. How is't, Laertes?
Laer. Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osrice.
 I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery.
Ham. How does the Queen?
King. She swoons to see them bleed.
Queen. No, no, the drink, the drink! O my dear Hamlet! 315
 The drink, the drink! I am poison'd. *Dies.*
Ham. O villainy! Ho! Let the door be lock'd.
 Treachery! Seek it out. [*Exit Osrice.*]
Laer. It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain.
 No medicine in the world can do thee good; 320
 In thee there is not half an hour's life.
 The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,
 Unbated and envenom'd. The foul practice
 Hath turn'd itself on me. Lo, here I lie,
 Never to rise again. Thy mother's poison'd. 325
 I can no more. The King—the King's to blame.
Ham. The point envenom'd too! Then, venom, to thy work.
Wounds the King.
All. Treason! treason!

310. is it] *Q2*; is't *F*. 312. own] *Q2*; not in *F*. 314. swoons] sounds
Q2, F, swounes *Q5*, swounds *F3*, swoons *Q* 1676. 315–16.] *As Q2*; 3 lines
 divided drinke. / Oh . . . drinke, / I *F*. 316 S.D.] *Rowe (cf. 306 S.D. Q1)*.
 317. Ho!] how *Q2*, hoe *Q3*; How? *F*. 318 S.D.] *This edn*; at 354 *Jennens*.
 319. Hamlet, thou] *F*; thou *Q2*. 321. hour's] *Q2*; heure of *F, Q1*.
 322. thy] *F, Q1, Q5*; my *Q2*. 327 S.D.] *Hurts the King / F*; not in *Q2*.

309. *ho!*] A call to stop the combat,
 as in Chaucer, *Knight's T.*, ll. 1706,
 2656.

312. *a woodcock . . . springe*] This
 combines two proverbs (Tilley *F* 626,
 S 788), so that the man who is caught
 in his own snare becomes the foolish
 bird who is easily caught.

318 S.D. *Exit Osrice.*] Necessary for
 the entry before l. 355, which most
 eds. delete. But if an editor is to help
 Shakespeare out, he should not re-
 move a clearly purposed entry but
 contrive an unobtrusive exit. Dover
 Wilson has it in the middle of l. 354,

immediately following the '*shot with-*
in', but it may occur more plausibly
 in the general commotion here.

323. *Unbated and envenom'd*] See iv.
 vii. 136–47.

practice] trickery, as at iv. vii. 66,
 137.

324. *here I lie*] Emphasizing *Nem-*
esis. Cf. Edmund in *Lr* v.iii. 174,
 'I am here'.

327. *venom, to thy work*] The hero
 finally achieves revenge with the same
 instrument, and the same venom,
 though not the same treachery, as he
 suffers it.

King. O yet defend me, friends. I am but hurt.
 Ham. Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damned Dane, 330
 Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?
 Follow my mother. *King dies.*
 Laer. He is justly serv'd.
 It is a poison temper'd by himself.
 Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.
 Mine and my father's death come not upon thee, 335
 Nor thine on me. *Dies.*
 Ham. Heaven make thee free of it. I follow thee.
 I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, adieu.
 You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
 That are but mutes or audience to this act, 340
 Had I but time—as this fell sergeant, Death,
 Is strict in his arrest—O, I could tell you—
 But let it be. Horatio, I am dead,
 Thou livest. Report me and my cause aright
 To the unsatisfied.
 Hor. Never believe it. 345

330. Here] *F*; Heare *Q2*. murd'rous] *F*; not in *Q2*. 331. off] *F*;
 of *Q2*. thy union] *F, Q1*; the Onix *Q2*. 332 S.D.] *F, Q1*; not in *Q2*.
 332-3. He . . . himself.] *As F*; one line *Q2*. 336 S.D.] *F, Q1*; not in *Q2*.
 344. livest] *Q2*; liu'st *F*. cause aright] *Q2*; causes right *F*.

331. *Drink off this potion.*] Objection has been made to Hamlet's forcing the liquor on the King. But death from the cup as well as the sword is necessary so that (1) treachery falls on the inventor's head - cf. ll. 313, 333, 390; (2) the King is punished for the Queen he has destroyed by being joined with her in death.

thy union] (1) the pearl of ll. 269, 284; (2) the King's marriage, of which the poisoned cup thus becomes the symbol. Cf. Bradley, p. 151.

333. *temper'd*] mixed, concocted. Cf. *Cym.* v. v. 250, 'to temper poisons'; *Rom.* iii. v. 97; *Ado* ii. ii. 19.

334-7. *Exchange forgiveness . . . follow thee.*] These important lines emphasize the distinction between Laertes and the King in their rela-

tion with Hamlet, too often overlooked by those who regard them as merely partners in crime. Note esp. *my father's death.* Cf. ll. 77-8, 222-49. *come*, subjunctive.

337. *free*] absolved.

338. *Wretched*] unhappy, pitiable. Cf. ii. ii. 168; iv. vii. 181.

340. *mutes*] lit. actors without speaking parts, hence non-participants.

341. *sergeant*] an officer of the courts whose duties included the making of arrests. Death as a 'fell arrest' occurs also in *Sonn.* LXXIV. The metaphor was traditional. LN.

342. *strict*] both just and incapable.

345. *unsatisfied*] inadequately informed. Cf. l. 384, 'yet unknowing'.

I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
 Here's yet some liquor left.

Ham. As th'art a man
 Give me the cup. Let go, by Heaven I'll ha't.
 O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
 Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me.
 If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart, 351
 Absent thee from felicity awhile,
 And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
 To tell my story. *A march afar off and shot within.*
 What warlike noise is this?

Enter OSRIC.

Osr. Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland,
 To the ambassadors of England gives 356
 This warlike volley.

Ham. O, I die, Horatio.
 The potent poison quite o'ercrows my spirit.
 I cannot live to hear the news from England,
 But I do prophesy th'election lights 360
 On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice.

346. antique] anticke *Q2*, Antike *F, Q1*, antique *Q5*. 347-8. As . . . ha't.] *As Q2*; divided Cup. / Let *F*. 348. ha't] *Q2* (hate); haue't *F*. 349. God] *Q2*; good *F*; fie *Q1* 350. shall I leave] *Q2*; shall liue *F*; wouldst thou leaue *Q1*; shall't leave *conj.* Nowotny; shall leave *conj.* Maxwell. 354 S.D.] Steevens; *A march a farre off. Q2*; *March asarre off, and shout within. F.* Enter Osric.] *Q2, F*; not in *Capell*; *Osric goes to the door and returns. Evans.* 356-7. To . . . volley.] *As Pope*; one line *Q2, F*. 356. the ambassadors] *Pope*; th'embassadors *Q2, F*.

346. *antique Roman*] i.e. one who prefers suicide to unworthy life. Cf. *Caes.* v. iii. 89; *Ant.* iv. xv. 87; *Mac.* v. viii. 1.

350. *shall I leave*] *Q2* is suspect because of the metre and the apparent error of *leaue* for *liue* at iii. iv. 160. But metrical redundancy would encourage corruption in *F*, and *leave* here has the support of *Q1*. The conjectures *shall't* (= shall it) *leave* and, still more, *shall* (= shall I) *leave* (*MLR*, li, 161-7; *LIV*, 395-6) regularize metre at the expense of syntax.

352. *felicity*] Cf. the dying words of Juliet in *Painter's Palace of Pleasure*

(ii. novel 25), 'death the end of sorrow, and beginning of felicity'. Cf. below, l. 383 n.

354. S.D. Enter Osric] See l. 318 S.D. n.

358. *o'ercrows*] triumphs over (like a victorious cock).

360. *th'election*] for the new king of Denmark. Cf. i. ii. 1 LN.

361. *He has my . . . voice.*] As Hamlet had had Claudius's voice, iii. ii. 332-3. The importance naturally attaching to a monarch's own view of his successor is reflected here, as in the concern for Elizabeth's deathbed nomination of James.