

Be All My Sins Remembered

Essays on Hamlet by Ray Eston Smith Jr
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*"To be or not to be" "so like the king **that** was and **is the question** of these wars"*
- Hamlet

"for look, where my abridgement comes."
- Hamlet

"We need more light to find your meaning out."
- Love's Labor Lost

"They will scarcely believe this without trial: offer them instances."
- Much Ado About Nothing



Come my friend, sit down a while, and let me
Assail your eyes with that which I have seen
On the printed page, on the living stage,
In sparkling pixels, on the giant screen,
And on sleepless nights, and in restless dreams.

Acknowledgements:

In memory of my father, Lt. Col. R Eston Smith

Bookstores, the continuing frontier.

Libraries, I only wish they were privatized so I would not have to acknowledge so great a debt to government.

Mrs. Black, my 10th-grade English teacher. When I first set foot in her classroom, I was expecting the usual stale rules of grammar and pretentious babble about Literature. Instead, she taught me how to think.

George Polya, author of "How to Solve It". It works.

Michael Malone and his novel, "Handling Sin", about a father's lively legacy to his son. In the darkest part of my life, before I had seen the light in Hamlet, his book gave me a ray of hope.

To Elle, with almost all the holy vows of heaven.

A Prologue to My Brain

What more can be said about Hamlet? After you read this book you will ask, "How could so many critics have missed so much?". Past critics have failed to find the answers in Hamlet because they have failed to ask the right questions. They have been blinded to the mysteries in Hamlet by that ever-prematurely rhetorical question, "What more can be said?" But there is a necessary question of the play yet to be considered: To be or not to be -- what? That is the question.

To live and to love living. That is the answer. In search of that answer, we constantly question the world. And the answer comes, more than from any other part of the world, from the minds of men (and womb-men). This book is an attempt to find part of the answer in one work conceived in the mind of one man -- in Hamlet by William Shakespeare.

Note: "womb-man" -> "woman" might be only "folk etymology" but it might have been believed by Shakespeare. I use it here mainly because there is a very significant "womb" motif in Shakespeare's Hamlet. (Please see [The Rebirth of Hamlet](#).) There was discussion of "womb-man" at least as far back as 1605, just a few years after Hamlet appeared.

Grammar and Gendes, Dennis E. Baron, 1986, page 32-33.

Again Verstegan (1605) is perhaps the earliest to offer a detailed analysis of *woman*, finding it a compound of *womb* and *man* that, perhaps because of its presumed transparency, is superior in structure to its Latin equivalent:

The name of *Mulier* hath no dependence is sound with the name of *Homo*, as our name of woman with man. It should in deed be written *womb-man* for so it is of antiquitie and rightly, the b. for easynesse and redynesse of sound beeing in the pronountiation left out: and how apt a

composed word this is, is plainly seen. And as *Homo* in Latin doth signifie both man and woman, so in our tounge the feminyne creature also hath as wee see, the name of man, but more aptly in that it is for due distinction composed with womb, shee being that kynde of man that is wombed, or hath the womb of conception, which the man of the male kynde hath not [193-94]

I am about to reveal to you a secret that has been hidden in plain sight for over four hundred years. Most of the clues are in the most performed, most written-about play in the English language. Other clues, though less obtrusive, can be found in any large library.

[Clues](#) such as:

1. The English Pope and his fertility well, and Henry VIII and his first queen.
2. A divorce decreed at Blackfriars.
3. An imaginary kick from an imaginary fetus when the Pole Star danced.
4. The day the canon disseminated "seminary".
5. A brass door-knocker shaped like a nose.
6. The mole under William Allen's right eye.
7. A 16th-century cannon called a "falcon" (but not Maltese).
8. A bunghole.
9. Domini canis will have his day.
10. Two provincial roses.
11. A Strange baker and his "daughter."
12. The steward that stole his master's daughter, and the baby born from the womb of earth.
13. The name of a forest or Shakespeare's kin, an anonymous play and a hamlet that destroyed itself, and two games of backgammon interrupted by murders.
14. Black Will and George Shakebag.
15. "When a man's verses cannot be understood...it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a small room."
16. "And for my means, I'll husband them so well, they shall go far with little."
17. A printer named Woodcock.

18. Christopher Marlowe's father's hometown, a messenger's mistress who did Yeoman's service, and a dagger in Christopher Marlowe's eye.

19. The twice-told tale of a St Valentine's Day murder.

20. Much ado about talking out at windows into men's souls.

21. A painfully inquisitive man named Topcliffe, a place called Marshallsea, and a chilling tale of two shoulder bones.

22. A loose cannon, eight crushed bodies, and a bride-to-be.

23. A cannon salute to "Henry VIII", Global warming, back to Blackfriars.

In "[Part 2 - Where Truth Is Hid](#)" I will use the foregoing clues to reveal what Hamlet tells us about Shakespeare, but first, in "[Part 1 - So Like the King](#)," I will investigate what Shakespeare told us about Hamlet. Finally, in "[Part 3 - Whither Wilt Thou Lead Me?](#)," in lieu of academic credentials, I offer my Hamletonion autobiography.

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Part 1 - So Like the King

"Who's there?" The rest of the play answers that initial question. Hamlet is the "glass of fashion" and most of the other characters reflect some aspect of Hamlet. But who is Hamlet? A son of his warrior father, but also one who "could be bounded in a nut shell and count myself a king of infinite space." Hamlet the soldier rants in golden couplets of warlike noise, while Hamlet the scholar unfolds himself through inaction and silence. But to be true to himself, Hamlet has to recognize that he is both soldier and scholar. He is the princely soldier who courageously returns to the fate awaiting him in his native soil (a graveyard). But he is also the gentle scholar who confesses the sins of his warlike nature.

There are a number of interlocking motifs in Hamlet which reveal much about Hamlet's character and the themes of the play. In the following essays, motifs, metaphors, puns, and wordplay are the keys to the themes of Hamlet.

How to Love Hamlet

Shakespeare's plays were meant to be viewed by an audience before being read. After seeing a play, you might be driven by curiosity to dig deeper by reading the play. Then after pondering the play on your own, your curiosity might lead you to seek out other opinions. But be very skeptical of those other opinions. The only true "authority" on Shakespeare is the author himself. An opinion about Shakespeare's meaning is worthless unless fully supported by quotes from Shakespeare.

"They will scarcely believe this without trial: offer them instances." - Much Ado About Nothing

For Hamlet, I recommend starting with Sir Kenneth Branagh's 4-hour uncut version.

Then read the play yourself.

Watch for connections between lines. There are word-play connections spanning the entire play. Lines in Act I, Scene 1 begin puns that are completed in Act V, Scene 5, and clarify the meaning of the whole play. "Knave" and "nave" sound alike. Is there a pun there? Where is "nave" used? What are the possible different definitions of "knave" and "nave"? Can you discover the "trick" to see the "fine revolution" spun throughout the play?

Is Hamlet a whiny indecisive wimp? Or is he a valiant soldier of the spirit fighting a desperate internal battle to defend the sovereignty of his soul? Is Hamlet a cold-hearted self-centered misogynist who deliberately hurts Ophelia? Or does he truly love her and does he do his best to defend her from the evil forces that are bringing him down? Does Hamlet really react to his father's murder by wanting to kill HIMSELF? Or would he rather see his father's murderer commit "self-slaughter," saving Hamlet the trouble of weeding the garden? Was Hamlet true to himself when he erased "all saws of books, all forms, all pressures past, that youth and observation copied there" from his own brain and there in the book and volume of his brain wrote his father's commandment (the voice of Denmark, loosed out of Hell to speak of horrors,

to breathe contagion, unfolding the secrets of his prison-house that he was forbid to tell to mortal ears)? Was Hamlet free to "carve for himself"? Was he from himself taken away? What's with the gravedigger hired on the day Hamlet was born, the same day that Hamlet's father killed Fortinbras' father to gain the land that is now "the question of these wars"? Was Hamlet's father a good king? A good king THAT was and IS THE QUESTION of these wars? Is Fortinbras the ideal prince, willing to send thousands to their graves for "his honor"? Or is Hamlet the better man, because he gave up "his honor" and his land to avert a war that would have doomed thousands of his countrymen?

Also please see [Questions of the Play](#)

After you've seen and read and thought about Hamlet, please read the following short essays that I wrote. My interpretations are radically different from the "authorities", but I thoroughly support every opinion with quotes from the play so I believe my interpretations are in accord with Shakespeare's intended meanings.

[The Rebirth of Hamlet](#)

[Hamlet in a Nutshell - Hamlet Is an Anti-War Play](#)

[The Honey of His Music Vows](#)

[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

[Was Hamlet Guilty of Murder?](#)

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The Last Act of Hamlet

(1) Hamlet was reborn.

(Extracts from [The Rebirth of Hamlet](#))

....

Hamlet, born to be a death-dealing king, hates his birthright. Thus, throughout the play he regresses back to the womb (the womb of earth - Ophelia's grave), where he is reborn as Hamlet the rational scholar.

....

His father, unable to part from his earthly kingdom, was [doomed to walk](#) the night in search of his "[extorted treasure in the womb of earth](#)."

There was another reference to *treasure* in the play: Ophelia's "[chaste treasure](#)." Ophelia, like Hamlet, was also untrue to herself by being excessively obedient to her father. [She let him tell her what to think](#). Her very name is an allusion to [excessive filial duty](#).

When Ophelia died, her grave was metaphorically the grave of filial duty - the final inevitable end to which obedience to their fathers brought Ophelia and Hamlet, to their [marriage-bed](#). When Hamlet jumped into Ophelia's grave he was finally giving his father's ghost what it had been seeking - Ophelia's *chaste treasure in the womb of earth*, the grave of filial duty.

Ophelia's *chaste treasure* was in her *lap*

HAMLET

I mean, my head upon your lap?

OPHELIA

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

Do you think I meant **country** matters?

Since she is a virgin, Ophelia's *lap* is *undiscover'd cuntry*. After she is laid in the *womb of earth* (her grave), her *chaste treasure* becomes *the undiscover'd country from whose bourn no traveller returns* ([3,1,87-88](#)). But Hamlet did return - he leaps into her *womb of earth*, then emerges re-**bourne**.

After Hamlet leaped into Ophelia's grave, when he's being choked by Laertes, he says, (5,1,264)

I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat; For, though I am not splenitive and rash, Yet have I have something in me dangerous, Which let thy wiseness fear:

That "*something in me*" was the last appearance of the Ghost, who had finally been delivered to the grave where he belonged, his *extorted treasure in the womb of earth*.

"Country matters" also means "cunt mater" because Hamlet metaphorically returns to his mother's womb to be reborn. Hamlet's mother Gertrude is there, channeling St Gertrude of

Nivelles, patron saint of mentally ill people (especially those with a rat phobia), travellers, pilgrims, recently dead people, and graves. (See [St Gertrude in the Garden](#).)

It is fitting for Hamlet's mother to be present at his rebirth, to **bear him** anew:

GERTRUDE ([5.1.279](#))

For love of God, forbear him.

GERTRUDE ([5.1.291](#))

*This is mere madness:
And thus awhile the fit will work on him;
Anon, as patient as the female dove,
When that her golden couplets are disclosed,
His **silence** will sit drooping.*

The hatching dove eggs symbolize Hamlet's metaphorical rebirth. The silence symbolizes Hamlet's liberation from the warlike *voice of Denmark*. Doves are a symbol for peace.

When Hamlet emerges from that *womb of earth* he is no longer ["from himself taken away."](#) He has been reborn as himself, the rational scholar from Wittenberg.

*"To **Be OR** Not to be. That is the **question**."*

*"Jesus **answered** and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man **be born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

John 3:3 KJV

(2) Hamlet averted a war, thereby saving the lives of thousands of his countrymen.

(Extracts from [Hamlet in a Nutshell - Hamlet Is an Anti-War Play](#))

....

[A gravedigger was hired on the very day that](#) Hamlet emerged from his mother's womb, which was the same day his father put old Fortinbras into the ["womb of earth"](#) (his grave), thus acquiring land ["that was and is the question of these wars"](#) and which was [Hamlet's inheritance, figuratively a graveyard](#), like the part of Poland [not big enough to cover the dead](#) from the [impending war over that same land](#).

BERNARDO ([1.1.121-124](#))

*... so like the king
that was and is the question of these wars.*

That is Hamlet's dilemma - whether **"to be or not to be,"** like the Ghost, **"so like the king that was and is the question of these wars."**

....

Then with his [dying words](#) Hamlet proved that he was not **"so like the king THAT was and IS THE QUESTION of these wars."** He passed his inheritance of blood-soaked dirt along with the

voice of Denmark to Fortinbras - without a war, thus saving the lives of thousands of his countrymen.

The arrogant and cowardly Prince Fortinbras, who had [sent thousands of commoners to their graves for his "honour."](#) is shocked that, at the Danish court, ["so many princes"](#) have died. In contrast, Hamlet has just **saved** the lives of thousands of commoners by refusing to be so like the "honourable" Fortinbras.

Even to this day, we are still so conditioned to bow to the divine rights of princes and presidents that Hamlet's concession to Fortinbras seems "dishonourable." But why should the [common people go to their graves by the thousands](#) for a [straw](#), for [a piece of ground not big enough to bury the dead](#), for the ["honour"](#) of pampered princes and pompous presidents?

Hamlet in a Nutshell - Hamlet Is an Anti-War Play

The title says it all: "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark." Because he is Prince of Denmark he is not free to ["carve for himself."](#) He is subject to the ["voice of Denmark"](#) - and that voice ["had been loosed out of hell to speak of horrors."](#)

Hamlet, like all the other major characters, is untrue to himself. When he is himself, he is like Horatio, a student from Wittenberg. But as he said, ["Horatio, or I do forget myself."](#) He does forget himself. He erases himself and his humanist education (["all saws of books, all forms, all pressures past, that youth and observation copied there"](#)) from his own brain and there in the book and volume of his brain he writes his father's commandment (the voice of Denmark, loosed out of Hell to speak of horrors, to [breathe contagion](#), [unfolding the secrets of his prison-house that he was forbid to tell to mortal ears](#)). [Hamlet is from himself taken away](#).

When he is not "from himself taken away," Hamlet is a rational humanist scholar from Wittenberg. But Hamlet erases that side of himself from the book and volume of his brain and replaces it with the commandment of his warlike father. Thereafter all of Hamlet's soliloquies are really debates between the warring sides of his divided soul. Hamlet is a valiant soldier of the spirit, fighting a desperate internal battle to defend the sovereignty of his soul.

In the "my thoughts be bloody" soliloquy: [\(4,4,38-68\)](#)

Hamlet the scholar says,

Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To fust in us unused.

But Prince Hamlet, the soldier-son of a warlike king scoffs at thinking too precisely and concludes:

[My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!](#)

[A gravedigger was hired on the very day that](#) Hamlet emerged from his mother's womb, which was the same day his father put old Fortinbras into the "[womb of earth](#)" (his grave), thus acquiring land "[that was and is the question of these wars](#)" and which was [Hamlet's inheritance, figuratively a graveyard](#), like the part of Poland [not big enough to cover the dead](#) from the [impending war over that same land](#).

BERNARDO ([1.1.121-124](#))

. . . . *so like the king*
that was and is the question of these wars.

That is Hamlet's dilemma - whether "**to be or not to be**," like the Ghost, "*so like the king that was and is the question of these wars*."

In the end, Hamlet won that battle for the sovereignty of his soul.
(Please see [The Rebirth of Hamlet](#).)

Then with his [dying words](#) Hamlet proved that he was not "*so like the king THAT was and IS THE QUESTION of these wars*." He passed his inheritance of blood-soaked dirt along with the *voice of Denmark* to Fortinbras - without a war, thus saving the lives of thousands of his countrymen.

The arrogant and cowardly Prince Fortinbras, who had [sent thousands of commoners to their graves for his "honour."](#) is shocked that, at the Danish court, "[so many princes](#)" have died. In contrast, Hamlet has just **saved** the lives of thousands of commoners by refusing to be so like the "honourable" Fortinbras.

Even to this day, we are still so conditioned to bow to the divine rights of princes and presidents that Hamlet's concession to Fortinbras seems "dishonourable." But why should the [common people go to their graves by the thousands](#) for a [straw](#), for [a piece of ground not big enough to bury the dead](#), for the "[honour](#)" of pampered princes and pompous presidents?

Aside from the whole play itself, I've found nothing that captures the spirit of Hamlet better than Tom Paxton's "When Princes Meet." You can buy it [here](#) for 99 cents. (I'm not getting a kickback from this link. I just want people to hear the song. If you can't afford the 99 cents, pirate it from YouTube.)

Also see [How to Love Hamlet](#)

[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

In Shakespeare's time the most popular theory of madness was that it was caused by demonic possession - Hamlet was possessed by his father's warlike spirit.

[Hamlet's Transformation](#)

[Old Men in the Book of his Brain](#)

[Remembrances in the Book of Their Brains](#)

[The Mole of Nature](#)

[An Honest Ghost?](#)

[Usurp Your Sovereignty of Reason](#)

[I Know a Hawk from a Handsaw - Hamlet and the Spanish Armada](#)

[Bell, Book, and Candle](#)

[Or I Do Forget Myself](#)

[Hamlet's Divided Soul](#)

Another popular belief was that lunacy was caused by the influence of the moon ("Luna"). Hamlet was compared to the moon and his father was compared the sun-god Hyperion. Hamlet's madness consisted of glowing with the bloody reflected sheen of his father instead of with his own true light.

[The Cause of Hamlet's Lunacy](#)

In more modern terms, Hamlet was undergoing an identity crisis. He was struggling to be true to himself despite the pressures to conform to his warlike father's royal traditions.

[Hamlet's Divided Soul](#)

Hamlet's insanity was real, but he was also faking it ("mad in craft"). He faked madness to hide his true madness, which consisted of being possessed by his father's spirit. If Claudius had suspected that he would have immediately murdered Hamlet (again).

[Mad in Craft](#)

To put Hamlet's madness in the context of the whole play, please see
[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[Summary of the Themes of Hamlet](#)

The main theme of Hamlet is "*To thine ownself be true.*"

[Hamlet's Tragic Flaw](#)

[To Thine Ownself Be True](#)

Hamlet and Ophelia are both untrue to themselves by being excessively obedient to their fathers. The play is about excessive filial duty - it's a filial drama (Ophelia drama).

[The Drama Filial](#)

[Chaste Treasure in the Womb of Earth](#)

[An Honest Ghost?](#)

[Old Men in the Book of his Brain](#)

[Remembrances in the Book of Their Brains](#)

[The Cause of Hamlet's Lunacy](#)

When Hamlet is true to himself, he's a rational scholar from Wittenberg. When Hamlet is "*from himself taken away*," he is Prince Hamlet, the soldier-son of a warlike king, who scoffs at reason as "*thinking too precisely*." Thus a sub-theme is "reason vs bloody royal tradition."

[Reason Motif](#)

[Thinking Makes It So](#)

[A Document in Madness](#)

[God-like Reason Unused Where Kings Lead, Folly Follows](#)

Hamlet's father, his uncle, old Fortinbras, and young Fortinbras all valued dirt over people (as in a graveyard). Thus a major theme is the sin of killing for land. Hamlet's dilemma is whether "*to be or not to be*," like the Ghost, "*so like the king that was and is the question of these wars*."

[Epitaph for a King](#)

[To Be Or Not To Be](#)

[Tis a Vice to Know Him](#)

[To Inherit the Earth](#)

[The Womb of Earth](#)

[When Your Clowns Speak](#)

[How If I Answer No?](#)

There is also a theme of purgatory and confession "*to be forestalled ere we come to fall*," to "*avoid what is to come*," "*lest more mischance on plots and errors, happen*."

[Confess Thyself](#)

[Leave It To Karma](#)

[The Majesty of Buried Denmark](#)

[The Rebirth of Hamlet](#)

[Hamlet in a Nutshell - Hamlet Is an Anti-War Play](#)

[Motifs in Hamlet](#)

[To Be Or Not To Be](#)

To be or not to be what? That is the question.

Hamlet is not agonizing over whether to live or die - he is agonizing over how to avoid damnation.

Hamlet feels bound by filial duty to try to kill King Claudius. To kill a king is a dangerous thing - he is likely to die in the attempt, but Hamlet does not fear death:

HAMLET ([1.4.70](#))

*Why, what should be the fear?
I do not set my life in a pin's fee;
And for my soul, what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself?*

However, he does fear damnation:

HAMLET ([2.2.609](#))

*The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me: >*

Trying to kill a king might be considered a suicide mission and suicide is a mortal sin.
Attempting to kill a king would be like taking "[arms against a sea of troubles](#)").

FIRST CLOWN ([5.1.15](#))

*. . . **If the man go this WATER,**
and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he, he
goes,--mark you that; but if the water come to him
and drown him, he drowns not himself: argal, **he**
that is not **guilty of his own death***

But suppose Hamlet succeeds in killing the king. Would that also be a sin? It would depend on his motives. Was he killing to defend the Danish people against a murderous tyrant?

HAMLET ([5.2.73](#))

*. . . is't not to be damn'd,
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?*

Or is "*this canker of our nature*" Hamlet's own **ambition**?

HAMLET ([3.1.73](#))

*To sleep: perchance to **dream**: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what **dreams** may come*

HAMLET ([2.2.268](#))

*O God, I could be bounded in a nut shell and count
myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I
have **bad dreams**.*

GUILDENSTERN

*Which **dreams indeed are ambition.***

If Hamlet kills Claudius out of ambition, he will inherit the same blood-soaked ground that doomed both his uncle and his father to damnation.

A gravedigger was hired on the very day that Hamlet emerged from his mother's womb, which was the same day his father put old Fortinbras into the *womb of earth* (his grave), thus acquiring land "**that was and is the question of these wars**" and which was Hamlet's inheritance, figuratively a graveyard, not big enough to cover the dead from the impending war over that same land.

BERNARDO ([1.1.121](#))

*I think it **be** no other but e'en so:
Well may it sort that this portentous figure
Comes armed through our watch; so like the king
that was and is the question of these wars.*

That was Hamlet's dilemma - whether "**to be or not to be**," like the Ghost, "*so like the king **that was and is the question** of these wars.*"

Also please see
[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[A Most Pitiful Ambition](#)

HAMLET ([3.2.39-46](#))

*. . . And let those that play
your clowns speak no more than is set down for them;
for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to
set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh
too; though, in the mean time, some necessary
question of the play be then to be considered:
that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition
in the fool that uses it.*

On the surface, "villanous" and "ambition" apply to the "*those that play your clowns.*" However, for the audience, Shakespeare intended a second meaning. The "**question of the play**" is "**villanous ambition.**"

(See [Fine Revolution](#) for the association between "villanous" and Hamlet's ambitious father.)

GHOST ([1.5.8](#))

Pity me not

The word "*ambition*" in this play always refers to the willingness to kill for land, valuing dirt over people - as in a graveyard.

CLAUDIUS(1,2,21) ([1.2.21](#))

*Colleagued with the **dream** of his advantage,*

HAMLET (2,2,268-271)

*O God, I could be bounded in a nut shell and count
myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I
have **bad dreams**.*

GUILDENSTERN

*Which **dreams** indeed **are ambition**,*

HAMLET

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Horatio thought it strange that the ghost had returned from his grave, but there is a much deeper meaning to "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy." As Guildenstern later says, "dreams indeed are ambition." After writing his father in the book of his brain, Hamlet is infected with those dreams of ambition. However Horatio represents Hamlet's rational side, before he forgot himself, before he was from himself taken away, before he was infected by his father's bloody royal ambition. In Horatio's philosophy, there are no dreams of ambition.

HAMLET

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come

Such was the very armour he had on
When he the ambitious Norway combated;

why wouldst thou be a
breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest;
but yet I could accuse me of such things that it
were better my mother had not borne me: I am very
proud, revengeful, ambitious,

some necessary
question of the play be then to be considered:
that's villanous, and shows a most pitiful ambition
in the fool that uses it.

Forgive me my foul murder'?
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?

Examples gross as earth exhort me:
Witness this army of such mass and charge
Led by a delicate and tender prince,

Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death and danger dare,
Even for an egg-shell.

Three Famous Quotations from Hamlet

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

To be, or not to be: that is the question:

But what do they really mean?

CLAUDIUS (1.2.127)

*No jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day,
But the great CANNON to the CLOUDS shall tell,
And the king's rouse the heavens all bruit again,
Re-speaking earthly thunder. Come away.*
[Exeunt all but Hamlet]

HAMLET

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His CANON 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!

On the surface:
Hamlet seems to be contemplating suicide.

Dig deeper:
Claudius (Cloud-ius) had just said that he would fire his *CANNON to the CLOUDS*.

Hamlet already suspected Claudius of murdering his father. Later when he heard it from the Ghost, he said, "*O my prophetic soul! My uncle!*". If you knew somebody had murdered your father, would you wish for your own death, or for the death of the murderer? If Claudius

dissolved into an actual cloud, when he fired his cannon to the clouds he would be committing self-slaughter.

Please see

[The Cloud, the Cannon, and in the Cup a Union](#)

HAMLET ([1.5.185](#))

*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are DREAMT of in your philosophy.*

On the surface:

Hamlet seems to be telling Horatio that the Ghost exists even though ghosts are not a part of Horatio's rational philosophy.

Dig deeper:

HAMLET ([2.2.268](#))

*O God, I could be bounded in a nut shell and count
myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I
have BAD DREAMS*

GUILDENSTERN

Which DREAMS indeed are AMBITION.

HAMLET ([5.2.88](#))

. . . Dost know this water-fly?

HORATIO

No, my good lord.

HAMLET

*THY STATE IS THE MORE GRACIOUS; for 'tis a vice to know him. He hath much land, and
fertile: let a beast be lord of beasts, and his crib shall stand at the king's mess: 'tis a chough;
but, as I say, SPACIOUS IN THE POSSESSION OF DIRT.*

With the combination of these lines, Shakespeare is telling us, with dramatic irony, that Horatio's state is "*the more gracious*" because he lacks ambition to acquire land. THAT'S the thing that is not DREAMT of in Horatio's philosophy - AMBITION.

HAMLET ([3.1.64](#))

*To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer*

*The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what DREAMS may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause:*

On the surface:
Hamlet is contemplating suicide.

Dig deeper:

Hamlet is contemplating the possibly suicidal mission of trying to kill a king. He is questioning his own motives. His [father](#) and his [uncle](#) were both damned to hell by their own ambition for land. If Hamlet kills Claudius out of AMBITION to acquire his land, then Hamlet will be damned by his DREAMS of AMBITON.

BERNARDO ([1.1.121](#))

*I think it be no other but e'en so:
Well may it sort that this portentous figure
Comes armed through our watch; so like the king
THAT was and IS THE QUESTION of these wars.*

"To be or not to be," like the Ghost, "so like the king THAT was and IS THE QUESTION of these wars" - THAT is Hamlet's dilemma.

Please see

[To Be Or Not To Be](#)
[Hamlet in a Nutshell - Hamlet Is an Anti-War Play](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

Hamlet's Divided Soul

Hamlet was metaphorically and psychologically (and perhaps literally) possessed by the warlike spirit of his dead father.

When he is not "[from himself taken away](#)," Hamlet is a rational humanist scholar from Wittenberg. But Hamlet erases that side of himself from the book and volume of his brain and replaces it with the commandment of his warlike father. Thereafter all of Hamlet's soliloquies are really debates between the warring sides of his divided soul. Hamlet is a valiant soldier of the spirit, fighting a desperate internal battle to defend the sovereignty of his soul.

So when listing Hamlet's character traits you need to distinguish between Hamlet the rational scholar and Prince Hamlet the soldier-son of a warlike king.

HAMLET [\(3.1.32\)](#)

*I am myself indifferent honest;
but yet I could accuse me of such things that it
were better my mother had not borne me: I am very
proud, revengeful, ambitious,*

Hamlet himself is only "*indifferent honest*" because he knows he was untrue to himself when he erased himself from his brain and wrote his father there. Hamlet, when he is not himself, when when he is possessed by his father's spirt, is "*proud, revengeful, ambitious.*"

HAMLET [\(5.1.265\)](#)

*For, though I am not splenitive and rash,
Yet have I something in me dangerous,
Which let thy wiseness fear*

HAMLET [\(5.2.224\)](#)

*. . . 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,
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.*

In the "*my thoughts be bloody*" soliloquy:

Hamlet the scholar says,

[\(4.4.38\)](#)

*Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To fust in us unused.*

But Prince Hamlet, the soldier-son of a warlike king scoffs at "thinking too precisely on the event" and concludes:

[\(4.4.68\)](#)

My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

[A gravedigger was hired on the very day that Hamlet emerged from his mother's womb](#), which was [the same day his father put old Fortinbras into the womb of earth](#) (his grave), thus acquiring land "[that was and is the question of these wars](#)" and which was [Hamlet's inheritance](#),

[figuratively a graveyard](#), which, [like the part of Poland conquered by Fortinbras, was not big enough to cover the dead](#) from [the impending war over that same land](#).

BERNARDO ([1.1.121](#))

*I think it be no other but e'en so:
Well may it sort that this portentous figure
Comes armed through our watch; so like the king
that was and is the question of these wars.*

That is Hamlet's dilemma - whether "[TO BE OR NOT TO BE](#)," like the Ghost, "[so like the king THAT was and IS THE QUESTION of these wars](#)."

For Prince Hamlet the soldier-son of a warlike king, please see
[God-like Reason Unused](#)

For Hamlet the rational scholar, please see
[Thinking Makes It So](#)
[The Election of His Soul](#)
[Or I Do Forget Myself](#)

Also see
[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

[Hamlet's Tragic Flaw](#)

The title says it all: "*The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*." Because he was *Prince of Denmark* he was not free to *carve for himself*. He was subject to the *voice of Denmark* - and that voice was *sent from Hell to speak of horrors*.

Hamlet, like all the other major characters, was untrue to himself. When he was himself, he was like Horatio, a student from Wittenberg. But as he said, "*Horatio, or I do forget myself*." He did forget himself. He erased himself and his humanist education (*all saws of books, all forms, all pressures past, that youth and observation copied there*) from his own brain and there *in the book and volume* of his brain he wrote his father's *commandment* (*the voice of Denmark, sent from Hell to speak of horrors, to breathe contagion, unfolding the secrets of his prison-house that he was forbid to tell to mortal ears*). Hamlet was *from himself* taken away.

[Thinking Makes It So](#)

Rosencrantz
We think not so, my lord.

Hamlet
*Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing
either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.*

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern interpret "*there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so*" to mean moral relativism ("there is no such thing as good or bad - it's all a matter of

subjective opinion"). However, Hamlet, although he's contemptuously aware of their moral relativism, means it in another sense: "Morality is the product of reason. You must think in order to determine what is good and what is bad."

Is Hamlet's fate to be good or to be bad? *That is the question*. When he is not "*from himself taken away*," Hamlet is a rational humanist scholar from Wittenberg. But Hamlet erases that side of himself from the book and volume of his brain and replaces it with the commandment of his warlike father. Thereafter all of Hamlet's soliloquies are really debates between the warring sides of his divided soul. Hamlet is a valiant soldier of the spirit, fighting a desperate internal battle to defend the sovereignty of his soul.

In the "*my thoughts be bloody*" soliloquy:

Hamlet the scholar says,
*Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To fust in us unused.*

But Prince Hamlet, the soldier-son of a warlike king scoffs at "*thinking too precisely on the event*" and concludes:
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

Please see [Reason Motif](#)

The Memory Be Green - Hamlet in Historical Context

Government censors tried to prevent plays from saying anything about current events or recent history. Playwrights took that as a challenge - they tried to sneak things past the censors.

The most sensitive topic of the day was the result of a royal divorce about 70 years earlier. King Henry VIII wanted to divorce his wife Catherine because although she'd given him a daughter, Mary, she could no longer have children, and Henry wanted a male heir. Henry asked the Pope to approve the divorce but the Pope refused (mainly because the Vatican was surrounded by the armies of Catherine's nephew, Charles V of Spain). So Henry divorced England from the Catholic Church, made himself the head of the Anglican Church and approved the divorce himself. Then he seized the extensive lands owned by English Catholic monasteries. Those monasteries had accumulated that land over the centuries when wealthy men bequeathed land to the Church in exchange for prayers to help them pass from Purgatory to Heaven. A few years before Henry's divorce, Martin Luther had caused a schism in the Church, founding Protestantism as an alternative to Catholicism, by criticizing the corruption of the Catholic Church. Martin Luther claimed that corruption was caused mainly by the Church practice of selling indulgences (free passes out of Purgatory). Those indulgences had allowed the Church to acquire vast amounts of land throughout Europe. That land now had become a tempting target for European Kings - if they converted to Protestantism they could justify seizing the Church-owned lands within their realms.

So Henry got his divorce and seized the monastery lands and sold them. Thereafter many middle-class Englishmen owned former monastery lands, and thus had a vested interest in keeping England Protestant. Henry's second wife Anne Boleyn gave him a daughter, Elizabeth. Then Henry chopped off Anne's head. Henry went through several more wives, decapitating some, divorcing others, and he finally got a son, Edward. When Henry died young Edward became King Edward VI. But Edward was sickly and died a few years later. He was succeeded by Queen Mary, the Catholic daughter of Catherine. Queen Mary married her cousin Phillip II of Spain (son of Charles V). Mary and Phillip tried to return England to Catholicism, but despite killing a lot of Protestants (hence her nickname, "Bloody Mary"), they were only partly successful, partly because of the resistance of all those middle-class Englishmen who were now owners of former monastery lands. When Mary died, Phillip returned to Spain and Anne Boleyn's daughter became Queen Elizabeth I of England and Catholicism was once again banned in England. English Catholics had to pay heavy fines. Any Catholic priest caught saying Mass was executed for treason. The brother of one of young Shakespeare's teachers was a Catholic missionary who was caught and executed. There is evidence that William Shakespeare's father was a secret Catholic.

In 1588, about 30 years after Mary died, Phillip II sent his Armada to attempt "to recover of us, by strong hand and terms compulsory, those foresaid lands" (like Fortinbras). Thanks to superior English seamanship and provident bad weather, the Armada was destroyed and England saved, but a dozen years later, when Hamlet steps on the stage, "the memory be green."

Purgatory was a major theme in Hamlet. The ghost of Hamlet's father was in Purgatory, doomed to walk the night trying to recover his "extorted treasure in the womb of earth." Thirty years before (just as there was a 30-year gap between the death of Mary and the launching of the Armada), Hamlet's father had killed Fortinbras' father to gain lands that were Hamlet's inheritance. On that same day, Hamlet was born and a gravedigger was hired. In the play, Hamlet looked into a grave and said, "The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box; and must the inheritor himself have no more, ha?"

The "necessary question of the play" was "To be or not to be. That is the question." But to be or not to be what? Perhaps the answer was given earlier in the play when Bernardo was describing the ghost of Hamlet's father: "so like the king that was and is the question of these wars." That was Hamlet's dilemma - whether **"to be or not to be"** . . . **"so like the king that was and is the question of these wars."**

That theme still resonates today as nation-states wage war over land, turning those lands into graveyards.

Also see

[Terms Compulsatory](#)
[How to Love Hamlet](#)

Terms Compulsatory

CLAUDIUS [\(1.2.17\)](#)

*. . . young Fortinbras,
Holding a weak supposal of our worth,
Or thinking by our late dear brother's death
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,
Collegued with the dream of his advantage,
He hath not fail'd to pester us with message,
Importing the surrender of those lands
Lost by his father, with all bonds of law,
To our most valiant brother.*

Thirty years earlier Hamlet's father (old King Hamlet) had slain old King Fortinbras in a fatal duel, winning (by the terms of the duel) a piece of ground to which young Hamlet fell heir. Young Fortinbras therefore must be at least 30 years old. But while old King Hamlet lived, young Fortinbras never dared to attempt vengeance against old King Hamlet nor to reclaim those *lands lost by his father, with all bonds of law*. But the cowardly young Fortinbras believes (probably correctly) that he has a better chance of reclaiming the land from Claudius. For one thing, Claudius won't challenge him to a personal duel. The two "brave" princes (Prince Fortinbras and King Claudius) can fight it out with no royal bloodshed - just a few thousand underlings.

But old King Hamlet also played an essential part in causing the impending war. If he had been less ambitious and "honourable" he would have turned down old Fortinbras' challenge ([*How if I answer 'no'?*](#)) and never would have obtained the land that is now *the question of these wars*.

HORATIO ([1.1.93](#))

*. . . Our last king,
Whose image even but now appear'd to us,
Was . . . by Fortinbras of Norway,
. . .
Dared to the combat; in which [old King] Hamlet--
. . .
Did slay this Fortinbras; who by a seal'd compact,
. . .
Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands
. . . which had return'd
To the inheritance of Fortinbras,
Had he been vanquisher; as, by the same covenant,
. . .
His fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,
. . .
Hath . . .
Shark'd up a list of lawless resolute,
. . . to recover of us, by strong hand
And terms compulsory, those foresaid lands
So by his father lost: and this . . .
Is the main motive of our preparations,*

*The source of this our watch and the chief head
Of this post-haste and romage in the land.*

BERNARDO

...

*Well may it sort that this portentous figure
Comes armed through our watch; so like the king
that was and is the question of these wars.*

Hamlet later alluded to *old Jephtha* .

HAMLET ([2.2.418](#))

Am I not i' the right, old Jephthah?

...

HAMLET ([2.2.426](#))

...

'It came to pass, as most like it was,

"As most like it was" sounds like "so like the king that was."

Hamlet later said ["The king is a thing,"](#) so substitute "it" for "*the king that*" and "*so like the king that was*" becomes "*so like it was*" which is synonymous with "*as most like it was.*" ("*The king is a thing*" also helps explain ["how the wheel becomes **it**,"](#) derived from ["the cease of majesty . . . **it** is a massy wheel."](#))

The story of *Jephtha*, in Judges 11, sounds *most like* the story of the king *that was and is the question of these wars*. The Ammonites were preparing for war against Israel to recover land Israel had taken from them, just as young Fortinbras was preparing for war *to recover of us, by strong hand and terms compulsatory, those foresaid lands so by his father lost* in the fatal duel with old King Hamlet.

Judges 11.12

... What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?

Judges 11.13

...Because Israel took away my land... now therefore restore those lands again

It is worth noting that Shakespeare took pains to let us know that there had been a 30-year interval between the time old Fortinbras died and the time young Fortinbras came to reclaim those lands *by strong hand and terms compulsatory*. There was also a 30-year interval between the time Queen Mary died and the time her widower, Prince Phillip of Spain, sent the Spanish Armada to attempt to reclaim England *by strong hand and terms compulsatory*.

Also see

[This Eternal Blazon Must Not Be
How to Love Hamlet](#)

How Old Is Hamlet?

HAMLET

. . . How long hast thou been a grave-maker?

First Clown

Of all the days i' the year, I came to't that day that our last king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

HAMLET

How long is that since?

First Clown

Cannot you tell that? every fool can tell that: it was the very day that young Hamlet was born. . .

First Clown

. . . I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years.

Hamlet was hired on the same day that his father killed old Fortinbras to win the piece of ground "**that was and is the question** of these wars." On that same day, a gravedigger was hired. The gravedigger was hired 30 years ago. Therefore, Hamlet is 30 years old.

Why did Shakespeare choose 30 years? I believe he first chose the interval from the death of old Fortinbras to the time young Fortinbras came to recover the lost land "*by strong hand and terms compulsatory*." He made that parallel the 30-year interval from 1558 (death of Queen Mary of England) to 1588 (the Spanish Armada). In 1588 (just a dozen years before Shakespeare wrote Hamlet) Phillip II of Spain, widower of Queen Mary, had launched the Spanish Armada to attempt to recover England for himself and for the Catholic Church "*by strong hand and terms compulsatory*."

Doomed to Walk the Night

Why was Hamlet's father doomed to walk the night?

The Ghost himself believed that all he wanted was for Hamlet to revenge his murder. However, the Ghost admitted that he was

Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away.

What "foul crimes" had Hamlet's father committed since his last confession (presumably the Sunday before his death)? Bernardo and Horatio believed that the Ghost had been frightened away "like a guilty thing" by the crowing of the cock:

BERNARDO

It was about to speak, when the cock crew.

HORATIO

And then it started like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons...

However the Ghost did not flee immediately after the cock crew. It didn't flee until Horatio accused it of walking in death for its "extorted treasure in the womb of earth."

If thou hast any sound, or use of voice,
Speak to me:
If there be any good thing to be done,
That may to thee do ease and grace to me,
Speak to me:

Cock crows
If thou art privy to thy country's fate,
Which, happily, foreknowing may avoid, O, speak!
Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,
Speak of it: stay, and speak! Stop it, Marcellus.

That was the sin that was keeping Hamlet's father in Purgatory. Like the biblical rich man and his camel, Hamlet's father was doomed to walk the earth because he could not part with his earthly treasures.

Fine Revolution

HAMLET [\(5.1.88\)](#)

*Why, e'en so: and now my Lady Worm's; chapless, and knocked about the mazzard with a sexton's spade: here's **fine revolution**, an we had the trick to see't.*

Within its immediate context this is a rather shallow pun about the turning (**revolution**) of the [fine dirt](#) in a grave, which is also the **final revolution** of the wheel of fortune. But it becomes more exciting when we take it as a challenge to unearth the subtle motif of wheel puns spun throughout the play.

HAMLET [\(1.5.134\)](#)

*There's ne'er a **villain dwelling** in all Denmark
But he's an arrant **knave***

HORATIO

*There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave
To tell us this.*

HAMLET

*Why, right, **you are i th'right**,
And so without more **circumstance** at all
I hold it fit that we shake hands and part,
You as your business and desires shall point you.
For every man has business and desire,*

*Such as it is - and for mine own poor part,
Look you, I'll go pray.*

HORATIO

*These are but wild and **whirling** words, my lord.*

These are indeed "**whirling** words." Shakespeare often wrote of madness but he only used the word "**whirling**" one other time, and then it didn't refer to madness: "*To calm this tempest **whirling** in the court*" (Titus Andronicus, IV, 2). He used "**whirling**" here to alert us to the "*fine revolution*" of Hamlet's words.

In addition to the usual meaning of "bad guy," "**villain**" means a person of low birth, as in "*I am no **villain**; I am the youngest son of Sir Rowland de Boys.*" (As You Like It, I, 1) A **villain** would not live in a palace - he would typically dwell in a village or **hamlet**. Thus a "**villain dwelling**" is a **Hamlet**. (Ever wonder why Shakespeare never punned on Hamlet/hamlet? Here's the missing pun.) So Hamlet and his father (Hamlet Sr) were *knaves* or *naves*. One definition of "**nave**" is the **nave** of a church. This definition is implicitly used when Hamlet says "*and for mine own poor part, Look you, I'll go pray*" "**Nave**" can also be the **nave** (hub) of a wheel, as in the speech that Hamlet requested from the First Player:

[\(2.2.502\)](#)

*Out, out, thou strumpet fortune! All you gods,
In general synod, take away her power;
Brake all the spokes and fellies from her **wheel**,
And bowl the round **nave** down the hill of heaven,
As low as to the fiends.*

Kings are bound by fortune (fate, birth) to determine the fates of their subjects

ROSENCRANTZ [\(3.3.16\)](#)

*The cease of majesty
Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw
What's near it with it. It is a massy **wheel**,
Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,
To whose huge **spokes** ten thousand lesser things
Are mortic'd and adjoin'd; which when it falls,
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boist'rous ruin. Never alone
Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.*

BERNARDO [\(1.1.54\)](#)

*It would be **spoke** to.*

[The ghost wants more **spokes** on his **nave** as he rolls down to hell]

Putting all this together, we see Hamlet cryptically likening himself (as a prince and potential king) to the **nave** of a **wheel**. His friends are his **spokes**, which are perpendicular (*i' the right*) to the **nave**. Before his **wheel** of **fortune** (his fate) turns anymore (*without more circumstance*), he

wants to *break all the **spokes** from her **wheel*** so that they won't be carried *down the hill of heaven* with him. (In the original staging, it is likely that Hamlet spun around as he shook hands with Horatio and flung him outward.) He wants to sigh alone (in contrast to [Laertes, who brought along a mob when he confronted the king](#)). However, Hamlet is not only the *nave* of a *wheel*; he is also the *nave* of a church (where he'll *go pray*). He cannot escape death, but he will avoid damnation.

Also see

[How the Wheel Becomes It](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[How the Wheel Becomes It](#)

POLONIUS

Therefore, since **brevity** is the soul of **wit**, [\(2.2.96-98\)](#)

And **tediousness** the limbs and outward flourishes,

I will be **brief**

In this bit of dramatic irony, "**tediousness**" alludes to Polonius ("these **tedious** old fools" [2.2.235](#)). "**Wit**" alludes to Claudius ("wicked **wit** and gifts" [\(1.5.49\)](#)). Claudius had been compared to a "massy **wheel**" ([\(3.3.18\)](#)).

Polonius, with his meddling, had put himself where Hamlet expected to find a king (behind the arras) and thus metaphorically imitated the *nave* (center) of a *wheel*, and so Hamlet cut him short (made him be **brief**).

POLONIUS

...I went **round** to work, [\(2.2.147\)](#)

POLONIUS

If **circumstances** lead me, I will find [\(2.2.168\)](#)

Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed

Within the **centre**.

HAMLET

Thou wretched, rash, intruding **fool**, farewell! [\(3.4.37\)](#)

I took thee for thy better: take thy **fortune**

HAMLET

Mother, good night. Indeed this counsellor [\(3.4.231\)](#)

Is now most still, most secret and most grave,

Who was in life a **foolish prating knave**.

Proverbs 10:8

...a **prating fool** shall **fall**.

OPHELIA

You must sing 'A-**down**, adown', an you call him a-down-a.
O, **how the wheel becomes it!** ([4.5.188](#))

FIRST PLAYER

Out, out, thou **strumpet fortune!** All you gods, ([2.2.502-508](#))
In general synod, take away her power;
Brake all the **spokes** and fellies from her **wheel**,
And bowl the **round nave down** the hill of heaven,
As low as to the fiends. ...

POLONIUS

This is too long.

HAMLET

It shall to the barber's, with your **beard**.

OPHELIA

They bore him **barefaced** on the bier ([4.5.179](#))

(Rosencrantz and Guildenstern also lived "*in the **middle**...In the secret parts of **fortune**... she is a **strumpet** ([2.2.247-251](#))*), Thus, they met a similar fate to Polonius. Polonius was killed in place of the **nave** Claudius - Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were killed in place of the **nave** Hamlet.)

Also see

[Fine Revolution](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[The Mole of Nature](#)

HAMLET ([1.4.25](#))

*So, oft it chances in particular men,
That for some vicious **mole of nature** in them,
As, in their birth--wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin--
By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft **breaking down the pales and forts of reason***

HAMLET (speaking to his father's ghost) ([1.5.181](#))

*Well said, old **mole!** canst work i' the earth so fast?
A worthy **pioneer!**...*

A **pioneer** was a military engineer, whose duties included burrowing under **pales** (walls) **and forts** to plant explosives to break them down. (To this day in the United States Army, combat engineers fresh out of training are still designated as "**Pioneers**.")

HORATIO ([1.1.56](#))

*What art thou that **usurp'st** this time of night*

HORATIO

[\(1.4.79\)](#) *What if itdeprive your sovereignty of reason*

Hamlet's father was the *mole* of his *nature* (birth) who was *breaking down the pales and forts* of his *reason* to *usurp the sovereignty of his reason* - "[If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away](#)."

Also see

[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

An Honest Ghost?

HAMLET [\(1.5.150\)](#)

*... Touching this vision here,
It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you*

But is the Ghost really honest?

Horatio had previously remarked that the Ghost "[started like a guilty thing](#)" and he implied that it was an "[extravagant and erring spirit](#)." He warned that it "[might deprive your sovereignty of reason and draw you into madness](#)."

The Ghost himself admitted that he was "[forbid to tell the secrets of \[his\] prison-house](#)" and that if he did the tale would "[harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood](#)" and that "[this eternal blazon must not be to ears of flesh and blood](#)." Immediately after saying that, the Ghost said, "[List, list, O, list!](#)" Then he went ahead and told Hamlet that forbidden tale. Hamlet then erased himself and his humanist education ([all saws of books, all forms, all pressures past, that youth and observation copied there](#)) from his own brain and there in the *book and volume* of his brain he wrote his father's commandment ([the voice of Denmark, loosed out of Hell to speak of horrors, to breathe contagion, unfolding the secrets of his prison-house that he was forbid to tell to mortal ears](#)). Hamlet was from [himself taken away](#).

Hamlet wasn't quite aware of what had happened to him: "[I have of late--but wherefore I know not--lost all my mirth](#)." He was well aware that he had lost his father, but he did not yet know that he had lost himself.

Hamlet was suspicious of the Ghost:

[\(2.2.609\)](#)

*The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me.*

It turned out that Claudius really had murdered Hamlet's father and the spirit really was the Ghost of Hamlet's father. However, it did not follow that the spirit was not abusing him to damn

him.

As Bernardo had said, the Ghost was "*so like the king that was and is the question of these wars.*" That was Hamlet's dilemma - whether to be true to himself or to carry on the bloody traditions of his warlike father - whether "*to be or not to be*," like the Ghost, "*so like the king that was and is the question of these wars.*"

Also see

[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

[Hell Itself Breathes Out Contagion](#)

The ghost said to Hamlet:

But that I am forbid
to tell the secrets of my prison-house
***I could a tale unfold** whose lightest word*
***would harrow up thy soul,** freeze thy young blood,*
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine:
But this eternal blazon must not be
*To ears of flesh and blood. **list, list, o list!***

But then the ghost went ahead and told the tale anyway and it drove Hamlet mad.

OPHELIA

My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;
No hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd,
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ancle;
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
to speak of horrors.,--he comes before me.

But, in this scene, Hamlet was mute. Unlike his father, Hamlet refused to pass on the madness. He was ***loosed out of hell to speak of horrors***, but he would not speak them to Ophelia.

As Hamlet later said, "*hell itself breathes out contagion to this world*," but with his silence Hamlet tried to protect Ophelia from that breath of contagion.

[The Rest Is Silence](#)

LAERTES

...he...may give his saying deed...no further
Than the main **voice of Denmark** goes withal.

CLAUDIUS

Be as ourself in Denmark

HAMLET

O God, I could be bounded in a nut shell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not
that I have **bad dreams**.

Guildestern

Which **dreams** indeed are **ambition**

HAMLET

....To die, to sleep:
To sleep: perchance to **dream**: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what **dreams** may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause:

Hamlet is contemplating an attempt to kill the King - which would probably be suicidal. He is questioning his own motives for wanting to kill the King. Would he, like his warlike father and his devious uncle, be killing out of ambition to gain land? If so, his afterlife would be Hell.

Hamlet at heart is just a student who wants to return to Wittenberg. But he cannot breach the custom that unites a king (or his heir) with his kingdom. He cannot reform his old stock. His choice is not his own - he is subject to the voice of Denmark. Both his father and his uncle want him to be like them **in Denmark**. Hamlet's dilemma is whether to be or not to be "so like the king that was and is the question of these wars. He kills Claudius only after he knows that he himself is dying, so he can avoid inheriting the kingdom and being dragged into hell by his union with it, as Claudius was.

In the end he finally silences the **voice of Denmark** (or at least passes it over to Fortinbras - he has my dying voice) - going to his final rest, free from **dreams of ambition**. The rest is silence.

The Voice of Denmark

When Hamlet said **the rest is silence**, he meant that he was finally free from the **voice of Denmark**. When Hamlet was ranting in Ophelia's grave, Gertrude likened his insane ranting to **golden couplets** and predicted that his sanity/**silence** would soon return - which it did when he realized that he had from himself taken away (by the **voice of Denmark**, i.e. his vow to his father that his father's will should live all alone in his brain).

The play had begun with the question, "Who's there?" and the injunction to "**Unfold yourself**."

Hamlet, with his vow to his father had *enfolded* himself in his father's value-system, just as he *enfolded* the note *in the form of the other, the changling never known*. By the end of the play, he had finally *unfolded* himself.

Osric was a reflection or *shadow* of Hamlet. Hamlet said, "*to know a man well, were to know himself*," but he admitted to the *vice* of knowing Osric. Osric was *rich in the possession of dirt* - Hamlet was heir to a **graveyard**. The king wanted to place a wager on Hamlet's head - Hamlet wanted to place a hat on Osric's head. Ophelia sang of Hamlet with a cockle(shell) hat. Osric ran off with "the shell on his head." The old king ordered Hamlet to remember - Hamlet told Osric to remember. Osric's *purse* was *empty*, *all his golden words* were *spent*. Hamlet's *purse*, with his *father's signet*, was finally *empty* - he was ready for *silence*.

LAERTES ([1.3.28-30](#))

*...he...may give his saying deed...no further
Than the main **voice of Denmark** goes withal.*

HAMLET ([2.2.435](#))

*Pray God, your **voice**, like a piece of uncurrent **gold**, be not cracked within the ring.*

GERTRUDE ([5.1.291](#))

*This is mere madness,
And thus a while the fit will work on him,
Anon, as patient as the female dove,
When that her **golden** couplets are disclosed,
His **silence** will sit drooping.*

HAMLET ([5.2.53](#))

*I had my **father's signet** in my **purse**,
Which was the model of that Danish seal,
Folded the writ up **in form of the other**,
Subscribed it, gave't the impression, placed it safely,
The **changeling** never known.*

HORATIO ([5.2.134](#))

*His **purse** is **empty** already: all 's **golden** words are spent.*

HAMLET ([5.2.374](#))

*. . . **the rest is silence**.*

See

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[Tis a Vice to Know Him](#)

Hamlet.

Dost know this water-fly?

Horatio.

No, my good lord.

Hamlet

*Thy state is the more gracious; for 'tis a vice **to know him**. He hath much land, and fertile: let a beast be lord of beasts, and his crib shall stand at the king's mess: 'tis a chough; but, as I say, **spacious in the possession of dirt**.*

Hamlet.

...to know a man well, were to know himself.

Horatio does not know Osric, but Hamlet knows him all too well. Horatio represents Hamlet's true unambitious self. Osric represents the man that Hamlet was born to be, the man Hamlet has struggled not to be.

The old king ordered Hamlet to remember - Hamlet told Osric to remember.

Osric was a reflection or shadow of Hamlet. Osric was rich in the possession of dirt - Hamlet was heir to a graveyard.

Hamlet tells Osric to put his hat on his head because *'tis very cold; the **wind is northerly***. But Osric is reluctant to put his hat on his head. This is echoed by Hamlet's reluctance to let Claudius *put a great wager on his head*. But the wind is northerly (***I am but mad north-north-west***. The ghost appeared *when yond same star that's **westward from the pole** had made his course to illume that part of heaven where now it burns [Purgatory?]*), so Hamlet accepts the wager on his head as Osric runs off with the shell on his head. (Ophelia sang of Hamlet with a cockle(shell) hat).

Osric's purse was empty, all his golden words were spent. Hamlet's purse, with his father's signet, was finally empty - he was ready for silence.

I Know a Hawk from a Handsaw - Hamlet and the Spanish Armada

Hamlet ([2.2.387-388](#))

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

BERNARDO [describing the previous appearance of the ghost of Hamlet's father] ([1.1.44-47](#))

Last night of all,

*When yond same star that's **westward from the pole***

Had made his course to illume that part of heaven

Where now it burns,

The "*pole*" is the North Star. "*Westward from the pole*" would be "*north-northwest*." Thus "*I am but mad, north-northwest*" means that Hamlet is only mad when under the influence of his father's ghost.

"*Pole*" might also be an allusion to Reginald Pole, who, as Bloody Mary's Catholic Archbishop

of Canterbury, liked to call himself "the Pole Star" because he thought of himself as the guiding star about which the English people revolved. Please see [Shakespeare, Breakspear, and Broken Pole \(The Prophecy\)](#) (Note: I mark my speculations with green italics. The rest is accepted historical fact.) (Note: My green italics are temporarily disabled because the EVIL MICROSOFT WORD hijacked this webpage and destroyed my simple html code, including the green italics. Thanks a lot Bill Gate, you damn control freak.)

But Reginald Pole died of a broken heart when Queen Mary died and England reverted to Protestantism. Thirty years later, Queen Mary's widower, King Phillip of Spain sent the Duke of Medina Sidonia with the Spanish Armada to bring England back to the Catholic Church by *"strong hands and terms compulsory."* But like Hamlet, Medina was *but mad north-north-west: when the wind [was] southerly.*) he was sane. On August 8, Saint Dominic's Day, Medina decided that if the wind continued to blow from the south (which it did) he would have to abandon the attack on England. He was unable to recapture the faith of Englishmen by force. He did *"it wrong, being so majestic, to offer it the show of violence, for it is, as the air, invulnerable, and [his] vain blows malicious mockery."* St Dominic had advocated reasoning with heretics to bring them back to the Church by persuasion rather than burning them. The significance of St Dominic's Day was not lost on English Catholics.

From the context, *"I know the difference between a hawk and a handsaw"* clearly means "I am in my right mind." However, I don't know why Shakespeare used that phrase to denote sanity. It might be related to the following line in Hamlet's instructions to the players:

HAMLET ([3.2.4](#))

*... Nor do not **saw** the air
too much with your **hand**, thus, but use all gently;
for in the very torrent, **tempest**, and, as I may say,
the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget
a temperance that may give it smoothness.*

In the *tempest* that had blown his Armada off course, Medina *acquired and begat a temperance* to abandon his *vain blows* against England. Perhaps "hand" is a pun on "Armada", similar to "Fort-in-bras" (near French for "strong arm").

It is worth noting that Shakespeare took pains to let us know that there had been a 30-year interval between the time old Fortinbras died and the time young Fortinbras came to reclaim those lands *by strong hand and terms compulsory*. There was also a 30-year interval between the time Queen Mary died and the time her widower, Prince Phillip of Spain, sent the Spanish Armada to attempt to reclaim England *by strong hand and terms compulsory*.

Elsewhere Hamlet alludes to another war to recover lost land, with his cryptic reference to *old Jephtha*.

HAMLET ([2.2.418](#))

Am I not i' the right, old Jephthah?

...

HAMLET ([2.2.426](#))

...

'It came to pass, as most like it was,

"As most like it was" sounds like "so like the king that was."

BERNARDO ([1.1.121-124](#))

... so like the king

***that** was and **is the question** of these wars.*

That is Hamlet's dilemma - whether "**to be or not to be**," like the Ghost, "*so like the king **that** was and **is the question** of these wars.*"

So like so many kings, his father, or old Jephtha.

The story of *Jephtha*, in Judges 11, sounds *most like* the story of the king *that was and is the question of these wars*. The Ammonites were preparing for war against Israel to recover land Israel had taken from them, just as young Fortinbras was preparing for war *to recover of us, by strong hand and terms compulsory, those foresaid lands so by his father lost* in the fatal duel with old King Hamlet.

Judges 11.12

... What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?

Judges 11.13

...Because Israel took away my land... now therefore restore those lands again

And you, the judges, bear a wary eye. (5.2.278)

Also please see

[The Memory Be Green - Hamlet in Historical Context](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

To Inherit the Earth

Hamlet was born to carry on a line of kings. Those kings were bound to Danish dirt by birth and fate. The *liegemen to the Dane* were *friends to this ground*. Claudius exhorted Hamlet to *be as ourself in Denmark*. The King was synonymous with the land - *the majesty of buried Denmark*.

Hamlet's father had once fought a duel to the death with old Fortinbras to acquire a piece of ground *the inheritance of which fell to* young Hamlet.

Hamlet

How long hast thou been a grave-maker?

First Clown

Of all the days i' the year, I came to't that day that our last king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

Hamlet.

How long is that since?

First Clown

Cannot you tell that? every fool can tell that: it was the very day that young Hamlet was born

Was this then Hamlet's "*inheritance*" - a graveyard?

Lord Polonius

Will you walk out of the air [heir], my lord?

Hamlet

Into my grave.

Hamlet (standing over a grave)

The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box; and must the inheritor himself have no more, ha?

Must the Inheritor Himself Have No More?

Horatio

. . . Did slay this Fortinbras; who by a seal'd compact,

Well ratified by law and heraldry,

Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands

Which he stood seized of, to the conqueror:

Against the which, a moiety competent

Was gaged by our king; which had return'd

To the inheritance of Fortinbras,

Had he been vanquisher; as, by the same covenant,

And carriage of the article design'd,

His fell to Hamlet.

In other words, the loser lost not only his life but also "all those his lands which he stood seized of." Young Fortinbras' uncle is called "Norway," which implies that his uncle is King of Norway. Old Fortinbras was called "Fortinbras of Norway." Maybe he was the King of Norway, or maybe just the brother of the king. Apparently "all those his lands which he stood seized of" was not all of Norway, because the uncle of young Fortinbras, old Norway, still retained that. Probably the land in question was some small patch of ground that was in dispute between Denmark and Norway.

That land is very important to the plot and theme of the play. Throughout the play, there is a war impending over that same land.

That land was part of Hamlet's inheritance. Hamlet was born on the very day of that fatal duel (thirty years ago), and also on that same day a gravedigger was hired. This implies that Hamlet's inheritance was metaphorically a graveyard. This metaphor is reinforced in couple places:

Polonius (2,2,222-224)

Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't. Will you walk out of the AIR, my lord?

Hamlet

Into my GRAVE.

Polonius

Indeed, that is out o' the AIR.

Hamlet is making a pun on air/heir. He knows that he is heir to a grave.

Hamlet (commenting on a grave) (5,1,103-112)

This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries: is this the fine of his fines, and the RECOVER of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures? The very CONVEYANCES of his LANDS will hardly lie in this box; and must the INHERITOR himself have no more, ha?

That speech not only reinforces the idea of inheriting a grave, it also contains a couple words that echo lines about Fortinbras RECOVERING the lands his father lost and seeking a CONVEYANCE over Denmark.

Horatio (1,1,108-120)

Now, sir, young Fortinbras,

...

*... to RECOVER of us, by strong hand
And terms compulsory, those foresaid lands
So by his father lost: and this, I take it,
Is the main motive of our preparations,
The source of this our watch and the chief head
Of this post-haste and romage in the land.*

PRINCE FORTINBRAS (4,4,1-4)

*Go, captain, from me greet the Danish king;
Tell him that, by his licence, Fortinbras
Craves the CONVEYANCE of a promised march
Over his kingdom*

Hamlet's description of Fortinbras' planned attack on Poland also is an apt description of the impending war between Fortinbras and Denmark:

HAMLET (4,4,26-30)

*Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats
Will not debate the question of this straw:
This is the imposthume of much wealth and peace,
That inward breaks, and shows no cause without
Why the man dies.*

HAMLET

*Witness this army of such mass and charge
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd*

....

*. . . I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,
Go to their GRAVES like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not TOMB enough and continent
To hide the slain?*

That reiterates the motif that the land at stake in any war is ultimately a graveyard.

Epitaph for a King

Epitaph for a King
(derived from Shakespeare by Ray Eston Smith Jr)

*He drank to his union with his land,
Now he's rich in dirt, for all it's worth,
Here he lies in the womb of earth,
A grave man, united with his land.*

Explanation:

HORATIO (to the King's Ghost) [\(1.1.148\)](#)

*Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death*

CLAUDIUS [\(1.2.124\)](#)

*Be as ourself in Denmark. . . .
No jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day,
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
And the king's rouse the heavens all bruit again,
Re-speaking earthly thunder.*

HAMLET [\(1.4.9\)](#)

*The king doth wake to-night and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail, and the swaggering up-spring reels;
And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge.*

CLAUDIUS [\(3.3.54\)](#)

*. . . But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,*

*My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?*

HAMLET ([4.4.61](#))

*. . . I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain?*

HAMLET (describing Osric) ([5.2.90](#))

*. . . 'tis a vice to
know him. He hath much land, and fertile: let a
beast be lord of beasts, and his crib shall stand at
the king's mess: 'tis a chough; but, as I say,
spacious in the possession of dirt.*

HAMLET (commenting on an open grave) ([5.1.110](#))

*The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in
this box; and must the inheritor himself have no more, ha?*

CLAUDIUS ([5.2.266](#))

Set me the stoops of wine upon that table.

*. . . .
The king shall drink . . .
And in the cup an union shall he throw,
Richer than that which four successive kings
In Denmark's crown have worn. Give me the cups;
And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,
The cannons to the heavens, the heavens to earth,
'Now the king drinks
And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.*

HAMLET (forcing Claudius to drink from the poisoned cup) ([5.2.336](#))

*Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,
Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?*

Also see

[My Uncle, More Like My Father](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[Epitaph for a Peacemaker](#)

Hamlet's epitaph:

Epitaph for a Peacemaker
(derived from Hamlet by Ray Eston Smith Jr)

*"To be or not to be so like the king,"
For Hamlet THAT was and is the question.
With Denmark's dying voice Hamlet did bring
The final answer. "NO!" his answer soars
To the heavens, "now END all of these wars!"*

Explanation:

*" To be or not to be " so like the king,"
For Hamlet THAT was and is the question.
With Denmark's dying voice Hamlet did bring
The final answer. "NO!" his answer soars
To the heavens. "now END all of these wars!"*

A gravedigger was hired on the very day that Hamlet emerged from his mother's womb, which was the same day his father put old Fortinbras into the "womb of earth" (his grave), thus acquiring land "that was and is the question of these wars" and which was Hamlet's inheritance, figuratively a graveyard, like the part of Poland not big enough to cover the dead from the impending war over that same land.

With his dying words Hamlet proved that he was not "so like the king THAT was and IS THE QUESTION of these wars." Hamlet passed his inheritance of blood-soaked dirt and the voice of Denmark to Fortinbras - without a war, thus saving the lives of thousands of his countrymen.

The Honey of His Music Vows

Hamlet was utterly sincere when he wrote to Ophelia: (2.2.122)

*Doubt thou the stars are fire;
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt I love.*

....

I love thee best, O most best, believe it.

He "importuned [her] with love in honourable fashion . . . and [gave] countenance to his speech . . . with almost all the holy vows of heaven."

He would have given her **all** the vows of heaven if his father hadn't first led him to give a vow from Hell.

GHOST (1.5.199)

[Beneath] Swear.

The Ghost said to Hamlet: [\(1.5.17\)](#)

*But that I am forbid
to tell the secrets of my prison-house
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
would harrow up thy soul . . .
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood. list, list, o list!*

So then the ghost went ahead and told the tale anyway and it drove Hamlet mad.

But in the closet scene, Hamlet was mute. Unlike his father, Hamlet refused to pass on the madness. He was *loosed out of hell to speak of horrors*, but he would not speak them to Ophelia.

OPHELIA [\(2.1.85\)](#)

*My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;
No hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd,
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ancle;
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
to speak of horrors,--he comes before me.*

Hamlet, who had once given Ophelia the [honey of his music vows](#), was now silent. As Hamlet later said, "[hell itself breathes out contagion to this world](#)," but with his silence Hamlet tried to protect Ophelia from that breath of contagion.

Laertes had warned Ophelia: [\(1.3.16\)](#)

*Perhaps he loves you now,
. . . . but you must fear,
His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own;
For he himself is subject to his birth:
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself . . .
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you,
It fits your wisdom so far to believe it
As he in his particular act and place
May give his saying deed; which is no further
Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.*

Hamlet, when he was himself, loved Ophelia. But then [he erased himself from his own brain and there in the book and volume of his brain he wrote](#) his [warlike](#) father's commandment (the voice of Denmark, sent from Hell to speak of horrors, to breathe contagion, unfolding the secrets of his prison-house that he was forbid to tell to mortal ears). Hamlet was from [himself taken away](#).

Hamlet did not want to chain Ophelia to the [monster he had become](#). He did not want to make her, like his mother, [imperial jointress to this warlike state](#), and [a breeder of sinners](#) - sinners like his warlike father, his murderous uncle, and [his own anguished and divided self](#).

Also see [How to Love Hamlet](#)

He Himself is Subject to his Birth

Laertes

*... his will is not his own,
For **he himself** is subject to his birth*

Hamlet

*That for some vicious **mole of nature** in them,
As in their **birth**, wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin*

Hamlet

*But, to my mind, though I am native here
and to the manner **born**, it is a custom
More honour'd in the breach than the observance.*

Hamlet

*O cursed spite that I was **born** to set it right*

Hamlet

*it were better my mother had not **borne** me*

Fortune has doomed Hamlet, from **birth**, to lose his true self for a kingdom of dirt.

Unforced Accord?

CLAUDIUS (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 17-24)

*. . . . young Fortinbras,
Holding a weak supposal of our worth,
Or thinking by our late dear brother's death
Our **state** to be **disjoint** and out of frame,
Collegued with the dream of his advantage,
He hath not fail'd to pester us with message,
Importing the surrender of those lands
Lost by his father, with all bonds of law,
To our most valiant brother.*

CLAUDIUS (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 8-14)

*Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
The imperial **jointress** to this **warlike state**,
Have we
taken to wife.*

Claudius **took** his brother's wife, just as he took his brother's life, to gain the power to kill more people to acquire more dirt.

Perhaps Gertrude was no more willing to marry Claudius than Hamlet was willing to stay in Denmark:

CLAUDIUS (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 114-126)

For your intent

In going back to school in Wittenberg,

It is most retrograde to our desire:

And we beseech you, bend you to remain

Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye,

Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet:

I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg.

HAMLET

I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

KING CLAUDIUS

Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply:

Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come;

*This gentle and **unforced** [???] accord of Hamlet*

Sits smiling to my heart

HAMLET (Act 2, Scene 2, line 258)

Denmark's a prison.

To be true to themselves, both Hamlet and Gertrude needed to disobey both Claudius and the ghost of Hamlet's father. But it wasn't easy.

Hamlet (Act 1, Scene 4, lines 68-69)

*It will not speak; then **I will follow it.***

Horatio

***Do not**, my lord.*

Hamlet (Act 5, Scene 2, line 194)

*I am constant to my **purpose**; they **follow the King's pleasure***

. . . .

Horatio (Act 5, Scene 2, lines 202-210)

You will lose this wager, my lord.

Hamlet

I do not think so: since he went into France, I have been in continual practise: I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart: but it is no matter.

Horatio

Nay, good my lord,--

Hamlet

It is but foolery; but it is such a kind of gain-giving, as would perhaps trouble a woman.

Horatio

If your mind dislike any *THING*, obey it

(Hamlet had previously said, "*The king is a **THING**.*" - Act 4, Scene 2, line 28)

Horatio is telling Hamlet to pay attention to his own mind, rather than "*follow the king's pleasure.*" Throughout the play Horatio represents the rational side of Hamlet's mind which is opposed by the bloody traditions of kings - his warlike father and his murderous uncle.

Finally, while forcing Claudius to drink the poison that had killed Gertrude:

HAMLET (Act 5, Scene 2, lines 337-338)

Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?

Follow my mother.

A Breeder of Sinners

Claudius

...your father lost a father,

That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound

*In **filial** obligation ...*

Bernardo

I think it be no other but e'en so:

Well may it sort that this portentous figure

Comes armed through our watch; so like the king

That was and is the question of these wars.

Hamlet

*virtue cannot so inoculate our **old stock** but we shall relish of it*

Hamlet is from a long line of warlike kings. It's a *custom* he would like to *breach*, but it is difficult to overcome his **old stock**. If he marries Ophelia and has a son, that son will likely be another death-dealing warrior-king.

Hamlet

*...why wouldst thou be a **breeder of sinners**?*

Hamlet

*For if the **sun breed maggots** in a dead dog, being a good **kissing carrion**,--Have you a **daughter**?*

Polonius

I have, my lord.

Hamlet

*Let her not walk i' the **sun**: conception is a blessing: but not as your daughter may conceive.*

Here **sun** relates to Hamlet's father who was like *Hyperion*, the sun-god. If Hamlet breeds true to his **old stock**, he and his son will both be like Hamlet's dead father. If Ophelia conceives a child with Hamlet, she will be **breeding sinners -- maggots** to eat the dead of future wars.

Polonius

Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't. Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

Hamlet

*Into my **grave**.*

Polonius

Indeed, that is out o' the air.

*How **pregnant** sometimes his replies are!*

Horatio

Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life

*Extorted treasure in **the womb of earth**,*

For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death, [Cock crows].

Ophelia

*... They say the **owl** was a baker's **daughter**.*

Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be.

There was a legend about a **baker** who told his **daughter** to give a loaf of bread to a beggar. She only gave him half a loaf (as Ophelia gave Hamlet part of herself, reserving the greater half for her father). The beggar turned out to be Jesus Christ, who then turned the **baker's daughter** into an **owl**. In Shakespeare's time, the **owl** was a portent of death.

(<http://raptorsridge.com/greathornedowl.html>)

Ophelia

Then up he rose, and donn'd his clo'es,

*And **dupp'd** the chamber door,*

Let in the maid, that out a maid

Never departed more.

On the surface, this song has a bawdy meaning. A man opens the door of his room and lets in a virgin. When she leaves the room, she is no longer a virgin. But it also has a deeper, morbid meaning. "**Dupp'd**" means "open upward", as with a cellar door, or a coffin lid. So the man let a *maid* enter his coffin and she never left it, with or without her virginity. This foreshadows the last act, where, rather than Ophelia entering Hamlet's grave, he enters hers. If she hadn't

committed suicide before he returned (to Denmark and to himself) , he might have married her. But instead, she came to their **marriage "bed"** - the **grave** that had been prepared by Hamlet's grave-digger.

Ophelia

*Quoth she, 'Before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed.'*

He answers,

*'So would I 'a done, by yonder sun,
And thou hadst not come to my **bed**.'*

Gertrude

*I hop'd thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife.
I thought thy **bride-bed** to have deck'd, sweet maid,
And not have strew'd thy **grave**.*

Chaste Treasure in the Womb of Earth

Hamlet was metaphorically and psychologically (and perhaps literally) possessed by the warlike spirit of his dead father. He had erased himself from the book and volume of his brain and written his father's commandment there. His father was the "voice of Denmark", "loosed out of hell to speak of horrors", to breathe contagion, unfolding the secrets of his prison-house that he was forbid to tell to mortal ears. His father, unable to part from his earthly kingdom, was doomed to walk the night in search of his "extorted treasure in the womb of earth."

There was another reference to *treasure* in the play: Ophelia's "chaste treasure." Ophelia, like Hamlet, was also untrue to herself by being excessively obedient to her father. She let him tell her what to think. Her very name is an allusion to excessive filial duty.

When Ophelia died, her grave was metaphorically the grave of filial duty - the final inevitable end to which obedience to their fathers brought Ophelia and Hamlet, to their marriage-bed. When Hamlet jumped into Ophelia's grave he was finally giving his father's ghost what it had been seeking - Ophelia's *chaste treasure in the womb of earth*, the grave of filial duty.

When Hamlet leaped into Ophelia's grave and was choked by Laertes, he said,

I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat;

For, though I am not splenitive and rash,

*Yet **have I something in me** dangerous,*

Which let thy wiseness fear:

That "*something in me*" was the last appearance of the Ghost, who had finally been delivered to the grave where he belonged.

As Gertrude said,

This is mere madness:

And thus awhile the fit will work on him;

*Anon, as patient as the female dove,
When that her golden couplets are disclosed,
His **silence** will sit drooping.*

When Hamlet emerged from that grave he was no longer "[*from himself taken away*](#)." He was at last free from the "voice of Denmark." [*The rest would be **silence**.*](#)

Elegy for the Kissing Carrion

I was struck by an idea so bizarre and so sick that I vowed to take it to my grave without ever giving it voice. And yet that hideous thought grew in my diseased brain like a canker, an abscess, a mole of birth, for which I am not guilty. Now I must pour my contagion into the unsuspecting ear of Earth.

The Ghost walked the night in search of treasure in the womb of earth. He usurped the sovereignty of reason of his son and namesake until, at last, that dutiful son brought him into the bride-bed and grave of filial fidelity, Ophelia, and her chaste treasure in the womb of earth.

For thirty years, the son had spun in dizzying orbit, glowing with the bloody borrowed sheen of his warlike father. He cursed his mother, imperial jointress to this warlike state and breeder of sinners, for ever giving him birth. On the very day his mother had ejected him from her womb into the raw air, his father had vanquished a man into the womb of earth, and won a piece of dirt scarcely big enough for the new gravedigger to bury the dead. To that graveyard, the son fell heir. He was doomed to walk in the air, into his gravid grave. How pregnant his replies were.

Let not your daughter walk in the sun. But her father kept her from the son and kept her for the sun-god Hyperion and she, that god-kissing carrion, did breed maggots in the womb of earth. She let her father tell her what to think and let her brother keep the key to her memory. Her father went round and became the wheel, the knave of majestic Fortune's wheel, down, down in the secret parts of strumpet Fortune, Ophelia's chaste treasure in the womb of earth.

His mother did think to strew her marriage-bed, and indeed she did, her marriage-bed in the womb of earth. Into that final chamber, she entered a virgin, nevermore to depart, virgin or not. But whose grave and marriage-bed was it? The daughter who had once sucked the honey of the son's music vows? The son and heir who had leaped into his inheritance? Or his pompous father who had been licked by the candied tongue of her father, who had gone down, down with pregnant hinges of the knee into the secret parts of strumpet Fortune, Ophelia's chaste treasure in the womb of earth.

The Drama Filial

HAMLET ([1.4.35](#))

*His virtues else, be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo,
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault. The **dram of eale**
Doth all the substance of a doubt
To his own scandal.*

"**Dram of eale**" has been correctly interpreted as "dram of evil". That is the surface meaning. But the deeper meaning is **drama filial** (dram-o f-eale, **drama Ophelia**). Within the context of the play, the drama filial is the *Mousetrap*, the play that Hamlet hoped would catch the conscience of his father's killer. *Hamlet* is itself a filial drama, because it is a drama about the conflict between filial duty and being true to oneself. (And in Part 2, I will show how Hamlet is Shakespeare's drama filial about his father and his secret godfather.)

Please see [Drama Filial Motif](#)

The Rebirth of Hamlet

A gravedigger was hired on the very day that Hamlet emerged from his mother's womb, which was the same day his father put old Fortinbras into the womb of earth (his grave), thus acquiring land "*that was and is the question these wars*" ([1,1,124](#)) and which is Hamlet's inheritance, figuratively a graveyard, not big enough to cover the dead from the impending war.

Hamlet, born to be a death-dealing king, hates his birthright. Thus, throughout the play he regresses back to the womb (the womb of earth - Ophelia's grave), where he is reborn as Hamlet the rational scholar.

HORATIO [to the Ghost] ([1,1,148-149](#))

*Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the **womb of earth**,
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,*

HAMLET ([1,5,207-208](#))

*. . . . O cursed spite,
That ever I was **born** to set it right!*

LORD POLONIUS ([2,2,222-225](#))

. . . . Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

HAMLET

*Into my **grave**.*

LORD POLONIUS

*Indeed, that is out o' the **air**.*

Aside

*How **pregnant** sometimes his replies are!*

[Note the pun on air/heir.]

HAMLET ([3.1.132-140](#))

*. . . I am myself indifferent honest;
but yet I could accuse me of such things that **it**
were better my mother had not borne me:*

HAMLET'S LETTER [read by HORATIO] ([4.6.14-15](#))

*Ere we were **two days old** at sea*

KING CLAUDIUS [reading the message from HAMLET] ([4.7.46-47](#))

*'High and mighty, You shall know I am set **naked** on
your kingdom.*

KING CLAUDIUS ([4.7.54-55](#))

*'Tis Hamlets character. '**naked**!
And in a postscript here, he says 'alone.'*

Hamlet has metaphorically reverted to a two-day-old baby, and then to a naked newborn.

The play contains a more explicit example of reverting to infancy:

HAMLET (to Polonius)([2.2.219-220](#))

yourself, sir, should be old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.

HAMLET (speaking about Polonius)([2.2.391-392](#))

. . .that great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling-clouts.

Polonius' rebirth was aborted when he put himself where Hamlet expected to find the king. This explains the connection between Polonius and Martin Luther ("[Your worm is your only emperor for diet](#)") => the Diet of Worms where Luther was outlawed). The Diet of Worms aborted the rebirth of the Catholic Church.

Hamlet was metaphorically and psychologically (and perhaps literally) possessed by the warlike spirit of his dead father. He had [erased himself](#) from [the book and volume of his brain](#) and written his father's [commandment](#) there. His father was the ["voice of Denmark"](#), ["loosed out of hell to speak of horrors"](#), [to breathe contagion](#), [unfolding the secrets of his prison-house that he was forbid to tell to mortal ears](#). His father, unable to part from his earthly kingdom, was [doomed to walk](#) the night in search of his ["extorted treasure in the womb of earth."](#)

There was another reference to *treasure* in the play: Ophelia's "[chaste treasure](#)." Ophelia, like Hamlet, was also untrue to herself by being excessively obedient to her father. [She let him tell her what to think](#). Her very name is an allusion to [excessive filial duty](#).

When Ophelia died, her grave was metaphorically the grave of filial duty - the final inevitable end to which obedience to their fathers brought Ophelia and Hamlet, to their [marriage-bed](#). When Hamlet jumped into Ophelia's grave he was finally giving his father's ghost what it had been seeking - Ophelia's *chaste treasure in the womb of earth*, the grave of filial duty.

Ophelia's *chaste treasure* was in her *lap*

HAMLET [to Ophelia] ([3,2,111](#))

*Lady, shall **I lie in** your **lap**?*

OPHELIA

No, my lord.

HAMLET

I mean, my head upon your lap?

OPHELIA

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

Do you think I meant **country** matters?

Since she is a virgin, Ophelia's *lap* is *undiscover'd **cuntry***. After she is laid in the *womb of earth* (her grave), her *chaste treasure* becomes *the undiscover'd country from whose **bourn** no traveller returns* ([3,1,87-88](#)). But Hamlet did return - he leaps into her *womb of earth*, then emerges re-**bourn**.

After Hamlet leaped into Ophelia's grave, when he's being choked by Laertes, he says, ([5,1,264](#))

*I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat;
For, though I am not splenitive and rash,
Yet have **I have something in me** dangerous,
Which let thy wiseness fear:*

That "*something in me*" was the last appearance of the Ghost, who had finally been delivered to the grave where he belonged, his *extorted treasure in the womb of earth*.

Hamlet's mother Gertrude is there, channeling St Gertrude of Nivelles, patron saint of mentally ill people (especially those with a rat phobia), travellers, pilgrims, recently dead people, and graves. (See [St Gertrude in the Garden](#).)

It is fitting for Hamlet's mother to be present at his rebirth, to **bear him** anew:

GERTRUDE ([5,1,279](#))

*For love of God, for**bear him**.*

GERTRUDE ([5,1,291](#))

*This is mere madness:
And thus awhile the fit will work on him;
Anon, as patient as the female dove,
When that her golden couplets are disclosed,
His **silence** will sit drooping.*

The hatching dove eggs symbolize Hamlet's metaphorical rebirth. The silence symbolizes Hamlet's liberation from the warlike *voice of Denmark*. Doves are a symbol for peace. (See [Hamlet in a Nutshell - Hamlet Is an Anti-war Play.](#))

When Hamlet emerges from that *womb of earth* he is no longer ["from himself taken away."](#) He has been reborn as himself, the rational scholar from Wittenberg.

*"To **Be OR** Not to be. That is the **question**."*

*"Jesus **answered** and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man **be born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

John 3:3 KJV

Also see [How to Love Hamlet](#)

[**The Cause of Hamlet's Lunacy**](#)

POLONIUS ([2.2.52](#))

*I have found the very cause of Hamlet's **lunacy**.*

The word "**lunacy**" is derived from "luna," Latin for moon, because of an old belief that insanity was caused by the *moon* (or, I believe, in this play's metaphor, being like the *moon*).

When Polonius finally states the cause of Hamlet's *lunacy*, a small part of his babbling is ["What majesty should be, what duty is,"](#) which, unknown to Polonius, really is precisely the cause. Hamlet is mad because duty demands that he become what majesty should be - a king. Yet Hamlet by nature is a man of reason, while kings are by nature ["the question of these wars"](#). Filial duty demands that Hamlet reflect the values of his father, but that way lies madness.

Hamlet compared his father to [Hyperion](#). Hyperion was the Greek Titan god of the sun. Laertes compared Hamlet to the moon: ["nature, crescent...waxes...If she unmask her beauty to the moon."](#) In the *Mousetrap*, Hamlet is implicitly related to the moon by ["thirty dozen moons with borrow'd sheen."](#) The "thirty" relates to [Hamlet's age](#). "**Borrow'd sheen**" is a hint that Hamlet is reflecting his father's values rather than shining with his own true self - and that is indeed *lunacy*.

POLONIUS ([1.3.78](#))

*Neither a **borrower** nor a lender be; This above all: to thine ownself be true.*

Polonius' daughter Ophelia had the same tragic flaw as Hamlet - she was untrue to herself by being too obedient to her father.

In 1986 Voyager 2 discovered a new moon of Uranus. Whoever named that moon evidently had

a very good understanding of Hamlet - the newly discovered moon of Uranus was named "Ophelia."

Ophelia goes round and round Uranus, without end. [*"O, how the wheel becomes it."*](#)

POLONIUS [\(2.2.401\)](#)

The actors are come hither, my lord.

HAMLET

Buz, buz!

POLONIUS

Upon mine honour,--

HAMLET

Then came each actor on his ass,--

OPHELIA [\(4.5.199\)](#)

they say he made a good end,--

[Reflections in a Broken Mirror](#)

[Hamlet tells the players to hold the mirror up to nature. He sets up a glass where his mother may see the inmost part of herself.](#) Hamlet, ["nature crescent"](#) is metaphorically the [moon](#). His father, like ["Hyperion" \(the Titan sun-god\)](#) is metaphorically the [sun](#). Hamlet the moon with ["borrowed sheen"](#) reflects his father the sun. Hamlet by the [image of his cause saw the portraiture of Laertes'](#). [To know a man well, were to know himself](#), but [Hamlet confesses to the vice of knowing Osric](#), who is not quite a reflection but rather a shadow of Laertes, ["his semblable is his mirror; and who else would trace him, his umbrage nothing more."](#) Hamlet's bad dreams are [ambition, which is merely the shadow of a dream which itself is but a shadow, and monarchs are beggar's shadows](#). Claudius tells Hamlet to ["be as ourself in Denmark"](#). Hamlet and Fortinbras are mirror images of each other. Each named after his father, each has ["some rights of memory"](#) to Denmark. Hamlet takes Fortinbras as an example [gross as earth](#) to exhort him. [Horatio is an image of Hamlet's true soul. "Horatio, or I do forget myself."](#) Polonius "boards" Hamlet and [his amber-purging eyes](#) are [dishonestly writ down in the book of Hamlet's mind](#), along with [his father](#) and [his uncle](#). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, ["so neighbour'd to his youth and havior,"](#) [take Hamlet's place on the English chopping block](#). Ophelia calls Hamlet the [glass of fashion](#). [Hamlet tells her to remember all his sins in her orisons. She lets Laertes keep the key to her memory](#) and [later dies by falling into the glassy stream that is metaphorically reflecting her father's image](#). Polonius tells Reynaldo, ["Observe his \[Laertes'\] inclination in yourself."](#) Polonius compares himself to Hamlet, ["in my youth I suffered much extremity for love."](#) [The Mousetrap is the image of a murder. Gonzago is the image of old Hamlet, Baptista the image of Gertrude, Lucianus the image of Claudius.](#)

Also see

[The Ugly Truth](#)

[To Thine Ownself Be True](#)

The Ugly Truth

Sometimes the truth is ugly, but we need to face it anyway - especially when it's in the mirror.

LORD POLONIUS (3,1,51-62)

...

To OPHELIA

Read on this book;

That show of such an exercise may colour

Your loneliness. We are oft to blame in this,--

'Tis too much proved--that with devotion's visage

And pious action we do sugar o'er

The devil himself.

KING CLAUDIUS

[Aside] O, 'tis too true!

How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!

The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,

Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it

Than is my deed to my most painted word:

O heavy burthen!

In the following lines, I think Ophelia represents Shakespeare's romantic comedies. But sometimes he has to write something ugly (or tragic) to show the ugly truth.

HAMLET (3,1,113-125))

Ha, ha! are you honest?

OPHELIA

My lord?

HAMLET

Are you fair?

OPHELIA

What means your lordship?

HAMLET

That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should
admit no discourse to your beauty.

OPHELIA

Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than
with honesty?

HAMLET

Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner
transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the
force of honesty can translate beauty into his
likeness: this was sometime a paradox, but now the
time gives it proof.

HAMLET (3,2,21-25)

. . .the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

HAMLET (3,4,21-23)

Come, come, and sit you down; you shall not budge;
You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you.

QUEEN GERTRUDE (3,4,97-100)

O Hamlet, speak no more:
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.

HAMLET (3,4,194)

I must be cruel, only to be kind:

Hamlet finally faced the ugly truth in his own mirror:

HAMLET (5,2,88-94)

. . . .Dost know this water-fly?

HORATIO

No, my good lord.

HAMLET

Thy state is the more gracious; for 'tis a vice to know him. He hath much land, and fertile: let a beast be lord of beasts, and his crib shall stand at the king's mess: 'tis a chough; but, as I say, spacious in the possession of dirt.v
"Tis a vice to know him," but Hamlet knows him.

HAMLET (5,2,140-142)

I dare not confess that, lest I should compare with him in excellence; but, to know a man well, were to know himself.

Horatio does not know Osric, but Hamlet knows him all too well. Horatio represents Hamlet's true unambitious self. Osric represents the man that Hamlet was born to be, the man Hamlet has struggled not to be.

A gravedigger was hired on the very day that Hamlet emerged from his mother's womb, which was the same day his father put old Fortinbras into the womb of earth (his grave), thus acquiring land "that was and is the question of these wars" and which was Hamlet's inheritance, figuratively a graveyard, not big enough to cover the dead from the impending war over that

same land.

BERNARDO (Act 1, Scene 1, lines 121-124)

I think it be no other but e'en so:

Well may it sort that this portentous figure

Comes armed through our watch; so like the king
that was and is the question of these wars.

That is Hamlet's dilemma - whether "TO BE OR NOT TO BE," like the Ghost, "so like the king
THAT was and IS THE QUESTION of these wars."

To Thine Ownself Be True

A unifying theme of Hamlet is "To thine ownself be true." Of all the main characters, Hamlet is the only one who finally is true to himself. Consequently, of all the main characters, Hamlet is the only one who avoids self-slaughter.

Even Horatio is taught by Denmark to drink deep and so tries to drink the last drops of poison from the cup. But Hamlet saves Horatio so that he can tell Hamlet's story and teach us all not to drink from the cup of self-slaughter.

Fortinbras Sr. and Fortinbras Jr. value land more than they value themselves. Fortinbras Sr did forfeit his life fighting for land. Fortinbras Jr goes to war, exposing what is mortal and unsure to all that fortune, death, and danger dare, even for an eggshell, a little patch of ground that hath no profit in it but the name, that is not tomb enough and continent to hide the slain.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, willing spokes to the king's *nave*, are deliverers of their own death warrant.

Polonius is a busybody, minding everybody's business but his own. Thus he was killed by a sword-thrust meant for somebody else.

Laertes subverts his own life so totally and unthinkingly to filial duty that he is willing to go to hell to revenge his father's death. Although he is satisfied in nature with Hamlet's repentance, he continues the fatal duel until by some elder masters [Claudius] he has a voice and precedence of peace. Thus he is fighting not for himself but for a cause borrowed from Claudius.

When Laertes allied himself with Claudius he dulled the edge of his husbandry. Then, in the subsequent duel with Hamlet, Laertes first wounded Hamlet with his poison-tipped sword, then accidentally exchanged swords with Hamlet and was fatally poisoned with his own sword. Thus he was a borrower and lender of swords, and was killed by a lent sword while fighting for a *borrowed* cause. [We shall see later that Laertes symbolized Christopher Marlowe and that "go far with little" is a paraphrase of Marlowe's "*infinite riches in a little room*." (The Jew of Malta)]

The tragic flaw of both Gertrude's husbands is that they are unable to part from their earthly

kingdoms, not even to save their souls. Gertrude's fatal flaw is that she is unable to part from her husbands, not even to save her soul. "Why, she would hang on him, as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on." Thus, "the imperial jointress to this warlike state" is doomed to join her husbands in the blood-soaked graveyard, their "extorted treasure in the womb of earth"

Ophelia lets her brother keep the *key* to her *memory*. She *does not understand herself so well as it behooves* Polonius's daughter, and so she lets her father tell her what to think. When she falls into the water, she makes no attempt to save herself because her true self has already been lost. She dies by falling into a mirror image of her father in the *glassy stream*.

(See [An Envious Sliver](#))

Both Claudius and Hamlet Sr are unable to separate themselves from their land. So they slaughter their own souls, dooming themselves to be dragged down into hell by their possessions. Hamlet Sr is doom'd to walk the night, to walk in death for extorted treasure in the womb of earth. Claudius could save his soul by sincerely repenting, but he cannot repent because he won't give up his kingdom and he cannot be pardon'd and retain the offense, he finally drinks a poison tempered by himself.

In the end, Hamlet recovers his true self in time to save his soul, although not his life.

(See [The Rebirth of Hamlet](#))

Also please see)
[How to Love Hamlet](#))

The Time Is Out of Joint

Polonius

*This above all: to thine own self be true,
And **it must follow, as the night the day,**
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

Conversely, if day follows night, somebody is being untrue to himself. Just after he has been false to himself by erasing himself from the book of his own brain, as the **day is following the night**, Hamlet says:

*The **time is out of joint**.*

Claudius

*. . .our sometime sister, now our queen, The imperial **jointress** to this **warlike state**,*

Marcellus

*What might be toward, that this sweaty haste
Doth make the **night joint-labourer with the day**:
Who is't that can inform me?*

Horatio

*That can I;
At least, the whisper goes so. Our last king,
Whose image even but now appear'd to us,*

. . . .

Bernardo

*I think it **be** no other but e'en so:*

Well may it sort that this portentous figure

Comes armed through our watch; so like the king

***That** was and **is the question** of these wars.*

Related lines:

[Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day:](#)

[And it must follow, as the night the day,](#)

[The imperial jointress to this warlike state!](#)

[O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!](#)

[The time is out of joint!](#)

[Why day is day, night night, and time is time,](#)

Hamlet's Transformation

HORATIO ([1.4.78](#))

What if it...

...assume some other horrible form,

*Which might **deprive your sovereignty of reason***

HAMLET ([1.5.99](#))

And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,

But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!

HAMLET ([1.5.103](#))

Yea, from the table of my memory

***I'll wipe away all** trivial fond records,*

*All saws of books, all **forms**, all pressures past,*

That youth and observation copied there;

And thy commandment all alone shall live

Within the book and volume of my brain,

CLAUDIUS ([2.2.4](#))

...Something have you heard

*Of **Hamlet's transformation**; so call it,*

Sith nor the exterior nor the inward man

***Resembles that it was.** What it should be,*

More than his father's death, that thus hath put him

So much from the understanding of himself,

I cannot dream of: ...

OPHELIA ([3.1.170](#))

*...Now see that noble and most **sovereign reason**,
....**Blasted**...*

The transformation of the message borne by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is symbolic of the transformation of Hamlet into his father's image.

HORATIO ([5.2.51](#))

How was this seal'd?

HAMLET

*Why, even in that was heaven ordinant.
I had **my father's signet** in my purse,
Which was the model of that Danish seal;
Folded the writ up **in form of the other**,
Subscribed it, gave't the impression, placed it safely,
The changeling never known...*

HAMLET ([3.1.132](#))

I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious

"But yet...proud, revengeful, ambitious" - this is a description of his father, not of Hamlet when he is himself.

HAMLET ([5.1.265](#))

*...though I am not splenitive and rash,
Yet have I something in me dangerous,
Which let thy wiseness fear*

The "*something in me dangerous*" is his father, who is in his brain. In the end, Hamlet exorcised the old men from his brain, reclaimed his own values, and saved his soul:

HAMLET ([5.2.227](#))

*Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet:
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
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.*

Also see

[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

Or I Do Forget Myself

We've seen how Hamlet "[wiped away every trivial fond record that youth and observation copied](#)" "[in the table of \[his\] memory](#)" - in other words, how he forgot himself. But what was Hamlet like before he forgot himself?

HAMLET ([1.2.164](#))

Horatio, or I do forget myself!

And what was Horatio like?

HAMLET ([3.2.54](#))

*Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man
As e'r my conversation cop'd withal.*

.....
*...thee, that no revenue hast
But thy good spirits to feed and clothe thee.*

.....
*Since my soul was mistress of her choice
And could of men distinguish, her election
Hath sealed thee for herself.....
...For thou hast
Been as one, in suffering all, that suffers
Nothing. A man that fortune's buffets and
Rewards hast ta'en with equal thanks.
And blessed are those
Whose blood and judgment are so well co-mingled
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion's slave and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee.*

Hamlet was unaware at first that he had from himself been taken away, but though he knew not why, he knew that he had lost something:

HAMLET ([2.2.308](#))

*...I have of late - but wherefore I know not--lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises;
and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a
sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging
firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than
a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in
reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how
like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!*

And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me: no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

That speech contrasts Hamlet's own humanist values ("*how noble in reason*") with the warlike values ("*this quintessence of dust*") of his father, which are now occupying Hamlet's brain.

"*This quintessence of dust*" is linked to Hamlet's father by these lines:

GERTRUDE ([1.2.71](#))

*Do not for ever with thy veiled lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust:*

HORATIO ([1.1.148](#))

*Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,*

"*A foul and pestilent congregation of vapours*" is linked to Hamlet's father by these lines":

HAMLET ([1.4.51](#))

*. . . why the sepulchre,
Wherein we saw thee quietly inurn'd,
Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws,
To cast thee up again*

HAMLET ([3.2.380](#))

*When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world:*

Also see

[The Election of His Soul](#)

[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

[The Election of His Soul](#)

HAMLET (complaining about Claudius) ([5.2.69](#))

He that hath

Popp'd in between the ***election*** and my hopes

Most people assume that Hamlet's "*hopes*" are to become king. That's only half right. Hamlet is speaking with a double meaning. The princely side of Hamlet does indeed want to become king ([that's the *Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*](#)), but the humanist side would rather return to his scholarly life in Wittenberg.

Hamlet's humanist, rational side was represented by Horatio,

Horatio the [scholar](#),

Ho-RATIO whose very name resonates with rationality,

Horatio who warned Hamlet that his father's ghost might deprive his "[sovereignty of reason](#)," "[Horatio, or I do forget myself](#)."

HAMLET (to Horatio): ([3.2.58](#))

.....thee
That no revenue hast but thy good spirits,
To feed and clothe thee?.....
Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
And could of men distinguish, her **election**
Hath seal'd thee for herself.....
....Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee

Did Claudius "pop" between Prince Hamlet and the throne? Claudius inherited the throne from Hamlet Sr, a throne that Prince Hamlet (under the influence of the ghost of Hamlet Sr) believed should have remained in the possession of a Hamlet. However, [Claudius did name Prince Hamlet as his heir](#), and urged him to ["be as ourself in Denmark."](#) [Trying to have Hamlet decapitated](#) was certainly "popping" between him and the throne, but it was also "popping" between Hamlet and his return to Wittenberg.

Did Claudius "pop" between Hamlet and the scholarly lifestyle of Horatio? [When Hamlet wanted to return to Wittenberg \(to be as Horatio in Wittenberg\), Claudius ordered him \(via Gertrude\) to remain](#), to "be ourself in Denmark." Then [he celebrated that decision with the "pop" of cannon](#). By making Hamlet his heir, he was cutting him off from Wittenberg, locking him in the [prison of Denmark](#).

Also see
[Unpacking the Whore in His Heart's Core - Whore Rational - Horatio](#)
[Where Kings Lead, Folly Follows](#)
[Horatio vs Rosencrantz & Guildenstern](#)
[Or I Do Forget Myself](#)
[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[Unpacking the Whore in His Heart's Core - Whore Rational - Horatio](#)

When Hamlet was not ["from himself taken away,"](#) he wore Horatio, the rational student, in his "heart's core." But when he was possessed by his father's bloody spirit, he scoffed at words and rational thought as being "like a whore" (Horatio) "to unpack my heart with words".

HAMLET ([2.2.593](#))

*Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a **whore**, **unpack my heart with words**,*

HAMLET (to Horatio) ([3.2.72](#))

*. . . Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him*

*In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee.*

Also see

[The Election of His Soul](#)

Where Kings Lead, Folly Follows

HAMLET ([1.4.68](#))

*It will not speak; then **I will follow it.***

HORATIO

***Do not,** my lord.*

HAMLET ([5.2.194](#))

*I am constant to my purpose; they **follow the king's pleasure**: if his fitness speaks, mine is ready; now or whensoever, provided I be so able as now.*

HORATIO ([5.2.202](#))

You will lose this wager, my lord.

HAMLET

I do not think so: since he went into France, I have been in continual practise: I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart: but it is no matter.

HORATIO

Nay, good my lord,--

HAMLET

It is but foolery; but it is such a kind of gain-giving, as would perhaps trouble a woman.

HORATIO

***If your mind dislike any thing, obey it:** I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit.*

(Hamlet had previously said, "[The king is a thing.](#)")

Horatio is telling Hamlet to pay attention to his own mind, rather than "*follow the king's pleasure.*" Throughout the play Horatio represents the rational side of Hamlet's mind which is opposed by the bloody traditions of kings - his warlike father and his murderous uncle.

Also see

[The Election of His Soul](#)

Horatio vs Rosencrantz & Guildenstern

Comparing Horatio to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is like comparing Einstein to Cheech and Chong. (No offense to Cheech & Chong. I would have said Abbot & Costello, but today's students would probably think those guys were Goldman Sachs partners.)

But somebody Asked, and to every Question there is an Answer (whether right or wrong, profound or profane):

Horatio was much more than a friend - he was a role model. ["Horatio, or I do forget myself."](#)
R&G were much less than friends - [they were Hamlet's jailers \(or gaolers\) in the prison of Denmark.](#)

HoRATIO was the voice of reason. R&G were jangling echoes of the [voice of Denmark.](#)

[Horatio had no dreams of ambition in his philosophy.](#)

[R&G interpreted the ambition in Hamlet's bad dreams.](#)

[Horatio gave Hamlet his mind. R&G gave Hamlet their heads.](#)

R&G were Hamlet's understudies in what Hamlet transformed into their last act.

[Horatio carried on after the last act ended to bring Hamlet's story to the unknowing world.](#)

[Hamlet guided R&G on the road to their own self-slaughter.](#)

[Hamlet prevented Horatio from drinking deeply from the cup of self-slaughter.](#)

But Horatio's real foil was the Ghost of Hamlet's father and/or Claudius and/or Fortinbras -
[Rational thought](#) vs [bloody thoughts.](#)

Also please see

[The Election of His Soul](#)

[Where Kings Lead, Folly Follows](#)

[Hamlet in a Nutshell](#)

[An Honest Ghost?](#)

[**The Cloud, the Cannon, and in the Cup a Union**](#)

CLAUDIUS [\(1.2.67\)](#)

*How is it that the **CLOUDS** still hang on you?*

HAMLET

*Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the **SUN**.*

The obvious pun is **sun** / **son**. Hamlet is too good a son to be cheerful less than two months after his father's death. But there is also a metaphor on **clouds** and **sun**. Later in the scene, Hamlet compares his father to **Hyperion**, the **sun**-god:

HAMLET [\(1.2.141\)](#)

So excellent a king; that was, to this,

***Hyperion** to a satyr*

Thus **sun** is a symbol for Hamlet's father, and now **clouds** is an obvious pun on **Claudius**.

Hamlet is too loyal to his father (*too much i' the **sun***) to shift his loyalty to Claudius (to be under the **clouds**.) This should prepare the audience for a more subtle pun on **CLOUDS** / **CLAUDIUS**:

CLAUDIUS [\(1.2.127\)](#)

No jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day,

*But the great **CANNON** to the **CLOUDS** shall tell, And the king's rouse the heavens all bruit again,*

Re-speaking earthly thunder. Come away.
[Exeunt all but Hamlet]

HAMLET

*O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His **CANON** 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!*

Hamlet is not contemplating his **own self-slaughter**, rather he is wishing that **Claudius** would kill himself. **Claudius** (cloud) has just ordered his **cannon** to fire at the **clouds**. Hamlet wishes Claudius's *solid flesh would melt* and *turn into a dew* (a cloud). Then, by aiming **his cannon** at the **clouds**, **Claudius** would be **slaughtering himself**. But, alas, the **Everlasting** has fixed **His canon** (religious law) **'gainst self-slaughter** and **Claudius has fixed (aimed) his cannon 'gainst self-slaughter** - for now.

Later we learn more about the Danish custom of firing *cannon* when the king drinks:

[\(1.4.7\)](#)

[A flourish of trumpets, and **ordnance shot off**, within]

HORATIO

What does this mean, my lord?

HAMLET

*The king doth wake to-night and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail, and the swaggering up-spring reels;
And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of **his pledge**.*

HORATIO

*Is it a **custom**?*

HAMLET

*Ay, marry, is't:
But to my mind, though I am native here
And to the manner born, **it is a custom**
More honour'd in the breach than the observance.*

The **custom** under discussion is not heavy drinking. The custom is the firing of **cannon** (ordnance) when the king drinks a pledge. It symbolizes the unity of the king with his kingdom, emphasized with the weapons he uses to obtain and keep that kingdom. It is the King's pledges, not his drinking, that gets Denmark in trouble with other countries. This is the custom that Hamlet would like to **breach**.

In the end, Hamlet gets his wish. *Claudius* does metaphorically slaughter himself with his own *cannon*. To the accompaniment of *cannon* fire, *Claudius* drinks from a *cup* symbolizing his *union* with Denmark. Shortly thereafter, he drinks from that same *cup* that *he himself* had poisoned.

CLAUDIUS ([5.2.269](#))

*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
In Denmark's crown have worn. Give me the cups;
And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,
The **CANNONS** to the heavens, the heavens to earth,
'Now the king drinks to Hamlet.*

CLAUDIUS ([5.2.286](#))

*Stay; give me drink. Hamlet, this pearl is thine;
Here's to thy health.*
[Trumpets sound, and **cannon shot off** within]
Give him the cup.

HAMLET ([5.2.336](#))

*Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,
Drink off this potion. Is **thy union** here?
Follow my mother.*
[Claudius dies]

([5.2.424](#))

[A dead march. Exeunt, bearing off the dead bodies; after which **a peal of ordnance is shot off**]

Also see

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

The Cannon May Miss Our Name

Was "*whale*" pronounced like "*wheel*"? Was "*weasel*" pronounced like "*wassail*"? Was "*Claudius*" pronounced like "*cloud-ius*"? (I realize that "*Claudius*" was never spoken in the play, but there must have been some reason for including it in the First Folio. It was probably included in the playbill, so the audience would be prepared for the Claudius/clouds puns.)

CLAUDIUS ([1.2.123](#))

*Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply.
Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come. 325
This gentle and unforc'd accord of Hamlet
Sits smiling to my heart; in grace whereof,
No jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day
But the great **CANNON** to the **CLOUDS** shall tell,*

*And the King's rouse the heaven shall bruit again, 330
Respeaking earthly thunder. Come away.
[Flourish. Exeunt all but Hamlet.]*

HAMLET

*O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd 335
His **CANON** 'gainst self-slaughter!*

HAMLET ([1.4.9](#))

*The King doth wake to-night and takes his rouse, 635
Keeps **WASSAIL**, and the swagg'ring upspring reels,
And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
The kettledrum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge.*

HORATIO

Is it a custom?

HAMLET

*Ay, marry, is't;
But to my mind, though I am native here
And to the manner born, it is a custom
More honour'd in the breach than the observance.*

HAMLET ([3.2.368](#))

*Do you see yonder CLOUD that's almost in shape of a **CAMEL**?*

POLONIUS

*By th' **MASS**, and 'tis like a camel indeed.*

HAMLET

*Methinks it is like a **WEASEL**. 2255*

POLONIUS

It is back'd like a weasel.

HAMLET

*Or like a **WHALE**.*

POLONIUS

Very like a whale.

ROSENCRANTZ ([3.3.16](#))

*... The cease of majesty
Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw
What's near it with it: it is a **MASSY WHEEL**,*

CLAUDIUS (Act 4, Scene 1) ([4.1.41b](#))

[So haply slander-]
*Whose whisper o'er the world's diameter, 2670
As level as the **CANNON** to his blank,
Transports his poisoned shot- may **MISS OUR NAME**
And hit the woundless air.-*

Also see

[Fine Revolution](#)

[How the Wheel Becomes It](#)

[A Camel in My Mind's Eye](#)

[The Cloud, the Cannon, and in the Cup a Union](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[Extorted Treasure in the Womb of Earth](#)

CLAUDIUS ([3.3.54](#))

*... O! what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder?'
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?*

Claudius knows that he can save his soul if and only if he gives up his earthly kingdom, but he chooses damnation. Hamlet's father has exactly the same problem (but doesn't know it):

GHOST ([1.5.80](#))

*Of life, **of crown, of queen**, at once dispatch'd;
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd,
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With **all my imperfections on my head***

Note that the ghost did not ask his son to pray for him ([pity me not](#)), which would be the traditional remedy for a soul trapped in purgatory. What **imperfections** were on his head? What sin had he committed since his last confession? What sin was he still committing?

BERNARDO ([1.1.161](#))

It was about to speak, when the cock crew.

HORATIO

And then it started like a guilty thing

But Bernardo and Horatio are a little off in their recollection of the timing:

HORATIO ([1.1.143](#))

*If there be any good thing to be done,
That may to thee do ease and grace to me,
Speak to me:
[Cock crows.]
If thou art privy to thy country's fate,
Which happily foreknowing may avoid,
O! speak;
Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,
Speak of it: stay, and speak! Stop it, Marcellus.*

The ghost didn't "*start like a guilty thing*" immediately after the cock crew. The dead king's conscience was not pricked until Horatio guessed his true sin: the ghost was walking in death because he could not bear to part with his "***extorted treasure in the womb of earth.***" Like the rich man on a camel, old King Hamlet cannot enter heaven because he will not give up his earthly kingdom.

Also see

[My Uncle, More Like My Father](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[My Uncle, More Like My Father](#)

HAMLET ([1.2.154](#))

my uncle, my father's brother, but no more like my father than I to Hercules.

But later we see that Hamlet is very much like Hercules:

HAMLET ([1.4.90](#))

*My fate cries out,
And makes each petty artery in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.*

The *Nemean lion* was a mythical beast with an almost invincible hide, which could only be cut by its own claws. After strangling the lion, Hercules fashioned a tunic for himself from its hide, which he cut with its own claws. This is similar to the way Hamlet killed [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with their own message](#), [Laertes with his own sword](#), and [Claudius with his own poisoned cup](#).

HAMLET (5.1.299)

*Let Hercules himself do what he may,
The cat will mew and dog will have his day.*

Hercules went mad and murdered his own family, just as Hamlet went mad (from himself was taken away by the ghost) and murdered his could-have-been father-in-law, indirectly causing the death of his should-have-been wife. *The cat will mew* refers to the du-cat. Polonius was a rat killed for a du-cat (a rat? Dead, for a ducat). The dog was Ophelia, the dead dog, the good kissing carrion which when touched by the sun/son (Hamlet) would breed maggots in her bride-bed (her grave).

CLAUDIUS (4.7.92)

*.....but this gallant [Lemord]
Had witchcraft in 't, he grew unto his seat,
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse,
As he had been incorp'd and demi-natur'd
With the brave beast*

Laertes said of Lemord "I know him well." But, as Hamlet said, "to know a man well, were to know himself." So let's exercise a little poetic license and assign some of Lemord's metaphoric qualities to Laertes. "Lemord" is French for "the death". *Demi-natured* with a horse is a good description of a centaur. Hercules was killed indirectly by a centaur whom he had previously killed, just as Hamlet was killed by Laertes after he had killed Laertes.

HAMLET (2.2.370)

Do the boys carry it away?

ROSENCRANTZ

Ay, that they do, my lord; Hercules and his load too.

This refers to the competition between the new boy acting companies and the older companies such as Shakespeare's, which performed at the Globe Theater. The emblem of the Globe was a picture of *Hercules* holding up the Earth (or Globe). (According to the legend, Hercules needed help from Atlas to perform one of his Tasks. So, to free himself for Hercules's Task, **Atlas shrugged** off the Earth onto Hercules for a while.) This might relate Shakespeare to Hercules, but where is the connection with Hamlet? After Hamlet died, Fortinbras provided the connection by echoing *"the boys [captains] carry it [Hamlet/Hercules] away,"* except this time Hamlet/Hercules/Shakespeare is carried to the *stage*.

FORTINBRAS (5.2.416)

*Let four captains
Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage*

Thus, as Hamlet was like Hercules, so was his uncle like his father. Hamlet's father was valiant, proud, war-like, rash, revengeful, and ambitious. Hamlet's uncle was cautious, intelligent, flexible, devious, manipulative, and ambitious. Their common vice was ambition (for control of

dirt). Both were doomed to [*fast in fires*](#) because neither [old King Hamlet](#) nor [new King Claudius](#) could give up his [earthly kingdom](#).

Also see

[Extorted Treasure in the Womb of Earth](#)

[Epitaph for a King](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[Usurp Your Sovereignty of Reason](#)

How can the dead King Hamlet possibly reclaim his kingdom? His son ([*born to set it right*](#)) can do it for him. That son even has the same name, Hamlet. True, the son has a different mind than his father, but that can be fixed.

HAMLET ([1.4.25](#))

*So, oft it chances in particular men,
That for some vicious **mole** of nature in them,
As in their **birth**, wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin,
By the o'ergrowth of some complexion [mole]
Oft **breaking down the pales and forts of reason***

HAMLET (to his father's Ghost) ([1.5.181](#))

*Well said, old **mole**! Canst work i'the earth so fast?
A worthy **pioneer**!"*

[A **pioneer** was a military engineer, whose duties included burrowing under **pales** (walls) and **forts** to plant explosives to **break them down**.]

HAMLET ([1.5.99](#))

*..you, my **sinews**, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up!*

Hamlet's **sinews** have grown *instant old* because he has just been possessed by the ghost of an old man - his father.

HORATIO ([1.1.56](#))

*What art thou that **usurp'st** this time of night*

HORATIO ([1.4.75](#))

*What if it...,
deprive your sovereignty of reason*

OPHELIA ([3.1.170](#))

*...Now see that noble and most **sovereign reason**,
...**Blasted**....*

HAMLET ([1.5.102](#))

*... Remember thee!
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there;
And **thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain**,
Unmix'd with baser matter*

Driven by his love for his father, Hamlet has allowed his father to **usurp the sovereignty of his brain**. He has *erased* himself from the **book of his brain** and *written* his father there. He continued to write in that same **table** of [his] *memory*":

HAMLET ([1.5.111](#))

*O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
My **tables**,--meet it is I set it down,
That one may smile, and smile, and be a **villain**
At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark:
[Writing.]
So, **uncle**, there you are*

CLAUDIUS ([1.2.124](#))

Be as ourself in Denmark.

If you hate someone, you think about him a lot. An image of him lives in your brain. That image can acquire a kind of autonomy, making you behave as your enemy behaves. In short, by hating your enemy, you allow your enemy to possess you. Hamlet seems to be taking notes not just on how to recognize a **smiling villain**, but also on how to be one.

If you love someone, you may want to give that person all that you have. But if your dearest friend demands that you give up your very self, then that dearest friend becomes your **dearest foe**.

HAMLET ([1.2.184](#))

*Would I had met my **dearest foe in heaven [or Purgatory]**
Ere I had ever seen that day, Horatio!
My father, methinks I see **my father**!*

Hamlet loved his father and was therefore possessed by his father. Hamlet hated his uncle and was therefore possessed by his uncle. But father and uncle both had the same values - they

valued dirt over people - as in the graveyard.

Also see

[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

[Mad in Craft](#)

Hamlet's insanity was real, but he was also faking it ("[mad in craft](#)"). He faked madness to hide his true madness, which consisted of being possessed by his father's spirit. If Claudius had suspected that, he would have immediately murdered Hamlet (again).

Instances where Hamlet was feigning madness:

HAMLET ([1.5.189](#))

*As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on,*

GUILDENSTERN ([3.1.7](#))

*Nor do we find him forward to be sounded,
But, with a crafty madness, keeps aloof,
When we would bring him on to some confession
Of his true state.*

GUILDENSTERN ([3.2.308](#))

. . . . If it shall please you to make me a wholesome answer . . .

HAMLET

Sir, I cannot.

GUILDENSTERN

What, my lord?

HAMLET

Make you a wholesome answer; my wit's diseased.

HAMLET [sarcastically] ([3.4.203](#))

*Make you to ravel all this matter out,
That I essentially am not in madness,
But mad in craft. 'Twere good you let him know;
For who, that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise,
Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,
Such dear concernings hide? who would do so?
No, in despite of sense and secrecy,*

LORD POLONIUS ([2.2.221](#))

*[Aside] Though this be madness, yet there is method
in 't. Will you walk out of the air, my lord?*

HAMLET

Into my grave.

LORD POLONIUS

Indeed, that is out o' the air. [note: pun on air/heir]

[Aside]

*How pregnant sometimes his replies are! a happiness
that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity
could not so prosperously be delivered of.*

People often claim that Hamlet was faking madness to ferret out Claudius' secret, but the truth is exactly the opposite. As you can see from the above quotes, Hamlet was faking madness to conceal his own secret - his true madness.

Also see

[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

[Old Men in the Book of his Brain](#)

Busy-body Polonius will join the other [tedious old men](#) occupying Hamlet's **brain**:

POLONIUS [\(2.2.184\)](#)

I'll board him presently

Polonius sees Hamlet reading a book ([the book and volume of his brain](#)) and asks him what he is reading.

HAMLET [\(2.2.212\)](#)

*Slanders, sir: for the satirical rogue says here that **old men have grey beards**, that their faces are wrinkled, their **eyes purging thick amber** and plum-tree gum, and that they have a **plentiful lack of wit**, together with most **weak hams**: all which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet **I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down**; for you yourself, sir, should be old as I am, if, like a crab, you could go backward.*

POLONIUS [Aside]

Though this be madness, yet there is method in't...

"old men have **grey beards**" = Hamlet's father

["His beard was grizzled, no?"](#)

"eyes purging thick **amber**" = Polonius.

Poland was famous for its **amber**. For more on the Polonius/Poland motif, see [Polonius Well-Ended](#)

[An Envious Sliver](#)

"a **plentiful lack of wit**" = Claudius

["With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts.](#)

*O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce!"*

"**Wit and gifts**" refers to Bishop **Whitgift**, the man who instigated the crack-down on recusants which perhaps caused the decline in fortunes of Shakespeare's father. Also, Whitgift signed Shakespeare's marriage license (when he married an older woman) and later he signed the license for the publication of Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis," a poem about a boy **seduced** by a goddess.

"**Plentiful lack**" mocks Claudius first speech: "*defeated joy*."

"**weak hams**" = **Hamlet**, weakened but still present in his own brain.

This is related to:
HAMLET [\(1.5.99\)](#)

*And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!*

Hamlet's **sinews** have grown *instant old* because he has just been possessed by the ghost of an old man - his father.

"*I hold it not **honesty** to have it thus set down.*" Hamlet knows he was not being true to himself when he set down these *tedious old men in the book and volume of his brain*.

Polonius also usurped the sovereignty of reasoning of his own daughter. He told her what think:

OPHELIA [\(1.3.108\)](#)

I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

POLONIUS

Marry, I'll teach you: think yourself a baby;

(Perhaps "think yourself a baby" was also part of the rebirth motif. Ophelia represented all of Shakespeare's plays. Perhaps he was envisioning some kind of rebirth for his dramatic talent. His greatest works were all written about the same time as Hamlet.)

Later Polonius handed Ophelia a book to study. It was metaphorically the book full of old men - old men whose corrupt values Polonius wanted to occupy Ophelia's mind. Yet both Polonius and Claudius recognized their own corruption in that book ("*We are oft to blame . . . with devotion's visage and pious action we do sugar o'er the devil himself*").

POLONIUS (to Ophelia) [\(3.1.51\)](#)

*Read on this book;
That show of such an exercise may colour
Your loneliness. We are oft to blame in this,--
'Tis too much proved--that with devotion's visage
And pious action we do sugar o'er*

The devil himself.

CLAUDIUS

[Aside] *O, 'tis too true!*
How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!

Also see
[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

Remembrances in the Book of Their Brains

The book full of old men is very important.

It is the book Polonius sees Hamlet reading.

It is also the book that Polonius later gives to Ophelia to occupy her mind.

It is also the book of remembrances that Hamlet doesn't remember when Ophelia tries to return it to him.

It is the book of orisons wherein Hamlet wants Ophelia to remember all his sins.

It is the book of Hamlet's brain from which he erased himself and wrote his father's commandment. It is also the book of Ophelia's brain, where she let her father tell her what to think and let her brother keep the key to her memory.

It is a document in madness. It is a book full of old men - it should be dusty.

LORD POLONIUS (to Ophelia) [\(3.1.51\)](#)

Read on this book;
That show of such an exercise may colour
Your loneliness. . . .

OPHELIA [\(3.1.102\)](#)

My lord, I have remembrances of yours,
That I have longed long to re-deliver;
I pray you, now receive them.

HAMLET

No, not I;
I never gave you aught.

OPHELIA

*My honour'd lord, you know right well you did;
And, with them, words of so sweet breath composed
As made the things more rich: their perfume lost,
Take these again; for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.
There, my lord.*

Since he IS a student, maybe Hamlet could take a shiny new book out of his backpack when he writes his father's commandment in the book and volume of his brain. Then when he writes his uncle in his tables, he could take out the book again (now dusty) and write his uncle in the back of the book, as an appendix.

At the end of the scene where Hamlet is reading the dusty book, Polonius could leave with the book in hand (Hamlet having willingly parted with the book of his brain) so that Polonius can later hand the book to Ophelia.

LORD POLONIUS ([2.2.230](#))

. . .--My honourable lord, I will most humbly take my leave of you.

HAMLET

You cannot, sir, take from me any thing that I will more willingly part withal: except my life, except my life, except my life.

Note:

From Syntinen Laulu's Yahoo Answer, I learned about actual portable, erasable tablets used in Shakespeares's time:

[Writing in a "notebook" in the middle ages?](#)

Here's an interesting link (from Syntinen Laulu's link):

[Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England](#)

That article somewhat undermines my own theory. However, in defense of my theory, Hamlet mentions "the book and volume of my brain." So I think he used an actual book and pretended to erase it, then write in it with a quill, using artistic license for erasable ink and an inkless quill. Or maybe he took notes on an actual table for later transcription into the book (of his brain) that Polonius saw him reading.

Also see

[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

[A Document in Madness](#)

OPHELIA (Act 4, Scene 5, lines 191-195)

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray,

love, remember: and there is pansies. that's for thoughts.

LAERTES

A document in madness, thoughts and remembrance fitted.

OPHELIA

*There's fennel for you, and columbines: there's rue
for you; and here's some for me: we may call it
herb-grace o' Sundays: O you must wear your rue with
a difference. There's a daisy: I would give you
some violets, but they withered all when my father
died: they say he made a good end,--*

There is method in her madness and madness in her method.

The "*document in madness*" is the book that Polonius gave her to occupy her mind..

It is the same book that Polonius saw Hamlet reading..

It is also the book of remembrances that Hamlet doesn't remember when Ophelia tries to return it to him..

It is the book of orisons wherein Hamlet wanted Ophelia to remember all his sins..

It is the book of Hamlet's brain from which he erased himself and wrote his father's commandment..

It is also the book of Ophelia's brain, where she let her father tell her what to think and let her brother keep the key to her memory.

It is a document in madness. It is a book full of old men - it should be dusty.

When they were true to themselves, that book of Ophelia's and Hamlet's brains was a document of "*noble mind[s]*" (3.1,163), "*noble in reason*" (2,2,317), filled with thoughts of love for each other. But then Hamlet erased himself from that book of his brain and wrote his father's commandment there and promised to "*remember*" (1,5,100-109). No wonder Hamlet didn't recognize the remembrances when Ophelia tried to return them. they were no longer Hamlet's remembrances - they were his father's. Ophelia's thoughts had been supplanted by her father's when she let her father tell her what to think. Thoughts and remembrance fitted - a document in madness.

The "*rue with a difference*," which "*we may call . . . herb-grace o' Sundays*" is Gertrude's key to finding grace if she will but grasp it. She must make a difference between herself and both her husbands else they drag her to hell along with the rest of their earthly possessions with which they cannot part.

The violets are the love between Hamlet and Ophelia ("*a violet in the youth of primy nature*" 1,3,8) which withered when Hamlet killed her father, only to spring up too late from her grave,

her "*womb of earth*."

LAERTES (Act 5, Scene 1, lines 238-240)

Lay her i' the earth:

And from her fair and unpolluted flesh

May violets spring!

[A Camel in My Mind's Eye](#)

HAMLET ([3.2.368](#))

*Do you see yonder **cloud** that's almost in shape of a **camel**?*

POLONIUS

*By the mass, and 'tis like a **camel**, indeed.*

A camel? A cloud? Claudius? Where? HAMLET ([1.2.184](#))

*Would I had met my **dearest foe in heaven***

Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio!

*My father, methinks **I see my father**.*

If your *father* is your *foe*, I can see that he would be your *dearest foe*, Hamlet, but he's not quite in *heaven* -- it sounds more like he's on his way to *heaven*, going through purgatory:

GHOST ([1.5.13](#))

*I am thy **father's** spirit,*

Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,

*And for the day, confin'd to **fast in fires***

Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature

*Are burnt and **purg'd** away.....*

Let me get this straight, Hamlet:

Your *father* is like your *Uncle Claudius*.

Claudius (cloud-ius) is like a *cloud* that's like a *camel*.

The *camel-cloud* is floating in *heaven*.

You wish to see your *dearest foe in heaven*.

Then you see your *father*.

Is he in *heaven*? Or in purgatory?

Hamlet, where is your *father*?

HORATIO ([1.2.187](#))

Oh, where, my lord?

HAMLET

***In my mind's eye**, Horatio.*

*In your **mind's eye**? Or in purgatory? Or both?*

*Your **father** or your **uncle**? Or both?*

*Your **dearest foe** or a **camel**? Or both?*

*A **camel** in your **mind's eye**?*

HAMLET ([1.4.70](#))

*Why, what should be the fear?
I do not set my life at a **pin's** fee
So now you're a *pin*, Hamlet?
And there's a *camel* in your eye?*

MATHEW, 19, 24. HOLY BIBLE in the King James version.

JESUS

*And again I say unto you, it is easier for a **camel to go through the eye of a needle**, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Some people misconstrue this biblical passage to mean that wealth is evil. Actually, it means that some rich men can't get into heaven because they value their worldly possessions more than their souls; they value Situation more than Self. Being rich is not a sin; even killing a brother to gain a kingdom is not an unforgiveable sin. But the man who values an earthly kingdom more than his own soul is doomed to [fast in fires](#). Such a man is *Claudius*:

CLAUDIUS ([3.3.46](#))

*What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offense?
And what's in prayer but this two-fold force,
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,
Or pardon'd, being down? Then, I'll look up;
My fault is past. But, O! what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?
That can not be since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the offense?*

....

*Try what repentance can: what can it not?
Yet what can it, when one can not repent?*

And such a man is Hamlet's *father*:

HORATIO (to the Ghost) ([1.1.148](#))

*Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death...*

Hamlet's *father* is in purgatory by choice, because he refuses to leave his *extorted treasure*.

These two foolish [old men](#) (and [Polonius](#) too) are trying to go *camel*-like through Hamlet's *mind's eye*. Forget the *camels* -- what's happening to the poor needle?

HORATIO (speaking of the Ghost of Hamlet's father) ([1.1.125](#))

*A mote it is to trouble the **mind's eye**.*

HAMLET (after killing Polonius, whom he mistook for Claudius) ([3.4.189](#))

*I do repent; but heaven hath pleas'd it so,
To punish me with this and this with me;
That I must be their **scourge and minister**.*

Pity the poor *camel*-crammed needle; that *scourge and minister*; purgatory personified.

By following a tenuous thread between three innocent words, *camel*, *pin*, and *eye*, my imagination has traced Hamlet's *father*, his *Uncle Claudius*, and the [false steward](#) Polonius going *camel*-like through the purgatory in Hamlet's *mind's eye*. At this point, perhaps the reader agrees with Horatio:

HORATIO ([5.1.203](#))

'Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so.

HAMLET

No, faith, not a jot; but to follow him thither with modesty enough and likelihood to lead it, as thus:

Before the age of Joe Camel, in the Elizabethan age, "*camel*" had just one vivid connotation -- the biblical metaphor of the camel going through the eye of the needle. The camel appears just four times in all of Shakespeare's works; twice in *Troilus and Cressida*, once in *Richard II*, and once in *Hamlet*.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

PANDUROS

*Achilles! a drayman, a porter, a very **camel**.*

THERSITES

*Mars his idiot! Do, rudeness, do, **camel**, do, do.*

THERSITES

I say this Ajax -

.....

Has not so much wit -

.....

*As will stop the **eye** of Helen's **needle**...* THERSITES

RICHARD II

RICHARD

*It is as hard to come as for a **camel**
To thread the postern of a small **needle's eye**.*

So the mere presence of the word "*camel*" is enough to send us in search of the needle (or *pin*) and its *eye* (Hamlet's *mind's eye*). But must our search lead us to Purgatory?

HORATIO ([1.5.149](#))

There's no offence, my lord.

HAMLET

*Yes, by **Saint Patrick**, but there is, Horatio,
And much offence, too...*

A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, edited by Horace Howard Furness, Hamlet, volume 1, New York, American Scholar Publications, INC, 1965, first published in 1877, page 111:

*136. Saint Patrick] TSCHISHWITZ: If Sh. had wished to be historically correct, he would have made a Dane swear by St Ansgarius. But since the subject concerned an unexpiated crime, he naturally thought of **St Patrick, who kept a Purgatory of his own**. See *The Honest Whore* [pt 2, I, I, p 330, Dodsley ed 1825, where the text reads, 'St Patrick, you know keeps Purgatory,' and not as the learned German quotes, 'keeps his Purgatory.' Ed]*

There is a very personal clue that Hamlet/Shakespeare's mind was Purgatory. In Stratford Guild Chapel there was a mural of Judgment Day. Although the mural was daubed over with whitewash about the time Shakespeare was born (in belated obedience to a government edict against religious icons and images), I believe that young Will could see the mural through the whitewash (or perhaps the whitewash was temporarily removed for special occasions, such as secret midnight Catholic Confirmations). The mural showed a group of sinners bound together with [hoops of steel](#) (a chain) and being led toward the mouth of hell. The [mouth](#) of [hell \(or purgatory\)](#) was set in what looked like a giant [porcupine head](#). When Shakespeare saw the porcupine in the Tower of London menagerie, he would have recognized it as the Guild Chapel's mouth of hell.

Note: For a clearer image of the mural (in black-and-white), please see <http://www.ifimages.com/public/image/1564926/view.html>



GHOST (to Hamlet) ([1.5.19](#))

*I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
**And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.***

GERTRUDE (to Hamlet) ([3.4.132](#))

*Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
And, as the sleeping soldiers in the alarm,
**Your bedded hair, like life in excrements,
Starts up and stand an end.***

Also see

[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[Bell, Book, and Candle](#)

Was Hamlet possessed by his father's spirit? I think he was possessed metaphorically and psychologically but not super-naturally, because his father's spirit was finally exorcised by

thought rather than by bell, book, and candle. However there may have been a metaphorical exorcism. Hamlet's mind was like sweet bells jangled", there was a book of his brain, and Claudius suggested that within a son's love for his father there is a "kind of wick or snuff that will abate it".

From Christopher Marlowe's Dr Faustus:
C. OF LOR.

*My lord, it may be some ghost newly crept out of **purgatory**, come to beg a pardon of your Holiness.*

POPE

It may be so. Friars, prepare a dirge to lay the fury of this ghost....

.....

MEPH.

*..... We shall be curs'd with **bell, book, and candle**.*

Also see

[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

[Leave It To Karma](#)

Hamlet must learn that he is not really the "*scourge and minister*" of God. It is not his job to decide who goes to hell, or even when.

Romans 12:19 (King James Version)

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

Hamlet will not kill Claudius while he's praying because he wants to send him to hell, not heaven.

HAMLET (3,3,76-98)

*Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven;
And so am I revenged. That would be scann'd:
A villain kills my father; and for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly, full of bread;
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought,
'Tis heavy with him: and am I then revenged,*

*To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and season'd for his passage?
No!
Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent:
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed;
At gaming, swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't;
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
As hell, whereto it goes. . .*

After killing Polonius, whom he mistook for Claudius, Hamlet seems to think he is the "scourge and minister" of God:

HAMLET (3,4,189-191)
*I do repent; but heaven hath pleas'd it so,
To punish me with this and this with me;
That I must be their scourge and minister.*

But was Hamlet following a commandment from heaven - or hell?
(See [An Honest Ghost?](#))

In the last act, Hamlet finally learns to leave it to Karma:

HAMLET (5,2,213-218)
*. . .there's a special
providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now,
'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be
now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the
readiness is all: since no man has aught of what he
leaves, what is't to leave betimes?*

Three Sons

Fortinbras's father was killed by Hamlet's father 30 years earlier. Fortinbras is an evil coward who didn't try to recover the lost lands until after Hamlet Sr died. If Fortinbras had attacked while old King Hamlet was still alive, the old King might have challenged young Fortinbras to a personal duel. But young Fortinbras was a coward who preferred to send thousand of commoners to die for his rotten royal "honour." So after old King Hamlet finally died, young Fortinbras "sharked up" an army of thugs to go to war against Denmark, but was easily diverted (at least temporarily) to easier pickings in Poland. In Poland, Fortinbras sent 10,000 men to their graves for a worthless piece of land.

Laertes, when he thought King Claudius had killed his father, immediately confronted the King -

but with a mob to back him up (and possibly to die for his cause). After hearing Claudius side of the story, Laertes immediately began plotting with Claudius to kill Hamlet by treachery. He didn't care about right or wrong, he just wanted revenge, even if it meant cutting Hamlet's throat in a church. He didn't bother to hear Hamlet's side of the story. However, just before the duel Laertes did finally hear Hamlet's apology which he would have accepted but he foolishly deferred to the opinions of "elder masters" - meaning Claudius - and continued the duel against his conscious. Laertes's father had warned him

Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing **dulls the edge of husbandry**.

But Laertes ignored that advice. When planning to revenge his father's death, Laertes said "for my means, I'll **husband** them so well, They shall go far with little." Then Laertes died fighting for a borrowed cause (borrowed from Claudius, his "elder master"). In a sense, he was killed because of borrowing and lending of swords (the accidental switch between swords, one poisoned) and that loan lost "both itself and friend (both Laertes and Hamlet, who was his friend at the end). However, before he died Laertes and Hamlet exchanged forgiveness and thus saved both their souls.

Hamlet wasn't naturally vengeful, but he was loyal to his father so he swore an oath to his father to seek revenge. But Hamlet didn't want to endanger his friends in the dangerous mission of seeking revenge against a sitting King, so he urged his friends to "shake hands and part." In the last act, he returned to Denmark "naked and alone" to confront the King. Hamlet was very concerned about right and wrong. Not sure that the ghost was really his father rather than a deceitful demon, he staged the Mousetrap to verify Claudius' guilt. In the last act, Hamlet realized that, in pursuing revenge, he had been untrue to himself - had written his father's command to live all alone in his brain. He had from himself been taken away and that was madness. A common theory of madness was that it was caused by demonic possession. At least psychologically and metaphorically, Hamlet had been possessed by his father's spirit. However, Hamlet recovered his true self by the end and saved his soul, but not his life.

Fond and Winnowed Opinions

Excerpt from Shmoop.com Laertes Character Analysis

- "Laertes analysis by Ph.D. and Masters students from Stanford, Harvard, and Berkeley."

<http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/laertes.html>

(See [Shmoop update as of June 1, 2014](#))

"Laertes, a young Danish lord, is the son of Polonius and brother of Ophelia. He spends most of his time abroad at college [sic]"

Please allow me now to correct the egregious errors of Shmoop and their "Ph.D. and Masters students from Stanford, Harvard, and Berkeley." I can do this because I was well educated by Mrs Black, my 10th-grade English teacher, back in 1965. (Thank you, Mrs Black, wherever you are.)

Laertes had just returned from France. There is no indication that Laertes was "at college." That would be out of character for him.

CLAUDIUS [\(1.2.50\)](#)

What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

LAERTES

*My dread lord,
Your leave and favour to return to France;
From whence though willingly I came to Denmark,
To show my duty in your coronation,
Yet now, I must confess, that duty done,
My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France
And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.*

KING CLAUDIUS [\(1.2.63\)](#)

*Take thy fair hour, Laertes; time be thine,
And thy best graces spend it at thy will!*

POLONIUS [Advising Laertes before his departure] [\(1.3.73\)](#)

*Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy;
For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
And they in France of the best rank and station
Are of a most select and generous chief in that.*

Later, when Polonius is giving Reynaldo instructions on how to spy on Laertes, we learn that Laertes is in Paris. Polonius expects "gaming . . . drinking, fencing, swearing, quarrelling, drabbing" but there is no mention of studying or college.

LORD POLONIUS [\(2.1.8\)](#)

Inquire me first what Danskers are in Paris;

LORD POLONIUS [\(2.1.23\)](#)

*But, sir, such wanton, wild and usual slips
As are companions noted and most known
To youth and liberty .*

REYNALDO

As gaming, my lord.

LORD POLONIUS

*Ay, or drinking, fencing, swearing, quarrelling,
Drabbing: you may go so far.*

LORD POLONIUS [\(2.1.33\)](#)

*. . . but breathe his faults so quaintly
That they may seem the taints of liberty,*

*The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind,
A savageness in unreclaimed blood,
Of general assault.*

This is the behavior Polonius is expecting from his son, with a pretense of disapproval but with a thinly veiled vicarious thrill:

LORD POLONIUS ([2.1.63](#))

*There was a' gaming; there o'ertook in's rouse;
There falling out at tennis:' or perchance,
'I saw him enter such a house of sale,'
Videlicet, a brothel . . .*

Claudius hears a report of Laertes activities in France from Lamond (or in some texts "Lamord"):

KING CLAUDIUS ([4.7.89](#))

*. . . Two months since,
Here was a gentleman of Normandy:--
I've seen myself, and served against, the French,*

KING CLAUDIUS ([4.7.105](#))

*He made confession of you,
And gave you such a masterly report
For art and exercise in your defence
And for your rapier most especially,*

Laertes, when he thought King Claudius had killed his father, immediately confronted the King - but [with a mob to back him up](#) (and possibly to die for his cause). After hearing Claudius' side of the story, Laertes immediately began plotting with Claudius to kill Hamlet by treachery. [He didn't care about right or wrong, he just wanted revenge](#), even if it meant [cutting Hamlet's throat in a church](#). He didn't bother to hear Hamlet's side of the story. However, just before the duel Laertes did finally hear Hamlet's apology [which he would have accepted but he foolishly deferred to the opinions of "elder masters" - meaning Claudius](#) - and continued the duel [against his conscience](#).

Some critics point to Laertes' dueling as an example of irony. Polonius had instructed Reynaldo to spy on Laertes to see if he was fencing, among other "taints." Lamond verified that Laertes was indeed fencing while in France. And then fencing led to Laertes' death. But the dramatic irony goes deeper:

Laertes's father had warned him

POLONIUS ([1.3.78](#))

*Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And **BORROWING DULLS THE EDGE OF HUSBANDRY.***

But Laertes ignored that advice. When planning to revenge his father's death, Laertes said,

LAERTES ([4.5.148](#))

*And for my means, I'll **HUSBAND** them so well,
They shall go far with little.*

Then Laertes died fighting for a borrowed cause (borrowed from Claudius, his "*ELDER MASTER*").

Laertes ([5.2.239](#))

*I am satisfied in nature,
...but...
I..will no reconciliation,
Till by some ELDER MASTERS, of known honour,
I have a voice and precedent of peace,*

Laertes [aside] ([5.2.304](#))

And yet 'tis almost 'gainst my conscience.

In a sense, he was killed because of borrowing and lending of swords (the accidental switch between swords, one poisoned) and that loan lost "[both itself and friend](#)" (both Laertes and Hamlet, who was his friend at the end).

However, before he died Laertes and Hamlet [exchanged forgiveness and thus saved both their souls](#).

Shmoop shoveled it even higher around their hero Fortinbras:

<http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/fortinbras.html>

"Fortinbras analysis by Ph.D. and Masters students from Stanford, Harvard, and Berkeley."

Schmoop:

"Fortinbras is a Norwegian prince who seeks revenge for his father's death [SIC]."

(See [Shmoop update as of June 1, 2014](#))

Fortinbras' father was killed 30 years earlier by Hamlet's father who is now dead. The cowardly Fortinbras waited until now, ([1.2.18](#))

*Holding a weak supposal of our worth,
Or thinking by our late dear brother's death
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,
Collegued with the dream of his advantage,*

to try to take back the land his father lost, by sharking up a gang of "[lawless resolute](#)s." The cowardly young Fortinbras believes (probably correctly) that he has a better chance of reclaiming the land from Claudius. For one thing, neither Claudius nor young Fortinbras will risk their own lives in a personal duel (as did old King Hamlet and Fortinbras's father). The two "brave" princes (Prince Fortinbras and King Claudius) can fight it out with no royal bloodshed - [just a few thousand underlings](#).]

Shmoop:

"Fortinbras takes clear and immediate action [SIC]"

["immediate action"??? Thirty years later???)

So much for Shmoop and Stanford and Harvard and Berkeley (assuming that affiliation is not another Shmoop lie):

HAMLET [\(5.2.184\)](#)

*Thus has he--and many more of the same bevy that I
know the dressy age dotes on--only got the tune of
the time and outward habit of encounter; a kind of
yesty collection, which carries them through and
through the most fond and winnowed opinions; and do
but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out.*

Shmoop update as of June 1, 2014

Shmoop has shuffled its alleged "authorities." They've dropped Harvard and added Yale:

"A majority of our writers are PhDs and PhD candidates from top universities like Stanford, UC Berkeley, and Yale."

They are now longer claiming that Fortinbras was motivated by revenge, but they still assert that he took "immediate action":

"But while Hamlet sits around contemplating life and death, Fortinbras takes immediate action by raising an army to reclaim Norway's lost territories."

Also please see

[God-like Reason Unused](#)

[In the Whirlwind of Passion, Show his Form and Pressure](#)

[Terms Compulsatory](#)

[To Thine Ownself Be True](#)

[Hamlet in a Nutshell - Hamlet Is an Anti-War Play](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[The Womb of Earth](#)

Since kings cause thousands of deaths by fighting wars over land, Hamlet equated his own birth and that of any future son with death and equated wombs with graves and land with graveyards.

Horatio

Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,

Hamlet

For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a god kissing carrion,--Have you a daughter?

Lord Polonius

I have, my lord.

Hamlet

Let her not walk i' the sun: conception is a blessing: but not as your daughter may conceive.

Friend, look to 't.

Lord Polonius

Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

Hamlet

Into my grave.

Lord Polonius

Indeed, that is out o' the air.

(Aside)

How pregnant sometimes his replies are!

Hamlet

...virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it ...

Hamlet Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? ...it were better my
mother had not borne me

Hamlet

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

Lying down at OPHELIA's feet

Ophelia

No, my lord.

Hamlet

I mean, my head upon your lap?

Ophelia

Ay, my lord.

Hamlet

Do you think I meant country matters?

[country matters - Ophelia's lap was the womb of earth.]

Ophelia

Well, God 'ild you! They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but
know not what we may be. God be at your table!

[In Shakespeare's time, the owl was a portent of death.]

Then up he rose, and donn'd his clothes,
And dupp'd the chamber-door;

Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more.

[Dupp'd means "opened upward," as with a coffin lid.]

From Answers.com:

Dup

v. t. (d 適 p) [Contr. fr. do up, that is, to lift up the latch. Cf. Don, Doff.]
To open; as, to dup the door. [Obs.] Shak.v

King Claudius

Pretty Ophelia!

Ophelia

Indeed, la, without an oath, I'll make an end on't:

By Gis and by Saint Charity,

Alack, and fie for shame!

Young men will do't, if they come to't;

By cock, they are to blame.

Quoth she, before you tumbled me,

You promised me to wed.

So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,

An thou hadst not come to my bed.

Queen Gertrude

Sweets to the sweet: farewell!

Scattering flowers

I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife;

I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,

And not have strew'd thy grave.

Hamlet [speaking of a grave]

'Thou dost lie in't, to be in't and say it is thine: 'tis for the dead, not for the quick; therefore thou liest.

First Clown

'Tis a quick lie, sir; 'twill away gain, from me to you.

Hamlet

(Leaps into the grave)

Hamlet

The imminent death of twenty thousand men,

That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,

Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot

Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,

Which is not tomb enough and continent

To hide the slain?

Hamlet [speaking of a skull in a grave]

This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land... The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box; and must the inheritor himself have no more, ha?

Horatio

Our last king...Was...by Fortinbras...Dared to the combat; in which...Hamlet [Sr]...Did slay this Fortinbras; who ... Did forfeit...his lands..[which] fell to Hamlet [Jr].

Hamlet

How long hast thou been a grave-maker?

First Clown

Of all the days i' the year, I came to't that day that our last king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

Hamlet

How long is that since?

First Clown

Cannot you tell that? every fool can tell that: it was the very day that young Hamlet was born; he that is mad, and sent into England.

Hamlet

How came he [Hamlet] mad?

First Clown

Faith, e'en with losing his wits.

Hamlet

Upon what ground?

First Clown

Why, here in Denmark

King Claudius

Be as ourself in Denmark.

Laertes

And therefore must his choice be circumscribed

Unto the voice and yielding of that body

Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you,

It fits your wisdom so far to believe it

As he in his particular act and place

May give his saying deed; which is no further

Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.

Hamlet

The rest is silence.

Kings caused thousands of deaths by fighting wars over land, thus, in the dirt, death, purgatory motif in Hamlet associates land with death. Hamlet's father was in purgatory because he could

not part with his land.

At the time of Hamlet's birth, his father (Hamlet Sr) won a duel with Fortinbras Sr to acquire a piece of land which was to become Hamlet's inheritance. At that same time, the gravedigger began his employment in Denmark. This suggests that Hamlet's inheritance of land was, figuratively, a graveyard. This idea is reinforced when Hamlet, standing by an open grave, remarks that the occupant of the grave might have been a landowner and now his grave is hardly large enough to contain the deeds for his land. Later Fortinbras Jr sent 10,000 men to their deaths to obtain a plot of land that was "not continent and tomb enough to bury the dead". That was the same Fortinbras who, according to Hamlet, had "rights of memory" in this land.

Later, Hamlet describes Osric as being "having much land" and being "spacious in the possession of dirt" and admits to the "vice" of knowing him, shortly before remarking that "to know a man well were to know himself." This indicates that Hamlet believes his unwillingly inherited land and his unwillingly inherited greed for land ("virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it") is a vice ("Cursed spite that I was born to set it right!"). "To be or not to be" . . . "so like the king that was and is the question of these wars."

Hamlet inherited greed for land from his father's ghost by promising that "thy commandment all alone shall live within the book and volume of my brain." Hamlet and the audience and even the ghost himself all believed that the ghost wanted revenge. But the ghost had said he was "doomed to walk the night...til the sins done in my days of nature are burnt and purg'd away." But what sins? The ghost himself did not understand his sin. Traditionally, a dying man wanted his kin to shorten his time in purgatory by praying for the forgiveness of his sins. But Hamlet's father told him "pity me not." He only wanted his son and namesake to recover the kingdom that Claudius had deprived him of. Horatio had accused the ghost of returning for "uphoarded treasure in the womb of earth" - then the ghost fled. Hamlet's father was doomed to walk the earth and burn in purgatory because he could not give up his deadly dirt.

The dirt motif was also important in English history (recent history in Shakespeare's time) and perhaps in Shakespeare's own life.

For centuries, rich men had bequeathed land to the Catholic Church in exchange for shortened stays in Purgatory. Martin Luther believed that the selling of passes out of Purgatory was the primary corrupter of the Church. Furthermore, the land which the Church had thus acquired was a tempting prize for any king who decided to break away from the Catholic Church. When Henry VIII separated the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church, he seized the lands of English monasteries, then sold those lands. Thereafter the English Reformation was irreversible. England could never again be Catholic because too many Englishmen had a vested interest in Protestantism -- all those owners of former monastery lands.

In 1565 (the year after Shakespeare's birth) William Allen wrote "A Defense and Declaration of the Catholike Churches Doctrine touching Purgatory, and Prayers of the Soules Departed." Before the Reformation, the primary social, economic, and religious institution in many English hamlets was the local guild. These town guilds (not to be confused with the craft guilds in large cities) had been formed for the primary purpose of praying for the souls of deceased members, in

order to shorten their time in Purgatory. With the Reformation, the Anglican Church declared the idea of Purgatory heretical, prolonged praying for the dead was outlawed, and the town guilds were ostensibly secularized. However, the guilds continued to be the main social and economic institutions in many towns. Furthermore, many guild members continued, openly or secretly, to be Catholics. Shakespeare was educated by the Stratford Guild. The brother of one of his teachers was executed for being a Catholic missionary, as was one of Shakespeare's former schoolmates. One of Shakespeare's teachers at the Guild went on to become head of the Catholic English College in Rome.

When Your Clowns Speak

HAMLET [\(3.2.39\)](#)

*... And let those that play **your clowns speak** no more than is set down for them; for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too; though, in the mean time, some **necessary question of the play** be then **to be** considered...*

What is the **necessary question** of Hamlet? When the **clowns speak**, it is **then to be** considered.

FIRST CLOWN [\(5.1.15\)](#)

*Give me leave. Here lies the water; good: here stands the man; good; if the man go to this **water**, and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he, he goes,--mark you that; but if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself: argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.*

SECOND CLOWN

But is this law?

FIRST CLOWN

*Ay, marry, is't; **crowner's quest law**.* </i>

"Crowner's quest" means "coronor's inquest" but it is also a pun on the question of whether to seize the crown - "to be or not to be" "so like the king"

HAMLET [\(3.1.64\)](#)

*To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a **sea** of troubles,
And by opposing end them?*

If Hamlet took arms against the king (*a **sea** of troubles*), he would very likely lose his own life in the attempt. Such an action might be considered suicide, which would cost Hamlet his soul. However if he waits for the king to initiate the attack (*if the **water** come to him*), then he *is not guilty of his own death*. In the end, Hamlet killed the king only after the King had indirectly

killed Hamlet (via Laertes' poisoned sword).

Before we leave the clowns, let's dig a little deeper.

Thirty years earlier, Hamlet's father (also named Hamlet) had killed King Fortinbras and gained some land that Hamlet subsequently inherited.

HAMLET [\(5.1.140\)](#)

How long hast thou been a grave-maker?

FIRST CLOWN

Of all the days i' the year, I came to't that day that our last king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

HAMLET

How long is that since?

FIRST CLOWN

Cannot you tell that? every fool can tell that: it was the very day that young Hamlet was born
Was this then Hamlet's "inheritance" - a graveyard?

HAMLET (standing over a grave) [\(5.1.111\)](#)

The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box; and must the inheritor himself have no more, ha?

To be or not to be -- what? That is the question. After Horatio had explained that the impending war was caused by a duel over land fought by Hamlet's father, whose ghost they had just seen, Bernardo replied:

[\(1.1.121\)](#)

*I think it **be** no other but e'en so: [\(1.1.121\)](#)*
Well may it sort that this portentous figure
Comes armed through our watch; so like the king
***That** was and **is the question** of these wars.*

To be or not to be... so like the king that was and is the question of these wars - that is Hamlet's dilemma.

Also see [How to Love Hamlet](#)

[How If I Answer No?](#)

OSRIC [\(5.2.166\)](#)

....it would come to immediate trial, if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer.

HAMLET

How if I answer 'no'?

Osric has been sent by Claudius to ask Hamlet whether he will consent to fight a duel with Laertes. But instead of asking that question directly, Osric refers to a subtly different question -

the question that the actual duel would answer: "who is the better swordsman." So "it would come to immediate trial" means that the question of "who is the better swordsman" would be answered if Hamlet answers it by dueling - "if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer."

Hamlet understands Osric's meaning but chooses to interpret "vouchsafe the answer" as answering whether or not he will consent to duel. If Hamlet answers that question "no" (he will not duel), then how could it "come to immediate trial" (with a duel)?

The entire dialog with Osric symbolizes themes of the whole play. Hamlet has been challenged by two warlike kings, his father and his uncle, to be like them ("[remember me](#)" and "[be as ourself in Denmark](#)"). Both those kings would like Hamlet to answer the challenge from Fortinbras by leading Denmark into war, to defend the land that his father seized and that his uncle wanted to keep. But in the end, Hamlet will "answer no." Instead of leading his countrymen to slaughter in another war over useless dirt, with his dying voice he will give that bloodsoaked dirt to Fortinbras, without a war.

See

[The Voice of Denmark](#)

[Hamlet Is An Anti-War Play](#)

Was Hamlet Guilty of Murder?

In this essay I will prove, based on evidence from the play, that Prince Hamlet was the legitimate ruler of Denmark and that he killed Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Claudius in defense of the legitimate government of Denmark and, more importantly, the people of Denmark. First I will demonstrate that Prince Hamlet's father was the legitimate and popular King of Denmark. Then I will prove that Claudius was not the legitimate successor to the throne. Then I will prove that Prince Hamlet was the legitimate successor as King of Denmark. Then I will show that the killings were legitimate acts of war, in circumstances that prevented normal due process, although Hamlet nevertheless conducted a de facto trial (the Mousetrap) to prove Claudius' guilt. Finally, I will show that, even though a government court of law would have absolved Hamlet, the Prince appealed to a higher authority (God) and Shakespeare submitted the case to higher judges (the audience). In those higher courts, Hamlet confessed his sins (and the sins of his dynasty) in the hope that his confession would prevent further evil.

Hamlet's father had not only been acknowledged as king, but he was widely regarded as a good king:

KING CLAUDIUS ([1.2.23](#))

. . . those lands

Lost by his father, with all bonds of law,

To our most valiant brother.

HORATIO ([1.1.93](#))

*Our last king,
Whose image even but now appear'd to us,
... our valiant Hamlet--
For so this side of our known world esteem'd him--*

HORATIO ([1.2.189](#))

I saw him once; he was a goodly king.

HAMLET

He was a man, take him for all in all,

In Shakespeare's day, the approval of the people played no part in the formal legitimacy of the monarch, but it was all important to the de facto legitimacy. Ultimately, royal legitimacy was a product of "might makes right." However, when two leaders were contending for the throne, the one with the support of the people would usually have an easier time raising an army.

GENTLEMAN ([4.5.102](#))

*Save yourself, my lord:
The ocean, overpeering of his list,
Eats not the flats with more impetuous haste
Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,
O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him lord;
And, as the world were now but to begin,
Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
The ratifiers and props of every word,
They cry 'Choose we: Laertes shall be king:'
Caps, hands, and tongues, applaud it to the clouds:
'Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!'*

The gentleman is disparaging of "*the rabble*." However, that gentleman is a minion of Claudius, who the audience knows is an evil king. This is as close as Shakespeare could come to advocating democracy without losing his head. However Shakespeare probably was not in favor of democracy. He wanted stability, to avoid war -

HORATIO ([5.2.400](#))

*Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,*

But this "*riotous head*" illustrates that no monarch's reign could be stable without the approval of the people. The whole apparatus of "legitimacy" was really just a tool to help gain that approval.

Even Queen Elizabeth of England and James VI of Scotland (soon to be James I of England) believed that the "divine rights" of monarchs were inseparable from their duty to promote the welfare of the people.

Old King Hamlet had saved the lives of thousands of his subjects by fighting a personal duel

instead of a war over disputed land. However a generation later old King Hamlet's victory in that duel became "[*the question of these wars*](#)." When young Fortinbras raised an army of thugs to reclaim that land "[*by strong hand and terms compulsatory*](#)," Claudius would not risk his own life in a personal duel in order to postpone war for another generation. Instead he temporarily diverted Fortinbras to Poland, delaying the war for only a few weeks. Thus although old King Hamlet was not as good a king as his son would be, he was less evil than Claudius.

The Danish throne was not strictly hereditary - kings were chosen by election. But Claudius seized the throne, bypassing the election:

HAMLET ([5.2.69](#))

*He that hath kill'd my king and whored my mother,
Popp'd in between the election and my hopes,*

Sometimes kings were chosen by their predecessors. Claudius himself named Hamlet as his successor:

KING CLAUDIUS ([1.2.109](#))

*... think of us
As of a father: for let the world take note,
You are the most immediate to our throne;
And with no less nobility of love
Than that which dearest father bears his son,
Do I impart toward you.*

ROSENCRANTZ ([3.2.333](#))

*... you have the voice of the king
himself for your succession in Denmark?*

It's a reasonable assumption that Hamlet's true father had also named Hamlet as his successor. Thus, Claudius had usurped the crown from the legitimate successor.

GHOST ([1.5.44](#))

*The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.*

GHOST ([1.5.79](#))

*Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch'd:*

HAMLET ([3.4.111](#))

*A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole,
And put it in his pocket!*

We've seen the "*riotous head*" with which Laertes could have overthrown Claudius. Prince Hamlet, because of "[*the great love the general gender bear him*](#)," could have easily raised an

army to defeat his uncle - but not without the deaths of many of his countrymen. Hamlet was better than that. Immediately after swearing to his father's ghost that he would attack Claudius, Hamlet urged his friends to "[*shake hands and part*](#)." Hamlet did not want to drag his subjects along to his doom, as was commonly done by kings:

ROSENCRANTZ ([3.3.16](#))

*.... The cease of majesty
Dies not alone; but, like a gulf, doth draw
What's near it with it: it is a massy wheel,
Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
Are mortised and adjoin'd; which, when it falls,
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone
Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.*

FIRST PLAYER ([2.2.502](#))

*Out, out, thou strumpet, Fortune! All you gods,
In general synod 'take away her power;
Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel,
And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven,
As low as to the fiends!'*

Hamlet was unwilling to spark a bloody civil war, but he has a responsibility to personally prevent Claudius from committing further evil:

HAMLET ([5.2.72](#))

*-is't not perfect conscience,
To quit him with this arm? and is't not to be damn'd,
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?*

Under the circumstances, Hamlet was not able to submit Claudius to formal due process. However, he did his best to establish guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. Hamlet heard the testimony of the victim himself:

GHOST ([1.5.44](#))

*The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.*

Even so, Hamlet sought more evidence to eliminate the last shred of reasonable doubt (that the Ghost might not really be his father:

HAMLET ([2.2.609](#))

*The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power*

*To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me: I'll have grounds
More relative than this:*

So he devised the Mousetrap play as a kind of trial:

HAMLET ([2.2.599](#))

*I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaim'd their malefactions;
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;
I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench,
I know my course.*

HAMLET ([2.2.615](#))

*. . . the play 's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.*

[Hamlet itself may have been a play that caught the conscience of a king. See [Princess of Denmark, James VI, and the Ur-Hamlet](#) and [It Began With a Lass \(The False Steward\)](#)]

The Mousetrap succeeded in exposing the guilt of Claudius to Hamlet, but it also exposed Hamlet's suspicions to Claudius. Immediately after the Mousetrap (and before Hamlet had killed Polonius) Claudius began plotting to murder Hamlet:

KING CLAUDIUS ([3.3.1](#))

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

HAMLET ([3.4.220](#))

*There's letters seal'd: and my two schoolfellows,
Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd,
They bear the mandate; they must sweep my way,
And marshal me to knavery.*

HAMLET ([5.2.18](#))

*. . . . to unseal
Their grand commission; where I found, Horatio,--
O royal knavery!--an exact command,*

*. . . .
That, on the supervise, no leisure bated,
No, not to stay the grinding of the axe,
My head should be struck off.*

Therefore, in order to defend himself and his country, Hamlet had to kill Claudius. When he saw somebody (Polonius) behind the arras in his mother's room, he naturally assumed that it was Claudius ("[I took thee for thy better](#)") so he stabbed through the arras, unintentionally killing Polonius. But Polonius was not a complete innocent:

CLAUDIUS ([1.2.14](#))

*.... nor have we herein barr'd
Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone
With this affair along.*

POLONIUS ([3.1.199](#))

*To England send him, or confine him where
Your wisdom best shall think.*

There is no indication that Polonius knew or suspected that Claudius had murdered the former king nor that he was planning to murder Hamlet, but Polonius was well aware of Claudius' very public usurpation of Hamlet's succession to the throne. Polonius volunteered to be a spy (normally a capital offense) for Claudius, even after Hamlet had warned him against it:

HAMLET ([3.1.141](#))

Where's your father?

OPHELIA

At home, my lord.

HAMLET

*Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the
fool no where but in's own house. Farewell.*

When he killed Polonius, Hamlet believed that he was the "*scourge and minister*" of God:

HAMLET ([3.4.189](#))

*I do repent; but heaven hath pleas'd it so,
To punish me with this and this with me;
That I must be their scourge and minister.*

But was Hamlet following a commandment from heaven - or hell?
(See [An Honest Ghost?](#))

HAMLET ([3.2.43](#))

. . . some necessary

**question of the play be then to be considered:
that's villanous, and shows a most pitiful ambition**

TO BE OR NOT TO BE so like the king THAT was and IS THE QUESTION OF THESE
WARS".

HAMLET ([5.2.169](#))

How if I answer 'no'?

In the end Hamlet finally killed Claudius, then lived just long enough to give Fortinbras the disputed land, thereby permanently averting the war and saving the lives of thousands of commoners.

(See [Hamlet Is An Anti-War Play.](#))

HAMLET ([5.2.346](#))

*You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
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.*

HAMLET ([5.2.358](#))

*O good Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story.*

HORATIO ([5.2.396](#))

*. . . . give order that these bodies
High on a stage be placed to the view;
And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
How these things came about: so shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on the inventors' heads: all this can I
Truly deliver.*

HORATIO ([5.2.413](#))

*But let this same be presently perform'd,
Even while men's minds are wild; lest more mischance
On plots and errors, happen.*

KING CLAUDIUS ([5.2.278](#))

And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.

Also please see

[The Madness of Hamlet](#)

and

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[Look Where My Abridgement Comes](#)

When Hamlet said, "*look, where my abridgement comes,*" he was talking about "*old Jephtha*". What's that got to do with the abridgement in "*to be or not to be*"... "*so like the king **that** was and **is the question** of these wars*"?

Hamlet

Why, 'As by lot, God wot,' and then, you know, 'It came to pass, as most like it was,' - the first row of the pious chanson will show you more; for look, where my abridgement comes.

(1) "*As most like it was*" sounds like "*so like the king that was*"

(2) The story of Jephtha, in Judges 11, sounds *most like* the story of *the king that was and is the question of these wars*. The Ammonites were preparing for war against Israel to recover land Israel had taken from them, just as young Fortinbras was preparing for war "*to recover of us, by strong hand and terms compulsatory, those foresaid lands so by his father lost*" in the fatal duel with old King Hamlet.

Judges 11.12

... What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?

Judges 11.13

...Because Israel took away my land... now therefore restore those lands again

[St Gertrude in the Garden](#)

St Gertrude of Nivelles is the patron saint of gardeners mentally ill people (especially those with a rat phobia), travellers, pilgrims . . . , recently dead people, and graves. . . She's associated with mice, which represent souls in purgatory. - extracted from the following link:

Begin-Quote from [Praying to Saints and Folk Magic: Santa Gertrude di Nivelles](#) (2010 Myth Woodling)

"She was venerated as a saint shortly after her death in 659. At her shrine in Cologne, Germany, gold and silver mice were given as offerings as late as 1822. . . . In artwork, St. Gertrude of Nivelles is depicted as one of the following: a woman holding a large mouse, an abbess with mice at her feet, an abbess with mice running up her cloak, an abbess with mice running up her crosier or pastoral staff,. . . Gertrude of Nivelles' iconic symbol is the mouse, and she is the patron saint of . . . mentally ill people (especially suriphobics),. . . gardeners, . . . travellers, pilgrims (particularly pilgrims in search of lodging), recently dead people, graves, . . . As a protective saint, she is invoked against rodents, vermin, rats, mice, pestilence, fever, fear of mice or rats (suriphobia), against mental illness and disorders (especially suriphobia), and insanity. . . . In modern Belgium, supposedly a drink-for-the-road is called a "St. Gertrude's Cup." There is also a legend relating to the "St. Gertrude's Cup." One day she sent some of her people to a distant country, promising that no misfortune would befall them on the journey. When they were on the waters, a large sea monster threatened to capsize their ship, but disappeared upon the invocation of St. Gertrude. Because of this legend, medieval travelers drank a toast known in German as the "Gertrudenminte" or "Sinte Geerts Minne" in the saint's honour before setting out on their journey. . . .Sometime Gertrude of Nivelles' symbol, the mouse, is said related to the souls in purgatory or symbolic as her protection of the recently dead people--citing the Teutonic tradition of mice being the emblem of souls. . . . St. Gertrude is patron saint of gardeners and herbalists, because there is a tradition that fine weather on her feast day (March 17) boads that it is time for spring planting."

end-quote from "Praying to Saints and Folk Magic: Santa Gertrude di Nivelles"

St Gertrude of Nivelles is the patron saint of gardeners:

HAMLET ([1.2.137](#))

*... 'tis an unweeded **garden**
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely.*

HAMLET [speaking to Gertrude] ([3.4.167-168](#))

*. . . **do not spread the compost on the weeds,**
To make them ranker.*

"Medieval travelers drank a toast known in German as the 'Gertrudenminte' or 'Sinte Geerts Minne' in the saint's honour before setting out on their journey."

Perhaps Hamlet was making a sarcastic allusion to the "Sinte Geerts Minne" toast when he forced Claudius to drink from the cup that had poisoned Gertrude, before Claudius set out on his journey to hell:

HAMLET ([5.2.337-338](#))

*Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?
Follow my mother.*

St Gertrude of Nivelles is also the patron saint of mentally ill people, especially those with a rat phobia:

HAMLET ([3.4.27](#))

*How now! a **rat**? Dead, for a ducat, dead!*

CLAUDIUS ([3.2.232-233](#))

What do you call the play?

HAMLET

*The **Mouse**-trap.*

"Gertrude of Nivelles' symbol, the mouse, is said related to the souls in purgatory."

FRANCISCO ([1.1.11](#))

*Not a **mouse** stirring.*

GHOST ([1.5.13-17](#))

*I am thy father's spirit,
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and **purged** away.*

St Gertrude's Feast Day is March 17, the same as **St Patrick's**, who is also a keeper of **purgatory**.

HORATIO ([1.5.148-149](#))

There's no offence, my lord.

HAMLET

*Yes, by **Saint Patrick**, but there is, Horatio, And much offence too.*

St Gertrude of Nivelles is also the patron saint of "travellers, pilgrims . . . , recently dead people, graves."

After Hamlet had been driven mad by listening to the the Ghost's forbidden tale of the secret's of his prison-house, Hamlet appears before Ophelia with "no **hat** upon his head" ([2.1.87](#)). Later Hamlet speaks of "The undiscover'd country from whose bourn no **traveller** returns"([3.1.87](#)). Still later Ophelia sings of Hamlet with a **cockle hat** ([4.5.28](#)) Pilgrims wore cockleshells on their hats. Ophelia's song foreshadows Hamlet's "pilgrimage" to the "undiscover'd country" of her "chaste treasure" in the "womb of earth" (her grave). With Gertrude standing by, Hamlet returns from that undiscovered country with his sanity restored.

See [The Rebirth of Hamlet](#)

Now aren't all you Freudian perverts ashamed of your spurious accusations against this saintly woman?

[Jointress to this Warlike State](#)

The tragic flaw of both Gertrude's husbands is that they are unable to part from their earthly kingdoms, not even to save their souls. Gertrude's fatal flaw is that she is unable to part from her husbands, not even to save her soul. "*Why, she would hang on him, as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on*" (1,2,145-147) Thus, "*the imperial jointress to this warlike state*" (1,2,9) is doomed to join her husbands in the blood-soaked graveyard, their "*extorted treasure in the womb of earth*" (1,1,149.)

[Polonius Well-Ended](#)

Shakespeare weaves a web of puns connecting Polonius with Poland and hence Hamlet with Fortinbras. Fortinbras set out to attack Claudius, but Claudius arranged to shift the attack to a part of Poland. Hamlet tried to attack Claudius, but stabbed Polonius instead.

POLONIUS ([3.3.30](#))

Behind the arras I'll convey myself,

Fortinbras ([4.4.1](#))

*Go, captain, from me greet the Danish king;
Tell him that, by his licence, Fortinbras
Craves the conveyance of a promised march
Over his kingdom.*

Hamlet (looking in a grave) ([5.1.110](#))

The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box

Hamlet([3.4.27](#))

How now! a rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!

Captain ([4.4.18](#))

*Truly to speak, and with no addition,
We go to gain a little patch of ground
That hath in it no profit but the name.
To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it;
Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole
A ranker rate, should it be sold in fee.*

Polonius([2.2.176](#))

*Be you and I behind an arras then;
Mark the encounter: if he love her not
And be not from his reason fall'n thereon,
Let me be no assistant for a state,
But keep a **farm** and carters.*

Polonius announced the ambassadors from Norway who would tell Claudius that Fortinbras attack had been shifted to Poland:

Polonius ([2.2.54](#))

*Give first admittance to the ambassadors;
My news shall be the **fruit** to that great feast. [the **end** or **dessert**]*

After the ambassadors delivered their news:

Polonius ([2.2.91](#))

*This business is **well ended**.*

After Hamlet's attempt to attack Claudius caused Polonius's untimely end:

Ophelia ([4.5.198](#))

*...when my father died: they say he made a **good end**,*

There was another foreshadowing of Polonius as **dessert**:

Hamlet ([2.2.535](#))

....after your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live.

Polonius

*My lord, I will use them according to their **desert**.*

Hamlet

*God's bodykins, man, much better: use every man after his **desert**, and who should 'scape whipping?*

Claudius ([4.3.19](#))

Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

Hamlet

At supper.

Claudius

At supper! where?

Hamlet

*Not where he eats, but **where he is eaten**: a certain **convocation of politic worms** are e'en at him. Your **worm is your only emperor for diet**: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots: your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table: that's the **end**.*

"Your **worm** is your only **emperor for diet**" is probably an allusion to the **Diet of Worms**, where the Holy Roman **Emperor** outlawed Martin Luther.

Hamlet ([4.3.30](#))

*A man may **fish** with the **worm** that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.*

Claudius

What dost you mean by this?

Hamlet

Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.

Polonius ([2.1.68](#))

*Your **bait of falsehood** takes this **carp of truth**:*

Polonius ([2.2.188](#))

Do you know me, my lord?

Hamlet

*Excellent well; you are a **fishmonger**.*

Polonius

Not I, my lord.

Hamlet

*Then I would you were so **honest** a man.*

An Envious Sliver

Polonius was aware that his meddling had ruined the lives of Hamlet and Ophelia. In the speech where he admitted this, he foreshadowed Ophelia's death:

POLONIUS ([2.1.117](#))

What, have you given him any hard words of late?

OPHELIA

*No, my good lord, but, as you did command,
I did repel his fetters and denied
His access to me.*

POLONIUS

*That hath made him mad.
I am sorry that with better heed and judgment
I had not quoted him: I fear'd he did but trifle,*

*And meant to wreck thee; but, beshrew my **jealousy**
By heaven, it is as proper to our age
To **cast beyond ourselves in our opinions**
As it is common for the younger sort
To **lack discretion**.*

GERTRUDE ([4.7.181](#))

*There is a **willow** grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the **glassy** stream;*

....

*There, on the pendent boughs her **coronet** weeds
Clambering to hang, an **envious sliver** broke;
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook.*

Polonius, jealous and envious of Hamlet, *cast beyond himself in his opinion* (like a branch over a stream). When Polonius died (broke), Ophelia, who had once reached for the *coronet* of a princess, *lacking discretion*, climbed out on the *envious sliver* of Polonius' commands and lost her self even before she drowned.. Polonius was metaphorically like the willow that was reflected in the brook. So Ophelia metaphorically died by falling into a mirror image of her father.

Polonius was also likened to a tree when Hamlet described one of the tedious [old men in his book \(metaphorically the book and volume of his brain\)](#) as having [eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum](#). Amber (fossilized tree sap) was an allusion to Poland, which was famous for its amber. This uses the Polonius/Poland pun, which is further developed later ([Polonius Well-Ended](#)).

Just as Polonius ruined Ophelia by "casting beyond" himself with his opinions, so Hamlet's father almost ruined Hamlet with the ["secrets of \[his\] prison house", an "eternal blazon" that "must not be to ears of flesh and blood", "thoughts beyond the reaches"](#) of Hamlet's soul.

Ophelia was untrue to herself; she gave her brother *the key to her memory* and let her father tell her what to *think*:

LAERTES ([1.3.87](#))

*Farewell, Ophelia; and remember well
What I have said to you.*

OPHELIA

*'Tis in my memory lock'd,
And you yourself shall keep the key of it.*

OPHELIA ([1.3.108](#))

I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

POLONIUS

Marry, I'll teach you...

After her father died, Ophelia was like a puppet with the strings cut:

HAMLET ([3.2.242](#))

*I could interpret between you and your love
if I could see the puppets dallying.*

Also see

[Old Men in the Book of his Brain](#)

[Remembrances in the Book of Their Brains](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[The Diet of Worms and the Aborted Rebirth of Polonius](#)

Claudius ([4.3.19](#))

Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

Hamlet

At supper.

Claudius

At supper! where?

Hamlet

*Not where he eats, but **where he is eaten**: a certain **convocation of politic worms** are e'en at him. Your **worm is your only emperor for diet**: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots: your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table: that's the **end**.*

As many writers have noted, this is an obvious allusion to the Diet of Worms in which the Holy Roman Empire outlawed Martin Luther. But why? What was Shakespeare's point for this allusion?

It's easy to draw a parallel between the Ghost of Hamlet's father and the ghost of the English Catholic Church, exhorting its sons to recapture the Church's lost land. (See [The Memory Be Green - Hamlet in Historical Context](#) and [Terms Compulsatory](#).) It's almost as easy to associate Claudius with the Church of England. (Claudius "wicked wit and gifts" might be an allusion to Bishop Whitgift. See [Old Men in the Book of his Brain](#).) But the parallel between Polonius and Martin Luther is much more subtle.

Perhaps the parallel is between aborted rebirths. Martin Luther's initial intent was to reform the Catholic Church rather than to destroy it. But that rebirth of the Catholic Church was aborted at the Diet of Worms. Like Hamlet, Polonius metaphorically reverted to infancy. But, unlike Hamlet, Polonius was not reborn - instead he was killed because Hamlet mistook him for the king. Similarly Luther's attempt to inspire a rebirth of the Catholic Church was aborted because kings and emperors and warlike popes used religious disputes as a pretext to fight over the lands of the Church.

See

[The Rebirth of Hamlet.](#)

[The Memory Be Green - Hamlet in Historical Context](#)

[Polonius](#)

[Shakespeare and Foxe's Book of Martyrs](#)

John Foxe became a tutor working for Thomas Lucy about 1545-7 Not where he eats, but where he is eaten: a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your **worm** is your only emperor for **diet**.

Martin Luther "was led by secret **stairs** to the place where he was appointed to have audience" - from Foxe's Book of Martyrs, 147, THE DIET OF WORMS (<http://www.exclassics.com/foxe/foxe148.htm>).

HAMLET

...

...[you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby.](#)

[Old Stock](#)

HAMLET

. . . I did love you once.

OPHELIA

Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

HAMLET

You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it:

Laertes had previously warned Ophelia that because Hamlet was a Prince he was not free to marry for love. However much he loves Ophelia now, eventually his royal duties will force him to dump her:

Laertes

*. . . Perhaps he loves you now,
And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch
The virtue of his will: but you must fear,
His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own;
For he himself is subject to his birth:
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself; for on his choice depends*

*The safety and health of this whole state;
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you,
It fits your wisdom so far to believe it
As he in his particular act and place
May give his saying deed; which is no further
Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.*

Laertes was right. Hamlet erased himself (the "pressures of youth," including Ophelia) from his own brain and wrote his father there. He was "from himself taken away," all his virtues (including his love for Ophelia) replaced by his father's values (his "old stock"). "Old stock" might be a gardening metaphor. Hamlet's humanist education was like a branch of a peach tree grafted onto the "old stock" of a lemon tree (the warlike traditions of his father). The graft did not take - Hamlet's humanism and his love for Ophelia was dying. Notice the plural form - "OUR old stock, but WE." Maybe that's because Hamlet's brain was occupied by both himself and his father.

Questions of the Play

Bernardo opens the play with a question: "who's there?". That question reverberates throughout the play.

Who's there?... What, is Horatio there?... Looks it not like the king? Is it not like the king? . so like the king that was and is the question of these wars .How is it that the clouds still hang on you?. Methinks I see my father. Where, my lord? In my mind's eye Must I remember?... What does this mean, my lord? What may this mean... why is this? wherefore? what should we do?... Why, what should be the fear?... What if it... deprive your sovereignty of reason and draw you into madness? Whither wilt thou lead me? Thou comest in such a questionable shape... canst work i' the earth so fast? What is't but to be nothing else but mad? Will you walk out of the air, my lord? Into my grave... And can you, by no drift of circumstance, get from him why he puts on this confusion, grating so harshly all his days of quiet with turbulent and dangerous lunacy?... some necessary question of the play be then to be considered. To be or not to be. That is the question. so like the king that was and is the question of these wars Who, I?... what is your cause of distemper? Sir, I lack advancement. How can that be, when you have the voice of the king himself for your succession in Denmark? Sir, I cannot make you a wholesome answer; my wit's diseased..Try what repentance can: what can it not? Yet what can it when one can not repent? Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats will not debate the question of this straw.....must the inheritor himself have no more, ha?...How came he mad?...Whose grave's this, sirrah?... is't not perfect conscience, to quit him with this arm? and is't not to be damn'd, to let this canker of our nature come in further evil?... crowner's quest...answer to the purpose the king's purpose confess thyself..when you are asked this question next, say 'a grave-maker'. ... if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer...How if I answer 'no'?.. Who does it, then? His madness... Is thy union here?... What warlike noise is this?.

See:

Some necessary **question** of the play **be** than **to be** considered . . . [When Your Clowns Speak](#)

[To Be Or Not To Be](#) . . .

Who's there?

[The Voice of Denmark](#)

[Hamlet's Divided Soul](#)

Also please see

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[A Piece of Work](#)

Hamlet

*What a **piece of work is a man!** how noble in reason!
how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how
express and admirable! in action how like an angel!
in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the
world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me,
what is this quintessence of dust? **man delights not**
me: no, nor woman neither*

Hamlet (to Polonius)

*How now, my lord! Will the king hear this **piece of work**?*

Hamlet (to Claudius)

*... 'tis a **knavish piece of work***

A *knavish piece of work* is a man (*piece of work*) who is a king (nave with his subjects attached like spokes). This man does not delight Hamlet.

[God-like Reason Unused](#)

Hamlet's soliloquy about Fortinbras is ironic. It goes from

*Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To fust in us unused.*

to

My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

Is that using his *god-like reason*? Only to think *bloody thoughts*?

Also in the same soliloquy:

*Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake.*

That "*honour*" leads to:

*The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain. . .*

Is that "*honour*"? To send thousands to their graves for "*a straw*"?

The irony is a little complicated in this soliloquy because, although the audience is intended to see the irony in Hamlet's words, Hamlet himself doesn't see it. He hasn't yet realized that he has *from himself been taken away* by his father's warlike spirit which he had written to *live all alone in the book and volume of his brain*. Thus, in this soliloquy he starts by expressing his own values, the values of a student from Wittenberg who uses his *god-like reason*. But then his father's spirit takes over and scoffs at reason as *some craven scruple of thinking too precisely on the event*, concluding that thoughts are worthless unless they are *bloody*.

Please see [Reason Motif](#)

In the Whirlwind of Passion, Show his Form and Pressure

When Hamlet swore to let his father's commandment live all alone in his brain, he (almost) erased his true self - all that forms and pressures past had copied there.

*Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll **wipe away** all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, **all forms, all pressures past**,
That youth and observation copied there;
And **thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain**,
Unmix'd with baser matter*

For the actor playing Hamlet, the challenge is to show the remnants of those almost-erased **forms and pressures** beneath the **whirlwind of passion** that is his father's warlike spirit (the nave of a great wheel with his hapless subjects as spokes).

*for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say,
the **whirlwind of passion**, you must acquire and beget
a temperance that may give it smoothness.*

*. . . to hold, as 'twere, the
mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature,
scorn her own image, and the very age and body of
the time his **form and pressure**.*

"Form and pressure" in Hamlet's instructions to the Players echoes Hamlet's promise to his father to "wipe away all trivial fond records, / All saws of books, all FORMS, all PRESSURES past, / That youth and observation copied there." Thus, in telling the players to accurately reflect the true nature of the world, a part of Hamlet is also trying to tell himself to restore his own true self that he had wiped away when he wrote his father's commandment to live all alone in the book and volume of his brain.

Hamlet was possessed by his father's ghost - at least metaphorically and psychologically, if not supernaturally. This means that for much of the play Hamlet is expressing his father's opinions rather than his own. Some of his soliloquies are actually debates between Hamlet himself (before he was "from himself taken away") and his father's spirit which now lives (almost) all alone in his brain.

This would be very challenging for an actor to convey. A specific example: the "my thoughts be bloody" soliloquy. Hamlet starts the speech as himself, the scholar from Wittenberg:

*...he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To fust in us unused.*

But then he abruptly comes under the sway of his father's anti-intellectual, warlike spirit:

*some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on the event,*

Culminating in "my thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth!"

A super-talented actor might be able to make that speech with the father's spirit roaring out his warlike noise while at the same time the son recoils from the words coming out of his own mouth.

Hamlet is too often portrayed as an indecisive, suicidal wimp, but I see him rather as a valiant soldier of the spirit, fighting a desperate internal battle to defend the sovereignty of his soul. Making that internal battle visible to the audience would be difficult, but not impossible.

Confess Thyself

Hamlet is the *glass of fashion*; he is possessed by demons; and he is purgatory personified. By reflecting his father's values, Hamlet becomes possessed by his father's spirit, and thereby joins his father in the purgatory of his own mind. From purgatory, a soul is in danger of *rolling down the hill of heaven even as low as to the fiends*. But there is also hope that his sins will be *burnt and purged away*. If you're trapped in purgatory and searching for *the steep and thorny way to heaven*, the answer is simple: *confess thyself*.

Gravedigger

*I'll put another question to thee: if thou answerest me not to the purpose, **confess thyself**--*

Rosencrantz (speaking of Hamlet)

He does confess he feels himself distracted;

Hamlet (after killing Polonius, whom he mistook for Claudius)

***I do repent;** but heaven hath pleas'd it so,
To punish me with this and this with me;
That **I must be their scourge and minister.***

Hamlet

*The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remember'd.*

Hamlet

*...I am myself indifferent honest; but yet **I could accuse me** of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? **We are arrant knaves, all.***

"But yet I could accuse me" - here Hamlet is really confessing on behalf of his father.

The need to confess and purge oneself of one's sins is common to many of the characters - all of them reflected by Hamlet, the *the glass of fashion*.

Hamlet (to Gertrude)

*You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you.*

....

*...**Confess yourself** to heaven;*

Repent what's past; avoid what is to come;

Gertrude

O Hamlet, speak no more:

Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;

And there I see such black and grained spots

As will not leave their tinct.

Claudius

*And what's in **prayer** but this two-fold force,*

To be forestalled ere we come to fall,

*Or **pardon'd** being down? Then I'll look up;*

My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer

Can serve my turn?....

*Try what **repentance** can: what can it not?*

*Yet what can it **when one can not repent**?*

Hamlet

*for me to put him [Claudius] to his **purgation** would perhaps plunge him into far more choler.*

Ghost

I am thy father's spirit,

Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,

*And for the day confined to **fast in fires**,*

Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature

Are burnt and purged away.

.....

Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,

Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd,

No reckoning made, but sent to my account

With all my imperfections on my head:

Laertes (to Claudius)

... I must confess, that...

My thoughts and wishes....

...bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.

Laertes's sin was that he bowed his wishes to Claudius:

Laertes

I am satisfied in nature,

...but...

I..will no reconciliation,

Till by some elder masters, of known honour,

I have a voice and precedent of peace,

Laertes [aside]
And yet 'tis almost 'gainst my conscience.

Laertes "confessed" out of context shortly before his actual confession:

Laertes
*A touch, a touch, **I do confess.***

Laertes
...I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery.

Laertes
*...**Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet:**
Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,
Nor thine on me.*

Hamlet
Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee.

That exchange of forgiveness for the deaths of father and son also included a general confession and pardon for the father and son Hamlets. Hamlet's "*I will follow thee*" to heaven echoes his First Act "*I'll follow thee*" when he followed his father into Purgatory. Now the "*I will follow thee*" is perhaps his father's spirit following him out of Purgatory and into Heaven.

[The Majesty of Buried Denmark](#)

Was "Hamlet" just a ghost story? Hamlet was possessed by his father's ghost. Hamlet's mind was purgatory for the ghost. By the end of the play he had managed to exorcise that ghost by confessing the sins of the ghost. Who could let belief take hold of him when presented with such a silly story? But ghost and purgatory and exorcism were not the point of the story, they were merely trappings above the deeper themes which denoted Hamlet truly.

Hamlet, by [study and thought and love of life](#), had formed his own character. But there was another side of his character, formed by his heritage, by his upbringing, by the "[terms of honour](#)" defined by his elders, and by the [particular circumstances of his life](#). Hamlet was trying to be true to himself, but which self? He finally realized that Denmark was part of him and he was part of Denmark. Thus he returned to Denmark "[naked and alone](#)." He was "[constant to the King's purpose](#)", yet unwilling to "[let this canker of our nature come in further evil](#)." He was not able to [inoculate his old stock with virtue](#), but by [remembering his sins](#) and repenting, he could perhaps help [others avoid his fate](#).

See [Purgatory and Confession Theme](#)

[Shakespeare's Audience - You the Judges](#)

"When a man's verses cannot be understood...it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a small room." - As You Like It

Did Shakespeare's audiences understand his plays? He didn't want everyone to understand everything - that would have cost him his head.

ROSENCRANTZ ([4.2.22](#))

I understand you not, my lord.

HAMLET

I am glad of it: a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear.

The royal Censor would not allow any criticism of the government nor even any references to current events - and the Spanish Armada was still current in English minds just a dozen years before Horatio stepped high onto the platform to remind them of the "king THAT was and IS THE QUESTION OF THESE WARS". So to keep his head, Shakespeare had to be subtle.

(Please see

[I Know a Hawk from a Handsaw - Hamlet and the Spanish Armada](#)

But royal Censors tended to be somewhat dim-witted compared to some in Shakespeare's audience, "the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others." Some may have been Shakespeare's co-conspirators in the Catholic underground. Some may have been his handlers after he became an unwilling double-agent. Some of his words may have been private conversations between Shakespeare and his God. However, Shakespeare was above all else a showman.

HAMLET ([3.2.138](#))

We shall know by this fellow: the players cannot keep counsel; they'll tell all.

OPHELIA

Will he tell us what this show meant?

HAMLET

Ay, or any show that you'll show him: be not you ashamed to show, he'll not shame to tell you what it means.

So Shakespeare had to be subtle, but most of the time he was not too subtle for his intended audience. Most of the audience, even many of the groundlings, had ears more attuned than modern ears to Shakespeare's words and methods.

Today the typical playgoer has seen thousands of plays, movies, and TV shows. But Shakespeare's first audiences had probably seen at most a few dozen plays in their whole lifetimes. So they paid close attention to those precious few.

Those first audiences feasted on Hamlet, striving to absorb the words into their very souls. Education back then emphasized memorization. Shakespeare, as an actor, had to be even more adept at memorization. And, given the expense of paper, Shakespeare the author also made good use of his memory. Ben Jonson said that Shakespeare hardly ever blotted out a word. Maybe Shakespeare composed most of each play in his head before putting quill to parchment. Holding

the whole play in his head helped Shakespeare craft subtle word-play connections among diverse sections of the play, but that also sometimes made him overestimate the ability of his audiences to follow those connections. (I had help first from a Shakespeare concordance in 1993, then by about 1994 I had a searchable floppy disk with the Complete Works. But even so, I missed many connections until a few years later when I thrice attempted to memorize all of Hamlet. And even after that, I have continued to discover new connections almost every time I revisit the play.) So even the first audiences were sometimes confused, but they were not daunted.

Probably the biggest advantage of Hamlet's first audiences was that they fully expected to uncover hidden meanings within Shakespeare's delightful wordplay. But since then, Hamlet has become the most written-about literary work in the English language. Today's audiences have been told that nothing more can be said about Hamlet, that the "authorities" have said all there is to say. So most approach the play with closed minds.

The pennant of Shakespeare's Globe Theater shows Hercules holding a globe. According to the legend, Hercules temporarily relieved Atlas of the task of holding up the Earth so that Atlas could help Hercules with one of his seven tasks. One of Hercules' tasks was to clear away the manure that had accumulated in the Aegean stables. To expose the truth in Hamlet, the modern reader must first, Hercules-like, clear away four centuries of accumulated bullshit.

Since 1689, when Newton reduced the world to clockwork, puns have fallen into disrepute. Now we want words to be unambiguous, rigidly determining one and only one meaning. When we encounter a pun, we assume that it's an unfortunate accident and we automatically filter out any multiple meanings. But in Shakespeare's day, words were still magical. The twisting beauty of Celtic art still resonated in English minds, which sought that same complex beauty and mystery in English words. Whether in the form of prayers, curses, magical incantations, majestic blank verse, or royal commandments, words had power.

Shakespeare used the power of words to humanize kings - to bring them down to the level of mere humans. Then kings could be held morally accountable by Shakespeare's audiences.

"And you the judges, bear a wary eye." ([5.2.278](#))

Also see

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

Links

Links to this website from: Academia.edu:

[This Eternal Blazon Must Not Be](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

[The Rebirth of Hamlet](#)

[Hamlet Is Anti-War](#)

[Hawk from a Handsaw](#)

[The Honey of His Music Vows](#)

Part 2 - Where Truth Is Hid

Warning: Most of what follows is speculation. To distinguish between my speculations and accepted historical facts, I have italicized and colored my speculations.

Summary:

Shakespeare's secret godfather was William Allen, leader of the English Catholic underground. Young Shakespeare swore an oath to his father and to his godfather to write a series of history plays, which was originally planned to culminate in an incendiary version of Henry VIII. The drafts of the first history plays were enough to secure him a position with Lord Strange's Players and later to make him a shareholder in a group of players. But Shakespeare did not want to fulfill his oath. He loved the stage too much to subvert it to politics. And he loved his country too much to lead it into bloody civil war. So he wrote history plays that humanized kings and showed the human cost of wars, and he procrastinated on writing the final Henry VIII play.

In 1593, Christopher Marlowe was murdered by double-agents. Shakespeare mistakenly believed that Marlowe had been killed by Catholic agents in order to prevent Marlowe from exposing Shakespeare's Catholic ties. Actually the Catholic agents had tricked the English government into murdering Marlowe because the Catholics were afraid that Marlowe would seduce James VI and prevent him from converting to Catholicism.

Essex and his followers were aware of Shakespeare's oath and used his Richard II to launch their rebellion. As a result, Shakespeare was imprisoned at Marshallsea and tortured by Topcliffe. He negotiated his freedom (and saved his fellow players) by polishing (almost completely rewriting) a play that James VI had written about Hamlet.

Due to Shakespeare's connection to the Catholic underground and his collaboration with James, it is possible that James got his real warning about the Gunpowder Plot (to blow up Parliament) from Shakespeare.

When Shakespeare finally wrote Henry VIII, it was incendiary only in a literal sense. It burned down the Globe. I believe the fire was set deliberately, for financial reasons and also so Shakespeare could symbolically fulfil his oath.

It is possible that Ben Jonson, working either for the English government or for the Catholic underground, forced Shakespeare to poison himself.

Why Will? (The Godfather)

William Shakespeare was a man of words. His world was shaped by the words of others until he mastered the words to create his own world, the Globe Theater. The first word to circumscribe Shakespeare's fate was his first name. Why William? He was born on St. George's Day. Not only was St. George the patron saint of England, he was especially important in Stratford on Avon. On the wall of Stratford's Trinity Church, where Shakespeare was baptized, there had once been a mural of St. George slaying the Dragon. Before Shakespeare, Stratford had produced only two very famous men. One, of them, John de Stratford, was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1333 to

1348. Thanks largely to the efforts of John de Stratford, St George became Patron Saint of England shortly before John's death. (The other famous Stratfordian, Hugh Clopton, was Lord Mayor of London in 1491, the year Henry VIII was born.) Even after Henry VIII told Englishmen they could no longer be Catholics, after the Church of England told them they could no longer venerate saints, after St. George had been painted over in Stratford's Trinity Church, many Englishmen still named their sons George, especially secret Catholics like John Shakespeare, especially when their sons were born on St. George's Day. But John Shakespeare's son, born on St. George's Day, was named William. Why William?

Before John Shakespeare's son was two days old, before the baptism, a modest man named William Allen rode into town. Although John had never before met William Allen, never even heard of him, he named his son after William Allen and named William Allen godfather to his son. Why? One day this William Allen would be a very important man. He would found a college in the Netherlands to train Catholic missionaries to go back to England (where a quarter of them would be drawn and quartered for preaching their outlawed religion). When Philip of Spain planned to capture England with his Armada, the plan called for William Allen as Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor of England. But there was little hint of that momentous future in the modest man who had just ridden into town.

To John Shakespeare, William Allen was important because he prophesied that John's son would become the most important man in the history of England, the man who would reunite England with the Catholic Church once and for all. Allen spun a tale of Shakespeare, Breakspear, and Pole; of the only English Pope and his fertility well; of the false fetus stirred by Pole's entrance; of almost-Pope Pole's conception of a new English word, "seminary," and the dissemination of Pole's "seminary" just as John Shakespeare was conceiving his son; and of two Catholic heirs who never were and one who was to be.

Shakespeare, Breakspear, and Broken Pole (The Prophecy)

Allen's prophecy wasn't all empty words -- his story had roots in history. Some four centuries before the birth of William Shakespeare, a man named Nicholas Breakspear was parish priest in the hamlet of Brinsley. Breakspear was not related to Shakespeare, but the mere similarity of names would link the two men across the centuries more profoundly than any ties of blood. From all over England, women flocked to Breakspear's parish, hoping to become pregnant. They were drawn not to Breakspear but to his well. The Brinsley well was believed to make barren women fertile. But Breakspear's enduring fame came not from the well but from his subsequent career -- he went on to become Pope, the first and only English Pope.

A few years after Breakspear died, a few miles from Brinsley, Oxford University was founded. In Shakespeare's time, Oxford was a breeding ground for Catholic resistance. William Allen was an Oxford graduate, as were most of Shakespeare's teachers at the Stratford Guild School.

About three centuries after Breakspear, we find Henry VIII and his wife Catherine at the Brinsley well. Catherine had given him a daughter (Mary), but Henry thought he needed a male heir. Since the Norman conquest, England had had only one female ruler, Matilda, and her reign had been one long civil war between her and her cousin Stephen. Elizabeth, Henry's as yet unborn second daughter, would be the greatest ruler England would ever have (with the possible

exception of Margaret Thatcher), but Henry couldn't know that. Henry could reasonably believe that, for the good of the country, he needed a son. Since Catherine couldn't give him a son, he decided to divorce her and try to get his male heir from another woman. But the Pope refused to annul Henry's marriage to Catherine. So Henry annulled the marriage of the Church of England to the Roman Catholic Church -- all because Breakspear's well had failed to produce a Catholic male heir.

By annulling his marriage to Catherine, Henry made their daughter (the future Queen Mary, a.k.a. Bloody Mary) a retroactive bastard. Mary's godmother was Margaret Pole, a cousin of Henry's. Margaret's son, Reginald Pole, was a respected theologian. Because he refused to recognize the legitimacy of Henry's annulment (and the consequent illegitimacy of Mary), Reginald Pole had to flee into exile on the Continent. But his mother Margaret remained in England, where Henry cut off her head.

While on the Continent, Pole was one of the chief organizers of the Council of Trent, which for many years studied ways to reform the Catholic Church and strengthen it against the encroachments of Protestantism. During the Council of Trent, Pole proposed the establishment of colleges to train priests. He coined a new word for these colleges, "seminaries." Pole was so widely respected that he was almost elected Pope -- he fell just one vote short of the required two-thirds majority.

Henry's second wife, Anne Boleyn, gave him another daughter, Elizabeth. Then Anne gave birth to a still-born son and Henry chopped off her head. Eventually Henry found a wife who gave him a son, Edward. Edward was raised as a Protestant, so after Henry died, King Edward VI continued the break with Catholicism begun by his father. But Edward was sickly and only survived his father by a few years.

Then, at last, Mary, the Catholic retroactive bastard, inherited the throne. Mary legalized Catholicism and even burned some heretics (hence Bloody Mary), but she was unable to undo what her father had done. Henry had confiscated the extensive lands of the Catholic monasteries and sold them. The present owners of the former monastery lands were a powerful force for preserving Protestantism.

Mary needed help to restore English Catholicism to its former dominance. She needed a strong Catholic husband. Her first choice was Reginald Pole, her godmother's son, the man whose mother had been beheaded by her father, the man who had almost become the second English Pope. But Pole declined, saying he was not up to the job because he was too old.

So Mary settled for Philip of Spain (the same Philip who, thirty years after Mary's death, would send his Armada against England). A few months after Mary married Philip, Pole finally returned to England from his long exile. When Pole was presented to Queen Mary, she felt the first kick from what she imagined was a baby growing in her womb. That baby, if it had existed, might have been the long-awaited Catholic male heir, who perhaps would have made England Catholic forever. But it was a false pregnancy. Mary never had a baby.

Pole became Archbishop of Canterbury and supervised the burning of Protestant martyrs, while

calling himself the "Pole Star" because he was the guiding star about whom the English people revolved. After about five years of Catholic rule, Mary died and Protestant Elizabeth became Queen. His heart broken, Pole died on the same day that Mary died. Despite Breakspear and broken Pole, England was once again severed from the Catholic Church.

In July, 1563, several years after Pole died and about nine months before William Shakespeare was born, the Council of Trent approved the De Reformatione decree which included a canon for the institution of the seminaries which Pole had proposed. This inspired William Allen to plant his own seminaries.

Dangerous Conjectures in Ill-Breeding Minds (The Oath)

Despite his great expectations for the son, Allen had a more immediate interest in the father. John Shakespeare was chamberlain (treasurer) for the Stratford government. He had considerable influence on the selection of teachers for the Gild School, and William Allen needed that influence. Allen wouldn't establish his seminary for missionaries until four years later, but with John's help, Allen hoped to turn the Stratford Gild school into almost a pre-seminary. Over the next decades, several of the Gild teachers would be devout Catholics.

In 1568, Allen founded his seminary at Douai, in the Netherlands. Threatened by the religious wars in the Netherlands, the seminary moved in 1578 to Reims, France, then back to Douai in 1597. The first graduates from Allen's seminary arrived in England in 1574. The first seminary martyr was Cuthbert Mayne, who was drawn and quartered in 1577. By the turn of the century, Allen's seminary had sent over four hundred missionaries back to England, and one hundred and four of them had been captured and executed as "traitors," (including one of Shakespeare's fellow students at the Stratford Guild school and the brother of one of his teachers.) The missionaries were well aware of the danger of their mission. As part of his training at Reims, a seminarian was required to visualize his probable capture and execution. If captured, he would be "questioned" by Topcliffe, the Queen's chief torturer. Then he would be hung by the neck, gasping vainly for air until he lost consciousness. Then he would be cut down and revived to experience being drawn and quartered. "Drawn and quartered" has an innocuous sound to modern ears, but the actual practice was horrible beyond description. His belly would be cut open and his intestines "drawn" out and sometimes burned while he watched. Then, while he was still alive and conscious, his arms and legs were tied to four horses and he was pulled apart - into "quarters." Then he would pass into the "undiscovered country" to receive a martyr's reward.

In 1570 the Pope issued a bull excommunicating Queen Elizabeth and releasing English Catholics from their allegiance to her. A London lawyer named John Felton pinned a copy of the bull to the Bishop of London's door. John Felton's wife, the mother of their two-year-old son Thomas, was a former lady in waiting to Bloody Mary and a personal friend of Elizabeth. John was executed on August 8 (St Dominic's Day), 1570, exactly eighteen years before England defeated the Spanish Armada which Phillip II of Spain (Bloody Mary's widower) had dispatched to enforce the Pope's bull. Twenty days after the defeat of the Armada, young Thomas Felton, then aged 20 and a graduate of Allen's seminary, was executed.

Simon Hunt was Shakespeare's teacher at the Stratford Gild school from 1571 to 1575. In 1575,

Simon Hunt attended William Allen's Douai seminary. He was ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1578 and became the first head of St Peter's College for English Catholics in Rome.

John Cottom was Shakespeare's teacher from 1579 to 1581. In June, 1580, Cottom's brother Thomas, a Jesuit missionary, was arrested in Shottery, a village near Stratford. Thomas Cottam was executed on May 30, 1581, on the forty-eighth anniversary of the coronation of Anne Boleyn, exactly twelve years before the murder of Christopher Marlowe. At about the same time, another, more famous priest, Thomas Campion, was arrested and executed. The Queen herself tried to persuade Campion to confess to treason and recant his Catholic religion so that she could spare his life. But he preferred martyrdom.

Campion's "Gallows Speech"

*"But we knew we were not lords of our own lives, and therefore **for want of answer would not be guilty of our death.**"*

Gravedigger

he that is **not guilty of his own death**, shortens not his own life.

For want of answer? What was the question?

Hamlet

To be or not to be. That is the question.

To be or not to be -- what? That is the question.

After Horatio had explained that the impending war was caused by a duel over land fought by Hamlet's father, whose ghost they had just seen, Bernardo replied:

Bernardo

I think it be no other but e'en so.

Well may it sort that this portentous figure

Comes armed through our watch so like the king

***That was and is the question** of these wars.*

To be or not to be so like the king that was and is the question of these wars. That is Shakespeare's dilemma. Should he be true to himself or should he let filial duty lead him in his father's footsteps? "Whither wilt thou lead me?" Should he write plays to satisfy his artistic soul or plays to jeopardize his life?. Should he entertain his audiences or lead them into a bloody religious war?

Campion's "Gallows Speech"

*...to minister the Sacraments, **to instruct the simple, to reform sinners, to confute errors -- in brief, to cry alarm spiritual against foul vice and proud ignorance, wherewith many my countrymen are abused.***

This inspired Shakespeare to write the following lines, in which Hamlet compares an actor's

"dream of passion" with his own "real" passion, and in so doing expresses Shakespeare's own feelings about Hamlet's fictional passion compared to his own real passion:

Hamlet

...What would he do,

Had he the motive and the cue for passion

That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,

And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,

[The Elizabethan penalty for hearing sedition was to have one's ears lopped off.]

Make mad the guilty and appall the free,

Confound the ignorant and maze indeed

The very faculties of eyes and ears.

Campion said his mission was to ***instruct the simple, to reform sinners, to confute errors...to cry alarm...against...proud ignorance.*** Shakespeare feared that in carrying forward Campion's mission with his plays, he had twisted it to ***appall the free, confound the ignorant..***

Campion at his trial:

In condemning us, you condemn all your own ancestors, Bishops and Kings...For what have we taught, however you may qualify it with the odious name of treason, that they did not uniformly teach?...posterity's judgment is not liable to corruption as that of those who are now going to sentence us to death.

This speech inspired Shakespeare to take an oath, sworn to his father and his godfather, to write a series of history plays, which was originally planned to culminate in an incendiary version of Henry VIII.

Be All My Sins Remembered (The Politics of Purgatory)

Hamlet's mind was a kind of purgatory for his father and for his uncle. But what does Purgatory have to do with William Shakespeare's "motive and cue for passion?" Everything. For centuries, rich men had bequeathed land to the Catholic Church in exchange for shortened stays in Purgatory. Martin Luther believed that the selling of passes out of Purgatory was the primary corrupter of the Church. Furthermore, the land which the Church had thus acquired was a tempting prize for any king who decided to break away from the Catholic Church. When Henry VIII separated the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church, he seized the lands of English monasteries, then sold those lands. Thereafter the English Reformation was irreversible. England could never again be Catholic because too many Englishmen had a vested interest in Protestantism -- all those owners of former monastery lands.

In 1565 (the year after Shakespeare's birth) William Allen wrote "A Defense and Declaration of the Catholike Churches Doctrine touching Purgatory, and Prayers of the Soules Departed."

Before the Reformation, the primary social, economic, and religious institution in many English hamlets was the local guild. These town guilds (not to be confused with the craft guilds in large

cities) had been formed for the primary purpose of praying for the souls of deceased members, in order to shorten their time in Purgatory. With the Reformation, the Anglican Church declared the idea of Purgatory heretical, prolonged praying for the dead was outlawed, and the town guilds were ostensibly secularized. However, the guilds continued to be the main social and economic institutions in many towns. Furthermore, many guild members continued, openly or secretly, to be Catholics.

Shakespeare's father began his rise through Stratford politics during the reign of Queen Mary, the Catholic daughter of Henry VIII. Mary's reign was five years of Catholicism in the midst of the English Protestant Reformation. William Shakespeare went to the Stratford Guild school. One of his teachers was Simon Hunt, who later became a Jesuit priest and leader of the Catholic English College in Rome. It is reasonable to speculate that Shakespeare's father and some of his teachers tried to indoctrinate him to pray and work for the restoration of the Catholic Church in England. But, partly because Henry VIII had redistributed the monastery lands, and partly because the Catholic Church would not formally relinquish its claim to those lands, the Catholic Church could never again become the dominant Church of England. Thus the relationship between Shakespeare and the Catholic Church was very much like the relationship between Hamlet and his father's ghost. Like the ghost, the English Catholic Church was dead but would not give up its claim to the lands it once owned -- that extorted treasure in the womb of earth. But Hamlet just wanted to go back to school in Wittenberg; and Shakespeare just wanted to write plays.

You the Judges Bear a Wary Eye (Of Kings and Commoners)

Some of the Stratford aldermen were devout Protestants, some were open Catholics, some were secret Catholics, others had been secret Protestants in Mary's reign. This peaceful co-existence of Catholics and Protestants on the Stratford town council tells us much about the character of England and about the mind of William Shakespeare. Most of the religious persecution and murder came from the central government. The people of England were happy to live and let live, to associate with and trade with their neighbors of whatever faith. The sudden shifts of religion dictated by the royal government -- Henry's split from Catholicism, Mary's reconciliation with Catholicism, Elizabeth's shift back to Protestantism --- gave the people (and Elizabeth) a sort of inoculation against religious intolerance. They had no desire to express their religion by murdering their neighbors. On the other hand, they condoned repression of their neighbors by the central government. They judged government by different standards than they judged themselves. Kings and Queens and Popes ruled by divine right -- they were not ordinary humans. William Shakespeare's genius was the ability to show the humanity of kings and cardinals -- thus bringing their actions back down to the sphere of human judgment.

Neither a Borrower Nor a Lender Be

I have a theory that *The Merchant of Venice* was not about antisemitism - it was about prejudice against moneylenders.

In Shakespeare's time there were almost no Jews in England. They had been expelled by Edward I three centuries earlier. But the English public still associated money-lending with Jews.

Money-lenders were a vital part of the expanding English economy. Almost every small farmer or craftsman or merchant borrowed from money-lenders (who themselves were also farmers, craftsmen, or merchants). And then as now, people natural hated the people to whom they owed money ("for loan oft loses both itself and friend").

John Shakespeare (father of the William) in addition to being a succesful tanner, was also a money-lender.

"Records indicate that he was also prosecuted in the 1570s for illegal dealing in wool and for usury, or lending money with interest. Such illicit trade would have been profitable to his glove business by avoiding the middleman. In 1570 he was accused of making loans worth £220 (equivalent to over £50,000 in 2007), including interest, to a Walter Mussum. Mussum was not a good risk; at his death his whole estate was worth £114, or barely half what John Shakespeare had seen fit to lend him. The financial risk was just one side of his potentially problematic business activity. The law described usury as "a vice most odious and detestable" and levied severe penalties for those caught in such practices, even in a small way. The law stated that anyone caught lending money with interest illegally would forfeit all the money lent, plus forfeiture of any interest due, face a fine on top and also possible imprisonment."

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Shakespeare#Risk_taking_and_financial_problems

In the 1570s, the English government began cracking down on recusants (people who refused to attend services of the Church of England). One of those recusants was John Shakespeare, although his former colleagues on the Stratford town council declined to prosecute him. But something caused a steep decline in John Shakespeare's income in the late 1570s. There is some evidence that John Shakespeare was a secret Catholic. Perhaps, like Shylock, John Shakespeare lost large sums of money to debtors who used his religion to excuse their defaults.

The Strange Baker's Daughter (The Drama Ophelia)

About seventy years after Shakespeare died, Richard Davies, chaplain of Corpus Christi College in Oxford wrote:

William Shakespeare was born at Stratford upon Avon in Warwickshire in about 1563-4. Much given to all unluckiness in stealing venison & rabbits particularly from Sr --- Lucy who had him oft whipt & sometimes Imprisoned & at last made Him fly his Native Country to his great Advancement.....He [Shakespeare] died a Papist.

There is a legend that Shakespeare left Stratford because he got in trouble for poaching a **deer** from Sir Thomas Lucy's estate and then composing an insulting poem about Sir Thomas. Shakespeare alluded to this incident in Hamlet. He also alluded to his first two history plays, about the War of the **Roses**.

Hamlet

*Why, let the stricken **deer** go weep,*

The hart ungalled play;

For some must watch; while some must sleep:

So runs the world away.

*Would not this, sir, and a **forest of feathers**, if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me, with **two provincial roses** on my razed shoes, **get me a fellowship in a cry of players**, sir?*

Horatio

Half a share.

Hamlet

A whole one, I.

For thou dost know, o Damen dear,

This realm dismantled was

Of Jove himself, and now reigns here

A very, very - pajock.

Horatio

*You might have **rhymed***

[Shakespeare might have gone to Allen's seminary in **Rheims** if he hadn't gotten in trouble by writing an insulting poem .]

Hamlet

*O good Horatio! **I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound.***

Didst perceive?

Horatio

Very well, my lord.

Hamlet

Upon the talk of the poisoning?

Horatio

I did very well note him.

Hamlet

Ah, ha! Come, some music! Come, the recorders!

For if the king likes not the comedy,

Why then, he likes it not, perdy.

Come, some music!

Guildenstern

*Good my lord, vouchsafe me **a word** with you.*

Hamlet

*Sir, **a whole history***

Guildenstern

The king, sir -

At the time he wrote Hamlet, Shakespeare still owed one more **history** play -- Henry VIII.

After he left Stratford, some scholars believe he joined the theater company patronized by Lord Strange, a high-ranking Catholic gentleman. For a while, Catholic plotters were considering Lord Strange as a Catholic replacement for Elizabeth. Their code name for him was "**the baker**" (see Nicholl's "The Reckoning," page 228.) I believe that Shakespeare was welcomed into Strange's company because he had already written drafts of two seditious **history** plays about the War of **Roses**, a period when the legitimacy of the English succession was questioned.

Ophelia

... They say the **owl** was a **baker's daughter**.
Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be.

Hamlet

.... *The **dram of eale***

[drama Ophelia or drama filia (daughter) or drama filial]

Doth all the substance of a doubt

To his own scandal.

There was a folktale that Jesus had visited a baker's shop disguised as a beggar. The baker ordered his daughter to give the beggar a loaf of bread, but the **baker's daughter** only gave the beggar half a loaf, so she was turned into an **owl**. Ophelia symbolized Shakespeare's filial drama - the series of subversive history drama's to culminate in an incendiary play about Henry VIII. These plays were filial dramas because Shakespeare he had sworn to his father and his godfather that he would write them. Like the baker's daughter in the folktale, Shakespeare's plays had only delivered half a loaf. But if he had written a subversive version of Henry VIII, it would have brought scandal and death to Shakespeare and perhaps to many other people.. .

When the Wind Is Southerly

Hamlet ([2.2.387-388](#))

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

"Handsaw" (indicating sanity) is probably an allusion to Hamlet's instructions to the players:

HAMLET ([3.2.4](#))

*. . . Nor do not **saw** the air*

*too much with your **hand**, thus, but use all gently;*

for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say,

the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget

a temperance that may give it smoothness.

Is north-north-west as a symbol of madness is dramatic irony, alluding to the first appearance of the ghost: BERNARDO [describing the previous appearance of the ghost of Hamlet's father] ([1.1.44-47](#))

*Last night of all, When yond same star that's **westward from the pole***

Had made his course to illume that part of heaven

Where now it burns,

The "**pole**" is the North Star. "**Westward from the pole**" would be "**north-northwest**." Thus "*I am but mad, north-northwest*" means that Hamlet is only mad when under the influence of his father's ghost.

("Pole" might also be an allusion to Reginald Pole, who, as Bloody Mary's Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury, liked to call himself "the Pole Star" because he thought of himself as the guiding star about which the English people revolved.

But Reginald Pole died of a broken heart on the day Queen Mary died and England reverted to protestantism under Queen Elizabeth. Thirty years later, Queen Mary's widower, King Phillip of

Spain sent the Duke of Medina Sidonia with the Spanish Armada to bring England back to the Catholic Church by "[*strong hands and terms compulsory.*](#)" But like Hamlet, Medina was [*but mad north-north-west: when the wind \[was\] southerly.*](#)) he was sane. On August 8, Saint Dominic's Day, Medina decided that if the wind continued to blow from the south (which it did) he would have to abandon the attack on England. He was unable to recapture the faith of Englishmen by force. He did "[*it wrong, being so majestic, to offer it the show of violence, for it is, as the air, invulnerable, and \[his\] vain blows malicious mockery.*](#)"

///C:/Users/Ray/Documents/Shakespeare/Be All My Sins Remembered/%23
website/index.html#Historical_Context
Also see

[The Memory Be Green - Hamlet in Historical Context](#)

[Terms Compulsatory](#)

[How Old Is Hamlet?](#)

[I Know a Hawk from a Handsaw - Hamlet and the Spanish Armada](#)

[Shakespeare's Audience - You the Judges](#)

[dex.html#Global_Warming](#) How Henry's Divorce Led to Global Warming (The Dog Has His Day) Blackfriars was symbolic of the English Reformation in another way, because of another coincidence. Blackfriars had been the principal English monastery of the Dominican order of monks, which had been founded about four hundred years before the English Reformation by Saint Dominic. At a time when the Catholic Church was massacring heretics, Dominic advocated the reconciliation of heretics through "persuasion and discussion rather than threats and belligerence" (Kristin E. White, A Guide to the Saints). This was not the approach of Phillip II in 1588 when he sent the Spanish Armada to restore England to Catholicism by strong hand and terms compulsory. England defeated the Spanish Armada on August 6 -- the feast day of Saint Dominic (and 357 years later, the date the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima). To many English Catholics (perhaps including William Shakespeare) this may have seemed like a sign from God that violence was the wrong way to restore English Catholicism. There was one more coincidence linking St Dominic and the Globe fire: St Dominic was sometimes depicted in art with "a globe, with fire" (White, page 107).

[**Shakebag, Falstaff, and Woodcock \(The Springe\)**](#)

*Shake the **bags** of hoarding abbots.* (King John, Act 3, Scene 3)

[*Shall I strike at it with my **partisan**? Do, if it will not stand.*](#) (Hamlet, 1.1.152)

[*Young men will do it if they come to it. By **cock** they are to blame.*](#) (4.5.63)

Playing with words can be dangerous There can be stiff penalties and punishments for penile puns. Sometimes the **woodcock** is caught in his own **springe**.

Mermaid Tavern, St. Patrick's Day, 1593:

WILL

What do you call the play?

KIT

*Arden of Faversham. Old Kit Kat hath set a **mousetrap** -- a springe it is, to catch a **Woodcock**. 'Tis a tale of a murder most foul. The murderer's name is George **Shakebag**, his accomplice Black **Will**.*

(Will chokes on his beer and bolts out of the tavern.)

These two young men, Will Shakespeare and Kit Marlowe, had much in common. Shakespeare was born on St George's Day, 1564, Marlowe a couple months earlier in St George's parish. Shakespeare was the son of a glover, Marlowe of a cobbler. Shakespeare was reputed to be the second best playwright in England, Marlowe the best. Shakespeare was a secret agent for the Catholics; Marlowe against.

Shakespeare knew that Marlowe was a spy -- now he feared that Marlowe knew that he was one too. He thought Arden of Faversham was a trap for him.

HAMLET ([2.2.599](#))

*...I have heard,
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions.*

Marlowe had been employed by the English government to spy on William Allen's seminary at Rheims shortly after Shakespeare himself had secretly studied there . Just ten years earlier Shakespeare's relative, Edward Arden, the head of the **Arden** family had been executed for treason. Now Shakespeare feared that, while at Rheims, Marlow had heard of William Allen's phallic-punning Papal prophecy about his secret godson.

(See [Why Will? \(The Godfather\)](#))

[Shakespeare, Breakspear, and Broken Pole \(The Prophecy\) \)](#)

Arden was Shakespeare's mother's maiden name. Arden of Faversham was based on an actual murder of a distant relative of Shakespeare. Two of the actual murderers were named Black **Will** and George Loosebag (changed to "**Shakebag**" by Holinshed). Marlowe was no doubt aware of the similarity to "Shakespeare" and the connecting phallic pun ("bag" for scrotum, "spear" for phallus. But Shakespeare didn't know that it was all in fun. William Allen's prophecy for William Shakespeare was based on phallic puns on his last name -- Breakspear, Shakespeare, Pole. Now Marlowe seemed to be using a pair of phallic puns, **woodcock** and **Shakebag** to hint that he had discovered Shakespeare's dark secret.

But Shakespeare's fears were groundless -- he had misunderstood Marlowe's pun. The actual murder of **Arden** had occurred a couple miles from the village of **Ospringe**, where, at the time

of the murder, Marlowe's father was growing up. **Woodcock** was the name of the printer who would print Marlowe's translation of *Hero and Leander* after Marlowe's death. Woodcock had written a play about Arden of Faversham, but it was so crudely written that no one would perform it. Marlowe was nearing completion of his *Hero and Leander*, but no printer would print it. So they made a deal. Marlowe polished up Woodcock's *Arden of Faversham* and Woodcock promised to publish *Hero and Leander*. So the play (set near **Ospringe**) was **a springe to catch a Woodcock** (the printer).

(Caveat: The authorship of *Arden of Faversham* is disputed. Marlowe is just one of several possible authors. Although Woodcock printed *Hero and Leander*, *Arden of Faversham* was printed by Edward White. However, there could have been some kind of 3-way deal among Marlowe, Woodcock, and White.)

But, at that time, Shakespeare didn't know that Marlowe's father was raised in Ospringe or that Woodcock would publish Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*. He thought Marlowe was on to him and was about to expose him. In a panic, he reported his fears to his underground Catholic contacts. A couple months later Marlowe was murdered by double agents, ostensibly (if that's the right word for a spy) working for England but really working for the Catholics.

"When a man's verses cannot be understood...it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a small room." (As You Like It, Act 3, Scene 3)

The Catholic spymasters had decided that Marlowe had to die, but not to protect Shakespeare. They had stronger reasons to fear Marlowe. For years, the Catholics had been wooing King James VI of Scotland. Marlowe was about to woo James solidly back to the Protestant cause.

When James was thirteen he had been seduced by Esme Stuart, an adult cousin, who Catholic plotters hoped would convert James to Catholicism. James became deeply enamored with Esme, which might have been the cause of James subsequent homosexuality. However, unfortunately for the Catholic plotters, Esme found it more expeditious to change his own religion than to convert James to Catholicism in the midst of a violently Protestant power structure. Even so, James developed and maintained a weakness for the Old Faith. For several years before Elizabeth's death, James had been secretly corresponding with Catholics, hinting that he might convert to Catholicism after acquiring the English crown. (His wife converted to Catholicism sometime during the 1590's,)

At the time of his death Christopher Marlowe had been planning a trip to Scotland. Marlowe was the ideal agent to woo James solidly to the Protestant side. James was fond of plays; Marlowe was the preeminent playwright of his time. James liked boys; so did Marlowe. James was interested in the occult. He had written a book on identification of witches. Marlowe had written a play about Faust, the famous magician. Marlowe was nearing completion of his masterful translation of the epic "*Hero and Leander*". James had likened himself to Leander because he had crossed the dangerous North Sea to fetch his Danish bride, just as Leander had made swum across the Hellespont to be with his lover, Hero.

The Catholics had to prevent Marlowe from reaching King James. But if James ever found out

that Catholics had murdered England's best playwright just because he might become James' friend, then James would turn against the Catholics forever. So the Catholics decided to trick the English government into killing Marlowe. And just in case that plot fell through, they had a cover story to hide their real motive. If James discovered that the Catholics were responsible for Marlowe's death, hopefully he would still be deceived by their backup story: that their motive was not to kill a potential friend of James, but rather to save another potential friend, William Shakespeare.

CLAUDIUS [\(4.7.71\)](#)

And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe,

CLAUDIUS [\(4.7.165\)](#)

*. . . if this should fail,
And that our drift look through our bad performance,
'Twere better not assay'd: therefore this project
Should have a back or second, that might hold,
If this should blast in proof.*

One of the three men involved in Marlowe's murder was Robert Poley, who had once been employed as a messenger between Queen Elizabeth and the King of Denmark. Poley was a double agent who was actually working for the Catholics. He had just returned from the Hague with "important letters including a supposedly intercepted letter which falsely implicated Christopher Marlowe as an agent for the Catholics. This letter was a forgery, written by Poley's mistress, Joan Yeoman.

Poley had a mistress named Joan Yeomans who was adept at forgery.

HAMLET [forging new note to trick Rosencrantz & Guildenstern] [\(5.2.33\)](#)

*...I sat me down,
Devised a new commission, wrote it fair:
I once did hold it, as our statists do,
A baseness to write fair and labour'd much
How to forget that learning, but, sir, now
It did me **yeoman's service**: wilt thou know
The effect of what I wrote?*

Seven years later William Vaughn, having heard the false cover story, wrote in The Golden Grove:

*...at Detford, a little village about three miles distant from London, as he meant to stab him with his ponyard one named Ingram, that had invited him thither to a feast, and was then **playing at tables** [backgammon] he quickly perceyving it, so avoyded the thrust, that withall drawing out his dagger for his defence, hee stabd this Marlow into the eye, in such sort, that his braines coming out at the daggers point, hee shorlie after dyed...*

"**Playing at tables**" means **backgammon**. Just as Arden of Faversham was murdered while playing **backgammon**.

From Arden of Faversham:

MOSBIE

*I'll fetch Master Arden home, and we like friends
Will **play a game or two at tables** here.*

ALICE

But what of all this ? how shall he be slain?

MOSBIE

*Why, **Black Will and Shakebag** locked within the counting-house
Shall at a certain watchword given rush forth.*

LAERTES ([5.2.316](#))

Woodcock to mine own springe

When a man's verses cannot be understood...great reckoning in a small room (As You Like It,3,3)

In Marlowe's Jew of Malta, as the Jew was in a small room counting his money he preferred large denominations because they allowed him to reckon large amounts with a small pile of coins.

It's often been said that poetry packs much meaning in few words.

Marlowe was murdered in Detford (sounds like "debt for"). Marlowe's murderer, Poley, in addition to being a secret agent, was also a loan-shark. The murder occurred in a small back room of a tavern. One story is that Marlowe and Poley fought over the *reckoning* (the tavern bill).

POLONIUS ([1.3.78](#))

*Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For lending oft loses a friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of **husbandry***

LAERTES ([4.5.148](#))

*And for my means, I'll **husband** them so well,
They shall go far with little.*

CLAUDIUS ([4.5.164](#))

*It shall as level to your judgment pierce
As day does to your eye.*

Marlowe was stabbed in the eye.

Shakebag had a personality similar to that of Falstaff (another phallic pun). Both were amoral, incompetent, buffoonish highwaymen.

FALSTAFF (Henry IV Part 1, Act 5, Scene 1)

What is that "honor"? Air. A trim reckoning. Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday.

Also please see

[Princess of Denmark, James VI, and the Ur-Hamlet](#)

[It Began With a Lass \(The False Steward\)](#)

[The Election of His Soul](#)

[Unpacking the Whore in His Heart's Core - Whore Rational - Horatio](#)

[How to Love Hamlet](#)

Princess of Denmark, James VI, and the Ur-Hamlet

On April 4, 1588, Frederick II, the King of Denmark, died from alcoholism. Two of the Danish nobles marching at the head of his funeral procession were Rosenkrantz and Gyldenstierne.

On August 20, 1589, James VI, the King of Scotland, married Anne, the 14-year-old, daughter of Frederick II. The marriage was by proxy, because the bride and groom were separated by the stormy North Sea, he on the Scottish side, she on the Danish side (at Kronborg Castle in Elsinore).

Ten days later Anne set sail for Scotland in a small fleet commanded by Admiral Gyldenstierne. However, the fleet encountered extreme storms. On Anne's ship a cannon broke loose from its moorings and fatally crushed eight sailors. Finally the fleet had to turn back.

While James had been anxiously waiting for his bride to join him in Scotland, he wrote a song about Hero and Leander. According to Byzantine myth, Hero and Leander were lovers who were separated by the narrow strait of the Hellespont, she on the European side, he on the Asiatic side. Leander swam the Hellespont every night to be with his lover, Hero, until one night he drowned in the attempt.

(When Christopher Marlowe died in 1593, he had been working on an epic poem about Hero and Leander. He had been planning to visit the Scottish court of James VI and it seems likely that he was writing "Hero and Leander" to curry favor with James.)

On November 19, 1589, James himself embarked to cross the North Sea, just as Leander had swum the Hellespont, to be with his new bride. They consummated their marriage in Oslo on November 23, 1589. On December 22, the honeymooners arrived at Kronborg Castle in Elsinore, where they stayed until March 7. During his stay in Denmark, James was much impressed by the

Danish custom of firing cannon to celebrate every occasion.

About 1589, a play (now referred to as the "Ur-Hamlet") was performed in London. My theory is that the Ur-Hamlet was written by James VI. I believe James was inspired by parallels between himself and the legend of Hamlet.

James added even more parallels, but the play was something of a flop. No copy has survived.

"to't like French falconers, fly at any thing we see" ([2.2.438](#))

Robert Abercromby was a Jesuit missionary to Scotland. He claimed to have converted Queen Anne to Catholicism (about 1598 or 1600). Then James VI appointed Abercromby as Superintendent of the Royal Falconry. ([wikipedia: Robert Abercromby \(missionary\)](#))

In 1596, Shakespeare's father was granted a coat of arms which included a falcon. See [William Shakespeare's Coat of Arms](#)

In the late 15th century, a light cannon was developed that was called a falcon. ([wikipedia: Falconet \(cannon\)](#))

On February 7, 1601, GELLY Meyricke, STEWARD to the Earl of Essex, hired Shakespeare's acting company to perform Richard II to launch the Essex Rebellion. After the rebellion was suppressed, Shakespeare's colleagues were questioned and released. Why weren't they punished? I think that James VI intervened on their behalf after Shakespeare promised to re-write the Ur-Hamlet, transforming it into the masterpiece we know today. Ophelia was an allegory for Shakespeare's dramatic output.

"Almost to JELLY with the act of fear" (Hamlet,1,2,210)

"It is the false STEWARD, that stole his master's DAUGHTER"(Hamlet,4,5,188)

I believe that OsRIC (and maybe also YoRICK) was an allusion to MeyRICK. Osric carried Claudius challenge while Meyrick carried Essex's challenge. "Os" is Latin(?) for "us", "yo" is Spanish for "I", and "me" is English for "me". Osrick was a reflection of Hamlet's dark side. Yoric represented Hamlet's youth (when he wrote Richard II) come back to haunt him with the specter of death. Also, Elizabeth had said of Richard II, "I am RICHard, know ye not that?"

After Shakespeare left Stratford, some scholars believe he joined the theater company patronized by Lord Strange, a high-ranking Catholic gentleman. For a while, Catholic plotters were considering Lord Strange as a Catholic replacement for Elizabeth. Their code name for him was "the BAKER" (see Nicholl's "The Reckoning," page 228.)

Ophelia (4,5,45)

... They say the OWL was a BAKER'S DAUGHTER.

Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be.

In Elizabeth times, the owl was a portent of death.

It Began With a Lass (The False Steward)

The Stewart line of kings began with a baby born from the corpse of a king's daughter, Margaret, who had been confined to a nunnery. The father of her baby was the High Steward.

breed maggots...good kissing carrion...as your daughter may conceive...the womb of earth...get thee to a nunnery

*It is the **false steward**, that stole his master's daughter.*

James I through IV all died violent deaths.

And in the cup an union shall he throw,

*Richer than that which **four successive kings***

[- the poisoned cup]

The first husband of Hamlet's mother died from a poisoned ear.

The first husband of James' mother died from an infected ear (rumored to be poisoned).

Hamlet's father was murdered in his orchard.

James VI's father was murdered in his orchard.

Hamlet's mother married his father's murderer.

James' mother married his father's murderer.

Hamlet's father's ghost cried for revenge.

A painting of James' father in his childhood home cried for revenge.

Hamlet's stepfather, the King of Denmark, died from drinking poison.

James' father-in-law, the King of Denmark, died from drink (alcoholism).

James' mother was doomed and James was endangered by a plot involving messages in **bungholes**.

*stopping a **bung-hole***

Details:

On the second of March in the year 1316, the very pregnant 19-year-old Lady Marjorie fell off her horse and broke her neck. The baby that was ripped from her dead womb was the son of Walter Stewart, the 6th High Steward of Scotland. Lady Marjorie was the daughter of King Robert I of Scotland. That baby would grow up to be King Robert II of Scotland. Thus began the line of Scottish Stewart kings. And thus began the deadly curse on the Stewart line, a curse that would not end until King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England.

It is the false steward, that stole his master's daughter.

Who would dare risk offending the soon-to-be Stewart King of England with such a line? Who else but the Stewart King himself? The motif of a cursed birth from a daughter's dead womb is

strongly reflected in Hamlet.

Hamlet

*For if the sun **breed maggots** in a dead dog, being a god **kissing carrion** - Have you a **daughter**?*

Lord Polonius

I have, my lord.

Hamlet

*Let her not walk i' the sun: conception is a blessing, but not as your **daughter may conceive**.*

When Lady Marjorie was 11 years old she had been captured by the English. Edward II of England had her confined to a **nunnery** for about 7 years. When she was 17, Scotland won the Battle of Bannockburn and she was returned to Scotland where she was given in marriage to Walter Stewart as a reward for his valor in the battle. Two years later she died, then gave birth, posthumously, to the first of the Stewart line of Scottish kings.

Hamlet

*Get thee to a **nunnery**. Why wouldst thou be a **breeder of sinners**?*

Lord Polonius

Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

Hamlet

*Into my **grave**.*

Lord Polonius

Indeed, that is out o' the air.

*Aside: How **pregnant** sometimes his replies are!*

Horatio (to the ghost)

Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life

*Extorted treasure in the **womb of earth**,*

For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,

A dead horsewoman bequeathed the Scottish throne to the Stewart line. That inheritance doomed four successive Stewart kings named James to a series of violent deaths, mostly in battle with English kings. Similarly in the play, a horseman named Death ("*LeMord*") praised Laertes' skill as a swordsman, which led to his mutually fatal duel with Hamlet.

The first Stewart King, Robert II, died of old age. The second Stewart King, Robert III, died of a "broken heart" after his son (the future James I) was kidnapped by pirates who turned him over to Henry IV of England. The English kept James for 18 years, but they treated him well, educating him and finally sending him home with an English bride. Hamlet, speaking of the pirates who had captured him: "*They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy.*"

Claudius, as he prepared to poison Hamlet's drink:

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**
In Denmark's crown have worn.*

But James VI did not want to join his four forefathers' (and namesakes') fatal union.

James I was assassinated by rebellious Scottish cousins.

James II was killed by his own cannon.

After Claudius (cloud-ius) ordered a cannon salute (*the great cannon to the clouds shall tell*), Hamlet wished that Claudius would literally, as well as figuratively aim his cannon at himself (cloud-ius): *O, that...the Everlasting had not fix'd His canon [his cannon] 'gainst self-slaughter!* In the end, Claudius slaughtered himself with poison *temper'd by himself* to the accompaniment of cannon fire (*Let all the battlements their ordnance fire: The king shall drink*).

James III was killed in battle against his rebellious son.

James IV was killed in battle against England.

James V died of natural causes (or of a "broken heart").

Mary Queen of Scots was beheaded by order of her cousin Elizabeth I. On his deathbed, James V said of his sole heir, his infant daughter Mary, *"It came wi' a lass and it shall go wi' a lass."* He was referring to the Stewart line of kings which had begun with Margaret's posthumous delivery of Robert II and which James V believed would end with his daughter Mary. But he was wrong. Mary Queen of Scots married a Stewart cousin and gave birth to James Stewart who would become James VI of Scotland and I of England. All subsequent monarchs of England have been descendants of James VI and I, but none of them (except Charles I) died violently. So the dynasty didn't end with Mary, but the Scottish curse did.

Mary's first husband was Francis II, King of France. He died from an infected **ear**. This was reflected both in Hamlet and in The Mousetrap.

The ghost of Hamlet's father described how he was murdered with poison poured into his **ears**:
*Sleeping within my orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of my **ears** did pour
The leperous distilment*

Hamlet, describing "The Mousetrap":
*..comes in a fellow... and pours poison in the King's **ears***

Hamlet described his Uncle Claudius to his mother:
*Here is your husband; like a **mildew'd ear**, Blasting his wholesome brother.*

History of the Affairs of Church and State in Scotland: [referring to the death of Francis II] "He died of an abscess in the ear, and not by poison, the rumours of which have been proved by De Thou and other historians to be without foundation."

" He was suddenly stricken with an aposthume in that deaf ear that never would hear the truth. of God." - John Knox

Hamlet Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats Will not debate the question of this straw: This is the imposthume of much wealth and peace, That inward breaks, and shows no cause without Why the man dies. I humbly thank you, sir.

History of the Affairs of Church and State in Scotland: [quoting a limerick allegedly popular in France right after Francis II died]

"Leist Francis, that unhappy child,
His father's footsteps following plane, To Christ crying, deaf ears did yield, Ane rotten ear then was his bane"

Hamlet, speaking of his father's ghost:
It waves me forth again: I'll follow it.

Hamlet's father's ghost to Hamlet:
But this eternal blazon must not be To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list! If thou didst ever thy dear father love-- ... Now, Hamlet, hear: 'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard, A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark Is by a forged process of my death Rankly abused"

Mary's 2nd husband, James' father, was found dead in the orchard after an explosion destroyed his house.

After his father was murdered and his mother exiled, James was adopted by his father's parents. In their house was a large painting showing Darnley's murder, with the inscription to "shut not out of his memory the recent atrocious murder of the King his father, until God should avenge it through him."

Ghost
Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder...Hamlet, remember me.

Perhaps King James VI of Scotland (later James I of England) felt drawn by filial duty to avenge his mother's death after Elizabeth had Mary (former) Queen of Scots beheaded. But James wisely avoided arousing the suspicion of Elizabeth. Mary was executed as a result of the Babbington Plot, in which conspirators communicated with her using messages hidden in the **bungholes** of barrels. There might be an allusion to this in Hamlet:

HAMLET (5,1,200-202)

To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of

*Alexander, till he find it stopping a **bung-hole**?*

James VI grew up to love literature, wordplay, and the theater. He had a predilection for comparing himself to literary figures. When he crossed the North Sea to meet his Danish bride, James compared himself to Leander swimming the Hellespont to be with Hero (which might have been Marlowe's inspiration for beginning his translation of Hero and Leander.)

James could not have failed to be impressed by the similarities between himself and Hamlet. Hamlet's stepfather, King Claudius of Denmark, who drained his draughts of Rhenish down as ordnance was shot off, in the end died from (poisoned) drink. James' father-in-law, King Frederick II of Denmark, was said to have died from excessive drinking. (Danish nobles Rosencrantz and Guildenstern marched at the head of Frederick's funeral procession.) During his honeymoon at Elsinore, James had been much impressed with the custom of firing ordnance at every occasion.

Hamlet:

"Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats will not debate the question of this straw..."

Martin Luther: "St. James Epistle is really an epistle of straw."

As Protestants and Catholics vied for his allegiance, James may have felt like a straw in the wind.

James' mother, Mary Queen of Scots, was beheaded after she had been caught communicating with conspirators with notes hidden in the bungholes of barrels which were routinely carried in and out of the castle where she was imprisoned.

Hamlet

To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander, till he find it stopping a bung-hole? Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay, Might stop a hole to keep the wind away: O, that that earth, which kept the world in awe, Should patch a wall to expel the winter flaw!

The north wind was a motif in Hamlet symbolizing Hamlet's madness brought on by the influence of his vengeful father (who was associated with "yond same star that's westward from the pole"). "I am but mad north-north-west." For James, any attempt to revenge his mother's death would be suicidal madness.

In his secret correspondence with Sir Robert Cecil in 1601, preparing for his succession after Elizabeth's eventual death, the codeword for James was "30"

Player King

Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orbed ground,
And thirty dozen moons with borrow'd sheen About the world have times twelve thirties been,
Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands Unite commutual in most sacred bands

Gravedigger

"I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years"

also see:

Hamlet and the Scottish Succession (1921) by Lillian Winstanley

<http://www.sourcetext.com/sourcebook...nley/index.htm>

Miss Winstanley reached related conclusions based on different evidence.

A video by Ian Stockdale, in which he argues that the works of Shakespeare were written by King James VI of Scotland and I of England, based partly on the connections between James and Hamlet.

[Was James I of England the true author of Shakespeare's works?](#)

Did Shakespeare Help Write the King James version of the Bible? - The Clue That Wasn't

The word "prating" is not in the Geneva Bible. It appears in "Hamlet," then a few years later in KJV. I thought I was on to something. Then I found "prating" in the 1568 edition of the Bishop's Bible. I'm recording my research here to spare others from hunting the same wild goose.

Proverbs 10:8 Geneva Bible, published in 1557

The wise in heart will receiue commandements: but the **foolish in talke** shalbe beaten.

-<http://oldebible.com/geneva-bible/proverbs-10.asp>

Proverbs 10:8 Bishops Bible, 1568 edition

A wyse man wyll receaue warning: but a **prating foole** shalbe **punished**.

HAMLET (Quarto 1, 1603) lines 2548-2551

. . .for this same Lord

I doe repent; but heauen hath pleasd it so

To **punish** me with this, and this with me,

That I must be their scourge and minister,

HAMLET (Quarto 1, 1603)

It is enough, mother good night:

Come sir, I'lle prouide for you a graue,

Who was in life a **foolish prating** knaue.

Proverbs 10:8 King James Version, published beginning in 1604

...a **prating fool** shall **fall**.

HAMLET (Quarto 1, 1603)

Nay Loue, I pray you make no words of this now:
I pray now, you shall sing a **downe**,
And you a downe a, t'is a the Kings daughter
And the false steward,

[This is me grasping at straws: Maybe Shakespeare was covertly criticizing KJV as the "Kings daughter" and a "false steward" - "no more words of this now." Except Hamlet was written around 1601 and KJV wasn't started until about 1604. And I think that, even if he didn't help write it, Shakespeare probably liked the KJV. And, as I've argued previously, "false steward" was probably inserted by King James himself.]

"The Geneva Bible [first published in 1557] is one of the most historically significant translations of the Bible into the English language, preceding the King James translation by 51 years. It was the primary Bible of 16th century Protestantism and was the Bible used by William Shakespeare ..." - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geneva_bible

The Bishops' Bible is an English translation of the Bible which was produced under the authority of the established Church of England in 1568. It was substantially revised in 1572, and this revised edition was to be prescribed as the base text for the Authorized King James Version of 1611. . . . The Bible had the authority of the royal warrant, and was the second version appointed to be read aloud in church services (cf. Great Bible, King James Bible). It failed to displace the Geneva Bible as a domestic Bible to be read at home, but that was not its intended purpose. The intention was for it to be used in church as what would today be termed a pulpit Bible. The version was more grandiloquent than the Geneva Bible. - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishops%27_Bible

"The Authorized Version, commonly known as the King James Version, King James Bible, AV, KJB, or KJV, is an English translation of the Christian Bible by the Church of England begun in 1604 and completed in 1611" - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Authorized_King_James_Version

A Chilling Tale of Two Shoulder Bones

A Winter's Tale, Act 3, Scene 3

ANTIGONUS

[Exit, pursued by a bear]

...

CLOWN

. . . to see how the bear tore OUT his SHOULDER-bone; how he cried to me for help and said his name was Antigonus

AUTOLYCUS

O, good sir, softly, good sir! I fear, sir, my SHOULDER-blade is OUT.

Autolycus was a symbol for Shakespeare. Shakespeare, who was born on April 23 and baptised 3 days later on Wednesday, and sold plays. Autolycus sold ballads, including one about a fish that appeared on "Wednesday the four-score of April"

Antigonus had been used against his will to separate the princess from her kingdom. Autolycus was used against his will to re-unite the princess with her kingdom.

I believe that Shakespeare, under the influence of his secretly-Catholic father, wrote plays like Richard II, which tried to separate Queen Elizabeth from her kingdom. Then Essex used Shakespeare's Richard II, performed by Shakespeare's acting company, to launch his abortive revolt. I believe that Shakespeare got himself and his fellow actors out of trouble by agreeing to become a reluctant double-agent, spying on his Catholic friends and reporting to the English government. A few years later, when James I improbably "decoded" an intercepted letter to reveal the Gunpowder Plot, I believe that James was really using information secretly provided by Shakespeare.

How Henry's Divorce Led to Global Warming (The Dog Has His Day)

On St. Peter and Paul Day, 1613, during a performance of Shakespeare's Henry VIII (or All Is True), the Globe theater caught fire and burned to the ground. The fire was allegedly started accidentally, by a cannon salute to Henry VIII. But was it an accident? There are several lines of evidence pointing to arson: the profitability of the fire, the theatricality of the fire, lines in the play that referred to the fire, the continuation of the cannon motif from Hamlet, and political/religious symbolism connecting Henry VIII and his divorce, Pope's Day, Blackfriars, St. Dominic, and the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

How could Shakespeare and the other Globe shareholders have profited from the fire? Fire insurance had not yet been invented, nor was there a complicated income tax code to motivate a tax write-off. To find the financial motive for the destruction of the Globe, we must look back to its birth:

On the night before St. Thomas a Beckett's Day in 1598, Shakespeare and his fellow players assembled at the Theatre and "*armed themselves with divers manye unlawfull and offensive weapons, as namelye swordes daggers billes axes and such...and...in a verye ryoutous outrageous and forcyble manner...did...pull downe the sayd Theater...And having so done did then also in most forcyble and ryotous manner take and carrye awaye from thence all the wood and timber thereof unto the Banckside [the south side of the Thames]...and there erected a new playe howse with the sayd Timber and wood.*" The new theater, built from the Theatre's wood, was called the Globe (*All the world's a stage*). The above description of the Theatre's deconstruction was quoted from Giles Alleyn, the irate owner of the land on which the Theatre had stood. Back in 1576 James Burbage had purchased a twenty-one-year lease on that land from Alleyn and built the Theatre, the first theater ever built in England. The building and lease had been inherited by Burbage's son, Richard, who became the leading actor and shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's acting company. When the lease expired, Alleyn,

perhaps because of complaints that the Theatre was a magnet for prostitutes and cutpurses, refused to renew it. So Burbage and his fellow actors, with fine dramatic flair, simply picked up their theater and moved it to a new site. Unfortunately, the new site was also leased and the lease was due to expire in 1613, so once again Shakespeare's company had to deal with a landlord who was reluctant to renew their lease.

This time Shakespeare and his fellow-players did not want to move. The Globe was in a very profitable location, so profitable that they may have wanted to tear down their theater and build a larger one on the same site, as a nearby rival theater company had already done. But they probably didn't want to re-use the wood because the Globe was built on marshy ground (*flanked with a ditch and forced out of a marsh* - Ben Jonson) which, over the past fifteen years, had probably rotted the wood (*your water is a sore decayer*). If they didn't want to re-use the wood, the most economical means to demolish the old Globe would be to burn it. But if their landlord knew that they were deliberately burning the old Globe to clear the site for a larger Globe, he surely would have held out for much more money on the lease renewal. So the Globe burned down "accidentally," allowing the players to argue that the lease renewal was less valuable. Shortly after the fire, the landlord finally agreed to a new lease.

During the months they were rebuilding the Globe, Shakespeare's company would have lost considerable revenue if they had not had some other place to stage their plays. By luck (or good planning), they already had an alternate theater ready by the time of the fire. Back in 1596, when he was haggling with his first landlord over the renewal of the lease for the Theatre's land, Richard Burbage had purchased part of the former Blackfriars Monastery. His original plan had been to move the company to Blackfriars after his Theatre lease expired. However, the other residents of Blackfriars (including even Lord Hunsden, the patron of the Chamberlain's Men) circulated a petition objecting to a theater in their neighborhood. But by 1608 attitudes had changed and Shakespeare's company (now called the King's Men) had finally started using their Blackfriars theater during winter seasons. Thus, when the Globe burned down in 1613, they probably resumed operations the very next day at Blackfriars.

Having decided to torch the Globe, the King's Men could have done it in the dead of night, with no witnesses. But that would have gone against their show business instincts. They wanted an audience. So, they would have chosen to start the fire in the middle of a play. Of course they would want to avoid roasting their audience -- that would be bad for business. They needed to create the illusion of a fire, evacuate the audience, and then start the real fire. Perhaps they would start with a smokepot hidden in the rafters.

From a letter written by Sir Henry Wotton (formerly a spy for Essex) on July 2, 1613:
The King's players had a new play, called All is True, representing some principal pieces of the reign of Henry VIII, which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty....Now, King Henry making a masque at the Cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain chambers being shot off at his entry, some of the paper, or other stuff, wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the thatch, where being at first but an idle smoke, and their eyes more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and ran around like a train, consuming within less than an hour the whole house to the very grounds.

This was the fatal period of that virtuous fabric; wherein yet nothing did perish but wood and straw, and a few forsaken cloaks; only one man had his breeches set on fire, that would perhaps have broiled him, if he had not by the benefit of a provident wit put it out with bottle ale.[This Bud's for you!]

Since the original name of the play was All Is True, I wonder if this was the origin of the chant, "Liar, liar, pants on fire!"

According to legend, one man in the audience was taking notes in order to publish a pirated edition of the play. He dutifully recorded everything he heard up to and including the moment when the actor playing Cardinal Wolsey cried out, "*The theater's afire!*" Recall that Wotton said the fire was thought to be "*at first but an idle smoke.*" If indeed the players were trying to fake a fire with smokepots, the illusion failed -- they had to reinforce it with words to make the audience take flight.

If the initial smoke had been from a real fire, it would have been remarkable that, even after a delayed evacuation, no one was injured. As for the fellow with the hot pants, why didn't his shirt burn? How many comedies since then have featured a man with burning pants? How many comedians have doused flames with booze? This incident has all the earmarks of a well-rehearsed stunt. When he was back inside the theater, the man (perhaps a little-known or well-disguised actor) could have soaked his shirt and pants with water, then strapped on a dry false bottom stuffed with straw. Then, with phony fanny aflame, he dashed outside, where a waiting confederate quenched his bogus butt with bottled beer, delighting the distracted multitude, while inside the real Global warming was beginning.

The actor playing Cardinal Wolsey may have ad libbed "The theater's afire!" But there are some prescient lines in the script which seem to be lightly veiled references to the fire. About forty lines after the cannon salute which allegedly ignited the Globe, Henry VIII first takes notice of Anne Boleyn (Bullen), a lady-in-waiting to his wife:

KING

*My Lord Chamberlain,
Prithee come hither. What fair lady's that?*

CHAMBERLAIN

*An't please your Grace, Sir Thomas Bullen's daughter --
The Viscount Rochford -- one of her Highness' women.*

KING

*By heaven, she is a dainty one. Sweet heart,
I were unmannerly to take you out
And not to kiss you. A health gentlemen!
Let it go round.*[As the flames "*ran around like a train.*"]

WOLSEY

*Sir Thomas Lovell, is the banker ready
I' th' privy chamber?* [Perhaps the King's Men had already arranged the financing for rebuilding the Globe.]

LOVELL

Yes, my lord.

WOLSEY

Your Grace,

*I fear, with dancing is a little **heated**.*

KING

I fear, too much.

WOLSEY

There's fresher air, my lord,

*In the **next chamber**.*

Heated too much indeed. For Henry VIII (the play), the next chamber would be the theater in Blackfriars, in the very room where Henry VIII had divorced Catherine in order marry Anne Boleyn, thus beginning the divorce of England from the Catholic Church.

When I first read that the Globe had burned down during a performance of Henry VIII, I had no reason to believe that the Globe fire was anything less than a financial disaster for Shakespeare. Yet I was immediately certain that it was arson. Why? For two very strong reasons. First, as I explained in a previous chapter, I believed that Shakespeare had taken a vow to write a series of provocative histories of English kings, culminating in an inflammatory history of Henry VIII. He had begun his career with this series of histories, but I wondered why he waited until the very end of his career to complete the series with an apparently cool and bland Henry VIII. Secondly, I had discovered that in Hamlet, the King metaphorically slaughtered himself with his own cannon, fired in salute, just as in Henry VIII the playhouse was destroyed by a cannon salute to Henry VIII. The Globe fire was the missing piece in the puzzle. The completed puzzle showed Shakespeare's lifelong struggle to reconcile his Catholic faith with his love for the theater.

CLAUDIUS

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

In Denmark's crown have worn. Give me the cups;

And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,

The trumpet to the cannoneer without,

The cannons to the heavens, the heavens to earth

'Now the king drinks to Hamlet!'

(A crown in the cup? What were they drinking? Corona beer? Or maybe Royal Crown cola? Or Konigsburg (sic) beer -- German for King's Town -- King's Hamlet? They would have been wiser to stick to good old Bud, King of Beers.)

The above speech gives us a hint that the king's drinking, with the accompaniment of cannon fire, might be a metaphor for the king's attachment to his kingdom (*and in the cup an union*). The metaphor is strengthened when we recall the following from Act I:

[A flourish of trumpets and ordnance shot off, from within.]

HORATIO

What does this mean my lord?

HAMLET

*The king doth wake tonight and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail and the swaggering upspring reels,
And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge.*

HORATIO

Is it a custom?

HAMLET

*Ay, marry, is't.
But to my mind, though I am native here
And to the manner born, it is a custom
More honour'd in the breach than the observance.*

Hamlet does not want to join his forefathers' union.

"*Four successive kings*" might also refer to Kings James I, II, III, and IV of Scotland, who all died violent deaths. The current King of Scots, James VI did not want to join his four fathers' union.

In the play's very first occurrence of this metaphor, Hamlet seemed to recognize the self-destructive nature of a king's union with his kingdom. He invoked the metaphor as a curse against Claudius, a wish that Claudius might destroy himself:

CLAUDIUS

*No jocund health that Denmark drinks today,
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
And the king's rouse the heavens shall bruit again,
Re-speaking earthly thunder. Come away.*

HAMLET

*O! that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew;
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter.*

If Cloud-ius was an actual cloud he could rain himself away (melt into dew), or, when he fired his cannon at the clouds, he would indeed be slaughtering himself. The Everlasting has fixed His canon against self-slaughter, but that will not prevent Claudius from fixing (aiming) his own metaphorical cannon at himself. In the end, this curse is carried out:

HAMLET

*Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?
Follow my mother.*

LAERTES

He is justly serv'd. It is a poison temper'd by himself.

Thus the metaphors of camel, cloud, cannon, and cup embrace both the essential flaw of Claudius's character and the means of his consequent self-destruction.

The range of the cannon motif extends beyond Hamlet, impacting the life of James VI of Scotland. What was Hamlet to James VI or he to Hamlet? I covered that in detail in a previous chapter, but for now, let's review the impact of cannons on James VI and his family. His great-great-great grandfather, James II, was killed by his own cannon, when it exploded. The bride of James VI, Princess Anne of Denmark, while attempting to cross the North Sea to marry James, saw eight sailors crushed to death by a loose cannon on her storm-tossed-ship.

The cannon was also a motif in William Shakespeare's life. He obtained a family coat-of-arms that showed a falcon shaking a spear. What does that have to do with cannons? "Falcon" was the name of a type of cannon in common use in the sixteenth century. But perhaps the most important cannon in Shakespeare's world was the one with which he destroyed his Globe:

CLAUDIUS

*Come, Gertrude, we'll call up our wisest friends;
And let them know both what we mean to do,
And what's untimely done: so, haply, slander,
Whose whisper o'er the world's diameter,
As level as the cannon to his blank
Transports his poison'd shot, may miss our name,
And hit the woundless air.*

Blackfriars was symbolic of the English Reformation in another way, because of another coincidence. Blackfriars had been the principal English monastery of the Dominican order of monks, which had been founded about four hundred years before the English Reformation by Saint Dominic. At a time when the Catholic Church was massacring heretics, Dominic advocated the reconciliation of heretics through "*persuasion and discussion rather than threats and belligerence*" (Kristin E. White, *A Guide to the Saints*). This was not the approach of Phillip II in 1588 when he sent the Spanish Armada to restore England to Catholicism by strong hand and terms compulsory. England defeated the Spanish Armada on August 6 -- the feast day of Saint Dominic (and 357 years later, the date the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima). To many English Catholics (perhaps including William Shakespeare) this may have seemed like a sign from God that violence was the wrong way to restore English Catholicism. There was one more coincidence linking St Dominic and the Globe fire: St Dominic was sometimes depicted in art with "*a globe, with fire*" (White, page 107).

Did Shakespeare dismiss these coincidences as mere chance? Or did he believe they were significant coincidences, causeless consequences?

HORATIO

*...give order that these bodies
High on a stage be placed to the view,
And let me speak to th' yet unknowing world [Globe]*

*How these things came about. So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause,
And in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on th' inventors heads: all this can I
Truly deliver. [All Is True]*

FORTINBRAS

*Let us haste to hear it,
And call the noblest to the audience.
For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune.
I have some rights, of memory in this kingdom,
Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me.*

HORATIO

*Of that I shall have also cause to speak,
And from his mouth whose voice will draw on more.
But let this same be presently perform'd
Even while men's minds are wild, lest more mischance
On plots and error happen.*

Part 3 - Whither Wilt Thou Lead Me?

More Things Dreamt of in My Philosophy

I am not a Shakespearian scholar. I turned to Hamlet to make sense of my life and my father's death. In the end, my life and my father's death made sense of Hamlet. Like Horatio, I am skeptical of ghosts. But there are more things dreamt of in my philosophy than there are in heaven and earth. My philosophy is the doctrine of plenitude. All things are possible. Quantum mechanics regulates probabilities but places no limits on possibilities. Everything that may be must be, in some time and place. The necessary plenitude of times and places is provided by the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics. Thus, although some of the events I describe are unconnected by cause and effect, they are not mere coincidences - rather they are significant coincidences, causeless consequences.

Born To Set It Right

(Act 1, Scene 1, Franciso at his post)

Who's there?

Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself.

I was conceived on Flag Day and born on the Ides of March (Tax Day) in a military hospital on the Presidio of San Francisco, within sight of the Golden Gate Bridge. On the very day that I was born, my father was promoted to Major.

Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's.

Beware the Ides of March.

Is Your Union Here?

Almost three centuries after Shakespeare's birth, the American Civil War began with the attack on Fort Sumter. There were no casualties during the seige of Fort Sumter. But after the Fort surrendered, one soldier was injured by a cannon fired in final salute to the Union flag and another man, drinking a toast to the Union, accidentally drank iodine.

Later in that war, my great-grandfather, Parmensius Smith, was shot in the head while carrying the Union flag in battle. Fortunately for me, since my grandfather had not yet been conceived, the wound was not fatal, although Parmensius, an itinerant preacher, walked the earth for the next 50-odd years with a hole in his head. He died from complications of falling out of an olive tree when my father was about four years old. My father remembered him as a mean old man.

Your Father Lost a Father, and That Father Lost, Lost His

My grandfather, Robert Smith, was an English teacher for a while, but he gave it up because he had more talent for reciting poetry than for disciplining unruly students. He recited poetry in a Chataugua for a time, but he finally settled down to work in a chair factory for several decades, until his retirement. I knew him as a gentle old man with white hair and blue eyes and an easy laugh. In my memory he is enthusiastically reciting poetry, something about "the barefoot boy on the burning deck". My father was born on July 16, 1916, exactly 29 years before the first nuclear explosion (in New Mexico).

Mud in My Mind's Eye

When I was about two years old, my mother and my older sister and I moved to Oregon, while my father served a tour of duty in Korea. I remember what I think was my first day in Oregon. It had finally stopped raining and now the sun was shining brightly on the huge vacant lot next to our house. In the middle of the lot, a group of boys were squatting around a mud puddle - just my cup of tea. I squatted down beside the largest boy, who was filling a jar with muddy water. "Whatcha makin?" "You wanna see? Lookee here." I leaned forward to look into the jar. Suddenly my world turned to muddy water. The boys laughed and walked away, leaving me alone with an empty jar and a muddy face.

Dynamite

My other memory of Oregon is of running into the house with my older sister, who was in a panic because, as she told my mother, the boy next door was threatening to blow us up with dynamite. "Blow us up" didn't interest me - I assumed that had something to do with the wind. But this new word, this dyn-a-mite was obviously a word of wondrous potency. Dynamite!

That year, 1952, the hit song was Wheel of Fortune, sung by Kay Starr. "Spinning, spinning, spinning."

Dawn in the Land of the Rising Sun

About 550 BC, a young Prince of the Sakya family walked away from his heritage of wealth and power and found enlightenment within himself. He came to be known as Buddha. In the 13th century, the Japanese built the Great Buddha, a giant statue of the Buddha of Eternal Light. Originally it was enclosed in a building, but the building was destroyed by a tidal wave in 1495, when Henry VIII was about three years old.

When I was three years old (some eight or nine years after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), my father was transferred to Japan, where my mother, my sister, and I rejoined him. We stayed there a couple years. My brother was born there. I have only a few fragmentary memories of Japan

Once we went to see the Great Buddha. I was astonished by this statue of a man the size of a building. I wanted to go inside the Buddha, the way people go inside the Statue of Liberty. But

that being impossible, I could only stare awestruck at the outside of the Buddha...

I was in a car, feeling slightly carsick as usual. We were driving slowly down a crowded Japanese street. It was a feast for my eyes and ears and nose and mind. Overhead, the air was sliced by a dazzling plenitude of signs and banners. The sidewalks thronged with people in strange clothes speaking stranger words. And the air was thick with the tantalizing odors of untasted, unnamed foods. I longed to mingle with the crowd, to explore this fascinating new world, but I was sealed inside the car...

We had finally got on-post housing, so we were moving out of our paper-house and saying a final good-bye to our friends in the Japanese neighborhood. My sister and three Japanese girls and I were playing ring-around-the-rosies, singing London-bridge-is-falling-down, first in English, then in Japanese. I remember just a few syllables, "ah-no-may, ah-no-may..." (Decades later, after I wrote this, I learned that "ah-no-may" actually means "what's your name?".)

Unopened Presents

I experienced my first Christmas when I was nine months old. To a baby, every day is a new experience - Christmas no more so than any other day. For my second Christmas, my father was in Korea, so I imagine it was a somewhat subdued occasion. But for my third Christmas the whole family was reunited in Japan. It was a magical time. The air was filled with joyful music and the odor of pine. There was a tree inside the house! It was festooned with sparkling tinsel, colorful bulbs, and flashing lights. But best of all was the unlimited potential of all those unopened presents.

It wasn't until decades later, after my father's death, that I learned that, under that Christmas joy, he hid a private sorrow.. Exactly thirty-three years before my third Christmas, when my father was only four years old, his mother died. Exactly thirty-three years after my third Christmas, my father died.

Where There's a Will There's a Ray

When I was four years old I almost drowned. I had decided that keeping my head above water required nothing more than an act of will. So I resolutely waded into deep water. After the water had risen over my head, all I remember is standing on tiptoe, reaching for the surface. I'm told it was my father who pulled me out.

An Offense to Reason Most Absurd

When I was five we were transferred to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where I was forced to start kindergarten. Each morning I was roused out of my soft bed and sent off to kindergarten where, after I had lost all desire for sleep, I was ordered to lay on the hard floor and take a nap. It

was unreasonable. Finally I said, in effect, "Hell no, I won't go!". I was a kindergarten drop-out. I had already learned that the formal educational system was attempting to teach me to jump through hoops like a trained dog.



What's in a Name?

The summer before I started first grade, I went to Bible school, happily and voluntarily because I had a crush on a girl in my class. I remember nothing about her except her name, Lisa. The only other thing I remember about Bible school is the walk home on the first day. I only had to walk a couple blocks, but I walked in a different direction. When I realized that I was lost, I knocked on a door and tearfully announced, "I'm Way Ethton Thmif Junior and I'm lost!" The lady who lived there knew my parents so, by the magic of my father's name, I was whisked back to the security of my home.

Whirling Words



One afternoon when I was about six, I came home from school and went directly to my favorite napping spot, under the coffee table. I don't remember what was covered in school that day, but, from the nature of my nightmare, I think it must have been my first encounter with astronomy and atomic physics and mechanist philosophy. I dreamed that I was flying around the world, like superman except that I had no control over my motion. I was skimming just above ground level, unintentionally knocking people down. I couldn't stop. I knew I would get blamed for hurting people, even though I couldn't help it. Then I was nothing but atoms. I was a swirling spiral in empty space. I was still me, still alive, yet I was nothing, nothing, nothing.

Hey, ho! Nobody home!

No meat, nor drink, nor money have I none.

Nobody home!

Nobody home.

"Mrs. Cress's class singing Hey, Ho, Nobody Home in a 2-part round 03-16-2009"

Yet will I be merry.



[A Springe to Catch Woodcocks](#)

During his last year in the army (when I was about ten), my father was stationed in Korea again, working in counter-intelligence, while my mother, my sister, my brother, and I stayed in San Diego. Once he wrote us about a Korean soldier he had befriended. He bought shoes for the children of this soldier. At that time, I didn't understand how much this gift of shoes signified to my father. He grew up during the depression in a family too proud to admit that they were poor. To me bare feet were an emblem of freedom, but to my father they were a stigma of poverty. In a subsequent letter, my father wrote that he had uncovered evidence proving that his Korean friend was a spy and that he had turned him in to the Korean government to be executed.

[Here Comes Thy Sun](#)

When I was 12, the madness almost killed us all.

JFK, the Catholic President from Massachusetts, should have gone to MASS.

As soon as he learned of the Soviet missiles in Cuba, Kennedy should have met with Khrushchev, then held a joint news conference to announce:

"We are ending the insanity of MAD ("Mutual Assured Destruction"), to be replaced with MASS, "Mutual Assured Sanity and Survival."

Under the new policy of MASS, the U.S. will immediately remove all nuclear weapons from Italy and Turkey, and the U.S.S.R. will immediately remove all nuclear weapons from Cuba.

Then we will begin the mutual assured destruction of all nuclear weapons."

As the sun was setting during the Cuban missile crisis, Robert McNamara said,

"The sun is setting. This may be the last sunset we will ever see."

But if MASS had been implemented, McNamara could have said instead,

"Content thyself awhile. By the mass, 'tis morning;"

(Othello,II,iii)

Let's all go to MASS. No more nukes.

And in the Cup a Dis-Union

After my father retired from the army, he became an Inspector for the Department of Agriculture. His duties included inspecting the cargoes of ships coming into San Pedro (the port for Los Angeles). Once I went along with him when he boarded a Russian ship, along with a customs inspector and a Coast Guard officer with a Geiger-counter. (The Coast Guard checked all Russian ships for smuggled atomic bombs.) The Captain invited all of us to his stateroom for drinks. He was in high spirits because the KGB officer assigned to his ship had been left in Japan with appendicitis. We drank to the continued ill-health of the KGB officer. This Bud's for you!

My Father's Union

When he heard that Ronald Reagan had once been President of the Screen Actors Guild, my father reversed his long-standing aversion to unions. Not only did he join his local of the American Federation of Federal and State Employees, he became the shop steward.

The Scope Of These Delated Articles

...bearers of this greeting....

Giving to you no further personal power

To business with the king, more than the scope

Of these delated articles allow.

When I was 21, after flunking a couple of physics classes, I lost my student deferment and received Greetings from the President. Rather than surrender my fate entirely to the whims of Big Brother, I volunteered for an extra year of servitude in exchange for choice of initial duty station (Europe) and Military Occupational Specialty (Combat Engineer, a.k.a. Pioneer). Before dawn on January 20, 1972, my father drove me to the Induction Center in downtown L.A. From there I was sent back to Fort Leonard Wood for basic training and then Combat Engineer training, where I learned how to build bridges and how to destroy bridges. Then I was sent to Virginia for a three-week Atomic Demolition Munitions school, where I learned how to destroy

really big bridges.

To Stop a Bunghole

At Atomic Demolition Munitions school I was at the top of the class in purely mental tasks, such as deciphering the coded messages which specified the times and places to detonate atomic munitions. However, I needed endless practice to master even the most basic mechanical tasks. The first step in arming an atomic demolition munition was to remove the lid from the 55-gallon drum (metal barrel) in which it was packed. To pass inspection, each step had to be done in the prescribed sequence. First, use a bung-wrench to loosen the *bung*-plug in order to equalize air pressure inside the drum. Then unlatch and remove a *steel hoop* from the rim of the lid. Then remove the lid. I was well into the second week of school before I could consistently remember to loosen that bung-plug before removing the hoop.

He Hath Borne Me on His Back

After ADM school, I was assigned to the 62nd Engineer Company, at a post called Caserma Ederle, in Vicenza, Italy (about 40 miles from Venice). In 1973, Caserma Ederle was visited by freshman Senator Sam Nunn. Although I was never known for the sharpness of my military bearing, for some reason I was one of the half dozen soldiers chosen to participate in the ADM demonstration for Senator Nunn. The the larger of the two weapons in our arsenal was the MADM (Medium Atomic Demolition Munition), a 400-pound monster with the about same yield as the bomb that murdered 60,000 innocent civilians in Hiroshima. The smaller weapon, the SADM (Special Atomic Demolition Munition), could be carried in a rather large backpack. I was chosen to demonstrate the SADM. As I stood there with an atomic bomb strapped to my back, leaning slightly forward to balance the weight, with my arms hanging down in front of me and my helmet slipping over my eyes, I felt a strange affinity with Sad Sack or Beetle Bailey. I overheard Senator Nunn talking to the General. He was saying he didn't feel good about it. These weapons posed too great a potential for theft by terrorists. Any Bozo could strap one on his back and walk off with it. After the demonstration, my company commander, Lt *Bungard*, congratulated me on a job well done.



The backpack bomb weighed 168 pounds, about the same weight as me back then.

Sam Nunn is a smart guy. He didn't need my Sad Sack act to see that backpack nukes were a bad idea. Nevertheless I'm proud to be associated, if only symbolically and only in my own mind, with the achievements of Senator Nunn.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Nunn

"His legislative achievements include . . . the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, which provides assistance to Russia and the former Soviet republics for securing and destroying their excess nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. To date, the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program has deactivated more than 5,900 nuclear warheads."

Senator Nunn became chair of the Armed Services Committee in 1987. Two years later Special Atomic Demolitions were removed from the US arsenal.

"300 SADMs were assembled and remained in the US arsenal until 1989."

www.wordiq.com/definition/Special_Atomic_Demolition_Munition

I'm pretty sure "*Any Bozo could strap one on his back and walk off with it*" is an exact quote. You don't forget it when a Senator tells a General that you're a Bozo.

Much Ado About Nothing

Dogberry

"But, masters, remember that I am an ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass."

Muddy Water Blues

Guildestern

Happy, in that we are not over-happy;

On fortune's cap we are not the very button.

Hamlet

Nor the soles of her shoe?

Rosencrantz

Neither, my lord.

Hamlet

Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?

Guildenstern

'Faith, her privates we.

Hamlet

In the secret parts of fortune? O, most true; she is a strumpet.

The first time I saw Leila, she was playing pinball. Although she spoke little English, she was a master of body-English. I doubt whether her gyrating derriere had any effect on the motion of the pinball, but it had a profound impact on my emotions. Before she even turned around, I was half in love. For the next several months, I dated Leila about once a week. Between dates, my spare time was consumed by fervent memorization of little speeches in Italian.

That summer, there was a swim-meet at Caserma Ederle and the coach of the 62nd Engineer Company swim-team was having difficulty finding enough volunteers for a full team. Even though I'm a naturally inept swimmer, I let myself be talked into signing up for the 200-meter swim. I practiced for a couple of weeks, so on the day of the competition I was confident that I could at least finish the race. And finish it I did.

The 200-meter swim was the last event of the day. Standing on the edge of the pool, I squinted against the bright sunlight glinting off the water. Finally, I heard the sharp crack of the starting pistol and I plunged into the water. The world closed in around me. It was just me against the water in a silent struggle for air. I turned my head, gasped in air, then forced it out again into the water, preparing to gasp in more. Despite my dogged flailing, I seemed to hang motionless in the water. Time had stopped. One stroke was just like another. The end of the pool seemed to offer a breach in the endless cycle, but then I turned and the next lap was just like the one before it. When I finally completed the last lap and emerged from the pool, the sky was overcast and there was a chill breeze. All the other swimmers had finished and departed. Most of the spectators had left too, except for a few stragglers who didn't even notice my triumphant finish. Someone told me later that Leila had been there but had left before I finished.

A couple weeks later, as I was wandering the streets of Vicenza, I unexpectedly encountered Leila. After an unsuccessful attempt at bilingual conversation, Leila accused me, in Italian, of having forgotten all my Italian, and I accused her, in English, of having forgotten all her English. Actually, I still remembered most of my little speeches, but they didn't fit any more. The real reason we couldn't communicate was that we no longer had anything to say to each other.

There once was a lass named Annie Boyd

Who insured her ass with London Lloyd.

Her ass was covered, tho' often bare,

So may God save her London derriere.

[The Dog Will Have His Day](#)

One fine summer day, I was sent on a work detail to cut weeds around the ammo dump. The ammo dump was a chain-link and barbed-wire fenced square compound about a quarter-mile on each side. The slopes of the steep surrounding hills started almost at the ammo-dump fence, so instead of using ordinary lawnmowers we had to use sickles. A large gothic-looking building was perched atop one of the hills. Somebody told me that it was an insane asylum and that sometimes you could hear the inmates screaming. I don't know if that was true. The same guy told me something else which I doubted at the time but which turned out to be true. He said that the largest building in the ammo dump, located in the very center, was a warehouse filled with empty aluminum coffins. Such were the preparations for war - bullets for killing and coffins for dying.

That fall I had guard duty at the ammo dump. The sun had already set when I began patrolling around the inside of the fence. A chill breeze was chasing clouds across the face of a full moon. Ahead of me, scraps of leaves swirled in the wind - little inconsequential pieces of reality taking control of the world and mocking my delusions of free will. Then the howling began. The wind? A dog? A lunatic? I don't know. Morbid curiosity drew me in toward the center of the compound. From fifty yards away I could see that the door of the warehouse was ajar. Then I saw a large white dog come out the door and disappear around the corner of the building. I went into the building and saw that it was indeed stacked with aluminum coffins. Finally I returned to making my rounds around the perimeter. My duty was to guard against real intruders from outside, not imaginary ghosts from within.

[The Ghost of Venice](#)

One of the things that I loved about Venice was that I could wander, delightfully lost, for hours through the narrow, winding alleys and over the plenitude of bridges without ever seeing a car. Often, I would go out late at night, when the shops were closed and the streets were hushed and deserted. I would stand on the cobblestone street, surrounded by 500-year-old buildings, trying to conjure up the ghosts of past Venetians: Marco Polo, Cassanova, and all the throngs of merchants. But the conjuring failed. I could not imagine that faded past had ever been reality.

One day, I happened across a street vendor who was selling old photographs of Venice. I bought a photo that showed a busy throng of Venetians in quaint turn-of-the-century clothes, with a bridge and a building in the background. Late that afternoon, I asked the pretty maid at the pensione if she could help me find the locale in the photo. Actually, I was more interested in the maid than the photo. She was just going off duty and I was hoping this would be an opportunity to get better acquainted with her. She did recognize the place, called "San Travano", but she wouldn't go there with me. Instead, she gave me directions so I could go there by myself.

I found the place a little after sunset. The building in the photo was now a hollow shell with a gaping hole in the wall. I asked a passing Venetian and he told me it had been bombed during the war. There were still a few Venetians around, but they were all hurrying home to their families. As the last of their footsteps echoed into silence, I stood alone, staring at the bombed-out hulk of days-gone-by. Then, in the dim lamplight, I looked at the photograph, at the vibrant Venetians scurrying about their business. It seemed like they were truly alive, and I was but a pale shadow

of their vitality. I had found the ghost of Venice.

This Bud's For You

The 62nd Engineer Company had a mascot, a white mongrel named Budweiser who roamed freely over the whole post. Among the thousands of soldiers stationed at Caserma Ederle, there was no one better known or better loved than Budweiser. Whenever any company on post was using its barbecue pit, Budweiser was an honoured guest. Sometimes he would walk beside me when I went to the PX or to the movies. As we walked along it seemed almost everyone we passed had some word of greeting for Budweiser. "Hey Bud!" "How's it goin Bud?"

Two or three times a year, the 62nd Engineer Company would take its turn marching out onto the parade field in dress greens for the Friday afternoon Retreat ceremony. On this particular Friday, the Post Commanding General had decided to re-instate the old custom of firing a cannon at the conclusion of the ceremony. As the 62nd Engineers marched slow and stately onto the parade field, Budweiser tagged along. As the flag was coming down, Budweiser ambled up to the Post Sergeant-Major and began sniffing at his boots. The Sergeant-Major stood stiffly at attention. Just before the cannon fired, Budweiser casually lifted his leg and pissed on the Sergeant-Major's spit-shined boots.

That was the last time that cannon was fired. Not because of Budweiser, but because of me, or rather the ceiling over my bunk. The sound of the cannon had caused about 50 pounds of plaster to fall on my bunk. It might have killed me if I'd been lying there at the time. My bunk-disaster even got written up in the post newspaper. So the General decided that, even though the cannon only fired at the woundless air, it was a custom more honoured in the breach than the observance.

From that day on, Budweiser was number one on the Sergeant-Major's shit-list. The MPs had standing orders to capture Budweiser, but they never did. When on duty, the MP's wore white boot-laces. Whenever Budweiser saw those white boot-laces, he'd take off running. But he continued to collect his tribute from all the barbecue pits, including the MPs' barbecue pit.



I guess Budweiser was mostly American Pit Bull.

americanpitbull.biz

"In the past, the pit bull was one of the most trusted companions and was loved by most people. In England, where the breed is no longer allowed, the pit bull was also considered one of the safest dogs to have around children. Unfortunately, negative attention has been given to this breed in the past several years. There are two groups to blame for these negative events. One group is the media, who report attacks in the most sensational way possible. The other group that needs to shoulder some of the blame is dog breeders who overbreed their dogs, resulting in high levels of aggression. Owners who train their dogs harshly or who encourage aggressive behavior can also be blamed for negative attention on the pit bull breed."

Budweiser was a very friendly dog. He was not trained to be aggressive. He was not trained at all.

[Whither Wilt Thou Lead Me?](#)



After I got out of the army, I went back to college and immediately joined ROTC. I don't know why. Perhaps it was to please my father. Or maybe, after 3 years of saluting officers, it seemed like a rise in station to become a "Gentleman by Act of Congress." After graduation, I was sent to Infantry Officer Basic Training at Fort Benning - the same place where my father had graduated from Officer Candidate school 36 years earlier. (In March, 1978, while I was still at Ft Benning, the Old Globe Theater in San Diego was destroyed by an arson fire.)

Enrolling in ROTC had committed me to two years of active duty, but in order to be assigned to Europe, I committed to a Voluntary Indefinite assignment. "Voluntary Indefinite" meant, in theory, the army could keep me as long as they wanted me. In practice, that usually meant three years, with an option for further terms of service. However, because I was not a "forceful leader", the army spit me out again after only two years. Unable to make a living with my skills in wholesale and retail killing (Atomic Demolition and Infantry), I enrolled in a trade school to

learn computer programming.

Swear

After eight months in trade school, I went to work for an insurance company that was a subsidiary of a Fortune 500 military-industrial corporation. While I was working there, the corporation got into some kind of trouble with the government. Consequently, I, along with all the other employees, had to sign a consent order swearing that we would not use baseball bats to collect debts.

He Hath Borne Me on His Back

The term "actor" is far from an insult in a book about Shakespeare, but the title "President" will never be a term of honour in any book that I write. That great actor, Ronald Reagan, said, *"Let's get the government off our backs!"* Although he never gave his saying deed, he spoke the speech trippingly on his tongue and in the very torrent, tempest, and whirlwind of his passion gave it smoothness, and for that I love him.

The Battlefield of Ideas

When I have patronized the same bookstore for a long time, sometimes the clerks start to recognize me. Then I have to find a new bookstore. To be recognized is to be defined, to be limited by the opinions of others. This attitude makes me reluctant to form close friendships. One exception was Jim Haldenwang (whose parents live near Lake Elsinore). Jim and I began as rivals for the affections of the same girl. After she rejected us both, we continued as friendly rivals in endless philosophical debates. No idea is welcome in my mind unless it has fought its way in against all the resistance I can muster. And even then I like to make my ideas fight for their continued existence. Survival of the fittest. This does not mean that I have no firm convictions. On the contrary, those ideas which have survived in the battleground of my mind are near-immortal champions of mental combat.

Old Dynamite In the Womb of Earth

For the last twenty years of his life, all my father's spare time was consumed by a played-out old gold mine near Desert Center, California. He called it the Lilly-Belle, after his mother. I remember one day my father became worried about a possible inspection by the BATF because he was storing a box of old dynamite in a shed at his mill-site. Although the dynamite was duly registered with the BATF, it was not stored according to regulations. So my father decided we should store it in the Lilly-Belle, which was less accessible than the mill-site and so less likely to be visited by government inspectors.

That's how I found myself in the passenger seat of our jeep, with a box of old dynamite on my

lap, bouncing along over an old road that was little more than a figment of my father's imagination. I was thinking about what I had learned in the army about the instability of old dynamite. My father said it was safe, and I trusted my father; but I wasn't so sure I could trust that old dynamite. Finally we arrived at the mine and my father carried the dynamite into the mine shaft. As far as I know, it's there still.

So Hallow'd and So Gracious Is the Time

On Christmas Eve, 1986, I drove from my apartment in Huntington Beach, California, to my parents' home in Desert Center (50 miles east of Indio, 50 miles west of Blythe). Early the next morning my parents and I set out, in separate cars, for my sister's home in Prescott, Arizona. As we left Desert Center, I heard a rooster crowing, although dawn was still an hour away.

We stopped for breakfast at Blythe. My father, grandson of two preachers, believed in God but not in organized religion. My mother had been agnostic since childhood, when she first learned that Santa Claus wasn't real. I had been agnostic since age 9, when I recognized the logical fallacy of trying to believe what you want instead of what facts and reason tell you must be. Belief is a matter of necessity not of choice. Or so I believed at that time. But your beliefs can determine what is to be. I wish that, before that one meal, we had said Grace. A few moments delay would have brought us to a different time and place. How you vote in the next election will make no difference, but what you did before breakfast this morning could change the course of history.

"One can't believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

-- Alice and the White Queen in Through the Looking Glass

When we were about an hour from Prescott, we stopped at a rest stop and my mother transferred from my father's car to mine, so that she could guide me through Prescott to my sister's house, in case the two cars became separated on the way. Then we continued on our way with my father in the lead. I could see unopened Christmas presents piled in the back of his car. When we were about 20 minutes away from Prescott, I heard tires squealing. A few seconds later, I saw a car coming around the bend ahead of my father's car. It was spinning out of control, bearing down on my father. Moments later my father was dead from massive chest injuries.

A Voice on the Radio

I hear Karen Carpenter on the radio, singing "Yesterday, Once More". They say she's dead. Once she breathed and ate and slept and loved. She had hopes and dreams. All that's ended now. But, to me, she was never anything more than a beautiful voice on the radio. And she still is and always will be a beautiful voice on the radio. Karen Carpenter lives.

My father's body was cremated and his ashes were buried in the Valley of the Sun, north of Phoenix.. When I am alone I cry, but silently. My father is nothing but a memory and the memory mourns for its lost self.

True Madness

In 1987 I was fired for having a higher standard of professional ethics than my employer. I was out of work for over a year. At one point, I found myself living in a cheap motel room in Orange County, California. I had no definite plan for finding a job. I kept telling myself that tomorrow I would do something, although I didn't know what. I read a Scientific American article on chaos theory, then read Gleick's "Chaos." I bought a PC and, using the simple algorithm described in Gleick's book, I wrote variations of BASIC programs to generate graphs of the Mandelbrot set.

To determine whether a point is in the Mandelbrot set, you compute multiple iterations of a simple algorithm ($Z_{\text{new}} = Z_{\text{old}}^2 + C$) for a pair of input values representing the coordinates of a point C on the complex plane.. If it seems that the result (length-of-Z) of the algorithm will stay under the value of 2 after an infinite number of iterations, then the point is in the set. Of course, you have to estimate infinity. You arbitrarily say, for instance, that 10 iterations is close enough to infinity. Sometimes that will give the wrong answer, but more often it works well enough. You assign coordinates to each point on the PC screen. If a point is in the Mandelbrot set, you color it black. If a point escapes (the algorithm yields a value over 2) on the 10th iteration, then it's just outside the set, so you color it blue. If a point escapes after 9 iterations, you color it green. After 8 iterations, orange. And so on, repeating the cycle of colors when you run out of different colors.

By this process, a very simple algorithm yields an amazingly complex display (although, with the primitive PC I had at that time it took hours to calculate all the iterations of the algorithm for all the pixels that comprised the PC screen). It seemed unbelievable that such a simple algorithm could generate such a complex picture. I had the feeling that the computer was slowly drawing back the curtain on a window into another universe. Through the window, I saw huge twisting tendrils like fat roots rising up from a mist far, far below. Sometimes they looked like writhing tentacles reaching up from a boiling sea of troubles.

The Mandelbrot set is infinitely detailed and unendingly varied. If you change the scale of the coordinate system mapped onto the computer screen, so that you are in effect zooming in and magnifying one small area, you will get a different but equally complex picture. However, the magnification comes at a cost. At higher levels of magnification, you have to use more iterations of the algorithm to approximate infinity. With each iteration, there is a rounding error, and with many iterations the errors add up. So, at higher levels of magnification the picture becomes fuzzier and fuzzier.

At one o'clock in the morning, I found myself staring with red-rimmed eyes at my PC, as it slowly resolved itself into the coiling tentacles of chaos. I was staring into the face of chaos and it was the face of a gorgon. Insanity is not the inability to perceive reality. True madness lies in the inability to ignore the meaningless patterns of blind chance. But how can we shut our eyes to the patterns that govern our fates?

Finally, rounding errors reduced the pattern to a uniform mist.

I began to study physics and philosophy. I read about the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics. At each instant, every sub-atomic particle in the world is in an indeterminate state. If circumstances have determined its position, then its momentum can have any value with equal probability. According to the many-worlds interpretation, the particle does not somehow choose among these many equal probabilities, but instead, the future of the world splits into a separate version for each possible momentum of that particle. This happens at each instant for each sub-atomic particle in the world. The result is that everything is possible and will in fact occur. The implications of this are terrifying. You cannot ever die. At each instant, there will be a possible configuration of sub-atomic particles, one of the many actual branches of the future, in which you will continue to live. Also at each instant, there will be many future branches in which you will suffer every conceivable affliction. You have an infinity of damnation ahead of you. However, also at each instant, you will begin a life of eternal bliss. You will be forever on the threshold of both heaven and hell. The only certainty in this eternal life will be your memory of your acts of free will. Although your will may be forever thwarted, it will always be. Because you are your will, nothing else.

Henry VI, Part 3

Yield not thy neck

To fortune's yoke, but let thy dauntless mind

Still ride in triumph over all mischance.

Must There No More Be Done?

After more than a year of unemployment, I finally got a job with the Arizona state government. A few months later, I heard that my father's killer had been given a plea bargain. He pleaded guilty to felony possession of marijuana and was sentenced to community service. Not a single day in jail. No mention of my father's death.

I fantasized about somehow attacking the reputation of my father's killer. Perhaps I could camp out outside his home, passing out flyers telling everyone what he did. But those fantasies always degenerated into a final confrontation scene, wherein I stomped on his chest until his ribs caved in. And sometimes I thought about old dynamite.

My father was not a violent man, nor was he an advocate of Big Government; but he was a career army officer. By his profession (in which I followed him) he symbolized institutionalized violence. I witnessed my father's murder by a joy-riding junkie. I looked to my father's government to revenge his death. Instead, I saw the justice system mete out a punishment of "community service" to my father's murderer; that same week I read about a man in Arizona sentenced to two years in prison for killing a protected species of deer. I felt obligated to seek revenge, yet I did nothing, because I knew that an act of revenge would destroy my own life. But not until I read Hamlet and wrote this book did I realize that I had been destroying my soul by keeping the hated image of my father's murderer "in the book and volume of my brain".

False Dogs

*How cheerfully on the false trail they cry!
O, this is counter, you false Danish dogs!*

On my way to an evening linear algebra class, I stopped by the Arizona State University Student Union building for a fast meal. A group of young students was gathered around a TV set, cheering enthusiastically. The TV screen was black with flashes of light, which prompted the cheering. Fireworks? No. It was the night of January 17, 1991. Each flash of light was an American bomb detonating in the midst of the ancient city of Baghdad, murdering thousands of innocent people.

I flashed back to 1966. I was sitting in the auditorium of Lakewood (California) Senior High School, attending a mandatory "pep rally" for the football team. Teachers were standing in the aisles, taking down names of anybody who failed to cheer. We were being well trained for that night in 1991.

Reflections on Hamlet

I had long shunned Hamlet because, from what I had heard of it, it seemed to be a glorification of suicide. After my father's death I was even more repelled by the idea of the son of a murdered father who might prefer suicide to revenge. But then, in 1992, I saw an interview with Mel Gibson, promoting his "gutsy" version of Hamlet. About the same time, I bought Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare. After reading Asimov's chapter on Hamlet and after seeing Gibson's movie, I began to see Hamlet not as an indecisive, suicidal wimp, but rather as a valiant soldier of the spirit, fighting a desperate internal battle to defend the sovereignty of his soul.

That same year, I read George Polya's How To Solve It, where I learned a new attitude. I learned to be a connoisseur of problems. I savor each problem, walking around it and admiring it from all sides. I invite the problem into my mind and guide it through the myriad chambers of my psyche, introducing it to each idea already living there. I search the outside world for relatives of this problem, this new idea. I welcome the related ideas, like the family of a new immigrant. I become one with the new idea. It becomes a cherished part of me and I become a node in its web of interconnections with the world.

With this preparation, I began to read Hamlet on Christmas Day, 1992, looking for proof that Hamlet was not suicidal. I found that and much more.

'Tis Not Strange

Player-King

*This world in not for ay, nor 'tis not strange
That even our love should with our fortunes change*

Physicists say the most fundamental laws of this world are writ in very choice quantum mechanics. According to quantum mechanics, an electron in isolation has no fixed properties. It

can have any position, speed, or direction. It is a probability wave spreading out in all directions. Its properties only become actual when it interacts with some larger configuration of matter; then, they say, "the probability wave collapses".

Horatio

Oh day and night! But this is wondrous strange!

Hamlet

And therefore, as a stranger, give it welcome.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,

Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Quantum mechanics is only strange if you try to understand it with a mechanical model, such as a pinball machine. Instead, compare the language of quantum mechanics to the language of people. A word in isolation can have many meanings. A *(k)nave* could be a rascal, or the hub of a *wheel*, or the center of a church, where people *pray* and babies are baptized. But when we hear a word in context, we automatically choose just one of the possible meanings; we "collapse the probability wave". In "*there's nary a villain dwelling in all Denmark but he's an arrant knave*" we choose the "rascal" meaning for "*knave*". But Shakespeare did not collapse the wave; he amplified it, focused it, bent it to his Will; he supplied multiple contexts to sustain multiple meanings.

I started writing this before I finished reading the complete works of Shakespeare. As I read, my interpretation of Shakespeare changes and I have to re-write what I have written.

Simultaneously, I have been trying to describe that within myself which enables me to see into Shakespeare. But, as my vision of Shakespeare changes so change I and I myself am being transformed by the very act of trying to define myself.

Mind and body root ideas in reality. Words on a page have no relationship with the world except the fading memory of the last reader. Shakespeare's plays don't live on dusty pages; they only come to life on the stage, in the minds and bodies of the actors and the audience.

What distinguishes reality from fantasy is the connectiveness of fact. Every fact is connected to every other fact by a complex web of interconnections. Fantasy is isolated, with connections only within the brain of its author, limited in extent, with a beginning and an end. But Hamlet is still occupying minds almost four centuries after Shakespeare's brain has crumbled to dust. He is intimately connected with ideas which will be vibrant long after we join Shakespeare in the dust. Who is real, we or Hamlet?

I comb my memory for events leading to my discovery of Hamlet. Then I struggle to find words to describe those events. And that struggle feels more like recollection than creation. What damned plagiarist has stolen the words of my life? Even the words I just wrote are a fading echo of someone else's song: "*stealin' my life with his song*".

[This Eternal Blazon Must Not Be](#)

Nukes as weapons of war make about as much sense as chain saws for surgical instruments. But nukes are ideal weapons for terrorism - that's how we've always used them.

August 8 is St Dominic's Day. St Dominic advocated reasoning with heretics to bring them back to the Church by persuasion rather than burning them. (There was also a Japanese St Dominic of Nagasaki.)

In 1588, King Phillip of Spain sent the Duke of Medina Sidonia with the Spanish Armada to bring England back to the Catholic Church by "strong hands and terms compulsory." But like Hamlet, Medina was but mad north-north-west: when the wind [was] southerly.) he was sane. On August 8, Saint Dominic's Day, Medina decided that if the wind continued to blow from the south (which it did) he would have to abandon the attack on England. He was unable to recapture the faith of Englishmen by force. He did "it wrong, being so majestic, to offer it the show of violence, for it is, as the air, invulnerable, and [his] vain blows malicious mockery."

On August 6, 1945, America dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Three days later, on the day after St Dominic's Day, we dropped another on Nagasaki. Americans are still insisting that the bombing was necessary and justified. I'm not asking Americans to wallow in guilt. But the deliberate slaughter of thousands of innocents is murder. If we can't acknowledge that the Bomb was evil, then this land of freedom, mankind's brightest hope, is doomed to sink back into the abyss of mindless violence, to "fast in fires til [our sins] are burnt and purged away."

Please see

"Made in America: Massacring the Innocents of Nagasaki" by Bradley J. Birzer

(<http://www.theimaginativeconservative.org/made-in-america-massacring-innocents-of/#.UaYPy5z3UXt>)

Extorted Treasure For Which They Say You Spirits Oft Walk In Death

Nuclear arms are spreading. How can we defend ourselves against the coming plenitude of destructive forces? Free individuals have nothing to fear from nuclear weapons. To extort tribute from a land of free people, a government would have to conquer the people one by one. In such a conquest, nuclear weapons would be of no use. But Americans have already surrendered their freedom to the IRS. To steal the wealth of America, it is only necessary to capture the IRS, which could be accomplished (or, just as bad, attempted) by a madman with a few atomic bombs.

Building Bridges

The Great Gallagher (in "Gallagher the Mad") describes the settling of the West: pioneers leaving Europe and moving ceaselessly westward, never satisfied, always looking for something better. Finally, they arrived at the Pacific coast and could go no further;
"they were pissed! . . . So they built piers..."

The most valuable creation of the West is the spirit of rugged individualism. And perhaps the most valuable creation of the the East is the wisdom to "acquire and beget a temperance which

may give" that rugged self smoothness, to live in harmony with the world. Maybe someday we'll build bridges.

Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water

My brother Brian was born when we lived in Japan, although he was still a baby when we left there. He had a lifelong fascination with Native American culture and also a keen interest in Japanese culture. He was a good son, brother, husband, father, and grandfather, well-loved by his family, friends, and co-workers. He was a good man. Though he was just my little brother, I looked up to him. Brian died from a sudden heart attack a week short of his fiftieth birthday. In accordance with his wishes the family gathered at Zion National Park to spread his ashes over the land he loved. We climbed a short trail up to Weeping Rock, which is a shallow cave with water seeping from the ceiling. From the ledge in front of the cave, there is a beautiful view of the rugged canyon. Just as we began to scatter Brian's ashes, a group of Japanese tourists happened to arrive at the ledge. One of them pulled a wooden flute from his backpack and played "Amazing Grace." Rest in peace, Brian.

The Beauty of the World

This goodly frame, the earth...this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, ...What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!

I stand atop Camelback mountain in Phoenix, overlooking the Valley of the Sun, and I "watch the sun going down, see the world spinning 'round."

Scientist

This is nothing but atoms and electromagnetic radiation causing the firing of neurons in my brain.

Preacher

I am just a humble vassal to the Higher Power Who created this.

Philosopher

I am just a speck of dust in the infinite Cosmos.

Pessimist

This is just a fleeting moment. Soon the sun will be down, the darkness will come, I will die.

Let them keep their atoms, their Higher Power, their speck of dust, their fleeting moment. This time and place and feeling is mine!

And the sun will rise again.

Plus Tax

Whenever anyone sells anything, he or she is really selling ideas. This is especially apparent when selling a book. Nevertheless, the government has the gall to tax books. If this book is ever published commercially, the government will want to tax it. Let the state extort, by strong hand and terms compulsory, its pound of flesh. It is fitting that a tax on ideas should be paid with ideas. So, in what follows, I give the devil his due.

Minds are the fountainhead of all value in the world. To acquire value, you must use minds, your own and others. People attempt to acquire value by three methods: force, fraud, or trade. Force can interact with minds only indirectly, by threatening to destroy them. Thus force would destroy what it seeks to control. Fraud interacts with minds directly but still destructively. Minds create value by finding truth, but fraud destroys value by obscuring truth. Trade is the natural interaction between minds, creating value in the process of giving and receiving ideas (or objects which are solidified ideas).

Morality is an individual choice. In order to further his own goals an individual chooses a set of internal rules of thumb by which he will voluntarily limit his own behavior. He also chooses a set of external rules that he expects others to obey. In order to be accepted in the group of people who obey his preferred set of external rules he must make his internal rules identical to his external rules. All the above is just a roundabout way of saying "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" or equivalently "Do not initiate force or fraud."

"In order to further his own goals" is a key phrase. What are those goals? Everybody has different goals. I could say that some goals resulted from evolution, some from brainwashing, some from reasoning - but that's irrelevant. A person's goals are what they are. Morality is not about prescribing goals for people. Morality is just about people finding ways to cooperate with each other so that each person can maximize the achievement of his own goals, whatever they may be.

There is an exception to "whatever they may be." If my goal is not just to help myself but rather is to help or hurt you, then you and I can never have a cooperative relationship. Whether I'm an altruist trying to help you or a sadist trying to hurt you, what I'm doing is trying to substitute my goals for yours within your mind. There can be no basis for cooperation and trade if we don't honour the sovereignty of each other's goal-setting.

By natural law, you own what you create or what you acquire from others by trade (without the use of force or fraud). If I steal from you, it's theft. If I and five other people steal from you, it's still theft. If I and a hundred million other people steal from you, we may call it taxes, but it's still theft. Majority rule has been wrongly elevated to a moral principle, a principle born of the unholy union of the modern cult of numbers with the ancient veneration of violence.

Numbers are the modern equivalent of witch's spells. People think there is some kind of

mathematical/moral law which says that the majority is right. But a mathematician will tell you that merely assigning numbers to objects (or people) does not guarantee that those objects can be logically added in the same way as the numbers. Indeed, he may become positively indignant if you maliciously add ordinal numbers. Any true accountant (not merely a bookkeeper for the tax-collectors) can tell you of the knowledge, skill, and insight needed to condense the lifeblood of a business into useful numbers, rather than meaningless statistics. And as any physicist can tell you, if you add together two halves of a critical mass of uranium, the resultant mass (after the explosion) will be less than the sum of the parts.

From its earliest beginnings, government has been rooted in the worship of violence. *"Might makes right. Without majority rule, there would be war, in which the majority would win anyway. So, let's avoid the bloodshed and submit peaceably to the mighty majority."* This assumes that violence, or the threat of violence, is the only way people can interact. It excludes the possibility of reasonable debate and free exchange, to which people naturally and profitably resort whenever they eschew violence.

As for a better system, as an individual I do not have the wisdom, ability, or moral right to impose any "system" on anyone. So I don't vote. Instead I try to persuade others, not to form a new "system" but just to apply their own day-to-day moral standards to everybody - including government agents who try to justify their thievery by calling it taxation and justify their murders by calling them "war".

The majority has decided that I should consent to abide by majority rule. But it is impossible for the majority to give my consent. Only I can give or withhold my own consent. To quote Hamlet: "How if I answer 'No'?"

I apply my own moral standards to regulate my own actions. To delegate my moral decisions to somebody else would be the ultimate self-betrayal, amounting to psychic suicide.

Rules that I choose myself to limit my own behavior are called "ethics" or "morality."

Rules that somebody else selects and enforces with the threat of violence are called "extortion" or "slavery" or "government."

If I don't like your behavior or you don't like mine, the best solution is for us to simply not associate with each other. That's much better than trying to control each other with violence.

Submit to force if you must, but never condone it, for that would make a mockery of morality.

I am the son of a career Army officer. As a child, I lived in occupied Japan just "eight year or nine year" after my country murdered thousands of Japanese children with the first atomic bombs. I followed my father into the Army where, in the early 70s, I was trained to carry a backpack atomic bomb (Special Atomic Demolition Munition). Now I'm retired and living on government pensions from that same government which continues to drop bombs on children (aka "collateral casualties").

I was born in a government hospital. I was a carrier of my country's weapons of mass murder. I was born and trained to be a tool of my government. Maybe I can't escape my fate, but a good deed from a flawed soul is still a good deed. I'll do what I can.

"O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,
Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make [e]ssay[s]!"

"All may be well."