

HAMLET: Nay, that follows not.

POLONIUS: What follows then, my lord?

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 abridgment° comes.

Enter the PLAYERS, [four or five].

You are welcome, masters, welcome all. I am glad to see
thee well. Welcome, good friends. O, old friend! why, thy
face is valanc'd° since I saw thee last; com'st thou to beard°
me in Denmark? What, my young lady and mistress! by°
lady,° your ladyship is nearer to heaven than when I saw
you last, by the altitude of a chopine.° Pray God your voice,
like a piece of uncurrent gold, be not crack'd within the
ring.° Masters, you are all welcome. We'll e'en to't like
[French] falc'ners — fly at any thing we see; we'll have a
speech straight.° Come give us a taste of your quality,°
come, a passionate speech.

[FIRST] PLAYER: What speech, my good lord?

HAMLET: I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never
acted, or if it was, not above once; for the play, I remember,
pleas'd not the million, 'twas caviary to the general,° but it
was — as I receiv'd it, and others, whose judgments in such
matters cried in the top of° mine — an excellent play, well
digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as
cunning. I remember one said there were no sallets° in the
lines to make the matter savory,° nor no matter in the
phrase that might indict the author of affection,° but call'd

407. row: Stanza. chanson: Song, ballad. 408. abridgment: (1) Interruption; (2) pastime. 411. valanc'd: Fringed, i.e. bearded. beard: Confront boldly (with obvious pun). 412-13. by° lady: By Our Lady. 414. chopine: Thick-soled shoe. 415-16. crack'd . . . ring: I.e. broken to the point where you can no longer play female roles. A coin with a crack extending far enough in from the edge to cross the circle surrounding the stamp of the sovereign's head was unacceptable in exchange (*uncurrent*). 418. straight: Straightway. quality: Professional skill. 423. caviary . . . general: Caviar to the common people, i.e. too choice for the multitude. 425. cried . . . of: Were louder than, i.e. carried more authority than. 427. sallets: Salads, i.e. spicy jokes. 428. savory: Zesty. 429. affection: Affectation.

† it an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very
much more handsome than fine.° One speech in't I chiefly
lov'd, 'twas Aeneas' [tale] to Dido, and thereabout of it
especially when he speaks of Priam's slaughter.° If it live in
your memory, begin at this line — let me see, let me see:

“The rugged Pyrrhus,° like th' Hyrcanian beast° — ”

'Tis not so, it begins with Pyrrhus:

“The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,°

Black as his purpose, did the night resemble

When he lay couched in th' ominous horse,

Hath now this dread and black complexion smear'd

With heraldy° more dismal:° head to foot

Now is he total gules,° horribly trick'd°

With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,

Bak'd° and impasted° with the parching streets,°

That lend a tyrannous and a damned light

To their lord's murder. Roasted in wrath and fire,

And thus o'er-sized° with coagulate gore,

With eyes like carbuncles,° the hellish Pyrrhus

Old grandsire Priam seeks.”

So proceed you.

POLONIUS: 'Fore God, my lord, well spoken, with good accent
and good discretion.

[FIRST] PLAYER: “Anon he finds him

Striking too short at Greeks. His antique sword,

Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls,

Repugnant° to command. Unequal match'd,

Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide,

But with the whiff and wind of his fell° sword

Th' unnerved° father falls. [Then senseless° Ilium,°]

Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top

Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash

431. fine: Showily dressed (in language). 433. Priam's slaughter: The slaying of Priam (at the fall of Troy). 435. Pyrrhus: Another name for Neoptolemus, Achilles' son. Hyrcanian beast: Hyrcania in the Caucasus was notorious for its tigers. 437. sable arms: The Greeks within the Trojan horse had blackened their skin so as to be inconspicuous when they emerged at night. 441. heraldy: Heraldry. dismal: Ill-boding. 442. gules: Red (heraldic term). trick'd: Adorned. 444. Bak'd: Caked. impasted: Crusted. with . . . streets: I.e. by the heat from the burning streets. 447. o'er-sized: Covered over as with a coat of sizing. 448. carbuncles: Jewels believed to shine in the dark. 456. Repugnant: Resistant, hostile. 458. fell: Cruel. 459. unnerved: Drained of strength. senseless: Insensible. Ilium: The citadel of Troy.