HAMLET

[ACT IV]

Hor. 'Twere good she were spoken with, for she may shew
Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.

Queen. Let her come in. [Exit Gentleman.]

[Aside] To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.
So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
It speaks itself in fearing to be spilt.

Enter Ophelia.

Oph. Where is the beauteous Majesty of Denmark?
Queen. How now, Ophelia?
Oph. (sings) How should I your true love know
From another one?

Enter King.

Sc. V]

HAMLET

By his cockle hat and staff
And his sandal shoon.

Queen. Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?
(sings) He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone,
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.

O ho!

Queen. Nay, but Ophelia—
Oph. Pray you mark.
(sings) White his shroud as the mountain snow—

Enter King.

Queen. Alas, look here, my lord.
Oph. (sings) Larded with sweet flowers
Which bewept to the grave did not go
With true-love showers.

29. 38, 46, 164, 187 (sings) Song (at right of text) Q.2; not in F. 33. O ho! Q.2; not in F; O, o Capell. 35-61 (As F; one line Q.2) Q.2; before 39 F. 38. Larded F, Q.2; not in F; Q.2; Larded all Q. 39. Larded Q.2; did not Q.2; F, Q.2; did Pope.

25-6. his cockle hat...shoon] The insignia of a pilgrim. A favourite convention pictured the lover as going on pilgrimage to the shrine of his saint (as in Min. V. i. 1-120, n. viii. 39-40). Cf. Rom. iv. 91-104). A lyric in Greene's Never Too Late (Greene, viii. 14) describes a pilgrim lover as having 'A hat of straw... With a scallop-shell before; Sandals on his feet he wore'.

25. cockle hat] A cockle-shell (or more strictly, a scallop-shell) was worn on the hat to denote, originally, one who had been at the shrine of St James at Compostela. The practice appears to have derived from the use of the scallop-shell in baptism and hence as a symbol of repentance and regeneration.

26. shoon] The ballad retains the archaic plural.

31-2. At his head...a stone.] Traditional burial customs referred to in ballad and folklore. Cf. Child, Eng. and Scot. Pop. Ballads, 1882-92, ii. 145, 'A green turf upon his breast; To hold that good lord down; Keats, Isabella, st. 38, 'a large flint-stone weighs upon my feet'. An allusion to the custom whereby obsercer graves had the gravestone at the feet seems unlikely.

33. O ho! A deep sigh (Parrott-Craig).

38. Larded] strewed, bedecked. The culinary verb for inserting strips of fat extended its range till it came to mean 'enrich' or 'garnish' in a general sense and so 'intersperse or sprinkle with ornaments'. Cf. v. ii. 20, and for the practice of strewing flowers on the dead v. i. 296-9.

39. not] This of course violates both the metre and the expected sense, and has been thought an error. But (with all three texts agreeing) we must...
King. How do you, pretty lady?

Oph. Well, good dill 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.

King. Conceive upon her father.

Oph. Pray let’s have no words of this, but when they ask you what it means, say you this.

(sings)

Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s day,

All in the morning betime,

And I a maid at your window,

To be your Valentine.

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

And dipp’d the chamber door,

Let in the maid that out a maid

Never departed more.

King. Pretty Ophelia—

Oph. Indeed, without an oath, I’ll make an end on’t.

By God and by Saint Charity,

A lack 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 promis’d me to wed.’

He answers,

‘So would I a done, by yonder sun,

And thou hast not come to my bed.’

King. How long hath she been thus?

Oph. I hope all will be well. We must be patient. But I cannot choose but weep to think they would lay him ‘twixt cold ground. My brother shall know of it.

And so I thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach. Good night, ladies, good night. Sweet ladies, good night, good night.

Exit.

King. Follow her close; give her good watch, I pray you.

Exit Horatio.

O, this is the poison of deep grief: it springs

All from her father’s death. And now behold—

41. you] Q.2; ye F. 42. good dill] Q.2; God dill’d F; God yeild Q.1. 46. Pray] Q.2; Pray you F. 48-51.] As Q.2;Q.1; s lines F. 52-5.] As Johnson, Q.1 subst.; 2 lines Q.6;F, 52. clo’ es] Wilson; close Q.2; clothes F;Q.1.

rather suppose it a deliberate interpolation by the singer, who recalls and so emphasizes that the pattern celebrated in the song is contradicted by the instance in her mind. The song thus reflects the actual shortcomings of her father’s burial (II. 84, 210-12) but still more, since it concerns a ‘true love’, her fantasies of Hamlet’s death. Cf. II. 23-40 lu.

42. good dill you] A corruption of God yield (i.e. require) you, which Q.1 reads. (OED yield s. 7; God 8). Q.2, with the good of colloquial speech (cf. ‘good-bye’), probably gives the authentic reading, which F and Q.1 sophisticate.

42-3. the owl was a baker’s daughter] The relevance of this legend to the context is obscure, but it possibly alludes to the loss of virginity. lu.

43-4. we know what . . . may be] An ironic echo of I. John iii. 2, ‘Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be’.

44. God be at your table.] A sentiment contrasting with that of the baker’s daughter (who grudged Christ bread) ?

45. Conceive] fancy.

upon her father] The King, not alone, apparently takes her to allude to the lack of burial rites and is blind to Ophelia’s frustrated love for Hamlet. Cf. I. 23 lu.

48-66.] LN.

51. Valentine] sweetheart according to the ancient custom which recognizes as such first person of the opposite sex seen on St Valentine’s day.

53. dipp’d] opened. Dup = do up (cf. don, doff).

54. Pretty Ophelia . . .] Comparison with II. 34. 41 suggests that this, though almost always rendered as an exclamation, is addressed to Ophelia, in a vain attempt to divert the flow.

57. Indeed,] Q.2; Indeed Ia? F. 62-3.] At F;Q.1; one line Q.2. 64. He answers] Q.2 (in brackets); not in F;Q.1. 65. a] Q.2;Q.1; ha F. 67. thus] Q.2; this F. 69. would] Q.2; should F. 72-3. (4 times) Good (or good) night] F (as one word); God (or god) night Q.2. 73 S.D.] F; not in Q.2. 74 S.D.] Thro’hold; Horatio and the gentleman follow her [Wilson. 75-7.] As Stevenh. 76. And now behold] Q.2; not in F.


Saint Charity] Not a saint’s name, of course, but through such phrases as by, for, or of Charity, often used in oaths as if it were. ‘The Catholiques comen othe . . . to have charitye alwayes in their mouth’ (Shepherdies Calendar, May gloss).

60. de’t] A euphemism. Cf. Tim. iv.i.8.

61. Cock] Corruption of God; but no doubt there is a thought of the male organ too.

62. tumbled] tossed (with obvious innuendo).
HAMLET  [ACT IV

Why thou art thus incens’d.—Let him go, Gertrude.—
Speak, man.
Lear. Where is my father?
King. Dead.
Queen. But not by him.
Lear. How came he dead? I’ll not be juggled with.
To hell, allegiance! Vows to the blackest devil!
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
I dare damnation. To this point I stand,
That both the worlds I give to negligence,
Let come what comes, only I’ll be reveng’d
Most thoroughly for my father.

King. Who shall stay you?
Lear. My will, not all the world’s.
And for my means, I’ll husband them so well,
They shall go far with little.

King. Good Laertes,
If you desire to know the certainty
Of your dear father, is’t writ in your revenge
That, swoopstake, you will draw both friend and foe,
Winner and loser?

Lear. None but his enemies.

SC. V]

HAMLET  357

King. Will you know them then?
Lear. To his good friends thus wide I’ll ope my arms,
And, like the kind life-ren’d ring pelican,
Repast them with my blood.

King. Why, now you speak
Like a good child and a true gentleman.
That I am guiltless of your father’s death
And am most sensibly in grief for it,
It shall as level to your judgment ‘pear
As day does to your eye.

A noise within. [Ophelia is heard singing.]
Let her come in.

Lear. How now, what noise is that?

Enter Ophelia.

O heat, dry up my brains. Tears seven times salt

146. pelican] Q2; Politician F. 150. sensibly] Q2; sensible F. 151. ‘pear] Johnson; peare Q2; pieerce F. 152 S.D. within.] Q2; within. Let her come in. 153. S.D. Enter Ophelia.] Q2 (at 152, before Let her come in.)

Enter Ophelia, fantastically drest with Straw and Flowers. Renée: Ophelia re-enters with flowers in her hand / Wilson.

146. kind] showing natural feeling for its ‘kind’. pelican] In traditional fable the pelican feeds its young from its own breast, in some versions reviving them from seeming death (cf. life-ren’d ring). According as it is applied to parent or the same fable may illustrate self-sacrifice or (Ex iii. 17, 170, ‘Honour pent to the meanest habit’; Wint. iv. iii. 1, iv. iv. 3, etc.) and the meanings of the two words interact. See OED peer v. 152 S.D. Ophelia . . singing.] The words which follow show that the ‘noise’ signals Ophelia’s return.

152. Let her come in.] This, which F and all the eds. misconceive, must belong to the on-stage dialogue. Q2’s error is in placing the speech-prefix Lear. a line too soon, so making these words begin Lear’s speech instead of continuing the King’s. Cf. for a similarly misplaced speech-prefix iii. iv. 53; and see MLR, liv. 311–3.

154–5. O heat . . . eye.] To be spared so painfully a spectacle Laertes longs to lose both sight and reason. The brain, conceived of in the old physiology as
HAMLET

[ACT IV]

Burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye.

By heaven, thy madness shall be paid with weight
Till our scale turn the beam. O rose of May!

Dear maid—kind sister—sweet Ophelia—
O heavens, is't possible a young maid's wits
Should be as mortal as an old man's life?

Nature is fine in love, and where 'tis fine
It sends some precious instance of itself
After the thing it loves.

Oph. (sings) They bore him bare-fac'd on the bier,
And in his grave rain'd many a tear—

Fare you well, my dove.

Lear. Hadst thou thy wits and didst persuade revenge,
It could not move thus.

Oph. You must sing A-down a-down, and you Call him

[ACT V]

a-down-a. O, how the wheel becomes it! It is the false steward that stole his master’s daughter.

Lear. This nothing’s more than matter.

Oph. There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance—pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that’s for thoughts.

Lear. A document in madness: thoughts and remembrance fitted.

Oph. There’s fennel for you, and columbines. There’s rue for you. And here’s some for me. We may call it herb of grace a Sundays. 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 a made a good end.

[sings] For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.

156. with J Q 2; by F. 157. Till] F; Tell Q 2. turn] Q 2; turns F. 158. an old] F, Q 1; a poore Q 2. 161-3. F; not in Q 2. 164. bier.] Q 2; Bier, / Hey non n'y nony, nony, hey nony: F. 165. in] Q 2; on F. rain'd Q 2; rains F. 166. ] Q 2; italic (as part of song) F. 167-8. As Q 2; prose F. 168. move] Q 2; move me con. Walker. 169-71. Prisse F; 3 lines divided a downe. / And . . . it, / It Q 2. 169-70. You ... adown-a] This edn; as two lines of song Stainton; all in italics Johnson; italics for all after You must sing / Steven's; only 'Adown adown' as quotation Wilson. 169. A-down a-down] Q 2; downe a-downde F. and] Q 2; F, an Capell.

cold and moist, would perish if 'dried up'.

155. virtue] inherent power, property.

157. turn the beam] tilt the bar joining the two scales of a balance.

161-3. These 'obscure and affected' lines (Johnson) have often given trouble but may be paraphrased: Human nature, when in love, is exquisitely sensitive, and being so, it sends a precious part of itself as a token to follow the object of its love. Thus, the fineness of Ophelia's love is demonstrated when, after the loved one has gone, her mind goes too. The commentators, with Laertes, always apply the general statement to Ophelia's love for her father, but the play leaves it open to us to apply it also to her love for Hamlet.

162. instance] example affording demonstration, specimen.

164-5. L.N. 166. Fare you well, my dove.] Printed by F as though part of the song, and indistinguishable from it in Q 2, but more plausibly an endearment added by Ophelia to it.

169. A-down a-down] Cited by Florio to illustrate 'the burden of a country song' (World of Words, under Filibucksichie), this common and all but meaningless refrain is found in a number of ballads in a variety of forms. It is sung by Quickly in Wv. i.v. 38 and by the mad Lucibella in Chettle's Hoffman (l. 1976). Here Ophelia instructs her hearers to sing it as a refrain to her song.

169-70. and you ... adown-a] You addresses others of those present. The refrain is apparently to be sung by alternating voices. L.N.
HAMLET

Laer. Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself
She turns to favour and to prettiness.

Oph. (sings) And will a not come again?
And will a not come again?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy death-bed,
He never will come again.

His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll.
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan.

God a mercy on his soul.

And of all Christian souls. God buy you. Exit.

Laer. Do you see this, O God?

King. Laeretes, I must commune with your grief,
Or you deny me right. Go but apart,
Make choice of whom your wisest friends you will,
And they shall hear and judge 'twixt you and me.
If by direct or by collateral hand
They find us touch'd, we will our kingdom give,
Our crown, our life, and all that we call ours
To you in satisfaction; but if not,
Be you content to lend your patience to us,

HAMLET

SC. VI]

And we shall jointly labour with your soul
To give it due content.

Laer. Let this be so.
His means of death, his obscure funeral—
No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones,
No noble rite, nor formal ostentation—
Cry to be heard, as 'twere from heaven to earth,
That I must call in question.

King. So you shall.
And where th'offence is, let the great axe fall.
I pray you go with me.

Exeunt.

[SCENE VI]

Enter HORATIO and a Servant.

Hor. What are they that would speak with me?
Serv. Scafarer men, sir. They say they have letters for you.
Hor. Let them come in.

[Exit Servant.]

Scene vi


It was an ancient custom, of which relics may still be seen in churches, that when a knight was buried, his helmet, sword, and coat-of-arms were hung over his tomb.

trophy memorial. Originally one erected in celebration of a victory and consisting of arms and other objects taken in war. Possibly we should read trophy sword, i.e. take trophy as adjectival.

hatchment a tablet or painting displaying the coat-of-arms of the deceased, normally placed outside the house of mourning, and then, after the burial, over the tomb.

orientation ceremony.

214. That] so that, as at iv. vii. 146 (Abbott 283).

Scene vi

iv. vi.] In Q1 this scene is replaced by one in which Horatio tells the Queen of the letter he has received from Hamlet announcing his return, and, further, reporting the exchange of commissions (from v. ii. 13-33), so that the Queen is now apprised of the King's villainy.

2. letters] The plural (following L. litterae) is common in a singular sense. N.B. 1. 8 below, 'a letter'. Cf. Oth. iv. i. 232 (the letter), 271 (the letters).