

***William Shakespeare's
Hamlet:
Soliloquy Standing Still
Part 2***



VANDERBILT OSHER
LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE

READING SHAKESPEARE WITH FILM

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Film: Sir Laurence Olivier (1948)

Film: Franco Zeffirelli – Mel Gibson (1990)

Film: Kenneth Branagh (1996)

Film: Robert Icke / Rhodri Huw / BBC – Andrew Scott (2018)

Clips from:

Act III, Scene 2, lines 331 – 384

Act III, Scene 3, lines 27 – end

Act III, Scene 4, lines 1 – 139

Act IV, Scene 4, lines 9 – 66

Act V, Scene 1, lines 109 – 209

Act V, Scene 2, lines 4-80; 175 – 209

Pages:

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9 - 16

17 - 19

20 - 24

25 – 31

Excerpts:

“Shakespeare and the Nature of Man” – Theodore Spencer

”Shakespearean Tragedy: *Hamlet*” – A.C. Bradley

“Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human” – Harold Bloom

“The Trial of Man – *Hamlet* and the Limits of Human Judgment” – Craig Bernthal

Hamlet – Part 2

Act III.2

HAMLET:

O, the recorders. Let me see one. To withdraw with
You – why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as
If you would drive me into a toil?

331
332
333

GUILDENSTERN:

O my lord, if my duty be too bold, my
Love is too unmannerly.

335

HAMLET:

I do not well understand that. Will you play
Upon this pipe?

GUILDENSTERN: My lord, I cannot.

HAMLET: I pray you.

GUILDENSTERN: Believe me, I cannot.

HAMLET: I do beseech you.

GUILDENSTERN:

I know no touch of it, my lord.

HAMLET:

It is as easy as lying. Govern these ventages
With our fingers and thumb, give it breath with your
Mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look
You, these are the stops.

343

GUILDENSTERN:

But these cannot I command to any
Utt'rance of harmony. I have not the skill.

HAMLET:

Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you
Make of me! You would play upon me, you would seem
To know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my
Mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to
The top of my compass; and there is much music,
Excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it
Speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on
Than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though
You can fret me, you cannot play upon me.

357

Enter Polonius.

God bless you, sir!

POLONIUS:

My lord, the queen would speak with you,
And presently.

360

HAMLET:

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.

POLONIUS: It is backed like a weasel.

HAMLET: Or like a whale.

POLONIUS: Very like a whale.

HAMLET:

Then I will come to my mother by and by. 368

[aside] They fool me to the top of my bent. – I will come 369

By and by.

POLONIUS: I will say so. *[Exit.]*

HAMLET: 'By and by' is easily said. Leave me, friends.

[Exeunt all but Hamlet.]

'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breaths out
Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood
And do such butter business as the day
Would quake to look on. Soft, now to my mother.

O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom. 379

Let me be cruel, not unnatural;

I will speak daggers to her, but use none.

My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites:

How in my words somever she be shent, 383

To give them seals never, my soul, consent! *Exit.* 384

Hamlet – Part 2

Act III.3

POLONIUS:

My lord, he's going to his mother's closet.

Behind the arras I'll convey myself.

To hear the process. I'll warrant she'll tax him home,

29

And, as you said, and wisely was it said,

'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother,

Since nature makes them partial, should o'erhear

The speech, of vantage. Fare you well, my liege.

33

I'll call upon you ere you go to bed

And tell you what I know

KING: Thanks, dear my lord. *Exit [Polonius].*

O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven;

It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,

37

A brother's murder. Pray can I not,

Though inclination be as sharp as will.

My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,

And like a man to double business bound

I stand in pause where I shall first begin,

And both neglect. 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?

47

And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,
Or pardoned 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 cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardoned and retain th' offense?**
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offense's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above.
There is not shuffling; there the action lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence. What then? What rests?
**Try what repentance can. What can it not?
Yet what can it when one cannot repent?**
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limed soul, that struggling to be free
Are more engaged! Help, angels! Make assay.
Bow, stubborn knees, and, heart with strings of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe.
All may be well.

54

58

61

63

68

69

[*He kneels.*]
Enter Hamlet.

HAMLET:

**Now, might I do it pat, now 'a is a-praying,
And now I'll do't. And so 'a goes to heaven,
And so am I revenged. That would be scanned.
A villain kills my father, and for that
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.**

73

Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
'A 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 seasoned for his passage:
No.

80

81

82

Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,
At game a-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 damned and black
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays.
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

88

92

Exit.

KING: [*rises*]

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

Exit.

Hamlet – Part 2

Act III.4

Enter [Queen] Gertrude and Polonius

POLONIUS:

'A will come straight. Look you lay home to him.
Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with,
And that your grace hath screened and stood between
Much heat and him. I'll silence me even here.
Pray you be round with him.
[HAMLET (*within*) Mother, mother, mother!]

1

2

5

QUEEN: I'll warrant you; fear me not. Withdraw; I hear
Him coming. *[Polonius hides behind the arras.]*
Enter Hamlet.

HAMLET: Now, mother, what's the matter?

QUEEN: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET: Mother, you have my father much offended.

QUEEN: Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

12

HAMLET: Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

QUEEN: Why, how now, Hamlet?

HAMLET: What's the matter?

QUEEN: Have you forgot me?

HAMLET: No, by the rood, not so!
You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife,
And (would it were not so) you are my mother.

15

QUEEN: Nay, then I'll set those to you that can speak.

HAMLET: 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: What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?
Help, ho!

POLONIUS: [*behind*] What, ho! help!

HAMLET: [*draws*]
How now? A rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!
[*Makes a pass through the arras and kills Polonius.*]

POLONIUS: [*behind*]
O, I am slain!

QUEEN: O me, what hast thou done?

HAMLET: May, I know not. Is it the king?

QUEEN: O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

HAMLET: A bloody deed – almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king, and marry with his brother.

30

QUEEN: As kill a king?

HAMLET:

Ay, lady, it was my word.

Thou wretched, rash intruding fool, farewell!

I took thee for thy better. Take thy fortune.

Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger. –

Leave wringing of your hands. Peace, sit you down

And let me wring your heart, for so I shall

If it be made of penetrable stuff,

If damned custom have not brazed it so

38

That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

39

QUEEN:

What have I done that thou dar'st wag thy tongue

In noise so rude against me?

HAMLET: Such an act

That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,

Call virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose

From the fair forehead of an innocent love,

And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows

45

As false as dicer's oaths, O, such a deed

As from the body of contraction plucks

47

The very soul, and sweet religion makes

48

A rhapsody of words! Heaven's face does glow,

And this solidity and compound mass,

50

With heated visage, as against the doom,

51

Is thought-sick at the act.

QUEEN: Ay me, what act,

That roars so loud and thunders in the index?

53

HAMLET:

Look here upon this picture, and on this
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers. 55

See what a grace was seated on this brow:
Hyperion's curl, the front of Jove himself, 57

An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,
A station like the herald Mercury

New lighted on a heaven-kissing hill –

A combination and a form indeed

Where very god did seem to set his seal

To give the world assurance of a man.

This was your husband. Look you now what follows.

Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear

Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?

Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,

And batten on this moor? Ha! Have you eyes? 68

You cannot call it love, for at your age

The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble, 70

And waits upon the judgment, and what judgment 71

Would step from this to this? Sense sure you have, 72

Else could you not have motion, but sure that sense 73

Is apoplexed, for madness would not err, 74

Nor sense to ask to see, was ne'er so thrall'd 75

But it reversed some quantity of choice

to serve in such a difference. What devil was't That thus hath cozned you at hoodman— blind?	78
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight, Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all, Or but a sickly part of one true sense could not so mope.	80 82
O shame, where is thy blush? Rebellious hell, If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones To flaming youth let virtue be as wax And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame When the compulsive ardor gives the charge, Since frost itself as actively doth burn, And reason panders will.	84 87
QUEEN: 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.	91

HAMLET: Nay, but to live
In the ranks sweat of an enseamed bed,
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty-

93

QUEEN: O, speak to me no more.
These words like daggers enter in mine ears.
No, more, sweet Hamlet.

HAMLET: A murderer and a villain,
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole
And put it in his pocket -

99

98

Enter the Ghost [in his nightgown]

HAMLET:

A king of shreds and patches –
Save me and hover o'er me with your wings,
You heavenly guards? What would your, gracious figure?

QUEEN:

Alas, he's mad.

HAMLET:

Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
That, lapsed in time and passions, let's go by 108
Th' importance acting of your dread command?
O, say!

GHOST:

**Do not forget. This visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
But look, amazement on thy mother sits.
O, step between her and her fighting soul!
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works. 115
Speak to her, Hamlet.**

HAMLET:

How is it with you, lady?

QUEEN:

Alas, how is't with you,
That you do bend your eye on vacancy,
And with th' incorporal air do hold discourse? 119
Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
And as the sleeping soldiers in th' alarm
Your bedder hairs like life in excrements
Start up and stand an end. O gentle son, 122
Upon the heat and flame. Whereon do you look? 123 124

HAMLET:

On him, on him! Look you, how pale he glares!
His form and cause conjoined, preaching to stones,
Would make them capable. – Do not look upon me,
Lest with this piteous action you convert
My stern effects. Then what I have to do
Will want true color – tears perchance for blood.

128

130

QUEEN:

To whom do you speak this?

HAMLET:

Do you see nothing there?

QUEEN:

Nothing at all; yet all this is I see.

HAMLET:

Nor did you nothing hear?

QUEEN:

No, nothing but ourselves.

HAMLET:

Why, look you there! Look how it steals away!
My father, in his habits as he lived!
Look where he goes even now out at the portal!

Exit Ghost

Hamlet
Act IV.IV

HAMLET: Good sir, whose power are these? 9

CAPTAIN: They are of Norway, sir.

HAMLET: How purposed, sir, I pray you?

CAPTAIN: Against some part of Poland.

HAMLET: Who commands them, sir?

CAPTAIN: The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

HAMLET: Goes it against the main of Poland, sir,
Or for some frontier? 15

CAPTAIN:

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, 20

Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole
A ranker rate, should it be sold in fee. 22

HAMLET: Why, then the Polack never will defend it.

CAPTAIN: Yes, it is already garrisoned.

HAMLET:

Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats
Will not debate the question of this straw.
This is th' imposthume of much wealth and peace,
That inward breaks, and shows no cause without
Why the man dies. I humbly thank you, sir.

27

CAPTAIN: God bye you, sir.

[*Exit.*]

ROSENCRANTZ: Will't please you go, my lord?

HAMLET:

I'll be with you straight. Go a little before.

[*Exeunt all but Hamlet.*]

How all occasions do inform against me

32

And spur my dull revenge! **What is a man,**

If his chief good and market of his time

34

Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.

Sure he that made us with such large discourse,

36

Looking before and after, gave us not

That capability and godlike reason

To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be

39

Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple

40

Of thinking too precisely on th' event –

41

A thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom
 And ever three parts coward – **I do not know**
Why yet I live to say, ‘This thing’s to do,’
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
To do’t. Examples gross as earth exhort me. 46
 Witness this army of such mass and charge, 47
 Led by a delicate and tender prince,
 Whose spirit, with divine ambition puffed,
 Makes mouths at the invisible event, 50
 Exposing what is mortal and unsure
 To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
 Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great
 Is not to stir without great argument,
 But greatly to find quarrel in a straw 55
 When honor’s at the stake. How stand I then,
 That have a father killed, a mother stained,
 Excitements of my reason and my blood,
 And let all sleep, while to my shame I see
 The imminent death of twenty thousand men
 That for a fantasy and trick of fame 61
 Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
 Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause, 63
 Which is not tomb enough and continent 64
 To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,
 My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! *Exit.*

Hamlet – Part 2

Act V.1

HAMLET: Whose grave's
This, sirrah?

CLOWN: Mine, sir.
O, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.

HAMLET: I think it be thine indeed, for thou liest in't.

CLOWN: You lie out on't, sire, and therefore 'tis not yours.
For my part, I do not lie in't, yet it is mine.

HAMLET: 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.

118

CLOWN: 'Tis a quick lie, sir, 'twill away again from me to
You.

HAMLET: What man dost thou dig it for?

CLOWN: For no man, sir.

HAMLET: What woman then?

CLOWN: For none neither.

HAMLET: Who is to be buried in't?

CLOWN: One that was a woman, sir; but, rest her soul,
She's dead.

HAMLET: How absolute the knave is! We must speak by
The card, or equivocation will undo us. By the Lord,
Horatio, this three years I have taken note of it, the age
Is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so
Near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe. – How long
Has thou been a grave-maker?

128

129

131

132

CLOWN: of all the days I' th' year, I came to 't that day that
Our last king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

HAMLET: How long is that since?

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: Ay, marry, why was he sent into England? 140

CLOWN: Why, because 'a was mad. 'A shall recover his
Wits there; or if 'a do not, 'tis no great matter there.

HAMLET: Why?

CLOWN: 'Twill not be seen in him there. There the men
Are as mad as he.

HAMLET: How came he mad?

CLOWN: Very strangely, they say.

HAMLET: How strangely?

CLOWN: Faith, e'en with losing his wits.

HAMLET: Upon what ground?

CLOWN: Why, here in Denmark. I have been sexton here,
Man and boy, thirty years.

HAMLET: How long will a man lie i' th' earth ere he rot?

CLOWN: Faith, if 'a be not rotten before 'a die (as we have
Many pocky corses now-a-days that will scarce hold the
Laying in), 'a will last you some eight year or nine year.
A tanner will last you nine year.

155

HAMLET: Why he more than another?

CLOWN: Why, sir, his hide is so tanned with his trade that
'a will keep out water a great while, and your water is a
Sore decayer of your whoreson dead body. Here's a skull
Now hath lien you i' th' earth three-and-twenty years.

HAMLET: Whose was it?

CLOWN: A whoreson mad fellow's it was. Whose do you
Think it was?

HAMLET: Nay, I know not.

CLOWN: A pestilence of him for a mad rogue! 'A poured
a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir
was-sir – Yorick's skull, the king's jester.

168

HAMLET: This?

CLOWN: E'en that.

HAMLET: Let me see. *[Take the skull]* Alas, poor Yorick!
I knew him, Horatio, a fellow if infinite jest, of most
Excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand
Times. And now how abhorred in my imagination it is!
My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have
Kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now?
You gambols, your songs, your flashes or merriment
That were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to
Mock your own grinning? Quite chapfall'n ? Now get
You to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an
Inch thick, to this favor she must come. Make her laugh
At that. Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

180

182

HORATIO: What's that, my lord?

HAMLET: Dost thou think Alexander looked o this fashion
i' th' earth?

HORATIO: E' en so.

HAMLET: And smelt so? Pah!
[Puts down the skull]

HORATIO: E'en so, my lord.

HAMLET: To what base uses we may return, Horatio!
Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of
Alexander till 'a find it stopping a bunghole?

HORATIO: 'Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so 193

HAMLET: No, faith, not a jot, but to follow him thither with
Modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it' as thus; 195

**Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander
Returneth to dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam;
And why of that loam whereto he was converted might
They not stop a beer barrel?**

**Imperious Cesar, dead and turned to clay, 200
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.**

**O, that earth which kept the world in awe
Should patch a wall t' expel the winter's flaw! 203**

But soft, but soft a while! Here comes the king –

*Enter King, Queen, Laertes, and the Corse [with
Lords attendant and a Doctor of Divinity as Priest].*

The queen, the courtiers. Who is this they follow?

And with such maimed rites? This doth betoken

The corse they follow did with desp'rate hand

Fordo it own life. 'Twas of some estate. 208

Couch we awhile, and mark. 209

[Retire with Horatio]

Hamlet – Part 2

Act V.II

Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay
Worse than the minutes in the bilboes. Rashly, 6
And praised by rashness for it – let us know,
Our indiscretion sometime serves us well
When our deep plots do pall, and that should learn us 9
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will 11

HORATIO: That is most certain.

HAMLET: Up from my cabin,
My sea-gown scarfed about me, in the dark
Groped I to find out the, had my desire,
Fingered their packet, and in fine withdrew 15
To mine own room again, making so bold,
My fears forgetting manners, to unseal
Their grand commission; where I found, Horatio –
Ah, royal knavery ! – an exact command,
Larded with many several sorts of reasons, 20
Importing Denmark's health, and England's too, 21
With, ho! Such bugs and goblins in my life, 22
That on the supervise, no leisure bated, 23
No, not to stay the grinding of the axe,
My head should be struck off.

HORATIO: Is't possible?

HAMLET:
Here's the commission; read it at more leisure.
But wilt thou hear me how I did proceed?

HORATIO:
I beseech you.

HAMLET:
Being thus benetted round with villainies,
Or I could make a prologue to my brains, 30
They had begun the play. I sat me down,
Devised a new commission, wrote it fair.
I once did hold it, as our statistes do, 33
A baseness to write fair, and labored much 34
How to forget that learning, but, sir, now
It did me yeoman's service. Wilt thou know 36
Th' effect of what I wrote?

HORATIO: Ay, good my lord.

HAMLET:

An earnest conjuration from the king,
As England was his faithful tributary,
As love between them like the palm might flourish,
As peace should still her wheaten garland wear 41
And stand a comma 'tween their amities, 42
And many such-like as's of great charge, 43
That on the view and knowing of these contents,
Without debatement further, more or less,
He should the bearers put to sudden death,
Not shriving time allowed. 47

HORATIO: How was this sealed?

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, 50
Folded the writ up in the form of th' other,
Subscribed it, gave 't th' impression, placed it safely, 52
The changeling never known. Now, the next day
Was our sea-flight, and what to this was sequent
Thou know'st already.

HORATIO: So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to' t.

HAMLET: [Why, man, they did make love to this employment.]
They are not near my conscience; their defeat
Does by their own insinuation grow. 59
'Tis dangerous when the baser nature come
Between the pass and fell incensed points 61
Of mighty opposites.

HORATIO: Why, what a king is this!

HAMLET: Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon – 63
He that hath killed my king, and whored my mother,
Popped in between th' election and my hopes, 65
Thrown our his angle for my proper life, 66
And with such coz'nage – is't not perfect conscience 67
To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damned 68
To let this canker of our nature come 69
In further evil?

HORATIO:
It must be shortly known to him from England
What is the issue of the business there.

Hamlet:
It will be short; the interim is mine,
And a man's life no more than to say 'one.'
But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
That to Laertes I forgot myself,
For by the image of my cause I see
The portraiture of his. I'll court his favors.
But sure the bravery of his grief did put me
Into a tow'ring passion.

79

OSRIC: I commend my duty to your lordship.

HAMLET: Yours, yours. [*Exit Osric.*] He does well to
Commend it himself: there are no tongues else for's turn.

HORATIO: This lapwing runs away with the shell on his
Head.

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HAMLET: 'A did comply, sir, with his dug before' a sucked
It. Thus has he, and many more of the same bevy that I
Know the drossy age dotes on, only got the tune of the
Time and, out of an habit of encounter, a kind of yeasty
Collection, which carries them through and through the
Most fanned and winnowed opinions; and do but blow
Them to their trial, the bubbles are out.

179

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Enter a Lord.

LORD: My lord, his majesty commended him to you by
Young Osric, who brings back to him that you attend
Him in the hall. He sends to know if your pleasure hold
To pay with Laertes, or that you will take longer time.

HAMLET: 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.

LORD: The king and queen and all are coming down.

HAMLET: In happy time. 194

LORD: The queen desires you to use some gentle Entertainment to Laertes before you fall to play. 195

HAMLET: She well instructs me. [Exit Lord.]

HORATIO: You will lose this wager, my lord.

HAMLET: I do not think so. Since he went into France I Have been in continual practice. 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 anything, obey it. I will
Forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit.

HAMLET:

**Not a whit, we defy augury. There is special
Providence in the fall of 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
Of aught he leaves knows, what is to leave betimes? Let be.**

“Shakespeare and the Nature of Man”

By: Theodore Spencer
(pages 105-109)

This sense of the reality of evil – in the cosmos, in the state, and in man – this enlargement of dramatic dimensions by significant generalization, this dramatic use of one of the essential conflicts of the age, is what helps to make *Hamlet* so large an organism, and to give it, as the expression of a universal situation, so profound a meaning. Hamlet’s disillusionment is a partial expression of a general predicament; the emotions he gives voice to were shared in his own time and have been shared ever since by many people less miraculously articulate than himself. His discovery of the difference between appearance and reality, which produced in his mind an effect so disillusioning that it paralysed the sources of deliberate action, was a symptom that the Renaissance in general had brought with it a new set of problems, had opened new psychological vistas, which the earlier views of man had not so completely explored. As we look back on the period, it appears that the contrast between outward seeming and inner truth had begun, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, to seem the most easily available example of a more portentous awareness, which could by no other means be so readily described. It is one of the keys to an understanding of Shakespearean tragedy, to that stretching into hitherto inarticulate reaches of experience, which is one of the chief emotional legacies of the Renaissance.

But we can find, if we return to the play itself, more in Shakespeare’s conception of Hamlet’s character than an embodiment, however profound, of the difference between appearance and reality. Shakespeare had made several earlier experiments with the development of character, in portraying Romeo and Prince Hal, among others, he had shown his ability to make a hero change as the result of the play’s action. But just as *Hamlet* illustrates both a more expanded and a more fused control of dramatic convention and traditional belief than the earlier plays, so it shows a greater mastery of how to describe the growth, inside dramatic limits, of a hero. This can be clearly seen if we examine, in order, Hamlet’s great soliloquies. When we first see Hamlet alone, he is emotionally in pieces, and the chaos of his thought and feeling is reflected in the grammatical chaos of his utterances; before he can finish a sentence some new agonizing disruptive thought explodes to distract his mind. The order of the world, of the state, and of the individual are all in pieces, and the chaotic grammar reflects the universal chaos of his thought. The same is true of his second great soliloquy, the one beginning

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

In which he bursts into violent self-deprecation as he thinks of the difference between stage-playing and real action. But even in this speech, at the end, he pulls himself together and orders his thought to play the testing of the king. Planned action takes the place, as it had not before, of emotional desperation.

In the soliloquy that follows (as far as the audience is concerned, about three minutes later), the “To be or not to be” soliloquy, we see a Hamlet who is able to generalize on a new level. No longer is there a grammatical torrent, and no longer is Hamlet thinking about existence as opposed to non-existence only in relation to himself; he has grown, psychologically and philosophically, so that he can think of the problem more universally. In the first soliloquy it was “This too too solid flesh” – Hamlet’s own – about which he was concerned. Now, as the play reaches its center, it is no longer, “I,” but “we” – all humanity – that he reflects upon: “When we have shuffled off this mortal coil”

And makes us rather bear those ills *we* have
Than fly to others that *we* know not of.
Thus conscience doth make cowards of *us* all...

Even the soliloquy in the fourth act – “How all occasions do inform against me” – when Hamlet compares his behavior to that of Fortinbras, combining, as usual personal and general reflections – even this agonized soliloquy has much more order, both logically and grammatically, than the first two violent outbursts. In fact, there can be little doubt that Shakespeare thought of Hamlet as growing much older, emotionally, intellectually and even physically, during the course of the play, than the literal time covered by the action could possibly justify. At the beginning Hamlet is fresh from the university; he is about twenty. In the graveyard scene he is unmistakably described as thirty. Shakespeare was in the habit of using concrete numerical details to make a particular scene vivid; regardless of previous data, and this is an obvious example of how his view of his hero had changed, perhaps unconsciously, at the end of the play. Throughout the fifth act, Hamlet is a very different man from the distracted undergraduate he was at the beginning. At the beginning there was a horrible split between his view of the world as it should be and the world as it is. At the end he is reconciled; and his reconciliation has both matured and ennobled him. He sees himself no longer in relation to a lustful mother and a vicious king; the immediate is replaced by the universal:

And that should learn us

He is no longer *in* the tumult, but above it; he is no longer “passion’s slave,” but a man who sees himself as part of the order of things, even though his final view of that order, exhausted, resigned, and in a way exalted, is very different from the youthful rosy picture his Renaissance theoretical education had given him.

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.

The thought may be neo-stoic Renaissance commonplace, but Hamlet’s expression of it, through his incomparable control of rhythm, enlarges our feeling about Hamlet’s character. To be resigned, as Hamlet resigned, is to be made, by experience instead of by theory, once more aware of the world’s order. The last time we know Hamlet emotionally, he has transcended his own situation; he is no longer a victim of it. That is why we feel so moved, so in a way glorified, by the inevitability of his death. We have seen the purgation of a soul, and when Fortinbras enters at the end to be the king that Hamlet might have been, we know in another way and on another level – a more practical level that brings us back to the world in which we live – that we have also seen, with the accomplishment of Hamlet’s revenge, the purgation of a state.

Shakespearean Tragedy: Hamlet

A.C. Bradley

(Pages 133-138)

This incident is, again, the turning-point of the tragedy. So far, Hamlet's delay, though it is endangering his freedom and his life, has done no irreparable harm; but his failure here is the cause of all the disasters that follow. In sparing the king, he sacrifices Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Laertes, the Queen and himself. This central significance of the passage is dramatically indicated in the following scene by the reappearance of the Ghost and the repetition of its charge.

Polonius is the first to fall. The old courtier, whose vanity would not allow him to confess that his diagnoses of Hamlet's lunacy was mistaken, had suggested that, after the theatricals, the Queen should endeavour in a private interview with her son to penetrate the mystery while he himself would repeat his favourite part of the eavesdropper (III.i.184ff). It has now become quite imperative that the Prince should be brought to disclose his secret; for his choice of the 'Murder of Gonzago', and perhaps his conduct during the performance, have shown a spirit of exaggerated hostility against the King which has excited general alarm. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discourse to Claudius on the extreme importance of his preserving his invaluable life, as though Hamlet's insanity had now clearly shown itself to be homicidal. When, then, at the opening of the interview between Hamlet and his mother, the son, instead of listening to her remonstrances, roughly assumes the offensive, she becomes alarmed; and when, on her attempting to leave the room, he takes her by the arm and forces her to sit down, she is terrified, cries out, 'Thou wilt not murder me?' and screams for help. Polonius, behind the arras, echoes her call; and in a moment Hamlet, hoping the concealed person is the King, runs the old man through the body.

Evidently this act is intended to stand in sharp contrast with Hamlet's sparing of his enemy. The King would have been just as defenseless behind the arras as he had been on his knees; but here Hamlet is already excited and in action, and the chance comes to him so suddenly that he has no time to 'scan' it. It is a minor consideration, but still for the dramatist not unimportant, that the audience would wholly sympathize with Hamlet's attempt here, as directed against an enemy who is lurking to entrap him, instead of being engaged in a business which perhaps to the bulk of the audience then, as now, seemed to have a 'relish of salvation in't'.

We notice in Hamlet as the opening of this interview, something of the excited levity which followed the *denouement* of the play-scene. The death of Polonius sobers him; and in the remainder of the interview he shows, together with some traces of his morbid state, the peculiar beauty of nobility of his nature. His chief desire is not by any means to ensure his mother's silent acquiescence in his design of revenge; it is to save her soul. And while the rough work of vengeance is repugnant to him, he is at home in this higher work. Here that fatal feeling, 'it is no matter', never shows itself. No father-confessor could be more selflessly set upon his end of redeeming a fellow-creature from degradation, more stern or pitiless in denouncing the sin, or more eager to welcome the first token of repentance. There is something infinitely beautiful in that sudden sunshine and love which breaks out when, at the Queen's surrender,

O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain,

He answers,

O throw away the worser part of it,
And live the purer with the other half.

The truth is that, though Hamlet hates his uncle and acknowledges the duty of vengeance, his whole heart is never in this feeling or this task, but his whole heart is in his horror at his mother's fall and in his longing to raise her. The former of these feelings was the inspiration of his first soliloquy; it combines with the second to form the inspiration of his eloquence here. And Shakespeare never wrote more eloquently than there.

I have already alluded to the significance of the reappearance of the Ghost in this scene; but why does Shakespeare choose for the particular moment of its reappearance the middle of a speech in which Hamlet is raving against his uncle? There seems to be more than one reason. In the first place, Hamlet has already attained his object of stirring shame and contrition in his mother's breast, and is now yielding to the old temptation of unpacking his heart with words, and exhausting in useless emotion the force which should be stored up in his will. And, next, in doing this he is agonizing his mother to no purpose, and in despite of her piteous and repeated appeals for mercy. But the Ghost, when it gave him his charge, had expressly warned him to spare her and here again the dead husband shows the same tender regard for his weak unfaithful wife. The object of his return is to repeat his charge.

Do not forget: this visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose;

But, having uttered this reminder, he immediately bids the son to help the mother and 'step between her and her fighting soul'.

And, whether intentionally or not, another purpose is served by Shakespeare's choice of this particular moment. It is a moment when the state of Hamlet's mind is such that we cannot suppose the Ghost to be meant for an hallucination; and it is of great importance here that the spectator or readers should not suppose any such thing. He is further guarded by the fact that the Ghost proves, so to speak, his identity by showing the same traits as were visible on his first appearance – the same insistence on the duty of remembering, and the same concern for the Queen. And the result is that we construe the Ghost's interpretation of Hamlet's delay ('almost blunted purpose') as the truth, the dramatist's own interpretation. Let me add that probably no one in Shakespeare's audience had any doubt of his meaning here. The idea of later critics and readers that the Ghost is an hallucination is due partly to failure to follow the indication just noticed, but partly also to two mistakes, the substitution of our present intellectual atmosphere for the Elizabethan, and the notion that, because the Queen does not see and hear the Ghost, it is meant to be unreal. But a ghost, in Shakespeare's day, was able for any sufficient reason to confine its manifestation to a single person in a company; and here the sufficient reason, that of sparing the Queen, is obvious.

At the cost of this scene it appears that Hamlet has somehow learned of the King's design of sending him to England in charge of his two 'school-fellows'. He has no doubt that this design covers some villainous plot against himself, but neither does he doubt that he will succeed in defeating it; and as we saw, he looks forward with pleasure to this conflict of wits. The idea of refusing to go appears not to occur to him. Perhaps (for here we are left to conjecture) he feels that he could not refuse unless at the same time he openly accused the King of his father's murder (a course which he seems at no time to contemplate); for by the slaughter of Polonius he has supplied his enemy with the best possible excuse for getting him out of the country. Besides, he has so effectually warned this enemy that, after the death of Polonius is discovered, he is kept under guard (IV.iii.14). He consents then, to go. But on his way to the shore he meets the army of Fortinbras on its march to Poland; and the sight of these men going cheerfully to risk death 'for an egg-shell', and 'making mouths at the invisible event', strikes him with shame as he remembers how he with so much greater cause for action, 'lets all sleep'; and he breaks out into the soliloquy, 'How all occasions do inform against me!'

This great speech, in itself not inferior to the famous 'To be or not to be', is absent not only from the First Quarto but from the Folio. It is therefore probable that, at any rate by the time when the Folio appeared (1623), it had become customary to omit it in theatrical representation; and this is still the custom. **But, while no doubt it is dramatically the least indispensable of the soliloquies, it has a direct dramatic value, and a great value for the interpretation of Hamlet's character. It shows that Hamlet, though he is leaving Denmark, has not relinquished the idea of obeying the Ghost. It exhibits very strikingly his inability to understand why he has delayed so long. It contains that assertion which so many critics forget, that he has cause and will strength and means to do it'. On the other hand – and this was perhaps the principal purpose of the speech – it convinces us that he has learnt little or nothing from his delay, or from his failure to seize the opportunity presented to him after the play-scene. For, we find, both the motive and the gist of the speech are precisely the same as those of the soliloquy at the end of the Second Act ('O what a rogue'). There too he was stirred to shame when he saw passionate emotion awakened by a cause which, compared with his, was a mere egg-shell. There too he stood bewildered at the sight of his own dullness, and was almost ready to believe – what was justly incredible to him – that it was the mask of mere cowardice. There too he determined to delay no longer: if the King should but blench, he knew his course. Yet this determination led to nothing then; and why, we ask ourselves in despair should the bloody thoughts he now resolves to cherish ever pass beyond the realm of thought?**

“Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human”

By: Harold Bloom

The **canonical sublime** depends upon a strangeness that assimilates us even as we largely fail to assimilate it. What is the stance toward life, the attitude, of the Hamlet who returns from the sea at the start of Act V? Hamlet himself veers dizzily between being everything and nothing, an alternation that haunts our lives as much as it does our literature. Like Shakespeare, Hamlet takes up no stance, which is why comparisons of either to Montaigne have been so misleading. We know what we mean when we speak of Montaigne’s skepticism, but we tend to mean both too much and too little when our emphasis is on Hamlet’s skepticism or Shakespeare’s. There is no absolutely accurate term (or terms) for Hamlet’s attitudes toward life and death in Act V. One can try them all out – stoicism, skepticism, quietism, nihilism, -- but they don’t quite work. I tend to favor “disinterestedness,” but then find I can define the word only with reference to Hamlet. Quietism, half century after *Hamlet*, means a certain Spanish mode of religious mysticism, but Hamlet is no mystic, no stoic, and hardly a Christian at all. He goes into the final slaughter scene in the spirit of a suicide, and prevents Horatio’s suicide with a selfish awareness that Horatio’s felicity is being postponed in order that the prince’s own story can be told and retold. And yet he cares for his reputation as he dies, his “wounded name,” if Horatio does not live to clear it, is his final anxiety. Since he has murdered Polonius, driven Ophelia to madness and to suicide, and quite gratuitously sent the wretched Rosencrantz and Guildenstern off to execution, his anxiety would seem justified, except that in fact he has no consciousness of culpability. His fear of a “wounded name,” is one more enigma, and hardly refers to the deaths of Claudius and of Laertes, let alone of his mother, for whom his parting salute is the shockingly cold “Wretched Queen, adieu.” His concern is properly theatrical, it is for us, the audience:

You that look pale and treble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act...

That seems to me a playwright's concern, proper to the revisionist author of *The Mousetrap*. Joyce's Stephen, in the library scene of *Ulysses*, scarcely distinguishes between Shakespeare and Hamlet, and as I have noted, Richard Ellmann assured us that Stephen's fantasia remained always Joyce's serious reading of the play. Hamlet himself seems quite free of the audience's shock that so vast a consciousness should expire in so tangled and absurd a mesh of poisoned sword and poisoned cup. It outrages our sensibility that the Western hero of intellectual consciousness dies in this grossly inadequate context, yet it does not outrage Hamlet, who has lived through much too much already. We mourn a great personality, perhaps the greatest, Hamlet has ceased to mourn in the interval between Acts IV and V. The profoundest mysteries of his personality are involved in the nature of his universal mourning, and in his self-cure.

Hamlet's spiritual despair transcends a father's murder, a mother's hasty remarriage, and all the miasma of Elsinore's corruption, even as his apotheosis in Act V far transcends any passing of the Oedipus complex. The crucial question becomes, How ought we to characterize Hamlet's melancholia in the first four acts, and how do we explain his escape from it into a high place in Act V, a place at last entirely his own, and something like a radically new mode of secular transcendence?

Dr. Johnson thought that the particular excellence of *Hamlet* as a play was its “variety,” which seems to me truer of the prince than of the drama. What most distinguishes Hamlet’s personality is its metamorphic nature: his changes are constant, and continue even after the great sea change that precedes Act V. We have the perpetual puzzle that the most intensely theatrical personality in Shakespeare centers a play notorious for its anxious expectations, for its incessant delays that are more than parodies of an endlessly delayed revenge. Hamlet is a great player, like Falstaff and Cleopatra, but his director, the dramatist, seems to punish the protagonist for getting out of hand, for being Hobgoblin run off with the garland of Apollo, perhaps for having entertained even more doubts than his creator had. And if Hamlet is imaginatively sick, then so is everyone else in the play, with the possible exception of the audience’s surrogate, Horatio. When we first encounter him, Hamlet is a university student who is not being permitted to return to his studies. He does not appear to be more than twenty years old, yet in Act V he is revealed to be at least thirty, after a passage of a few weeks at most. And yet none of this matters; he is always both the youngest and the oldest personality in the drama; in the deepest sense, he is older than Falstaff. Consciousness itself has aged him, the catastrophic consciousness of the spiritual disease of his world, which he has internalized, and which he does not wish to be called upon to remedy, if only because the true cause of his changeability is his drive toward freedom. Critics have agreed, for centuries now, that Hamlet’s unique appeal is that no other protagonist of high tragedy still seems paradoxically so free. In Act V, he is barely still in the play, like Whitman’s “real me” or “me myself” the final Hamlet is both in and out of the game while watching and wondering at it. But if his sea change has cured him of the Elsinore illness, what drives him back to the court and to the final catastrophe? We feel that if the Ghost were to attempt a third appearance in Act V, Hamlet would thrust it aside; his obsession with the dead father is definitely over, and while he still regards his maligned mother as a whore, he has worn out his interest there also. Purged, he allows himself to be set up for Claudius’s refined, Italianate version of *The Mousetrap*, on the stated principle of “Let be.” Perhaps the best comment is Wallace Stevens’s variation: “Let be be finale of seem.” And yet once more, we must return to the Elsinore illness, and to the medicine of the sea voyage.

Every student of the imagery of the play *Hamlet* has brooded on the imposthume, or abscess, which Robert Browning was to pun on brilliantly with his “the imposthume I prick to relieve thee of, -- Vanity.” Hamlet himself, precursor of so many Browning *personae*, may be punning on the abscess as imposture:

This is th’ imposthume of much wealth and peace,
That inward breaks, and shows no cause without
Why the man dies.

Elsinore’s disease is anywhere’s, anytime’s. Something is rotten in every state, and if your sensibility is like Hamlet’s, the finally you will not tolerate it. Hamlet’s tragedy is at last the tragedy of personality: The charismatic is compelled to a physician’s authority despite himself; Claudius is merely an accident; Hamlet’s only persuasive enemy is Hamlet himself. When Shakespeare broke away from Marlovian cartooning, and so became Shakespeare, he prepared the abyss of Hamlet for himself. Not less than everything in himself, Hamlet also knows himself to be nothing in himself. He can and does repair to that nothing at sea, and he returns disinterested, or nihilistic, or quietistic, whichever you may prefer. But he dies with great concern for his wounded name, as if reentering the maelstrom of Elsinore partly undoes his great change. But only in part: the transcendental music of cognition rises up again in a celebratory strain at the close of Hamlet’s tragedy, achieving the secular triumph of “The rest is silence.” What is not at rest, or what abides before the silence, is the idiosyncratic value of Hamlet’s personality, for which another term is “**the canonical sublime.**”

“The Trial of Man – *Hamlet* and the Limits of Human Judgment

By: Craig Bernthal (2003)
(pages 78-81)

When he is invited to the fencing contest with Laertes, Hamlet is virtually certain that it is a trap, and Horatio tries to convince him not to go. Hamlet replies with the definitive insight of the play, the anagnorisis of the tragic hero:

We defy augury. There is 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, of aught
He leaves, knows aught, what is 't to leave betimes?
Let be.

(5.2.215-20)

Prediction, plots – none of these matter to Hamlet anymore. He has, essentially, received the gift of faith, a spiritual condition ultimately attributable to God and unexplainable by reference to any series of events or experiences. He does not try to postpone the time of his own death, and he does not go into the duel with thoughts of killing Claudius. Death will come when it will come – for human beings as well as for sparrows – and the final arbiter is Providence, what God has decided, not man. Hamlet’s speech alludes to Matthew 10:28 – 31, Jesus’ commission to his disciples when he sent them out to preach and heal, knowing that they would encounter danger and threats to their lives:

And fear ye not them that kill the body, but are not
Able to kill the soul: but rather fear him, which is
Able to destroy both body and soul in hell. / Are not
Two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall
Not fall on the ground without your Father? / Yea,
And all the hairs of your head are numbered.

This was a popular verse for English ministers preaching on Providence, which the Elizabethans understood to operate in two ways. There was God's general providence, by which nature was ordered according to law, and there was special providence, which worked its way out in the lives of individuals and nations. The seventeenth-century preacher Ralph Walker states "[t]he Providence of God is a worke of God by which hee doth most wisely, freelie, and mightily, and excellently well governe all things for the manifestation of his great goodness and glorie." Walker's contemporary, Peter Baro, gives a similar definition: "We call Gods Providence, a perpetuall and unchangeable disposition and administration of all things that be." Writers disagreed on whether Providence impinged on free will. Those of Calvinist leanings believed it did; adherents to Roman Catholic theology did not. But neither group disputed that ultimate outcomes were in God's control, no matter what decisions made.

Providence includes the full range of natural law, spiritual and physical; disobedience of the spiritual laws governing life carries with it consequences that are as unavoidable as the laws of gravity for those who step off tall buildings. As Presbyterian minister James Montgomery Boice puts it, "If anger and tension go unchecked, they produce ulcers or high blood pressure. Profligacy is a path to broken lives and venereal disease. Pride will be self-destructive. These spiritual laws are equivalent of the laws of science in the physical creation." The consequence of Providence is not to relieve us of the need to be prudent or to make informed and reasoned judgments, but to "relieve us from anxiety in God's service." This is what Hamlet's final reliance on Providence does for him. He has tried to be responsible, though he failed by killing Polonius; he has berated himself for not taking revenge, yet he has not taken it. His judgment has extended itself as far as it can, and how that thought has run out, Providence is what is left. Hamlet will enter the duel without anxiety, not only because he is ready to meet death, but also because he knows he is only an actor in divine plan that will work its way out no matter what he does.

"The readiness is all," he says, a line in Shakespeare liked so much he virtually repeats it in *King Lear*. It alludes to Luke 12:40 and Matthew 24:10, "Therefore be ye also ready: for insuch an hour as yet think not the son of man cometh."

Being truly ready for death transforms Hamlet. In accepting death, he finds life. In submitting to Providence, Hamlet preserves his soul. His anxiety vanishes, along with the need to exert control over events; death, which has been Hamlet's real nemesis all along will come when God wills it and with the consequence He desires, and for the first time, this is good enough for Hamlet.

SPARROWS AND PROVIDENCE

MATTHEW 10: 28-31

28 And fear ye not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him, which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall on the ground without you Father?

30 Yea, and all the hairs of your head are numbered.

31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.



LUKE 4-7

4 And I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that are not able to do anymore.

5 But I will forewarn you, whom ye shall hear: fear him which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell: yea, I say unto you, him fear.

6 Are not five sparrows bought for two farthings,

And yet not one of them is forgotten before God?

7 Yea, and all the hairs of your head are numbered: fear not therefore; ye are more of value than many sparrows.