

Hamlet's Soliloquy, Act II, Scene ii

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!	550
Is it not monstrous that this player here, But in a fiction, in a dream of passion, Could force his soul so to his own conceit*	*imagination
That from her working all his visage* wann'd,*	*face/*paled
Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect*,	*mood
A broken voice, and his whole function* suiting With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing! For Hecuba! ¹	*the whole operation of his body
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, That he should weep for her? 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, Make mad the guilty and appall the free, Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed	560
The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I, A dull and muddy-mettled* rascal, peak, Like John-a-dreams*, unpregnant* of my cause, And can say nothing; no, not for a king, Upon whose property and most dear life A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward? Who calls me villain? breaks my pate* across? Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face? Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the throat*, As deep as to the lungs? who does me this? Ha! 'Swounds,* I should take it: for it cannot be But I am pigeon-liver'd ² and lack gall* To make oppression bitter, or ere this I should have fatted* all the region kites* With this slave's offal*: bloody, bawdy villain! Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindles* villain!	565
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, And fall a-cursing, like a very drab*, A stallion*! Fie upon't! foh! About*, my brain! Hum—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	*dull spirited * a sleepy fellow/not filled with 570 *head *calls me a liar 575 * God's wounds (a curse) *unable to take resentment *made fat/local crows or ravens *guts, internal organs *unnatural
	585
	*prostitute *male prostitute *to work
	590
	*immediately

Play something like the murder of my father		595
Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;		
I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench*,	*flinch	
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen ³		
May be the devil: and the devil hath power		
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps		600
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: the play's the thing	*more closely related	
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.		605

¹A character from the story of the Trojan war; she is one of the characters described in the speech by the player that Hamlet is responding to.

²Pigeons and doves were believed to be mild and to lack "gall," one of the four "humours" that make up the body in the current belief. Gall controlled the ability to be irritated. If you had no gall, you couldn't be irritated by others.

³Hamlet is referring to the ghost of his father he saw earlier.