

Prince Hal

King Henry IV Part 1

Act 1 Scene 2

Hal, the young heir to the throne of England, has spent more time at the pub than the palace. He has been frequenting London's Eastcheap district, mixing with thieves and drunks, chief among them the larger-than-life Sir John Falstaff. In this soliloquy, Hal explains the benefits of his 'off-the-rails' behaviour.

I know you all, and will awhile uphold
The unyoked humour of your idleness.
Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That, when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted, he may be more wondered at
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.
If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work,
But when they seldom come, they wished for come,
And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents.
So when this loose behaviour I throw off
And pay the debt I never promisèd,
By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glittering o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
I'll so offend to make offence a skill,
Redeeming time when men think least I will.

Hamlet

Hamlet

Act 1 Scene 2

Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, is deeply troubled by the sudden death of his father and the hasty marriage of his mother to his uncle. In this speech he tries to make sense of this new reality.

O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God, God,
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this:
But two months dead – nay not so much, not two –
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on. And yet within a month
(Let me not think on't – frailty, thy name is woman),
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she –
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourned longer – married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her gallèd eyes,
She married. O most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not, nor it cannot come to good;
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

Trinculo

The Tempest

Act 2 Scene 2

Trinculo, a court jester, has been shipwrecked on the shore of a strange island; he believes himself to be the only survivor of the storm. As another storm brews, Trinculo looks for a place to shelter. He finds Caliban hiding under a cloak and tries to figure out what he is.

Here's neither bush nor shrub to bear off any weather at all, and another storm brewing – I hear it sing i'th'wind. Yond same black cloud, yond huge one, looks like a foul bombard that would shed his liquor. If it should thunder as it did before, I know not where to hide my head; yond same cloud cannot choose but fall by pailfuls. What have we here? A man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish: he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell; a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-John. A strange fish. Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday-fool there but would give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man. Any strange beast there makes a man: when they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian. Legged like a man, and his fins like arms. Warm, o'my troth! I do now let loose my opinion, hold it no longer: this is no fish, but an islander that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt. *[Thunder]* Alas, the storm is come again. My best way is to creep under his gaberdine; there is no other shelter hereabout. Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows. I will here shroud till the dregs of the storm be past.

BELL SHAKESPEARE.

Iago

Othello

Act 1 Scene 3

Iago, an ensign in the Venetian army, is widely believed to be honest. He isn't. Here he outlines his plans to rob Roderigo, take Cassius' job and hurt his master, Othello.

Thus do I ever make my fool my purse:
For I mine own gained knowledge should profane
If I would time expend with such a snipe
But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor,
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
He's done my office. I know not if't be true,
But I for mere suspicion in that kind
Will do as if for surety. He holds me well,
The better shall my purpose work on him.
Cassio's a proper man: let me see now,
To get his place, and to plume up my will
In double knavery. How? How? Let's see:
After some time to abuse Othello's ear
That he is too familiar with his wife.
He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected, framed to make women false.
The Moor is of a free and open nature
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by th'nose
As asses are.
I have't, it is engendered! Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

Benedick

Much Ado About Nothing

Act 2 Scene 3

Don Pedro has hatched a plan to trick the quarrelsome Benedick and Beatrice into falling in love with each other. In this scene, Don Pedro, Leonato and Claudio allow Benedick to overhear them talking about how desperately Beatrice loves him. Benedick takes the bait.

This can be no trick. The conference was sadly borne; they have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady. It seems her affections have their full bent. Love me? Why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censured: they say I will bear myself proudly if I perceive the love come from her. They say too that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. I did never think to marry. I must not seem proud; happy are they that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair – 'tis a truth, I can bear them witness. And virtuous – 'tis so, I cannot reprove it. And wise, but for loving me. By my troth, it is no addition to her wit, nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her. I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have railed so long against marriage. But doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age. Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humour? No, the world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married.

[Enter Beatrice]

Here comes Beatrice. By this day, she's a fair lady! I do spy some marks of love in her.

BELL SHAKESPEARE.

Sebastian

Twelfth Night

Act 4 Scene 3

Olivia has fallen in love with Cesario, who is really Viola in disguise. Viola's twin brother, Sebastian, is a dead ringer for his disguised sister. When Sebastian stumbles upon Olivia, and she starts making advances towards him, Sebastian questions both his and her sanity.

This is the air, that is the glorious sun,
This pearl she gave me, I do feel't and see't,
And though 'tis wonder that enwraps me thus,
Yet 'tis not madness. Where's Antonio then?
I could not find him at the Elephant,
Yet there he was, and there I found this credit,
That he did range the town to seek me out.
His counsel now might do me golden service:
For though my soul disputes well with my sense
That this may be some error, but no madness,
Yet doth this accident and flood of fortune
So far exceed all instance, all discourse,
That I am ready to distrust mine eyes
And wrangle with my reason that persuades me
To any other trust but that I am mad,
Or else the lady's mad; yet if 'twere so,
She could not sway her house, command her followers,
Take and give back affairs and their dispatch
With such a smooth, discreet and stable bearing
As I perceive she does. There's something in't
That is deceivable. But here the lady comes.

BELL SHAKESPEARE.

Mark Antony

Julius Caesar

Act 3 Scene 1

Mark Antony's friend, Julius Caesar, has just been assassinated. The conspirators Brutus and Cassius allow Antony to speak at Caesar's funeral as long as he doesn't blame them. Antony very carefully and skilfully sways public opinion back towards Caesar. By this point in his speech, the mob are screaming for revenge.

Good friends, sweet friends, let me not stir you up
To such a sudden flood of mutiny.
They that have done this deed are honourable.
What private griefs they have, alas, I know not,
That made them do it: they are wise and honourable
And will no doubt with reasons answer you.
I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts.
I am no orator, as Brutus is,
But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man
That love my friend, and that they know full well
That gave me public leave to speak of him.
For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech
To stir men's blood. I only speak right on:
I tell you that which you yourselves do know,
Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb mouths,
And bid them speak for me. But were I Brutus,
And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
Would ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue
In every wound of Caesar that should move
The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.

Romeo

Romeo and Juliet

Act 2 Scene 2

Romeo and Juliet, children of two feuding families, meet at a party and fall instantly in love. Later that night, Romeo hides in Juliet's orchard and watches her.

He jests at scars that never felt a wound.
But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief
That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she.
Be not her maid, since she is envious;
Her vestal livery is but sick and green,
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.
It is my lady, O it is my love:
O that she knew she were!
She speaks, yet she says nothing: what of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.
I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night.
See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!
O that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!