

Cutting the Text Activity: sample speeches from *Hamlet*

All excerpts are taken from Shakespeare's full text, not from the FSU/Asolo Conservatory's touring adaptation.

From Act I, Scene 2

KING

'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
 To give these mourning duties to your father.
 But you must know your father lost a father,
 That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound
 In filial obligation for some term
 To do obsequious sorrow. But to persevere
 In obstinate condolment is a course
 Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief.
 It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
 A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,
 An understanding simple and unschooled.
 For what we know must be and is as common
 As any the most vulgar thing to sense,
 Why should we in our peevish opposition
 Take it to heart? Fie, 'tis a fault to heaven,
 A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
 To reason most absurd, whose common theme
 Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,
 From the first corse till he that died today,
 "This must be so." We pray you, throw to earth
 This unprevailing woe and think of us
 As of a father; for let the world take note,
 You are the most immediate to our throne,
 And with no less nobility of love
 Than that which dearest father bears his son
 Do I impart toward you. For your intent
 In going back to school in Wittenberg,
 It is most retrograde to our desire,
 And we beseech you, bend you to remain
 Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
 Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

From Act I, Scene 2

HAMLET

O, that this too, too sullied 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.

From Act III, Scene 2

HAMLET

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious, periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. It out-Herods Herod. Pray you, avoid it.

PLAYER

I warrant your Honor.

HAMLET Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone or come tardy off, though it makes the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theater of others. O, there be players that I have seen play and heard others praise (and that highly), not to speak it profanely, that, neither having th' accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

PLAYER

I hope we have reformed that indifferently
with us, sir.

HAMLET

O, reform it altogether. And let those that play
your clowns speak no more than is set down for
them, for there be of them that will themselves
laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators
to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary
question of the play be then to be considered.
That's villainous and shows a most pitiful ambition
in the fool that uses it. Go make you ready.

Players exit.

From Act III, Scene 3

KING

O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven;
 It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,
 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 cursèd 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?
 And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
 To be forestallèd 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 no 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 limèd soul, that, struggling to be free,
 Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make assay.
 Bow, stubborn knees, and heart with strings of steel
 Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe.
 All may be well.

He kneels.

From Act IV, Scene 7

QUEEN

One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow. Your sister's drowned, Laertes.

LAERTES

Drowned? O, where?

QUEEN

There is a willow grows askant the brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crowsfeet, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do "dead men's fingers" call them.
There on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,
As one incapable of her own distress
Or like a creature native and endued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

LAERTES

Alas, then she is drowned.

QUEEN

Drowned, drowned.