

GRAVEDIGGER Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that. It was that very day that young Hamlet was born, he that is mad and sent into England.

HAMLET Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?

GRAVEDIGGER Why, because 'a was mad. A shall recover his wits there, or if 'a do not, 'tis no great matter there.

HAMLET Why?

GRAVEDIGGER 'Twill not be seen in him there. There the men are as mad as he.

HAMLET How came he mad?

GRAVEDIGGER Very strangely, they say.

HAMLET How strangely?

GRAVEDIGGER Faith, e'en with losing his wits.

HAMLET Upon what ground?

GRAVEDIGGER Why, here in Denmark. I have been seven here, man and boy, thirty years.

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

GRAVEDIGGER Faith, if 'a be not rotten before 'a die—as we in—a will last you some eight year or nine year. A tanner will last you nine year.

HAMLET Why he more than another?

GRAVEDIGGER 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 whorson dead body. Here's a skull now hath lien you i'th' earth three-and-twenty years.

HAMLET Whose was it?

GRAVEDIGGER A whorson mad fellow's it was. Whose do you think it was?

HAMLET Nay, I know not.

GRAVEDIGGER A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! 'A poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. [He picks up a skull.]

This same skull, sir, was, sir, Yorick's skull, the King's jester.

HAMLET This?

GRAVEDIGGER E'en that.

HAMLET [He takes the skull.] Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now how

143. ground: cause

145. thirty years: (Since the Gravedigger came to his profession the day that young Hamlet was born [131], this line—along with Yorick's death twenty-three years ago—sets Hamlet's age at thirty, somewhat older than audiences like to imagine.)

148. pocky: rotten (especially with syphilis)

148–49. hold . . . in: hold together long enough for burial

154. sore: grievous; whorson: vile

155. lien you: lain

161. flagon of Rhenish: bottle of Rhine wine

abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here heaving these gibes that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gambols now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now, to mock your own grinning? Quite chopfallen? Now, get you to my lady's table and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come. Make her laugh at that. [Exit.]

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! [He 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 bung-hole?

HORATIO Twere to consider too curiously to consider so.

HAMLET No, faith, not a jot, but to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it: 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 Caesar, dead and turned to clay,

Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.

Oh, that that earth which kept the world in awe

Should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw!

Enter KING, QUEEN, LAERTES, and the corpse [of OPHELIA, with a DOCTOR OF DIVINITY, and ATTENDANTS.]

But soft, but soft awhile. Here comes the King,

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

And with such maimed rites? This doth betoken

166. My gorge rises: i.e., I feel like vomiting

170. gibes: taunts; gambols: tricks

172. grinning: (Because they showed teeth, skulls were thought to grin.); chopfallen:

(1) lacking the lower jaw; (2) dejected

173. table: dressing table; paint: apply cosmetics

174. favor: appearance

177. Alexander: Alexander the Great (356–323 BC), Greek conqueror, and, with Julius Caesar, symbol of worldly achievement

184. bung-hole: hole of a cask

185. curiously: ingeniously

187. modesty: moderation; it: i.e., imagination

189. loam: clay mortar

190. imperious: imperial

194. flaw: gust of wind

195. soft: be silent

197. maimed: mutilated, diminished