

Hamlet abbreviated

Act 3, Scene 3

Disclosure

Situation: Claudius provides instructions to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as they are about to leave for England, specifically to accompany Hamlet. Polonius tells us that he overheard Hamlet say that he was going to “his mother’s chambers.” Polonius then lets us know that “behind the arras I’ll convey myself to hear the process.” It’s at this point when Claudius lets us know how guilty he feels.

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.

Claudius to himself

My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent
To pray, and, like a motionless man bent
On two options, I know not where to start,
Neglecting both. To what end serves mercy
But to face the offense? What is the part
Of prayer but to be not tempted and be
Forgiven? What form of prayer would serve me
Best? “Forgive my foul murder?” That can’t be
Since I am still possessed of those effects
For which I did the murder, my fair queen
And crown. I lose all if the state detects
The crime. Yet above the crime will be seen
For the truth it is? What is there to vent?
What can one do when one cannot repent?

KING: Bow, stubborn knees, and heart with strings of steel be soft as sinews of the newborn babe. All may be well.