**Hamlet’s Speech in Act 2**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Original Text** | **Modern Text** |
| O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!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 conceitThat from her working all his visage wann'd,Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,A broken voice, and his whole function suitingWith forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!For Hecuba!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 passionThat I have? He would drown the stage with tearsAnd cleave the general ear with horrid speech,Make mad the guilty and appal the free,Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeedThe 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 lifeA 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 beBut I am pigeon-liver'd and lack gallTo make oppression bitter, or ere thisI should have fatted all the region kitesWith this slave's offal: bloody, bawdy villain!Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!O, vengeance!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 scullion!Fie upon't! foh! About, my brain! I have heardThat guilty creatures sitting at a playHave by the very cunning of the sceneBeen struck so to the soul that presentlyThey have proclaim'd their malefactions;For murder, though it have no tongue, will speakWith most miraculous organ. I'll have these playersPlay something like the murder of my fatherBefore mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench,I know my course. The spirit that I have seenMay be the devil: and the devil hath powerTo assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhapsOut of my weakness and my melancholy,As he is very potent with such spirits,Abuses me to damn me: I'll have groundsMore relative than this: the play 's the thingWherein I'll catch the conscience of the king. | Now I’m alone. Oh, what a mean low-life I am! Isn’t it awful that this actor could force his soul to feel made-up feelings in a work of make-believe? He grew pale, shed real tears, became overwhelmed, his voice breaking with feeling and his whole being, even, meeting the needs of his act—and all for nothing. For Hecuba!What is Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he would weep for her? Just imagine what he would do if he had the cause for feeling that I do. He would drown the stage with his tears and burst the audience’s ears with his terrible words, drive the guilty spectators crazy, terrify the innocent ones, confuse the ignorant ones, and astound absolutely everyone’s eyes and ears. But what do I, a grim and uncourageous rascal, do? Mope around like a dreamer, not even bothering with plans for revenge, and I can say nothing—nothing at all—on behalf of a king whose dear life was stolen. Am I a coward? Is there anyone out there who’ll call me “villain” and slap me hard? Pull off my beard? Pinch my nose? Call me the worst liar? By God, if someone would do that to me, I’d take it, because I’m a lily-livered man—otherwise, I would’ve fattened up the local vultures with the intestines of that low-life king a long time ago. Bloody, inhuman villain! Remorseless, treacherous, sex-obsessed, unnatural villain! Ah, revenge! What an ass I am. I’m so damn brave. My dear father’s been murdered, and I’ve been urged to seek revenge by heaven and hell, and yet all I can do is stand around cursing like a whore in the streets. Damn it! I need to get myself together here! Hmm…. I’ve heard that guilty people watching a play have been so affected by the artistry of the scene that they are driven to confess their crimes out loud. |