

# Did Shakespeare Get It Right?

## The Dram of Eale

Since I arrived at the door of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) in 1969, I have had led a highly active life physically, and mentally. I faced most of the challenges that I thought to be impossible before I got sober and found them to be much easier than I expected. As I got older, I had to be a little more calculating when I took physical risks to avoid ending up disabled. Sometime around the age of 65, I suffered a leg injury playing racket ball and it put a stop to most of my physical endeavors and forced me to look elsewhere for my challenges.

I always envied people who could quote classic literature and especially those who could understand Shakespeare. While I was incapacitated with the leg injury, I went to the library and took out books on understanding The Bard. As the result of many hours of reading all 38 of his plays I became able to comprehend Middle English. I have read all his plays multiple times, and the more popular plays, as many as 10 times each. I also believe that I have been that diligent about understanding the A.A. program and as the result of that, I believe that I saw a particular scene in Hamlet that the average literary critic would overlook unless they were alcoholics themselves.

Shakespeare developed hundreds of characters between 1588 and 1613 and modern readers marvel at how deeply he understood the human condition. It seemed that he could put himself right inside of the character whether they were Kings, or Fools. After reading many modern versions of what he was trying to express, I think they would have to be *an alcoholic and a literary critic* for them to understand what Hamlet was trying to describe in Act 1. Scene 4. Briefly I will try explaining the context of his words he uses to describe the King.

King Claudius is Hamlet's stepfather after murdering the king, (Hamlet's father), and immediately marrying Hamlet's mother, and in almost every scene where he is sitting, he has a cup of wine in his hand and sometimes slurs his words. His dead father's ghost is appearing each night atop the castle platform stuck between this world and the next. The guards tell Hamlet of this, and he goes there at night to witness it. While they are there waiting, they see the King and his courtiers carousing down below in the courtyard. He tries to explain the shames they bring on Denmark as they are seen as drunkards and low lives. (So to speak) Then he tries to explain what he sees in the King: *So oft it chances (happens) in particular men, That for some vicious mole of nature in them As in their birth---wherein they are not guilty, Since nature(life) cannot choose his origin---By the o'ergrowth of some complexion, oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason, Or by some habit that too much o'er-leavens(raises) the form of plausible manners, that these men, Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect, Being natures (life's) livery, or fortunes star,- Their virtues else--be they as pure as grace, as infinite as man may undergo-- Shall in the general censure take corruption from that particulate fault: The dram (drink) of eale (evil) Doth all the noble substance o'er daub (over paint) to his own scandal.* If this is not an attempt by Shakespeare's Hamlet to describe Alcoholism long before the term "Alcoholism" was ever coined, I stand corrected. To see this on film, I recorded Hamlet from the TCM channel where they show it about every 2 years, starring Lawrence Olivier where it is plain to me, what he is trying to say.