SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR MONOLOGUES FOR SHAKESPEARE AUDITIONS

This compilation is divided into two sections: one section of passages from comic scenes and one section of passages from the tragedies or histories.

Texts are drawn from the Folger Shakespeare Library free online series of Shakespeare plays.

FROM THE COMEDIES OR COMIC SCENES IN HISTORIES

Beatrice, *Much Ado About Nothing,* Act 3, Scene 1 and Act 4, Scene 1.

These two relatively short passages show two sides of Beatrice's character.

Brief Context: *Beatrice has just been tricked into overhearing her friends talk about how deeply Benedick is supposedly in love with her. Up to this point in the play, she and Benedick have been verbally sparring as though they hated each other.*

What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?
Contempt, farewell, and maiden pride, adieu!
No glory lives behind the back of such.
And Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.
If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee
To bind our loves up in a holy band.
For others say thou dost deserve, and I
Believe it better than reportingly.

Brief context: *Beatrice's cousin Hero has just been publicly and falsely accused and shamed for infidelity by her prospective husband, Count Claudio, just as they were about to be married. She is speaking to Benedick after everyone else has left the scene. The two have not yet confessed their love for each other.*

Is he not approved in the height a villain
that hath slandered, scorned, dishonored my kinswoman?
O, that I were a man! What, bear her in
hand until they come to take hands, and then, with
public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated
rancor—O God, that I were a man! I would eat his
heart in the marketplace!
Princes and counties! Surely a princely testimony,
a goodly count, Count Comfect, a sweet
gallant, surely! O, that I were a man for his sake! Or
that I had any friend would be a man for my sake!
But manhood is melted into curtsies, valor into
compliment, and men are only turned into tongue,
and trim ones, too. He is now as valiant as Hercules
that only tells a lie and swears it. I cannot be a man
with wishing; therefore I will die a woman with
Grieving.

Notes: "counties" here is a variant of "counts," referring to as rank of nobility. "Comfect" is a sweet, sugary treat, a confection.

Viola, *Twelfth Night,* Act 2, Scene 2.

Brief Context: *Viola, disguised as Duke Orsino's pageboy, has delivered a love message to Olivia on Orsino's behalf, but Olivia suddenly falls in love with the disguised Viola. Olivia sends her steward, Malvolio, in pusuit, bearing a ring, which he pretends that Olivia is returning.*

I left no ring with her. What means this lady?
Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her!
She made good view of me, indeed so much
That methought her eyes had lost her tongue,
For she did speak in starts distractedly.
She loves me, sure! The cunning of her passion
Invites me in this churlish messenger.
None of my lord's ring? Why, he sent her none!
I am the man. If it be so, as 'tis,
Poor lady, she were better love a dream.
Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How easy is it for the proper false
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!
Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
For such as we are made ⌜of,⌝ such we be.
How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly,
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.
What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love.
As I am woman (now, alas the day!),
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!
O Time, thou must untangle this, not I.
It is too hard a knot for me t' untie.

Notes: "pregnant enemy" here means an enemy that is very full of wiles and tricks–probably meaning the devil. "Fadge" means turn out" "Thriftless" means failing to thrive; i.e., useless and unsuccessful.

Rosalind, *As You Like It,* Act 4, Scene 1.

Brief Context: *Rosalind, disguised as a shepherd-boy, has agreed to instruct Orlando, who is madly in love with her but does not recognize her in disguise, how to go about wooing in such a way that he will be cured of love permanently. He says that he will never be cured except by dying for love. She expresses her skepticism by demythologizing the tragic loves of two famous figures from classical legemd. (More notes follow the passage.)*

No, faith, die by attorney.
The poor world is almost six thousand years old,
and in all this time there was not any man died in
his own person, *videlicet*, in a love cause. Troilus
had his brains dashed out with a Grecian club, yet
he did what he could to die before, and he is one of
the patterns of love. Leander, he would have lived
many a fair year though Hero had turned nun, if it
had not been for a hot midsummer night, for, good
youth, he went but forth to wash him in the Hellespont
and, being taken with the cramp, was
drowned; and the foolish chroniclers of that age
found it was Hero of Sestos. But these are all lies.
Men have died from time to time and worms have
eaten them, but not for love.

Notes: "Die by attorney" means let someone else die in your place, perhaps someone specifically hired to do so. "Videlicet" is a Law Latin expression meaning "that is to say," pronounced, "Vee-day-lee-chet," with stress on "Vee" and "lee." Rosalind has continued the law metaphor suggested by "die by attorney." Troilus was one of King Priam of Troy's younger sons. He fell in love with a noble Greek prisoner, Cressida, but their affair was broken up by forces outside their control. Despairing, Troilus sought and found his death in battle. Rosalind mocks and de-romanticises this story and the story of Hero and Leander. Leader, a beautiful young man, and Hero, a beautiful young woman, lived on opposite sides of the Hellespont (the relatively narrow water dividing

what is now Turkey from Europe. One night, according to the traditional story, Leander drowned while trying to swim across to see Hero.In most versions, it is said that the sea god Neptune, smitten by Leader's beauty, embraced him and (accidentally?) drowned him.

Doll Tear-Sheet, *2 Henry IV,* Act 2, Scene 4.

Brief Context: *Doll is a prostitute and Sir John Falstaff is one of her regular clients. Falstaff's junior officer (an "ancient,"--something like a lower-ranking sergeant), the blustering braggart Pistol, has shown up, calling himself a "captain" and wanting to avail himself of Doll's services. (The first part of Doll's surname–Tear-Sheet–refers to the act of ripping something up, not to weeping, so it is pronounced to rhyme with "share."*

I scorn you, scurvy companion.
What, you poor, base, rascally, cheating lack-linen
mate! Away, you mouldy rogue, away! I am meat for
your master.Away, you cutpurse rascal, you filthy bung, away!
By this wine, I'll thrust my knife in your mouldy
chaps an you play the saucy cuttle with me. Away,
you bottle-ale rascal, you basket-hilt stale juggler,
you. Since when, I pray you, sir? God's light, with
two points on your shoulder? Much!
Captain? Thou abominable damned cheater, art
thou not ashamed to be called captain? An captains
were of my mind, they would truncheon you out for
taking their names upon you before you have
earned them. You a captain? You slave, for what?
For tearing a poor whore's ruff in a bawdy house?
He a captain! Hang him, rogue. He lives upon
mouldy stewed prunes and dried cakes. A captain?
God's light, these villains will make the word as
odious as the word "occupy," which was an excellent
good word before it was ill sorted.

Notes: "lack-linen"--suggests that Pistol is too poor or too vulgar to possess underclothes. (The exact meanings of a number of Doll's wonderful insults are rather obscure.) "An you play" means "if you play." "Truncheon you out" means "drive you out with a truncheon, a heavy club."

Bottom, *Midsummer Night's Dream,* Act4, Scene 1.

Brief Context: *Oberon, the king of faeries, has removed the enchanted donkey head from Bottom and put him asleep so that he will believe that his adventure with Titania, queen of the fairies, was merely a dream. Bottom awakes, initially disoriented, thinking he is still in the middle of rehearsing a Pyramis and Thisby play with his fellow crafts-people.*

When my cue comes, call me,
and I will answer. My next is "Most fair Pyramus."
Hey-ho! Peter Quince! Flute the bellows-mender!
Snout the tinker! Starveling! God's my life! Stolen
hence and left me asleep! I have had a most rare
vision. I have had a dream past the wit of man to say
what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about
to expound this dream. Methought I was—there
is no man can tell what. Methought I was and
methought I had—but man is but a patched fool if
he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of
man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen,
man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to
conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream
was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this
dream. It shall be called "Bottom's Dream" because
it hath no bottom; and I will sing it in the
latter end of a play, before the Duke. Peradventure,
to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her

Death.

Notes: "Patched fool" refers to the brightly patched clothing worn by fools. "Sing it at her death"--presumably Thisbe's death near the end of the Pyramis and Thisby play.

Falstaff, *1 Henry IV,* Act 5, Scene 1.

Brief Context: *Immediately before the battle of Shrewsbury, Falstaff asks Prince Hal to stay near and protect him during the fight. Hal replies that Falstaff, like all people, owes God a death, and departs, leaving Falstaff to reflect on the nature of valor and military honor.*

'Tis not due yet. I would be loath to pay Him
before His day. What need I be so forward with
Him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter.
Honor pricks me on. Yea, but how if honor prick me
off when I come on? How then? Can honor set to a
leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a
wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery, then?
No. What is honor? A word. What is in that word
"honor"? What is that "honor"? Air. A trim reckoning.
Who hath it? He that died on Wednesday. Doth
he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible,
then? Yea, to the dead. But will ⌜it⌝ not live with the
living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore,
I'll none of it. Honor is a mere scutcheon. And
so ends my catechism.

Notes: "doth" is pronounced "duth" with the same "u" sound as in "must." "Detraction will not suffer it" means that envious words will not allow it. "Scutcheon" is a heraldic symbol or badge, a bit like a coat of arms or part

thereof. “Catechism” is a summary of religious dogma which children or converts had to learn and recite by heart.

Malvolio, *Twelfth Night,* Act 2, Scene 5.

Brief Context: *Malvolio discovers and reads the letter written by the serving-woman Maria that falsely purports to indicate that Lady Olivia is in love with Malvolio.*

Soft, here follows prose.
⌜He reads.⌝ If this fall into thy hand, revolve. In my
stars I am above thee, but be not afraid of greatness.
Some are ⌜born⌝ great, some ⌜achieve⌝ greatness, and
some have greatness thrust upon ’em. Thy fates open
their hands. Let thy blood and spirit embrace them.
And, to inure thyself to what thou art like to be, cast
thy humble slough and appear fresh. Be opposite with
a kinsman, surly with servants. Let thy tongue tang
arguments of state. Put thyself into the trick of singularity.
She thus advises thee that sighs for thee.
Remember who commended thy yellow stockings and
wished to see thee ever cross-gartered. I say, remember.
Go to, thou art made, if thou desir’st to be so. If
not, let me see thee a steward still, the fellow of
servants, and not worthy to touch Fortune’s fingers.
Farewell. She that would alter services with thee,
The Fortunate-Unhappy.
Daylight and champian discovers not more! This is open.
I thank my stars, I am happy!
Here is yet a postscript.
Thou canst not choose but know who I
am. If thou entertain’st my love, let it appear in thy
smiling; thy smiles become thee well. Therefore in my

presence still smile, dear my sweet, I prithee.
Jove, I thank thee! I will smile. I will do everything
that thou wilt have me.

Notes: "soft," in this context, is an expression of surprise. "Revolve" here means "turn over in your mind." "Greatness" and "great" refer to high social status. "Inure thyself" is a pretentious way to say "prepare yourself." "Humble slough" means deferential, perhaps overly-deferential if not cringing. "Be opposite with" means speak and behave in a contradictory and deliberately annoying manner. "Tongue tang arguments of state" means "speak knowingly and sharply about high level political matters." "Singularity" means in a somewhat eccentric but "classy" manner that will attract attention and admiration. "Champian" refers to wide-open level landscape.

FROM THE TRAGEDIES, ROMANCES, OR HISTORIES

Constance, *King John,* Act 3, Scene 4.

Brief Context: *Constance is the widow of Geoffrey, the elder brother of King John of England. Geoffrey died before he could inherit the throne. Constance and her young son Arthur have been captured by Phillip, King of France, and the boy sent away to prison. Constance, distraught, speaks here in the presence of Phillip and his ally, Cardinal Panduph. She anticipates the death of her son, which does indeed take place later in the play.*

My name is Constance; I was Geoffrey's wife;
Young Arthur is my son, and he is lost.
I am not mad; I would to heaven I were,
For then 'tis like I should forget myself.
O, if I could, what grief should I forget!
Preach some philosophy to make me mad,
And thou shalt be canonized, cardinal.

For, being not mad but sensible of grief,
My reasonable part produces reason
How I may be delivered of these woes,
And teaches me to kill or hang myself.
If I were mad, I should forget my son,
Or madly think a babe of clouts were he.
I am not mad. Too well, too well I feel
The different plague of each calamity.
Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
Then, have I reason to be fond of grief?
Fare you well. Had you such a loss as I,
I could give better comfort than you do.105
O Lord! My boy, my Arthur, my fair son,
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world,
My widow-comfort and my sorrows' cure!

Notes: "canonized" means officially declared a saint. "Clouts" here refers to the strips of cloth with which an infant's swaddling clothes are made.

Isabella, *Measure for Measure,* Act 2, Scene 2.

Brief Context: *Lord Angelo, serving as proxy ruler for the supposedly absent Duke of Vienna, has revived an old and disused law that punishes fornication with death. Isabella's brother, Claudio, who has gotten his fiancee pregnant, is the first person whom Angelo has condemned to death under this law. Isabella, who is about to become a nun, petitions Angelo to show mercy.*

So you must be the first that gives this sentence,

And he that suffers. O, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant.
Could great men thunder
As Jove himself does, Jove would never be quiet,
For every pelting, petty officer
Would use his heaven for thunder,
Nothing but thunder. Merciful heaven,
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Splits the unwedgeable and gnarlèd oak,
Than the soft myrtle. But man, proud man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As makes the angels weep, who with our spleens
Would all themselves laugh mortal.

Note: Scholars don't agree on what "glassy essence" means precisely. One widely held view is that it refers to the fragility of human nature–fragile as glass in both moral and physical nature.

Hermione, *Winter's Tale,* Act 3, Scene 2.

Brief Context: *Queen Hermione, a faithful wife falsely accused of adultery with Polixenes, her husband's closest childhood friend, defends herself in a court presided over by her jealous husband.*

Since what I am to say must be but that
Which contradicts my accusation, and
The testimony on my part no other
But what comes from myself, it shall scarce boot me
To say "Not guilty." Mine integrity,

Being counted falsehood, shall, as I express it,
Be so received. But thus: if powers divine
Behold our human actions, as they do,
I doubt not then but innocence shall make
False accusation blush and tyranny
Tremble at patience. You, my lord, best know,
Whom least will seem to do so, my past life
Hath been as continent, as chaste, as true,
As I am now unhappy; which is more
Than history can pattern, though devised
And played to take spectators. For behold me,
A fellow of the royal bed, which owe
A moiety of the throne, a great king's daughter,
The mother to a hopeful prince, here standing
To prate and talk for life and honor fore
Who please to come and hear. For life, I prize it
As I weigh grief, which I would spare. For honor,
'Tis a derivative from me to mine,
And only that I stand for. I appeal
To your own conscience, sir, before Polixenes
Came to your court, how I was in your grace,
How merited to be so; since he came,
With what encounter so uncurrent I
Have strained t' appear thus; if one jot beyond
The bound of honor, or in act or will
That way inclining, hardened be the hearts
Of all that hear me, and my near'st of kin
Cry fie upon my grave.

Notes: "Boot me" means "do me any good." "Owe a moity" means "own a part of." "Fie" is an expression of disgust and is pronounced to rhyme with "eye."

Cleopatra, *Antony and Cleopatra,* Act 4, Scene 15.

Brief Context: *Antony, mortally wounded, meets with Cleopatra one last time before he dies. As Cleopatra considers what her life will be without him as a prisoner of the Romans, she decides that her only choice is suicide.*

Noblest of men, woo't die?
Hast thou no care of me? Shall I abide
In this dull world, which in thy absence is
No better than a sty? O see, my women,
The crown of th' Earth doth melt.—My lord!

⌜*Antony dies.*⌝

O, withered is the garland of the war;
The soldier's pole is fall'n; young boys and girls
Are level now with men. The odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.
It were for me
To throw my scepter at the injurious gods,
To tell them that this world did equal theirs
Till they had stolen our jewel. All's but naught.
Patience is sottish, and impatience does
Become a dog that's mad. Then is it sin
To rush into the secret house of death
Ere death dare come to us? How do you, women?
What, what, good cheer! Why, how now, Charmian?
My noble girls! Ah, women, women! Look,
Our lamp is spent; it's out. Good sirs, take heart
We'll bury him; and then, what's brave, what's
noble,
Let's do 't after the high Roman fashion
And make death proud to take us. Come, away.
This case of that huge spirit now is cold.

Ah women, women! Come, we have no friend
But resolution and the briefest end.

Notes: "Woo't" means "would you," pronounced to rhyme with "foot." "Doth" is pronounced "duth" with the same "u" sound as in "must." "sottish" means foolish.

John of Gaunt, *Richard II,* Act 2, Scene 1.

Brief Context: *Mortally ill and soon to die, old John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and uncle to King Richard II, laments the decline of the English nation from its former greatness and foretells what he fears will be the fate of the Kingdom of England under his nephew's rule.*

This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall
Or as ⌜a⌝ moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessèd plot, this earth, this realm, this
England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Feared by their breed and famous by their birth,
This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world,
Is now leased out—I die pronouncing it—
Like to a tenement or pelting farm.

England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
Of wat'ry Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds.
That England that was wont to conquer others
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.
Ah, would the scandal vanish with my life,
How happy then were my ensuing death!

Note: "demi-paradise" means little paradise.

Hamlet, *Hamlet,* Act 2, Scene 2.

Brief Context: *Hamlet has just witnessed one of the visiting actors ("players") perform a passage from a play that laments the killing of King Priam of Troy and the grief of Priam's wife, Hecuba. Alone on stage, Hamlet compares the convincing performance of grief by the player by what Hamlet considers his own lack of motivating emotion over what he believes to be the murder of his father.*

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 conceit
That from her working all his visage wanned,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With 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 passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,

Make mad the guilty and appall the free,
Confound the ignorant and amaze indeed
The 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 life
A damned 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 in the throat
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
Ha! 'Swounds, I should take it! For it cannot be
But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless
Villain!
O vengeance!

Notes: "wanned" means grown pale in the face. It is pronounced the same as "wand." "Pate" means head. " 'Swounds" means "God's wounds," and is pronounced "swoons." "Offal" refers to internal organs. "Kites" are scavenger birds.

Leontes, *Winter's Tale,* Act 1, Scene, 2.

Brief Context: *King Leontes is suddenly overcome by a sudden and unwarranted fit of jealousy, believing that his faithful wife is committing adultery with his best friend from childhood. He speaks in the presence of his young son.*

Inch thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a forked

one!—
Go play, boy, play. Thy mother plays, and I
Play too, but so disgraced a part, whose issue
Will hiss me to my grave. Contempt and clamor
Will be my knell. Go play, boy, play.—There have
been,
Or I am much deceived, cuckolds ere now;
And many a man there is, even at this present,
Now while I speak this, holds his wife by th' arm,
That little thinks she has been sluiced in his absence,
And his pond fished by his next neighbor, by
Sir Smile, his neighbor. Nay, there's comfort in 't
Whiles other men have gates and those gates opened,
As mine, against their will. Should all despair
That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind
Would hang themselves. Physic for 't there's none.
It is a bawdy planet, that will strike
Where 'tis predominant; and 'tis powerful, think it,
From east, west, north, and south. Be it concluded,
No barricado for a belly. Know 't,
It will let in and out the enemy
With bag and baggage. Many thousand on 's
Have the disease and feel 't not,

Notes: "forked one" refers to the invisible horns that appear on the heads of "cuckolds"--husbands of unfaithful wives.
"Physic" is medicine.

Lear, *King Lear,* Act 3, Scene 4.

Brief Context: *Lear is wandering the barren countryside as a fierce thunderstorm begins. He is accompanied only by his court fool and a couple of other loyal followers*

Prithee, go in thyself. Seek thine own ease.
This tempest will not give me leave to ponder
On things would hurt me more. But I'll go in.—
In, boy; go first.—You houseless poverty—
Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.

⌜Fool⌝ exits.

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp.
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them
And show the heavens more just.

Notes: *"physic" is medicine. "Superflux" is what one has that exceeds one's needs.*