

**Claudius.**

O, my offence 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.  
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,  
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,  
And both neglect. What if this cursed hand  
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,  
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens  
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy  
But to confront the visage of offence?  
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,  
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,  
Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up;  
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer  
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?  
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd  
Of those effects for which I did the murder-  
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.  
May one be pardon'd and retain th' offense?  
Try what repentance can. What can it not?  
Yet what can it when one cannot repent?  
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!  
O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,  
Art more engag'd! Help, angels! Make assay.  
Bow, stubborn knees; and heart with strings of steel,  
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe!  
All may be well. He kneels.