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presents
the Annotated Popular Edition of

The Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex
(aka Gorboduc)

By Thomas Norton and
Thomas Sackville
First Published 1565

Featuring complete and easy-to-read annotations.

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THE TRAGEDY OF FERREX AND PORREX  
(aka GORBODUC)  

By Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville  

Written 1561  
First Published 1565  
First Authorized Publication 1570

set forth without addition or alteration but altogether as the same was shewed on stage before the Queenes' Maiestie about nine yeares past, viz the xvij. day of Januarie, 1561. by the gentlemen of the Inner Temple.

The Names of the Speakers.

Gorboduc, King of Great Britain.  
Videna, Queen, and Wife to King Gorboduc.  
Marcella, A Lady of the Queen's Privy Chamber.  
Ferrex, Elder Son to King Gorboduc.  
Porrex, Younger Son to King Gorboduc.

Hermon, A Parasite remaining with Ferrex.  
Tyndar, A Parasite remaining with Porrex.

Eubulus, Secretary to the King.  
Arostus, A Councillor to king Gorboduc.

Dordan, A Councillor assigned by the King to his Eldest Son Ferrex.  
Philander, A Councillor assigned by the King to his Youngest Son Porrex.  
(Both being of the old King's Council before.)

Clotyn, Duke of Cornwall.  
Fergus, Duke of Albany.  
Mandud, Duke of Loegris.  
Gwenard, Duke of Camberland.  

Nuntius, A Messenger of the Elder Brother's Death.  
Nuntius, A Messenger of Duke Fergus’ rising in Arms.  

Chorus:  
Four Ancient and Sage Men of Britain.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

Ferrex and Porrex, or Gorboduc, tells the story of the legendary King Gorboduc, an ancient Briton who unwisely divided his realm into separate parts, each to be ruled by one of his two sons. Our play, appearing as it does so early in the Elizabethan era, is to some degree modeled on ancient Roman drama, and as such the "action" takes place off-stage; however, the verse is stately, and, though repetitive, is best experienced if you mouth the speeches to yourself, and become completely absorbed in the driving, relentless strict iambic pentameter.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

Our text of Ferrex and Porrex is adopted from John S. Farmer's edition of the play (cited at #3 below), which in turn is adopted from the 1570-1 quarto. I have reinstated some of the original spellings from the quarto.

NOTES ON THE ANNOTATIONS

Mention of Farmer, Adams, Creeth, Smith, Cunliffe and Cauthen in the annotations refers to the notes provided by these editors in their respective editions of our play, each cited fully below.

The most commonly cited sources are listed in the footnotes immediately below. The complete list of footnotes appears at the end of this play.

1. Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online.
A. The Historical Importance of the Play.

_Gorboduc_, or *Ferrex and Porrex*, is of historical importance for two reasons: (1) it is the first proper history play of the English stage, and (2) it is the first play to employ blank verse (verse without rhyming).³

Compared to the soon-to-come plays of Lyly, Marlowe and Shakespeare, _Gorboduc_ is, as stage drama, a dud. None of the action takes place on stage - all occurrences are described by the characters rather than presented on-stage - and there is hardly any engaging "dialogue", as we understand the term today; the play is, instead, simply a collection of long set-speeches.

The play is best enjoyed if you think of it as poetry - though not without strong emotion - in a dramatic context; furthermore, if you mouth the speeches to yourself, you can fully experience the relentless, locomotive-like drive of the strict iambic pentameter; which though old-fashioned to us today, must have been exciting to those who saw this performance in a time when the classic stage productions of the era's greatest dramatists were still in an unimaginable - though near - future.

B. Earliest Printings of the Gorboduc.

The early publication history of _Gorboduc_ is actually a little more interesting than is normally found in the plays of the Elizabethan era. _The Tragedy of Gorboduc_ was first published in a 1565 quarto. This edition, when compared to the quartos of other plays published in the 16th century, is a perfectly acceptable version of the play: it is clearly complete, and filled with numerous minor errors, which was par for the course in the Elizabethan era, and beyond.

The play was then republished in 1570-1, under the title _The Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex_. What makes this edition unusual is the inclusion of a lengthy note from the publisher which points out that the 1565 edition was unauthorized, and in a lengthy and graphic metaphor, compares the pirated version to a violated maiden.

The note is so unusual that we have decided to include it in our edition of _Gorboduc_ here. We have also decided to follow the later editors' tradition of using the 1570-1 edition as the basis for our text.

We may note here that according to the title page of the 1565 quarto, Thomas Norton wrote the first three acts of the play, and Thomas Sackville the final two.

C. Gorboduc and the 12th Century Monk.

Stories of the early Britons were being told by the early Middle Ages, and had even been collected in at least one long-lost tome. It was a 12th century monk, however, who wrote the definitive "history" of mythical Britain. This was Geoffrey of Monmouth (1100? - 1154), an educated man whose _Historia Regum Britanniae_ (History of the Kings of Britain) brought under one cover the entire body of legend of the history of the British people, starting with the first Britons, who were fugitives from Troy, through the tale of Gorboduc (the subject of this play), and beyond. Geoffrey's _History_ became famous all over Britain and Europe, and was primarily responsible for popularizing such well-known characters as King Arthur, Queen Guinevere and Merlin the Magician, whose romantic adventures still fascinate so many people today.¹⁷

D. Elizabethan Politics and Gorboduc.

Dramatists of the Elizabethan era and beyond generally - but not always - wisely avoided making overtly political points in their plays, in order to ensure that their plays passed the censor (who did not go into business until later in the 16th century) and did not offend their prickly monarchs. _Gorboduc_, however, is unique in that its primary message was clearly understood to be one which gave dynastic advice to Queen Elizabeth.
Gorboduc purported to demonstrate the dangers that could ensue if a monarch did not provide for an unambiguous succession; it sent a clear message that Elizabeth should either marry and have children or appoint a definite successor (Cunliffe, p.298). The Virgin Queen, who had come to the throne in 1558, had almost immediately begun to consider various candidates for her hand, but of course no marriage ever took place.

E. Note on the Use of Archaisms in this Play.

The English language, from its very beginnings, has continually evolved, with new words and phrases constantly being added, even as others have dropped out. Such words and phrases no longer in use, which we may call archaisms, were frequently used by Elizabethan dramatists any time they wanted to give a feeling of "antiqueness" to the language. As Gorboduc takes place in a literally pre-historic time, Norton and Sackville have used a generous collection of archaic words to give their characters a colour of ancientness.

An excellent, if brief, discussion of archaisms used by Shakespeare can be found on page 22 of David and Ben Crystal's indispensable Shakespeare's Words. A list of many of the likely archaisms used in this play appears at the end of this edition.

F. Settings and Stage Directions.

The original quartos of Gorboduc do not provide scene settings to the play; all scene settings in this edition are adopted from the suggestions of Smith and Cunliffe.

The original quartos do not have any stage directions. Some stage directions have been added for purposes of clarity. Most of these additions are adopted from Farmer and Smith.
WHERE this tragedy was for furniture of part of the grand Christmas in the Inner-Temple, first written about nine years ago by the Right Honourable Thomas, now Lord Buckhurst, and by T. Norton, and after shewed before her Majesty, and never intended by the authors thereof to be published: yet one W.G., getting a copy thereof at some young man's hand that lacked a little money and much discretion, in the last great plague, an. 1565, about five years past, while the said Lord was out of England, and T. Norton far out of London, and neither of them both made privy, put it forth exceedingly corrupted: even as if by means of a broker for hire, he should have enticed into his house a fair maid and done her villainy, and after all to bescratched her face, torn her apparel, bewrayed and disfigured her, and then thrust her out of doors dishonested. In such plight, after long wandering, she came at length home to the sight of her friends, who scant knew her but by a few tokens and marks remaining. They, the authors I mean, though they were very much displeased that she so ran abroad without leave, whereby she caught her shame, as many wantons do, yet seeing the case as it is remediless, have for common honesty and Note from the Publisher: the title of the Note in the 1570 quarto reads only, The P to the Reader. The publisher, as indicated on the play's title page, was John Daye. We have separated the Note, which was originally published as one long paragraph, into smaller paragraphs to facilitate reading.

1-2: Where…Inner-Temple = Gorboduc was written for and presented as part of the Christmas festivities of the Inner Temple.

furniture = an adornment.1

Inner Temple = one of the four Inns of Court (the Inner Temple, the Middle Temple, Gray's Inn and Lincoln's Inn), London's principal legal societies, which together still hold a monopoly on the admissions of barristers. The names also refer to the individual buildings which house the societies.1,20

= ie. c. 1561.

4: Lord Buckhurst = ie. Thomas Sackville.

T. Norton = Thomas Norton.

shewed = shown, ie. presented.

= William Griffith, publisher of the 1565 quarto.

7: at = from.

lacked…discretion = the unknown pilferer of the play lacked both money and discretion.

8-9: the last…1565 = the plague referred to was the 1563 plague, which killed over 17,000 Londoners.21 1565 was the year Griffith published Gorboduc.

= ie. Sackville.

11: neither…privy = without the knowledge of either author.

put it forth = published the play.

= ie. filled with errors.

13ff: in a most intense metaphor, which continues all the way to the end of this Note, the publisher compares the unauthorized printing of Gorboduc to the rape of a young maiden. The victim of the rape represents the play itself.

broker for hire = ie. pimp.

= an archaic usage of to to mean "asunder" or "to pieces" (Creeth, p.554).

= dirtied, defiled.5,9

= dishonoured.15

= bad condition = she refers to both the play and the maiden.

= barely recognized.

= ie. by some evidence that proved it was her.

23: caught her shame = (1) lost her virginity, and (2) was published filled with errors.

wantons = loose women.

= ie. nothing could undo what had happened. = decency.
shamefacedness new appareled, trimmed and attired her
in such form as she was before, in which better form
since she hath come to me.
I have harboured her for her friends' sake and her
own, and I do not doubt, her parents the authors will
not now be discontent that she go abroad among you,
good readers, so it be in honest company. For she is
by my encouragement and others somewhat less
ashamed of the dishonesty done to her because it was
by fraud and force.

If she be welcome among you, and gently
entertained, in favour of the house from whence she is
descended, and of her own nature courteously disposed
to offend no man, her friends will thank you for it. If
not, but that she shall be still reproached with her
former mishap, or quarreled at by envious persons, she,
poor gentlewoman, will surely play Lucrece's part, and
of herself die for shame, and I shall wish that she had
tarried still at home with me, where she was welcome:
for she did never put me to more charge, but this one
poor black gown lined with white that I have now given
her to go abroad among you withal.

= literally cleaned up and gave her new clothes, and
figuratively (referring to the authors) made the necessary
corrections to the script.

= ie. John Daye, the new publisher.

= ie. crime.
= neither the girl nor the play could be blamed for what
was done to them.

35-46: as was frequently done in the plays of the era, the
author expresses a hope that the audience will like the show.
Normally, such an appeal was recited aloud to a live
audience by a cast member who appears on stage alone in a
play's Prologue, but here the audience is the play's
readership.

36-37: the house...descended = ie. the Inner Temple in
London, where Gorboduc was originally performed.¹²

= blamed, criticized.
= calamity. = malicious.

= ie. kill herself from shame.
Lucrece, or Lucretia, was a famously virtue Roman
matron; she killed herself after she had been raped by the son
of the Roman king Tarquinius.

= ie. any great expense.
= ie. the new edition of the published play.
THE ARGUMENT OF THE TRAGEDY

GORBODUC, King of Britain, divided his realm in his lifetime to his sons, Ferrex and Porrex. The sons fell to dissension: the younger killed the elder; the mother that more dearly loved the elder, for revenge killed the younger. The people, moved with the cruelty of the fact, rose in rebellion and slew both father and mother. The nobility assembled, and most terribly destroyed the rebels, and afterwards, for want of issue of the prince whereby the succession of the crown became uncertain, they fell to civil war, in which both they and many of their issues were slain, and the land for a long time almost desolate and miserably wasted.

The Argument: a complete summary of the plot. If you do not want to know what happens before you read the play, DO NOT READ the Argument.

= deed.
= ie. lack of an heir. = king.
= children, descendants.
**ACT I**

THE ORDER OF THE DUMB SHOW BEFORE THE FIRST ACT, AND THE SIGNIFICATION THEREOF.

The Dumb Show: Medieval and early Renaissance dramas may have been preceded by a dumb show, a brief pantomime that demonstrated ahead of the performance an allegorical representation of what was to happen, or the lessons to be drawn therefrom. A written explanation of the dumb show, as appears here, might have been handed out to the audience members so they could understand what otherwise would be meaningless to them.

Please note, Gorboduc's original Dumb Show descriptions were written in the past tense. The editor of this edition has changed the tense to the present to make them more comfortable for the contemporary reader. The paragraph breaks are the editor's as well.

First the music of violins begins to play, during which comes in upon the stage six wild men clothed in leaves; of whom the first bares in his neck a faggot of small sticks, which they all, both severally and together, assay with all their strengths to break, but it cannot be broken by them. At the length one of them plucks out one of the sticks and breaks it; and the rest plucking out all the other sticks one after another, do easily break them, the same being severed: which, being conjoined, they had before attempted in vain.

After they do this, they depart the stage, and the music ceases.

Hereby is signified that a state knit in unity doth continue strong against all force; but, being divided, is easily destroyed. As befell upon Duke Gorboduc dividing his land to his two sons, which he before held in monarchy, and upon the dissention of the brethren to whom it was divided.

**ACT I, SCENE I.**

*Enter Videna and Ferrex.*

A Room in Gorboduc’s Palace

Entering Characters: **Videna** is the queen of Britain and wife of King Gorboduc. **Ferrex** is the older of her two sons, and her favourite.
1-6: Videna's opening speech is actually quite beautiful: though nighttime brings relief from the drudgery of her days, it does not alleviate her anxiety.

= labours; 

= full of care, ie. anxious.

4-5: 

= Ferrex addresses his mother with the formal and respectful you, as is correct; Videna, in turn, addresses her son as thee, signifying both tender affection and her superior status as mother and queen.

= remedy, compensation.

18-19: "the person I am describing is so obstinate, that it is both my misfortune (mishap)\(^2\) and yours (thine)."

= I know of no such misfortune (that affects me)".

24: "he is by nature your father, but he is not very kind."

= done harm.\(^1\)

= "exactly, and that is why". = ie. "unkind he is".

= ie. "to take you away from me"; many of the editors speculate that the line was printed erroneously, and should read spoil me of thy sight.
But thee, of thy birthright, and heritage,
Causeless, unkindly, and in wrongful wise,
Against all law and right he will bereave:
Half of his kingdom he will give away.

**Ferr.** To whom?

**Viden.** Even to Porrex his younger son;
Whose growing pride I do so sore suspect,
That being raised to equal rule with thee,
Me thinks I see his envious heart to swell,
Filled with disdain and with ambitious hope.
The end the gods do know, whose alters I
Full oft have made in vain, of cattle slain.

To send the sacred smoke to Heaven’s throne,
For thee my son; if things do so succeed,
As now my jealous mind misdeemeth sore.

**Ferr.** Madam, leave care and careful plaint for me!
Just hath my father been to every wight:
His first injustice he will not extend
To me, I trust, that give no cause thereof;
My brother’s pride shall hurt himself, not me.

**Viden.** So grant the gods! but yet thy father so
Hath firmly fixèd his unmovèd mind,
That plaints and prayers can no whit avail;
For those have I assayed, but even this day,
He will endeavor to procure assent
Of all his council to his fond device.

**Ferr.** Their ancestors from race to race have born
True faith to my forefathers and their seed:
I trust they eke will bear the like to me.

Viden. There resteth all, but if they fail thereof,
And if the end bring forth an ill success,
On them and theirs the mischief shall befall,
And so I pray the gods requite it them!

And so they will, for so is wont to be
When lords and trusted rulers under kings,
To please the present fancy of the prince.

With wrong transpose the course of governance.

Murders, mischief, or civil sword at length,
Or mutual treason, or a just revenge,
When right-succeeding line returns again

By Jove’s just judgment and deservèd wrath,

Brings them to cruel and reproachful death,
And roots their names and kindreds from the earth.

Ferr. Mother, content you, you shall see the end.

Viden. The end? thy end I fear, Jove end me first!

[Exeunt.]

ACT I, SCENE II.

The King's Council Chamber.

Enter Gorboduc, Arostus, Philander and Eubulus.

Gorb. My lords, whose grave advice and faithful aid
Have long upheld my honour and my realm,
And brought me to this age from tender years,
Guiding so great estate with great renown;
Now more importeth me, than erst, to use
Your faith and wisdom, whereby yet I reign;
That when by death my life and rule shall cease,

= also (another archaism).

= result, not necessarily suggesting a positive outcome.
= ie. the counsellors' families.
72: Viden hopes that the gods will punish the king's counsellors if they do not try to talk him out of his mad scheme.
requite = repay.

= ie. "normally happens".

= king, monarch; the title of prince is frequently used to mean king.
= change the proper order and system by which a nation is governed.

77-78: Viden rues the civil strife that is assuredly attendant if the heir-apparent is deprived of his full birthright.

79-82: when the rightful heir regains the throne after a civil war, he will properly punish those who brought about the strife and discord.

= Jove is the alternate named used for Jupiter, king of the gods. Note that the characters always refer to Jove by this, his Roman name, even though as the near descendants of the Trojans they should be using his Greek name Zeus; this is a reflection of the authors' training in Latin texts and the Latin language.

Note the dramatic alliteration in the line.

= deserved.
= ie. uproots.

86: the line contains a good example of the figure of speech known as antaclusis, in which a word, here end, takes on different meanings in each of its appearances.

Entering Characters: King Gorboduc enters with his advisors. Eubulus is identified as the king's secretary, meaning he is Gorboduc's special confidant.

= ie. "my younger days".
= ie. a kingdom.
= "it is more necessary for me than ever before (erst)".
The kingdom yet may with unbroken course
Have certain prince, by whose undoubted right,
Your wealth and peace may stand in quiet stay:
And eke that they, whom nature hath prepared
In time to take my place in princely seat,
While in their father's time their plant youth
Yields to the frame of skilful governance,
May so be taught and trained in noble arts,
As what their fathers which have reigned before
Have with great fame derived down to them,
With honour they may leave unto their seed;
And not be thought for their unworthy life,
And for their lawless swarving out of kind,
Worthy to lose what law and kind them gave:
But that they may preserve the common peace,
The cause that first began and still maintains
The lineal course of kings' inheritance,
For me, for mine, for you, and for the state,
Whereof both I and you have charge and care,
Thus do I mean to use your wonted faith
To me and mine, and to your native land.
My lords, be plain, without all wry respect,
Or poisonous craft to speak in pleasing wise.
Lest as the blame of ill succeeding things
Shall light on you, so light the harms also.
Aros. Your good acceptance so, most noble king,
Of such our faithfulness, as heretofore
We have employed in duties to your grace,
And to this realm whole worthy head you are,
Well proves that neither you mistrust at all,
Nor we shall need no boasting wise to shew
Our truth to you, nor yet our wakeful care
For you, for yours, and for our native land.
Wherefore, O King, I speak for one as all,
Sith all as one do bare you egal faith:
Doubt not to use our counsels and our aids
Whose honours, goods, and lives, are whole avowed
To serve, to aid, and to defend your grace.
Gorb. My lords, I thank you all. This is the case:
Ye know the gods, who have the sovereign care
For kings, for kingdoms, and for common weals,
Gave me two sons in my more lusty age,
Who now in my decaying years are grown
Well towards riper state of mind and strength,
To take in hand some greater princely charge.
As yet they live and spend [their] hopeful days
With me and with their mother here in court:
Their age now asketh other place and trade,
And mine also doth ask another change;
Their to more travail, mine to greater ease.
When fatal death shall end my mortal life,
My purpose is to leave unto them twain
The realm divided into two sondry parts:

The one, Ferrex mine elder son shall have,
The other, shall the other Porrex rule.

That both my purpose may more firmly stand,
And eke that they may better rule their charge,
I mean forthwith to place them in the same:
That in my life they may both learn to rule,
And I may joy to see their ruling well.
This is in sum what I would have ye weigh:
First, whether ye allow my whole device,
And think it good for me, for them, for you,
And for our country, mother of us all:
And if ye like it, and allow it well,
Then for their guiding and their governance,
Show forth such means of circumstance,
As ye think meet to be both known and kept.

Lo, this is all; now tell me your advice.
Aros. And this is much, and asketh great advice;
But for my part, my sovereign lord and king,
This do I think: your majesty doth know,
How under you in justice and in peace,
Great wealth and honour long we have enjoyed;
So as we cannot seem with greedy minds
To wish for change of prince or governance:
But if we like your purpose and device,
Our liking must be deemed to proceed
Of rightful reason, and of heedful care,
Not for ourselves, but for our common state,
= responsibility.
= in this edition, words in brackets were present in the 1565, but absent from the 1570, quarto, and reinstated by the editors.
= ie. "they are old enough now that they should take on another position and occupation".16
= ie. "my age".
= work.
= two.

62: this line appears as printed here with an extra syllable in both of the earliest quartos; Farmer emends into two to in two.

sondry = sundry, ie. separate; sondry is the earlier form, but by the mid-16th century sundry was in more common use.

63-64: the authors were not mindful of where the names of Ferrex and Porrex appear in the metered lines of the play: sometimes, as in line 63, it seems the second syllable is stressed (Fer-REX), and other times, as in line 64, the first (POR-rex).

= also.
= ie. the same rank, equal shares.

76-77: "provide me with recommendations as would be fitting (meet) and which should be observed (kept)."

Note that two syllables seem to have dropped out of line 76.

= behold.

82-86: "if we do advise you to step down, you know we are not doing it for any selfish reason, since we have all thrived materially and in honour while serving you."

= judged.
= from.
= ie. "the kingdom that is all of ours".
Sith our own state doth need no better change:
I think in all as erst your grace has said.
First, when you shall unload your aged mind
Of heavy care and troubles manifold,
And lay the same upon my lords your sons,
Whose growing years may bear the burden long,
(And long I pray the gods to grant it so)
And in your life while you shall so behold
Their rule, their virtues, and their noble deeds,
Such as their kind behighteth to us all;
Great be the profits that shall grow thereof,
Your age in quiet shall the longer last,
Your lasting age shall be their longer stay:
For cares of kings, that rule as you have ruled
For public wealth and not for private joy,
Do waste man’s life, and hasten crooked age
With furrowed face and with enfeebled limbs,
To draw on creeping death a swifter pace.
They two, yet young, shall bear the parted reign
With greater ease than one, now old, alone
Can wield the whole, for whom much harder is
With lessened strength the double weight to bear.
Your eye, your counsel, and the grave regard
Of father, yea, of such as father’s name,
Now at beginning of their sondered reign
When it is hazard of their whole success,
Shall bridle so their force of youthful heats,
And so restrain the rage of insolence
Which most assails the young and noble minds,
And so shall guide and train in tempered stay
Their yet green bending wits with reverent awe,
As now inured with virtues at the first.
Custom, O king, shall bring delightfulness.
By use of virtue, vice shall grow in hate;
But if you so dispose it, that the day
Which ends your life, shall first begin their reign,
Great is the peril, what will be the end,
When such beginning of such liberties
Void of such stays as in your life do lie,
Shall leave them free to randon of their will.
An open prey to traitorous flattery,
The greatest pestilence of noble youth:
Which peril shall be past, if in your life,
Their tempered youth with aged father’s awe
Be brought in ure of skilful stayedness:
And in your life, their lives disposèd so,
Shall length your noble life in joyfulness.
Thus think I that your grace hath wisely thought,
And that your tender care of common weal
Hath bred this thought, so to divide your land,
And plant your sons to bear the present rule
While you yet live to see their ruling well,
That you may longer live by joy therein.
What further means behoefful are and meet.

At greater leisure may your grace devise,
When all have said; and when we be agreed
If this be best to part the realm in twain,
And place your sons in present government:
Whereof, as I have plainly said my mind,
So would I hear the rest of all my lords.

Phil. In part I think as hath been said before,
In part again my mind is otherwise.
As for dividing of this realm in twain,
And lotting out the same in egal parts,
To either of my lords your grace’s sons,
That think I best for this your realm’s behoof.
For profit and advancement of your sons,
And for your comfort and your honour eke:
But so to place them while your life do last,
To yield to them your royal governance,
To be above them only in the name
Of father, not in kingly state also,
I think not good for you, for them, nor us.
This kingdom since the bloody civil field,
Where Morgan slain did yield his conquered part
Unto his cousin’s sword in Camberland.

Containeth all that whilom did suffice
Three noble sons of your forefather Brute:

= lengthen.
= thought this through, ie. decided.

= ie. which are both necessary or desirable (behoefful)³
and appropriate (meet).

= "once all of us advisors have had our say".
= divide. = two.

= dividing, allotting. = equal.
= ie. "I think that is best". = benefit.²
= also.

= ie. "but not also as an actively ruling monarch".

166-7: a reference to the story told by Geoffrey of
Monmouth of two cousins, Morgan and Cunedag, who
rebelled against their common aunt, Cordela, who was sole
sovereign of ancient Britain. Having captured and removed
the reigning queen from power, Morgan and Cunedag
divided rule of Britain, Morgan ruling north of the Humber
River, his cousin ruling to its south.

Encouraged to try to take all of Britain for himself,
Morgan invaded the south, but his army was destroyed by
Cunedag’s. Cunedag pursued the fleeing Morgan until finally
catching up with him in Wales (ie. Camberland, named after
its first sole king Camber, a son of Brute: see the note below
at line 169), where he slew him. Cunedag ruled the whole
island for 33 years. Gorboduc was among his descendants
(Evans, p. 34-35).

= at one time.

= Brute was the legendary first king of Britain. According to
Geoffrey, Brute was the great-grandson of Aeneas, the
Trojan hero and prince who, after the sack of Troy by the
Greeks, escaped and settled in Italy to found Rome. Brute
travelled to Greece, where he settled in with the descendants
of the survivors of the race of Trojans.

After a series of wars with the Greeks, Brute escaped
with the Trojans, and after many adventures settled in
Britain, which was uninhabited "save only of a few giants."
Brute named the island after himself, founded the city of New Troy (later London), and when he finally died left Britain to be ruled successfully in separate pieces by his three sons (Evans, pp. 3-23).

170: "since Brute's three sons successfully ruled a divided Britain, so too can your two sons."

171f: Philander argues that there are advantages to having two kings ruling separate, smaller kingdoms, if the individual kings are in amity; to line 181, he describes the many benefits such an arrangement may have.

\[ \text{mo} = \text{more.} \]
\[ \text{gree} = \text{agree.} \]

172: The sense is that in a smaller realm, a king will be more likely to hear about and thus be able to correct injustices committed against the weaker members of society.

\[ = \text{space or area.} \]
\[ = \text{influence or control.} \]

174: the smaller compass that the realm doth hold
175: The easier is the sway thereof to wield;
176: The nearer justice to the wrongèd poor,

172: The sense is that in a smaller realm, a king will be more likely to hear about and thus be able to correct injustices committed against the weaker members of society.

\[ = \text{space or area.} \]
\[ = \text{influence or control.} \]

176: And when the region is divided so
That brethren be the lords of either part,

178: Such strength doth nature knit between them both,
In sondry bodies by conjoinèd love,

180: That not as two, but one of doubled force,
Each is to other as a sure defense;

182: The nobleness and glory of the one,
Doth sharp the courage of the other’s mind

184: With virtuous envy to contend for praise:

186: And such an egalness hath nature made,
Between the brethren of one father’s seed,
As an unkindly wrong it seems to be,

188: To throw the brother subject under feet
Of him, whose peer he is by course of kind:

190: And nature that did make this egalness,

192: That oft she raiseth up a grudging grief
In younger brethren at the elder’s state:

194: Whereby both towns and kingdoms have been razed,
And famous stocks of royal blood destroyed:

196: The brother, that should be the brother’s aid,
And have a wakeful care for his defense,

198: Gapes for his death, and blames the lingering years
That draws not forth his end with faster course;

200: And oft impatient of so long delays,
With hateful slaughter he prevents the Fates.
And heaps a just reward for brother’s blood,
With endless vengeance on his stock for aye.
Such mischiefs here are wisely met withal;
If egal state may nourish egal love,
Where none hath cause to grudge the other’s good,
But now the head to stoop beneath them both.

Ne kind, ne reason, ne good order bears.
And oft it hath been seen, where nature’s course
Hath been perverted in disordered wise,
When fathers cease to know that they should rule,
And children cease to know they should obey:
And often over-kindly tenderness
Is mother of unkindly stubbornness.
I speak not this in envy or reproach,
As if I grudged the glory of your sons,
Whose honour I beseech the gods increase:
Nor yet as if I thought there did remain
So filthy cankers in their noble breasts,
Whom I esteem (which is their greatest praise)
Undoubted children of so good a king;
Only I mean to shew by certain rules,
Which kind hath graft within the mind of man,
That nature hath her order and her course,
Which, being broken, doth corrupt the state
Of minds and things even in the best of all.
My lords, your sons may learn to rule of you;
Your own example in your noble court
Is fittest guider of their youthful years,
If you desire to seek some present joy
By sight of their well ruling in your life,
See them obey, so shall you see them rule:
Who so obeyeth not with humbleness,
Will rule with outrage and with insolence.
Long may they rule, I do beseech the gods;
But long may they learn, ere they begin to rule.

If kind and Fates would suffer, I would wish
Them aged princes and immortal kings.
Wherefore, most noble king, I well assent
Between your sons that you divide your realm,
And as in kind, so match them in degree:
the lives of humans. Philander means that the younger may act to kill the elder before the latter’s rightful lifetime is played out.

202: "and receives appropriate punishment for spilling his brother's blood".
= descendants. = forever.
204: here = ie. "with this decision to split the kingdom".
met = prevented, anticipated.
withal = altogether.¹

207f: Philander now changes tack: one cannot be sure that such perfect harmony will arise if two sons are given their own kingdoms while the father simultaneously and officially retires.

the head...both = when the king reduces his own rank so that it is lower than that of his sons.¹²

208: ne...ne = neither...nor.
= manner
= "tenderness beyond nature" (Smith, p. 20).¹⁶
= "leads to", metaphorically.
= malice.
= the earliest usage of grudge - in the 15th century - was as a verb (meaning "to begrudge"), not a noun.¹
= cancers, corruption.
= unsuspected.
= nature. = grafted, implanted.
= from.

236: "but hopefully they will have a long time to learn, before they rule alone." The line has an extra syllable: its first word (But) may be stressed or deleted.
= see the note at line 201 above. = allow.
= ie. "them to live to be".
= "nature has done".
But while the gods prolong your royal life, 

Prolong your reign; for thereto live you here, 

And therefore have the gods so long forborn
To join you to themselves, that still you might
Be prince and father of our common weal:
They, when they see your children ripe to rule,
Will make them room, and will remove you hence,
That yours, in right ensuing of your life,

May rightly honour your immortal name.

Eubu. Your wonted true regard of faithful hearts
Makes me, O king, the bolder to presume
To speak what I conceive within my breast;
Although the same do not agree at all
With that which other here my lords have said,
Nor which yourself have seemed best to like.
Pardon I crave, and that my words be deemed
To flow from hearty zeal unto your grace,
And to the safety of your common weal.
To part your realm unto my lords your sons,
I think not good for you, ne yet for them,
But worst of all, for this our native land:
For with one land, one single rule is best:
Divided reigns do make divided hearts;
But peace preserves the country and the prince.
Such is in man the greedy mind to reign,
So great is his desire to climb aloft,
In worldly stage the stateliest parts to bear,

That faith and justice and all kindly love,
Do yield unto desire of sovereignty,
Where equal state doth raise an equal hope
To win the thing that either would attain.
Your grace rememb'reth how in passèd years,
The mighty Brute, first prince of all this land,
Possessed the same and ruled it well in one:
He, thinking that the compass did suffice
For his three sons three kingdoms eke to make,
Cut it in three, as you would now in twain:
But how much British blood hath since been spilt
To join again the sondered unity?
What princes slain before their timely hour?
What waste of towns and people in the land?
What treasons heaped on murders and on spoils?
Whose just revenge even yet is scarcely ceased,
Ruthful remembrance is yet raw in mind.
The gods forbid the like to chance again:
And you, O king, give not the cause thereof.
My Lord Ferrex your elder son, perhaps
Whom kind and custom gives a rightful hope
To be your heir and to succeed your reign,
Shall think that he doth suffer greater wrong
Than he perchance will bear, if power serve.

Porrex the younger, so upraised in state,
Perhaps in courage will be raised also,
If flattery then, which fails not to assail

The tender minds of yet unskilful youth,
In one shall kindle and increase disdain,
And envy in the other’s heart enflame:
This fire shall waste their love, their lives, their land,
And ruthless ruin shall destroy them both.
I wish not this, O King, so to befall,
But fear the thing, that I do most abhor.

Give no beginning to so dreadful end;
Keep them in order and obedience;
And let them both by now obeying you,
Learn such behavior as beseems their state;
The elder, mildness in his governance,
The younger, a yielding contentedness;
And keep them near unto your presence still,
May live in compass of well-tempered stay,
And pass the perils of their youthful years.

Your agèd life draws on to feebler time,
Wherein you shall less able be to bear
The travails that in youth you have sustained,
Both in your person’s and your realm’s defense.
If planting now your sons in furder parts,
You send them furder from your present reach,
Less shall you know how they themselves demean:
Traitorous corrupters of their pliant youth
Shall have unspied a much more free access;
And if ambition and inflamed disdain
Shall arm the one, the other, or them both,
To civil war, or to usurping pride,
Late shall you rue that you ne recked before.
Good is, I grant, of all to hope the best.

But not to live still dreadless of the worst.
So trust the one, that th' other be forseen.

Arm not unskilfulness with princely power;
But you that long have wisely ruled the reins
Of royalty within your noble realm,
So hold them, while the gods for our avails
Shall stretch the thread of your prolonged days.

Too soon he clamb into the flaming car,
Whose want of skill did set the earth on fire.

Time and example of your noble grace,
Shall teach your sons both to obey and rule;
When time hath taught them, time shall make them place,
The place that now is full: and so I pray
Long it remain, to comfort of us all.

Gorb. I take your faithful hearts in thankful part:
But sith I see no cause to draw my mind.
To fear the nature of my loving sons,
Or to misdeem that envy or disdain
Can there work hate, where nature planteth love;
In one self purpose do I still abide:
My love extendeth equally to both,
My land sufficeth for them both also.
Humber shall part the marches of their realms;

The southern part the elder shall possess,
The northern shall Porrex the younger rule.
In quiet I will pass mine aged days,  
Free from the travail and the painful cares  
That hasten age upon the worthiest kings.  
But lest the fraud, that ye do seem to fear

Of flattering tongues, corrupt their tender youth,  
And writhe them to the ways of youthful lust.  
To climbing pride, or to revenging hate;  
Or to neglecting of their careful charge.  
Lewdly to live in wanton recklessness;  
Or to oppressing of the rightful cause;  
Or not to wreak the wrongs done to the poor,  
To tread down truth, or favour false deceit;  
I mean to join to either of my sons  
Someone of those whose long approved faith  
And wisdom tried may well assure my heart:  
That mining fraud shall find no way to creep

This is the end; and so I pray you all  
To bear my sons the love and loyalty  
That I have found within your faithful breasts.

Aros. You, nor your sons, our sovereign lord, shall want  
Our faith and service while our lives do last.

Chorus. When settled stay doth hold the royal throne  
In steadfast place by known and doubtless right,  
And chiefly when descent on one alone  
Make single and unparted reign to light;  
Each change of course unjoint the whole estate.

And yields it thrall to ruin by debate.

End of the Acts: Acts I-IV in Gorboduc are each followed by a Chorus, a kind of epilogue, presenting some final thoughts and lessons to be drawn from the action so far.  
The Names of the Speakers of the Choruses, as listed at the beginning of the play, consists of Four Ancient and Sage Men of Britain: a different Sage Man speaks at the end of each of the first four Acts, while the fifth and final Act contains no Chorus.

The Chorus' Entrance and Rhyme Scheme: the entrance of the Chorus is not indicated in the original editions.  
The Choruses of Acts I, II, and IV are written in six-line stanzas with the rhyme scheme ab-ab-cc. Such a scheme is now known as the Venus and Adonis stanza, since Shakespeare used this form in his 1593 published poem Venus and Adonis; of course, as can be seen, the existence of the form predates the Bard.

Chorus. When settled stay doth hold the royal throne  
In steadfast place by known and doubtless right,  
And chiefly when descent on one alone  
Make single and unparted reign to light;  
Each change of course unjoint the whole estate.

And yields it thrall to ruin by debate.

= deceit; the description in lines 357-360 is of sycophants misleading the young kings with ideas of grandeur and power.

= ie. turn or incline, or twist. = ambition.

= ie. responsibility which requires great care.

= basely.

= avenge or punish.

366-8: Gorboduc will assigned an experienced advisor to keep an eye on and wisely counsel his sons.

= the sense is "undermining".

370: the sense is that the ears, thanks to the presence of a wise counsellor, are defended against insidious advice with good advice.

= read as "neither you". = lack

= conditions.

= undoubted.

382-3: "and especially when the royal throne settles on (lights on) one heir alone".

384: change of course = alteration to the proper course of things.  
unjoint = dislocates. = kingdom.

385: thrall = the normal meaning would be "captive" or
The strength that knit by fast accord in one,
Against all foreign power of mighty foes
Could of itself defend itself alone;
   Disjoined once, the former force doth lose.

The sticks, that sondered brake so soon in twain,
In faggot bound attempted were in vain.

Oft tender mind that leads the partial eye
Of erring parents in their children’s love,
Destroys the wrongly lovèd child thereby:

   This doth the proud son of Apollo prove,
Who, rashly set in chariot of his sire,
Inflamed the parchéd earth with Heaven’s fire.

And this great king, that doth divide his land,
   And change the course of his descending crown,
And yields the reign into his children’s hand;
   From blissful state of joy and great renown,
A mirror shall become to princes all,

To learn to shun the cause of such a fall.

"slave", though the sense here seems to be simply "subject".
   debate = strife.\(^5\)

= ie. but once separated. = ie. loosen, referring to the force or bond that should knot (line 387) sibling rulers.
= ie. when separated. = broke. The reference is to the allegorical sticks of Act I’s introductory Dumb Show.

394-6: briefly, parents can ruin their child by being too indulgent.
   Oft = often.
   partial = biased.

397-9: a second allusion to the famous and oft-cited myth of Phaeton; see lines 335-6 above.

= hereditatry.\(^5\)

= example or warning; the early meaning of mirror as "an exemplar" actually may have predated its usual meaning of a reflective surface.\(^1\)

END OF ACT I.
ACT II.
THE ORDER AND SIGNIFICATION OF THE DUMB SHOW BEFORE THE SECOND ACT.

First, the music of cornets begins to play, during which comes in upon the stage a king accompanied with a number of his nobility and gentlemen. And after he has placed himself in a chair of estate prepared for him, there comes and kneels before him a grave and aged gentleman and offers up a cup unto him of wine in a glass, which the king refuses. After him comes a brave and lusty young gentleman and presents the king with a cup of gold filled with poison, which the king accepts, and drinking the same, immediately falls down dead upon the stage, and so is carried thence away by his lords and gentlemen, and then the music ceases.

Hereby is signified that as glass by nature holdeth no poison, but is clear and may easily be seen through, ne boweth by any art; so a faithful counsellor holdeth no treason, but is plain and open, ne yieldeth to any undiscreet affection, but giveth wholesome counsel, which the ill-advised prince refuseth. The delightful gold filled with poison betokeneth flattery, which under fair seeming of pleasant words beareth deadly poison, which destroyeth the prince that receiveth it. As befell in the two brethren Ferrex and Porrex, who, refusing the wholesome advice of grave court counsellors, credited these young parasites, and brought to themselves death and destruction thereby.

ACT II, SCENE I.
The Court of Ferrex.

Enter Ferrex, Hermon and Dordan.

Ferr. I marvel much what reason led the king
My father, thus without all my desert,
To reave me half the kingdom which by course
Of law and nature should remain to me.

Herm. If you with stubborn and untamèd pride
Had stood against him in rebelling wise;
Or if with grudging mind you had envied
So slow a sliding of his aged years;
Or sought before your time to haste the course
Of fatal death upon his royal head;
Or stained your stock with murder of your kin;
Some face of reason might perhaps have seemed
To yield some likely cause to spoil ye thus.

Ferr. The wreakful gods pour on my cursed head
Eternal plagues and never dying woes;
The hellish prince adjudge my damned ghost
To Tantal’s thirst, or proud Ixion’s wheel,
Or cruel gripe to gnaw my growing heart,

= “without my having done anything to deserve it”.
= deprive or rob.

6-14: Hermon argues that it would have made sense to deny Ferrex his birthright only if he had done something to deserve such treatment; he enumerates several examples of such unworthy behavior.

= manner.
= displayed resentment towards.
9: i.e. the long and lingering life of his father, so that the throne would have been slow to descend to Ferrex.

10-11: haste...head = hasten Gorboduc's death, perhaps a euphemism for "murder him".

= family tree.

16-23: this speech is one long sentence, whose point only becomes clear at the end: Ferrex wishes a number of curses upon himself, if he ever once held a malicious thought against his father.

wreakful = avenging.

18: the hellish prince is Pluto, the god and ruler of the underworld; technically, however, Pluto did not make the individual decisions about the punishments to be assigned to individual souls (ghost = soul or spirit); such decisions were made by the judges Rhadamanthys, Minos and Aiakos, three men who were famous for establishing law and order during their lives on earth.

adjudge = sentence.

19: Ferrex alludes to some famous stories from mythology:
(1) Tantalus, a son of Zeus, revealed secrets told him by the king of the gods, and for this indiscretion was punished by being placed in a lake to suffer permanent thirst and hunger; whenever he reached for the water around him or the fruit hanging from the branches above him, they would shrink away from him. Our word tantalize derives from his name.

(2) Ixion's father-in-law tried to extort Ixion's wedding presents from him, and in revenge Ixion invited the man to his home, wherein he caused him to fall into a pit filled with fire; Ixion was pardoned by Zeus, who invited him to a feast, but Ixion repaid his host by trying to seduce Zeus' wife Hera. He was punished by being tied by his hands and feet to a wheel which forever spun around in the underworld.

= vulture. The reference in this line is to the myth of Tityus, a giant who tried to rape the mortal woman Leto (the future mother of Helen of Troy); Zeus killed him with a bolt of lightning, and he was punished in hell by being tied to the ground (he covered nine acres) and having two vultures continuously eat his liver, which always grew back.
To during torments and unquenchèd flames;  
If ever I conceived so foul a thought,  
To wish his end of life, or yet of reign.

Dord. Ne yet your father, O most noble prince,  
Did ever think so foul a thing of you:  
For he, with more than father’s tender love,  
While yet the Fates do lend him life to rule,  
(Who long might live to see your ruling well)  
To you, my lord, and to his other son,  
Lo, he resigns his realm and royalty;  
Which never would so wise a prince have done,  
If he had once misdeemed that in your heart  
There ever lodgèd so unkind a thought.

But tender love, my lord, and settled trust  
Of your good nature, and your noble mind,  
Made him to place you thus in royal throne,  
And now to give you half his realm to guide;  
Yea, and that half which in abounding store  
Of things that serve to make a wealthy realm,  
In stately cities, and in fruitful soil,  
In temperate breathing of the milder Heaven,  
In things of needful use, which friendly sea  
Transports by traffic from the foreign parts,  
In flowing wealth, in honour and in force,  
Doth pass the double value of the part  
That Porrex hath allotted to his reign.  
Such is your case, such is your father’s love.

Ferr. Ah love, my friends? love wrongs not whom he loves.

Dord. Ne yet he wrongeth you, that giveth you  
So large a reign, ere that the course of time  
Bring you to kingdom by descended right,  
Which time perhaps might end your time before.

Ferr. Is this no wrong, say you, to reave from me  
My native right of half so great a realm?  
And thus to match his younger son with me  
In equal power, and in as great degree?  
Yea, and what son? The son whose swelling pride  
Would never yield one point of reverence,  
When I the elder and apparent heir

Stood in the likelihood to possess the whole;  
Yea, and that son which from his childish age  
Envieth my honour, and doth hate my life.
What will he now do, when his pride, his rage,
The mindful malice of his grudging heart,
Is armed with force, with wealth, and kingly state?

Herm. Was this not wrong? Yea, ill-advisèd wrong
To give so mad a man so sharp a sword,
To so great peril of so great mishap,
Wide open thus to set so large a way.

Dord. Alas, my lord, what grieveful thing is this,
That of your brother you can think so ill?
I never saw him utter likely sign
Whereby a man might see or once misdeem
Such hate of you, ne such unyielding pride:
Ill is their counsel, shameful be their end,
That raising such mistrustful fear in you,
Sowing the seed of such unkindly hate,
Travail by reason to destroy you both.
Wise is your brother and of noble hope,
Worthy to wield a large and mighty realm;
So much a stronger friend have you thereby,
Whose strength is your strength, if you gree in one.

Herm. If nature and the gods had pinchèd so
Their flowing bounty, and their noble gifts
Of princely qualities from you my lord,
And poured them all at once in wasteful wise
Upon your father’s younger son alone;

Perhaps there be, that in your prejudice
Would say that birth should yield to worthiness:

But sith in each good gift and princely art
Ye are his match, and in the chief of all −
In mildness and in sober governance −
Ye far surmount; and sith there is in you
Sufficing skill and hopeful towardness

To wield the whole, and match your elders’ praise.

I see no cause why ye should lose the half,
Ne would I with you yield to such a loss:

Lest your mild sufferance of so great a wrong
Be deemed cowardice and simple dread,
Which shall give courage to the fiery head
Of your young brother to invade the whole.
While yet therefore sticks in the people’s mind
in a dignified manner, nor accepted his fate, Porrex does not
deserve to have a share in ruling Britain.

= unforgetting. 16

71-74: Hermon wonders what crazy thing Porrex might do,
now that he is so powerful.
= i.e. so great a weapon as his own kingdom.
= risk or danger. = misfortune.

78-80: Dordan flatly contradicts Ferrex's description of a
bitter younger brother.
= nor.

= strive.

= i.e. act in harmony.

= been stingy or ungenerous with. 9

93-94: i.e. "if the gods had given all the qualities desirable
in a king to your brother, and none to you".

wasteful wise = a wasteful manner.

= "there would be those who". = "to your detriment".

96: "would say that you, who should be king based on
your birth, should yield the throne to your brother
based on his superior worthiness".

= since. = i.e. skill required to be a good king.
= equal. = i.e. most important quality of all in a ruler.

= "are far superior".
= an expectant willingness or desire.

102: wield = reign over.
match...praise = i.e. "be equal to the praise your
elders heap upon you".

104: Hermon finally comes right out and explicitly advises
Ferrex to not accept this division of the kingdom.

= acceptance.
= judged, reckoned. = "fear".
106-7: a rhyming couplet has snuck into the blank verse.

109-119: Ferrex should anticipate Porrex and attack him
The loathed wrong of your disheritance;

And ere your brother have by settled power,

By guileful cloak of an alluring show,
Got him some force and favour in this realm;

And while the noble queen your mother lives,
To work and practice all for your avail:
Attempt redress by arms, and wreak yourselves
Upon his life that gaineth by your loss,
Who now to shame of you, and grieve of us,
In your own kingdom triumphs over you:
Shew now your courage meet for kingly state,
That they which have avowed to spend their goods,
Their lands, their lives, and honours in your cause,
May be the bolder to maintain your part
When they do see that coward fear in you
Shall not betray their faithfull hearts.
If once the death of Porrex end the strife,
And pay the price of his usurped reign,
Your mother shall persuade the angry king,
The lords your friends eke shall appease his rage;
For they be wise, and well they can foresee
That ere long time your aged father's death
Will bring a time when you shall well requite
Their friendly favour, or their hateful spite,
Yea, or their slackness to advance your cause.

“Wise men do not so hang on passing state
Of present princes, chiefly in their age,
But they will further cast their reaching eye,
To view and weigh the times and reigns to come.”

Ne is it likely, though the king be wroth,
That he yet will, or that the realm will bear,
Extreme revenge upon his only son:
Or if he would, what one is he that dare
Be minister to such an enterprise?

And here you be now placèd in your own,
Amid your friends, your vassals and your strength:
We shall defend and keep your person safe
Till either counsel turn his tender mind.

first while he, Ferrex, still has the advantage.
109-110: "while the wrong done to you is still fresh
in people's minds”.

= before.

112-3: the sense is that Porrex, an illegitimate king, might,
given enough time, be able to convince enough people to
accept him as their ruler simply by acting the part, and as a
result gain enough support to be able to raise an army to
resist Ferrex.

*guileful cloak* = deceiving disguise.
*alluring show* = attractive playing of the part.

114-5: Hermon is aware that Ferrex is his mother's favourite.

= scheme. = benefit.
= revenge.

= fit.
= "those who". = vowed, promised.

= nor deceive.

= will also work to mollify.

131-4: Hermon cleverly points out that Gorboduc's coun-
sellors will, out of self-interest, recognize that Gorboduc's
eventual death will put them at Ferrex's mercy no matter
what, so they will work hard to get the king to accept
Ferrex's removal of Porrex; specifically, Ferrex could be
expected to reward (requite) them for taking his side - or
punish them if they don't!

135-138: Adams notes that in the 16th century, quotation
marks were used to "emphasize sententious passages",
meaning that the included speech indicates sentiments of
accepted wisdom or were in the nature of aphorisms: such
passages, of which there are several in the play, sound as if
the speakers are quoting authority.

= irate or moved to great anger.

= ie. "who would dare".

143: "be the one to carry out such an assignment?"

*minister* = agent.

= ie. "the good advice of his counsellors sways Gorboduc's
Or age, or sorrow end his weary days.  
But if the fear of gods, and secret grudge  
Of nature’s law, repining at the fact.

Withhold your courage from so great attempt,  
Know ye, that lust of kingdoms hath no law, 

The gods do bear and well allow in kings  
The things [that] they abhor in rascal routs,  
“When kings on slender quarrels run to wars,  
And then in cruel and unkindly wise  
Command thefts, rapes, murder of innocents,  
To spoil of towns, and reigns of mighty realms;  
Think you such princes do suppress themselves  
Subject to laws of kind, and fear of gods?”

Murders, and violent thefts in private men  
Are heinous crimes and full of foul reproach:  
Yet none offence, but decked with glorious name  
Of noble conquests in the hands of kings.  
But if you like not yet so hot device,  
Ne list to take such vantage of the time,  
But, though with peril of your own estate,  
You will not be the first that shall invade;  
Assemble yet your force for your defense,  
And for your safety stand upon your guard.

Dord. Oh, Heaven! was there ever heard or known  
So wicked counsel to a noble prince?  
Let me, my lord, disclose unto your grace  
This heinous tale, what mischief it contains;  
Your father’s death, your brother’s, and your own,  
Your present murder, and eternal shame.  
Hear me, O king, and suffer not to sink  
So high a treason in your princely breast.

Ferr. The mighty gods forbid that ever I  
Should once conceive such mischief in my heart.  
Although my brother hath bereft my realm,  
And bear perhaps to me an hateful mind,  
Shall I revenge it with his death therefore?  
Or shall I so destroy my father’s life  
That gave me life? The gods forbid, I say,  
Cease you to speak so anymore to me. –
Ne you, my friend, with answer once repeat  
So foul a tale: in silence let it die.  
What lord or subject shall have hope at all  
yielding or pliant (tender) mind”

150: "nature turns with pain or shrinks (repines) from the deed (fact) of killing one's brother" (Smith, p. 36). The law against killing one's kin.

151-2: "if you lack the courage to attack your brother, you should remember that greed for a kingdom, i.e. the ambition to rule, knows or acknowledges no rules of fair play." Hermon will repeatedly make the point that when it comes to winning a kingdom, Ferrex should not expect his brother to adhere to the niceties of ethical behaviour.

16: = approve,²
   = worthless rabble,³
   = slight pretexts.
   = manner.

165: "but if you are uncomfortable with such an extreme scheme (hot device)".

166: "nor wish (list) to take advantage of this propitious moment".

169-170: Hermon argues that even if Ferrex refuses to invade Porrex's half of Britain and kill him, then at a minimum he should raise an army that will be prepared to defend him when Porrex invades his half.

174-5: Dordan will predict what will happen if Ferrex follows Hermon's advice.

191-5: if Ferrex kills his brother, how could any of his sub-
That under me they safely shall enjoy
Their goods, their honours, lands and liberties,
With whom neither one only brother dear,
Ne father dearer, could enjoy their lives?
But sith I fear my younger brother's rage,
And sith perhaps some other man may give

Some like advice, to move his grudging head
At mine estate, which counsel may perchance
Take greater force with him, than this with me;
I will in secret so prepare myself,
As, if his malice or his lust to reign
Break forth in arms or sudden violence,
I may withstand his rage, and keep mine own.

Dord. I fear the fatal time now draweth on
When civil hate shall end the noble line
Of famous Brute, and of his royal seed: —
Great Jove, defend the mischiefs now at hand!
O that the secretary's wise advice
Had erst been heard when he besought the king
Not to divide his land, nor send his sons
To further parts from presence of his court,
Ne yet to yield to them his governance.
Lo, such are they now in the royal throne
As was rash Phaëton in Phoebus' car;
Ne then the fiery steeds did draw the flame
With wilder randon through the kindled skies,

Then traitorous counsel now will whirl about
The youthful heads of these unskilful kings.
But I hereof their father will inform;
The reverence of him perhaps shall stay
The growing mischiefs while they yet are green:
If this help not, then woe unto themselves,
The prince, the people, the divided land!

[Exeunt.]

ACT II, SCENE II.
The Court of Porrex.

Enter Porrex, Tyndar, and Philander.

Entering Characters: Porrex is Ferrex's younger brother, and now king of the northern half of Britain. Tyndar is Porrex's own personal sycophant, and Philander his wise advisor, assigned by Gorboduc to remain by his side. This
Porr. And is it thus? And doth he so prepare
Against his brother as his mortal foe?
And now while yet his aged father lives?
Neither regards he him, nor fears he me?
War would he have? and he shall have it so.

Tyn. I saw myself the great preparèd store
Of horse, of armour, and of weapons there;
Ne bring I to my lord reported tales
Without the ground of seen and searchèd truth.
Lo, secret quarrels run about his court
To bring the name of you, my lord, in hate.
Each man almost can now debate the cause
And ask a reason of so great a wrong.
Why he so noble and so wise a prince
Is as, unworthy, reft his heritage?
And why the king, misled by crafty means,
Divided thus his land from course of right?
The wiser sort hold down their grievful heads;
Each man withdraws from talk and company
Of those that have been known to favour you:
To hide the mischief of their meaning there,
Rumours are spread of your preparing here.
The rascal numbers of [th'] unskilful sort
Are filled with monstrous tales of you and yours.
In secret I was counseled by my friends
To haste me thence, and brought you, as you know,
Letters from those that both can truly tell,
And would not write unless they knew it well.

Phil. My lord, yet ere you move unkindly war,
Send to your brother to demand the cause:
Perhaps some traitorous tales have filled his ears
With false reports against your noble grace;
Which once disclosed shall end the growing strife,
That else not stayed with wise foresight in time,
Shall hazard both your kingdoms and your lives:
Send to your father eke, he shall appease
Your kindled minds, and rid you of this fear.

Porr. Rid me of fear? I fear him not at all;
Ne will to him, ne to my father send.
If danger were for one to tarry there,
Think ye it safety to return again?

In mischiefs, such as Ferrex now intends,
The wonted courteous laws to messengers Are not observed, which in just war they use.

Shall I so hazard any one of mine?

Shall I betray my trusty friend to him
That hath disclosed his treason unto me?

Let him entreat that fears, I fear him not:
Or shall I to the king my father send?
Yea, and send now while such a mother lives
That loves my brother and that hateth me?
Shall I give leisure, by my fond delays,
To Ferrex to oppress me all unaware?

I will not; but I will invade his realm,
And seek the traitor-prince within his court.
Mischief for mischief is a due reward.
His wretched head shall pay the worthy price
Of this his treason and his hate to me.
Shall I abide, and treat, and send, and pray,
And hold my yelden throat to traitor’s knife,
While I with valiant mind and conquering force
Might rid myself of foes, and win a realm?
Yet rather, when I have the wretch’s head,
Then to the king my father will I send.
The bootless case may yet appease his wrath:
If not I will defend me as I may.

Phil. Lo, here the end of these two youthful kings!
The father’s death! the reign of their two realms!
“O most unhappy state of counsellors
That light on so unhappy lords and times,
That neither can their good advice be heard,
Yet must they bear the blames of ill success.”

But I will to the king their father haste,
Ere this mischief come to that likely end,
That if the mindful wrath of wreakful gods
Since mighty Ilion’s fall, not yet appeased

46-47: Porrex points out that opposing nations engaged in an honourable war will always observe the accustomed (wonted) immunities granted to official messengers who move back and forth between the two sides; Ferrex’s bellicose intentions, however, are so insidious that he cannot be expected to grant the same.

"do you expect me to risk sending one of my messengers to him now?"

49-50: Porrex is unwilling to send the man who did so great a service for him by spying on Ferrex and reporting back the military build-up going on in the southern kingdom, ie. Tyndar, on such an obviously dangerous mission.

= beg.
= appeal.

55-56: "shall I give Ferrex time to make the preparations necessary that would allow him to make a surprise attack on me?"

fond = foolish or stupid.
oppress = overwhelm.
unaware = unaware or unexpectedly.

= suffer, endure.
= entreat, beg.
= yielded, ie. surrendered;
yelden was archaic by the mid-16th century.
= only then.

68: since the situation, once Ferrex is dead, would be irreversible, Gorboduc will realize he has no choice but to accept it.  

bootless case = irretrievable situation.

70: Porrex and Tyndar likely exit the stage at this point.

"see here".
= unfortunate.
= figuratively land or descend on, ie. "are put in a position in which they must work with".
= "when the results are bad".
= hurry.
= the sense is "never forgetting". = avenging.

80-83: the British, we remember, were descended from
With these poor remnants of the Trojan name,
Have not determined by unmovèd fate
Out of this realm to rase the British line;

By good advice, by awe of father’s name,
By force of wiser lords, this kindled hate
May yet be quenched, ere it consume us all.

**Chorus.** When youth not bridled with a guiding stay
   Is left to randon of their own delight,
And welds whole realms, by force of sovereign sway,
   Great is the danger of unmastered might,
Lest skillless rage throw down with headlong fall
Their lands, their states, their lives, themselves and all.

When growing pride doth fill the swelling breast,
   And greedy lust doth raise the climbing mind,
O, hardly may the peril be repressed;
   Ne fear of angry gods, ne laws kind.
Ne country’s care can firèd hearts restrain,
When force hath armèd envy and disdain.

When kings of foreset will neglect the rede
   Of best advice, and yield to pleasing tales,
That do their fancy’s noisome humour feed,
   Ne reason, nor regard of right avails:
Succeeding heaps of plagues shall teach too late,
   To learn the mischiefs of misguiding state.
Foul fall the traitor false, that undermines
   The love of brethren, to destroy them both!
Woe to the prince that pliant ear inclines.

And yields his mind to poisonous tale that floweth
   From flattering mouth! and woe to wretched land
That wastes itself with civil sword in hand!

Lo thus it is, poison in gold to take,
And wholesome drink in homely cup forsake.

END OF ACT II.
ACT III.
THE ORDER AND SIGNIFICATION OF THE DUMB SHOW BEFORE THE THIRD ACT.

First the music of flutes begins to play, during which comes in upon the stage a company of mourners all clad in black, betokening death and sorrow to ensue upon the ill-advised misgovernment and dissension of brethren, as befell upon the murder of Ferrex by his younger brother. After the mourners have passed thrice about the stage, they depart, and then the music ceases.

ACT III, SCENE I.
The Court of Gorboduc.

Enter Gorboduc, Eubulus, and Arostus.

Gorb. O cruel Fates, O mindful wrath of gods,

Whose vengeance neither Simois’ strained streams

Flowing with blood of Trojan princes slain,

Nor Phrygian fields made rank with corpses dead

Of Asian kings and lords, can yet appease;

Ne slaughter of unhappy Priam’s race.

1-16: Gorboduc’s speech harkens back to the Trojan War, and the destruction of his ancestor’s city and slaughter of the royal family at the hands of the Greeks: the gods cannot or will not release the descendants of the Trojans, now the British, from their wrath.

mindful = probably meaning “remembering”, ie. unforgetting.

2: Simois = the attendant god of the river of the same name. The Simois flowed from Mt. Ida, and joined the Scamander River on the plains of Troy. Note the striking alliteration in this line.

strained = perhaps suggesting “labouring”, as under the stress of great amounts of a foreign fluid, ie. blood.

= while the name Phrygia usually refers to an ancient nation that was situated in west-central Asia Minor, it can also be used to describe the broader area of western Asia Minor generally, or, as here, the region which contained Troy and the battlefields of the Trojan War specifically.21

= ie. the allies of the Trojans, who came from the western half of Asia Minor; although we may point out that a contingent from Thrace, which is on the European side of the border between the continents, also fought with the Trojans.

6: Ne = nor.

unhappy = ill-fated.

Priam’s race = Priam was the patriarch of the Trojan royal family at the time of the Trojan War. Priam famously had 50 sons, including Paris, whose eloping with Helen precipitated the Greek attack on Troy, and Hector, the Trojan side’s greatest warrior.
Nor Ilios's fall made level with the soil,
Can yet suffice: but still continued rage
Pursues our lines, and from the farthest seas
Doth chase the issues of destroyèd Troy.
“O, no man happy, till his end be seen.”
If any flowing wealth and seeming joy
In present years might make a happy wight,
Happy was Hecuba, the woefullest wretch
That ever lived to make a mirror of;
And happy Priam with his noble sons;
And happy I, till now alas, I see
And feel my most unhappy wretchedness. –
Behold, my lords, read you this letter here;
Lo, it contains the ruin of our realm
If timely speed provide not hasty help.
Yet, O ye gods, if ever woeful king
Might move you kings of kings, wreak it on me
And on my sons, not on this guiltless realm:
Send down your wasting flames from wrathful skies,
To reave me and my sons the hateful breath.
Read, read, my lords; this is the matter why
I called you now to have your good advice.

The Letter from Dordan
the Counsellor of the Elder Prince.

Eubulus readeth the letter.

My sovereign lord, what I am loath to write
But loasthest am to see, that I am forced
By letters now to make you understand.
My lord Ferrex, your eldest son, misled
By traitorous fraud of young untempered wits.

Assembleth force against your younger son;
Ne can my counsel yet withdraw the heat
And furious pangs of his enflamèd head.
Disdain, saith he, of his inheritance,
Arms him to wreak the great pretended wrong
With civil sword upon his brother's life.
If present help does not restrain this rage,
This flame will waste your sons, your land, and you.
Your Majesty’s faithful and most
humble subject,
Dordan.

Aros. O king, appease your grief and 
50 stay your plaint:
Great is the matter and a woeful case;
But timely knowledge may bring timely help.
Send for them both unto your presence here:
The reverence of your honour, age, and state,
Your grave advice, the awe of father’s name,
Shall quickly knit again this broken peace.
And if in either of my lords your sons
Be such untamed and unyielding pride,
As will not bend unto your noble hests:
If Ferrex the elder son can bear no peer.

Or Porrex not content, aspires to more
Than you him gave, above his native right;
Join with the juster side, so shall you force
Them to agree, and hold the land in stay.

Enter Philander.

Eubu. What meaneth this? Lo, yonder comes in haste
Philander from my lord your younger son.

Gorb. The gods send joyful news.
Phil. The mighty Jove
Preserve your majesty, O noble king.

Gorb. Philander, welcome; but how doth my son?
Phil. Your son, sir, lives; and healthy I him left:
But yet, O king, this want of lustful health
Could not be half so griefful to your grace
As these most wretched tidings that I bring.

Gorb. Oh heavens, yet more? no end of woes to me?

Phil. Tyndar, O king, came lately from the court
Of Ferrex, to my lord your younger son,
And made report of great prepared store
Of war, and saith that it is wholly meant
Against Porrex, for high disdain that he
Lives now a king and egal in degree
With him that claimeth to succeed the whole,
As by due title of descending right.
Porrex is now so set on flaming fire,
Partly with kindled rage of cruel wrath,
Partly with hope to gain a realm thereby,
That he in haste prepareth to invade
His brother’s land, and with unkindly war
Threatens the murder of your elder son;
Ne could I him persuade, that first he should
Send to his brother to demand the cause;
Nor yet to you, to stay his hateful strife.
Wherefore, sith there no more I can be heard,
I come myself now to inform your grace,
And to beseech you, as you love the life
And safety of your children and your realm,
Now to employ your wisdom and your force,
To stay this mischief ere it be too late.

Gorb. Are they in arms? would he not send to me?
Is this the honour of a father’s name?
In vain we travail to assuage their minds:
As if their hearts, whom neither brother’s love,
Nor father’s awe, nor kingdom’s cares can move,
Our counsels could withdraw from raging heat.
Jove slay them both, and end the cursed line!
For though, perhaps, fear of such mighty force
As I, my lords, joined with your noble aids,
May yet raise, shall repent their present heat;
The secret grudge and malice will remain,
The fire not quenched, but kept in close restraint,
Fed still within, breaks forth with double flame:
Their death and mine must pease the angry gods.

Phil. Yield not, O king, so much to weak despair:
Your sons yet live; and long, I trust, they shall.
If Fates had taken you from earthly life,
Before beginning of this civil strife,
Loose from regard of any living wight,
Would run on headlong, with unbridled race,
To their own death, and ruin of this realm.
But sith the gods, that have the care for kings,
Of things and times dispose the order so,
That in your life this kindled flame breaks forth,
While yet your life, your wisdom, and your power,
May stay the growing mischief, and repress
The fiery blaze of their enkindled heat;
It seems, and so ye ought to deem thereof,
That loving Jove hath tempered so the time
Of this debate to happen in your days,
That you yet living may the same appease,
And add it to the glory of your latter age.

= unnatural.
= delay.
= in consequence of which.¹ = since.
= stop.
= strive. = mollify.¹⁶

116: father’s awe = ie. reverence for their father.
kingdom’s cares = worries or anxieties over their kingdoms.

= advice.

119-124: "even if (though) we can raise our own army and
use it to force the boys to stand down, it will not solve
the root of the problem, which is their mutual envy and
malice, for it will remain simmering below the surface,
only to break forth sooner or later again into open war."

= "will be necessary to appease"; both pease and appease
were in use by the early 14th century.¹

127-8: Philander pleads with the king not to project an
inevitable tragic ending to the unfolding situation.
129-130: another rhyming couplet appears in the blank
verse here.

132: free from the close attention of any person (wight)
with authority over them

= check, cut off.
= "think about it this way”.
= Jove, who is full of love.
= ie. "while you are still alive".
= old age.

Line 145 appears to have 12 syllables; Morley²² suggests
pronouncing add it to the "swiftly" in two syllables: add ‘t ‘t
‘the. Cunliffe suggests the extra foot was simply added by
And they your sons may learn to live in peace.
Beware, O king, the greatest harm of all,
Lest by your wailful plaints your hastened death
Yield larger room unto their growing rage:

Preserve your life, the only hope of stay,
And if your highness herein list to use
Wisdom or force, counsel or knightly aid,
Lo we, our persons, powers and lives are yours:
Use us till death; O king, we are your own.

Eubu. Lo here the peril that was erst foreseen.

When you, O king, did first divide your land,
And yield your present reign unto your sons,
But now, O noble prince, now is no time
To wail and plain, and waste your woeful life;

Now is the time for present good advice –
Sorrow doth dark the judgment of the wit.

“The heart unbroken, and the courage free
From feeble faintness of bootless despair,
Doth either rise to safety or renown
By noble valour of unvanquished mind;
Or yet doth perish in more happy sort.”
Your grace may send to either of your sons
Someone both wise and noble personage,
Which with good counsel, and with weighty name
Of father, shall present before their eyes
Your hest, your life, your safety and their own,
The present mischief of their deadly strife:
And in the while, assemble you the force
Which your commandment, and the speedy haste
Of all my lords here present can prepare.
The terror of your mighty power shall stay
The rage of both, or yet of one least.

Enter Nuntius.

Nunt. O king, the greatest grief that ever prince did hear,
That ever woeful messenger did tell,
That ever wretched land hath seen before,
I bring to you: Porrex your younger son,
With sudden force invaded hath the land
That you to Ferrex did allot to rule;
And with his own most bloody hand he hath
His brother slain, and doth possess his realm.
require days or weeks to occur off-stage take place within minutes of each other on-stage. This tactic hastens the pace of the story, heightening the play's drama.

= "father", meaning himself; another rhyming couplet has inserted itself in 192-3.

195: pease = appease.

hateful = full of hate; you can create your own Elizabethan adjective by attaching -ful to the end of any emotion (and I suppose any noun), and the result will mean "full of (emotion)".

= desire or greed for. Note that this Chorus is comprised of 4-line stanzas, each with a rhyme-scheme of ab-ab, before ending with a final rhyming couplet.

200: a spectacular bit of alliteration.
= familial.
= spite, malicious hate.3

206: the heir to the throne is resentful when the king his father lives too long.
= "nor fears".
= "can you not remember".16

= murders; murther remained the more commonly used form well into the 17th century. Note that murderous, however, was printed with its modern spelling in line 215.

212: see Act I.ii.166-7, for the note on Morgan.

214: Cunliffe suggests the line refers to the classical notion of an inescapable family curse.
= stained, defiled or steeped in.1

= ie. his grieving father.
ACT IV.

THE ORDER AND SIGNIFICATION OF THE DUMB SHOW BEFORE THE FOURTH ACT.

First the music of howbies begins to play, during which there comes forth from under the stage, as though out of hell, three Furies, Alecto, Megera and Ctisiphone, clad in black garments sprinkled with blood and flames, their bodies girt with snakes, their heads spread with serpents instead of hair, the one bearing in her hand a snake, the other a whip, and the third a burning firebrand, each driving before them a king and a queen, which, moved by Furies, unnaturally had slain their own children. The names of kings and queens were these, Tantalus, Medea, Athamas, Ino, Cambyses, Althea; after that the Furies and these pass about the stage thrice, they depart, and then the music ceases.

Hereby is signified the unnatural murders to follow: that is to say, Porrex slain by his own mother, and King Gorboduc and Queen Videna killed by their own subjects.

3-8: three Furies...firebrand = see the note after line 18 below.

= encircled.

= piece of burning wood used as a torch.

= urged or incited.

10-12: The names...Althea = see the note after line 18 below.

3-8: three Furies...firebrand = the Furies were three goddesses whose job it was to follow and torment those who committed such serious crimes as murder of one’s kin or breaches of faith and duty. Alecto was the never-tiring prosecutor, Megera was the “grim”, and Ctisiphone, the “avenger of murder”. The ladies were imagined to be dressed in black and with hair of snakes, and sometimes with wings. Each carried an object with her, either a weapon, a torch, or a snake (see Murray, pp. 189-190).

10-12: The names...Althea = the authors have listed a number of famous mythological characters who committed terrible crimes against their own families:

Tantalus = an alternate story told of Tantalus (compare the one described at Act II.i.19) had Tantalus inviting the gods to a feast. To test their alleged powers of perception, he killed, cooked, and served them his son Pelops. Needless to say, they noticed (Murray, p. 243).

Medea = the witch Medea had a number of gruesome stories told about her. In Euripides’ play about Medea, she kills her children with Jason (of Jason and the Golden Fleece) to get revenge on him when he decides to leave her to marry a princess.

Athamas and Ino = Athamas was the husband of Ino, the daughter of Cadmus, the founder and king of Thebes. The
couple were devoted to worshiping Dionysus, to the point where it caused Hera (the queen of the gods) to become furious with jealousy. She ordered one of the Furies, Tisiphone, to punish them by driving them mad. Tisiphone, wearing a "dress of serpents", proceeded to cause Athamas and Ino to go insane by throwing snakes, whose poison worked on their minds but not their bodies, upon them. Now mad, Athamas smashed their son against a wall, and Ino threw herself into the sea, while Hera laughed at the whole scene (Humphries, pp. 94-99).

Cambyses = the Greek historian Herodotus told a number of stories about Cambyses, son of the famous Persian ruler Cyrus the Great, and the successor to Cyrus. Driven mad in punishment for his having killed the sacred Egyptian cow known as Apis, Cambyses had his full brother Smerdis killed, then married and subsequently killed his younger sister.14

Althea = Althea was queen of Calydon. When her son Meleager was born, she was warned by one of the Fates that her son would live only so long as a particular piece of firewood remained unconsumed by fire. To keep him alive forever, Althea hid the log. Later in life, after Meleager had killed his uncles - Althea's brothers - during a war, she burnt the firebrand in revenge, causing Meleager's immediate death.8

**ACT IV, SCENE I.**

A Room in the Palace.

Enter Videna sola.

Viden. Why should I live, and linger forth my time
In longer life to double my distress?
O me, most woeful wight, whom no mishap
Long ere this day could have bereaved hence.

Mought not these hands by fortune or by fate
Have pierced this breast, and life with iron reft?

Or in this palace here, where I so long
Have spent my days, could not that happy hour
Once, once have hap’d, in which these hugy frames
With death by fall might have oppressed me?
Or should not this most hard and cruel soil,
So oft where I have pressed my wretched steps,
Sometime had 

ruth of mine 
accursèd life,

To rend in twain [and] swallow me therein?  
So had my bones possessed now in peace

Their happy grave within the closed ground,
And greedy worms had gnaun this pinèd heart

Without my feeling pain: so should not now
This living breast remain the ruthful tomb

Wherein my heart velden to death is graved:

Nor dreary thoughts with pangs of pining grief,

My doleful mind had not afflicted thus. —
O my belovèd son! O my sweet child!
My dear Ferrex, my joy, my life’s delight!
Is my belovèd son, is my sweet child,
My dear Ferrex, my joy, my life’s delight,
Murdered with cruèl death? O hateful wretch!
O heinous traitor both to Heaven and earth!
Thou Porrex, thou this damned deed hast wrought;
Thou Porrex, thou shall dearly by the same:
Traitor to kin and kind, to sire and me,
To thine own flesh, and traitor to thyself:
The gods on thee in hell shall wreak their wrath,
And here in earth this hand shall take revenge
On thee, Porrex, thou false and caitiff wight:
If after blood so eager were thy thirst,
And murderous mind had so possessèd thee;
If such hard heart of rock and stony flint
Lived in thy breast, that nothing else could like
Thy cruèl tyrant’s thought but death and blood:
Wild savage beasts, mought not their slaughter serve
To feed thy greedy will, and in the midst
Of their entrails to stain thy deadly hands
With blood deserved, and drink thereof thy fill?
Or if nought else but death and blood of man
Mought please thy lust, could none in Britain land
Whose heart be torn out of his loving breast
With thine own hand, or work what death thou wouldst,
Suffice to make a sacrifice to pease
That deadly mind and murderous thought in thee,
But he who in the self-same womb was wrapped
Where thou in dismal hour receivèdst life?
Or if needs, needs this hand must slaughter make,
Moughtest thou not have reached a mortal wound,
And with thy sword have pierced this cursèd womb
That the accursèd Porrex brought to light,
And given me a just reward therefore?
So Ferrex yet sweet life mought have enjoyed,
And to his agèd father comfort brought,
With some young son in whom they both might live.
But whereunto waste I this ruthful speech,
To thee that hast thy brother’s blood thus shed?
Shall I still think that from this womb thou sprong?

= "pity on my". The use of mine for my was common until the end of the 18th century.¹
= split apart.
= would have.
= wasted with grief.²
= pitiful.
= yielded. = buried. The old use of grave as a verb was still common in the Elizabethan era.¹
= wasting.²
= grieving, full of sorrow.¹

26: the repetition of line 24 here is no doubt a printer’s error.

= worked, brought about.
= pay or atone for.³
= family and nature. = ie. "your father and mother".
= avenge.
= wretched creature.²,⁵
= sharp.⁴
= satisfy, please.²

41-44: basically, "couldn't you satisfy your bloodlust with hunting?"

mought = might.

= nothing.
= ie. "satisfy your bloodlust".
= appease.
= ie. Ferrex.
= "(that) inauspicious".

= it was a common Elizabethan motif to suggest that people "lived on" in some sense through their descendents.
61: ie. "but why am I wasting my pitiful breath?"

63: "sprang", a common alternate form.
That I thee bear? or take thee for my son?
No, traitor, no; I thee refuse for mine;
Murderer, I thee renounce, thou are not mine:
Never, O wretch, this womb conceivèd thee,
Nor never bode I painful throses for thee.

Changeling to me thou art, and not my child,

Nor to no wight that spark of pity knew:
Ruthless, unkind, monster of nature’s work,
Thou never suckèd the milk of woman’s breast,
But from thy birth the cruël tiger’s teats
Have nurséd thee, nor yet of flesh and blood
Formed is thy heart, but of hard iron wrought;
And wild and desert woods bred thee to life.
But canst thou hope to ‘scape my just revenge?
Or that these hands will not be wroke on thee?
Dost thou not know that Ferrex’ mother lives,
That lovèd him more dearly then herself?
And doth she live, and is not vengèd on thee?

Exit Videnä.

ACT IV, SCENE II.
The Court of Gorboduc.

Enter Gorboduc and Arostus.

Gorb. We marvel much whereto this lingering stay
Falls out so long: Porrex unto our court,
By order of our letters is returned:
And Eubulus received from us by hest
At his arrival here, to give him charge
Before our presence straight to make repair,
And yet we have no word whereof he stays.

Aros. Lo where he comes, and Eubulus with him.

Enter Eubulus and Porrex.

Eubu. According to your highness’ hest to me,
Here have I Porrex brought, even in such sort
As from his wearied horse he did alight,
For that your grace did will such haste therein.

Gorb. We like and praise this speedy will in you,
To work the thing that to your charge we gave. —
Porrex, if we so far should swerve from kind,
And from those bounds which law of nature sets,
As thou hast done by vile and wretched deed,
In cruel murder of thy brother’s life;
Our present hand could stay no longer time,
But straight should bathe this blade in blood of thee
As just revenge of thy detested crime.
No; we should not offend the law of kind

If now this sword of ours did slay thee here:
For thou hast murdered him, whose heinous death
Even nature’s force doth move us to revenge
By blood again; but justice forceth us
To measure death for death, thy due desert:
Yet sith thou art our child, and sith as yet

In this hard case what word thou canst allege
For thy defense, by us hath not been heard,
We are content to stay our will for that
Which justice bids us presently to work;
And give thee leave to use thy speech at full,
If aught thou have to lay for thine excuse.

Porr. Neither, O king, I can or will deny,
But that this hand from Ferrex life hath reft:
Which fact how much my doleful heart doth wail,
O! would it mought as full appear to sight
As inward grief doth pour it forth to me.
So yet perhaps, if ever ruthful heart
Melting in tears within a manly breast,
Through deep repentance of his bloody fact,
If ever grief, if ever woeful man
Might move regret with sorrow of his fault,
I think the torment of my mournful case
Known to your grace, as I do feel the same,
Would force even Wrath herself to pity me.
But as the water troubled with the mud
Shews not the face which else the eye should see,
Even so your ireful mind with stirrèd thought
Cannot so perfectly discern my cause.
But this unhap, amongst so many heaps

= desire.
= Gorboduc continues to use the royal "we".
= responsibility.
20: ie. "if I was to behave in such an unnatural manner".

= hold back, delay. = archaic form of longer.
= Gorboduc gestures to or raises his sword here.

27: No = the sense is "indeed no".
should not = ie. would not.
kind = nature or familial relationships.

= ie. repay.
33-39: only because Porrex is Gorboduc’s own son will the king give him a chance to explain his actions.
sith = since; line 33’s first sith appears in the 1570 quarto as sithens, which we emend to 1565’s sith for the sake of the meter.

= restrain, delay. = desire. = ie. his killing Porrex.
= permission.
= anything.

= bad deed.
44-45: ie. "if only you could see the grief I genuinely feel inside."
= "a compassionate".
= deed.

= Wrath, in whom pity would normally be absent, is personified.
54-55: ie. muddy water does not show a reflection.
= full of ire (not surprisingly!), angry.
= clearly. = ie. "perceive why I did this act."

58: unhap = misfortune, probably archaic by this time;
unhap was generally being replaced by mishap in the 1560’s.
so many heaps = the sense is "such a multitude (of
misluck; even though *many heaps* may be redundant, as *heaps* alone means "a large quantity", the expression became a common one.

= wasting. = act.

= ie. can expect, = wailing or lamenting.
= "save (my)". = call or appeal (archaic).
= record as a noun was often stressed on the second syllable.

= full of thought, ie. anxious.

70: *your grace’s* = *your grace* was a title used to address the members of the royal family in England until the time of Henry VIII, but subsequently only used for dukes and duchesses. 

*doom* = judgment.

72: *Nor never* = double negatives were used as intensifiers in the Elizabethan era. 

*spend* = expend.

= petition or act of begging.

74-75: *I mean…death* = ie. "in refusing to beg for my life, I don't mean to suggest that I have no worry or fear over dying".

= ie. "my".

41-80: **Porrex’s speech:** Porrex has approached his father the right way: he admits his guilt, offers no excuse, and gladly submits himself to his father’s judgment, and he is willing to accept the punishment he deserves.

88-94: Porrex reminds his father that he never asked or sought to be given his own kingdom to reign over, but that Gorboduc instead gave it to him out of benevolence alone.

= strived to gain.
= ie. acted through.
= sprang.
= directed at or inclined towards.
= complained, felt discontent over.
= "my equal reign or kingship".
Seeing that realm which by descent should grow
Wholly to him, allotted half to me?
Even in your highness’ court he now remains,
And with my brother then in nearest place,
Who can record what proof thereof was shewed,
And how my brother’s envious heart appeared.

Yet I that judged it my part to seek
His favour and good-will, and loath to make
Your highness know the things which should have brought
Grief to your grace, and your offence to him,
Hoping my earnest suit should soon have won
A loving heart within a brother’s breast,
Wrought in that sort, that for a pledge of love
And faithful heart he gave to me his hand.
This made me think that he had banished quite
All rancour from his thought, and bare to me
Such hearty love, as I did owe to him:
But after once we left your grace’s court,
And from your highness’ presence lived apart,
This egal rule still, still, did grudge him so,

That now those envious sparks which erst lay raked
In living cinders of disseeming breast,
Kindled so far within his heart disdain,

That longer could he not refrain from proof
Of secret practice to deprive me life

By poison’s force; and had bereft me so.

If mine own servant, hirèd to this fact,
And moved by troth with hate to work the same,
In time had not bewrayed it unto me.

When thus I saw the knot of love unknot,
All honest league and faithful promise broke,
The law of kind and troth thus rent in twain,
His heart on mischief set, and in his breast
Black treason hid; then, then, did I despair
That ever time could win him friend to me:
Then saw I how he smiled with slaying knife
Wrapped under cloak; then saw I deep deceit
Lurk in his face, and death prepared for me:

99-102: this is an assertion, not a question: "as we speak,
there is a man in your court (presumably meaning
Dordan) who was with Ferrex and can reveal to you
the envy and malice that was in his heart."

103-09: Yet I...that sort = "yet I did not want to be the
one to upset you by telling you the evil things Ferrex
did, but rather I sought my brother out to try to regain
his love for me."

= worked in that manner, ie. approached his brother in
this way.

110-113: he gave...to him = Porrex suggests that he and
Ferrex appeared to be on amicable terms when they
departed the court to take over their respective king-
doms.

116: still = always.
did grudge him = caused him to be discontented; this
interesting use of grudge as a verb lingered on throughout
the 19th century.¹

117-9: Smith identifies a custom (called raking a fire) of
keeping a fire alive at night by covering it with ashes or
cinders.¹ Porrex's point is that like a fire quietly smoldering
underneath raked ashes, resentment lingered in Ferrex's heart
even as he made an outward show of amity towards his
brother.
erst = first.
raked = covered.¹

= plot.

122: By poison’s force = now Porrex claims that Ferrex was
going to poison him!
had bereft me so = "would have in fact robbed me
of my life".

= ie. Tyndar. = here disyllabic: HI-red.
= "loyalty (to me)".
= ie. "exposed (bewrayed) Ferrex's plans to kill me".

= untied, unraveled.¹
= alliance.
= loyalty. = torn apart.

132-3: Then saw...cloak = a nice metaphorical image of
false friendship.
Even nature moved me then to hold my life

More dear to me than his, and bad this hand,
Since by his life my death must needs ensue,
And by his death my life to be preserved,
To shed his blood, and seek my safety so;
And wisdom willèd me, without protract,
In speedy wise to put the same in ure.
Thus have I told the cause that movèd me
To work my brother’s death, and so I yield
My life, my death, to judgment of your grace.

---

Gorb. Oh cruël wight, should any cause prevail
To make thee stain thy hands with brother’s blood?
But what of thee we will resolve to do
Shall yet remain unknown: thou in the mean
Shalt from our royal presence banished be,
Until our princely pleasure furder shall
To thee be showed; depart therefore our sight,
Accursèd child!

[Exit Porrex.]

What cruël destiny,
What froward fate hath sorted us this chance,
That even in those, where we should comfort find,
Where our delight now in our agèd days
Should rest and be, even there our only grief
And deepest sorrowsto abridge our life,
Most pining cares and deadly thoughts do grow.

Aros. Your grace should now, in these grave years of yours
Have found ere this the price of mortal joys;

How short they be; how fading here in earth;
How full of change; how brittle our estate;
Of nothing sure, save only of the death
To whom both man and all the world doth owe
Their end at last; neither shall nature’s power
In other sort against your heart prevail,
Than as the naked hand whose stroke assays
The armèd breast where force doth light in vain.

Gorb. Many can yield right grave and sage advice

135-6: *Even nature...than his* = "I naturally felt it more important to preserve my life, even if it was at the expense of his".

= bade, ie. enjoined.² = Porrex raises his right, or sword, hand.

= delay.³
= way. = ie. his plan to kill Ferrex. = into action.¹

86-144: Porrex's speech: we can never know how genuine Porrex's contrition really is; but we may suspect that Porrex is gambling that Gorboduc will be unwilling to execute his only remaining son, no matter how angry or upset he is over Porrex's murder of Ferrex; Porrex first thought of this line of reasoning in Act II.ii.66-68.

= person.

148-9: *But what...unknown* = "my decision over what to do about this situation will come at a later time".

= meantime.

= further.

155: stage direction added by Smith.

= contrary.² = "allotted to me this falling out of events".²
= ie. "in those people".

= the sense of this clause is simply "only".
= cut short.
= wasting or consuming anxieties.

165-6: a sentence of regret: Arostus is ruing the fact that now that he is in his old age, when he should able to live in ease and contentment, Gorboduc should discover the price that must be paid for any happiness we have on earth.

*Your* = read as "That your".
*ere this* = before now.

= condition.

= another way.
= attempts (to pierce).
= land or strike.

176-182: Gorboduc is bitter and sarcastic in this speech.
Of patient spirit to others wrapped in woe,

And can in speech both rule and conquer kind:

Who if by proof they might feel nature’s force,
Would show themselves men as they are indeed,

Which now will needs be gods. But what doth mean

The sorrow cheer of her that here doth come?

Enter Marcella.

Marc. O, where is ruth? or where is pity now?
Whither is gentle heart and mercy fled?
Are they exiled out of our stony breasts,
Never to make return? Is all the world
Drownèd in blood, and sunk in cruélty?
If not in women mercy may be found,
If not, alas, within the mother’s breast,
To her own child, to her own flesh and blood;
If ruth be banished thence; if pity there
May have no place; if there no gentle heart
Do live and dwell, where should we seek it then?

Gorb. Madam, alas, what means your woeful tale?

Marc. O silly woman I; why to this hour
Have kind and fortune thus deferred my breath
That I should live to see this doleful day?
Will ever wight believe that such hard heart
Could rest within the cruël mother’s breast?
With her own hand to slay her only son?
But out, alas, these eyes beheld the same:
They saw the dreary sight, and are become
Most ruthless records of the bloody fact.
Porrex, alas, is by his mother slain,
And with her hand, a woeful thing to tell,
While slumb’ring on his careful bed he rests,
His heart stabbed in with knife is reft of life.

Gorb. O Eubulus, O, draw this sword of ours,
And pierce this heart with speed. O hateful light,
O loathsome life, O sweet and welcome death!

176-7: “it’s easy for others to advise someone in despair to be patient”.
spirit = spirit.

178: ie. “and can in doing so overcome distraught feelings with words alone.”
kind = nature.

179-180 = ie. if those who breezily give others advice were to find themselves in a situation in which events had turned so brutally against them, they would show indeed that they are only men - that they are as weak in spirit or lacking in fortitude as any other mere mortal.

= ie. “who now act like gods.” The idea is that only gods can be so superhuman as to be able to suppress such cripplingly strong emotions.

= sorrowful countenance or expression.16

Entering character: Marcella is a noble woman serving as Queen Videna’s lady-in-waiting, a position of honour.

= mercy or pity.
= to where.

= from there.

= foolish or weak.
= nature. = "prolonged my life".1
= humanity.

= an exclamation of grief.1
= gory or bloody, a very ancient meaning for dreary.1
= witnesses.1 = criminal deed.

= full of cares or worries.

184-212: Marcella’s Entrance and Speech: here is another example of Compression of Time; Marcella’s entrance and announcement that Videna has slain Porrex occurs a mere 22½ lines of speech after Porrex leaves the stage.
Dear Eubulus, work this we thee beseech.

Eubu. Patient your grace, perhaps he liveth yet, With wound received, but not of certain death.

Gorb. O let us then repair unto the place, And see if Porrex live, or thus be slain.

Marc. Alas, he liveth not! it is too true. That with these eyes, of him a peerless prince, Son to a king, and in the flower of youth, Even with a twink a senseless stock I saw.

[Exeunt Gorboduc and Eubulus.]

Aros. O damnèd deed!

Marc. But hear his ruthless end: The noble prince, pierced with the sudden wound, Out of his wretched slumber hastily start, Whose strength now failing, straight he overthrew. When in the fall his eyes even now unclosed Beheld the queen, and cried to her for help. 
We then, alas, the ladies which that time Did there attend, seeing that heinous deed, And hearing him oft call the wretched name Of mother, and to cry to her for aid, Whose direful hand gave him the mortal wound, Pitying (alas, for nought else could we do) His ruthless end, ran to the woeful bed, Dispoiled straight his breast, and all we might, Wipèd in vain with napkins next at hand The sudden streams of blood that flushèd fast Out of the gaping wound. O, what a look! O, what a ruthless, steadfast eye, methought He fixed upon my face, which to my death Will never part from me! when with a braid, A deep-fet sigh he gave, and therewithal Clasping his hands, to Heaven he cast his sight; And straight pale death pressing within his face, The flying ghost his mortal corpse forsook.

Aros. Never did age bring forth so vile a fact!

Marc. O hard and cruel hap, that thus assigned Unto so worthy a wight so wretched end: But most hard cruel heart, that could consent To lend the hateful destinies that hand, By which, alas, so heinous crime was wrought! O queen of adamant! O marble breast! If not the favour of his comely face,
If not his princely cheer and countenance,
His valiant active arms, his manly breast,
If not his fair and seemly personage,
His noble limbs, in such proportion cast
As would have rapt a silly woman’s thought; –
If this mought not have moved thy bloody heart,
And that most cruèl hand, the wretched weapon
Even to let fall, and kissed him in the face,

With tears for ruth to reave such one by death:
Should nature yet consent to slay her son?
O mother, thou to murder thus thy child?
From Jove with justice must with lightning flames
Ah, noble prince, how oft have I beheld
Thee mounted on thy fierce and trampling steed,
Shining in armour bright before the tilt,

And with thy mistress’ sleeve tied on thy helm,
And charge thy staff to please thy lady’s eye,
That bowed the head-piece of thy friendly foe?
How oft in arms on horse to bend the mace?
How oft in arms on foot to break the sword?
Which never now these eyes may see again.

Aros. Madam, alas, in vain these plaints are shed,
Rather with me depart, and help to suage
The thoughtful griefs that in the agèd king
Must needs by nature grow by death of this
His only son, whom he did hold so dear.

Marc. What wight is that which saw that I did see,
And could refrain to wail with plaint and tears?
Not I, alas, that heart is not in me:
But let us go, for I am grieved anew,
To call to mind the wretched father’s woe.

Chorus. When greedy lust in royal seat to reign

Hath reft all care of gods and eke of men,
And cruèl heart, wrath, treason and disdain,

Behold how mischief wide herself displays,

= molded.
= enraptured, captured the heart of. = foolish.

273-5: Marcella apostrophizes to the absent Videna here: she wonders how it was possible for the queen not to be moved to drop her weapon and shower kisses on her son’s face, even after having stabbed him.

mought (line 273) = might.

= pity. = rob.

= jousting tournament; such elements of medieval romance described by Marcella throughout this speech are obviously anachronistic (Cauthen, p. 57).¹⁵

= helmet. The sleeve is attached to the helmet as a favour. Early sleeves, notes the OED, were separate articles of clothing which could be worn with or without a top.

= ie. level his lance (Cauthen, p. 57).¹⁵

= bent.¹ = helmet.

= aim or direct his weapon.

mace = a heavy club, possibly with a metal, sometimes spiked, head.¹

= laments.

= allay, an alternate form of assuage.

= sorrowful.¹

305f: The final Chorus returns to the 6-line stanzas, except for the second stanza (lines 312-321), which has 10 lines.

lust = desire.

= robbed. = also.
And with the brother’s hand the brother slays.
When blood thus shed doth stain the Heaven’s face
Crying to Jove for vengeance of the deed,
The mighty god even moveth from his place,
    With wrath to wreak; then sends he forth with speed
The dreadful Furies, daughters of the night,
    With serpents girt, carrying the whip of ire,
With heare of stinging snakes, and shining bright
    With flames and blood, and with a brand of fire:
These for revenge of wretched murder done,
Do make the mother kill her only son.
Blood asketh blood, and death must death requite:
    Jove by his just and everlasting doom
Justly hath ever so requited it;
The times before record, and times to come
    Shall find it true, and so doth present proof
Present before our eyes for our behoof.
O happy wight that suffers not the snare
    Of murderous mind to tangle him in blood;
And happy he, that can in time beware
    By others’ harms, and turn it to his good:
But woe to him, that fearing not t’ offend,
Doth serve his lust, and will not see the end.

315-8: the chorus returns to the image of the Furies, who corporeally appeared in the Dumb Show at the beginning of this Act; the sisters were sometimes described as daughters of the mythological god Night. Compare the descriptive language here with that of the Dumb Show, lines 3-8.
Line 317 has an extra syllable; perhaps carrying should be pronounced as a disyllable: carr-ying.
heare (line 318) = old variation of hair.

= work his vengeance.

= repay.
= judgment.

= this word dating from the 13th century means "benefit".
= fortunate man.
= the sense is "learned from".

305-335: **Rhyming Words:** the fact that the lines in the Chorus were meant to rhyme is evidence of how the sounds of vowels have changed over the centuries; in 1565, the following pairs of words from the Chorus would have rhymed, or at least come much closer to rhyming than they do in modern English: requite - it, doom - come, blood - good.
ACT V.

THE ORDER AND SIGNIFICATION OF THE DUMB SHOW BEFORE THE FIFTH ACT.

First the drums and flutes begin to sound, during which there comes forth upon the stage a company of harquebusiers and of armed men, all in order of battle. These, after their pieces discharge, and that the armed men three times march about the stage, depart, and then the drums and flutes cease.

Hereby is signified tumults, rebellions, arms and civil wars to follow, as fell in the realm of Great Britain, which by the space of fifty years and more, continued in civil war between the nobility after the death of King Gorboduc and of his issues, for want of certain limitation in the succession of the crown, till the time of Dunwallo Molmutius, who reduced the land to monarchy.

= a harquebus was an early long gun, and a harquebusier was a soldier armed with such a weapon.¹

= for.

11: issues = children. 11-12: want of certain limitation in = ie. lack of provision for.¹

13-14: Dunwallo...monarchy = after the royal family had been completely wiped out, Britain succumbed to civil war “for a long space”, eventually splitting into separate kingdoms. It was up to Dunwallo Molmutius, a prince of the royal family of Cornwall, to lead an army which defeated the other kings of Britain, and reunite the island under a single ruler (See Evans, p. 36-37).⁶

monarchy (line 14) = used here literally to indicate that Britain was returned to rule under a single king.

ACT V, SCENE I.

A Council of the King's Lords after the murder of King and Queen.

Enter Clotyn, Mandud, Gwenard, Fergus and Eubulus.

Setting: once again, important action has taken place off-stage between Acts: Gorboduc and Videna are dead, killed by outraged mobs.

Entering Characters: the first four named gentleman are dukes, the leading nobility of Britain.

Clotyn is the Duke of Cornwall, perhaps the south-west quadrant of England; Sugden⁵⁰ tells us that Cornwall actually remained an independent kingdom long after the rest of the isles had been captured by the Angles and other Dark Age tribes, not falling under the invaders' rule till the 10th century.

Mandud is the Duke of Loegris, a region which comprises perhaps the central, east and south-east regions of Britain. The exact extent of all the dukes' lands is unclear; according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, the first British king Brute divided the island into three sections and allotted them to his three sons, the three realms being Loegria (the central part of the island, says Geoffrey), Camber (present day Wales) and Albany (modern Scotland).

Gwenard is the Duke of Camberland, which includes modern-day Wales at least.

Fergus is the Duke of Albany, which comprises modern Scotland.

Clot. Did ever age bring forth such tyrant’s hearts?
The brother hath bereft the brother’s life;  
The mother she hath dyed her cruel hands  
In blood of her own son, and now at last  
The people, lo, forgetting troth and love,  
Contemning quite both law and loyal heart,  
Even they have slain their sovereign lord and queen.

**Mand.** Shall this their traitorous crime unpunished rest?  
Even yet they cease not, carried out with rage,  
In their rebellious routs, to threaten still  
A new bloodshed unto the prince’s kin,  
To slay them all, and to uproot the race  
Both of the king and queen, so are they moved  
With Porrex’s death, wherein they falsely charge  
The guiltless king without desert at all,  
And traitorously have murdered him therefore,  
And eke the queen.

**Gwen.** Shall subjects dare with force  
To work revenge upon their prince’s fact?  
Admit the worst that may, as sure in this  
The deed was foul, the queen to slay her son,  
Shall yet the subject seek to take the sword,  
Arise against his lord, and slay his king?  
O wretched state, where those rebellious hearts  
Are not rent out even from their living breasts,  
And with the body thrown onto the fowls  
As carrion food, for terror of the rest.

**Ferg.** There can no punishment be thought too great  
For this so grievous crime: let speed therefore  
Be used therein, for it behooveth so.

**Eubu.** Ye all, my lords, I see, consent in one,  
And I as one consent with ye in all.  
I hold it more than need, with sharpest law  
To punish this tumultuous bloody rage:  
For nothing more may shake the common state  
Than sufferance of uproars without redress;  
Whereby how soon kingdoms of mighty power,  
After great conquests made, and flourishing  
In fame and wealth, have been to ruin brought;  
I pray to Jove that we may rather wail  
Such hap in them, than witness in ourselves.  
Eke fully with the duke my mind agrees,  
That no cause serves, whereby the subject may  
Call to accompt the doings of his prince,  
Much less in blood by sword to work revenge,  
No more than may the hand cut off the head,  
In act nor speech, no: not in secret thought  
The subject may rebel against his lord,
Or judge of him that sits in Caesar's seat.

With grudging mind to damn those he mislikes.

Though kings forget to govern as they ought,
Yet subjects must obey as they are bound.
But now, my lords, before ye farther wade,

Or spend your speech, what sharp revenge shall fall
By justice' plague on these rebellious wights;
Methinks, ye rather should first search the way
By which in time, the rage of this uproar
Mought be repressed, and these great tumults ceased.
Even yet the life of Britain land doth hang
In traitor’s balance of unequal weight;
Think not, my lords, the death of Gorbonuc,
Nor yet Videna's blood will cease their rage:
Even our own lives, our wives and children dear,
Our country, dearest of all, in danger stands
Now to be spoiled; now, now made desolate,
For, give once sway unto the people’s lusts,
To rush forth on, and stay them not in time,
And as the stream that rolleth down the hill,
So will they headlong run with raging thoughts
From blood to blood, from mischief unto moe.
To ruin of the realm, themselves and all:
So giddy are the common people's minds,
So glad of change, more wav’ring than the sea.
Ye see, my lords, what strength these rebels have;
What hugy number is assembled still:
For though the traitorous fact for which they rose
Be wrought and done, yet lodge they still in field;

So that how far their furies yet will stretch
Great cause we have to dread. That we may seek
By present battle to repress their power,
Speed must we use to levy force therefore; For either they forthwith will mischief work, Or their rebellious roars forthwith will cease: These violent things may have no lasting long. Let us therefore use this for present help: Persuade by gentle speech, and offer grace, With gift of pardon, save unto the chief, And that upon condition that forthwith They yield the captains of their enterprise To bear such guerdon of their traitorous fact, As may be both due vengeance to themselves, And wholesome terror to posterity. This shall, I think, scatter the greatest part That now are holden with desire of home, Wearied in field with cold of winter's nights, And some, no doubt, stricken with dread of law. When this is once proclaimèd, it shall make The captains to mistrust the multitude, Whose safety bids them to betray their heads; And so much more, because the rascal routs, In things of great and perilous attempts, Are never trusty to the noble race. And while we treat and stand on terms of grace, We shall both stay their fury's rage the while, And eke gain time, whose only help sufficeth Withouten war to vanquish rebel's power. In the meanwhile, make you in readiness Such band of horsemen as ye may prepare: Horsemen, you know, are not the common's strength, But are the force and store of noble men, Whereby th’ unchosen and unarmèd sort Of skillless rebels, whom none other power But number makes to be of dreadful force, With sudden brunt may quickly be oppressed. = raise an army.

90: "in the meantime, here is what we should do".

91-92: offer a general pardon to all the rebels, except for the leaders; this was the typical approach taken by kings in all of the historical dramas of the era, such as in John Ford's Perkin Warbeck and Shakespeare's Henry VI, Part II, and Richard III.

= immediately.¹
= ie. their leaders.
= ie. receive. = reward. = deeds.

97: ie. "and as a warning to those in the future who may consider rebelling against their monarch."

98-101: this is great psychology on the part of Eubulus: having initially joined the rebellion in a fit of irrational frenzy, most of the rabble will quickly tire of the escapade, and will look for an excuse (in this case, a pardon) to go home.

102-4: a general pardon will in turn make the leaders of the rebellion less trusting of their followers, who they now realize have a strong incentive to turn them over to the royal army!

heads = leaders, with perhaps a secondary reference to the heads the leaders can expect to lose.

= wretched rabble.
106-7: "when it comes to momentous and dangerous schemes, can never be trusted by their betters".

108: ie. "so that by offering a general pardon".

treat = negotiate.

stand on terms of grace = "insist on the conditions of our offer".

= mollify.

110: eke = also.

110-1: whose only...power = "which will allow us to suppress the rebellion while preventing further bloodshed."

withouten = without (archaic).

= ie. a cavalry force.

114-5: cavalry is always made up of noblemen, never of those of lower rank.

= collection.

117-8: whom none...force = the rabble, being untrained in war, is dangerous only because of its large numbers.
And if this gentle means of proffered grace,
With stubborn hearts cannot so far avail
As to assuage their desperate courages.
Than do I wish such slaughter to be made,
As present age and eke posterity
May be adrad with horror of revenge,
That justly than shall on these rebels fall:
This is, my lords, the sum of mine advice.

Clot. Neither this case admits debate at large;
And though it did, this speech that hath been said
Hath well abridged the tale I would have told.

Fully with Eubulus do I consent
In all that he hath said: and if the same
To you, my lords, may seem for best advice,
I wish that it should straight be put in ure.

Mand. My lords, than let us presently depart,
And follow this that liketh us so well.

[Exeunt all except Fergus.]

Ferg. If ever time to gain a kingdom here
Were offered man, now it is offered me.
The realm is reft both of their king and queen;
The offspring of the prince is slain and dead:
No issue now remains: the heir unknown;
The people are in arms and mutinies;
The nobles they are busied how to cease
These great rebellious tumults and uproars;
And Britain land now desert left alone,
Amid these broils uncertain where to rest,
Offers herself unto that noble heart
That will or dare pursue to bear her crown.

Shall I, that am the Duke of Albany,
Descended from that line of noble blood,
Which hath so long flourished in worthy fame
Of valiant hearts, such as in noble breasts
Of right should rest above the baser sort,
Refuse to venture life to win a crown?

Whom shall I find emnies that will withstand
My fact herein, if I attempt by arms
To seek the same now in these times of broil?

120: ie. "and if this offer of a general pardon".
= ambitions.

= archaic variation on adread, meaning "terrified". ¹

129-131: "There is no time for a protracted debate; but even if there were, Eubulus has spoken so well that there is no need for me to go on at length just to agree with him."

= agree.³

= into action.²

= ie. this plan. = pleases.²

140: stage direction added by editor; Fergus' following speech is clearly a soliloquy.

= "robbed"; reft is the past tense of the verb reave, which appears, together with its cognate bereave, an even dozen times in this play. Interestingly, reft and bereft also appear a combined total of exactly a dozen times.

= king; note also that offspring is treated as a singular word, with is.

= children or descendants.

= barren, or like a wilderness.¹

= Britain land is personified.

154-5: according to Geoffrey, the Duke of Albany was directly descended from Albanactus, the son of Brute.

= by right. = ie. stand. = lower, meaner.

= "risk my life".

160-2: "who would stand up against me should I take advantage of the instability in Britain to grab the crown for myself?" The Duke seems to be trying to talk himself into seizing the moment.

emnies = enemies; enemy sometimes was written beginning with emn- in this period, and fits the meter better here.

fact = deed.
These dukes’ power can hardly well appease
The people that already are in arms:

But if perhaps my force be once in field,
Is not my strength in power above the best
Of all these lords now left in Britain land?
And though they should match me with power of men,
Yet doubtful is the chance of battles joined:

If victors of the field we may depart,

Ours is the sceptre then of Great Britain:

If slain amid the plain this body lie,
Mine enemies yet shall not deny me this,
But that I died giving the noble charge,
To hazard life for conquest of a crown.

Forthwith therefore will I in post depart
To Albany, and raise in armour there
All power I can: and here my secret friends,
By secret practice shall solicit still,
To seek to win to me the people’s hearts.

[Exit.]

ACT V, SCENE II.
A Council of the King’s Lords.

Enter Eubulus.

1 Eubu. O Jove, how are these people’s hearts abused?
What blind fury thus headlong carries them?
That though so many books, so many rolls

4 Of ancient time, record what grievous plagues
Light on these rebels aye, and though so oft
Their ears have heard their aged fathers tell
What just reward these traitors still receive,
Yea, though themselves have seen deep death and blood,

8 By strangling cord and slaughter of the sword
To such assigned, yet can they not beware;
Yet cannot stay their lewd rebellious hands:

12 But suffering, lo, foul treason to distain
Their wretched minds, forget their loyal heart.
Reject all truth, and rise against their prince.

broil = disturbances.¹

163-4: the sense is that the other dukes have so inadequate an army that they are not likely to be able to quell the rebellion on their own.

168-9: "Even if the other dukes' army is as large as my own, you can never tell who will win a battle"; Fergus tries to convince himself that the great reward is worth the risk of a major engagement against the others.

= with we in this line and Ours in the next, Fergus, employing with undue anticipation the royal "we", means "I" and "mine" respectively.

= needless to say, the use of the term Great Britain here is terribly anachronistic, not coming into use until the early part of the second millenium.³

= "risk my life".
= immediately. = in haste.¹⁶

178: all power = ie. "as large an army as".

178-180: and here...hearts = remember that Fergus' home, Albany, is modern day Scotland; as Fergus heads way up north to raise an army, he will need partisans in the south to work to create a faction that will favour his bid for the throne.

= misled.

3-7: history records what terrible punishment is inevitably visited on rebels and traitors.

= descend on. = always.

= ie. punishment. = always.

= noose.

= halt. = base.³

= allowing. = disgrace.³

= ie. king.
A ruthful case, that those whom duty's bond,
Whom grafted law by nature, truth, and faith,
Bound to preserve their country and their king,
Even they should give consent thus to subvert
Thee, Britain land, and from thy womb should spring,
O native soil, those that will needs destroy
And ruin thee, and eke themselves in fine.
For lo, when once the dukes had offered grace
Of pardon sweet, the multitude, misled
By traitorous fraud of their ungracious heads,
One sort that saw the dangerous success
Of stubborn standing in rebellious war,
And knew the difference of prince's power
From headless number of tumultuous routs,
Whom common country's care, and private fear,
Taught to repent the terror of their rage,
Laid hands upon the captains of their band,
And brought them bound unto the mighty dukes:
And other sort, not trusting yet so well
The truth of pardon, or mistrusting more
Their own offense, than that they could conceive
Such hope of pardon for so foul misdeed;
Or for that their captains could not yield,
Who fearing to be yielded, fled before,
Stale home by silence of the secret night:
The third unhappy and enraged sort
Of desperate hearts, who, stained in prince's blood,
From traitorous furor could not be withdrawn
By love, by law, by grace, ne yet by fear,
By proffered life, nay yet by threatened death;
With minds hopeless of life, dreadless of death,
Careless of country, and aweless of God,
Stood bent to fight as furies did them move,
With violent death to close their traitorous life.
These all by power of horsemen were oppressed.
And with revenging sword slain in the field,
Or with the strangling cord hanged on the tree;
Where yet their carrion carcasses do preach,
The fruits that rebels reap of their uproars,
And of the murder of their sacred prince. −
But lo, where do approach the noble dukes,
By whom these tumults have been thus appeased.

25: "by the treasonous deception of the mob's wicked leaders"; Creeth, however, suggests that heads refers to the individual brains of the members of the rabble, so that ungracious heads instead means "unsophisticated minds".

26-33: one group (sort) of rebels, recognizing that they were really nothing more than a disorderly mob (tumultuous routs), and also anxious for Britain as well as secretly fearful of the consequences of their actions, turned their leaders over to the nobles.

success (line 26) = aftermath.\(^5\)

common country's care (line 30) = care for their country.

34-40: the leaders of a second portion of the rebels, no longer trusting their followers, ran away before the indecisive mob acted any further; the rebels then went home in turn themselves.

= give up.
= given up (to the authorities).
= stole (archaic).\(^1\)

41-49: the third part of the rebel armies kept on fighting.

unhappy = troublesome.\(^1\)

= ie. dissuaded.

= ie. saving their lives via a general pardon.

50: this last group of rebels was destroyed or overwhelmed (oppressed) by the government's army, which naturally fought from horseback. A small but skilled cavalry force will always defeat an untrained mob fighting on foot.

53-54: ie. their dead, swinging bodies speak a lesson to those who want to study what happens to rebels.

carrion carcasses = dead bodies which serve as food for vultures or other scavengers.

= ie. "here come".
Enter Clotyn, Mandud, Gwenard, and Arostus.

Clot. I think the world will now at length beware, And fear to put on arms against their prince.

Mand. If not? those treacherous hearts that dare rebel, Let them behold the wide and hugy fields With blood and bodies spread with rebels slain, The lofty trees clothed with the corpses dead, That, strangled with the cord, do hang thereon.

Aros. A just reward, such as all times before Have ever lotted to those wretched folks.

Gwen. But what means he that cometh here so fast?

Enter Nuntius.

Nunt. My lords, as duty and my truth doth move, And of my country work and care in me, That if the spending of my breath availed To do the service that my heart desires, I would not shun t' embrace a present death; So have I now in that wherein I thought My travail mought perform some good effect, Ventured my life to bring these tidings here. Fergus, the mighty Duke of Albany, Is now in arms, and lodgeth in the fields With twenty thousand men; hither he bends His speedy march, and minds t' invade the crown: Daily he gathereth strength, and spreads abroad, That to this realm no certain heir remains, That Britain land is left without a guide, That he the sceptre seeks for nothing else But to preserve the people and the land, Which now remain as ship without a stern. Lo, this is that which I have here to say.

Clot. Is this his faith? and shall he falsely thus Abuse the vantage of unhappy times? O wretched land, if his outrageous pride, His cruel and untempered willfulness, His deep dissembling shows of false pretence, Should once attain the crown of Britain land! Let us, my lords, with timely force resist The new attempt of this our common foe, As we would quench the flames of common fire.

Mand. Though we remain without a certain prince To wield the realm, or guide the wandering rule, Yet now the common mother of us all, Our native land, our country, that contains Our wives, children, kindred, ourselves, and all That ever is or may be dear to man,
Cries unto us to help ourselves and her.
Let us advance our powers to repress
This growing foe of all our liberties.

**Gwen.** Yea, let us so, my lords, with hasty speed—
And ye, O gods, send us the welcome death
To shed our blood in field, and leave us not
In loathsome life to linger out our days,
To see the hugy heaps of these unhaps
That now roll down upon the wretched land,
Where empty place of princely governance,
No certain stay now left of doubtless heir,
Thus leave this guideless realm an open prey
To endless storms and waste of civil war.

**Aros.** That ye, my lords, do so agree in one,
To save your country from the violent reign
And wrongfully usurpèd tyranny
Of him that threatens conquest of you all,
To save your realm, and in this realm yourselves
From foreign thraldom of so proud a prince,
Much do I praise; and I beseech the gods,
With happy honour to requite it you.

But O, my lords, sith now the heavens' wrath
Hath reft this land the issue of their prince,
Sith of the body of our late sovereign lord
Remains no moe, since the young kings be slain,
And of the title of descended crown
Uncertainly the divers minds do think
Even of the learned sort, and more uncertainly
Will partial fancy and affection deem;

But most uncertainly will climbing pride,
And hope of reign, withdraw to sundry parts
The doubtful right and hopeful lust to reign.

When once this noble service is achieved
For Britain land, the mother of ye all,
When once ye have with armed force repressed
The proud attempts of this Albanian prince,
That threatens thraldom to your native land,
When ye shall vanquishers return from field,
And find the princely state an open prey
To greedy lust and to usurping power;
Then, then, my lords, if ever kindly care

= armed forces.

120-1: note the alliteration in both these lines.
linger = linger.
= "enormous misfortunes (unhaps)".

123: ie. the throne has no sovereign to occupy it.
124: ie. no unambiguous chain of succession for the crown.

= enslavement by.

= since.
= taken from. = children. = ie. king.
138: one more line with an apparent extra syllable; none of the editors comment.
= no more.

140-2: *And of...learned sort* = even the educated class is unclear, and of various ideas, regarding how to determine who should be king.

= various.

142-3: *more uncertainly...deem* = judgment regarding the matter will be warped by biased imagination (*partial fancy*) and emotion (*affection*).

144-6: ie. an unfilled throne always invites those who are proud and ambitious to seek it for themselves.
sundry = uniquely spelled with a *u* instead of an *o* here.

= slavery.
= ie. shall as. = the battlefield.
Of ancient honour of your ancestors,
Of present wealth and noblesse of your stocks,

Yea, of the lives and safety yet to come
Of your dear wives, your children, and yourselves,

Might move your noble hearts with gentle ruth,
Then, then, have pity on the torn estate;

Then help to salve the wellnear hopeless sore;
Which ye shall do, if ye yourselves withhold

The slaying knife from your own mother’s throat:
Her shall you save, and you, and yours in her,

If ye shall all with one assent forbear
Once to lay hand, or take unto yourselves

The crown, by colour of pretended right,
Or by what other means soe’er it be,

Till first by common counsel of you all
In parliament, the regal diadem

Be set in certain place in governance;
In which your parliament, and in your choice,

Prefer the right, my lords, without respect
Of strength or friends, or whatsoever cause

That may set forward any other’s part;
For right will last, and wrong cannot endure:

Right, mean I his or hers, upon whose name
The people rest by mean of native line,

Or by the virtue of some former law
Already made their title to advance.

Such one, my lords, let be your chosen king;
Such one so born within your native land;

Such one prefer; and in no wise admit
The heavy yoke of foreign governance:

Let foreign titles yield to public wealth,
And with that heart wherewith ye now prepare

To withstand the proud invading foe,
With that same heart, my lords, keep out also

Unnatural thraldom of strangers’ reign,
Ne suffer you against the rules of kind,

Your mother land to serve a foreign prince.

[Exeunt all except Eubulus.]
Eubu. Lo, here the end of Brutus' royal line,
And, lo, the entry to the woeful wreck
And utter ruin of this noble realm.
The royal king, and eke his sons are slain;
No ruler rests within the regal seat;
The heir, to whom the sceptre longs, unknown;
That to each force of foreign prince's power,
Whom vantage of our wretched state may move
By sudden arms to gain so rich a realm;
And to the proud and greedy mind at home,
Whom blinded lust to reign leads to aspire,
Lo, Britain realm is left an open prey,
A present spoil by conquest to ensue.
Who seeth not now how many rising minds
Do feed their thoughts with hope to reach a realm?
And who will not by force attempt to win
So great a gain that hope persuades to have?
A simple colour shall for title serve.
Who wins the royal crown will want no right:
Nor such as shall display by long descent
A lineal race to prove himself a king.

In the meanwhile these civil arms shall rage,
And thus a thousand mischiefs shall unfold,
And far and near spread thee, O Britain land;
All right and law shall cease; and he that had
Nothing to-day, to-morrow shall enjoy
Great heaps of gold; and he that flowed in wealth,
Lo, he shall be bereft of life and all;
And happiest he that then possesseth least:
The wives shall suffer rape, the maids deflowered,
And children fatherless shall weep and wail;
With fire and sword thy native folk shall perish:
One kinsman shall bereave another life;
The father shall unwitting slay the son;
The son shall slay the sire, and know it not.
Women and maids the cruel soldiers' swords
Shall pierce to death, and silly children, lo,
That play[ing] in the streets and fields are found,
By violent hand shall close their latter day.
Whom shall the fierce and bloody soldiër
Reserve to life? whom shall he spare from death?
Even thou, O wretched mother, half alive,
Thou shalt behold thy dear and only child
Slain with the sword, while he yet sucks thy breast.
Lo, guiltless blood shall thus eachwhere be shed.
Thus shall the wasted soil yield forth no fruit,
But derth and famine shall possess the land.
The towns shall be consumed and burnt with fire;
The peopled cities shall wax desolate;
And thou, O Britain, whilom in renown,
Whilom in wealth and fame, shalt thus be torn,
Dismembered thus, and thus be rent in twain;
Thus wasted and defaced, spoiled and destroyed;
These be the fruits your civil wars will bring.
Hereto it comes, when kings will not consent
To grave advice, but follow willful will.
This is the end, when in fond princes’ hearts
Flattery prevails, and sage rede hath no place.
These are the plagues, when murder is the mean
To make new heirs unto the royal crown.
Thus wreak the gods, when that the mother’s wrath
Nought but the blood of her own child may suage.
These mischief spring when rebels will arise
To work revenge and judge their prince’s fact.
This, this ensues when noble men do fail
In loyal troth, and subjects will be kings:
And this doth grow, when, lo, unto the prince,
Whom death or sudden hap of life bereaves,
No certain heir remains, such certain heir
As not all only is the rightful heir,
But to the realm is so made known to be,
And truth thereby vested in subjects’ hearts,
To owe faith there, where right is known to rest.
Alas, in parliament what hope can be,
When is of parliament no hope at all?
Which, though it be assembled by consent,
Yet is not likely with consent to end;
While each one for himself, or for his friend
Against his foe, shall travail what he may.
While now the state left open to the man
That shall with greatest force invade the same,
Shall fill ambitious minds with gaping hope,
When will they once with yielding hearts agree?
Or in the while, how shall the realm be used?
No, no; then parliament should have been holden.
And certain heirs appointed to the crown
To stay the title of established right,
And plant the people in obedience,
While yet the prince did live, whose name and power
By lawful summons and authority
Might make a parliament to be of force,
And might have set the state in quiet stay:
But now, O happy man, whom speedy death
Deprives of life, ne is enforced to see
These hugy mischiefs and these miseries,
These civil wars, these murders, and these wrongs
Of justice, yet must God in fine restore
This noble crown unto the lawful heir:
For right will always live, and rise at length,
But wrong can never take deep root to last.

= in the end.¹

152-250: Eubulus' unbroken speech of 100 lines and 807 words may be the single longest speech in the entire Elizabethan canon. The longest single speech in Shakespeare's works, by contrast, is that of Richard in *King Henry VI, Part III*, Act III.ii, which contains a mere 575 words.

In John Lyly's c. 1590 play *Midas*, we find a single continuous prose speech that goes on for 737 words.

FINIS
Norton and Sackville's Invented Words

Like all of the writers of the era, Norton and Sackville made up words when they felt like it, usually by adding prefixes and suffixes to known words, combining words, or using a word in a way not yet used before. The following is a list of words and phrases that research suggests appear for the first time, or were used with a given meaning for the first time, in Gorboduc:

- Albanian (meaning Scottish)
- delightfulness
- descended (as an adjective, per the OED: unconfirmed)
- dumb show
- foreset (as a noun)
- hautboy
- ill-succeeding
- lustful (meaning vigorous)
- marble (first figurative use, meaning cold and unyielding, per the OED: unconfirmed)
- motherland
- overkindly
- random / randon (meaning to wander aimlessly)
- stand on terms
- traitor-prince
- unjoint (first use as a verb meaning to sever or separate something other than actual joints)
- unmastered

Collocations

Collocations are words that are commonly, conventionally and familiarly used together, but which when used collectively so do not rise to the level of what may be called an expression. All of the following collocations make their first appearance in Gorboduc, and were subsequently used by later writers, and some even continue to be used this day.

These collocations are in quotation marks to indicate an exactly worded formula that was reused regularly by later writers.

"abounding store"
"armed breast"
"black treason"
"bootless case"
"broken peace"
"careful charge"
"climbing mind"
"climbing pride"
"creeping death"
"divided hearts"
"face of reason"
"feeble / feebled / enfeebled limbs"
"flaming cart" (1565 quarto)
"flaming car" (1570 quarto)
"furrowed face"
"gaping wound"
(shared with another source as first appearing in 1565)
"hazard life"
(shared with another source as first appearing in 1565)
"kin and kind"
"levy force(s)"
"lingering stay"
"marble breast"
"mortal corpse"
"parched earth"
"partial eye"
"pleasing tale(s)"
"quiet pause"
"raging thoughts"
"rascal rout(s)"
"rebellious rout(s)"
"reft of life"
"rend in twain"
"royal seed"
"stony breast(s)"
"strangling cord"
"swelling breast"
"timely help"
"timely hour" (1570 quarto only)
"troubles manifold" (though "manifold troubles" had been in previous use)
"unquenched flames"
"win a crown"
"youthful lust"

**Norton and Sackville’s Archaic Words**

The following is a list of words used by the authors in *Gorboduc* that were likely already archaic by the time they wrote the play in the mid-16th century (see the discussion at the beginning of the play):

- adrad
- behight
- **bode** (past tense of bide)
- clepe
- derth (for dearth)
- eachwhere
- eke
- hastily
- helm
- lenger
- mought
- ne...ne
- **overthrow** (meaning “to fall down”)
- stale (for stole)
- unhap
- wight
- withouten
- woke
- yelden
FOOTNOTES

The footnotes in the play correspond as follows:
1. Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online.