

Skull Shop

The first skull I choose is yellow with age.

My father's sharp sword slashed a hole in its head.

A drawn-out death; the grass stained red.

They called this one '*Old Fortinbras*'.

This head talked once, long ago!

At least, that's how the whisper goes.

A bloody battle, a frenzied fray.

A murdered man, a darkened day.

God bless this poor skull,

Which looks like it might fade or fray.

Dusty, dusty; dust falls away!

A deformed piece, it seems,

The left ear all burnt in some commotion,

Poisoned with some curséd potion.

'*Hamlet, King of Denmark*': sleeping in an earthy bed.

Just a ghostly presence now. Oh, God... my father's dead.

A funny skull is this.

I can see him clearly – what a jest!

The entertainer at his best.

Pouring Rhenish on his own grave-digger's head.

A whoreson mad fellow, to be sure.

Cause of death? Hmm, '*premature*'.

'*Yorick*' has no gibes to give.

None do when they cease to live.

I seethe at this stupid spying skull.

Pretentious weasel, pompous rat,

For God's sake, the man was dead for a ducat!

It has a hooked, crooked nose.

He died needlessly, I suppose, and as did his son.

And his daughter, drowned beneath the beating sun.

And the hand holding him murdered him, his blood flowing like ink.

That was me, I think.

Ooh, here's a set of two!

'*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*', the same, if one omits

Some minor depressions and tiny chips,

From the many times they've been appraised

Then glanced at in unmasked distaste

(And then they're clumsily replaced).

And the hands holding them murdered them, changing those letters in a foolish blink.

That was me, I think.

The next skull is beautiful.
So pale! So sweet! So... cold.
Just like the lovely mind it used to hold.
This one's called '*Ophelia*'
With shadowed bone of an icy colour
And then the sockets, glowing duller
Than in her flowery life, all filled with regret.
The drowsy label is wet.

Alack, this poor skull '*Gertrude*';
Salty tearwater has eaten away at it.
My madness led to this, I must admit.
'*Damage due to sorrow and murky marital conscience.*'
I watch her, I see her, and the potion she sips!
You can almost see her poor parchéd poisoned lips.
But it's too late – the deed is done.
By the Lord, how my heart breaks for this one.

This skull I don't know what to make of.
An eerie skull, no doubt, no doubt;
Its non-existent eyes seem to follow me about.
This is a bloody skull, to be sure.
Labelled as '*Claudius*', thief of my father's queen!
He brought about the deaths of all the rest I've seen.
And the hand holding him murdered him with his own deadly drink.
That was me, I think.

Let's have a look at this one, shall we?
A fight worthy of the great god Mars;
He's all stuck through with foil scars.
Poor skull, this '*Laertes*', an unlucky one, I think.
I watched his sickly poisoned blood spread
When the tables turned. Oh, so much bloodshed!
And the hands holding him half-murdered him, and pushed him to the brink.
The greater half was me, I think.

This last one is interesting.
A skull that I have known for years
The cheeks that've borne so many tears.
The front is whole and clean,
But the cranium is rotting in the state.
Blacker even than the dark ink, one could debate.
'*Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*? My hope begins to sink...
Once, but long ago, that might have been me, I think.