



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE  
(1554–1616)  
Hamlet

Considering the great and well-deserved fame of his work, surprisingly little is known of William Shakespeare's life. Between 1585 and 1592, he left his birthplace of Stratford-upon-Avon for London to begin a career as playwright and actor. No dates of his professional career are recorded, however, nor can the order in which he composed his plays and poetry be determined with certainty. By 1594, he had established himself as a poet with two long works—*Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*; his more than 150 sonnets are supreme expressions of the form. His matchless reputation, though, rests on his works for the theater. Shakespeare produced perhaps thirty-five plays in twenty-five years, proving himself a master of every dramatic genre: tragedy (in works such as *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*); historical drama (for example, *Richard III* and *Henry IV*); comedy (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, and many more); and romance or "tragic-comedy" (in plays such as *The Tempest* and *Cymbeline*). Without question, Shakespeare is the most quoted, discussed, and beloved writer in English literature.

CHARACTERS

CLAUDIUS, *King of Denmark*  
HAMLET, *son of the former king and nephew to the present king*  
POLONIUS, *Lord Chamberlain*  
HORATIO, *friend of Hamlet*  
LAERTES, *son of Polonius*  
VOLTEMAND  
CORNELIUS  
ROSENCRANTZ  
GUILDENSTERN  
OSRIC  
A GENTLEMAN  
A PRIEST  
LORDS, LADIES, OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, SAILORS, MESSENGERS, AND ATTENDANTS

MARCELLUS } *officers*  
BERNARDO }  
FRANCISCO, *a soldier*  
REYNALDO, *servant to Polonius*  
PLAYERS  
TWO CLOWNS, *gravediggers*  
FORTINBRAS, *Prince of Norway*  
A NORWEGIAN CAPTAIN  
ENGLISH AMBASSADORS  
GERTRUDE, *Queen of Denmark, and mother of Hamlet*  
OPHELIA, *daughter of Polonius*  
GHOST OF HAMLET'S FATHER

SCENE: *The action takes place in or near the royal castle of Denmark at Elsinore.*

## ACT I

## Scene I

A guard station atop the castle. Enter BERNARDO and FRANCISCO, two sentinels.

BERNARDO: Who's there?

FRANCISCO: Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.

BERNARDO: Long live the king!

FRANCISCO: Bernardo?

5 BERNARDO: He.

FRANCISCO: You come most carefully upon your hour.

BERNARDO: 'Tis now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Francisco.

FRANCISCO: For this relief much thanks. 'Tis bitter cold,  
And I am sick at heart.

BERNARDO: Have you had quiet guard?

10 FRANCISCO: Not a mouse stirring.

BERNARDO: Well, good night.

If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,  
The rivals<sup>1</sup> of my watch, bid them make haste.

[Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS.]

FRANCISCO: I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who is there?

HORATIO: Friends to this ground.

15 MARCELLUS: And liegemen to the Dane.<sup>2</sup>

FRANCISCO: Give you good night.

MARCELLUS: O, farewell, honest soldier!

Who hath relieved you?

FRANCISCO: Bernardo hath my place.

Give you good night.

[Exit FRANCISCO.]

MARCELLUS: Holla, Bernardo!

BERNARDO: Say—

What, is Horatio there?

HORATIO: A piece of him.

20 BERNARDO: Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, good Marcellus.

HORATIO: What, has this thing appeared again tonight?

BERNARDO: I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS: Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,

1. Companions.

2. The "Dane" is the king of Denmark, who is also called "Denmark," as in line 48 of this scene. In line 61 a similar reference is used for the king of Norway.

And will  
Touching  
Therefore  
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That if ag  
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HORATIO: Tush  
BERNARDO:

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HORATIO:

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3. Confirm the

And will not let belief take hold of him  
 Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us. 25  
 Therefore I have entreated him along  
 With us to watch the minutes of this night,  
 That if again this apparition come,  
 He may approve<sup>3</sup> our eyes and speak to it.

HORATIO: Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.

BERNARDO: Sit down awhile, 30  
 And let us once again assail your ears,  
 That are so fortified against our story,  
 What we have two nights seen.

HORATIO: Well, sit we down.

And let us hear Bernardo speak of this. 35

BERNARDO: Last night of all,

When yond same star that's westward from the pole<sup>4</sup>  
 Had made his course t' illumine that part of heaven  
 Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,  
 The bell then beating one—

[Enter GHOST.]

MARCELLUS: Peace, break thee off. Look where it comes again. 40

BERNARDO: In the same figure like the king that's dead.

MARCELLUS: Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.

BERNARDO: Looks 'a<sup>5</sup> not like the king? Mark it, Horatio.

HORATIO: Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.

BERNARDO: It would be spoke to. 45

MARCELLUS:

Speak to it, Horatio.

HORATIO: What art thou that usurp'st this time of night  
 Together with that fair and warlike form

In which the majesty of buried Denmark

Did sometimes march? By heaven I charge thee, speak. 50

MARCELLUS: It is offended.

BERNARDO: See, it stalks away.

HORATIO: Stay. Speak, speak. I charge thee, speak. [Exit GHOST.]

MARCELLUS: 'Tis gone and will not answer.

BERNARDO: How now, Horatio! You tremble and look pale. 55

Is not this something more than fantasy?  
 What think you on't?

HORATIO: Before my God, I might not this believe  
 Without the sensible<sup>6</sup> and true avouch

Of mine own eyes.

3. Confirm the testimony of. 4. Polestar. 5. He. 6. Perceptible.

MARCELLUS: It is not like the king?

HORATIO: As thou art to thyself.

60 Such was the very armor he had on  
When he the ambitious Norway combated.  
So frowned he once when, in an angry parle,<sup>7</sup>  
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.  
'Tis strange.

65 MARCELLUS: Thus twice before, and jump<sup>8</sup> at this dead hour,  
With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch.

HORATIO: In what particular thought to work I know not,  
But in the gross and scope of mine opinion,  
This bodes some strange eruption to our state.

70 MARCELLUS: Good now, sit down, and tell me he that knows,  
Why this same strict and most observant watch  
So nightly toils the subject<sup>9</sup> of the land,  
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon  
And foreign mart for implements of war;  
75 Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task  
Does not divide the Sunday from the week.  
What might be toward that this sweaty haste  
Doth make the night joint-laborer with the day?  
Who is't that can inform me?

HORATIO: That can I.

80 At least, the whisper goes so. Our last king,  
Whose image even but now appeared to us,  
Was as you know by Fortinbras of Norway,  
Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride,  
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet  
85 (For so this side of our known world esteemed him)  
Did slay this Fortinbras; who by a sealed compact  
Well ratified by law and heraldry,  
Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands  
Which he stood seized of,<sup>1</sup> to the conqueror;  
90 Against the which a moiety competent<sup>2</sup>  
Was gagèd<sup>3</sup> by our king; which had returned  
To the inheritance of Fortinbras,  
Had he been vanquisher; as, by the same covenant  
And carriage of the article designed,  
95 His fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,  
Of unimprovèd mettle hot and full,

7. Parley. 8. Precisely. 9. People. 1. Possessed. 2. Portion of similar value. 3. Pledged.

Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there  
 Sharked up a list of lawless resolute  
 For food and diet to some enterprise  
 That hath a stomach in't; which is no other, 100  
 As it doth well appear unto our state,  
 But to recover of us by strong hand  
 And terms compulsatory, those foresaid lands  
 So by his father lost; and this, I take it,  
 Is the main motive of our preparations, 105  
 The source of this our watch, and the chief head  
 Of this post-haste and romage<sup>4</sup> in the land.

BERNARDO: I think it be no other but e'en so.  
 Well may it sort<sup>5</sup> that this portentous figure  
 Comes armèd through our watch so like the king 110  
 That was and is the question of these wars.

HORATIO: A mote<sup>6</sup> it is to trouble the mind's eye.  
 In the most high and palmy state of Rome,  
 A little ere the mightiest Julius fell, 115  
 The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead  
 Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets;  
 As stars with trains of fire, and dews of blood,  
 Disasters in the sun; and the moist star,  
 Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands,<sup>7</sup> 120  
 Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.  
 And even the like precurse<sup>8</sup> of feared events,  
 As harbingers preceding still the fates  
 And prologue to the omen coming on,  
 Have heaven and earth together demonstrated 125  
 Unto our climatures<sup>9</sup> and countrymen.

[Enter GHOST.]

But soft, behold, lo where it comes again!  
 I'll cross it<sup>1</sup> though it blast me.—Stay, illusion.

[It spreads (its) arms.]

4. Stir. 5. Chance. 6. Speck of dust.

7. Neptune was the Roman sea god; the "moist star" is the moon. 8. Precursor. 9. Regions.

1. Horatio means either that he will move across the ghost's path in order to stop the ghost or that he will make the sign of the cross to gain power over the ghost. The stage direction that follows is somewhat ambiguous. "It" seems to refer to the ghost, but the movement would be appropriate to Horatio.

If thou hast any sound or use of voice,  
 Speak to me.  
 130 If there be any good thing to be done,  
 That may to thee do ease, and grace to me,  
 Speak to me.

If thou art privy to thy country's fate,  
 Which happily foreknowing may avoid,  
 135 O, speak!  
 Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life  
 Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,  
 For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,

[*The cock crows.*]

Speak of it. Stay, and speak. Stop it, Marcellus.  
 140 MARCELLUS: Shall I strike at it with my partisan?<sup>2</sup>

HORATIO: Do, if it will not stand.

BERNARDO: "Tis here.

HORATIO: "Tis here.

MARCELLUS: "Tis gone.

[*Exit GHOST.*]

We do it wrong, being so majestic,  
 To offer it the show of violence;  
 145 For it is as the air, invulnerable,  
 And our vain blows malicious mockery.

BERNARDO: It was about to speak when the cock crew.

HORATIO: And then it started like a guilty thing  
 Upon a fearful summons. I have heard  
 150 The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,  
 Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat  
 Awake the god of day, and at his warning,  
 Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,  
 Th' extravagant and erring<sup>3</sup> spirit hies  
 155 To his confine; and of the truth herein  
 This present object made probation.<sup>4</sup>

MARCELLUS: It faded on the crowing of the cock.  
 Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes  
 Wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated,  
 160 This bird of dawning singeth all night long,  
 And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,  
 The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,  
 No fairy takes,<sup>5</sup> nor witch hath power to charm,

2. Halberd. 3. Errant, wandering out of bounds. 4. Proof. 5. Enchants.

So hallowed and so gracious is that time.  
 HORATIO: So have I heard and do in part believe it. 165  
 But look, the morn in russet mantle clad  
 Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.  
 Break we our watch up, and by my advice  
 Let us impart what we have seen tonight  
 Unto young Hamlet, for upon my life 170  
 This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.  
 Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it,  
 As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?  
 MARCELLUS: Let's do't, I pray, and I this morning know  
 Where we shall find him most conveniently. [Exeunt.] 175

## Scene 2

*A chamber of state. Enter KING CLAUDIUS, QUEEN GERTRUDE, HAMLET, POLONIUS, LAERTES, VOLTEMAND, CORNELIUS and other members of the court.*

KING: Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death  
 The memory be green, and that it us befitted  
 To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom  
 To be contracted in one brow of woe,  
 Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature 5  
 That we with wisest sorrow think on him,  
 Together with remembrance of ourselves.  
 Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,  
 Th' imperial jointress<sup>6</sup> to this warlike state,  
 Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy, 10  
 With an auspicious and a dropping eye,  
 With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage,  
 In equal scale weighing delight and dole,  
 Taken to wife; nor have we herein barred  
 Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone 15  
 With this affair along. For all, our thanks.  
 Now follows that you know young Fortinbras,  
 Holding a weak supposal of our worth,  
 Or thinking by our late dear brother's death  
 Our state to be disjoint and out of frame, 20  
 Colleague'd with this dream of his advantage,  
 He hath not failed to pester us with message

<sup>6</sup>Widow who holds a *jointure* or life interest in the estate of her deceased husband.

25 Importing the surrender of those lands  
 Lost by his father, with all bonds of law,  
 To our most valiant brother. So much for him.  
 Now for ourself, and for this time of meeting,  
 Thus much the business is: we have here writ  
 To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras—  
 Who, impotent and bedrid, scarcely hears  
 30 Of this his nephew's purpose—to suppress  
 His further gait<sup>7</sup> herein, in that the levies,  
 The lists, and full proportions are all made  
 Out of his subject; and we here dispatch  
 You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand,  
 35 For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,  
 Giving to you no further personal power  
 To business with the king, more than the scope  
 Of these dilated<sup>8</sup> articles allow.  
 Farewell, and let your haste commend your duty.

40 CORNELIUS: } In that, and all things will we show our duty.  
 VOLTEMAND: }  
 KING: We doubt it nothing, heartily farewell.

[*Exeunt* VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS.]

And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?  
 You told us of some suit. What is't, Laertes?  
 You cannot speak of reason to the Dane  
 45 And lose your voice. What wouldst thou beg, Laertes,  
 That shall not be my offer, not thy asking?  
 The head is not more native to the heart,  
 The hand more instrumental<sup>9</sup> to the mouth,  
 Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.  
 What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

50 LAERTES: My dread lord,  
 Your leave and favor to return to France,  
 From whence, though willingly, I came to Denmark  
 To show my duty in your coronation,  
 Yet now I must confess, that duty done,  
 55 My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France,  
 And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.

KING: Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius?

POLONIUS: He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave  
 By laborsome petition, and at last

7. Progress. 8. Fully expressed. 9. Serviceable.

Upon his will I sealed my hard consent,  
I do beseech you give him leave to go. 60

KING: Take thy fair hour, Laertes. Time be thine,  
And thy best graces spend it at thy will.  
But now, my cousin<sup>1</sup> Hamlet, and my son—

HAMLET: [*Aside.*] A little more than kin, and less than kind. 65

KING: How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET: Not so, my lord. I am too much in the sun.

QUEEN: Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,  
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.  
Do not for ever with thy vailèd lids<sup>2</sup> 70

Seek for thy noble father in the dust.  
Thou know'st 'tis common—all that lives must die,  
Passing through nature to eternity.

HAMLET: Ay, madam, it is common.

QUEEN: If it be,

Why seems it so particular with thee? 75

HAMLET: Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not "seems."

'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,  
Nor customary suits of solemn black,

Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,

No, nor the fruitful river in the eye, 80

Nor the dejected havior<sup>3</sup> of the visage,  
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,

That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,

For they are actions that a man might play,

But I have that within which passes show— 85

These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

KING: 'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,  
To give these mourning duties to your father,

But you must know your father lost a father,

That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound 90

In filial obligation for some term

To do obsequious<sup>4</sup> sorrow. But to persever

In obstinate condolment is a course

Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief. 95

It shows a will most incorrect to<sup>5</sup> heaven,

A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,

An understanding simple and unschooled.

1. "Cousin" is used here as a general term of kinship. 2. Lowered eyes. 3. Appearance.  
4. Suited for funeral obsequies. 5. Unsubmissive toward.

For what we know must be, and is as common  
 As any the most vulgar thing to sense,  
 100 Why should we in our peevish opposition  
 Take it to heart? Fie, 'tis a fault to heaven,  
 A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,  
 To reason most absurd, whose common theme  
 Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,  
 105 From the first corse<sup>6</sup> till he that died today,  
 "This must be so." We pray you throw to earth  
 This unprevailing woe, and think of us  
 As of a father, for let the world take note  
 You are the most immediate<sup>7</sup> to our throne,  
 110 And with no less nobility of love  
 Than that which dearest father bears his son  
 Do I impart toward you. For your intent  
 In going back to school in Wittenberg,  
 It is most retrograde<sup>8</sup> to our desire,  
 115 And we beseech you, bend you to remain  
 Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,  
 Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

QUEEN: Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet.

I pray thee stay with us, go not to Wittenberg.

120 HAMLET: I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

KING: Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply.

Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come.

This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet  
 Sits smiling to my heart, in grace whereof,  
 125 No jocund health that Denmark drinks today  
 But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,  
 And the king's rouse the heaven shall bruit<sup>9</sup> again,  
 Respeaking earthly thunder. Come away.

[*Flourish. Exeunt all but HAMLET.*]

HAMLET: O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,  
 130 Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,  
 Or that the Everlasting had not fixed  
 His canon<sup>1</sup> 'gainst self-slaughter. O God, God,  
 How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
 135 Fie on't, ah, fie, 'tis an unweeded garden  
 That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature

6. Corpse. 7. Next in line. 8. Contrary. 9. Echo. *Rouse*: carousal. 1. Law.