

ACCESS TO SHAKESPEARE

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**The Tragedy of**  
**Hamlet**  
**Prince of Denmark**

*A Facing-pages Translation into Contemporary English*

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**The Tragedy of**

# **Hamlet**

**Prince of Denmark**

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## Introduction

This volume of William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* consists of two versions of the play. The first is the original, based on the *Globe* edition of 1860, which was in turn based on the Folio of 1623. The second is a translation of that version into contemporary English. In both versions spelling and punctuation have been updated, and the names of the characters have been spelled out in full for easier reading. Insights from modern scholars have been included in both versions.

The translation of *Hamlet* is not meant to take the place of the original. Instead, it is an alternative to the notes usually found in current editions. In many cases these notes interfere with the reading of the play. Whether alongside or below the original text, the notes break the rhythm of reading and frequently force you to turn back to an earlier page or jump ahead to a later one. Having a translation that runs parallel to the original, line for line, allows you to move easily from Elizabethan to contemporary English and back again. It's simply a better way to introduce Shakespeare.

Also, this translation is suitable for performance, where notes are not available to the audience. Admittedly, a well-directed and well-acted production of the original can do much to clarify Shakespeare's language. And yet, there will be numerous references and lines whose meanings are not clear on a first hearing. What, for instance, does Claudius mean when he says, "And in the cup an union shall he throw"?

### Shakespeare's Language

Shakespeare's language does present problems for modern readers. After all, more than four centuries separate us from him. During this time words

# Act One

## Scene 1 [*Royal castle of Elsinore, Denmark*]

*Enter BARNARDO and FRANCISCO, two sentinels*

BARNARDO Who's there?

FRANCISCO Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.

BARNARDO Long live the king!

FRANCISCO Barnardo?

BARNARDO He.

5

FRANCISCO You come most carefully upon your hour.

BARNARDO 'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.

FRANCISCO For this relief much thanks. 'Tis bitter cold,

And I am sick at heart.

BARNARDO Have you had quiet guard?

10

FRANCISCO Not a mouse stirring.

BARNARDO Well, good night.

If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,

The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.

FRANCISCO I think I hear them.

15

*Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS*

Stand, ho! Who is there?

HORATIO Friends to this ground.

MARCELLUS And liegemen to the Dane.

FRANCISCO Give you good night.

MARCELLUS O, farewell, honest soldier.

20

Who hath relieved you?

FRANCISCO Barnardo hath my place.

Give you good night.

*Exit FRANCISCO*

MARCELLUS Holla, Barnardo!

BARNARDO Say—

25

What, is Horatio there?

HORATIO A piece of him.

# Act One

## Scene 1 [*Royal castle of Elsinore, Denmark*]

*Enter* BARNARDO and FRANCISCO, two sentinels

BARNARDO Who's there?

FRANCISCO No, you answer me. Stand and identify yourself!

BARNARDO Long live the king!

FRANCISCO Barnardo?

BARNARDO Yes. 5

FRANCISCO You're right on time.

BARNARDO It just struck twelve. Get off to bed, Francisco.

FRANCISCO For this relief, much thanks. It's bitter cold,  
And I have had enough.

BARNARDO Have you had a quiet watch? 10

FRANCISCO Not a mouse stirring.

BARNARDO Well, good night.

Should you meet Horatio and Marcellus,

The others on the watch, tell them to hurry.

FRANCISCO I think I hear them. 15

*Enter* HORATIO and MARCELLUS

Halt! Who goes there?

HORATIO Friends to this land.

MARCELLUS And loyal subjects of the king.

FRANCISCO Good night to you.

MARCELLUS Oh, farewell, good soldier. 20

Who has relieved you?

FRANCISCO Barnardo took my place.

Good night to you.

*Exit* FRANCISCO

MARCELLUS Hello, Barnardo!

BARNARDO Say, 25

What, is Horatio there?

HORATIO A part of him.

Hamlet

BARNARDO Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, good Marcellus.  
MARCELLUS What, has this thing appeared again tonight? 30  
BARNARDO I have seen nothing.  
MARCELLUS Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,  
And will not let belief take hold of him  
Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us.  
Therefore I have entreated him along  
With us to watch the minutes of this night, 35  
That, if again this apparition come,  
He may approve our eyes, and speak to it.  
HORATIO Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.  
BARNARDO Sit down awhile, 40  
And let us once again assail your ears,  
That are so fortified against our story,  
What we two nights have seen.  
HORATIO Well, sit we down,  
And let us hear Barnardo speak of this.  
BARNARDO Last night of all, 45  
When yond same star that's westward from the pole  
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. 50  
BARNARDO In the same figure, like the king that's dead.  
MARCELLUS Thou art a scholar. Speak to it, Horatio.  
BARNARDO Looks a not like the king? Mark it, Horatio.  
HORATIO Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.  
BARNARDO It would be spoke to. 55  
MARCELLUS Question it, Horatio.  
HORATIO What are thou that usurp'st this time of night,  
Together with that fair and warlike form  
In which the majesty of buried Denmark

Act One, Scene 1

BARNARDO Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, my good Marcellus.

MARCELLUS Well, has this thing appeared again tonight?

BARNARDO I have seen nothing. 30

MARCELLUS Horatio says it's just imagination

And will not let himself believe

In this fearsome sight we have seen twice.

That's why I begged him to join us

And keep watch for a period of this night, 35

So that if this apparition comes again,

He may confirm what we saw and speak to it.

HORATIO Come, come, it will not appear.

BARNARDO Sit down awhile,

And let us tell you once again, 40

Although you're skeptical of our story,

What we have seen these last two nights.

HORATIO Well, let's sit down,

And let's hear what Barnardo has to say.

BARNARDO Only last night, 45

When that same star that's to the west of the North Star

Had made its path to light that part of heaven

Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,

The bell having struck one—

*Enter GHOST*

MARCELLUS Wait, say no more. Look, here it comes again. 50

BARNARDO In the same form, like the king who's dead.

MARCELLUS You're a scholar. Speak to it, Horatio.

BARNARDO Doesn't it look like the king? Look at it, Horatio.

HORATIO Very like him. I shake with fear and wonder.

BARNARDO It wishes to be spoken to. 55

MARCELLUS Question it, Horatio.

HORATIO What are you that intrudes this time of night,

Dressed in the fair and warlike armor

Which his majesty the dead king



## Act Two

### Scene 1 [*In Polonius's chambers*]

*Enter* POLONIUS *with his man* REYNALDO

POLONIUS Give him this money and these notes, Reynaldo.

REYNALDO I will, my lord.

POLONIUS You shall do marvelous wisely, good Reynaldo,  
Before you visit him, to make inquire  
Of his behavior. 5

REYNALDO My lord, I did intend it.

POLONIUS Marry, well said, very well said. Look you, sir,  
Inquire me first what Danskers are in Paris,  
And how, and who, what means, and where they keep,  
What company, at what expense; and finding 10  
By this encompassment and drift of question  
That they do know my son, come you more nearer  
Than your particular demands will touch it.  
Take you, as 'twere some distant knowledge of him,  
As thus, "I know his father and his friends, 15  
And, in part, him"—do you mark this, Reynaldo?

REYNALDO Ay, very well, my lord.

## Act Two

### Scene 1 [*In Polonius's chambers*]

*Enter* POLONIUS *and his servant* REYNALDO

POLONIUS Give him this money and these notes, Reynaldo.

REYNALDO I will, my lord.

POLONIUS It would be extremely wise, Reynaldo,

Before you visit him, to inquire

About his behavior. 5

REYNALDO I intended to, my lord.

POLONIUS Good, well said, very well said. Look here, sir,

Find out first what Danes live in Paris,

How they came there, who they are, what means they have,

Where they stay, what they spend; and discovering 10

By this roundabout and indirect way

That they know my son, you'll come nearer

The facts than with direct questions.

Pretend you have some distant knowledge of him,

Say, for instance, "I know his father and his friends 15

And, slightly, him"—are you following this, Reynaldo?

REYNALDO Yes, very well, my lord.

# Glossary

The following terms are taken from the translation of *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. The scene and line numbers are given in parentheses after the terms, which are listed in the order they first occur.

## Act One

**Caesar** (scene 1, line 128): Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.), general and statesman of Rome, whose assassination was preceded by disturbances in nature

**University of Wittenberg** (scene 2, line 115): German university founded in 1502, famous as the university of Dr. Faustus and Martin Luther

**Niobe** (scene 2, line 151): the mythical mother whose children were slain by the gods after she boasted of them. At her request, Zeus turned her into a rock from which tears flowed forever. Weeping women are sometimes likened to "Niobe, all tears"

**Hercules** (scene 2, line 155): a mythical Greek hero of fabulous strength

**Nemean lion** (scene 4, line 91): the lion, thought to be invulnerable, killed by Hercules as one of his twelve tasks

**Lethe** (scene 5, line 38): a mythical river of the underworld, from which the dead drink so that they may forget everything they said and did when they were alive

**St. Patrick** (scene 5, line 150): in addition to being the patron saint of Ireland, Patrick is also the patron saint of Purgatory, where the spirit of Hamlet's father resides

## Act Two

**figure of speech** (scene 2, line 104): a form of expression used to heighten an effect; here, chiasmus, an inversion of parallel phrases

**nest of child actors** (scene 2, line 331): these were boys' acting companies, revived about 1600 and, for a brief time, serious rivals to the adult companies. Shakespeare is referring, of course, to the theatrical situation in the London of his own time, not to something taking place in Denmark

**Globe** (scene 2, line 349): the Globe was the name of the theatre where Shakespeare's company performed. A flag, flown from the top of the theatre on days when a performance was given, showed Hercules carrying the globe of earth on his shoulders. Shakespeare is saying that the rival companies of boy actors cut into the business of his company

**Roscius** (scene 2, line 373): a great Roman comic actor of the first century B.C., and a teacher of Cicero

**Jephthah** (scene 2, line 385): one of the Judges of Israel who vowed to sacrifice the first person he met if he returned successfully from war. That person turned out to be his daughter

**voice not broken** (scene 2, lines 406-407): the parts of women in Shakespeare's time were played by boys, and when their voices changed, they could no longer take these roles

**Aeneas...Dido...Priam** (scene 2, lines 421-422): characters in the *Aeneid*, an epic poem by Virgil, first century B.C., about, among other things, the Greek siege and destruction of the city of Troy. Aeneas tells the story of the fall of Troy to Dido, queen of Carthage. Priam was the king of Troy. Other Elizabethan dramatists, Marlowe and Nashe, also used this subject