

# 8. Hamlet and Othello

## William Shakespeare *Hamlet* (1600-1601)

### The ghost 25

This is the opening scene, which sets the tone of the whole play as it foreshadows both its atmosphere and its general theme, the search for the truth.

Hamlet's father's ghost appears to the soldiers on the ramparts in Elsinore.

#### Act 1, Scene 1

*Elsinore. A platform before the castle.*

*Francisco at his post. Enter to him Bernardo.*

BERNARDO           Who's there?

FRANCISCO        Nay<sup>1</sup>, answer me: stand and unfold<sup>2</sup> yourself.

5   BERNARDO        Long live the king!

FRANCISCO        Bernardo?

BERNARDO        He.

FRANCISCO        You come most carefully upon your hour<sup>3</sup>.

BERNARDO        'Tis<sup>4</sup> now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.

10   FRANCISCO       For this relief much thanks: 'tis bitter cold,  
And I am sick at heart<sup>5</sup>.

BERNARDO        Have you had quiet guard?

FRANCISCO        Not a mouse stirring.

BERNARDO        Well, good night.

15                    If you meet Horatio and Marcellus,  
The rivals<sup>6</sup> of my watch, bid them make haste.

FRANCISCO        I think I hear them. Stand<sup>7</sup>, ho! Who's there?

*Enter Horatio and Marcellus*

20                    *The dialogue goes on reciprocating until they start talking about a mysterious presence  
haunting the place.*

MARCELLUS        What, has this thing appear'd again to-night?

BERNARDO        I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy<sup>8</sup>,  
 And will not let belief take hold of him  
 25 Touching<sup>9</sup> this dreaded sight, twice seen of<sup>10</sup> us:  
 Therefore I have entreated<sup>11</sup> him along  
 With us to watch the minutes of this night;  
 That if again this apparition come,  
 He may approve<sup>12</sup> our eyes and speak to it.  
 30 HORATIO Tush, tush 'twill not appear.  
 BERNARDO Sit down awhile;  
 And let us once again assail<sup>13</sup> your ears,  
 That are so fortified against our story  
 What we have two nights seen.  
 35 HORATIO Well, sit we down,  
 And let us hear Bernardo speak of this.  
 BERNARDO Last night of all,  
 When yond<sup>14</sup> same star that's westward from the pole  
 Had made his course to illume<sup>15</sup> that part of heaven  
 40 Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,  
*The bell then beating one, –*

*Enter Ghost.*

8. **fantasy:** imagination  
 9. **Touching:** Regarding  
 10. **of:** by  
 11. **entreated:** invited

12. **approve:** believe  
 13. **assail:** attack  
 14. **yond:** that  
 15. **illuminate:** illuminate



Henry Fuseli, *Hamlet and his father's Ghost* (1780-1785).

# William Shakespeare

## *Hamlet* (1600-1601)

### Hamlet and his mother 26

After the play within a play, Hamlet thinks he has discovered the truth about the death of his father who has been murdered by Claudius, as the ghost had told him. His uncle's reaction is proof of this as he cannot tolerate the performance and rushes out in distress. Gertrude wants to talk to Hamlet afterwards while Polonius is hidden behind a curtain.

#### Act 3, Scene 4

*The Queen's closet.*

*Enter Hamlet.*

- |    |                |  |
|----|----------------|--|
|    | HAMLET         | Now, mother, what's the matter?  |
|    | QUEEN GERTRUDE | Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.  |
| 5  | HAMLET         | Mother, you have my father much offended.  |
|    | QUEEN GERTRUDE | Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.  |
|    | HAMLET         | Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.   |
|    | QUEEN GERTRUDE | Why, how now, Hamlet!  |
|    | HAMLET         | What's the matter now?   |
| 10 | QUEEN GERTRUDE | Have you forgot me?  |
|    | HAMLET         | No, by the rood <sup>1</sup> , not so:<br>You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife;<br>And – would it were not so! – you are my mother.  |
|    | QUEEN GERTRUDE | Nay, then, I'll set <sup>2</sup> those to you that can speak.  |
| 15 | HAMLET         | Come, come, and sit you down; you shall not budge <sup>3</sup> ;<br>You go not till I set you up a glass<br>Where you may see the inmost part of you.  |
|    | QUEEN GERTRUDE | What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?<br>Help, help, ho!   |
|    | [...]          |  |
| 20 |                | <i>Hamlet kills Polonius but he thinks it was Claudius. While his mother is upset he insinuates that she herself is a murderer since she was involved in the plot to kill the king her husband.</i>  |
|    | QUEEN GERTRUDE | What have I done, that thou darest wag <sup>4</sup> thy tongue<br>In noise so rude against me?   |
|    | HAMLET         | Such an act<br>That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,<br>Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose<br>From the fair forehead of an innocent love<br>And sets a blister <sup>5</sup> there, makes marriage-vows<br>As false as dicers' oaths: O, such a deed |
| 30 |                | As from the body of contraction plucks   |

1. **by the rood:** for God's sake

2. **Nay, then, I'll set:** In that case I'll call in

3. **budge:** move

4. **wag:** it. *scatenare*

5. **blister:** a nasty blemish

6. **Oh, such a deed ... A rhapsody of words:** Oh, you've done a deed that plucks the soul out of marriage and turns religion into meaningless blather

- 35 The very soul, and sweet religion makes  
A rhapsody of words<sup>6</sup>: heaven's face doth glow:  
O'er, this solidity and compound mass,  
With tristful visage, as against the doom,  
Is thought-sick at the act<sup>7</sup>.
- [...]  
QUEEN GERTRUDE O Hamlet, speak no more:  
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;  
And there I see such black and grained spots  
As will not leave their tinct.
- 40 HAMLET Nay, but to live  
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,  
Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love  
Over the nasty sty<sup>8</sup>.
- 45 QUEEN GERTRUDE O, speak to me no more;  
These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears;  
No more, sweet Hamlet!
- HAMLET A murderer and a villain;  
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe<sup>9</sup>  
Of your precedent lord; a vice of kings;  
50 A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,  
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole,  
And put it in his pocket!
- QUEEN GERTRUDE No more!

7. **heaven's face doth glow ... at the act**: heaven looks down on this earth, as angry as if Judgment Day were here, and is sick at the thought of what you've done
8. **Nay, but to live ... Over the nasty sty**: Yes, and you lie in the sweaty stench of your dirty sheets, wet with corruption, making love
9. **tithe**: tenth

## Margaret Atwood

### *Good Bones* (1992)

#### Gertrude talks back 27

The Canadian writer (b. 1939) imagines Queen Gertrude talking back to her son Hamlet, unveiling what has really happened. Hamlet, the young prince of Denmark, wants to avenge his father's assassination committed by the king's brother, Claudius, who has become the new king and has married Gertrude. The short story was published in 1993.

- I always thought it was a mistake, calling you Hamlet. I mean, what kind of name is that for a young boy? It was your father's idea. Nothing would do but that you had to be called after him? Selfish. The other kids at school used to tease the life out of you<sup>1</sup>. The
- 5 nicknames! And those terrible jokes about pork. I wanted to call you George. I am not wringing my hands. I'm drying my nails. Darling, please stop fidgeting<sup>2</sup> with my mirror. That'll be the third one you've broken.
- 10 Yes, I've seen those pictures, thank you very much. I know your father was handsomer than Claudius. High brow, aquiline nose and so on, looked great in uniform. But handsome isn't everything, especially in a man, and far be it from me to speak ill of the dead, but I think it's about time I pointed out to you that your dad
- 15 just wasn't a whole lot of fun. Noble. Sure, I grant you. But Claudius, well, he likes a drink now and then. He appreciates a decent meal. He enjoys a laugh, know what I mean? You don't always have to be tiptoeing around<sup>3</sup> because of some holier-than-thou principle or something.
- 20 By the way, darling, I wish you wouldn't call your stepdad the bloat king<sup>4</sup>. He does have a slight weight problem, and it hurts his feelings. The rank sweat of what? My bed is certainly not enseamed, whatever that might be! A nasty sty<sup>5</sup>, indeed! Not that it's any of your business, but I change those sheets twice a week, which is more than you do,
- 25 judging from that student slum pigpen<sup>6</sup> in Wittenberg. I'll certainly never visit you there again without prior warning! I see that laundry of yours when you bring it home, and not often enough either, by a long shot! Only when you run out of black socks.

1. **to tease the life out of you:** it. *ti prendevano in giro a non finire*

2. **fidgeting:** it. *gingillare*

3. **tiptoeing around:** it. *camminare su gusci d'uovo*

4. **the bloat king:** it. *il re gonfiore*

5. **nasty sty:** it. *un porcile*

6. **student slum pigpen:** it. *porcilaia da studenti*

- And let me tell you, everyone sweats at a time like that, as you'd find  
 30 out if you ever gave it a try. A real girlfriend would do you a heap of  
 good. Not like that pasty-faced<sup>7</sup> what's-her-name, all trussed up like a  
 prize turkey<sup>8</sup> in those touch-me-not corsets of hers. If you ask me,  
 there's something off<sup>9</sup> about that girl. Borderline. Any little shock  
 could push her right over the edge<sup>10</sup>.
- 35 Go get yourself someone more down-to-earth. Have a nice roll in the  
 hay. Then you can talk to me about nasty sties.  
 No darling, I am not mad at you. But I must say you're an awful prig<sup>11</sup>  
 sometimes. Just like your Dad. The Flesh, he'd say. You'd think it was  
 dog dirt. You can excuse that in a young person, they are always so  
 40 intolerant, but in someone his age it was getting, well, very hard to live  
 with and that's the understatement of the year.  
 Some days I think it would have been better for both of us if you  
 hadn't been an only child. But you realize who you have to thank for  
 that. You have no idea what I used to put up with<sup>12</sup>. And every time  
 45 I felt like a little, you know, just to warm up my aging bones, it was like  
 I'd suggested murder.  
 Oh! You think what? You think Claudius murdered your Dad? Well,  
 no wonder you've been so rude to him at the dinner table!  
 If I'd known that, I could have put you straight in no time flat<sup>13</sup>.
- 50 It wasn't Claudius, darling.  
 It was me.

7. **pasty-faced:** *it. slavata*

8. **trussed up like a prize turkey:** *it. legata come un tacchino da premio*

9. **there's something off:** *it. c'è qualcosa di sbagliato*

10. **push her right over the edge:** *drive her crazy (it. la porta al punto di rottura)*

11. **prig:** *it. moralista*

12. **put up with:** *tolerate*

13. **put you straight in no time flat:** *it. avrei messo le cose in chiaro immediatamente*

# William Shakespeare

## *Othello* (1604)

### The villain 28

A turning point in the play, the following monologue shifts Iago's Machiavellian reasons to plot against Othello from the social level – where he has failed because Othello's prestige is still great – to the private one. Niccolò Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (1513/1516) was translated into English as *The Prince*. Machiavelli was advising the petty rulers of a divided Italy to use practical, manipulative practices to control their governments. In part as a reaction to Machiavelli's vision of power, the English adopted a form of his name, 'Machiavel', as the name for a type of villain in tragic drama – the immoral enemy of order. Roger Ascham, in *The Scholemaster* (1535), even said 'the Italianate Englishman is the devil incarnate'. Even today, to call a deed 'Machiavellian' denotes a kind of immorality.

### Act 1, Scene 3

I hate the Moor:  
 And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets  
 He has done my office<sup>1</sup>: I know not if't be true;  
 But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,  
 5 Will do as if for surety<sup>2</sup>. He holds me well<sup>3</sup>;  
 The better shall my purpose work on him.  
 Cassio's a proper<sup>4</sup> man: let me see now:  
 To get his place and to plume up<sup>5</sup> my will  
 In double knavery<sup>6</sup> – How, how? Let's see: –  
 10 After some time, to abuse Othello's ear<sup>7</sup>  
 That he is too familiar with his wife.  
 He hath a person and a smooth dispose<sup>8</sup>.  
 To be suspected, framed to make women false<sup>9</sup>.  
 The Moor is of a free and open nature,  
 15 That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,  
 And will as tenderly be led by the nose  
 As asses are<sup>10</sup>.  
 I have't. It is engender'd. Hell and night  
 Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

1. 'twixt my sheets ... my office: he has taken my place in my bed (he has slept with my wife)
2. Will do as if for surety: I will think it is true
3. He holds me well: He holds me in high esteem
4. proper: attractive
5. plump up: succeed
6. In double knavery: it. *Furfanteria*. Iago will take some risks but he will obtain two outcomes: Cassio's position and respectability
7. to abuse Othello's ear: to lie to Othello
8. He hath a person and a smooth dispose: He is handsome and has gentle manners
9. To be suspected, framed to make women false: It seems he can persuade a woman to betray her husband
10. And will as ... As asses are: I can lead him around like a donkey