



HAMLET

“THIS ABOVE ALL:
TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE.”

ctp

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WORDS, WORDS, WORDS



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SHAKESPEARE

was a playwright. Obviously. But many other aspects of his life are reflected in his plays. Let's look at specific examples in *Hamlet*.

Shakespeare was an actor.

Shakespeare is known to have performed for The King's Men, in addition to writing for the company. It is traditionally supposed that Shakespeare played the Ghost of Hamlet's father in the original production of *Hamlet*, although the first mention of this is recorded nearly 100 years after Shakespeare's death.

Watch:

Blah blah blah

Shakespeare was a father.

In 1585 Shakespeare's wife gave birth to twins, Hamnet and Judith. Some have theorized that the Hamnet's death at age 11 inspired the writing of *Hamlet*, with its similarly named hero, focus on fathers and sons, and themes of death and grief.

Watch:

Are there any details or nuances in the text, that support such a theory? Why do you think people would like to believe in such a personal connection between Shakespeare's life and his art?

Shakespeare was a loyal subject.

Shakespeare's company was frequently called upon to perform before the Queen, and the patronage of the monarch was an important honour. Shakespeare would have been well aware of the perils of displeasing an absolute monarch. Versions of *Hamlet* published after Elizabeth's death removed Hamlet's lines referring to Denmark as a prison, out of deference, perhaps, to the new King James, who was married to a Danish princess.

Watch:

Watch for ways in which Claudius wields his new power, and for how others defer to him. Watch and listen, too, for the moments in which Hamlet defies the new king, and the increasing boldness of his defiance as the story progresses.

Hamlet was probably written in 1599-1600, about midway through Shakespeare's career as a playwright.

- The play was first published in 1603, although that first printing was a somewhat unreliable version, with some scenes and dialogue apparently reconstructed from memory.
- *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's longest play; with over 4000 lines, it is nearly twice the length of his shortest tragedy, *Macbeth*. Hamlet himself speaks over 1/3 of those lines, a huge role, and a challenge to the actor's stamina.
- Shakespeare's basic source for *Hamlet* was a play (now lost) that was popular in London in the 1580's, which told the same basic story, elements of which can be traced back to the 9th century. The name of the hero in earlier versions is "Amleth", which means "foolish" or "dull" - probably a reference to the madness the character feigns.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

IN CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR CHARLES ROY

What is the enduring appeal of Hamlet? What do people keep reading it, staging it, studying it 400 years after it was written?

Hamlet, to its great credit, is a play that poses more questions about the people within it than it answers. The play has within it a certain unknowability of motivation. It's a play where Shakespeare gives you extraordinary people, but it's almost like he gives you unbelievably rich pencil sketches and you have to colour within the lines yourself. And everybody comes up with a Hamlet of a very different complexion. I'm talking about readers and performers alike, anybody who approaches the play. There are similarities that everyone will find, but everyone has to invest themselves in this character in order to deal with and answer the questions that the play and the characters leave unanswered within it.

People can see themselves in Hamlet; it's not that he's a blank slate; it's that he seems to be a mirror of our internal selves. He seems to speak aloud many of the concerns and fears that we ourselves hold dear, but are too afraid to speak. He wonders what it means to be an honest man, and to speak honestly about oneself and one's feelings, and he poses the very real question, "Am I a coward?" Well, who among us, at some point, hasn't had to look at themselves in the mirror and say, "Am I a coward?" And Hamlet does this repeatedly throughout the play. He asks the deep dark questions, the probing questions that we barely even dare to ask ourselves in our weakest moments.

What is the focus of Classical Theatre Project's production?

This production is focused in on the character of Hamlet at the expense of the political intrigues and the machinations of the court and the succession story at work in the play. It's about watching someone fearlessly go through a deeply personal domestic trauma, and struggle to get out on the other side. Our play is about one of the most dysfunctional families in history. Hamlet doesn't seem all that bothered that the lines of succession have brushed him to one side. He's primarily angry that his mother remarried too quickly, that his mother didn't honour his father's memory for long enough. There's something highly relatable about that.

It's about watching a man willingly endure as much as he can -- and he hits a breaking point. He's pretending to be mad, but at a certain point he becomes mad in his own right. It's anxiety induced -- I think many of us under similar conditions would have gone a whole lot madder a whole lot earlier. And that's a very interesting aspect of the play -- where is the breaking point of a human being? What is the breaking point of a soul?

We see a man go through terrific traumas, constantly questions, "Why should I put up with this? Why should I persevere? Why should I carry on?" And ultimately the answer to that, for the purposes of our show, is so that the audience can feel it. Human beings like the safety of observing somebody else go through horrific events from a vantage point that allows us to be empathetic and sympathetic, but not actually directly involved. We need to relive emotional experiences, especially dark ones, and by reliving them temporarily, we get to release them for a little while too.

WORDS FROM THE WISE

IN CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR CHARLES ROY

In rehearsal you said that Hamlet is a play about “the death of a great soul.” Could you talk about that idea?

Part of the enduring legacy of this play is that we get to experience a couple of hours with one of the most extraordinary people we will ever meet. That person is Hamlet. He's smarter than most of us, he's funnier than most of us, he's braver and more charismatic than most of us, he's more insightful than most of us, and depending on how I cast it, he's usually better looking than most of us. [Laughs.] Because this production focuses so acutely on the struggle of this one man, it becomes a struggle about a great young man. We don't simply relate to the emotional traumas that he's experiencing, we now relate to the man and the person we wish we could be. We desperately hope that he'll make it.

But the forces are so large that they swallow him up too. And what's amazing is that he makes it so terrible close to making it out alive. That's what our play is about. The most extraordinary man we've ever met, and we'll watch him suffer the most extraordinary emotional and physical traumas that are imagineable, and we'll pray that he makes it out the other side. There's a suggestion in our play that this is an enduring story, that this man will continuously endure this hardship for us. As long as there are people who will watch Hamlet, there will be a Hamlet who will suffer.



CONCEPT & INSPIRATION

HAMLET AND FILM NOIR

Can you talk a little bit about your inspirations for the production?

In an effort to focus in on the Hamlet story, observing his suffering and his death, it was important to me to reflect the world in which he lives. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. This world is a contained environment which has experienced extraordinary corruption. There is a void in the middle of it, a power void after the death of Hamlet's father, and a moral void. The whole place is rotting from the inside.

Our production is meant to evoke the moral ambiguity of film noir on stage, the duplicity, the two-facedness, the fractiousness. This is a world in which there is no more absolute hard and fast, right or wrong. Everyone is adrift, almost in limbo, there's barely a floor underneath our feet anymore. It's very dark, very shadowy, it's a world of heavy surveillance. Everybody is peering in and listening, eavesdropping on everybody else.

In a way, it's about police state. The time in which Shakespeare was writing Hamlet, there's a very good reason to think that England was very much in the middle of a police-state-like culture. There was massive suppression of Catholicism. The England of Shakespeare's day more closely resembled the Afghanistan of the Taliban than it does our world. Religious freedoms, many freedoms were suddenly in short supply. Freedoms that people had enjoyed for generations were suddenly gone, and if you were caught practicing any of those freedoms that you used to take for granted, you would be tried and most likely executed. That police state aspect is revealed through Polonius, and Claudius too. They don't use technology to do it, they hide behind curtains, but there's that atmosphere of surveillance and paranoia. And it's surveillance where everybody knows they're being surveyed.

Everybody knows that there's eavesdropping, everybody knows that every room is bugged, so nobody says aloud what they're actually thinking. Everyone keeps their cards very close to their chest, everybody is wearing a mask, and everybody is trying to get away with something. Everybody is, including our hero. It's just that we hope he will get away with it.

How will we see those ideas represented onstage?

Many of the visual elements in the piece are borrowed from film noir. Stylistically that has to do with a lot of dark shadows, fedoras and trench coats, and our world resembles that. You'll see an environment that's full of reflective surfaces, a world of shadows and darkness; there's no expanse of light. The lighting is from steep angles, so there are highly shadowy eyes and faces. People walk around with these long coats and umbrellas, everybody is dressed for the rain, because it's always raining in our Elsinore, which I relate to. I'm from Vancouver, so that feels like home a little bit. I guess I was feeling homesick when I did it. [Laughs.] So you're going to hear the rain.



In the second half of the play, you're going to see a femme fatale. In our production there's a strong suggestion that, although she's a soft-spoken, seemingly ideal mother at the beginning of the play, Gertrude gradually reveals herself to be the corrupt power at the heart of the entire story. There's one horrifying moment where, after a very emotional exchange with her son, she betrays him. She turns on him, and laughs at his emotional duress, and reveals herself to be the nastiest person in the whole place. And that kind of reversal is typical of film noir; strong, duplicitous women, very weak men are at the heart of film noir and we do that too in our world. Many film noir movies deal with a central character who is one step away from madness, and is struggling with the myriad choices in front of him and really doesn't know which way to turn, and the walls are actually closing in on him. And sometimes, quite literally in our play, the walls close in on Hamlet. Highly noir film idea, and one that exists in our play too. The colours of our world are white, black, lots of grey, and red. Or, as we say around the office, the colours are white, black, and blood.

How is all of that reflected in your cutting of the text?

I decided to eliminate the Fortinbras plotline. Fortinbras comes in as the successor, the light who will get rid of the dark, who will put everything back on the right path. Without him coming in there's a serious question of, "Now what?" What will happen? In the world we live in today, there is no Fortinbras. In our world there are more Horatios than Hamlets. There are more witnesses and observers than there are heroes who will suffer and endure. We're a culture of Horatios. Most of us don't engage. Most of us watch fighting on TV. That's why Horatio has the last line. He is our witness, our observer. For this play to work in our world, I don't believe there can be a Fortinbras who can arrive. There is no saviour. There is only us.

ACTOR BENJAMIN BLAIS has been a veteran The Classical Theatre Project since 2007. He's proved his versatility by playing diverse characters like Mercutio in *Romeo & Juliet*, Rosencrantz in *Hamlet*, and the title roles in *Oedipus Rex*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet*. Read on to learn about how an actor prepares for the challenging role of the Danish prince.



What does it feel like when you get the call that says, "We want you to play Hamlet"?

It's exciting, the opportunity to play that part. It's a challenge; so many people have played the part, there are so many interpretations for it. When I got the call I was ecstatic. I'd just begun touching on classical theatre, and really begun enjoying it, and enjoyed exploring how to perform in that medium. So when the opportunity arose to play Hamlet I wanted it; there's so much to do with this role that all these ideas start flooding in your head, and when I got it, it was really exciting. And it's been a wonderful experience; there's a sense of being filled with something that's bigger and older than you, and it's a great feeling.

Hamlet is a huge role. Where do you begin?

Hamlet is one of the longest roles in Shakespeare, so it's very demanding. One of the first things an actor should do is be as familiar as he can with the text. That allows you the freedom to put the script down, actually play with the other actors on stage, play with the emotions that the words may bring up inside you, or the ideas that you've thought about and want to try out. But if you're sitting there with your nose buried in the book, there's not much you can do.

The way I learn is that I kind of soak things in; I don't see the words on the page. I watch a lot of other actors, the classic actors, the Gielguds, the John Nevilles, these old guys. And I hear the way they say it, and then the pieces have a context and a relevance to me, because I've associated things to their performance. I'm like "that's interesting", or "I understood that, but I didn't understand that," and then I look at the speech myself and it's intimidating at first.

There's a lot of poetry, a lot of words, and syntax that we don't use anymore. So I try to read the piece and compartmentalize it in the ideas. "To be, or not to be." To live, or not to live? Should I commit suicide, or not? You've got to try to understand the ideas before you try to understand the words. Because if you're just trying to understand the words, it's like trying to understand a series of numbers. So first come the ideas, and then the words almost follow suit.

We can't talk about Hamlet and avoid the question – what about Hamlet's madness?

Hamlet's a very clever character. He feigns his madness in the beginning; to mess with Polonius, to keep people off balance so he can enact his plot. But after he kills Polonius, something changes in him. It's the first bold action that he takes against the state, but it's the wrong guy, and it's at the wrong time. And it's right after he's had the opportunity to kill his villainous uncle, but he doesn't. There's all this guilt, and the madness starts to take hold, and take shape in his mind. And it begins to manifest itself in this real pain. So when he's introduced to the death of Ophelia it all just starts to fall apart, and then he becomes resigned. His madness starts off as his own creation, but then I think it gets the better of him.

What about Ophelia? Hamlet treats her quite terribly in this production.

Shakespeare doesn't fully explore their relationship in the beginning, so it's almost as if he starts to treat her badly out of nowhere. But at that point in the story, I think he's so wrapped up in the intrigue of his uncle's succession to the throne, and the mysterious death of his father, that he is just so angry at her for being a participant in this game that they're playing to catch him. He can see what they're doing. And when we're angry we don't do what we mean to do to people. This is a point in the play where this madness gets the better of him, and it becomes very real because he's hurt, and he feels betrayed. And then he crosses the line, and there he is again, doing the wrong thing to the wrong person. He's angry at Claudius, but this poor girl is the subject of his torture. He sees that and it drives him mad. It's this downward spiral. I think Shakespeare uses Ophelia to do that because she's the one person in the whole story that represents hope and light and love. It's a way to show how isolated he makes himself, by doing that to her, of all people.

Do you have a favorite scene or moment in the show?

There's a couple. I'm a big kid, so I love the sword fight at the end. It's just so much fun to do. And I like Hamlet's monologue "O what a rogue and peasant slave am I" – I just love the words in that monologue, and I feel that it really sums up the way he feels throughout most of the play. Hamlet is going through this huge debate in his own mind, about what he should do, about who he is and what he feels. I love getting [to that monologue]; we've just finished doing this really high octane series of scenes, and then we get there and it's time to just sit down with the audience and recap. And hang out. He's expressing thoughts and feelings to them that he wouldn't express to any of the other characters. And he's very articulate, and it's so inward and personal that it's a really exciting opportunity for me to get everybody on Hamlet's side. That's where Hamlet is best friends with his audience.

CHARACTERS

PEOPLE YOU WILL MEET IN *HAMLET*

Hamlet

The Prince of Denmark.

The Ghost of Hamlet's Father

Hamlet's dead father, the late King of Denmark, murdered by his brother Claudius.

Gertrude

Hamlet's mother, the Queen.

Claudius

Hamlet's uncle, the newly crowned King of Denmark. Recently married to Gertrude, so he is also Hamlet's stepfather.

Polonius

King Claudius' chief councilor. Father to Ophelia and Laertes.

Ophelia

Daughter to Polonius, and sister of Laertes. She was courted by Hamlet, though the status of their relationship is never made clear.

Laertes

Son to Polonius, and brother of Ophelia.

Horatio

Hamlet's close friend from Wittenberg.

Rosencrantz & Guildenstern

Acquaintances and schoolfellows of Hamlet, brought in by Claudius to spy on the Prince.

Also assorted guards, courtiers, messengers, players, a priest and a grave-digger.

The Classical Theatre Project production of *Hamlet* is performed by eight actors, several of whom play multiple roles. In Shakespeare's time it was accepted that a single actor might take on several minor roles (particularly when a company was on tour), and the practice has continued into modern times. WATCH for ways in which the actors use tone, gesture, and body language to differentiate one character from another.

MAJOR EVENTS

WHAT YOU WILL SEE ON STAGE

1. Murder Most Foul

Two night watchmen have seen a ghost on the ramparts of the castle at Elsinore; the ghost resembles the dead king, Hamlet's father. When Hamlet goes to see the Ghost for himself, the Ghost reveals that he was murdered by Claudius and demands that Hamlet seek revenge.

3. Trifling of His Favour

Meanwhile, Ophelia's brother Laertes is preparing to return to France. He warns Ophelia to be wary of the attention Hamlet has been showing her. Their father, Polonius, bids Laertes farewell, and forbids Ophelia to have anything more to do with Hamlet.

5. False Friends

Unsettled by Hamlet's sudden madness, Claudius enlists Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on him and find out why he's behaving so strangely. Hamlet sees through their deceit; to distract him, they tell him a troupe of travelling actors are approaching the castle.

2. Antic Disposition

Hamlet's mother Gertrude has married his uncle Claudius, the accused murderer, and they continue to reign in Denmark. In order to safely investigate the Ghost's accusation, Hamlet decides to put on an "antic disposition" - he will pretend to be crazy. He cannot take revenge on the new king without first gathering proof.

4. Your Noble Son is Mad

A terrified Ophelia brings news to Polonius - Hamlet has been behaving very strangely. Convinced that her obedient rejection of Hamlet has driven him crazy, Polonius tells the King and Queen as much; they conspire to spy on Hamlet and Ophelia. The encounter is bitter, and Hamlet tells Ophelia she should never have believed that he loved her.

6. The Play's the Thing

Hamlet decides to stage a play in which a murderer kills the king and marries the queen; Claudius's reaction will be a clue to his guilt or innocence. When the play comes to the king's death, Claudius storms from the room, which Hamlet takes as evidence of his guilt.

7. Try What Repentance Can

IN the aftermath of the play, Claudius is consumed by guilt and kneels to pray. Hamlet considers killing him in this vulnerable moment, but killing him mid-prayer will only send him to Heaven; best to wait for a better opportunity.

9. Painting of a Sorrow

Her father dead, Ophelia goes mad with grief and drowns. Claudius, determined to kill Hamlet, convinces a newly returned Laertes to avenge his father and sister by duelling with Hamlet and killing him with a poisoned blade. As a backup, they will also poison Hamlet's wine. Just in case.



8. What Wilt Thou Do? Though Wilt Not Murder Me?

Hamlet is summoned to Gertrude's room to account for his actions. A vicious argument between mother and son ensues and Polonius, hidden behind a curtain and fearing for the Queen's safety, calls for help. Hamlet thinks the hidden figure is Claudius and takes his chance, killing Polonius. Hearing of the death, Claudius, fearing for his safety, orders Hamlet immediately to England.

10. Revenge and Death

Hamlet agrees to duel with Laertes. In the confusion of the duel, Gertrude toasts her son; mistakenly drinking the poisoned wine, she dies. Hamlet is stabbed with the poisoned sword, in the scuffle Laertes is wounded with the same blade; as he dies, he reveals Claudius's plot and asks Hamlet's forgiveness. Hamlet kills Claudius using the poisoned blade and poisoned wine; he himself is overcome by his wounds and orders Horatio, the only survivor, to tell his story. Hamlet dies. "The rest is silence."



LANGUAGE OF THE PLAY

(LSV.02, LS1.03, LS1.05, LS3.01, LS3.02)

My dread lord,

Your leave and favour to return to France...

- I, ii, 50-51.

The word "dread", in this case is a "false friend" – a word whose meaning we think we know, but it's changed since Shakespeare's time. Here, "dread" means honoured, or revered, a meaning different than (but possibly related to) it's modern sense of something to be feared.

But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son...

- I, ii, 64.

Hamlet is, of course, Claudius' nephew. In Shakespeare's day, "cousin" could refer to any relative outside of the immediate family, or be a term of affection between social equals of any relationship. It is perhaps telling that Claudius refers to "my cousin" here, and uses the royal "our cousin" later in the scene.

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off...

- I, ii, 68.

Shakespeare's is the first recorded use of the word "nighted"; Gertrude's reference is that his clothes are as black as night. This usage, which also appears in King Lear, has not survived.

Obsequious sorrow...

- I, ii, 92.

"Obsequious", as Claudius uses it here, refers closely to the noun "obsequy" (funeral rites) as well as the more familiar modern sense of "eager to please".

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

- I, ii, 119.

Wittenberg is a town in Germany, home to the University of Wittenberg. Most famous perhaps for its association to Martin Luther and the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Exactly when Hamlet left his studies at Wittenberg, and his reasons for wishing to return, are open questions.

***So excellent a king, that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr...***

- I, ii, 139-140.

Hamlet compares his dead father to Hyperion, an Ancient Greek god of light; his uncle and new step-father to a half-man, half-beast. The tension between the god-like and the grotesque will be a theme Hamlet returns to throughout the play.

***...she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears...***

- I, ii, 148-149.

In Greek myth, Niobe turned to stone as she mourned the murder of her children; the stone continued to weep, a stream forming from her tears as they continued to fall.

I doubt some foul play.

- I, ii, 256.

"Doubt" in this case is another false friend, meaning "I suspect", instead of carrying the sense of disbelief it usually has to modern ears.

***...now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch
The virtue of his will.***

- I, iii, 15-16.

Shakespeare takes an older word, "smirch" (to smear) and adds a prefix, suggesting thorough discolouration. His newly coined form proves to be the one that has survived.

His will is not his own.

- I, iii, 17.

"Will", as usual, means "inclination" here. Hamlet cannot do as he likes. But in Shakespeare the word often also carries the meaning "sexual desire", or may refer directly to a man's physical excitement. Laertes neatly points up Hamlet's dilemma as presumed heir; his responsibility is to continue the royal line, and he cannot simply do as he likes, with whom he likes.

'Swounds, I should take it.

- II, ii, 572.

"Swounds" is a shortened form of "God's wounds"; therefore an oath or curse.

Get thee to a nunnery.

- III, i, 121.

The word "nunnery" (convent) was sometimes used in sarcasm to refer to a whorehouse; its use in that sense here would make for an interesting (if strained) interpretation of the speech.

I did enact Julius Caesar: I was killed I'th' Capitol.

Brutus killed me.

- III, ii, 102-103.

Echoes and similarities to Julius Caesar (1599) suggest that Hamlet was written just after it, probably in 1600-1601. Some suggest that the actors who played Hamlet and Polonius would also have played Brutus and Caesar in the earlier play, making this a kind of in-joke for the audience.

Let not ever

The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom...

- III, ii, 384-385.

A reference to the Roman Emperor, famous for the murder of his own mother.

What if this cursed hand

Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,

Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens

To wash it white as snow?

- III, iii, 43-46.

In Macbeth, written just after Hamlet, the title character has much the same thought after murdering the king: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood/clean from my hand?"

Bring me to the test,

And I the matter with re-word...

- III, iv, 144-145.

"Reword" seems to be Shakespeare's invention – Hamlet says that he could say the same thing exactly again (thus proving that he's not mad); the modern sense implies finding different words to say the same thing.

To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms,

And like the kind life-rendering pelican,

Repast them with my blood.

- IV, v, 145-147

It was believed that the pelican fed its children with its own blood; by extension this is a Christian reference to the blood of Christ. Queen Elizabeth I was frequently pictured with jewelry in the shape of a pelican, symbolizing her role as mother of the people.

I'll rant as well as thou.

- V, i, 279.

Shakespeare's is the first recorded use of the word "rant", which is borrowed from an obsolete Dutch word, "ranten", meaning "to rave". Whether he invented the word is open to debate.

THEME: REVENGE

"NOW COULD I DRINK HOT BLOOD"

(LSV.01, LSV.02, LS1.01, LS1.02, LS1.04, LS2.01, LS3.01, WRV.02, LA2.02, LA2.03)

From Hamlet's earliest suspicions to its bloody conclusion, Hamlet is a play that revolves around vengeance and the settling of scores.

"Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand/Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatch'd./If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not... "

- The Ghost

The Ghost of Hamlet's father tells him that he was murdered by his own brother, and urges Hamlet to avenge that violation.

Discuss:

What do you think the Ghost means when he says, "if thou hast nature in thee, bear it not"? Are there times when we are bound to get even, when circumstances leave us no choice? Is it natural to seek revenge? What do we gain in getting revenge? Is there anything we lose? Are there times when getting revenge in person is necessary, or preferable to letting the law take its course?

"To hell, allegiance! Vows, to the blackest devil!/Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!/I dare damnation.../Let come what comes; only I'll be revenged/Most thoroughly for my father."

- Laertes

Laertes returns to Elsinore upon hearing of the murder of his father, and storms into the presence of the king to demand an explanation.

Discuss:

Compare Laertes' reaction when he hears of his father's death to Hamlet's reaction earlier in the play. How are their responses different? How can circumstance account for those differences?

"No place indeed should murder sanctuarize;/Revenge should have no bounds."

- Claudius

Laertes has sworn that he will kill Hamlet to avenge Polonius, even if he has to "cut his throat in the church." Claudius approves of Laertes' determination, agreeing that no place should be a safe place (or sanctuary) when it comes to revenge.

Discuss:

Is it right to answer violence with violence? Imagine potential consequences for a revenge that has "no bounds". Would the revenge be worth the consequences? Can you think of an instance in which someone went too far to gain revenge? In what case? At what cost?

WATCH: For moments in the play where the characters use their language and actions to escalate heated situations. Watch for the moments where they choose to put on the brakes, and cool things.

THEME: SECRETS, LIES & DECEPTION

"I WOULD YOU WERE SO HONEST A MAN."

Director Charles Roy describes the world of Hamlet as one in which, "Everybody is wearing a mask, and everybody is trying to get away with something." Concealing the truth, the hiding of emotions, and the telling of lies keeps the characters and the audience guessing what is fact and what is fiction in the world of Elsinore.

"But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue."

- Hamlet

Early in the play, Hamlet laments the circumstances of his mother's remarriage, saying "it is not, nor it cannot come to good." He is filled with sadness and anger, but he must not give voice to his feelings.

Discuss:

Why must Hamlet keep his feelings secret? What prevents him from speaking his mind? Is there a kind of dishonesty in not revealing your true feelings? (Compare this to Claudius' question to Laertes: "are you like the painting of a sorrow/A face without a heart?") Hamlet cannot share his thoughts with anyone on stage here, but he shares them with the audience. What effect does this have on your understanding of the character? Of the play?

"... at such times seeing me, never note/That you know aught of me: this not to do,/So grace and mercy at your most need help you, Swear."

- Hamlet

After meeting the Ghost and hearing of the murder, Hamlet decides to "go undercover"; he will pretend to be crazy in order to investigate the circumstances of the alleged murder. In telling of the plan, he swears Horatio to secrecy.

Discuss:

Why is an "antic disposition" the first plan that comes to Hamlet? Do you think it is an effective tactic? Hamlet essentially plans to lie in order to uncover a lie. Is he justified in deceiving those around him?

"Come, go we to the king:/This must be known; which, being kept close, might move/More grief to hide than hate to utter love."

- Polonius

After a disturbing event in which Hamlet approached her in his "madness", a shaken Ophelia tells her father of their strange encounter. His first reaction is not to comfort her, but to take the news she has shared to the king.

Discuss:

What is the meaning of Polonius' final line in the scene? Have you ever known a situation where a supposed secret HAD to be told? Have you ever known a situation where keeping a secret turned out to be worse than telling the truth?

WATCH: For moments in the show when characters have a secret moment, when they are spied upon, when they listen while unseen, or pretend to be something they are not.

THEME: REFLECTIONS, OPPOSITES & DOUBLES

When speaking of the world of Hamlet, director Charles Roy notes that "Everyone is adrift, almost in limbo, there's barely a floor underneath their feet anymore." Shakespeare's language reflects and reinforces that uncertainty. Words carry unexpected and twisted meanings. Nothing is simple, certain or plain; uncles are also fathers, mothers are also aunts, and a nephew becomes a son.

"Therefore our sometime sister, now our Queen,/Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,/With an auspicious and a dropping eye,/With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,/Taken to wife."

- Claudius

The first time we see Claudius, the new king of Denmark, he uses highly anti-thetical language to recount the circumstances of his marriage to his dead brother's wife.

Discuss:

What do you make of Claudius' language in this scene? Why is he so careful to cover both sides of the situation? Does covering all the bases make Claudius a good politician, or just a hypocrite?

HAMLET: Farewell, dear mother.

CLAUDIUS: Thy loving father, Hamlet.

HAMLET: My mother: father and mother is man and wife; man and wife is one flesh; and so, my mother.

As Claudius sends Hamlet to England, Hamlet bids farewell. By a neat trick of language, Hamlet proves that Claudius is actually Gertrude, Hamlet's mother.

Discuss:

What does Hamlet demonstrate with this "proof"? What are the implications and insinuations within his words? To what end does Hamlet employ this verbal sleight-of-hand in this moment? To what effect? What potential responses can you imagine from Claudius?

"For this same lord,/I do repent: but heaven hath pleased it so, /To punish me with this and this with me..."

- Hamlet

After his mistaken murder of Polonius, Hamlet reflects that he is both victim and villain in this situation; the wrong that he has done is punishment in itself.

Discuss:

In trying to avenge his father's death, Hamlet ends up killing Laertes' father, so becoming the villain on whom Laertes will seek revenge. Do you sympathize more with Hamlet, or with Laertes in this situation? As they enter their final duel, which do you root for? Claudius and Hamlet are both guilty of murder. Are their crimes equivalent? Why, or why not?

WATCH: For moments in the play where images are reflected or mirrored, or fractured. Listen for moments when the language of the play has unexpected or evasive meanings, when characters are not what they seem to be or say they are. Are any of the characters absolutely honest in everything they say and do?

CONSIDER:

AFTER YOU SEE THE SHOW

Knowing that The Classical Theatre Project is a company that is dedicated to performing for young people, are there ways in which you would say this production was particularly designed to suit an audience of students?

What would you say was the director's main focus in this staging of Hamlet? Was the production faithful to your understanding of Shakespeare's text? Were there deviations or distortions from what Shakespeare intended, or what you expected? Do you think the show was biased at all in its presentation of the characters? (LS3.04, LA2.01, LA2.02, LA2.03, LA2.07)

Think back to the physical production of the show. What can you remember of the costumes, the sets and lights, the sound and music? In what ways did these support and enhance your understanding of the play? Were there times that they obscured the message of the play? Is there anything you would have done differently? (MDV.01, MDV.02, MD1.02)



ACTIVITIES:

DRAW THY BREATH IN PAIN TO TELL MY STORY

Before seeing the play, review Gertrude’s famous “Willow Speech”. (Act IV, scene vii, lines 165 – 181.) Gertrude must deliver the news of Ophelia’s death to Ophelia’s brother, who is already angry and mourning the recent loss of his father. **(LSV.01, LS1.01, LS1.02, LS3.01)**

- What details does Gertrude include? What mood does her language create? What words or phrases lend clarity to the facts, and which give richness to the images?
- Do you think this is a literal account of Ophelia’s death? Does Gertrude tell exactly what happened? Why, or why not? What details might she have chosen to leave out?
- How is her account appropriate to the situation in which she must deliver it?
- Do you think she’s speaking mostly to Laertes, or to Claudius? Or to herself?

Then choose one of the characters in the play who will die onstage – the list includes Polonius, Laertes, Claudius, Gertrude and Hamlet.

As you watch the play, pay close attention to everything around the moment of that character’s death. Observe the circumstances of their death, their behavior, their vocal quality, what else is happening onstage around them. You will have just this one opportunity to view this once-in-a-lifetime event – the moment of someone’s passing. **(LA2.03)**

Then, using Gertrude’s speech as a model, prepare the news of your chosen character’s death. Be certain to include the specific details that will add clarity, and the images that will add richness and weight to your account. Consider the “audience” for your news: will you be telling the character’s child or their mother of their passing? How will your language reflect that choice? Are there details you choose to add, or anything you gloss over in order to spare those you must tell? **(WRV.02, WR2.01, WR2.04, LA2.06, MD1.01)**

Share your report of the death to a classmate, taking care to use an appropriate tone and pace as you deliver the news.

ACTIVITIES:

BRINGING LANGUAGE TO LIFE - GIVE ME UP THE TRUTH

This short scene is from Act One, scene three of Hamlet. It has been cut here to closely conform to the version that Classical Theatre Project uses in performance. The language and circumstances of the scene are quite simple, but there are some words that have archaic or multiple meanings; it may be useful to have a dictionary or glossary at the ready.

In this excerpt, Polonius confronts his daughter, Ophelia, about her relationship with Hamlet. He casts doubt on the sincerity of Hamlet's love, and orders Ophelia not to see him again.

Read through the scene a couple of times as a group – either chorally, or perhaps with each student taking a line in turn. When everyone has had a turn to speak, take a moment to answer (or investigate) any questions about the meaning of the words and the action of the scene.

This scene is the first time we see Polonius and Ophelia alone together. What inferences can we draw about the characters and about their relationship, based on this scene? The characters exist only through what they say – there is nothing else to go on – so we can only assess what kind of people they are based on their words to make the scene come alive. (LS3.01, LS3.03)

Now have a pair of volunteers read through the scene, so as to hear each character with an individual voice. As you continue, you might now have everyone speak lines of interest all at once; encourage experimentation with rhythm, tone, and volume. What do you notice about the language and rhythms of the scene, about the length of each character's lines? How does each character shape their side of the argument? What repeated words and phrases stand out? Why so many repetitions of the phrase "my lord"? Experiment with changes in tone or emphasis to lend clarity and meaning to the repetitions. Why does Polonius echo so many of Ophelia's words? (LS3.03, LS3.04, LA1.01)

Next break into pairs to read through the scene. (You could also use trios, where one member of the group acts as a "director", helping to shape the reading of the scene.) Read through a couple of times (perhaps switching characters, even) to get familiar with the language, considering the following: Are there times when Ophelia uses her words to evasively? When is she more direct? Chart a course for each character through the scene. Do they push ever more strongly, more aggressively throughout the scene? Or are there times that they give in, soften, fall back? (LS3.01, LS3.03, LS3.04, LA1.01, LA2.03)

ACTIVITIES:

BRINGING LANGUAGE TO LIFE - GIVE ME UP THE TRUTH

Then try a reading of the scene where Ophelia is as submissive and obedient as possible. Then try again, making Ophelia stronger, more certain of herself – how might she use her words more aggressively? Defensively? Sarcastically? How will Polonius' reactions change in response? How does it change the scene? Does it still work?

As time permits, have a number of groups share their scene with the class. Compare the nuances of the assorted interpretations. What do you learn about the characters, and about their relationship through seeing the scene in these different ways?

WRITE: Consider what might happen for Ophelia after this barrage of advice from her father and brother. Imagine that you are Ophelia's friend – what advice would YOU offer her in this situation? How should she deal with her father? With Hamlet? (LS1.01, LS3.01, WRV.02, WR2.02, WR2.04, WR3.02)

LORD POLONIUS

What is't, Ophelia, he hath said to you?

OPHELIA

So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

LORD POLONIUS

Marry, well bethought.

'Tis told me, he hath very oft of late

Given private time to you, and you yourself

Have of your audience been most free and bounteous.

What is between you? Give me up the truth.

OPHELIA

He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders

Of his affection to me.

LORD POLONIUS

Affection! You speak like a green girl.

Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?

OPHELIA

I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

BRINGING LANGUAGE TO LIFE - GIVE ME UP THE TRUTH

LORD POLONIUS

Marry, I'll teach you. Think yourself a baby
That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay,
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly.

OPHELIA

My lord, he hath importuned me with love
In honourable fashion.

LORD POLONIUS

Ay, fashion you may call it. Go to, go to.

OPHELIA

And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

LORD POLONIUS

I do know,
When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul
Lends the tongue vows. In few, Ophelia,
I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,
Have you so slander any moment leisure,
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.
Look to't, I charge you.

OPHELIA

I shall obey, my lord.



APENDIX A

CURRICULUM LINK SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Who's Telling the Truth? Create a Dramatic Monologue and Additional Scene to Hamlet

"In a way, it's about police states. The time in which Shakespeare was writing Hamlet, there's a very good reason to think that England was very much in the middle of a police-state-like culture... Freedoms that people had enjoyed for generations were suddenly gone... That police state aspect is revealed through Polonius and Claudius too... there's that atmosphere of surveillance and paranoia. And it's surveillance where everyone knows they're being surveyed. Everybody knows that there's eaves-dropping.... Everyone keeps their cards very close to their chest, everyone is wearing a mask, and everybody is trying to get away with something. Everybody is, including our hero."

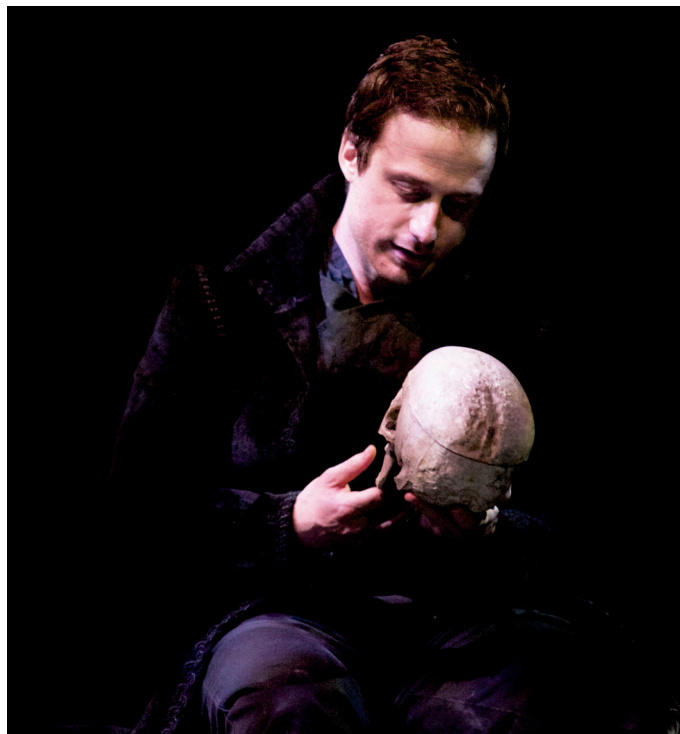
– CTP Director Charles Roy

With Spying and Espionage as catalysts for action (or inaction!) in this play, it's hard to figure out who to believe! Everyone, as Charles Roy states, "is wearing a mask," and is trying to get away with something. We have seen this in Hamlet's planning of his "antic disposition," Gertrude's speech, and Claudius' confession, just to name a few.

This assignment, while engaging students to reflect on and practice elements of drama, encourages students to explore how we build our stories, how stories are stemmed in family histories, and how often, different things are important to different people when it comes to "the truth."

* Adapted from Ontario Curriculum English 12 University Preparation Course Profile, 2002.

* Please visit <http://csc.immix.ca/storage/126/1283534021/ENG4UP.pdf> for sample Rubrics and Rating Scales



APENDIX A

CURRICULUM LINK SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Time	Learning Expectations	Assessment	Lesson Organization
Homework	LS1.04, WRV.02, WRV.02, WRV.04, WR1.02, WR2.04, WR5.03	Homework Assessment Written Response: Supported Opinion Assessment and Anecdotal Feedback	6. Writing Task: Students write a short Supported Opinion piece analyzing one chosen character, their actions and tells, and how their realities and motivations are depicted in the three media presentations.
Day 2/3 180 minutes	LSV.03, LS3.01, LAV.02, LA1.01, LA2.02, LA2.06 WRV.02, WRV.04, WR2.02, WR2.03, WR3.02, WR4.02, LAV.01, LA1.03	KU, TI, CO, AP Lg. Group Discussion Sm. Group Discussion Peer Assessment (rating scale) Written Work: Dramatic Monologue (rating scale)	7. Class discussion or Peer assessment of Supported Opinion pieces. 8. Discuss and/or review elements of the Dramatic Monologue, with selected examples such as “My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning and “The Death of the Hired Man” by Robert Frost. 9. Writing Task: Each student writes a Dramatic Monologue , which reflects the selected character’s viewpoint at a critical time in the play for that character. The individual monologue will be used as an introduction to development of a scene. Present and discuss.

APENDIX A

CURRICULUM LINK SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Time	Learning Expectations	Assessment	Lesson Organization
Day 4/5/6 270 minutes	LSV.03, LS1.02, LS2.01, LS3.01, LS3.03, WRV.01, WRV.02, WRV.04, WRV.05, WR1.02, WR1.04, WR2.01, WR2.02, WR2.03, WR2.04, WR4.01, WR4.02, WR4.03, WR5.01, WR5.02, WR5.03, WR5.04, LAV.01, LAV.02	KU, TI, CO, AP Anecdotal Comments (rating scale) Communication Skills: Lg. Group Discussion Sm. Group Discussion (rating scale) Checklist for Oral Communication Skills Anecdotal Feedback	10. Introduce script writing task, which will build from the individual student monologues into a single, coherent script creating an additional scene not presented in the play. 11. Review the Elements of Drama visited through the study of Hamlet: dramatic monologue, language and syntax, literary devices, tone, voice, pacing, characterization, blocking (stage direction), tragedy, comedy, plot, conflict, setting, themes, soliloquy, etc. 12. Connections to the Community: Review scriptwriting format and the elements of creating Dramatic Works; (Connections to the Community can be made through a visit from, or workshop with a CTP director, actor or scriptwriter. Write a series of questions for an interview with the author or director of the play to focus on scriptwriting methods, dramatic techniques, themes, or purpose.) Review set design, costume, dialogue, blocking (stage direction). How are emotions, motivations, visual images represented in the play/script? Ask students to speculate on Shakespeare's writing choices, the director and scripteriter's choices in technique and dramatic purpose.

APENDIX A

CURRICULUM LINK SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Time	Learning Expectations	Assessment	Lesson Organization
		Written Work: Additional Scene and Script (rubric) Media: Performance Presentation (rubric) Writing: Argumentative Essay (rubric)	13. Students develop their additional scene including their chosen character. Note: you can include as many characters as you like in addition to your chosen; however, fewer characters usually work best for one scene. The scene must stay true to the integrity of the play. 14. Peer editing and revision of the scene, and mini-lessons as appropriate on language and writing process. 15. Performance of scene for the class. 16. Follow-up with unit on the Argumentative Essay.

CTP would like to see the results! Record your performance with a quick introduction on your character study, your assessment of their "truth," and how you interpreted their reality in this scene. Then upload your video to our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/classicaltheatreproject





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