

HAMLET
The Undiscovered Country

FESTIVAL EDITION

– Stash Kirkbride and Peter Beck –

– Edited by Peter Barrow –

pbsk
PARTNERSHIP

In association with

Fosters Solicitors and The John Jarrold Trust, Norwich

First published in 2012
By PBSK Partnership

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Lightning Source, Milton Keynes

© Stash Kirkbride, Peter Beck and Peter Barrow 2012

Stash Kirkbride, Peter Beck and Peter Barrow are hereby identified as the authors of this play in accordance with section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. The authors assert their moral rights.

This play is fully protected under the copyright laws of the British Commonwealth of Nations, the United States of America and all countries of the Berne and Universal Copyright Conventions.

All rights including, Stage, Motion Picture, Radio, Television, Public Readings, and Translations into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

For performance rights contact:
info@hamlettheundiscoveredcountry.com

No parts of this publication may lawfully be reproduced in ANY form or by any means – photocopying, transcript, recording (including video recording), manuscript, electronic, mechanical or otherwise – or be transmitted or stored in a retrieval system, without prior permission.

No characters in this play are based on any real persons living or dead and where similarities may arise with real people they are totally unintentional on the part of the authors. Similarly the inclusions of, or references to, any actual institutions, programmes, or named real people, are purely for dramatic effect and are not intended to impute any negative attributes to such organisations or persons, whatsoever.

ISBN 978-0-9574089-0-6.

Cover image © Colin Self 2012.
Interior images © Matt Dartford 2012

To:

Betty Barrow, Melinda and John Kirkbride, Maureen, Jenny,
the Barnes and Boyes families.

Contents

THE PLAY

Act I

Scene 1	3
Scene 2	11
Scene 3	18
Scene 4	32
Scene 5	38
Scene 6	54
Scene 7	65

Act II

Scene 8	71
Scene 9	73
Scene 10	77
Scene 11	86
Scene 12	92
Scene 13	96
Scene 14	101
Scene 15	103
Scene 16	107
Scene 17	108
Scene 18	116

HOSTRY FESTIVAL – THE ORIGINAL STAGING

Introduction	125
Production Images	139
Biographies	155

Dramatis Personae

This play was first performed at the Hostry Festival, Norwich in October
2012 with the following cast:

CHORUS	.....David Banks
HAMLET	.....Tom Harper
HORATIO	.....Chris Ellis
HAMLET'S FATHER	.....David Newham
CLAUDIUS	.....Peter Beck
GERTRUDE	.....Rebecca Chapman
LAERTES	.....Evan Ryder
OPHELIA	.....Caitlin McClay
YORICK	.....Peter Barrow
MRS YORICK	.....Etta Geras
ROSENCRANTZ	.....Robin Watson
GUILDENSTERN	.....Bijan Arasteh
POLIANA	.....Henrietta Rance
REV RANK SEDGES	.....Neville Miller
FAITHFUL	.....William Harvey
THE BOY	.....Alex Scott
ATTENDANTS	
TRAVELLERS	

ACT I

SCENE 1 – THE END AND THE BEGINNING

Lights up.

CLAUDIUS

Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand from me.

Claudius puts Laertes hand into Hamlet's hand.

HAMLET

Give me your pardon, sir. I have done you wrong;
But pardon't as you are a gentleman.
What I have done,
That might your nature, honour, and exception,
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
Sir, in this audience,
Let my disclaiming from a purpos'd evil,
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts,
That I have shot my arrow o'er the house
And hurt my brother.

LAERTES

I am satisfied in nature.
I do receive your offer'd love like love and will not wrong it.

HAMLET

I embrace it freely,
And will this brothers' wager frankly play.

CLAUDIUS

Cousin Hamlet, you know the wager?

HAMLET

Very well, my lord.
Your Grace has laid the odds o'th weaker side.

CLAUDIUS

I do not fear it. I have seen you both,
But since he is better'd, we have therefore odds.

LAERTES

This is too heavy. Let me see another.

HAMLET

This likes me well. These foils have all the length?

CLAUDIUS

Ay, they do indeed.
If Hamlet give the first or second hit,
Or quit in answer of the third exchange,
Let all the battlements their ordnance fire:
The King shall drink to Hamlet's better breath,
And in the cup a union shall he throw,
Richer than that which four successive kings,
In Denmark's crown have worn.
Let the kettle to the trumpet speak,
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,
The cannons to the heavens, the heaven to earth,
Now the King drinks to Hamlet. Come, begin.
And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.

HAMLET

Come on, sir.

LAERTES

Come, my lord.

HAMLET

One.

LAERTES

No.

Act I, Scene 1 – The End and the Beginning

HAMLET

Judgement.

CLAUDIUS

A hit, a very palpable hit.

LAERTES

Well again.

CLAUDIUS

Stay, give me a drink. Hamlet this pearl is thine.
Here's to thy health.

The sound of drums, trumpet and a gunshot going off are heard.

(To an attendant) Give him the cup.

HAMLET

I'll play this bout first. Set it by a while. Come.

They play again.

Another hit. What say you?

LAERTES

I do confess't.

CLAUDIUS

Our son shall win.

GERTRUDE

He's fat and scant of breath.
Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brow.
The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.

Act I, Scene 1 – The End and the Beginning

HAMLET

Good Madam.

CLAUDIUS

Gertrude, do not drink.

GERTRUDE

I will, my lord, I pray you pardon me;

She drinks and offers the cup to Hamlet.

CLAUDIUS

It is the poison'd cup. It is too late.

HAMLET

I dare not drink yet madam, by and by.

GERTRUDE

Come, let me wipe your face.

LAERTES

My lord, I'll hit him now.

CLAUDIUS

I do not think't.

LAERTES

And yet it is almost against my conscience.

HAMLET

Come for the third Laertes.

You make a wanton of me.

I pray you pass with your best violence.

Act I, Scene 1 – The End and the Beginning

LAERTES

Say you so? Come on.

They play.

CLAUDIUS

Nothing neither way.

Laertes wounds Hamlet. Then, in the scuffling, they change rapiers.

LAERTES

Have at you now.

CLAUDIUS

Part them, they are incensed.

HAMLET

Nay, come again.

He wounds Laertes. The Queen falls.

HORATIO

Look to the Queen there, ho!

They bleed on both sides.

How is it, my lord?

Horatio goes to Hamlet, then questions Laertes at Hamlet's side.

How is't Laertes?

LAERTES

Why, as the woodcock to mine own treachery.

HAMLET

How does the Queen?

CLAUDIUS

She swoons to see them bleed.

GERTRUDE

No, no, the drink, the drink! O my dear Hamlet!
The drink, the drink! I am poison'd.

HAMLET

Oh villainy! Ho! Let the doors be lock'd.
Treachery! Seek it out.

LAERTES

It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain.
No medicine in the world can do thee good;
In thee there is not half an hour's life.
The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,
Unabated and evenenom'd. The foul practice,
Hath turn'd itself on me. Lo, here I lie,
Never to rise again. Thy mother's poison'd.
I can no more. The King, the King's to blame.

HAMLET

The point evenenom'd too! Then, venom, do thy work.

He wounds the King.

ATTENDANTS

Treason! Treason!

CLAUDIUS

O yet defend me, friends, I am but hurt.

HAMLET

Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damned Dane,
Drink off this poison. Is thy union here?
Follow my mother.

LAERTES

He is justly serv'd.
It is a poison temper'd by himself.
Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.
Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,
Nor thine on me.

HAMLET

Heaven make thee free of it. I follow thee.
I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, adieu.
You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time, as this fell sergeant Death,
Is strict in his arrest, O, I could tell you –
But let it be. Horatio, I am dead,
Thou livest. Report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.

HORATIO

Never believe it.
I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
Here's yet some liquor left.

HAMLET

As th'art a man.
Give me the cup. Let go, by Heaven I'll ha't.
O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me.
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain to tell my story.
O, I die, Horatio.
The potent poison quite o'ercrows my spirit.
The rest is silence.

HORATIO

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.
Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,
For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have prov'd most royal.
Such a sight as this becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.
Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

During the last two speeches an underscoring of music has built. Almost as soon as the simplicity of Horatio's final lines have settled, the Chorus steps onto the stage and begins his speech. This bridges the scene from the end of Shakespeare's original 'Hamlet' play, to the beginning of the new 'Hamlet – The Undiscovered Country' play.

Chorus walks among the dead.

CHORUS

And just when we presumed the end, the story good and told,
A new beginning with second chance must surely now unfold.
Hamlet, a troubled soul with so much yet to tell,
And for our story here tonight, we must begin in hell?

A dying Prince, a poisoned mother, a lover drowned,
Then comes the King and his brother, also crowned.
A political advisor, a youth with treacherous sword in tow,
Just one remains upon this stage, the loyal Horatio.

This friend so true will play a role, a voice from here on earth,
He'll steer the young man's troubled mind toward a second birth.
Pray dear mortals, of our spirits that now ascend,
That they discover peace herein and so will call an end.

Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country, a place of no return,
To live, and die, and live again, with so much yet to learn.

**SCENE 2 – HAMLET ARRIVES IN THE
UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY**

Lights up.

HAMLET

Dead?

Pause.

HAMLET

What world is this... where am I brought? Ho! Ho! Angels and saints protect me now!

Pause.

HAMLET

What ground do I now walk on?

Pause.

HAMLET

My Father! Where do you bring me? I do not know this world!

Pause.

HAMLET

What now for Hamlet? I had thought him to be dead, defeated, cut by the poisoned sword of Laertes, murdered by my Uncle? Mother? Mother! Answer me! And yet... and yet... with these hands I feel, my heart... beating. Am I to be punished now? Is this to be my penalty? Alive or dead? To wander this forsaken place alone; is this how it should end, time after time? I cannot!

Pause.

HAMLET

I beg you, take pity on me now. When my father appeared to me that night in ghostly form and imparted news of his foul murder, my mind did swell with thoughts of revenge. I pray for forgiveness now for the life that I have taken.

Pause.

My sweet Ophelia, my love, forgive me, I beg. In that time my madness and rage struck my mind with falsehoods, thoughts of betrayal always near. Oh, that gentle flesh, so weak. Pity me, pity me please, I beg.

Hamlet's Father enters.

HAMLET'S FATHER

My son. Open your eyes my son, it is true. I stand before you. I am real.

My son, how is it with you? Are you now not truly come of age? Have the passages of time and your studies with learned men not served you well? I see there is still some heat within your blood... well? Speak boy!

HAMLET

I swore revenge for you!

HAMLET'S FATHER

Ah revenge, yes. (*To himself*) Is that what ails you.

HAMLET

The blood upon my sword is not mine Father. I have committed murder most foul.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Say you so? Who have you killed, son?

Act I, Scene 2 – Hamlet Arrives in the Undiscovered Country

HAMLET

I cannot say.

HAMLET'S FATHER

My brother, Hamlet?

HAMLET

Yes.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Oh yes, and his loving friend Polonius, and his boy. What of your mother?

She is dead too. Oh yes, I know this my son. My Queen.

HAMLET

My uncle.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Claudius, yes.

HAMLET

Forgive me Father.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Look at me Hamlet. I grow weak. My eyes are pitted and the flesh on my hands is thin. My time is little here, it runs fast.

Help me Hamlet. This world is none that I have ever known. It is grey and empty; the wind whistles a dull tone, like the bottom of the mighty ocean; you know nothing of its danger. Hold my hand tightly, tightly.

Your mother is alive in this world.

HAMLET

My mother, it cannot be.

HAMLET'S FATHER

It is true. Alive, yes, in this world.

Indeed. What news!

HAMLET

Then we must go to her.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Hold! Claudius alive too, and the young Laertes.

HAMLET

What is this world, father?

HAMLET'S FATHER

When my brother Claudius, defenceless as I slept did take my life, I awoke here, in a daze, blinded by confusion and fear. For days and days I walked in madness through this empty land, my mind rolling over and over. In desperation I looked up to the heavens and cried "I am your King, why do you bring such sorrow on me?", but no word came. No word. Like a savaged animal I railed against the world that had brought me here. I set my soul upon revenge and came into your world. My dear son, I saw you in that time. A noble young man, fit to take the crown. I did impart my news to you and with such duty you set forth. The rest we know of. So like myself, my Queen and all who were slain did come into this world. Men grow stronger through ceaseless struggle Hamlet, those who want to live fight on and those that don't want to fight in this world of struggle don't deserve to live. This world provides a second chance. Here a palace can be built, a kingdom renewed. We can become strong again. Join me my son and when I am gone you will be such a wise and good King.

HAMLET

Yes, father.

HAMLET'S FATHER

We must take arms against my brother once and for all. This battle must be won; we must do now what we have failed in before. Great danger exists for the Queen, your mother.

HAMLET

I cannot...

HAMLET'S FATHER

What? What do you mean?

HAMLET

I can fight no more. No more. No more blood to be spilled.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Have we come this far to leave alone the damage done to those we love so deeply?

HAMLET

Please...

HAMLET'S FATHER

Can it be true that the son of mine who once swore revenge is now unmanly in his habit, a mere remnant of his former self? Tell me, have you now weakened, shrunk in stature and persuasion? Come now, hear my fervent prayer. For all our loved ones let us devise a plan of action, to do away with the man who caused the downfall of so many lost souls, this time for good. So many beloved friends, so many cherished hearts and minds. Your mother too, being held by a pernicious man who belittles her very nature.

HAMLET

Oh Father, had I your strength to discern right and wrong then I would be bathed in a glorious golden light and blessed with happy endings for my bravery. But Father, I am less than you had hoped. How best may I live and die and live again, with such hatred towards our betrayers? Do not ask of me what I cannot do. Rather let alone all that is done. Leave it to others better qualified than I. I am new to this world and drifting and confused father; let me walk aside without this deed pressing upon me.

HAMLET'S FATHER

My beloved son, in truth there are such things ahead of you, great dangers. I offer you this hand as you venture forth into the unknown. When your gallant heart begins to falter, for it will, when the black mantle-like clouds hang heavy on your path, I will revive you once again. Gentle son, summon up your better half. I am the father that held you in his arms, read to you tales of great courage, and in battle fought beside you as you became a soldier. It is through duty and love that you are called again to fight. What answer will I hear?

HAMLET

My endeavours are yours, noble father and King.

HAMLET'S FATHER

My loyal son, for now let you rest here a while. I will seek out a place where we may despatch the villain.

HAMLET

Then I will come.

HAMLET'S FATHER

No, you will rest for now.

Hamlet's Father exits.

HAMLET

When I did see my father that night upon the walls at Elsinore he came to me in ghostly form, yet now I see no such trick. His flesh is warm, his words more natural to my ear, and his breath now punctuates the air. Yet does he live or am I dead now? My mother, alive? I did not think to see her again, or King Claudius. I did despatch him with venomous sword. I did see him dead. Not so. And Laertes too, I will be quickly called to my grave a second time! If all this news be true, then what of my dear Ophelia? Alive too? No, what I have seen is too fantastic. I have been blinded. This is so; I will close my eyes and this will not be so.

It is true, I saw my father. He talked with words of revenge, to rid this world of those that did betray before. And I his son at his request to carry out this deed a second time. May this bring peace? Revenge and peace, these words are unnatural neighbours! Yet both Kings are transported now on equal ground and brought to war. One King with rightful crown, the other clothed in treachery. Ah me! With bloody hands King Claudius pursues my Father. And so like my father is bound to revenge! I must away and give warning. The air begins to thicken. What ho! Ho!

Hamlet exits in pursuit of his father. Blackout.

SCENE 3 – CLAUDIUS AND GERTRUDE

Lights up on an empty stage.

GERTRUDE

(From offstage) Please no more, help me, god save me from this, I cannot breathe!

CLAUDIUS

(From offstage) Please my love, listen, listen!

GERTRUDE

(From offstage) Let me go, no, no!

Claudius and Gertrude enter.

CLAUDIUS

Listen to me!

GERTRUDE

Let me go, unhand me.

(She hits him.)

CLAUDIUS

Gertrude hold!

GERTRUDE

Hold indeed, held up! Locked up! Enslaved here! Place after place each the same, empty, vacant; the furniture now rotting, piled high and discarded. To where am I brought? I do not know whether I am alive or dead?

CLAUDIUS

Alive my love, alive!

GERTRUDE

How?

CLAUDIUS

With me my love, here.

GERTRUDE

You do not know! You do not!

CLAUDIUS

We must think ourselves alive!

GERTRUDE

And yet we are not, neither alive nor dead, but somewhere in between.

CLAUDIUS

Look at me sweet Gertrude and take courage.

GERTRUDE

Courage? Courage now? The same courage when I did drink and left no drop?

CLAUDIUS

I shall not listen to this!

GERTRUDE

Oh courageous plot, to plan to take a life and yet in doing so take the life of one you profess to love, your Queen?

CLAUDIUS

You are my love, I profess, my Queen. Oh heavy misfortune.

GERTRUDE

That is what it is, misfortune, plain misfortune...

She explodes, pounding him with blows.

GERTRUDE

Is this misfortune? (*Blow*) And this? (*Blow*) this and this? (*Two blows*) Is to be dead a misfortune? Oh yes, a misfortune! Or perhaps to lose a son? A boy of my own flesh who I have loved every moment, now dead, dead!

She takes his knife from his belt and puts it to her stomach.

Please give me strength to do this now!

Just as she tries, Claudius rushes at her and restrains her.

CLAUDIUS

No Gertrude!

The knife drops.

We have strength now in life! We are alive! To where we have been brought I know not, but we have been given life. Take courage from this. We will know more of this place in time.

GERTRUDE

And my son, what of my boy Hamlet?

CLAUDIUS

We do not yet know of your son, of Hamlet.

GERTRUDE

I must know of him, of his fate.

CLAUDIUS

In time!

GERTRUDE

I must know of his fate!

CLAUDIUS

Gertrude, can you not rest from your thoughts of this boy!

GERTRUDE

I will not! In killing my son you killed me too!

CLAUDIUS

Gertrude! Control yourself! Calm yourself and be yourself, for in this manner we are likely to draw attention to our party when we do not know where or who we are as yet!

GERTRUDE

And with that I am to take comfort, my lord? Any woman in my position would have long ago left your side, and yet here I am, beside you, beside myself with fear and loathing toward this hateful place we have been sentenced to! By all rights I should by now have lost my mind with the wonder of it all!

CLAUDIUS

I do implore you! Be calm woman!

GERTRUDE

Calm! I am anything but that my lord and best you know it! I am frightened beyond measure and all you do is treat me like a child! To hell with it and let all who reside here, hear me say it! To hell with all this madness! We are undone! Oh help us, hallo! Anyone? Anything? Anywhere? Answer me I beseech you, we are lost and I am coupled to a murderer as my companion, my lord, my master! Ha!

(She coughs, through her pain from previous poisoning in the throat.)

CLAUDIUS

You see? Your condition tells you how best you should behave and behave you will or else. Think I have come this far in my endeavours to have you act out a scene like the worst of those players, and so put us in peril? I grant we are at a loss and know not where we may be, but in time such a place may prove of great advantage to our cause. Man can thrive and obtain the very highest office if only his wife would know her duty. If she would behave as ruled and be guided by her husband, then all would be well. You test the patience of a thousand angels when you cry out and feminise your emotions thus. It is most unattractive to behold!

GERTRUDE

Let all who are able, hear this! My lord and master, King Claudius' is a murderer and a coward! He has ruined me and killed my son by the shameful hands of others, while he did nothing as his own flesh and blood gave in to death!

CLAUDIUS

Enough! Calm yourself or by these hands I will finish the job that poison first began. You were not the target and I was not the guilty one. Young Laertes was the owner of the blade that caused your son's death, and more to it, he alone the giver of the poison. And so there's an end to it! What's done is done!

GERTRUDE

I will obey you my lord. I no longer have the strength to fight you in this matter.

CLAUDIUS

There! It is for the best my love. I promise we shall prosper in this new world far better than before. Trust me. I will make amends for any wrong-doing, let that be a comfort to you.

GERTRUDE

It is my lord. I remain your loyal subject, and your loving wife.

CLAUDIUS

Good! Good! Better and better.

But who comes here?

Enter The Boy.

A young lad! What do you have to say boy? Speak!

The Boy takes out a small notebook and writes something in it. He looks them up and down and writes more notes into his book. He ignores them.

Do you not know who stands before you?

The Boy continues to write.

Hand me that book boy!

The Boy puts his book and pen away.

GERTRUDE

My lord, let me try my hand in more ‘motherly terms’. Tell me child, where may your family be, your father and your mother?

Silence.

Have you no father and mother?

Silence.

Then your home, do you live near?

CLAUDIUS

The boy is mute, or else he’s dumb for sure!

GERTRUDE

The Boy, my lord is perhaps alarmed at seeing us here. Let me ask you this, have you lost your way? I don't think he understands, my lord.

THE BOY

I am neither lost nor found! I am I suppose you'd say, 'at play' madam. For all boys, given time and chance, will play until the sun sets and they are called to bed for sleeping.

GERTRUDE

A most... forthright language for one so young! Are you alone, here?

THE BOY

Alone, yes.

GERTRUDE

No mother?

THE BOY

She has been dead some thirty year.

GERTRUDE

The boy is surely mistaken.

CLAUDIUS

What, is this some sport?

Silence. The Boy takes out his book again and writes something down.

Answer me this, knave, have you knowledge of this place? Do you reside here?

Silence.

CLAUDIUS (Cont.)

Again he refuses to answer when I talk! Why so boy? Why do you not answer me? Hand me that book!

The Boy puts the book away.

GERTRUDE

You need only listen to yourself but for a fleeting moment. If I knew you less, I would not venture even one word to you, lest I should offend!

CLAUDIUS

Then he is of little use to us at best, most unlike any ordinary boy.

GERTRUDE

Yet I am curious. He's speaks in tones that belie his years.

The Boy exits.

Look, he goes!

CLAUDIUS

There will be others. Let the boy go Gertrude. *(To The Boy)* Away with you!

GERTRUDE

And yet another comes this way. Quick my lord, it is the young Laertes! He staggers and is weak. Let us go to him.

CLAUDIUS

No, no!

GERTRUDE

He is pale!

CLAUDIUS

There is anger in his blood, let us away, we shall hide ourselves.

GERTRUDE

Yes my lord.

CLAUDIUS

There we shall observe and know his mind better. Quick, this way!

Claudius and Gertrude hide themselves from Laertes. They are visible to the audience however and we can overhear their speech. Laertes enters with his sword drawn.

LAERTES

What ho!

Silence.

Ho!

Silence.

I would have you show yourselves! For if I am to be drowned in blood then let it be now! But for my honour I will fight with you first!

He draws his sword and circles.

GERTRUDE

(Aside to Claudius) The boy is run mad!

LAERTES

Take this life, I want no more of it. Draw, draw!

He continues to circle with an imaginary enemy.

LAERTES (Cont.)

You soldier, what's your name? I fight for the King; it is upon his counsel and command that I am drawn into battle. My King, Claudius! I had dreamt that I was at court, and in the flickering light the young Prince and I, with swords drawn did fatally quarrel. Yes, he and I forced to rest. And yet, once more have I awakened? Now into this place have I wandered like the Night Watchman, my eyes sinking into the fog.

CLAUDIUS

(Aside) Gertrude, speak with Laertes alone so that you may quell his anger. Tell him not of my presence.

LAERTES

What of the Prince? Where are you now noble King, Sovereign Lord? You did entreat me to contrive against the Prince, to take up arms in retribution for my father's murder, a life for a life. This was my undertaking. With the King's envenomed sword the Prince and I have plunged each other into darkness. The Queen too, drinking from the cup poisoned by your treachery, lay dead. But you were not spared murderous Dane! Hamlet, the soldier, put an end to your work.

Gertrude has stepped forward into view. Claudius is still hidden.

GERTRUDE

Good Laertes. Come, let me embrace you!

LAERTES

Gertrude, is it you? Can it be so? Good Queen.

They embrace.

GERTRUDE

There, take comfort.

LAERTES

I have walked alone. The world went dark.

GERTRUDE

I know, I have seen it too.

LAERTES

And then brought to this place, for what purpose? For punishment?
God's punishment? Can this be the afterlife for which all men pray?

GERTRUDE

I know nothing of this world. No heavenly place, of that I am certain.

LAERTES

Then to be punished. Yet, what crime have you committed fair lady? What deed, what act? The answer is none, I say. I give you my sword so that you may give me swift ending. I was the villain that took your life.

He offers his sword to her.

GERTRUDE

No, I will not!

LAERTES

I beg you Madam.

He grabs the sword to pull it into his chest.

Your husband the King and I did conspire to murder your son.

GERTRUDE

Hamlet?

LAERTES

Yes Madam and I his murderer, the name befits me.

GERTRUDE

No more!

LAERTES

And your murderer too!

GERTRUDE

An end to the bloodshed, enough!

Silence.

Look at me Good Laertes and understand. Do not burden yourself with such thoughts of blame and revenge. Let all this be forgotten. My husband the King has told me all.

LAERTES

The King, alive?

GERTRUDE

Yes, Laertes.

LAERTES

What news? What was his utterance? Did he come in fury, or in better temper?

GERTRUDE

Speak with him, Laertes!

Claudius walks forward. Laertes draws his sword.

CLAUDIUS

Peace I speak, Laertes.

LAERTES

Away Madam, God save you from this tormenter!

CLAUDIUS

I bear no arms, words only shall serve me. I have greatly wronged you. Let me make amends.

GERTRUDE

This is no trick Laertes. The King is in earnest.

LAERTES

You have given uneven counsel, bound me to vile acts, and left me shipwrecked in this godforsaken land! What words may you have for that sir, what words?

CLAUDIUS

You are like a son to me Laertes. I see good in you.

LAERTES

Good? For certain there is no good in me!

CLAUDIUS

So proud, so just, most fair. So much goodness.

LAERTES

Not I!

CLAUDIUS

Believe me when I tell you. You are a better man than I, in truth. You are of good parentage. I loved your father. Like you he served me well. On the night of your birth we raised a cup, “to your boy, the young Laertes! Laertes, let his shoulders be strong enough to carry the deeds of a soldier!” In war there are casualties on both sides. We pay the price of our actions when we gather up our dead. But

CLAUDIUS (Cont.)

we must build our strength again, not dishonour them through sorrow and doubt.

LAERTES

Your son, Madam?

CLAUDIUS

You have made your peace with Hamlet. Let him rest now. Honour him too.

LAERTES

Full of grief am I for him, sweet Prince. Let all remember him at Elsinore.

CLAUDIUS

We are come unto this world now. Let us make of it all that we can. To better fortune. I need you now, my son. Let us make this world anew, together, in honour of those lost and to comfort those that may now remain. Come, let us talk further.

They exit.

SCENE 4 – HAMLET AND YORICK

Hamlet enters with sword drawn.

HAMLET

Father? Again, like a shadow he moves. His utterances ring in my ears; ‘to take arms against my uncle... through duty and love?’ Ah me! How shall we bring an end to this torment; through war, bloodshed? May this satisfy? All for order, subjects to be directed, for the crown? What man may win this? Such matters may my father resolve.

There is rustling of papers and things being moved about within some furniture that makes up the scenery.

Who’s there, show yourself!

There are noises from a cupboard.

YORICK

(From inside the cupboard) Up, up...

HAMLET

Show yourself or I shall seek you out!

The front of a cupboard opens. We see Yorick in the cupboard, climbing out. He rifles through pieces of paper.

YORICK

Ah now, there you are... yes here we are... Samuel Wheeler, Rose Kidd and Elisabeth Masters, three more...

He turns to face Hamlet.

YORICK (Cont.)

Do my eyes deceive me? Young Hamlet? Son of Elsinore? As I live and breath it is. You have arrived.

HAMLET

Yes, that is who I am sir... how do you know my name?

YORICK

Since you were born I've known your name Hamlet.

HAMLET

Known me since I was born?

YORICK

Before you could walk. Oh, dear, another makes four.

HAMLET

Your name sir, what is your name, and how do you come to be in this... cupboard?

YORICK

This cupboard is where I live; and may I say, in some comfort too!

HAMLET

This is your home?

Yorick nods.

Well, I am happy for you sir.

YORICK

Oh, dear, what did you ask?

HAMLET

Your name, who are you?

YORICK

That's right, who am I? or... who *was I* when we last met Young Hamlet. Yorick sir, your loyal servant; and may I say I am more than pleased to shake your hand in friendship once again.

HAMLET

Yorick? You jest sir!

YORICK

Both true.

HAMLET

If my eyes and mind are still my own... God's blessings on you sir... never more amazed. Yet I had seen you...

YORICK

Buried, sir?

HAMLET

In the ground. I held your... (*holds out imaginary skull.*)

YORICK

You did sir!

HAMLET

How long since I have seen you?

YORICK

Some twenty years.

HAMLET

I am glad to see you sir, however you come to be here with me. Let me embrace you.

They embrace.

YORICK

Welcome. Now, no tears.

HAMLET

A happy reunion my friend, a happy one. Tell me all that is with you? What do you know of this world? How long have you been here? What have you seen?

YORICK

I will tell all, but first there are matters of great urgency, quickened by your presence. What I must impart is of great consequence, news that will lay your heart unbound.

HAMLET

Come, come, tell me I pray. I am your student again and you my teacher!

YORICK

This news concerns your father.

Your father was not all he appeared to be; neither in life or in that ghostly habit when he did visit you.

HAMLET

What's this?

YORICK

Not much older than you now, before your birth, your father, a young Prince and Officer, returned from a long and bloody war in

YORICK (Cont.)

Sweden. At that time his father the King had grown old and taken to his bed. Your father prepared himself to take his seat upon the throne. His brother Claudius, only just old enough to wear his armour, eyed a lover, a beautiful young girl who was to love him greatly. Their love remained a secret, until the blessing of the King could be passed. Great rivalry grew between the two brothers. Your father, triumphant in battle, became fattened by reputation abroad, while Claudius, no match on the battlefield, had gained many friends at Court. Two factions you understand, brothers, born to the same parents, but growing in their mutual contempt. One evening your father, hearing news of the King's pending demise, sent for his brother's lover. In her night apparel she was brought into his bedchamber.

HAMLET

Go on.

YORICK

The truth my lord. The lady that I speak of is your mother.

HAMLET

No, I will listen no longer!

YORICK

It is so. Believe me. As the day is new, I remember all. Your mother, sir! And for your Uncle, his fury had no match; your mother fell with child. In haste they were married, as young Claudius looked on. Your mother lost that unborn infant. It was to be some years hence when your father, now our Sovereign Lord, and your mother his Queen, were to have another child.

HAMLET

Enough! Am I to believe this? Let my sword answer you and put an end to this most foul of tales!

YORICK

Your father's language, not your natural speech, young Hamlet. Rage runs deep within your family, but only the strongest and most self-determining voyager can truly be free. Look to your mother before it is too late. She has been wronged from all sides. You may not trust your father's word, more from hell than heaven. So like his brother, full of deceit, of revenge. In friendship I have spoken. For now you may do with me as you wish.

HAMLET

Be gone, before I blind your way with blows about the head that would make the strongest man on earth quiver in his shoes! Take your foul jests to lesser men.

YORICK

Look to your father and see the reflection of unending revenge in his eyes! Do not be fooled by him.

Yorick exits.

HAMLET

May I believe the vile portrait he has painted? His words would tear my heart asunder and make me drown in my own tears! Why should I believe such a fool? Father! I need only say that word and his face appears before me, like a wise and gentle friend, not one of selfish acts and wicked deeds. No! **THIS IS NOT MY FATHER!** To deceive me thus all these years? There was never a better man than he! To talk with him was a gift indeed. Why, in one moment he would talk with all the authority of a politician and in the next tell tales of great humour and mirth. What if he *had* claimed my mother against her wishes. The love between my Uncle and my mother true? What if all those visitations were a device to woo me into madness! It is too unjust to consider!

Blackout.

SCENE 5 – ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

Rosencrantz enters singing a sea shanty. He is dressed in eighteenth century pirate clothes and is drunk.

ROSENCRANTZ

'Twas eight o'clock in the morning
When they began to fight,
And so they did continue there
Till nine o'clock at night;
Fight on, fight on, says Captain Ward
This sport well pleases me,
For if you fight this month or more,
Your master I will be.

O then the gallant Rainbow, she fired
She fired in vain.
Till six and thirty of her men
All on the deck were slain;
Go home, go home, says Captain Ward
And tell your king for me,
If he reigns king all on the land
Ward will reign king on the sea!

(Calling to offstage) Pull, heave-ho!

GUILDENSTERN

(From offstage) Pull, heave ho!

ROSENCRANTZ

Splice the mainbrace!

GUILDENSTERN

(From offstage) Splice the mainbrace!

Guildenstern enters, also dressed in eighteenth century pirate clothes, pulling on a long piece of rope which is taut all the way offstage as if something heavy is on the end of it.

ROSENCRANTZ

Dear friend Guildenstern, there you are at the end of your tether!

GUILDENSTERN

(Struggling) 'Tis true, I am at the end!

ROSENCRANTZ

And the other end, what news of it?

GUILDENSTERN

(Struggling) I cannot find it. I am at the end of my tether.

ROSENCRANTZ

Is it lost?

GUILDENSTERN

(Struggling even more) No, I tied a knot in it so that I might remember where I put it.

ROSENCRANTZ

Where did you put the knot?

GUILDENSTERN

(Still struggling) At the other end of the rope.

ROSENCRANTZ

Then rope and knot are to be found together. This calls for a drink.

GUILDENSTERN

(Struggling) Yes 'tis true!

Rosencrantz sits down. Guildenstern continues pulling on the rope.

ROSENCRANTZ

No news?

GUILDENSTERN

None.

ROSENCRANTZ

How long shall we wait?

GUILDENSTERN

I don't know.

ROSENCRANTZ

Ah! You're at the end of your tether.

GUILDENSTERN

Yes!

ROSENCRANTZ

I have an idea!

GUILDENSTERN

Yes?

ROSENCRANTZ

What if we cut the rope in two?

GUILDENSTERN

Yes!

ROSENCRANTZ

Then we might stand at the other end!

GUILDENSTERN

Yes!

ROSENCRANTZ

Ah, no... then we'd have a new end and a new beginning!

GUILDENSTERN

And another end!

ROSENCRANTZ

A second ending, how exciting!

GUILDENSTERN

A shorter journey surely?

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes. Well done Guildenstern!

GUILDENSTERN

Thank you, Rosencrantz.

ROSENCRANTZ

Go and cut it with your knife.

They fuss with the rope, trying not to let whatever is on the end of it run away. Rosencrantz holds the end of the rope while Guildenstern goes and cuts the rope and brings the new end to him.

ROSENCRANTZ

Ready?

GUILDENSTERN

Ready!

They both pull the end of the new rope, struggling and eventually on the end of it is The Boy with a rope around his neck, carrying lots of luggage. Rosencrantz goes over to the end with The Boy on it. The trick here is to make the rope always look very, very tight so that it seems as if the boy has a very strong neck. When the boy comes on he is not hurt or exhausted in any way.

ROSENCRANTZ

Look Guildenstern, the knot!

There is a knot in the rope just before the loop for The Boy's neck.

GUILDENSTERN

So it is.

ROSENCRANTZ

Drink?

GUILDENSTERN

Don't mind if I do!

They toast each other.

THE BOY

Let me go!

ROSENCRANTZ

What do you think Guildenstern?

GUILDENSTERN

Not yet.

ROSENCRANTZ

(To The Boy) There it is, not yet.

THE BOY

The King will hear of this!

GUILDENSTERN

The King, do you hear that Rosencrantz?

ROSENCRANTZ

The King say you, good boy, very good, and what next, the Queen also?

THE BOY

Yes!

ROSENCRANTZ

Do not torment me. There is no King here, not in this land!

THE BOY

True I say!

ROSENCRANTZ

True? Most untrue!

GUILDENSTERN

The King did put us out boy! In that time a letter did the King entrust to us when we sailed upon England with young Hamlet.

ROSENCRANTZ

Indeed, a letter, the contents we knew not of.

GUILDENSTERN

On the seas were we set upon by pirates, the young Prince escaping in the fray that did ensue. We continued on to Dover where we were met by the English King's men.

ROSENCRANTZ

The letter boy, written in the King's hand, has sent two loyal, most obedient men –

GUILDENSTERN

Devoted one may say!

ROSENCRANTZ

To their deaths! Our heads have been the executioner's.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern reveal the scars on their necks underneath their scarves.

GUILDENSTERN

(To The Boy) We are, you might say, undone!

ROSENCRANTZ

Drink?

GUILDENSTERN

Don't mind if I do!

They drink and then silence.

ROSENCRANTZ

What now?

GUILDENSTERN

To sleep?

ROSENCRANTZ

Ah yes, I suppose to sleep.

GUILDENSTERN

Let us close our eyes.

ROSENCRANTZ

So that we may indeed sleep.

Both gradually drifting off to sleep.

GUILDENSTERN

To sleep.

Hamlet enters as they are asleep.

HAMLET

(To himself) What a sight is this! Two gentlemen of great mischief, loyal courtiers to my Uncle, asleep on this same ground! Upon the English seas I saw them last. To their graves were they sent! And my hand has been the instrument of their death! A letter written by my Uncle, plotting against my life in their possession did I find. In great secrecy their names I changed, exchanging theirs for mine. Of this they know nothing. The letter re-sealed, these gentlemen sailed on. Their fate they have delivered themselves!

He spots The Boy.

Who may this be?

(To The Boy) Boy, I will know you better, but let me first devise a plan for these two gentlemen so that you may be set free. I give you my word that no harm will come to you. Silence a short while, while in false confidence I shall speak.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, good friends!

Rosencrantz awakes.

ROSENCRANTZ

Hamlet? Guildenstern awake!

GUILDENSTERN

Lord Hamlet?

HAMLET

The same, gentlemen. I bid you well.

GUILDENSTERN

How did you come unto this place?

HAMLET

In the same manner that has brought you here.

ROSENCRANTZ

Then death has been with you?

HAMLET

Yes, the same.

GUILDENSTERN

I had not thought to see you again. The swollen seas I thought to be your end.

ROSENCRANTZ

Drowned sweet Prince?

HAMLET

Of the sea, not drowned, no.

GUILDENSTERN

Then bated by a fisherman's hook?

HAMLET

No! It was the King's line that hooked me.

ROSENCRANTZ

Would that I was alive to see the King, I would run my sword through him!

GUILDENSTERN

A letter from the King, sir, we did deliver and contained within, our own fates sealed. He would send us all to our graves!

HAMLET

In the King's own hand was the letter written?

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

Yes.

HAMLET

And this letter you kept about your person.

ROSENCRANTZ

Safely stowed with us, sir.

HAMLET

Then in this matter we are one.

This boy, sirs, your servant?

GUILDENSTERN

An ill-disciplined boy.

ROSENCRANTZ

I would take my knife to his tongue!

HAMLET

Gentlemen, a word in conference. (*Hamlet takes them aside*) I would make a bargain with you sirs. I have heard news that the King is *here*, alive, and with my mother.

GUILDENSTERN

May our wits deceive us!

ROSENCRANTZ

Then we shall seek him out. My sword is up, up I say!

HAMLET

Patience, I have a plan that will serve as a greater punishment for this villain.

ROSENCRANTZ

Tell us all!

HAMLET

May you both be allies to the King. Go to him.

Not as you appear now, but in disguise, decked in politician's clothes, both ambassadors of this new land. Say that you have come from the King's court, an imagined King, old and now departed. Say that in some great war, or some such time, the court was set about, the King and his only heir killed. With great spectacle may you tell this story.

GUILDENSTERN

May my tears accompany my words!

HAMLET

Most attentively will Claudius listen. Show some surprise when he tells you of his title. May you go down on one knee and beg him to be your sovereign.

ROSENCRANTZ

In this game we will take great pleasure!

HAMLET

May you act most loyal subjects, in agreement upon his every word. His countenance may you praise. Say that there are none so worthy as him.

GUILDENSTERN

This we will do!

HAMLET

But let you listen with true ear and mark you his strategy. In time we will reveal ourselves to him. This will surely send him mad! One further thing I ask of you, sirs. My mother is with him and in great danger. Her mind is overtaken and she knows not who she may trust. Be her protectors. She is in heart a good woman and I love her dearly.

ROSENCRANTZ

You may trust us in this Lord Hamlet.

GUILDENSTERN

Indeed you may!

HAMLET

In return fair Rosencrantz and good Guildenstern, I will take the boy and instruct him to be more dutiful. May he return to you better-trained in the art of service or else he digs his own grave.

ROSENCRANTZ

A pact. Come Guildenstern, let us put on our new faces!

GUILDENSTERN

And our parts!

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit.

HAMLET

There now boy, you are free.

THE BOY

Free sir?

HAMLET

I do not want you. My words only serve a purpose with these gentlemen. Go now.

THE BOY

Go sir? Am I not indebted in your service now, sir?

HAMLET

No.

THE BOY

May I not give advantage to your cause? I have a good eye and a quick wit, sir!

HAMLET

No boy you shall not. You are a child. You were made to play, not perform the actions of a man.

THE BOY

Very well sir, if it pleases you.

The Boy exits.

HAMLET

How can I be pleased? Does it please me to send these two men to their deaths, only now to help their revenge? Against Claudius, ah me, and what a King is he? I had known him. No greater enemy had I thought! Upon my father's deathbed had married my mother! And yet the fool, my childhood companion, talks of the deep bonds

HAMLET (Cont.)

between my mother and my uncle before my birth. That they were robbed by my father! Should my father speak with a deceitful tongue, tricking his only son?

Hamlet's Father enters.

(Aside to himself) Now I will test Yorick's confession and see the true colour of my father's words.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Hamlet, my son.

HAMLET

My lord.

HAMLET'S FATHER

How is it with you Hamlet?

Silence.

What, still of pale complexion, what troubles you?

HAMLET

Threats upon your life my lord and my mother's, too much to bear.

HAMLET'S FATHER

My son.

They embrace.

HAMLET

My lord, my... uncle was... quick to take a wife.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Yes, the bed was not yet cold.

HAMLET

(Hamlet watching him carefully) My mother, your Queen, at the side of this odious intruder perched upon the throne. Many times I watched their sport; many times my eyes were filled with loathing at such a sight. *(Slowly and pointed)* My mother was most... informal... with the King. Not the countenance of a woman in grief, newly widowed. No, my mother's face was tender, attentive, her expression warm. As if she had *known* him my lord. And yet only four night-falls from one King to another. How can this be so?

HAMLET'S FATHER

Silence! I will hear no more! No more, an end to such fanciful stories. You hear?

HAMLET

(Aside) There, he bites. *(To his father)* Have I spoken out of turn, good Father?

HAMLET'S FATHER

No, but you will put this out of your mind, Hamlet. To greater purpose devote yourself.

HAMLET

Good my lord.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Come with me.

Hamlet's Father draws his sword.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Draw your sword.

HAMLET

My lord?

Hamlet's Father aims a blow at Hamlet, which misses him. Hamlet's Father tries to make another blow, and another. They just miss Hamlet.

HAMLET Father

Fight with me, show your hand! What, my son a coward? No by heaven, you will fight me!

He takes another swipe at Hamlet but misses.

Or would you have your uncle Claudius remain your keeper?

HAMLET

Not my keeper sir!

Hamlet's Father pushes Hamlet to the floor.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Get up, get up, Hamlet! Fight me, fight!

In a rage Hamlet goes to hit Hamlet's Father with his sword, but misses.

Yes, I see in your eyes a rage, let it fall upon your uncle! Put an end to this... now! Kill him and so an end to my suffering!

Hamlet, bring news of his death.

Hamlet's Father exits. Blackout.

SCENE 6 – ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN MEET CLAUDIUS

Enter Laertes and Claudius with swords drawn. Gertrude follows.

CLAUDIUS

Of this I am certain, there will be others Gertrude. We must be cautious and prepare to take arms against them.

GERTRUDE

More bloodshed say you?

CLAUDIUS

Indeed, even so!

GERTRUDE

Oh, these men that would run so fast into dispute! Brawl with each other like children! Show their teeth and stamp their feet! I am a mother! I have held a baby in my arms, seen his eyes full of innocent wonder, watched him take his first fragile steps. I have protected him within my bosom, sheltered him from the violent winds of man's corrupting influence. How may a mother watch her son take on the form of such a man? Should I be unmoved, full of praise? Put away your swords, for you I will weep no more!

LAERTES

(Calling to her) Fair Gertrude, I mean no offence!

CLAUDIUS

(To Laertes) Let her be Laertes, our passage here troubles her greatly and still she talks of her son.

LAERTES

Of him we know nothing.

Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Hamlet enter out of sight.

HAMLET

(Hamlet aside to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) There stands the villain. Oh that I should end it now! There is my mother, pale and aged, and Laertes too. What cruel acts has he performed? Go forth gentlemen, let mischief be your occupation.

Hamlet hides himself and looks on. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in disguise step forward.

CLAUDIUS

Who may this be? Hold gentlemen, turn and face me!

ROSENCRANTZ

Unarmed, sir we come.

GUILDENSTERN

Put down your swords and we may be friends.

CLAUDIUS

Who are you gentlemen that do creep?

ROSENCRANTZ

Not creep sir, though our natural habit be temperate.

GUILDENSTERN

In truth, for we are men of the court sir, more politicians than soldiers.

CLAUDIUS

Court? From which court are you come, what are you names?

ROSENCRANTZ

Goodnooth.

GUILDENSTERN

And Malymains sir.

LAERTES

Whose court do you serve gentlemen?

GUILDENSTERN

Why, from the King's court, sir!

ROSENCRANTZ

His ambassadors sir, do you not know us?

CLAUDIUS

No I do not. Where is this King? Answer me!

GUILDENSTERN

The King, sir, is at peace!

CLAUDIUS

Peace?

LAERTES

Explain yourself, sir!

ROSENCRANTZ

Malymains? (*Gesturing to Guildenstern.*)

GUILDENSTERN

Goodnooth. The Kingdom is without a King, sir. The King has passed away some time now. We are King-less.

CLAUDIUS

How can this be so, what of his heir?

ROSENCRANTZ

We are but the few that remain. The King and his only son in battle were lost.

GUILDENSTERN

Quite lost. His son and I were schooled together, sir.

ROSENCRANTZ

We were set upon! An army, none the like seen before, some miles from the Palace in the thick of the morning mist, quite untamed, wild and savage, a thousand men, maybe more, well-armed!

GUILDENSTERN

From the east they came, with the morning sun behind them.

ROSENCRANTZ

The King and his son, woken from their sleep, lead their men on horseback out into battle! Down through the valley, disappearing into the mist and out of sight. Silence. It is told that when the mist did part, upon the ground a sea of bodies, the river running red. Many more were killed on our side that day. Only a handful returned. With the sad remains of our dead King, and his young son, they came. They were buried together.

GERTRUDE

And what of your Queen, the boy's mother?

GUILDENSTERN

She died Madam. She took her own life, her heart broken.

ROSENCRANTZ

A sad tale, madam. Pray, to whom do we address our story?

CLAUDIUS

A King, Claudius is my name.

GUILDENSTERN

May it be so! King Claudius? Your name we have heard!

ROSENCRANTZ

On one knee we go in praise of your most worshipful lord!

GUILDENSTERN

Happy day!

ROSENCRANTZ

That we have been saved, Malymains!

GUILDENSTERN

Let us be your most loyal subjects!

ROSENCRANTZ

Take you the crown of our departed ruler!

CLAUDIUS

Let this be no trick or else your guts will be strung out and used to bind your tongues.

GUILDENSTERN

Trick say you?

ROSENCRANTZ

This is no trick. We shall bring you further knowledge of this, if it pleases you.

CLAUDIUS

We will hear further from you.

ROSENCRANTZ

And this is your Queen.

GUILDENSTERN

Your majesty.

CLAUDIUS

(Aside to Laertes) Let us talk with these gentlemen a while and observe them. If what they say is true, this may prove useful. May their lives depend on it.

LAERTES

(Aside to Claudius) I will observe.

CLAUDIUS

(To everyone) Let us to this battleground and understand your conference further. Come Goodnooth and Malymains.

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, the Queen looks tired and perhaps should rest. It is some miles hence.

CLAUDIUS

No, she shall accompany us.

GUILDENSTERN

(Aside to Claudius so Gertrude may not hear) The bodies are sometime buried my lord, but the air still trembles with the sounds of our fallen dead. An odious place, the smell burns our nostrils. It is not for the faint of heart.

CLAUDIUS

(Aside to Guildenstern and Rosencrantz) It is true the Queen is most affected. *(To everyone)* Gertrude, may you hide here a while. Take my knife for your protection. Rest until our return. Laertes come with me, we shall know more of this.

Act I, Scene 6 – Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet Claudius

Claudius and Laertes exit with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Gertrude is left alone to bide. Hamlet quickly creeps out from where he has hidden himself.

HAMLET

Madam, alive?

GERTRUDE

Hamlet! My son! Can it be?

They embrace.

I have wept for you Hamlet! So many tears that my eyes have all but dried up. Let me look upon you. It is you.

HAMLET

Yes and I have wept a thousand tears for you, thought little else but of your passing, and in violent temper chastised myself for what I have brought upon you.

GERTRUDE

My child!

HAMLET

I have walked alone mother, no companion in this world. Not a sound but the haunting wind. My mind riddled with the thoughts of what had been. Nothing but death surrounded me.

GERTRUDE

I am here Hamlet, do not be alone, do not be afraid.

HAMLET

You are pale and your hand trembles!

GERTRUDE

In disbelief my, son.

HAMLET

How do you fare?

GERTRUDE

Well enough.

HAMLET

Not so, you have aged by our transgressions!

GERTRUDE

Hamlet, do not dwell on what has passed. It will do no good.

HAMLET

How may I not? I know not what or which way to turn. Chaos haunts my mind. Alive or dead, for this world or the next, or the one after. How may we die, how may we live, ah me!

GERTRUDE

I do not know.

HAMLET

The son of one King, ruled by another, his wife and not his wife, and then upon the throne of his brother, and then to die and be re-born. Too much, too much I say!

GERTRUDE

Put it out of your mind!

HAMLET

I cannot, it haunts me, it follows me, I am never alone but it is with me!

HAMLET

I saw my father!

GERTRUDE

Hamlet?

HAMLET

From whom I was born.

GERTRUDE

You are mistaken.

HAMLET

Your husband mother, that was.

GERTRUDE

No!

HAMLET

He alone, within this world, he stalks. We did embrace, as much flesh as you and I.

GERTRUDE

I will not talk of this! This is but fantasy that you torment me with!

HAMLET

He would have me kill my Uncle a second time!

GERTRUDE

Claudius is not here!

HAMLET

Not so! In secrecy I have watched him talk with these fellows and Laertes. Under what spell do you protect him mother?

GERTRUDE

None.

HAMLET

Not so! In bed with a proven rogue, a murderer? Like a venomous snake he has bound himself around you. He has infected you, poisoned your very being!

GERTRUDE

I am a woman, Hamlet! What else for a woman but to serve, honour, be dutiful?

Pause.

Love in devotion.

HAMLET

Love?

GERTRUDE

Yes, love.

HAMLET

What love is this?

GERTRUDE

Deep and painful. Too great for those that fear!

HAMLET

How may he protest his love, with one hand upon your brow and the other upon your neck? No! My father –

GERTRUDE

Your father, Hamlet? Yes, a soldier, a King, prized with the many corpses of his enemies, so many dead. Do you think him a better

Act I, Scene 6 – Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet Claudius

GERTRUDE (Cont.)

man? Most prodigious, constant in his purpose? Question your affection my son.

Hamlet, stay not a moment longer, they shall return. Be more devoted to what your head and your heart may tell you.

HAMLET

Such unrest, sorrow, suffering. How can we reconcile ourselves?

GERTRUDE

What you cannot love, let pass. Away.

Hamlet exits. Blackout.

SCENE 7 – HAMLET AND HORATIO

Hamlet re-enters into a change of light.

HAMLET

My soul cries out to God that I would know my answer better. Why would you have me do this father? A second killing and what a third, a fourth? Where to shall their souls repair, heaven or to another world, and so it turns again? My father appears in less ghostlike form, but his words more haunting. Kill Claudius? And may I do this while my mother watches on? How so? That she should be constant in her affection. Strange truths come to bear! How may we endure this?

The sleeping form of Horatio appears projected onto the scenery. Horatio appears in person at the side of the stage. Hamlet can hear him but not see him.

HORATIO

Hamlet!

HAMLET

Horatio's voice?

HORATIO

Sweet Prince!

HAMLET

Again!

HORATIO

My good friend, you are forever in my thoughts. My restless dreams bring me to you. What I must tell you is of great urgency. You are not long for this world Hamlet!

HAMLET

My kindred friend, how so?

HORATIO

Act without delay.

HAMLET

Horatio, tell me in truth, am I sent mad?

HORATIO

Not mad, but the victim of another's story. You are not the author, you are the matter within a play that has been created even before you were born. You may live through it again and again, but it will not change. There is no time for doubt and reflection. You are here between worlds. The world where you died and the world where you begin to live again. Choose another way and move on from this place. The window begins to close.

HAMLET

What window?

HORATIO

You must walk away from the shadows and into the light. Only then can you be free to leave.

HAMLET

I am afraid, Horatio!

HORATIO

My love and strength are yours. Look for the light Hamlet. And follow it before it is too late.

The image fades. Horatio exits.

HAMLET

What did Horatio mean when he said to walk away from darkness?
I pray for guidance on this journey.

Yorick enters.

YORICK

Young Hamlet.

HAMLET

Who now disturbs my prayer?

Fool! Am I not yet amazed, bewildered? I am visited by my friend
Horatio, he speaks in riddles!

YORICK

No better man. What of him Hamlet?

HAMLET

In most urgent terms he spoke. That I should change my course
before the world sinks into darkness!

YORICK

Heed what he has spoken Hamlet. His words with warning came.
Now you must act with haste. You once loved a young girl?

HAMLET

Ophelia yes, what of her?

YORICK

How did she die?

HAMLET

Upon the river, her body cold, interred in the ground. I did love
her. What of this? She is dead.

YORICK

Yes, once she died. Look upon her again, Hamlet.

As they have been talking two of Yorick's house enter. One of them carries Ophelia in his arms.

HAMLET

Ophelia, no breath, no sound, her cheeks pale. Stir, stir my love!
Look at me god, I pray to the heavens, what world have we created
here!

Blackout.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 8 – HAMLET AND OPHELIA

Lights up on the same scene we have seen at the end of Act 1.

HAMLET

I pray you look upon this fragile soul. No ill meaning, no violent deed, no word crossed or poisoned glance did she give. If you do hear my words, feel my breath upon your cheek, my warm lips upon yours; if you feel but one beat of my aching heart, then you will awake!

YORICK

I have a remedy Hamlet, that when taken may restore her senses.

HAMLET

Give it me I pray!

Hamlet takes the medicine.

YORICK

Put a few drops onto her lips.

HAMLET

(Pouring the drops onto Ophelia's lips) Here my love, may this do some good I pray.

They watch.

Nothing, the medicine renders nothing. Please Ophelia wake!

YORICK

Something more powerful. *(To one of his Attendants)* Hand me the smelling salts, they may prove more potent.

Here Hamlet.

Act II, Scene 8 – Hamlet and Ophelia

Hamlet places the smelling salts under Ophelia's nose.

HAMLET

I beg of you Ophelia!

Ophelia awakes.

HAMLET

She is alive. She, alive!

YORICK

Yes.

HAMLET

You may breath now my love, my sweet Ophelia.

He kisses her.

Still beautiful, like an angel.

YORICK

Comfort her now Hamlet, nurse her back to her full strength. Come with me to a place where you may both restore and mend.

HAMLET

Good Fool, under some wondrous star you were born. What spell, what trick you have performed I do not know, but my heart is most thankful. I thank you all.

They exit. Blackout.

SCENE 9 – REV RANK SEDGES AND THE BOY

Claudius and Laertes enter.

CLAUDIUS

Good Laertes, the hour beckons. Our reward is at hand. Malymains and Goodnooth have told us much of this realm. It goes in want of a King, an heir to give command. Many have died it is said, in their most bloody wars and those that do remain cry out for a leader. I, Laertes, am such a man, born into the breeding of office, given shape by the responsibilities placed upon my shoulders, and my resolve unbroken. I am their King, their Sovereign. I lay my claim upon their crown. You are my son now Laertes, born out of duty and devotion to me. I take your father's place, most proud now, none as wise as he. I bestow great charge upon you. The subjects have grown idle, their soldiers left to fatten. They must be schooled, tutored in the ways of war. You Laertes will give their orders. You my son will lead them out into battle upon the hour. On your head shall it be. The Queen tells me of my brother's presence and of her son. If this be so and they are come into this world, then they alone stand between us and our honour. Of Hamlet we shall press for forgiveness. He is his mother's son and she holds great affection for him. In time we shall meet. Of my brother, I will seek him out and so will end his pitiful reign. Give me your hand.

Spend the time wisely my son. Seek out true and brave men for your legions.

LAERTES

Yes my, lord.

CLAUDIUS

Now, away.

Claudius exits.

LAERTES

Yes, I will set myself upon this and so play my part. May our actions bring order to this world, and in so doing, its people great comfort.

The Boy and Reverend Rank Sedges approach.

But who comes upon this ground, a boy and his elderly master?

Laertes draws his sword in readiness.

REV RANK SEDGES

Good day to you, sir.

LAERTES

And to you fair gentleman. What is your name sir, what brings you here?

REV RANK SEDGES

My name is Rank Sedges. We go upon the business of this boy's news. Put away your sword sir, we come unarmed and alone.

LAERTES

How so?

REV RANK SEDGES

I am a man of God sir. Only he shall be my shield.

LAERTES

(Retracting his sword) What of the boy, does he serve you?

REV RANK SEDGES

No, not a servant sir but my companion, and one of many. In all things we are equal here. We do not profit from the labours of others.

LAERTES

There are others, you say?

REV RANK SEDGES

People of every sort and condition arrive here as a result of their confused and unresolved lives. They come to heal and mend. What of you sir, what is your purpose here, for remedy?

LAERTES

I am a soldier, sir, I come to bring order, no less. I would speak with those in your company, in haste, for great dangers reside here.

REV RANK SEDGES

Dangers sir? I am most grateful to you, indeed, indebted to you, upon my life. You have protected us from such peril. What of these dangers sir, in what form do they come?

LAERTES

A vengeful King sir, one who died and now returns to reclaim his seat from my master, his brother. He looks for blame, with blood upon his hands he goes.

REV RANK SEDGES

What of your master, sir?

LAERTES

A most noble man, only now he goes to face him. He would have an end to his foul deeds.

REV RANK SEDGES

Your master, with sword drawn?

LAERTES

Yes, an excellent swordsman.

REV RANK SEDGES

Blood upon his hands too?

LAERTES

Yes?

REV RANK SEDGES

Two brave Kings, alike, brothers. They come to fight? What of this victory when both brothers lie under the earth? It matters no more.

Put down your sword gentle soldier. There are others, once like you. Seek them out and hear their words. There is much to learn from the wisdom of friends.

You are a good man. I see it, tender and good of heart. May your thoughts be your own, they will serve you well.

They exit. Blackout.

SCENE 10 – YORICK'S HOUSE

*Lights up. Yorick enters with Hamlet who is carrying Ophelia in his arms.
The Attendants follow on.*

HAMLET

Yorick wait, you walk too fast. How much further? Why won't you tell me where we are going?

YORICK

You'll know soon enough.

Yorick looks around and stops.

HAMLET

What? Why have you stopped?

YORICK

We've arrived.

HAMLET

Arrived? Please I have no more strength. I hold my love now with tenderness, but when my eyes look down upon her I am reminded of nothing but my shameful deeds.

YORICK

Peace Hamlet. Listen!

HAMLET

I hear nothing, not a thing.

YORICK

Listen –

HAMLET

Please, no more of your games. My head feels bruised. *(To himself)*
What have I done to my love?

YORICK

Listen Hamlet, listen.

HAMLET

No, I don't hear anything! You say the same words over and over
and it helps little.

YORICK

Hamlet, look at my hat. A good hat, it belongs to my head. And yet
if my hat is not on my head then what's in my hat?

HAMLET

Games, more games...

Pause.

Nothing, nothing at all...

YORICK

True, it is an empty hat, until my head goes into it. Look around
you. What about this place? What can you hear?

HAMLET

Nothing, except you and your sport, and I.

YORICK

Exactly! So I take my hat off and it's just an empty hat! Hamlet, this
place would be empty but for the thoughts in your head. They only
exist in here. And your mind is at war with them. Rest, and clear
your mind of uneasy thoughts and talk of blame. I have something
to show you.

Yorick knocks on a small chamber.

HAMLET

Yorick please!

YORICK

Observe and see before you kindred spirits, and note how they set out my home for your benefit and solace in this troubled time. Here, among these souls, once lost to us, your beloved Ophelia will heal and mend.

Mrs Yorick and more Attendants enter. The chamber opens out into Yorick's house.

Attend and make yourself useful.

HAMLET

This is very well Yorick, but something more than well meaning remedies administered by your apothecaries are needed now.

The attendants start to administer help to Ophelia.

What are you doing? She is weak and needs careful handling.

YORICK

And that is precisely what they offer, Hamlet! Let her be taken care of as we commune a while together. I have yet more knowledge of your father's past life that will much amaze you. Draw near and hear my antidote to pretty endings. I must impart this to you as a matter of some urgency, may I say.

HAMLET

Very well, look to her as you would a new born babe in arms, she is alabaster and brittle like the seasoned branches of the fallen oak in winter, I charge you on your honours all.

ATTENDANTS

Do not worry good master Hamlet! We will attend to her with all our hearts.

OPHELIA

You must have faith in the unknown Hamlet, draw near and take from me a kiss until I am restored once more.

They kiss.

YORICK

Madam Yorick, a cup of something warming for the boy.

MRS YORICK

It is indeed an honour to have you in our home Master Hamlet, an honour so it is.

HAMLET

And I am grateful to you both in this hour of need.

YORICK

Hamlet, I will cut to the core as time is indeed against us. Your father, that man who now resides here as mortal as the rest of us, is guilty. Guilty of so many hateful deeds that I alone cannot lay claim to remember all. Hamlet, your father had me dead and buried, when you were not yet come of age. I, along with another fool known to you, good Olaf Petersen, was sentenced to a deathly silence for merely possessing too witty a wit, supposedly a danger to his reign. His widow serves within our house. Poliana where are you?

Poliana steps forward.

POLIANA

Master Hamlet, you are most welcome.

HAMLET

Thank you madam.

Poliana has already turned away to continue nursing Ophelia.

I know not what to say.

YORICK

See even now how lovingly she attends your lady.

HAMLET

(To himself) Oh say this cannot be so! Am I to believe such darkness resides within the blood that I belong to.

Pause.

YORICK

Best believe it Master Hamlet, his behaviour throughout his reign was always so. I had hoped to spare you this, but there is yet more knowledge to come.

HAMLET

If this be true, then how came I never to witness his temper as a child? Only kindness all around me, or so I thought? Am I to believe that my father, whom I have well regarded all my life, is such a piece of work as this?

MRS YORICK

It was just as he says it was Master Hamlet. I remember your dear mother coming to your quarters and telling you stories of such adventure that any boy of your tender age would have treasured. Yet sadly I was a witness to your father's disapproval of your mother's love for you, on many sorrowful occasions. Your father was heard to say in no uncertain terms "time would be better spent at study and with tutors well versed in the knowledge needed for a

MRS YORICK (Cont.)

future son and heir, not couched in 'mother love' in unmanly proximity to her feminine ways." Perhaps I ought not to continue?

YORICK

Tell Hamlet of your downfall day, Mrs Yorick, and let that hit him hard.

MRS YORICK

Indeed it is just as he says it was Master Hamlet, a downfall day for me, of undisputed pity and shame, the like of which from that day to this very hour I have never felt again.

HAMLET

Go on.

MRS YORICK

Indeed I will Master Hamlet. There came a spring day, filled with all the promise of morning, the robin I recall, sang his song so sweetly prior to the shouting and the tears that followed. I had gone to pick blackberries from the walled gardens, they were to be bathed in fresh milk and offered up for breakfast to you. They were indeed your favourite, I remember Master Hamlet –

HAMLET

Yes, yes they were.

YORICK

They are unlikely to remain his favourite should you cease to complete your story, may I say, Mrs Yorick.

MRS YORICK

How right you are, a gossip they say! To the point precise I will rush toward without delay. Now where was I?

HAMLET

I believe the robin was in full song, madam.

MRS YORICK

Just so indeed Master Hamlet, he was, and had he not been startled like you and your mother, the day may have passed without incident. There you both were, your mother and you in your room, with her at your side reading. When all of a sudden your father swept in through the door and stole your mother away from your arms, with just enough force for you, young as you were, not to notice, but with enough edge to his action as would sharpen the blade of any butcher's knife. Your mother fled, with tears welling up in her eyes and you were sent to your official studies for the rest of the day. Well, my lips could not remain without opinion or concern a moment longer. On your father's exit from your room, I whispered, at such a level that no one's ears, save mine, would hear this simple word... tyrant! It was to be the only opinion I ever aired within the walls of Elsinor. I was stripped of my position before sunset and sent away without pay or thanks for over ten years loyal service to your family. I at least escaped with my life. I wept that night, not for myself, but for your mother and you young master Hamlet. For I knew your mother could do little but oblige your father, and I knew that you would be too young to notice your parents bickerments and quarrels. You were to be sentenced to adulthood, with little, if any remembrance of how your father behaved towards your mother and you in those early days. That is my story master Hamlet, in as plain a language as I am able.

YORICK

He was, and is, a most cunning deceiver Master Hamlet, with a face and a voice for all occasions, chameleon-like, and just as driven as his brother, your uncle, our King.

HAMLET.

I am most grateful to you both, for this timely lesson. Perhaps now is the moment to graduate to a better understanding of my past.

HAMLET (Cont.)

Piece by piece I begin to see what I must do. I thank you for your kindness to Ophelia. I now entrust her healing to you both. I will to my rightful parents go, so that I may learn more of what I must, in order to succeed.

YORICK.

God speed to you my good Hamlet.

HAMLET.

I will take with me this woman, Poliana, who's story will serve to prise out my father's confession. *(To Poliana)* Come with me if you will?

POLIANA.

I will go with you my lord.

HAMLET.

Come, lets away.

They exit.

MRS YORICK.

Never was there a youth in more need of a miracle than he. She stirs.

(To the Attendants) Quick, bring me more water here.

OPHELIA.

I thought I heard my Hamlet's voice again, or am I dreaming? Hamlet?

YORICK.

Give her remedy and attend to her Mrs Yorick.

Act II, Scene 10 – Yorick's House

MRS YORICK.

I will indeed. (*To Attendants*) Hand me that bottle there. Now then my lady, best you close your eyes and allow yourself to rest a while.

Blackout.

SCENE 11 – GERTRUDE AND HAMLET'S FATHER

Gertrude enters. She is visibly aged and unwell.

GERTRUDE

Here shall I rest, a moment's silence I do pray. These gentlemen, my husband Claudius, and the young Laertes talk of nothing but waging war. Was ever thus! No good shall it bring, no peaceful end. What is a woman's life, but to curtsy, smile and hold her tongue, then to mop their brows and tend their wounds when they return bruised and bloody? Ah me, no life I say! Oh, that I would see my son once more, that I might say to him, "Let not your soul be blackened by expectation. Let war and duty be your enemy, not man. Surrender all of this my son and I promise, you will be free."

The wind grows stronger and I feel a chill.

Hamlet's Father enters.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Gertrude.

GERTRUDE

I knew you would come.

HAMLET'S FATHER

You are alone, madam?

GERTRUDE

Alone, with what is left of my sanity. I keep it locked, away from the insanity of men.

HAMLET'S FATHER

You have kept your tongue madam, I see, what of your affection?

GERTRUDE

My affection. Of my son unfaltering, of you sir, never living.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Come, come, we once were married. I know you madam, you have enjoyed all that I afforded you, the accessories of state, rank and approbation!

GERTRUDE

At what cost? What price say you? To be enslaved to a tyrant, one who crosses his brother, plays false with his wife, and to his son, sacrifices him to bloody deeds? Enjoyed? Not I sir, not I!

What burdens you bring upon our son.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Never was his burden heavier than when his mother crept into his uncle's bed!

GERTRUDE

Creep I did not sir, but with an open heart I went. You think I wept for you? Oh yes, false tears, only for show. Like animals you treated your kin and those that served you!

HAMLET'S FATHER

Claudius was a mere boy, childish –

GERTRUDE

He was your brother. I loved him.

HAMLET'S FATHER

And I needed my Queen!

My brother, madam, in the orchard took my life. He has taken my son too. Now may you go to him, bring news of me. Let us meet, so that I may bathe my feet with his blood.

Hamlet enters with Poliana.

GERTRUDE

Hamlet! May angels protect your soul! Know that I have always loved you. I am always in your heart. I am gone.

Gertrude exits.

HAMLET

Mother, I will attend you. Have you exchanged civil words with my mother, sir?

HAMLET'S FATHER

No, that's an end to it.

HAMLET

Then, may you be civil with this gentlewoman. (*Referring to Poliana*)
Do you know her? I would have you reacquainted with her!

HAMLET'S FATHER

Your mother's condition worsens Hamlet. Of her mind she knows nothing and her words are but foolish falsehoods. But what of this woman? I do not know her, therefore I cannot be reacquainted with her. Away madam!

HAMLET

She shall not sir. She *will* stay a while. Madam, may you speak with my father?

POLIANA

If it pleases you Prince Hamlet, I will speak with your father and tell him what I know.

HAMLET'S FATHER

What's this?

HAMLET

A most intriguing tale, the content may prove familiar.

Stay madam! Your name, proceed.

HAMLET'S FATHER

One of your travelling players Hamlet, come to regale me with one of her stories?

HAMLET

I think not Father. Begin madam and speak in all honesty, do not be ashamed.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Well madam?

POLIANA

My name is Poliana sir. It was a long time ago, yet seems like only yesterday all the same, you see. I was employed almost as soon as my husband took up his position at Court.

HAMLET'S FATHER

A most rousing tale –

HAMLET

Proceed as you were.

POLIANA

We worked hard in our separate roles, many years of service sir. One evening my husband returned home, not as the man I knew, but his happy disposition shattered. He was your fool, Olaf sir, a man of enviable wit. His place at court obtained when Master Yorick, his tutor did disappear, much loved. You did see fit to dismiss my husband from your employ that day! What was his offence, to doubt you, sir? To bring bad repute upon the court? Not he, a good man sir, the most loyal, never a cross word spoken or a

POLIANA (Cont.)

jest in offence! But graver yet, in the hour that he returned, your men, armed and full of spite, came into our house. They took him sir, tore him from where he lay, beat and bound him. I never saw him again, my love taken from me. He, like Yorick before and many more that have served you, disappeared! You left me widowed sir, with a babe no more than a week old, a daughter for whom I could not provide. In my desperation I gave her away. Not a day goes by when I do not weep for her. I know nothing of her. Your son shall know the truth of you. I do not come seeking revenge. Just to know your reason. I am a woman, a mother, a wife, I ask to know why, sir?

HAMLET'S FATHER

Your husband, like Yorick before him, had too much wit, too much knowing! I see your fear in this women's story Hamlet, but let it alone. I will look upon this as your kind heart, but stay on course boy and finish what we have started. As for your child, madam, she was taken into the court. She was afforded all opportunity, indeed she lived within the walls of Elsinore with a Father far more qualified. She was at best beautiful, but no more. She took her life.

POLIANA

The devil himself, no more!

She goes to attack Hamlet's Father. Hamlet holds her back.

Let me at him, that I may pierce his eyes! I have been denied my motherhood, bereft of my husband by your murderous commands, and still, you live! May a thousand demons plague you in your sleep! We meant no harm to you, and yet you are the cause of my pain. I am at a loss as to know why? I am not educated enough, perhaps you understand? I am not a clever woman it is true, but all my instincts tell me you have gone beyond any kind of decent human conduct! Why, I do not understand?

HAMLET

I should kill you now and so end this. For what I have learnt, there are not worlds yet created to save you from revenge! I go now, not as your son, but as a man who can begin to see more clearly.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Then so shall it be. A weak child, sickly, from his mother's breast not long. Run to her, let noble acts be done by more courageous men. Hamlet, you knew this woman's daughter well. Ophelia was her name. Oh yes... God rest her soul.

Hamlet's Father exits.

HAMLET

How do you fare, madam?

POLIANA

Much amazed... I thought... or else so sure... Ophelia, sweet Ophelia is my daughter... my daughter alive!

HAMLET

Can it be so? Let us to her now, we must tell her of this news. Out of vile acts a glimmer of light!

They exit.

SCENE 12 – HAMLET'S FATHER AND CLAUDIUS

Lights up. We see Hamlet's Father and Claudius with swords drawn, fighting.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Come brother, stand and face or else a coward!

CLAUDIUS

Coward you say, not so by the point of this sword!

They fight.

Give in brother, give in, or else a second death!

HAMLET'S FATHER

A second you say, and what of the first? Like a viper in the grass while I lay sleeping you came. My back turned, unarmed, you poisoned my very being.

CLAUDIUS

All this you did deserve. You took my love, the thing most precious to me in the world, and against her will took her to your bed. I would end your life for this alone.

HAMLET'S FATHER

We were at war, our enemies threatening to invade our ports, and what of my brother, a child or else a fool, his only thought to amuse himself.

CLAUDIUS

I was young, only a boy.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Not so young that you would favour the affection of a woman,
rather than be loyal to the crown?

They fight.

CLAUDIUS

I was loyal to our father. He wanted me at his side, to be there, at
his side when he was in pain, when he could no longer breathe. I
wept for him at his bedside and closed his eyes.

HAMLET'S FATHER

He was dead a long time before. His pain was to have a son so weak
and unwilling.

CLAUDIUS

For this you will pay!

They fight.

That you had died and were but dust upon my feet!

HAMLET'S FATHER

No, not so, and so I come again!

They fight.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Face to face we fight on equal ground. We will see who is the better
soldier, the rightful King!

CLAUDIUS

What of your son, brother? Where is he now? What of this boy that
fights for your cause? He is of an uncertain mind, forever changing

CLAUDIUS (Cont.)

He sees through you brother, he knows your words are but
noisome!

HAMLET'S FATHER

Born under his mother's shadow, he falters like his uncle! Come to!

They fight.

CLAUDIUS

A soft blow!

HAMLET'S FATHER

A prologue of what's to follow!

CLAUDIUS

So long I have I thought you dead, seen it in my sleep and in my
prayers. Let it be now that this image becomes real. Give me
strength!

They fight.

Say goodbye brother, goodbye!

HAMLET'S FATHER

I will not, I will not!

Faithful enters.

FAITHFUL

Masters all, hear this news I pray, most urgent!

They stop fighting.

The Queen, sirs, is dead!

Act II, Scene 12 – Hamlet's Father and Claudius

CLAUDIUS

What?

FAITHFUL

It is true what I say, sir.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Dead!

Blackout.

SCENE 13 – ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN AND THE BOY

Lights up.

GUILDENSTERN

My learned friend, if all Kings and Queens and Heads of State ran their courts and countries in a manner that we have served under, then there would be little if anything to celebrate! I tell you, what we need is a proper change, not a handed down succession of the same breed! This God-given right to govern is nonsense! We need a man more simple, plain, less courtly!

ROSENCRANTZ

Oh no my dear Gilder, I cannot agree with you there. The less distinguished are well, simply, indistinguishable! The moment you give the unschooled a voice they'd soon have the country in ruins!

GUILDENSTERN

Of course! Of course how silly of me, I, I meant only that it would be more pleasant not to have a son and heir up on the throne!

ROSENCRANTZ

Agreed in principle then! I too am of the opinion that change is needed, but not for its sake alone. For change without the proper candidate is to *short change* the country that we love!

GUILDENSTERN

Ah! The joys of argumentation with you confirm our investment in education and learning over and over again. We are the fortunate and wise: *nos sunt felix et sapiens!*

ROSENCRANTZ

We are the leaders of tomorrow: *nos sunt principes cras!*

Enter The Boy.

THE BOY

Saluto generosi, good day to you gentlemen!

ROSENCRANTZ

Oh, he arrives unannounced and proceeds to translate to us in a trice! Boy, did your parenting not include the art of manners?

THE BOY

Shall I go out and come in again?

GUILDENSTERN

That would be preferable indeed.

The Boy exits.

ROSENCRANTZ

That boy is presumption personified. I thought we had seen the last of him.

GUILDENSTERN

He may well prove useful to us yet. And now, we await your entrance, boy!

THE BOY

Good day to you gentlemen, may I enter?

GUILDENSTERN

Come, you may indeed. Now then, let me look at you. You seem as you were before, a somewhat unwelcome, unclean image of your better self as yet to be discovered, much to the dismay of your parents whomsoever they should be. But, be that as it may, we are to know the reason of your visit in haste, as we have more pressing matters to attend to, and so to the point directly boy!

THE BOY

Very well. Claudius plans to convey his position as sovereign of this land! I know this to be so, for not two nights passed, a witness to his speech alone, I heard him confess to it. His conceit now is raging! There is only a little game to play before he is ready to be broken. I am not, at my age, able to action anything that would impel the downfall of such a man, save only to be the messenger of what I have heard.

GUILDENSTERN

Extraordinary! And most timely. Most extraordinary indeed! You say, you heard and saw the King confess this in private?

THE BOY

Alone, all save me! Yes.

GUILDENSTERN

Look to it boy, if you have a care for your life you best be to the letter correct in your reporting of these facts!

THE BOY

I swear by all that's good sirs! If used correctly it shall bring you all you desire; wealth, position, reputation, all yours, only waste not the time. It is a precious thing to men with your ambitions, am I right?

ROSENCRANTZ

Indeed young man! Now then, go your ways and take our thanks with you. Leave the rest to us. We have it in hand.

THE BOY

Good day to you sirs! And may fortune shine on you both.

The Boy exits.

GUILDENSTERN

My dear Rosy, if what this youth says is true, then we are set for much merriment! Let us compose a letter now telling him of our error. Say that wine and mead have been our undoing, most potent upon our senses!

ROSENCRANTZ

Truly, and that our encumbered state has brought about such fancies!

GUILDENSTERN

No court, say I!

ROSENCRANTZ

No crown!

A cunning plan, I like it much!

GUILDENSTERN

I thought you would! And here's the detail even better: together we shall form a party with men of our persuasion. The King shall be a mere remnant of his former self!

ROSENCRANTZ

We shall prick him, my learned friend, and watch his bubble burst, as we would observe a child's toy when it deflates toward the ground, pitiful in its shape when no air yet remains to hold it upward any longer.

GUILDENSTERN

Oh joyful day, when children come to play and leave us with such treasures! Let us to the courier and send the letter.

ROSENCRANTZ

I follow you as if my life were yours to take, such is my admiration for your style and profiteering.

GUILDENSTERN

And I shall share with you all the glory of our days to come! You know, looking at us now, it is a wonder of our good looks we never took more advantage!

ROSENCRANTZ

Indeed so my dear Gilder! I was reluctant to utter it, but such fine suits, suit us well don't you think?

GUILDENSTERN

They do! That they do!

ROSENCRANTZ

Come along!

They exit. Blackout.

SCENE 14 – THE QUEEN'S BURIAL

Faithful enters ringing a bell, accompanied by Attendants carrying a coffin, followed by Rev. Rank Sedges. Hamlet enters.

FAITHFUL

Let us pray for this woman's soul.

HAMLET

Pray you sir, who is the lady you come to bury?

FAITHFUL

A gentlewoman sir, of noble birth, a Queen they say. Did you know her sir?

HAMLET

Yes, I knew her well.

Pause.

How did she die?

FAITHFUL

In her sleep they say, sir.

HAMLET

(To himself) I shall weep for you mother, and then some more. She was unwell and not long in this world. She could never rest. Look what we have wrought! This world of shadows, too much for her beating heart! See how we fail! So much a mother, so much a wife, so loving, so kind! Ah, me! For those that remain may their conscience cry out in pain for what they bear! For you my sweet mother, I pray that you are at peace now.

Hamlet backs away and into the shadows to watch unnoticed by the rest of the procession. The procession stops.

REV RANK SEDGES

I knew this lady only briefly, but always found her most gracious. We must hope that all those left behind may learn from our loss today. She was a woman of gentle strength who found herself caught between battles not of her making. I now charge all men of power and those that seek it, to bow their heads in shame, if their deeds have been the ruin of this innocent woman. Oh, when will peace be ours for more than but a fleeting moment? When will families let the blood that unites them, flow freely like water, rather than languish like decaying poison in their veins? As *second death* now takes her from us, bear witness all to this untimely departure of our Queen. May God protect her on her way. Amen.

The procession move on. Blackout.

SCENE 15 – THE REUNION

Lights up on Hamlet, Poliana and Mrs Yorick.

HAMLET

Mrs Yorick, I am indebted to you and your husband with increasing gratitude.

MRS YORICK

I am pleased to see you master Hamlet, what news?

HAMLET

Mrs Yorick, you were as honest as the day is long and your story may yet prove to be worthy of a thousand thanks and more.

Attendants bring in Ophelia.

(To Mrs Yorick) But how is my love? *(Seeing Ophelia)* How fare you Ophelia?

OPHELIA

I am comforted by having you near me. I have been in good company.

Have you news to tell me my lord?

HAMLET

I do indeed have news, and an introduction of a wondrous nature.

OPHELIA

Am I to learn more of this? Or is it likely to remain a secret for only you to enjoy?

MRS YORICK

Master Hamlet, we long to learn more of your news. By all that's good, if there is any good news in this world we would welcome it with all our hearts.

HAMLET

You are correct again Mrs Yorick. I will reveal my happiness to you all. Ophelia, look closely at this woman's face and tell me you do not see yourself?

OPHELIA

I see a kindly face Hamlet, I knew this women before. Good day to you again, and most welcome.

HAMLET

Ophelia! You knew her well before your last meeting. Look deeply into her features and you will see your own. She is the woman who delivered you into life.

OPHELIA

My mother? If this be true, than I am truly blessed!

POLIANA

And I am luckier than I had ever hoped to be.

OPHELIA

I believe it, not only because I have wished for this moment all my life, but I felt our bond from the moment you were close by my side. Mother!

POLIANA

My Child!

They embrace.

MRS YORICK

Most wonderful to see!

POLIANA

Thank you Hamlet. Without your courage to confront your father we would not have learnt of this wonderful news!

OPHELIA

What of your father in our reunion?

HAMLET

It was my father again who played with fate and withheld your mother's identity all this time. The pain my father has caused you both is unforgivable and immeasurable.

OPHELIA

He has no goodness in him, Hamlet. You must not ally yourself with him any longer. Promise to keep distance between you both, for all our sakes?

HAMLET

Quite the opposite Ophelia! I will get closer to him than ever before! I will question him and interrogate him until he confesses all his sins to me, every one of them. I promise you I shall be thorough in the dissection of his guilt.

OPHELIA

Hamlet, you must cease all thoughts of revenge. Any tricks you play upon your father, your uncle or anyone else here, makes you no better. Be truly cleansed of all this, I beg you.

HAMLET

I must be gone.

POLIANA

Thank you, sir, for all you have done. I am forever in your debt.

HAMLET

Not so! I am the one who must compensate you handsomely for my family's despicable actions. I will make haste towards my Father. Oh, that I could claim to be the son of a better man!

MRS YORICK

May God protect you, Master Hamlet. It is indeed so wonderful to see them side by side, mother and daughter, reunited at last!

OPHELIA

Take care, my lord!

HAMLET

I will be on my guard. Farewell to you all, but only for now.

POLIANA

Our love and thanks to you sir.

HAMLET

And mine to you.

He exits. Blackout.

SCENE 16 – CLAUDIUS ALONE

Lights up on Claudius.

CLAUDIUS

May this be my end, so far have I come, so much I have lost. Born into a breed of Princes and Kings. My forbears weigh upon my crown. I have worn this tainted metal and carried its burden. What of this title? May a man be given such a name and live with customary habit? He shall not, most unnatural, fake, full of affectation it comes. My ambassadors, duplicitous or else full of faint praises; my soldiers out of their manly habit, yield; our royal kin, our foe! What of me? What would you have of me? My Queen and my heart lie dead. I have nothing left to serve you. You have taken all, horror and solitude haunt me now! I pray that you shall walk beside me, be of comfort to me now. The love that was once mine is all lost! My Queen, beautiful Queen, how fair and loving. You have lived in every minute of me. I come to you now. Now I throw off the manacles of this war, this bloody feud between my brother and me. So may he have his rule, his prize. Take it brother, it is yours. I give it freely now. It has made me mad. Around your neck the corroded chains may hang, to war I have worn them, in bloody battle, washed many times from the stains of countrymen and those abroad. It suits you well. Take with you your son, Hamlet, you have won his mind. For me, I take no more from life, only to enter into silence, to sleep, yes, to rest...

Claudius takes his dagger and thrusts it into his stomach.

Oh... my mind settles... I am warm... my spirit free now to wander... unknown, unhindered... where to... where to now... to you now God, or else... or else...

He dies. Blackout.

SCENE 17 – HAMLET CONFRONTS HIS FATHER

Lights up on Hamlet's Father and Hamlet.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Son! Come closer into the light, so that I might see your face better.

HAMLET

My face will bring you little comfort father.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Still angry? As much I expected. You are a man of strong principles and you look upon my conduct in certain matters as... dishonest. Not the bearing of a man from a court under your charge!

Hamlet does not answer.

In all things I am right Hamlet! But for your anger I give way, and so, speak!

Pause.

Silence? Anger toward me Hamlet? Anger that should be spent on killing my brother! You let your feelings for a woman you have barely known come between us son? She was a mere servant. She and her husband were most unruly. Of this I have told you. Do you not understand? Your mother to a second death goes and all your anger must now be directed at your uncle, my brother. It is he who is responsible! More silence, Hamlet? I demand that you seek him out and confront him! For both our sakes, for your father's sake, for the memory of your beloved mother whom he destroyed! Are you listening to me boy? In the name of God why do you not answer me!

HAMLET

Which way to your death, Father?

HAMLET'S FATHER

You reply! Hamlet, you do not want to kill me. Too much if I had told you everything, all the horrors and perturbations. What I have done I have done for you, for your mother, for all our sakes! You have to believe me, Hamlet!

HAMLET

Father, my father, ha! See how you beg me. No more am I duty-bound to honour one word of what you say, an end to your lies! So plain to me now. I have been your puppet for too long father. I cut the strings! Be prepared for bloodshed!

HAMLET'S FATHER

Hamlet, I pray you, hold! You must believe me. It was never my intention to bring grief and sorrow upon you.

HAMLET

Then you have failed. I can see no goodness in you. Rather now my father than my uncle. Upon your knees before me and beg my forgiveness!

HAMLET'S FATHER

Hamlet! Please! Listen to me! You are a man possessed! Take time to let your temper subside!

HAMLET

No more the father I knew and loved, a man who I would have died for. No, I see before me an ugly man, stripped of his mask, your face almost inhuman. I am not your son! I will refute it!

HAMLET'S FATHER

And when you knew me then, no words of dissent or protest did I hear from you! You were willing, free to make up your own mind. You played your part!

HAMLET

Silence! Be silent!

HAMLET'S FATHER

I am your father, you are my son. You know me well. I beg of you to let me live! We are flesh and blood. By all that's good Hamlet!

HAMLET

There is no good! Take your last breath!

HAMLET'S FATHER

No! Hamlet! Please! I beg of you!

HAMLET

May God alone decide how best to treat your wicked soul!

Hamlet goes to plunge the sword into his father, when Horatio appears on film, projected onto the scenery.

HORATIO

Cease! Prince of Denmark! My dear friend, revenge is fleeting, it offers no cure. It cannot heal. The window to a better world closes with every moment that passes now.

Listen to me Hamlet.

HAMLET

How may I simply walk away? Tell me that Horatio?

HORATIO

Your father *waits* for you to kill him. His blood upon your hands for all time, Hamlet?

HAMLET

No... yes, if that is what must happen in order for the chain to be broken. Perhaps it is my destiny to take his life, here and now, while I have the chance. Horatio! I must finish this! My hands tighten around my blade, my anger swells within me. I am unable to let go!

Horatio enters. Hamlet can hear him but not see him.

HORATIO

Close your eyes Hamlet and listen to your heart. It will tell you all you need to know. Do it now!

HAMLET

I don't want to listen, I don't want reason. I need to do away with this monster that created me, so that the better half of me may live! Can't you see, as long as my father walks abroad in this world there can be no end to it all.

HORATIO

I charge you, by all that's good to walk away. It is not too late. I know you Hamlet.

HAMLET

Oh forgive me Horatio if you can. I stand ready to pay the price for my action should God decide to punish me. I end his life now because he has deceived us all. Goodbye father!

HORATIO

Do not strike or else you may not leave! Be satisfied. Do not become him; his conscience, Hamlet, will be torture enough.

Ophelia appears. Hamlet can hear her but not see her.

OPHELIA

Hamlet! Do not do it!

HAMLET

Ophelia!

OPHELIA

Yes my love. Come with me Hamlet, step into the light, I have seen the view beyond, and it is beautiful.

HORATIO

She is right Hamlet. Let go! Move on from this moment, for that is all it is, a moment, only.

Pause.

We are the choices we make, Hamlet.

Hamlet pulls his sword. Horatio and Ophelia exit.

HAMLET

Goodbye father. I leave this weapon by your side. May you follow your brother. None shall stop you.

Hamlet exits. Laertes enters from where he has been watching. Laertes silently comes up behind Hamlet's Father.

HAMLET'S FATHER

Ah! What is this?

LAERTES

Do not be afraid my liege, you are not alone! I have come to finish the task that your son would not do. I am your executioner! I am the one who will now take your life and send you into hell! Have you any words to say before I cut you down?

HAMLET'S FATHER

Laertes! I, I have been wrongly accused! This is nothing but the workings of my son's unbalanced mind!

LAERTES

Your endless stories, out of shape, sending the world around you into despair, while you busy yourself, making others mad so that you can claim what was never yours to take! No sir, we have heard enough!

HAMLET'S FATHER

Laertes my boy you must... let me explain –

LAERTES

I am not your boy! I am the man who will now end your life! And with this sword I take delight in sentencing you to death! Farewell, King of Denmark!

HAMLET'S FATHER

No!

LAERTES

Yes and for my late father too. He was killed in error by your son, who you had sent mad. Both good men! I pray to God that your son is reacquainted with my sister now. May you now be reacquainted with your maker, whoever or whatever he was. Receive this with all our thanks, it is yours alone!

He plunges his sword into the King. Rank Sedges enters.

LAERTES

Look, see what I have done. No one else but me can lay claim to this with you as my witness, you are welcome friend!

REV RANK SEDGES

It is your work son. No one will doubt that now.

LAERTES

And I have done well, have I not?

REV RANK SEDGES

Most precise in your execution.

LAERTES

Look! Look! You can see how the blade entered, with all the strength that comes when an action has true meaning such as mine.

Well? What say you sir?

REV RANK SEDGES

What's done is done now. The result is here before us.

LAERTES

And I stand strangely prouder today than at any point in my life so far. I am ready to head into the light that you have talked about. Will you take me to the portal and wish me well, Father?

REV RANK SEDGES

I cannot Laertes, no. And neither can you make that your destination now. Not after this.

LAERTES

I don't understand! Surely I am to be heralded as a hero in the new world. It is I who ended this bloody story once and for all.

REV RANK SEDGES

You have merely played your part in it, Laertes. Unfortunately for you a sorrowful one. The new world, as you put it, is unable to accommodate those who have taken life. And, although you have ended a tyrant's reign, in turn, you have secured your internment here. You cannot leave. For you, the window is now firmly closed. You must walk this land alone now and live out your days here as best you can.

LAERTES

How strangely falls the hand of fate. What happens to him? Does he go now, into the light?

REV RANK SEDGES

No Laertes. He does not! Come with me.

LAERTES

No!

REV RANK SEDGES

Let me be your guide.

LAERTES

No you shall not! It cannot be like that. Leave me. I am alone now and not worthy of any happiness. My journey ends here.

REV RANK SEDGES

Laertes –

LAERTES

No! I am but nothing now, no goodness left. Go now! Please.

REV RANK SEDGES

You need not be solitary, dear son. Left alone, we die on our own.

Laertes waves Rank Sedges away. Rank Sedges exits.

LAERTES

No purpose left for me and no escape!

Blackout.

SCENE 18 – THE CROSSING

Five Travellers slowly walk across the stage. Yorick crosses their names off.

YORICK

(Speaking to himself) Susannah and Francis Dove, Josia Helme, Samuel and Martha Maycot, Rose Young; that's more than half already safely there.

Mrs Yorick enters.

Take the rest of our party Mrs Yorick; you know the way now as well as I, if not better!

MRS YORICK

Indeed so Mr Yorick.

Yorick and Mrs Yorick embrace.

This way friends, it's not far now. Let the light be your guide as you go.

Hamlet enters with Ophelia, Poliana, Faithful, The Boy and Attendants.

HAMLET

Bring her forward with careful handling.

Faithful picks up Ophelia and carries her forward.

OPHELIA

I strengthen by the hour, Hamlet. I am almost ready to take my first steps again, I can feel it already.

POLIANA

She does seem much improved, sir. She's talked all day of feeling stronger.

HAMLET

But are we sure she has fully healed, before she attempts to walk again?

OPHELIA

Walk over there and let me come to you, Hamlet. I have all the security I need should I falter, don't you think? Mother, do I have your approval to go to my love?

POLIANA

You surely have it, in all matters concerning this young man.

FAITHFUL

Be careful now my lady. Boy, stay close to her.

OPHELIA

I shall repay you all by showing you my health restored.

She goes to walk.

(To The Boy) I am alright. Have no fear for me.

She now corrects herself and walks a few paces towards Hamlet.

I am yours Hamlet!

HAMLET

And I the happiest of men to know you are well again. Thank God, and thanks to you Yorick and your company. I am indebted to you all.

YORICK

It has been our pleasure all along, Hamlet. Now friends, Faithful will take you to my good wife, she will be your guide. Now then, for my belongings, are they all here?

HORATIO

My friend! I call upon you to make haste! This will be the last time I appear to you! Follow me. You are almost out of time in this world. Do not delay!

HAMLET

I hear you Horatio. I am but a moment from leaving now!

The party start to leave. The boy stays behind, waiting at Ophelia's side.

YORICK

It's time for me to head off young Hamlet, time to say our final goodbyes. I am taking a different path to yours now.

HAMLET

My dear Yorick, you cannot simply disappear as quickly as all that. Where are you planning on going?

YORICK

My own way, at last. I'm told it's as good a destination as any.

HAMLET

I don't understand?

YORICK

Hamlet! You don't need to understand everything, all the time, you know! Besides, part of growing up is releasing yourself and letting others do the same, may I say.

HAMLET

Indeed you may say so, but I shall in return be saddened by your departure beyond measure –

YORICK

Choose not to be saddened, Hamlet, rather turn toward your new life and those who now await you with open arms. Have you not earned your place in the sun Hamlet? And I too deserve my quieter days, away from other people's stories, that are not my own.

HAMLET

Yorick, surely you jest, please, I entreat you, come and live out your time with us.

YORICK

Indeed no, and no again! I never jest, unless payment is first agreed! My calling is a strong one. And so, be gentle on your old friend, he isn't one for long goodbyes, and anyway who knows, we may meet again. Goodbye to you, young Hamlet.

Travel well, and keep the load as light as daybreak. That is all any of us can hope to do.

HAMLET

I will do so, and far better having known your love.

YORICK

Enough of all this. Come on then, onwards, upwards... sideways. Why not, who knows!

Yorick exits. The Boy begins to leave.

HAMLET

Boy! I never did know your name?

THE BOY

Polonius, sir.

The Boy exits. Hamlet and Ophelia look at one another. Ophelia matures in stature, knowing the role of a mother to her stepfather will be part of her duty in the life to come.

HAMLET

It is time to leave.

OPHELIA

Yes, let us depart now into the new world. Take us there?

HAMLET

With all my heart Ophelia. Always.

The sound of a train draws near. Blackout. They exit. The sound of the train hurtling through an unseen station is heard. Lights up. Chorus enters

CHORUS

And so the end is now in sight.

All but my epilogue to tell and we can dim the light.

Fortunate are they that live and live again,
taking each life as a gift, and learning all the while.

Let not your conscience and your better nature
give way to sleepless nights, what's done is done. Moreover,
young Hamlet and Ophelia have found real peace, at last.
Elsinore may now begin its own recovery:
the walls, chambers, halls and battlements,
in time, will heal and mend. All things human,
mineral, made by the hand of God or man,
deserve, at last, to rest.

Pray with me now and let the angels all around us
hear our words when we unite

CHORUS (Cont.)

in wishing good, and peace, and quiet,
to all whom we have met tonight.

God bless and keep you safe,
and for your presence here our thanks,
gentles, one and all.

Blackout.

HOSTRY FESTIVAL

The Original Staging

“The team behind the Hostry Festival have a pure ambition to demonstrate the best creative talent in the county. We at the Theatre Royal know that without risky and exhilarating experimentation the performing arts can never develop, so we welcome Stash and his colleagues’ initiative. On a personal level, I admire many of the performers and writers who are being showcased during the Festival, and I’m delighted that there will be such a prominent, and so well supported, platform for their work. I salute Fosters Solicitors for their significant financial contribution, such a great example of the kind of partnership between the arts and the business community that enables both to find a common voice. Long may the Festival flourish.”

PETER WILSON

Hostry Festival Patron.

Chief Executive , Theatre Royal Norwich.

Introduction

STASH KIRKBRIDE

I don't think I am as obsessed with Shakespeare as would first appear to be the case!

I first came up with the idea of writing a play that starts at the end of the original *Hamlet* over twenty years ago. I was at drama school and tackling the role of Hamlet for the first time myself. All kinds of questions were going through my head at the time, and as I began to find the answers I also found myself asking what happens after all is said and done, after all the characters die. Wouldn't it be extraordinary to learn what happens to Horatio for example. Then the idea hit me. Why not write a play that is able to go beyond this mortal coil, to the undiscovered country in fact.

The idea excited me a great deal, but I knew there was little point doing anything about it until the right project and the right time showed themselves to me.

Fifteen years later, I returned to Norfolk, having worked as a professional actor/producer in London for two fascinating decades. I had thrown in the towel. I had given up on acting and the arts in general, and yet all too soon, I found myself running a fledgling arts programme on Future Radio in Norfolk. I ended my second year at the helm of this project mounting and directing a radio version of *Hamlet*. I cast actors from across the county, one of whom was Peter Beck. I instantly got on with Peter and knew he and I would work together on something before too long. The radio programme quickly grew into one of the station's flagship shows and I developed partnerships throughout the county over the next two years; interesting, as I had thought the world of the arts was behind me. It was actress and good friend Susan Hampshire who said "Actors never really retire or give up, they just do something else for a while!" How true this seems to be.

In late 2009 my long term friend Peter Barrow also moved to Norfolk.

He asked me if I would finally like to stage those two plays I had talked about so often? I said yes, if we could find a venue with no history, somewhere new and altogether uncharted. We found the Hostry at

Norwich Cathedral. The Hostry had only recently been opened by The Queen. It cost £10 million to build and it had been built to last many lifetimes. Perfect. Ideal. We were the first to produce a play and a song writers' concert there, both of which played to enthusiastic audiences.

As with almost all projects I initiate, the next year saw us expanding by creating a new Festival with over eight nights of different projects. We had grown and were supplying Norfolk with a sort of unofficial rep company with our now annual productions as The Hostry Festival.

It was during one of our final rehearsals for *The Rainmaker* play in late 2011 that the lightning bolt moment happened. I saw in front of me, the cast of talented actors and suddenly began to realise we had the team to stage *Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country*. I jumped out of my chair and proclaimed "I have just decided what we're doing for next year's festival!" I also decided there and then not to tell them what it was! I wanted to wait until I could find the right person to co-write it with. My creative partner Peter Barrow and I sat down and talked about it in more detail and by the start of 2012 we approached Peter Beck, our leading actor and associate producer. I asked him if it he'd be crazy enough to attempt to co-write a play I had the beginning and end for, but no in-between!

After we had talked it over, Peter did what most normal mortals would have run a mile from, he agreed, but he also added that he'd like to design the lighting, and the costumes and to build the set! Such is the marathon man that Peter is. We of course agreed and we set ourselves the time period of just 6 months in which to bring it all to life.

Amazingly, the writing partnership of Peter Beck, myself, and Peter Barrow as editor, worked perfectly. Our tastes in theatre were pretty much unanimous, and where they differed, we simply found the middle ground and moved forward with renewed focus.

We worked on structure for the first six weeks, Peter Beck guiding me through this as he had studied writing and directing at the University Of East Anglia. We knew we had to find a series of bombshells, events and information that would change the new story from being simply a sequel to something far more original and compelling.

Going with my original idea of setting it in an afterlife was of course exciting and provoking in itself, but Hamlet's journey needed to be far more than simply a repeat of the first play. Peter Barrow came up with the answer, and it was to be his character of Yorick who'd serve as the catalyst. Yorick is the one, who in the great tradition of Shakespeare's

Fools, drops the pearls for Hamlet to pick up. Horatio in our story is the ghost-like figure, as he was the only one still alive in the world that the other characters have left. His character is able to travel between different worlds in order to commune with Hamlet.

Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country, put simply, is what happens “after today, after tomorrow, after life”. We can only surmise, create, pretend, imagine, what happens when one world ends and another begins, and that is what we have done with our new story. We have attempted not to preach, or set the play in any one particular space or time, nor are we opting for any one set of religious beliefs or theories. With over forty years combined theatre experience under our belts, we have written in a manner that works for actors. We have been able to hear when it sounds right and when it doesn’t. We have been able to edit ourselves even before Peter Barrow has edited us!

It is in fact Peter’s disdain for Shakespeare being held up as iconic that has proved invaluable. He has ensured both Peter Beck and I haven’t opted for any Thees and Thous; he has insisted we keep the language our own, and drawn us away from pastiche and homage. We have written in large language, without setting it in any particular genre. As with the “Search For Spock’s Brain” – a wonderful episode in the original *Star Trek* TV series – if the actors believe in it, so will the viewer. Funny how *Star Trek* seemed so influenced by Shakespeare, indeed their first movie was called *The Undiscovered Country*. It seems we are all keen to delve into the unknown, boldly going where no man has gone before! There’s something so unending, so out of our control about what takes place on the other side. I guess we too proclaim our right to create our own take on “What next for Hamlet?”

To run alongside our main house production at The Hostry Festival 2012, featuring the world premiere of *Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country*, we are continuing our partnership with Total Ensemble Theatre Company. Our leading actress Rebecca Chapman had set up Total Ensemble in 2010 here in Norfolk, with the ethos being based on her time at Chickenshed Theatre Company in London. Co-founder of Chickenshed, Jo Collins, had become patron of Total Ensemble in 2011 and we knew Rebecca would bring in a wholly original and uplifting *Prologue* for us. With over twenty performers with additional needs, as well as mainstream people, she has created a twenty minute piece of Movement Theatre in order to portray the themes within the original story of Hamlet. This has served wonderfully for those who may not have seen

the original play, and also stands alone as a master class in truly inclusive theatre. The pictures in this book will speak more clearly than any language in a Forward can hope to do. Nevertheless, I will say this: To witness the sheer enjoyment created by Rebecca and her team of passionate performers is to be part of a ground-breaking community project. Both *Prologue* and *Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country* have been devised and created all within 8 months, February to September 2012. On behalf of the 100-plus volunteers, the actors, and the sponsors of The Hostry Festival, I hope you enjoy our play and I look forward to seeing it on the Big Screen, when it becomes a feature film “Made In Norfolk” in 2014. Fingers crossed, who knows, wonders *do* happen. They are *such things that dreams are made of*, after all.

Stash Kirkbride

stashkirkbride@hostryfestival.org

Co-writer, Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country

Founder, Artistic Director, Producer

The Hostry Festival at Norwich Cathedral

PETER BECK

In the midst of rehearsals Stash paused and announced that every actor in the room was perfect for a project that he had always wanted to realise and that I was to help him write it. A weekend of anticipation followed before I was to meet with him to find out what the proposed project was about.

“You want to write a new play continuing from the end of *Hamlet*, bringing the characters back to life and into a new world. *Hamlet*, possibly Shakespeare’s greatest play; are you mad?” was the thought that ran through my head. Somehow my reply didn’t come out quite like that. As with so many projects that I have been involved with over the years, the audacity and adventure of it has a dramatic effect on my ability for reasoned speech and I say yes.

It’s true that I was nervous, it was not long since I had come out of university where I had been taught by a Shakespeare scholar who had once told me “Of course nobody should ever really attempt Shakespeare, it’s so easy to get it wrong”. True, I had seen countless productions over the years that had been painful to watch as people grappled with the language or failed to make it relevant for modern audiences. As with most arguments however, there are two sides and I also remembered two other pieces of advice that I had heard. I’d been to see Steven Berkoff’s award winning one-man show, *Shakespeare’s Villains* at London’s Haymarket Theatre in 1998. A real masterclass in acting, it was as interesting to watch his portrayal of Shakespearian tyrants as it was to hear what he had to say in-between. “Every major character in Shakespeare’s canon has been played and made synonymous by a well-known actor at some point. We remember Olivier’s Henry V, Gielgud as King Lear and Anthony Sher as Richard the Third. They are like enormous boulders that have to be rolled off the stage before audiences can accept that a different actor is to play the role and perform it in a different way” he said. Another piece of advice came from a friend who had trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama - “Many university scholars believe that Shakespeare should only be done in a certain way. It’s different being an actor and getting the work up on its feet. You have to experiment, not revere it too much because it’s Shakespeare. You need to be free to invent and play with it, make it happen for the audience, not just in the book”. All these pieces of advice proved invaluable, even the warning.

It was essential that I knew the original well. I had seen Hamlet played on film by Kenneth Branagh and Mel Gibson, seen it on stage with Michael Maloney, directed it myself in 2003 and taken a role in a radio production of it for Future Radio, produced by Stash Kirkbride. I had also watched a fascinating documentary about Peter Brook's production at his Theatre des Bouffes du Nord. All these productions helped me to make a decision about what I felt was happening in the original play so that I could address the complex relationships, ideas and arguments in the second. Ringing in my ears was the threat of an audience member pointing out a discrepancy. I'm sure they still will do, but I am fully armed with my justifications. Hamlet, after all, is seen so differently by everyone and we have to make our own minds up when we come into contact with it. The beauty of it is that it brings up so many questions about self, about life and death, and we can't answer them all.

I first met Stash when he was working for a community radio station in Norwich. He'd returned to the city after twenty years working as an actor in London and had set up a team of correspondents for an arts programme. He asked me to come on board as a theatre reviewer. I have to admit that I wasn't really very good at standing with a microphone waiting for audience reaction as they came out of the theatre, but the on-air discussions and monthly meetings were possibly too much fun. Very quickly we realised that we'd had similar experiences in theatre, projects that had gone well and others that had frustrated us. We shared a love of certain actors' work and understood that working in theatre meant you had to go the extra mile. I knew at some point we would work together.

The opportunity came in 2010 when Stash asked me to play a lead role in a production of Tennessee Williams' *Night of The Iguana* at the Hostyry in Norwich. The next year the production turned into a festival and Stash established a creative partnership with Peter Barrow, inviting me to come on board as co-producer. That year we performed a beautiful play called *The Rainmaker* by Richard Nash. I designed and created the set for the production, as well as taking a role amongst a wonderful cast that we brought together. Stash and I began to work closer and closer on realising the productions.

I first met Peter Barrow at the rehearsal of the radio recording for Hamlet. Peter had edited the script and Stash introduced him as 'not being a fan of the Bard's work'. This was the most curious introduction for the start of a rehearsal. Peter sat like a wise owl in rehearsal saying little but interjecting when asked to. Very soon I discovered that Peter is a very generous man with a great sense of humour and an encyclopaedic

knowledge of history. He is not prone to being overly reverent about renowned work, just curious; something that proved very helpful to Stash and me throughout our writing process.

Our writing process started with questions of why, where and what – why should the characters be brought back to life, where are they brought to and what happens to them there? The final scene of the original Hamlet sees the stage littered with the bodies of the King and Queen, Laertes and of course Hamlet. It is as a result of the choices that they make and the knowledge that they have that they end this way. It is often written that Hamlet's downfall is his indecision. What if these characters were able to come back to life and reflect upon their actions? To then have the opportunity to learn and choose a different path in their lives or to continue to make the same mistakes? Lots of scope existed for characters to meet each other again, now armed with the news of who has betrayed them and see if they would choose revenge or to discover peace for themselves. We decided that we needed to create a new world for them to exist in, a level playing field to see what they would each individually do. The characters would know that they had died and come back to life, and that the world they had entered was now decaying; any other information about place was deliberately left ambiguous. We created a series of bombshells for the characters in the play, news that would change the characters perspectives on each other. What if Hamlet's devotion to his father was based on a false premise and his father had used him to do his bidding? What if Gertrude had loved Claudius all along and her marriage to Hamlet's Father had been forced upon her? Life can often seem like a series of tests and we choose how we react to them. For these characters their choices would lead to the next stage of their lives or leave them stuck in the past.

So here is the play. It experiments with what might have happened to the original characters in Shakespeare's play had they been given the chance to reflect. It is written for audiences and actors to debate the original play and the new idea you see here. We hope, like so many plays written for the stage, it makes us think about our own humanity.

Peter Beck

peterbeck@hostryfestival.org

Co writer Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country

Co Producer of The Hostry Festival at Norwich Cathedral

PETER BARROW

I had no interest whatever in Art until classical music took me by surprise at the age of 17. This happened in Toronto, Canada where I was born and which I left in 1973, after going to the University of Toronto. I came away from U of T still with no interest in theatre, but with a BA in History, a subject which still fascinates, even almost obsesses me. I also came away as a life-long member of the Zeta Psi Fraternity of North America, an organization that, believe me, has no High Cultural associations of any kind.

For my first nine months in London I pursued what passed for my conventional business career, an experiment never repeated. What kept me in London was the music, opera and general culture, as well as The Beer. Since I told myself “I’ll only be here one more year”, I figured I’d better have a look at this here theatrical stuff, which I fully expected to be dull by comparison with opera, since it would lack the orchestra, the thundering, the horned helmets and big effects, the big artistes.

Well I was wrong of course, and in fact began to think that here was something I could actually do myself. To test whether I could do it, I stuck a toe in the water at the Mountview Theatre School Evening Course.

My triumph as Dr... Somebody in *Our Town* and as one half of Seneca’s *Oedipus* (I was down to be one third of Oedipus but one of the other two Oedipi stomped out in a huff, so I was upgraded; my first encounter with the luvvy temperament) showed me I could indeed do it, so I carried on. I did a further one year course at The Drama Studio and a sizeable variety of plays and other projects in London and Edinburgh.

However, there comes time in a young man’s life when he realises he will never play The Dane, as Richard Griffiths’ character says in *Withnail and I*... actually I did play him, but only in little bits in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*... and in 1994 I decided to withdraw from acting. But I never really did, not entirely. I always told myself that if acting came back to me, I’d take it, and I always paid close attention to what writers wrote and actors did on stage and screen. In addition, I met someone at the same time I “retired” from the stage who would prove to be curiously significant...

Stash Kirkbride comes from a family that you could call “theatrical” in more senses than one. I first encountered him when I ran a PCR

syndicate... some of you will know what that is... and I had to phone him up on regular occasions to get him to part with his money. We finally met in a basement in Camden Town when a mutual friend appeared in a dreadful play called *Big Buddha Beach*. Perhaps our determination to produce good theatre in later years grew out of this unfortunate but stimulating example. Over the next years I saw more and more of him in London and at his very distinctive family home, a rambling old rented farmhouse in a one-street village, tucked into the only valley in Norfolk. In recent years it's occurred to me that it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that I adopted myself into his family. Our friendship grew, and so did my friendly acquaintance with Norwich. By 2007 Stash was a bit of an arts mogul at Norwich's Future Radio and on his coat-tails I started to float back toward theatrical performance, first doing book reviews on his radio arts programme, then editing *Hamlet* for his Future Radio production of it, which he produced, directed, and starred in. So he has played The Dane.

Now about this Hamlet thing: I have a problem, and my problem is A Shakespeare Problem. I don't like him. Shakespeare, I mean. Or to be more accurate, I can't stand Shakespeare worship, the Cult of Shakespeare. No one *could* be so perfect, so supposedly almightily great. For a start no one could be that consistent. Have you ever considered cutting Shakespeare? You'd better, because he goes on, and on, and on. If you don't cut, you die, of boredom or of incomprehension amid the swarming mass of words. When I edited *Hamlet* in '08, I found again and again that The Bard would say something once, probably well enough or very well; then he'd say it again loading in extra classical allusions; then occasionally a third time with even more obscure literary references. Enough Bill!... Or Christopher, my Lord Oxford, or whoever you really were. And I don't much like the character of Hamlet: Whining hysterical momma's boy, self-pitying martyr, self-righteous lying twister. Enough, perhaps I exaggerate. Or not. Anyway, the Bard Cult piously jacks up a mere mortal in a way that is sentimental, unrealistic and humanly impossible. I cannot abide piety and I cannot abide hero worship.

Well... that shuts me out of the RSC, I guess.

Never mind all that. I began to recue myself from passively waiting around for somebody else to re-integrate me into acting in 2009. In that year several things happened, one of them sad, the rest of them glad. The sad event was the death of my mother, Betty Barrow, aged nearly 90. The glad events were three: I bought a house in Norwich, received a

substantial inheritance from my late mother, and I found out about Landmark Education, formerly known as EST. I began doing Landmark courses on 9/11 of that year and have since done a dozen more. There's an excessive amount I could say about its influence on me, but for the moment I'll just say this: I learned, that is, I finally "got" the possibility of being the prime mover in my own life, of identifying and ploughing through the obstacles I'd spent a lifetime raising against myself. I recommend it.

I put this possibility into practical effect in April 2010 when I went to Stash and said, "Y'know *Night Of The Iguana*?" – he's long harboured a desire to do that play as well *The Rainmaker*; why these two American plays in particular I don't know; you'll have to ask him – anyway, "Y'know NOTI, why don't we just do it?" "Great!", he said, "Why don't we use the brand new Hostry building by the Cathedral as a theatre and do it there?" "Oh, I dunno...", I said, thinking that wouldn't work. Then he took me there and it was obviously perfect, a very impressive venue for any purpose. Thus was The Hostry Festival born, and paid for by me and my mother's inheritance. Two things about that: We didn't call it a Festival until the next year when we had more events programmed, and also, you may have noticed that I entered into this by breaking both the iron rules of theatrical production laid down by that great impresario Max Bialystock in *The Producers*. The first rule is that you do not put in your own money. When Bialystock's innocent protégé asks "What's the second rule?" He is thunderously reminded that it is obviously, "YOU DO NOT PUT IN YOUR OWN MONEY!!"

Well I don't care. I put in my own money because the project inspires me. In fact, as it turns out, the project inspires a lot of people, both on stage and off. And I get to appear in it. You could say the whole Festival runs on Inspiration, which is why so many people are keen to join us both as performers and helpers of all kinds, and we value all of their services. We also value their good humour and cooperativeness.

And so, back to Hamlet. Also back to one of Stash's long held ideas: as long as I've known him, which is 20 years now, he's wanted to do a sequel to *Hamlet*. After the 2011 Festival, Stash, Peter Beck and I began to consider the implications of such a sequel. Where would it possibly take place? Who would be doing what to whom? We, along with our friends Hamilton Wilson and Nick Broughton spent several weeks in early 2012 considering such questions, and thrashed out who would be the *dramatis personae* and what would be the plot of our new Hamlet

Extension. Then over the next several months Stash and Peter got down to the hard work of writing the new play, while as editor I got to do the easy job of telling them where they were going wrong. Not only did we not get in each other's way, we also encouraged and inspired each other at every turn. This may sound hard to believe but it is what actually happened. Writing by committee really is possible, when the writers keep their egos from falling over each other.

And I still get to appear in the result. In World Shakespeare Year, Yorick lives for the first time on stage, and he is me. And he has a wife. I bet you didn't know that.

Peter Barrow

peterbarrow@hostryfestival.org

Editor/actor, *Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country*

Founder, Executive Producer, Hostry Festival at Norwich Cathedral

REBECCA CHAPMAN

In November 2010 we had just finished our first play at the Hostry, *the Night of the Iguana*. Thinking ahead to 2011, Stash suggested that this might be a good time for me to embark upon an idea I had to start an inclusive theatre company. Over the years I have been inspired by the integrated able bodied and disabled performance work pioneered by Adam Benjamin and Celeste Dandeker, founders of the Candoco dance company. I worked at Chickenshed in London, an amazing theatre company pioneering inclusive theatre work for almost forty years now. Jo Collins, co-founder of Chickenshed (alongside Mary Ward), encouraged me to set up a company in Norwich and here we are with her as our Patron.

“Prologue”

Total Ensemble debuted with *All Walks of Life*, a ten minute piece of movement theatre at the Hostry Festival in October 2011. At the first rehearsal we had eight performers and, with people joining up until two weeks before the performance date, we ended up with fourteen.

I then started to dream of a Total Ensemble collaboration with one of the main events as part of the next Hostry Festival.

A play, *Hamlet; The Undiscovered Country*, was planned for 2012. It hadn't been written yet so it was an ideal opportunity for Total Ensemble to get in on the act; every night of the Festival!

With the new play being written and produced in the year that is “World Shakespeare Year”, here was a brilliant opportunity for Total Ensemble to develop its more abstract movement language into a period piece; a narrative and character-driven work.

A year on and we have twenty-one performers who have devised and rehearsed with me for two hours on a Friday night since January. At the time of writing we are about to embark on the next stage. The devising period over, we now have to set and rehearse the material in no more than sixty hours over the next two months!

Total Ensemble has become a group of strolling players, providing the prologue for a new play that is literally the afterlife of Hamlet and the afterlife of the original *Hamlet* play. The strolling players re-enact the original Hamlet story in their unique way to remind us of the drama that

sets the scene for the new one. *Prologue* therefore creates a play within a play within a play, as the Total Ensemble players play the parts of the players who re-enact the death of Hamlet's father in the original play!

We have collaborated with both Chris Ellis and Greg MacDermott in creating original music and soundscape for the piece.

Total Ensemble champions inclusive theatre because it is my preference as a practitioner. Working with performers that vary in age, ability, look, experience, learning style and interpretive style excites me more than putting on a show or play using a very specific demographic of the “mainstream” populous that demonstrates talent in a narrow form.

Most important of all is that Total Ensemble Theatre Company is out to make good theatre so the performers must be able to do the job required; be an effective part in the telling of the story through drama. They have to really want to be part of the theatre we are producing; be disciplined, motivated and work hard, like any other professional performer. They have to put the ensemble work before their own performance; be a team player. The only difference is that some of these performers might not walk, speak, act, sing or dance in a way that we as audiences have come to learn is acceptable or “normal” in this arena.

I hear that there still is not enough provision in this area but it is happening more and more - We have been reminded by the recent Paralympic opening and closing ceremonies, embracing both sporting achievement and theatrical spectacle that the creative work of all types of people has to have standing in the community.

For me, performance and inclusion are inseparable if the human story is to be presented with integrity. It can be created and told by all types of humans, working together; TOTAL ENSEMBLE.

For further information and to contact Total Ensemble Theatre Company visit: www.totalensemble.org

Rebecca Chapman

enquiries@totalensemble.org

Founder and Artistic Director

Total Ensemble Theatre Company



Stash Kirkbride, Peter Beck, Rebecca Chapman and Peter Barrow.
(Photo by Robin Watson.)

The PBSK Partnership in association with

FOSTERS
SOLICITORS

present the world première of

HAMLET

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

After today, after tomorrow, after life...
the rest is *not* silence.

A new play written by

STASH KIRKBRIDE & PETER BECK

Cast

DAVID BANKS as Chorus
TOM HARPER as Hamlet
PETER BECK as Claudius
DAVID NEWHAM as Hamlet Senior
PETER BARROW as Yorick
CHRIS ELLIS as Horatio
REBECCA CHAPMAN as Gertrude
EVAN RYDER as Laertes
CAITLIN McCLAY as Ophelia
ALEX SCOTT as Boy
ROBIN WATSON as Rosencrantz
BIJAN ARASTEH as Guildenstern
ETTA GERAS as Mrs Yorick
HENRIETTA RANCE as Poliana
WILLIAM HARVEY as Faithful
NEVILLE MILLER as Rev Rank Sedges

Devised & Directed by

STASH KIRKBRIDE

Executive producer/editor

PETER BARROW

Set/Lighting/Costumes designed by

PETER BECK

Original Music Score by

CHRIS ELLIS

OUR STORY BEGINS AT THE END ~

In this brand new play specially commissioned
for the Hostry Festival, Shakespeare's story of
Hamlet, at last, continues...

Supported by

JARROLD
The John Jarrold Trust



Publicity for the main house double bill production.



Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country original cast and production team, 2012.



Tom Harper, in rehearsal as Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.



Chris Ellis, Horatio and Henrietta Rance, creating the role of Poliana.



Peter Beck, William Harvey, David Newham, Evan Ryder.



Rebecca Chapman as Gertrude and Peter Beck as Claudius.



Peter Barrow creating the role of Yorick.



Bijan Arasteh, Robin Watson and Tom Harper.



Peter Beck as Claudius.



Alex Scott, creating the role of The Boy.



Hamilton Wilson and Scott Meacock, with Stash Kirkbride, directing.



David Banks as Chorus.

CHORUS SPEECH (PROLOGUE)

Gentles one and all, citizens most beloved,
lend us your willing ears, as chorus-like
I tell a story as ancient as these very walls.

When last we met upon this wooden O,
all was not well within the Kingdom of Elsinore –
oh, Elsinore, sweet Elsinore – for never was a place
as ravaged and torn asunder.

Let us restore you
to that place – but sometime hence.
Our story, now with new words, will give life
to the very embers of the souls who did depart.
Those hearts that ceased to beat will now revive,
and with new life will come a *second* chance.

But let us stay awhile.
Let our eyes light upon the story thus far.

Imagine a band of players, troubadours if you will,
well versed in the art of storytelling, travelling by torch light.
See there! through yonder portal our kindred folk,
who now arrive to lend their expert hand.

As you would know it, The Tragedy of Hamlet,
Prince of Denmark, shall be shown to you
in mime, movement and mellifluent melodrama.
Look you, and observe these masters of their art;
each one a scholar in their field. Their purpose now
to entertain, but also to interpret
what took place before.

Then shall we be transported, sharing what takes place
beyond,
after all is said and done. After today, after tomorrow,
after life – all is not silence.

So now, The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, is afoot.
And thus, gentles all, begins our opening scene –
the prologue to this Undiscovered Country –
told for you in perfect union
by our travelling players, our Total Ensemble.

The PBSK Partnership in association with Fosters Solicitors
present a Hostry Festival debut performance of

TOTAL ENSEMBLE

Theatre Company's

PROLOGUE

Created & directed by

REBECCA CHAPMAN



Inclusion in action, with integrity

Norfolk's new and fully inclusive theatre company returns to this year's festival with a brand new piece of movement theatre. A cast of over 20 will ignite the Hostry stage with a prologue inspired by Shakespeare's Hamlet and set to original music by Chris Ellis, with additional soundscape by Greg MacDermott.



Patron Jo Collins MBE

Co-founder Chickenshed Theatre Company

*"Total Ensemble offers a world where people
with different abilities live and work together".*
Nicola Baxter, TETC Member

Publicity for Main House double bill production.



Strolling Players.



Nick Doig, Etta Geras, Ruby Ashby, Eloise Hoxley.



Tom Maile and Tillie Curson



Peggy Holden.



Eloise Hoxley, Caitlin McClay and Peggy Holden.



Irah Hawkshaw and Ensemble.



Evie Pettit, William Harvey and Ben Sykes.



Rebecca Chapman directing *The Strolling Players*.

Biographies

STASH KIRKBRIDE

Trained as an actor at BRISTOL OLD VIC THEATRE SCHOOL.

Stash comes from an acting family, with both his late father and grandmother having gained scholarships to RADA. He began his acting career in Norfolk, playing parts at The Maddermarket and Sewell Barn Theatre before moving to London full time in 1987. In London his work spanned over two decades and included setting up and running two theatre companies, with Hugh Grant, Susan Hampshire and Susannah York as patrons. He produced over a dozen plays Off West End in venues like BAC, Kings Head Theatre Islington and The New End, Hampstead. He has played leading roles in Rep theatres across the country as well as parts in the West End.

Work includes: *Blood Brothers* No:1 tour, and Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* at The Royal Haymarket Theatre, West End (both for Bill Kenwright). The role of Faulkand in Kate O'Mara's British Actors Company production of *The Rivals* (National tour). Charles Murdock In *The Ghost Train* at Theatre Royal Bristol. The Earl of Derby, *Richard III*, Leicester Haymarket theatre. Five lead roles in The Agatha Christie Season at Westcliff (director Roy Marsden) as well as numerous productions for his favourite all time director, the late Dan Crawford, about whom he devised and produced a documentary for Sky TV. He has acted and directed for radio, with a long list of acting and voiceover credits to his name, notably Captain Rishda Tarkaan in *The Chronicles of Narnia* with Paul Scofield and David Suchet.

In 2010 he set up The PBSK Partnership with long term friend Peter Barrow, in order to produce projects that celebrate talent in Norfolk; amongst their projects is The Hostry Festival at Norwich Cathedral, as well as producing The New Norfolk Arts Awards with co-producer Peter Beck.

Work in the near future includes the filming of *Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country*, to be filmed and funded entirely in Norfolk in 2014.

PETER BECK

Peter began his theatre career at The Theatre Royal Arts Courses in Norwich, playing roles in a number of productions, including musical theatre. Still a teenager he was then invited to perform with The Maddermarket Theatre, The Sewell Barn Theatre, Seventh Seal and SLAP and got his first taste of television roles in ITV's *The Chief* and Tan Trum Films / Anglia Television's *Communication Studies*. In 1995 Peter joined the Norwich Playhouse new writing company Plays Without Décor, performing in two new works, *Falls* by Anthony George and *Breaking The Bonds* by Graham Coulam. This was shortly followed by the establishment of a new company, Platform One which he helped to run. The company's work was diverse and included small-scale theatre touring, school tours, workshops and comedy shows, including the first Normal for Norfolk show, now a favourite with audiences in the county. In 1998 Peter got together with composers Robin Forrest and Karen Riley to write a tongue-in-cheek musical set in space called *Planet Aqua*. The next year he worked with writer Tim Ashwell on a new play called *Thumping*, which premiered in London at the Etcetera Theatre before a month at The Edinburgh Fringe. By this time Peter had been offered places on the postgraduate acting courses at LAMDA and Webber Douglas, but unfortunately was unable to find the funding to take them up. Returning to work in Norwich he met newly-appointed artistic director of The Maddermarket Theatre, Clare Goddard. Through Clare's vision and passion for this community theatre, education and training became a priority. Soon she invited him to become the theatre's first Education Officer, taking charge of its theatre classes, workshops and education projects. During this time Peter produced and directed a number of projects with other cultural organisations, including actor-led gallery tours for Norfolk Museum Service, passion plays for Norwich Cathedral and issue-based theatre for Leeway Women's Refuge. He also directed productions of *Antigone*, *The Lion*, *the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Bugsy Malone* for theatre's youth company. In 2003 Peter played the role of Good Deeds in a production of *Everyman* directed by Simon Callow and Clare Goddard, performed as part of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival. During his time at The Maddermarket Theatre he also directed a number of main house productions, including *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Elephant Man*, *Philadelphia Story* and

Hamlet, along with productions of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* and *Metamorphosis* for schools. Leaving the venue Peter set up a new youth theatre organisation, Norwich Young People's Theatre, with colleagues Laura Cordiner and Gail Atkins. The organisation grew rapidly with in excess of four-hundred young people attending theatre, dance and singing classes and examination groups every week. Along with a number of youth productions in venues across Norwich the company also produced issue-based plays, actor-led literary tours and specially commissioned projects for young people. In 2006 Peter took up a place at The University of East Anglia on the Theatre Director's MA programme, gaining a distinction and the Julian Award for Best Director. After graduating Peter lectured on the Creative Writing Degree Course at Norwich University College of the Arts and in 2008 he set up his own theatre company, Theatre Paradisum, directing and producing productions of Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* and *Man is Man*. Peter met Stash Kirkbride and Peter Barrow in 2008, having been invited by them to play a role in a radio production of *Hamlet* for local radio station Future Radio. He was soon taken on-board by Stash as theatre correspondent on the station's arts programme and a year later became a presenter himself of that show. In 2010 he was invited to play the role of Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon in Tennessee Williams's *Night of the Iguana* at The Hostry in Norwich. This was the start of Peter's work with Stash and Peter's newly formed company The PBSK Partnership. The following year they established The Hostry Festival and Peter joined them as co-producer. The festival, now in its second year, sees the very first Norfolk Arts Awards, which Peter has created and produced with Stash. Along with Peter's work as a director and actor he continues to work as freelance arts manager and designs and constructs scenery for the stage.

PETER BARROW

Peter Barrow was born in Canada and has lived in this country since 1973, mostly in London, more recently in Norwich. He left Toronto with a BA in History, an interest that he keeps up keenly. Once in London his interest in classical music and opera led to an interest in theatre, which then led him to train at Mountview Theatre School and The Drama Studio. He appeared in a variety of productions and projects in London and Edinburgh. These included *The Glass Menagerie*, *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, *Macbeth*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Country Wife* and improvised stage performances with London Theatre Sports. He even played Hamlet... well, in *Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead*, and was heard both to sing and to speak in a Lancashire accent in a new musical, *Seats In All Parts*. Peter left the theatre temporarily but told himself that if acting ever came back to him, he'd take it.

He started to re-approach performing in 2007-08 when he did book reviews on Norwich's Future Radio, then edited *Hamlet* for Future's radio production.

He took a leading role in his own theatrical renaissance in 2010 by teaming up with Stash Kirkbride to produce a play and a concert at The Hostry, Norwich Cathedral (he didn't think the Hostry appropriate as a venue at first, but Stash knew better).

The play was *Night Of The Iguana* and Peter made his return to acting as Nonno, the 97 year old poet. This grew into The Hostry Festivals of 2011 and 2012, in which he's played the Sheriff in *The Rainmaker*, a silly ass villain in *Rufus Rank Investigates*, and now Yorick in *Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country*. Peter is the Executive Producer of the project and the editor of the play.

REBECCA CHAPMAN

Rebecca Chapman is the founder and artistic director of the Total Ensemble Theatre Company.

She trained as a professional actor at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and has a BA Hons Performance Arts from Middlesex Poly; majoring in contemporary dance.

Originally from Cornwall, she started her acting career in Aberystwyth playing Frenchie in *Grease* in 1987. She has appeared in many comedy revue shows in London's West End, Camden, the Canal Café Theatre in Little Venice and several Edinburgh Festivals. For the Chickenshed Theatre she played many roles both in London and on tour, including the Queens Theatre, Hornchurch and Birmingham Rep.

She played Margaret in a No.1 tour of *High Society* and appeared in *Let's Do It* at the Chichester Festival Theatre. Other roles include, Mrs Bennet; *Pride and Prejudice*, Paulina; *Death and the Maiden*, Alice More; *A Man for all Seasons*, Helene; *Sweet Charity*, Countess Giulietta; *Beethoven's Tenth*.

For the Hostry Festival she played Maxine Faulk in *The Night of the Iguana*, 2010, Lizzie in *the Rainmaker*, 2011 and created the role of Gertrude in *Hamlet; the Undiscovered Country*, 2012.

She is one half of the cabaret, comedy duo, the TinaMarinas.

TV work includes Antonia in *The Bill*, *Dream Team* and *The House of Elliot*.

Thank Yous:

To all the casts and production teams on The Hostry Festival productions 2010/11/12.

A huge thank you for all your energy, talent and fabulous fun together.

Peter Wilson, PW Productions and Chief Exec Theatre Royal, Norwich
Helen McDermott, BBC Radio Norfolk
Hostry Festival patrons Mike King, Joel Cohen
The Dean and Chapter at Norwich Cathedral
Sue Ball Commercial Manager at The Hostry and Norwich Cathedral.
Richard, Simon and Susan, Jenny and Ann, at The Cathedral office.
Iain McClay and Andrea Spooner, and all at Fosters Solicitors
Emma Knights, Tony Wenham, David Powles, and all at The Eastern Daily Press
David Clayton, Graham Bernard and all at BBC Radio Norfolk
Caroline Jarrold and all at The John Jarrold Trust.
Henry Layte and all at The Book Hive.
Richard and Annie Austin and all at Rainbow.
Nick Snell and Robin Norton and all at Sevenwolves.
Tom Buckham and all at Future Radio.
Genevieve and all at The Maddermarket Theatre.
Chris Gribble and Writers' Centre Norwich.
Hamilton and Hasina Wilson and all at Subud.

Thanks to Jarrold and The Book Hive, Norwich.

Mary Barrow. David and Jane. Terry and Jan Chapman. Tom. Judy Longman.
Emma Chapman. Trehane and Debbie James. Adrian Drew. Paul Willets. Lauren Farley.
Theodora Lecrinier. Scott Meacock. Rachel Hall. Lindsay Venn. Daisy Turville-Petre.
Esther Lemmens. Louisa Griffith-Jones. Steph McKenna. Eve Stebbing. Sian Davies.
Roger Rowe MBE. Jo Collins MBE. Matt Dartford. Paula Sanchez. Jeanette and Archie Martin.
Debbie and Nick deSpon. Martin Watters. Keri Lambden. Rachel Codling. Andy Sapey.
Richard Howes. James and Kerry Kirkbride, Jayagita and Aranyaka. Delia Kirkbride, Joc,
Jazz, Jesse, Archie. The Kurzner family. Sir Timothy and Lady Mary Coleman.
Aine Branting. Av and Bill. Susan Seddon, Bay Herez-Smith. Simon Hepworth.
Katherine Kingsley. Lucy Frean. Paul McEwan. Howard Jago. Lonnie James.
Melanie Andrews. June Andrews. Michael Andrews. Grant Stimpson. Kerry Crowson.
Heidi Sear. Neville Miller. Chris Denys and all at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.
Jeremy Young. Phil Wilmot. Tony Cleary. Jonathan Church. Susan Hampshire.
Kate O'Mara. Richard Jackson. Stephanie Sinclair. Ann Pinnington. Roger Boyland.
Bill Kenwright. Clare Goddard. Anthony Gash, Maryce and Martin, Gilly Sanguinetti
and thank you to John Dane for his continued encouragement.

Henry Burke. David Gwyn Harris. Adrian Cairns.
Neil Sutton. Vivian Jacobs. Ian Emmerson.
Dan Crawford, founder of The Kings Head Theatre, Islington.

