

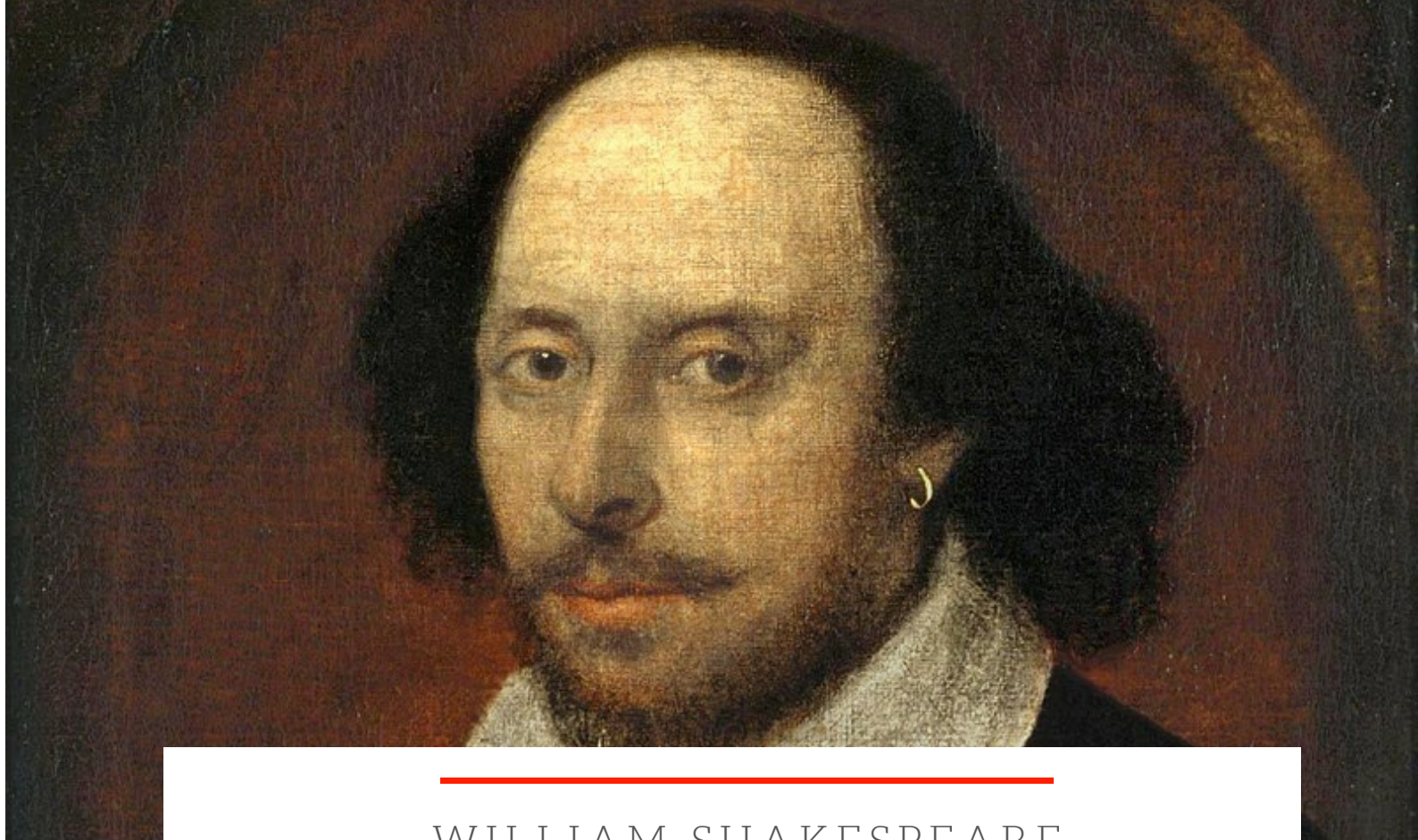
TNT THEATRE

HAMLET

by William Shakespeare

Didactic Material

Directed by Paul Stebbings



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was an English poet, playwright, and actor. He was born on 26 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. His father was a successful local businessman and his mother was the daughter of a landowner. Shakespeare is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and nicknamed the Bard of Avon. He wrote about 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses, of which the authorship of some is uncertain. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

There is no record of his birth, but his baptism was recorded by the church, thus his birthday is assumed to be the 23 of April. His father was a prominent and prosperous alderman in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, and was later granted a coat of arms by the College of Heralds. All that is known of Shakespeare's youth is that he presumably attended the Stratford Grammar School, and did not proceed to Oxford or Cambridge.

Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway at the age of 18. She was eight years older than him. They had three children: Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith.

Career

After his marriage there is very little information about his life. But he is thought to have spent most of his time in London writing and performing in his plays. Between 1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men.

Seven years later Shakespeare was recognized as an actor, poet, and playwright, when a rival playwright, Robert Greene, referred to him as “an upstart crow” in *A Groatsworth of Wit*. A few years later he joined up with one of the most successful acting troupes in London called “The Lord Chamberlain's Men”. When, in 1599, the troupe lost the lease of the theatre where they performed (appropriately called “The Theatre”), they were wealthy enough to build their own theatre across the Thames, south of London, which they called “The Globe”. The new theatre opened in July of 1599, built from the timbers of “The Theatre”, with the motto “Totus mundus agit histrionem” (En. A whole world of players). When James I came to the throne (1603) the troupe was designated by the new king as the “King's Men” (or “King's Company”). The Letters Patent of the company specifically charged Shakespeare and eight others “freely to use and exercise the art and faculty of playing Comedies, Tragedies, Histories, Interludes, Morals, Pastorals, stage plays... as well for recreation of our loving subjects as for our solace and pleasure.”

His Work

Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were mainly comedies and histories and these works remain regarded as some of the best work produced in these genres. He then wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, considered some of the finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote tragicomedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights. Shakespeare's plays remain highly popular today and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.

Shakespeare entertained the King and the people for another ten years until June 19, 1613, when a cannon fired from the roof of the theatre for a gala performance of *Henry VIII* set fire to the thatched roof and burned the theatre to the ground. The audience ignored the smoke from the roof at first, being too absorbed in the play, until the flames caught the walls and the fabric of the curtains. Amazingly there were no casualties, and the next spring the company had the theatre “new builded in a far fairer manner than before.” Although Shakespeare invested in the rebuilding, he retired from the stage to the *Great House of New Place* in Statford that he had purchased in 1597, and some considerable land holdings, where he continued to write.

Retirement and Death

Around 1613, at the age of 49, he retired to Stratford, where he died three years later. Few records of Shakespeare's private life survive. He died on 23 April 1616, at the age of 52. He died within a month of signing his will, a document which he begins by describing himself as being in “perfect health”. In his will, Shakespeare left the bulk of his large estate to his elder daughter Susanna.



SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE

SHAKESPEARE'S ERA

1564-1616

Covered most of the Elizabethan era and the start of the Jacobean era



"We, the princes, are installed on a stage at the sight of the world" – echo "the world is a scene" ("the world is a stage") of Shakespeare

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Any Director approaching HAMLET must first deal with the weight of artistic and critical interpretation that sits heavily upon this most famous of all dramatic texts. The temptation is to add a little more weight, another interpretation that allows the audience to view the original text through the supposed brilliance of the modern director. Shakespeare must be turned into "our contemporary" (in the famous phrase of Jan Kott). So recent HAMLETS I have seen included one where the same actor played Hamlet and Claudius and the same actress Ophelia and Gertrude! Freud, Beckett and a host of other authorities are invoked as if Shakespeare was not enough.

What we are attempting is an exploration of the original. We make no claims that this is a definitive version, nor are we trying to avoid interpretation; but our attempt is to draw the interpretation from the text rather than superimpose a simplification. For example, the Ghost is a type of performer, he chooses when and where to appear to make his impact, he even selects his audience (so that Gertrude cannot see him but humble Marcellus can). This sets up a chain of performances which at its most extreme develops into our use of puppets and draws attention to the performances that are given throughout the play: Claudius performs the dutiful step-father in his first scene, Ophelia performs as if she is, alone with Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern perform the role of old friends, Hamlet out performs them all in his role of a madman. However, all these performances will end with the jester Yorick in death. The text constantly yields up images and scenes of performance, to explore this idea it is not necessary to bend the play to fit some external theory.

A SCENE FROM THE
PERFORMANCE



We particularly reject the interpretation of Coleridge and Schlegel, reiterated by Laurence Olivier in his preface to the 1949 film: "Hamlet is the tragedy of a man who cannot make up his mind". The philosopher Prince is seen as the extreme example of the paralysis of the intellectual. This interpretation, very much the product of Romanticism, relies on simple hindsight: the Ghost tells the truth, why doesn't Hamlet act upon it? I feel there are two answers to this and once the idea is dispatched we can get on with letting the play and its central character operate as Shakespeare intended.

It is a great mistake to analyse what happens in the play as opposed to what is written by Shakespeare. Neither Hamlet himself nor Horatio are very concerned with this issue of thought versus action, supposedly the central theme of the play. Two or three lines can be found in its support. This is hardly a tragic flaw on a par with Macbeth's ambition or Lear's selfish folly, it also supposes that Hamlet is a philosopher, whereas he never truly engages in philosophical discussion but constantly reacts to events. Hamlet is trying to make sense of the "rotten state" of his world. We feel that unless the killing of Claudius will somehow "put the world to right" Hamlet will not perform this murderous

act. Murderous yes, because "conscience makes cowards of us all". It is "conscience" that paralyses the Prince, not thought. Hamlet is searching for an action that will "set this world to right" but in all conscience he cannot find one.



Why? Well, firstly, I suggest he does not believe the Ghost. The "Mousetrap" play is as much a test for the Ghost as the King. But it is Hamlet's actions after he proves that his uncle did murder his father that are the most telling: he does not take the opportunity to kill Claudius at prayer but rushes to confront his mother. These two actions make no sense for an Avenger, but they do make sense if we see Hamlet as a melancholic, depressive and burdened young man, overwhelmed with grief and disgusted by his mother's sexuality. This is the Hamlet we first see, who wishes that his "too solid flesh would melt" and recoils at incest before he ever meets the Ghost. This is the Hamlet of "To be or not to be, who even rejects the idea of an afterlife as an "undiscovered bourn (place) from which no traveller ever yet returned." Hamlet struggles to place the idea of revenge that will -set the world to right" within the framework of his melancholic nihilism; for "man delights me not, nor woman...". This hatred of life manifests itself in sexual disgust (not incestuous desire for his mother, Freud has nothing to say about this play in my opinion).

The same misanthropy is apparent in his violence towards all those who love him - indeed, violence towards love and procreation. This aggression encompasses madness, as the only proper response to the "rotten" world and indeed the human condition: "who would the fardels bear?" (The weight of human existence). Only Death might provide an answer, but suicide and murder seem to Hamlet to confirm the futility and wretchedness of human existence. Death is only appropriate as an accident, he can kill Claudius but only on an Impulse, without forethought (hence he kills Polonius by mistake).



Death rules the world anyway, and even a king will pass through the guts of a beggar. Hamlet prays for a path that is morally clear, but "conscience makes (him) a coward", and only madness and its mirror of theatre will provide a haven of sense and meaning. The tragedy in this, the fatal flaw, is that Hamlet in seeking to make sense of the rotten state of Denmark merely increases its depravity. Ophelia, Laertes and even Polonius are to a varying degrees innocent and yet he destroys them. He also fails to save his own mother, his revenge is private, unacknowledged and therefore incomplete. He has tried to be "cruel to be kind" but he has ended only in cruelty and the sea of troubles overwhelms him.

Hamlet confronts the human condition with honesty and we admire him for that but his attempts to act 'in all conscience are an utter failure'. The rest is silence.



QUOTES FROM *HAMLET*

Listen to many, speak to a few.

“

H

A

This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

“

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

“

M

L

Brevity is the soul of wit.

“

There is nothing either good or bad but
thinking makes it so.

“

E

T

Doubt thou the stars are fire;
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt I love.

“

The lady doth protest too much, methinks.

“

To be, or not to be,
that is the question.

“



THE MAIN CHARACTERS

CLAUDIUS

The new King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle. He married Gertrude, Hamlet's mother. He is the villain of the play. An ambitious politician obsessed with power. Sometimes, he shows signs of human feeling (for example, his love for Gertrude appears sincere)

GERTRUDE

She is Hamlet mother. She marries Claudius shortly after his husband death. She loves Hamlet deeply. However she is a weak character, constantly in search of attention and ranking.

OPHELIA

Polonius' daughter and Laertes' sister - in love with Hamlet. She is a sweet and innocent young girl who obeys her father and her brother. Hamlet breaks her heart. Her descent into madness will lead her to death.

HAMLET

Main character. Prince of Denmark. Son of Gertrude and Old Hamlet. His father just died and his uncle Claudius is the new king and his step father. He is a thoughtful, melancholic character who seeks revenge for his father

POLONIUS

Counsellor. Father of Ophelia and Laertes. Conniving and imperious. Hamlet kills him accidentally.

LAERTES

Polonius' son and Ophelia's brother. Passionate and quick to action. He wants to kill Hamlet who murdered his father and broke his sister heart.

HORATIO

An old friend of Hamlet. A real friend. Horatio and Hamlet studied in Wittenberg together. He is loyal to Hamlet during the whole play.

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

Childhood friends of Hamlet. They are employed to spy on Hamlet and discover the causes of his behaviour.

FORTINBRAS

The young prince of Norway. Old Hamlet killed his father so he wants to invade Denmark to avenge his father's honor

THE GHOST OLD HAMLET

Specter of the previous King of Denmark, Hamlet's father. He appears to Hamlet claiming that Claudius murdered him. He asks his son to avenge him.

GAMES AND QUESTIONNAIRES

1

QUIZ. ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS ABOUT WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

1) Where was William Shakespeare born?

- a) London b) Cambridge c) Stratford-upon-Avon

2) How many sonnets have been written by Shakespeare?

- a) 15 b) 154 c) 451

3) What is the name of Shakespeare's wife?

- a) Sandra Hathaway b) Anne Hathaway
c) Hanna Hathaway

4) Which of the Shakespeare's era coincides with two periods of the British history?

- a) Caroline Era and Restoration b) Caroline era and Tudor Period
c) Elizabethan Era and Jacobean Era

5) During Shakespeare's era, the society was divided into a strict social order. How many classes were there?

- a) 4 b) 3 c) 6



2

QUIZ. ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PLAY HAMLET.

- 1) Where is the university at which Hamlet and Horatio studied?**
 - a) Paris
 - b) Wittenberg
 - c) Oxford
- 2) Which of these characters survive?**
 - a) Ophelia and Old Hamlet
 - b) Fortinbras and Horatio
 - c) Claudius and Guildenstern
- 3) How does Ophelia die?**
 - a) She drowns in a river
 - b) Claudius strangles her
 - c) Hamlet stabs her
- 4) What is the name of the play travelling actors perform in Elsinore?**
 - a) The Mouse
 - b) The Mouse-Trap
 - c) The Trap
- 5) Who kills Polonius?**
 - a) Ophelia
 - b) Hamlet
 - c) Horatio
- 6) Why is Laertes eager to kill Hamlet?**
 - a) To seek revenge for Ophelia and Polonius
 - b) To become king of Denmark
 - c) To marry Gertrude



3

CHOOSE YOUR FAVOURITE CHARACTER IN HAMLET AND ASSOCIATE THAT CHARACTER TO EACH OF THESE LEITMOTIFS. EXPLAIN YOUR CHOICE.



REVENGE



CORRUPTION



LOVE

MADNESS

**LUST FOR
POWER**

RELIGION



4

EXPLAIN THE MEANING AND THE CONTEXT OF EACH QUOTE

1. "Doubt thou the stars are fire; / Doubt that the sun doth move; / Doubt truth to be a liar; / But never doubt I love."

2. "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

3. "One may smile, and smile, and be a villain. "

4. "Madness in great ones must not unwatched go."

5. "I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw."

5

YOU ARE IN ELSINORE. IMAGINE YOUR FICTIONAL DIALOGUE WITH YOUR FAVORITE CHARACTER IN THE PLAY.

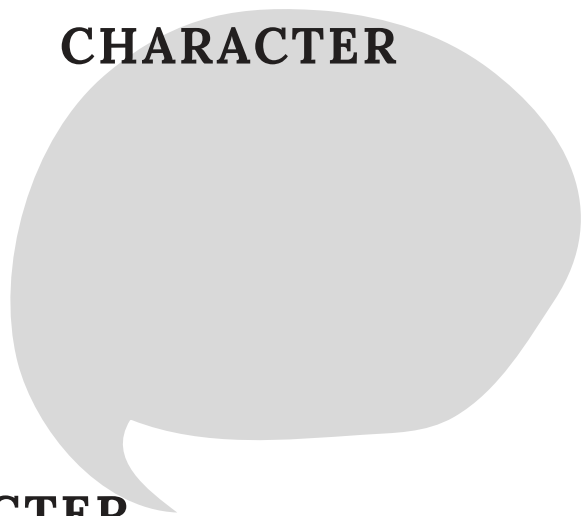
YOU



CHARACTER



CHARACTER



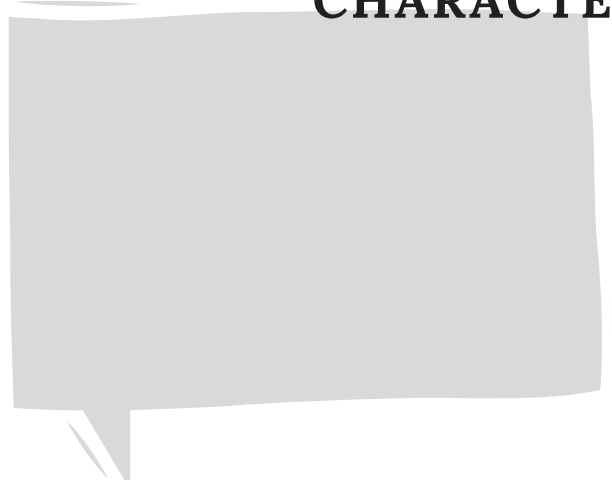
YOU



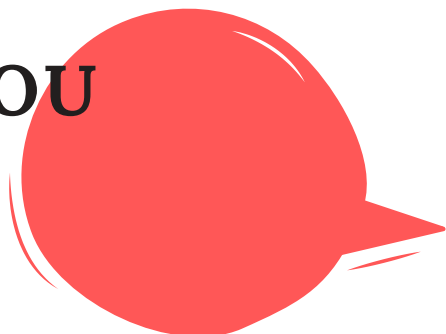
CHARACTER



CHARACTER



YOU



6

FOR EACH CHARACTER PICK AT LEAST TWO ADJECTIVES WHICH CAN DESCRIBE HIS/HER PERSONALITY.

OPHELIA

GERTRUDE

LAERTES

H
A
M
L
E
T

HORATIO

CLAUDIUS

POLONIUS





CROSSWORD PUZZLE. CROSS THE WORDS HORIZONTALLY AND VERTICALLY.

C	H	W	A	F	W	T	F	Q	D	I	H	E	Y	W	Q	B	W
O	C	F	R	A	O	W	T	H	O	R	A	T	I	O	F	F	M
P	N	F	H	S	H	E	P	G	S	A	D	F	N	D	G	O	A
H	L	Y	Z	V	R	L	Z	E	B	M	X	M	Q	V	O	R	Y
E	J	Z	P	N	A	F	D	R	D	N	Y	J	U	Y	T	T	P
L	O	I	D	P	R	T	A	T	V	Q	A	N	V	D	H	I	K
I	P	B	G	A	D	H	S	R	D	E	C	M	E	F	E	N	D
A	K	M	N	R	H	N	K	U	Y	Y	C	E	V	L	L	B	C
A	C	L	Q	Y	L	I	T	D	I	U	K	Q	X	D	L	R	S
F	W	L	H	X	N	G	K	E	S	L	P	P	E	U	O	A	P
C	M	I	L	Z	X	H	W	P	O	L	O	N	I	U	S	S	S
G	C	C	M	N	V	T	K	I	A	H	A	V	M	Z	Q	Z	Y

1. Hamlet's friend
2. Hamlet's love
3. Shakespearean tragedy
4. Shakespearean comedy
5. Claudius' wife
6. Character who says "Brevity is the soul of wit"
7. Son of King Fortinbras



Published by American Drama Group Europe and TNT Theatre

© American Drama Group Europe - TNT Theatre, 2020

First published in 2016

Made in EU



All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior written permission of the publishers.

CREDITS

Published by American Drama Group Europe:

Authors - Paul Stebbings, Federica Parise

Graphic Designer - Domante Tirilyte

Every effort has been made to trace all the copyright holders. If any have been inadvertently overlooked, the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

www.artednet.com

www.tnttheatre.com

ADG EUROPE
BARERSTRASSE 19A
80333 MÜNCHEN
ALLEMAGNE
WWW.ADG-EUROPE.COM