William Shakespeare’s

HAMLET

adapted by

Clive Duncan

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Author’s Note

*What a piece of work is a man...*

Think about someone you really love, who is very important to you. Now think about something terrible happening to them. If what you imagined really happened, how would you feel? How would you cope? How would you cope mentally? Am I allowed to ask that? Can I talk about mental health? It is still a difficult subject, one which we don’t like to discuss, especially if we are talking about ourselves. And yet, Shakespeare, in his play “Hamlet”, written over 400 years ago, examines exactly that.

Although Hamlet is a prince and the play is set in a castle, it is very much a family story. A university student learns that his much-loved father has died. By the time he gets home, his uncle has been crowned king (taking Hamlet’s inheritance), his mother has married his uncle (taking away any happy memories Hamlet might have of his parents’ marriage), and the girl he loves dumps him without explanation. (Gosh! Sounds like a soap story!). Shakespeare piles the trauma onto his main character to see what will happen; Hamlet falls into despair, doesn’t dress, eat or sleep properly, talks of suicide, obsesses over the truth and is unable to do anything positive. Understandably, Hamlet is depressed. [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk) describes depression as “…intense emotions of anxiety, hopelessness, negativity and helplessness, and the feelings stay instead of going away” and that depression can be caused by “physical illness, experiences dating back to childhood, bereavement, family problems or other life-changing events”.

A regular criticism of both play and character is that Hamlet fails to act – he vows to revenge his father’s death but continually hesitates. I would argue that Shakespeare is presenting us with a real human being and not an action hero. Ground breaking stuff for 1600 when “heroes” handed out justice without any soul-searching. And even today we enjoy the heroes of films like “Red Sparrow”, “Tomb Raider” and “Black Panther”, all driven by personal crisis into terrific feats of action. But we know, as we watch, it is fantasy and not what we would do ourselves. “Hamlet” is a character study, a portrait, painted in a similar way that the artists Egon Schiele or Lucien Freud might paint – unlovely but truthful. Shakespeare is showing us the depths and complexity of the human mind and presenting it as a work of art; as he says himself in “Hamlet” - “*What a piece of work is a man.*”

Of course, there are many aspects to “Hamlet” and the play is continuously re-interpreted, but in adapting it, reducing it from 3 hours to 60 minutes, I’ve focused on Hamlet’s state of mind because mental health is a growing issue. In the UK, 1 in 5 young adults have a diagnosable mental health disorder, while
suicide is the most common cause of death for boys aged 5-19 years and the second most common cause for girls of this age. This subject, and the prejudice which surrounds it, allows us to access “Hamlet” today. To help further with this I’ve modernised the language, although I’ve kept the verse, and removed some of the characters that you will find in the original.

If you enjoy reading and watching this adaptation, I hope it will lead you to the original version. As I say, I have focused on a particular aspect and there is much more to discover in this amazing play that still has something to tell us from 400 years ago. What a piece of work is “Hamlet”.

*Clive Duncan*

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**Characters in the Play:**

*The Play will be performed by four actors*

- Horatio/Laertes
- Claudius/Ghost/ Actor 1
- Gertrude/ Ophelia/Gravedigger/ Actor 2
- Hamlet/ Actor 3
Scene 1
The stage is an open space with a simple backdrop which shows headlines and articles from tabloid newspapers. The main one reads: “Something rotten in the state of Denmark! — enquiry into palace deaths continues.” Another reads: “Murder most foul — King’s death was not from natural causes.” Towards the back of the stage is a theatrical skip containing the props needed for the play. To either side are costume rails with hanging costumes. There are four chairs and a small table, a large cardboard box, some musical instruments. Four actors are setting out the props and costumes. One, Horatio, steps forward to speak to us...

HORATIO: So, Denmark’s royal family are all dead. And not by accident or sudden illness. The government remains tight-lipped and so fake news and rumour soon replaces truth; A terrorist act; Russian intervention; The Norwegians are to blame, the Finns, the Swedes, And everyone suspects the Polish, too. But I was there and witnessed all that happened, I was with prince Hamlet when he died. His final words to me —
Actor 3 and Horatio snap into a tableau of Hamlet’s final moments...

HORATIO: I promised, and with the help of these three actors, From Hamlet’s favourite theatre company, We’ll tell this dark and bitter tragedy So you can judge who’s guilty of these crimes.

Scene 2
Funereal music. The actors drape a flag on the box, placing a crown in the middle of it. They lift it shoulder high and carry it to centre stage where they put it down. Actor 2, in a black veil, puts flowers on it.

HORATIO: The old king’s dead. Died in his sleep, they say. The crown goes to his brother, Claudius, For Hamlet’s far away in Germany And Denmark needs a ruler right away.

The music changes to a triumphal march. A chair is put in front of the coffin, Actor 1 sits and the crown is placed on his head. The coffin is removed, Claudius, the king, consoles Gertrude, the widow. He puts a comforting arm around her. He lifts her veil and kisses her. She kisses him back. Gertrude’s black veil is removed and replaced with a crown. The music changes to party music. The flowers from the coffin are placed in her hand. They stand as a “happy couple.”

HORATIO: The grieving widow and the grieving king Quickly find some comfort in each other. Before the mourning period is done Hamlet’s uncle marries Hamlet’s mother. The couple kiss again and then Gertrude throws the wedding bouquet behind her.

1 popular 2 bad, evil 3 investigation 4 evil 5 box, container 6 stage properties (pieces of furniture, objects) 7 silent, giving nothing away, refusing to comment 8 believes (them) to be responsible 9 saw for myself 10 move, switch quickly 11 scene, presentation 12 lay out 13 face covering 14 box containing the body 15 comforts, supports emotionally 16 feeling extremely sad for their loss 17 time of expressing sadness in public
Scene 3
Claudius leaves Gertrude and goes to a lectern ready to give a public statement...

HORATIO: But time to put all ceremony aside, It’s back to business and affairs of state.
CLAUDIUS: I'd like to thank you for the deep respect Shown to my late brother; for respecting The privacy of our family at this Sad time. And yet, through sorrow grows some joy – My sister-in-law, once, but now my wife, And I found strength together in this dark time, And, as you know, we married quietly. For your good wishes, thanks. But time for grief And time for celebration must be paused – The enemy, my friends, is at the door. Our neighbour, Norway, mistakenly believes We Danes, in grief and sorrow, have grown weak And threatens to invade. To counteract, Our diplomats, worldwide, seek condemnation, And ask for sanctions to be put in place. But should this fail, and Norway, here take note, Our fighting forces are now mobilised And ready to repel our enemies. I hope this present crisis will explain The urgent need to fill the throne; without A king, Norway's aggression would be worse. I took the crown to put Denmark first.

A round of applause. Claudius steps away from the lectern. He receives a lingering kiss from Gertrude. Hamlet is watching his mother and uncle.

HORATIO: Meet Hamlet. How quickly life can change. A prince, Away at university hears of The unexpected death of his dear father, He travels back, though too late for the funeral And far too late to claim his father’s crown. Within two months his mother has remarried.

What confused thoughts must fill his grieving mind?

Gertrude becomes aware of Hamlet watching them and reaches out to him

GERTRUDE: Dear Hamlet, do not look so sorrowful. Be happy for me and for your uncle. We’ll celebrate – a new start for us all.

HAMLET: Forgive me if I mourn my father, Mother, At least until his body has grown cold.

GERTRUDE: Your father’s gone, you must accept that, now. Gone, but not forgotten. Not by me.

GERTRUDE: We living have a duty to continue, Respect his memory, get on with your life, He would not want to see you laid so low.

CLAUDIUS: Your mother’s right. I know you loved him well, But your father lost his father who lost His, etcetera – all very natural. And each son, for a time, paid his respect. But move on now, don’t be self-indulgent. It is not good to wallow in this grief.

HAMLET: Perhaps if I returned to Wittenberg. My studies there would help...

GERTRUDE: Oh, please don’t go! Stay here awhile, with us. Please. Claudius...

CLAUDIUS: Your mother needs you, Hamlet. Laertes?

HORATIO: Laertes – political advisor to The king...

LAERTES: Your majesty?
CLAUDIUS: What's your advice?

LAERTES: That Hamlet should stay here. As next in line He is, of course, a target. With Norway’s threat, The risk to all high-profile Danes abroad Is high. Best to avoid a “situation”.

Hamlet turns away. Gertrude tries to engage with him.

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26 stand for a speaker
29 recently died
30 unhappiness at a loss
31 wrongly
32 want this threat (of invasion) to be condemned
33 official restrictions
34 put on alert and ready
35 drive back

36 sad, unhappy
37 sad, depressed
38 give yourself up to sad reflection
39 spend too much time
40 medieval university city in Saxony, Germany
41 for a little longer
42 a potential victim
43 politically important
44 politically difficult problem
45 speak to and get his attention
CLAUDIUS: That’s good advice. *(Aside to Laertes)* And we aren’t certain where His loyalty lies. He could still stage a coup\(^{36}\)
To grab the crown. Best keep him close. Best keep
An eye on him. *(To Hamlet and Gertrude)* Hamlet, stay here
Until the threat of war has gone. Gertrude…

*Claudius holds out a hand to Gertrude who goes to him.*

GERTRUDE: That settles it\(^{37}\) – for safety’s sake, stay here.
The love and warmth of home and family
Will help you through your grieving, soon enough.

*They leave, arms around each other.*

*Hamlet, when he is alone, begins to retch\(^{38}\).* He finds a suitable receptacle\(^{39}\) and vomits into it.

HAMLET: Aaggh! How I wish this flesh of mine would melt\(^{40}\),
Turn liquid and run deep into the ground.
Or that suicide was not a mortal sin\(^{41}\)!
How dark the world has grown. How grey, how cold.
No, no! It cannot be, it can’t, no, no!
Just two months dead, no, not so much, not two –
A gentle man, loving to my mother –
Why, she would hold him close to her for fear
Of losing him, she would be lost herself.
And yet within a month, a little month –
Before her little shoes, which had followed
My father’s coffin, were cleaned and put away—
She married my uncle. I know of birds and beasts
Who mourn their soulmates\(^{42}\) longer. My father’s brother.
Hah! no comparison! – he’s no more like
My father than I am like the mighty Thor\(^{43}\)!
And yet, within a month, she climbed into
His bed, to incest\(^{44}\) – with such wicked speed!
This can’t be right – and I am powerless
To speak out, though I curse my silent tongue.

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\(^{36}\) sudden political revolt
\(^{37}\) that’s arranged, fixed then
\(^{38}\) be sick
\(^{39}\) container
\(^{40}\) dissolve
\(^{41}\) a very serious crime against God
\(^{42}\) partners
\(^{43}\) god of thunder in Nordic mythology
\(^{44}\) forbidden sex between close relations

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**Scene 4**

*Horatio goes to Hamlet.*

HORATIO: And now it was that I became involved…

ACTOR 1: Loyal Horatio, fellow student,
Went to the prince with a strange tale to tell…

HORATIO: My lord…

HAMLET: Horatio, my friend, I’m pleased
To see you here.

HORATIO: I’m glad, and I have news…

HAMLET: From Wittenberg?

HORATIO: From here, from Helsingør\(^{45}\).

HAMLET: Oh, yes? And what brings you to Helsingør?

HORATIO: Your father’s death. I’m paying my respects.

HAMLET: I think it was to see my mother’s wedding!

HORATIO: The two, my lord, were very close together.

HAMLET: A special offer – buy one, get one free\(^{46}\)!
My father’s wake\(^{47}\), mother’s wedding reception,
Where did the first one end, the next begin?
A sad day.

HORATIO: Which one?

HAMLET: Indeed, Horatio.

HORATIO: What is your news?

HAMLET: Something I’d normally
Think was hysterical rubbish\(^{48}\), had I
Not witnessed it myself. I saw the king,
Your father.

HORATIO: When?

HAMLET: Last night. Let me explain.
Two nights ago, some soldiers keeping watch
Were startled\(^{49}\) by a most unearthly sound…

Actor 1 runs his finger around the top of a wine glass producing a sustained\(^{50}\) note.

They went to where the noise was coming from

*Horatio and Actor 2 move towards the skip…* And where the battlements\(^{51}\) join with the south tower

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\(^{45}\) Elsinore, medieval fortress on NE coast of Zealand, Denmark
\(^{46}\) an example of Hamlet’s cynical humour
\(^{47}\) meeting of family and friends before or after a funeral
\(^{48}\) mad nonsense
\(^{49}\) shocked and frightened
\(^{50}\) continuing
\(^{51}\) fortified wall around the top of a castle
Up through the flagstone floor\textsuperscript{52} arose a mist…

\textit{Horatio and Actor 2 pull from the skip a strip of white fabric\textsuperscript{53} which they stretch out.}

In which a face, resembling the king,  
Appeared to them.

\textit{The shape of a face appears through the fabric.}

It made as if to speak  
But then the morning cock crowed and it went –  
Vanished\textsuperscript{54} into air.

\textit{The fabric has gone, the sound has stopped.}

The terrified soldiers  
Told me this in confidence\textsuperscript{55}. Last night  
I joined their watch – and saw the apparition\textsuperscript{56}.  
It was the king, I’m sure.

\textbf{HAMLET:} And did he speak?

\textbf{HORATIO:} I spoke to him, but he just turned away.

\textbf{HAMLET:} How did he look?

\textbf{HORATIO:} Quite sad, my lord, and pale.

\textbf{HAMLET:} Did he stay long?

\textbf{HORATIO:} A minute or so, no more.

\textbf{HAMLET:} I wish I had been there. He’ll come again?

\textbf{HORATIO:} I’m sure of it.

\textbf{HAMLET:} Then take me there. Let’s go.

\textbf{ACTOR 2:} Up to the castle roof he led the prince  
And there they waited in the frosty night  
Until the bells of midnight had rung out.

And then…

\textit{A sustained note sounds.}

\textbf{HORATIO:} Listen, it’s somewhere near.

\textit{Actor 1 creates a life-size puppet out of coats, hats and scarves from the costume rail.}

\textbf{HAMLET:} Angels of heaven protect us! You may be good  
Or a devil sent from hell, but either way  
I’ll speak to you; King, father, royal Dane,  
Why have you come, what do you want with us?

\textbf{The ghost beckons\textsuperscript{57} to Hamlet.}

\textsuperscript{52} of hard flat pieces of stone

\textsuperscript{53} piece of material

\textsuperscript{54} disappeared

\textsuperscript{55} trust (as a secret)

\textsuperscript{56} visible ghost

\textsuperscript{57} signals, gestures

\textbf{HORATIO:} He’s calling you!

\textbf{HAMLET:} I’ll follow.

\textbf{HORATIO:} You must stay here!  
Although it has the shape of your father  
You don’t know that it’s really him. It could  
Be here intent on your destruction.\textsuperscript{58}

\textit{The ghost beckons again.}

\textbf{HAMLET:} A risk.

\textbf{GHOST:} That I’m prepared to take. My life is worthless,  
It could not harm my soul. He calls, I’ll follow.

\textit{Hamlet follows the ghost.}

\textbf{HAMLET:} I’ll go no further…

\textbf{GHOST:} Listen.

\textit{The sound stops}

\textbf{HAMLET:} I’m listening.

\textbf{GHOST:} I am the spirit of your father, Hamlet.  
I cannot rest until I am revenged\textsuperscript{59}.

\textbf{HAMLET:} Revenged? For what?

\textbf{GHOST:} It was reported that whilst sleeping in  
My garden, I was bitten by a snake.

\textbf{HAMLET:} Claudius? He murdered you?

\textbf{GHOST:} He crept  
To where I slept and poured into my ear  
Poison taken from the most venomous\textsuperscript{60} of  
Snakes. Death was quick. But I had no confession\textsuperscript{61},  
No rites, and so I’m doomed\textsuperscript{62} to walk the night  
And stay in purgatory\textsuperscript{63} for many years.

\textbf{HAMLET:} My poor father!

\textbf{GHOST:} Pity will not help me rest!  
Take action now against that foul adulterer\textsuperscript{64},  
Protect the royal bed of Denmark from incest.

\textbf{HAMLET:} Oh yes, by heaven, they’ll pay, that smiling reptile,  
That evil, evil woman –

\textsuperscript{58} determined to destroy you

\textsuperscript{59} the person who committed the crime against me has been punished

\textsuperscript{60} poisonous, deadly

\textsuperscript{61} chance to be forgiven for any sins I may have committed

\textsuperscript{62} destined, condemned

\textsuperscript{63} where sinners suffer before going to heaven

\textsuperscript{64} married person having sex outside marriage or in this case making love with the married queen
GHOST: Hamlet, no!
It is not right to turn against your mother;
The blame is his – he groomed\(^{65}\) and seduced her.
Let heaven, and her conscience\(^{66}\), deal with her.
Goodbye. Goodbye, Hamlet. Remember me.

The ghost goes.
HAMLET: I’ll remember you! Yes! I’ll rid my brain
Of every single thought but you!

Horatio rushes to Hamlet.
HORATIO: My lord!
(To us):
I found prince Hamlet in a wild state.
He spoke of smiling villains, serpent’s stings.\(^{67}\)
His whirling\(^{68}\) mind – jumped one thought to another…

HAMLET: If what he said was true we are not safe.
We’re being watched, he’ll have spies everywhere.
I must be sure that what he said is true
Before I can do what I have sworn\(^{69}\) to do.
To kill a king, Horatio, is wrong.

HORATIO: Calm down, shhh, you’re not making any sense.

HAMLET: Yes, yes! Nonsense – let that be my disguise\(^{71}\).
Who would suspect a madman of pure thought?
But first, swear on your life you will not tell
A soul about tonight. Swear!

The ghost’s note sounds.

GHOST: Swear!
HORATIO: I swear! All this cannot be happening.
HAMLET: There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than we can ever imagine. But swear again:
However strange, or mad, or crazy I appear
You’ll hold your tongue, say nothing. Swear to me.

GHOST: Swear!
HORATIO: I swear!
HAMLET: Rest, spirit, rest…
The sound stops.
Everything is broken and needs fixing.

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\(^{65}\) prepared
\(^{66}\) understanding of right and wrong
\(^{67}\) evil characters, snake bites
\(^{68}\) confused
\(^{69}\) promised
\(^{70}\) doubt and uncertainty
\(^{71}\) cover, false appearance

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Scene 5

ACTOR 2: But where’s the girl? In a story such as this
There’ll be a girl. And I don’t mean his mother.
The sweet Ophelia was Hamlet’s love.
The sister of Laertes, aide\(^{75}\) to Claudius.
They’d known each other from an early age,
And then one day it all turned serious.
He wrote her poetry - listen to this -
(She reads) “Shall I compare you to a summer’s day?
You are as fresh and lovely and more pleasing….”

She drops the sheet of paper.
Or (She reads)
“Being your slave what should I do but wait
Upon the hours and times of your desire.”

She lets the sheet of paper fall.
Or…
“O cruel love, the memory of your face
Keeps me from sleep this night and every night.”

She drops the sheet of paper.
Romantic. He even wrote her songs.\(^{77}\)

Actor 2 sings – IT WAS A LOVER AND HIS LASS. Actor 1 and 3 join in. During
the second verse Actor 2 and 3 dance. Horatio as Laertes picks up the dropped
poems and reads them. He gets in the way of the dancers and brings the song to an end.

LAERTES: It has been brought to my attention that Prince Hamlet and my sister have spent time Alone together recently. Alone?

ACTOR 2: Ophelia could hear his disapproval.78

OPHELIA: Since he returned from Wittenberg we’ve grown Quite close.

LAERTES: Alone and close – have you thought about Your reputation? No?

OPHELIA: We love each other.

LAERTES: I don’t believe that you could be so stupid. He writes you letters and poems – if this gets out.

OPHELIA: What if it does – there’s nothing wrong with it?

LAERTES: Look, Hamlet is a prince, the next in line, Of royal blood, of royal parentage. And you, my sister, are a common girl, No title, land or money to your name. You cannot marry him. Don’t talk of love!

OPHELIA: I can’t just change my feelings overnight!

LAERTES: You run the risk of ruining reputations. Three, to be precise. Firstly: Hamlet. He’s with a girl who cannot be his wife, He’ll take what he can get and then he’ll dump her.

OPHELIA: It’s not like that, at all. He’s not like that!

LAERTES: We know that, but he’s in the public gaze. The world prefers the gossip, not the truth. They’ll nudge and wink and laugh, but disapprove – “It’s not what we expect from future kings.” The stories won’t be kind. And gold digger’s The kindest name they’ll call you. There’ll be much worse. And who would want to marry the girl Prince Hamlet Left behind? How things are seen and understood Are as important as the truth. If you

Love Hamlet, care for him at all, you will Return these now. Tell him it’s all over. He stuffs the poems into Ophelia’s hands:

OPHELIA: Who is the third? You said three reputations…?

LAERTES: Mine. My political career would be dead. Tainted by association – “I only got Where I did because of my sister.” I care about my life and yours, and it’s My job to care about the royal family; So this must end, and it must end today.

He angrily leaves her.

ACTOR 2: Ophelia had no choice but to obey. She sent back all his letters and his poems Without explanation. The prince did not Reply, did not ask why, sent no rebuke. But when some time had passed he visited her One day, unexpectedly, and she Was taken by surprise.

Hamlet goes to her. He is wearing a torn coat, his shirt is hanging out. He has her letters and the poems he sent her stuffed into his pockets. Ophelia is startled by his arrival.

OPHELIA: My lord Hamlet.

Hamlet says nothing but stares at her. Ophelia becomes uncomfortable and cannot meet his gaze. He takes a sheet of paper from his pocket and begins to eat it.

OPHELIA: My lord, please, Hamlet… Still staring at her, Hamlet walks backwards from her, continuing to eat the poem.

ACTOR 2: Disturbed by this, she went and told her brother About this strange visitation. There was Concern in the royal household of the Unusual behaviour of the prince Which was growing stranger by the day. Laertes now believed he knew the reason And took this information to the king.

Laertes goes to Claudius

LAERTES: I know the cause of Hamlet’s depression.

CLAUDIUS: His father’s death? My marriage to his mother?

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78 displeasure
79 of lower social class
80 drop (her) brutally
81 view
82 rumours, speculation
83 hint
84 give a sign by blinking one eye
85 will not like it
86 pushes
87 marked, stained
88 word of criticism
89 surprised
90 meeting
LAERTES: There’s something else that’s tipped him over the edge, and I’m to blame.
CLAUDIUS: How so?
LAERTES: As you will know, my sister and the prince have known each other for many years. I recently found out they had become romantically attached. Before things grew too serious between them, I thought it best the relationship should end. When Hamlet marries it must be someone royal.
CLAUDIUS: Ah, yes. I see.
LAERTES: But since that time he’s not been himself.
CLAUDIUS: Hysterical, I’d say. Mood swings, outbursts, accusations, which alarm his loving mother. He gets worse day by day. If not for her I’d deal with him more harshly. Is there a way to test your theory?
LAERTES: Sir, Prince Hamlet likes to sit in the Great Hall…
CLAUDIUS: And shouts at everyone who passes through…
LAERTES: I’ve told Ophelia to meet me there in twenty minutes.
CLAUDIUS: You’ve set her up to meet Hamlet?
LAERTES: “Accidently”. And if we wait in a room nearby, you’ll see how he reacts.

Laertes and Claudius stand behind the costume rails. Hamlet, with book in hand, takes a chair, sits downstage and reads. After a moment he looks up.

HAMLET: To live or not to live; the big decision. Is it morally better to stand and take the battering life gives, or rid yourself of growing misery by slipping quietly away? To die, to sleep. Nothing. The end of all the heartache, grief and trouble. Oh how I long for that. To die, to sleep…

Perhaps to dream. Yes, there’s the catch. For in that everlasting sleep, what dreams may come? That makes us hesitate. We could relieve the pain of a cruel life with one sharp blade, and yet so many will endure their agony through fear of death; the unknown; the “what’s to come”. Our own imagination makes us cowards, and that tempting glimpse of peace fades away as action turns into uncertainty.

Ophelia enters. She stops when she sees Hamlet. He sees her but resumes reading.
OPHELIA: I was…. Sorry, I didn’t mean to disturb you. How are you?
HAMLET: I am well, well, well. Did you want something?
OPHELIA: I still have this. You’d better have it back.
HAMLET: I never gave you anything.
OPHELIA: You know you did!
HAMLET: I loved you, once.
OPHELIA: Yes, I know you did.
HAMLET: Then you know nothing – I never loved you.
OPHELIA: You made me believe you loved me.
HAMLET: All men are liars. We never tell the truth. Stay away from them, stay single, become a nun! Where is your brother?
OPHELIA: My brother? I – I’m not sure.
HAMLET: If he’s at home, tell him to stay there. He’s a manipulative, scheming, self-satisfied fool who needs to be locked up!
OPHELIA: What is it, my lord? What’s wrong…?
HAMLET: If you do find someone else it’ll end in tragedy. Better off in a convent. Goodbye. He starts to leave but comes back. Or if you do marry, marry an idiot. Because clever men see through you, they know how you women turn them into monsters. Find a convent! Goodbye!

He starts to go.
OPHELIA: No, don’t go, don’t…
He returns and grabs hold of Ophelia.

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91 has driven him to madness
92 emotionally involved with each other
93 sudden changes
94 sudden shows of anger
95 strongly, brutally
96 hard knocks
97 unhappiness
98 hidden problem
99 lighten, ease
100 knife
101 weak persons
102 disappears, vanishes
103 goes back to
104 where nuns live
10 Sept – 20 Oct 2018

**THE LIE** by Zeller/Hampton

How much sincerity can a marriage stand? Paul and Alice are about to entertain their friends, Michel and Laurence, for dinner. But Alice has spotted Michel kissing another woman in the street that very afternoon and is now confronted with a dilemma: how much should she reveal to Michel’s wife Laurence? Her husband, the eternal pragmatist, argues in favour of neutrality – therefore for lying. A comical argument ensues as their own relationship is held up to scrutiny and questioned. Only one thing’s for sure – don’t expect this dinner to go smoothly!

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28 Jan – 2 March 2019

**TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE** by Hatcher/Albom
*Based on Mitch Albom’s best-selling autobiographical novel*

During his college years, Mitch takes every course that charismatic sociology professor Morrie Schwartz offers. After graduation, sixteen years pass before Mitch happens to catch Morrie’s appearance on a television program and learns that his old professor is battling the terrible neurological disease ALS. The career-driven journalist plans one last visit to soothe his conscience but finds himself, once again, under the spell of Morrie’s humour and wisdom. Their touching reunion develops into a weekly fixture in Mitch’s busy calendar and a delightful and moving last class in the meaning of life begins.

18 March – 27 April 2019

**CORPSE!** by Gerald Moon

London, December 1936 - the day of Edward VIII’s abdication, a day when everyone in England is at home waiting to hear the King’s history-making speech on the radio – the perfect timing for a devilish murder plot! Evelyn Farrant, a struggling actor plans to murder his identical twin brother, the wealthy Rupert Farrant, hoping to then assume the identity of the hated brother and secure his fortune for himself. To achieve the desired result, Evelyn enliststhe services of the shady Irishman, Major Ambrose Powell. However, as with most fool proof plans, things do not quite go as they should and people are not exactly what they seem. This tremendously clever comedy-thriller has more twists than a corkscrew!

6 – 11 May 2019

**YOUNG V.E.T. PRESENTS THE MUSICAL**

**NEXT TO NORMAL**

Winner of 3 Tony Awards and the Pulitzer Prize for best Drama

Next to Normal is the story of Diana Goodman and her family; on the outside they appear to be a typical American family and yet their lives are anything but normal. Diana has been battling her own demons for years, which is affecting everyone in her life. As the mystery of what is triggering Diana’s instability is slowly unravelled, the audience is taken on a heart wrenching journey into the power of memory and the fragility of the mind. With a balance of humour and pathos *Next to Normal* highlights the value of love, and the sacrifices we are willing to make.

27 May – 6 July 2019

**BAREFOOT IN THE PARK** by Neil Simon

Neil Simon’s irresistible Barefoot in the Park established him as a master of comedy with his sharp wit and vivid characterisations. The original Broadway production featured Robert Redford, who was later joined by Jane Fonda in the hit 1967 movie.

Fresh off a six-day honeymoon at the Plaza Hotel, free-spirited, fun-loving Corie and her buttoned-down husband Paul, a lawyer, move into their new apartment in New York City to begin their wonderful life as newly-weds. However, romance turns out a bit of a challenge when it has to be sustained in a one room, fifth floor walk-up with a broken skylight that lets in the cold and occasional snowfall in equal measures. When Corie decides to set up her meddling mother with their eccentric upstairs neighbour Velasco, the disastrously hilarious dinner only accelerates the impending fall out between the formerly madly-in-love spouses. When opposites attract it takes a little patience to get through daily routine – walking barefoot in the park together might be a good start ...
HAMLET: Dishonesty! You make your faces up to look younger, older, thinner, moodier, sexier. But it’s not the truth. You wear suggestive
clothing, swing your hips, you lisp,
give girly names to simple objects, you seduce us and then pretend innocence. It drives me mad. I’ve had enough. No more couples!
Let’s have no more. Those who are couples already can stay as they are, except one. But from now on, no more. A convent, go!
Hamlet storms off. Claudius and Laertes come through the costume rail.
OPHELIA: Oh, someone save him! How can a soul so Sensitive be cut and crippled by hurt, by grief, 
And by betrayal?
LAERTES: Go home – you’re not to blame.
Ophelia hesitates before leaving.
CLAUDIUS: This is not love, it is not madness, either. There’s something angry growing deep within him; It won’t be good to watch when it explodes. Keeping him here is not in our best interests – Let’s get him out of the way.
LAERTES: To Wittenberg?
CLAUDIUS: Further away, and much more isolated. I’m owed a favour by an Englishman, We’ll send him there. The constant drizzle might suit His chilly moods, and even if it doesn’t, He’ll be too far away for us to care.

Scene 6
Actor 3 speaks to the audience.

ACTOR 3: Hamlet is lost. He doesn’t know what to do. He promised to revenge his father’s death, But hesitates. What for? He needs evidence. He can’t just kill his uncle, who’s the king, Because a ghost has asked him to. Evil – That’s how we usually see the spirit world. And faking mental illness gets him down; He’ll readily admit the lines are blurred.

As each day passes he loses confidence. He doubts that he can see it through. But then…
The actors with musical fanfare, juggling and acrobats, burst into the acting space.

A theatre company, travelling players, Favourites of the prince, pay him a visit…

HAMLET: My friends, it’s good to see you. You could not come at a worse, and therefore, a better, time.
ACTOR 1: That’s what we thought – his lordship could do with cheering up.
So here we are.
ACTOR 2: We’re here to entertain you, my lord. What’s it to be? A magical show?
Actor 1 takes an imaginary object from a paper bag, throws it in the air and catches it in the bag with a thump.
ACTOR 2: Or one with thrills and spills…
Horatio juggles three objects precariously.
ACTOR 1: Perhaps something with music to soothe a troubled soul…. Actor 2 plays and the others sing in harmony:

ALL: And I would love you all the day, 
Every hour would kiss and play, 
If with me you’d fondly stray
Over the hills and far away.

The wind shall blow my top knot off.

ACTOR 2: Or something to excite…. Actor 1 and Horatio perform a short, mock, swordfight with wooden swords.
ACTOR 1: Or something to chill the blood. Everyone likes a bit of murder!
HAMLET: Murder? I’ve heard it said that someone who’s committed a terrible crime, should they see it re-enacted on the stage, are so shocked that they confess their guilt. Is that true? Have you ever seen that happen?
ACTOR 1: Oh yes! That’s the power of theatre. You see, your lordship, theatre

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105 sexually provocative
106 speak only with the lips
107 damaged, weakened
108 being let down
109 light rain
110 pretending, simulating
111 the differences are confused, not clear
112 keeping balls moving in the air
113 making happier
114 dull sound
115 exciting risks
116 which are likely to fall
117 calm
118 gladly wander
119 These four lines are shared by Macheath and Polly in the song ‘Over the Hills and Far Away’ from John Gay’s ‘The Beggar’s Opera’ (1728)
120 hair tied up
121 pretended
122 admit
is like a mirror held up to society. A mirror!

ACTOR 2: That’s deep.

HAMLET: Do you know the play – The Murder of Gonzago?

ACTOR 1: Yes, my lord. The one about the two brothers; one kills the other
because he’s in love with his wife.

HAMLET: That’s the one. How does he kill him?

ACTOR 1: He smothers¹²³ him in his sleep. Nasty! Lovely!

HAMLET: Play it tonight. But change the murder. Gonzago is to be poisoned.

ACTOR 1: No problem.

HAMLET: In his ear.

ACTOR 1: How else!

HORATIO: The play was rehearsed. Claudius and Gertrude were sent an
invitation, which, to please their troubled son, they accepted.

Actor 1 and 2 set up the stage for the performance.

HAMLET: Horatio, my friend, I ask a favour.

HORATIO: Anything, my lord.

HAMLET: The play tonight reflects
My father’s death. Watch my uncle closely
For any signs which may betray¹²⁴ his guilt.
I’ll watch him too, then let’s compare our notes.
(To Actor 1) Are you all set – all ready to begin?

ACTOR 1: Your lordship, yes.

HAMLET: Make sure that you speak clearly,
Make sense of all the words, don’t move unless
It’s necessary, and please, no extra jokes!

ACTOR 1: Your lordship, if you don’t tell me how to act, I won’t tell you how to
be a prince!

HORATIO: At the appointed hour the guests arrived.
The king and queen sat in the place of honour.
The actors took their cue¹²⁵ and so, began.

ACTOR 1: Your majesties, lords, ladies and gentlemen, we give you: The
Murder of Gonzago.

Actor 2 plays an instrument as Actor 3 creates a puppet from the contents of the
skip. It has a happy smile and noticeable¹²⁶ ears.

ACTOR 2: There was a jolly farmer, Gonzago was his name,
And he had many olive groves in the south of Spain
It made him lots of silver, but the best thing in his life
Was the lovely Catarina – his beautiful wife.

Actor 1 creates a similar puppet which has long hair. The two puppets caress¹²⁷ each other.

She said:
I love you, I love you, I love you, my bonny¹²⁸ man.
I’ll always be your loving wife, even when you’re dead and gone.

Horatio creates a third puppet which has a frown¹²⁹ on its face.

Gonzago had a brother; he was useless through and through.
He wanted all his brother had – and Catarina, too.
And then one summer afternoon, after drinking too much wine,
The jealous brother boldly¹³⁰ said – I’ll make that woman mine.

The brother tries to caress Catarina but she shrugs him off¹³¹.

But she said:
I love you, I love you, I love you, my bonny man.
I’ll always be your loving wife, even when you’re dead and gone.

Gonzago settles down and falls asleep.

Gonzago had a little nap¹³², beneath an olive tree,
His brother bought some poison from the apothecary.

The brother pulls a little bottle of poison from his coat pocket. He creeps up on
Gonzago...

He crept into the olive grove to see his brother dear,
And whilst Gonzago slept he poured the poison in his……

HORATIO: Oh! Where shall I pour it?

ACTOR 3: Ear!

HORATIO: Here?

ACTOR 2: Not here… ear!

ACTOR 1: You can’t miss it!

The brother pours the poison in Gonzago’s ear.

HORATIO: There was commotion¹³³ in the audience.

CLAUDIUS: Stop!

HORATIO: Then hurried from the room. His wife ran after…

GERTRUDE: Stop!

HORATIO: Then hurried from the room. His wife ran after…

GERTRUDE: Claudius, Claudius!

¹²³ suffocates
¹²⁴ show, reveal
¹²⁵ signal to start
¹²⁶ large, clearly seen
¹²⁷ touch gently
¹²⁸ handsome
¹²⁹ a displeased expression
¹³⁰ daringly, bravely
¹³¹ pushes him away
¹³² short sleep
¹³³ stirring and confusion
HAMLET: Did you see the king’s face, Horatio?

HORATIO: Oh, he looked pale and very frightened, sir.

HAMLET: When Gonzago was poisoned?

HORATIO: Especially then!

HAMLET: The ghost was right. My uncle’s guilt betrays him.

HORATIO: A note, with angry words, came from his mother. She wished to see him in her private rooms. So Hamlet went straight away to meet her. But on the way found Claudius at prayer.

Scene 7
Claudius is on his knees praying. Hamlet sees him and moves quietly towards him.

CLAUDIUS: Each time I kneel to pray, I’m lost for words. My guilt is sharp and I’d pray for relief. If only my ambition would allow it. Can I hope for forgiveness of my crime. Whilst still enjoying all the things I’ve stolen; My crown, the power and my wife? Give them up? No, never. Can’t be done. If not salvation, What do I pray for, then?

HAMLET: Here is my opportunity for revenge. A twisted neck, one knife thrust, and he’s gone. But he’s at prayer and so goes straight to heaven. That’s not revenge. My father was dispatched. Without confession and suffers for his sins. I’ll wait until he’s drunk or in his bed, To make sure that his soul is damned to hell.

Hamlet moves away from Claudius. Gertrude sits at a small table; she is re-applying her make up. She pours herself a drink and downs it in one. Hamlet watches her for a moment before going to her.

HAMLET: Mother!

GERTRUDE: You have offended your father, Hamlet.

HAMLET: You have offended my father, mother.

GERTRUDE: Foolish words!

GERTRUDE: Foolish words!

HAMLET: Whilst yours are wicked, mother.

GERTRUDE: Hamlet! Who do you think you’re talking to?

HAMLET: You are the queen, your husband’s brother’s wife, And, though I wish you weren’t, you are my mother.

GERTRUDE: How dare you speak to me like that! Get out!

HAMLET: Sit down. I haven’t finished yet. Look here. He holds a picture up for her to look at.

A picture of my father. A noble man, Fair, good, honest. A man of grace, authority. This was your husband, now, let’s look at this – He holds a second picture up.

Here is your husband; cheat, liar, murderer. There’s no comparison. Are you so blind? To go from this to this? Can you not see? What tempted you from Adam to this snake? Don’t call it passion! You’re far too old for that. You’re a mother, not a school-girl with a crush.

GERTRUDE: Hamlet, please, no more, I’ll not discuss it.

HAMLET: Ah, do not climb into that man’s bed tonight, Honeying and making love…

GERTRUDE: Please, stop! My heart - You’ve broken it in two.

HAMLET: Then throw away The weaker half and live with just the better! The ghost’s note sounds. Hamlet looks around and sees the Ghost which remains invisible to Gertrude and us, the audience.

HAMLET: Have you come to remind me of my promise?

GERTRUDE: Who are you talking to?

HAMLET: To him. Just there.

GERTRUDE: There’s no one there.

HAMLET: I’m certain and it will be done tonight.

GERTRUDE: Hamlet, Hamlet…

GHOST’S VOICE: Do not forget. Protect Your mother, Hamlet, she is not to blame. She’s frightened, speak to her.

HAMLET: Are you all right?

GERTRUDE: Are you all right? You’re talking to yourself.
HAMLET: Can you not see him?
GERTRUDE: Who?
HAMLET: My father, there.
GERTRUDE: There’s only me and you.
HAMLET: Look there, he’s going…

The ghost’s note stops.

GERTRUDE: This is your grief, and you need help.
HAMLET: Perhaps.

Good night. Do not sleep with my uncle. Not tonight.
Pretend you’re modest, pure, although you’re not.
But let him sleep alone, tonight. Good night.

Hamlet leaves Gertrude. Two security men lead Hamlet away.

Scene 8

HORATIO: A ship’s made ready in Helsingør harbour.
It’s bound for England when the tide is high.
Its cargo is Hamlet and his minder,
Who carries secret instructions from the king.

Claudius holds out a sealed letter to a secretary which he takes.

CLAUDIUS: Deliver this at your destination;
Make sure your host carries out my requests;
A hunting accident, or sudden illness,
A decent burial for appearances’ sake.
Cover the costs with the money that I gave you.

The secretary goes.

Farewell Hamlet. Your madness feigned or real
Will soon be cured. Although the medicine’s harsh;
Desperate diseases require desperate remedies.

Scene 9

ACTOR 2: What of Ophelia? Forced to reject
Her love, and then be rejected by him.

Abandoned by her brother, and so alone.
Hamlet’s departure distressed her even more.
Sorrows do not come as single soldiers
But as an army ready to invade.

Actor 2 sings.

ACTOR 2: Her love was sent across the sea
Down a down, hey down a down
And she did weep most bitterly
With a down
For when she saw that he was gone
She knew she was all alone
With a down, derry, derry, derry down, down

"Ophelia" floats and then slowly begins to move.
Her billowing dress kept her afloat
Down a down, hey down a down
She sang, sailing like a boat
With a down

"Ophelia" starts to sink in the water.
Green water weeds, they pulled her down
In the cold river she did drown
With a down, derry, derry, derry down, down
Ophelia’s dress is flat on the floor.
And she slept on the river bed
All of her troubles finished
With a down, derry, derry, derry, down, down.
Scene 10

Horatio lifts up the dress as though it contained Ophelia and carries “her” away. Actor 2 puts on a cap and donkey jacket and becomes the Gravedigger. She picks up a spade, climbs into the skip and digs, throwing some of the contents out with her spade.

HORATIO: I was tasked with arranging Ophelia’s funeral.
GRAVEDIGGER: It isn’t right. She shouldn’t be given a Christian burial.
HORATIO: The poor girl drowned.
GRAVEDIGGER: She drowned herself. No one in their right mind just falls into a river and can’t get out again. Someone heard her singing as she went under.
HORATIO: She was crying for help! The coroner said it was an accident.
GRAVEDIGGER: Pay him enough and he’ll say anything. It’s one law for the rich and another for the poor. If she hadn’t been a politician’s sister there’s no way she’d be buried in this churchyard.
HORATIO: Just get on with it.

The gravedigger disappears down in the skip. Hamlet appears wearing a pirate’s headscarf and a seaman’s jacket. Horatio looks at him suspiciously as he gets nearer to him.

HAMLET: Horatio.
HORATIO: Hamlet? My lord, Hamlet?

They embrace each other happily.

HAMLET: I was, Horatio. Like a prisoner Taken against my will and thrown onto A ship. Once we’d set sail, I was released And allowed to roam the decks. I quizzed the secretary, Sent to accompany me, who told me nothing. So when he slept I went through all his things And found this letter; from my uncle to my

He gives the letter to Horatio...

English host, with instructions to arrange A fatal accident for me.

HORATIO: Good God!

HAMLET: The next day, we ran into some trouble; A pirate ship attacked and tried to board us. I took a chance and jumped into its rigging, At which point, being repelled, they sailed away With me, their only loot. But I had money; My own and all the secretary had brought To pay for my execution. The pirates, Although crooks, were fair and took their payment For my safe passage to the nearest harbour.

HORATIO: Who knows you’re back in Helsingør?

HAMLET: Just you.

HORATIO: What will you do?

HAMLET: That letter, my death warrant, Is now the death warrant of my uncle. It’s written proof of all his treachery. I’ll write to him explaining my return, Apologising for my bad behaviour, And ask to meet him, then, when we’re alone, I’ll be revenged – and with impunity.

GRAVEDIGGER: Heads!

The gravedigger throws a skull out of the skip which Hamlet catches.

HAMLET: Whoa! To talk of death and then come face to face with it…

155 a heavy jacket, often having a waterproof panel across the shoulders, worn especially by workingmen
156 given the job of
157 investigative judge
158 with doubt
159 sudden intervention
160 very
161 set free
162 wander over
163 questioned
164 rope nets running up a mast
165 stolen goods, prize
166 criminals
167 sentence (order to be killed)
168 betrayal
169 without being punished
HORATIO: An omen?
HAMLET: Who was this? A politician, perhaps, or a businessman?
HORATIO: Unlikely, crooks and thieves aren’t buried on holy ground!
HAMLET: What happened to his house, his lands, his possessions? Is he remembered still? Did he have power? If so, all gone, he hasn’t the power to stop the gravedigger playing catch 170 with him. (To the Gravedigger) Whose grave is this?
GRAVEDIGGER: It’s mine.
HAMLET: What? You’re digging it for yourself?
GRAVEDIGGER: No, I’m digging it for money.
HAMLET: Who is it for? What’s his name?
HORATIO: I’ll tell you…
GRAVEDIGGER: Oh, it’s not a man.
HORATIO: My lord…..
HAMLET: Woman, then.
GRAVEDIGGER: Not a woman.
HAMLET: Go on, let’s have it…
GRAVEDIGGER: One that was a woman, but, rest her soul, she’s dead!
HORATIO: I need to tell you something…
GRAVEDIGGER: You’ll never guess whose grave it was – him that you hold in your hand…. Guess who!
HAMLET: I can’t say I recognise him.
GRAVEDIGGER: Oh, he was a favourite of the last king’s. Been laying here for twenty years. A great joker, he was! Makes me laugh just thinking about him. That skull you’re holding, ha! That belonged to Yorick, the comedian!
HAMLET: No! Poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio. A very funny man, with a wild imagination. He gave me piggy backs 171 when I was small. Just here, were lips that kissed me, what – a thousand times? Here, was his tongue that told me stories, made up silly rhymes. Where’s your jokes now, your songs, the twinkle 172 in your eyes. Where’s your jokes now, your songs, the twinkle 172 in your eyes. Although you still have the same silly grin – look, Horatio. Ho, ho, ho! He doesn’t look as good as he used to…. He’s turning my stomach and the smell – pah!
He throws the skull back to the Gravedigger.
Sorry, Horatio, you were saying?
The Gravedigger hurriedly climbs out of the skip.
GRAVEDIGGER: Quick! They’re here! Stand aside. They’re coming. Look – it’s the funeral procession.
HORATIO: I’m sorry. This grave – it’s for Ophelia.
HAMLET: The sweet Ophelia? Tell me it’s not so.
No, Horatio, not Ophelia!

HORATIO: Shhh, my lord, be quiet, or they’ll hear.
Hamlet climbs into the skip.
HAMLET: Let me be buried with her in this grave.
Cover us over with the dust and dirt.
I am Hamlet, the Dane, and I’ll go with her.
Horatio pulls Hamlet out of the skip.
HORATIO: They must not see or hear you. No, not here.
To the gravedigger: Help me to get him away before they come.
This way, my lord, it is not safe to stay.
Come on, sir, come, we must get you away.
Horatio and the Gravedigger take Hamlet away.

Scene 11
Actor 1 appears with a letter.

ACTOR 1: Claudius, the king, thought he had won;
He had the crown, the queen; his wayward 173 nephew
No longer a threat. Time to solve the problem
That was Norway, and then enjoy the fruits
Of victory. But then, he receives a letter;
The dead, it seems are not dead, after all.
He calls Laertes in to advise him….

CLAUDIUS: My condolences, Laertes, for your sister.
Gertrude and I, we’re sorry for your loss.
I’d not have called you at this difficult time,
But you’re the one I trust most in the world.
I know the distress Hamlet made her feel,
Whilst she, poor thing, acted with integrity. 174
There is no doubt, he tipped her over the edge. 175
She was blameless. It’s Hamlet’s fault, not hers.

LAERTES: Thank you for saying so.

CLAUDIUS: I’d understand
If you were seeking vengeance; you’ve been wronged.
What Hamlet put that girl through, who could blame you
Wanting to restore your family’s honour?

170 A ball game [also the idea that death ‘catches up’ with him]
171 carried me on his back
172 shine, brightness
173 difficult to control
174 fairly, with moral principle
175 pushed her to desperation
LAERTES: Yes, sir.

CLAUDIUS: Of course, to do so openly
Would be unwise; though we may know the truth,
A court might view it differently. And then,
The prince is still the darling of the nation.
So, Hamlet has returned to Helsingør;
Advise me, Laertes, what’s to be done?

LAERTES: Welcome him home with open arms. Give thanks
That he’s escaped the dangers of the sea.
A day of celebration – show the crowd
You’re the one who takes the highest ground.176

CLAUDIUS: A day of celebration – that sounds good.
With games and sport and trials of bravery?

LAERTES: The essence of the Danish spirit.

CLAUDIUS: I hear
You’re skilled with rapier177 and dagger.

LAERTES: I’ve won medals, sir.

CLAUDIUS: Hamlet is quite skilled, too.
What if, as part of the celebrations,
A match was held between you two?

LAERTES: What for?

CLAUDIUS: Did you not love your sister? Do you not want
To even up the score?178

LAERTES: A fencing match
Could not repay that debt.

CLAUDIUS: But let’s suppose,
In this fencing match, between you both,
One of the foils179 had an unguarded180 tip
That went unnoticed. What then? A punctured181 lung,
A skewered182 spleen183, a tragic accident.

LAERTES: What makes you think he’d accept the challenge?

CLAUDIUS: He’s competitive, and fighting you gives him
The chance to get at me – his favourite sport.

LAERTES: So, let’s suppose this rapier point was dipped
In poison, so strong, one scratch meant certain death.

CLAUDIUS: A tragic accident. Impurities
In steel can taint184 the blood, often with fatal
Consequences. And let’s suppose, for safety’s sake,
That in between the bouts185 a drink was served,
But one of the glasses, quite accidentally,
Contained a toxic substance from some earlier
Use. The drinker, thirsty, downed186 it in one.

LAERTES: Tragic.

CLAUDIUS: Are we agreed?

LAERTES: You’ll find me on
The fencing piste,187 at practice, should you need me.

Scene 12
The actors set up for the fencing match. Foils are laid out on either side of the
stage. A chair placed in the middle for the king to watch.

ACTOR 2: It’s headline news: The Prince in narrow escape.
The routine sea-voyage that went wrong. Although
The reason for his journey’s never mentioned.
To celebrate, a public holiday!
With sporting fixtures, dancing in the streets.
Star billing188 goes to Denmark’s favourite son.
He’s taking on a national champion
At rapier and dagger. All bets are on!

HORATIO: You will not win this fight.

HAMLET: Thanks for the vote of confidence, Horatio. I’m in with a chance.
Laertes is past his best and I’ve practiced regularly since my father’s death.

HORATIO: I only meant the odds are stacked against you.189 You cannot trust
your uncle.

HAMLET: It’s foolish to say, but I do have a sense of foreboding….190

HORATIO: I’ll tell them you’re ill.

HAMLET: No, no. I’ll not give way to superstition. It is destiny, Horatio; even
the death of a sparrow is planned. If my time is up today, then it is. And if not
today, then sometime in the future. Nothing in this world goes with me to the
next – does it matter if I leave it early? I am ready.

176 has the moral advantage
177 fencing-sword
178 to balance out the wrong he did
179 a thin, light sword
180 unprotected
181 pierced
182 ripped through, pierced
183 an organ
184 poison
185 phases of a fight
186 drank it down
187 training ground
188 the main publicity
189 your chances of winning are minimal
190 unpleasant feeling about the future

HAMLET: Laertes, a word before we start. The pain I feel, losing Ophelia, is indescribable. It breaks my heart. I loved her, Laertes. And as you know, I’m suffering mentally, I’m not ashamed to say, at times, I’m mad. So if I hurt her, or contributed to her deep despair, I’m sorry, and I can only say Had I been well, there might have been another way.

Hamlet holds out his hand. Laertes looks at it for a moment and then takes it in a brief handshake.

LAERTES: Shall we get on with it?

GERTRUDE: Pick up your swords!

Hamlet and Laertes take a foil. They show the ends of their foils to each other and then begin a few practice moves. Claudius stands.

CLAUDIUS: to the audience: Welcome to this tournament, we’ll play the best of five. One successful strike will win each bout. Keep your eyes peeled, for you, as much as I, will act as referee in any dispute.

He sits.

LAERTES: This grip is loose, hang on…. Laertes exchanges his foil for another.

That’s better. So, let’s start – en garde!

HAMLET: En garde!

They fight with rapier and dagger – it is fast but formal. Eventually, Hamlet is able to hit the target.

HAMLET: One!

LAERTES: No!

CLAUDIUS: Oh yes! A hit!

LAERTES: Let’s play again.

CLAUDIUS: One moment, please. I need a glass of wine, The excitement’s far too much.
He pours two glasses of wine. He picks up the first in salute... Your health, gentleman.
He drinks and then picks up the second glass and holds up a jewel in his other hand.

This precious stone’s for you… He drops it in the glass and swirls it round and holds the glass out to Hamlet. Come have a drink.

HAMLET: I’ll play this bout first.

GERTRUDE: Here, give me the wine. She takes it from Claudius.

CLAUDIUS: That’s Hamlet’s wine!

GERTRUDE: All right, there’s plenty more.

I drink to you, my son.

HAMLET: Your good health, mother. She drinks the wine.

CLAUDIUS: Gertrude, no….

HAMLET: Shall we play on, Laertes?

Hamlet and Laertes begin the second bout. Gertrude, feeling the effect of the poisoned wine, finds a chair to sit in. Hamlet strikes Laertes to win the second bout.

HAMLET: Another hit. Two nil.

LAERTES: A touch. Well done.

HAMLET: I’ll have that wine now, mother, where’s the glass?

As Hamlet turns to his mother, Laertes strikes him with his foil.

LAERTES: Here’s for my sister!

HAMLET: Agh! You’ve wounded me.

Hamlet attacks Laertes and they fight with less formality. In the fight, Laertes loses his sword. Hamlet picks it up, sees the tip is unguarded and gives Laertes his own sword.

CLAUDIUS: Enough now, that’s enough!

HAMLET: Let’s finish this!

Hamlet and Laertes fight again. Hamlet strikes Laertes. Laertes drops his sword.

LAERTES: Oh, you’re dead too. You’ve half an hour, at most. I am rightly killed by my own treachery;
The sword was poisoned, nothing can save us now.
The king’s to blame!

_Claudius stands, Hamlet threatens him with his sword._

HAMLET: Don’t move. Stay there. Sit down.

_Claudius sits._

LAERTES: The glass of wine your mother drank was poisoned…

HAMLET: Mother?

Gertrude is dead, slumped in her chair.

LAERTES: And meant for you. He could have stopped her.

I know you loved Ophelia, and she

Loved you. I ended your relationship

Against her wishes. I got it wrong, I’m sorry…

Laertes goes. _Hamlet looks at the tip of his sword._

HAMLET: Mother?

_He pushes the sword a little way into Claudius._

CLAUDIUS: Guards! Help! Someone help me please!

Hamlet picks up the glass his mother has used.

HAMLET: And here’s the poisoned wine you gave my mother.

_He pours some into Claudius’ mouth._

This is for her…

_He pours some more._

And this is for my father.

_Claudius struggles. Hamlet holds him till he is still._

Horatio! I’m dead, but you are living.

Let all the world know what has happened here.

HORATIO: What words are there that can describe this sorrow?

HAMLET: Horatio, do you see how all this looks?

To all the world my uncle dies a victim

And I, the mad prince, am the murderer.

Only you are left alive who knows the truth.

Use every living breath to tell my story

And let the listener judge it for themselves.

HORATIO: _(To us)_ And so he died, his noble heart quite broken.

Good night, sweet prince, the angels sing you home.

ACTOR 2: _(sings)_ Although in life we lose our friends,

We always will remember them.

And we shall sing both night and day,

Over the hills and far away.

_The End._

Notes:

197 fallen forward, collapsed

198 tragedy
1966 MAN OF DESTINY by George Bernard Shaw
1967 THE HAPPY JOURNEY by Thornton Wilder
1968 VILLAGE Wooing by George Bernard Shaw
1970 THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST by Oscar Wilde
1971 THE GLASS MENAGERIE by Tennessee Williams
1972 MAN OF DESTINY by George Bernard Shaw
1973 LOVERS by Brian Friel
1973 AN INSPECTOR CALLS by J. B. Priestley
1974 THE HAPPY JOURNEY by Thornton Wilder
1975 OF LOVERS AND FOOLS, scenes from Shakespeare as arranged by Manfred Vogel
1976 A SLIGHT ACCIDENT by James Saunders
LOOK BACK IN ANGER by John Osborne
1977 THE HAPPY JOURNEY by Thornton Wilder
ARMS AND THE MAN by George Bernard Shaw
1978 FAMILY ALBUM by David Newby
AN INSPECTOR CALLS by J. B. Priestley
1979 THE CANTERVILLE GHOST by Nicholas Allen, based on the story by Oscar Wilde
ALL MY SONS by Arthur Miller
1980 THE HAPPY JOURNEY by Thornton Wilder
MAN OF DESTINY by George Bernard Shaw
1981 FAMILY ALBUM by David Newby
RELATIVELY SPEAKING by Alan Ayckbourn
1982 THE CANTERVILLE GHOST by Nicholas Allen, based on the story by Oscar Wilde
A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS by Robert Bolt
1983 ROBIN HOOD by Nicholas Allen. An entertainment with music
LOVERS by Brian Friel
1984 THE HAPPY JOURNEY by Thornton Wilder
1984/85 KING ARTHUR by Nicholas Allen. An entertainment with music
1985/86 THE CANTERVILLE GHOST by Nicholas Allen, based on the story by Oscar Wilde
THE GLASS MENAGERIE by Tennessee Williams
1986/87 SONGS AND DREAMS by Nicholas Allen
SAME TIME, NEXT YEAR by Bernard Slade
1987/88 DICK WHITTINGTON AND HIS CAT by Sean Aita
LOOK BACK IN ANGER by John Osborne
1988/89 THE WIDOW’S DIAMONDS by Nicholas Allen
THE PRIVATE EAR by Peter Schaffer
1989/90 ROBIN HOOD by Nicholas Allen. An entertainment with music
THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST by Oscar Wilde
IN PRAISE OF LOVE by Terence Rattigan
1990/91 RICHARD THE LIONHEART by Nicholas Allen
DANGEROUS OBSESSION by N. F. Crisp
1991/92 RICHARD THE LIONHEART by Nicholas Allen
THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH by Sean Aita
THE ZOO STORY by Edward Albee
1992/93 SONGS AND DREAMS by Nicholas Allen
STAGE BY STAGE by Jennie Graham
1993/94 TREASURE ISLAND by Sean Aita
SHERRYHOLME INVESTIGATES by Ingrid Statman
RELATIVELY SPEAKING by Alan Ayckbourn
1994/95 FAMILY ALBUM by David Newby
FREDDIE AND THE CLOVEN HOOF by Adam Bridges
LOVERS by Brian Friel
1995/96 THE CANTERVILLE GHOST by Nicholas Allen
DRAÇULA by Sean Aita
MY CHILDREN! MY AFRICA! by Athol Fugard
LOVE HURTS by Sean Aita
1996/97 THE GLASS MENAGERIE by Tennessee Williams
1997/98 HUCKLEBERRY FINN by Sean Aita
SUGAR AND SPICE by Philip Dart
ALL MY SONS by Arthur Miller
1998/99 THE SWORD AND THE CROWN by Sean Aita
BOTTLING OUT by Philip Dart
1999/00 BANANAS by Sean Aita and Nicholas Allen
DANCE CLASS by Clive Duncan
THE BROWNING VERSION by Terence Rattigan
2000/01 AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS by Sean Aita
MILLENNIUM by Sean Aita
BLUE GIRL by Deborah Aita
2001/02 HOTMAIL FROM HELSINKI by Judy Upton
ROMY AND JULIAN by Clive Duncan
THE LAST YANKEE by Arthur Miller
2002/03 A PERFECT MATCH by Sean Aita
A DOG’S LIFE by Sean Aita
DANGEROUS OBSESSION by N. F. Crisp
2003/04 STREET by Street by Sean Aita
WILD WEEKEND by Clive Duncan
BUTTERFLIES ARE FREE by Leonard Gershe
2004/05 THE CANTERVILLE GHOST
adapted from Oscar Wilde by Clive Duncan
SUGAR AND SPICE by Philip Dart
MACBETH adapted from Shakespeare by Clive Duncan
2005/06 AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS by Sean Aita
ROMY & JULIAN by Clive Duncan
THIS IS YOUR LAND a Woody Guthrie Folk Musical
devised by David M. Lutken
2006/07 REVOLTING BRITONS by Clive Duncan
DANCE CLASS by Clive Duncan
LOOK BACK IN ANGER by John Osborne
2007/08 VIRTUAL HEROES by Clive Duncan
WILD WEEKEND by Clive Duncan
PITCH BLACK by Clive Duncan
2008/09 PERFECT MATCH by Sean Aita
LITTLE GIRL LIES by Claudia Leaf
VIRGINS by John Retallack
2009/10 FAME GAME by Philip Dart
SACRIFICE by Claudia Leaf
MACBETH by William Shakespeare adapted by Clive Duncan
2010/11 ROB AND THE HOODIES by Sean Aita
ROMY & JULIAN by Clive Duncan
BUTTERFLIES ARE FREE by Leonard Gershe
2011/12 THE SWITCH by Philip Dart
DISCONNECTED by Adam Barnard
PITCH BLACK by Clive Duncan
2012/13 AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS by Sean Aita
JEKYLL’S POTION by James Cawood
A PICTURE by Clive Duncan
2013/14 VIRTUAL HEROES by Clive Duncan
POPULAR by Philip Dart
PRETTY SHREWD by Clive Duncan
2014/15 SPOOKED! by Sean Aita
DANCE CLASS by Clive Duncan
THE MAKEOVER by Clive Duncan
2015/16 THE FAME GAME by Philip Dart
UNDERCOVER STAR by Robin Kingsland
VIRGINS by John Retallack
2016/17 ROB AND THE HOODIES by Sean Aita
THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES by David Taylor
MACBETH adapted from W. Shakespeare by Clive Duncan
2017/18 A FAMILY AFFAIR by Sean Aita
ROMY & JULIAN by Clive Duncan
THE VISIT by Philip Dart
2018/19 THE LITTLE PRINCE by Sean Aita, freely adapted from Saint-Exupéry
WILD WEEKEND by Clive Duncan
HAMLET by Clive Duncan, freely adapted from Shakespeare