

HAMLET



THE QUESTORS THEATRE COMPANY

First performance 5th November, 1983

AN INTERPRETATION OF HAMLET

In the nigh-on four hundred years since Shakespeare's play was written, it has been the subject of a wider range of interpretation than any other play. "The gloomy Dane"; the noble young prince caught up in a web of corruption which was none of his own making; as Olivier subtitled his film: "the story of a man who could not make up his mind"; "a purely psychological study" (Bradley). The main focus of study of the play has usually been on the *character* of Hamlet. Thus an eminent scholar came to write, "that the essential emotion of the play is the feeling of a son towards a guilty mother", a view apparently accepted by T.S. Eliot which led him to write the play off as "an artistic failure". "The difficulty in ultimate terms", wrote Waldo, "is to know what the play is really about".

For our part we feel the answer to these and to other problems of the play is to be found in a brilliant book by John Vyvyan, *The Shakespearean Ethic*, published in 1959. In analysing Shakespeare's later plays, comedies as well as tragedies, Vyvyan finds very convincingly a consistent ethical viewpoint, a deep concern with the meaning and enhancement of life; what his hero does may have been theatrically right, but if it was ethically wrong, that also was Shakespeare's preoccupation. This was in striking contrast with Bradley's "We cannot be sure, as with those other poets we can, that in his works he expressed his deepest and most cherished convictions on ultimate questions, or even that he had any. And in his dramatic conceptions there is enough to occupy us". In the particular case of Hamlet, we have a hero, potentially of great nobility of soul, who is evilly tempted to a course of revenge. The temptation is objectified in the form of the Ghost (as in the case of Macbeth by the witches). Hamlet in a state of embittered melancholy, broadly because the world in which he lives falls too far below the standard of his ideal, and in particular because of his mother's over-rapid and incestuous remarriage, already beginning to hate his uncle, is ripe to yield to the temptation of the Ghost and this he does, but not without an inner conflict. The rest of the play is concerned with just that inner conflict and the gradual reversal of Hamlet's values. To fulfill his oath after that first temptation, he must first cast out love, and that is the true meaning of the "Nunnery scene" which has foxed so many commentators. Hamlet cannot at the same time be true to his own self, which is to be true to love (Ophelia is also an allegory of Love), and true to his oath of revenge. He yields, and follows a course which results in the killing of Polonius, the driving of Ophelia into madness and her subsequent death, the cold-blooded murder plot of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the killing of Laertes, the murder of his uncle and the death of his mother, and finally the overthrow of the state of Denmark. Hamlet's true madness lies in the progressive loss of the "mastery of his own soul" of which his "antic disposition" is at most no more than a superficial symbol.

At any rate that, following Vyvyan, is how we have seen the play.

A.E.

THE TRAGEDIE OF HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

by
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Characters in order of appearance

Francisco	} <i>members of</i>	Sandeep Bhardwaj
Barnardo		<i>the King's</i> James Farnham
Marcellus		<i>Guard</i> Paul Weir
Horatio, <i>a student and friend to Hamlet.</i>		Hugh Simon
The Ghost of the late King, Hamlet's father		Mike Davis
Claudius, <i>King of Denmark, Hamlet's Uncle</i>		Keith Parry
Gertrude, <i>the Queen, Hamlet's mother</i>		Anne Renn
Polonius, <i>Councillor of State</i>		Derek Bullock
Laertes, <i>Polonius's son</i>		Robert Jones
Voltemand	} <i>Danish Councillors,</i>	Paul Vincent
Cornelius		<i>Ambassadors to Norway</i>
Hamlet, <i>Prince of Denmark</i>		Steve Fitzpatrick
Ophelia, <i>Polonius's daughter</i>		Judy Emmet
Reynaldo, <i>servant to Polonius</i>		Ned Gethings
Rosencrantz	} <i>former school fellows.</i>	Stephen Quinn
Guildenstern		<i>of Hamlet</i>
Players:	First Player (Player King)	Paul Vincent
	Second Player (Player Queen)	Georgie Glen
	Third Player (Lucianus)	Sandeep Bhardwaj
	Fourth Player (Prologue)	Antony Valenti
Fortinbras, <i>Prince of Norway</i>		David Fletcher
A Norwegian Captain		Paul Weir
A Sailor		Derek Bullock
First Gravedigger		Wilfrid Sharp
Second Gravedigger		Ned Gethings
A Priest		Mike Davis
Osric, <i>a foppish Courtier</i>		Simon Surtees
English Ambassador		Wilfrid Sharp
Ladies of the Court		Sue Bradford, Marjorie Wiles,
Attendants, Councillors, }		Sandeep Bhardwaj, Richard Brown,
Courtiers, Gentlemen, }		Jon Campbell, Mike Davies,
Messengers		James Farnham, Simon Surtees,
		Antony Valenti, Paul Vincent
Fortinbras's bodyguard		Derek Bullock, Mike Davis,
		Tony Diggle, Ned Gethings,
		Stephen Quinn, Paul Weir

The action of the play takes place in and around the Royal Palace
of Elsinore in Denmark.

Directed by Alfred Emmet
Associate Director John Davey
Designed by John Rolfe
Lighting designed by Andrew Dixon
Sound designed by Colin Horne
Fight arranged by Frank Wood

THERE WILL BE ONE INTERVAL OF FIFTEEN MINUTES

Stage Management	—	John Clayton <i>and</i> Jenny Richardson
Technical Deputy Stage Manager	—	Martin Stoner
Assistant Stage Managers	—	Caroline McMahon Penny Seyfert David Palmer Clare McKeown Marion Sellwood Philippa Forster Caroline Bleakley Anne O'Brien Rosalind Norman Liz Chisholm Clare Willis Jo Perse
Construction	assisted by	— Neville Gillett — Charles Massey Bill Skedgill David Cload
Properties	assisted by	— Garth Shaw — Jean Derby
Wardrobe	assisted by	— Doreen Dodd — Valerie Palmer Mary Angus Lucy Lacaille Nicola Wakeham Marie Tierney Jackie Hulbert Seema Malhotra Fran Williams
Prompters	—	Jill Gee <i>and</i> Wendy Harrison
Lighting Assistants	—	Andrew Davie James Linehan Adam Tarnowski
Sound Assistant	—	Tony Swaby
Puppet Makers	—	Kath Harrington Judith Jones Yvette Bach Chris Bullock Vera Robinson Denis Robinson Barbara Howes
Musical Instruments designed and made by	—	Mike Davis
Helmets supplied by	—	Securicor
Assistance from	—	Beth Crowley Charles Lacaille Gerry Blake

IN THE WEST FOYER, THERE IS A DISPLAY OF PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE TWO PREVIOUS PRODUCTIONS OF **HAMLET** BY THE QUESTORS.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

There are three versions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* on which an acting text may reasonably be based: the First Quarto (Q1) usually known as the 'bad' Quarto, published in 1603; the Second Quarto (Q2) published in 1604/5, and the First Folio (F1), 1623. The generally 'accepted' text is the F1, with some emendations from Q2.

In preparing the text for this production we have drawn on all three versions, the main difference being that we have adopted the Q1 sequence of scenes in Act II (as, indeed, has often been done) by which the 'to be or not to be . . . ' soliloquy and the Hamlet/Ophelia 'nunnery scene' precede the so-called 'fishmonger scene' between Hamlet and Polonius, and the greeting of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, instead of on the following day after the arrival of the Players. We believe this makes for a clearer dramatic 'line' for Hamlet. We have also followed the Q1 sequence of Ophelia's songs in her 'mad' scenes.

Any production of *Hamlet* has to make the choice between the various available versions in the interests of a consistent and coherent text for the stage, in line with the director's concept of Shakespeare's play.

It has to be cut — the full version would last over four hours. We have pruned about 800 lines, but without cutting any entire scene as is frequently done.

SCHOOLS' SYMPOSIUM

On November 9th and 14th The Questors are presenting an all-day symposium on *Hamlet* for the benefit of A Level students from neighbouring schools. The programme consists of both academic and theatrical explorations of the play, and includes readings from various versions and interpretations of it; a talk about topics which are likely to arise in the examination; an account of the approach by The Questors production team; an 'open rehearsal' session provided by members of the cast, and an 'Any Questions' session when a panel of experts will discuss questions on the play posed by the audience. Among those taking part this year will be Arthur Pollard, Professor of English at Hull University, and Robert Cushman, dramatic critic of *The Observer*. This will be the fourth symposium for schools presented by The Questors and they have proved to be extremely popular. This year we have been heavily over-subscribed. The day concludes with the evening's performance of the play, attended by the students.

OLD MEMBERS' REUNION: JANUARY 7th 1984

Questors who have already been invited to this event are urged to reply to the invitation as soon as possible, as tickets are going fast. The price, £5.00, is inclusive of supper and a seat for the last night of *The Coarse Acting Show*. Any member with a membership number below 7500 is also invited to apply. Applications (with cash) to Doreen Coates, or Wilf Sharp at the theatre.

THE DISCUSSION on HAMLET will take place on Tuesday, NOVEMBER 22 at 7.45 pm in THE SHAW ROOM.

All are welcome — Admission FREE.

Forthcoming Attractions

IN THE STUDIO

A DREAM OF PASSION

Reflections on *Hamlet*

devised and directed by Sue Solomon

24 – 27 NOVEMBER 7.45 and 9.15 pm

LITTLE EYOLF

by Henrik Ibsen

translated by Michael Meyer

directed by Peter Field

15 – 18 DECEMBER 7.45 pm

IN THE THEATRE

BODIES

by James Saunders

directed by Larry Irvin

27 NOVEMBER – 3 DECEMBER 7.45 pm

FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON

THE THIRD GREAT COARSE ACTING SHOW

29 DECEMBER – 7 JANUARY 7.45 pm

and for **MATINÉES ONLY**

WALDO AND THE WONDERFUL WEB

31 DECEMBER at 2.30 pm

1 JANUARY 2 pm, 2 JANUARY 2.30 pm

7 JANUARY 11 am and 2.30 pm

New and Prospective Members evenings are held every Wednesday, commencing at 7.45 pm in the Grapevine bar.

HOTPLATE

Delicious food is available in the Upper Foyer from 6.30 pm during the run of theatre productions.

Interval refreshments and drinks will also be available.

PATRONS ARE RESPECTFULLY ASKED TO REFRAIN FROM TAKING REFRESHMENTS INTO THE AUDITORIUM.
