

**DOMMAR**®

**A Study Guide**

# HAMLET

**By William Shakespeare**

**Written by Dominic Francis**

**Edited by Rosie Dalling**

**Rehearsal photography by Marc Brenner**

**Production photography by Johan Persson**

This programme has been made possible by the generous support of  
The Bay Foundation, Noel Coward Foundation and Universal Consolidated Group

# Contents

**Section 1      Cast and Creative Team**

**Section 2      An introduction to William Shakespeare and his work**

Biography  
Elizabethan Drama  
Shakespeare's Plays  
HAMLET

**Section 3      Inside the rehearsal room**

An interview with actors Ron Cook (Polonius), Gugu Mbatha-Raw (Ophelia) and Alex Waldmann (Laertes)

**Section 4      Shakespeare in performance**

Practical exercises based on an extract from Scene Two  
Questions on the production and further practical work

**Section 5      Ideas for further study**

Reading and research  
Bibliography  
Endnotes

## Section 1 Cast and Creative Team

### Cast (in order of speaking)

---



**David Burke**

**Barnardo**, a soldier guarding the battlements of the Castle of Elsinore.



**Alan Turkington**

**Francisco**, another soldier on guard at the castle.



**Henry Pettigrew**

**Marcellus**, a third soldier guarding the castle.



**Matt Ryan**

**Horatio**, Hamlet's closest friend and trusted confidante.



**Kevin R McNally**

**Claudius**, the new King of Denmark, the old king's brother. A scheming statesman with a taste for luxurious living, he is keen to assert his authority over his kingdom, in particular the royal court. He struggles to forge a relationship with his nephew, now stepson, Hamlet.



**Ian Drysdale**

**Osric**, a member of the royal court, loyal to Claudius.



**Alex Waldmann**

**Laertes**, Polonius' son. A young man preferring the attractions of Paris to Elsinore. He remains suspicious of Hamlet's intentions towards his sister, Ophelia.



**Ron Cook**

**Polonius**, an ambitious politician who's reached the rank of prime minister. He is keen to ingratiate himself with the new king and charges himself with the responsibility of identifying the cause of Hamlet's erratic behaviour.



**Penelope Wilton**

**Gertrude**, widow to the old king and now wife to Claudius. She suppresses her own misgivings about remarrying so soon, focusing instead on her son's continued mourning for his late father.



**Jude Law**

**Hamlet**, son of the old king and Gertrude. A sensitive and intelligent scholar, prone to long periods of introspection. Disgusted by his mother's hasty second marriage, he remains devastated by his father's recent death and deeply suspicious of his uncle, now stepfather, Claudius. He struggles with his conscience, desperate to discover the truth.



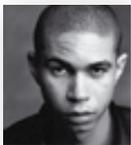
**Gugu Mbatha-Raw** **Ophelia**, Polonius' daughter. Despite her brother's warnings, the young woman has fallen in love with Hamlet but is soon instructed by her father to end the relationship. This apparent rejection fuels Hamlet's anger and Ophelia finds herself an unwitting pawn in Polonius' and Claudius' plans.



**Peter Eyre** **Ghost of Hamlet's father**, the old king who haunts the battlements of the castle of Elsinore. Appearing before Hamlet, the apparition charges his son with avenging his murder, accusing his brother, the new king, Claudius.



**Sean Jackson** **Reynaldo**, a junior politician working for Polonius.



**John MacMillan** **Rosencrantz**, a fellow student of Hamlet.



**Gwilym Lee** **Guildenstern**, another fellow student. Both he and Rosencrantz are used by Claudius to spy on their old friend, with devastating consequences.



**Peter Eyre** **Player King**, one of the leading actors within a touring theatre company that visits the castle of Elsinore.



**Alan Turkington** **Fourth Player**, a fellow actor within the company.



**Jenny Funnel** **Player Queen**, another actor with the company.



**Henry Pettigrew** **Third Player**, the final actor who makes up the company.



**Harry Attwell** **Cornelius**, a member of the royal court, loyal to Claudius.



**Faye Winter** **Member of the Court**



**Colin Haigh**

**Member of the Court**



**James Le Feuvre**

**Member of the Court**



**Alan Turkington**

**Fortinbras**, Prince of Norway. An ambitious young soldier who eventually assumes command of neighbouring Denmark.



**David Burke**

**First Gravedigger**, working within the royal court.



**Henry Pettigrew**

**Second Gravedigger**, apprentice to the first.



**Harry Attwell**

**Priest**, officiates reluctantly at Ophelia's funeral due to the dubious circumstances of her death.

## Creative Team

---

### **Michael Grandage, Director**

Artistic Director of the Donmar Warehouse. Recent work includes, for the Donmar's West End Season at the Wyndham's Theatre: *Madame de Sade*, *Twelfth Night*, *Ivanov* (2008 Evening Standard Award for Best Director); at the Donmar: *The Chalk Garden*, *Othello*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, *Don Juan in Soho*, *Frost/Nixon* (also Gielgud, Broadway and USA tour), *The Cut* (also UK tour), *The Wild Duck* (2006 Critics' Circle Award for Best Director), *Grand Hotel – The Musical* (2005 Olivier Award for Outstanding Musical Production and 2004 Evening Standard Award for Best Director), *After Miss Julie and Caligula* (2004 Olivier Award for Best Director); for the West End: *Evita* and *Guys and Dolls* (2006 Olivier Award for Outstanding Musical Production); as Artistic Director of the Sheffield Theatres: *Don Carlos* (2005 Evening Standard Award and TMA for Best Director), *Suddenly Last Summer* and *As You Like It* (2000 Critics' Circle and Evening Standard Awards for Best Director).

### **Christopher Oram, Designer**

Recent work includes, for the Donmar's West End Season at the Wyndham's: *Madame de Sade*, *Twelfth Night*, *Ivanov*; for the Donmar: *Othello*, *Parade*, *Don Juan in Soho*, *Frost/Nixon* (also Gielgud and Broadway), *Grand Hotel – The Musical*, *Henry IV*, *World Music* and *Caligula* (2003 Evening Standard Award for Best Design); other theatre: *King Lear/The Seagull* (RSC), *Evita* (Adelphi), *Guys and Dolls* (Piccadilly), *Macbeth*, *The Jew of Malta* and *The Embalmer* (Almeida), *Oleanna* (Gielgud), *Loyal Women* and *Fucking Games* (Royal Court), *Stuff Happens*, *Marriage Play/Finding the Sun*, *Summerfolk* and *Power* (NT, 2004 Olivier Award for Best Costume Design).

### **Neil Austin, Lighting Designer**

Recent work includes, for the Donmar's West End Season at the Wyndham's: *Twelfth Night*; for the Donmar: *Piaf*, *Parade* (2008 Knight of Illumination Award), *John Gabriel Borkman*, *Don Juan in Soho*, *The Cryptogram*, *Frost/Nixon* (West End and Broadway, 2007 Outer Circle Critics' Award nomination for Outstanding Lighting Design on Broadway), *The Wild Duck*, *The Cosmonaut's Last Message to the Woman He Once Loved in The Former Soviet Union*, *Henry IV*, *World Music*, *After Miss Julie* and *Caligula*; for the RSC: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *King John* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*; for the NT: *Philistines*, *Man of Mode*, *Therese Raquin* (2007 Olivier Award nomination for Best Lighting Design), *The Seafarer*, *Henry IV Parts I and II*, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, *Further than the Furthest Thing*, *The Night Season* and *The Walls*.

### **Adam Cork, Composer and Sound Designer**

Recent work includes, for the Donmar's West End Season at the Wyndham's: *Twelfth Night*; for the Donmar: *The Chalk Garden*, *Othello*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, *Don Juan in Soho*, *Frost/Nixon* (also Gielgud, Broadway and USA tour, 2007 Drama Desk Award nomination), *Caligula*, *Henry IV*, *The Wild Duck* and *The Cut*; other theatre: *No Man's Land* (Duke of York's), *Macbeth* (Broadway and Gielgud, 2008 Tony nomination), *Don Carlos* (Gielgud), *Suddenly Last Summer* (Albery), *On the Third Day* (New Ambassadors), *Speaking Like Magpies* and *The Tempest* (RSC), *Five Gold Rings* and *The Late Henry Moss* (Almeida).

## An introduction to William Shakespeare and his work

### Biography

---

'The name and reputation of William Shakespeare towers over much of Western culture like a colossus,' writes academic and theatre practitioner Peter Reynolds in the introduction to his book *Shakespeare: Text into Performance*. His plays are performed more often than any other writer, living or dead, and there is a vast and ever-expanding Shakespeare industry. 'People almost everywhere, in a huge variety of cultures, are influenced by the name of a long-dead poet and playwright, despite the fact that the majority of them will never have seen, and certainly never have read a Shakespeare play.'<sup>1</sup>



Despite the considerable, and often daunting, reputation of this 'cultural monolith' very little is known about Shakespeare and his life. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire in 1564 (baptised there on 26 April) and died in the same town fifty-two years later on 23 April, 1616. During his childhood William's father, John, was a prosperous businessman with interests in farming and textiles and held several public offices. Given his father's position, it is likely that William was educated at the local grammar school. He did not, however, progress to university, perhaps as a result of his father's dwindling fortunes from 1578 onwards, and was thus deprived of the benefits many of his contemporary writers received.

In 1582, at the age of eighteen, Shakespeare married twenty-six-year-old Anne Hathaway. They had three children together: Susanna, born shortly after their marriage, and twins Judith and Hamnet in 1585. It is uncertain how William supported his family during this period. He may have worked for his father or, as many academics have suggested, he may have been a teacher. Whatever his occupation it was at this time he moved from Stratford to London.

Although we cannot be certain when Shakespeare moved to London, it may have coincided with the visit to Stratford in 1585 by a company of London-based actors, what we do know, however, is that Shakespeare was living in London in 1592, by which time he was established as both a writer and actor. In a pamphlet published that year, the lesser-known dramatist Robert Greene criticised Shakespeare - essentially an uneducated writer - for usurping the place which, according to him, rightly belonged to university graduates. That Shakespeare warranted such attention suggests his plays, even at this early stage in his career, had achieved a level of notoriety and some degree of success.

In 1593 a plague broke out in London and all theatres were closed. In addition to writing two long poems, *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare appears to have used the time to strengthen his relationship with a theatre company called, under Queen Elizabeth I's reign (1558-1603), the Lord Chamberlain's Company and then, after King James I's accession (1603), the King's Men. This association was long and successful, continuing until Shakespeare's retirement from the theatre in 1611.

1596 brought both personal tragedy and newfound success. In the year Shakespeare was granted a coat of arms, thereby guaranteeing his status as a 'gentleman' by the College of Herald's, his son Hamnet died. The following year, in 1597, Shakespeare bought New Place, one of the largest houses in Stratford, and two years later he acquired shares in the Globe Theatre. In 1609, the year he published a collection of sonnets, Shakespeare also became part-owner of the newly built Blackfriars Theatre.

Although he retired to Stratford two years later, Shakespeare maintained many of his business links with London until his death in 1616 at the age of fifty-two.

## Elizabethan Drama

---

Drama in English dates from the Middle Ages, and it was the 'miracle' and 'morality' plays that were most commonly associated with this period. Often based around stories from the Bible - typically miraculous, such as Noah and the Ark - or those from which a clear moral could be drawn, these medieval plays were usually written to coincide with religious festivals such as Christmas and Easter. They were performed in or near the church and involved most of the community, either as actors or audience.

Drama at this time was a significant part of the structure of society and was, in many ways, an extension of Christian ritual - intended to make a strong impression on all who participated in it. Audiences were meant to be awed by the power of God, inspired by the faith of religious men and frightened by the fate of wrongdoers. Thus the drama had a universal appeal - written with all members of society in mind - and a cathartic effect, giving spectators an outlet for their feelings of greed, hatred, lust and pity.

By the early sixteenth century, however, the close relationship that had previously existed between the church and state began to disintegrate. Individual Christian sects had differing attitudes to the role of drama in society. While tolerated by Catholics it was condemned by Puritans who essentially wanted to 'purify' people's religious beliefs and encourage them to forsake worldly pleasures and attend to spiritual matters. As Puritanism grew stronger in the second half of the sixteenth century, Elizabethan dramatists had to struggle against growing opposition and often criticised Puritanism in their plays. (There is some evidence of this within TWELFTH NIGHT.) Shakespeare and his contemporaries, however, had the support of the royal court and continued the medieval tradition of producing plays which appealed to all social classes.

Among the more notable sixteenth-century playwrights are John Lyly, Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593). The latter, born the same year as Shakespeare, was a gifted writer and many of his dramatic innovations, such as his extensive use of blank verse, were adopted by playwrights of his own and later generations. Marlowe pre-empted Shakespeare in focusing his tragedies on a central character, a person with whom the audience could sympathise. Shakespeare himself appears to have learned much from his contemporaries, especially Marlowe, and from the earlier medieval tradition. He borrowed ideas, and even plots, from a variety of sources but all were transformed by his own unique dramatic talents.

The increasing secularisation of drama during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had a significant impact on the types of spaces plays were performed in. They ceased to be staged in or near a church and were often performed in the courtyard of an inn instead. Such a venue offered several distinct advantages: many doors for use as entrances and exits; balconies which could represent battlements or towers; and a captive audience, glad of entertainment, in the form of the inn's guests.

When the first London theatre was built in 1576 it was only natural, therefore, to base it upon the design of an inn's courtyard. It too had no roof, forcing performances to be cancelled whenever the weather was inclement. The theatre had galleries around the walls where the wealthy sat, while the poorer 'groundlings' stood around the stage throughout the performance.



The stage itself was the only difference from the inn courtyards. Often called an 'apron', it projected out into the auditorium. The stage was not curtained off from the audience and there was no scenery upon it. Indications of where and when - i.e. day or night - scenes were set are embedded within Shakespeare's text. This lack of scenery led to the use of lavish costumes and music.

Another significant element of Elizabethan drama was that women were not allowed to perform on stage. Female characters were played by boys instead. This helps to explain why so many of Shakespeare's heroines, such as Viola in *TWELFTH NIGHT*, disguise themselves as men - it was easier for a boy to act like a young man than to act like a young woman.

## **Shakespeare's Plays**

---

Shakespeare's career as a writer spanned approximately twenty years, from 1591 until 1611. He is believed to have written thirty-seven plays during this period and may have collaborated on the writing of several more. It's difficult to accurately date the composition of individual pieces but some idea can be gained from records of performances and editions of the plays published before and shortly after Shakespeare's death.

The work was often not wholly 'original', and Shakespeare drew upon stories from history or contemporary literature. These stories were, however, transformed by him into well-crafted plays characterised by his own unique dramatic voice. They can essentially be divided into two main categories: comedies and tragedies, the latter concluding with the death of the central character.

In terms of language, prose is generally used in what may be called the 'comic' scenes, whereas blank verse tends to be the medium for more serious interaction. By alternating between the two, Shakespeare can thus emphasise differences in the behaviour and attitudes of characters.

## HAMLET

---

When attempting to date any of Shakespeare's plays it must be remembered that we have none of his original manuscripts. A pirated edition of HAMLET first appeared in 1603, which was succeeded by another, much longer version, the following year. Both were published as 'quartos' (book-sized editions, for which a sheet of paper is folded twice to make eight pages). Several of Shakespeare's plays were printed in this format.

In 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, two actors from his old company, John Heminges and Henry Condell, collected together thirty-six of his plays and published them in a 'folio' (a larger format than quartos, consisting of a sheet of paper folded just once, making four pages). This collection is referred to as the First Folio and, according to Heminges and Condell, represents an accurate version of Shakespeare's plays, 'Cured, and perfect of their limbs... absolute in their numbers, as he conceived them'<sup>2</sup>.

However, the text of HAMLET that appears within this folio is significantly different to the two quartos published twenty years before. Until recently, editors of Shakespeare's plays usually based their texts upon those within the First Folio. Where earlier versions existed - two in the case of HAMLET - they supplemented the folio with anything they thought worth including from the quartos. The assumption was that Shakespeare had written just one version of each play and that the various texts were, more or less, accurate reproductions of the original.

In recent years, critical thinking has changed. It is now generally agreed that Shakespeare revised his plays depending on what did and didn't work on stage, and to suit changing circumstances within the theatre. HAMLET was immediately popular amongst audiences and was probably given many performances. As with any play in production, Shakespeare would have modified it over a period of time. Most editors now regard the 1604 quarto edition of HAMLET as the first version of the play, while the 1623 folio edition represents the playwright's final performance draft.

There are many complex and interconnected themes to emerge in HAMLET, including a thorough exploration of the idea of revenge and madness. Ancient Roman thinking prized family honour above all else. A man's reputation was all that truly lived after him. If he had been wronged, and the law failed to see justice done, it was a son's duty to seek revenge. The Elizabethan philosopher, Francis Bacon ([1561-1626]) condemned revenge as 'a kind of wild justice', which 'putteth the law out of office'<sup>3</sup>. Revenge was a criminal offence, and the Christian Church insisted that vengeance was God's concern not man's.

Despite this, bloody, Roman-style revenge plays were very popular in England in the late sixteenth century. By the time Shakespeare revisited the genre for HAMLET, revenge tragedies had developed certain theatrical conventions. These included a ghost who would reveal how they had met their treacherous end, calling upon the hero to avenge their death for the sake of family honour. As if to endorse Bacon's condemnation of such 'wild justice', the cost of revenge is invariably death to the person delivering it.

Shakespeare takes such elements and treats them seriously. In HAMLET the incompatible belief systems of the Romans and Christians, their values and codes of honour, come into direct conflict, creating a far more complex play than had previously been seen on the London stage. The Ghost of Hamlet's father talks like



a Christian, telling his son there is judgement after death and that he is suffering in purgatory. Yet what he asks of Hamlet, to avenge his murder, sounds Roman and would surely send his son to Hell. Torn between duty to his dead father and obedience to his God, it is not surprising Hamlet struggles with his conscience.

In keeping with the conventions of revenge tragedies, Hamlet tells his friends he may pretend to be mad in order to carry out the Ghost's instructions, thereby lulling his intended victim (Claudius) into a false sense of security. Opinion is divided on the extent to which Hamlet's assumed madness is feigned or real. Throughout the play, various characters - Claudius, Polonius, even Hamlet himself - offer differing viewpoints.

Most of his behaviour, as described by Ophelia in Scene Six, for example, sounds like play acting. Even in the heated exchanges with Polonius, Hamlet's comments remain essentially satirical in tone. The older statesman, the chief doubter of the prince's sanity, recognises as much himself – 'Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.'<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Hamlet uses 'crafty madness'<sup>5</sup> to taunt and ultimately betray his former friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

This reading of feigned madness would be more readily accepted if it weren't for evidence to the contrary, including Hamlet's own, apparently sincere, admission to Laertes that 'you must needs have heard,/ How I am punish'd with a sore distraction./ What I have done/ That might your nature, honour, and exception/ Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.'<sup>6</sup> It is in his soliloquies, however, that Hamlet's thinking is most confused as he struggles to decide what to do. Often there is a deep disconnect between his words and subsequent actions.

For a true depiction of madness in HAMLET, one has to focus on Ophelia. Shock and a deep, inconsolable grief following her father's sudden death leave her incapable of engaging in the world around her. Her decline, as witnessed by a distraught Laertes, is complete and devastating. Dramatically, it offers a perspective on Hamlet's behaviour, helping the audience put his 'madness' in context.

## Synopsis

---

The castle of Elsinore, royal court, Denmark. Old Hamlet has recently died to be succeeded by his brother, Claudius, who has married Old Hamlet's widow, Gertrude. Together they rule as the new King and Queen of Denmark. Young Hamlet, in mourning for his father, struggles to accept their relationship and openly expresses his disgust.

Meanwhile, a Ghost resembling the late king roams the castle battlements at night. He accuses Claudius of poisoning him and commands his son, the prince, to avenge his murder. Elsewhere within the court, Ophelia, with whom Hamlet is in love, is told by her father Polonius, a statesman, and her brother Laertes to end the relationship. Reluctantly, she obeys.

Concerned by Hamlet's erratic behaviour, Claudius asks the prince's friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to watch him. Under pressure from the prince, they reveal the true purpose of their visit. The three are interrupted by the arrival of a travelling theatre company, of whom Hamlet is particularly fond. He asks the actors to perform a play before the court enacting the poisoning of a king, during which he'll watch Claudius' guilty reaction.

Polonius believes he has discovered the cause of Hamlet's distemper, telling Claudius it is his daughter Ophelia's rejection of the prince which has led to his altered mood. Together, they spy on an encounter between the two young lovers, in which Hamlet angrily rejects Ophelia (suspecting they are being watched). This convinces Claudius that Hamlet is only feigning madness and he resolves to send him away on business.

Later, increasingly troubled by his conscience, the king interrupts the performance of the play. Hamlet takes this as proof of his uncle's guilt and now fully believes the Ghost's story. He goes to Gertrude's bedroom to convince her of the truth. As agreed with Claudius, Polonius once again spies on Hamlet who, believing the hiding statesman to be his uncle, kills him. Gertrude accuses her son of recklessness and he, in turn, forces his mother to admit her own wrongdoing. A distraught Gertrude realises the truth behind her late husband's death and promises to be faithful to Hamlet.

Devastated by her father's murder, Ophelia suffers a breakdown and eventually kills herself. Laertes returns from overseas to avenge first his father's and now his sister's death. Claudius manipulates events, encouraging Laertes to challenge Hamlet to a duel. He plans to poison the blade of Laertes' sword, as well as Hamlet's drink, to ensure the prince's death. Having escaped from his exile abroad, Hamlet accepts the challenge, determined to finally fulfil his promise to the Ghost.

During the fencing match, Gertrude is inadvertently poisoned when, taking Hamlet's untouched glass of wine, she drinks a toast to her son. Both Hamlet and Laertes are stabbed by the same envenomed sword and, realising the treachery which Laertes then confirms, the prince turns on the king, forcing him to drink from the poisoned glass. All four die, leaving power to be assumed by neighbouring Norway.

## Inside the rehearsal room

April 2009. The cast of the final production in the Donmar Warehouse's West End Season, *HAMLET*, gather for the traditional 'Meet and Greet', which marks the beginning of all rehearsals. They're joined by personnel from both the Donmar and Delfont-Mackintosh. The latter own and manage the Wyndham's Theatre, the Donmar's second home since September last year.

There must be over thirty people in the room, eighteen of whom are the actors. We're in a large rehearsal room situated at the top of the Jerwood Space, a venue often used by the theatre industry and where many of the Donmar's previous productions - including all four in the West End Season - have been rehearsed. It's vast and looks more like the venue for the rehearsals of a rock concert, being able to accommodate the Wyndham's stage several times over. Black tabs (curtains) have been suspended from scaffolding bars in the ceiling and flats (temporary walls) have been erected to help further delineate the space. Along the length of one wall light pours in from large windows, which look out onto the South London skyline.

Michael Grandage, the Donmar's Artistic Director (and director of *HAMLET*), calls everyone to attention and begins by talking a little about the West End Season. He then invites everyone in the room to introduce themselves and briefly say who they are and what they do. After this, most people, including myself, depart to let the work begin in earnest. The first week of rehearsals are usually



'closed' (private) to allow the director and actors time to establish themselves as a company, developing personal and working relationships without the added pressure of being observed.

I return at the beginning of the following week (week two) for the afternoon rehearsal. The company are halfway through Scene Two<sup>7</sup> - Hamlet is alone on stage when he is joined by Horatio, Marcellus and Barnardo. As is Michael's practice as a director, only the actors involved in the scene are in the room. The rest of the company scheduled to rehearse that day are in the green room (a break-out space) nearby waiting to be called.

Michael asks Jude Law, playing Hamlet, how long Hamlet has known the other characters? This leads to a discussion among the group about their characters' 'back story' (history). How well they know one another makes a difference to Hamlet, suggests Michael, the support they represent. It allows him to react.

The actors go off and come on again. What is the noise offstage that prompts Hamlet's line, 'But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue'? asks Michael. A door opening or improvised Shakespearean dialogue? The actors come on, in character, talking amongst themselves. Michael briefly considers the 'blocking' (actors' position on stage), repositioning them to open up the space. 'Help the shape of it by taking a step to the left,' he tells one actor. 'Be more definitive in your movement,' he adds as a general note.

Horatio is 'out of context' in this scene, observes Michael, being accompanied by both Marcellus and Barnardo. Are Hamlet's questions ('What make you from Wittenberg, Horatio?') more loaded? he wonders. 'Why does he ask Horatio several times why he has come?' On each turning point, Michael 'checks on the colour' (tone and pitch) of the scene, occasionally suggesting the actors 'bring it down' at different points. 'It's probably quite helpful to colour that line,' he says to Jude, describing Hamlet as 'an open wound' at this point in the play. 'Put a "Come on!" in front of "But what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg?" to up the ante of the scene.' The actors play the exchange again. 'I think that should be the first place where that does happen,' says Michael, reflecting on the forcefulness of Hamlet's questioning. 'It's a more interesting choice. Just make sure you get it tonally. Harden up the top end of it.'

Returning to the staging, he asks Matt Ryan, playing Horatio, how he can include the two actors behind him (Henry Pettigrew as Marcellus and David Burke as Barnardo) more? They reposition themselves. 'That's better,' says Michael. 'Take the diagonal and do it from up there.' He asks another actor, 'Can you find a way of coming downstage?' Then to Jude, 'Take yourself away on "'Tis very strange"'. It gives Matt a beat (short pause) to bring you back in.' Afterwards he adds, 'Why don't you try and open it up? Walk round the back, take in Marcellus and Barnardo.' The scene would be 'unplayable' if it was just Horatio who claimed to have seen the Ghost, reflects Michael. 'The fact that Marcellus and Barnardo saw it too means this is suddenly a space that offers potential.'

In addition to keeping an eye on blocking, Michael's ear listens carefully to the verse speaking. Hamlet's question 'But where was this?' is a half-line, Jude should therefore come straight in. Similarly, Michael warns him against 'dropping the ball' on 'I will watch tonight.' It's a useful note to all the actors, reminding them to pay close attention to the dynamics of Shakespeare's language. 'Can I just ask a question before we go on,' says Michael, reflecting on this specific line of Hamlet's. 'Is that the moment where you decide to believe them?'



Coming to Horatio, Marcellus and Barnardo's exit, Michael says to the three actors, 'You can afford to put a couple of "farewells" in as you go.' To avoid the line 'Our duty to your honour' being spoken in unison, the actors vary the words slightly. Left alone on stage, Jude brings Hamlet's final lines right down. The resulting tone is still and hushed. Afterwards, he asks to run the scene again, 'To get all the little beats.' Finishing work, Michael congratulates the four actors. 'Well done, we'll pick up on that next week.'

Working chronologically through the play, Scene Three is next. Actors Ron Cook, Alex Waldmann and Gugu Mbatha-Raw - playing Polonius, his son Laertes and daughter Ophelia respectively - are called into the room. Michael describes them collectively as, 'The family that can't show love.' They begin work immediately, considering what luggage Laertes might be carrying as he prepares to take leave of his family and set sail for France. A saxophone case is suggested, evoking the image of an itinerant musician off to play in the Parisian jazz clubs. Alex wonders whether it's too 'gimmicky' for Michael's taste.

There is much discussion about how Laertes introduces Hamlet as a topic of conversation at the beginning of his second speech, 'For Hamlet...' Michael describes it as, 'The elephant in the room. Laertes can't stop himself, he has to lecture Ophelia about it.' Alex tries it one way and afterwards Michael comments, 'I know you can do even better in the finding of Hamlet.' He suggests that Laertes hasn't mentioned him previously, neither in an unseen earlier scene or offstage moments before. 'That's the version I like best,' he concludes. 'There's something terribly true about it - the biggest thing hasn't been said yet.' Conscious of Ophelia's function, at times, to listen within the scene, Michael comments to Gugu, 'We're missing you a little bit in this. You could turn away, come downstage and then we get all of Ophelia.'

The exchange between Laertes and Ophelia is interrupted by Polonius' entrance. 'Make sure you've come to say goodbye, and in the act of saying goodbye you want to say something more,' Michael tells Ron. 'It's a mirror of the previous scene between Laertes and Ophelia. Polonius is saying goodbye but can't help giving advice.' Perhaps the speech is Polonius' way of giving his son a hug suggest the actors. 'This is obviously a weird moment for the Polonius' family,' agrees Michael. 'It's out of place, saying goodbye.' A key question the scene poses is, 'How does this family do their version of love?'

Laertes gone, father and daughter are left alone on stage. Michael suggests to Gugu that Ophelia tries to get away from Polonius – 'That's your instinct.' Having played the exchange once, he gives Ron and Gugu further encouragement. 'Just do it again. Your instincts are both nearly there.' He suggests the scene presents a rare opportunity for Ron, as Polonius, to demonstrate a different colour. Having run the scene once more, Michael is satisfied. 'Everything's there, we're on course for this scene.' Adding, 'I want to save something up to add the next time we come to it.'

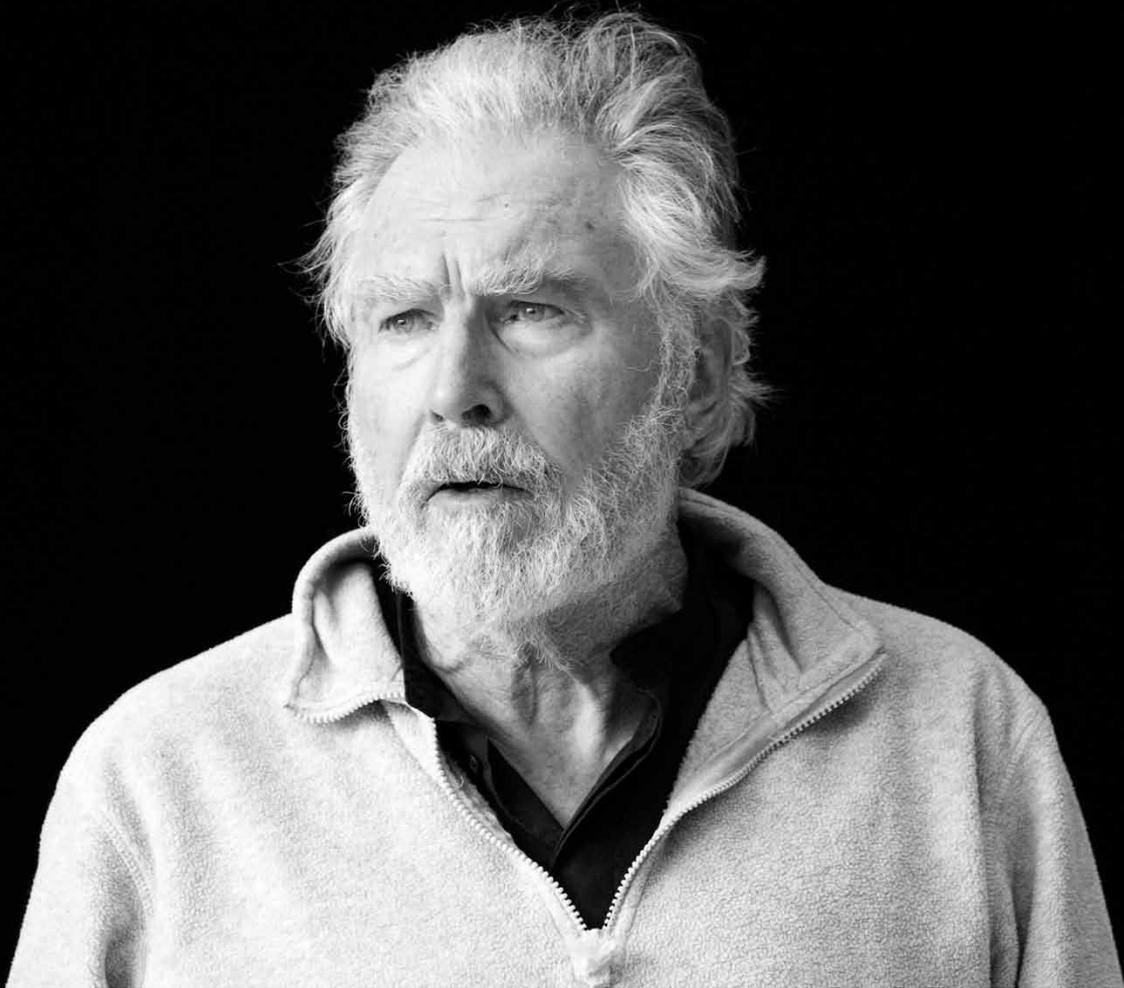
The actors for Scene Four – Jude, Matt, Henry and Peter Eyre playing the Ghost - are called. Set on the battlements of a castle at night, Michael begins by establishing the basic facts. 'What's the temperature? Freezing. And you're waiting, so it's twenty times colder.' There is brief discussion about reinstating a line referring to the climate, but Jude says simply, 'We can show the cold.' Everyone agrees. 'It depends which drama school you went to as to how good your "cold acting" is,' quips Michael.

The actors try the opening of the scene, after which Michael stops them. 'Why don't we...?' he pauses, thinking. 'Let's start the scene again with all of you on the battlements. In other words, we have to come to you.' He warns Jude against Hamlet becoming too preoccupied by the newly crowned king's offstage celebrations. 'Remember that you're up here because of the potential to see your father. Be careful that your return to Claudius doesn't distract you from your primary need.'

Michael questions where exactly the Ghost enters from, adding that the apparition needs space around him. 'Help yourself here, Jude. Get on a level footing with Peter.' Michael stresses the importance of Hamlet at first keeping his distance. 'It felt like it got too intimate too quickly there.' He's keen to maintain the tension throughout the scene. 'Don't make it easy on Old Hamlet. The exchange has a directness about it – "How dare you do this if you're not my father's spirit!" Keep the anger, don't be too gentle. Hold each moment so everything means something.' Jude agrees. 'Each moment, each second, is loaded and dangerous,' he says. 'We don't know if the Ghost is dangerous.' Is he an impostor? A threat? 'Until you believe in him, he's a threat,' concludes Michael.

He encourages Jude to follow the momentum of Hamlet's anger. 'Don't let it drop at the end there, those last six lines. Make sure you let him have it. Don't in anyway be reflective.' After running the scene as a whole, Jude comments, 'There are a couple of little beats in there where I have to remember to keep my eyes on it.'

They continue into Scene Five, which begins with Hamlet and the Ghost alone together. Michael questions the significance of the first time we hear the Ghost speak. 'We have placed on you something fearful,' he comments to Peter, who reminds the others that the Ghost remains a prisoner. They consider whether there should be a pause before the word 'revenge' in the Ghost's instruction to



Hamlet ('So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear'). At this stage Michael encourages the actors to set aside any concerns about being 'ham' (overacting). While playing the scene naturalistically he warns them against being too 'matter of fact' – 'It's a big thing the Ghost is asking of Hamlet.'

Michael wants to work through to the end of this exchange to make sure it has a shape. Jude's keen to play the scene again with more physical contact, but who should do so first? Peter suggests it makes more sense for Jude to do it as the Ghost *knows* he's Hamlet's father. On a second runthrough, Michael asks both actors to re-engage with the text. 'Invest in it,' he says to Peter at one point. 'There's no reason why our Ghost shouldn't have emotions, for the Ghost to become the man, the father.'

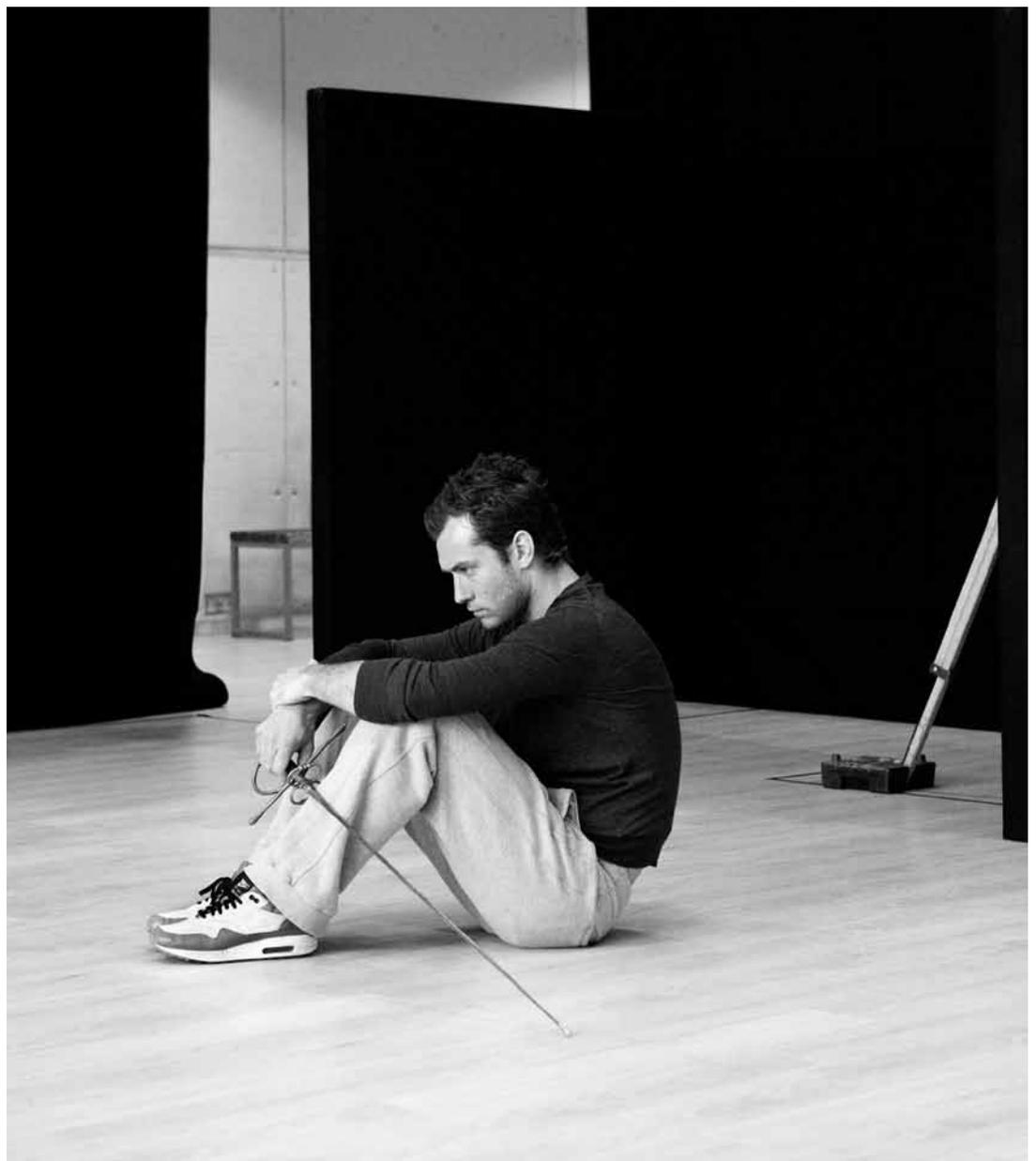
Matt and Henry rejoin rehearsals, their characters, Horatio and Marcellus, interrupt the scene between Hamlet and the Ghost. They question Hamlet about the significance of the apparition. Michael questions Hamlet's response, 'No, you will reveal it.' What's his intention? 'Make it more threatening,' he suggests to Jude, 'put them on the spot more.' He highlights Horatio's observation, 'These are but wild and whirling words, my lord' as a useful acting note for Jude. 'It's a good indication of how you should play the scene.' They discuss the line, 'There's never a villain dwelling in all Denmark/But he's an arrant knave.' Michael suggests Hamlet cuts himself off on the line break, the switch implying a decision made. 'He needs to keep changing much more,' says Jude.

Having clarified the precise placing of the Ghost's repeated instruction for the others to 'swear', Michael asks whether there's a release of tension at the end of the scene, prompted by Hamlet's line, 'Rest, rest, perturbèd spirit...' The apparition has gone. He notes that Hamlet repeats his suggestion that they all 'go in together' – 'You've just shared this amazing experience together. It's very potent.' For Michael, Hamlet's invitation to the others highlights his essential loneliness –

he wants friendship. Bringing the day's rehearsal to an end, he comments to the actors, 'There's a mass of choices there and we don't have to settle on any one now, not in week two.'

I next visit rehearsals at the end of the following week (week three). Almost all of the company has been called to rehearse Scene Twenty, a long court scene at the end of the play. They sit in the green room talking amongst themselves while Michael works with small pairings and groups before rehearsing with everyone.

While we wait I talk to Alex Waldmann, who plays Laertes. His experience of rehearsals has differed slightly to the rest of the company, partly as a result of the particular way in which Michael works – essentially working chronologically through the play with just the actors required for those scenes. As Laertes leaves for France in Scene Three, only returning to Denmark in Scene Sixteen, Alex spends much of the performance offstage and therefore, during rehearsals, hasn't been called for most of the working week. While reinforcing his character's sense of being an outsider, the challenge for Alex is to find the right pitch for his performance in comparison to other members of the cast. This highlights the differing roles, and their specific demands, within a large company of actors.



Everyone is called into the rehearsal room and Michael explains that he is trying to people the courtroom by fitting in other members of the cast. He proposes removing John Macmillan and Gwilym Lee, who play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as he thinks it confusing to have them present following their characters' recent death. He says he wants to run the scene without stopping to discuss dialogue, explaining that there'll be an opportunity to revisit the scene and work on it in more detail early next week. There follows much discussion about who stands where, etc.

Kevin R McNally, playing Claudius, wants to clarify the blocking around his joining of Hamlet and Laertes' hands before their fencing match begins. When exactly does he move away? This prompts the further question, which of Hamlet's following lines are a public declaration or private? One of the actors might suggest an interpretation, to which Michael will respond, 'Show me that.' The cast also question one another on the meaning of certain lines. After delivering his speech, Jude is asked by Penelope Wilton, playing Gertrude, 'So what are you saying by that? What do you mean?' Meanwhile, Michael ensures the actors observe the verse – 'That line coming straight in. You must finish the half-line.'

Also present today is fight director Terry King, who has been working separately with Jude and Alex for the past several weeks rehearsing the duel between Hamlet and Laertes. Michael suggests they take their coats off before the fight begins, otherwise 'It feels as though it's not starting.' He calls everyone to attention with a 'Here we go...' Various members of the cast are positioned around the stage, acting as linesmen and umpire to the fencing match. Terry reminds them that sideswipes are not permitted within the rules of the game - such an action would elicit gasps from the crowd. Michael is keen to encourage such vocal reactions. 'There are plenty of places in which you the court can help. Just because Shakespeare hasn't given you a "My Lord!" doesn't mean you can't react. It's difficult if you only have "Oo!" and "Ah!" in your armoury, but I'm sure if he were here he'd say put in whatever you need.' They'll need to work out who speaks when, but Michael explains that they're starting from an 'improvisatory basis'.

The safety of everyone on stage remains Terry's main priority throughout rehearsals. Not only those actors fighting ('We're just *marking* this first stroke...'), but also the onstage spectators, ensuring they're always at a safe distance from the duel. At one point he concentrates on getting a sword, necessarily dropped during the action, offstage so it doesn't present a danger to any member of the cast.

Scene Twenty contains multiple deaths: first Gertrude, inadvertently poisoned by Claudius; then Laertes, cut by his own poison-laden sword; next Claudius, stabbed by Hamlet; and finally the eponymous hero, fatally wounded. Each of the actors are keen to explore the staging of their characters' final moments. 'We'll do one death at a time!' jokes Michael. Starting with the first, he comments to Penelope Wilton, playing Gertrude, 'We're up for any version of the queen's death.' He's keen for her to push over a chair as she collapses. 'Some diversion tactic', making a loud noise, which pulls focus from the action in the foreground. 'Whatever it is, it shouldn't look neat.' Again, Terry is careful to ensure that Penelope doesn't fall and injure herself.

Working through Laertes' death, Michael encourages Alex to deliver his final speech 'out' (towards the audience) with an 'occasional nod' to Hamlet, who's positioned behind him further upstage. With Claudius' death, Kevin wants the king



to have a final swipe at Hamlet, crawling towards him on his hands and knees before collapsing. He demonstrates and Alex smiles, evidence of the good humour within the rehearsal room. 'I didn't laugh at your death!' quips Kevin. Jude isn't sure about Hamlet simply cutting Claudius with his foil, and therefore poisoning him. 'I just worry that a swipe isn't as satisfying as a plunge,' he comments. If he were to run a sword through the king it would not only require Kevin to wear extensive padding, but the staging of it would also be difficult. 'You're not going to make that work in profile,' says Terry. With Hamlet forcing the poisoned wine down Claudius' throat, Michael asks stage management to make a note for wardrobe – Jude will be pouring liquid over Kevin, and therefore his costume, every performance.

The week's rehearsal over, Michael calls everyone together into a circle. The full company are now in the room. He summarises the progress the cast have made in the first three weeks. 'There was good analysis in week one, followed by good discussion in week two, and now some scenes are landing more than others.' He's identified those he wants to look at in more detail next week, but overall he feels the rehearsals are in a good place. 'The end of week three, going into week four, is the most profitable time to go back to the script,' he comments. Michael urges the actors to return to the text this weekend and really think about what they've got left to achieve. He wants to see evidence of this in next week's rehearsal.

While reassuring the cast that week four is 'still text based and investigative', Michael explains that some sound effects will also be introduced– just those that characters comment upon and therefore impact directly upon the scene. In week five more sound, plus costume, will be added. During the middle of that week, the Wednesday, they will attempt their first run. He adds that, 'The current thinking is to take an interval after scene eight, not seven.' Therefore the second half would open with Hamlet's instructions to the players, 'Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you...'

Once Michael has finished, Company Manager Howard Jepson makes an announcement. He asks for the actors to submit their biographies, which will be included in the programme, and for one or two people to volunteer for the position of Equity (the actors' union) representative/s. Saying goodbye, Michael asks the actors to keep their mobile phones on that evening as he and stage management are still working out the 'call times' (schedule) for early next week.

I return to rehearsals at the beginning of the following week (week four). The day starts with a fight rehearsal between Jude and Alex, led by Terry. Ian Drysdale, playing Osric, is also present. The fight is divided into 'sequences', rather like acts and scenes within a play, to make it more manageable. After a few moves, Jude removes his shoes to prevent himself slipping on the floor. Occasionally Terry stands in for the actors, demonstrating their moves. He does so for Alex, asking, 'What am I doing differently...? I'm working with Jude's sword.' Next, he marks Osric's interventions in the duel, 'yellow carding' Laertes for his illegal manoeuvres. To what extent is he privy to Claudius' plot? Osric knows about the poison, says Ian. Does this affect how much he intervenes?

Following a runthrough, Jude comments about the fight, 'It sounded very "Clink! Clank!" today, not as light.' He asks to slow it down, with Terry calling out, 'Easy, easy, easy...' or, 'Pressure, pressure, pressure... Avoid!' Afterwards Terry notes, 'It accelerated towards the end there. It mustn't go any faster.' Later, Jude tells me there are three speeds at which they run the fight, describing the choreography as essentially 'balletic'.

Observing, Michael questions one move, seeking to clarify the 'acting intention' behind it. He's noticed Alex 'putting the brakes on' at one point during the fight. Terry attempts to fix this by helping him join up the moves, requiring a minor alteration to the choreography. 'You might have trouble changing this as it's in your body,' he tells Alex. As always, safety remains Terry's main concern. 'Always be too far away rather than too close,' he reminds the actors, before asking them, 'Are we happy to do the whole fight today?' Both Jude and Alex are keen to try it. 'We're not going to do it quickly,' says Terry, 'we're going to do it properly.' He adapts the swords, changing blades, etc., in order to make them shorter and lighter depending on what the actors feel comfortable with.

Having been joined by most of the cast to 'revisit' Scene Twenty from last week, Michael explains that today's is, 'A thorough rehearsal, slowly incorporating technical elements such as the fighting.' He reminds everyone that the duel is meant to be a 'formal bout', but it suddenly changes and people are killed. Starting with the arrival of the king and queen, Michael comments that Claudius' entrance 'needs some air' to mark his status and the formality of the occasion. The assembled court clap and Michael tells Kevin, 'Just pitch over the top of the decay of that with your line, 'Give them the foils.' Before they continue, he turns to the cast. 'Can I just ask one question of the court... Do you recognise and acknowledge Hamlet's apology? Is there a sense of relief? A court murmur.' Focusing on the verse, Laertes and Hamlet's embrace is cut on a 'point of punctuation' – the qualifying 'but' in the line, '[Line – See p.96].' Michael comments to Jude, 'You might have a view on Laertes' request for another foil.'

Claudius' poisoning of the wine with a venomous pearl is considered next. Kevin wonders whether it wouldn't be better to empty a small bag, supposedly containing the pearl, into a glass or cup. Michael questions the clarity of this. 'Are you sure we don't need to see the pearl, so we're all absolutely clear?' Most people agree that pouring the contents of a concealed container into a drinking



receptacle looks suspicious. Perhaps, suggests Kevin, the pearl could in fact be a pearl ring, which the king removes from his hand to place in a goblet? After some deliberation it is decided to use just a pearl. 'Are you saying this way raises fewer questions than the other?' Kevin asks Michael. In this instance, the simpler option is more effective.

Michael wants to build the tension within the court in reaction to the hits Hamlet and Laertes inflict on one another. This in turn increases the sense of urgency felt by Claudius, as he looks over at Osric with growing desperation. From the audience's perspective, Michael encourages the rest of the cast to make the background exchanges bigger. 'Our eye will naturally be drawn to the forestage, we'll want to watch the fighting, but should we wander it's good if there's life upstage.' Accordingly, the cast become more vocal in their reactions, gasping when Laertes lashes out at Hamlet.

During a brief break in the action, while the cast reposition themselves, Jude declares, 'I suddenly had a funny question! I'm not sure what I'm fighting for?' To restore his honour? For Ophelia? For Claudius? It highlights the fact that

fundamental questions about the play continue to be asked throughout rehearsals and into the run. Discoveries are made on a daily basis. In Laertes' last speech, Alex is encouraged by Michael not to be sentimental. 'Be ruthlessly matter-of-fact.' The court's reaction to Hamlet murdering Claudius is explored next. How is the word 'Treason!' to be said? The cast agree that it's more a comment than a warning. Another possibility is that Kevin says it alone, 'Treason... treason!' The rehearsal of the last scene at an end, Michael and the rest of the cast congratulate Jude and Alex on the fighting. 'Cracking!' says a smiling Terry.

Rehearsals resume with a return to the first scene of the play. Also watching are the understudies who have to learn, in some cases, multiple parts, which includes the blocking as well as the lines. Barnardo's line, 'Who's there?' opens the play and therefore, says Michael, has to 'throw down the gauntlet'. He stops the scene at one point, commenting, 'My ear heard something that didn't sound right.' Matt explains that he was experimenting with Horatio's line, 'Twill not appear', regarding the Ghost, as though a part of him suspects it might. 'It's stronger to be adamant,' concludes Michael. With reference to Horatio, Marcellus and Barnardo he asks, 'Where does the authority lie in this triumvirate?'

'Once the Ghost arrives the scene takes its natural form,' says Michael. 'The scene we don't see is what happened last night. We need to see that in this scene.' He encourages the actors to 'free themselves up' in response to the Ghost – 'You seem to be waiting for the text to lead you.' He talks about 'stage pictures' telling stories. Having watched different interpretations of the scene, Michael comments, 'That last version is the best of them all.'

There follows a production meeting at lunchtime where the various departments within the Creative Team – set, lighting, sound, etc. – come together to discuss the progress of the production as a whole.

After lunch rehearsals continue with work on Scene Two. Michael discusses the transition from the previous scene, in terms of light and sound. The 'rule of the production' is that it keeps moving, he explains. 'There's a crossfade into the next sequence of events.' He wants a cast and production that can be watched on different levels, so there's always something for the audience to see. 'You're active all the way through. The whole picture is alive. Like a good painting, you can look at the various characters.'

At the beginning of the scene a red 'tab' (cloth) will drop in at the back to herald the arrival of Claudius and Gertrude. Michael wonders if this is the new king and queen's first public appearance? Should the court applaud? The event marks a funeral (Old Hamlet's), a coronation (Claudius') and a wedding (Claudius and Gertrude's). On reflection, Michael thinks it would be 'helpful' if it was the first time the royal couple had been seen at court. He makes the point that they're a new king and an old queen. A further question is whether Claudius has brought his own people to work with him at court?

Michael asks the cast to respond to Kevin's line, 'So much for him...' 'Something there,' he calls out, 'a little reaction.' Osric's cross enables the rest of the court to move, to get on with 'state business'. Horatio telling Hamlet about the Ghost helps propel the action forward. Michael encourages the actors to pick up their cues – 'Ramping up the energy,' comments Jude. Having run the first two scenes together, there's a short pause while Michael gives notes to individual actors, written on yellow post-it notes, on a one-to-one basis.

He continues into Scene Three, again talking about the lighting – bright, intense sunlight to contrast with the castle interior the night before. Michael suggests Laertes carries a holdall, 'Something slightly more relaxed than a suitcase.' Discussing the discoveries the company as a whole have made about the play, Michael observes, 'The simpler choice is often so much more effective.' He remains positive about actors' interpretation of the scenes, even when they differ from his own. 'It's not wrong, but this is a nicer choice,' he may say, encouraging an actor to consider another possibility.

The next time I visit rehearsals is towards the end of week five for a runthrough. This is the company's first before an audience, following a closed run the day before. In the audience are personnel from the Donmar. We sit in the front row - behind us are the actors. They wear most of their costumes and some elements of the set, furniture and props, are in place.

The cast give an incredibly detailed, nuanced and committed performance. The scenes bristle with energy and the play itself is alive and clear. The end is truly devastating. Afterwards, the actors look pleased and relieved. They applaud each other along with the audience, all of whom have been genuinely moved.

## **An interview with actors Ron Cook (Polonius), Gugu Mbatha-Raw (Ophelia) and Alex Waldmann (Laertes)**

---

**Q** Perhaps each of you could start by telling me a little about your character and their place within the world of the play, then we can talk about how they relate to one another.

**GMR** I play Ophelia, who is the youngest daughter of Polonius, and my older brother here is Laertes. In terms of our place within the court, we decided that Polonius, our father, occupies the role of Prime Minister. So we've grown up in this environment and, for myself, I don't think I've really had much of a life outside it. This is pretty much my entire world. I'm not really old enough to have been to university like my brother.



**Q How old is Ophelia?**

**GMR** She's now 18. She's like Benjamin Button, she gets younger and younger. So I've spent my whole childhood here in the court. I don't know if it's useful to talk about the back story that we've created...

**RC** We invented it for ourselves really.

**GMR** This isn't in the play.

**RC** It isn't in the play. We needed to make sense of who Polonius was. This is coming on to talk about me really. I think he's come into politics through being a lawyer. He was a very ambitious young man, wanted to get into the court. And then he met Laertes' and Ophelia's mother. She's never mentioned in the play.

**GMR** This is the puzzle.

**RC** The missing mother. Although the themes in the play are about fathers, and fathers dying, there's this missing mother. So we created the story that Polonius was completely in love with her and that she was only eighteen when they met.

**GMR** Mirroring the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia.

**RC** And she looked like Gugu there. So he was totally besotted with her, but a very ambitious man who wanted to get into the court. Finally, Laertes was born and then did we decide...?

**AW** Yeah, they had a few years and then...

**RC** They moved to the court, where he was lower down in the government, and then Ophelia was born and now that's all she's ever known. And he was a very ambitious politician, worked his way up, so there's a bit of neglect going on as well, especially with the mother. We thought she wouldn't like that, finding herself in this alien world which she doesn't like or respond to.

**GMR** Very isolated.

**RC** And we thought maybe there was someone in the court, someone a bit younger – because we decided that Polonius was an older man when they married - so she finds someone younger and has an affair. Polonius finds out about it and is heartbroken and puts a stop to it. But this tips her over the edge, Ophelia's mother, and we thought she might have committed suicide. It sort of mirrors what happens with Ophelia herself. That's just a back story for us.

**Q Was there anything in the text itself?**

**RC** Nothing.

**AW** There's one reference to the mother, when Laertes comes back from France. He's found out that his father's been killed and been given a really unsatisfactory burial, without what he deserves as Prime Minister. When Laertes comes back and discovers this, there's a brief mention of the mother. He says: 'brands the harlot/ Even here between the chaste unsmirch'd brow/ Of my true mother.' So he's saying, in context, if I can be calm when all this stuff is happening then I'm not my father's son, I must be the son of a bastard and my mum's been sleeping around. And it's the only mention of her, this 'true mother'.

**GMR** So for us to create this family we had to invent our own relationships.

**AW** And obviously Laertes wants to remember his mum as being perfect.

**RC** Because they didn't know about her affair.



**AW** We were working out that Ophelia and I were between ten and thirteen when we last saw her.

**Q** **So there's about three years between you?**

**AW** Yeah. So Laertes would be about twenty-one now.

**RC** And it feeds in for Polonius, right at the very beginning, when I ask Ophelia, 'What's going on between you and Hamlet?' and I say, 'Don't trust this man.' There are two things going on there - one is the affair of the mother, and the other is his own experience. Because there are several times in the play where Polonius says, 'I do know,/ When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul/ Lends the tongue vows.'

**GMR** It's as if he's speaking from experience.

**RC** And then, talking to the audience, he says about Hamlet, 'truly, in my youth I suffered much/ extremity for love, very near this.' You could play that for a laugh or you could play it truthfully. That's what he knows, he's been there himself.

**Q** Thinking about the journey you all go on in the play, Hamlet obviously impacts upon this family more than any other, ultimately with tragic consequences. Can you tell me about that and how his journey's an integral part of your own.

**AW** There's a couple of lines in the play which suggest there's some sort of relationship between Laertes and Hamlet, in the sense that there's history between them. At Ophelia's funeral Hamlet says to Laertes, 'I lov'd you ever', and later, before the duel, he says, 'I have shot mine arrow o'er the house/ And hurt my brother.'

And so from the moment we started to rehearse we got talking and sensed that when Laertes gives his advice to Ophelia and says be careful of Hamlet, there was a feeling that Laertes was speaking from experience and that he was really close to Hamlet at one point and then something happened. So that's the starting point for Laertes. And in the court at the beginning there's a sense that even the king is playing Laertes and Hamlet against one another. There's an awareness in court of these two young men - one's royalty and the other's with the government, the son of the Prime Minister. It's funny because Laertes' warning to Ophelia - 'Be careful of Hamlet' - is, in a weird way, proved right. Hamlet does break Ophelia's heart, not in the way Laertes expects, but he does ultimately cause enormous problems for the family. Laertes doesn't realise he's predicting the future when he tells her to be careful and then when he comes back he doesn't know what's happened. He finds out his father's been killed and Ophelia's gone mad. He just assumes she's gone mad as a result of grief and then it gets revealed to him, by Claudius, that it's actually Hamlet who killed Polonius. Then at Ophelia's funeral Hamlet turns up and, in an undignified show of grief, he and Laertes end up having a scrap over Ophelia's grave, over who she loved the most.

Laertes blames Hamlet for the death of two family members. He's left an orphan and ends up in this plot with the king to kill him. He has this big showdown at the end for lots of different reasons. Mainly for his dad's honour, for Laertes to prove himself his father's son. He's the only one left, all he's got now is the family name and protecting the honour of that. That's what he's fighting for at the end without anyone really there to witness it - no family. It's purely a marriage of convenience between him and Claudius. And I think only by loving someone as much as Laertes loves Hamlet can you hate someone that much. Laertes thinks he will feel better when he kills him, but afterwards he doesn't feel any better and is quite relieved to be killed himself.

**Q** And Ophelia, where does she travel to within the play?

**GMR** It's a massive journey for her because she starts out as this young girl in the early stages of love, almost infatuation, with Hamlet. It's odd because we don't really see much of them together in the play, because when we join the action, the recent death of Hamlet's father is the most significant thing, and the new king as well. For Ophelia this situation, and also the ever-present protective father, has forced the relationship to be quite a secretive and fleeting one. Hamlet has been at university in Wittenberg and has written these love letters, so it's really a long distance relationship, but it's still exciting and new.

But as the play progresses Hamlet's behaviour begins to deteriorate and he comes to her at one point in her room in a terrible state. This is the scene which Ophelia describes to her father. He's in a really strange mood, half-undressed, and this is the first time she's quite disturbed by him and questions how well she really

knows him. She is genuinely shaken up by the experience and because Laertes, the only person she has to confide in, is away she tells her worries to her father. She unloads everything onto Polonius, which is quite traumatic for him. Ron, you probably have something to say about this, but I think Polonius sees this as a sign that Hamlet's mad with love for Ophelia.

**RC** 'The very ecstasy of love.'

**GMR** From then on it feels like Ophelia becomes a pawn in an elaborate plot to try and discover if this is the true cause of Hamlet's apparent madness.



**Q** **A pawn used by...**

**RC** Polonius.

**Q** **Claudius uses Laertes, but does Polonius use Ophelia?**

**GMR** I don't know. It's difficult because obviously they have a very intimate relationship, as you say in that scene... What is it?

**RC** 'This must be known, which, being kept close, might move/ More grief to hide than hate to utter love.' Essentially, it would be worse to keep it quiet than to go down the road of admitting there's something wrong.

**GMR** And when I say pawn I don't mean that Ophelia is passive because, albeit under Polonius' command, she's rejected Hamlet's letters and his advances, so they're both implicated at that moment. And she thinks, 'Oh, my God, maybe this is the cause of it...' And actually I think Ophelia really does feel a responsibility, a guilt.

**RC** Polonius is guilty because he stops the love between them, stops any letters or any talk between them.

**GMR** Yes, but she's an accessory to the crime.

**RC** I think Polonius' back story is that he worked for Hamlet's father, was the first minister then, and when Old Hamlet died he had a choice to make, thinking that Young Hamlet would become king... I think there's a mistrust of Hamlet somehow. He's always been a bit strange intellectually.

**Q** **I was going to ask you about that, because Polonius and Hamlet don't seem to like one another. What's that about?**

**RC** I think Polonius mistrusts Hamlet. He doesn't think he's mature enough, and he seems to be behaving petulantly. Different generations, I think. A different outlook on the world. Hamlet can see Polonius doesn't suffer fools gladly. I know sometimes he's played like a doddering old fool but I thought if he's Prime Minister he would want to hold onto his job, which he seems to be doing anyway, and that's the key thing. He's got to get on with Claudius because he's trying to maintain his position with the new king, so he needs to prove himself. He thinks he's found the cause of Hamlet's madness. Politicians always like to say, 'I know how to solve this, I've got the solution.'

**Q** **So he's got a vested interest?**

**RC** He's absolutely got a vested interest and he does sort of use Ophelia in a way to prove his point. And there's a theme in the play of spying on people.

**GMR** The 'Get thee to a nunnery' scene as well. Polonius and Claudius are hidden, observing events. That puts Ophelia in a very difficult position.

**RC** It was quite interesting when we were rehearsing that scene in the beginning, we were trying to experiment. Polonius comes on with Claudius and actually says, 'How now, Ophelia?/ You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said,/ We heard it all.' And he seems to ignore what his daughter's just been through.

**GMR** There's a greater priority there, isn't there?

**RC** At first we tried playing it totally cold, as though he's ignoring her, which after a while seemed wrong. It's one way of playing the scene but it seemed wrong the more we explored it.

**Q** **The family as a whole seem to have difficulty showing their emotions, and you in particular struggle to share your feelings with your children.**

**RC** To begin with I was experimenting with the idea that he didn't show any affection at all towards his children. I know that experience, sort of, with my own father. I was trying to find a way to do Polonius' famous speech in which he gives advice to his son. I was thinking, that's his expression of love. He's been trained as a lawyer, lived his life as a lawyer, and he wants to give his son advice before he goes off - perhaps he may never see him again - and he wants to get some things through. That's his expression of love. And the way we're playing it at the moment, which seems to be working, is that he's sort of emotionally ambushed at the end. But he's not very good at displays of emotion, I think that's the conclusion we came to.

**RC** They really want to hug each other but there's something between them that just goes that's a bit unmanly.

**AW** It's a challenge trying to get that across, because you only see the three of them together as a unit in that one little scene. Then so many things happen as the play goes on. So many things happen because of this family, because of Laertes' love for his dad and sister, which spurs him on to do so much. You have to set up quite a lot in that scene.

And there's no such thing as a perfect, happy family. It just doesn't exist. So we had this idea of a family who had never quite spoken about their grief at the mother's death. There are things in there that resemble a normal family. The brother and sister who love each other, but that doesn't mean they can't have an argument or disagree. That's what families do, you know, fathers and sons, there's always so much love there.

**RC** Expressing it is another matter.

**AW** But actually what they'd both like to say is, 'I love you.'

**Q** **That moment in which Polonius and Laertes attempt to say goodbye is very moving precisely because they're unable to say it. You're longing for them to have some sort of physical contact, because that connection is clearly there between the two of you.**

**RC** Well, for me, you look at the scene and ask what's going on here? What's Shakespeare saying? Laertes does say goodbye to his father, but Polonius responds, 'The time invites you; go, your servants tend.' At the beginning he's pushing him away. He's saying, 'Are you still here? Haven't you gone yet?' Which is a form of denial, I think. But at the same time there's this wonderful thing... I love characters in conflict with themselves, that's always more interesting. Polonius wants to say something but he can't.



**Q** And how did you find the moment, just after Laertes' departure, where you and Ophelia hold hands? I hadn't seen that before. That's an incredibly tender detail.

**GMR** That came from Ron, didn't it?

**RC** Yes. I just thought that if they can't express emotion and Laertes says, 'I'm going now' and Polonius responds, 'Well, go on, go' and then he and Ophelia both go and watch his son, her brother, go off and there's the thought that possibly they might not see him again... I think perhaps with them standing there, in terms of body language, if there's an instinctive thing which happens, Polonius just puts out his hand to take his daughter's. It might be the first time it's ever happened, they don't know, but he just grabs hold of her.



**Q** And you just did that in rehearsal?

**RC** Yeah.

**Q** You didn't discuss it beforehand?

**RC** I think we just did it. I had an idea about it and Michael liked it.

**AW** It was interesting talking about that scene because, as Ron said, you always have to go with what the text says, but at the same time with what it doesn't say. So when things aren't stipulated you can make decisions. We talked about it and thought, maybe this is Laertes thinking he's going for good. This time there's a sense of, 'I'm going to Paris to live. This is it for me.' The audience don't need to know that, though.

**RC/GMR** It's for us.

**AW** It's for the family. If I'm just going for two weeks, it's a different goodbye to, 'I'm going and I don't know if I'm ever coming back.'

**RC** In fact, they never see each other again.

**AW** They don't see each other again. This goodbye becomes much more poignant as the play goes on, because it turns out it's a final farewell. As we've been exploring the play and rehearsing it we've come to realise that what this family deals with is a series of griefs. The loss of Laertes - even if they're not the most emotionally affectionate family, they were a tight little unit. They've certainly always relied on each other, the three of them without a mother. Then Laertes goes off leaving Polonius and Ophelia alone. So there were four of them, then three, then just two.

**RC** Then only one.

**Q And, as you say, there's the absent mother.**

**AW** They've all dealt with that. She goes and then so does Laertes. When he comes back he finds his dad's gone, but he's still got a sister. I think that's Laertes' big mistake. He's still got his sister but he's trying to avenge his dad's death. He doesn't think, 'I've still got one family member left. I've got my sister, I just need to look after her.' He takes his eye off the ball and gets caught up plotting revenge with Claudius. While he's doing that, Ophelia kills herself. If he'd just thought, 'Well, at least I've got one. I've just got to hold onto her, make sure nothing happens to her,' but he doesn't. He comes back, sees her like that and doesn't quite deal with it. Laertes has a choice. He could have followed her off after the scene when he sees her having lost her mind. It's an interesting scene in which Shakespeare shows us the way the son and daughter deal with grief. They're both lost, I think. Slightly unhinged.

**RC** And I think, in the same way, Polonius is so keen to solve the problem of Hamlet for Claudius he uses Ophelia and she sort of gets used by it. I don't think it's done maliciously, but he's so focused on trying to prove something that he uses his own daughter to get there. That's the business of the court.

**GMR** That's the thing. The scene you were talking about, when Polonius says, 'You needn't tell us what he said', just before that Ophelia has a speech in which she unloads her feelings - 'O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown.' She recognises the huge change that has taken place in Hamlet and at the end of that scene Claudius says, 'Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go.' You suddenly realise the focus is so much on Hamlet, no one has even contemplated Ophelia's state of mind. So there she is, left behind and unthought of.

**Q What challenges does this play in particular present? In contrast, say, to TWELFTH NIGHT (an earlier production in the Donmar's West End Season), which Ron and Alex you were both in.**

**AW** In TWELFTH NIGHT all I had to do was come on and kiss Indira Varma (playing Olivia)! That was easy. But with HAMLET, for me as Laertes, it's the big gap in the middle of the play when I'm offstage.

**Q We talked about this before, didn't we? (See Inside the Rehearsal Room.) Tell me a little bit more about it.**

**AW** It's interesting. Laertes is on at the beginning and then he's off for over ten scenes, for about an hour and a half. The way Michael rehearses a play, chronologically, you're in on the Monday then you don't get to your next scene until the Thursday. You end up doing far too much work in your head, going through the scenes in your bedroom, and when you come back in you're not always open to what other people are doing. That's what I found really hard. Even today, before the scene, we talked about when they're saying farewell and it just helped me relax and think, 'You know what you're coming onto on stage.'

That's what I found hard as an actor - separating the bubble Laertes is in and what he needs to do. I think I've brought in too much stuff. My head's been too cluttered with things, rather than just playing off what people are doing and playing the scene. So there's a real danger of overcomplicating and doing too much. Michael has been really great and said, 'Just clear all that out and look at the people on stage and play the scene again.' And he's right, because I'd sort of got away from that.

**GMR** It was real helpful this past weekend to read the whole play again, as Michael suggested. By the end of week three of rehearsals you get so into your character's journey, which you have to, but it's really useful to get a perspective on the whole thing again and to thread it all together. New ideas come to you.

**Q** **And just to read the story again.**

**GMR** The story. Exactly.

**RC** That's because if you're not in the scene, Michael won't allow you in the rehearsal room. Which is good, because then you can experiment and you don't feel you're being judged or watched in any way. You haven't got an audience. But it does mean we don't necessarily know what's going on in the rest of the play.

**Q** **It's interesting towards the end of Michael's rehearsal period, when he starts to run the whole play, you notice the actors crowding round so they can see what their colleagues have been up to.**

**AW** It's great the way Michael times it. Concentrate on your own particular journey and what you're doing, then see where you fit in in the play, what your role must be, and what you're coming into. Because he has that in his head, how it's all going to fit together.

**Q** **Ron, you played Sir Toby Belch in Michael's recent production of TWELFTH NIGHT. How does that character and experience compare to Polonius?**

**RC** Yes, Sir Toby and now Polonius. I think one of the big problems doing something like Hamlet, more Hamlet than Twelfth Night, is that they're famous plays and they've been done to death by famous people and there are famous speeches in them, and I've got one of them, which is Polonius' advice to Laertes.

But I always tell this story, which is an absolutely true story. I went to see Hamlet at the Young Vic once, there was a friend of mine in it, and I was on my own. Now I've seen Hamlet a few times and I'm sitting there thinking, 'I wonder how they're going to do the costumes? I wonder how they're going to interpret that speech?' And there was a young boy sitting next to me, probably about sixteen, and he was on his own as well. When it came to the interval, he turned to me and said, 'What's he going to do?' And I thought, 'You don't know, do you? You have no idea.' And I thought, I must always remember that boy because that's who you're doing it for.

Michael says the same thing. You've got to really do it for those people who don't know the play. Michael's very good at making the narrative clear and uncluttered, so you're telling the story, and it's such a dramatic story. And I've never been in Hamlet before. One of the great things about being involved in it is that you get to know the play more. You have to find your own way through it. There's no point getting worried about how was it done before. You've just got to clear the deck and say, 'I'm going to try and do it in my own way.'

**Q** **It's a new play.**

**RC** It's a new play. I've got to use what I'm bringing to it and what I understand of it. What Michael wants and what Alex and Gugu are doing also affects how you find a way through it. Michael commented that Polonius is often played as a dithering old fool, and there is an element of that in there, but for me it's trying

to make him something I can believe in. He's a Prime Minister, he's good at that. He's cunning and very devious - he sends someone to spy on his own son. So I thought, he's very worried about things and he's a bit of a control freak. But it's squaring the circle. It's making all those things come together and be believable. You have to remember that Hamlet calls Polonius an old fool, although you don't necessarily have to believe what he says. I thought of Ming Campbell, who became leader of the Liberal Party in his sixties. He was always admired as a politician but when he became party leader everyone said, 'He's an old man, he's not up to it.' And in the end he was ousted. So I think maybe Polonius is a little like Ming Campbell, who was a very bright politician, perhaps not as devious as Polonius, but the press called him an old man.

**Q** That was projected onto him and then he assumed it.

**RC** Exactly.





## Shakespeare in performance

The following practical exercises consider approaches to Shakespeare's text with reference to a key speech from Hamlet. In the first instance they aim to free the language from its literal meaning, encouraging the participants to play with the sound, shape and texture of words.

'The language is the way in,' explained Jude Law in a recent conversation with Michael Grandage. 'Finding those gateways is the pleasurable part of the experience. Hamlet has a physical, psychological and emotional journey and one finds it all in the text. As an actor, you have a map in front of you that you have to try and read. It can be tricky at times but it is the key to unlocking the emotional journey of the play. To younger audiences or anyone watching it for the first time, I'd say, don't worry; if you are understanding it emotionally it means you are already engaging with the language.'

Hamlet's soliloquy below, from Scene Two, is his first of many within the play. Following Claudius' first appearance within the royal court as king, accompanied by his new wife and queen, Gertrude, Hamlet is left alone on stage. The devastated prince, still in mourning for the recent death of his father, rails angrily against his mother for marrying again so soon and unfavourably compares Claudius to Old Hamlet.



## HAMLET by William Shakespeare

### An extract from

Hamlet            O that this too too solid flesh would melt,  
                      Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,  
                      Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
                      His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God! O God!  
                      How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
                      Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
                      Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden  
                      That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature  
                      Possess it merely. That it should come to this!  
                      But two months dead – nay, not so much, not two –  
                      So excellent a king, that was to this  
                      Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother  
                      That he might not betwixt the winds of heaven  
                      Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,  
                      Must I remember? Why, she should hang on him  
                      As if increase of appetite had grown  
                      By what it fed on; and yet within a month –  
                      Let me not think on't. – Frailty, thy name is woman –  
                      A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
                      With which she follow'd my poor father's body,  
                      Like Niobe, all tears – why she, even she –  
                      O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason  
                      Would have mourn'd longer! – married with my uncle,  
                      My father's brother – but no more like my father  
                      Than I to Hercules. Within a month,  
                      Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
                      Had left the flushing in her gall'd eyes,  
                      She married – O most wicked speed! To post  
                      With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!  
                      It is not, nor it cannot come to good.  
                      But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

- As a group, stand in a circle and speak the whole speech but only one word at a time. The first person speaks the first word, the person on their right the second, and so on round the circle until the speech is finished.
- Repeat the exercise, this time participants doing one of two things: when it's the turn of an individual to speak, if they find the word interesting - for whatever reason - they should emphasise it, saying the word to the circle as a whole; if they do not find the word interesting, then they should simply say it without emphasis to the person on their right.

- The group should experiment with what sounds the words can make by, for example, elongating the vowel sounds or stressing the consonants. Participants need to relish the taste and texture of the language and be aware of what their mouths and tongues have to do in order to say the words in sequence. How do particular word sounds – harsh, smooth, polysyllabic, etc.?
- Participants should look at the speech again and select two lines from it. They should not tell anyone else what they are.
- The group is going to discover who has chosen which lines in the following way: they should try to 'hear' the whole speech in their heads and when – and only when - they think it's time to say their line/s, speak it aloud.
- Someone signals when the exercise starts and everyone should concentrate and try to 'hear' the progression of the speech. Of course no one knows who has chosen which lines and there might be no one at all to speak the first, or first few, line/s. If this is the case, when repeating the exercise, a volunteer should speak the missing lines.
- Remember, when someone does speak the rest of the group should adjust the pace of the voice in their head by slowing down or speeding up.
- Afterwards discuss who chose which line and why. Often people have chosen the same line/s. What does this reveal? Is there an unspoken agreement among the group that some words or lines are more significant than others?

The next exercise explores physical ways into Shakespeare's language in an attempt to avoid over-analysing the text, which can often result in paralysis of thought and movement. The physical freedom is meant to encourage greater mental freedom in the participants.

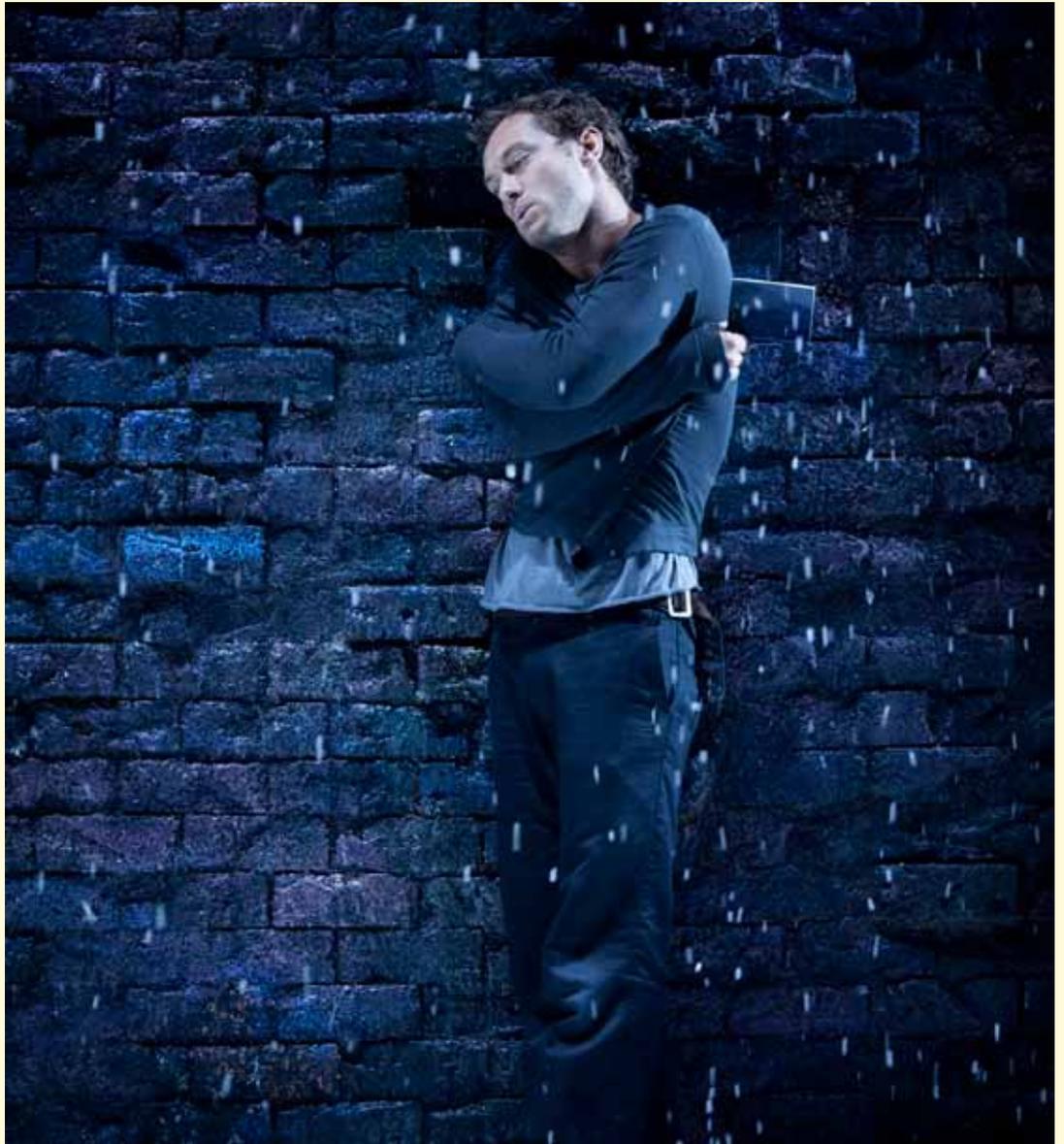
- Working individually, participants should read the speech aloud – but to themselves – while moving round the room. At each punctuation mark they should change direction. The stronger the punctuation, the greater the change. For example, a comma might suggest a veer to the left or right, whereas a full stop should signal exactly that.
- Afterwards, the group can discuss how many changes of directions they made. How much punctuation is there within the speech as a whole and what does that suggest about the thoughts of the character?
- Participants should repeat the exercise, this time ignoring the punctuation and only changing direction whenever they think the thought changes.
- People often talk about their thoughts being 'all over the place' or of 'going round and round in circles'. Participants should think of the speech as a map designed to help them, the actor, navigate a complicated journey in the mind of the character. The aim is to plot this journey step by step, stage by stage, within the room. Is the journey of the speech linear? Does it progress in a straightforward, uncomplicated manner or is the route circuitous and complex? What clues are there within the text to indicate a change in the direction of thought? (See Jude Law quote above.)
- Next, participants should speak the speech again but this time remaining still while recalling the physical journey in their mind.

## Questions on the production and further practical work

---

You may wish to work individually on completing these questions.

1. When you go to see the Donmar's production of HAMLET consider the following:
  - What transformations take place within the main characters through the journey of the play? How do the actors embody these changes?
  - How does the design establish the world of the play, in terms of its location and atmosphere? You should also take into account the other elements of production. For example, what effect does the lighting and sound create?
2. Once you have seen the production you could improvise new scenes exploring the background to the play, taking the material within this Study Guide as a starting point. The scenes could include Claudius poisoning Old Hamlet while he sleeps in his garden, or Hamlet's escape from banishment to England. What discoveries do you make? How do such improvisations inform your ideas about the play and characters?



## Ideas for further study

### Reading and research

---

To gain a fuller understanding of William Shakespeare's work you may want to read some of his other plays, available in many editions including Arden and Penguin.

*William Shakespeare – The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, et.al. (OUP, 1988)

The following books are a small selection of the many which provide an invaluable insight into various theatre practitioners' (directors and actors) approaches to Shakespeare:

*Playing Shakespeare* by John Barton (Methuen, 1984)

*Players of Shakespeare*, 1 – 6, ed. Philip Brockbank, Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood (CUP, 1988 – 2007)

### Bibliography

---

*Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, ed. by T.J.B. Spencer (Penguin, 1980)

*Hamlet – York Notes Advanced* by Jeff and Lynn Wood (York Press, 2003)

*Shakespeare: Text into Performance* by Peter Reynolds (Penguin, 1991)

*Dramatic Events* by Richard Hahlo and Peter Reynolds (Faber and Faber, 2000)

### Endnotes

---

1 *Shakespeare: Text into Performance* by Peter Reynolds (Penguin, 1991), p.xi

2 Quoted in *Hamlet – York Notes Advanced* by Jeff and Lynn Wood (York Press, 2003), p.10

3 *Ibid.*, p.104

4 HAMLET, Scene Seven, p.32

5 *Ibid.*, Scene Eight, p.42

6 *Ibid.*, Scene Twenty, p.95

7 Act One, Scene One through to Act Five, Scene Two have been renumbered Scenes One to Twenty in the Donmar Warehouse's rehearsal draft of the play.

8 Quoted in 'Jude Law in Conversation with Michael Grandage,' HAMLET Programme, Donmar Warehouse (2009)



## About the Donmar Warehouse

---

The Donmar Warehouse is an intimate not for profit 251 seat theatre located in the heart of London's West End. The theatre attracts almost 100,000 people to its productions a year. Since 1992, under the Artistic Direction of Michael Grandage and his predecessor, Sam Mendes, the theatre has presented some of London's most memorable theatrical experiences as well as garnered critical acclaim at home and abroad. With a diverse artistic policy that includes new writing, contemporary reappraising of European classics, British and American drama and music theatre, the Donmar has created a reputation for artistic excellence over the last 12 years and has won 26 Olivier Awards, 12 Critics' Circle Awards, 10 Evening Standard Awards and 10 Tony Awards for Broadway transfers.

For more information about the Donmar's education activities, please contact:

Development Department  
Donmar Warehouse  
41 Earlham Street  
London WC2H 9LX

T: 020 7845 5815

F: 020 7240 4878

W: [www.donmarwarehouse.com/education](http://www.donmarwarehouse.com/education)