

The rest

is

silence.

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

performed by **The Parlement of Foules**

30th June and 1st - 4th July 2014

Theaterhaus Schnürschuh



Director's notes

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Hamlet – The Cast

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, son of the former King (also named Hamlet) and nephew to the present King	Alexandra Kind
Claudius, King of Denmark, younger brother of the late King and young Hamlet's uncle	Tobias Turowski
Gertrude, Queen of Denmark, mother to young Hamlet, his father's widow, now married to Claudius	Franziska Ptok
Ghost of the dead King Hamlet, young Hamlet's father	Florian Oxen
Polonius, Lord Chamberlain, chief counsellor to the past and present Kings of Denmark, father of Laertes & Ophelia	Helena Gaubiz
Laertes, son to Polonius	Chantal Waltersdorf
Ophelia, daughter to Polonius, in love with young Hamlet	Katalina Kopka
Horatio, friend to Hamlet and his fellow-student	Anna Schmieding
Rosencrantz, courtier and Hamlet's fellow-student	Sara Trontelj
Guildenstern, courtier and Hamlet's fellow-student	Lisa Eisold
Voltemand, Danish ambassador to Norway	Anahita Pourmomen Arabi
Cornelius, Danish ambassador to Norway	Lisa Jaschek
Osrice, courtier	Florian Oxen
Reynaldo, servant to Polonius	Laura Helberg
A gentlewoman, lady in waiting to Gertrude	Lisa Jaschek
Priest	Laura Helberg
Marcellus, officer of the watch	Lisa Eisold
Bernardo, officer of the watch	Jana Middendorf
Francisco, sergeant of the watch	Anahita Pourmomen Arabi
Player King	Mia Stine Matzkow
Player Queen	Sarah Lütjen
'Lucianus' Player	Lisa Jaschek
Prologue Player	Anahita Pourmomen Arabi
Player	Jana Middendorf
1 st Gravedigger	Lisa Eisold
2 nd Gravedigger	Sara Trontelj
Fortinbras, Prince of Norway, son of the previous King of Norway (also named Fortinbras) and nephew to the present Norwegian King	Jana Middendorf
Norwegian captain	Laura Helberg
English ambassador to Denmark	Anahita Pourmomen Arabi
Lords, Ladies, courtiers, mourners, attendants etc.	<i>The Foulies</i>

The action takes in and around the Royal Castle of Kronberg at Elsinore (Helsingør), Denmark, beginning four months after the death of old King Hamlet and some three months after the coronation of his brother, Claudius, as the new King and the wedding between Gertrude and Claudius.

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Our "Parlement of Foulies" assembles twice a year, once in fully fledged form (with performances in midsummer) and once in a slimmed-down version (with performances in November/December). We look forward to seeing you here in the Schnürschuhtheater again, observing our 'debate'. If interested, contact Michael Claridge at claridge@uni-bremen.de; work on the next smaller-scale production will begin in September 2014, and on the larger-scale one in January 2015.

Our next performances will be here in the Schnürschuh on 18th, 19th, 27th and 28th November, 2014. If you are involved with teaching and would like details of future productions, send an email to the above email address, so that we can add you to the mailing list of the Bremen English Drama Network, informing lovers of English-language drama (not only in schools) about relevant activities, workshops, performances, guest lectures etc. in and around Bremen.

Bremen University's Faculty of Modern Languages and Literatures offers an MA degree (*Masterstudiengang*) entitled "Transnational Literary Studies: Literature, Theatre, Film" (*Master Transnationale Literaturwissenschaft – TnL*), containing the option to focus primarily (but not exclusively) on theatre. This includes the possibility of working on a stage production in either French or English, work that can focus on acting, assistant direction, publicity, and many other areas. We believe Bremen is the only university in Germany offering such a qualification within the modern-foreign-languages area. The "English-Speaking Cultures" BA degree includes a biennial course entitled "Shakespeare's London and Shakespeare's Globe" with a weeklong excursion to London and workshops in Shakespeare's Globe, as well as the opportunity to participate in *Parlement of Foulies* productions.

The Foulies would like to express their gratitude to...

Our very good friends at the **Schnürschuhtheater** for housing us yet again

Rainer Streng for two excellent workshops on on-stage movement and character & emotion portrayal, voice training, stage fighting and dying (!), and so much else...

Our friends at **Globe Education (Shakespeare's Globe, London)** for regular, massive input and amazing practical workshops regarding mining a Shakespeare text for clues as to character, movement, emotions, and interpreting verse form and prose for all of this.

The **Deutsches Rotes Kreuz** for the loan of a stretcher.

Those current and former colleagues from E-SC and TnL at Bremen University who have given the *Foulies* projects unstinting and most active support over the past months and years, especially Elisabeth Arend, Jana Nittel, Logie Barrow, Marcus Callies, Tim Giesler, Katja Müller, Elizabeth Reick, Norbert Schaffeld, Nancy Schrauf, Janet Sutherland, Ian Watson and Andrew Winter

Finally, Michael would like to express an eternal thank-you to his late mother, who set him afire with a burning love of Shakespeare when she took him as a somewhat unwilling schoolboy to his very first Shakespeare performance (*Hamlet*, of course...) at the Roundhouse in London, way back in – well, in times *decidedly* past. She then fanned the flames by organising frequent visits to the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford over the following 15 years, little knowing what would result... "I can no other answer make but thanks, / And thanks, and ever thanks" [*Twelfth Night*, III.3, 14-15].

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Russell Brown, John: *Hamlet* (The Shakespeare Handbooks series), 2006. Commentary without script – very thought-provoking, as are the accompanying contextual documents and information on performances and critical opinion.

Hamlet – the production team

Master of Light.....Anton Suharev
Lighting design.....Julia Arroja da Silva
Mistresses of the Wardrobe and Maskery.....Sabrina Steinbrink & Saskia Wieland
Mistresses of the Dance.....Alexandra Kind & Franziska Ptok
Mistress of Song.....Franziska Ptok
Master of the Sword.....Rainer Streng
Publicity.....Jana Nittel and Jacqueline Sprindt, aided and abetted by the *Foules*
Schools Pack.....Franziska Ptok (scribe-in-chief), Laura Acksteiner,
Lisa Eisold, Helena Gaubiz, Jana Middendorf
Poster art and flyer & button design.....Alexandra Kind
Character coaching, voicework and dumb-show & *Mousetrap* direction by Franziska Ptok
Assistant Direction by Tobias Torowski
Directed by Michael Claridge

Music used in this production

The various fanfares are by Leonhard J. Leeb, from a Naxos CD entitled – appropriately – *Imperial Fanfares* (8.555879). *The Mousetrap* (a.k.a. *The Murder of Gonzago*) is accompanied by two pieces by John Dowland, *My Lady Hunsdon's Allmande* and *My Lord Chamberlain his Galliard*, from an excellent introduction to Dowland's instrumental and vocal music entitled *The John Dowland Collection* (Deutsche Grammophon, 00289 477 6548). The song at the end of the play, *Weep, O mine eyes*, is by John Bennet. The 'jig' music is a Lavolta by Thomas Morley, performed by the Musicians of the Globe on *The Music of the Globe* CD (Globe Editions GE003), a CD sadly no longer available; however, all recordings by the Musicians of the Globe are highly recommended!

Who – what – are *The Parlement of Foules*?

They comprise a flock of students of English & American Studies, English-Speaking Cultures (BA) and Transnational Literature (MA) at the University of Bremen. This is the sixteenth year of Foule activities; *Hamlet* is their twenty-second production.

The name (*das Vogelparlament*) comes from a dream-poem by Geoffrey Chaucer, centring on a conference of birds – or fowls – to choose their mates on St.Valentine's Day. For this reason, many have considered it to have been written in celebration of a marriage, perhaps that of the young King Richard II to Anne of Bohemia in 1382. At the end of the poem, the debate is unresolved, and the birds agree to assemble a year later to decide. (Anyone interested in following up a German link should consult the traditional folksong entitled *Die Vogelhochzeit*.)

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There is a break of two months between the opening scenes and the arrival of a troupe of players (actors) in Elsinore, and another of two weeks before the final events take place.

There will be one interval of 20 minutes. A bell will sound three minutes before the performance continues to warn you.

Please switch **mobile phones** and **peeping watches off**: the actors and your neighbours will be greatly distracted by any bleeping and by your using them in any way (including SMS-ing) during the performance.

If you wish to take photographs, please note that the use of flash (*Blitzgeräte*) in the theatre is **strictly forbidden**: the flash itself (and especially any 'pre-flash' programme) is extremely distracting to audience and actors alike. If you would like a souvenir of friends' performance, we will be making a video recording of a performance and can provide you with a copy on request.

If you wish to smoke in the interval, you can do so on the balcony at the back of the theatre.

Hamlet – the plot [adapted from our schools' pack]

The play tells the story of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, who is struggling with his current situation: His father, the former King of Denmark, has died. And only weeks after the funeral his uncle Claudius has come to the throne and has married Hamlet's mother, Gertrude.

One night, a ghost in the shape of his dead father appears to Hamlet. The ghost reveals to him that Claudius is responsible for his death. The conversation with the ghost provokes Hamlet's desire to take revenge on his uncle for the murder of his father.

It does not remain unnoticed that something is on Hamlet's mind. Gertrude wonders whether her remarriage with his uncle weighs upon Hamlet. Polonius, the chief counsellor of King Claudius, then discovers the feelings of love Hamlet has for Polonius' daughter Ophelia and wonders whether these might be the reason for Hamlet's odd behaviour.

Meanwhile Hamlet arranges a play that should reveal if King Claudius is truly responsible for the death of his father. And indeed, Claudius' reaction to the play betrays him and his secret crime to Hamlet. But suddenly circumstances change when Hamlet accidentally kills Polonius. Now Claudius is warned about the danger of being killed by Hamlet. Therefore, he decides to send Hamlet to England to escape his revengefulness, scheming to have Hamlet killed in England.

Ophelia goes mad with grief about the death of her father, Polonius, and is soon after found dead in a stream. Polonius' son, Laertes, returns from France on the news that his father has been murdered, seeking revenge on the murderer for this crime.

Claudius' attempt to get Hamlet out of the way fails, and Hamlet returns alive. At Ophelia's funeral Hamlet is confronted with the latest events – and a furious Laertes. The two young decide to duel. Who is going to win the fight? And what happens with the cup filled with poisoned wine that is Claudius' back-up plan to kill Hamlet? Who will survive this catastrophe and rule over Denmark?

Hamlet – the interpretation

Ben Crystal, aiming to provide someone about to watch the play with sufficient information to understand the plot and characters, and enjoy the language, ends his introduction thus, in a playful reference to Polonius' advice to his son, Laertes:

"These 5 Questions Above All:

1 – IS HAMLET MAD?

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2 – DOES HE LOVE OPHELIA?

3 – DOES GERTRUDE KNOW ABOUT, OR IS SHE COMPLICIT WITH, CLAUDIUS' TREACHERY?

4 – WHAT DOES THE TO BE, OR NOT TO BE SPEECH MEAN TO HAMLET?

5 – IS THE GHOST REALLY HAMLET'S FATHER'S SPIRIT, OR A DEVIL IN DISGUISE?"

[*Springboard Shakespeare*, p. 29]

These are some of the core questions that any examination of *Hamlet* must deal with. Yet anyone who has consulted secondary literature on *Hamlet* or examined any two of the excellent editions available will have been struck by how greatly opinions differ about the play and its characters – and very definitely so with regard to the five questions above.

In the cut and thrust of classroom and university-seminar debate, however, it can all too easily be forgotten that Shakespeare did not write his plays with the thought in mind that ink-stained wars would be fought over them by university lecturers – he wrote them to be performed, to be seen, to be heard (people often talked in the late 16th and early 17th theatre of going to *hear* a play, emphasizing the effect on the ear as much as on the eye). Thus, while we had to establish a starting position when beginning work on *Hamlet* based on an examination of many different interpretations, both literary-studies and theatrical in nature, that interpretation has undergone considerable modification as we have progressed, exploring the First Quarto, Second Quarto and Folio editions to see how Shakespeare (and others) adapted and altered his own work and cherry-picking what fit our interpretation. But in so doing we have always gone back to the script: as Fiona Banks of Globe Education puts it,

All we know for certain about Shakespeare's plays are contained in the words of the plays themselves. Everything else, including many of the stage directions which were added later by editors of play editions, is conjecture or a 'best guess'. All we have are the words, and they are all we need, for everything that is necessary to know about the play is found in the text itself. [*Creative Shakespeare*, p.6]

What you will see tonight is thus a very personal interpretation of *Hamlet*, one that we have teased out of the warp and weft of the material Shakespeare has given us, examining the possibilities his words offer, choosing some and rejecting others, based on individual and collective thinking. Moreover, the interpretation is as personal as the relationship between each actor and her/his character(s), as they 'put on', 'step into', and indeed 'become' the character(s). Of all the very many interpretative options the script offers, these are our Hamlet, our Guildenstern, our Gravedigger, our Players – and very much our *Hamlet*.

* * * * *

A selection of thoughts from down the ages on the play and some of its characters:

'It is *we* who are Hamlet' – William Hazlitt, English writer.

'Yes, Germany is Hamlet!' – Ferdinand Freiligrath, German political poet.

'This is very Slavic' – Alexander Herzen, Russian thinker.

'Poland is a Hamlet!' – Adam Mickiewicz, Polish Romantic poet.

'Unfortunate family, these Hamlets' – anonymous Dublin theatergoer.

[all quoted in *Hamlet. A User's Guide*, p.3]

Hamlet is one of the most medieval as well as one of the most acutely modern of Shakespeare's plays. [EMW Tillyard, *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*, 1950, p.30]

[Samuel] Johnson is well known to have said that Shakespeare 'seems to write without any moral purpose'; but [*Hamlet*] is perhaps a play in which a moral is implicit, both simple and profound. For it commends a man who, after questioning the meaning of creation, comes to accept a design in it beyond our comprehending, and who therefore,

after seeking to withdraw from life through an abhorrence of all that is ugly and vicious in it, is finally – though tragically not until death approaches – content to live life as it is, able to acknowledge, in word and deed, 'The readiness is all'. [Harold Jenkins, *Hamlet* (The Arden Shakespeare, 2nd edition), 1982, p.159]

In the tragedy of *Hamlet*, the ghost of a king appears on the stage; Hamlet goes crazy in the second act, and his mistress in the third; the Prince slays his mistress' father under the pretence of killing a rat, and the heroine throws herself into the river. Meanwhile another of the actors conquers Poland. Hamlet, his mother and his father-in-law carouse on the stage, songs are sung at table, there's quarrelling, fighting, killing; it is a vulgar and barbarous drama which would not be tolerated by the vilest populace of France or Italy. [Voltaire (1694-1778), quoted in *Hamlet. A User's Guide*, p.17]

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Finally, some of the books we have found particularly useful:

Banks, Fiona: *Creative Shakespeare: The Globe Education Guide to Practical Shakespeare*, 2014. A handbook for hands-on practical work to explore Shakespeare scripts with school and university classes, and source of many of the workshops we have done in the course of this production. Fiona is a member of the Globe Education team at Shakespeare's Globe and was for many years the head of the schools & universities workshops team. The book contains the distilled wisdom of a group of practitioners and is – quite simply – brilliant.

Billington, Michael: *Hamlet. A User's Guide*, 1996. Billington has played Laertes, Hamlet, Claudius and the Ghost, in a long Shakespearean career, and contributes his views and those of fellow-actors and directors, as well as remarks on how to play (and sometimes not play!) *Hamlet*. This is one of a restricted series by him on Shakespeare plays.

Crystal, Ben: *Springboard Shakespeare*, 2013. A very useful series to consult before (and after) going to a performance, with key extracts from each scene, discussions of characters and language (including prose↔verse usage and exploring pentameters), and masses of interesting information by a combined actor and scholar.

Crystal, Ben and David: *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary and Language Companion* (2002). The Shakespeare scholar's and actor's Bible, this dictionary by a linguistics-professor-father and actor-son team is quite simply the guide to what the words in Shakespeare plays mean. The team also have a fantastic website, based on the book, which amazingly is free to use: www.shakespeareswords.com

Duffin, Ross W.: *Shakespeare's Songbook*, 2004. A magnificent treasure trove of songs in and associated with Shakespeare's plays, including both texts and music (usually only the melody, unless multiple-voice pieces such as catches, in which case all the relevant voices are given). In some cases, alternative melodies are provided. A CD with 81 songs accompanies the volume.

Hapgood, Robert: *Hamlet* (Shakespeare in Production series edition), 1999. Script with masses of description as to how the play has been performed onstage (covering productions from 1601 almost to the present), on film, and in sound recordings provided both in a comprehensive introduction and also in footnote form throughout the script. A magnificent way of understanding the play as a play, while also contrasting different staging and characterization ideas.

Kines, Tom: *Songs from Shakespeare's Plays and Popular Songs of Shakespeare's Time*, 1964. A useful supplement to Ross Duffin's book (if much smaller-scale), looking at some other songs of the period, and providing indications regarding guitar chords.

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