

Production Patter

A MINI-STUDY GUIDE FOR *Hamlet*

HAMLET: “THE TIME IS OUT OF JOINT. O CURSÉD SPITE, THAT EVER WAS I BORN TO SET IT RIGHT!” ACT I, SCENE 5

Welcome to “Production Patter,” Indy Shakes’ mini-study guide.

In the theatre, patter describes an actor’s very quick speech or rapidly delivered song. Gilbert and Sullivan were superb masters of patter songs—just think of “I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major General” from the deliriously funny THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE (1879):

*“I’m very well acquainted, too, with matters mathematical,
I understand equations, both the simple and quadratical,
About binomial theorem I am teeming with a lot o’ news—
With many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse.”*

Lin-Manuel Miranda’s brilliant rap verses in HAMILTON (2015) are close relatives of the patter song:

*“Yo. Turns out we have a secret weapon!
An immigrant you know and love who’s unafraid to step in!
He’s constantly confusin’ confoundin’ the British henchmen.
Ev’ryone, give it up for America’s favorite fighting Frenchman.”* “Guns and Ships.”

Our “Patter” is designed to quickly give you some background about HAMLET, including a few Internet links; suggested further readings; and some thoughts from the play’s director, Indy Shakes Company member Ryan Artzberger, to add to your enjoyment and understanding of the play.

Yo. So read on just a bit, we’ll show you a hit!

AN INVITATION AND A CHALLENGE

Indy Shakes’ welcomes you to our first Riverside Regional Park production with this exquisite play that invites and challenges each of us to look closely at our ideas and feelings about what matters most to us: family, friendship, trust, love, security, and our fragile sense of self. Hamlet, the son grieving for his beloved father, is in the midst of a world turned upside-down, where nothing quite makes sense, or is quite what it appears to be—where a family power struggle has ramifications far beyond the walls of Elsinore Castle, in this dark and lonely place where betrayal is rampant, in this Denmark steeped in turmoil.

Shakespeare wrote his plays to be seen and heard in the company of other people—to be shared and felt together. And HAMLET is a play to be felt with our hearts; for in HAMLET, Shakespeare speaks particularly to who we are and to what matters to us. Acclaimed British actress Glenda Jackson has noted that “All Shakespeare ever asks is: Who are we, what are we, why are we?” And indeed HAMLET poses these questions for us—timeless questions for which there are no easy answers—but questions well-shared together in each other’s company.

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DIRECTOR'S NOTES A PLAY ABOUT YEARNING

Ryan Artzberger, noted Indianapolis actor, director, and Indy Shakes Company member, is HAMLET's director. Artzberger, a graduate of The Julliard School, is described by Diane Timmerman, Indy Shakes' Executive Artistic Director as "a consummate theatre artist with impeccable insight into the intricacies of Shakespeare's words and how to apply them in performance."

For Artzberger, HAMLET, at its heart, is a play about yearning: "a yearning to understand the meaning of human existence; a yearning to reach across the void to the afterlife, the 'undiscovered country' (as the fact that it was written after Shakespeare lost a son named Hamnet accentuates); and, a yearning for a time when violence is not the primary act of problem-solving."

He writes further, that, contrary to the criticism that Hamlet is afraid to act, this Prince of Denmark "is constantly in action—it's just not action using violence. He is a man who finds himself in a world turned upside down, where every element of life (love, family, and politics) seems to be shattered. He struggles to figure out what is right; he desperately searches for the truth behind what is happening to him; he quickly strategizes feigning madness so that he can buy himself time to figure out what to do; and in very short order comes up with a plan to use theatre as a tool for discovery. He exhausts all avenues of reflection, self-debate, and experimentation because he doesn't believe in using violence to solve problems."

"The time is out of joint,' both in the play—and in our time—for nothing is what it seems; and in such a world, doesn't it behoove us all to take a cue from Hamlet and CHOOSE to ACT by thinking, reflecting, and questioning before jumping to rash, violent action without thought? What if all world leaders were like Hamlet and stopped to think, wrestled with ideas, struggled to come up with the right solution, and, above all, questioned—questioned what is the right thing to do?"

ECHOING OUR HEARTBEAT

As his iambic pentameter echoes our heartbeat in his plays and in his poems, Shakespeare speaks intrinsically to who we are and to who we can become.

So, we invite to you to come and listen, come and enjoy, come and delight in theatre, in HAMLET, our free, professional 2019 summer Shakespeare production, performed for you on July 25 - 27 and August 1 - 3 in Riverside Regional Park, 2420 East Riverside Drive, Indianapolis.

Bring a picnic, your friends, and your families—and enjoy our pre-show beginning at 6 p.m. and our performance at 8 p.m.

LINKS

<https://www.folger.edu/hamlet>
Plot summary and introduction to the play, with links to on-line texts, digital images, and other resources.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOrOoqITzd4>
Kenneth Branagh as Hamlet: Soliloquy: "To be or not to be."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGX_qtZFtGc
Kenneth Branagh: Interview on HAMLET.

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/>
Excellent source of all things Shakespeare with frequent updates.

FURTHER READINGS

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1999.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.

<https://www.hartfordstage.org/stagenotes/hamlet/pop-culture>
MacNaughton, Theresa. "HAMLET in Pop Culture," *Stage Notes: HAMLET*. Hartford Stage. 16 Oct.-16 Nov. 2014.

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/hamlet-a-love-story>
Rothman, Joshua. "HAMLET: A Love Story," *The New Yorker*. 14 Aug. 2013.

Thomson, Peter. *Shakespeare's Theatre*. London: Routledge, 1984.

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564 – 1616)

THE BARD OF AVON

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, in the English market town of Stratford-on-Avon. Today, Stratford offers plays by Shakespeare in two theatres: the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and the Swan Theatre on the banks of the River Avon.

Shakespeare is buried in the riverside Holy Trinity Church in Stratford, directly in front of the altar. It is believed that he himself wrote the warning on his gravestone not to move his body from its final resting place:

“Good friend for Jesus sake forbear,
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blessed be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones.”

One of eight children, Shakespeare was born to John, a glove-maker, and his wife, Mary Shakespeare. Shakespeare was educated at the local grammar school and married Anne Hathaway when he was 18. Together he and his wife had three children, a daughter and twins, a boy and a girl.

In the late 1580s, Shakespeare moved to London (about a four-day walk from Stratford) to try to support his family by becoming an actor; but soon he turned his hand to writing plays and poetry. In 1594, he joined a troupe of actors called the Lord Chamberlain’s Company. This Company took the wooden boards from their playhouse and carried them across the Thames River to build what would become one of the most famous theatres in England, the Globe Theatre. A modern reconstruction of the Globe was opened in 1997.

Shakespeare became the main playwright for the Company, creating two plays each year, and also helped manage the Company, sharing in the profits. His plays were extremely popular, and his reputation grew. In 1603, the company became the King’s Men

when James I was crowned as King of England, and Shakespeare stopped acting to concentrate on writing and managing the Company. In all, this Bard of Avon wrote 38 plays, 2 narrative poems, 154 sonnets, as well as additional poems.

Retiring to Stratford as quite a wealthy man in 1611, Shakespeare was known to be good Company and, not surprisingly, quite witty. His knowledge of the human spirit and the human condition, his innate and brilliant understanding “of what makes us tick,” and his literary genius expressed through his ever-alive, ever-meaningful, and ever-current plays have made him most rightfully one of the most revered playwrights of all time.

Speaking to his best friend, Horatio, Hamlet says of the father he adored:

“He was a man. Take him for all in all,
We shall not look upon his like again.”

In these lines spoken by Hamlet, we find a most apt description of Shakespeare as well.

