MAKE HAMLET:
FRAGMENTED IDENTITY IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY
AND
A NEW ADAPTATION

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I dedicate this thesis to Celia and Charles, who stood by me throughout the process – though they were often asleep.

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Preface

I first read *Hamlet* in Advanced Placement English Literature class my senior year of high school. The language of Shakespeare had already seduced me while reading *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet* (of course, Baz Luhrmann's film helped). But the nature of *Hamlet* was different. It seemed much more serious and relevant. I was no longer dealing with teenagers falling in love or stories of armies and politics that took place thousands of years ago. Hamlet's problems for some reason felt very close to home for me. I wonder now why that was. Hamlet is the prince of Denmark whose dead father's ghost visits him and demands that Hamlet avenge his murder. Hamlet's situation could not have been further from mine. Why did I feel that we had so much in common? To me the problems facing a seventeen-year-old high school girl in rural Pennsylvania were eerily similar to those facing this fictional prince of Denmark.

A similar phenomenon had occurred the year before, my junior year of high school, when we had to read *Catcher in the Rye*. I could not believe how much I had in common with Holden Caulfield. I thought it was uncanny until I learned that nearly all my classmates felt the same way about themselves. There are actually some fundamentally similar qualities among real teenagers, Holden Caulfield, and (despite his age according to the Gravedigger) Hamlet. All exist in a world that appears to deteriorate around them. Each of their stories centers around an end: for regular teenagers, the end of childhood; for Caulfield, the end of sanity; and, for Hamlet, the end of a father's life. Hamlet tries to hold onto a past where his father was alive, his parents were together, and, most importantly, he did not have to deal with real problems. His world changes even though the only thing he has done to initiate change is grow older. Having to avenge his father's murder does not hurt as bad as having to cope with his new disillusionment with the present. Has the world changed or has he merely realized a truth about the human

condition? His loved ones and role models turn out to be only acting in self-interest. For a senior in high school, life is similar. All of a sudden, everything changes. Soon you will no longer to be able to live at home. Your own cost of living becomes more and more your own burden. You begin to realize that adults harbor the same insecurities, resentments, and defensive tactics you were hoping your classmates would grow out of. You wonder about your parents' future with you out of the house. But worst of all, you did nothing to initiate these changes – you simply grew older. Maybe you over think things – every one else seems to be moving along just fine. You vacillate between accepting this new present and rebelling against it. Maybe you are exactly like Hamlet. You have approached the moment for transition – one phase of life has ended and it is time to move into another one. Though it is sad and even terrifying to let go of the past, if the transition into the future is successful, the event becomes part of ordinary life. It is difficult to say goodbye to childhood, but it should be quickly replaced with adulthood. Though Hamlet feels grief for the loss of his father, as his uncle Claudius explains to him, it is part of life – fathers die. Hamlet's father lost a father, and his father's father lost his. It is not sufficient conditions for a tragedy. Claudius is right, and normally, the death would allow Hamlet to transition from childhood to adulthood, in his case, from prince to king. But Claudius prevents the natural transition that should occur by usurping the throne. Hamlet is pushed out of one phase of his life without the opportunity to move to the next. It is the fear of the teenager realized – that childhood will end and there will be nothing to replace it.

What was Shakespeare's emotional connection to *Hamlet*? A theory is offered by another literary hero of mine whose path I felt very connected to in my late teens: Stephen Dedalus of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*. Shakespeare had a son named Hamnet Shakespeare. According to Marjorie Garber, "the names of Hamlet and Hamnet

were functionally the same in Shakespeare's time, like different spellings of Alan or Stephen today" (214). Hamnet died in 1596 at the age of eleven, "four to five years before the final version of *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*" (Bloom 385), and Shakespeare's father died in 1601 (Garber 215). These lost familial relationships may have influenced similar ones in *Hamlet*, in which "Shakespeare probably … acted the part of the Ghost" (Bloom 389). Stephen Dedalus explains his own interpretation:

> The play begins. A player comes on under the shadow … It is the ghost, the king, a king and no king, and the player is Shakespeare … He speaks the words to Burbage, the young player who stands before him … calling him by a name: *Hamlet, I am thy father's spirit*, bidding him list. To a son he speaks, the son of his soul, the prince, young Hamlet and to the son of his body, Hamnet Shakespeare … Is it possible that that player Shakespeare, a ghost by absence, and in the vesture of buried Denmark, a ghost by death, speaking his own words to his own son's name …that he did not draw or foresee the logical conclusion of those premises: you are the dispossessed son: I am the murdered father: your mother is the guilty queen, Ann Shakespeare, born Hathaway? (Joyce, *Ulysses* 188-189; ep. 9)

Stephen goes on to talk about the similarities between Shakespeare's life and elements of his other plays. Whether Stephen's theories are correct or not or whether or not he or Joyce even believes them, we will never know. What I take away from it is this: "*Hamlet* is so personal, isn't it?" (*Ulysses* 194; ep. 9). In fact, one thing I learned from Stephen Dedalus is that all art is very personal, not only for artists but also for their audiences. And I feel like *Hamlet* belongs to me just as much as to Shakespeare, if not more, or to anybody else. That is why I have taken the liberty to create a version of the work that foregrounds my personal artistic ideals, ideals that I

will explore through the production of *Make Hamlet* – the title of my adaptation.

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Introduction

When I first read *Hamlet* I approached it as a work of literature or philosophy. After I studied the play more, saw it onstage and in films, and matured as a theatre-artist, my relationship with the play as a theatrical work grew, but I found it so frustrating! I thought I could never have a personal relationship with such a work. First of all, I realized just how famous the play really is – how could my connection to the work ever be any different or more significant than anyone else's? Most importantly, nothing about the play seemed consistent. I could not figure anything out about it because as soon as I would, that aspect of the play would change. *Hamlet* is not like some great works of art in which all the themes, forms, and overall artistic choices point in the same direction. It is Christian, pagan, and classical. It is medieval, modern, and contemporary. It is Danish, English, and universal. The action does not seem to advance, yet there are several different plots, some of which are completely unnecessary to advance the main one. Our perspectives on the characters are continually reshaping and the difference between innocence and guilt is as unclear as the difference between madness and sanity. Who is Hamlet? What is *Hamlet*? Who is anyone in this play? These questions were so pervasive that I began to realize that this was the very essence of the play.

Hamlet is a tragedy about the question of identity. The full title of the play is *The Tragical History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (Thompson and Taylor, Notes 139). Aristotle defines tragedy:

> An imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. By 'language embellished,' I mean

> language into which rhythm, harmony and song enter. By 'the several kinds in separate parts,' I mean, that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song. Now as tragic imitation implies persons acting, it necessarily follows in the first place, that Spectacular equipment will be part of a Tragedy… Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude… A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end… And to define the matter roughly, we may say that proper magnitude is comprised within such limits, that the sequence of events, according to the law of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad. (Aristotle 61-66; pt. 6-7)

The elements Aristotle deems necessary to complete a tragedy are Plot, Character, Thought, Language, Song, and Spectacle (62; pt. 6). *Hamlet* ostensibly fits Aristotle's overall definition of tragedy. It uses rhythmic, poetic language and song to portray Hamlet's search for the motivation to kill his uncle Claudius. It is wholly achieved by employing the Aristotelian elements of tragedy and thereby accomplishes by means of compassion and extreme fear the purgation of such emotions. *Hamlet* is the "imitation of an action": the action of searching. But this action undermines Aristotle's meaning in two ways: first of all, "searching" is an inactive action, especially in the case of *Hamlet* where it is mostly a cerebral activity. Compare this action to that of the paradigm of tragedies, according to Aristotle (and many others), *Oedipus the King* (72; pt. 11), in which the action is discovering. Second of all, while Aristotle intends for a single, complete action in tragedy, or a linear structure, this passive action of searching allows room for the occurrence of other actions. Shakespeare takes advantage of this mostly by giving strong, complete actions to many of the other characters in the play.

Hamlet's action and structure relate directly to the issue of identity. What does identity

mean? The Oxford English Dictionary offers several definitions for identity but I find the following four definitions very relevant to this discussion:

> [1.] The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness. [2. In logic, the] law or principle of identity: the principle expressed in the identical proposition *A is A*. [3.] Who or what a person or thing is; a distinct impression of a single person or thing presented to or perceived by others; a set of characteristics or a description that distinguishes a person or thing from others. [4.] Personal or individual existence. ("Identity" n. pag.)

All these definitions suggest similar characteristics of "identity": consistency, definability, originality, and essentialness. However, as a work of art, *Hamlet*'s identity is contradictory. *Hamlet* is likely the greatest, most widely recognized tragedy of the western world. It is by all definitions a masterpiece. Likewise Aristotle's *Poetics* is possibly the western world's standard for defining tragedy. Though *Hamlet* sustains Aristotle's theories it also undermines them and thus places our methods for understanding the play into question.

Tragedy is an imitation of an action, and the action of *Hamlet* is searching: Hamlet searches for the motivation to kill Claudius. But *Hamlet*'s action does not progress; it continues but it does not develop. A typical Aristotelian tragic action builds as one incident causes the next. For instance, in *Oedipus the King* the titular character discovers facts until he has discovered enough to know who he is: he discovers knowledge until he has it. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet searches for the motivation to kill Claudius and then, at the end, he achieves his goal. But *Hamlet*'s action does not build upon itself the way *Oedipus*' does. As Hamlet searches he does not find bits of motivation, with one bit leading to the discovery of the next until he finally has found enough to

kill the King. In fact, it is as though he continues to search in order to avoid carrying out his task. Also, in *Oedipus* the action progresses logically: discovering facts results in possessing knowledge. In *Hamlet*, however, the action does not progress: Hamlet's searching for motivation may result in discovery but not necessarily in discovering what he is looking for. What Hamlet does find has to do with the ephemerality of the notion of the self and the instability of the relation of the self to the world. We can especially see evidence of this in Hamlet’s soliloquies. Additionally, the action of searching directly affects Hamlet's character; as Hamlet searches, he discovers, and as he discovers, he changes. Therefore, the action of *Hamlet* continually reinvents the identity of its main character.

I have always loved and admired *Hamlet*. But the idea of writing about it or being involved in a production of it just seemed out of the question. No matter how much I studied it, I felt like I could never completely comprehend it. I just assumed that the play was beyond my capabilities and capacity for understanding because every time I searched it for explanations I would find more contradictions and ultimately end up with more questions. Not to mention, *Hamlet* is probably the most famous play in the world. What could I possibly contribute to a play that renowned scholars have spent their lives trying to decipher? I dreamed there was at least a chance that, perhaps when I was forty, I might have acquired enough experience and knowledge to consider myself a legitimate candidate for working on a production of this play. But the more I thought about meaning in *Hamlet* the more I saw that questions are more important than answers: "Who's there?" (1.1.1); "What is a man?" (4.4.32); "To be, or not to be[?]" (3.1.55). I noticed that questioning and searching, not discovering and answering, seemed to be the play's main actions. Then, I began to realize that most of my anxiety about *Hamlet* stemmed from *expectations* about understanding and performing the play. I finally asked myself, Why *can't* I

work on a production of *Hamlet*? What if I actually created my *own* production of *Hamlet*? What if I did it *now*?

What really made me want to adapt, produce, and direct my own version of *Hamlet* was the realization that I actually had a right to do so. The recognition of my entitlement to take on such a task thrilled me. I felt giddy in considering such a simple yet seemingly insane idea; it was like deciding whether or not to run away to Las Vegas to marry someone I had just met. But *Hamlet* is a work of art, and the possibilities for interpreting art are endless. There is no such thing as a right or wrong choice, and experience and education are only part of a process that also relies on ubiquitous human senses such as instinct, imagination, and courage. *Hamlet*'s essence lies in its struggle to figure out what it is: "Who's there?" (1.1.1.). I decided that I would adapt *Hamlet* for a production that I would also produce and direct.

I have designed *Make Hamlet*, my version of *Hamlet*, for audiences familiar with Shakespeare's play, mostly because I believe that nearly all audiences are. I approach my exploration, deconstruction, and adaptation of the play as one would approach a masterpiece. I believe that this is how most people approach *Hamlet*, since the concept of the masterpiece implies by its nature that it is a work that is publicly known and perhaps over-known. *Hamlet* completely warrants the status of "masterpiece": it is a brilliant work of art unlike any other and it has mystified and inspired us since its creation over four-hundred years ago. Unfortunately, when a culture collectively classifies a work a masterpiece it automatically attributes to the work certain notions about how it should be understood. As a masterpiece, *Hamlet* assumes a position of unchallenged artistic greatness, and our culture perpetuates the work's untouchable status in its reverence for the play; the work has become a monument. Re-interpreting *Hamlet*, especially re-interpreting it using its own language, is like drawing a mustache on the *Mona Lisa*; it inherently

represents irreverence, a challenge to the authority of high aesthetics, and even an anger toward art that our culture perceives as immaculate, unrivaled and worthy of unquestionable appreciation. This anger or desire to diminish the seriousness of a masterpiece comes from the feeling of inadequacy a masterpiece evokes in other artists. In regards to *Hamlet*, it comes from a frustration with what seems like other's inability to separate the play from the traditions associated with it. Let us consider our culture's iconic image of *Hamlet*: the early-middle-aged, somewhat gaunt man, in royal, Elizabethan garb, holding a skull. And yet nothing in the play insists that Hamlet ever physically holds a skull; the play never indicates when in history it takes place; there is as much evidence to indicate that Hamlet is less than twenty years old as there is to imply that he is over thirty; and Hamlet's own mother calls him "fat" (5.2.269) (Can you even imagine a fat Hamlet?). Often when I explain my adaptation to other theatre-artists, they say, "You actually cut that passage?" or "How could you take out that character?" or "Why would you ever choose to stage this scene like *that*?" It is as though I am committing a crime in reinterpreting *Hamlet* and not adhering to the preconceived standards for performing it.

I think that audiences who see *Make Hamlet* will pick up on the emotional inspiration for this production. They will experience the freedom of letting go of expectations as *Make Hamlet* presents them with a new interpretation of an old story. They will appreciate the innocence of a production of *Hamlet* that has to do with the work itself instead of which rock-star director staged it or which celebrity is playing the title character. They will pick up on the honesty of a production that shows its "nuts and bolts" and concerns itself with the actors' experience as well as the characters'. They will sense the ambition needed to stage such a play as they watch six actors bravely take on an immense work. They will feel the excitement of a looking at the stage and knowing anything is possible, which *Make Hamlet* suggests in many ways: specifically,

through its unexpected opening stage set-up (all the actors, already onstage when the audience enters, warm-up while their costumes hang on costume racks that line the sides and back of the stage); its unprecedented prologue (the beginning of Act III, scene ii, in which Hamlet directs lessons in acting to the Players); and the unique way it presents a reinterpretation of *Hamlet* while almost exclusively employing Shakespeare's own language.

This thesis is a supplement to and in-depth discussion of my adaptation, *Make Hamlet*. In this thesis I will argue that the Aristotelian elements of tragedy – plot, character, thought, language, song, and spectacle – not only reinforce that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is about identity, but also show that identity in *Hamlet* is fragmented, elusive, and continually in flux. In fact, in examining *Hamlet* through Aristotle's theories I find that the concept of identity in this play actually resonates with postmodern and contemporary theories about this subject. For example the cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall explains:

> We can no longer conceive of 'the individual' in terms of a whole, centered, stable and completed Ego or autonomous, rational 'self'. The 'self' is conceptualized as more fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple 'selves' or identities in relation to the different social worlds we inhabit, something with a history, 'produced', in process. (120)

Interestingly, this quote echoes the theories of one of Shakespeare's likely influences, Michel de Montaigne. Montaigne writes:

> There is no permanent existence in our being or in that of objects. We ourselves, our faculty of judgment and all mortal things are flowing and rolling carelessly: nothing certain can be established about one from the other, since both judged and judging are ever shifting and changing… We are entirely made up of bits and pieces, woven together so shapelessly that each of them pulls its own way at every moment. (680; bk. 2, ch. 12).

In *Make Hamlet*, I have created a personal but grounded interpretation of Shakespeare's play by focusing on the idea that *Hamlet* is fundamentally about identity, specifically, the representation of identity as inconsistent, unstable, and multi-faceted. I will show not only that fragmented identity manifests in the character Hamlet but also that uncertainty about identity is a defining aspect of Shakespeare's play. I will demonstrate how these concepts inspired me and dictated major choices in my adaptation, so that the reader will better understand the reasons for my work.

Chapter 1: Plot

Plot, for Aristotle, "is the imitation of the action…[or] the arrangement of the incidents" and it is the most consequential among the elements that comprise a tragedy:

> Most important of all is the structure of the incidents. For tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality… Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end of the chief thing of all. (62; pt. 6)

Just as Aristotle defines the elements of tragedy, he also defines the elements of plot. Most tragic plots contain "*anagnorisis*," or recognition; "*peripeteia*," or "an unexpected reversal in the action"; "*pathos*," or suffering (Smethurst 308-309), caused by the hero's "*hamartia*," or "The fault or error which entails [his] destruction" ("Hamaratia" n. pag.); and "*catharsis*" (Fergusson 35), or "purgation," specifically of the emotions of pity and fear (Aristotle 61; pt. 6). "Plots are either Simple or Complex, for the actions in real life, of which the plots are an imitation, obviously show a similar distinction" (71; pt. 10). In a Simple plot, the change in fortune occurs without a reversal or recognition; Complex plot contains a change in fortune accompanied by a reversal and/or recognition.

The plot of *Hamlet* is an imitation of a "complete" and "whole" action of "magnitude," and the "sequence of [its] events" results in the tragic hero's change from good to bad fortune (Aristotle 66; pt. 7). It can be summarized as thus: Hamlet, prince of Denmark, searches for the motivation to kill King Claudius, his uncle and murderer of his father, Hamlet, the late king. This can be further broken down into four parts: the Ghost of the late King Hamlet charges his son, also named Hamlet, with avenging his murder; Hamlet searches for the motivation to kill

King Claudius, his father's murderer and the late King's brother; Hamlet is continually unable to find the motivation to kill Claudius; and, finally, Hamlet kills Claudius and Hamlet himself is killed.

Therefore the action of *Hamlet* certainly contains the elements of a tragic plot. When the play begins, Hamlet is in a state of grief, and his grief certainly deepens when he learns of his father's murder. But his true suffering (*pathos*) begins with the realization (*anagnorisis*) that he is unable to find the motivation to kill Claudius – he is unable to act. His inaction, therefore, is his miscalculation, or his tragic flaw (*hamartia*). Hamlet endures a change in fortune: from good fortune to bad fortune (though perhaps it is more accurate to say his change in fortune is from bad fortune to worse). And the plot of *Hamlet* is complex according to Aristotle's standards because the reversal in action (*peripeteia*) occurs with Hamlet's change in fortune. The play's plot reverses at the moment when Hamlet kills Claudius; it moves from inaction to action. Hamlet's fatal wound signifies his change in fortune; his agony is now physical as well as mental – complete *pathos*. The universal quality of the tragic plot, that life causes suffering, effects pity and fear in the audience, eventually causing the *catharsis* of these emotions.

As established, Hamlet's fortune changes from good to bad. However, in a structural twist, the plot of *Hamlet* also appears to result in the main character's move from bad fortune to good. The entire play he suffers from his tragic flaw – his inability to take action, and he even muses over and takes interest in his own death. At the end of the play, with his journey set to "The undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveler returns" (Shakespeare 3.1.78-79)[1], Hamlet is finally able to take action. In another subversion of Aristotle's principles, *Hamlet*

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[1] The edition of *Hamlet* I cite throughout the thesis is a Second Quarto edition. It is an Arden Shakespeare publication, and I chose this edition because throughout my education, the Arden Shakespeare series seems to be the one most recommended by professors.

actually contains a second set of a change in fortune, reversal, and recognition, and all three elements of this second set happen at once, but, unusually, near the beginning of the play. Hamlet begins as a prince in mourning, but nevertheless ignorant of the biggest horror of his familial situation. Then, when Hamlet speaks to the Ghost, he learns the truth about his father's death (recognition). This new knowledge is his change from good to bad fortune. And with this knowledge comes a reversal in the action of the play: before this, the only actual plot we knew of was political – that of preventing Fortinbras from reclaiming parts of Denmark; now the play has become about revenge. The only thing missing from this second set of elements is the tragic flaw – Hamlet's character is not responsible for learning about his father's murder. Nevertheless, the additional occurrence of these three Aristotelian elements supports the argument that *Hamlet* is composed of *two* tragic plots.

Structurally, or, in terms of action and plot, *Hamlet* the play suffers a crisis of identity. By this I mean it contains many and even contradictory structures. Some of this predicament lies in not only its use of Aristotelian tragic elements but also in its deviation from the intention behind these elements. Aristotle defines tragedy as an imitation of an action, and plot as a series of incidents in the order in which they occur. *Hamlet*'s main plot is a series of incidents, as Aristotle suggests, but many of these incidents center on a lack of action. The first major event of the play is that the late King Hamlet charges his son with avenging his murder. Then, Hamlet spends the whole play, until the very last scene, *not* avenging his father's murder. The plot's main reversal, recognition, and miscalculation all center on Hamlet's inaction. It is nearly an anti-plot, in which nothing happens, and, were it not for the second half of the last scene, the plot would end with how it began – Hamlet still entrusted with avenging his father's murder.

Despite its atypical plot structure *Hamlet* achieves the status of a tragedy in the very last

scene: Hamlet finally kills Claudius and Hamlet himself is killed. And if Hamlet had killed Claudius sooner, if he had not had the flaw of inaction, his own death would likely not have occurred. This final tragic action brings about the purgation of the pity and fear the play has effected in the audience.

However, all of this is only true of the part of the play's structure that displays Aristotelian characteristics. Looking at *Hamlet* from a different angle, one sees that it may also have an episodic structure. Episodic means that the play periodically shows us incidents from stories that are not part of the main action, "in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without…necessary sequence" (Aristotle 69; pt. 9). There are, for example, several subplots associated with various characters: Fortinbras, who intends to re-conquer the lands his late father lost in battle to the late King Hamlet; Ophelia, who rejects Hamlet's love and eventually becomes mad and kills herself; Gertrude, who suffers as a result of her son's madness and is eventually killed (inadvertently) by her husband; Claudius, guilty of his brother's murder, who conspires to kill Hamlet; Polonius, who meddles in Hamlet's affairs until he is eventually murdered by the latter; and Laertes, who goes to Paris, returns ready to revolt against the throne of Denmark, and eventually dies in battle against Hamlet. Though it contains all these subplots, we really only need the trajectories of Claudius and Laertes to advance the main plot from the beginning of the play until the end. In the beginning of the second scene, and certainly by the end of the third, *Hamlet* already displays an episodic sequence of plot. In the first scene of the play, Bernardo, Horatio, and Marcellus witness the Ghost. In a linear plot, the incident of the three men telling Hamlet of the Ghost would follow, and the next incident would be Hamlet's encounter with the Ghost. However, after the first scene, the plot moves to the Court where it catches up with itself,

relaying to the audience through the use of diegetic action[2] the relevant incidents that occurred before the first scene began. These incidents support the main action. However, in regards to story-telling, the information revealed in the Court scene actually moves the plot backwards, giving the context for the appearance of the Ghost after the Ghost has appeared. Also in the court scene (Act I, scene ii) a new story emerges: the Fortinbras plot, which parallels Hamlet's main trajectory. Though the audience only periodically hears updates regarding Fortinbras, one imagines his story as another entire narrative taking place simultaneously only in a different place. In the next major incident, Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo tell Hamlet about the Ghost, continuing the plot in real time. However, the scene after that contains Laertes' departure for France and Polonius' instruction to Ophelia to stay away from Hamlet, both of which could disappear without affecting the play's main action. Yet, despite this episodic sequence and these peripheral stories, the main tragic action, complete with its magnitude, miscalculation, recognition, reversal, and suffering, continues through the play and achieves a beginning, middle, and end. Thus, paradoxically, *Hamlet* consists of two opposing structures: the Classical Aristotelian and the more medieval episodic. The contradictory meta-structure of the play puts the identity of the play as a whole into question. It has a shape-shifting identity: it is neither completely Aristotelian, because it is episodic, nor completely episodic, because it is Aristotelian, and yet, it is always both.

This blending of two distinct theatrical structures not only suggests *Hamlet* as a play with fragmented identity but also characterizes it as relevant to concerns of post-modern art. Martin Irvine explains that in postmodernism we experience, "Hybridity, promiscuous genres,

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[2] The *OED* defines "diegesis" as "a narrative; a statement of the case" ("Diegesis" n. pag.). Thus when applied to theatrical action, "diegetic" refers to action that the audience learns about through narrative, through characters talking about what happened, as opposed to witnessing the action in real time.

recombinant culture, intertextuality, [and] pastiche [whereas modernism emphasized a] sense of clear generic boundaries and wholeness (art, music, and literature)" (n. pag.). Though Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* 400 years before the post-modern era, structurally the play is a pastiche, simultaneously representing the structure of ancient Greek tragedy and the structure of Medieval England's episodic theatre cycles. *Hamlet* shows a shift away from the purely episodic, religious play cycle and the influence of classical aesthetics revived by the Renaissance, reflecting the process of adapting to a new artistic era and creating a genre defined by its transitional state. The fact that the play already contains the cohabitation of incongruous theatrical models lends itself to its reinterpretation as a post-modern work with a focus on the theme of the fragmented self.

The presence and content of the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet* suggests a third structure within the play, a circular structure. The play-within-the-play re-reveals the incidents that spawned Hamlet's story similarly to how these incidents were revealed to Hamlet at the beginning of the play. And it repeats these revelations for the audience: the audience re-learns of the murder of the late King Hamlet, Claudius' usurpation of power, and the new King's hasty marriage to the late King's wife. The difference is that the first act of the play reveals this information through diegetic action (the Ghost tells Hamlet about what happened), and the play-within-the-play reveals it through a kind of mimetic action (the audience sees the incidents and actions of which the Ghost spoke portrayed as they had unfolded in real time.)[3] But structurally,

[3] The *OED* defines "mimetic" as "relating to, characterized by, or of the nature of imitation; *spec*. representing, picturing, or presenting the real world" ("Mimetic" n. pag.). However, in terms of theatrical action, "mimetic" usually refers to action taking place in view of the audience and unfolding in real time – a sort of opposite to diegetic action. Though the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet* is a representation of real events that already happened and is not the events themselves occurring in real time, it does use live, physical action to recreate these events instead of the historical account employed by the Ghost.

it is as though the whole play restarts with the play-within-the-play; it returns to its report of the incidents that form the foundation for the plot. Hamlet confirms, and he and the audience relearn, that Claudius murdered King Hamlet, and in a symbolic representation, the audience relearns of the subsequent marriage of Claudius and Gertrude. Interestingly the play could actually restart at this point in the story without actually changing anything about it because nothing involving the main plot has actually occurred since the Ghost initially revealed Claudius' guilt.

Plot in *Make Hamlet*

For my version of *Hamlet*, entitled *Make Hamlet*, the first major change I make to the plot is that it begins with Hamlet's instructions to the players (3.2.1-43). This becomes the prologue. I have also reduced the cast to six actors in order to explore the theme of identity on a deeper level. For example, the actors cast in the roles of the major characters also play the Players who perform the play-within-the-play. Therefore, when Hamlet addresses the "Players", the actor playing Hamlet addresses his fellow actors. And because the word "Player" in *Hamlet* means "actor", there is little to distinguish between the two possible cases. Thus, the prologue suggests four possible identities onstage: the actors; the characters, played by the actors; the Players, played by the characters played by the actors, or perhaps played by the actors themselves; and the characters of the play-within-the-play, played by the characters played by the actors, who, of course, are also designated as the Players. This means that, when it comes time for the play-within-the-play, an actor plays King Claudius, and King Claudius plays the Player King; another actor plays Queen Gertrude, and Queen Gertrude plays the Player Queen; and another actor plays Hamlet, and Hamlet plays Lucianous. This arrangement changes the dynamics of the play-within-the-play: for instance, instead of Claudius being forced to watch his

ugly deeds, he is forced to re-enact them with himself playing the victim. Also, it heightens the play's identification of itself as a work of theatre. It draws attention to the concept of rehearsal when Hamlet speaks to the other characters on stage and addresses them as actors. It underlines the fact that actors must represent characters because characters are not in themselves real people. And it emphasizes that the performers are performing since we see the characters performing as well.

I find this choice for a prologue – Hamlet's instructions to the players – very apt for my adaptation for two reasons. First of all, it emphasizes identity as a multi-faceted, ambiguous concept that applies not only to actors, roles, and characters, but also to the play itself. Second of all, it shows from the very beginning that *Hamlet* is a play about theatre. Any play that contains another play demonstrates self-referential and self-conscious theatricality. In this way *Hamlet* presents us with another major dramatic model, the theatricalist model – it is the kind of play that explicitly calls attention to itself as a theatrical work. In *Hamlet* the play within the play is not some random piece of entertainment – it is a microcosm for the whole play. The action of *Hamlet* is searching – Hamlet searches for motivation to kill his uncle. Hamlet says, “The play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King” (2.2.539-540). This quote refers specifically to “*The Mousetrap*” (3.2.231), as he calls the play-within-the-play. And his remark seems in line with his intention: Hamlet will use the play to find the inspiration to kill Claudius. But he also speaks meta-theatrically as if he were talking about the whole play, about *Hamlet*. Like any actor, he searches the play to find the ideas needed to perform his role. I once heard the American director Anne Bogart refer to a theory that every work of art contains a tiny replica of itself. In terms of action, that is exactly what *The Mousetrap* represents. And, of course, if we look at this logically from the other direction – every work of art is a replica of a miniature

contained within it – we realize that *Hamlet* is above all, a work in which Hamlet, like an actor in his own play, searches for the motivation to properly play his part. The work itself becomes its own replication and continues infinitely in representing itself, like a mirror facing a mirror. This concept implies the disappearance of an authoritative original, just as, in postmodern theory, representations of reality are foregrounded over originals, making subsequent representations until eventually, the representation refers to itself and its original source is forgotten (Hebdidge 81). The concept of a real self with a singular, definable identity dissolves. In a theatrical context, any production of *Hamlet* is as legitimate as the first, because the concept of "first" has disappeared. This suggests the negation of a hierarchy of authority of representation with the original at the top. In this case, my representation of *Hamlet* has the same authority as the productions in which Shakespeare himself supposedly acted.

Since in *Make Hamlet* the Players are played by Claudius, Gertrude, and Hamlet, the play-within-the-play allows Hamlet to safely enact his ambition without taking action. Hamlet plays Lucianous, the nephew of the Player King, and Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, plays the Player King. In the story of the play-within-the play, Lucianous kills the Player King, and then steals his crown; Hamlet goes through the motion of killing his uncle and becoming king without any of the consequences of real action. And Hamlet serves as the director of the play-within-the-play, the master of action. Thus, in *Make Hamlet*, *The Mousetrap* allows Hamlet to act on his preference for theatre over real life, illusion over reality. Hamlet not only stalls carrying out his duty, but also literally makes his inaction theatrical. Then, at the end of the play, Hamlet the director instructs Horatio to tell his story:

> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart
>
> Absent thee from felicity awhile

> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
>
> To tell my story. (5.2.330-333)

When Fortinbras appears immediately after Hamlet's death, Horatio makes his priorities clear:

> And let me speak to th'yet unknowing world
>
> How these things came about. So shall you hear
>
> Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts,
>
> Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
>
> Of deaths put on by cunning, and for no cause,
>
> And in this upshot purposes mistook
>
> Fallen on th'inventors' heads. All this can I
>
> Truly deliver.
>
> . . . .
>
> But let this same be presently performed
>
> Even while men's minds are wild, lest more mischance
>
> On plots and errors happen. (5.2.363-369, 377-379)

How do we know, as audience members, whether or not we are watching the "real" events of Hamlet or if this is Horatio's portrayal of Hamlet's story? How would we know the difference between the real thing and the pretend? Just like in the theatre, the story of *Hamlet* constantly blurs the lines between reality and illusion. Any production of *Hamlet* may actually be Horatio retelling Hamlet's story, or in other words, a representation of what is already a representation,

instead of events happening in the "present." This suggests that *Hamlet* is a play devoid of origin that endlessly recurs. In a postmodern context, as Jean Baudriallard explains, representation "is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" leaving no room for "any distinction between the real and the imaginary" (n. pag.). Simulacra are just as powerful and potentially more powerful than the real. This idea that the story of *Hamlet* is actually a representation of the story of *Hamlet* makes this play relevant to a postmodern culture constantly "adapting to simulation" (Irvine n. pag.). To me, every production of *Hamlet*, since the first one, is Horatio telling Hamlet's story, and repeating it night after night is part of the ritual of this kind of narrative.

In my version of *Hamlet*, certain elements of the plot have been eliminated. This is of course necessary in order to perform with six actors a play that in its entirety requires at least eleven actors (Thompson and Taylor 536). But the plot of *Make Hamlet* is not a consequence of arbitrary choices. I believe the elimination of certain incidents serves to impact the audience in several ways. First of all, because scenes must be cut due to the number of actors, the cuts draw attention to the small cast. The small cast emphasizes the idea of ensemble acting, which represents an unusual approach to performing *Hamlet*. It heightens the play's theme of distrust by focusing on the characters who have the greatest influence on Hamlet. It also draws attention to the play's meta-theatricality by emphasizing the actors' virtuosity – the play itself becomes a game as the audience witnesses the ingenuity and imagination required to perform it with such a small cast. The cutting of several scenes increases the play's tempo, which will create the effect of the plot moving ahead of, instead of behind, the audience's thoughts. Also, removing major scenes shows the audience that *Make Hamlet* is not about preserving Shakespeare's words, but about interpreting Shakespeare's ideas through a personal and bold dialogue with his work.

Interestingly, the elimination of certain elements of the plot has actually made the plot more Aristotelian in that the play is more centered on the main action.

Chapter 2: Character

Aristotle writes that it is better for the play to be driven by what the characters do rather than what they are. Character, for Aristotle, is habitual action. He also explains that a character should be appropriate, as in a king should behave like a king, not a peasant, and consistent, meaning that a character's actions should all be compatible with one another, as in a liar would always lie, an honest man always tell the truth. He also points out that it is better if a hero's downfall comes from a mistake or miscalculation rather than completely uncontrollable events, and that the hero should be good in nature so we will care more about his outcome (81-82; pt. 15).

Of course, Hamlet is the hero of *Hamlet*. Hamlet's character is a manifestation of his habitual action of not acting. Hamlet's other actions, most of which are extraneous to the main plot, however, are not consistent with his inability to carry out the one thing he needs to do. For instance, while he searches without success for the motivation to kill Claudius, the man who murdered his father, he murders Polonius, his lover's father, and is responsible for the deaths of Ophelia, his lover, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his childhood friends, and Laertes, his lover's brother. He has shouting matches with his mother and with Ophelia, he dupes Polonius, and he fights pirates. One might argue that his only action consistent with his purpose is the staging of *The Mousetrap*. But his reasons for staging it are muddy. He claims that it is to provoke the guilt of Claudius. But in his soliloquy immediately after he chooses the content for the play-within-the-play he admits that he already has more than enough incentive to avenge his father's death. He speaks of the first Player:

> What would he do

Had he the motive and the Cue for passion[4]

That I have? He would drown the stage with tears

And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,

Make mad the guilty and appal the free,

Confound the ignorant and amaze indeed

The very faculties of eyes and ears. (2.2.495-501)

He goes on to declare that he is “Prompted to [his] revenge by heaven and hell” (2.2.519) and rhetorically asks himself, “Am I a coward?” (2.2.506) because he is unable to take action though he has ample reason to do so. It is possible that he needs to witness Claudius’ reaction to *The Mousetrap* to confirm that killing Claudius is the proper choice. But his own language also suggests that he may just be stalling, making the staging of the play-within-the-play a substitute action removed from that of the main one and another distraction from his purpose. The creation of *The Mousetrap* is a manifestation of Hamlet’s searching to try to discover the ambition to fulfill his task. And just like an actor looking for his motivation, his instinct is to look to a play to find it. But Hamlet's own world, in other words, the whole play, is the thing wherein he will have to look for it. Hamlet must seek the inspiration to play the role of a character capable of killing the King. His choice to stage the play-within-the-play reflects his ambivalence about reality. And, in making this choice, this famous, fictional character ironically chooses the theatre over real life.

Many actors express apprehension about playing Hamlet because it is such a huge role to

[4] Exceptionally, I quote this line from the Folio edition (Thomspon and Taylor 275, Notes). In the Second Quarto, the line is "Had he the motive and that for passion." The Folio's choice to replace "that" with "the Cue" linguistically supports the metatheatrical aspects of this soliloquy.

fill. It is a problem for many of the reasons the play itself is a problem: it is too well known, it has been played by too many great actors, and the role is so grand it seems impossible to give the character a proper performance. Is it possible that Hamlet himself feels this way about his own character? McGinn writes, “He contains everything, but consists of nothing. He approximates to the condition of paradox” (41). The task of filling the role of Hamlet also blurs the lines between reality and illusion – the action of pretending to be Hamlet is the same as the action of actually being Hamlet (which is a paradox in itself since Hamlet is a theatrical invention) because Hamlet himself has anxiety about fulfilling his own role.

McGinn draws a conclusion regarding Hamlet’s inaction by comparing him to the Player in the “O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!” soliloquy (2.2.485-540): “If only he could act with the conviction of an actor!” (45). Hamlet, who loves the theatre, must become an actor in order to properly play his part. He blatantly tells his friends that he will act as though he is crazy. But in this play where the line is blurred between what one pretends one is and what one really is, Hamlet acts too well and becomes actually mad. Though this idea is debated by some critics (the play never blatantly diagnoses Hamlet as clinically insane), I believe there is more than sufficient evidence to support that Hamlet's "antic disposition" (1.5.170) is accompanied by actual insanity: he contemplates suicide, he intentionally murders a man, and he avoids reality. Hamlet's behavior is a combination of feigned and uncontrollable madness. The uncontrollable madness begins when (if not before) the Ghost claiming to be Hamlet's father confronts him telling him that he, the late King Hamlet, was murdered by none other than his own brother, the usurper of the throne and Hamlet's new stepfather; he then demands that the Prince avenge his murder. In other words, Hamlet is in a particularly traumatizing situation that would likely cause anyone, even the psychologically sound, to become unhinged. The famous twentieth century

Shakespeare director Harley Granville-Barker upholds this notion:

> Now, with an "O, all you host of heaven! O, earth! What else? / And shall I couple hell? O, fie!" he emerges; 'recovers his senses' we cannot say – for that, it will appear, is just what he does not completely do. From this moment indeed … Hamlet is 'mad.' How mad, whether by a modern alienist's standard certifiably so – Shakespeare does not think in those terms. He uses the word as unprecisely as we still commonly do … Hamlet speaks of himself as mad; half ironically, while he is under the spell; when he is free of it, as having been "punished / With sore distraction." He is not ironical there … Hamlet will also pretend to be mad, and the pretence and the reality will not easily be distinguished. That there is reality mixed with the pretence – so much is plain." (Granville-Barker 55-56)

This life of acting based on pretense and conflicting facets of the individual's identity does not stop with Hamlet's character. Nearly every character in this play is pretending to be something he or she is not. In any production of *Hamlet* the actors are not the only ones acting – their characters are acting too. The Ghost acts or represents himself as Hamlet's father, although he is merely an apparition of the late King. Even his character name is "Ghost", not King Hamlet. Claudius acts or represents himself as though he is innocent of any crime, although the Ghost and Claudius himself have told us otherwise. Hamlet even describes Claudius' acting technique: "O villain, villain, smiling damned villain, / … / That one may smile and smile and be a villain…" (1.5.106-108). Hamlet also tells his mother to play the part of the virtuous Queen, although she has abandoned respectable widowhood: "Assume a virtue if you have it not" (3.4.158). Laertes acts as though he is playing an honest game of fencing, although he is in it for murder. Ophelia acts as though her behavior toward Hamlet is uncorrupted, although her father

instructs her to feign pious innocence:

> Read on this book
>
> That show of such an exercise may colour
>
> Your loneliness. We are oft too blame in this –
>
> 'Tis too much proved that with devotion's visage
>
> And pious action we do sugar o'er
>
> The devil himself. (3.1.43-48)

Reynaldo plays an unsuspicious part when he embarks to inquire about Laertes' behavior, although he has been sent and prepped by Polonius in hopes of tricking someone into revealing secrets about Laertes' life. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are terrible actors, although they try (at least for a while) to feign ignorance of Hamlet's accusations. Even the Priest must act or perform a ceremony for someone with a blameless death, although he believes that Ophelia's death was "doubtful" (5.1.216). Interestingly, the Players, who account for much of the play's metatheatricality, represent a facet of honesty. In reality, professional actors would play the roles of the Players, and, in *Hamlet*, a player is an actor. Ironically, the Players further blur the lines between representation and reality by performing a reproduction of incidents that actually happened, incidents that reveal the truth surrounding King Hamlet's death, incidents that all the other characters in the play avoid revealing in some way. But reality, even in imitative form, cannot be tolerated in this world of theatrical semblance and pretense and so Claudius orders the Players to stop.

Aristotle specifies how character manifests in a properly constructed tragedy:

> Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in

> action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. (63; pt. 6)

Similarly, Jan Kott describes one of the reasons why a fixed identity is nearly impossible for the characters in this play:

> *Hamlet* is a great scenario, in which every character has a more or less tragic and cruel part to play, and has magnificent things to say. Every character has an irrevocable task to fulfil, a task imposed by the author. This scenario is independent of the characters; it has been devised earlier. It defines the situations, as well as the mutual relations of the characters; it dictates their words and gestures. But it does not say who the characters are. It is something external in relation to them. And that is why the scenario of *Hamlet* can be played by different sorts of characters. (Kott 58)

This is Aristotle's concept of character as action taken to the extreme, to the point that the characters are *only* their actions and devoid of any essential features. This makes it very difficult for any role in this play to have "the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness" ("Indentity" n. pag.).

Michel de Montaigne, whose essays Colin McGinn believes heavily influenced the creation of *Hamlet*, writes about the many dimensions of an individual's identity: "there is as much difference between us and ourselves as there is between us and other people" (380; bk. 2, ch. 1). McGinn explains "that our identity is not the simple, fixed, and constant thing we suppose" (38). In other words, *A* does not always equal *A*. If Montaigne believes this to be true

about individual lives, I believe this to be true about character. I once heard the Belgian director Ivo van Hove speak about character (n. pag.). He said that it is important to remember that character is not always constant because people's identities are not constant. An individual is a different person at home than at work; he displays certain behavioral characteristics to his family and other characteristics to his friends. Before, I knew the play was about identity in some way, but I still could not understand how it could possibly play out in production. Van Hove's assessment became a key to my understanding of *Hamlet*. Van Hove's ideas also helped me better understand psychology in a theatrical context, and why it can be a trap. Psychology in itself is not dangerous for a character to have or for an actor or director to think about. But constructing a character based on psychology can limit the possibilities for characterization and cause an actor to try to portray emotions and mental states instead of actions. However, the most difficult concept to reconcile is how a person's identity is inconsistent yet uniquely his.

Beginning the play with a ghost instantly challenges the idea of fixed, consistent identity. The post-modern philosopher Jacques Derrida writes about the concept of haunting:

> In *Hamlet*, the Prince of a rotten State, everything begins by the apparition of a specter… Still more precisely, everything begins in the imminence of a reapparition, but a reapparition of the specter as apparition for the first time in the play… The revenant[5] is going to come… The spirit of the father is going to come back and will soon say to him: 'I am the Father's Spirit' (1, iv), but here, at the beginning of the play, he comes back, so to speak, for the first time. It is a first, the first time on stage. (4-5)

The entire play is haunted by its beginning. The first major event of the play is the appearance of

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[5] In French, Derrida's native language, a "revenant" is one who returns. It comes from the verb *venir*, which means "to come," and, more specifically, from the verb *revenir* which mean "to return, or to come back."

the Ghost. The play begins with something that has ended, something that "comes back." The entire basis for this character is something that happened before the play even began. For us, we are seeing the Ghost for the first time. For the Ghost, he is returning. Also, the main action is entirely built upon this Ghost's testimony even though his identity is more questionable and opaque than any other character in this play; in fact, the Ghost creates the foundation of the play. The dramaturgical consequence of the Ghost establishes this character's identity as a reflection of the identity of the play as a whole; to analyze the Ghost is to analyze *Hamlet*.

The mysticism, god-like qualities, and importance attributed to the Ghost show the influence of medieval theatre, which includes mystery plays about the life of Jesus Christ and full theatrical cycles depicting biblical stories from Eden to the apocalypse. However, a play that begins with a character that symbolizes an existential end resonates with theatrical structures that the Western world would not generally produce until after World War II, when faith in linear narrative and its implications of progress dissolved along with Western Europe's trust in mankind, resulting in the rejection of order in life and art. In fact, *Hamlet* takes place in a sort of Beckettian endgame. It begins with the main character already having limited choices for action and feeling oppressed by this limitation. But when the Ghost appears, it is the beginning of the end for Hamlet, a beginning that contains an end. Though it already seems lost, Hamlet is able to perpetuate the game, just as it is often possible for the losing party in a game of chess to extend the game indefinitely by avoiding any moves of actual consequence. Other aspects regarding the Ghost make *Hamlet* eerily similar to theatrical constructs that would become popular nearly four-hundred years later. Shakespeare spectacularly manages to create an entire tragedy based on provocation from a character whose existence he will later overtly call into question, specifically in the closet scene when the Queen is unable to see or hear the specter. The audience is as

shocked as Hamlet that the character who put the play's main action into motion, whose appearance to Hamlet's friends in the first scene spawned nearly all the incidents of the play, now appears to be invisible to characters other than Hamlet. What does it mean when Shakespeare changes the rules or conventions established regarding the Ghost? Perhaps it symbolizes Hamlet's forgotten purpose or his fading *raison d'etre*. But in making such implications Shakespeare puts into question the *raison d'etre* of the whole play, since the play itself revolves so tightly around its main character. What is truth? What is a lie? What is the point of it all? Why are things losing their meaning? The play also undermines itself because its main action is inaction, and because, at the end, Hamlet's real motivation for killing Claudius seems to be that the latter causes the Prince's own death. The fact that this play creates these questions, and the fact that the play continually questions the need for its own existence, further aligns the play with twentieth and twenty-first century aesthetics that reject meaning, purpose, reason, and logic, as in post-modern art.

"The question of identity is immediately raised by the issue of the ghost's identity" (McGinn 39). It looks just like the late King Hamlet, but what does that mean when we're dealing with ghosts? Is a ghost not always a sort of imposter? No matter how much it looks like King Hamlet it can never be equal to King Hamlet. The Ghost is like a painting or a memory – it is a version of King Hamlet that always falls short of being the real thing. The fourth definition of identity in the *OED* is "Personal or individual existence" ("Identity" n. pag.). However, the character of the Ghost epitomizes a very personal and individual *in*existence, just as Hamlet's character is defined by *in*action instead of action. They are characters defined by absence rather than presence, by insufficiencies rather than achievements. Hamlet further negates the presence of the Ghost by linguistically denying the Ghost an identity. Hamlet is a student at "Protestant

Wittenberg," the school of Luther (Granville-Barker 59). Hamlet, therefore, is likely a Protestant himself; his views on the ghost are certainly in line with a seventeenth century English Protestant's way of thinking about spirits. He believes that spirits walk the earth but that they are either angels or demons, not humans come back from the dead (Wilson 68). He says he'll speak to the Ghost "If it assume my noble father's person;" and when he thinks of the Ghost as "my father's spirit / [he] doubt[s] some foul play" (1.2.223-224). Hamlet says to the Ghost, "I'll *call* thee Hamlet" (1.4.44). He gives him the name of his father without fully granting him that identity.

Wilson points out that there are three major schools of thought represented in the scenes with the ghosts. There is the Catholic point of view, represented by Marcellus and Bernardo, which would believe that ghosts without a doubt exist and that they are spirits from Purgatory who have returned to earth because of some unfinished business. There is the Protestant point of view, represented by Hamlet, which states that spirits certainly walk the earth but that they are either angels or demons. In other words, *people* do not come back from the dead. Most Protestants do not believe in Purgatory.

> Obdurate Protestants would refuse to admit him anything but a devil even after the play scene had proved the truth of his story: and most would stand in doubt between the two, shaking their heads and echoing Hamlet's words, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy." (Wilson 85)

Then there is the skeptic's point of view, which is the opinion that "apparitions are either the illusion of melancholic minds or flat knavery on the part of some rogue" (Wilson 64). Horatio represents this camp. It was however unpopular in Elizabethan's time to not believe in witches and spirits. Finally, writers from all three points of views, "declare that persons subject to

melancholy, as Hamlet was, were peculiarly prone to spectral visitations" (64). Because he is melancholic, we must question whether or not the ghost is real or appears to Hamlet in his madness. How far are we inside Hamlet's head? We hear his thoughts through his soliloquies. He even suggests that he is perhaps more prone to see his father's ghost because of his "weakness and [his] melancholy" (2.2.536). Questioning the existence of the ghost may not only be contemporary, but also textually valid.

The character of Horatio is nearly as mysterious as that of the Ghost. Horatio is clearly the only character Hamlet trusts. Hamlet tells him and no one else the information relayed by the Ghost. Hamlet shares other secrets with Horatio only, such as his intention behind the staging of *The Mousetrap* and his responsibility for the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet even expresses his love for Horatio, saying that he wears Horatio "In his heart's core … in [his] heart of heart" (3.2.69). In Act I, scene ii, Hamlet greets Horatio as a fellow student from Wittenberg. Horatio explains to Hamlet that he came to Elsinore for King Hamlet's funeral; this is likely around the very same time Hamlet himself returned to Denmark. However, until this encounter, Hamlet is apparently unaware of Horatio's visit, and when this first encounter of theirs at the castle occurs, it is, based on Hamlet's first soliloquy, approximately two months since the funeral. When Horatio first greets Hamlet, Hamlet reacts as though he barely recognizes Horatio: "I am glad to see you well – / Horatio, or I do forget myself" (1.2.160-161). Though we never learn where Horatio is from originally, in the first scene of the play, Horatio explains to the King's sentinels, with whom he inexplicably appears to be friends, the reason for their nightly guard of the castle and displays a native-like depth of knowledge of the last few decades of Danish political history. Yet, Claudius appoints Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to figure out the cause of Hamlet's madness, designating them as "being of so young days brought

up with him / And sith so neighboured to his youth and haviour" (2.2.11-12). Gertrude confirms the King's point of view, saying to the two friends, "he hath much talked of you / And sure I am two men there is not living / To whom he more adheres" (2.2.19-21). However, Hamlet clearly "adheres" more to Horatio. Are Claudius and Gertrude merely flattering Rosencrantz and Guildenstern or are they not familiar with Hamlet and Horatio's friendship because Horatio is not from Denmark? But Horatio describes the Ghost of King Hamlet as wearing "the very armour he had on / When he the ambitious Norway combated" (1.1.59-60). Thompson and Taylor explain:

> The assumption here seems to be that Horatio recognizes the armour, which is mentioned again at 1.2.199, just as Hamlet later recognizes 'My father in his habit as he lived' (3.4.133), but this raises problems of chronology (and Horatio's age) when we learn that the event referred to happened 30 years previously (5.1.135-53). (Thompson and Taylor 154, Notes)

Like a loyal and protective servant, but unlike a friend, Horatio neither challenges Hamlet nor eggs him on. When Claudius banishes Hamlet to England for an indefinite amount of time, Horatio, for reasons unknown, stays behind at the castle. During this time, Horatio initiates the need to pay attention to Ophelia's mental state, advising the Queen on its strategic political consequences: "'Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew / Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds" (4.5.14-15). He goes against the Queen's expressed wishes by commanding a gentleman to "Let [Ophelia] come in" (4.5.16), witnesses Ophelia's mental breakdown, and receives orders from the King to "Follow her close. Give her good watch, I pray you" (4.5.74). This finally confirms that the King and Queen clearly know Horatio and are aware he is present at the castle although Hamlet is not. Despite the King's instructions, shortly after Horatio exits with Ophelia, she re-enters alone and, shortly after that, she kills herself. Since

Horatio was the first to legitimately concern himself with Ophelia's psychological turmoil, why, then, does he suddenly leave her to her own demise, especially after receiving an order from the King to do the opposite? Though he is not onstage for it, he is still at the castle when Laertes rebelliously returns. And he receives mail from Hamlet, showing that Hamlet clearly expected him to stay there. All this occurs while Hamlet is away. But in Act V, scene i, Hamlet's remarks reveal that upon his return from England, Horatio told him neither of Ophelia's madness, nor of her death, nor of the return of the revenge-seeking Laertes. Yet, he tries to prevent Hamlet from fencing with Laertes, saying, "You will lose, my lord… If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit" (5.2.187, 195-196); it is as though he suspects something sinister. And when Hamlet is mortally wounded, Horatio, as though it were his duty, searches for the means to kill himself. But Hamlet stops him, ordering that he live to tell the prince's story. And he obeys him. After the royal family dies, the Ambassadors from England report the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Horatio makes a point to absolve the dead King of the responsibility for their execution: "He [King Claudius] never gave commandment for their death" (5.2.358). Is he trying to protect the evil, dead King's reputation?

Hamlet's other love, Ophelia, has an elusive identity. Elaine Showalter's work *Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism* discusses the problems that arise in trying to understand Ophelia's character. Showalter finds that Ophelia's existence in criticism is marginalized while her identity is heavily represented and interpreted through illustration and popular and artistic references. But how does the *Hamlet* represent the identity of Ophelia? As Showalter points out, Ophelia is only in five of the play's twenty scenes. And though Hamlet's story could certainly exist without Ophelia, her story could not at all be told without including him. Showalter writes, "In comparison to Hamlet, Ophelia is

certainly a creature of lack," suggesting that in *Hamlet* the feminine is the negative representation of the masculine (78). This is reflected in Hamlet's demand for Ophelia to go to a nunnery, perhaps the only acceptable place he can think of for her, this place that is defined by what it lacks. Hamlet condemns his own inaction but finds it to be the only ethical solution for her. Also, instead of searching for intention, like Hamlet, Ophelia avoids it – "I think nothing, my Lord" (3.2.111). It is Shakespeare who marginalizes Ophelia. In other words, as Showalter suggests, the play is not enough to create any "personal or individual existence" ("Identity" n. pag.) for Ophelia, and her identity must be or has already been filled in through criticism and popular culture; her identity is actually the "*history* of her representation" (Showalter 79). Ophelia's identity is constructed by a world beyond that of the play. Similarly, this approach to identity construction is applicable to the play as a whole: the identity of *Hamlet* is partially constructed by a world beyond that of the play. *Hamlet* means so much more than what happens in the play. If it did not, it might be uninteresting to continually reinterpret it. But the outside world's incessant impact on the identity of *Hamlet* causes the play to constantly adapt, even without moving or removing a single word, within an ever-changing plethora of cultural contexts. As the identity of *Hamlet* adjusts to its contemporary environments, it also accumulates a vast, deep history of representation that follows the play and continually affects its meaning. Therefore, it is actually necessary and even inevitable that one reinterprets *Hamlet* with each production because the play is never the same play it was before.

Similar to its treatment of Ophelia, *Hamlet* also marginalizes the identity of Gertrude, and, unfortunately, she is not heavily represented outside of the world of the play. There is no account in the play of her independently making a consequential decision or performing a major action. At least Ophelia commits suicide (though, according to Gertrude, her death was

accidentally caused by her dress). Hamlet himself is a major contributor to Gertrude's diminished autonomy. As with Ophelia, he is obsessed with the actions Gertrude should not take and the thoughts she should not have. He wanted her to remain a widow – one defined by the absence of marriage, just like the nunnery for Ophelia. He says that "a beast that wants discourse of reason" (1.2.150), in other words, a creature that lacks the faculties that Gertrude has, would have behaved more appropriately than her. He tries to rid her of her most fundamental identity: "would it were not so, you are my mother" (3.4.15). He orders her: "You shall not budge / You go not" (3.4.17-18); "Leave wringing of your hands" (3.4.32). He deplores her every action, especially that she married Claudius: "Such an act / That blurs the grace and blush of modesty, / Calls virtue hypocrite" (3.4.38-40). He declares: "You cannot call it love" (3.4.66); he accuses:

> Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
>
> Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
>
> . . . .
>
> Could not so mope. (3.4.76-77, 79)

Again, he points out that if she lacked senses she would not have "behave[d] in such an aimless way" (Thompson and Taylor 342, Notes), but other times she seems to have to senses at all. When Hamlet sees the Ghost, Gertrude sees "Nothing at all" (3.4.129); when Hamlet hears the Ghost, Gertrude hears "nothing" (3.4.131). He ends his pedantic rant with instructions of what not to do:

> Mother, for love of grace,
>
> Lay not that flattering unction to your soul
>
> That not your trespass but my madness speaks.

> . . . .
>
> Repent what's past, avoid what is to come,
>
> And do not spread the compost on the weeds
>
> To make them ranker.
>
> . . . .
>
> Goodnight, but go not to my uncle's bed;
>
> . . . .
>
> Refrain tonight
>
> And that shall lend a kind of easiness
>
> To the next abstinence, the next more easy.
>
> . . . .
>
> Not this, by no means, that I bid you do –
>
> Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed… (3.4.142-144, 148-150, 157, 163-165, 179-180)

Unlike Hamlet whose continuous goal is action, the more Gertrude refrains from action and rids herself of actions already done, the more virtuous she will become.

Character in *Make Hamlet*

I wholly subscribe to Aristotle's theory about the relationship between action and character in tragedy:

> Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in

> action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their action that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes as a subsidiary to the actions… Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character. (62; pt. 6)

This should be great news for someone adapting a masterpiece of theatre, or especially for those acting in one. No one has to try to figure out the essence of the characters or how they feel; one has to figure out what they do. Although an actor cannot easily portray a state of mind, actions are actable. Normally, the more specific the action is the more effective the actor will be in performing it. However, action in *Hamlet* is a more difficult concept to decipher than in other tragedies, mostly because *Hamlet*'s main action is really inaction. Also, there are the frequent soliloquies in which the character speaking has very little to actually do. But even in these moments, action must drive the play.

Action is equally important in *Make Hamlet*. There are several ways to determine the proper action for a specific moment. Action may be explicit in the play's language or stage directions. For instance, in *Make Hamlet*, the script's stage directions indicate that at the top of Scene 2, Hamlet holds a gun to his head. Action may also be inferred by context – what a character says and especially how other characters react to him. For example, in Scene 14 of *Make Hamlet*, Ophelia sings some slightly crude songs, but everyone reacts as though she has completely lost her mind; therefore, it might make sense to instruct the actor playing Ophelia to do a wild dance while taking off her clothes, or some other action(s) to warrant such a response from the other characters onstage. Action may also be entirely invented. In Scene 8 of *Make Hamlet* (the "nunnery" scene) the actor playing Ophelia may try seduce Hamlet. The text does

not at all suggest that this is what Ophelia should do, but it does not offer a specific alternative, and it is always better to employ action than not. Through the process of rehearsal, we would discover whether or not this choice would create an interesting dynamic for the scene and a comprehensible path for the actor. Aristotle says character is a result of action. As the actors of *Make Hamlet* discover their actions, their characters develop, and as their characters develop, their actions become easier to discover. Once the characters have developed, their psychologies, the mental and emotional factors, become apparent. The difference between the psychology of characters and the psychology of real people is that real people usually act as a result of psychology; in the theatre action often precedes psychology; at least I believe it should, especially in the creation of *Make Hamlet*. Creating character by way of action allows for more possibilities for each actor because it prevents the tendency to construct a consistent character based on a single, linear, psychological narrative. Because identity in *Make Hamlet* is indefinable, contradictory, and constantly changing, action is the clearest tool available for developing characters in this play.

Jan Kott's specific description of Hamlet illustrates aspects of the character that I would like my adaptation to portray:

> A young rebel… His passion sometimes seems childish. No doubt he is more primitive than all previous Hamlets… He is wild and drunk with indignation… He does not yet experience deep moral doubts, but he is not a simpleton… He loathes the world… He is a born conspirator. "To be" means for him to revenge his father and to assassinate the King; while "not to be" means – to give up the fight. (Kott 56)

Hamlet is incredibly smart but his testosterone filled youth and rash rage at the world throw his instincts out of whack. When he acts compulsively he makes mistakes; when he thinks about his

actions he doubts his green mind. His volatile state and unfixed identity determine his range of character choices. His contemplation of suicide the first time he is alone with the audience displays an initial mental instability before he even develops the idea to make a pretense of it:

> O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,
>
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
>
> Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
>
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. (1.2.129-132)

His discontent with the present is part of his love for playing pretend: for example, his instinct to pretend to be mad, or his enthusiasm for the play-within-the-play. In *Make Hamlet*, Hamlet does not only direct the play-within-the-play, but also directs the play as a whole. This is signified by using Hamlet's instruction to the Players as a prologue addressed to the entire cast. He insists that they perform his play just as he demands Horatio to live for the sake of telling his story. He organizes *The Mousetrap* so he, as Lucianous, can stage an action that has no basis in reality – it is a simulation of a simulacrum. This infatuation with performance emphasizes Hamlet as an actor in his own play; he needs to enact the play to exist. And his obsession with representation raises questions about truth, innocence, rationality, reality, and the instability of these concepts within the world of the play and in the theatre in general.

The Ghost certainly poses a problem in adapting *Hamlet* for a contemporary audience. Jan Kott writes about the contemporary Hamlet, "He cannot fully trust the Ghost, or any ghosts for that matter. He looks for more convincing evidence, and that is why he arranges a psychological test by staging the crime that has been committed" (62). Initially the play presumes that the Ghost exists; the first scene of the play quickly refutes any skepticism about

whether or not the Ghost will appear, and the major suspicions about the Ghost pertain to its honesty, not its existence. However, the encounters with the Ghost are the only supernatural events we witness in this story. And when the Ghost appears in the closet scene, he is invisible and inaudible to Gertrude. Like Hamlet the audience sees and hears the Ghost in this scene, but by this point in the play the audience is already three acts deep into the mind of Hamlet and is no longer an objective witness.

Wilson emphasizes that Shakespeare intended to fully represent the knowledge and beliefs regarding ghosts in Elizabethan times, and imagines that the character was much more impressionable in its original context: "There can be no doubt at all about it; the ghost in *Hamlet* was a far more arresting and prominent figure to the Elizabethans than can ever be to us. We may deplore our loss – and it is great indeed" (86). However, we do not need to feel any loss; the same doubt that the Elizabethans had about trusting the Ghost can apply to us as well. It is just a different kind of doubt for us. Hamlet tries to figure out if it is an "honest ghost" (1.5.137) or not. To Elizabethans this probably meant figuring out the Ghost's intentions; is it a devil or not. To us that means figuring out the Ghost's existence; is it real or not? And a contemporary production of *Hamlet* can wonder the same thing, is this ghost real, is it a hoax, or is it a figment of Hamlet's melancholic imagination? The distrust comes not from questioning what *kind* of thing it is but from questioning whether it is or not.

I think it is important to believe in the Ghost's inexistence as much as its existence. Since my adaptation of *Hamlet* is set in a costume shop, the Ghost is represented by a lit mannequin bust with its garments blown by a fan. Representing the Ghost with an inanimate object deliberately emphasizes the production's intention to focus on the ambiguity of this character. A mannequin may very well signify the presence of a real character. However, the

mannequin, an imitation of a real person, represents the Ghost, a character that by nature has a questionable identity. Thus, this choice comments on status of the Ghost and indicates that it, like the mannequin, is a fabricated imitation of someone that may or may not be real. Allowing for the possibility that the Ghost is not supposed to be real creates a new perspective, especially for audience members that may not have enjoyed their previous experiences with *Hamlet* as much as others because they could never reconcile with the play's dependence on an apparition. These audience members might also want the characters, whom Shakespeare presents as rational beings, to assess the Ghost as they, the audience members would. Therefore, they might desire a context in which a rational, contemporary-minded person might believe he saw a ghost. Imagine if you were Horatio and his friends in the dead of night. Might you, especially if you had already been prompted to think about the supernatural, think a human-like object, such as a mannequin, which is easy to stumble upon in a costume shop, is a ghost? Therefore, the audience vacillates between the reality of the situation – that the Ghost is represented by a mannequin – and what each audience member wants the production to say about the world of the play in order to remain invested in it: the Ghost is real, or the Ghost is merely imagined by the characters in their vulnerable states, or any other possibilities. What is important is that in *Make Hamlet*, there are always multiple possibilities and that there are always ways to refute these possibilities, for this adaptation depends on the unresolved nature of identity in *Hamlet*.

In questioning the existence of the Ghost we must not exclude the possibility that the Ghost is a hoax performed for Hamlet by the other characters in the play. All the characters at some point plot against Hamlet or are dishonest to him (though Horatio never lies to Hamlet, he does withhold major information from him). This is why, in *Make Hamlet* everyone but Hamlet says the Ghost's lines – everyone but Hamlet plays the Ghost. Suggesting that the Ghost may be

a ruse transforms the character into a symbol for the distrust and paranoia Hamlet experiences throughout the play. Hamlet even wonders at one point if the Ghost is not a demon abusing his fragile state of mind.

The inconsistencies and obscurities surrounding Horatio's identity leave room for personal interpretation in drawing conclusions. I believe that Horatio is Hamlet's servant, literally. He calls himself Hamlet's "poor servant" (1.2.162). He is loyal to Hamlet as though he serves him, although Hamlet pretends that Horatio is his peer to the point that he has forgotten that he is not. Horatio may be slightly older than Hamlet, but the two have known each other since Hamlet was born. It is very likely that Horatio attends Wittenberg with Hamlet, but that he does so to watch over the prince more than for his own studies. Above all Horatio devoutly protects Hamlet, and when Hamlet is killed Horatio believes that he has failed and that he must die as well. And even though Horatio lives, he continues to live for Hamlet.

At the end of the play, Hamlet instructs Horatio to tell his story, in other words, the story of Hamlet, and Horatio makes it clear that this is what he intends to do before he does anything else. In real life, this would mean that Hamlet is actually dead and that the play *Hamlet* is Horatio's retelling of what happened to Prince Hamlet from the moment the Danish sentinels took Horatio to see the Ghost until the end, which includes Hamlet ordering Horatio to stay alive in order to tell the Prince's story. However, there is no real life example of *Hamlet*'s story, no singular, original event from which Horatio can draw his content. *Hamlet* in its original form is a retelling of fictional events. And yet, I argue that *Hamlet* is Horatio's story and has been since its creation, because the end of Hamlet's story is the beginning of Horatio's. The play's circularity allows this too be true; it indicates a story where the beginning is the end and vice versa. The characters cannot exist after or outside of *Hamlet* because its end implies its beginning. And it is

Horatio's job to "spread the compost on the weeds" and perpetuate its retelling, which he will inevitably do since that is how the story goes (3.4.149).

If *Hamlet* were a garden, Horatio would be its gardener. In fact, in *Make Hamlet*, Horatio is a gardener. Although usually used to describe corruption (Charney 102-113), gardens and plants are frequently used as metaphors for the play and symbols for its characters. Hamlet describes the "world" (1.2.134) as "an unweeded garden / That grows to seed" (1.2.135-136), and begs his mother, "do not spread the compost on the weeds / To make them ranker" (3.4.149-150). The Ghost prophetically compares Hamlet to "the fat weed / That roots itself in ease on the Lethe wharf" (1.5.32-33). Just as man's original sin corrupted Eden, Claudius corrupted Denmark when he murdered his brother while the latter was "sleeping in [his] orchard" (1.5.35), and this first sin puts the story's events into play (Charney 102-103). Like Elsinore, "The symbolic garden in *Hamlet* seems to be a dangerous and threatening place" (Charney 105). It is the setting of Horatio's story:

> So shall you hear
>
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
>
> Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
>
> Of death put on my cunning, and for no cause,
>
> And in this upshot purposes mistook
>
> Fallen on th'inventors' heads. All this can I
>
> Truly deliver. (5.2.564-569)

Horatio carries on the recounting of *Hamlet*; his promise at the end of the play to "presently perform" (5.2.377) "how these things came about" (5.2.364) keeps the play alive. Horatio

crucially tells Hamlet about the appearance of his father's ghost. He takes care to make the plot continue. Destruction permeates the play, but Horatio is a creator. He is Hamlet's caretaker. He sustains the awful story of the rotten state. When he goes to England, Hamlet essentially leaves the plot of the play. But Horatio must stay behind in Denmark to maintain the weeds. In *Make Hamlet* Horatio has a small garden onstage that he waters throughout the play. This also creates a visual manifestation of the garden imagery that saturates the play. As the only one left alive at the end, Horatio is the only character who can nurse the play back to life.

The character of Polonius claims, "the apparel oft proclaims the man" (1.3.71). In regards to the character of Polonius, *Make Hamlet* tests the artistic extremity of this concept. The twentieth century cultural theorist Fred Davis elaborates on Polonius' maxim: “Dress … comes easily to serve as a kind of visual metaphor for identity and, as pertains in particular to the open societies of the West, for registering the culturally anchored ambivalences that resonate within and among identities” (Davis 25). In *Hamlet* clothing is frequently used as a metaphor for identity. In *Make Hamlet*, costume is used as a device to represent the existence of a character. At the beginning of the play, all the actors put on their costumes in front of the audience. When a character dies, the actor removes his costume. In *Make Hamlet* no actor plays Polonius – Polonius is represented by a costume. Like the ironic, inevitable consequences of Greek tragedy that Aristotle praises, Polonius’ own famous words provide the rationale for choosing him for this depiction of character. He has determined his fate: “the apparel oft proclaims the man". This takes no deciphering – Polonius claims that you are what you wear (but, interestingly, not that you wear what you are). Also, I have doctored the plot of the play so that the incidents unfold rapidly. A lot of the humor of Polonius lies in the character's long-windedness and artful rambling. In removing the majority of Polonius' long speeches, I have greatly increased the

tempo of the play. In *Make Hamlet* the language of live action is as important as spoken language. Thus, another reason why I have virtually cut Polonius from the play is to better balance the scales of action and language. The character of Polonius is funny and foolish because he obsesses over precision in his explanations, inappropriately uses lofty language, and overuses puns, metaphors, and other linguistic flourishes, often confusing himself in the process. I believe that this kind of humor is difficult for audiences to understand. It is solely linguistic humor that purposefully uses complex, overwrought language. Meanwhile the audience is already making an aural adjustment in dealing with the fact that the language is Elizabethan. I am in no way opposed to spoken language, but in the case of Polonius, I believe the problems outweigh the benefits.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* employs Ophelia and Gertrude as plot embellishments; they provide thematic support to the men's problems. They are easily manipulated and frail, which gives them a semblance of innocence that further diminishes their agency: Ophelia's dishonest choices were a result of her father's demands and made without the knowledge that Hamlet truly loved her (as he claims in Act 5, scene 1, line 258) – her weakness exonerates her; King Hamlet's Ghost insists that Gertrude had no knowledge of his murder – her ignorance makes her less guilty; Gertrude's depiction of Ophelia's "accidental" death describes the girl falling over and not being able to swim – the clumsy Ophelia did not commit suicide; the Queen, uninformed of the plot to kill her son, inadvertently poisons herself with a drink intended for Hamlet – if she had listened to her husband's instructions, "Gertrude, do not drink" (5.2.273), she would have been spared. In my production of *Make Hamlet*, I would like to emphasize Ophelia and Gertrude's responsibility for their actions. Gertrude wears a revealing dress and drinks Cosmopolitans continuously throughout the play. In the closet scene, she speaks to Hamlet as though she is

reprimanding him rather than begging him. She participates, as does Ophelia, in the chorus that speaks for the Ghost. The Queen's surprised reaction to the word murder reads as feigned. In a play that emphasizes the ambiguity of identity, Gertrude may be guilty of aiding in her husband's murder, adultery, lust, indulgence, and/or lying to her son. Even the rather conservative Shakespeare scholar John Dover Wilson believes that Gertrude is culpable of adultery as well as incest. He points to the passage, "So lust, though to a radiant angel linked, / Will sate itself in a celestial bed / And prey on garbage" (291: 1.5.55-56). The validity of the theory lies in the verb “prey”. When did Gertrude “prey on garbage” – before or after her husband’s death? Wilson claims that the “sate[ing]” and the “prey[ing]” occurred during the same time period. The truth is not important, but the possibilities are. In *Make Hamlet* Ophelia's father is a costume, and can no longer take the blame for her actions. Ophelia's mad scene is wild and sexy rather than pathetic. She tempts Hamlet as much as she disgusts him. Her death is not remotely portrayed as accidental; the Queen's description of Ophelia's death is cut, and, instead we witness her commit suicide. She is as angry as she is confused. Importantly, Hamlet's inappropriate treatment of these characters is blameworthy. Ophelia and Gertrude are no longer delicate characters. They are complex, they constantly change, and they are full of contradictions.

Any actor's control of the expression of his character's identity is constantly challenged as he takes into consideration and reacts to how this identity is perceived. The audience, the character, and the actor have an ongoing dialogue throughout any work of theatre. It begins as a simple subject/object relationship: the audience (subject) takes in the art (object). But in the theatre, the art is alive. The performers (who in theatre are the art and the artist) sense the scrutiny and reaction of the audience and are changed by it. The dialectic is reversed: the art (subject) takes in the audience (object), the audience senses this and is changed. The dialogue

continues throughout the performance.

Make Hamlet regards its audience as a reality television audience. In this construct, the characters are aware that there is an audience, and the audience is aware that the characters are aware of them. Even though the audience is inherent to this construct, it is, nevertheless, a voyeur. The characters may forget that the audience is there, but when something is embarrassing, for example, it is even more so because it occurs in front of the audience, and in these moments the characters are very sensitive to the fact that they are being watched. The characters speak to the audience, but they do not expect the audience to respond, not verbally, at least. In this context the soliloquy becomes the "confessional," the motif in reality television where one person talks to the camera alone. And like reality television, the concept of the performer and the character are interchangeable and the difference between them indefinable. The difference, of course, between *Make Hamlet* and an actual reality television show is that *Make Hamlet* is live theatre and takes place in front of a live audience.

Chapter 3: Thought

Aristotle writes, "Thought … is the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances … [It] is found where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated" (Aristotle 63-64; pt. 6). The first part of Aristotle's definition of thought is found throughout the entire play of *Hamlet*. The soliloquies, however, best represent both parts of the Aristotelian definition of thought in tragedy. According to the *OED*, a soliloquy is "an instance of talking to or conversing with oneself, or of uttering one's thoughts aloud without addressing any person" ("Soliloquy" n. pag.). In *Hamlet*, there are seven of these: six spoken by Hamlet and one by Claudius. In each case, the character reflects on what is possible and pertinent in the given circumstances and he proves something or enunciates a general maxim.

In Act I, "Hamlet's first soliloquy reveals pent-up emotion through its exclamation, questions and expressions of pain" (Thompson and Taylor 175, Notes):

> O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,
>
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
>
> Or that the Everlasting had not
>
> Fixed his canon 'gainst self-salughter. (1.2.129-133)

The first two lines ask for self-deconstruction and even annihilation: Hamlet wants to destroy his own identity – undo what he is. The following two lines are more specific: "Or that the Everlasting had not fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (1.2.131-132). Here he longs for suicide. These first four lines introduce a dichotomization between the earthly world and the celestial: the first line speaks of "flesh", the second of "the Everlasting". He compares his world to an "unweeded garden" (1.2.135), then speaks of "the winds of heaven" (1.2.141). Finally, he

poses the two concepts directly next to one another: "Heaven and earth" (1.2.142). He goes on to talk about Gertrude's "appetite" (1.2.143), his father's body, and compares his mother to a "beast" (1.2.150), emphasizing her association to the animalistic and worldly and then equates her with a character from classical mythology.

The third line also brings up one of the driving motifs of this soliloquy – Christian beliefs versus classical mythology. Much like the play's structure, which mixes the epic or medieval with the Aristotelian or classical, the Christian allusions in the soliloquy are presented along with those made to classical mythology. Hamlet addresses God three times in his first soliloquy. But he also compares his father as a superior being to Claudius by saying he is like "Hyperion to a satyr" (1.2.140), that is, the difference between the "Greek god of the sun" and a "grotesque creature, half human and half goat" (Thompson and Taylor 177, Notes). He compares his mother to "Niobe" (1.2.148) from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, a "Greek mythical figure who mourned for the deaths of her children until she was turned into a weeping stone statue" (Thompson and Taylor 178, Notes), and says his father's brother is "no more like my father / Than I to Hercules" (1.2.152-153). He ends his first soliloquy with a general maxim: "It is not, nor it cannot come to good" (1.2.158), without hope of redemption by superior beings of any origin.

The second soliloquy occurs in Act II after the first scene with the Players. Perhaps this is why this soliloquy centers on pretend versus real, action versus behavior, and saying versus doing:

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

Is it not monstrous that this player here,

But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,

Could for his soul so to his own conceit… (2.2.485-488)

Hamlet admires the performance of the First Player and compares the Player to himself: "What would he do / Had he the motive and the Cue for passion[6] / That I have?" (2.2.495-497). Here Hamlet feels discouraged as the reality of his own role falls short of the illusion. Hamlet compares his task to an actor's motivation to play a part, a task for which he has the "motive" (2.2.496) but not the motivation to perform. He believes that the First Player would be much more effective at playing his role:

He would drown the stage with tears

And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,

Make mad the guilty and appal the free,

Confound the ignorant and amaze indeed

The very faculties of eyes and ears. (2.2.497-501)

Here Hamlet speaks of behavior instead of action; he explains that if the Player had real motive, like Hamlet, that he would conduct himself so piteously and tragically that it would deeply affect anyone who witnessed him, yet Hamlet never implies that the Player would take vengeful action. Hamlet chastises himself because he "can say nothing" (2.2.504), ironically later in this soliloquy he condemns himself for "unpack[ing his] heart with words" (2.2.520) instead of doing something about the situation. As he ends the soliloquy, he continues to blur the lines between real and pretend: he decides he will test whether Claudius' guilt is real or not by showing the King a simulacrum of the possible crime.

[6] Again, this line, exceptionally, is taken from the Folio instead of the Second Quarto.

The third and most famous soliloquy is much more directly about identity. Hamlet states, “To be or not to be – that is the question” (3.1.55). In other words, he questions what constitutes a personal existence. The ambiguity of Hamlet’s language in this monologue, however, reflects the uncertainty of his debate. He uses the personal pronouns “we" (3.1.60, 66, 80, 81), "us" (3.1.67, 80), "he" (3.1.74), "his” (3.1.74), "himself" (3.1.74); he never uses “you” nor (shockingly) “I”. The reason for this is because this soliloquy is more about philosophizing on the identity of mankind than on specific, personal experience. He contemplates the unknown and wonders what one’s identity becomes after death. He paradoxically presents death as a rebirth, as “shuffl[ing] off this mortal coil” (3.1.66) which Hibbard explains is “this mortal flesh…which encloses within its coils or folds our essential being and has to be *shuffled off* at death as a snake sloughs its old skin” (qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 285, Notes). It is as though in death, one might finally be able to discover one’s true self.

Having previously seen his father in arms and preparing for his own impending battle, Hamlet takes on militaristic vocabulary, discussing “slings and arrows” (3.1.57) and questioning whether or not one should, “take arms against a sea of troubles” (3.1.58). Most interestingly in this soliloquy, Hamlet equates action with suicide or death. He says that our fear of the “undiscovered country” (3.1.78), or death, makes us “cowards” (3.1.82):

> And thus the native hue of resolution
>
> Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,
>
> And enterprises of great pitch and moment
>
> With this regard their currents turn awry
>
> And lose the name of action. (3.1.83-87)

Ironically, in the previous soliloquy, Hamlet compares himself to a coward for not avenging his father's murder. But the famous "to be or not to be" soliloquy asks, among several things, whether to have motivation to act or not. And this motivation is a sort of comprehension. It means to really know what the proper action is, but for Hamlet this comprehension is elusive. Collin McGinn writes of Hamlet: "Action seems farthest from him when he contemplates it most intensely; the more he knows he must do something, the less able he is to carry it out. He is a man who loves the theater, yet finds it impossible to occupy a clear role for himself" (41). Thus, "to be" means "to exist" but could mean "to act" as well. However, Hamlet also equates action with taking one's own life:

> Who would fardels bear
>
> To grunt and sweat under a weary life
>
> But that the dread of something after death
>
> (The undiscovered country from whose born
>
> No traveler returns) puzzles the will
>
> And makes us rather bear those ills we have
>
> Than fly to others that we know not of.
>
> Thus conscience doth make us cowards –
>
> . . . .
>
> And [we] lose the name of action (3.1.75-82, 87).

So, in a paradoxical twist, he equates being with dying. And this is how Hamlet concludes his soliloquy, where he really draws no conclusion but contemplates the mystery in this verb "to be"

much like the mystery surrounding the word “logos” at the beginning of the book of John.

The fourth soliloquy occurs after the scandal caused by the play-within-the-play. Immediately, Hamlet invokes devilish images:

> ‘Tis now the very witching time of night
>
> When churchyards yawn and Hell itself breaks out
>
> Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood
>
> And do such business as the bitter day… (3.2.378-380)

Then he involves himself in this hellish world. Shakespeare’s contemporaries believed that witches drank hot blood (Thompson and Taylor 325, Notes). He is saying that he is now ready to kill the King. But why, if he has now determined that the Ghost is a good Ghost, does Hamlet need the help of Hell? He continues to align himself with the supernatural, the “unnatural” (3.2.385). Hamlet is full of the enthusiasm for revenge, he is almost possessed by it and he would drink hot blood to bring out the hellishness within him. He speaks like a frenzied Bacchante following the scent of wine. He ends this soliloquy by determining to meet with his mother but not to harm her: “My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites” (3.2.387). He must fragment himself in order to maintain control. In fact, Hamlet needs to search the splinters of his identity to find the part of him capable of killing Claudius. His conclusion for this soliloquy is that he is ready for revenge.

In Act III, the fifth soliloquy belongs to Claudius. It is his second admission of guilt, the first being in an aside earlier in the same act (3.1.49-54). Like Hamlet, Claudius struggles with motive to do something he cannot bring himself to do. In this case, the desired action is praying:

> O, my offense is rank: it smells to heaven;

It hath the primal eldest curse upon't –

A brother's murder. Pray can I not:

Though inclination may be as sharp as will… (3.3.36-39)

This soliloquy is characterized by its focus on Christian principles and state law. For example, he begins with saying that his “offense … / … smells to heaven” (3.3.36). He states his crime “hath the primal eldest curse upon’t – / A brother’s murder”, referring to the murder of Abel by Cain in the Bible. He uses words like "mercy" (3.3.41), "pray(er)" (3.3.38, 48, 51), "heaven(s)" (3.3.36, 45), "fall" (3.3.49), "pardoned" (3.3.50, 56), "possessed" (3.3.53), "forgive" (3.3.52), "repent(ance)" (3.3.65, 66), and "angels” (3.3.69). He explains how he manipulated the law:

In the corrupted currents of this world

Offence’s gilded hand may shove by justice

And oft ‘tis seen the wicked prize itself

Buys out the law… (3.3.57-60)

However, unfortunately for Claudius, “’tis not so above” (3.3.60). Like in Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy, Claudius believes that one’s true identity is revealed in death: “There is no shuffling, there the action lies / In his true nature” (3.3.61-62). There is a break in this soliloquy where Claudius tries to pray and Hamlet secretly enters and contemplates whether or not he should kill his uncle. After Hamlet has exited, Claudius ends his soliloquy before he too exits: “My words fly up, my thoughts remain below / Words without thoughts never to heaven go” (3.3.97-98). Claudius concludes by resigning to the fact that he is not able to pray because he does not mean what he says to God.

The sixth soliloquy directly follows the fifth and its ideas are also heavily related to

Christian principles:

> Now I might do it. But now 'a is a-praying.
>
> And now I'll do it [*Draws sword*.] – and so 'a goes to heaven,
>
> And so am I revenged! That would be scanned:
>
> A villain kills my father, and for that… (3.3.73-76)

Nevertheless, in this soliloquy Hamlet almost kills Claudius: “And now I’ll do it” (3.3.74). However, if there is one consistent aspect of Hamlet’s character it is that he cannot find the proper moment to carry out his task. In this case, he decides against killing Claudius, not because murder is a Christian sin, but because Claudius is praying and therefore, according to Hamlet, he would go straight to heaven upon dying. This would be unfair since Claudius killed King Hamlet when the latter was “grossly full of bread / With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May” (3.3.80-1). Hamlet imagines a better time to kill the Claudius:

> When he is drunk, asleep or in his rage,
>
> Or in th'incestuous pleasures of his bed,
>
> At game a-swearing, or about some act
>
> That has no relish of salvation in’t.
>
> Then trip him that his heels may kick at heaven
>
> And that his soul may be as damned and black
>
> As hell whereto it goes. (3.3.89-95)

Hamlet has come so close to defeating the being that stands in his way more than anyone else: himself. However, Identity *A* is no match for Identity *A*, and Hamlet loses his battle against the

only person he can trust, a man who is also his worst foe: himself.

The seventh and last soliloquy occurs immediately after Hamlet speaks to the Captain in the Norwegian army. The Norwegian army, led by Fortinbras, has permission to cross through Denmark on its way to fight a war in Poland. Hamlet encounters the Captain while on his way with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to the ship that is set to bring him to England. Hamlet asks the Captain about the traversing soldiers and the Captain explains that they are on their way to fight the Polish. Hamlet comments on the soldiers' meaningless, imminent deaths, and the Captain exits. Hamlet asks the others to go ahead of him and then begins his last soliloquy:

> How all occasions do inform against me
>
> And spur my dull revenge. What is a man
>
> If his chief good and market of his time
>
> Be but to sleep and feed? A beast – no more. (4.4.31-34)

Thompson and Taylor write, "If he begins from his own situation, he moves on to more general speculations about the human condition – a tendency featured … in the maligned 'How all occasions do inform against me' (4.4.31-65), where … Hamlet asks 'What is a man?'" (Thompson and Taylor 24, Intro.). The first words in the play are echoed in this soliloquy; it is as if Hamlet looks at mankind and asks, "Who's there?" (1.1.1). He compares two extremes: his own situation of inaction to that of the Norwegian soldiers who are practically marching to their deaths:

> How stand I then
>
> That have a father killed, a mother stained,
>
> Excitements of my reason and my blood

> And let all sleep; while to my shame I see
>
> The imminent death of twenty thousand men
>
> That for a fantasy and trick of fame
>
> Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
>
> Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
>
> Which is not tomb enough and continent
>
> To hide the slain? (4.4.55-64)

This is not the first time that Hamlet compares his own identity to another's and finds his own to be unsatisfactory. In the second soliloquy Hamlet weighs his position with that of the Player and concludes that the Player would do a better job playing Hamlet than Hamlet himself does. Hamlet is embarrassed of himself. Now Hamlet says:

> I do not know
>
> Why yet I live to say the thing's to do,
>
> Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
>
> To do't. (4.4.42-45).

He wonders how he allowed this neglect of his purpose. He has neglected it so badly that it is almost embarrassing for the audience to hear him bring it up yet again, and promise us, yet again, that he is going to do it. Nevertheless, Hamlet finally concludes, "O, from this time forth / My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth" (4.4.64-65).

Thought in *Make Hamlet*

In my adaptation *Make Hamlet*, I have cut the second and seventh soliloquies and kept the first, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth soliloquies. The value of cutting the second soliloquy lies in meta-theatricality of the opening scene, which happens as if the second soliloquy has already taken place. *Make Hamlet* starts with Hamlet's instructions to the Players, so it begins as a play in process where Hamlet is the director. As I intend this production for an audience who is familiar with *Hamlet*, everyone would likely be aware of the play-within-the play to "catch the conscience of the King." The value of cutting the seventh soliloquy lies in the elimination of distractions from the main action. In the seventh soliloquy, Hamlet promises us, for what feels like the millionth time, that he will definitely take care of this thing that he has had nearly the entire play yet to accomplish. It is almost embarrassing that Hamlet stands before us, yet again, without having completed the one and only action he is charged with. Though it ends with a bold declaration of newfound motivation, I believe this soliloquy represents Hamlet at one of his weakest states. Also, including this soliloquy in *Make Hamlet* would make no sense since it references the Norwegian army, which Hamlet does not see in *Make Hamlet*, and I completely agree with my choice to cut the appearance of the Norwegian Captain and Fortinbras, as it allows us to focus on the more complex identities of the main characters. However, during the rehearsal process, I may try to find a moment for Hamlet to merely say, "I do not know / Why yet I live to say the thing's to do" (4.4.42-43).

In performing these soliloquies, I would like to reconsider the concept of the soliloquy. When discussing *Hamlet* (and Shakespeare's works in general), the monologues that a character delivers while alone onstage are referred to as soliloquies, which means, "An instance of talking to or conversing with oneself, or of uttering one's thoughts aloud without addressing any person"

("Soliloquy" n. pag.): "*Hamlet* remains famous for its soliloquies" (Thompson and Taylor18, Intro.). But this is what we call them – it is not as though they are labeled as soliloquies in the plays. I would prefer for characters to address the audience as though it were the audience of a reality television show and experiment with the concept of the "confessional" that is distinct to the reality television construct. I would like to change the "soliloquies" into direct address and bring the audience closer to the "thought" aspect of the play. Although this may have has been done before, my production would re-contextualize the soliloquies using a contemporary method that recognizes the role of the audience in making the meaning of the play.

Chapter 4: Language

The question of identity pervades the language of *Hamlet* from the very beginning. The very first line of the play asks "Who's There?" This is the question that *Hamlet* asks itself as well as the question that the character Hamlet asks himself throughout the play. The most famous soliloquy in the play, the "To be or not to be" monologue, asks whether to have an identity or not. In the second scene, Claudius addresses Hamlet: "now my cousin Hamlet, and my son" (1.2.64). In one line Claudius gives Hamlet two conflicting identities. Claudius asks him, "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?" (1.2.66). Hamlet replies, "Not so much, my lord, I am too much in the 'son'" (1.2.67). What it means to be son is further blurred. Finally, Claudius gives him three identities – "Our chiefest courtier, our cousin, and our son" (1.2.117) – three identities Hamlet would rather not have.

The issue of identity in *Hamlet* is expressed not only through direct discussion among the characters but also through the use of metaphor. In his discourse on "language" in the *Poetics*, Aristotle writes that for a tragic poet, "The greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances" (104; pt. 22). The relationship between clothing and identity in *Hamlet* is one area on which Shakespeare focused his eye for resemblances. Metaphors involving clothing, costume, or cloth are one of the most noticeable linguistic motifs of the play. If the first line of the play puts identity into question – "Who's there?" – the second line of the play presents the idea that this question can be solved by the person's garments: "Nay answer me. Stand and unfold yourself" – "unfold yourself", meaning, "tell me who you are" (Thompson and Taylor 147, Notes). Throughout the play clothing is continually used as a metaphor for identity. In Act I scene ii, Hamlet, Gertrude, and Claudius use sartorial language to

describe Hamlet's behavior. The clouds "hang" on Hamlet like a woeful jacket (1.2.66). Hamlet's costume is spelled out for us in his own lines: "inky cloak… / …customary suits of solemn black" (1.2.77-78). And his mother asks him to "cast [his] nighted colour off" (1.2.68), as though his behavior is an overcoat, and not to seek for his father with "vailed lids" (1.2.70), literally meaning his eyelids have become a funeral veil for his eyes while figuratively meaning his eyes appear mournful. Hamlet wears his identity like a woeful suit. When it comes to madness, clothing represents a key metaphor for Hamlet's behavior. Hamlet claims he will "put an antic disposition on" (1.5.170) as though it is a costume. Claudius questions why "he puts on this confusion" (3.1.2). Ophelia describes how Hamlet frightened her when he appeared in her closet, "with his doublet all unbraced, / No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled, / Ungartered and down-gyved to his ankle, / Pale as his shirt" (2.1.75-78). This is perhaps literally the "the antic disposition" he has "put on." In the closet scene Hamlet introduces the idea that apparel can actually change ones identity:

> That monster Custom, who all sense doth eat
>
> Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,
>
> That to the use of actions fair and good
>
> He likewise gives a frock or livery
>
> That aptly is put on. (3.4.159-163)

Thompson and Taylor explain this quote: "The assumptions seems to be that, if the Queen *put*[*s*] *on* the clothing or appearance of virtue, custom will make it habitual (i.e. real), just as custom has made her insensitive to sin" (350, Notes). Clothing will define who she is. We should also note the phrase "put on". Here it is actually used when speaking of clothing but it is the same

language Hamlet uses in speaking of his “antic disposition.”

In the closet scene Hamlet also refers to his mother as “stained” (4.4.56) as though she were a soiled piece of cloth. He explains to his mother that Claudius became king by stealing “the precious diadem” (3.4.98) as if having the proper attire makes one king. He later uses clothing as a metaphor to describe Claudius saying he is a “king of shreds and patches” (3.4.99).

Shakespeare uses the language of arms and armor to compare Fortinbras and Hamlet. The characters are in similar situations: their fathers, both former kings, were killed and they both feel these deaths were wrongful; both live in countries now ruled by their fathers’ brothers; and each prince uses the play to avenge his father’s death. Shakespeare employs clothing metaphors, however, to emphasize their differences. Fortinbras is of “unimproved mettle” (1.1.95) meaning he has an “undisciplined spirit” (Thompson and Taylor 157, Notes) while making a pun on “metal” armor. Although inexperienced, Fortinbras is made of metal and ready for battle. For Hamlet, the mettle/metal pun is used in contrast: Hamlet calls himself “muddy-mettled” (2.2.502) indicating he is “poor-spirited” and bearing tarnished armor (Thompson and Taylor 276, Notes). Unlike Fortinbras, Hamlet is not fully armed or equipped to avenge his father. He is poorly dressed, or not dressed at all. “Naked” is one of the more harped on words in the play. Hamlet writes to the King, “You shall know I am set naked on your kingdom” (4.7.43-44). Claudius exclaims, “’Naked’, / And in a postrscript here he says ‘alone’” (4.7.49-50). This bizarre phrase seems to trouble the king as much as Hamlet’s actual return. Bell writes that in *King Lear* “naked” signifies a “loss of all identity … represented by his utter lack of clothing of any kind” (184). If Hamlet is naked, who is he?

Clothing metaphors are often applied to the behavior of various characters. Claudius refers to Hamlet’s functioning as “from fashion of himself” (3.1.6), using clothing as a metaphor

for his unfocused behavior. Later Laertes warns his sister that “The canker galls the infants of the spring / Too oft before their buttons be disclosed” (1.3.38-39). Buttons are buds, but when applied to Ophelia the metaphor gives us the imagery of Ophelia being unbuttoned too hastily. Then Polonius warns his daughter that Hamlet’s vows are “Not of that dye which their investments show / But mere implorators of unholy suits” (1.3.127-128). The vows wear clothing that disguises their false representation. Here, instead of representing one’s true behavior, clothing is a metaphor for a false identity. The law of identity is broken: *A* does not equal *A*.

Visual art also becomes a linguistic key for deception. “Paint” which in *Hamlet* usually refers to women’s make-up is an example of this. This artistic practice is part of Hamlet’s problem with women: "I have heard of your paintings well enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another. You jib and amble and you lisp, you nickname God's creatures and make your wantonness ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't. It hath made me mad" (3.1.141-146). Claudius uses the language of art and artifice to describe his villainous behavior: "The harlot’s cheek beautied with plastering art / Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it / Than is my deed to my most painted word (3.1.50-52). A prostitute’s made-up face is like a beautiful sculpture of which the surface hides deterioration underneath, just as Claudius’ words are artfully brushed over his actions and hide the ugly canvas below. Claudius asks Laertes if his father was “dear” (4.7.105) to him or if he is “like the painting of a sorrow / A face without a heart?” (4.7.106-107). Is Laertes really mourning or is he merely a counterfeit representation of one who mourns? Art is always used as a metaphor for covering up something unpleasant in this play. While contemplating Yorick’s skull Hamlet says to it, “Now get you to my lady’s table and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come” (5.1.182-184). Artistry may present

the identity you want to have, but nothing can hide the truth of death.

Language in *Make Hamlet*

The metaphorical emphasis on clothing in *Hamlet* is abundant. In *Make Hamlet*, I have foregrounded this in several ways. First of all, the play is set in a costume shop. Costume literally becomes a symbol for life, as the actors put on their costumes as part of the performance at the beginning of the play, and each removes his costume when his character dies. Meanwhile, from the time the audience arrives, the actors never enter or exit the stage. This underlines the fact physical existence is only one facet of identity, and that, in the theatre, costume puts identity into action. Also, in *Make Hamlet* the character of Polonius is represented by a costume. This is especially ironic since it is Polonius who famously says, "the apparel oft proclaims the man" (1.3.71). In scene 2, Claudius, forgetting that Polonius is merely a costume, addresses him. Regarding Laertes request to return to France he asks, "Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius?" The King is quickly reminded that Polonius is actually a costume and, therefore, cannot respond when spoken to. It is a brief, comical moment, but it indicates to the audience that this costume, a clown costume, represents Polonius. In scene 3, Hamlet pretends to be Polonius by wearing him; in scene 11 Hamlet kills Polonius by cutting him up with a scissors. In scene 17, the funeral party mourns Ophelia's wet dress. Furthermore, a clothed mannequin bust represents the Ghost. In *Make Hamlet*, visual language sometimes replaces spoken language.

The additions I have made to the language of the play occur with Ophelia. Her mad scene and death are markedly different in my version of *Hamlet*. In *Make Hamlet* we witness Ophelia's death. This occurs after the Queen announces to Laertes and Claudius that Ophelia is dead. The lights come up on her and she is at the top of a tall ladder holding two large rocks. Then, she recites a Robert Frost poem that I believe completely summarizes her state before she

dies:

> Some say the world will end in fire,
>
> Some say in ice.
>
> From what I've tasted of desire
>
> I hold with those who favor fire.
>
> But if I had to perish twice
>
> I think I know enough of hate
>
> To say that for destruction ice
>
> Is also great and would suffice. (80)

For Ophelia, the world is ending. She reflects on what exactly caused her downfall. Ophelia takes on two victimized roles: that of the bereft lover – her "desire" has left her with a broken heart; the other role is that of an orphaned child who "hates" the one who took away what remained of her only parent. Problematically, the one she desires and the one she hates are the same person. Therefore, it is ironic for Ophelia to recite this poem because her world has already ended in both ways. After finishing the poem, she puts the two rocks in her pockets and descends the ladder. The rocks are a visual key indicating that Ophelia's death is a suicide; famously, Virginia Woolf drowned herself by weighting her pockets with stones. The descent and the rocks clearly convey Ophelia's choice of death to the audience without the Queen's explanation. Also, fire and ice together makes water.

Chapter 5: Song

Aristotle writes, “Song holds the chief place among the embellishments” (64; pt.6). By “embellishments” he means Song and Spectacle. Though he only discusses Song to this brief extent, he makes it clear that it is needed to create a tragedy.

Hamlet contains six songs: the first five are sung by Ophelia and the last one by the Gravedigger. As the gravedigger scene is not included in my adaptation, I will focus the discussion on Ophelia’s songs. Ophelia’s songs are particularly poignant when speaking of identity. The subject of her songs vacillate between her demanding and strict father, who is now dead, and her somewhat sadistic and absent lover, and these two subjects are also the objects of her grief. Her songs show how, in her mad state, she easily confuses Hamlet for Polonius and frequently substitutes one for the other.

In Act IV, scene v, in the first half of Ophelia’s mad scene, she sings 'How should I your true love know' (4.5.23-26, 29-32, 36, 38-40) and 'Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s Day' (4.5.48-55, 58-66) (Thompson and Taylor 566, App.). She exits and then, reappears after Laertes returns from France, and completes the second half of her mad scene where she sings 'They bore him bare-faced on the bier' (4.5.160-161), 'For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy' (4.5.179), and 'And will ‘a not come again?' (5.1.57-60, 67-70, 89-92, 113) (Thompson and Taylor 566, App.). Throughout these songs, Ophelia continually confuses Hamlet with Polonius and grief with overt sexuality. The seeds of this confusion are sewed in as early as Act I, scene iii, when Polonius insists that Hamlet’s love for Ophelia, though he has expressed it “With almost all the holy vows of heaven” (1.3.113), is false:

Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers

Not of that dye which their investments show

But mere implorators of unholy suits

Breathing like sanctified and pious bonds

The better to beguile. (1.3.126-130)

Polonius instructs her: "I would not in plain terms from this time forth / Have you so slander any moment leisure / As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet" (1.3.131-133). Ophelia must decide whether or not to obey her father and if she does, she must also deny her love. But influencing her decision is the opinion her father has expressed that Hamlet does not love her. She decides to “repel his letters and den[y] / his access to [her]” (2.1.106-107). Then Hamlet appears to her like a “melodramatic lover” (Thompson and Taylor 234, Notes), but frightening, “As if he had been loosed out of hell” (2.1.80). “Hamlet, for the audience, if not for Ophelia, resembles his father’s Ghost” (Thompson and Taylor 234, Notes). Terrified, she recounts the encounter to her father. He concludes that “This is the very ecstasy of love” (2.1.99) and says to her, “I am sorry” (2.1.103).

But Polonius has permanently destroyed Ophelia’s relationship with Hamlet. This is confirmed in Act III scene i during Hamlet and Ophelia’s first onstage encounter. Hamlet flies into a rage and orders her, “Get thee to a nunnery!” (3.1.120). Perhaps he is calling her a permiscuous, perhaps he wants her to go somewhere where she cannot break any more hearts, or perhaps he is genuinely wants to preserve her purity. In any case, he is clearly disgusted with her. He also specifically asks her where her father is. With this question, Hamlet lets Ophelia know that he is aware they are being spied on, and his cruelty toward her makes it apparent that he holds her at fault for the deterioration of their relationship. Ophelia is inflicted with the

knowledge that her relationship is unsalvageable and the guilt that her choices led it to this state. The second meeting between Ophelia and Hamlet further adds to Ophelia's sense of shame that will become part of her madness. This meeting occurs at the performance of the play-within-the-play. In front of Horatio, Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Claudius, and Gertrude, Hamlet bombards Ophelia with sexual innuendos and humiliating insults making us wonder if Polonius' obsession with Ophelia's virginity is a moot point.

When Hamlet kills her father, Ophelia can no longer bear the strain of her two loves. Already overwhelmed with guilt, she also likely believes that her actions are partly, if not completely responsible for her father's murder. And the man she loves has just killed the man she loves. The next time we see Ophelia, "Her mood will needs be pitied" (4.5.3).

Ophelia's madness is very specific. Linguistically it manifests mostly in song, and the song is always either about a dead man or a lover who treats his mistress poorly. The first song begins, "How should I your true love know / From another one?" (4.5.23-24). "This song is a version of a popular ballad… Its theme of the woman bereft of her lover seems to indicate that her father's death is not the only cause of Ophelia's distress, in fact she alternates between lover and father" (Thompson and Taylor 375, Notes). Her next song begins "Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's Day" (4.5.48): "It depends on the belief that the first person one sees on St. Valentine's day (14 February) will become one's lover" (Thompson and Taylor 377, Notes). Ophelia's madness centers on mourning for her dead father and lost love and manifests as her confusion between which one to mourn for – the lover who killed her father, or the father who destroyed her relationship, and she clearly feels sexual frustration towards these two inseparable identities. Her conflicting relationship with sex is overtly expressed. For example, Ophelia sings:

Quoth she, 'Before you tumbled me

You promised me to wed.'

He answers:

'So would I ha' done by yonder sun

An thou hadst not come to my bed.' (4.5.62-66)

Song in *Make Hamlet*

In *Make Hamlet* during the second portion of Ophelia's mad scene, instead of singing her last three songs and handing out herbs and flowers to everyone, Ophelia sings an Ella Fitzgerald version of 'My Heart Belongs to Daddy':

While tearing off a game of golf,

I may make a play for the caddy.

But when I do, I don't follow through,

'Cause my heart belongs to Daddy.

If I invite some boy some night

To dine on my fine Finnan Haddie,

It's just a pose, 'cause my baby knows

That my heart belongs to Daddy.

Yes, my heart belongs to Daddy,

So I simply couldn't be bad.

Yes, I want to marry Daddy, Daddy.

So I want to warn you laddie.

Gee, boy, I think you're swell.

But my heart belongs to Daddy.

Yes, my heart belongs to Daddy,

'Cause my Daddy treats it so well. (n. pag.)

This song is from the point of view of a woman who, though she clearly loves to flirt with others, is in love with a man whom she calls "Daddy". It could also be perceived as a woman who does not allow herself sexual encounters with men because she is devoted to her own father, though her feelings go beyond a healthy devotion: "Yes, I want to marry Daddy." And it is clearly a torch song, longing for a lost lover, which, in this particular case, could refer to Polonius or Hamlet. To me, this song pointedly represents Ophelia's specific fixation and reason for her psychological torment. It is not that I think 'My Heart Belongs to Daddy' is artistically superior to Shakespeare's choices, nor do I expect the jazz song to more specifically represent Ophelia's psychological state than the sixteenth century ballads. But 'My Heart Belongs to Daddy' represents her conflicted identity more overtly, and in a modernized manner, while clearly depicting that her downfall comes from being stuck between her love for Hamlet and her devotion to Polonius. I believe the choice to use 'My Heart Belongs to Daddy' at this moment in the play will have a greater dramatic impact than using the songs Shakespeare intended. Singing this iconic, American song breaks with *Make Hamlet*'s established theatrical conventions at a moment where the audience does not expect it; in the first part of her mad scene, Ophelia sang the songs Shakespeare indicated for that moment establishing that the audience will hear the traditional songs from Ophelia in her mad scene. Furthermore, up until this moment of the play,

the audience has only heard a few words that were not taken directly from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The surprise of hearing 'My Heart Belongs to Daddy' immediately awakens the audience's senses. Also, though it directly relates to Ophelia's situation, this twentieth century Cole Porter song is entirely out of context in this play. This well-known classic takes on a foreign quality when heard amidst the equally well-known Elizabethan language of *Hamlet*, and this alienation effect further draws the audience's attention to this moment. In fact, the better the audience knows the play, the more thwarted its expectations will be. And yet this choice also allows for Ophelia to keep singing; like Bob Fosse famously said, you sing when you can no longer express what you have to say by speaking, and when Ophelia sings American jazz she is at this point.

Chapter 6: Spectacle

For Aristotle, Spectacle is the least important component of tragedy (64; pt. 6). For me, it is one of the most important in defining my adaptation of *Hamlet*. Though Aristotle does not really define spectacle, I infer that he means it to be all production choices that are not textual or songs. *Make Hamlet* is as much about Spectacle as it is about the play's text. Of course, until I reach the rehearsal process, it is impossible for me to know all the production choices I would like to make. I have already conducted a reading of my adaptation, which has allowed me to foresee some staging possibilities. Overall, it is most important to me that the Spectacle of the play projects my idea that this is a tragedy about identity, and in particular, its fragmentation.

The name of my production is *Make Hamlet*. This refers to several aspects regarding the theme of the indeterminable notion of self in *Hamlet*. Also the word "make" immediately evokes certain ideas. It implies process and creation, it suggests action and immediacy, it presupposes that the play will be achieved in the present because it is not already made, and in an almost childlike manner, it conveys the goal of the production. The concept of the play as a play (as opposed to an illusion) permeates the production. This is a work of art that is aware of itself as such, and because it is a live work, it constantly focuses on its own creation. The play begins with the actors warming up onstage as the audience enters. Costume changes occur in front of the audience, staged and with purpose. The play is set in a costume shop, which visualizes the concept of making. Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Horatio, and Ophelia put on the play-within-the-play; together, they create the characters playing the Players making the play and its audience. This is a production in the true sense of the word, it is the action of making, and it is as much about *making Hamlet* as it is about *doing Hamlet*.

Make Hamlet goes further in displaying the concept of a work of art in which process

exists in the present as opposed to a production that is the result of a process that already happened. In my version of *Hamlet*, the actors never leave the stage and instead, observe the scenes in which they do not participate. Moving to the sides or back of the stage may indicate that a character is not in that particular scene, however, it may also indicate that the character eaves-drops or spies on the scene, or that the actor has become part of a chorus. Keeping the actors onstage even if they are not in the scene forces the onstage and offstage spaces to exist simultaneously in the same place thereby allowing the audience to continually contemplate the transition from the identity of "actor" to that of "character," and the fact that process and presentation are inseparable in art. Also, showing the characters watching scenes in which they do not play a role depicts the characters' awareness of the events of the play. This reflects the fact that the audience is very likely already aware of the events of *Hamlet*, similar to the prescient audiences of ancient Greek tragedy. The pathos lies in the inevitability of the characters' actions instead of the surprise of the scenario unfolding. This example reminds me of a story that Professor James Leverett once told about the American director Robert Woodruff (n. pag). Woodruff, speaking of a production of *Oedipus the King* that he had directed in 2004 at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, said that all the characters know from the beginning what is about to happen, they know the truth about Oedipus, but that they go through the actions of the play anyway, forced by the inevitability of tragic fate and the ritual of performance. This makes perfect sense to me, not only in regards to *Oedipus* but also in regards to any tragedy. To me, the actor and the character are indistinguishable – they are both part of a single fractured identity. The actor of course knows what will happen throughout the course of a play. Therefore the character, who exists via the actor, knows as well. Also, the presence of actors who are not performing will cause the audience to think of the rehearsal process in which everyone involved

witnesses the production several times. I also believe that nearly every audience member who would see this production would at least have a culturally derived notion of the story of *Hamlet*. Keeping the actors onstage throughout the whole play further underlines this idea: everyone knows what is happening regardless of what they claim, pretend, or wish to know.

Also supporting the idea of shared knowledge and prescience is the fact that, at the end of *Hamlet*, and the end of *Make Hamlet*, before he dies, Hamlet asks Horatio to tell his story: "Horatio, I am dead. / Thou livest: report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied (5.2.322-324). It is valid to believe that *Hamlet* is actually Hamlet's story as told by Horatio. In this case, at the end of each production, Hamlet would tell Horatio to tell his story, and the next production of *Hamlet* would be Horatio telling Hamlet's story. Therefore, performing *Hamlet* would be an endless cycle forcing each character to replay their actions in the unstoppable machine of tragedy. The story of *Hamlet* would be the *only* story they know. Their tragic ending is inevitable, as Aristotle would want, and the play is a cleansing ritual for the audience. In addition, doing away with exits emphasizes the motif of eavesdropping and overhearing that is so prominent throughout the play. One is constantly spied on. There is distrust everywhere. Also, cutting entrances and exits lets the audience visually consider the many identities of the production: the multi-faceted, ever-changing identities of the characters and the real people who necessarily bring their own complex identities to the creation of these characters. And the presence of all these identities leads to trying to decipher who is present when.

The spectacle of process strongly presents itself at the beginning of *Make Hamlet*. After the prologue, in which Hamlet addresses all the actors onstage, all the actors stand in a horizontal line and put on their costumes while the Danish National anthem plays. This lets the audience know that this is a performance. Also, because clothing is so important in *Hamlet*, we set up a

construct with the audience that shows that putting on a costume is the equivalent of bringing a character to life, of giving a character an identity. This concept is partly borrowed from Japanese Noh theatre in which elaborate costume changes that frequently take place onstage are part of the ritual of this genre, and usually indicate an actor switching to a different character. In *Make Hamlet*, as occurs in Noh, stagehands dressed in black (called *koken* in noh) will assist the actors as they put on their costumes (Smethhurst 328). I love this concept because it turns a mundane, logistical action into a purposeful, focused performance. Because of this construct, when a character dies in *Make Hamlet*, he removes his costume. There is, of course, an exception for Polonius, who is represented by a costume; his death is signified by Hamlet cutting the Polonius costume in half with a pair of fabric shears.

In fact, more than a few of my production choices are based on Noh performance. The highly ritualistic nature of Noh theatre has always captivated me, and I think that the ritual of performance takes on an especially important role when it comes to performing a play that the audience already knows, as is the case with *Hamlet*. Similarly, ancient Greek audiences knew the stories of the tragedies they attended, and their theatre was also heavily based in ritual; the plays were performed as part of the festival of Dionysus, and they were in competition with one another, which meant they had to adhere to a detailed set of rules and traditions. The point of watching the tragedies was not to be surprised by the unfolding of the plot's events. The group cleansing ritual, the purgation of the pity and fear the tragedy evoked in the audience, was a major reason for the existence of these performances. Though I am hardly an expert in Noh theatre, I have had the opportunity to see authentic, live Noh theatre. There is a Noh play called *Aoi No Ue* that I saw in which a dead character, whose presence is of great consequence for the play, is represented by a kimono on the ground near the front of the stage. I found this concept

visually and intellectually striking because it elevates the importance of costume to evoke character. I really wanted to use this idea in my production of *Hamlet* in order to emphasize the play's frequent use of sartorial language, specifically its motif of using clothing as a metaphor for identity. Although *Hamlet*'s language frequently employs this motif, I find it difficult to realize its significant presence when hearing the play. But in performance, visual representations of clothing as a metaphor for identity can reinforce its frequent linguistic appearance. I also had decided that I wanted to cut Polonius from the play but realized that his presence was somewhat necessary in telling the story of *Hamlet*. Thus, the two ideas came together resulting in using a costume to portray Polonius. And in the closet scene, in which Polonius is present for the whole scene but only alive for only the first 23 of its 215 lines, the costume lies on the ground, downstage center, just as in *Aoi No Ue*.

Having one idea from Noh theatre led to bringing in other ideas from this genre. It is common in Noh to have a chorus that speaks in the first-person for a character because the chorus in this form of theatre is not a fixed character (Smethhurst 16). In such instances there is "an interaction between…the group and the individual for whom it speaks…such that often the distinctions between them disappear" (Smethhurst 16). Naturally, this kind of transcendence of the boundaries of individual identity is representative of the major themes in *Make Hamlet*. In *Make Hamlet*, everyone except Hamlet speaks for the Ghost. But for a Western audience who is likely somewhat unfamiliar with the actual practices of Noh, this raises ambivalence about the identity of the characters and especially about the identity of the Ghost. In the scenes with the Ghost, are the other characters assuming the role of a chorus speaking for a character, or are they actually fabricating the existence of the Ghost? I do not expect the audience to see the specific references to Noh. However, I do believe that theatrical choices grounded in specific examples

from other tragic genres create a depth in meaning, even if those examples are not overtly recognized.

In my production of *Make Hamlet* I would like visual language to have a strong presence, and for the ideas, themes, and motifs of the play to manifest in images as much as in words. At the top of scene two[7], Hamlet stands holding a gun to his head. This is an obvious visual representation of Hamlet's state of mind. From the reactions of the other characters, we gather that this has happened before. Eventually, he predictably puts the gun down because for all his suicidal thoughts, he is a man of inaction when it comes to his own death as much as when it comes to Claudius'. In fact, the action with the gun is a rather obvious visual symbol of a ubiquitous facet of the lead character's personality; it shows whom he is – a man confronted with death (his father's, his own, the King's) – and what he does about it – not much, especially considering all his threats to act. The symbolism of this action is as recognizable as any cartoon depicting Hamlet, which is nearly always an image of a man holding a skull and asking "To be, or not to be" – an iconic but ironic summary of the character since the gravedigger scene, which is frequently staged with Hamlet holding the skull of Yorick (though this particular gesture is indicated neither by the text nor stage directions), is two acts after Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" monologue. However, this classic cartoon image has become a sign, even a metaphor, for the whole play. Thus, in *Make Hamlet*, when Hamlet holds the gun to his head, the audience sees the character in a similar but new situation and perhaps even wonders what choice he will make. In other words, how far has this production gone in changing the original? When Hamlet puts down the gun, the choice reinforces that, though this is an adaptation, it is the same story that everyone more or less already knows about the famously troubled man whose identity is

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[7] *Make Hamlet* is divided into eighteen scenes with no act breaks, preceded by a prologue.

embedded in our culture, much like the ancient Greeks knew the stories of the tragedies they watched from their own cultural experience.

One major departure from the original in *Make Hamlet* is that it is performed with an ensemble of six actors. This mostly affects Language and Spectacle. Similar to the idea of keeping the actors onstage throughout the performance, I believe that this small cast allows the production and the audience to better see the process of the work as it unfolds. It shows the dependence that each actor has on the ensemble. Because of the cuts made to accommodate six actors, the play moves very quickly making it imperative that the actors listen very closely to one another. A significant portion of Hamlet's text is cut, which heightens the importance of the supporting characters; I have adapted the play to emphasize the ensemble. And the clever choices needed to fill the gaps left from only having six actors become part of the game of the play and underline the virtuosity of performance. For example, Ophelia's conversation with her father in scene five of *Make Hamlet* takes place over the phone. The audience only hears Ophelia's end of the conversation. This makes sense since there is no actor playing Polonius. Also, at the start of the conversation, all the other characters pick up phone receivers "on the same line." This brings out the eavesdropping motif of the play and underlines the idea that when performing *Make Hamlet*, there are no secrets. Re-appropriating lines and even whole characters is a large part of the game when performing *Hamlet* with six actors. Despite the small cast for a play that usually requires at least eleven actors (Thompson and Taylor 556, App.), I try to avoid double casting for the sake of convenience because I believe that double casting greatly affects the way an audience perceives characters. Though all the characters have additional lines they would not normally have in a traditional production of *Hamlet*, Horatio portrays the majority of the absent characters, sometimes to facilitate moving the dialogue and action forward

and other times for the sake of representing more conceptual aspects of the production, like themes or motifs; and this choice works well in my version in which we are watching Horatio's retelling of the story of *Hamlet* as he is instructed to do upon Hamlet's death at the end of the play. He literally must make *Hamlet*. This play is Horatio's creation, which is the reason why he is the play's gardener – the play is his garden, which he must tend.

Performing Act I, scene iii when Polonius is merely a costume creates not only an interesting staging problem but also a great opportunity to visually show the difficulty in clearly defining individual identities in *Hamlet*. In *Make Hamlet*, Hamlet takes on the role of Polonius in this scene by wearing the Polonius costume. Laertes and Ophelia immediately recognize Hamlet; Ophelia demands, "Why are you wearing my father's costume?" But instead of answering, Hamlet immediately continues the scene knowing that Ophelia and Laertes will inevitably keep performing; they are characters in a play: performing the lines they are assigned is their *raison d'être*. Plus, like their father, Hamlet is their "Lord," and they must obey him. Laertes probably thinks Hamlet is mocking him by pretending to be his foolish father. Ophelia is at first in a state of perplexed shock, then thinks of the situation is a strange flirtation, but is ultimately taken aback by all of Hamlet's insisting to stay away from Hamlet. Any audience members who did not already know that this scene is normally played by Polonius would learn that Hamlet is pretending to be Polonius from Ophelia's question, and this is reinforced by the scene's text: it is clearly a scene written for Laertes, Ophelia, and their father. Furthermore, the audience would create a rapport with the costume: it is the same costume that Claudius addresses as Polonius in scene 2 and, later, the costume that Hamlet "kills" in the closet scene. And it is the costume of a clown, a fool, as he is referred to three times in *Hamlet*. Hamlet refers to him in addressing Ophelia: "Where is your father?... Let the doors be shut upon him that he may play

the fool nowhere but in's own house" (3.1.131-132); in the closet scene Hamlet says to the dead Polonius, "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool" (3.4.29); and Polonius himself says to Ophelia, "Tender yourself more dearly / Or… / …you'll tender me a fool" (1.3.106-108). Having Hamlet play Polonius also foreshadows Ophelia's madness. In her mad state, she confuses the identities of Hamlet and her father, talking and singing about them both interchangeably.

One of the most apparent challenges in regards to Spectacle in any production of *Hamlet* lies in the creation and portrayal of the Ghost. One reason it poses such a problem is because, as most today people have neither seen a ghost nor believe in their existence, there is no concrete, real-life situation to use as a template for representation. Therefore, it is important to consider what the Ghost represents in regards to the production's desired effect on the audience, looking at who/what the Ghost is within the world of the play instead of the world in general. However, it is possible and perhaps also helpful to think about the Ghost in a cultural context – in its context during Shakespeare's world in order to consider the original intentions in staging such a character, and in its contemporary context in order to establish a frame based on our world's attitude towards the subject. John Dover Wilson points out that for Elizabethan audiences, the Ghost in *Hamlet* was extremely special. For most performances up until the first productions of *Hamlet*, "The stock apparition of Elizabethan theatre was a classical puppet, borrowed from Seneca, a kind of Jack-in-the-box, popping up from Tartarus at appropriate moments" (Wilson 55). Shakespeare clearly shook things up when he put a real man onstage (probably himself) dressed fully in armor. However, as Wilson himself says "the modern reader … is not apt to take ghosts seriously" (53). So what might shake things up for us? A real person has played the Ghost for the last four hundred years. Maybe now we should return to the concept of the puppet, which is what I suggest by having the ghost appear as a mannequin bust with garments blown by

a fan. Avoiding certain illusionistic special effects or attempts towards realism will hopefully provoke the imagination of the audience members and cause them to consider multiple possibilities for the Ghost's identity. Also, in *Make Hamlet*, the scene where we first encounter the Ghost, Scene 1, takes place in darkness. This emphasizes the possibility that the three men imagine they see a ghost. It is pitch black, the middle of the night, and they are expecting to see a ghost; of course they see one. Unlike most things, it is actually easier to see a ghost in the dark: our eyes invent images when we cannot see. And this Ghost in particular, who "faded on the crowing of the cock" (1.1.156), clearly prefers the darkness of night. However, the possibility always exists that the Ghost is real, that he is "an honest ghost" (1.5.137), and his unwavering legitimacy lies in words of his true creator – Shakespeare. And yet, since in *Make Hamlet* all the actors recite the Ghost's lines as a chorus, the potential arises that the other characters fabricate the Ghost to abuse the melancholic Hamlet. The Spectacle of the Ghost is rooted in the ambivalence of his identity.

Though according to Aristotle, Spectacle, or *opsis* (Smethurst 309) as he would have said, should be the least influential aspect of any tragedy, In *Make Hamlet*, it is critical to understanding the play. I do not, however, believe that this is an original preference of mine but rather a shift in the paradigm of theatrical production since its Western conception in ancient Greece. The word "opsis" is the base for the word "optic," meaning "Of, relating to or connected with the eye or with the process of vision" ("Optic" n. pag.). By Spectacle, Aristotle refers to what the audience can see. In the massive theatres in ancient Greece, many of the seats were so far from the stage that the performance was not clearly seen but, and anyone who has visited these ruins would agree, very clearly heard. This likely influenced Aristotle's foregrounding of the text – its story, its imitations of men, its poetry, and its songs – over everything that had to do

with visual staging. Even the content of Greek tragedy, especially of the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, consists more of diegetic than mimetic action – characters often describe what has already happened as opposed to the audience seeing it happen in real time. However, though large theatres still exist, the prevalence of many small, intimate theatrical settings likely contributes to the shaping of different priorities and expectations in theatrical works today.

Conclusion

As I conclude this paper I again think about my personal history with *Hamlet*. At the time I first read the play I was at a transitional point in my life: between high school and college and, more importantly, between childhood and adulthood. *Hamlet* is about a tragic hero in a similar situation. Hamlet is trying to become someone he does not quite know how to identify. He recognizes that whoever he is now is not sufficient. He feels unfairly abandoned by the world as it changes around him. But he also perceives the opportunity to actually do something of significance – his only chance at changing his situation. My other hero at that time, Stephen Dedalus, faces similar circumstances. He realizes that to become the artist he wants to become he must change his setting – he must leave Ireland. *Hamlet* is about what has happened and what will happen; the present is only a transition. But the present is the play; the reality is the waiting, the hoping, and the searching. Hamlet's identity reflects his transitional situation – it is indefinable and constantly changing; and this ever-changing, elusive, liminal state is the world of the play itself.

"There is no such thing as an original play," writes Charles L. Mee (n. pag.). This concept is difficult for some to accept, especially in regards to the work of literary gods, like Shakespeare. Even though Shakespeare himself often found the material for his plays in other works (as is the case with *Hamlet*), scholars and artists often support their theories and choices by referencing the "original," or a play's first production. The authority of the "original" is predicated on the assumption that it is the best, the most authentic, because it most closely represents the author's intentions. And we desperately want to understand *Hamlet*. It would solve so many vehement debates. It would answer questions that have been asked for centuries. It would validate the work of hundreds of scholars who have devoted their lives to the history and

criticism of the play. Unfortunately, we only know a little about the first production of *Hamlet* and know significantly less about what Shakespeare wanted the play to mean. Shakespeare wrote his plays to be performed and really for that purpose alone (he did not see any of his works published in his lifetime). He wrote his plays for specific actors of a real company of which he was also a member. He intimately knew the layout of the stage in the theatre where his plays would be performed. He even performed in these plays, as was presumably the case with *Hamlet*. But since Shakespeare is dead, everything we know from the remnants of the first production is all we can ever know about the "original" *Hamlet*; even our knowledge of the text is incomplete.

Mee suggests that in art, the concept of an original is a myth. In interpreting Shakespeare's plays the concept of the original is often interchangeable with the concept of authenticity. If there is no such thing as an original, how do we know where to find authenticity? I suggest that in art, the concept of authenticity is also a myth. Authenticity implies that there is an absolute, but there is no absolute in art. Art changes with context, time, and culture. The ephemeral quality of art is most apparent in theatre where it is tangible as well as conceptual. Because it is live, every theatrical production is visibly unique. Because it is collaborative, every production is variable. William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a play, and it may be copied and reprinted a billion times (of course the problem that no one entirely knows which text to copy will always exist). But the play is only one part of the identity of *Hamlet*. The play's text is not the complete work because its form inherently indicates that it is part of a larger work that is based on and includes performance. *Hamlet* is always thus a work in progress represented by the fact that it is never in itself complete. This is a fundamental theme of *Make Hamlet*. The play is never completely "made" or finished. It is always in the process of creating itself. *Hamlet*'s identity changes with each production and is therefore incapable of authenticity.

Aristotle says that tragedy is an imitation; it is a copy, a simulation, a reproduction, a replica. It is by definition the opposite of an original. There is an original *Hamlet* in that there is a production of the play that historically took place before all its other productions. But there is no authentic *Hamlet*. Even if Shakespeare's ghost visited me and revealed to me his intentions for every word in the play, this would not be the answer to the question that is *Hamlet*. There is no answer to that question. It is a question to be interpreted, not answered. And if *Hamlet* is unknowable it means there is no authority on *Hamlet* because there is no way to know the play better than someone else. And this is why I have the right to create my own interpretation of *Hamlet*, as does anyone else. Even legally *Hamlet* belongs to everyone: it is in the public domain. In fact the ubiquitous aspects of the play are part of what makes *Hamlet* a masterpiece. It is the story of a man who, having lost something he loves, searches desperately for a shard of reason to be, to act, or to go on and finds only deceit, disillusionment, and his own death. This universal quality of the tragedy, that life causes suffering, evokes pity and fear in its audience and ultimately results in the catharsis of these emotions. This is why we will never rid ourselves of the desire to reinterpret *Hamlet*.

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