

DIRECTOR'S NOTES / PAUL MULLINS

Hamlet, Shakespeare's most famous play, has captured the mind and imagination of the world for the last four hundred years. The play is not only a bold literary masterpiece, but also a tale of revenge and a deep psychological thriller that has been debated and savored by scholars, readers, and audiences for generations. Like all great works of drama, it reveals itself fresh and new each time the story is told. Here in Santa Cruz Shakespeare's beautiful new venue, under the California sky, enjoy Shakespeare's immortal story of mortality.

Hamlet – a poem by Boris Pasternak (1890-1960)
translated by Jon Stallworth and Peter France

The buzz subsides. I have come on stage.
Leaning in an open door
I try to detect from the echo
What the future has in store.

A thousand opera-glasses level
The dark, point-blank, at me.
Abba, Father, if it be possible
Let this cup pass from me.

I love your preordained design
And am ready to play this role.
But the play being acted is not mine.
For this once let me go.

But the order of the acts is planned,
The end of the road already revealed.
Alone among the Pharisees I stand.
Life is not a stroll across a field.

DRAMATURG'S NOTES / ARIANE HELOU

Hamlet marks a turning point in Shakespeare's playwriting career. During the 1590s, Shakespeare wrote mostly comedies and histories (the exceptions are the tragedies *Titus Andronicus*, 1592; *Romeo and Juliet*, 1595; and *Julius Caesar*, 1599). Scholars generally agree upon a first performance date of *Hamlet* around 1600-1601; it was shortly followed by *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, masterpieces of tragedy.

Hamlet is a play of questions. It opens with "Who's there?" It pivots on "To be or not to be?" And it ends with an all-encompassing question mark: the uncertain future of the state of Denmark.

The play is also a meditation on the art of theatre. The company of players that wanders into Act Two provides the mechanism by which Hamlet is able to assess the guilt of the new king, Claudius. Their staging of the play-within-the-play also provides a window into the theatrical process of Shakespeare's day, for example in their speedy adoption of Hamlet's new text and in Hamlet's exhortations to "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action," in order to create a performance that will "hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature."

The First Player accomplishes just this in his speeches that narrate the slaughter of King Priam in the Trojan War: he moves himself and his audience to tears with his portrayal of the grief-stricken Queen Hecuba. Hamlet wonders aloud why the Player and his auditors should weep at this tale of a fictional character, and we may ask ourselves the same question. What's Hamlet to us, or we to Hamlet? One answer is that the root of the drama is in the human touch that brings Hecuba—and Hamlet—to life, and in the common experiences of loss and sorrow by which we can empathize with people unknown or imagined.