



Festival Artistic Director's Statement

Several months ago I directed a production of *The Merchant of Venice* with F. Murray Abraham as Shylock. The production started in New York at the Theatre for a New Audience. Then we took it to Stratford-upon-Avon, to the Royal Shakespeare Company's Complete Works Festival. We were one of the last productions to be featured in this year-long festival, during which companies from around the world came together to perform all thirty-seven of Shakespeare's plays. The other productions to close the festival were *Coriolanus* with Janet Suzman and *King Lear* with Sir Ian McKellan.

My last night in Stratford, I ended up — by divine chance — having drinks with Ms. Suzman and Sir Ian at the Dirty Duck Pub. Several tables away from us, Murray was in deep conversation with the great Cicely Barry, the voice coach for the RSC. Later that night, I spoke about Shylock with Henry Goodman, who played the role several years earlier in a renowned production directed by Trevor Nunn. All around us, young American and English actors were talking about their struggles in

establishing careers on the two sides of the Atlantic. The pub was overflowing with young artists barely out of the gate and veterans well into their legendary careers.

Nevertheless, at every table that night, the predominant tone of the conversation was surprisingly practical and humble. Everyone spoke about the difficulty of working against the clock in order to rise to the challenge of performing Shakespeare's extraordinary texts. No one that night was arrogant enough to claim that they knew everything that there is to know about Shakespeare; foolish enough to claim that there is only one right way to stage a production, interpret a role, or speak a line; tiresome enough to claim absolute ownership of Shakespeare. Instead, there was an honest expression of desire to rise to the challenge of something that will always be every-so-slightly out of our reach and to communicate it to audiences in the year 2007.

Whether we are established in the theatre profession or just starting out; whether we work on stage or backstage; whether we participate as artists or as audience members — our engagement with Shakespeare always places great demands on our minds and on our hearts. It asks for the best in all of us. We believe in Shakespeare and return to him year after year because he believes in us.

Thank you for joining us for our 2007 season.

Darko Tresnjak, Artistic Director
The Old Globe Shakespeare Festival

The Role of the Revenger: An Interview with Darko Tresnjak about HAMLET

By Scott Horstein

For someone who's never seen *Hamlet*, what is the one thing that you think is most entertaining to watch and listen for?

I like the fact that you use the word entertaining. On one hand, the play is a literary masterpiece. On the other hand, it is a great stage thriller. And the combination of those two qualities, the insight and the entertainment, have made *Hamlet* the most famous and popular play of all time. So I would say look at how deftly Shakespeare balances the two from scene to scene, from line to line. Look at how the title character shifts during the course of the play from a hypersensitive young student, a poet, and a budding stage director, to a detective, a judge, and finally an executioner.

What made you want to direct *Hamlet* at this point in your career?

Last year, when I directed a production of *The Merchant of Venice*, I got a chance to work with two wonderful and influential artists, James Shapiro and Cicely Berry.

James wrote a book called *Shakespeare and the Jews*. He was our consultant on this production of *Merchant*. We really hit it off. At the time that I met him, James had just published another book, *1599: A Year in the Life of Shakespeare*. The book focuses on the year that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, on all the personal,



LUCAS HALL AS HAMLET
PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ.

political, social, religious, theatrical, and literary events that would have influenced the creation of the play. The insights from *1599* and the subsequent discussions that I had with James became the backbone of this production.

Cicely Berry is the Voice Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the author of *Voice and the Actor* and many other influential books. Something that she spoke about extensively (and explored with us in rehearsals) was the notion that the goal in acting Shakespeare is to capture the flow of human thought. She said that emotions that are expressed on stage when acting Shakespeare should be secondary, simply byproducts of thoughts, and that thoughts are always more provocative, political, and interesting on stage than emotions. Well, of course, *Hamlet* was Shakespeare's technical breakthrough when it came to capturing the flow of human thought, the journey of the inner life.



LUCAS HALL AS HAMLET AND CELESTE CIULLA AS GERTRUDE, PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ.

Hamlet is one of mankind's great images. It turns a new face to each century, even to each decade. It is a mirror which gives back to the audience the reflection of the age that is contemplating it.

— Peter Hall

In his book, James Shapiro expresses his belief that the character of Hamlet and his famous soliloquies must have been greatly influenced by the fact that personal journals were being published for the first time in history — not fiction or non-fiction books, but the actual records of human thought. So once I connected the opinions expressed by James' book with Cicely's teachings, it seemed like the right time for me to direct my first production of *Hamlet*.

Laurence Olivier famously said in his 1948 film version of *Hamlet* that the play is about a man who could not make up his mind. Some scholars agree that the character of Hamlet is indecisive, that all of his big speeches are about procrastinating and shirking his responsibility, which is to avenge his father's death by killing Claudius. What do you think?

I think that I like the word "struggle" more than the word "indecisive," simply because I find struggle more exciting on

stage than indecisiveness. For me, personally, it is much more about crumbling, falling apart under the weight of an assignment that you are not cut out for, about having to transform yourself into a much tougher human being in order to fulfill that assignment.

I also believe that there is a deep religious component to Hamlet's struggle. Not just the question: when, if ever, is it right to kill another human being? But also the question: does the ghost come from heaven or hell? Is it "a spirit of health or goblin damn'd?" Hamlet has to figure out the answers to these questions for himself.

And he uses the Players and *The Murder of Gonzago* [the play the Players perform] to

do this. The play-within-a-play gives him his first taste of blood, the look of fear in Claudius' eyes. It may only be stage blood but he seems to like it. It leads to the all-too-real blood of Polonius and the calculated execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He is not cut out for the role of the Revenger in the beginning of the play. During the course of the play, we will see him turn into one.



Hamlet cannot act upon mere spectral evidence. The testimony of the Ghost must somehow be corroborated. The murderer must be forced to testify against himself. Then, and not till then, will action be possible for a reasonable man.

— George Lyman Kittredge

HAMLET COSTUME SKETCH BY ROBERT MORGAN