

Eleanor Holdridge's Director's Notes

Hamlet is perhaps the most incredibly tortured, intelligent and facile character Shakespeare ever conceived. Much has been made of his "tragic flaw" and his lack of action. But what draws me to the play is his relentless and very active pursuit of self-knowledge and his rigorous exploration of what it is to be human. His is a mind not content to live within the form of his given society or even the form of his own play.

A thinking man with a well of conscience, exploring in absolute every ramification of every decision, Hamlet would perhaps make a terrible ruler. Claudius and Gertrude, as they quickly and concisely make decisions on domestic and foreign policy and homeland security often causing the deaths of innocent souls, are perhaps stronger leaders. But which is better for the country, and which is better for the conscience of the society, which is better for the heart of the individual? Shakespeare's questions, posed over 400 years ago seem to be at the heart of our continuing human debate.

Hamlet is a man who is struggling not only with his conscience, honor, personal vengeance for the death of his father, but also a man trying to discover his political and personal responsibilities in the world. The questions are eternal. Do we take revenge or seek another course? And if we follow our own vengeance and sense of personal retribution, what is the outcome and how do we take responsibility for what we've done?

I believe that one of the greatest achievements of Shakespeare's great art is that he poses the essential ontological questions not in a removed and intellectual manner, but with all the power and messiness of human emotion, wedding the probings of the human mind with the longings of the human heart.

Although the design team and I have conceived a production that centers the play in the electrical synapse impulses of Hamlet's dying brain, creating flashes of memory or imagination that codify a life, it is in the passion and heart with which we are most concerned. Although Hamlet could be a terrible king, a bad boyfriend, a quixotic friend, a sullen and brooding son, he is also a man who wants to do what is right, to live up to the dictates of his father, and yet be true to himself. A very human being.

—*Eleanor Holdridge*

Hamlet Program Quote: "Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell."

Synopsis from Shakespeare & Company 2006 program

Unquestionably the most famous play in the English language, *Hamlet* altered the course of Shakespeare's artistic evolution, and the history of theatre. It marks the discovered of the inwardness of character, a milestone in dramatic art. In a straightforward plot of a son grappling with betrayal and treachery, we see a luminous depiction of the human struggle with two opposing forces: moral integrity and the desire for vengeance.