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*Dramatic Publishing*



**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S**

# HAMLET

**One-Act Adaptation**

**by ALBERT PIA**



**THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY**



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(HAMLET)

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## HAMLET

*A Play in One Act*

For Fifteen Men, Four Women, Extras  
(Eight Men, Two Women with Doubling)\*

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### CHARACTERS

HAMLET	.....	<i>Prince of Denmark</i>
HORATIO	.....	<i>friend to Hamlet</i>
KING	.....	<i>Hamlet's uncle</i>
QUEEN	.....	<i>Hamlet's mother</i>
GHOST	.....	<i>of Hamlet's father</i>
POLONIUS	.....	<i>lord chamberlain</i>
LAERTES	.....	<i>son to Polonius</i>
OPHELIA	.....	<i>daughter to Polonius</i>
ROSENCRANTZ		<i>former schoolmates of Hamlet</i>
GUILDENSTERN		
PLAYER KING		
PLAYER QUEEN	.....	<i>strolling players</i>
LUCIANUS		
BERNARDO	.....	<i>officers</i>
MARCELLUS		
GRAVEDIGGER		
ASSISTANT	.....	<i>workmen</i>
OSRIC	.....	<i>a courtier</i>

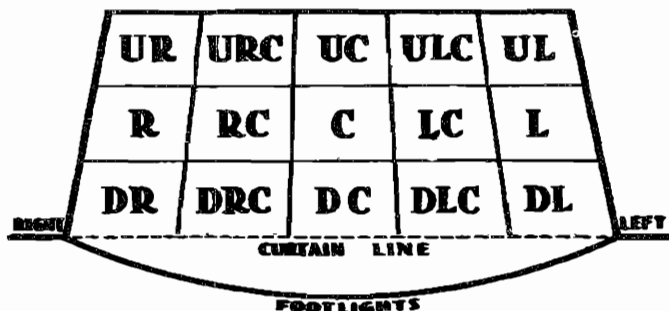
*Court Ladies and Gentlemen, Guards, Attendants,  
Messengers, Players, Priest, Casket Bearers,  
as desired.*

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\*All but leading roles may be doubled.

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## CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



### STAGE POSITIONS

*Upstage* means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

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**NOTE:** Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

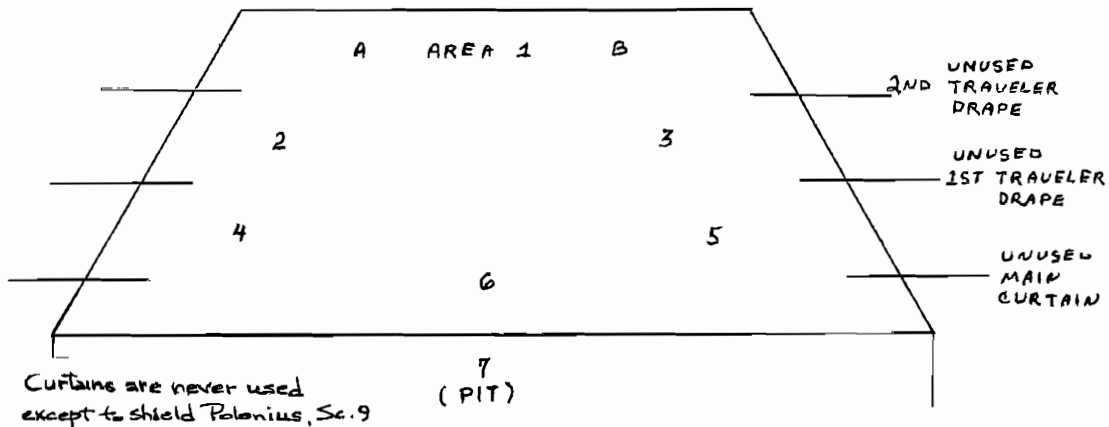
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## STAGING

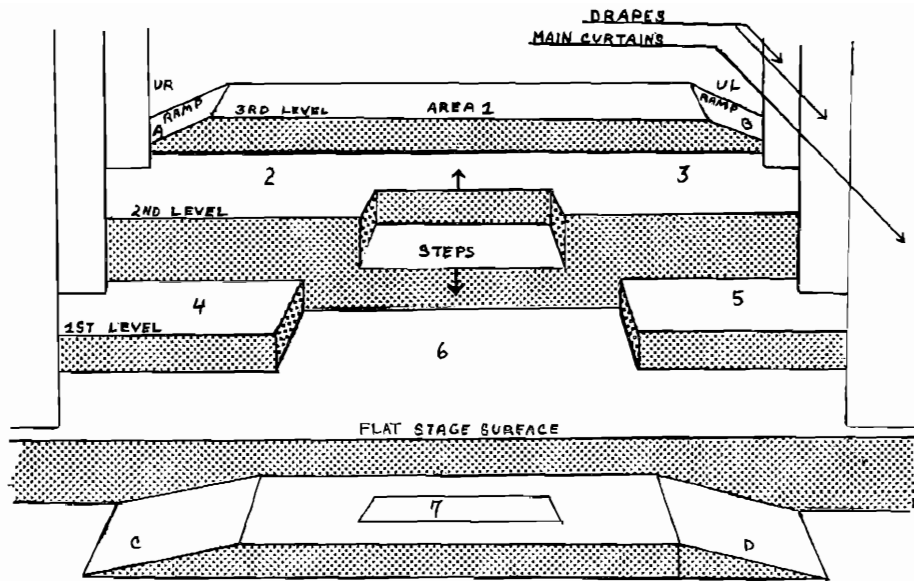
The stage and forestage areas are to be used fully and may be divided into seven playing areas. Area One is upstage center; Area Two is just below this up right; Area Three is also below Area One and up left; Area Four is stage right; Area Five is stage left; Area Six is stage center and largest playing area; Area Seven is forestage or orchestra pit area in auditorium.

Should elevations be available, the following suggestion is a functional arrangement. Number one platform is across the back of the stage and up center at the highest level and with ramps leading off right (ramp A) and left (ramp B). Steps will lead from platform down to stage level at center. Slightly below this first level are platforms up right, number two, and up left, number three, each leading off to wings. They are separated at center by the steps mentioned above. Slightly below this second level of platforms are platform right, number four, and platform left, number five, which are smaller in dimension and each leading off into wings. They are separated at center by stage surface Area Number Six, the largest playing area. Before the stage and a step below the surface level is another platform, number seven, with ramps leading right (ramp C) and left (ramp D). A removable trapdoor is located in center of platform to be used for grave opening.

A table and two chairs are used downstage right in Area Six for King and Queen. They are moved to upstage center of Area Six for final scene. A chair for the King and Queen Gertrude can be placed in Area Two. A chair for Ophelia can be placed in Area Three and for Polonius in Area Four. Two small stools can be brought in for Laertes and Hamlet before final duel scene.



HAMLET  
Flat Stage



**HAMLET**  
**Platform Stage**  
 (if available)



## COSTUMES

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It is recommended that costumes remain simple in design. This production has been very successful in modern dress. However, an appealing suggestion would be for females to wear long gowns, and for males to wear tights and loose, hip-length blouses. Ballet type slippers are excellent for all actors. If desired, males may use capes, and older characters may use floor-length robes. A white, loose-fitting robe may be suitable for the ghost. For the gravediggers, burlap sack type tunic blouses can be used with rope belts tied at the waist. Burlap can also be wrapped around lower legs and feet. Brown tights are also worn.

## PROPERTIES

**GENERAL:** Platform, ramps, steps, table and two chairs (see notes on staging, page.53).  
**Scene Eight:** Other chairs. **Scene Thirteen:**  
Two small stools, table, chairs, foils and cups of wine on table.

**BERNARDO and MARCELLUS:** Pikes.

**HORATIO:** Sword.

**POLONIUS:** Portfolio containing letter, eyeglasses (Scene 6).

**HAMLET:** Book (Scene 7); locket (Scene 9); papers (Scene 13).

**OPHELIA:** Prayer book, locket (Scene 7).

**QUEEN:** Locket (Scene 9); flower (Scene 12); napkin (Scene 13).

**MESSENGERS:** Sealed letters.

**GRAVEDIGGER:** Lantern, skull (in "grave").

**ASSISTANT:** Shovel, axe.

**KING:** Two large pearls (Scene 13).

**LUCIANUS (A PLAYER):** Vial.

**OTHER PLAYERS:** Props, scripts, etc.; small bench and other set pieces; banner reading "THE MOUSETRAP."

# HAMLET

## *Scene 1*

(The play opens at a sentry post of Elsinore castle. It is a cold, dark night. There is an atmosphere of watchfulness and suspicion bordering on fear, which sets the tone of the event about to unfold. BERNARDO is pacing slowly at sentry post URC in Area One.)

BERNARDO (comes to sudden halt, lowers pike, calls loudly). Who's there?

(ENTER HORATIO and MARCELLUS from UL, ramp B.)

HORATIO (to Area One, with MARCELLUS).  
Friends to this ground!

BERNARDO. Is Horatio there?

HORATIO (good-naturedly, as he approaches). A piece of him.

BERNARDO (relieved, putting up his pike). Welcome, Horatio; welcome, good Marcellus!

HORATIO. What, has this thing appeared again to-night?

BERNARDO (referring to ghost of old King Hamlet). I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS (at left of HORATIO). Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy--(HORATIO laughs.)--this dreaded sight, twice seen of us; therefore I have asked him along with us to watch this night,

that if again this apparition come, he may speak to it.

HORATIO (skeptically, as he steps toward L).

'Twill not appear.

BERNARDO (stepping toward HORATIO, speaking convincingly). Last night of all, when yond star--(Pointing up to sky.)--that's westward from the pole had made its course to light that part of heaven where now it burns--(Mounting excitement.)--Marcellus and myself . . .

(His speech is halted by a distant bell which intones low and mournfully. ENTER the GHOST of Old Hamlet, slowly, from UR. NOTE: He may be dressed in flowing white robes, with bearded face. A special spotlight may highlight his appearance from overhead. An ultra-violet light may be used to create a glowing effect in the nighttime atmosphere. His voice may be amplified with microphone, throat type or attached to inner garments. Many methods have been effectively employed by imaginative directors. )

MARCELLUS (at left of HORATIO, is first to spy GHOST; fearfully). Peace! Break thee off! Look where it comes again!

BERNARDO (spinning about fearfully, then backing a step toward L). Like the king that's dead!

MARCELLUS (believing that Horatio's considerable education qualifies him to speak to spirits; urgently). Speak to it, Horatio! (BERNARDO moves behind HORATIO.)

HORATIO (dumbfounded; then, drawing sword). What art thou that usurp'st this time of night? (He holds his ground. Then speaks more strongly.) By heaven, I charge thee, speak! (GHOST begins to move slowly R toward exit. HORATIO steps toward GHOST.) Stay! I charge thee, speak! (EXIT GHOST off R.)

MARCELLUS. 'Tis gone!

BERNARDO. How now, Horatio! Is this not something more than fantasy?

HORATIO (ending his skepticism). 'Tis strange!

MARCELLUS. Thus twice before hath he gone by our watch.

HORATIO (at ULC, with BERNARDO and MARCELLUS on either side of him). This bodes some strange eruption to our state. (Pause briefly.) Break we our watch up; and let us impart what we have seen tonight unto young Hamlet; for, upon my life, this spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him. (EXIT ALL UL.)

End Scene

## *Scene 2*

(The scene takes place the following day in the room of state in the castle. The entire stage is used. A flourish of trumpets is heard to introduce the entrance of the new King Claudius and Queen Gertrude. All lights come up to full level to brighten all stage areas. ENTER court LADIES and GENTLEMEN from all offstage positions, including auditorium, if desired. They are in a gay mood, bowing and chatting with each other as they move across stage into positions in all areas. KING and QUEEN ENTER up ramp A to Area One, then down steps to C as they nod to court, smilingly, then cross to down right of Area Six to chairs. POLONIUS ENTERS DR and joins them. ENTER LAERTES ULC; he stands ULC in Area Six. ENTER HAMLET, sad and preoccupied, DL; he sits on edge

of Platform Number Five.)

**KING** (solemnly but with confidence, for his marriage to Queen Gertrude was advised by his chief counselors soon after death of Old Hamlet). Though yet of Old Hamlet, my dear brother's death, the memory be green, and that it me befitted to bear my heart in grief, yet so far hath discretion fought with nature, therefore my sometime sister, now my queen--(Tenderly taking hand of **QUEEN GERTRUDE** sitting chair R.)--have I taken to wife. (He then turns to court.) Nor have we herein barred your better wisdoms, which have freely gone with this affair along. For all, our thanks. (All bow. **KING** smilingly acknowledges all, then glances at **HAMLET** who remains sadly quiet DL, then turns his glance to **LAERTES**.) And now, Laertes, what's the news with you? (Warmly smiling.)

**LAERTES** (crossing down and bowing before the **KING**). Your gracious leave to return to France.

**KING**. Have you your father's leave? (Turns DR to **POLONIUS**.) What says Polonius? (Smiling fondly at his chief advisor.)

**POLONIUS**. I do beseech you give him leave to go, my lord.

**KING** (placing hand gently on **LAERTES**). Take thy fair hour, Laertes. Time be thine. (**LAERTES** rises and backs away to former position.

**KING** then directs attention to **HAMLET**.) But now, my cousin, Hamlet, and my son . . .

**HAMLET** (aside; a pun on the word "kind," pertaining to "kindred"). A little more than kin, and less than kind!

**KING** (not hearing the pun, continuing in a gentle manner). How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET (turning to KING, without suspicion of evil deed, again a pun on the words "son" and "sun"). Not so, my lord. I am too much in the sun.

QUEEN (rising and exhibiting sincere motherly concern). Good Hamlet, thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die.

HAMLET. Ay, madam, it is common.

QUEEN. If it be, why seems it so particular with thee?

HAMLET (picking up her use of the word "seems," he stresses his mourning to be no outward show, but sincere). "Seems," madam? Nay, it is. I know not "seems."

KING (gently upbraiding; moves slowly toward HAMLET). Hamlet, pray you throw to earth this unprevailing woe, and think of me as of a father, for let the world take note, you are the most immediate to my throne.

QUEEN (crossing to HAMLET, she passes to left of the KING). Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet. I pray thee stay with us, go not to Wittenberg [Hamlet's college]. (She reaches for him, but he rises, but not offensively, and steps L.)

HAMLET. I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

KING (crossing to QUEEN at his left). Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply. (Relieved, he takes her arm tenderly and turns to exit UC.) Madam, come. (COURT MEMBERS bow to KING and QUEEN and HAMLET. EXIT ALL /using all exits/ but HAMLET.)

HAMLET (sadly and despairingly). Oh that this too, too solid /sullied/ flesh would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew! Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God! How weary, stale,

flat and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world! (Mounting vehemence.) Fie on't! Oh, fie! 'tis an unweeded garden, that grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature possess it merely. (Crosses slowly to R toward table.) That it should come to this! (Indicating king's chair and table.) But two months dead! Nay, not so much, not two: So excellent a king, that was, to this, Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother that he might not permit the winds of heaven--(Tenderly.)--visit her face too roughly. (Distractedly, he moves to queen's chair and then sits.) Heaven and earth! Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him, as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on; and yet--(Increasing bitterness.)--within a month . . . Let me not think on't . . . Frailty, thy name is woman! (Rises. Reaching emotional peak as he condemns mother and all women, he moves slowly DR, then across to L. Incredulously.) A little month, or ere those shoes were old with which she follow'd my poor father's body, like Niobe, all tears--why, she, even she----(Anguished.) O God! A beast, that wants discourse of reason, would have mourned longer----married with my uncle! (Painfully and unbelievably.) My father's brother . . . but no more like my father than I to Hercules. (Tumultuously.) Within a month! Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears had left the flushing of inflamed eyes, she married! Oh, most wicked speed, to post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets! (He crosses R and sits wearily in chair.) It is not nor it cannot come to good: (Softly and hopelessly.) But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

(ENTER HORATIO, MARCELLUS, BERNARDO from UR.)



- HORATIO (tentatively, sensing intrusion on privacy). Hail to your lordship.
- HAMLET (starting out DR without looking up; catching himself and turning as he recognizes voice). Horatio! (He moves quickly to HORATIO at C.) Marcellus! Bernardo! (He moves to each and shakes their hands.)
- HORATIO (joined by others). My good lord!
- HAMLET. But what makes you from Wittenberg?
- HORATIO. My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.
- HAMLET (moving toward R and sitting on edge of table downstage). I think it was to see my mother's wedding.
- HORATIO (crossing to Hamlet's left; sympathetically). Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon.
- HAMLET. Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven or ever I had seen that day, Horatio! (Looks upward as if seeing an image.) My father--methinks I see my father. (Crosses L.)
- HORATIO (startled, moving toward HAMLET). Where, my lord?
- HAMLET (confounded by Horatio's abrupt response). In my mind's eye, Horatio.
- HORATIO (relieved; quietly). My lord, I think I saw him yesterday.
- HAMLET (pause; then sharply). Saw? . . . Who?
- HORATIO. My lord, the king your father. (He moves closer to HAMLET as BERNARDO and MARCELLUS move in.)
- HAMLET (astounded). Let me hear!
- HORATIO. Two nights together had these gentlemen encountered a figure like your father. And I with them last night kept the watch where the apparition comes. I knew your father.
- HAMLET (turning to his left; thoughtfully). This troubles me. (He turns quickly to HORATIO as

plan forms.) Hold you the watch tonight?  
HORATIO, BERNARDO and MARCELLUS. We do,  
my lord.

HAMLET. I will watch tonight! Perchance 'twill  
walk again! (Decisively.) Upon the platform  
'twixt eleven and twelve I'll visit you. (He  
places hand warmly on Horatio's arm to dismiss  
them.)

HORATIO, BERNARDO and MARCELLUS. Our  
duty to your honor. (They nod farewell and  
EXIT R.)

HAMLET (crossing slowly downstage, deep in  
thought). My father's spirit--indeed? All is  
not well! I guess some foul play. (Looks up  
uneasily.) Would the night were come! (EXIT  
quickly DL.)

### End Scene

## Scene 3

(Lights come up in a room in the house of Polonius,  
platform Area Three. ENTER LAERTES with  
arm around waist of OPHELIA, from UL into  
Area Three, where they pause. They have the  
buoyancy of youth as the scene progresses light-  
ly and vibrantly.)

LAERTES. My necessaries are embarked. Fare-  
well! (Embraces her.) And, sister, for Ham-  
let, perhaps he loves you now, but you must  
fear, his will is not his own. Fear it, my dear  
sister--(Teasingly, as they move to center steps  
and sit.)--and keep you in the rear of your af-  
fection, out of the shot and danger of desire.  
(He is left of OPHELIA.)

OPHELIA (smiling, lovingly). I shall this good lesson keep, but my good brother, do not show me the thorny way to heaven while himself-- (Teasing playfully.)--the primrose path of dalliance treads and follows not his own advice. (They laugh together.)

(ENTER POLONIUS hurriedly from UL Area Three.)

POLONIUS. Yet here, Laertes? Aboard, aboard, for shame! (LAERTES and OPHELIA rise.) There; my blessing with thee. (Hands to Laertes' shoulders.) And these few precepts in thy memory keep. Give thy thoughts no tongue. Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar. (Crosses DL.) Those friends thou hast, grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel. (Knowing he has a captured audience, he moves about.) Beware of entrance to a quarrel; but being in, bear't that the opposed may beware of thee. (Facing LAERTES.) Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice; costly thy habit-- (He lightly fingers Laertes' cape or blouse.)--as thy purse can buy, but not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy, for the apparel oft proclaims the man. . . Neither a borrower nor a lender be. (Looking now at each of them.) This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man. (He embraces LAERTES lovingly.) Farewell. My blessing season this in thee!

LAERTES (embracing POLONIUS and then OPHELIA). My lord. Farewell, Ophelia. (He rushes up stairs C.) Remember well what I have said to you! (EXIT LAERTES, waving and hurrying out UL.)

OPHELIA (moving UC, shouting and waving farewell). 'Tis in my memory locked! Farewell!

POLONIUS. What is't, Ophelia, he hath said to you? (Crossing to her.)

OPHELIA. So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

POLONIUS. 'Tis told me he hath very oft given private time to you.

OPHELIA. He hath, my lord, made many tenders of his affection to me.

POLONIUS (moving from her toward platform Area Three). Affection? Pooh! Tender yourself more dearly, or you'll tender me a fool.

OPHELIA (following POLONIUS obediently, appealing for understanding). My lord, he hath importuned me with love in honorable fashion.

POLONIUS. Ophelia, do not believe his vows. (Firmly, as he faces her.) This is for all: I would not from this time forth have you give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet. Look to't, I charge you! (He turns L and EXITS.)

OPHELIA (she is crushed, but will comply). I shall obey, my lord. (EXIT OPHELIA, slowly.)

End Scene