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*Dramatic Publishing*

# *Shakespeare in Mind*

Conceived by Michael Bigelow Dixon



# Shakespeare in Mind

**Comedy. Conceived by Michael Bigelow Dixon. Written by Janet Allard, Niko Tsakalakos, Constance Congdon, Richard Dresser, Ginna Hoben, Brooke Jennett, Mollie LaFavers, Jon Jory, Jeremy Paden, Valerie Smith, Dean Staley, Justin Wright and Elizabeth Wong.**

*Cast: 10 to 50 either gender. Shakespeare in Mind* takes a strange and wondrous trip through a dozen “post-modern Elizabethan” plays, poems and songs. This dynamic production interweaves comedy, romance, song and tragedy as it presents contemporary characters interacting with Macbeth and Duncan, Juliet and Titus Andronicus, Othello and Desdemona, and 20 other classic characters. In *Shakespeare’s Brainscan*, the many murders in *Titus Andronicus* demonstrate how our brains respond to fear and horror. *Tomorrow & Tomorrow & Tomorrow & Today* updates the violence in *Macbeth* for bloodthirsty audiences. *Spit Spit Splendor Spite* pushes six pairs of Shakespeare’s famous lovers down a slippery slope from ecstasy to enmity. The tragedy of *Othello* is placed in the context of seafaring explorers of the 16th century. The cause of recent wars is questioned by a riff on Juliet’s famous soliloquy, “What’s in a name?” A trio of characters discuss the relevance of *Hamlet* while comparing it to *Game of Thrones*. These works and many others celebrate and reimagine the theatrical universe of the Bard for a technology-driven 21st-century audience. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 75 minutes. Code: S2D.*

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VALERIE SMITH, DEAN STALEY,  
JUSTIN WRIGHT and ELIZABETH WONG



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*Shakespeare in Mind* opened on Nov. 13, 2014, in the Lucille C. Little Theater at Transylvania University. The staff included Sullivan Canaday White (producer), Michael Bigelow Dixon (director), Michael O. Sanders (set designer), Missy Johnston (costumer), Jason Sankowitch (lighting designer), Olivia Luken (sound designer), Jarod Auton (stage manager) and Brayden Bergman and Natalie McGinnis (assistant stage managers).

The casts included:

*Shakespeare's Brainscan* by Elizabeth Wong

Tamora .....	Jessica Wilson
Bassianus .....	Grant Schumer
Chiron .....	Josiah Knight
Demetrius.....	Justin Wright
Titus .....	Nick Spencer
Aaron .....	Joey Bahena
Lavinia .....	Martha White
Shakespeare 1 .....	Brooke Jennett
Shakespeare 2 .....	Sophia Burke
Shakespeare 3 .....	Mollie LaFavers

*Gogglebox Hamlet 1, 2 & 3* by Valerie Smith

Gal.....	Katie Brewer-Calvert
Guy 1.....	Michael Huelsman
Guy 2.....	Christopher Perez

*Hair of the Dog 1, 2, 3 & 4* by Constance Congdon

Marlowe .....	Nick Spencer
Shakespeare .....	Joey Bahena

*Starcrossed* by Brooke Jennett and Mollie LaFavers

Julia.....	Martha White
Remy.....	Grant Schumer

*Tomorrow & Tomorrow & Tomorrow & Today* by Richard Dresser

Macbeth ..... Josiah Knight  
Duncan ..... Nick Spencer  
Logan ..... Mollie LaFavers  
Chamberlain Number One ..... Charlotte Stephens

*Iago on the Bus* by Dean Staley

Bus Driver ..... Michael Huelsman  
Juliet ..... Sophia Burke  
Romeo ..... Joey Bahena  
Iago ..... Brooke Jennett

*Twisted Shakespeare 1 and 2* by Jeremy Paden

I/Romeo ..... Joey Bahena  
II/Juliet ..... Sophia Burke

*Out Light* by Janet Allard

Desdemona ..... Charlotte Stephens  
Othello ..... Justin Wright  
Cop ..... Grant Schumer

*Desdemona's Heart* by Jeremy Paden

Narrator ..... Michael Huelsman

*If They Do See Thee* by Jon Jory

Juliet ..... Martha White  
Actor #1 ..... Sophia Burke  
Actor #2 ..... Aaron Botts  
Actor #3 ..... Justin Wright  
Actor #4 ..... Mollie LaFavers

*Chivalry* by Justin Wright

Woman ..... Jessica Wilson



*Spit Spat Splendor Spite* by Ginna Hoben

Hostess .....	Jessica Wilson
Lysander .....	Joe Bahena
Hermia .....	Martha White
Romeo .....	Justin Wright
Juliet .....	Charlotte Stephens
Beatrice .....	Mollie LaFavers
Benedick .....	Grant Schumer
Bertram .....	Josiah Knight
Diana .....	Sophia Burke
Gloucester .....	Michael Huelsman
Lady Ann .....	Brooke Jennett
Helena .....	Katie Brewer-Calvert
Party Guy .....	Christopher Perez

*Hold Onto Me* by Janet Allard (lyrics) and Niko Tsakalacos (music)

Guitar Troubadour .....	Aaron Botts
Singing Troubadour .....	Nick Spencer

# Shakespeare in Mind

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

For 400 years, William Shakespeare was known primarily as the author of 37 (or is it 38?) great plays written and first produced during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I in England. In the age of Google, however, Shakespeare has become 126 million things, including a dead playwright, a living text, a t-shirt, a film, an immersive theatrical event running off-Broadway, a musical adaptation, a parody rip-off, a brand, a festival, a mug, a sonnet, a restaurant and a fraud or front for other writers of his day ... to name a few.

*Shakespeare in Mind* embraces our new era of multiple meanings as it channel-surfs the Bard through American culture in the 21st century. Jump-cutting quickly from idea to idea and style to style, this postmodern performance text interweaves Shakespeare-inspired motifs of fear and murder, love and death, dreams and destiny. Along the way, Shakespeare and these contemporary playwrights “hold as ’twere the mirror up to nature” and our time.

As 13 playwrights and a composer clearly demonstrate, Shakespeare and his works are embedded in our culture in ways that seem both familiar and strange. We recognize references to *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*, yet the context is unexpected and our experience is revelatory. We witness iconic literary characters and famous historical figures, but they're out of time and place as they interact with our world in ways that redefine what Shakespeare means today.

If the mention of Shakespeare sparks multiple associations in your mind, this production is for you.

— Michael Bigelow Dixon

# Shakespeare's Brainscan

By Elizabeth Wong

## CHARACTERS

Tamora  
Bassianus  
Chiron  
Demetrius  
Titus  
Aaron  
Lavinia  
Shakespeare #1  
Shakespeare #2  
Shakespeare #3

\*\*\*

*(Enter TAMORA with CHIRON and DEMETRIUS leading a handcuffed BASSIANUS.)*

TAMORA. No sooner had they told this hellish tale,  
But straight they told me they would bind me here  
Unto the body of a dismal yew,  
And leave me to this miserable death:  
And then they call'd me foul adulteress,  
Lascivious Goth, and all the bitterest terms  
That ever ear did hear to such effect:  
And, had you not by wondrous fortune come,  
This vengeance on me had they executed.  
Revenge it, as you love your mother's life,  
Or be yet not henceforth call'd my children.

DEMETRIUS. This is a witness that I am thy son.

*(Stabs BASSIANUS.)*

CHIRON. And this for me, struck home to show my strength.

*(Stabs BASSIANUS, who dies.*

*Whirring and clicking sounds of the MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] machine.*

*Enter SHAKESPEARE #1 in a gleaming white lab coat.)*

SHAKESPEARE #1 *(with breathless rapidity, think actor Matt Smith as Doctor Who in the BBC modern remake).*  
When the brain receives a sensory stimulus indicating danger, it is first routed to the thalamus.

*(Enter TITUS and AARON.)*

AARON. Titus Andronicus, my lord the emperor  
Sends thee this word; that if thou love thy sons,  
Let Marcus, Lucius, or thyself, old Titus,  
Or any one of you, chop off your hand,  
And send it to the king: he for the same  
Will send thee hither both thy sons alive;  
And that shall be the ransom for their fault.

TITUS. Come hither, Aaron; I'll deceive them both:  
Lend me thy hand, and I will give thee mine.

*(AARON cuts off TITUS' hand. They exit.*

*SHAKESPEARE #1 examines the hand.)*

SHAKESPEARE #1. From there, the information travels over two parallel pathways. The short way, the thalamo-

amygdala pathway. OR, it goes the long way, the thalamo-cortico-amygdala. The short route gives a quick impression of the situation because it is a sub-cortical pathway in which no cognition is involved. The pathway activates the amygdala generating an emotional response, EVEN before any perceptual integration has even occurred and BEFORE the mind can form a complete representation. (*Deliberately.*) In other words, *FEAR is ancient.*

*(Again sounds of an MRI. Enter CHIRON, DEMETRIUS and LAVINIA, whose hands have been cut off and her tongue cut out.)*

DEMETRIUS. So, now go tell, an if thy tongue can speak,  
Who 'twas that cut thy tongue and ravish'd thee.

CHIRON. Write down thy mind, betray thy meaning so,  
An if thy stumps will let thee play the scribe.

DEMETRIUS. See, how with signs and tokens she can scrawl.

CHIRON. Go home, call for sweet water, wash thy hands.

DEMETRIUS. She hath no tongue to call, nor hands to wash;  
And so let's leave her to her silent walks.

CHIRON. An 'twere my case, I should go hang myself.

DEMETRIUS. If thou hadst hands to help thee knit the cord.

*(DEMETRIUS and CHIRON exit. Enter SHAKESPEARE #2 in lab coat with bloodstains. He picks up LAVINIA's tongue with tongs.)*

SHAKESPEARE #2 (*same breathless Doctor Who-like rapidity and manner*). If the stimulus goes by way of the long route, it is processed in the cortex, reaches the amygdala, where the amygdala ascertains whether or not the stimulus represents a real threat. Should I defend myself? Is it safe? Should I stay in my seat? Or should I rrrrrun?

*(Re-enter SHAKESPEARE #1.)*

SHAKESPEARE #1. To provide this assessment—cortical processing. First, the various modalities of the perceived stimuli are processed by the primary sensory cortex. Then, the uni-modal associative cortex provides the amygdala with an analysis.

SHAKESPEARE #2. THEN at an even higher level of analysis, the polymodal associative cortex, sends on this information to the hippocampus, the information being—14 killings, 9 onstage, 6 severed members, one rape, one case of insanity, one case of people pie. Yum, yum.

SHAKESPEARE #1. It is in the hippocampus where this new information is compared with your memory of any previous experience. Even memories buried deep. Older than the species. Memories hardwired. Into your DNA. Titus and his deeds, in your DNA.

*(Raises an eyebrow as if to say, “Have you murdered or maimed or eaten anyone lately?” Enter TITUS with CHIRON and DEMETRIUS bound and gagged.)*

TITUS. Come, come, Lavinia; look, thy foes are bound.  
O villains, Chiron and Demetrius!  
Here stands the spring whom you have stain'd with mud.  
Hark, wretches! how I mean to martyr you.  
This one hand yet is left to cut your throats,  
Whilst that Lavinia 'tween her stumps doth hold  
The basin that receives your guilty blood.  
You know your mother means to feast with me,  
And calls herself Revenge, and thinks me mad:  
Hark, villains! I will grind your bones to dust

And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,  
And make two pasties of your shameful heads,  
And bid that strumpet, your unhallow'd dam,  
Like to the earth swallow her own increase.  
This is the feast that I have bid her to,  
And this the banquet she shall surfeit on;  
And now prepare your throats.

*(He cuts their throats.)*

TITUS *(cont'd)*. So: now bring them in, for I'll play the cook—Lavinia come.

*(Sounds of an MRI. The dead are reanimated. They exit as SHAKESPEARE #3 enters in a lab coat with bloody hands. Shakespeare #1 and #2 enter. Each hold male dismembered heads [TITUS' sons] by the hairs, and #3 has TITUS' dismembered hand. NOTE: Shakespeare #1, #2 and #3 may address their remarks partly to the dismembered body parts.)*

SHAKESPEARE #3. The hippocampus is especially sensitive to the encoding of the context associated with an aversive situation. The hippocampus tells us danger is imminent. Then it performs the task of activating the amygdala. So you feel it.

SHAKESPEARE #1. You feel it.

SHAKESPEARE #3. You feel everything.

SHAKESPEARE #2. The increase in your heart rate. The rise in your blood pressure.

SHAKESPEARE #1. Muscles tensing. Hands sweating. Mouth, dry as a bone.



SHAKESPEARE #3 (*building to orgiastic fervor pitch*). Even in a story. Your brain fires up. Mirror neurons remember and respond at the moment a threat is perceived. You FEEL increased strength, you feel power surging, senses heightening, intuition vibrating off the charts. You are alive! Oh yes! YES! YES!

SHAKESPEARE #1. Basically, a cheap fast dark thrill ride, (*To the head he holds.*) isn't that right, Chiron?

SHAKESPEARE #3. Only 12 cranial nerves but a story lights them all. Olfactory nerve, bipolar and myelinated. Auditory nerve, bipolar and myelinated. Motor nerves multi-polar and myelinated. Optic nerve. Facial nerve. The trigeminal. The abducent. The glossopharyngeal. The hypoglossal. Nothing, gets your brain all hyped up, like a good story.

SHAKESPEARE #1. Especially a good story. And although you know, it's only a story, yet—you feel it.

SHAKESPEARE #2. Because the brain is lighting up like a *Stars Wars* battle. Like Imperial fighters going phew phew phew. Lightsabers going zzzzzt, zzzzt, zzzzt. Firing on all cylinders—Phew phew phew. Zzzzt. Zzzzt Zzzzt. Crrrazy! (*To the head in his hand.*) Right, Demetrius? He doesn't much care for stories. What's that? (*Ear to head.*) Says they're dangerous. No, they're not, they're safe, Demetrius. Promise. Very safe. Isn't that right, Will?

SHAKESPEARE #3. Yes that's right, Will. And why is that? Because you are safely nestled in the arms of the story. There, within the story. You feel pleasure. You feel anxiety. You feel happy. You feel fear. Delight. Agony. Together. A perfect marriage of opposites. Caught up in the embrace of a story, you are snug like a bug in a rug. Safe.

SHAKESPEARE #1. Unless you are texting during the movie, and someone shoots you.

SHAKESPEARE #2. Or a madman enters wearing a red wig firing a semi-automatic gun as he walks up the aisle.

SHAKESPEARE #1. Or a madman in an elementary school, or a military base, or hidden high above in a clock tower, or in a campus cafeteria. Everyone blames the story. Or the writer. *Piss off.*

SHAKESPEARE #2. Endorphins. Dopamine. Adrenaline. Enter-tain-ment. Catharsis.

SHAKESPEARE #3. Distress and delight, correlated. Duality. Therefore, delicious. And why are we drawn to stories? Why is your brain craving a story?

SHAKESPEARE #2. Because it speaks to the basic human condition of existential fear.

SHAKESPEARE #1. Because it connects, with ancestors who faced a multitude of savageries. And survived.

*(SHAKESPEARE #1 slits throat of #3.)*

SHAKESPEARE #1 *(cont'd)*. Or not. Perhaps, because it's fun.

*(SHAKESPEARE #2 comes from behind #1 and stabs him in the throat or slices his throat too.)*

SHAKESPEARE #2. And so. We are primed up, rehearsed for the ultimate mystery for every life. And that feels good. *(Beat.)* Or not. Care for some people pie?

*(Sounds of the MRI as all the dead reanimate and make a slow ominous advance towards the audience. Slow lights out.)*

## TRANSITION

# Gogglebox Hamlet 1

By Valerie Smith

## CHARACTERS

Gal

Guy 1

Guy 2

\*\*\*

GUY 1. All the guy does is talk backwards. Yoda on meth.

GAL. You illiterate swine. It's Shakespeare.

GUY 1. We could have watched *Lion King*.

GUY 2. Another beer, at once. Thank God I bought extra.

GUY 1. We should make a nude *Hamlet*. Or a *Zombie Hamlet*.

GAL. Done already. *Zombie Hamlet*.

GUY 1. The hell you say? Well why aren't we watching that?

GAL. Ophelia pisses me off. So lame. Believe it or not, she gets worse when she goes psycho-bitch.

GUY 2. Let's be a tad bit sensitive here. Let us say, rather, that she is "confused and conflicted."

GUY 1. *I'm* confused. *I'm* conflicted.

GUY 2. Maybe she's gay. Maybe everybody's gay. Maybe that should be our premise.

GAL. We *could* say she's OD-ing on advice. I mean, her brother gives her advice. Her father gives her advice. If she had a mother, she'd give her advice. The dog and the cat probably give her advice. "I will obey, my lord." Now Hamlet's giving her advice. Piss off to a nunnery. He's so mean. Asshole!

GUY 2. Get to the choppa, babe!

GUY 1. Well, she can't say she wasn't warned.

GAL. Girl, slap his face off. He's a tool.

GUY 2. Hey! He's being dicked around. In a major way.

GAL. Ohhhhhh. C'mon!

GUY 1. Something is rotten in Denmark.

GUY 2 (*belches*). But unlike Schwarzenegger, our man here is not taking out the trash in a timely manner.

GAL. Oh, he's hurting, so it's OK if he takes it out on her?  
(*Exasperated.*) Ah, she's crying.

GUY 1 & 2. Ahhhhhhhhhh!

GAL. Gawd. Please. So lame.

GUY 2. Be fair. When that thing happened with Josh, you were texting like crazy, asking everybody what to do. You were stricken. You were in deep pain. *You* cried.

GAL. I don't believe this! That was totally different!

GUY 2. How was that different?! We *told* you he was an asshole.

GUY 1. He had a history of ass-holery.

GUY 2. What happened with Josh?

GAL. I don't want to talk about this.

GUY 2. Just sayin'.

GUY 1. It's not our fault you wouldn't listen. Ophelia got decent advice. She's just too invested. Like you were.

GAL. I didn't lose my freakin' mind over it and go all stupid!  
(*Pause.*) And I didn't wear puff sleeves and matador pants.

GUY 2. True. Her outfits are ... not right.

## TRANSITION