

HAMLET

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE PRINS AV DANMÄRQ



Att vara prins är inte lätt. Särskilt om man inte vill vara en. Och än värre om familjen avgör ens egna livsval. Hamlet kommer hem från studierna för att vara med på sin pappas, den danske kungens, begravning och finner mamma drottningen gift med den nya kungen. När den döde återvänder som vålnad och berättar hur det hela gått till sänds sonen på en ny livsväg. Hamlet tvingas tjuvkoppla det sociala system som håller honom fången och dundrar i självdiagnostiserad galenskap fram genom denna nya danska värld.

I Teater Dictats queera läsning är pjäsen full av modersarketyper: Köttmodern, styvmodern, svärmodern och den frånvarande spökmodern – alla vill de något med sonen och hans liv. Denna pjäsernas pjäs, är teater i teatern. Vad passar bättre efter pandemins kalla restriktioner än att vi alla tar plats på klassiska Varbergs teaters scen, med ett begränsat antal platser, och deltar i sensommarens scenkonsthändelse. Hamlets öde är allas vårt öde, vi som söker vår livsväg. Ska vi vara, eller ska vi inte vara?



Being a prince is not easy. Not when you don't want to be one. Especially not when your family wants to make all your life choices for you. Hamlet comes home from university to attend the funeral of his father, the Danish king, only to find his mother is now married to his uncle. The dead king returns to tell Hamlet what really happened, putting his son on a new life path. Hamlet finds himself hot wiring the social systems that hold him captive and roams, in self-diagnosed madness, through this new Danish land.

In Teater Dictat's queer reading of Hamlet, we bring the mothers centre stage: the meat mother, the stepmother, the mother-in-law, and the absent ghost mother. Each one wants something from the son and won't stop at pulling the strings of his life. This play of plays brings theatre to the theatre. What could be better after the restrictions of this pandemic than taking a seat on the stage itself, at the classical Varberg Theatre, to participate in the event of the summer? Hamlet's fate is the fate of everyone carving out their own path. Should we be, or should we not be?

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT: PRESENTING QUEER MOTHERS [SLIDE EXAMPLES]

The artistic director wanted a queer performance with an all male cast which also examined "motherhood". I researched into forms of queer motherhood, including within contemporary drag culture.

Mothers in drag culture:

In the drag community, a drag mother takes on very much the same function as the traditional "heteronormative" mother. She is typically an older/more experienced drag queen, who "adopts" a younger/less experienced drag queen. She teaches her daughter the tricks of the trade, often being the first one to apply makeup to the new drag queen, or teaching her how best to do it, and helping the daughter to get work/a stronger network.



The drag mother/daughter relationship has also started to create drag families that often share/inherit a drag name. This indicates a close-knit group of performers who might work together or share a distribution of shows. This is of particular relevance/importance to the queer community because it represents the "chosen family" that liberates queer people from dangerous family environments where they may not be accepted.

Interesting mothers(?) in Shakespeare's time:



The Virgin Mary was a dominant figure as religion still permeated everyday life in renaissance England. Her virginity and the role of mother of the son of God have many interesting connotations.



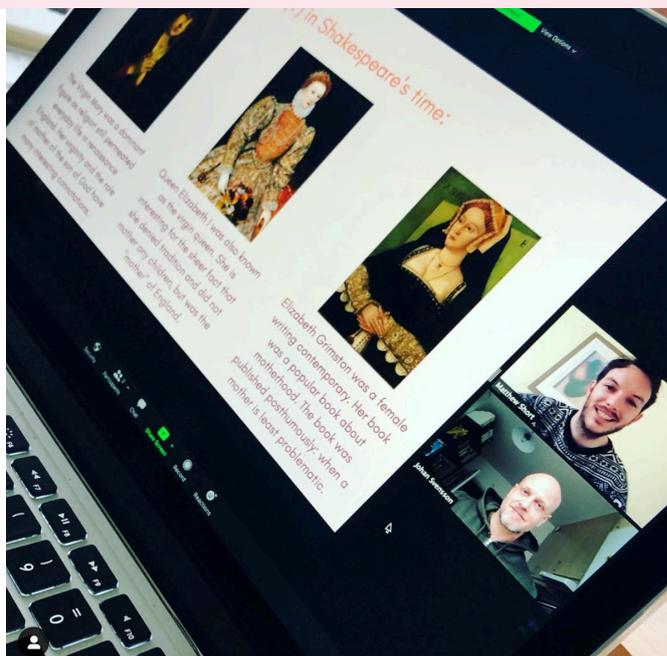
Queen Elizabeth I was also known as the virgin queen. She is interesting for the sheer fact that she denied tradition and did not mother any children, but was the "mother" of England.



Elizabeth Grimston was a female writing contemporary. Her book was a popular book about motherhood. The book was published posthumously: when a mother is least problematic.

I also looked into important cultural mothers of the time that Shakespeare was writing to see just why they were so absent from his dramas.

Zoom presenting during the pandemic with announcement of the project on Instagram.



DRAMATURGICAL SCRIPT TREATMENT [EXCERPT]

ACT I SCENE III

Enter POLONIUS carrying a blow up sex doll. This is OPHELIA. He seems agitated and concerned, having just come from bringing OPHELIA out of HAMLET's room. He places her in a chair and checks her for any damages.

Polonius: What is't, Ophelia, he hath done to you?
 'Tis told me he hath very oft of late
 Given private time to you, and you yourself
 Have of your audience been most free and bounteous.
 If it be so - as so 'tis put on me,
 And that in way of caution - I must tell you
 You do not understand yourself so clearly
 As it behove my daughter and your honour.

POLONIUS calms after seeing that there isn't any damage to Ophelia. He moves over to his vanity table, fixes his turban, and brings up gaudy earrings to his ears, trying them on in the mirror. He turns to Ophelia and continues.

Polonius: (cont.) Marry, I will teach you; think yourself a baby
 That you have taken these tenders for true pay
 Which are not sterling. *(He imitates the queens' behaviour)* Tender yourself more dearly
 Or - not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
 Wronging it thus - you'll tender me a fool.

He returns once more to his mirror, now reapplying his make up, paling his skin, trying to reduce his wrinkles, adding lipstick and rouge. It is clear that he is trying to imitate the faces of CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE but is somehow missing the mark. He looks old and tired. He sighs.

Polonius: (cont.) Ay, springes to catch woodcocks - I do know
 When the blood burns how prodigal the soul
 Lends the tongue vows. These blazes, daughter,
 Giving more light than heat, extinct in both
 Even in their promise as it is a-making,
 You must not take for fire. *(He gets up and sashays to OPHELIA)* From this time
 Be something scanter of your maiden presence;
 Set your entreatments at a higher rate
 Then a command to parle. For Lord Hamlet,
 Believe so much in him that he is young
 And with a larger tether may he walk

Than may be given you— (*He grabs some toilet roll, unwinds it, spits on it, then cleans the doll.*)

—In few, Ophelia,

Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers
Not of that dye which their investments show
But mere implorators of unholy suits
Breathing like sanctifies and pious bonds
The better to beguile. This is for all;
Have you so slander any moment leisure
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.

Having finished cleaning OPHELIA, he searches for a turban to match his own. He ties it around Ophelia's head and adds a pair of large sunglasses, knock-off designers. Then he picks her up, swans over to his vanity and looks in the mirror.

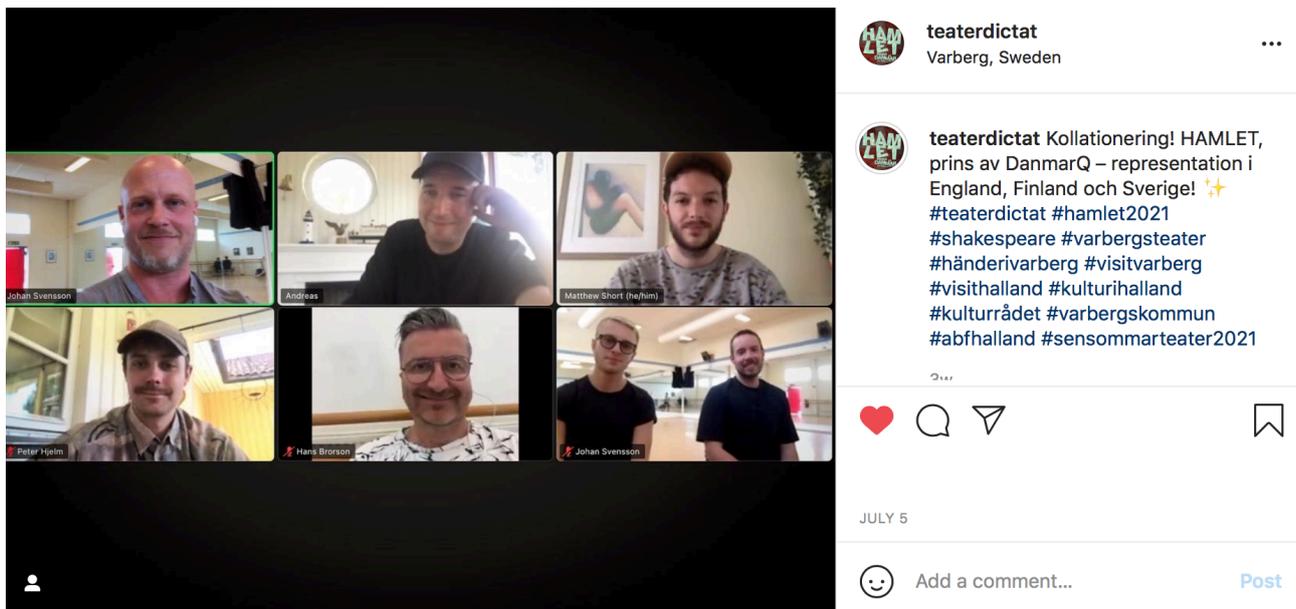
Polonius: (cont.) You shall obey, my dear. (*He exits with the doll.*)

[END OF EXCERPT]

QUEER READING WORKSHOP [SESSION PLAN]

Session delivered by me on 5th July 2021 via Zoom

Time	Activity	Objective	Outcome
11:00-11:05	Introduction: what is queer reading, what we can learn from it, and how the session will look.	To briefly explain the shape of the session so the actors will know what to expect.	A slight awareness of the more theoretical aspect of queer reading.
11:05-11:20	Hand out scripts: loosely contextualise the speeches, explain the notes to help them, why I chose these sequences (without giving too much away), and then give them five minutes to read them aloud neutrally and without motive a few times.	To present the soliloquies as blank canvases which might trigger or inspire moments relating to the actor's lived experiences.	Sensation of reading scripts aloud, a free flow of associations that may come from a neutral reading.
11:20-11:30	Check in: how was it? How did it feel? Do you have any questions? Initial thoughts on the characters? Any strong images that came to mind?	To start off conversations, but to also create a space to make the actors comfortable with what is to come.	Early stage expressions of what was felt and seen during the previous activity.
11:30-11:45	Ethnographic interview: ask for one of the actors to volunteer first for the deepening of the queer reading. A semi-structured interview that others are allowed to come in to ask questions. Some key questions to facilitate the reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is this soliloquy expressing? - When is a time you lived this experience? - Back to this memory, who are you saying this speech to? - What are you trying to convey in that memory? 	To facilitate deep thinking and a relational approach to the text by bringing forwards a memory and lived queer experience which can help to bring a new depth to their character.	A story and a memory that brings forwards their own real life into the story of the play. An interrogation of this story that makes the actor see/live it with an active agency.
11:45-11:55	Check in: what do the others actors think of that? What can we learn from this exercise? What does this signify about your character now? What other ways can we tell this story within the script that we have?	To confirm and solidify the learning experience from the previous activity, creating a way of thinking that can be applied to the text during future rehearsals.	Feedback on the actor's experience, what he has learnt, and how he can apply it.
11:55-12:00	Set up for rehearsal room practice. Do the actors feel like they can now do this with the remaining two speeches?	To build up confidence on continuing this practice more independently.	For activities 4 and 5 to be repeated for the other two speeches, without Matthew leading them.



[Translation: Collaborating! Hamlet, Prince of DenmarQ - representing England, Finland, and Sweden!]

The actors worked with adapted soliloquies to fulfil the session plan and expected outcomes. It was well received as a part of the rehearsal period that allowed the actors to connect the script to their own queer experience, allowing a new framework of understanding in terms of their characterisation and narrative arcs.

HORATIO:

We do it wrong being so majestic
To offer it the show of violence,
For it is as the air, invulnerable,
And our vain blows malicious mockery.

But look, the morn in russet mantle clad
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.
Break we our watch up and by my advice
Let us impart what we have seen tonight
Unto young Hamlet, acquaint him with it
As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?

This above texts were the first (left) and last (right) lines of a soliloquy we had created for our character Horatio. The actor read through this sequence without a purpose or specific approach, and then using the queer reading framework, started to open up about what these words meant to him.

He spoke about his experience of coming out as being reflected in the imagery of sunrise. The darkness before and the light after, and how he felt lighter for being able to share the news as opposed to keeping it inside. His queerness was also reflected as the “majestic”, and how staying in the closet and denying its truth is an act of violence against the self.

Since Horatio is Hamlet’s lover in our adaptation, this session was able to help the actor understand the characters’ gay relationship, and draw on his own experience of finding the light and the joy in Horatio’s time spent with Hamlet, which in turn is a contrast to Hamlet’s own inner-turmoil.