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## **Cast of Characters**

#1 NARRATOR  
#2 NARRATOR  
DRAMATURG  
HAMLET  
POLONIUS  
LAERTES  
GHOST  
HORATIO  
CLAUDIUS  
GERTRUDE  
ORSIC  
OPHELIA  
UNDERSTUDY  
STUNT DOUBLE  
#1 TRANSLATOR  
#2 TRANSLATOR  
SUBTITLE #1  
SUBTITLE #2  
EXTRA CAST MEMBERS

## **Production Notes**

*The Rules of Comedy* can be cast any number of ways. In its debut it was cast with 6 men and 6 women. Gender switching is certainly permitted in this play. Each actor, with the exception of the Narrators, will play multiple parts. This show was devised to be a vehicle for comedic physical theatre, though there is a part in the midst of the *Hamlet* synopsis that can showcase the dramatic skills of the actors as well. Since the play is so physical, much of the script is written in stage direction. It therefore behooves the reader (*perhaps more than most plays*) to create the stage in their mind's eye in order to "see" the actions as they unfold.

## Acknowledgments

*The Rules of Comedy* was first performed at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota, September 20, 2002. It was directed by Peter Bloedel and Jason Jaspersen. Technical direction was provided by Jonas Nissen and Costumes were designed by Esther Iverson.

The cast was as follows (only their primary “Hamlet” roles are listed):

HAMLET .....Steve Corona  
POLONIUS, UNDERSTUDY.....Peter Faugstad  
LAERTES .....Ben Inniger  
GHOST, #2 TRANSLATOR,  
STUNT DOUBLE..... Dan Jaspersen  
HORATIO ..... Simon Schmitt  
CLAUDIUS ..... Andrew Umphrey  
GERTRUDE; SUBTITLE #1.....Megan Czer  
ORSIC .....Marie Holtz  
#2 NARRATOR.....Joanna Kopperud  
OPHELIA; #1 TRANSLATOR..... Tricia Quist  
DRAMATURG; SUBTITLE #2 .....Alyssa Schrader  
#1 NARRATOR..... Nicole Zahn

# THE RULES OF COMEDY

## A PHYSICALLY COMIC EXTRAVAGANZA IN ONE ACT

by Peter Bloedel

*(An empty stage.)*

*(Enter #1 NARRATOR. Reading from a dictionary.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Slapstick. Comedy with the emphasis on fast physical action, farcical situations, and obvious jokes that don't depend on language.

*(Enter #2 NARRATOR, also reading from a dictionary.)*

*(These NARRATORS serve as comedy teachers to the audience.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Shtick! A show business routine, gimmick or gag. Something comic.

*(#1 NARRATOR is flipping through the dictionary to look up a word.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Comic! Appearing in or characteristic of comedy. Something funny!

*(#2 NARRATOR is flipping through the dictionary to look up a word.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Funny. Causing amusement. Especially enough to provoke a laugh.

*(#1 NARRATOR is flipping through the dictionary to look up a word.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Laugh. To make sounds from the throat while breathing out in short burst or gasps often causing the diaphragm to pulsate and frequently causing the soft palate to undulate on the intake—as a way of expressing amusement.

**#2 NARRATOR.** *(To the audience:)* All of these things are necessary components of comedy.

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(To the audience:)* Comedy is important.

**#2 NARRATOR.** That's right. A gifted, young comic once aptly stated it this way: It don't mean a thing...if it ain't funny.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Who said that?

**#2 NARRATOR.** I did.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Well even though that little joke had a suck factor of 9, on the fun-o-meter, it is a useful axiom.

**#2 NARRATOR.** That's right! Just think of all the great movers and shakers in history.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Aristotle, Joan of Arc...

**#2 NARRATOR.** Shakespeare, Napoleon...

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(Insert your own laughable, popular icons:)* Britney Spears, Michael Jackson...

**NARRATORS TOGETHER.** All Funny!

**#2 NARRATOR.** So what makes things funny?

**#1 NARRATOR.** After months of painstaking research...

**#2 NARRATOR.** ...Endless experiments...

**#1 NARRATOR.** ...Data Generation...

**#2 NARRATOR.** ...Compilation...

**#1 NARRATOR.** ...Computation...

**#2 NARRATOR.** ...Organization...

**#1 NARRATOR.** ...Collation...

**#2 NARRATOR.** ...Manipulation...

**#1 NARRATOR.** ...and Constipation!

**#2 NARRATOR.** We here at Theatre Physics, Inc. *(Insert your playing company's name here)*, are proud to boast the introduction...

*(Holds up a long piece of paper with a list on it.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** ...Of the creation...

**#2 NARRATOR.** ...And the compilation...

**#1 NARRATOR.** ...And the consummation...

**#2 NARRATOR.** ...Of the most official documentation...

**#1 NARRATOR.** ...Of humor integration,...

**#2 NARRATOR.** ... Laughter instillation,...

**#1 NARRATOR.** ...And comic inculcation,...

**BOTH NARRATORS.** ...In the entire nation!

**#2 NARRATOR.** Put in the simplest of terms...

*(Both NARRATORS point to the long list.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** We have the funny list.

**#2 NARRATOR.** So without further adieu...

**#1 NARRATOR.** Class is in session.

**#2 NARRATOR.** ...We present to you...

*(Some CAST MEMBERS race out and blow a majestic [but short] fanfare with brass instruments.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** The Rules of Comedy!

**#1 NARRATOR.** Brass instrument fanfares are funny.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Having to empty the spit valves on the instruments before the fanfare...

*(The INSTRUMENTALISTS empty their spit valves; the brass players blow an inordinate amount of spit from their instruments. They play upon the “grossness” of the situation, and then perform the fanfare again.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** *(Both give “the thumbs up” signal:)* Funny!

*(A random CAST MEMBER, passing across the stage, hands a head of lettuce to #1 NARRATOR.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Food by itself...

**#2 NARRATOR.** Not funny, unless you consume it irregularly.

*(#1 NARRATOR takes a big bite out of the lettuce head like an apple.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** *(Nods.)* Funny!!!

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(Talks with lettuce spraying out of his/her mouth:)*  
Talking with mouth full...Funny.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Food is also funny if you make use of it without eating it.

*(A lettuce head is dropped from above and “splats” onto the stage. A “JANITOR” comes out with a broom to clean up the lettuce. [Note: A lettuce head will “splat” best if the “core stem” of the lettuce head is pulled off first.])*

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(Still with a bit of lettuce in the mouth:)* A single funny thing can increase in funniness if it is repeated.

*(Another lettuce head falls in the same place just missing the janitor. The JANITOR is startled momentarily, but then continues sweeping. Another lettuce head falls in the same place just missing the JANITOR again. The JANITOR becomes more paranoid.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Three times is always funny.

*(A fourth head of lettuce falls just as before.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Four times...

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Not funny!

**#1 NARRATOR.** Unless, an alteration is made.

*(A laundry basket is dropped from above. A fetching young laundry WENCH crosses the stage and picks up the basket.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Illicit infatuation.

*(The JANITOR is dumbfounded by the WENCH and follows her off stage clearly infatuated with her. A pit CLEAN-UP CREW quickly picks up the remaining lettuce mess.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Funny!

**#2 NARRATOR.** A possible exception to the food funniness rule is...

*(A cream pie is brought out by an ACTOR.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** *(Continuing:)* ...The cream pie!

**#1 NARRATOR.** It harbors so much potential comic energy, nothing even has to happen.

**#2 NARRATOR.** It's just funny.

**#1 NARRATOR.** When there is a cream pie on stage the audience waits with anticipation for...something.

*(Another CAST MEMBER with a towel around his/her shoulders enters. This ACTOR joins the ACTOR with the pie. The one with the pie tests the weight of the pie and loosens his arm, and then gets ready to throw the pie into the face of the actor with the towel.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** When the audience's anticipation is thwarted...

*(The ACTOR with the pie does not throw, but instead, quite suddenly, leaves the stage with the pie. [Big build up...to no follow through.]*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Not funny! However...

**#2 NARRATOR.** Misdirection...

**#1 NARRATOR.** ...And surprise...

*(A third CAST MEMBER enters quickly with a second pie. The CAST MEMBER who remains [the one who should have gotten a pie in the face, but didn't] has his back to, and is unaware of the third cast member with the new pie. The ACTOR with the towel [the one who remains] shrugs and turns around as if to leave the stage but accidentally turns his face right into the new pie. Both ACTORS give a glance to the audience, and exit.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Funny.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Visual bits...

*(Many ACTORS enter repeating various visual bits like: one ACTOR's pants keep dropping to the ground, two ACTORS alternate kicking each other's butts, ACTORS dance wearing "google eyed" glasses, and "arrow through the head" hats, and yet another ACTOR might slap herself and fall to the ground over and over, or anything else of that ilk.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Funny.

*(The visual bit action continues. One NARRATOR checks his/her watch.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Visual bits that go on too long...

**#1 NARRATOR.** Not funny!

*(The ACTORS stop and scatter, exiting.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Switched drinks and potions...

*(Five CAST MEMBERS enter with identical tuxedos and wine glasses.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Or as we like to call it—playing a fun game of “where the heck is the poison now.”

**FIVE ACTORS TOGETHER.** *(Standing in a half circle, with their glasses raised:)* One...Two...Three...Switch!

*(On the word switch, all of the “TUXEDOED” ACTORS switch wine glasses with one another. That is, all except the ACTOR in the middle who stealthily ducks down and protects his own glass, not switching it with anybody. The rest of the group members don’t seem to notice the cheater in the middle. When the glasses of the four “fair players” are switched, ALL FIVE stand up straight, raising their glasses again in the toasting position.)*

**FIVE ACTORS TOGETHER.** One...Two...Three... Switch!

*(The glasses are switched [or not switched] exactly as before. The cheating ACTOR in the middle looks very smug by this time.)*

**FIVE ACTORS TOGETHER.** Cheers!

*(They all drink.)*

*(A small pause.)*

*(All but the PERSON standing in the middle fall over dead. The ACTOR in the middle slowly spits his drink back into his glass, throws his head back and lets out an evil, maniacal laugh. The laugh is cut short and the person in the middle suddenly falls over dead. It seems the cheater gets the poison after all. The OTHER FOUR get up, brush themselves off, give each other “high fives” and leave the stage.)*

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**BOTH NARRATORS.** Funny.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Medical and Security teams are funny.

*(A MEDICAL TEAM enters with a loud siren. They scoop up the dead body of the poisoned victim. A SECURITY TEAM stands there with sunglasses and walkie-talkies looking very “secret service” like. They all leave together with the poison victim, sirens blaring.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Realistic looking ghosts...

*(A CAST MEMBER enters dressed realistically as the “grim reaper” with a black hooded cloak and a big scythe.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Not Funny!

*(GRIM REAPER exits.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** A “normal guy ghost” with a sheet over his head...

*(A CAST MEMBER casually comes out with a sheet over his/her head...waves...then exits.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Funny!

**#2 NARRATOR.** Rubber chickens are funny.

*(An ACTOR runs on with a rubber chicken, holds it up and runs off.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Gorilla suits are funny. *(Or some other obscure object.)*

*(An ACTOR with a gorilla suit runs across the stage, and runs off.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Even part of a gorilla suit is funny.

*(An ACTOR wearing “gorilla hair” pants runs across the stage, and runs off.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Clubbing.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Clubbing with a real club...

*(#1 NARRATOR holds up a real billy-club or a baseball bat or some like object.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** NEVER FUNNY!

**#2 NARRATOR.** Clubbing with a “flexi-club” ...

*(#2 NARRATOR holds up a flexible club.)*

*(Note: A flexi-club can be made simply out of pipe insulation wrapped in black tape. It should be soft enough to allow a person to be clubbed over the head without injury.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Funny.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Point of specification.

*(#1 NARRATOR takes the flexi-club from #2 NARRATOR.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** A flexi-club needs to be soft but still rigid enough to make a “thwack” sound when it hits something, like this.

*(#1 NARRATOR demonstrates the sound by hitting #2 NARRATOR over the head with it. #2 NARRATOR looks at her very annoyed.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Funny?

*(#2 NARRATOR shakes his/her head. Grabs the club and whacks #1 NARRATOR.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Funny!

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(Quietly:)* Ow.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Death delayed is funny!

*(An ACTOR enters wearing glasses and carrying a handful of books. He’s a professor.)*

**PROFESSOR.** ...Thus we have the harmonic oscillator. The eigenfunctions belonging to the four lowest energy states. Hence one over two pi times the square root of k over m is equal to v sub zero...

*(A second ACTOR enters with a flexi-club and clubs the PROFESSOR over the head in the middle of his statement. The PROFESSOR doesn’t react to the hit and continues talking until he is done with his line. The line should end as if it were suddenly interrupted. Then he drops dead.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Slow motion is funny!

*(The PROFESSOR gets back up. He and his ASSAILANT suddenly launch into a slow motion replay of the attack that just happened. This time the PROFESSOR sees the club coming [very slowly] and reacts in the same speed. He falls in slow motion as soon as he is hit. The slower and more detailed the attack, the better.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Stunt doubles are funny.

*(Again the PROFESSOR gets up. He delivers the first part of his line. The ATTACKER with the club approaches and is ready to swing.)*

**PROFESSOR.** ...Thus we have the harmonic oscillator. The eigenfunctions belonging to the four lowest energy states.

*(The PROFESSOR methodically steps aside and a new CAST MEMBER enters and takes the club hit [full speed] for the PROFESSOR. The ACTOR who took the hit exits unhurt, and the PROFESSOR falls into position writhing on the ground.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Angry mobs and full stage chases are funny.

*(The ASSAILANT who attacked the PROFESSOR runs for his life being chased by the rest of the CAST, all carrying flexi-clubs. The PROFESSOR gets up and chases him too. They all exit.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Metaphors taken literally...

*(A CAST MEMBER enters.)*

**LITERAL METAPHOR CAST MEMBER.** Hey. It's raining cats and dogs!

*(Suddenly hundreds of stuffed animal "dogs" drop from above and hit the stage. Most of them land on or around this ACTOR.)*

**LITERAL METAPHOR CAST MEMBER.** I mean it's really coming down in sheets.

*(Sheets begin to fall from above and land on or around the ACTOR.)*

*(Any metaphor can be inserted here if it has a humorous literal interpretation, i.e.—“You're dynamite”—“You're totally trashed.” This description will, of course, change with each different metaphor.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Funny!

*(The stage is quickly cleared of dogs and sheets.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Spit takes are funny!

*(Two CAST MEMBERS enter, one with a glass of water. The one with the water starts to drink and the other suddenly says something funny or shocking [i.e.—“Honey, I’m pregnant!”] The drinking CAST MEMBER spontaneously, convulses and blows the contents of his/her mouth into a huge cloud of mist. They exit.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** A spit take with rotten curdled milk...

*(A new CAST MEMBER enters with a carton of regular [not rotten] milk. The ACTOR takes one taste straight out of the carton and blows the contents of his/her mouth out as was just done with the water. This CAST MEMBER exits.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Even more funny!

**#2 NARRATOR.** Speaking of rotten curdled milk...

*(The same ACTOR who just did the milk spit take enters with a milk carton [identical to the previous milk carton], and a glass. This time the carton contains a mixture of milk and cottage cheese. The ACTOR pours the white clumpy mixture into a glass, winces, and exits.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Simply viewing curdled milk is funny.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Yet, strangely, curdled milk seems to have an ominous power all its own.

*(Eerie music plays.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Translators are funny.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Blatantly wrong translation...

*(A CAST MEMBER [a foreigner] enters, and his TRANSLATOR follows behind.)*

**FOREIGNER.** *No Habla Engleis.*

**TRANSLATOR.** I’m a duck billed platypus, I enjoy pancakes, and my pants are too tight.

*(They exit.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Even funnier!

**#2 NARRATOR.** Game show personalities are funny.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Lying badly is funny.

**#2 NARRATOR.** I is funny.

**#2 NARRATOR.** I is funny.

**#1 NARRATOR.** I is funny.

**#1 NARRATOR.** I is funny.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Foreign accents are funny.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Completely unintelligible accents are even more funny.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Speaking in a legitimate foreign language...

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Not that funny.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Near misses are funny.

*(An ACTOR enters carrying a long ladder. From the opposite side of the stage another ACTOR enters. The ACTOR with the ladder turns swinging the ladder, just missing the other ACTOR who has quickly bent over to pick up a penny on the stage [variations of this theme can be applied]. They exit.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Finally, spontaneously breaking into song is always funny.

*(Music to a big musical number starts. The CAST fills the stage and launches into the introductory dance steps. After a few bars the CAST takes a big unified breath as if starting to sing... They are cut short by #1 NARRATOR.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Whoa! Hey, hey, hey...nix on the music (*Pig Latin.*)

*(The music falls apart.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** What!? Why'd you do that?

**#1 NARRATOR.** Because we're missing something.

**#2 NARRATOR.** What? What are we missing?

**#1 NARRATOR.** We need a place to put the Rules of Comedy.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Where did you want to put them?

**#1 NARRATOR.** We need something that tests them, something that examines their truth.

*(The CAST MEMBERS, annoyed that their big number has been squelched, start to filter back into the wings.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** You mean like another play or something?

**#1 NARRATOR.** I mean a part of another play.

**#2 NARRATOR.** So... something light?

**#1 NARRATOR.** Something dark.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Something serious?

**#1 NARRATOR.** Something tragic.

**#2 NARRATOR.** *(Not too sure about this idea:)* Okay.

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(Very sure:)* Okay!

**#2 NARRATOR.** *(Still with trepidation:)* Alright?!

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(With searing eyes, almost in a trance—Very sure!)* Alright!

*(Weird awkward pause.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Um...So...Did you have something in mind?

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(Less austere, and suddenly very perky:)* Hamlet!

**#2 NARRATOR.** *Hamlet?!*

**#1 NARRATOR.** *Hamlet!!!*

**#2 NARRATOR.** By Shakespeare?

*(#1 NARRATOR nods.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** But most people don't even know *Hamlet*, and a lot of people don't understand Shakespeare.

**#1 NARRATOR.** That's why we have a Dramaturg.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Dramaturg... Good word.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Funny?

**#2 NARRATOR.** *(Giving the thumbs up:)* Funny.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Enter the Dramaturg!

*(DRAMATURG enters. Elderly and professorial, yet uncharacteristically energetic.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Okay, professor, we need a quick synopsis of *Hamlet*.

**#1 NARRATOR.** With a special emphasis on the final scene.

**#2 NARRATOR.** On your mark!

**#1 NARRATOR.** Get set!

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Synopsise!

**DRAMATURG.** Hamlet, the young prince of Denmark is haunted by the Ghost of his father also named Hamlet, Hamlet Senior I guess, or King Hamlet if you prefer, Many people call him Hamlet's Dad or Dad Hamlet...

*(#1 NARRATOR's hand goes over the mouth of the DRAMATURG—quieting him.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(To the audience:)* Getting side tracked. Slightly funny, yet mildly annoying. *(To DRAMATURG:)* Please continue.

**DRAMATURG.** The ghost beckons Hamlet...

*(HAMLET and a GHOST [An actor in a sheet] enter hurriedly.)*

**GHOST.** If thou didst ever thy dear father love—Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

**HAMLET.** Murder?!

**GHOST.** Murder most foul, as foul as foulness is, But this most foul, strange and unnatural. Foul beyond all...

**#2 NARRATOR.** Okay! Skip ahead professor.

**DRAMATURG.** Hamlet Senior...

**#1 NARRATOR.** "The ghost"

*(The GHOST waves to the audience.)*

**DRAMATURG.** ...informs Hamlet Junior...

**#2 NARRATOR.** “Our hero”

*(HAMLET waves to the audience.)*

**DRAMATURG.** ...of his uncle CLAUDIUS’ treachery.

*(CLAUDIUS enters, and waves to the audience.)*

**DRAMATURG.** Claudius, poisons and kills the King, takes the queen Gertrude...

*(GERTRUDE enters, and waves to the audience.)*

**BOTH NARRATORS.** Hamlet’s Mom.

**DRAMATURG.** ...to be his own wife, and usurps the throne and crowns himself King.

*(GERTUDE hands a crown to CLAUDIUS, and he puts it on.)*

*(GERTRUDE and CLAUDIUS exit.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** *(Looking at #1 NARRATOR:)* Usurps?

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(Giving the thumbs up:)* Funny!

**DRAMATURG.** Heeding the Ghost, Hamlet seeks revenge against his uncle Claudius.

**HAMLET.** Rest, rest perturbed spirit... The time is out of joint; O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right!

*(The GHOST exits.)*

**DRAMATURG.** A distraught Hamlet, roams around the castle contemplating the vengeful task that is set before him. As a means of cloaking his grief and hiding his true motives, he occasionally feigns madness.

*(POLONIUS and OPHELIA enter and watch HAMLET’s rantings.)*

**HAMLET.** Excellent well! You are a fishmonger if the sun breeds maggots in a dead dog. Have you a daughter?

(POLONIUS *nods and presents to HAMLET his daughter OPHELIA.*)

**HAMLET.** Words, words, words—Between who? Into my grave? (*Skipping like a broken record.*) Except my life, except my life, except my life...

(POLONIUS *slaps HAMLET to make him stop. This sends HAMLET into a 5 second dance jig, at the end of which he faces the audience and says:*)

**HAMLET.** These tedious fools!

(HAMLET *exits.*)

**DRAMATURG.** Hamlet's pretend madness makes his girlfriend Ophelia die.

(*She dies. A MEDICAL TEAM quickly enters, and takes her out.*)

**POLONIUS.** (*Distraught by OPHELIA's death, he strikes an over dramatic pose:*) Nooooooooooooo!

(*He exits.*)

**DRAMATURG.** Hamlet concocts a clever plan. He shows the court a play that is sure to reveal the guilt of Claudius.

(*The whole court is gathered and watches two or three people playing Barbies [improvising dialog]. It's cute to everybody except CLAUDIUS, who finds the whole show very tedious. HAMLET watches CLAUDIUS like a hawk. After a bit of time CLAUDIUS can't take it anymore and stands.*)

**CLAUDIUS.** Am I insane? This is sooooooooo, boring. This isn't even about anything. Who writes this crap? Is this some kind of a joke?

(*He storms out.*)

**ALL.** OOOOOOOOH!

(*Everybody but HAMLET and HORATIO leave.*)

**DRAMATURG.** For Hamlet, this bold act solidifies the guilt of CLAUDIUS.

**HAMLET.** *(To HORATIO:)* Did you see that?

**HORATIO.** I saw that.

**HAMLET.** Didn't he?

**HORATIO.** He did.

**HAMLET.** Do you think?

**HORATIO.** I do think.

**HAMLET.** Yeah. I think too.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Hey guys!

*(HAMLET and HORATIO are cut short and look over to the NARRATORS.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Shakespeare!

*(HAMLET and HORATIO start again assuming more of a "classical" posture.)*

**HAMLET.** O good Horatio! I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pounds. Didst perceive?

**HORATIO.** Very well, my lord.

*(They exit.)*

**DRAMATURG.** It wasn't long before Gertrude...

*(Enter GERTRUDE.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(Interrupting for clarification:)* The queen.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Hamlet's mother.

**DRAMATURG.** ...Gertrude has enough of Hamlet's shenanigans, and by Claudius' request, calls Hamlet to her chamber so she can give him a good chewing out.

*(Enter HAMLET.)*

**DRAMATURG.** However, Polonius...

**#2 NARRATOR.** Remember Polonius?

*(Enter POLONIUS.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Okay. Ophelia? The chick who died?

*(A quick re-enactment of OPHELIA dying can happen here.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Hamlet's girlfriend?

**#1 NARRATOR.** Yeah, remember the dude who was with her?

**#2 NARRATOR.** Yeah, the guy who screamed...

*(POLONIUS assumes the "screaming" position and lets it fly.)*

**POLONIUS.** Noooooooooooooooooo!

**NARRATORS TOGETHER.** That's Polonius!

**DRAMATURG.** Hamlet is with his mother in her chamber, and Polonius is eavesdropping from behind a curtain.

*(POLONIUS holds a curtain up and conceals himself.)*

**QUEEN GERTRUDE.** Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

**HAMLET.** *(Screaming:)* Mother, you have my father much offended. You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife; And—would it were not so! —you are my mother.

*(Enraged and deranged, HAMLET chases her around.)*

**HAMLET.** AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!

**QUEEN GERTRUDE.** What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me? Help, help, ho!

**POLONIUS.** *(Peeking around the curtain:)* What ho?

**HAMLET.** How now! A rat? Dead for a ducat, dead.

*(HAMLET stabs POLONIUS through the curtain.)*

**POLONIUS.** *(Again assuming "scream" position:)* Nooooooooooooo!

*(POLONIUS pauses and assesses the situation.)*

**POLONIUS.** I am slain.

*(He drops dead.)*

*(HAMLET and GERTRUDE look at each other, shrug, and leave. A MEDICAL TEAM quickly enters and scoops up POLONIUS.)*

*(Enter GERTRUDE and CLAUDIUS.)*

**DRAMATURG.** Gertrude tells Claudius that Hamlet has killed Polonius...

**POLONIUS.** *(From off-stage:)* Nooooooooooooo!

**DRAMATURG.** Claudius declares that Hamlet must leave Denmark for his own “safety.”

*(HAMLET enters accompanied by two “friends” from school. They are ROZENCRAINTZ and GULDENSTERN.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** For England!

**HAMLET.** For England!

**DRAMATURG.** But CLAUDIUS, understanding that Hamlet is very popular with his own subjects, devises a plan to have Hamlet killed in England, and to that effect sends a letter to the King of England making it clear that Hamlet should be killed while he is abroad.

**HAMLET.** *(Putting on a feminine demeanor:)* I’m not a broad!

**NARRATORS TOGETHER.** Over seas!

**HAMLET.** Oooooohhh!

*(HAMLET exits momentarily.)*

**DRAMATURG.** Hamlet perceives that CLAUDIUS is plotting to have him killed, so he escapes the ship and those attending him to England, and joins a band of pirates who bring him safely back to Denmark.

*(HAMLET enters with a parrot on his shoulder, accompanied by a band of rum drinking pirates.)*

**HAMLET AND PIRATES.** Arrrrrrrrr! Eeeeeiiiiiii! Arrrrrrrrr!

**#1 NARRATOR.** Pirates?

**NARRATORS TOGETHER.** Funny!

*(HAMLET and PIRATE BAND exit.)*

**DRAMATURG.** Meanwhile. Laertes...

*(Enter LAERTES.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** That's the brother to Ophelia.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Remember, Hamlet's dead girlfriend?

*(OPHELIA steps out and waves.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** And, he's also the son of dead Polonius.

**DRAMATURG.** Laertes comes back to Denmark from Paris to mourn his father's death, only to realize that his sister is dead too.

*(OPHELIA drops dead [again] right in front of LAERTES.)*

**LAERTES.** *(Assuming the same "scream" position as POLONIUS:)*  
Nooooooooooooooooo!

*(OPHELIA is scooped up by the MEDICAL TEAM and is taken off-stage.)*

*(CLAUDIUS enters to join LAERTES.)*

**DRAMATURG.** Claudius gets word that Hamlet has escaped his appointment with death in England. He convinces Laertes that Hamlet is solely responsible for the death of his father and sister. They hatch a plan to kill Hamlet and call it an "accident."

**CLAUDIUS.** Hamlet bad...Claudius good....me friend.

**NARRATORS TOGETHER.** Shakespeare!

**CLAUDIUS.** Will you be rul'd by me?

**LAERTES.** My Lord, I will be rul'd; The rather, if you could devise it so, That I might be the organ.

*(They exit.)*

**DRAMATURG.** *(This pantomimed by ACTORS.)* Hamlet and Horatio are approached by Orsic, a gentleman of the court, who informs them that Laertes challenges Hamlet to a duel. Hamlet recognizes this as a trap especially after hearing that the King will be betting on Hamlet. Covertly Claudius and Laertes are planning to poison Hamlet during the duel either with a sip of poison wine taken in the middle of the match, or by Laertes' sword, the tip of which has been dipped in deadly poison.

*(The DRAMATURG lets out an evil cackle, quickly realizes this to be inappropriate behavior, and apologizes.)*

*(People of the court enter to watch the duel. CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE are in the center.)*

**DRAMATURG.** *(Continuing, soberly:)* The duel begins and Hamlet makes the first contact.

*(HAMLET and LAERTES act this out.)*

*(At this point, the play becomes serious. The ACTORS suddenly play the rest of the final HAMLET scene straight.)*

**ORSIC.** A hit, a very palpable hit.

**DRAMATURG.** Seeing that Hamlet has the lead, the King poisons the wine chalice, by dropping into it a fake pearl containing poison.

**CLAUDIUS.** Stay; give me drink. Hamlet, this pearl is thine;

*(He drops the poisoned pearl into the cup.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** Here's to thy health. Give him the cup.

**HAMLET.** I'll play this bout first; set it by awhile.

**DRAMATURG.** Hamlet makes a second point off Laertes.

*(HAMLET and LAERTES act this out.)*

**DRAMATURG.** The Queen drinks to Hamlet's success.

**QUEEN GERTRUDE.** The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.

**HAMLET.** Good, Madam!

**CLAUDIUS.** Gertrude, do not drink!

**DRAMATURG.** Queen Gertrude drinks the poison.

*(GERTRUDE does.)*

**DRAMATURG.** In the meantime Laertes wounds Hamlet. They scuffle, switch swords, and Hamlet wounds Laertes.

*(Again...this should be acted out in all seriousness as if the ACTORS were really performing the play Hamlet.)*

*(Both HAMLET and LAERTES are both obviously wounded now.)*

**HORATIO.** They bleed on both sides. How is it my Lord?

**LAERTES.** I am justly killed with mine own treachery.

**HAMLET.** How does the Queen?

*(The QUEEN staggers. She is poisoned.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** She swoonds to see them bleed.

**QUEEN GERTRUDE.** No, No, the drink, the drink—O my dear Hamlet! The drink, the drink; I am poisoned.

*(She dies.)*

**HAMLET.** O villainy! Ho! Let the door be lock'd: Treachery! Seek it out.

**LAERTES.** It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain; No medicine in the world can do thee good; In thee there is not half an hour of life; The treacherous instrument is in thy hand, Unhated and envenomed. The foul practice hath turned itself on me; lo! here I lie, Never to rise again. Thy mother's poison'd. I can no more. The king, the king's to blame.

**HAMLET.** The point envenomed too! Then, venom, to thy work.

*(HAMLET stabs CLAUDIUS.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** O! Yet defend me friends; I am but hurt.

**HAMLET.** Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, Drink off this potion; —Is thy union here? Follow my mother!

*(HAMLET forces the poisoned cup into CLAUDIUS' mouth. CLAUDIUS dies.)*

**LAERTES.** He is justly served; Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet. Mine and my father's death come not upon thee, Nor thine on me!

*(LAERTES dies.)*

**HAMLET.** Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee. I am dead, Horatio. But let it be. Horatio, I am dead; Thou liv'st; report me and

my cause aright To the unsatisfied. O! I die Horatio. —The rest is silence.

*(HAMLET dies.)*

**HORATIO.** Now cracks a noble heart. Good-night, sweet prince, And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest! The stage blackens as a peal of salutary cannon fire is sounded.

*(Profound ending. Very sober.)*

*(Awkward pause. The stage is still dark, but spotlights come up on the NARRATORS.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Whew! Yikes!

**#1 NARRATOR.** As you can see there isn't anything very funny about the last scene of *Hamlet*.

**#2 NARRATOR.** So what better testing ground for the *Rules of Comedy*.

**#1 NARRATOR.** That's right! In order to test the Rules of Comedy, we are going to take the most famous tragic scene in all of literature...

**#2 NARRATOR.** The final scene of Hamlet...

**#1 NARRATOR.** ...and inject into it...

**#2 NARRATOR.** ...like an illegal performance enhancing drug...

*(#1 NARRATOR gives #2 a quizzical look, they grin at each other, then to the audience, rubbing their hands like mad scientists...)*

**NARRATORS TOGETHER.** ...THE RULES OF COMEDY!

*(Suddenly there is traffic on stage. ACTORS are getting into place, other ACTORS and TECHNICIANS are quickly preparing the stage for the next scene.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** We'll start the scene when Orsic greets Hamlet and Horatio, and delivers to Hamlet Laertes' challenge.

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(Speaking into a megaphone:)* Places..... Lights..... Action!

*(Note: The timing of the play from here on out is crucial. The pacing should be swift, quickly moving from bit to bit. It is not out of place for the ACTORS, at times, to run to their places, do their bit, and quickly run off. Companies should feel free to play here. Lines should be delivered loudly with clear diction. Energy!)*

*(HAMLET and HORATIO are in place. They are both wearing loose fitting trousers. ORSIC enters also with big trousers and a hat. The pants need not be period costuming.)*

**ORSIC.** Sweet lord, if your lordship were at leisure, I should impart a thing to you from his majesty.

*(His pants fall to his ankles revealing some loudly patterned underwear. ORSIC takes his hat off and covers his underwear.)*

**HAMLET.** I will receive it, sir, with all diligence of spirit. Put your bonnet to his right use; 'tis for the head.

*(ORSIC keeps his hat where it is.)*

**ORSIC.** I thank your lordship, 'tis very hot.

*(ORSIC hands his hat to HAMLET and bends over to pull his own pants up. Upon taking ORSIC's hat, HAMLET's pants drop to the ground, revealing even louder underwear, but he doesn't realize it.)*

**HAMLET.** No, believe me, 'tis very cold; the wind is northerly.

**ORSIC.** It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.

*(ORSIC gestures to HAMLET that his pants are on the ground. HAMLET quickly covers up with ORSIC's hat.)*

**HAMLET.** *(Blushing:)* But yet methinks it is very sultry and hot for my complexion.

*(HAMLET hands ORSIC's hat to HORATIO. HORATIO cringes and refuses to take it. HAMLET hands the hat back to ORSIC, who does take it. HAMLET bends down to pull up his own pants. ORSIC's pants drop because his hands are no longer holding up his pants, they are holding his hat.)*

**ORSIC.** Exceedingly, my Lord; it is very sultry, as twere, I cannot tell how.

*(ORSIC and HAMLET continue passing the hat back and fourth and pulling up their pants a couple more times. Then they stop and realize that HORATIO's pants have never come down.)*

*(Disgusted, the two flank HORATIO, whistling nonchalantly. HORATIO suspects nothing. They spring, and yank HORATIO's pants to the floor. Revealing the hairy gorilla pant legs.)*

*(HORATIO is embarrassed but not as embarrassed as HAMLET or ORSIC. The two slowly pull HORATIO's pants back up, compose themselves and continue.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Enter subtitles!

*(The SUBTITLE TRANSLATORS enter. They carry large signs that clearly have subtitle translations written on them. They hold up the appropriate translation sign at the appropriate time. Option #2: Use a projector to project the subtitles onto a readable surface. Simpler. More "high tech." Very legitimate.)*

**ORSIC.** But, my lord, his majesty bade me signify to you that he has laid a great wager on your head. Sir, this is the matter,—

*(SUBTITLE READS: Hamlet. The king is betting on you.)*

**HAMLET.** I beseech you, remember -

*(SUBTITLE READS: I ask you earnestly to tell me more.)*

**ORSIC.** Nay, good my lord; for mine ease, in good faith. Sir, here is newly come to court Laertes; believe me, an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences, of very soft society and great showing; indeed, to speak feelingly of him, he is the card or calendar of gentry, for you shall find him the continent of what part a gentleman would see.

*(SUBTITLE READS: Laertes is nice.)*

**HAMLET.** Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you; though, I know, to divide him inventorially would dizzy the arithmetic of memory, and yet but yaw neither, in respect of his quick sail. But, in the verity of extolment, I take him to be a soul of great article; and his infusion of such dearth and rareness, as, to make true diction of him, his semblable is his mirror; and who else would trace him, his umbrage, nothing more.

(SUBTITLE READS: *Yes, Laertes is nice.*)

**ORSIC.** Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him.

(SUBTITLE READS: *Soooo, you say he's nice too.*)

**#1 NARRATOR.** Enter Translators!

(*Two TRANSLATORS enter. #1 TRANSLATOR is a woman, #2 TRANSLATOR is a man. SUBTITLES exit.*)

**HAMLET.** The concernancy, sir? Why do we wrap the gentleman in our more rawer breath?

**#1 NARRATOR.** (*Sharply:*) Translation!

**#1 TRANSLATOR.** Why are we talking like this?

**HAMLET.** What imports the nomination of this gentleman?

**#1 NARRATOR.** Translation!

**#1 TRANSLATOR.** What's the deal with Laertes?

**ORSIC.** Of Laertes?

**#1 NARRATOR.** Translation!

**#2 TRANSLATOR.** (*Shrugging:*) Laertes?

**HAMLET.** Of him, sir.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Translation!

**#1 TRANSLATOR.** (*As if to say "who else would we be talking about, stupid?":*) Duh?!

**HORATIO.** His purse is empty already; all's golden words are spent.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Translation!

**#2 TRANSLATOR.** (*Smugly:*) My name is Horatio and I finally get a line!

(*HORATIO raises his arms like an Olympic winner.*)

**ORSIC.** I know you are not ignorant—

**#1 NARRATOR.** Translation!

**#1 TRANSLATOR.** I know you are not ignorant.

**HAMLET.** I would you did, sir; in faith, if you did, it would not much approve me. Well, sir.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Translation!

**#2 TRANSLATOR.** Watch it Bub!

**ORSIC.** You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is—

**#1 NARRATOR.** Translation!

**#2 TRANSLATOR.** Laertes is nice.

**HAMLET.** I dare confess that, lest I should compare with him in excellence; but to know a man well, were to know himself.

**#1 NARRATOR.** *(Sighing:)* Not this trash again. *(Full voice:)* Translation!

**#1 TRANSLATOR.** Yes, Laertes is nice.

**ORSIC.** I mean, sir, for his weapon.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Illicit infatuation!

*(“Love” [strings and harps, etc.] music comes on in theater. #2 TRANSLATOR starts his translation, but then notices the stunning beauty of the #1 TRANSLATOR, and becomes “love clumsy.”)*

**#2 TRANSLATOR.** I mean he is excellent with his wea-wo-wow-wow-wowee-wow-aaaaa-ruuuuu-gaaaa! Yum-yum yowzaa...

*(HORATIO covers the TRANSLATOR’s mouth with his hand and translates for the TRANSLATOR. Love music abruptly stops.)*

**HORATIO.** Laertes is excellent with a weapon!

**HAMLET.** What’s his weapon?

*(HORATIO lets loose the mouth of #2 TRANSLATOR. Love music comes on again. #2 TRANSLATOR continues his “love-sick” babbling, staring longingly at #1 TRANSLATOR. #1 TRANSLATOR flirts with #2 TRANSLATOR, perpetuating the shenanigans.)*

**#2 TRANSLATOR.** Hot Hot-chee Hot Hubba hubba...

(HORATIO *grabs the TRANSLATOR's mouth and again the music stops.*)

**ORSIC.** Rapier and Dagger.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Translation!

(#1 TRANSLATOR *straightens up.*)

**#1 TRANSLATOR.** Pies, rubber chickens, and flexi-clubs.

**HAMLET.** (*Counting to three on his fingers:*) That's two of his weapons; but well.

(HORATIO *releases #2 TRANSLATOR's mouth. Music starts again.*)

**#2 TRANSLATOR.** Halla halla za za za za za bombee bombee bombee... (*Improvise.*)

(*The TRANSLATORS break free from HORATIO, HAMLET and ORSIC and "twirl" to opposite sides of the stage. Then they look at each other and lapse into a slow motion run toward each other. HORATIO, HAMLET, and ORSIC should be in slow motion watching them. At the last possible moment when the lovers are just about to embrace...*)

**#1 NARRATOR.** Freeze!

(*Music stops.*)

**#1 NARRATOR.** Understudy!

(*A new male UNDERSTUDY for #2 TRANSLATOR appears.*)

**#2 TRANSLATOR.** No, No, No, No, No, this can't happen. For cryin' out loud you can't do this. Come on. Have a heart. I have rights. I want my lawyer, I want *your* lawyer, I want that translator. Look at her! She's a babe!

**#2 NARRATOR.** (*Interrupting:*) Security!

(*The SECURITY TEAM enters and carries #2 TRANSLATOR away screaming, in the middle of his previous speech. The UNDERSTUDY steps into the #2 TRANSLATOR's old frozen position.*)

**#1 NARRATOR.** Okay! Music!

*(The “love” music resumes. The UNDERSTUDY and #1 TRANSLATOR embrace and kiss passionately in slow motion. The music stops and so does the slow motion. The two new lovers exit flirting as they go [perhaps he picks her up and carries her off].)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Foreign Accents!

**ORSIC.** *(Strange foreign accent:)* The king, sir, hath wagered, sir, that in a dozen passes between yourself and him, he shall not exceed you three hits.

*(ORSIC exits.)*

**HAMLET.** *(Distinctly different accent from ORSIC’s:)* Let the foils be brought, the gentleman willing, and the king hold to his purpose.

**HORATIO.** *(Again a distinctly different dialect from HAMLET or ORSIC:)* You will lose this wager my Lord!

*(The dialects continue.)*

**HAMLET.** I do not think so; since he went into France, I have been at continual practice; I shall win at the odds.

**HORATIO.** If your mind dislike any thing, obey it; I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Completely unintelligible accent!

**HAMLET.** *(With an accent that is next to impossible to understand:)* Not a whit, we defy augury, there’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow.

*(Enter KING CLAUDIUS, QUEEN GERTRUDE, LAERTES, ORSIC, LORDS and LADIES.)*

*(CLAUDIUS enters up stage center, as he walks downstage, he extends his hand to HAMLET.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** Come, Hamlet, come and take this hand from me.

*(HAMLET grabs CLAUDIUS’ hand, and it comes off. It’s a rubber hand. HAMLET holds the hand looking confused.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** Ha! Classic. That’s a classic.

(CLAUDIUS and his entourage get a good chuckle over the whole thing.)

(HORATIO laughs too. HAMLET slaps HORATIO with the hand and then gives it to him. HORATIO looks at the hand he is holding, and then bursts spontaneously into song.)

(Note: The treatment of the song is at the whim of each company producing this play. Possible genres: Jazz, Beat recitation, Rap, Showtune, etc.)

**HORATIO.** *(Singing:)* When I was down,  
I wore a frown.  
Everyone here thought that I was a clown.  
Then in September,  
I received this member *(Points to the hand:)*  
And that's when my life turned around.

**ALL.** Yes that's when his life turned around.

**HORATIO.** *(Song Chorus:)*  
Give your friend a hand.  
Show 'em that your a fan.  
Don't let them fidget  
'Cuz a palm and five digits,  
Will cure your blues,  
So I'm spreadin' the news...

**ALL.** Give your friends a hand,  
Help them to understand,  
That happiness lingers  
With a thumb and four fingers,  
Give your friends a hand.

*(Song ends. With the whole COMPANY freezing in a big "show pose.")*

*(Action resumes.)*

**LAERTES.** *(Rushing up to HAMLET:)* You mock me, sir.

**HAMLET.** No, by this hand.

*(HAMLET takes the hand from HORATIO and gives it to LAERTES. LAERTES is overcome with joy and hugs HAMLET. CLAUDIUS interrupts.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** No! Give them the foils, young Orsic. Cousin Hamlet, You know the wager?

**HAMLET.** Very well my lord; Your Grace hath laid the odds o' the weaker side.

*(HAMLET and LAERTES are attended to, and are given cream pies to fight with.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** I do not fear it; I have seen you both; But since he is better'd we have therefore odds.

**LAERTES.** This is too heavy; let me see another.

*(An ATTENDANT gives LAERTES a new pie.)*

**HAMLET.** *(Eating his pie with a fork:)* This likes me well.

*(ORSIC is also eating HAMLET's pie.)*

**ORSIC.** Ay, my good lord.

*(HAMLET and LAERTES practice [prepare to duel] with their pies.)*

*(We also see one of the ATTENDANTS pigishly eating the pie that was "too heavy" for LAERTES, it's the same actor that played #2 translator.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** Set me the stoups of wine upon the table.

*(Some ATTENDANTS bring trays with goblets and pitchers [the pitchers should be opaque], and set them on the table. The "pie eating ATTENDANT" is eating more voraciously and is now calling too much attention to himself.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Understudy!

*(Everybody stops and stares at the ATTENDANT eating Laertes' old pie. The UNDERSTUDY [the same one as earlier] steps in to take his place.)*

**#2 TRANSLATOR.** (*ATTENDANT EATING PIE, trying to get away:*)  
Come on! Come on!! Not again! This isn't fair.

**#1 NARRATOR.** Security!

**#2 TRANSLATOR.** (*ATTENDANT EATING PIE.*) This isn't happening! No way! No way!! GIVE ME A BREAK!

*(SECURITY pulls him off stage.)*

*(CLAUDIUS continues. HAMLET and LAERTES continue practicing with their pies.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** If Hamlet give the first or second hit, The king shall drink to Hamlet's better breath; And in the cup a pearl shall he throw.

*(He holds up a ping-pong ball, this is the pearl.)*

Richer than that which four successive kings In Denmark's crown have worn. Give me the wine.

*(The KING extends his hand to the side to take the wine goblet. His eyes gaze straight ahead with a regal demeanor, as an ATTENDANT pours. The "liquid" that pours from the pitcher into the goblet isn't wine but a substance that looks like curdled milk.)*

*(Note: The clumpier the liquid is, the better [cottage cheese slightly diluted with milk]. It is very important that everyone in the audience sees that this is not wine, and that it is clearly disgusting.)*

*(The goblet is passed to the KING.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** Now the King drinks to Hamlet!

*(He raises the glass to his lips everybody watches with restless anticipation and disgust.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Game show personality!

*(A sudden change comes over CLAUDIUS.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** But before I do, I'd just like to take this opportunity to say what a fine and very handsome group we have here today. Thanks, everybody, for coming. Now the King drinks to Hamlet!

*(The CAST doesn't quite know how to react to CLAUDIUS' new "game show" personality.)*

*(CLAUDIUS again nearly drinks from the goblet, then stops and addresses the "real" audience.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** And how about this crowd, have you ever seen a more intelligent looking audience in your life?

*(The CAST looks quite bewildered. The CAST begins a smattering of applause to the real audience.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** No, no ,no. You all deserve much better than that. Don't be afraid to go nuts! Come on crowd let's hear it for...YOU!

*(The CAST leads the "real" crowd into uproarious applause.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** This is such a beautiful audience that I can't help but be drawn into their presence.

*(Game show music ensues ["The Price is Right" Theme].)*

*(CLAUDIUS wanders out into the audience and picks out an audience volunteer.)*

*(Note: It's important to look for someone who is stable, who looks like they have a sense of humor and is relatively willing to go on stage. If it takes too much coercion to pick a particular volunteer, go on to somebody else. Women are usually more passive than men and tend to be better candidates.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** Hi there! I'm CLAUDIUS.

*(CLAUDIUS can introduce himself to a few audience members before picking one.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** What's your name?

*(The VOLUNTEER gives his/her name. We will suppose that the volunteer is a woman, and her name is Cindy.)*

*(Note: When dealing with volunteers from an audience, dialogue is going to be, in large part improvised. Volunteers are not always predictable. The actors have to be ready to adapt to whatever the volunteer might do. However, general discourse with a volunteer can be*

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*mapped out to keep the show on track. The following is a suggested blue-print for the dialogue with the volunteer.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** Talk about a good-looking crowd. *(To CINDY:)* Stand up for a second. *(To the CAST:)* Cast, say hi to Cindy.

**CAST TOGETHER.** Hi Cindy!

**CLAUDIUS.** Audience, say hi to Cindy.

**AUDIENCE.** Hi Cindy!

**CLAUDIUS.** Cindy, say hi to everybody.

**CINDY.** Hi everybody.

**CLAUDIUS.** Come with me, Cindy!

*(CLAUDIUS takes CINDY by the hand and leads her up onto the stage.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** So Cindy, where are you from?

*(CLAUDIUS uses his goblet [which he is still holding] for a microphone. When he talks, he holds it in front his mouth. When CINDY talks, he holds it in front of her mouth.)*

**CINDY.** Toledo.

**CLAUDIUS.** Toledo, where's that?

**CINDY.** Ohio.

*(CLAUDIUS acts as if he didn't hear her correctly.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** I'm sorry?

**CINDY.** I said Ohio.

**CLAUDIUS.** No, I heard you. I'm just sorry. Only joking, Cindy. How long have you lived in Toledo?

**CINDY.** Ten years.

**CLAUDIUS.** That's plenty. So how are you enjoying the show right now?

**CINDY.** Just fine.

**CLAUDIUS.** Do you feel the slightest bit foolish right now?

**CINDY.** Yeah, slightly.

**CLAUDIUS.** Do you want to know why that is?

**CINDY.** Why?

**CLAUDIUS.** Because you're talking to a goblet, Cindy.

*(CLAUDIUS motions to one of the attendants. The ATTENDANT pours another goblet. This one is full of water. The ATTENDANT gives the goblet to CLAUDIUS, who now holds one goblet of water and one goblet of cottage cheese milk.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** Cindy, you're probably wondering why I brought you up here. I was so struck by the charm of this audience that I knew there would be a hardy soul that would drink to young, brave Hamlet with me. *(He hands her the cottage cheese goblet.)* Cindy, drink with me. To Hamlet!

*(CINDY refuses to drink the disgusting mixture in the first goblet.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** What? You refuse to drink? *(To the audience:)* Who wants to see Cindy drink to Hamlet with me?

*(Audience applauds prodded by the CAST who also applaud. CINDY still refuses.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** Okay, Cindy. Let's make a deal. You can either drink the entire contents of the goblet you are holding in your hand right now, or...

*(Door number one is revealed.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** *(Continuing:)*...you can choose the exciting mystery prize that awaits you behind door number one.

**CINDY.** I choose door number one.

*(At this point CINDY is granted some odd and embarrassing prize, like a live goat, or the chance to stand in the middle of jugglers throwing clubs, knives and torches around her, or she could win a date with #2 translator. The prize could be distinctly crafted according to the unique abilities of the cast, but the pacing of the show should remain high. After CINDY receives her prize, the cast prods the audience into applause and the volunteer is whisked back stage and prepped to appear later in the show.)*

*(Note: The cast must be prepared for the possibility that the volunteer might actually drink the contents of the goblet. If this happens, the volunteer should be rewarded for his/her bravery with the same prize that was behind door number one or perhaps a bonus prize. At any rate, the volunteer should be brought back stage and prepped just as before. Also, never put any audience member in the path of any sort of harm...Safety first.)*

*(The focus goes back to HAMLET and LAERTES.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Hamlet and Laertes prepare to fight.

**HAMLET.** Come on, Sir.

**LAERTES.** Come, my Lord.

*(Each of them alternate lunging and dodging with their pies. HAMLET winds up for a mighty blow that everyone can see coming.)*

**HAMLET.** One.

**LAERTES.** No.

**#2 NARRATOR.** Stunt Double!

*(HAMLET holds his position. LAERTES steps away. The SECURITY PEOPLE bring in #2 TRANSLATOR, he's the stunt double. He is put in place of LAERTES, looking oblivious as to what's going on. Hamlet's target is now #2 TRANSLATOR.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Position and Action!

*(HAMLET winds up and smacks the pie in the face of #2 TRANSLATOR. #2 TRANSLATOR is whisked off stage and LAERTES takes his place again, acting slightly wounded.)*

**HAMLET.** Judgment.

**ORSIC.** A hit, a very palpable hit.

**LAERTES.** Well; again.

*(ATTENDANTS prepare HAMLET and LAERTES for the second bout. This time they will be fighting with "flexi-clubs.")*

**CLAUDIUS.** Stay; give me drink.

*(CLAUDIUS is handed a goblet of wine. The content of the goblet is actually water. He holds up the ping-pong ball.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** *(Continuing)* Hamlet, this pearl is thine;

**#1 NARRATOR.** Lying badly!

**CLAUDIUS.** I'm putting this pearl into the glass, so that when you drink out of this cup, you can have the pearl. It's not like this is some kind of fake pearl or anything, and it doesn't have any poison in it, if that's what you're thinking. Here's to thy health. *(To an ATTENDANT:)* Give him the cup.

**HAMLET.** I'll play this bout first; set it by awhile. Come—

*(Once again HAMLET and LAERTES spar with the flexi-clubs. After a few more artful lunges and dodges, HAMLET winds up again for a mighty blow.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Stunt Double!

*(Again, HAMLET holds his position and LAERTES steps away. #2 TRANSLATOR is whisked in again and put into LAERTES' position.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** Position and Action!

*(HAMLET abruptly whacks #2 TRANSLATOR over the head with the flexi-club. #2 TRANSLATOR falls to the ground and is quickly picked up and carried off stage.)*

**HAMLET.** Another hit! What say you?

**LAERTES.** A touch, a touch, I do confess.

**CLAUDIUS.** Our son shall win!

**QUEEN GERTRUDE.** Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows;

*(She picks up the poisoned goblet.)*

**QUEEN GERTRUDE.** The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.

**HAMLET.** Good madam!

**CLAUDIUS.** Gertrude, do not drink!

**QUEEN GERTRUDE.** I will my Lord; I pray you, pardon me.

**CLAUDIUS.** *(To the audience:)* It is the poisoned cup! It is too late.

*(GERTRUDE takes a drink from the goblet.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Spit take!

*(QUEEN GERTRUDE does a big spit take.)*

**#2 NARRATOR.** And again!

*(The whole CAST [all of whom have secretly loaded their mouths with water] does a huge “group spit take” with water.)*

*(GERTRUDE reaches into the cup and pulls out the ping-pong ball.)*

**QUEEN GERTRUDE.** This pearl makes the wine taste bad!

*(She throws the “pearl” across the stage. #2 TRANSLATOR emerges from back stage, picks up the ping-pong ball.)*

**AN ACTOR IN THE COURT.** *(Yells and points:)* Hey! He’s got the expensive pearl.

**ALL.** Get Him!

*(#2 TRANSLATOR turns and runs and everybody chases after him. A full stage chase is on.)*

*(Chase music comes on. Everybody in the CAST rushes after the #2 TRANSLATOR. The chase can be improvised in any number of ways. Actors can run off stage and then come back on stage, being chased by the person who was previously chased. Actors can enter through the lobby doors and chase through the house. However, during the chase, in a moment of prominent focus, we see “CINDY the Volunteer” sneaking up behind #2 TRANSLATOR, who seems to have duped the rest of the cast and is enjoying a “breather.” CINDY wacks #2 TRANSLATOR with a flexi-club and he falls to the ground. The chase culminates in the capture of #2 TRANSLATOR.)*

**#1 NARRATOR.** Stunt double!

*(#2 TRANSLATOR is handcuffed by SECURITY and brought down stage where he kneels.)*

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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