



# ACTORS FROM THE LONDON STAGE

**Actors From The London Stage**

**Fall 2018 Tour: Hamlet**

**Play Synopsis**

Updated 6.28.18

## THE STORY

King Hamlet of Denmark has died. His brother, Claudius, has become king and married King Hamlet's widow, Gertrude. Young Hamlet has come home from university for his father's funeral and his mother's rapid remarriage. Denmark is nervously preparing for war with Norway, whose previous king, Fortinbras, had been beaten by King Hamlet, losing territory as a result. Two soldiers, Marcellus and Bernardo, and Hamlet's friend Horatio see a ghost, apparently of the late King Hamlet, appear at midnight on the battlements of Elsinore. When Hamlet watches with them the next night, the ghost tells him privately that Claudius had murdered him by pouring poison in his ear and urges Hamlet to avenge his death.

Hamlet, unsure whether the ghost speaks the truth, acts like a madman, prompting Claudius, Gertrude, and the king's counselor, Polonius, to send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, college friends of Hamlet, to spy on Hamlet and find out what causes his madness. Hamlet's bizarre behavior, especially towards Polonius' daughter Ophelia, prompts Polonius to believe Hamlet's madness is caused by his love for her. Polonius has allowed his son, Laertes, to return to France (sending Reynaldo to spy on him) and has ordered Ophelia to keep clear of Hamlet. Meanwhile, Hamlet muses on what has happened and tries to decide what to do. He convinces a visiting troupe of traveling actors to put on a performance of a play, *The Murder of Gonzago*, whose action is like Claudius' deed. Claudius leaves the performance before it is over, convincing Hamlet both of the ghost's veracity and of his uncle's guilt. Gertrude tries to reason with Hamlet after the play, allowing Polonius to spy on the conversation. Hamlet hears Polonius and kills him through the wall hangings, thinking he is Claudius. The ghost appears and chides Hamlet for delaying. Claudius sends Hamlet to England, accompanied by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, with secret orders to the English court to kill Hamlet on arrival. On his way to England, Hamlet sees Young Fortinbras, nephew to the current King of Norway, leading an army to fight for land in Poland.

Ophelia reacts to her father's death at her lover's hands by going mad, and falling in a stream, drowns. Laertes, blaming Claudius for his father's death, returns at the head of a mob. En route to England, Hamlet finds Claudius' orders and rewrites them to order Rosencrantz and

Guildestern killed. He is then kidnapped by pirates, but finds his way back to Denmark, returning to find himself watching Ophelia's funeral. Claudius and Laertes plot Hamlet's murder in a fencing bout between Hamlet and Laertes: the latter will have a poisoned sword and a poisoned drink as a back-up. Here the action races to conclusion with multiple deaths and a regime change.

**Peter Holland**

McMeel Family Chair in Shakespeare Studies, University of Notre Dame