

SHEOAK PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

HAMMLET

A COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE ADAPTATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDY



BENDIGO
GARDEN FOR THE
FUTURE
FEBRUARY 26 – MARCH 2
1:00PM & 7:30PM

MELBOURNE
FAIRFIELD
AMPHITHEATRE
MARCH 4 – MARCH 15
1:00PM & 7:30PM

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We would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on Wurundjeri Country as well as Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country of which the members and elders of the Kulin Nation and their forebears have been custodians for many centuries and have performed traditional ceremonies of celebration, initiation, and renewal.

We acknowledge their living culture, Songlines and their unique role in the life of these regions.



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Introduction

Sheoak Productions are delighted to have a third production included on the VCAA playlist for 2024, following their previous productions of *'Two Gents'* and *'Midsummer'*. The following resource information and activities are intended to support VCE Drama students and their teachers in their analysis and evaluation of Sheoak Production's contemporary adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. This play is also suitable for performance analysis in year 9 and 10 Drama, VCE Unit 1 Drama and VCE Unit 1 Theatre Studies.

Please note that this resource information does not provide definitive answers. The purpose of the resource is to evoke ideas, observations and opinions about how the script was interpreted and performed to the audience. We encourage students and teachers to engage in their own broader research, study and discussion. Make sure you are familiar with the current VCAA VCE Drama Study Guide: Key knowledge and Skills for Unit 3 Area of Study 3 Outcome 3.

These notes also refer to support material drawn from *Acting Smart VCE Drama Version 8* by Jane Bird and Richard Sallis.

Interviews with the actors and members of the creative team will provide insights to the playmaking processes used by the actors and the director to develop the production as an ensemble performance, incorporating conventions of transformation, application of symbol and consideration of how the dramatic elements and production areas have been applied to shape the dramatic meaning of the text to engage the audience. The performance style is a modern eclectic style which includes conventions from Elizabethan Theatre, Commedia Dell'arte and Epic Theatre.

We hope you enjoy this production as much as we, the creative team, have had creating it for you, the audience!



Picture by Georgina Sebar, Bendigo Advertiser

VCE Drama Unit 3: Area of Study 3 Outcome 3

ANALYSING AND EVALUATING A PROFESSIONAL DRAMA PERFORMANCE

In this area of study students analyse and evaluate a professional drama performance selected from the prescribed VCE Drama Unit 3 Playlist. Students analyse the actors' use of expressive and performance skills to represent character and to communicate meaning in the performance. They consider how the actor–audience relationship is created and manipulated and analyse and evaluate how the conventions, dramatic elements, production areas and performance styles are used in the performance. (VCAA VCE Drama Study Design 2019 - 2024)

Outcome 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse and evaluate a professional drama performance. To achieve this outcome the student will draw on these key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3:

Key knowledge

- **performance styles and conventions** and their use in performance
- **the actors' use of expressive and performance skills** to represent characters in performance
- **manipulation of dramatic elements and production areas** to enhance performance
- **drama terminology** associated with performance styles and practitioners from contemporary and/or historical and/or cultural traditions relevant to the performance.

Key skills

- **analyse and evaluate** the **representation of characters** within a performance
- **analyse and evaluate** the **manipulation of conventions, dramatic elements and production areas** within a performance
- **analyse and evaluate** the use of **performance styles** within a production
- **analyse and evaluate** the **actors' use of expressive and performance skills** in a performance
- **analyse and evaluate** the establishment, maintenance and manipulation of the **actor–audience relationship** in a performance.



DEFINITIONS

ANALYSE:

To look at something closely, methodically and in detail and to consider how it's formed by its various parts or essential elements. In doing so you make sense of something including how and why it happened. (*Acting Smart Drama Version 8 p8*)

THREE KEY QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO ASK...

WHAT HAPPENED?

(a dramatic moment or scene in the performance)

HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

(acting, direction and production area choices)

WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

(the effect of the choices to communicate meaning to the audience)

EVALUATE:

To assess or judge the value of something... You are being asked to express your opinion about the quality, merit or success of what you have seen. (*Acting Smart Drama Version 8 p16*)

THREE KEY QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO ASK...

WHAT

Did I think of that choice?

HOW

Did the choices have an effect on me / the audience?

Was the effect negative or positive?

WHY

What did I learn or understand about the story, characters or ideas?

So, you are going to **discuss** and **write** an **analysis** and **evaluation** of the performance including:
(*Acting Smart Drama V8 Bird & Sallis p 92*)

- HOW the **character/s** are represented
- HOW **performance styles** and **conventions** are manipulated
- HOW **dramatic elements** and **production** areas are manipulated
- HOW the actors use their **expressive skills** and **performance skills**
- HOW the **actor-audience relationship** is established, maintained and manipulated.
- Use appropriate and relevant drama terminology

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

HAMLET / POLONIUS

Scott Middleton

CLAUDIUS / GHOST/ PLAYER/ POLONIUS / HANS

Lachlan Murdoch

GERTRUDE/ PLAYER / POLONIUS

Jacqui Martin

LAERTES / ROSENCRANTZ / PLAYER / POLONIUS

Scott Jackson

HORATIO / OPHELIA / MESSENGER / POLONIUS

Seon Williams

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR SHEOAK PRODUCTIONS: *Scott Middleton*

DIRECTOR: *Mandy Ellison*

STAGE MANAGER: *Emma Herben*

PROPS and COSTUME COORDINATOR: *Emma Herben*

SCRIPT ADAPTATION: *Mandy Ellison & Scott Middleton*

SET DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION: *Greg Bowen & Mandy Ellison*

LIGHTING DESIGN: *James Bodin*

COMMEDIA DELL' ARTE TRAINER: *Scott Middleton*

FIGHT DIRECTION: *Scott Jackson & Lachlan Murdoch*

EDUCATION RESOURCE NOTES: *Mandy Ellison*

PHOTOGRAPHY:

Creative Team, Mark Beever & publicity photos courtesy of The Bendigo Advertiser

VIDEOGRAPHY: *Scott Middleton*

GRAPHIC DESIGN: *James Bodin (Marketing Poster) & Lachlan Murdoch (Character Posters)*

HAMLET - Creative Team



Scott Middleton - Sheoak Productions Artistic Director



Script Adaption, Movement Director, Performer

Scott is an Australian born actor and theatre maker who has worked across all disciplines of performance nationally and internationally with a passion for physically and emotionally demanding theatre.

His training includes a BA in Acting from Federation University in his native Australia and an MA in Theatre Lab from RADA in London. He has also undertaken extensive training in Commedia dell'arte with Antonio Fava, Viewpoints and Suzuki method as well as completing the advanced actor training program with Frantic Assembly in London. While in the UK he made several new works, began teaching and toured a production to Gardzienice in Poland before returning to make his Edinburgh Fringe debut in 2019.

After 3 years training and working in London he has returned to Melbourne where he is working on several projects and is a movement/acting lecturer at Federation University. He is involved with two companies, Sheoak Productions and Psychopomp! Theatre Collective. Scott has production managed, produced, and performed in both of Sheoak's Productions and is excited to be tackling their next challenge surrounded by an amazing team.

Mandy Ellison - Director / Drama Educator



Sheoak Productions Company Member: Script Adaptation, Set Design & Construction, Educational Support Material

Mandy has over 25 years' experience as a VCE Teacher, specialising in Drama and Theatre Studies as well as English and Outdoor Education. She is a VCE Assessor for Drama. Mandy trained as a Drama teacher at Melbourne University and has a Post Graduate Certificate in Teaching Shakespeare from the University of Melbourne in partnership with the Royal Shakespeare Company and Warwick University in the UK.

She has developed a strong portfolio as a director in local and school productions, including marking the amateur premiere of critically acclaimed production of *Matilda - The Musical* production in Australia. She is passionate about the transformative power of Shakespeare's plays in any form. Mandy previously directed *Two Gents* and *Midsummer* for Sheoak Productions in 2021/2022 and is excited to return for this production of *Hamlet*.

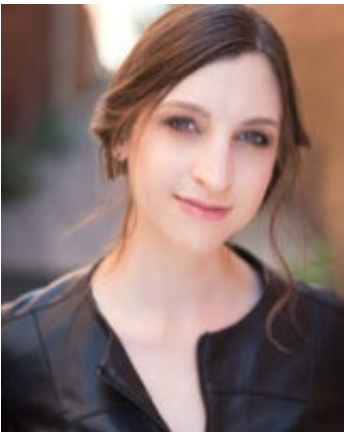
Emma Herben - Stage Manager, Costume and Props



Sheoak Productions Company Member

Based in Melbourne and Bendigo Emma has been involved in the industry for 19 year. Working festivals, films and stage productions she loves being a backstage dweller. Although assistant stage manager is her all time favourite position she has also held other roles such as assistant director, production manager, stage manager, backstage assistant, audio, hair and makeup design/application, front of house, ensemble and set construction. Emma has Stage Managed *Two Gents* and *Midsummer* for Sheoak Productions and is thrilled to be joining the team for *Hamlet*. She is truly grateful for the opportunity to keep growing and honing her skills in this rewarding role.

Jacqui Martin - Performer



Sheoak Productions Company Member

Jacqui is a seasoned performer with 15 years of experience under her belt. Being the Company Manager for Alpha Shows for 10 of those years she is no stranger to wearing many different hats; as a full time performer in each of their ten productions as well as being the director and manager of the company. She has adored creating magical theatre for students of all ages across Australia. As a lover of a full schedule Jacqui is currently a front woman of the band Groovecentrix and she also holds an Intermediate certification in Combat for Stage and Screen (ASCA). Since leaving Alpha Shows, Jacqui is loving her new role as Operations Manager at DanceHouse Melbourne. After appearing in both *Two Gents* and *Midsummer* for Sheoak Productions, Jacqui is excited to be joining this incredible team again for the production of *Hamlet*.

Lachlan Murdoch - Performer



Sheoak Productions Company Member

Lachie Murdoch is a performer, director, stage combatant, and arts creative based in Naarm/Melbourne. In performance, Lachie cut his teeth in the stand up comedy scene. As a director, 10 years' experience in touring Children's Theatre - whilst covering all facets and rolls of production, touring, and performing. This also included stage combat, evolving to instruction & training as a committee member of the Australian Stage Combat Association. After assisting in the background for previous productions, Lachie is delighted to finally step onto the stage with the fantastic team at Sheoak Productions as Claudius/Ghost in *Hamlet*. Fulfilling a long standing desire to explore not only a profoundly historic playwright, but also an equally influential comedic performing style for his Shakespeare & Commedia debut.

Scott Jackson - Performer



Sheoak Productions Company Member

Scott appeared in Sheoak's first production of *Two Gents* in 2021 and is thrilled to be returning to the team for *Hamlet*. Scott has worked for the Australian Shakespeare Company on the following productions: *Romeo and Juliet* (Mercutio), *A Midsummer Nights Dream* (Demetrius), *Hamlet* (Guildenstern), *As You Like It* (Le Beau/ Silvius), and *Shakespeares's Best Bits* (Snout), which was nominated for a Green Room award. Some of Scott's other credits include: *Immersive Cinema's Dirty Dancing Tour* (Acting Ensemble), *A Midnight Visit* (Undertaker), *A Dog's Tale* TV Series WIN TV (Chris), *Romeo and Juliet* (Romeo) and *King Lear* (Oswald) for Ozact Theatre Company, *Macbeth* (Ross) for Melbourne Company of Players. Scott recently appeared in *The Wind in The Willows* in the Botanical Gardens (Toad), a production of *The Dress* at Werribee Mansion and the sold out season of *Holding the Man* with Taylor Made Productions at Chapel Off Chapel earlier this year. Scott is a member of the prestigious Melbourne Playback Theatre Company, certified Stage Combat Instructor and proud member of the MEAA since 2008.

Seon Williams - Performer



Sheoak Productions Company Member

Seon is a Melbourne based actor, writer, and director with over 15 years of experience in the industry, including over 40 stage productions. Seon has been involved in a wide range of projects from all female Shakespearian shows to musicals, to contemporary works and has worked on television shows, feature films, music videos and award-winning short films and web series. She has performed at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival and had the privilege of touring through Europe and Asia with BYTE (Back Yard Theatre Ensemble) performing "The Deep Freeze Option". Most recently she appeared in *Shakespeare Aliens* which enjoyed a return season in Melbourne and a tour to Adelaide Fringe Festival earlier this year. Seon is a regular performer for Sheoak Productions appearing in both *Two Gents* and *Midsummer*.



Hamlet by William Shakespeare

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, often shortened to **Hamlet** is a revenge tragedy written by William Shakespeare sometime between 1599 and 1601. It is Shakespeare's longest play, with 29,551 words. Set in Denmark, the play depicts Prince Hamlet and his attempts to exact revenge against his uncle, Claudius, who has murdered Hamlet's father in order to seize his throne and marry Hamlet's mother. *Hamlet* is considered among the "most powerful and influential tragedies in the English language", with a story capable of "seemingly endless retelling and adaptation by others".



EXPLORE FURTHER

Here are some links to explore the original script and story of *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* by William Shakespeare:

- ❖ A short visual summary of the story of Hamlet
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0CqUTmwKiM>
- ❖ Full Script of *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*
 - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/27761/27761-h/27761-h.htm>
 - (Note: for our reference, Sheoak Productions used the Arden Edition of the printed text)
- ❖ Summary of the plot and story
 - <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespedia/shakespeares-plays/hamlet/#:~:text=Hamlet%20Summary,devises%20plots%20to%20kill%20Hamlet.>
- ❖ Royal Shakespeare Company Education
 - <https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/hamlet/story/scene-by-scene>
- ❖ Wikipedia
 - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamlet>



EXPLORE FURTHER

Investigate the **social context** of Elizabethan England at the time when Shakespeare wrote this play.

- ❖ **What were the values, beliefs and role expectations of men and women, relationships, religion and justice during this period?**

<https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/life-and-times/social-context/women-in-shakespeares-england/>

Revenge in Elizabethan Society:

<https://www.grin.com/document/66583?lang=en#:~:text=In%20the%20Elizabethan%20times%2C%20private,spread%20among%20the%20religious%20public.>

Hamlet - A Comic Tragedy adapted by Sheoak Productions

THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

SETTING

Circus Belli, Copenhagen, Denmark, 1939.

This production of Hamlet has been re-contextualised to set the story in the Danish 'Circus Belli' in 1939, on the precipice of World War Two. As with Sheoak Productions previous performances, the aim has been to present the play incorporating the inherent style of Elizabethan Theatre from the era in which Shakespeare wrote the play and also include conventions of the theatrical style of the Italian Renaissance Commedia dell'arte. Both of our previous productions have tackled Shakespeare comedies applying the Commedia style, but this production of Hamlet marks a brave new venture into bringing the world of one of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies to life through a Commedia lens.



'Circus Belli' was the largest and most successful 'big top' style Circus in 1930's Denmark and was owned by Danish matriarch Meta Jensen who was married to Giovanni Belli before taking over the business. (This is reflected in the role of Gertrude, the matriarch Lion Tamer, who has married Hamlet's father's brother, Claudius, who becomes the new Ringmaster at the beginning of the play)

The onset and aftermath of World War Two saw the decline in popularity of the traditional carnival circus, with the advent of television quickly becoming the preferred method of entertainment. Setting the play in 1939 allows the beginning of the play to start in the joyous, carefree, showy world of the big top circus at its peak, with Hamlet on the path of demise, fuelled by his despair at the sudden death of his father and brooding anger at the quick union of his mother to his uncle. As the play progresses, the appearance of the fun, showy world of Circus and larger than life Commedia characters gradually fall apart, descending into a sad darkness as one by one the characters' pursuit of revenge is their undoing and the undoing of the world they know and love.

The demise of the characters and as a result, their Circus, serves as a symbol of the demise of the circus industry as a whole and the descent of Denmark into the beginning of World War Two, where the country's unaggressive neutrality is to be later ripped away by the German Army at war around it. The brutal and bloody climax to this play in the microcosm of this Circus world, with the tattered remains of the set and props scattered across the stage like a war zone, symbolises not only what is to come for the people of Denmark and their country, but also the "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts, accidental judgments, casual slaughters" and "deaths put on by cunning and forced cause" which have occurred and will soon ensue across Europe throughout World War 2.

As the characters move away from the Commedia/ Circus world, so too does their physicality and demeanour. In the opening physical sequence, we will see Hamlet playing his part in the joyous circus world, until his father's death and mother's remarriage to his uncle sees him start to spiral and become removed from that world. His physicality at the opening of the text employs conventions of Realism which is juxtaposed against the exaggerated Commedia Dell'arte physicality of the other characters, further highlighting his sense of being alone and isolated. As each character unravels, they too will lose the physical conventions of their Commedia character/s to reflect the tragedy of the demise of their world. By end of the play the application of the Commedia style is all but faded, paving the way for the gritty and brutal climax of loss of life and the descent into war. Students in Drama and Theatre Studies will find plenty of examples to discuss the use of symbol in the production areas of the set costume and prop design and character gestures.

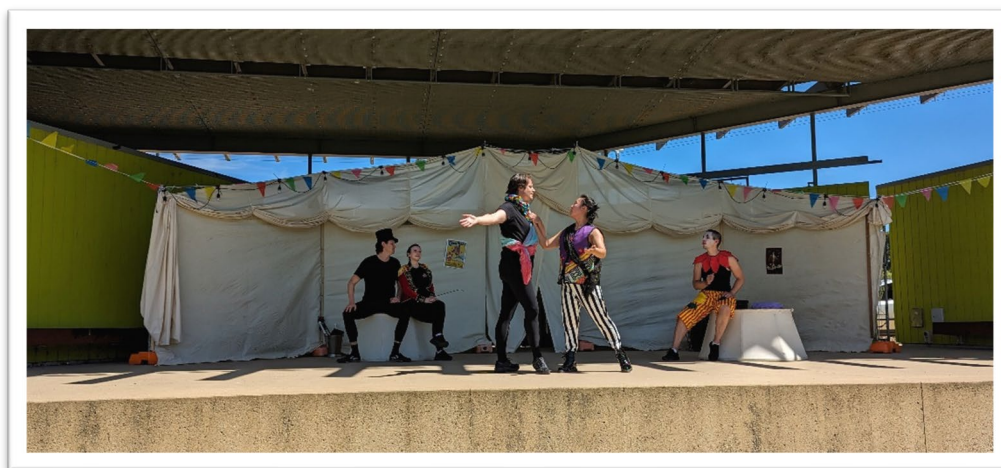
Our aim has been to breathe fresh life into this tragic tale, using the traditional circus environment in place of the royal court of Elsinor and the focus on the physical conventions of the style of Commedia Dell'arte to emphasise the relationships and mental demise of the characters and the world around them.



SCRIPT

The Arden Version of The Tragedy of Hamlet by William Shakespeare has been used for this adaptation. The script has been heavily to reduce the playing time to approximately 100 minutes (no interval), whilst still maintaining and honouring Shakespeare's language as a whole. Some changes to place names and objects help contextualise the setting the piece. The intent has been to focus on the story of Hamlet and the immediate people in his world and to focus the dramatic storytelling on the main themes and ideas that resonate for a modern 2024 audience.





PLOT SYNOPSIS

Quick Hamlet Summary

The ghost of the King of Denmark tells his son Hamlet to avenge his murder by killing the new king, Hamlet's uncle. Hamlet feigns madness, contemplates life and death, and seeks revenge. His uncle, fearing for his life, also devises plots to kill Hamlet. The play ends with a duel, during which the King, Queen, Hamlet's opponent and Hamlet himself are all killed.

MORE DETAIL

In this production the 5 Acts and scenes run consecutively without an interval.

Act I

Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, married Hamlet's recently widowed mother, becoming the new Ringmaster of Circus Belli. Hamlet continues to mourn for his father's death and laments his mother's lack of loyalty. Polonius, the Circus Belli manager, farewells to his son Laertes, who is departing for more performances as a Swordsman in France. Laertes warns his sister, Ophelia, to stay away from Hamlet and ignore his attentions towards her. Hamlet hears from his friend Horatio of a ghost that resembles Hamlet's father, that has been seen each night. Somewhat sceptical, Hamlet wants to see it for himself.

This above all: to thine own self be true. — Polonius: ACT 1 SCENE 3

The Ghost appears to Hamlet, claiming indeed to be the ghost of his father. He tells Hamlet about how Claudius, the current Ringmaster and Hamlet's uncle, murdered him, and Hamlet swears vengeance for his father. Hamlet decides to feign madness while he tests the truth of the Ghost's allegations.

Act II

According to his plan, Hamlet begins to act strangely. Polonius sets up an opportunity for he and Claudius to spy on Hamlet to determine the cause of this strange behaviour. Polonius is convinced it is the result of the ecstasy of love from Hamlet being enamoured of his daughter Ophelia (a union that would ensure Polonius position and status in Circus Belli). Aware they are listening, Hamlet rejects Ophelia, which confuses Claudius and Polonius. Claudius summons Rosencrantz, an old friend of Hamlet, to find out what's got into him. Rosencrantz' arrival coincides with a group of travelling actors that are seeking possible employment at Circus Belli. Hamlet, who has not yet avenged his ghostly father's death, decides to write a short play which includes scenes that mimic the murder of Hamlet's father. During rehearsal, Hamlet gets the actors to present this play before the Claudius and Gertrude, where Hamlet hopes to '*catch the conscience of the King*'.

What a piece of work is man! - HAMLET, ACT 2 SCENE 2

Act III

At the performance, Hamlet watches Claudius closely to see how he reacts. The play provokes Claudius, and he interrupts the action ending the play (and any chance of the players getting a gig at the Circus). Realising Hamlet might be on to him, Claudius immediately resolves to send Hamlet away. Hamlet is summoned by his distressed mother, Gertrude, and on the way, he happens upon Claudius reflecting on his guilt. Hamlet has the opportunity to avenge his father and kill Claudius with a knife, but prevaricates with reasons that to kill Claudius in this moment would only send his soul to heaven rather than hell. Hamlet decides to spare his life for the time being.

Polonius, keen to impress Claudius, hides in Gertrude's room to protect her from her unpredictable son and hear what he has to say to her in private. Hamlet arrives to scold his mother, hears movement behind the curtain and stabs the curtain, in so doing, kills Polonius. The ghost of Hamlet's father reappears and warns his son not to delay revenge and reminds him not to upset his mother.

Polonius: (*having been stabbed*) I am slain

Hamlet: I'st Claudius?

Polonius (*falling in the throes of dramatic death*) Nay, it is I, Polonius!

What dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause. —

HAMLET, ACT 3 SCENE 1

Act IV

Hamlet is sent to Germany ostensibly to get help for his 'madness' and from Gertrude's perspective to prevent Hamlet from being jailed for the murder of Polonius. At this point, a radio announcement reports that Britain and France are now at war with Germany as a result of the German invasion of Poland - the beginning of World War 2. As Hitler and the Nazi party are setting a new trajectory for Europe, Hamlet travels with Rosencrantz as his chaperone to Germany. During his journey, Hamlet discovers Claudius has friends in high places in Germany and has written a commission to have Hamlet killed once he arrives. Hamlet is able to utilise the aid of Pirates to escape but not before forging a new commission in Claudius name which sends Rosencrantz to his deaths in Hamlet's place. Hamlet returns to Denmark alone, back to seeking revenge on Claudius. Having been rejected by Hamlet and him sent to Germany, Ophelia is now desolate at the loss of her father. She goes mad and drowns herself. Laertes returns to Denmark from France to seek revenge on whoever murdered his father.

Act V

On the way back to Denmark, Hamlet meets Horatio in the graveyard (along with a gravedigger), where they talk of the chances of life and death. Ophelia's funeral procession arrives at the very same graveyard. (The magic of theatre). Hamlet confronts Laertes at Ophelia's grave, and they fight about who loved Ophelia the most.

Claudius sees a new opportunity to dispose of Hamlet. He persuades Laertes to avenge Polonius and Ophelia's death encouraging Laertes to suggest a fencing duel between himself and Hamlet. Claudius and Laertes plan that Laertes will secretly have an 'unbated' sword (a sharp sword that will cut) and Laertes offers to poison the tip of the sword to doubly ensure death will occur. For good measure Claudius also plans to have poisoned wine ready for when Hamlet is thirsty. They are sure that Hamlet will die either by a poisoned rapier or with the poisoned drink. The plans go awry when Gertrude unwittingly drinks from the poisoned cup and dies. Then both Laertes and Hamlet are wounded by the poisoned blade, and Laertes dies.

Hamlet, in his death throes, kills Claudius. As Hamlet dies, soldiers from the German army arrive fresh from their conquests in the invasion of Poland, to seek their recompense from Claudius for fulfilling his request and to survey Denmark for future Nazi occupation. Horatio vows to tell Hamlet's story to try to find the truth of the madness and destruction that has occur, and symbolically, that will occur in the war that will follow.

The rest is silence - HORATIO, ACT 5 SCENE 2

Comparison between the Characters in the original and adapted playscripts

<i>Hamlet</i> - original Shakespeare text	<i>Hamlet</i> - Sheoak text adaptation 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hamlet – son of the late king and nephew of the present king, Claudius• Claudius – King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle and brother to the former king• Gertrude – Queen of Denmark and Hamlet's mother• Polonius – chief counsellor to the king• Ophelia – Polonius's daughter• Horatio – friend of Hamlet• Laertes – Polonius's son• Voltimand and Cornelius – courtiers• Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – courtiers, friends of Hamlet• Osric – a courtier• Marcellus – an officer• Barnardo – an officer• Francisco – a soldier• Reynaldo – Polonius's servant• Ghost – the ghost of Hamlet's father• Fortinbras – prince of Norway• Gravediggers – a pair of sextons• Player King, Player Queen, Lucianus, etc. – players	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hamlet – son of the late Ringmaster of Circus Belli in Denmark and nephew of the present Ringmaster, Claudius• Claudius – Ringmaster, married to Gertrude, previous circus performer and now co-owner of Circus Belli since his marriage to Gertrude. Hamlet's uncle and brother to Hamlet's deceased father.• Gertrude – Lion Tamer - Queen of Lions at Circus Belli and Hamlet's mother• Polonius – Circus Belli Production Manager• Ophelia – Polonius's daughter, Trapeze Artist• Horatio – friend of Hamlet, clown circus performer• Laertes – Polonius's son, Circus performer: Master of Swords, Knives and Weaponry• Rosencrantz – childhood friend of Hamlet• Ghost – the ghost of Hamlet's father• Gravedigger• Player King, Player Queen, players visiting Circus Belli from Europe



A Word from the Director...

*Mandy Ellison, the Director and Scott Middleton, Production Manager and Artistic Director of **Sheoak Production Company** adapted their interpretation of the script from the Arden Shakespeare Edition of Hamlet by William Shakespeare. Their aim was to present an interpretation of the play combining conventions of traditional Commedia Dell'arte and Elizabethan Theatre performance styles, re-contextualised to set the story in Denmark in 1939 on the cusp of World War Two in Europe. Here Mandy discusses the playmaking process of adapting the script in this way for the target VCE Drama student audience.*

Once again, I am privileged to have been asked to direct another Sheoak production which has been included on the 2024 VCAA playlist for VCE Drama students to analyse. In my role as the Director, Scott gave me a specific brief to work with. The style of the performance would be Commedia Dell'Arte and I could only have 5 actors to portray all of the characters. The run time had to be edited to approximately 100 minutes and as with all productions, we had to work within a budget. My experience as a VCE Drama and Theatre Studies teacher would be used to develop the work so that the performance could demonstrate the key knowledge and skills for the VCE Unit 3 Drama students' performance analysis task. This includes modelling the use of playmaking techniques when devising an ensemble performance, as well as the inclusion of conventions such as transformation of time, place and character, as well as application of symbol, throughout the performance. Adapting Shakespeare's 'The Tragedy of Hamlet' into a Commedia performance has been no small undertaking. At nearly 4 hours in length, rich with poetic imagery, lengthy monologues and political intrigue, a story that ends up with most of the main characters dead, we had a challenge ahead of us. Both Scott and I have long harboured a passion for Shakespeare and the style of Commedia Dell'arte. We have successfully combined these two styles in previous adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (*Two Gents* 2021) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*Midsummer* 2022). In this production we wanted to explore how the application of conventions of Commedia Dell'arte could continue the traditional art of dramatic storytelling and engage a contemporary audience in one of Shakespeare's tragedies.

The first techniques we used in our process were brainstorming and research. Scott decided to keep the story in Denmark, but recontextualise the era to 1939, just prior to WW2. The reasons for this concept are outlined elsewhere. Research included finding information about the history of original Circus Belli in Copenhagen and how this could be connected to the text. We collected a collage of images to create a mood board that helped emphasise the colours, textures, lines and shapes of circus in the 1930's. Looking for the dramatic potential of the performance style, we had Scott's expertise and training in the techniques of Commedia Dell'arte to identify which Commedia character archetypes could possibly be attached to the characters of Hamlet. We then began editing the Arden script. In our first edit, we focussed on cutting aspects we decided were not relevant to the essence of the story and themes, including references to imagery and cultural contexts that would be understood more specifically to an Elizabethan audience, rather than our contemporary audience. Some words of the Shakespearean text were changed to suit the era and circus setting of the adaptation. In our second and third draft edits, more text was edited out and whole scenes cut in order to reduce the running time of the play yet maintain the through-line of the plot and main characters. In our first play reading with the cast, further editing suggestions were discovered. We then gathered the cast and started improvising with the script in rehearsals.

As an ensemble, the creative team solved problems through playmaking techniques such as brainstorming and improvisation, trialling ideas that were driven by character motivation and purpose in each scene and exploring the use of costume pieces and circus props. The background research was consistently referenced to justify the contexts of the adaptation and was the framework for all character development. Throughout the rehearsal process the actors collaborated with each other, with the director and with our Stage Manager, Emma Herben, to refine choices for costume, props, set design and construction. This cycle of rehearsing, editing, and updating the script helped identify the rhythm and flow of the story. Refinement started once the actors had their scripts memorised. Even one week away from the first performance date, we were still making editing and refinement choices, such as the decision to cut a whole scene as it did not serve the purpose of the story and intended darkening mood of the end of the play. Despite the humour and delight created by the comic character of 'Osric' in this scene, it was agreed that the scene and character was not essential to the throughline of the story, so judicial tweaks were made to redistribute some lines of dialogue to keep the story intact and then remove two pages of script!

Working with eclectic conventions, we also used devices such as distilling the script into short telegram style delivery to keep the action fast paced and the convention of puppetry, where the coat of Polonius is manipulated by different actors at time when we could not have an actual actor playing the role on stage at that moment. The wonderful thing about William Shakespeare's plays is that the character archetypes, stories and themes are universal. Shakespeare wrote his plays to both entertain and provide commentary on the London Elizabethan world. Shakespeare did not write plays for literary study and analysis, he wrote plays to be seen and heard, with characters that his audiences would recognise and identify with. In the spirit of Shakespeare's intentions for theatre in London in the late 16th Century, we believe he would wholeheartedly embrace any adaptation that would make his characters and themes pertinent for diverse audiences. At least, this is the Director's licence to be able to explore and harness the dramatic potential of the script. As a teacher/director I would like our student audiences to question, analyse and evaluate how this interpretation

resonates with them. I believe plays should be provocative, ask questions and create opportunities for discussion. There is no right or wrong – just how do you react to or feel about what is presented to you. This adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* focuses on the theme of revenge, in particular the psychological demise of the characters’ blinded by the need to avenge an injustice. Hamlet’s desire for revenge drives much of the action in the play, and ultimately leads to a tragic ending for many of the characters. Revenge is an important theme in *Hamlet* because it raises questions about the nature of justice, morality, and the consequences of seeking revenge. Hamlet struggles with the morality of his desire for revenge, and the expectations of loyalty to each of his parents, particularly his father in his ghostly form. Other examples of revenge in *Hamlet* include the ghost of Hamlet’s father seeking revenge for his own murder at the hand of his brother and Laertes’ desire for revenge against Hamlet for killing his father and contributing to the death of his sister, Ophelia. Through the actions of these characters, the play explores the destructive nature of revenge, the moral code and costs of loyalty and the toll this can take on individuals and society as a whole. The concept to keep the location of the play in Denmark as per the original text, but to change the setting period to 1939 gave a sound basis for exploring Hamlet’s psychological decline as a metaphor for destruction of the impending impact of World War 2, including the oncoming occupation of Denmark by German forces in 1941 and the decline in the Circus as a popular entertainment after the war.

I have relished the opportunity to work with Scott and the production team three years on from our first collaboration with *Two Gents* in 2021. The dynamic, professional cast, most of whom have also returned after performing in *Two Gents*, and *Midsummer* in 2022 have injected so much creative energy into the demands of multi-rolling all the characters and the intense physicality in performing stock characters of the Commedia Dell’ Arte. Emma Herben is absolutely gold as our Stage Manager. She has once again blessed us with her fabulous organisation, attention to detail, creative arts for many of the props and costumes and ability to source just about anything on the internet as well as her role as Stage Manager and Front of House during every performance. Watch the interviews with the actors to hear about their journey of discovery in bringing *Hamlet* to the stage.



PLAYMAKING TECHNIQUES



EXPLORE FURTHER

BONUS TIP!!! Links to Outcomes 1 and 2: Devised Ensemble

Compare the playmaking process and techniques of the Sheoak Ensemble with your Unit 3 Devised Ensemble Process.

<p>Playmaking techniques are used in the process of devising ensemble or solo drama performances. Playmaking techniques are used to extract and to explore the dramatic potential of stimulus material and to develop ideas, roles, dramatic action, story, and themes to construct devised performances. Write examples of how the Sheoak Ensemble used these techniques to DEVELOP their performance from the first ideas to the final performance. Reorder or repeat these to reflect your Unit 3 devised ensemble process.</p>		
Playmaking Technique	Example of how this technique was used to create/develop the ensemble performance	Unit 3 Devised Ensemble – example of how has your group used any of these techniques to create/develop your ensemble performance?
<p>Researching</p>	<p>Scott researched the initial concept of Circus Belli in Denmark and how the period of 1939 might fit the themes and intention of the story. He created a concept vision and mood board of the circus setting in this era.</p> <p>Each member of the cast did background research about their characters in the original script and the adapted setting. They created character profiles, using the script to justify their ideas.</p>	
<p>Brainstorming</p>	<p>The production team brainstormed how the setting and characters could be realised in a Commedia Dell’arte style. They did this by looking for dramatic potential in the concept images and edited script in a group discussion following the first play reading (stimulus). Ideas were documented and shared in a Google Drive and Facebook Messenger Group Chat</p>	

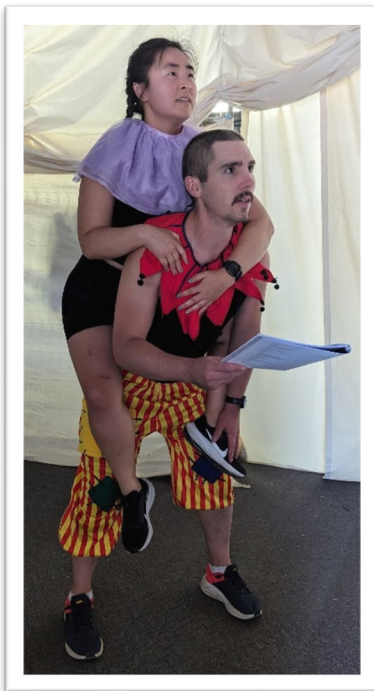
Watch the Sheoak Productions YouTube videos on the website to see how they collaborated to devise this production.

Improvising	The cast learned the techniques of the Commedia Arte character movements and improvised how these might be applied to their Hamlet character. Scenes were initially blocked using improvisation to explore the relationships and action in the scene.	
Scripting	The script was edited by the Artistic Director and Director ready for the first reading by the cast. During rehearsals further script was cut to reduce performance time and keep the focus on the main characters and key themes in the story.	
Editing	The script went through several drafts. Script editing occurred as a result of the rehearsal process. Consideration of the purpose of each scene, Commedia, Elizabethan and eclectic conventions and the manipulation of dramatic elements to shape the performance into a smoothly flowing story.	
Rehearsing	Rehearsals occurred on two evenings per week after work until 10:00pm over 5 weeks. A rehearsal schedule was provided to plan what would happen at each rehearsal. Initial rehearsals involved improvisation of characters, action, then blocking the action in the performance space. Consideration of the two different performance spaces had to be considered. Each rehearsal started with a physical warm up and ended with stretching and cool down. Questions and problems were solved by the actors in collaboration with the director – always focussing on what the motivation of the character was in the scene. The sword fight was choreographed by the actors who are trained to instruct stage combat with weapons. The duel was practiced at each rehearsal, first to complete the moves slowly, fluently and with accuracy for safety, then as the actors developed muscle memory for the fight sequence, they increased the pace and added lines of dialogue and reactions.	
Refining	Refining involved working with the actual set, costumes, and props. Refining continued to involve problem solving, such as how to create a way for the actors to deconstruct the set smoothly and efficiently towards the end of the play. This had to be trialled and experimented to find the most effective ways of securing the set elements so they could be quickly unclipped on the actor's exit after the final duel. This was also used a theatrical device to enable the actors to leave the performance space after their character's death in a purposeful way.	

PERFORMANCE STYLES

This production employs a contemporary eclectic style of performance. Elizabethan Theatre and Commedia Dell'arte are the primary performance styles that drive the stylistic choices. The set design, costumes and props are deliberately minimal, a convention of both the Elizabethan Theatre and Commedia Dell'arte, but also reflect the minimalism of the late 1930's post-depression era. Presentational acting, including heightened gestures, movement and voice and the exaggerated character traits of specific Commedia archetypes, focus on the physicality of the actors working as an ensemble group to communicate the story. In this production we have chosen not to have the actors wear the traditional Commedia character masks, but each actor trained with Scott to learn the traditional and specific physical and vocal gestures and gaits associated with the key Commedia Characters with which they would be playing in their roles. Conventions of lazzi, exaggerated gesture and slapstick, including the use of the traditional slapstick sound effect from the **battacio** are employed for comic effect.

Selected elements of costume are used to suggest characters rather than full costumes. This is a stylistic choice which also allows for quick costume changes, as all 5 actors will be multi-rolling all the characters in the play. As with Elizabethan Theatre and the touring players of the Italian Commedia Dell'arte, the performance space is outdoors, the actors are unamplified, and the scenes run consecutively as a continuous story without interval. As the production will be performed at two different locations, Regional Bendigo, and the Fairfield Amphitheatre in Melbourne, all of the production elements have been designed for quick and easy construction and deconstruction for each performance and transport. Our audience is invited to snack and drink during the performance in the convivial outdoor, open seating, as they would have in the 1600's. Contemporary conventions include the addition of selective music and sound effects, amplified through a modern bluetooth speaker.





EXPLORE FURTHER

- ❖ Identify examples from the performance that demonstrate any of the following conventions from the performance styles listed.
- ❖ Create a mind map or make a table with headings identifying each of the performance styles you saw in the production.
- ❖ Under each performance style, list 2 - 3 conventions you saw and include a description of specific example from the performance.



Characters from the Commedia Dell'arte used in this production from left to right: Arlechinno, il Capitano, Pedrolino, La Signora, Zanni

COMMEDIA DELL' ARTE CONVENTIONS

- Stock characters - audiences were instantly able to recognise a character.
- Caricature - characters were often satires of a stereotype.
- Status - with few exceptions, all characters of the Commedia dell' arte belonged to one of three categories: masters (Vecchi), lovers, servants (Zanni)
- The acting style was very physical, and many acrobatics, dancing, and physical comedy could be expected in a production. The movement was also exaggerated.
- Slapstick was an essential ingredient, particularly for servant characters.
- Burle- comic banter
- Many individual characters have specific acting techniques unique to their character.
- Initially, performances occurred outdoors: in the streets, at marketplaces and at fairs. Acting troupes travelled from place to place and managed their own company.
- Music was often included with simple instruments played by the actors. Instruments and voices were also used to create comic sound effects.
- The set was minimalistic because they were often street performances, which did not allow for a complicated set.
- The actors improvised the performances. The actors were given a general outline of the scenes and the action that needed to happen. The rest was left for the actors to create in the moment.
- The lazzi were pre-prepared comedic acts that could be performed at any moment in the show. They were funny because the audience expected to see the Lazzi; they did not know when.
- All Commedia characters are referred to as "masks", meaning "character type", which includes the actual mask (if worn). Masks were made of leather, which exaggerated features such as wrinkles, or a long nose to enhance the caricature. Popular masks belonged to characters such as Il Capitano, Pantalone, Il Dottore, Arlechinno and the Zanni. The lovers usually did not wear masks.



The traditional Battachio or slapstick

Representation of Characters

Shakespeare's Hamlet Character	Commedia Character	Sheoak Production Hamlet Character
Hamlet: Prince of Denmark	Arlecchino	Hamlet, clown, Belli Circus
Queen Gertrude: Hamlet's mother	La Signora	Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, Lion Tamer
King Claudius: Hamlet's uncle	Il Capitano/Dottore blend	Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, Ringmaster
The Ghost of Hamlet's Father	Il Capitano/Dottore blend	Ghost, Hamlet's Father, Claudius' brother
Horatio	1st Zanni	Horatio, Hamlet's clown partner and friend
Polonius	Pedrolino	Polonius, Circus Belli Manager/ PA
Ophelia	Innamorati	Ophelia, trapeze artist, Polonius daughter
Laertes	Innamorati	Laertes, Swordsman, son of Polonius
Rosencrantz	2nd Zanni	Rosencrantz, childhood friend of Hamlet



EXPLORE FURTHER

- ❖ As a class, research the traditional Commedia dell'arte in Italy during the 1500s and the representation of the conventions of specific stock characters used in the Sheoak Production of Hamlet.

You can find more about the history and conventions of Commedia dell'arte here:

- <https://thedramateacher.com/commedia-dellarte-conventions/>
- <https://www.britannica.com/art/commedia-dellarte>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commedia_dell%27arte

The National Theatre - A short video introducing acting and movement for main Commedia characters

- https://www.youtube.com/watch/h_OTAXWt8hY

According to the Commedia Dell'arte Maestro Antonio Fava, the famous character types can be divided into four main categories:

- (1) The **Servants** or **Zanni** such as 1st Zanni, the lowest, status servant and 2nd Zanni such as Arlecchino and Pedrolino,
- (2) The **Old Men** or **Vecchi** such as the greedy Magnifico (Pantalone), the know-it-all professor (il Dottore)
- (3) The young **Lovers** or **Innamorati** with names such as Isabella, Flaminia, or Ortensia (for women) and Flavio, Orazio, Ortensio, or Leandro (for men).
- (4) The boasting **Captains** or **Capitani** and their female equivalent, the vivacious and oftentimes violent **La Signora**.

Hundreds of character names exist, each the invention of a particular actor, but all of them can be viewed as a derivative or hybrid of these four major character types.

- ❖ Choose one or more of the characters in Hamlet and describe examples from the performance that demonstrate any of the acting conventions used from Commedia dell’arte to portray the character/s.
- ❖ Explain what is meant by the term ‘stock character’ in Commedia dell’arte. How are the characters in Hamlet based on the stock characters of Commedia? Where would you see these types of characters in the world today?
- ❖ Evaluation - how well in your opinion did the actors differentiate between the multiple roles they played?

Characters in the Play	Commedia Dell’arte Character	Which conventions were used by the actor to portray their character/s?
Ophelia, Laertes	The Inammorati (Lovers)	
Gertrude	La Signora Status of a Master (Female) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Signora	
Claudius & Old Hamlet’s Ghost	il Capitano / il Dottore	
Hamlet	2nd Zanni - Arlecchino	
Polonius	1st Zanni – Pedrolino	
Horatio	2 nd Zanni	
Rosencrantz	2 nd Zanni	

Directors note: The characters in this production are not intended to replicate exactly the original Commedia Dell’arte characters. The **stock characters** are used for satirical purposes in this modern adaptation. A prop, costume, gesture, or colour may be a **symbolic** representation of the original stock character. (eg Polonius jacket – Pedrolino) For this production the actors completed training with Scott Middleton (who has trained with renowned Commedia Dell’arte Instructor Antonio Fava in Reggio Emilio, Italy) to learn the traditional movements and gestures associated with each

Commedia Dell' Arte character. As the actors developed their characters for Hamlet, the actors selected aspects of the conventions of the Commedia characters, they made choices about which movements they would select and sustain to represent the basis of their Commedia character, including their status and personality to fit the context of the world of the play. The choice not to wear traditional Commedia masks was deliberate to enable the symbolic stripping back of the colour and comedy of the circus setting at the beginning into the bleak world at the end of the play.

Other Performance Styles and Conventions

Eclectic Performance Style

The study of Drama focuses on the creation and performance of characters and stories in naturalistic ways and ways that move beyond reality. This production is an example of an eclectic contemporary performance style. It applies the main styles and conventions of traditional Commedia Dell'arte, along with aspects of Elizabethan Theatre, combined with the contemporary conventions of comedy and ensemble/Poor Theatre.

ELIZABETHAN THEATRE CONVENTIONS

This style of theatre is associated with a historical period in England when Queen Elizabeth I reigned. Theatre was performed in public playhouses, by travelling troupes, and in the royal court for the Queen herself.

Conventions of this style include:

- asides (an actor speaking privately to the audience, unheard by other characters);
- soliloquies (a character speaking their thoughts aloud to themselves)
- disguises and eavesdropping (where the audience is aware of what's happening, but characters are ultimately duped)
- a presentational style (with large gestures)
- All the parts were played by men, as women were banned from the stage.
- Early on actors travelled as acting troupes, performing in all kinds of places: halls, outdoor platforms, chapels, and village greens and the Queen's Court, before London Theatres such as The Rose, The Swan and The Globe were built as permanent theatre houses.
- As there were minimal sets, the dialogue was rich in imagery to evoke places for the audience, but trapdoors were commonly used.
- To compensate for the lack of scenery, the actors used an array of colourful costumes—some traditional for recurrent characters or situations, some opulent for their own sake.
- Costumes were often symbolic in colour or design to communicate the status of the characters.
- Elizabethan Theatre used musicians to enhance the play, and plays were performed in daylight hours as there was no theatrical lighting technology.

CONVENTIONS OF COMEDY:

- A narrative that focuses on the foibles or weaknesses of the character/s
- Characters presented in an amusing situation—often a familiar situation—that they have to resolve against all odds.
- A script that usually culminates in a happy or satisfying ending
- Use of expressive skills to convey humour.
- Skilful application of comic timing to convey the humour of the script.
- The use of production areas (acting, direction, costume, makeup, set, props, lighting, sound, theatre technologies) to support, enhance or convey humour.

CONVENTIONS OF SATIRE:

- A script that uses comedy or wit to attack a target—political, social, institutional, individuals or groups.
- A script that parodies and highlights flaws and faults, making the audience see the stupidity and hypocrisy of the target
- A script that focuses on and highlights social inequities.
- Exaggerated, stereotypical characters.
- Characters who appear relatively shallow
- Explicit representation of the characters' status in relation to each other
- Intellectual content
- Language of the script uses sarcasm and irony.
- Skilful delivery of the language of the script to convey complex ideas and/or observations.
- Sophisticated use of comic timing
- The use of production area (acting, direction, costume, makeup, set, props, lighting, sound, theatre technologies) to support, enhance or convey humour.

ENSEMBLE THEATRE

Ensemble theatre can be described as a group of individuals dedicated to collaborative creation, committed to working together consistently to develop a distinctive body of work and practice. Created through the original work of Jerzy Grotowski and his style of Poor Theatre from the 1960s, an ensemble prioritises the success of the whole over the success of the individual. This is in stark contrast to how theatre often works: the “most talented” actors getting the “best parts.” Ensemble theatre values the contributions of every member of the cast and crew. Ensemble practise fosters collective ownership of the art, believing in actors as creative and interpretive artists. Because of its focus on **inclusivity** and **collaboration**, all members of an ensemble develop a sense of the whole, and feel supported, trusted, and listened to by the group. In this kind of environment, performers can take more significant risks and experience greater growth.

POOR THEATRE CONVENTIONS

- Actors and Production Team collaborate throughout the rehearsal and playmaking process.
- Dramatic storytelling is dependent on the actors more than production areas.
- Minimal use of set, costumes and props and any other production areas
- Actors wear a base costume of ‘theatre blacks’, using select costume or props to represent a character (symbol)
- Transformation of character, time, place
- Transformation of object - props used in different ways to represent different objects.

CONVENTIONS OF TRANSFORMATION – refers to actors' techniques or methods to transform or transition between characters and/or times and/or places. Transformation requires an actor's energy and focus to make the audience ‘believe’ or engage in the scene they are viewing. Expressive skills and performance skills are essential to a successful transformation. The application of symbol may also assist in this process.

Further details and examples of transformation techniques are explained in *Acting Smart Drama V8 p 27*

Expressive and Performance Skills

Expressive Skills

Facial Expression
Voice
Gesture (including body posture)
Movement



Performance Skills

Focus
Energy
Timing
Actor-audience Relationship

Further explanation of these skills can be found in Acting Smart Drama V8 pp16 – 18, pp20 -22

For your Outcome 3 analysis you are asked to analyse and evaluate:

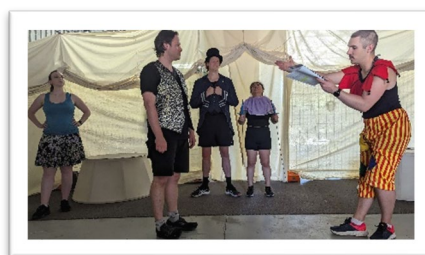
- How the characters are represented and
- How the actor's manipulate their expressive and performance skills part of your evaluation of the characters and the way the actors portray them, you may also consider
- How the actors established and maintained the actor-audience relationship by
- How they manipulate the performance style/s, conventions, dramatic elements and any production areas.

Students are encouraged to refer to the detailed explanation of the task for Outcome 3, including helpful worksheets and activities in *Acting Smart Drama Version 8 pp 91 – 114*



EXPLORE FURTHER

- ❖ *In small groups, choose a central character and brainstorm all of the details you can recall about HOW the character was represented in the production.*
- ❖ *Using the prompt questions from Acting Smart Drama V8 p103. Have each member of the class choose another character and create a table or mind map to answer the following questions. Collate your findings so you have 2 – 3 character examples for analysis and evaluation.*
- ❖ *How do any of the expressive skills used by the actors as well as any production areas such as costume, set, music and prop design work together to help communicate of the world of the play?*





EXPLORE FURTHER

- ❖ *Watch interviews with the actors where they discuss how they each developed their characters, why they chose particular expressive skills to create contrast between characters and how they refined their performance skills in the latter stages of the playmaking process to enhance the portrayal of their characters.*



These videos can be located on the Sheoak Productions Website,

<https://www.sheoakproductions.com/>

Hamlet Education Resources

The following questions were used by the actors to record their video responses.

- What research and/or brainstorming with the rest of the production team helped you develop your initial ideas for each of the characters you were going to play in the world of this Sheoak Production interpretation of the script?
 - How did you develop, edit, and refine your interpretation of the character through the rehearsal process? Describe one technique that you found valuable to bring the script/performance to life for any moment in the play. (Improvisation, language, and structure of the script, editing, rehearsal devices, refining) When was a moment when you felt you were 'in character'?
 - How did you apply any conventions of the style of Commedia Dell'arte to your character development to suit the interpretation of the script?
 - Each member of the ensemble cast plays multiple roles. What processes/acting techniques did you choose to use to develop and differentiate your characters clearly?
 - Can you describe how you developed specific expressive skills (voice, gesture, facial expression, movement) to communicate one (or more) of your characters?
 - Playing multiple roles required you to learn a lot of lines of script. What do you find helps you to memorise the script and action during the rehearsal process?
 - What were the benefits of working as part of a collaborative ensemble during the rehearsal process and in the performances to the audience? What skills as an actor did you need to have to maintain your focus in your roles?
 - Revenge is one of the themes of *Hamlet*. Can you give an example of how your character represented a perspective on the impact of revenge and how you portrayed this in your acting choices? Alternatively, describe any other theme or main idea your character role represents.
 - What purpose do you think one or more of your characters serves in the plot/story?
 - Do you have a favourite quote from the play and /or from one of your characters? Why?
 - Why do you think Hamlet is relevant to contemporary audiences today?
- ❖ **You may copy and paste the table on the next page into a shared class document, such as shared Google Doc, to analyse specific characters and the actor's choices in more detail as part of your SAC 3 preparation:**

Character <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personality/Physical Attributes ● Key Relationships ● Relationship to the setting of the play ● Status ● Motivation ● Symbol 	Describe examples that show how the actor used their expressive and performance skills– what did you see/hear?	Evaluate – how well did these choices work to communicate the intended meaning? How well did actor’s choices help you understand the character and/or story?
Eg Hamlet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What was the character’s role (purpose) in the plot/story? ● How was the status of this character conveyed? (Relationships to other characters, use of space, language, costume, props) ● Did the status of the character change during or by the end of the performance? When and why did this happen? How did this change contribute to the meaning or themes of the play? ● How did the actor establish and maintain an actor-audience relationship? Did the nature of the actor-audience relationship impact on the portrayal of the character or your reaction to the character? Why/Why not? ● What do we learn about the character’s personality, attitude, subtext and motivations from their behaviour and relationships with other characters? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -How effective was the actor’s use of focus, timing, and energy to convey the qualities of the character? -Identify any conventions, such as any conventions of Commedia Dell’arte, used by the actors to portray their characters. ● Did the character change throughout or by the end of the play the play? How? Why? How did this change contribute to the meaning or themes of the play? ● What symbol was used to help emphasise any character traits or themes? 		

Dramatic Elements

Dramatic elements are essential features of every performance. Actors manipulate dramatic elements to shape and enhance meaning. **The dramatic elements for VCE Drama are climax, conflict, contrast, mood, rhythm, sound, space and tension.**



EXPLORE FURTHER

- ❖ Further explanation of the Dramatic Elements can be found in *Acting Smart Drama V8 pp11 – 14*
- ❖ Here is a link to the Melbourne Theatre Company Interactive Flashcards for the Dramatic Elements and their definitions:
<https://www.mtc.com.au/discover-more/mtc-now-2020/dramatic-elements/#:~:text=The%20dramatic%20elements%20for%20VCE,%2C%20sound%2C%20s%20pace%20and%20tension.>
- ❖ **Choose a moment from the performance. Brainstorm the dramatic elements that are manipulated in this moment to engage the audience.**
- ❖ **Rhythm and Timing are used constantly throughout the performance to create Contrast in Mood and Tension within and between scenes. Describe an example from the performance that demonstrate how these elements were applied.**
- ❖ **How was Sound used by the actors to enhance the meaning of any scene?**
- ❖ **Describe two moments in the performance where Conflict was evident and how Tension and Conflict were created.**
- ❖ **Describe the way the actors used the performance Space. Consider the director's blocking, placement of characters and distance between them. How did the use of distance and levels communicate the relationships and status of the characters? How was the space used to create rhythm, mood, contrast and/or tension? How did the use of the performance space impact on the actor-audience relationship?**
- ❖ **Where is the Climax of the play? How does the rhythm and flow of the action build tension towards the climax?**
- ❖ **Describe the Mood at the start of the play and compare this with the mood at the end of the play. How are these moods enhanced by the use of any production areas - eg set design, costume design, sound design, props.**



Application of Symbol

The VCAA Drama Study Design states that application of symbol is the creating of meaning in a way that is not literal. The application of symbol may assist transformations.

Application of symbol allows actors to communicate ideas and themes through action, gesture, language, vocal or facial expression, object/property, costume, set pieces, heightened movement.

Acting Smart Theatre Studies adds: a symbol is something that indicates or stands for something else. The application of symbol is intended to convey a deeper meaning than what appears on the surface. The use of symbol in a play can have several functions.

- To give the audience a clue to something that is yet to happen in the performance.
- To enhance a theme
- To help the audience more fully understand character/s
- To create an intended emotional response in the audience

With symbol, it is not necessarily the object, expression, or movement that itself is symbolic. It is more about how you apply and use it in a non-literal way that conveys is symbolic meaning. (**Acting Smart Drama Version 8 p26**)

The Aside Podcast on Symbol in VCE Drama is another helpful resource!



<https://soundcloud.com/asidepodcast/the-aside-application-of-symbol-vce-drama>

Here are some examples of the different ways symbol was applied in *Midsummer*.

ANALYSE and EVALUATE:

- Did you recognise these symbols?
- Were they effective or obscure?
- What was the central idea, theme, or message for you?

❖ Look for other examples for the application of symbol in each of the categories in the next table



Symbol	Where and How it was used	Why it was used - intended meaning
<p>COSTUME</p> <p>Polonius Jacket</p>	<p>Worn by different actors to represent the one character.</p> <p>The Convention of puppetry is used to endow the jacket with the character (eg Polonius death)</p>	<p>The jacket was used as a theatrical device to create a collective representation of Polonius, so that the ensemble actors could convey the character when wearing the jacket, which enabled the convention of multi-rolling. When an actor was not available to portray Polonius on stage, the jacket was manipulated by an actor using the convention of puppetry to imply the character in the scene. The design of the jacket is in the colour white to reference the traditional white costume of Pedrolino the clown from the Commedia Dell'arte..</p>
<p>SET DESIGN</p>	<p>The set represents a circus tent - specifically the 'back yard' behind the circus arena. It acts as a backdrop to all of the action, including two elephant stands that were traditionally used in the circus for animal acts such as Lion Taming.</p>	<p>The set was made from calico, coated in a PVA/Water mix to emulate the plain canvas style tents of the post-Depression 1930's. Posters typical of the era adorn the canvas walls. As it is the tent behind the main arena, it is deliberately uneven and constructed from rough unadorned timber poles. The back yard contains the items that various acts might use when they enter through the centre when performing. The design incorporates simple release clips to enable the actors to -deconstruct the tent at the end as the world of Hamlet, Circus Belli, and Europe, descend into darkness and destruction.</p>
<p>PROP</p>	<p>Gertrude's whip</p>	
<p>GESTURE/SYMBOLIC MOVEMENT</p>		
<p>LANGUAGE</p>		
<p>CHARACTER</p> <p>Hamlet, Claudius, Laertes - symbolise the dire consequences of harbouring revenge</p>		



Sheoak Productions is a Victorian based performing arts company dedicated to telling compelling stories that include, inspire and enrich the community. Sheoak intends to collaborate with a variety of artists to devise and reimagine work in exciting and dynamic ways. For further information about the work of Sheoak Productions follow on Facebook or the company webpage:

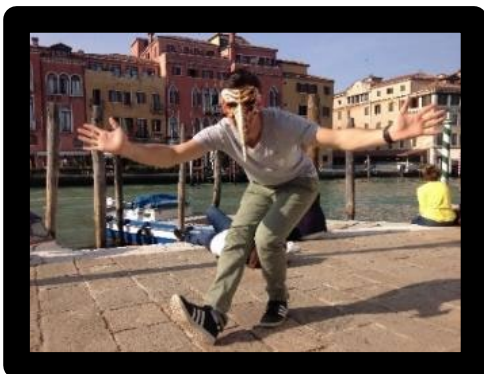
- <https://www.facebook.com/sheoakproductions>
- <http://www.sheoakproductions.com/>

Email: sheoakproductions@gmail.com

In-School Commedia dell'arte Workshops



Scott Middleton is the Artistic Director of Sheoak Productions. Scott has trained extensively in Commedia dell'Arte with Antonio Fava in Italy while training and working in Europe as an actor and teacher. He holds an M.A. from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, has lead workshops for his company Psychopomp! Theatre Collective and taught at the Identity School of Acting. Since returning to Australia, he has been teaching movement at Federation University and has applied his skills and knowledge to direct the movement and Commedia Dell'arte Training for *Two Gents (2021)* and *Midsummer*. Scott is eager to continue sharing his skills with students and teachers to help make Commedia an accessible and enjoyable theatrical style. Scott is available to run in-house training in your school. You can contact Scott directly via email: sheoakproductions@gmail.com



CREDITS

We are sincerely grateful for the assistance and generosity of the people who have helped bring this project to fruition. Our performing artists are still trying to recover their careers from the impact of the Covid-19 restrictions two years ago. We would like to thank the audience for coming to see Hamlet to support live theatre and our actor's livelihoods.

Bendigo Theatre Company

*for assistance with the rehearsal venue and the wonderful **Stania Tresize** for her help with costume hire.*

Mark Beever

for assistance with production photos used in the performance

Emma Herben, Stage Manager Extraordinaire

For her impeccable organisation, creative crafting, sewing and her never-ending Mary Poppins Wardrobe

The Bendigo Advertiser and GOLD FM Radio Bendigo

for media coverage and publicity photographs

Dr Meg Upton

Curriculum Manager-Performing Arts Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Ian Scott from ISLX

Lighting hire

