

# The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)

By Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield

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**NOTE:** The script is written for three actors. Where Shakespeare characters appear in the script, the character name is preceded by the actor's initial: e.g. A/JULIET means Adam is playing Juliet, D/ROMEO means Daniel is playing Romeo, J/HAMLET means Jess is playing Hamlet, etc. More or less "Shakespearean" dialogue appears in double quotation marks (" ").

**ALSO NOTE:** The show was developed through improvisation and ad lib, and is predicated on the conceit that these three guys are making the whole thing up as they go along, getting on by blind enthusiasm and boundless energy wherever they lack talent or any real clue about Shakespeare's work. It's important that the actor be genuinely surprised by each line, each action, and each turn of events. For example, although the audience participation section of Act Two is presented here based on our broad experience with how audiences generally respond, each audience is different. The actors should respond honestly to the audience's performance, and their own, rather than stick blindly to the written text. The whole show should feel so spontaneous that the audience will never really know if that screaming audience member was a plant. Above all, have fun!

And do it **FASTER!**

## ACT ONE

*[The pre-show music, the “Jupiter” section of Gustav Holst’s “The Planets,” reaches its crashing climax. Lights come up on the stage. The set consists of a low-budget representation of an Elizabethan theatre in the fashion of Shakespeare’s Globe. There is a wooden bookstand center right, which prominently features a book: The Complete Works of William Shakespeare. After a beat, Daniel enters from the wings, ostensibly a house manager. He wears a watch.]*

**DANIEL** Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the O’Plaine Auditorium and tonight’s performance of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*. I have just a few brief announcements before we get underway. The use of flash photography and the recording of this performance by any means, audio or video is strictly prohibited. Also, please refrain from eating, drinking or smoking – anything – during the performance. If you have a cell phone, please take a moment now to turn it off, and if you have a pager – you need to get yourself a cell phone.

For your convenience, toilets are located in the bathroom. Also, please take a moment now to locate the exit nearest your seat. *[Points to exits in the manner of an airline flight attendant]*. Should the theatre experience a sudden loss of pressure, oxygen masks *[pulls one from his pocket]* will drop automatically. Simply place the mask over your nose and mouth, and continue to breathe normally. If you are at the theatre with a small child, please place your

own mask on first, and let the little bugger fend for himself.

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and it gives me great pleasure to announce that we are about to attempt a feat that we believe to be unprecedented in the history of civilization. That is, to capture, in a single theatrical experience, the magic, the genius, the towering grandeur of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. *[Lifts up the might book.]* Now we have a lot to get through tonight, so at this time, I’d like to introduce a gentleman who is one of America’s preeminent Shakespeare scholars, he has a Certificate of Completion from preeminentshakespearanscholar.com. He is here tonight to provide *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* with a much-needed preface. Please welcome me in joining, Mr. Jess Winfield.

*[Jess enters in a tweedy suit and spectacles. He shakes hands with Daniel, who hands him the book and steps far stage left to listen.]*

**JESS**

Thank you, Daniel, and greetings, ladies and gentlemen. William Shakespeare: playwright, poet, actor, philosopher; Stratford’s proudest flower, transplanted from the heart of the English countryside to bask in the warmth of London’s literary greenhouse. A man who, despite the ravages of male pattern baldness, planted the potent seed of his poetical genius in the fertile womb of Elizabeth’s England. There it took root and spread through the lymphatic system of Western civilization, until it became the oozing carbuncle of knowledge and

understanding that grows even today on the very top of our collective consciousness. And yet, how much do we intellectually inhabitants of the twenty-first century appreciate the plump fruit of Shakespeare's productive loins?

DANIEL How much?

JESS Let's find out, shall we? I believe I could illustrate this point by conducting a brief poll here, among our audience. Bob, may I have the house lights, please?

*[The house lights come up.]*

Now, you are a theatre-going crowd, obviously of above-average literary sensibility, and yet, if I may just have a brief show of hands, how many of you have ever seen or read any play by William Shakespeare? Any contact with the Bard whatsoever, just raise your hands... *[Almost everyone raises their hand.]*

JESS Dude, we're screwed.

DANIEL Why?

JESS I think they know more than we do.

DANIEL But you're an eminent Shakespeare scholar!

JESS No, I'm *pre*-eminent.

DANIEL Okay... than, *be* preeminent.

JESS How?

DANIEL *[Mouthing]* Narrow it down.

JESS What?

DANIEL *[Whispering]* Narrow it down.

JESS Yes. All right, let's see if we can narrow it down a bit, shall we? How many of you have ever seen or read *All's Well That Ends Well*?

*[Perhaps a third of the audience raises their hands. Jess turns to Daniel and they exchange a thumbs-up.]*

Let's see if we can find out if we have any *super*-eminent Shakespearean scholars have tonight. Has anybody ever seen or read *King John*? *King John*, anyone?

*[Adam, in street garb, raises his hand in the third row. Jess briefly acknowledges two people with raised hands. NOTE: if Adam is the only responder, Jess may just*

*Seen it, or read it? [They respond.] Good. Seen it, read it? [They respond.] Good. [He spots Adam.] What about you? Seen it, read it?*

ADAM Well, I downloaded it.

JESS Hm. Would you mind telling us what it's about?

ADAM Um, it's about a hunchback...?

JESS No, *King John* is not about a hunchback. As any preeminent Shakespearean scholar can tell you, *King John* is about a king named John. Would you stand up, please? *[Adam rises]*. Ladies and gentlemen ecce homo *[pronounced et-chay homo]*.

ADAM Hey!

JESS Judging by your obvious lack of fluency in Latin, may I presume that you have not matriculated?

ADAM Well, not today. Isn't that a little personal?

JESS Look at this man, ladies and gentlemen: abandoned by our educational system, dragged here by his girlfriend, hoping for extra credit in Mr. Miller's English class, and hopped up on Red Bull. And now look at the person sitting next to you. Go ahead! Look at them! Do you recognize the same lifeless expression? The same pores, clogged with the acne of intellectual immaturity? Or do you perhaps see – KEEP LOOKING! – do you see there a longing, a desperate plea for literary salvation?

ADAM Can I sit down now?

JESS No! You stand there before us as a living symbol of a society whose capacity to comprehend, much less attain, the genius of a William Shakespeare has been systematically sodomized by soap operas, reamed by reality shows, and violently violated by the women of *The View!*

*[Jess gestures to Adam to sit down.]*

Ladies and gentlemen, I say to you, cast off the cheap thrill of the car chase for the splendor of the sonnet. Exchange the isolation of the iPhone for the gentle idylls of the iamb! Imagine a world where many men wear pink tights with pride!

DANIEL Hallelujah!

JESS But have no fear, Warren Theatre is here as your intellectual salvation!

DANIEL Amen!

JESS We descend among you on a mission from God and the literary muse to spread the holy word of the Bard to the masses. To help you take those first halting steps OUT of the twenty-first century quagmire of Facebook, the Kardashians and One Direction and into the future! A glorious future! A future where this book *[indicating the Complete Works]* will be found in every hotel room in the world! Can I get an 'amen'?

DANIEL Amen! *[If the audience does not respond with 'Amen', repeat until they do.]*

JESS This is my dream, ladies and gentlemen, and it begins here tonight. Join us in taking those first steps down the path toward the brave new world of intellectual redemption by opening your hearts.

*[Daniel picks up a collection plate and begins to walk through the audience, soliciting donation.]*

Yes, please open your hearts – and your pocketbooks. Or simply charge your donations to your MasterCard or Visa by phoning 1-800-THE-BARD right now! Give us your cash, if we be friends, and deduct it when the tax year ends! Now, on with the show, and may the Bard be with you!

*[The house lights fade as Daniel shakes Jess's hand. Daniel exchanges the collection plate for the Complete Works book. Jess finds a large bill in the plate and tucks it in his pocket as he exits.]*

DANIEL Those of you who own a copy of this book know that no collection is complete without a brief biography of the life of William Shakespeare. Providing this portion of the show will be the next member of our troupe; please welcome to the stage Mr. Adam Long.

*[Adam comes to the stage. As he reaches to shake Daniel's hand, he drops a small stack of 3x5 index cards.]*

DANIEL Oops, sorry. Let me help you...

ADAM No, don't touch them. They go in an order.

DANIEL Okay, okay.

ADAM *[Trying to quickly put his notes back in order.]* Hi. As you can see, I'm not an audience member. I completely fooled you. I was Googling Shakespeare and I found some cool stuff on Shakespeare's life so we could get the show off to good start, so you could know all the stuff he did and everything...

*[He begins reading from the index cards.]*

William Shakespeare. William Shakespeare was born in 1564 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. The third of eight children, he was the eldest son of John Shakespeare, a locally prominent merchant, and Mary Arden, daughter of a Roman. *[Flips to next card.]* Catholic member of the landed gentry. In 1582, he married a farmer's daughter named Anne Hathaway... Isn't she that chick from *Les Misérables*?

DANIEL Different Anne Hathaway.

ADAM That's too bad. She's pretty hot. *[Back to the cards.]* Shakespeare arrived in London in 1588. By 1592, he had achieved success as an actor and a playwright. After 1608, his dramatic production lessened, and it seems that he spent more time in Stratford. *[Next card.]* There he dictated to his secretary, Rudolf Hess, the work *Mein Kampf*, in which he set forth his program for the restoration of Germany to a dominant position in Europe. After reoccupying the Rhineland zone between France and Germany, and annexing Austria, the Sudetenland and the remainder of Czechoslovakia *[Next card.]* Shakespeare invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, thus precipitating World War II. *[to Daniel]* I never knew that before. *[Daniel gestures to wrap it up.]* Shakespeare remained in Berlin when the Russians entered the city, and committed suicide with his mistress, Eva Braun. *[Next card.]* He lies buried in the church at Stratford. Thank you.

*Adam exits.*

DANIEL With that brilliant introduction, I would like to introduce the rest of our motley crew to you.

*[The ensemble enters the stages and states their name for the audience.]*

DANIEL Now, without further ado, we are proud to present, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*!

*[Blackout. A pretentious, heavy-metal version of "Greensleeves" crashes through the sound system. At its conclusion, lights come up to reveal Jess, in*

	<i>Shakespearean attire and high-top sneakers. Jess consults the book, realizes it's upside down, turns it over, flips a page, and reads.]</i>	JESS	Act One, Scene One: In the street meet two men tall and handsome, One, Benvolio. The other named Sampson Their hatred fueled by an ancient feud For one serves Capulet, the other Montague...d.
JESS	“All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances And one man in his time plays many parts.” How many parts, exactly, must one man play? According to my computations, there are one thousand one hundred twenty-two roles in Shakespeare’s works. Way too many.	A/BEN	<i>[Singing]</i> O, I like to when the the sun she rises, early in the morning...
	<i>[Enter Adam and Daniel, also in Elizabethan garb and sneakers, warming up as if preparing to run a race.]</i>	D/SAM	<i>[Singing simultaneously]</i> O, I had a little doggie and his name was Mr. Jiggs, I sent to the grocery store to buy a pound of figs...
	Let us therefore begin our shrinkage of Shakespeare’s canon by travelling to Verona, Italy with the Bard’s most beloved characters: Romeo and Juliet. Prologue!	A/BEN	<i>[Aside]</i> Ooo, it’s him. I hate his guts. I swear to God I’m gonna kill him.
ADAM / DAN	<i>[Simultaneously, with synchronized and exaggerated gestures].</i>	D/SAM	<i>[Aside]</i> Ooo, it’s him. I hate his family, hate his dog, hate ‘em all.
	“Two households, both alike in dignity, In fair Verona where we lay our scene, From ancient grudge break to new mutiny Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. From forth the fatal loins of these two foes A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life, Whose misadventured, piteous o’erthrows Do, with their death, bury their parents’ strife.”	<i>[They smile and bow to each other. As they cross, Sampson bits his thumb at Benvolio, who trips Sampson in return.]</i>	
	<i>[They bow, flourish, and exit.]</i>	A/BEN	“Do you bite your thumb at me, sir?”
		D/SAM	No sir, I do but bite my thumb.
		A/BEN	Do you bite your thumb at me, sir?
		D/SAM	No sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir, but I do bite my thumb. Do you quarrel, sir?
		A/BEN	Quarrel, sir? No, sir.
		D/SAM	But if you do, sir, I am for you. I serve as good a man as you.

A/BEN No better.

D/SAM Yes. Better.

A/BEN You lie!

D/SAM Down with the Montagues~

A/BEN Up yours, Capulet!

*[They fly at each other. Massive fight scene, with deliberately silly fight choreography. Several ensemble members enter the stage and join in the silly fight choreography. They can be a stunt-dummy being maligned, slapping, etc. Jess enters as the Prince.]*

J/PRINCE Rebellious subjects!”

A/BEN & D/SAM Oh no, it’s the Prince. *[They silently mimic the Prince as he speaks, and poke it other whenever they get a chance.]*

J/PRINCE “Enemies to the peace. On pain of torture, Throw your mistemper’d weapons to the ground, And hear the sentence of your moved prince.”

D/SAM Buzz-kill.

J/PRINCE “You, Capulet, shall go along with me. Benvolio, come you this afternoon To know our farther pleasure in this case.”

A/BEN Brown-nose!

D/SAM Ass-hat!

*[Annoyed, Jess slaps Daniel in the back of the head as they exit. All exit except Benvolio]*

A/BEN “O where is Romeo? Saw you him today? Right glad I am he was not at this fray. But see, he comes!

*[Daniel makes a grand entrance as Romeo, wearing a very silly wig and wistfully sniffing at a plastic rose.]*

Good morrow, coz.

D/ROMEO Is the day so young?

A/BEN But new struck nine.

D/ROMEO Ay, me. Sad hours seems long.

A/BEN What sadness lengthens Romeo’s hours?

D/ROMEO Not having that which having makes them short.

A/BEN In love?

D/ROMEO Out.

A/BEN Out of love?

D/ROMEO Out of her favor where I am in love.

A/BEN Alas that love, so gently in his view, Should be so rough and tyrannous in proof.

D/ROMEO Alas that love, whose view is muffl’d still, Should without eyes see pathways to his will.”

BOTH O!

A/BEN Go ye to the feast of Capulets. There sups the fair Rosaline whom thou so lovest With all the admire beauties of Verona. Go tither and compare her face with some that I shall



	show. And I shall make thee think thy swan a crow.	A/JULIET	Ay, pilgrim. Lips that they must use in prayer.
D/ROMEO	None fairer than my love.”	D/ROMEO	O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do.  <i>[Adam has no wish to be kissed and struggles with Daniel over the following lines.]</i>
A/BEN	There’s free beer.	A/JULIET	Saints do not move, though grant for prayers’ sake.
D/ROMEO	Let’s go!  <i>[Exit Benvolio and Romeo. Jess re-enters, flips a couple of pages in the book.]</i>	D/ROMEO	Then move not, while my prayers’ effect I take.
JESS	So much for Act One. Now hie we to the feast of Capulet Where Romeo shall meet his Juliet. And where, in a scene of timeless romance, He’ll try to get into Juliet’s pants.  <i>[Exit Jess. Adam enters as Juliet, wearing a wig even sillier than Romeo’s. She dances. Romeo enters, sees her, and is immediately smitten.]</i>	A/JULIET	Then from my lips the sin that they have took.
D/ROMEO	“O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright. Did my heart love ‘til now? Forswear it, sight. For I ne’er saw true beauty ‘til this night. <i>[Taking Juliet’s hand.]</i> If I profane with my unworhiest hand This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this: My lips, two blushing pilgrims ready stand To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.	D/ROMEO	Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged. Give me my sing again.”
A/JULIET	Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hands too much, Which mannerly devotion shows in this; For saints have hands that pilgrims’ hands do touch And palm to palm is holy palmers’ kiss.	ADAM	<i>[Breaking character]</i> I don’t want kiss you, man.
D/ROMEO	Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?	DANIEL	It’s in the script.  <i>[Adam kneels Daniel in the groin. Daniel crumples to the floor in pain.]</i>
		A/JULIET	“You kiss by the book.” Oh, coming mother!  <i>[Adam looks around in panic, curses under his breath: there is no balcony on the set. Getting at idea, he runs to some tall architectural element in the room that he can awkwardly climb, and struggles to gain some height. He may climb a pillar or a ladder. If no such architectural element exists, Adam can summon Jess from backstage and climb on his shoulders]</i>
		D/ROMEO	“Is she a Capulet? Ay, so I fear. The more is my unrest.” <i>[Breaking character, to Adam.]</i> What are you doing?
		A/JULIET	The balcony scene.

D/ROMEO Ah. "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?"

A/JULIET O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art though Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name... Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, And I'll no longer be a Capulet. What's in a name, anyway? That which he call a nose By any other name would still smell.  
*[He is beginning to lose his grip / balance.]*  
O Romeo, doff thy name, and for thy name Which is no part of thee, take all myself.  
*[Plummets to the floor.]*

D/ROMEO I take thee at thy word. Call me but love, And I shall be new baptiz'd. Henceforth I shall never be Romeo."

A/JULIET What did you just say?

D/ROMEO "Call be but love, and I'll be new peptized. Henceforth—"

A/JULIET Call you butt-love?!

D/ROMEO No no! I said, "Call be but love"—

A/JULIET Okay: you're butt-love! Butt-love, butt-love, butt—  
*[Daniel snatches Adam's hand and Adam snaps back into character.]*

"What man art thou? Art thou not Romeo, And a Montague?"

D/ROMEO Neither, fair maid, if either thee dislike.

A/JULIET Dost thou love me then? I know thou wilt say aye, and I will take thy word. Yet, if thou swearest, thou mayest prove false. O Romeo, if thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully.

D/ROMEO Lady, by yonder blessed moon, I swear—

A/JULIET O swear not by the moon!

D/ROMEO What shall I swear by?  
*[Juliet points to a woman in the audience.]*

D/ROMEO Lady, by yonder blessed virgin, I swear—

A/JULIET *[Referring to the woman]* I don't think so. No, "Do not swear at all. Although I joy in thee, I have no joy in this contract tonight. It is too rash, too sudden, too unadvised, Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be Ere one can say it lightens. Sweet, good night.  
*[Juliet is ready to say 'good night' at the upstage door, but Romeo is flirting with the 'virgin' in the front row.]*

Sweet, good night... sweet, good NIGHT!" Yo, butt-love, over here!  
*[Romeo snaps out of it and joins her upstage.]*

D/ROMEO *[On bended knee.]* O wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

A/JULIET *[Juliet sits on Romeo's knee]* What satisfaction can'st thou have tonight?  
*[Romeo nuzzles into her breast]*

	Whoa, whoa... second base if for second date, sweetie. “Good night, good night; parting is such sweet sorrow—“ Bye, butt-love!		
JESS	Lo, Romeo did swoon with love; By Cupid he’d be crippl’t; But Juliet had a loathsome coz Whose loathsome name was Tybalt.  <i>[Jess exits. Adam enters as Tybalt carrying two foils]</i>	A/JULIET	<i>[Jess exits. Juliet enters wearing an imaginary horse, humming the “William Tell Overture.”]</i> “Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds, And bring in cloudy night immediately. Come civil night! Come, night! Come, Romeo, Thou day in night! Come, gentle night! Come loving, black-brow’d night!” O, night night night night night... Come come come come come! “And bring me my Romeo!”
A/TYBALT	Romeo, the love I bear thee can afford No better term than this: thou art a villain. Therefore turn and draw.		<i>[Daniel enters as the Nurse. The fake breasts sewn into her dress are flopping around outside.]</i>
D/ROMEO	Tybalt, I do protest, I never injured thee, But love thee, better than thou canst devise.	D/NURSE	Boo hoo hoo hoo!
A/TYBALT	Thou wretched boy, I am for you!  <i>[Tybalt throws Romeo a foil. Romeo catches it and closes his eyes, holding the foil extended. Tybalt steps forward neatly impaling himself.]</i>	A/JULIET	“O it is my Nurse.” Dude, your boobs.
A/TYBALT	O I am slain.” <i>[Tybalt quickly bows and exits. During the laugh, the other panic and consult with the book, wildly flipping pages. Jess points to a place. Daniel nods and exits.]</i>	D/NURSE	Oops!
JESS	Moving right along... From Tybalt’s death onwards, the lovers are curs’d, Despite the best efforts of Friar and Nurse; Their fate pursues them, they can’t seem to duck it... And at the end of Act Five, they both kick the bucket.	A/JULIET	“Now nurse, what news?”
		D/NURSE	Alack the day! He’s gone, he’s kill’d, he’s dead!
		A/JULIET	Can heaven be so envious?
		D/NURSE	O Romeo! Who ever would have thought it? Romeo!
		A/JULIET	What devil art thou to torment me thus? This torture shal’d be roared in dismal hell. Hath Romeo slain himself?
		D/NURSE	I saw the wound, I saw it with mine own eyes, here in his mainly breast.
		A/JULIET	Is Romeo slaughter’d and is Tybalt dead?

D/NURSE No, Tybalt is slain and Romeo banished.  
Romeo that killed Tybalt, he is banished!

A/JULIET O God! Did Romeo's hand shed Tybalt's blood?

D/NURSE It did, it did, alas the day it did."  
*[They sob and scream hysterically, finally pick up mugs and throw water in each other's faces.]*

BOTH *[Bowing]* Thank you.

A/JULIET Now Romeo lives, whom Tybalt would have slain.  
Well, that's good, isn't it?  
*[Probably no response from the audience.]*  
I said, "that's good, isn't it?"  
*[Audience murmurs, "yeah!"]*  
Damn right. And Tybalt is dead, who would have  
killed my husband. Well, that's good, isn't it?  
*[Audience responds.]*  
So why do I feel like crap? It's not a good day for  
Juliet, it's an icky poo-poo ca-ca wee-wee pee-pee  
weeble-wobble-but-they-don't-fall-down-day...  
*[Jess enters as Friar Laurence. He is an actual Italian  
in a monk's robe.]*

A/JULIET O, Friar Laurence! Romeo is banished an' Tybalt is  
slain and I've got cramps an' that not-so-fresh feeling.  
Can you help me please?

J/FRIAR Take-a thou this vil-a, and this distilled liquor drink-a  
thou off-a. And presently through all thy veins-a shall  
run a ccold anna drowsy-a humor-a.

A/JULIET *[Drinks.]* O, I feel a cold and-a drowsy-a humor-a  
running through my veins.

J/FRIAR Told-a you so.

A/JULIET Thanks, Obi-wan!  
*[Friar exits. The potion goes straight to Juliet's head.]*

A/JULIET Hey, this feels kinda nice! Uh-oh...  
*[Juliet begins to convulse, vomits on several people in  
the audience, returns center.]*  
There, I feel better. *[Collapses suddenly.]*  
*[Romeo enters. He sees Juliet and rushes to her  
prone body, accidentally stepping on her crotch.]*

D/ROMEO "O no!  
My love, my wife!  
Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,  
Hath no power yet upon thy beauty.  
O Juliet, why art thou yet so fair?"

A/JULIET Dunno, lucky I guess.

D/ROMEO "Here's to my love.  
*[He drinks from his poison bottle.]*  
O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick.  
Thus, which a kiss, I die...  
*[Just as Daniel leans in to kiss Adam, Adam burps.  
This time it is Daniel who has no wish to kiss Adam.]*

*He struggles with the problem for a moment, takes another swig of poison, and finally kisses him.]*

Thus with a kiss, I die.

*[Romeo dies. Juliet wakes up, stretches, scratches her butt, checks her breath (yuck!), and looks around.]*

A/JULIET

Good morning. “Where, O where is my love?  
*[She sees him lying at her feet, and screams.]*  
What’s this? A cup, closed in my true love’s hand?  
Poison I see hath been his timeless end. O churl.  
Drunk all and left no friendly drop to help me after?  
Then I’ll be brief. O happy dagger! This is thy sheath!”

*[She unsheathes Romeo’s dagger and does a double-take. The blade is tiny.]*

That’s Romeo for ya.

*[She stabs herself. She screams, but to her surprise, she does not feel injured. She looks for a wound and can’t find one. Finally, she realizes that the blade is retractable. This is a cause for much joy. She stabs herself gleefully in the torso, on the crown of the head, on her butt, up her nostril, delighting in a variety of death noises. She finally flings the happy dagger to the ground.]*

A/JULIET

“There rust and let me die.” *[Dies.]*

*[Jess enters with a guitar and the R&J ensemble.]*

JESS

Epilogue!

*[Jess strums the famous theme from Prokofiev’s Romeo and Juliet as Daniel recites the epilogue and the rest interpret with funny jestures.]*

DANIEL

“A glooming peace this morning with it brings;  
The sun for sorrow will not show its head;  
Go forth and have more talk of these said things;  
Some shall be pardon’d, and some punished;  
For never was there a story of more woe  
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.”

ALL

*[Singing to the theme’s finale.]* And Romeo and Juliet are deeeecad...!

*[They rock out, jamming a power-chord rock ‘n roll coda, ending with all three doing a synchronized Pete Townshend-style jump on the last chord.]*

ADAM

Thank you, Warren, and good night!

*[Blackout. Jess and Adam exit. Lights come back up and reveal Daniel alone on stage. The narrator’s set has been struck.]*

DANIEL

Wow, we did that in twelve minutes! Let’s see, at that rate we’ll be done in... twelve times thirty-seven is... seven hours and... crap. Okay, well *Romeo and Juliet* is a classic – unlike this next play – which Shakespeare wrote as a twenty-four-year-old starving artist, desperate for a hit, but too poor to know where his next meal was coming from. No surprise that an obsession with food dominates his first tragedy, the primitive revenge drama *Titus Andronicus*... which we now present as a cooking show.

*[A brief, cheesy musical string brings on Jess as Titus Andronicus, wearing a apron, carrying a large butcher's knife. He has a bloody stump where his left hand should be. He is somewhat reminiscent of Julia Child.]*

J/TITUS

Hi, everyone. I'm Titus Andronicus. Welcome to *The Gory Gourmet!* Now, when you've had a lousy day - your left hand chopped off, your sons murdered, your daughter raped, her tongue cut out, and both her hands chopped off - well, the last thing you want to do is cook. Unless, of course, you cook the rapist and serve him to his mother at a dinner party! My daughter Lavinia and I will show you how.

*[Adam enters as Lavinia, clutching a large mixing bowl held between her two stumps, pushing Daniel as the Rapist in front of her.]*

Good evening, Lavinia!

A/LAVINIA

Ood ebeie, abby! *['Good evening, daddy' as performed without a tongue.]*

J/TITUS

And how are we feeling today?

A/LAVINIA

Ot so odd, abby. I ot my ongue yopped off, my hands cut off, he waped me, o woo oo ink I ell!?!

J/TITUS

Well, that's a pissar, isn't it? But we'll get our revenge.  
 "Now hark, villain. I will grind your bones to dust,  
 And of your blood and it I'll make a paste;  
 And of the paste a coffin I will rear  
 And make a pasty of your shameful head.  
 Come, Lavinia, receive the blood."

*[Lavinia holds the bowl underneath the Rapist's through to collect the blood.]*

First of all, we want to make a nice, clean incision from carotid artery to jugular vein, like so.

D/RAPIST

Aaaaargh!

A/LAVINIA

Yech! That's weally gwass, abby!

*[The Rapist bows his head over the translucent bowl, dropping his red hat into it. The bowl now appears to be filled with blood. Lavinia show it to the audience cheerily.]*

J/TITUS

Be sure to use a big bowl for this because the human body has about four quarts of blood in it! "And when that he is dead," which should be...

*[The Rapist collapses to the floor in a head. Lavinia exits.]*

... right about now, "let me go grind his bones to powder small

And with this hateful liquor temper it;

And in that paste let his vile head be baked..."

At about three hundred and fifty degrees. And forty minutes later, you have this lovely human-head pie...

*[Lavinia re-enters with a truly disgusting human-head pie.]*

... which I prepared earlier...

*[Pulling a severed hand from the pie.]*

I even chopped up some ladyfingers for dessert!  
Now, who will be the first to try this delicious, high-protein treat?

*[Titus and Lavinia offer the pie to the audience.]*

“Welcome, gracious lord. Welcome, dread queen.  
Will’t please you eat? Will’ please you feed?”  
It’s finger-linkin’ good!

A/LAVINIA Ha ha! Finger-yiggin!

*[They try to give each other a high-five, but since neither has a hand, it is a miserable failure.]*

J/TITUS Well, we’re out of time. Be sure to tune in tomorrow when we’ll see Timon of Athens teach us how to make ratatouille out of our special guests, the Merry Wives of Windsor. Say good night, Lavinia!

A/LAVINIA Ood ight, Abibia!

J/TITUS Close enough. Good night everybody and “bone” appetit!

*[Titus and Lavinia exit to a musical outro sting.]*

DANIEL Disgusting! But inexplicably, it was one of Shakespeare’s biggest hits during his lifetime, and allowed Shakespeare to broaden his artistic horizons. For example, compare the immaturity of *Titus Andronicus* to the complex subtleties of the human condition revealed in his dark and brooding tragedy *Othello, the Moor of Venice*.

*[Daniel exits. Adam enters as Othello, with plastic boats on a strong draped around his next.]*

A/OTHELLO “Speak of me as I am; let nothing extenuate  
Of one who love not wisely, but too well;”  
For never was there a story of more woe  
Than this of Othello and his Desdemono.

*[He stabs himself with a tugboat.]*

O, Desi!

*[He dies amid a clatter of plastic boats. Daniel and Jess watch in distress from a doorway. They confer briefly, then enter.]*

DANIEL Bob, can we have some lights please?

JESS I’m sorry about this. It seems that Adam, secure in the infallibility of the Internet, has Googled the word, “moor” and determined that it’s a place where you tie up boats.

ADAM I didn’t Google it, I Wiki’d it.

DANIEL Lose the boats.

ADAM *[Slinking off.]* Oh, I feel like such a dork.

DANIEL God, Adam is so ignorant. *[To Jess.]* So, what’s a “moor”?

JESS Well, interestingly, this is the subject of a blazing scholarly debate. For Elizabethans, “moor” could refer either specifically to the Berbers of North Africa, or more generally, to any people of sub-Saharan African descent.

DANIEL So Othello’s black.

JESS *[Gasp!]* You mean African American.

- DANIEL Doesn't the play take place in Italy?
- JESS Okay, so he's African Italian.
- DANIEL Can't we just do it in blackface?
- JESS What, are you *trying* to piss off Oprah? No, today's entertainment culture expects sensitive, ethnically appropriate casting. If Othello's African Italian, we can't do it without a genuine, Koran-spoutin', spaghetti-lovin' homeboy.
- [Enter Adam, sans boats.]*
- ADAM Hey, just because we're white doesn't mean we can't represent the Afro Italian condition, yo! I got this idea, it's sort of old school, and it's totally boatless. We just gotta get a beat going...
- [He beat-boxes, then raps.]*
- Here's the story of a brother by the name of Othello. He liked white women and he love green jello.
- JESS Oh, yeah, yeah. Uh...  
And a punk named Iago who made hisself a menace 'Cos he didn't like Othello, the Moor of Venice.
- ADAM Now Othello got married to Des-demonia,
- JESS But he took off for the wars and he left her alone-a.
- ADAM It was a moan-a.
- JESS A groan-a.
- ADAM/JESS He left her alone-a.
- DANIEL *[Finally catching on.]* He didn't write a letter and he didn't telephone-a.
- [Brief pause. Now everyone's in on hit. A beat drops from the speakers, perhaps a hand-held mic/s are on stage. Even the lighting operate gets into it, as multicolored light begin flashing to the beat.]*
- DANIEL Now Othello loved Desi like Adonis loved Venus.
- JESS And Desi loved Othello because he had a big -
- DANIEL *[Not wanting Jess to say "penis."]* SWORD!
- ADAM But Iago had a plan that was clever and slick. He was crafty.
- JESS He was sly.
- DANIEL He was sort of a... *[Not wanting to say, "dick"]* PENIS.
- ADAM He say, "I'm gonna shaft the Moor."
- DANIEL How you gonna do it?
- DANIEL/JESS Tell us!
- ADAM Well, I know his tragic flaw is that he's -
- ALL Too damn jealous!
- ADAM I need a dupe. I need a dope. I need a kind of a shmoe...
- JESS So he find a chump sucker by the name o' Cassio.
- DANIEL And he plants on him Desdemona's handkerchief.



ADAM           So Othello gets to wonderin' just maybe if... While he  
                  been out fightin'

DANIEL/ADAM    Commandin' an army.

JESS            Are Desi and Cass playin' hide the salami?

ALL             Sa-sa-sa-salem. Salaaammii !

DANIEL          So he come back home an' he smother the beeyotch.

JESS            An' he think he pulled it off, without a heeyotch.

ADAM           But there's Emilia at the door.

JESS            Who we met in Act Four.

DANIEL          Who say, "Yo, homey, she wasn't no ho. She was—

ADAM/JESS     Pure.

DANIEL          She was—

ADAM/JESS     Clean.

DANIEL          She was—

ADAM/JESS     Virginal, too...

ALL             So why'd you have to go and make her face turn  
                  blue?

ADAM           It's true.

DANIEL          It's you.

ADAM/DANIEL    Now what you gonna do?

ADAM           And Othello say:

JESS            "Damn, this is gettin' pretty scary."

DANIEL          So he pulled out his blade and committed hara-kiri.  
  
*[Jess mines hara-kiri on himself and twitches in death throes.]*

ADAM/DANIEL    *[Singing]* Do that funky Moor thing, white  
                  boy!

ADAM           Iago got off on a technicality.

JESS            Moved to Hollywood.

DANIEL          And got his own TV...

ALL             Show, that is.

DANIEL          Prime time.

JESS            HBO.

ADAM           *Desperate Houseboats.*

ALL             *[With a raised fist salute.]* Africa!

*[Bows and elaborate handshakes all around as the lighting returns to normal.]*

DANIEL          Why don't we lighten up from all this heavy tragedy  
                  and move onto the comedies?

ADAM/JESS     Yeah!

ALL             *[with another raised fist salute.]* Comedies!

JESS            *[To audience.]* Now Shakespeare comedies were  
                  greatly influenced by the Roman plays of Plautus and  
                  Terence, Ovid's hilarious *Metamorphoses*, as well as  
                  the rich Italian tradition of Commedia dell'arte. He

- was a genius at borrowing and adapting plot devices from these different theatrical traditions.
- ADAM Isn't that called "plagiarism"?
- JESS Shakespeare didn't "plagiarize", he "distilled." *[Exits.]*
- ADAM Whatever. He's a big cheater!
- DANIEL Hey, it takes a real genius to milk five ideas into sixteen plays.
- ADAM Yeah, but I can never tell them apart. Like what's that one with the shipwreck, the identical twins, and the big wedding at the end?
- DANIEL All of them.
- ADAM See, that sucks.
- DANIEL You see, essentially Shakespeare was a formula writer. Once he found a device that worked, he used it...
- ALL Over and over and over again.
- [Jess re-enters, and distributes three thin manuscripts.]*
- JESS Well, Shakespeare obviously should have written one exemplary play instead of sixteen suck ones. Which is why I have taken the liberty of condensing Shakespeare's comedic diarrhea into a single, solid, well-formed lump of hilarity, which I have entitled *The Comedy of Two Well-Measured Gentlemen Lost in the Merry Wives of Venice on a Midsummer's Twelfth Night in Winter*. Or...
- DANIEL *Cymbeline Taming Pericles the Merchant in the Tempest of Love as Much as You Like It for Nothing*. Or..
- ALL *Four Weddings and a Tranvestite!*
- [They read from their manuscripts. Note: This may be done reader's theater style, or the scripts may be placed on book stands, freeing up the actors to use props, masks puppets, or other devices. But it's important that the other two actors are seeing Jess's script for the first time.]*
- JESS Act One! A Bohemian duke swears an oath of celibacy, turns the rule of the city over to his tyrannical brother, and sets sail for the Golden Age of Greece. While rounding the heel of Italy, the duke's ship is caught in a terrible tempest that casts him up on a desert island along with his sweet innocent, and clueless young daughter.
- A/PRINCESS O dear father, I am so lonely and pubescent on this island! I am sad, boo-hoo. And frisky, rrarr.
- D/DUKE O precious daughter, watch out for symbols of colonial oppression lurking in caves waiting for virgins.
- A/PRINCESS 'Kay, b-bye!
- JESS Meanwhile, the duke's long-lost son, a handsome, dashing, clueless young merchant, is also shipwrecked – coincidentally, on the very same island.
- D/MERCHANT How shall I survive without funds in this strange, foreign lang? I know, I must needs find me

- an old Jew! Behold, here cometh a convenient Judeo Italian stereotype now.
- A/JEW *[Italian accent]* Whatsammata you, eh? *[Jewish accent.]* Need a payday load, bubby?
- JESS The wicked Jew tricks the merchant into putting down his brains as collateral on the loan.
- D/MERCHANT Such a deal!
- JESS Act Two. Fearing ravishment, the clueless young princess disguises himself as a boy and becomes a page to a handsome, dashing, clueless young soldier.
- D/SOLDIER You there, boy!
- A/PRINCESS *[High voice.]* Yes? ... I mean... *[Lowering his voice.]* Yes?
- D/SOLDIER You shall woo the Lady Violivia for me, for she is shrewish, and I am sick with love!
- A/PRINCESS I too feel phlegmy down there, for while I may not speak it aloud, I do love thee, though I am a boy.
- D/SOLDIER I swingeth not that way, boy. Deliver this letter to Violivia. Go, hence.
- A/PRINCESS Whence?
- D/SOLDIER Hie thee hither from hence to thence!
- JESS Act Three. The beautiful, virginal, and clueless young princess arrives in man-drag to woo the Lady Violivia.
- D/SHREW It is I, the bitchy shrew Violivia. Come hither!
- A/PRINCESS Whither?
- D/SHREW Hither, from thither. *[Hitting on her.]* If you come in, I'll show you my zither.
- JESS Act Four. On the twelfth night of midsummer, a puckish sprite leads all the lovers deep into a forest and squeezes the aphroditic juice of a hermaphroditic flower in their eyes, while the queen of the fairies seduces a rude mechanical who has the head of an ass.
- D/BOTTOM Yeah, but I have the ass of a man, and I'm hung like a donkey! Hee-haw!
- JESS Act Five. In the ensuing bisexual animalistic orgy, the Princess's man-clothes get ripped off, revealing a smokin' bod and female genitalia! The merchant recognizes his sister!
- D/MERCHANT My nearly identical twin!
- A/PRINCESS My long-lost and strangely attractive brother!
- JESS The shrew realizes she's bi-curious.
- D/SHREW O Brave New World!
- JESS The dashing young soldier decides he actually prefers Bottom.
- D/SOLDIER And thereby hangs a sweet tail!
- JESS The Jew exits, pursued by bear.
- A/JEW Oy, a bear.
- JESS And they all get married in the state of Massachusetts and go out to dinner. Now give us your hands if we be friends.

- ALL Because all is well that finally ends! Thank you!  
*[Lights return to normal. They bow and hand their manuscripts to Jess, who dumps them offstage and returns.]*
- ADAM Dude, I had no idea Shakespeare was such a perv.
- DANIEL Sixteen plays in five minutes. Not bad. But if we're going to get outta here before midnight, we have to get back to the tragedies.
- ADAM/JESS *[Again with a raised-fist salute.]* TRAGEDIES!  
*[Daniel clear his throat because that was inappropriate: with a much smaller, lower fist-salute.]* Tragedies.
- JESS Interestingly, we've discovered Shakespeare's comedies aren't nearly as funny as his tragedies.
- DANIEL That is so true. You know what's funny? "The Scottish play!"
- ADAM Oh yeah! *Mac*—
- DANIEL/JESS *[Ad lib./* Shhhh! Don't say it!
- ADAM Why not?
- DANIEL Because it's cursed. It's bad luck to say the name of that show in a theater unless you're performing it. That's why we refer to it as "The Scottish Play."
- ADAM But we *are* performing it. And besides, there's nothing remotely Scottish about it.
- JESS It's all in the performance, Adam. It needs to be done so that you can see the heather rippling on the highlands, feel the cold summer breeze wafting up your kilt, and smell the vomit steaming in the alley outside the pub.
- DANIEL Good idea! *[points to Adam.]* Kilts! *[Points to Jess.]* Whiskey!  
*[Adam and Jess give the raised-fist salute.]*
- ADAM/JESS Vomit!  
*[Adam and Jess exit.]*
- DANIEL Ladies and gentlemen, we now present our authentically Scottish production of...*Macbeth!*  
*[Lights darken, and a short blast on the bagpipes is heard.]*
- D/WITCH "Double, double, toil and trouble."  
*[Jess enters as Macbeth, carrying a bag of golf clubs. In nearly impenetrable Scottish accents.]*
- J/MACBETH Stay, ye imperrfect macspeaker. Mactell me macmore.
- D/WITCH Macbeth, Macbeth, beware Macduff. No man of woman born shall harm Macbeth tell Birnam Wood come to Dunsinane, don't ye know.  
*[Witch exits. Adam enters as Macduff, also carrying golf clubs and hiding behind a leafy twig.]*
- J/MACBETH Och, that'd dead great. That macwhat macneed maci macfear of Macduff?  
*[Macduff throws down his disguise, wields a golf club, and throws a two-fingered gesture at Macbeth.]*

A/MACDUFF See YOU, Jimmy! And know that Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripped! What d'ye think about that?

J/MACBETH Och! That's bloody disgusting. Lay on, haggis-breath!

*[Macbeth pulls out a golf club, and they whack at each other with them.]*

A/MACDUFF Ah, Macbeth! Ye killed me wife, ye murdered me wee bairns, and ye did a poop in me soup.

J/MACBETH Och! I didnae!

A/MACDUFF Och, aye, ye did. I had t' throw half of it away.

*[Macduff chases Macbeth offstage. Backstage, Macbeth's scream is abruptly cut off with a loud whack. Macduff re-enters carrying a severed head.]*

A/MACDUFF "Behold where lies the usurper's cursed head." Macbeth, yer arse is oot the windee.

*[Macduff sets down the head, addresses it like a golf shot, and whacks it into the audience with his club.]*

And know that never was there a story of more blood and death that this o' Mr. and Mrs. Macbeth. Thankee. *[Exits.]*

JESS *[Entering.]* Meanwhile, in ancient Rome, Julius Caesar was a much beloved tyrant.

*[Adam enters.]*

ADAM/JESS All hail Julius Caesar!

*[Daniel enters as Julius Caesar, wearing a laurel wreath.]*

D/CAESAR Hail, citizens!

JESS ... Who was warned by a soothsayer...

A/SOOTHSAYER "Beware the Ides of March."

JESS The great Caesar, however, chose to ignore the warning.

D/CAESAR What the hell are the Ides of March?

A/SOOTHSAYER The 15<sup>th</sup> of March.

D/CAESAR Why, that's today.

*[Jess and Adam stab him repeatedly. He falls. Adam exits.]*

D/CAESAR "Et tu, Brute?"

*[Caesar dies. Jess becomes Mark Antony, orating over the body.]*

J/ANTONY Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to bury Caesar," so bury him, and let's get on to my play, *Antony...*

*[Adam enters as Cleopatra, wearing a wig and clutching a rubber snake.]*

A/CLEOPATRA ... and Cleopatra! Is this an asp I see before me? "Come, venomous wretch—"

*[Cleopatra applies the snake to her breast. A wave of nausea hits her. She elaborately vomits on several people in the front row.]*

JESS/DANIEL *[Ad lib.]* Whoa, Adam! No! Stop!

ADAM What?

- DANIEL You have this bizarre notion that all of Shakespeare’s tragic heroines wear really ugly wigs and vomit on people before the die.
- ADAM It’s an interpretation.
- DANIEL Barfing in not an interpretation.
- ADAM *[Referring to the people he vomited on.]* Well, they were into it.
- JESS Adam... *Antony and Cleopatra* has nothing to do with gastro-intestinal distress. It’s an exciting, trans-global thriller about political maneuvering across the ancient Mediterranean.
- ADAM Oh, it’s one of Shakespeare’s trans-global plays? Wow, I love those! Like the one that totally predicted twenty-first century wireless communications?
- DANIEL What?!
- ADAM Yeah, it was called *Two Mobile Kinsmen*.
- DANIEL Adam, Shakespeare wrote a play called *Two NOBLE Kinsmen*.
- JESS Not *Two Mobile Kinsmen*.
- DANIEL/JESS *Two NOBLE KINSMEN*.
- ADAM No, it’s definitely “mobile” because the two kinsmen are Bill Gates and Steve Jobs.
- JESS No, the kinsmen are cousins who fall in love with the same woman.
- ADAM Oh, they’re, like, texting her “OMG, You’re my BFF. LOL”?
- DANIEL/JESS No!
- ADAM Well, that’s stupid. I’ve never even heard of that play.
- JESS That’s because *Two Noble Kinsmen* falls into the category of Shakespeare’s plays which are neither tragedy, comedy, nor history, and which scholars refer to as the “problem” plays, or in some circles, the “obscure” plays, or the “lesser” plays, or simply, the “bad” plays. And yet, not all of the bad plays are completely without merit. In fact, one of them, *Troilus and Cressida*, is hardly crap at all. I actually discuss it in my unpublished monograph about Shakespeare, entitled, *I Love My Willy*. Oh, you guys would love it! It’s big, it’s long, it’s uncut, and I’ve been hammering away on it for years. In fact, if you don’t mind, I’d like to whip it out for you right now!
- [Jess reaches into his pants and fishes around for something.]*
- ADAM I wish you wouldn’t.
- DANIEL Jess, we don’t want to see your—
- JESS *[Pulls out a manuscript.]* Monograph!
- ADAM What else do you keep in your pants?
- JESS *[Looks.]* Some sandwiches. Want one?
- DANIEL/ADAM No!
- DANIEL Hey, maybe we could improvise an interpretive dance, performance-art version of you... thingy.
- ADAM Oh, I love interpretive performance art. It’s so... pretentious! We could use *Troilus and Cressida* as a

jumping-off point to explore deeper themes like the transient nature of life and the mythology involved in the arising and dissipation of forms.

DANIEL Yeah! Get some props!

JESS Now wait just a minute. I was thinking of a more straight-forward scholarly approach.

ADAM Naw, screw that! *[He exits.]*

DANIEL Go ahead and read, and we'll interpret. *[He poses.]*

JESS Well, okay. *Troilus and Cressida* was written in 1603, published in quarto in 1604, and appears in the First Folio, although this version is some one hundred and sixty-six lines longer than the second quarto edition of 1645, which is some one hundred and sixty-six lines shorter.

*[During the above, Daniel performs an awkward dance-mime and Adam re-enters, first with an inflatable dinosaur and then with a battery-operated Godzilla that walks and roars (though any mechanical toy with good comic timing will suffice). Daniel and Jess stare at the toy, then look at Adam and gesture for him to remove it. Adam picks up the toy, turns it off, and exits like a wounded puppy.]*

JESS Ladies and gentlemen, my monograph has nothing to do with Godzilla!

DANIEL Isn't there something in there about the plot?

*[Adam reenters with a crown.]*

JESS Plot? Of course I cover the plot. Right here in the footnote on page twenty-nine. "Troilus, youngest son of Priam, King of Troy..."

ADAM Okay, you be Troilus and you *[crowning Jess.]* be the King.

JESS Okay, great. "... loves Cressida..."

*[Jess and Daniel look at Adam.]*

ADAM I'll get the wig. *[Adam exits, fetches the wig, and re-enters.]*

JESS "... and has arranged with her uncle Pandarus for a meeting. Although she feigns indifference, she is attracted to him..."

ADAM I have to feign indifference?!

JESS Yeah! "Meanwhile, Agamemnon, the Greek commander, has surrounded the Trojans—"

ADAM/DANIEL Agamemnon?!?

ADAM Bo-ring!

DANIEL This is the kind of stuff that kids hate to study in school because it's too boring.

ADAM Yeah, like as soon as you said, "Agamemnon," I was asleep. No, I'm sorry, guys, but I promised them *[referring to the audience.]* I would not do dry, boring, vomitless Shakespeare.

JESS You don't even know these people.

ADAM That's not true! We bonded while I was sitting out there, and now I care about each and everyone one of

them. *[Pointing.]* There's Lillian – she came all the way across town on a bus to be here tonight, and Jennifer, who has a test on Monday that she hasn't studied for, and little Timmy, who though he was going to see *Wicked* and feels totally ripped off—

DANIEL

What's your point, Adam?

ADAM

The point is I love these people, and I don't want to see them get turned off to Shakespeare. That's what happened to me. When I was in school and we were supposed to be studying Shakespeare, I'd be looking out the window at the kids play ball, and thinking, "Why can't this Shakespeare stuff be more like sports?"

JESS

Sports?

DANIEL

How do you mean?

ADAM

Well, sports are exciting. Engaging. I mean, take the histories, for example. With all those kings knocking each other off, running up and down the field, the throne passing from one guy to the next—it's exactly like football, but you know... with a crown.

DANIEL

Hey, they kinda are similar, aren't they?

JESS

*[Reaching deep into his pants.]* I think I have a whistle in here!

*[He does. He pulls it out and blows it.]*

DANIEL

Okay, line 'em up. Let's kick some royal ass!

*[They line up in a three-man football formation. Then, like a quarterback calling signals.]*

Twenty-five! Forty-two! Richard the Third! Henry the Fourth, Part One, Part Two...

ALL

HUP!

J/ANNOUNCER

... And the crown is snapped to Richard the Second, that well spoken fourteenth-century monarch. He's fading back to pass, looking for an heir downfield, but there's a heavy rush from King John.

*[Jess and King John stabs Daniel as Richard.]*

D/RICHARD II

"My gross flesh sinks downwards!"

J/ANNOUNCER

The crown is in the air, and Henry the Sixth comes up with it!

A/HENRY VI

Victory is mine!

D/ANNOUNCER

But he's hit immediately by King John. Oh no! He's cutting Henry the Sixth into three parts, that's gotta hurt!

*[King John slices up Henry.]*

This could be the end of the War of the Roses Cycle!

*[King John grabs the crown and runs in place with it.]*

A/ANNOUNCER

King John is in the clear...

J/KING JOHN

My soul hath elbow room!"

A/ANNOUNCER

He's a the forty, the thirty, the twenty—  
*[Daniel sneaks up from behind and pantomimes pouring something into Jess's mouth.]* –ooh, but he's poisoned on the ten-yard line! *[Daniel snatches the crown and puts in on. Jess exits.]* Looks like he's out



	for the game. Replacing him now is number seventy-two, King Lear.	ALL	<i>[As cheerleaders.]</i> Henry the Fifth, Richard the Third. This whole family is frickin' absurd! Go, <i>[insert name of local favorite sports team.]</i> Yay!
D/LEAR	To Regan and Goneril I hand off my kingdom. Cordelia, you go long...  <i>[Jess enters, throwing a penalty flag and blowing a whistle.]</i>		<i>[Daniel and Jess congratulate each other as Adam clambers into the audience.]</i>
A/ANNOUNCER	There's a penalty marker!  <i>[Jess makes a hand signal and points at Lear.]</i>	ADAM	Can I have some house lights please? <i>[House lights come up. To an audience member.]</i> Can I borrow your program for a sec? <i>[He grabs a program from a patron, which must contain a list of the plays. If there's no program, he may consult The Complete Works book.]</i>
	Fictional character on the field. Lear is disqualified, and he's not happy about it.	DANIEL	What are you doing?
D/LEAR	Bastards.	ADAM	I just want to check the list of plays. I think we might have done 'em all already.
A/ANNOUNCER	Lining up now is that father-son team of Henry the Fourth and Prince Hal. Center snaps to the quarterback... quarterback gives to the hunchback. It looks like Richard the Third's limp is giving him trouble.	JESS	Really?
		ADAM	Yeah, see, we did all the histories just now—
D/RICHARD III	“A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!”  <i>[Jess tackles Richard III.]</i>	DANIEL	The comedies were a “lump of hilarity.”
		JESS	Okay, that leaves the tragedies. We did <i>Titus Andronicus</i> with all the blood—
A/ANNOUNCER	There's a pile-up on the field.	ADAM	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> we did—
D/ANNOUNCER	FUM-BLE!!! And Henry the Eighth comes up with it. He's at the fifteen, the ten... He stops at the five-yard line to chop off his wife's head...	DANIEL	<i>Julius Caesar, Troilus and Cressida</i> , right—
		JESS	We rapped <i>Othello</i> , Lear was in the football game, <i>Macbeth</i> we did with Scottish accents. What about <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> ?
A/HENRY VIII	Who's your daddy?	ADAM	Yeah, I puked on that lady over there—
D/ANNOUNCER	TOUCHDOWN for the Red Rose! Oh my! You gotta believe this is the beginning of a Tudor dynasty!		

- JESS Right. *Timon of Athens?*  
[Daniel and Adam shake their head 'no.']  
Well I mentioned it, so that can count. *Coriolanus?*
- ADAM Eh... let's skip it.
- JESS Why? What's the matter with *Coriolanus?*
- ADAM I don't like the "anus" part. I think it's offensive.
- DANIEL Okay, so we'll skip the anus play.
- ADAM And that's it, right? That's all of them!
- DANIEL Wow. Great. [Checks the time. To audience.] Looks like we can let you go a little early.
- JESS Hey, no, you guys... [Points to a spot in the program.]
- ALL Oh, no, *Hamlet!*
- ADAM Shakespeare didn't write *Hamlet*.
- DANIEL Sure he did.
- ADAM What's it about?
- JESS You know, the young prince struggling with his conscience after his uncle murders his father.
- ADAM Dude, that's *The Lion King*.
- JESS Ladies and gentlemen, thirty-six plays down, one to go. Perhaps the greatest play every written. A play of such lofty poetic and philosophical—
- ADAM What a minute, Jess. *Hamlet* is a serious, hard-core play, and I'm just not up for it right now.
- JESS Whaddya mean? It's the last one!
- ADAM I know. It's just that that football game left me emotionally and physically drained. I don't think that I could do it justice.
- DANIEL We don't have to do it justice. We just have to do it.
- ADAM I don't wanna do it!
- JESS Look, Adam. Our show's called *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*.
- ADAM Okay, so we'll change it to *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare Except Hamlet*.
- JESS That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard.
- DANIEL Adam, I think all your new little friends would like to see it. [To audience.] What do say, would you like to see *Hamlet?*  
[Audience responds]
- ADAM Fine. If you guys feels so strongly about it, then *you* do it. I'm going to hang out with them. [Sits on an audience member's lap.] She's my friend. I'll sit here and we'll watch it together.
- DANIEL C'mon. Adam—  
[Jess and Daniel try to pry him loose from the audience member, but Adam starts to get hysterical.]
- ADAM You can't make me do it!
- JESS/DANIEL [Ad lib, to Adam.] Let go of her! [etc.]
- ADAM Don't let go. You're all I have in the world!

*[Jess and Daniel pry Adam loose from the audience member and drag him roughly onto the stage.]*

ADAM Okay, okay, okay! Just don't touch me.

JESS Okay, jeez! *[He tosses a non-crumpled wad back to the audience member.]* Here's your program; sorry, it got kinda trashed. *[To Daniel.]* Right. We start off with the guard scene, so we'll need Bernardo and Horatio.

DANIEL Gotcha.

JESS We'll need Rosencrantz and Guildenstern too.

DANIEL Nah, they've got their own play, we can skip them.  
*[While they are distracted, Adam sprints toward an audience member, preferably a youngster.]*

ADAM I'll kill little Timmy! I'll kill him!

JESS Fine, but I think it's gonna turn him off to live theater.  
*[Adam lets go of his victim and runs out the back of the house.]*

JESS Get back here, you Shakespeare weenie!  
*[Jess follows, slamming the door behind him. We hear Adam scream once in the lobby. Then silence. They are gone. Daniel returns to the stage alone. House lights down.]*

DANIEL You know, Jess is usually much faster than Adam. *[He gets an idea. He consults the book, flipping through a few pages. He runs offstage, and re-enters a*

*moment later dressed as a guard and carrying a sword.]*

D/GUARD "Who's there?"

D/ANOTHER GUARD *[Using another voice and changing his posture.]* Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.

D/FIRST GUARD Long live the King.

D/SECOND GUARD Bernardo?

D/FIRST GUARD He!"  
*[Daniel realizes how lame this is, and stops.]*

DANIEL *[Calling toward the back of house.]* Jess? *[Another pause, then.]* So, a horse walks into a bar. And the bartended says, "Why the long face?" *[Laughs awkwardly.]* I love that. *[Note: the horse joke is just one possible stall here. The actor may choose to tell another joke or two, play a short tune on a musical instrument, maybe do an impression or a party trick. Then:]* So, I had this weird dream the other night. Typical actor's anxiety dream. We were doing *this* show, and it's going really great, we're making really good time, but then I realize that we haven't actually read all the plays, and we're just making stuff up as we go along. But then Adam and Jess just disappear and I'm left totally alone on the stage with an hour to fill. And then suddenly the lights go out and it's intermission. And I'm naked. Weird dream, huh? Anyways, go out to the lobby, stretch your legs, get something to drink, support our incredible Warren Drama Boosters. I'll meet you back here in fifteen

minutes. Adam and Jess should be back by then, and we'll proceed with *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*—I hope.

*[As Daniel drops his trousers... Blackout.]*

*[Lights come up in the house. Daniel is done. Halftime music kicks in.]*

## INTERMISSION

## ACT TWO

*[The intermission music fades out and lights come up—on an empty stage. After a beat, Daniel enters nervously, costumed as Horatio for the opening of Hamlet.]*

DANIEL Hi. *[He waits for a response, then...]* Did you have a nice intermission? *[He waits again for a response.]* Yeah? What'd you do? *[He waits for a response.]* Nice. Was there a long line at the ladies' room? *[Of course there was.]* Yeah, I hate that. *[A cell phone rings.]* Hey, who didn't turn off their cell phone? Oh crap, it's mine. *[He looks at his cell phone, to audience:]* It's Jess! *[He answers it. To phone:]* Jess, where are you?! ... Oh. Which airport? ... Do you have Adam? ... Put him on the phone... What the hell do you think you're doing!?! What? ... I'm sorry. Hello, Adam, how are you? ... I'm fine. Wait, no! I'm not fine. I'm standing here onstage with over a hundred people staring at me. ... No, I'm not naked... No, you may not speak with Lillian... *[Getting an idea.]* Because Lillian is very upset that you left, and doesn't want to have anything to do with you until you're back onstage, performing Shakespeare like a little trouper! ... Yes that *does* sound like something she would say! Okay? *[Daniel gives a relieved thumbs-up.]* Okay, see you soon. Put Jess back on... Yes, I love you too. Hi, Jess, how far away are you? Well, what am I supposed to do in the meantime? Oh. Okay. Good. No, no, I'm not naked. Okay, bye. Oh, don't give Adam any candy. You know his blood sugar... Jess? *[He hangs up the phone.]* Okay, they're on their way back. While we're waiting, Jess reminded me that I should cover the sonnets. *[He*

*pulls out a single index card./* Ahem. Shakespeare wrote one hundred and fifty-four Shakespearean sonnets. We've condensed them into this three-by-five card, and I was thinking maybe what we could do is pass it among the audience. Like if we start here with you. *[Indicating a member of the audience.]* You take it, read it, enjoy it, then pass it to the person next to you and so on down the row, and then you pass it behind you, and so on back and forth and back and forth and back and by the time it gets to *you [in the back.]* Jess and Adam should be back. So, Bob, if we could have some house lights, please? Ready? Ladies and gentlemen, Shakespeare's sonnets! *[Hands the card to the first person in the audience.]* That first one's really good. *[Begins to hum a waiting tune on a kazoo.]*

*[Jess and Adam enter at the back of the house and approach the stage.]*

ADAM Honey, we're home!

DANIEL Jess and Adam, ladies and gentlemen! *[Retrieves the sonnet card.]*

ADAM We're back and ready to do *Hamlet!* Woo-hoo! H-E-L! M-E-T! H-E-L! M-E-T! What's that spell?

DANIEL/JESS/AUDIENCE Helmet!

ADAM Yeah! I gotta go put on my helmet! Woo-hoo! H-E-L... *[Exits.]*

DANIEL You have him sugar, didn't you?

JESS No, I told him if he did *Hamlet*, I'd take him to Six Flags.

*[Daniel shrugs and exits.]*

Right, where were we? Thirty-six plays down, one to go. Bob, could you please set the scene for perhaps the greatest play ever written in the English language? *[The lights change to a moody night scene.]* Helmet, the trag - *Hamlet... the Tragedy... of the Prince... of Denmark*. The place: Denmark. The battlements of Elsinore castle. Midnight. Two guards enter.

*[Exits. Enter A/Bernardo and D/Horatio, opposite.]*

A/BERNARDO "Who's there?"

D/HORATIO Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.

A/BERNARDO Long live the king.

D/HORATIO Bernardo?

A/BERNARDO He. 'Tis now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Horatio.

D/HORATIO For this relief, much thanks.

A/BERNARDO Well, good night.

D/HORATIO Peace, break thee off. Look where it comes!

*[The ghost of Hamlet's father enters. Well, it's actually just a sweat sock with a happy face drawn on it with a marker, dangling from a fishing line upstage center. Jess makes ghostly moaning sounds from backstage.]*

A/BERNARDO Mark it, Horatio. It would be spoke to.

D/HORATIO What art thou? By heaven, I charge thee, speak!

*[Jess makes the sound of a cock crowing, and the sock disappears.]*

'Tis gone.

A/BERNARDO It was about to speak when the sock crew.

D/HORATIO Break we our watch up; and by my advice, let us impart what we have seen tonight unto...

BOTH Hamlet, prince of Denmark!

*[They exit together. Lights change to day. Jess enters as Hamlet, classically costumed: black tights, black pants, black doublet, black hat, and dagger.]*

J/HAMLET O that this too, too solid flesh would melt,  
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew.  
That is should come to this, but two months dead.  
So loving to my mother. *[Pointing to a woman in the audience.]*  
Frailty, thy name is woman."  
Yeah, you!  
"Married with mine uncle, my father's brother.  
The funeral baked meats did coldly furnish forth  
The marriage tables.

*[He kneels and begins sobbing uncontrollably; a very impressive display of melancholy, a performance that William Shatner... er, Shakespeare himself would be proud of. Horatio and Bernardo appear and watch Hamlet bawl. Bernardo nods for Horatio to approach. Horatio enters as Bernardo disappears.]*

D/HORATIO My lord!

J/HAMLET Horatio!

*[They exchange a very silly Wittenberg University Danish Club handshake. Then.]*

J/HAMLET Methinks I see my father.

D/HORATIO Where, my lord?

J/HAMLET In my mind's eye, Horatio.

D/HORATIO My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

J/HAMLET Saw who?

D/HORATIO The king, your father.

J/HAMLET The king my father? But where was this?

D/HORATIO Upon the platform where we watched.

J/HAMLET 'Tis very strange. I will watch tonight.  
Perchance 'twill walk again. All is not well.  
Would the night were come.

*[The stage lighting changes suddenly from day to night. Jess and Daniel are impressed. They give a thumbs up to the light booth, and commence pretending to be cold.]*

J/HAMLET The air bites shrewdly. It is very cold.

D/HORATIO Look, my lord, it comes!

J/HAMLET Angels and ministers of grace defend us.  
Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

*[Adam enters as the Ghost of Hamlet's Father. Beneath his armor he wears a ghostly robe that is somewhat reminiscent of a giant sweat sock.]*

A/GHOST Mark me!



J/HAMLET Well, God-a-mercy.

D/POLONIUS Do you know me, my lord?

J/HAMLET Excellent well. You are a fishmonger.

D/POLONIUS What do you read, my lord?

J/HAMLET Word, words, words.

D/POLONIUS *[Aside]* Though this be madness, yet there's method in't."

A/OPHELIA *[Poking her head out from backstage.]* Daddy, the players are here and they want to do a play-within-a-play and I don't know what that is, so you'd better talk to them right away—

*[She disappears.]*

D/POLONIUS "My lord.

*[Polonius follows Ophelia off.]*

J/HAMLET I am but mad north-northwest. When the wind is southerly,  
I know a hawk from a hawk from a handsaw.  
I'll have these players play something like  
The murder of my father before mine uncle.  
I'll observe his looks. If he do but blench,  
I'll know my course. The play's the thing  
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king!

*[Hamlet kneels and draws his dagger. Lights blackout to a pin-spot, which misses the actor by several feet; he has to slide over to it, while trying to maintain his serious composure. As he speaks, however, the titters*

*of the audience annoy him each time they react, he reacts with increasing anger.]*

To be, or not to be? That is the question.  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune  
Or to take arms against a seas of troubles  
And by opposing end them.

*[He's really intense now; maybe a little too intense.]*  
To die; to sleep;"

Perchance to nap...

*[If the audience hasn't tittered yet, they will now. It throws him.]*

To... doze, to... snooze, perchance to... much, it's too much!!!

*[Jess collapses into a nervous breakdown. Daniel and Adam rush in to comfort him.]*

ADAM Bob, lights please!

DANIEL What's wrong? What happened to your speech?

JESS They were laughing at me!

DANIEL They weren't laughing *at* you. They were laughing... adjacent to you.

JESS No! That woman was laughing *at* me!

ADAM Don't worry about her. That's Jennifer and her opinion is worthless.

JESS She laughed at me! Just like they laughed at Lulu!!!

DANIEL Ladies and gentlemen, this is a heavy-duty emotional speech, and frankly, Jess hasn't been himself lately—



JESS Lulu...!

ADAM Who is this Lulu he keeps going on about?

DANIEL I don't know. I mean, there's a bratty character named Lulu on *General Hospital*.

JESS She is *not* bratty! She's going through hell! She had an abortion at eighteen 'cause the condom broke, and her mother's been in a catatonic state for four year, and... *[Jess updates the audience on Lulu's trauma of the week. Visit <http://soapcentral.com/gh/recaps.php> for details.]* And you don't even *care!* *[Collapses into more sobs.]*

ADAM You watch *General Hospital!*?!

JESS Maybe...

DANIEL So... wait a minute. All that stuff you were spouting about killing our televisions and embracing the Bard... that was all BS?

JESS No...

ADAM Jess... you're not really a preeminent Shakespeare scholar at all, are you. *[Jess mumbles inaudibly.]* ARE YOU?!

JESS I'm not even post-eminent.

DANIEL But... you took that course.

JESS I didn't finish it.

DANIEL I saw your certificate!

JESS I made it in Photoshop.

DANIEL I... don't even know who you are.

JESS I thought the world of Shakespeare scholars would be all fast cars and hot babes. But it's not! It's full of folios and quartos and quatrains and ibids. So cold. But when I'm in Port Charles, and everyone's so young and bold, and beautiful and restless—*[Jess collapses in a heap, quietly sobbing.]* I just love my stories.

*[Adam glares at the woman in the audience.]*

ADAM Well, I hope you're really proud of yourself. *[Addressing the rest of the audience.]* Sorry, folks, I think we're gonna have to skip the “to be or not to be” speech.

DANIEL We can't skip “to be or not to be,” it's the most famous speech in all of Shakespeare.

ADAM It's overrated.

DANIEL Overrated?!

ADAM Think about it. Hamlet is supposed to be killing his uncle and suddenly he's talking about killing himself. Where did *that* come from? It completely weakens his character.

DANIEL It makes it more complex. The layers give it meaning.

ADAM The layers make it sucky! All those long speech with big words nobody understands! Like what that one that goes, “I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercise; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile

promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you; this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire, why it appears to me no more than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is man; how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel; in apprehension how like a god. The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals; and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me?”  
*[He has delivered the speech simply, quietly and without a trace of “interpretation.” You can hear a pin drop. To Daniel.]* Hey, that didn’t suck!

JESS *[Still emotional, like a drunk.]* That was beautiful, man!

DANIEL See you guys? That speech is emotional *and* intellectual. The two can live side by side.

JESS Like Luke and Laura!?

DANIEL Um, sure.

ADAM So when I play Ophelia, I could add some layers?

DANIEL That would be appreciated. She’s not all screams and vomit, you know. There’s something going on inside her pretty little wig.

ADAM Oh, I get it! Ophelia’s complicated! I bet in the “Get thee to a nunnery” scene, she’s probably thinking stuff, and feeling stuff, like, at the same time!

DANIEL In fact, let’s do that scene real quick...

ADAM Whoa, whoa, whoa! You can’t rush all those layers! If Ophelia is that complex, we need to peel open her brain like an onion!

DANIEL Ew! That’s gross!

JESS No, that’s great! Adam, you’re actually having a rare moment of lucidity. We could explicate Ophelia’s id, ego, and superego. Do a sort of Freudian analysis.

ADAM Yeah, a Floridian analysis! We can divide Ophelia’s brain into three different parts. Okay, I’ll be Ophelia, but one of you needs to play the Id.

DANIEL Whoa, whoa, whoa. I can’t play Ophelia’s Id. I’m already playing Polonius and Laertes, and the play-within-a-play scene’s coming up. I’m overbooked.

*[Adam looks at Jess.]*

JESS Hello? Hamlet.

ADAM Fine. I’ll get my new friends to do it! *[Adam goes into the audience and selects a female volunteer to bring onstage. Jess is enthusiastic about this idea and helps Adam get the gal up onstage. Daniel is not happy.]*

DANIEL Adam, you can’t just bring some bozo onstage to play Ophelia’s brain!

ADAM She’s not a bozo, she’s one of my very best friends. *[to volunteer.]* Okay, what’s your name? *[She responds.]* Do you mind if we call you, “Bob?” It’s a little easier to remember. *[She responds.]* Okay, Bob this is a very important scene. What’s happening is... um... *[He has no idea what’s happening in the scene.]* Jess, would you like to tell Bob about all the layers?

JESS Sure, Bob, it's very simple: Hamlet is playing out sublimated childhood neuroses, displacing repressed Oedipal desires into sexualized anger towards Ophelia—

DANIEL Hamlet's being a prick.

JESS Exactly. Now... the id represents the raw, animal power of the individual, which Adam has effectively encapsulated in Ophelia's trademark scream.

ADAM Why thank you, Jess.

JESS You're welcome, Adam.

DANIEL This is clearly over her head!

ADAM Just give her a chance. So Hamlet gets all worked up and tells Ophelia to get out of his life. He says, "Get thee to a nunnery." And in response, Ophelia's Id screams.

JESS It's very simple. Hamlet says, "Get thee to a nunnery" and Ophelia's Id screams. Okay? Let's give it a try.

DANIEL *[To volunteer.]* Thanks for breaking up the group, Yoko.

JESS I'll give you your cue. Wait, let me just step into character...  
*[Jess takes a deep breath and then one time step downstage.]*  
"Get thee to a nunnery!"  
*[The audience member screams - probably not very well.]*

ADAM Did you hear that, Daniel. I thought that was really good.

JESS Yeah, it was okay.

DANIEL No, it sucked.

ADAM Come on, Daniel. Give her a break. I mean, okay, she's not an actress... frankly it shows. *[To volunteer.]* But I think you showed a lot of heart. A lot of courage. A lot of - as Shakespeare would say, *chutzpah* - and to get a better scream, I think we just need to get everybody involved in this. You know, create a supportive environment for Bob here.

JESS We could divide the rest of the audience up into Ophelia's Ego and Superego!

DANIEL Fine, let's just get one with it! I'll get the ego. Bob, bring up the house lights, please?  
*[The house lights come up, Daniel grabs a guy out of the audience and hustles him up onstage.]*  
Now, you're playing the part of Ophelia's Ego. At this point in the play her ego is flighty, it's confused...

ADAM It's an ego on the run.

DANIEL So why don't we symbolize this, Bob, by - oh, do you mind if we call you "Bob?" - we'll symbolize this by actually having you run back and forth across the stage in front of Ophelia. Will you give that a try? Right now, just...

ALL Go, go, go, go, go, go!

- [Ego runs. They stop him before he begins his second round trip.]*
- DANIEL Wow. He's an egomaniac!
- ADAM Now, everyone in the front three rows, you're going to be Ophelia's Unconscious. Now the Unconscious is like the watery depths of Ophelia's soul, right, Jess. *[Jess nods reluctant agreement.]* And she's tossed by the tides and the currents of her emotions. So everybody in the first three rows, hands in the air, wave them back and forth, and say, *[in falsetto.]* Maybe... maybe not... maybe... maybe not." Okay, that's good.
- JESS But you... *[Picking on a less-than enthusiastic member of the unconscious.]* What was your problem? You were not participating with the rest of the group. You know what that means, don't you? You're going to have to do it—
- ALL ALL...BY...YOUR... SELF.
- JESS Okay, hands up.
- DANIEL Don't worry, nobody's looking. And... *[They make the malingerer do it alone.]*
- ADAM I feel a lot of love in this room.
- JESS I feel... something. Now why don't we get everybody behind the first three rows to be Ophelia's Superego. The superego is that jumble of voices inside your head that dominate your moral and ethical behavior. It's very powerful, very difficult to shake... some people never shake it in their entire lifetime.
- ADAM Sorta like Catholicism!
- JESS Exactly.
- ADAM Let's divide the Superego into three parts. Everybody from where Jess is indicating... *[Jess indicating with his dagger, slices off the left third of the audience.]* ...to my left will be Section A. Everyone from Jess to here... *[Indicating the middle third of the audience.]* ...you're section B. And everybody to our right, you'll be Section...? *[He seems to be prompting the audience to respond. They call out "C".]* Awesome. Now Section A is the masculine part of Ophelia's brain, the voice of all the men in her life that have been holding her back. We'll use Hamlet's line for this. I'd like you to say, "Get thee to a nunnery!" Let's try it, Section A? *[They respond.]*
- DANIEL Section A, that was awful.
- ADAM C'mon, people, work with us on this. We want it very loud, very strident. Section A? *[They respond.]*
- JESS Yes! Much less totally pathetic!
- ADAM Okay, Section B. Let's make you the voice of Ophelia's "inner ho."
- JESS Freud would call it the "libido."

- ADAM            Whatever, the libido is the part of Ophelia that wants to get it on with Hamlet. So you're saying to her, look, do something with yourself for God's sake. Put on some makeup or something—*[to the volunteer]* Oh, no offense.
- JESS            There's a great line about make that's straight out of the Shakespearean text. Why don't we have them say, "Paint an inch thick!"
- ADAM            Perfect! Give it a try... Section B? *[They respond.]*
- DANIEL          Section A, you could learn something from Section B.
- ADAM            Now, Section C, you're the most important layer of them all. We're going to use you to make Ophelia relevant to the twenty-first century.
- JESS            Interesting. So maybe she wants power... but she doesn't want to lose her femininity.
- DANIEL          Maybe she wants to be a corporate executive, but she also wants to raise a family.
- ADAM            Yes! She's tired of being pushed around and she just feels like saying, "Look, cut the crap, Hamlet, my biological clock is ticking and I want babies now!"
- DANIEL          So why don't we just have them say that?
- ADAM            Okay, yeah, Section C, we'll have you say...
- ALL              "Cut the crap, Hamlet, my biological clock is ticking and I want babies now!"
- ADAM            Let's give it a try, shall we? Section C? *[They respond.]*
- DANIEL          I don't know about you, but I thought that was a fantastic C-Section.
- ADAM            *[To volunteer.]* So now, Bob. We're going to get all of the Floridian stuff going at once: the ego, the Superego...
- JESS            The Unconscious, "Maybe... maybe not—"
- DANIEL          The biological clock is ticking—
- ADAM            Now your job as an actress is to take all of these voices and blend the deep within your soul. We're going to whip everyone into a might frenzy, then stop everything; all attention goes to you, and at the moment of truth you let out with that scream that epitomizes Ophelia's Id. *[Beat]* Ah, she can't wait. *[To the audience.]* Make sure you watch me, because when I go like this *[gestures with his hands to stop.]* you must stop everything that you're doing. *[to volunteer playing Ophelia.]* Again, when everything stops and I point to you, let out that might scream.
- DANIEL          Okay, everybody, let's all take a deep breath. *[They do. To a random audience member.]* Let it out.
- ADAM            *[To volunteer.]* And remember, no matter what happens...
- ALL              Act natural.
- ADAM            Okay, start with the Ego.
- DANIEL          Ready, Bob, on your mark, get set, go!  
*[The ego runs back and forth across the stage.]*
- JESS            Unconscious, arms up. "Maybe, maybe not..."

- ADAM *[Building into a mighty frenzy.]* Section A. Section B. Section C... A... B... C... A... B... C... EVERYONE TOGETHER! Okay, STOP!!! *[He signals for everything to stop and points to the volunteer playing Ophelia.]*
- [All indicate that Ophelia should scream. As she does, all lights go out onstage and in the house and she is hit with a red spotlight. Her scream ends, the audience goes wild. All thank her. Perhaps reward the two volunteers with an autographed poster of the play. Adam and Jess exit as Daniel walks volunteers back to their seats.]*
- DANIEL Let's hear it for Bob. And Bob! *[The house lights fade out.]* Boy, we really shared something there, didn't we! But we digress. Back to *Hamlet*, Act Three, Scene Two, the pivotal "play-within-a-play scene" in which Hamlet discovers conclusive evidence that his uncle murdered his father.
- [Hamlet enters, pauses, then whips his hands out from behind his back to reveal sock-puppet players on his hands.]*
- J/HAMLET "Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, and hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature. *[Polonius enters. A puppet theatre appears in the set.]* Will my lord hear this piece of work?"
- D/POLONIUS Aye, and the king, too, presently.
- [Trumpet fanfare. Adam enters as Claudius. He is not a nice man.]*
- A/CLAUDIUS And now, how does my cousin Hamlet, and my son?
- J/HAMLET A little more than kin, and less than kind.
- A/CLAUDIUS I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet; these words are not mine."
- D/POLONIUS Take a seat, my lord.
- A/CLAUDIUS *[Moves into audience.]* Very well. You! Gimme your seat! The king wishes to park his royal rump!
- [Claudius displaces an audience member and sits. Jess disappears behind the puppet theatre.]*
- D/POLONIUS My lord, the Royal Theater of Denmark is proud to present *The Murder of Gonzago*.
- A/CLAUDIUS Hey, a puppet show! I love them wacky puppets.
- D/POLONIUS My lord, Act One.
- [Jess performs a romantic dumb show: the King puppet and Queen puppet meeting, falling in love, and promptly humping... Polonius break in.]*
- Intermission!
- J/HAMLET "How likes my lord the play?"
- A/CLAUDIUS The lady doth protest too much, methinks!" *[Laughs uproariously. To the person he's displaced.]* Get it? Get it? *[To rest of audience.]* He doesn't get it.
- D/POLONIUS My lord, Act Two.
- A/CLAUDIUS Gesundheit. Har har!! I'm on fire.
- [The puppet king lies down to sleep. A puppet shark dressed like Claudius appears and attacks the king!]*

*Claudius rises, storms onstage, rips the puppets off of Hamlet's hands.]*

D/POLONIUS "The king rises.

A/CLAUDIUS Give o'er the play! Lights! Away! *[Exits with puppets. The puppet theater disappears.]*

J/HAMLET I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound!

D/POLONIUS My lord, the queen would speak with you in her closet.

J/HAMLET They will I come to my mother's... closet. *[Exits.]*

D/POLONIUS Behind the arras I'll convey myself to hear the process. *[Hides.]*

*[Enter Hamlet and Adam as Gertrude, opposite.]*

J/HAMLET Now, Mother, what's the matter?

A/GERTRUDE Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

J/HAMLET *[Drawing his dagger.]* Mother, you have my father much offended.

A/GERTRUDE What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me? Help! *[Exits.]*

D/POLONIUS Help! Help!

J/HAMLET How now? A rat!"

*[Hamlet charges at Polonius with his dagger, shifting into slow motion. Lights strobe and we hear the sound effects from the shower scene in Psycho.]*

D/POLONIUS *[Slo-mo voice.]* Oh no, that will hurt!

*[Hamlet stabs Polonius in exaggerated slow motion. Polonius exits as he dies. Hamlet licks his dagger clean and snaps out of slo-mo as the strobe effect ends.]*

J/HAMLET "Dead for a ducat, dead!"

*[Claudius enters.]*

A/CLAUDIUS Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

J/HAMLET At supper.

A/CLAUDIUS At supper? Where?

J/HAMLET Not where he eats, but where he is eaten."

*[Daniel enters as Laertes, huffing and snarling.]*

A/CLAUDIUS & J/HAMLET O no, it's Laertes!

A/CLAUDIUS Son of Polonius.

J/HAMLET Brother to Ophelia!

A/CLAUDIUS And a snappy dresser!

D/LAERTES Why, thanks.

"O, thou vile king! Give me my father!

I'll be revenged for Polonius's murder.

*[Ophelia screams offstage. Claudius exits.]*

How now, what noise is this?

*[Ophelia screams again.]*

Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia!

*[Ophelia enters screaming, with flowers.]*

A/OPHELIA I'm mad! *[She tosses flowers wildly about.]* I'm out of my tiny little mind! *[Tot the volunteer who played*

*Ophelia.* See, this is acting. “Here’s rue for you, and rosemary for remembrance... *[She offers a flower to an audience member.]* and I would have given you violets, but they withered all when my father died,” you bastard! *[She yanks the flower back.]* I’m starting to feel a little nauseous...  
*[Adam lurches into the audience and pretends to vomit on people.]*

D/LAERTES *[Attempting to carry on despite the chaos Adam is creating.]* “Hamlet comes back—“

ADAM *[Leaping back to the stage.]* Daniel, what’s the next scene with Ophelia?

DANIEL What?

ADAM What’s the next scene with Ophelia?

DANIEL There are no more scenes with Ophelia. “Hamlet comes back—“

ADAM But I’ve got layers now, I’m up for it.

DANIEL That’s all Shakespeare wrote. “Hamlet comes back—“

ADAM Well, what happens to her?

DANIEL She drowns.

ADAM Oh. *[Exits.]*

D/LAERTES “What would I undertake to show myself my father’s son in deed more than in words? To—“  
*[Ophelia re-enters with a cup of water.]*

A/OPHELIA Here I go!

DANIEL No, offstage!

A/OPHELIA *[She throws the cup of water in her own face.]*  
 Aaaaaaaaauuugh! *[Dies. Bows. Exits.]*

DANIEL Ophelia, ladies and gentlemen.

D/LAERTES *[Continuing.]* ... “To cut his throat in the church. Aye, and to that end, I’ll anoint my sword With an unction so mortal that where it draws blood No cataplasm can save the thing from this compulsion.”  
 I don’t know what it means either.  
*[Laertes exits. Hamlet enters with a skull.]*

J/HAMLET “This skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once.”  
 And then came... *[Insert latest fad diet, you know, the one with confirmed deaths. Like the Jenny Craig Weight Loss Center or Atkins Diet.]* “Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him – But soft! Here comes the queen. Couch me awhile, and mark.  
*[He goes to hide in the audience. Gertrude and Laertes enter, bearing the corpse of Ophelia – a dummy wrapped in a sheet – and flowers.]*

D/LAERTES Lay her in the earth; and from her fair and unpolluted flesh, may violets spring.

A/GERTRUDE Sweets to the sweet. Farewell.

D/LAERTES Hold off the earth awhile, ‘til I have caught her once more in mine arms.

J/HAMLET What is he worse grief bears such an emphasis? This is I, Hamlet the great Dane!



*[He spikes the skull of Yorick - it is rubber, and bounces away. He rushes to the corpse, and tries to yank it away from Laertes. There is a brief tug of war.]*

A/GERTRUDE            Gentlemen! Hamlet! Laertes!

D/LAERTES    The devil take thy soul.

*[Laertes lets go fo the corpse as Hamlet pulls, and it bonks Gertrude on the head. Gertrude exits, staggering.]*

J/HAMLET    I will fight with him until my eyelids no longer wag. The cat will mew, the dog will have his day. Give us the foils.

D/LAERTES    Come, one for me.”

*[Gertrude re-enters, hands a foil to each, then as she exits...]*

A/GERTRUDE            Now be careful. Those are sharp.

J/HAMLET    “Come sir.

D/LAERTES    Come, my lord.”

*[They fence.]*

J/HAMLET & D/LAERTES    Clink! Clank! Swish! Poke! Slice! Smack!

*[Hamlet scores a hit.]*

D/LAERTES    Ouch!

J/HAMLET    “One.

D/LAERTES    No!

J/HAMLET    Judgment?

*[Adam enters. He is ostensibly Claudius, but is not quite fully dressed in three different costumes.]*

A/CLAUDIUS            A hit, a hit; a very palpable hit.”

DANIEL            What are you wearing?

ADAM            Um... layers?

A/CLAUDIUS            “Hamlet, here’s to thy health. Drink off this cup.”

J/HAMLET    Nay, set it by awhile, Uncle” ... Father... Mother... whatever you are.

*[They fence. Hamlet runs Laertes completely through.]*

J/HAMLET    “Another hit. What say you?

D/LAERTES    *[Examines the foil entering his chest and exiting his back.]* A touch. A touch, I do confess.

*[Gertrude enters with a goblet.]*

A/GERTRUDE            The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.

D/LAERTES    Madam, do not drink.

A/GERTRUDE            I will, my lord. I pray you pardon me.

D/LAERTES    *[Aside.]* It is the poisoned cup! It is too late.

*[Gertrude chokes and exits.]*

J/HAMLET    Come, for the third, Laertes.”

*[They fence, ultimately running each other through simultaneously.]*

J/HAMLET & D/LAERTES Yowch!!

*[Both fall. Gertrude re-enters.]*

J/HAMLET “How does the queen?”

D/LAERTES She swoons to see thee bleed.

A/GERTRUDE No. The drink! The drink! I am poisoned.  
*[She vomits on the audience until Hamlet grabs her and spins her offstage.]*

J/HAMLET O villainy! Treachery! Seek it out!

D/LAERTES It is here, Hamlet. Here I lie, never to rise again. I can no more. The king. The king’s to blame.

*[Claudius enters, still wearing Gertrude’s skirt.]*

J/HAMLET What, the point envonom’d too? Then venom to thy work!  
Here, thou incestuous, murd’rous, cross-dressing Dane:  
Follow my mother!

*[Hamlet stabs Claudius, who dies.]*

D/LAERTES Forgive me, Hamlet. I am justly killed by mine own treachery. *[Dies.]*

J/HAMLET Heaven make thee free of it. I follow thee.  
*[To the audience.]* You that look pale, and tremble at this chance  
That are but mutes, or audience to this act;  
If ever thou did’st hold me in thy hearts

Absent thee from felicity awhile;  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain  
To tell my story. The rest is silence.  
*[He gags, convulses, then dies in a comically balletic pose.]*

*[Blackout. The lights come up. Jess, Adam, and Daniel bounce up and bow.]*

ADAM Thank you, thank you, thank you, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU. *[The audience quiets.]* THANK YOU! THANK—*[Embarrassed.]* Um, we just wanted to say, “Thank you.”

JESS Ladies and gentlemen, that was *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Thirty-seven plays in ninety-seven minutes.

DANIEL Guess what, we actually finished a few minutes early.

ADAM Let’s do *Hamlet* again!

DANIEL We don’t have time.

ADAM We do if we cut the layers.

JESS Right! Ladies and gentlemen, you shall have...

ALL An encore!

*[Jess and Adam reset the stage and clear the props.]*

DANIEL I should make an announcement in case there are any children in the audience. There’s a lot of crazy props flying around, a lot of sharp swords... it may look like fun and games, but really this is very difficult and dangerous. Please, keep in mind that we are trained professionals.

ALL Do not try this at home!

ADAM Yeah. Go over to a friend's house.

*[Exeunt. A brief pause, then, at high speed, the actors re-enact the highlights of Hamlet, matching the original staging and diction.]*

J/HAMLET "O that this too too solid flesh would melt.

D/HORATIO My lord, I think I saw your father yesternight.

J/HAMLET Would the night were come.

A/GHOST Mark me!

J/HAMLET Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

A/GHOST Revenge my murder.

D/HORATIO My lord, this is strange.

J/HAMLET Well, there are more things in heaven and earth, so piss off. *[Jess slaps Daniel.]*  
To be or not to be, that is the -

A/OPHELIA Good my lord!

J/HAMLET Get thee to a nunnery!

A/OPHELIA *[Truncated scream.]* Aaaaugh!

J/HAMLET Now speak the speech, trippingly on the tongue.

A/CLAUDIUS Give o'ev the play.

J/HAMLET I'll take the ghost's work for a thousand pound. Now, Mother, what's the matter?

A/GERTRUDE Thou wilt not murder me. Help!

D/POLONIUS Help! Help!

J/HAMLET How now, a rat! Dead for a ducat, dead.

D/LAERTES How, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

J/HAMLET At supper.

D/LAERTES Where?

J/HAMLET Dead.

A/OPHELIA *[Splashing water on her face.]* Aaaaaaugh!

D/LAERTES Sweet Ophelia!

J/HAMLET Alas, poor Yorick! But soft, here comes the queen.

D/LAERTES Lay her in the earth.

A/GERTRUDE Sweet to the sweet.

D/LAERTES Hold off the earth awhile.

J/HAMLET It is I, Omelet the cheese Danish.

D/LAERTES The devil take thy soul.

J/HAMLET Give us the foils.

D/LAERTES One for me. O! I am slain!

A/GERTRUDE O, I am poisoned.

J/HAMLET I follow thee. The rest is silence."  
*[They have all fallen dead in the same tableau as before. Pause. They all jump up for bows.]*

ADAM How much time do we have left?

DANIEL Thirty seconds!

JESS Ladies and gentlemen, we shall do it...

ALL FASTER!

*[Exeunt. After a beat, J/Hamlet, D/Learnes, and A/Ophelia enter running, each with a deadly prop. All simultaneously scream a line, apply an instrument of death to themselves and fall dead. Pause. Then all bounce up again for bows. All exit except...]*

DANIEL You've been fantastic, ladies and gentlemen. We shall do it... BACKWARDS!

*[Jess and Adam re-enter, staring at Daniel incredulously.]*

JESS I thought we were out of time.

DANIEL Screw the time, I'm havin' fun!

ADAM *[To the audience.]* You are very sick individuals.

JESS Be sure to listen for the Satanic messages.

*[They all like down - in the final death tableau. Pause. Then the encore begins, and sure enough, it is an exact reversal of the lines, movement, gestures, and blocking of the first encore, live a movie reel run backward.]*

J/HAMLET Silence is rest the. Thee follow I.

A/GERTRUDE Judas Priest is god!

D/LAERTES Slain am I O!

J/HAMLET Foils the us give. Dane the Hamlet, I is this.

D/LAERTES Earth the off hold.

A/GERTRUDE Sweet the to sweets.

D/LAERTES Earth the in her lay.

J/HAMLET Queen the comes here. Yorick poor, alas.

D/LAERTES Ophelia sweet!

A/OPHELIA *[Spits a mouthful of water into a cup, then...]*  
Ghuaaaaaaaaa!

D/LAERTES Father my is where?

J/HAMLET Dead. Ducat a for dead.

D/POLONIUS Help! Help!

A/GERTRUDE Help! Me murder not wilt thou. Do thou wilt what.

J/HAMLET Matter the what's, mother now?

D/POLONIUS Sesir gnik eht.

J/HAMLET Tongue the on trippingly speech the speak.

A/OPHELIA Hguaaaaaa!

J/HAMLET Nunnery a to thee get!

A/OPHELIA Lord my good.

J/HAMLET Be to not or be to.

*[Jess slaps Daniel backwards.]*  
Off piss, Horatio, earth and heaven in things more are there.

D/HORATIO Strange is this, lord my.

A/GHOST Oob.

J/HAMLET Denmark of state the in rotten is something.

D/HORATIO Yesternight father your saw I think I, Lord my.

J/HAMLET Melt would flesh solid too too this that O.

ALL You thank!

*[All bow and exit. Blackout. All re-enter and bow again. If a standing ovation, enjoy it and exit. If not...]*

DANIEL Ladies and gentlemen, that was *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged.)*

JESS If you enjoyed the show, please tell both your friends.

ADAM If you didn't enjoy the show, then this was *[Insert name of current, much-despised stage show.]*

DANIEL Thanks again for coming! I'm Daniel.

JESS I'm Jess—

ADAM I'm Adam—

ALL And we're going to Six Flags!

*[All bow and exit. Blackout. Exit music. House lights come up. The audience is momentarily stunned. Then, slowly, they reach into their pockets, remove five-ten-and twenty-dollar bills, and throw them at the stage.]*

**THE END**